

# FORUM ON THE FUTURE OF GENDER EQUALITY IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

As part of a broader stakeholder consultation process around the equality of women and men, the European Commission Directorate General for Justice and Consumers, Unit for Gender Equality organised the **Forum on the Future of Gender Equality in the European Union**. The Forum was held on 20 and 21 April 2015 in the Radisson Blu Royal Hotel in Brussels. A total of 308 participants attended the Forum, representing national governments, EU Institutions, International Organisations, social partners, civil society organisations, businesses and academia. The Forum was professionally moderated by Jacki Davis and Geoff Meade and was designed to allow for maximum participant engagement, providing ample space for discussions and networking.

## OFFICIAL OPENING

**Věra Jourová**, Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality, officially opened the Forum and welcomed all participants. In her speech, Commissioner Jourová highlighted the good position of women in Europe, while at the same addressing the inequalities that still persist including unequal pay and unequal share of household tasks. She stressed her main areas of focus with regard to gender equality: equal economic independence, gender balance in decision-making, a better work-life-balance for men and women, and eliminating violence against women.

Commissioner Jourová encouraged all participants to have constructive discussions, propose concrete ideas and bring forward possible policy solutions.

## VISIONS FOR A GENDER EQUAL EUROPEAN UNION

To kick-start a fruitful discussion on potential visions for a gender equal European Union, five speakers from diverse perspectives were invited to share their thoughts on the topic.

**Assita Kanko**, **Emma Bonino** (via video message), **Dr Gary Barker**, **Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka** (via video message) and **Brigitte Grésy** inspired the participants when sharing experiences from their personal and professional life and how that reflects on how a gender equal Europe would look like in the future.



Following the stimulating presentations participants were encouraged to think about “What does a gender equal European Union look like for me?”. Reuniting all individual ideas, the following main clusters emerged:



**Giovanna Martelli**, Gender Equality Adviser to the Prime Minister of Italy, closed the session by highlighting the need of cooperation to reach a joined vision for a gender equal Europe. In her view, economic and social empowerment of women will make them less vulnerable and will therefore reduce gender violence. In that respect the economic crisis in Europe poses specific challenges that can only be overcome by close cooperation between European Institutions and other actors.

### **PRIORITIES FOR A GENDER EQUAL EUROPEAN UNION**

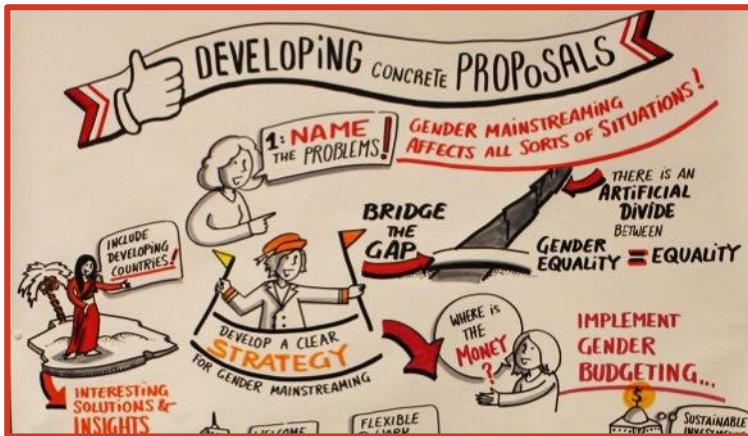
Taking into account the identified elements of a common vision, participants could join two out of ten different workshops covering various topic areas:

- Gender equality in the labour market
- Poverty and social exclusion
- Beyond the work/life balance
- Violence against women
- Gender roles and stereotypes
- Gender and the digital society
- Gender balance in decision-making
- Gender in development cooperation
- Gender and health
- Governance and ways of working together

Each of the workshops was hosted by two experts on the topic, and participants enthusiastically dived into developing three or four main issues that need to be addressed to achieve a gender equal European Union in the particular topic.

