

**PES**

Socialists & Democrats

**WOMEN**

# A FEMINIST ECONOMY FOR EUROPE

Towards a progressive economic system that works for women

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# FOREWORD

## “TURNING THE TABLES: BUILDING A FEMINIST ECONOMY FOR EUROPE”

*Zita Gurmai, PES Women President*

Gender equality in Europe has come a long way over the past decades, not least thanks to progressive reforms at the EU level. We women are increasingly making our mark in plenary chambers, board rooms, offices and labs, in the media, the arts and the public conversation. As PES Women, we are happy to have played a decisive part in this development. And yet, we still have a long way to go. Precarious and low-paid ‘female’ work, toxic gender stereotypes, intersectional discrimination and violence against women continue to put 51% of the population at an unfair disadvantage.

No wonder that we were all looking forward to the year 2020, which was supposed to bring a new burst of energy to gender equality. It started off well with the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the launch of a new EU Gender Equality Strategy for 2020-2025. We finally got a female European Commission President and a female, progressive European Commissioner for Equality, something PES Women has fought for since the early 2000s.

Then the COVID-19 pandemic struck. The ensuing crisis has highlighted already existing gender inequalities, especially of an economic nature. All over the world, women have seen their economic opportunities deteriorate, while having to shoulder the heavy burden of unpaid care work and low-paid, insecure jobs.

Female-dominated sectors have been hit hard, and those women — already low down on the economic ladder — are falling even further behind. Throughout this spring and summer, the voices of experts and politicians have largely been male, but the crisis has had a female face: the face of working women, like the stressed healthcare worker, the teleworking mother, the cashier in the pharmacy. The face of vulnerable women, stuck at home with abusive partners or without access to support services and sexual and reproductive healthcare. And, finally, the face of angry, brave women all over Europe and beyond protesting the backlash against their rights by opportunistic right-wing governments, on the streets and online. From the white-clad women’s solidarity chains in Belarus to the demonstrations in favour of the Istanbul Convention in Poland, women are demanding an equal share — of the power, the money, the respect, the security.

The situation for women in Europe is unfair and unsustainable. It is time for holistic change, starting with how we view the distribution of power, work and money in relation to gender. I am happy to see that gender equality has become more mainstreamed in social and economic policy discussions in recent years. We socialists and social democrats have led the way in this, but more must be done. It is time to make women in all their diversity truly count in the European economy, starting with a gender-mainstreamed COVID-19 recovery strategy. Europe must build back better, or we risk backsliding on the last decades of gender

equality progress. Now is not the time for complacency, for thinking that gender equality can wait until the crisis has blown over. Gender equality must be built into the very fabric of the next generation of European economic policies.

This publication contains PES Women's vision for a progressive, feminist economy for Europe. A fair and sustainable economy that works for everyone, regardless of their gender. An economy that is inclusive and just, guided by the principles of gender equality, intersectionality, diversity, solidarity, dignity, well-being, human rights, democracy and rule of law. An economy built for real people with real concerns and aspirations, not just for profit.

Achieving this vision will require more than applause and aspirational hashtags. It demands political will, effective policies and funding at EU, national, regional and local levels to change the status quo. We need policies that get more women into decent, well-paid jobs and get more men to share the unpaid care work. Ensuring the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and the Work-life Balance Directive, delivering EU legislation on pay transparency, gender equality in digitalisation and STEM, women on corporate boards, and increasing targeted funding for gender equality in the new Multiannual Financial Framework and the Next Generation EU recovery instrument are some key EU actions that should be further complemented by progressive, national initiatives.

Furthermore, to achieve a truly progressive feminist economy, we need to go beyond specific gender equality measures and thoroughly gender mainstream all economic policy. That means ending austerity once and for all, investing more in the care economy and the welfare state, reforming tax systems and making gender budgeting the norm. We must also stand up to the right-wing backlash against women's and LGBTI rights, making sure that women in all their diversity are able to participate in the public sphere without fear of violence or threats.

Last but not least, we must combat stereotypes and start changing cultural misconceptions about the relationship between gender, work, money and power. It is not enough that some women

have been given a seat at the boys' table. It is time to turn the tables completely, to create a system of equality.

This will require a lot of political will and coordination at the European level, and PES Women will be at the forefront, together with our progressive colleagues. With a European Commissioner for Equality from the PES family, Helena Dalli, leading the work to implement the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, the time is right to push for more ambitious policies.

This publication is a rallying cry. It is an invitation to other feminist progressives to join the conversation and present their own ideas for how to make Europe's post-COVID-19 economic system more gender just. Intersectional feminism demands that a multitude of viewpoints are taken into account. That is why the launch of this publication will be accompanied by a series of articles featuring voices from our progressive family, who will add their own perspective to the discussion.

I would like to thank everyone in our PES family who has contributed to this publication: our PES Women member organisations, the PES staff, our partner organisations and the civil society actors in our PES Gender Equality Network.



# PES WOMEN

PES Women is the women's organisation of the Party of European Socialists (PES), promoting gender equality and women's rights both inside and outside the party. PES Women is made up of representatives from all 33 PES member parties and has its own political structure and resources with an executive bureau, which is made up of its members, the President and four Vice-Presidents, each representing a different region in Europe. PES Women is fighting for a gender-just and feminist Europe by giving a voice, tools and platform for women, by putting forward specific women's rights policies, through gender mainstreaming the overall policy-making of the social democratic family and by ensuring equal representation in the PES bodies, member parties and organisations. We believe that women's rights and gender equality go beyond borders. While women around the world experience different challenges that are particular to their context, there are also common challenges of representation, participation and fundamental rights and freedoms for women. We show solidarity and cooperate closely with progressive advocates for women's rights all over Europe and around the world to put gender equality at the top of the political agenda and to strengthen the global feminist movement.

# SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

PES Women represents women's organisations from national parties belonging to the Party of European Socialists (PES). 'Social democratic' here encompasses all branches of the PES family's progressive ideology, including those embraced by socialist and labour parties. For simplicity we refer only to social democracy in this publication.

# WOMEN IN ALL THEIR DIVERSITY

PES Women aims to represent women 'in all their diversity', which means improving all rights for all women regardless of their social and economic background, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, health status etc. We embrace an intersectional approach which recognises the intersection between sex and gender with other personal characteristics and identities and how these contribute to unique experiences of discrimination.<sup>1</sup> Our aim is to develop a feminist economy which benefits everyone who is marginalised by the patriarchy.



# 1. INTRODUCTION



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## 1.1 THE ECONOMY THROUGH WOMEN'S EYES: A SHORT HISTORY

In the 18th century, the 'father of political economy', Adam Smith, shaped our modern understanding of economics by stating that we expect our food on the dinner table not from the benevolence of the butcher, brewer or baker, but due to their interest in making a profit. He claimed that the free market runs on this unlimited supply of self-interest, and its subject is the *homo economicus*, the 'economic man': a person who acts rationally on complete knowledge out of self-interest and the desire for wealth.

For Smith, the subject was the economic man, not woman. Women were assigned the task of caring for others, not maximising their own economic gain.

If economics is the science of self-interest, as Smith claims, where do women fit in? Smith thought it was self-interest, served through trade, that put his dinner on the table. But, as Katrine Marçal asks: who actually cooked that meal?<sup>2</sup>

The work of the butcher, baker and brewer — and even Smith himself — depended on the toil of wives, mothers and sisters, who spent an incredible amount of time cleaning, cooking and caring. This invisible economy, made up of the unpaid care work of women and girls, continues today all over the world.

Borrowing from Simone de Beauvoir's concept of the 'second sex', the other sex, we can sketch out the 'second economy', where work that is traditionally carried out by men counts, and women's work is 'the other'. At best, Smith's theory only addressed half of the economic equation.

**“ Despite the incredible progress of women's movements, we still have not reached full gender equality ”**

For millennia, women's role in the home has wrongfully been seen as biologically determined, and this falsehood has been used to justify women's status as second-class economic actors. But if a woman bears a child, this does not mean that she is the one who must always take care of it. And a man is not forced by biology to sacrifice seeing his own kids grow up for the sake of his career. Yet, such false conclusions — socially constructed 'gender stereotypes' — persist even today.

Over the last century, a systemic economic shift has taken place: more women than before have left the home and entered the male-dominated labour market. Women did not start to work, since they have always worked, but they changed jobs, started taking payment for their labour and began competing with men for the same jobs and positions. Since then, women's movements and feminist voices have fought hard to make women's work count, at home and in the labour market.

Despite the incredible progress of women's movements, we still have not reached full gender equality. Much of society remains shaped by patriarchal norms. Women still have to prove their worth in an economy that is essentially shaped by the needs and experiences of white men. Many tax systems and public budgets

still treat women as secondary economic actors. Women outperform men in education, but the gender pay and employment gaps are still significant, especially for women of minority backgrounds and women with disabilities. Work-life balance is too often seen as a concept dividing the private from the public sphere — a distinction of limited value for many women, who carry a heavy burden in both environments.

Men have not entered the home to the same degree that women have entered the job market, and full-time, private domestic help is only available to those who can afford it, which perpetuates socioeconomic inequalities between working women. Even when care work is professionalised and moved into hospitals, day care centres and nursing homes, it is highly undervalued because it is carried out mostly by women.

**“ What we need is an economy that can support and serve real people, not just the 'economic man'. We need an economy that fosters a society of well-being for all, both women and men, without perpetuating gender stereotypes ”**

Although technology has transformed the economy since Smith, we cannot ignore that economies continue to be based on the labour of the human body: 'bodies that work, bodies that need care, bodies that create other bodies. Bodies that are born, age and die. Bodies that are sexed. Bodies that need help through many phases of life'.<sup>3</sup>



What we need is a paradigm shift which reflects this reality, as envisaged by feminist economic thinkers like Nancy Folbre, Nata Duvvury, Lourdes Benería and others. What we need is an economy that can support and serve real people, not just the 'economic man'. We need an economy that fosters a society of well-being for all, both women and men, without perpetuating gender stereotypes. What we need is a progressive feminist economy.

## 1.2 WHAT IS A PROGRESSIVE FEMINIST ECONOMY?

Achieving a feminist economy means more than just 'adding women' to the status quo. It is a recalibration of how society designs economic policy. A feminist economy promotes progressive principles and values such as gender equality, intersectionality, inclusivity, diversity, peace, solidarity, dignity, justice, human rights, democracy, rule of law, well-being and sustainability. It creates the conditions for women, in all their diversity, to live and work as economic actors on equal terms with men.<sup>4</sup>

A feminist approach to the economy means looking beyond mainstream economic concepts like public vs. private spheres, the self-serving economic man and GDP as the main indicator of economic success. For too long, women have been told that they must behave like the economic man if they want to be part of the economic world. If we are all like 'him' – a rational individual – questions like race, class and gender become irrelevant: we are all free actors and the market will supposedly solve any problem. To extend this logic, if people are rational and discrimination occurs, then discrimination must be rational. Thus, patriarchy is (wrongly) justified by 'nature' and cannot be changed. Unfortunately, it is clear that the market has failed to solve problems like discrimination and injustices persist.

