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Women in Europe

Taking the bull by the horns **Women in Europe**

Europa was a beautiful Phoenician princess. Zeus, the father of the Greek gods, fell in love with her. In order to avoid the wrath of his wife Hera, he approached the princess in the guise of a powerful bull, and carried her off from her Asian homeland to the island of Crete. As legend has it, the Greeks were so taken by Europa's charm that they named all the countries they discovered after her.

Has Europe proven worthy of its mythological origins? Has it since treated women well? Yes and no. The story begins rather coarsely with coal and steel. In fact, wars over these major industrial resources have twice reduced Europe to rubble and ashes. So the idea arose that peace could be promoted by sharing the management of these industries, which led to the founding of

the European Coal and Steel Community. As a subsequent step, Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Italy, Luxembourg and the Federal Republic of Germany formed the European Economic Community in 1957.

The founding documents of the EEC were the Treaties of Rome, which called for all members of the community to compete on a common market under equal conditions – and here is where women enter the picture. They were in a position to skew competitive conditions, or so it was feared. Because France had already introduced the principle of "equal pay for equal work", the other countries would have an advantage on account of their lower wages for women. For this reason alone, Article 119 of the EEC Treaty of Rome stipulated equal pay for equal work. It would be wrong to see an intent to emancipate in this article, but it is true that



the article later became an important reference point for equality policies designed to eliminate all discriminatory barriers from the labour market. Thus in 1979, for example, Brussels stipulated that women have the same claim to all state and employee social benefits as men. Until that point, such claims had hardly been self-evident, nor were special protections for employees who were pregnant or nursing.

The original six member states of the European Economic Community were soon joined by Denmark, Ireland and the UK (1973), Greece (1981), Spain and Portugal (1985), and ten years later by Finland, Austria and Sweden. These latter three countries in particular brought very progressive women's policies with them into Europe. New momentum was also generated by the United Nations, especially the Fourth World Conference on Women held in

Beijing in 1995. Women's movements around the world succeeded in raising awareness for the fact that societal roles for women and men are not determined by nature but rather are flexible, and that political, economic and cultural factors combine to discriminate against women. As such, anyone wishing to close the power gap between men and women must incorporate this objective into decisions in all areas. In the final document of the 1995 World Conference on Women, this approach was termed "gender mainstreaming".

The conference had a major effect on European gender equality policy. In Beijing, national governments committed themselves to comprehensive equality policies. Having done so, these governments as well as the European Parliament and Commission were then subjected to pressure from women's groups and organisations,



thousands of whose members had participated in the NGO forum in Beijing. Their pressure effected a major new development in the 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam. It took the idea of equal treatment for women and men and extended it from labour policy to all other areas as well. Above all, it made gender equality a shared responsibility of the Union. Since then, gender mainstreaming has been mandatory for the member states. In the years that followed, the EU issued several directives that prohibit discrimination on the basis of gender, race or ethnic origin, religion or world view, disability or sexual orientation. In Germany, debate over how to implement these directives went on for years until the General Equality Act (Allgemeines Gleichstellungsgesetz – AGG) was passed in 2006. It remains to be seen how this act will be applied. An equally important development is the prohibition on different insurance policies for women and

men. This means that private pension plans that receive state subsidies (the Riester-Rente) may not differentiate on the basis of gender. Health insurance plans must provide detailed substantiation for why women represent a higher risk. And in any event, all costs associated with bearing children must be shared by both sexes.

Yet Europe does not consist solely of directives and laws. A large amount of money is also in circulation. Thus the European Social Fund (with a budget of 864 billion euros for 2007-2013) expressly allocates funds to promote gender equality on the labour market and to reduce the considerable discrepancies in income for women and men throughout Europe. Such guidelines are important, but the matter of putting them into practice is left largely to the individual member states. And the public very rarely hears about this. If citizens were better informed



about how the EU functions as well as about the corresponding activities in their respective countries, their identification with and commitment to the European Union would increase.

An important related objective is to devote serious efforts to promoting the process of democratisation. For example, one might justifiably criticise the distribution of decision-making power in the European Union, i.e. that the Parliament still has too little compared to the Commission and the Council, and that important decisions are consequently made behind closed doors. The European Union, which now numbers 27 member states and around 493

million inhabitants, has undergone a step-by-step process toward greater unification over the past fifty years. It now faces the challenge of generating a stable democratic foundation for this unique community of nations.