## DEVELOPING CONCRETE PROPOSALS FOR POLICY

Whereas the first day of the Forum was dedicated to the identification of issues and priorities, the second day focused on the measures that need to be taken to address these priorities. Being encouraged to bring forward their own ideas, participants identified **35 topics** for policy intervention on which they wanted to elaborate in smaller groups. Throughout two sessions, participants joined as many discussion islands as they wanted, bringing in their own ideas and gaining insight from other participants. The topics of discussion varied from EU funding for gender equality to entrepreneurship to stereotypes to gender mainstreaming, and in many of the discussion islands the elements of the vision and the priorities developed during the first day of the Forum came back. Each discussion island



was hosted by one of the participants, who were also asked to steer the discussion towards developing three concrete proposals for policy/action. Following the group discussion the hosts were asked to provide feedback to the plenary.

## REALITY CHECK WITH POLICY MAKERS

After two days of discussing ideas for policy priorities, six policy makers from different parts of Europe ran the ideas developed by participants through a political reality check. All six policy makers agreed that the priorities and policy proposals identified represent major challenges that need to be addressed in order to reach a gender equal Europe. Specifically, they highlighted the following topics: equal pay, gendered violence, inequality in the labour market, caretaking, decision-making power for women (including in democratic representations) and work-life balance. When inquired about the role of the EU in tackling those topics, the policy makers stressed the fact that the EU should set a positive example and include gender equality in all policy areas, set a framework, determine concrete targets, and establish an effective monitoring system. Identifying their number one priority to realise the vision of a gender equal European Union, the six policy makers stated:



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- “My priority would be a specific strategy for the equality between men and women and from there we can link all the other priorities we have“, **Iratxe García Pérez**, Member of the European Parliament, Chair of the Committee for Women’s Rights and Gender Equality.

- “For me it would be one strong stand-alone strategy with clear targets to be discussed in the EPSCO Council, the Ministry of Finance and at the European Council level”, **Pernilla Baralt**, State Secretary, Ministry of Health Social Affairs, Sweden.
- “Equality between men and women should remain identified and subsumed in a specific strategy with clear objectives and the necessary financing”, **Pascale Boistard**, Secretary of State for Women’s Rights, France.
- “Additionally to having a specific strategy, I propose a European Congress of Women”, **Prof. Małgorzata Fuszara**, Secretary of State, Government Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment, Poland.
- “The EU needs a clear gender strategy with clear objective and a clear action plan that is promoted by each member state and involving NGOs”, **Elke Ferner**, Parliamentary State Secretary to the Federal Minister for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, Germany.
- “Taking for granted that we will have a strategy, in choosing one of my four priorities, I choose for violence against women”, **Teresa Morais**, Secretary State of Parliamentary Affairs and Equality, Portugal.

## STEPS FORWARD

**Salla Saastamoinen**, Director of the Directorate for Equality in DG Justice and Consumers, expressed her gratitude towards the participants, who developed an enormous amount of ideas and proposals. The Director explained that the outcomes of the Forum will be complemented by other forms of consultation. The European Network of Experts on Gender Equality (ENEGE) has produced a **report on the visions on the future of gender equality** and citizens have been consulted via the Eurobarometer. The Advisory Committee on Gender Equality has equally been consulted and provided their opinion on the vision for a gender equal European Union. The European Commission annually reports on progress towards equality between women and men. Lastly, DG Justice and Consumers has produced a report on gender equality law in 33 countries. All of these documents can be found on the European Commission [website](#).

In addition, the consultation process started with a Ministerial Round Table in Rome under the Italian Presidency and the Council agreeing on conclusions taking stock of the development in the last years and giving some ideas for the future. The European Parliament has produced a report on the work that has been done so far. Based on those achievements, the Commission is carrying out a **broad public consultation**, which was launched at the Forum and can be found [online](#). The Director invites all participants to distribute the link and to take part in the public consultation until July 2015. The challenge will be to find those priorities that tackle the most important gender equality problems and that are politically feasible in 28 member states and the European Parliament. The contributions by participants in this Forum are an integral part of the consultation process, and they will be elaborated in a full report on the Forum. It will give a detailed account on the discussion and outcomes produced. As soon as the report is finalised, it will be available on the website of the European Commission.