A feminist economy is guided by a much more rounded approach. It values non-market activities, which have tradition-

ally been excluded from economic consideration, but which are essential to society, such as unpaid care work. Traditional economic theory assumes that these activities are not tangible, cannot be traded and do not count as 'productive' in the standard economic model. They remain unrecognised and invisible in GDP calculation and economic statistics. A feminist approach recognises that the economy does not just depend on self-interest, but on cooperation and care. We all depend on each other to some extent.




For PES Women, a feminist economy must also be social democratic and vice-versa. Feminism is part of a wider fight for social justice. Sustainable and inclusive growth for the sake of social well-being and the realisation of full gender equality are the goals. Progressive taxation, a more equal distribution of resources, universal social protection and a strong welfare state are key to realising a feminist economy. Neoliberal trickle-down economics has never worked well for women – feminism requires solidarity. Similarly, without feminist principles at its core, social democratic economic policy will never be able to achieve a just society for all. A progressive feminist economy also relies on respect for rule of law, transparency and democracy as preconditions for building sustainable and just socioeconomic infrastructures.

As a feminist party, the relationship between gender equality and economic progress has been central to the political programme of the PES and PES Women for many years.<sup>5</sup> The aim of this publication is to consolidate and expand this standpoint into a progressive plan for a European feminist economy.

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## 1.3 WHY DO WE NEED A FEMINIST ECONOMY?

 **Current economic policy, in Europe and globally, is gender ignorant.**

Most economic policy is designed to be gender neutral, but actually affects men and women differently,<sup>6</sup> which means it may perpetuate and deepen existing gender gaps. Patriarchal assumptions mean that women are not properly acknowledged as economic actors. For example, our economies rely on unpaid social labour to function, which is predominantly performed by women, but is not reflected in GDP calculations. Moreover, many authorities still do not adequately consider gender when planning budgets and public investments.<sup>7</sup> Some EU countries also still rely on a male breadwinner model when determining pension rights, benefits and taxes.<sup>8</sup>

 **Women are losing out from the current economic system.**

While we have seen some improvements in economic gender equality in Europe over the past decades, women still have lower

employment rates than men, and the gender pay and pension gaps remain wide. Women are underrepresented in economic decision-making — as managers, investors, entrepreneurs and creators of economic policy — and overrepresented in low-paid and part-time jobs. Women are also less likely to have capital income.<sup>9</sup> We are seeing a feminisation of poverty in Europe. Women living alone, migrant women, elderly women and women with disabilities are particularly exposed to economic marginalisation.<sup>10</sup>

 **Women's economic status has been further damaged by recent economic crises.**

Women were disproportionately affected by the austerity measures enacted after the financial crisis of 2007-2008. When the welfare state is weakened, women are forced to assume more unpaid care responsibilities. Women are also more likely to be employed in public sector jobs and to depend on care and family-related benefits and public services, which were hit hard by the cuts.<sup>11</sup> Some European economic frameworks, like the Stability and Growth Pact, do little to encourage macroeconomic policies that improve women's economic situation, focusing instead on budgetary constraints.<sup>12</sup> The economic repercussions of the COVID-19 crisis are not yet fully known, but a June 2020 report by Eurofound concludes that measures taken by governments to control the spread of the virus have exacerbated gender divides in unemployment, domestic labour and financial security to the disadvantage of women. Unemployment is rising faster for women than men, and women are feeling the financial strain more.<sup>13</sup> Our political family, progressive women's movements, and the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)<sup>14</sup> have all warned about severe job losses in women-dominated professions. Europe must not repeat the mistakes of the last crisis.

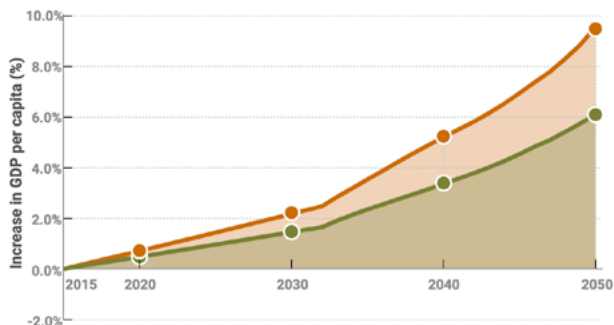
## Gender equality makes sense economically.

Improving gender equality and women's economic empowerment would lead to greater economic growth, diversity and resilience,<sup>15</sup> features valued by mainstream economics. Improving gender equality would lead to an increase in EU GDP per capita by 6.1 to 9.6%, which amounts to €1.95-3.15 trillion, by 2050. Improvements in gender equality would also lead to an additional 10.5 million jobs in 2050, and could also boost the EU's long-term competitiveness and improve the balance of trade.<sup>16</sup>

Creating a feminist economy will not automatically end all gender inequalities, but it is the foundation on which to build a more gender-just society. Business as usual is no longer a viable option. As socialists and democrats, PES Women is calling on the European Commission, the European Parliament, EU Member State governments and all PES member parties to lead the way in promoting a feminist economy for Europe, starting with the following four areas:

- Creating an inclusive and gender equal labour market
- Recognising the value of the care economy
- Promoting gender-just business practices
- Gender mainstreaming economic transitions

### Effect of gender equality on GDP per capita



*The green graph illustrates the effect on GDP of slow progress on gender equality. The orange graph illustrates the effect of rapid progress.*

*Source: EIGE 2017*

## 2. CREATING AN INCLUSIVE AND GENDER EQUAL LABOUR MARKET

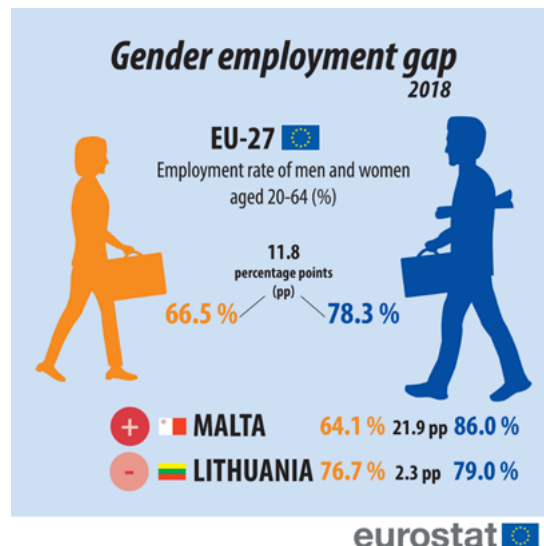


Women in Europe are working hard, but the labour market is not working for women. Even though gender equality in the labour market is enshrined in EU law, gender gaps still persist when it comes to employment levels, pay and pensions, types of jobs, working conditions, work-life balance and decision-making. These gaps are exacerbated for women exposed to multiple forms of discrimination, for example women with minority or migrant backgrounds and women with disabilities. Women's experiences of the labour market also differ widely between countries and regions. Labour market inequalities have a negative effect on women's well-being, economic independence, and the European economy as a whole. They are symptomatic of a patriarchal system which was not designed with women's experiences in mind, and where 'gender neutral' employment policies perpetuate existing inequalities.

Part of a progressive feminist economy is to make employment policy work for women as well as men. That will require fundamental changes at EU, national and regional levels, through binding legislation, social dialogue, increased public funding and a revision of cultural biases about work and gender.

## 2.1 WORK-LIFE BALANCE FOR BOTH WOMEN AND MEN

The EU employment rate for men is approximately 78% (surpassing the Europe 2020 goal of 75%). However, for women it is still only around 67%.<sup>17</sup> Even though women's labour market participation has increased over the last decades,<sup>18</sup> the gender employment gap has stagnated in the past few years.<sup>19</sup> Although more young women than men complete tertiary education, the employment rate of female graduates is lower than for their male peers.<sup>20</sup> Women are also more likely to be part-time workers and are more likely to opt out of the labour force because of unpaid family and care responsibilities.<sup>21</sup> Almost one third of women with care responsibilities are either in part-time work or inactive because of the lack of affordable care services for children and other dependents.<sup>22</sup> 85% of single parents are women,<sup>23</sup> for whom work-life balance is especially difficult. While some progress has been made in improving the uptake of parental leave among fathers, it is still mostly mothers who take time off work to raise their family,<sup>24</sup> which affects their economic prospects negatively. In some EU Member States, male breadwinner models for taxation and social benefits disincentivise women in heterosexual relationships from participating in the labour market on an equal footing with men.<sup>25</sup>



Source: Eurostat 2020

**“ The gender employment gap is not only negatively affecting women’s economic independence, it is also costing the EU economy €360 billion per year ”**

Labour market participation is even lower for women with a migrant background, who often do essential work in low-paid and traditionally ‘female’ care and service jobs, even when they have high levels of education.<sup>26</sup> Migrant women have a harder time gaining a foothold in the European labour market than migrant men. More needs to be done to support migrant women’s rights and their ability to access the necessary legal status, child care, language training and recognition of qualifications which are needed to integrate fully into the European labour market.<sup>27</sup> Women with disabilities also face multiple discrimination — due to accessibility obstacles, stigmatisation and other issues — which curtails their employment opportunities.<sup>28</sup>

Work-life balance can no longer be seen as a concept dividing the private from the public sphere. This is particularly true with regards to parenthood: a woman cannot leave her pregnant belly at home when going to the office. Work-life balance should no longer be seen as a woman’s responsibility to juggle and resolve. The mental load of work-life balance is gender-specific and continues to contribute to a generation of women who feel that they fail to ‘have it all’, even when they are ‘doing it all’.

## **SWEDEN: ‘DADDY MONTHS’ AND FAMILY WEEKS <sup>33</sup>**

Sweden has a ‘gender equality bonus’ or ‘daddy months’ which give 90 days of paid leave specifically to fathers, in addition to the months of leave parents can divide freely between themselves. If the fathers do not use it, the family loses both the leave and the financial benefit associated with it. To further improve work-life balance, the Swedish Social Democratic Party also wants to introduce ‘family weeks’ – an extra annual week of holidays for each parent to make it easier to combine full-time jobs with raising a family.

## **MALTA: FREE CHILDCARE FOR WORKING PARENTS** <sup>34</sup>

In 2014, Malta introduced a free childcare scheme for children under the age of 3 years to incentivise more parents – particularly mothers – to return to, or remain in, work. This reform has contributed to a significant increase in the number of children enrolled in childcare centres, to the benefit of women in the labour market.