In the course of vigorous debates over the draft for a European constitution, women in Europe have taken the bull by the horns and ensured that advances in women's policy issues remain safeguarded. With or without a constitution, however, the greatest problem in old and new member states alike remains how to put EU directives into practice.



Women's work is worth more Equal pay

"Equal pay for equal work" – Fifty years ago, this principle was included in the founding treaties of the European Community. Eighteen years later, it was linked specifically to the idea of gender equality. In 1997, it was stipulated in the Treaties of Amsterdam and is thus legally binding for all member states of the European Union.

But equal pay for women and men has not been put into practice. EU statistics show that the average gender wage gap in the member states is 16%. Women earn 10.7% less in government jobs, and a good 23.7% less on the free market. Calculated for a full working career, women earn only 42-64% of what men do.

There are many reasons for this. In addition to traditional gender roles and distribution of labour inside and outside the home, gender-specific clichés about the quality and performance of work also exert a decisive influence on women's income levels. Most job evaluation systems, for example, assign a higher value to "typically male" than to "typically female" qualities. Thus work with and on people is usually valued less than jobs in business and commerce – and receives correspondingly less pay.

In order to counter this undervaluation, the European Court of Justice has issued a number of judgments warning that wage systems must be transparent and that the same differentiation criteria must apply to "women's" and "men's" work. In several EU member states, such as Belgium, Denmark, Greece, Ireland, Lithuania, Austria and



Sweden, progress has been made and strategies and initiatives have been developed that feature non-discriminatory job evaluations.

Even with the same qualifications as men, women are rarely found in the top third of company hierarchies. They run up against "glass ceilings" and are denied top positions. Women are also disproportionately represented in part-time jobs, the low-wage sector, and in positions without legal protections, where they are rarely entitled to benefits. This means that they have inadequate old-age pension insurance, they receive lower termination payments than their male counterparts, and they receive fewer social security benefits. Although employment rates for women in the EU are rising slightly, the average unemployment rate

for women is 2.8% higher than for men. And this also does not reflect the number of hours of work actually performed. (page 8)

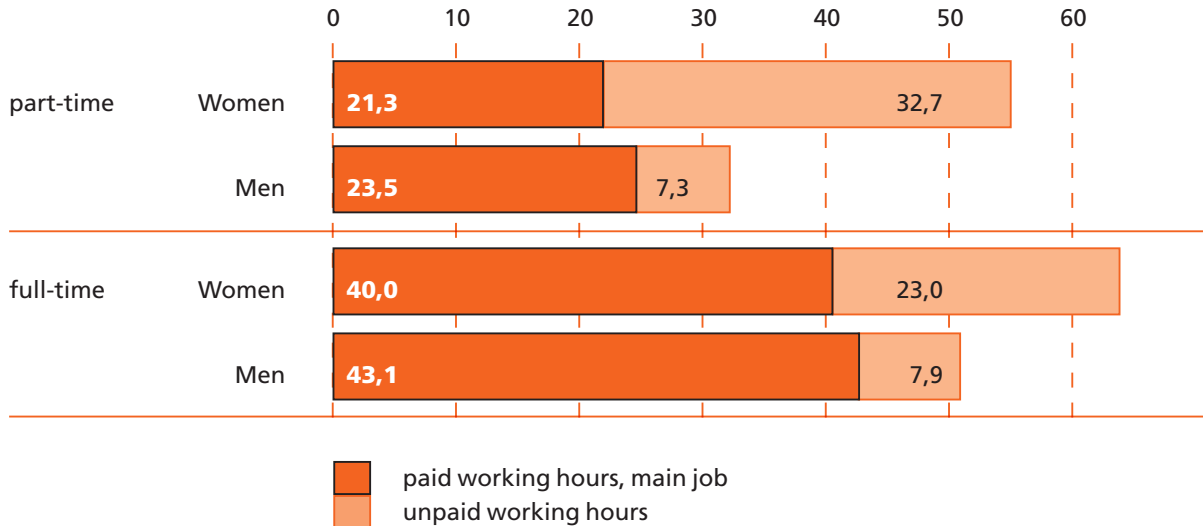
The EU „General Direction for Employment, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities" wants to devote greater efforts to identifying the causes for unequal pay and to propose countermeasures on the basis of these investigations.

The governments of the EU member states must ensure general conditions that enable women to assume leadership positions. But employees at all levels are called upon to demand uniform job evaluation systems and to compel their employers to examine their companies' treatment of women and men – and if inequalities are found, to introduce effective improvements.



Composite weekly working hours

by part-time employment and gender (EU 27 only)



Source: Fourth European working conditions survey 2005

Investing in the future Education

In Europe as elsewhere, education is the most important factor in a country's economic potential, and the core vehicle for imparting social values such as solidarity, equal opportunities and participation in society. In 2002, the European Council and the European Commission launched the Action Programme known as "Education and Training 2010". Its aim is for the European Union to lead the world in the quality of its member states' educational systems by the year 2010 at the latest. In order to achieve this, urgently needed reforms must be introduced, because a disturbing number of young people have not completed school or acquired basic skills. Across the EU, 15% of young people do not have a school-leaving certificate, only 70% of EU citizens have any type of higher

education, and only 11% of adults consider "lifelong learning" to be necessary.

Despite some recent progress, there are large discrepancies among the EU member states. Studies have shown that family background exerts the greatest influence on children's school education. In Germany in particular, schools have done little to counter this effect. A child of university graduates has a far higher chance of entering college than a child of labourers. By contrast, in Finland the weak pupils of each class receive extra individual support from special teachers. EU education ministers have criticised Germany for its practice of assigning children to different school tracks at an early age, i.e. for the fact that its educational system promotes instead of counteracts the transmission of parental educational levels to later generations.

On the other hand, Germany has largely achieved



equal treatment for girls and boys with respect to both access to schooling and school results. This does not, however, continue on in vocational training.

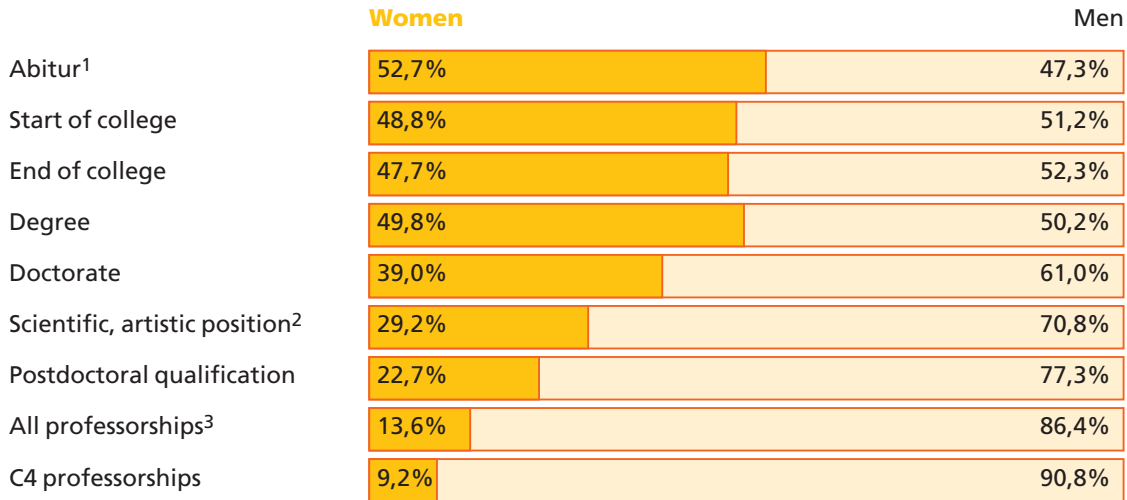
For one thing, the choice of training programme continues to be influenced by gender roles. Training for typical "women's jobs" usually takes place solely in the classroom, whereas "men's jobs" generally have a dual structure, namely both in the classroom and at the workplace. And here we see a phenomenon that continues on throughout the subsequent working careers. While the "male" dual track is paid by the employer, including health insurance and social benefits, the "female" classroom track is both unremunerated and lacking in social benefits. Thus women are at high risk of becoming accustomed early on to working for little or no compensation.