A system which forces women to give up paid employment and discourages men from caring for their loved ones is unsustainable. The gender employment gap is not only negatively affecting women's economic independence, it is also costing the EU economy €360 billion per year.<sup>29</sup> Improving women's labour market participation would widen the tax base and help mitigate the negative impacts of a rapidly aging labour force.<sup>30</sup> In addition, ensuring better work-life balance would improve well-being for both women and men, making for more satisfied, more productive and healthier citizens.<sup>31</sup>

PES and PES Women believe in a society where women and men enjoy the same work-life balance and equal economic participation. Every woman has the right to a career and economic independence, just as every man has the right to raise his children and care for his family, partner and friends.<sup>32</sup>

That is why our political family fought hard for work-life balance to be included in the European Pillar of Social Rights and for the adoption of an EU Work-life Balance Directive in 2019. It is time to implement these EU frameworks and translate them into concrete improvements at national level. The EU must move towards more equal employment rates for women and men. This will require collective agreements to improve work-life balance, legislative changes to parental leave and tax systems at national level, more targeted action to integrate women facing multiple discrimination into the labour market, and increased funding for formal care services. In addition, it will require efforts to tackle cultural biases with regards to work, parenthood and gender roles.

## **BELGIUM: FREE CONTRACEPTION UP TO AGE 25** <sup>35</sup>

In 2020, Belgium expanded reimbursement for contraceptives and the morning-after pill. This means that the government reimburses all contraceptives up to the age of 25 and that the morning after pill is free for all women, whatever their age. The measure, supported by Belgian socialists, is an important step to empower women's autonomy regardless of economic status.

## POLICY PROPOSALS

✓ Introduce an ambitious, gender-mainstreamed EU roadmap to reach equal employment levels for women and men by 2030.

✓ Collect disaggregated and intersectional data on women's employment at the EU level, with monitoring and evaluation through the European Semester and Social Scoreboard in a way which allows for analysis of regional disparities.

✓ Fully transpose the EU Work-life Balance Directive into national law. Go beyond the basic provisions of the directive by ensuring well-paid parental and care leave for everyone, encouraging men's uptake of leave rights through, for example, specific 'daddy months' (individualised parental leave rights), and introducing flexible working arrangements.<sup>36</sup>

✓ Employers must respect every worker's 'right to disconnect' in order to allow them to reach a better work-life balance and engage in domestic and care activities without impacting their professional life.<sup>37</sup>

✓ Address flaws in the (implementation of the) EU Working Time Directive with regard to women's career progression, and particularly the penalties they face when refusing structural overtime.<sup>38</sup>

✓ Investigate and evaluate women's experience of teleworking during the pandemic from a work-life balance perspective and apply this insight to new work arrangements post COVID-19. Introduce a gender-sensitive framework for telework as part of the provisions of flexible working arrangements in the Work-life Balance Directive.

✓ Investigate the possibility of a four-day work week or six-hour work day to better balance private and professional responsibilities, especially in the wake of COVID-19.<sup>39</sup>

✓ Make full-time work a right and part-time work a choice.

✓ Strengthen protection from discrimination for pregnant workers and employees taking family leave.

✓ Improve access to affordable and full-time child care by implementing the European Child Guarantee and supporting it with adequate funding. Develop similar frameworks for quality access to long-term care services for other dependents.

✓ Guarantee universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), including abortion, contraception and sex education, to give women autonomy over their own bodies and freedom to plan their careers.

✓ Reform implicitly discriminatory tax and benefits systems to reduce financial disincentives for second earners, for example by individualising benefits for parents, abolishing joint taxation, 'marital quotients' which raise the marginal tax rate on the second income earner (usually the woman), and removing tax credits for single-earner couples.

✓ Adopt the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which requires that women are treated equally to men in tax law, as individuals and autonomous citizens rather than as dependants.



✓ Review the system for taxing independents and self-employed workers and those who pay little tax because of low earnings. Fixed costs and payments should be revised so they do not disproportionately burden these taxpayers. Legal registration systems for this type of activity and employment should promote the extension of social safety nets and benefits.

✓ Develop gender-specific EU and national action plans to integrate migrant women into the labour market, with particular focus on recognition of qualifications, access to child care and language training.

✓ Include initiatives to combat multiple discrimination of women with disabilities in the labour market in the next EU Disability Strategy.

✓ Strengthen the gender dimension of a reinforced European Youth Guarantee to improve the employment rates of young women.

## 2.2 DESEGREGATING THE LABOUR MARKET

Vertical and horizontal gender segregation of employment limits both women and men's career opportunities, contributes to the gender pay gap and hampers the innovative potential of the European economy.

'Vertical segregation' means that women are rarely hired or promoted to top positions. Women are often told to 'lean in' and fight their way to the top of the career ladder. They are expected to assume 'male' characteristics in order to get a seat and say at the leadership table. They are supposed to work full time to reach full equality. However, there is only so much individual women can do before they hit a glass ceiling.

Most top-level jobs in Europe are still occupied by men, due to gender stereotypes, discrimination and a lack of affordable child care and flexible working arrangements.

More women than men graduate from university,<sup>40</sup> and a recent survey reports that management quality is rated higher for female managers,<sup>41</sup> yet men still dominate management boards and the executive leadership of big European companies. Less than 29% of board members of the largest publicly listed companies in the EU are women. They account for just 7.8% of board chairs and 8.2% of CEOs.<sup>42</sup> Women entrepreneurs also face obstacles when accessing funds, training, networking and reconciling business and family.<sup>43</sup> For women of colour, women with disabilities and women from working class backgrounds, the glass ceiling is almost impossible to crack.

'Horizontal segregation' means that women are also underrepresented in high-paying sectors like science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), where over 80% of workers are men,<sup>44</sup> while they dominate lower-paid, 'feminine' areas like care and education,<sup>45</sup> primarily due to gender stereotypes and educational differences.



## FRANCE AND NORWAY: GENDER EQUALITY QUOTAS ON COMPANY BOARDS <sup>48</sup>

Improvements in the representation of women on company boards are most significant in countries that have imposed binding national quotas (like France, Norway, Italy, Belgium and Germany) and/or have other types of concrete measures in place. For example, since 2007 in Norway and 2011 in France, medium and large companies are required by law to have at least 40% women on their boards or they risk sanctions. In 2019, 44% of French board members were women, making France the only EU Member State where the representation of each gender is not lower than 40%.

As Europe is recovering from the economic fallout of COVID-19, we cannot afford to sideline women's professional potential. Women deserve the top jobs just as much as men and no area of work should be closed to either women or men due to gender stereotypes. Enabling more women from a variety of backgrounds to take up senior leadership positions would help change businesses from the inside, narrow the gender pay gap, improve women's economic independence and foster a more innovative economic culture, one which is open to diverse ex-

periences, ideas and management styles.<sup>46</sup> Research shows that improving gender diversity in traditionally male-dominated industries (such as energy, utilities, construction and engineering) can also help them overcome challenges related to sustainable development and improve corporate social responsibility, profitability and competitiveness.<sup>47</sup> Empowering young women in particular to break into male-dominated sectors like digital and green technologies is crucial to building a gender equal labour market for the future.

## POLICY PROPOSALS

✓ Unblock the 2012 European Commission proposal for an EU Women on Boards Directive, which sets a goal of at least 40% women among non-executive directors of companies listed on stock exchanges. Examine the possibility of a more ambitious plan in light of the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, expanding the target to 50% for executive as well as non-executive members of all large European company boards, with credible sanctions for non-compliance.

✓ Introduce gender quotas or zip-lists for European Parliament and other elections to increase the number of women in politics. Governments should appoint at least 50% women to ministerial and top advisory positions, especially in the field of financial and economic policy.

✓ Develop promotion plans for women in the EU civil service so equal representation is achieved at all decision-making levels by 2030, especially in positions connected to economic and financial policy.

✓ Increase financial support for women's entrepreneurship, especially in male-dominated sectors and industries, for example through the European Investment Fund and the European Social Fund Plus.

✓ Introduce corporate incentives and tax breaks for promoting gender-balanced employment policies.

✓ Gender mainstream the European Child Guarantee, European Youth Guarantee, Digital Education Action Plan and updated European Skills Agenda to tackle horizontal segregation, stereotyping and gender gaps in education

and training. A fundamental principle of European education should be to empower women and girls and encourage their professional and academic equality with men and boys.

✓ 'Up-value' female-dominated sectors like care and education by raising wages and improving working conditions to combat horizontal segregation.

✓ Implement the 2019 EU ministerial declaration on 'Women in Digital', with special focus on combatting stereotypes and online gender-based violence.

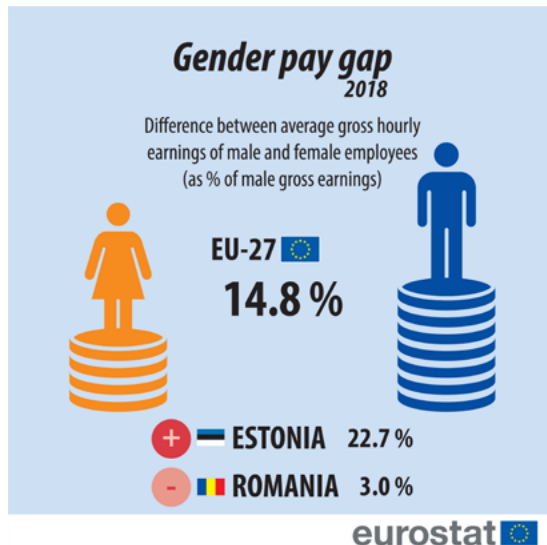
✓ Increase EU funding for projects which tackle gender stereotypes in media and education.

✓ Strengthen gender mainstreaming of Erasmus+ to increase the number of lifelong learning projects dealing with gender equality.

✓ Adopt an intersectional approach in all initiatives to desegregate the labour market, with targeted efforts to include more women from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, minorities, and women with disabilities in male-dominated professions.

## 2.3 CLOSING THE GENDER PAY AND PENSION GAPS

The principle that men and women should receive equal pay for equal work or work of equal value is enshrined in the European Treaties (Article 157 TFEU) and is set out in EU legislation on gender equality in employment (Directive 2006/54/EC) and in the European Pillar of Social Rights.



Source: Eurostat 2020

Nevertheless, the EU gender pay gap remains high. On average, women are paid 14.8% less than men per hour. In some countries, the gap is even wider.<sup>49</sup> This means that women in the EU work almost two months per year for free compared to men.<sup>50</sup> This unequal income accumulates over a lifetime: the average EU gender pension gap is 30%, owing to women's lower wages and comparatively low and irregular employment rates across their careers.<sup>51</sup> The gender pay gap has only slowly improved in the last decade,<sup>52</sup> and for women with migrant or minority backgrounds and for women with disabilities, the gap is even wider.<sup>53</sup>

The gender pay gap is the result of a combination of inequalities in the labour market. Around 30% of the gap is explained by the overrepresentation of women in low-paying sectors, like care and education. Other reasons are women's underrepresentation in top management positions and a large part can be explained by the pressure to assume more unpaid care responsibilities, part-time work, and parental leave than men. Finally, there is pure gender discrimination – in some workplaces, women are simply seen as less valuable than men doing the same job, with the same qualifications.<sup>54</sup> Companies with higher proportions of women also tend to pay lower wages than those with a more equal number of women and men employees, even in the same economic sector.<sup>55</sup>

Because of a lack of pay transparency, many women do not know or cannot prove that they are being underpaid, making it difficult to fight for equality. Such structural inequalities have led to a 'feminisation of poverty', meaning that women are more at risk of poverty than men.<sup>56</sup> This is particularly true for older women and single mothers, who often endure a large gender pay gap. If women were paid the same as men, the poverty rate among working women could be halved and 2.5 million children would be lifted out of poverty.<sup>57</sup>

## **PORTUGAL: LEGISLATION TO CLOSE THE GENDER PAY GAP <sup>59</sup>**

In 2018, the Portuguese parliament approved Law 60/2018, which strives to close the gender pay gap by promoting pay transparency. The law demands that all companies document their pay policies and that the government publishes detailed gender pay gap data annually, while also enabling the government to require selected companies to evaluate their gender pay gaps. Companies that do not comply face penalties and may be banned from tendering for public contracts for two years.

## **SWITZERLAND AND BELGIUM: SOCIALIST WOMEN CAMPAIGNING FOR EQUALITY <sup>60</sup>**

PES Women members all over Europe are famous for their campaigns and actions for equal rights, including in the labour market. In Switzerland, for example, the national Women's Strike 2019 was strongly organised and supported by socialist women and labour unionists, mobilising up to half a million women all over the country to protest against pay discrimination, gender-based violence, gender stereotypes and other injustices. For many years the Belgian socialist women's organisation Zij-kant has also organised creative annual Equal and Unequal Pay Day campaigns to call for an end to the gender pay and pension gaps. Such actions bring progressive women together in their fight for gender equality and economic empowerment.

**“ Women in the EU work almost two months per year for free compared to men ”**

Tackling the gender pay and pension gaps will require action on a number of fronts, from combatting occupational segregation to raising wages in the care economy and improving equal sharing of family responsibilities.

However, we also need binding legislation at EU-level which directly targets the gap and imposes credible sanctions for violations. PES Women has been advocating for such measures for many years as part of our European Equal and Unequal Pay Day campaigns.<sup>58</sup> Under the leadership of the European Commissioner for Equality Helena Dalli, who hails from the PES political family, we are now fortunately seeing an increased interest and willingness to tackle the gender pay and pension gaps in the EU. We must ensure that the ambitious goals of the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 become a reality as soon as possible and are not watered down during the legislative process.

PES Women/Zij-kant campaign for European Equal Pay Day 2020, under the motto: "Gender Pay Gap – Not a Game"



## POLICY PROPOSALS

✓ Introduce an EU Pay Transparency Directive. The European Commission has promised to propose measures in 2020, and it is vital that this initiative is not delayed because of the COVID-19 crisis. The directive must contain credible sanctions for non-compliance by companies and

binding equal pay targets per member state and age group to completely eliminate the gender pay and pension gaps by 2030. Both targets should be monitored through mandatory equal pay plans and pay gap audits. It should also include standardised rules for data collection and guidelines for determining what counts as 'work of equal value'. It must support trade unions and anti-discrimination associations to ensure collective rather than individual solutions to achieve equal pay for women and guarantee the right of such organisations to take legal action in case of unequal pay for equal work or work of equal value (strategic litigation etc.).

✓ The gender pay gap must be prioritised by all European social partners in the social dialogue.

✓ An EU directive on equality plans at company level and equality measures in collective agreements should be explored.<sup>61</sup>

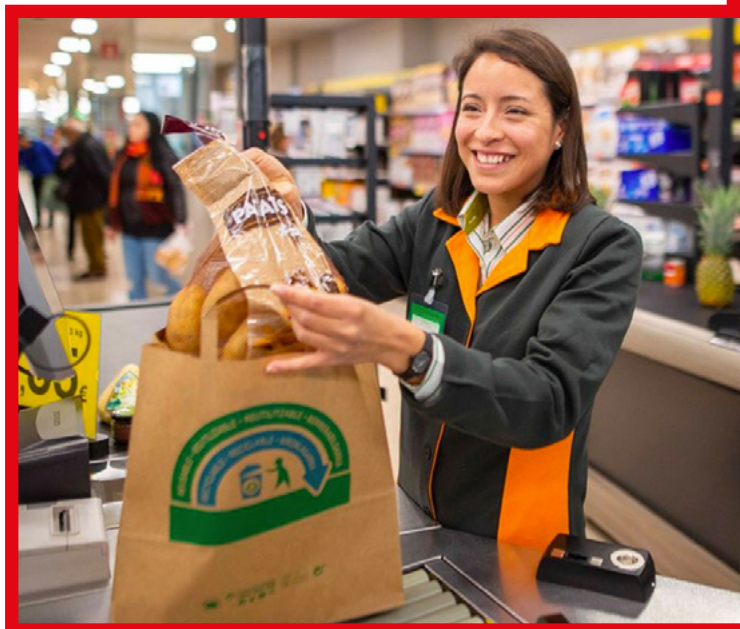
✓ Adopt a gender-mainstreamed EU framework for decent minimum wages to ensure wages that cover the true costs of living and allow workers and their families to live a life in decency. An EU framework for decent minimum wages and strengthened collective bargaining would raise the lowest wages, including for jobs usually done by women, and may thus contribute to reducing the gender pay gap.

## 2.4 MAKING WORK SAFE AND FAIR FOR WOMEN

Decent jobs and social protection are key priorities for socialists and social democrats.<sup>62</sup> Our political family is fighting hard to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights, in order to put a stop to precarious jobs and zero-hour contracts, involuntary part-time work, bogus self-employment, and in-work poverty.<sup>63</sup> A strong Social Europe guided by social cohesion and upward convergence between countries and regions, with decent wages, an effective social dialogue and extensive unemployment protection will benefit everyone, including women.<sup>64</sup>

Yet, gender-specific efforts are also required. The rising 'precarariat' and the poorly regulated gig economy have made work unsafe for both women and men. However, women are more likely to be in temporary and precarious employment. Around one quarter of women in Europe are in precarious jobs, and levels are particularly high among young women, women with low qualifications and migrant women.<sup>65</sup> Women are also more likely to be in 'bogus self-employment'<sup>66</sup> and engage in informal work, which is often unsafe and not officially recognised as remunerative economic activity.<sup>67</sup>

**“ As the EU is facing the economic fallout of the COVID-19 crisis, it is essential that women’s employment is taken into account in national and European recovery plans ”**



Europe must include a gender perspective in our common efforts to tackle precarious and exploitative work. Crucially, as the EU is facing the economic fallout of the COVID-19 crisis, it is essential that women’s employment is taken into account in national and European recovery plans. Women (especially young women) are overrepresented in many of the sectors hit hardest by the crisis, such as care, retail and hospitality.<sup>68</sup> The heavy impact of the lockdown on women in these sectors has led some commentators to dub the ongoing crisis a ‘pink collar recession’.<sup>69</sup> The International Labour Organization (ILO) has reported a massive increase in the global youth unemployment rate since February 2020, particularly for young women. 60% of young women view their career prospects with uncertainty or fear after COVID-19.<sup>70</sup> To improve young women’s employment prospects, reinforcing the European Youth Guarantee and its gender dimension is vital.

PES Women has cooperated with our political family to ensure that the PES recovery plan,<sup>71</sup> is gender mainstreamed. For example, we have called for gender equality to be a condition to receive financial aid from EU recovery funds, which must comply fully with the principles of gender budgeting. Measurable gender mainstreaming, with specific gender equality indicators for the Next Generation EU recovery instrument is a precondition for a fair, adequate and coherent distribution of the money. We have also supported the call by the S&D Group in the European Parliament for top-ups to existing EU programmes and budget lines. This includes, among other things, support for women in the labour market during and after the crisis.<sup>72</sup> Female-dominated sectors which have been most affected by the crisis (such as education, care, hospitality and culture) must receive their fair share of financial support from the EU. Investments must not be focused solely on traditionally male-dominated areas like construction, energy and transport. It is vital that support for women's employment in the wake of COVID-19 is intersectional, as there have been worrying reports about the pandemic's disproportionate impact on women of colour.<sup>73</sup>

Occupational health and safety measures must also be gender sensitive and developed in consultation with working women in all their diversity. Due to occupational segregation, women tend to score more favourably than men when it comes to physical

risks at work.<sup>74</sup> However, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, women have disproportionately been putting their health on the line, as they represent 76% of European healthcare workers.<sup>75</sup> The EU needs to address the impact the pandemic is having on women's workplace health and safety and financial security.<sup>76</sup> Efforts to improve the mental health and stress levels of workers, especially in essential services and during telework, must also be gender sensitive.

Furthermore, as brought to light by #MeToo and similar movements, six out of ten women in the EU have experienced sexual harassment or violence in the workplace. 9% of European women report that they have been pressured at least once for an act of a sexual nature in exchange for a job or a promotion.<sup>77</sup> Sexual harassment and bullying in the workplace is an especially big problem for women with disabilities, women of colour and women from the LGBTI community.<sup>78</sup> Online gender-based violence is an increasing problem faced by women, especially in public positions.<sup>79</sup> It is particularly important to address online violence in the wake of COVID-19, as teleworking has changed the landscape of work and education.<sup>80</sup> Women will not be able to participate as full and equal actors in the labour market until their autonomy and human dignity are protected from gender-based violence.



## POLICY PROPOSALS

- ✓ Collect gender-disaggregated data on working conditions and occupational health and safety, in particular with regards to the impact of COVID-19 on women's working environment.
- ✓ Top up EU funding for gender equality programmes and budget lines to support gender equality during and after COVID-19, including targeted support for women's job security, upskilling and other areas.
- ✓ Add COVID-19 to the EU directive on the protection of workers from risks related to exposure to biological agents to ensure the most effective and strict prevention measures. Enlarge the scope of the recommendation concerning the European schedule of occupational diseases to cover all professions exposed to COVID-19 at a higher level than for the general population.<sup>81</sup>
- ✓ EU financial support given to Member States under the SURE instrument to protect jobs in the wake of the pandemic must be used for work schemes that proportionately benefit women's employment as well as men's, given that women have been badly affected economically by the crisis.
- ✓ Adopt an EU directive on mental well-being in the workplace, including the recognition of anxiety, depression and burnout as occupational diseases, in addition to establishing mechanisms for the prevention of mental ill health and reintegration of affected employees into the workforce.
- ✓ Employers must respect every worker's 'right to disconnect' to fully enjoy family and leisure time and to prevent stress-related illnesses.<sup>82</sup> Governments should investigate the possibility of a four-day work week or six-hour work day to combat stress and create better balance between

private and professional responsibilities.<sup>83</sup>

- ✓ Introduce more flexible sick leave rights for workers experiencing symptoms due to menstruation or menopause.
- ✓ Gender mainstream upcoming EU legislation on working rights for platform and other atypical workers, as well as efforts to improve working conditions and wages in essential services where women are in the majority. The European Commission should identify the sources of precariousness in these sectors and propose European legal instruments to ensure decent working conditions for all workers, strengthen collective bargaining coverage, ban zero-hour contracts, end bogus self-employment, set strict limits regarding subcontracting practices and improve social protection standards.<sup>84</sup>
- ✓ Ensure that the situation of low-paid women working rotating shifts and fragmented part-time hours, which is detrimental to enrolling children in childcare, is addressed when transposing the EU directive on transparent and predictable working conditions by 2022.<sup>85</sup>
- ✓ Ensure EU-wide ratification and implementation of the Istanbul Convention on violence against women. In parallel, the European Commission should elaborate the possibilities of an EU directive on gender-based violence which is coherent with and complementary to the Istanbul Convention, and add gender-based violence to the list of EU crimes.
- ✓ Ensure EU-wide ratification and implementation of the 2019 ILO Convention to combat violence and harassment at work.
- ✓ Support awareness-raising and promotion of trainings and independent report mechanisms to combat sexual harassment at work.