Although more women than men earn university degrees, it is usually the men who start successful careers in academia, because it is very difficult for women to reconcile a full-time university career with children.

In order to reduce the risk of poverty for a large part of future generations, the educational system in Germany must be reformed. The EU rightly demands that its member states make greater efforts to implement their respective reforms and invest more in their educational systems. It has developed a programme to help exchange proven strategies, and will monitor and support putting these strategies into practice.



Percentages of women and men in academic careers in 2004



1) and other college-eligible school-leaving certificates in 2003; 2) only full-time personnel; 3) including junior professors

source: Statistisches Bundesamt 2005, Hans-Böckler-Stiftung 2005

A decent existence for all ***Poverty***

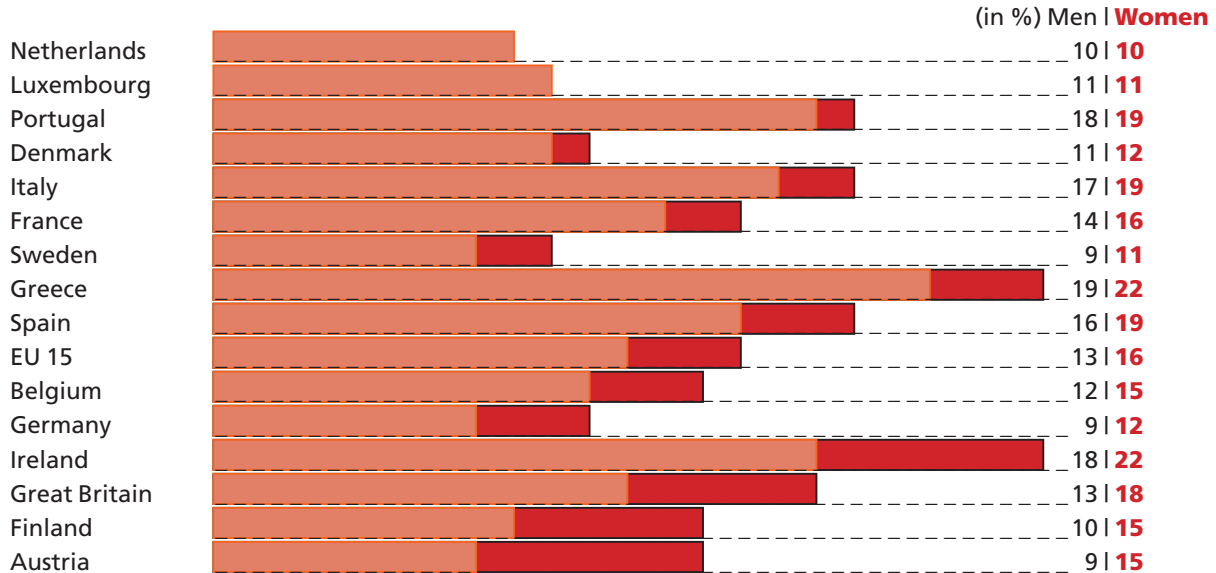
In order to combat social exclusion and poverty and to ensure a decent existence for all, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights recognises the right of every individual to social services and social assistance. Nevertheless, poverty remains one of the greatest problems in the European Union, as a recent study by the European Commission has shown.

According to this study, around 16% of the EU population, or 70 million people, live in relative poverty. In a statement of 19 December 1984, the EU Council of Ministers defined persons, families,

and groups of persons as relatively poor if their "resources (material, cultural and social) are so limited as to exclude them from the minimum acceptable way of life in the Member State to which they belong." In monetary terms, this minimum is calculated as less than 60% of the national median. In Germany, that means 938 € (801 € for the former East German states, 974 € for the former West), and in Austria 786 €. The relative poverty line varies among the different member states, in some cases strongly. In the 15 original EU member states, for example, it lies more than twice as high as in the new Central and Eastern European countries.