# 3. RECOGNISING THE VALUE OF THE CARE ECONOMY



## 3.1 COVID-19 AND THE FEMINISATION OF CARE

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the importance of well-functioning healthcare systems and the dangers of allowing years of austerity to hollow out the welfare state. It has also highlighted the heavy, often invisible, burden assumed by women as carers. Women make up 76% of European healthcare workers and the vast majority of childcare and domestic workers. When the virus hit, it was mostly women who delivered the essential care

services, working physically and emotionally gruelling shifts in hospitals and nursing homes, often lacking the necessary protective gear, and putting their own physical and mental health on the line. These care workers are often underpaid, due to a systematic undervaluing of ‘female’ sectors, and their contracts are often part-time and insecure.<sup>86</sup>

Women have also assumed additional unpaid care responsibilities for children and other dependants, when schools closed and elderly or vulnerable relatives or friends needed more help with errands or care in the home.<sup>87</sup> Overnight, women became teachers, personal assistants and nurses, carrying out essential, society-sustaining work from home, without any remuneration and little recognition. Never has it been clearer that our European society relies completely on unpaid social-reproductive work to function.

The COVID-19 crisis has blurred the line between the personal and public spheres. The unpaid care, emotional and reproductive work carried out predominantly by women can no longer be ignored by political and economic decision-makers. It is time to make the invisible work of women visible. Moreover, the crisis has shown that many ‘female’ sectors are essential services, whose workers deserve proper long-term funding, not just applause – from nurses to cleaners and shop assistants.<sup>88</sup> As the EU and national governments are implementing their recovery plans, the time is right to re-value care as an essential economic activity and to rid ourselves of the old liberal notion that self-interest runs the world.

## 3.2 SHARING THE BURDEN OF UNPAID CARE WORK

As advocated by feminist economists like Nancy Fraser and conceptualised for the European context by the European Women's Lobby's *Purple Pact*, a feminist economic system must be a 'care economy'. Care – for one's home, children, partner, family and friends, as well as for one's community and environment – is a collective need and a social good which is essential for economic development and a well-functioning society.<sup>89</sup> Just as environmental sustainability should be incorporated into the European 'green economy', it is time for care and social reproduction to be equally recognised in the European agenda.

The current patriarchal economic system does not value care work properly, because it is considered a 'female' activity, one in which women naturally and selflessly engage and which therefore need not be included in the 'male' economic sphere. 80% of care in the EU is carried out by unpaid informal carers, 75% of whom are women.<sup>90</sup> More men than women are in paid employment, but women work longer hours when unpaid domestic work is taken into account.<sup>91</sup> Women in the EU spend 13 hours per week more than men on unpaid care and housework:<sup>92</sup> cooking, cleaning, washing, picking children up from school and helping with their homework. The tasks are endless. In rural areas of Europe, women not only carry out family and domestic care for free, but also contribute to agricultural activities and environmental protection, in other words caring for the planet, without remuneration.<sup>93</sup> Many young women and girls are balancing their education with caring for vulnerable parents or other family members, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, which can have a significant impact on their quality of life, mental well-being and career prospects.<sup>94</sup>

While one cannot put a price on interpersonal relationships, unpaid care work is still work and its economic value must be acknowledged. In mainstream economic terms, the value of unpaid family domestic work and unpaid family care work in 2009 was estimated to range between a minimum of 27.1% and a maximum of 37% of EU GDP, depending on the methodology used.<sup>95</sup>

Yet, no woman was remunerated for this contribution made to society. She received no income, pension rights or social security contributions for her efforts, which keep the wheels of society turning. Quite the opposite – for many women, unpaid care and housework is stopping them from pursuing paid employment and achieving economic independence, in effect curtailing their human rights. How care is structured and distributed on a societal basis is perhaps the largest single factor in the perpetuation of gender inequalities.<sup>96</sup>

Personal care work cannot and should not be eliminated – caring for one's family and friends, the environment and one's local community without monetary gain is a valuable part of life. It is integral to a feminist society of well-being, where people and the planet are put before profit. However, care must be recognised as valuable by economic policy-makers, and its cost as well as rewards should be equally shared between genders. Moreover, just as we need a fairer distribution of care work within families, women should not be forced to assume unpaid social labour which, in a welfare state, is best provided publicly if we want to guarantee equal access to high-quality care for all. As goal 5.4 of the 2030 UN Sustainable Development Goals states: unpaid care and domestic work should be 'recogniz[ed] and valu[ed] through the provision of public services infrastructure and social protection policies, as well as through the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate.'<sup>97</sup>



As noted in the chapter above on work-life balance, supportive infrastructures such as well-paid and shared parental leave and flexible working arrangements are important for facilitating a more equal sharing of unpaid care responsibilities between women and men.

In addition, as we will examine in the next section, substantial public investments are needed to improve formal care services, easing the burden on women and allowing them to take up paid employment. For those who do engage in unpaid care work, efforts must be made to improve their social inclusion, mental and physical well-being.

## POLICY PROPOSALS

- ✓ Improve EU time use surveys and data collection on the value of unpaid care work, especially in light of the COVID-19 crisis. EIGE should get a mandate to calculate the gender care gap for all EU Member States, i.e. the different amount of time that women and men spend on unpaid care work.
- ✓ Develop macroeconomic policies based on economic measurements which go beyond GDP and take unpaid care work into account in gender-sensitive budgets and fiscal policy.
- ✓ Conduct further EU-wide research on the strengths and weaknesses of different long-term care regimes for women as users and carers.
- ✓ Recognise unpaid care work in calculations of women's pension schemes. A system of care credits could provide pension benefits to people who opt for career breaks or part-time work in order to take care of family members. Such a system must be designed in a way which does not discourage women from engaging in paid work or foster a system in which women's care for dependents 'replaces' the welfare state.<sup>98</sup>
- ✓ Support efforts to improve the social inclusion and mental health of family carers, especially young carers.
- ✓ Strengthen support for family carers in the new EU Disability Strategy.

✓ Improve work-life balance measures. For example, introduce measures which encourage men to take more parental leave and ensure the immediate implementation of an ambitious and gender-mainstreamed European Child Guarantee, which ensures affordable access to quality early learning and child-care, with targeted support for single mothers and low-income families.

✓ Ensure access to high-quality, affordable and accessible long-term care services for the elderly and people with disabilities as a feasible alternative to unpaid care by relatives.

## 3.3 PUBLIC INVESTMENT IN QUALITY AND AFFORDABLE CARE

Equal access to quality and affordable care is a right recognised by the European Pillar of Social Rights and is fundamental to achieving an economy of well-being, which is a key priority for the PES family.<sup>99</sup> Childcare, healthcare, and long-term care for the elderly and people with disabilities must be inclusive, and all care must be responsive to individual needs, dignity and autonomy, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, disability or socioeconomic background.

The best way to ensure this goal is through universal public care systems and redistributive policies.<sup>100</sup> Care regimes in Europe are very diverse, but none has made a serious effort to bring care into the centre of economic activities and to attach a high value to care activities – as would be the case in a feminist reproductive or care economy.<sup>101</sup> Investing in accessible care regimes is one of the best ways to show solidarity as a society. Public funding for care services should not be seen solely as a cost, but as a public good and an investment in both social well-being and gender equality – making for healthier, happier and more productive citizens, as well as easing the unpaid care burden on women, making it easier for them to enter and thrive in the labour market.

As a result of the 2007-2008 financial crisis, several EU countries cut their health budgets, reducing or freezing government budget transfers to health insurance schemes and tightening controls on growth rates with regards to public spending on health.<sup>102</sup> Long-term formal care services in many EU Member States are underdeveloped and inaccessible.<sup>103</sup> It is time to end the privatisation of healthcare and austerity measures, which are curtailing public services generally. Cuts to public services have hit women hardest: as workers in social services, in administration, in healthcare, and in child and elderly care, as users, and as the main link between families and service providers.<sup>104</sup> Following the COVID-19 pandemic, it is more important than ever that the EU's fiscal rules are revised to allow for proper public spending on the welfare state.<sup>105</sup>

Investing in quality care primarily means investing in professional carers, most of whom are women, many of migrant or minority backgrounds. According to a recent study by Cedefop, care is one of the few sectors not at risk of automation and, with an ageing population, demand for care skills in the EU labour market will only rise in the next decade.<sup>106</sup> Those working in the care sector deserve more than applause. They deserve decent wages, secure and stable contracts, necessary equipment, a sufficient number of well-trained colleagues to avoid overwork and burnout, professional capacity building, training and upskilling, and protection from violence at work.



The EU also needs to address the issue of 'brain drain' – where qualified health professionals from Central and Eastern Europe move to Western Europe – improve recognition of qualifications for migrant health workers,<sup>107</sup> and develop a proper framework to support domestic workers, many of whom are women and migrants.

Domestic workers provide professional care services in the home, but their pay, working conditions and social protection are often poor.<sup>108</sup> In the absence of properly funded childcare and work-life balance provisions, many relatively privileged, middle-class, primarily white women in Europe rely on low-paid domestic workers to pursue their careers. Improving the working conditions for domestic workers will not only show proper recognition for an important type of care work, it will be one step towards decreasing class, racial and ethnic inequalities between women.

In summary, investing in care will not only lead to a higher quality of care for all, but raising the status of formal care work will also contribute to closing the gender pay gap, decreasing in-work poverty, and increasing job security and career opportunities for women in all their diversity.<sup>109</sup>

## POLICY PROPOSALS

✓ Introduce a 'Care Deal for Europe', including investment in care provisions, work-life balance policies and valuing the care sector in Europe, particularly regarding working conditions and pay.<sup>110</sup>

✓ Build on the ILO's '5R' care framework (Recognise care, Reduce the amount of unpaid care and Redistribute the amount of care, Reward care and ensure Representation of care workers), as a guide for European care systems.<sup>111</sup>

✓ Improve the mainstreaming of care in all EU policies, for example by carrying out 'care checks' on existing and future policies and packages. Care should be included as a dimension of the Green Deal, Gender Equality Strategy, Just Transition and other key EU policies.<sup>112</sup>

✓ Gender mainstream the EU Health Programme.

✓ Establish truly universal health coverage and access in all EU Member States and strengthen public health services in order to deliver quality care for all. Revise EU fiscal and budgetary rules to encourage sustainable investment in public care systems.

✓ Improve EU data collection to be able to compare different European care regimes, as a first step to reveal gaps and areas for improvement.<sup>113</sup>

✓ Increase investment in care workers by raising wages, hiring more qualified staff and improving funding for training and capacity building.

✓ Introduce targeted measures to end the gender pay gap within the care sector, including by increasing the proportion of women in specialist and management positions.

✓ Increase the share of men working in the care sector by providing educational and career opportunities, combating stereotypes and raising awareness about the social and economic importance of care.

✓ Address 'brain drain' and other aspects of regional and class-based care inequalities in Europe.

✓ Ensure that all health workers have access to collective organisation.

✓ Improve recognition of migrant health workers' professional qualifications.

✓ Ensure EU-wide ratification and implementation of the 2011 ILO Domestic Workers Convention.

## 4. PROMOTING GENDER-JUST BUSINESS PRACTICES



A feminist economy requires a fundamental change in business practices and a re-evaluation of what society considers to be acceptable economic activity. Sustainability, social responsibility and respect for human rights must be guiding principles for all commercial enterprises. It should be impossible to profit economically from gender inequality, gender-based violence and sexism. Exploitation must be prosecuted and punished. Corporations must take responsibility for shifting towards a more socially sustainable economy, and consumers must be empowered to make socially sustainable choices.

**“ It should be impossible to profit economically from gender inequality, gender-based violence and sexism ”**



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## 4.1 COMBATTING THE ECONOMIC EXPLOITATION OF WOMEN AND GIRLS



A lot of economic activity carried out in Europe is exploitative of women and girls. This is most obviously true of criminal enterprises which engage in human trafficking. In 2013-2014, there were nearly 16,000 registered trafficking victims in the EU, of whom 76% were women or girls. The majority of trafficked women are exploited for sexual purposes.<sup>114</sup>

Trafficking is a human rights violation and should be treated as a crime, not an economic activity, by European policy-makers and law enforcement. Nevertheless, it cannot be ignored that trafficking in Europe is sustained primarily by economic motives. The economic profits from human trafficking are difficult to calculate, but according to a 2010 UNODC report on trafficking in persons to Europe for sexual exploitation and forced labour generate around € 2.1 billion (\$ 2.5 billion) annually in Europe.<sup>115</sup>

Many female victims of trafficking are also forced into domestic servitude,<sup>116</sup> and constitute part of the informal domestic workforce in the EU. These women lack social protection and often work under poor conditions with a high risk of abuse.<sup>117</sup> While not all informal work is inherently exploitative, women who work in the so-called 'shadow economy', for example in domestic work but also in farming or family businesses, have a higher risk of insecure and unprotected working conditions. The number of women in such jobs is increasing,<sup>118</sup> and even though the size of the informal economy has declined across Europe in recent years, it is still creating vast revenues. According to the IMF, if properly calculated, the informal economy would constitute around 15-20% of GDP in advanced economies and around 30-35% in emerging economies globally.<sup>119</sup>

European economies cannot be feminist whilst relying on the invisible wealth generated by the exploitation of women and girls' bodies and labour, both within and outside our continent. While feminists' views on pornography and prostitution/sex work diverge, all agree that industries, legal or not, where third parties profit from gender-based violence and where women are treated as products without autonomy and physical, mental and economic safety, are unacceptable. Gender-based violence is a human rights violation and should not be commercialised, nor should businesses be able to profit from sexism and the subjugation of women with impunity. This also includes widely accepted legal practices such as sexist advertising, where women's bodies and damaging gender stereotypes are exploited to sell goods and services.

Continued efforts at the EU and global level to end human trafficking and discourage industries which exploit women and girls are essential. Regardless of each individual EU country's legal framework for prostitution/sex work and pornography, women's needs and voices must guide the political response and gender-based violence must be stopped. We also need increased efforts to crack down on sexist advertising in Europe, which, though not comparable to the exploitation of trafficking victims or other vulnerable women, is part of the same economic culture which profits from misogyny.

## **UNITED KINGDOM: LONDON BANS SEXIST ADVERTISING**<sup>120</sup>

In 2016, the Labour Mayor of London Sadiq Khan banned sexist advertisements from the city's public transport, forbidding ads that objectify or demean women on the London Underground, buses and across the Transport for London network. The S&D Group in the European Parliament has launched the campaign 'The EU platform for cities against sexist advertisements' to persuade more cities to do the same. The accompanying charter commits local leaders to work towards stamping out stereotyping, overtly sexist advertising and all forms of messaging which objectifies women.

## POLICY PROPOSALS

- ✓ Step up the EU's efforts to combat organised crime targeting women and girls, in particular human trafficking. Measures to combat trafficking of women and girls must be victim/survivor-centred and must tackle underlying causes rooted in gender inequality, such as female poverty, unemployment and intimate partner violence. An intersectional and regional approach is vital.
- ✓ Fully implement the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive 2011/36/EU and follow up on the European Commission's proposals for an EU strategy for the eradication of trafficking in human beings and an EU strategy on a more effective fight against child sexual abuse.
- ✓ Ensure the continuation of the work of the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator.
- ✓ National strategies concerning prostitution/sex work must listen to women's voices and prioritise women's health, safety and physical and financial autonomy.
- ✓ Fully ratify and implement the Istanbul Convention on violence against women, with possible additional EU legislation on gender-based violence.
- ✓ Improve conditions for women in the informal domestic economy, for example through EU-wide ratification and implementation of the 2011 ILO Domestic Workers Convention.
- ✓ Exchange best practices across Europe for combatting sexist advertising, for example through the EU platform 'Social Democratic Cities Against Sexist Advertising'.<sup>121</sup>

## 4.2 NO MORE 'PINK TAXES'

The gender pay gap is exacerbated by the fact that women tend to be disadvantaged as consumers. 'Pink taxes' refer to the generally higher prices paid for female-coded products. For example, products and services marketed to women (clothes, toys, cosmetics, haircuts) are often more expensive than their male equivalents. It is high time we stop companies profiting from sexism in this way. This will require more information campaigns by consumer watchdogs and encouraging consumers to boycott gender-stereotypic products. Promotion of gender-neutral product designs for toys and children's clothes especially will also contribute to breaking down gender stereotypes and traditional gender roles from an early age.<sup>122</sup>

In some countries, even the design of consumption taxes disadvantage women. Tax injustice has a female face, and tax systems can perpetuate and exacerbate gender inequalities, just as the transformative power of tax laws and practices is a key tool to promote equality. Following the last financial crisis, many EU Member States raised their regular Value Added Tax (VAT) rate as part of their fiscal consolidation programmes, while decreasing capital and corporate income tax. Such a shift towards a regressive rather than progressive form of taxation may affect women negatively, since they tend to be the ones shopping for the household. Women also have lower average incomes than men, which means consumption takes up a bigger proportion of their income.<sup>123</sup> Progressive taxation, on the other hand, would likely benefit women, precisely due to their lower wages.



Moreover, almost half of EU Member States still apply VAT rates on sanitary products which classify them as 'luxury goods', similar to tobacco, beer and wine. This so-called 'tampon tax' is an unacceptable financial burden on menstruating people, which luckily several countries have started to lower in line with the EU minimum (for example, Spain, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom).<sup>124</sup> This is a step in the right direction, yet the EU's VAT regulations still fail to recognise that sanitary products are essential goods which should be universally accessible to everyone, no matter their economic status. Menstrual hygiene is not a choice. Free sanitary products should be made available in schools, universities, workplaces and other public places all over Europe to make it easier for menstruating people to participate freely in education and paid employment. Ideally, sanitary products should be made completely free, in line with the new policy adopted in Scotland.<sup>125</sup>

## POLICY PROPOSALS

- ✓ Improve collection of gender-disaggregated data on consumption patterns and tax rates.
- ✓ Stop the European trend of over-relying on VAT, which overall is regressive, in favour of more progressive, redistributive tax systems which levy capital and wealth. Increase corporate taxation and roll over the burden on income, labour and indirect taxation to big corporations.
- ✓ Tax income at progressive rates and move towards more global schemes that tax all revenue for individuals, thus avoiding discriminatory treatment by income source. As women tend to have less capital, this measure would help to address gender as well as wealth inequality.
- ✓ Eliminate period poverty by encouraging governments to make use of the flexibility introduced in the EU VAT Directive and apply exemptions or 0% VAT rates to menstrual and sanitary products, or at least introduce a harmonized maximum cap on VAT on female hygiene products. In addition, provide free sanitary supplies in public spaces such as schools, universities, hospitals and shelters, and introduce incentives for employers to do the same in all workplaces.
- ✓ Support civil society efforts to stop the production of unnecessarily gendered products, especially for children,<sup>126</sup> and the markup on 'female' products.



*In early 2018 the S&D group in the European Parliament launched a campaign to fight sexist advertising at the local level.*

## 4.3 ENCOURAGING SOCIALLY SUSTAINABLE BUSINESSES

Overall, businesses must play their part in shifting towards a more socially sustainable economic system. As employers, they should be required to improve work-life balance and pay transparency, provide decent wages, contribute to social inclusion and actively work to remove the glass ceiling. Just as environmental sustainability should be mainstreamed by companies, gender equality must be incorporated into business plans and corporate social responsibility (CSR) agendas.

It is also time to put an end to neoliberal policies that put business interests before the common good. Social rights for citizens must take priority over economic freedoms for big corporations.

Over the last decades, corporate tax rates have fallen, putting the burden of financing public services on consumers and low-income groups, including women. Tax evasion by big companies has made it harder to finance public investment in social infrastructures and gender equality.<sup>127</sup> When multinational companies evade taxes, governments have less resources to invest in public services such as education, sexual and reproductive health, childcare and other services.

This further increases gender inequality and limits access to social rights, especially for women. The effects on women are twofold: public services are dominated by women and the lack of funding has serious effects on access to decent work for these sectors, and, with inadequate public support systems, the burden of family care falls almost entirely on women. There is thus a need to guarantee proper collective agreements as well as systems for social dialogue to monitor advancement and guarantee adherence.

Internal market loopholes have also led to forum shopping, social dumping, letterbox companies, bogus self-employment and the further undermining of social and labour standards.<sup>128</sup> The use of public-private partnerships (PPPs) means high risks and high costs for the public sector. Privatisation of public services has lowered governments' capacity to regulate these markets in the public interest, while profit motives have led to lower quality services, lack of accountability and inflated fees, hitting low-wage earners and the care economy hard.<sup>129</sup>

**“ To realise a feminist economy, for-profit businesses must be held socially accountable and be made to work with the public good, not against it ”**



To realise a feminist economy, for-profit businesses must be held socially accountable and be made to work with the public good, not against it. This includes taking responsibility both for the environment and for the socioeconomic externalities they cause throughout the production chain, at home and abroad. In addition, alternative business models and social economy enterprises — such as co-operatives, mutual societies and not-for-profit organisations — should be encouraged, especially those that offer employment opportunities for women and marginalised groups.

## POLICY PROPOSALS

- ✓ Dismantle European tax havens and close legal loopholes enabling corporations to systematically evade, avoid or aggressively plan taxes. We need a common European approach to ensure a proper level of effective taxation and stop downward corporate tax competition. Countries must automatically exchange tax-related information and companies and trusts must be open about who runs them. Country-by-country reporting is important, and we must tax profits where they are generated.<sup>130</sup>
- ✓ Shift the tax burden from labour and indirect taxes to capital and corporate taxation to fund quality gender-responsive public services.
- ✓ Curb the use of public-private partnerships (PPPs) and the privatisation of public services.
- ✓ Put gender equality at the centre of the EU's strategy on corporate social responsibility (CSR) and add requirements of gender equality plans and procedures to public procurement assessments.
- ✓ Facilitate the growth of social economy enterprises in Europe through (access to) EU funding, best practice exchange, and simplified regulatory environments.

# 5. GENDER MAINSTREAMING ECONOMIC TRANSITIONS



The current challenges affecting the EU and the complexity of our global society require the utmost attention to make sure no one is left behind, especially the most marginalised in our communities. In an ever-changing world, we must ensure that inequalities are not further embedded by important economic transitions, such as the green, just and digital transitions. These changes will touch on a vast range of economic policy, including the labour market, industries, taxation and the well-being of people and the planet. All of these policy areas have a gender di-

mension,<sup>131</sup> and this must be reflected in all EU and national policies and programmes to ensure they contribute to greater gender equality and the maximisation of the potential and well-being of all citizens. This can only be achieved if businesses, policy-makers and society as a whole make use of everyone's talents in all their diversity, and if gender mainstreaming is embraced as a strategy. The aim is to redistribute power, influence and resources in a fair and gender-equal way, tackling inequality, promoting fairness and creating opportunity in the economic transitions.<sup>132</sup>

## 5.1 GENDER BUDGETING

Gender equality is not just a human right, it brings tremendous socioeconomic benefits. As stated previously, reducing gender inequality has many positive effects and leads to higher growth rates, healthier people, improved labour productivity and more responsive governments. Gender-responsive budgets and related policies play a crucial role in this process by improving welfare, well-being and leading to more sustainable and inclusive growth and employment.

The EU's budget can be a powerful force for such growth and development. Yet when it comes to reducing inequalities between women and men, the EU's budget falls short. For example, less than 1% of the 2014-2020 European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) budget was earmarked for gender equality measures.<sup>133</sup> Making gender equality a reality requires more than words — it needs dedicated and consistent funding.

Gender budgeting is not a special approach to budgeting, or even an add-on to budgeting. Gender budgeting is a strategy to achieve equality between women and men by focusing on how public resources are collected and spent. It requires all budgetary and taxation measures to be subjected to gender impact assessments, whereby a distributional analysis is undertaken to identify how women and men, and different groups, are likely to be affected by proposed spending. The assessment must include consideration of how any unequal effects can be mitigated and eliminated.<sup>134</sup> Gender budgeting can improve budgeting, when fiscal policies and administrative procedures are structured to address gender inequality.<sup>135</sup>

The purpose of gender budgeting is to promote accountability and transparency in fiscal planning, to increase gender-responsive participation in the budget process and to advance gender equality and women's rights. Effective implementation of gender budgeting at EU, national and local levels requires political commitment matched with a technical capacity for gender mainstreaming, monitoring and evaluation. Here, civil society and the

media play a crucial role in monitoring and holding governments accountable for their budgets. The Women's Budget Group<sup>136</sup> in the United Kingdom is a good example of this. Engaged leadership is important to ensure that gender equality is integrated into the planning and budgeting processes and that public budget revenues and expenditures benefit women and men equally.<sup>137</sup>

Financing for gender equality is a means of ensuring that gender equality commitments are met. The commitments of governments to finance the realisation of women's rights and the advancement of gender equality are set out in a number of international treaties, agreements and policies that translate political commitments into action and address the chronic underinvestment in gender equality.

**“ Gender budgeting is a strategy to achieve equality between women and men by focusing on how public resources are collected and spent ”**

A gender-sensitive approach is now more important than ever, as we address the effects of the COVID-19 crisis. Gender mainstreaming of national, regional and EU budgets and macroeconomic policy frameworks will ensure that economic recovery measures post COVID-19 are gender just and leave no one behind. Gender needs to be integrated when the EU gets ready to deploy stimulus packages and investments to tackle the crisis, including the use of billions of euros in EU funds. Gender equality 'checks' should be made for all COVID-19 response measures, and no money should be spent on initiatives or given as support to recipients who cannot show that it will be spent in a way which improves gender equality.



At the national level, funding for civil society organisations, education, culture, re-skilling, unemployment support, aid to businesses and other areas must all be deployed in a way which benefits women and does not perpetuate existing inequalities. EIGE has created a toolkit that highlights good practice from EU Member States and helps users keep in mind the different needs of women and men throughout the EU funds process, from development of indicators to definition of project selection criteria, involvement of partners, and monitoring, reporting and evaluation of programmes.<sup>138</sup>

**“ Gender mainstreaming of national, regional and EU budgets and macroeconomic policy frameworks will ensure that economic recovery measures post COVID-19 are gender just and leave no one behind ”**

Gender budgeting also demands an end to austerity policies once and for all. The cuts to European welfare states in the wake of the last financial crisis undermined women’s rights, perpetuated gender inequalities, and impeded sustainable and equal economic progress. Cuts to public sector jobs, family benefits, health and care services, and support for gender equality institutions and organisations hit women hardest. Cuts to public services and benefits impacted women’s economic independence negatively, since benefits often are an important income source for women and since they use public services more than men. Single mothers and female single pensioners faced the biggest losses overall.<sup>139</sup> For example, it has been calculated that 86%

of the burden of the conservative government’s austerity measures in the United Kingdom between 2010 and 2017 fell on women.<sup>140</sup> Europe must not make the same mistake in its response to COVID-19. Public budgets and economic governance must be guided by gender equality assessments and women’s organisations and experts must be fully involved in budgetary processes at all governance levels.<sup>141</sup> Europe’s economic and fiscal policy coordination tools must allow national governments to develop budgets that not only invest in targeted gender equality measures, but also strengthen welfare states and public services, which in turn will improve gender equality.

## **AUSTRIA: GENDER BUDGETING REQUIRED BY CONSTITUTION** <sup>142</sup>

Since the federal constitution was revised in 2009, Austrian authorities are obliged to carry out gender budgeting. Gender objectives, measures and indicators must be integrated in the strategy reports, in the federal budget and in the supplementary sheets on the basis of the Federal Budget Act in order to improve gender mainstreaming of policies. In-house training is teaching administrators and policy-makers to apply the principles of gender budgeting in practice in their specific departments. Gender budgeting in Austria was initialised and negotiated by the social democratic party, SPÖ, and it was a unanimous decision by the Austrian parliament. Moreover, in Vienna, gender mainstreaming has been anchored in the city’s constitution for the last 15 years.

## POLICY PROPOSALS

- ✓ Integrate gender budgeting elements into existing tools at local and national levels, as well as in EU tools such as the Multiannual Financial Framework, the European Semester, and the annual budgetary cycle. Strengthen gender mainstreaming in the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF).<sup>143</sup>
- ✓ Top up EU funding and gender budgeting within the the EU MFF to better finance initiatives tackling gender-based violence and human rights violations and follow up the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme 2014-2020.
- ✓ Embed gender equality as a distinct policy objective and institutionalise gender mainstreaming methods in all public funds.
- ✓ Set budgetary targets for gender equality and introduce a system to track funding for gender equality in all funding programmes.
- ✓ Set achieving full gender equality as a horizontal priority, carry out midterm reviews and gender impact assessments before the planning of actions or projects within EU frameworks receiving funding.
- ✓ Employ gender-sensitive management of publicly funded projects. For example, establish gender-specific indicators to be applied in project selection, monitoring and

evaluation phases, measure the expenditure and resource allocation related to gender equality objectives and establish and maintain sex-disaggregated and gender-specific output and result indicators.

- ✓ Integrate gender equality and better work-life balance as key elements in EU funds by implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights.
- ✓ Promote and implement international commitments such as the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Addis Ababa Action Plan on Transformative Financing for Gender Equality.<sup>144</sup>
- ✓ Ensure that the EU's economic and fiscal coordination tools are used to mitigate the negative effects of austerity at national level, and replace EU policies aiming to achieve short-term fiscal stability with policies that provide equality and solidarity-driven prosperity in the long term, while safeguarding the economic positions of both women and men.
- ✓ The Commission's guidance on socially responsible public procurement should go beyond fighting discrimination and promoting gender equality in public tenders, and also work to improve wages and working conditions by stopping the race to the bottom in public services and the focus on cost of care services to municipal budgets at the expense of ensuring quality and good working conditions.<sup>145</sup>

## 5.2 BRIDGING THE DIGITAL GENDER DIVIDE

The ongoing digital transformation provides new economic opportunities for women and can contribute to greater gender equality. The internet, digital platforms, devices and services could help bridge the digital gender divide by giving women the possibility to earn more, increase their employment opportunities, and access knowledge and general information.

However, according to a 2018 OECD study,<sup>146</sup> worldwide almost 327 million fewer women than men have a smartphone and can access mobile internet. 90% of jobs in Europe require basic digital skills.<sup>147</sup> Women are underrepresented in ICT jobs, top management and academic careers and women are four times less likely to be ICT specialists than men. Start-ups owned by women receive 23% less funding and are 30% less likely to have a positive trajectory compared to male-owned businesses.<sup>148</sup>

COVID-19 has shown how essential digital literacy and equal access to devices and good quality internet are to avoid isolation as well as social and economic exclusion. Due to the lockdown, many less privileged people have been isolated and cannot keep up with e-learning, apply for financial aid or access emergency help services. The rise of gender-based online violence also contributes to the overall digital gender divide and discrimination of women.

Another strategic area where women must be better included is development, research, programming and Artificial Intelligence (AI). For example, only 22% of the world's AI developers are female.<sup>149</sup>



While AI can bring solutions to many societal challenges, it also risks intensifying gender inequalities. Algorithms and related machine-learning, if not transparent and robust enough, risk repeating, amplifying or contributing to gender biases that programmers may not be aware of, or that are the result of specific data selection.<sup>150</sup>

If women are not included on an equal footing with men, the digital economy will waste their huge potential. Closing digital gender gaps will foster greater gender equality in the labour market, boost economic growth and build a more inclusive, digital economy. According to a report by the Broadband Commission, bringing an additional 600 million women and girls online around the world would result in a GDP increase of up to €15.4 billion.<sup>151</sup>

## POLICY PROPOSALS

- ✓ Apply a systematic gender perspective to EU policy and programmes related to digital spaces and markets, trade, competition, AI, ICT and development. This includes the EU Digital Agenda and the EU digital single market strategy.
- ✓ Foster and implement the Safer Internet Programme, the European Safer Internet Centre, the EU Cyber Security Strategy and the Digital Service Act to combat online hate speech and gender-based violence.
- ✓ Introduce quotas for management and executive boards of tech companies; support and apply campaigns that promote equal representation of women on panels and debates about digital development.
- ✓ Foster women's entrepreneurship and engagement in innovation and research.
- ✓ Facilitate labour market participation, on-the-job learning, and upskilling of female employees in tech.
- ✓ Enhance access to and improve the affordability of digital technologies.
- ✓ Collect gender-disaggregated data to inform and underpin digital policy.
- ✓ Address horizontal segregation, stereotyping and gender gaps in education and training through an updated European Skills Agenda; foster lifelong learning from an early age.

✓ Reinforce the European Youth Guarantee, specifically addressing women that are not in education, employment or training to ensure equal opportunities.

✓ Implement the Member States' declaration of commitment on 'Women in Digital'.<sup>152</sup>

## 5.3 A FEMINIST EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL

When we try to create climate action without gender justice, we fail. When we try to deliver climate justice without racial justice and the rights of ethnic minorities, we fail. If we ignore the deep intersection between misogyny, sexism, racism, the rise in right wing fascism and climate denialism, we fail.

The European Green Deal has sparked a conversation around solutions to the climate crisis that are based on real, systemic, transformative change, and that are ambitious enough to meet the scale of what science, justice and people demand. Movement leaders, activists, politicians, and academics are seizing the opportunity to shape the vision of what this systemic overhaul could look like. The PES family has been vocal and active throughout to transform our economy towards sustainability, circularity and to introduce the Green Deal as the new growth strategy for Europe. A feminist analysis must be part of this discourse. The Green Deal should be rooted in feminist principles and practices so that people and the planet are truly put before profit.

That is why it is crucial not to repeat the mistakes of the 2007-2008 financial crisis. Further neoliberal austerity measures that put the burden on the most vulnerable are not the answer to the climate crisis. Rebuilding from the health and economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic requires dramatic socioeconomic transformation which prioritises people and the planet by re-shaping our economic and social system towards more equality and true sustainability.

We need to increase our readiness for future climate crises and take extraordinary action to mitigate the worst of the climate emergency, especially for women who are too often affected first and consulted last. The European Green Deal can be a valuable tool in combatting the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic by incorporating social, environmental and feminist economic concerns as a central element of recovery programmes.<sup>153</sup> Just as COVID-19 has an asymmetrical impact on women and men, so has climate change and green policies.



Since women are most at risk of poverty and social exclusion, this also makes them more vulnerable to issues like energy poverty, housing deprivation and lack of mobility options. These problems have been magnified during this time of crisis. When living in confinement, quality housing and access to heating and energy become crucial. With women at the forefront of the efforts to contain the virus, it is even more important to provide them with high-quality and affordable services and housing. For mobility, women depend on access to public transport to a larger degree due to lower level of car ownership, but also because of their preference using of environmentally friendly solutions. Due to their lower average income, women are at greater risk of energy poverty when compared to men, and have fewer resources to invest in low-carbon options, such as energy efficiency and providers who utilise renewables.

Perceptions and attitudes towards climate change and climate policy options also vary substantially according to gender. Women are, on average, more concerned about climate change than men.<sup>154</sup> While a preference for environmentally friendly options already largely exists for women, it is important to enable them financially and provide them with the means to act on this preference. Sustainability remains a privilege — decisive action is required in line with the European Green Deal and the Sustainable Development Goals to push for greater socioeconomic equality with an emphasis on gender equality to provide better living conditions for women and enable them to further lead Europe's climate action.

In addition, on a global scale, women are strongly affected by climate change and its consequences. Already 25 years ago, the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995) identified the environment as one of the 12 critical areas for women, stating that women have an essential role to play in the development of sustainable and ecologically sound consumption and production patterns and approaches to natural resource management.<sup>155</sup>

Addressing the gender dimension of the EU's efforts against global climate change can therefore have a key role in leveraging the full potential of environmental policies and create synergies to promote gender equality globally. New industries and the job opportunities they create must be in line with our ambition for a truly sustainable economy rooted in equal societies. The just transition we are envisioning must be fair for women and support incentives for women to play a central role, as entrepreneurs, employees, researchers and managers at all levels. The glass ceiling in the green economy must be broken, and a key step to achieving that is to increase women's representation in STEM professions. Green employment for women in rural areas must also be prioritised, by supporting women farmers to secure their income through green growth and enabling women to flourish in rural areas as food producers and protectors of the environment.<sup>156</sup> According to recent estimates, the energy transition can also create 60 million new jobs globally in the next 20 years and thus help boost labour market participation for women.<sup>157</sup>

The EU has the potential to take the lead in strengthening global efforts to protect the climate, including more sustainable energy and transport policies, and demonstrate that the transition to a low carbon society can be beneficial in social and economic terms. Gender issues need to be addressed in climate policies in order to ensure that women and men are equally and meaningfully involved in planning and decision-making. This is a matter of equality and fairness. Climate change policies must be adapted to all relevant beneficiaries and consumers, addressing the different needs and concerns of society. This will lead to efficient outcomes and will bring benefits to women and men on an equal basis.<sup>158</sup>

## POLICY PROPOSALS

- ✓ Incorporate gender equality as a key aspect of the socio-economic transition towards sustainability, specifically through the European Green Deal and its dimensions such as transport and energy policies.
- ✓ Gender mainstream the EU Just Transition Fund and its implementation.
- ✓ Foster women's environmental-economic decision-making through quotas for company boards in relevant industrial sectors as well as in environment decision-making institutions.
- ✓ Align the European Green Deal and resulting policy measures with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, including Goal 5.
- ✓ Incorporate gender equality, decent work and affordable and sustainable energy in future investment plans and the EU recovery strategy.
- ✓ Implement the 2009 European Council conclusions on climate change and development and the 2012 Council conclusions on gender equality and the environment.<sup>159</sup>
- ✓ Compile age- and gender-disaggregated data when strategies, programmes and budgeting projects are being planned, implemented and evaluated for the environment and climate sectors, as requested by the European Parliament in 2012 and 2015 resolutions.<sup>160</sup>
- ✓ Put gender equality next to sustainability at the centre of the EU's strategy on corporate social responsibility (CSR).

## 6. CONCLUSION: MAKING WOMEN COUNT IN ECONOMIC POLICY



The 2020s will be a defining decade for gender equality in Europe. It started off well with the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the launch of an EU Gender Equality Strategy for 2020-2025. We finally got a female European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, and a progressive Commissioner for Equality, Helena Dalli. Then the COVID-19 pandemic struck and all over the world women saw their economic opportunities deteriorate, whilst at the same time having to shoulder the heavy burden of unpaid care work and low-paid and insecure, yet essential, jobs.

Europe is at a crossroads. As we are working to recover from the social and economic fallout of COVID-19, we have the chance to finally make women in all their diversity count in economic policy by creating a progressive, feminist economy for Europe – an economic system based on gender equality, diversity, well-being, solidarity and justice. It is no longer enough to just 'add women' to mainstream economic policy, where profit and fiscal austerity are valued higher than human beings. It is time for a paradigm shift.

Europe must make the labour market work for women through policies that increase women's employment levels in safe and decent jobs, improve work-life balance, desegregate professions, ensure that more women reach decision-making positions, and close the gender pay and pension gaps. Women's job insecurity must be tackled and their working conditions improved, including when it comes to gender-based violence in the workplace.

For too long, women's economic contribution to society as carers, both as unpaid carers and care professionals, has been undervalued. It is time to put an end to gender stereotypes and promote a more equal sharing of care responsibilities between women and men, as well as strengthen the welfare state. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of well-funded health and care sectors and has shown that we as a society must improve pay and working conditions in essential services, which are dominated by women.

We must also hold corporations and other private economic actors responsible for the social externalities they create, and make it impossible to profit from gender-based violence, sexism or exploitation. Finally, women must not be forgotten in the big economic transitions currently facing Europe. It is essential that the digital, just and green transitions are gender mainstreamed, and that all EU, national and local authorities practice gender budgeting. An intersectional approach, which takes into account the different needs and experiences of women facing multiple discrimination, is essential.

**“ It is no longer enough to just ‘add women’ to mainstream economic policy, where profit and fiscal austerity are valued higher than human beings. It is time for a paradigm shift ”**

Creating a feminist economy for Europe will require concerted efforts and strong political will by policy-makers at all levels, in cooperation with social partners, to develop the legislation, collective agreements, targeted funding and project support needed. Change is never easy, but it is necessary. Gender equality is a matter of justice and a feminist economy benefits everyone. PES Women and our progressive political family are leading the way in this fight.



# 7. A PROGRESSIVE FEMINIST ECONOMY AT A GLANCE

PROGRESS IN SOCIETY MEANS EQUAL PROGRESS FOR EVERYONE

**Gender equality can be achieved through an economic model that is feminist, meaning an economy that:**



is based on and promotes progressive principles and values such as gender equality, intersectionality, inclusivity, diversity, peace, solidarity, dignity, justice, human rights, well-being and sustainability



is using 100% of society's talents and skills



provides decent work for everyone and equal economic rights for women and men



explores all strategies within public financing and macro-economic policy to make resources available for women's rights and gender equality



considers full-time employment as a given, part-time as a choice



holds states and businesses accountable for social externalities



recognises, reduces and redistributes the unpaid care work disproportionately done by women



recognises both women and men as earners and carers



secures income, tax justice and promotes women's safety and ability to engage politically



redistributes its resources so social and economic burdens do not fall on women's shoulders



fosters social dialogue

## To realise this, we need to create fair and inclusive conditions. We need to:



address structural barriers such as discrimination, harassment, gender-based violence and gender stereotypes



ensure legal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) to protect women's economic and bodily autonomy



end gender segregation and improve wages in female-dominated sectors



ensure work-life balance policies such as paid care leave schemes, end the motherhood penalty and ensure return to employment after leave



practice gender budgeting at all levels and allocate targeted resources to implement gender equality provisions



promote a shift in economic policy-making towards transformative universal social protection systems, quality public services, including publicly funded education, health and care services and sustainable infrastructure



implement progressive national and global tax reforms and improvements in global governance and accountability



allocate sufficient public resources to guarantee adequate and high-quality of health and care provisions



ensure rights to unionise and access to collective bargaining for all workers

## A feminist economy will result in:



decent jobs and fair pay for both women and men in all their diversity



sustainable and fair economic growth



increased tax revenues to strengthen the welfare state



better quality public services and infrastructures



increase in physical and mental health



the closure of gender pay and pension gaps



the closure of the gender employment gap



a more equal and just society as a whole

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PES Women is the women's organisation of the Party of European Socialists (PES,) promoting gender equality, women's rights and a feminist Europe both inside and outside the party by giving a voice, tools and platform for women, by putting forward specific women's rights policies, through gender mainstreaming the overall policy-making of the social democratic family and by ensuring equal representation in the PES bodies, member parties and organisations.

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