Poverty risk rates for women and men in the EU states in 2001



With the exception of Greece and Hungary, all EU member states have social security systems that reduce the risk of poverty. Without these systems, the number of people living in relative poverty would be around 25% higher. States in which income discrepancies are the lowest, namely Denmark, Sweden, and Finland, also show the lowest risk of relative poverty. In most of the EU member states, children and women are much more likely to be affected by poverty. Due to demands on their time and money, single parents are especially affected, as are single older women. For the latter, inadequate old-age insurance is often due to the derivative pensions they receive via their husbands. But many of those who are gainfully employed also

live at the poverty level, i.e. the working poor. These are usually women, especially those who support themselves on the basis of uninsured working conditions, part-time jobs, and/or the low-wage sector.

The EU Commission made combating poverty one of the main points of its Social Policy Agenda 2005-2010. It has joined in the discussion on introducing minimum wages, and views the idea favourably. Due to the large number of people at risk of poverty, the year 2010 will be designated the "European Year of Combating Exclusion and Poverty".



Women pensioners deserve more Old-age pension

The older we become, the greater our chances of poverty. This is especially true for women. In fact, old-age poverty is a decidedly female problem. In the countries of the EU, the average percentage of older men below the poverty line is 9.8%, whereas for women it is 13.5%.

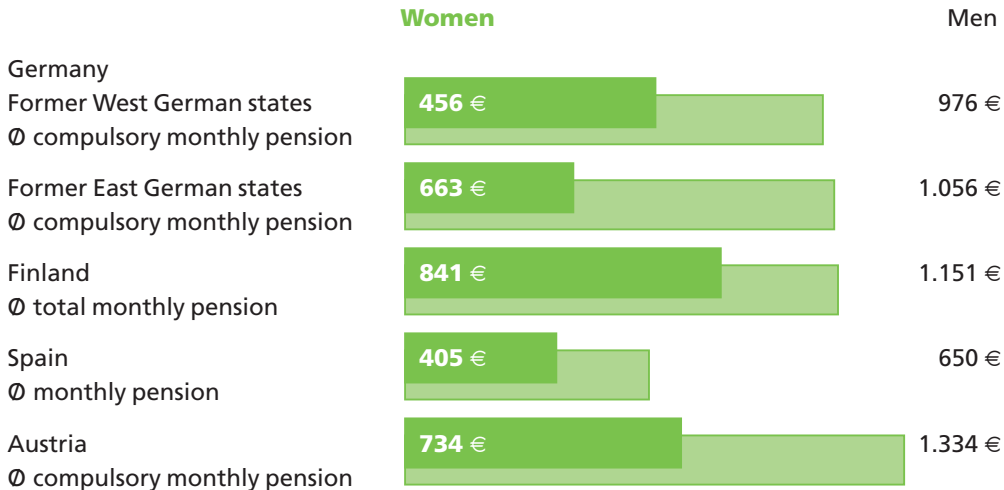
Old-age pension systems were originally designed for men as the sole breadwinners of their families, and who had full-time, uninterrupted working histories. Women were almost all insured via the incomes of their husbands. Although many EU member states are slowly reforming their pension systems to be more gender equitable, and although female employment rates have risen, the original principle still continues to be applied

almost everywhere. As a result, income-based pension systems continue to show gender-specific differences. Traditional notions of gender roles, which are often still reflected in practice, translate into little or nothing in the way of pension claims.

Other pension systems (e.g. in the Netherlands, Sweden, and Denmark) feature a universal basic component for all long-term residents, which is supplemented by an income-based component.



Old-age pension



Pension schemes and how to reform them are high on the policy agendas of all the EU member states. On the European level, the question of gender equality in social security and old-age pensions systems is part of the 2006-2010 road map for achieving equal rights for women and men. The European Commission plans to publish a guidebook on achieving gender equality, and also wants to assess how the social security systems of member states can promote this objective. The European Court of Justice has interpreted the exemptions to equal treatment for men and women made in the area pension awards very narrowly, and has ordered member states to re-evaluate the grounds for these exemptions on a regular basis.

Major steps toward achieving gender equality in pension plans include guaranteeing a minimum income for older people who have not accumulated sufficient claims for benefits. In addition, company pension plans should be adapted to include atypical working conditions such as part-time jobs, temporary jobs, and time off, and to increase their solidarity components (such as including parental leave in eligibility periods).

Germany has played a leading role in reforming private pension plans. As of 2006, it only subsidises those private plans that offer gender-equitable policies. This goes above and beyond the EU Equal Treatment Directive.



Legalize it Migratory work

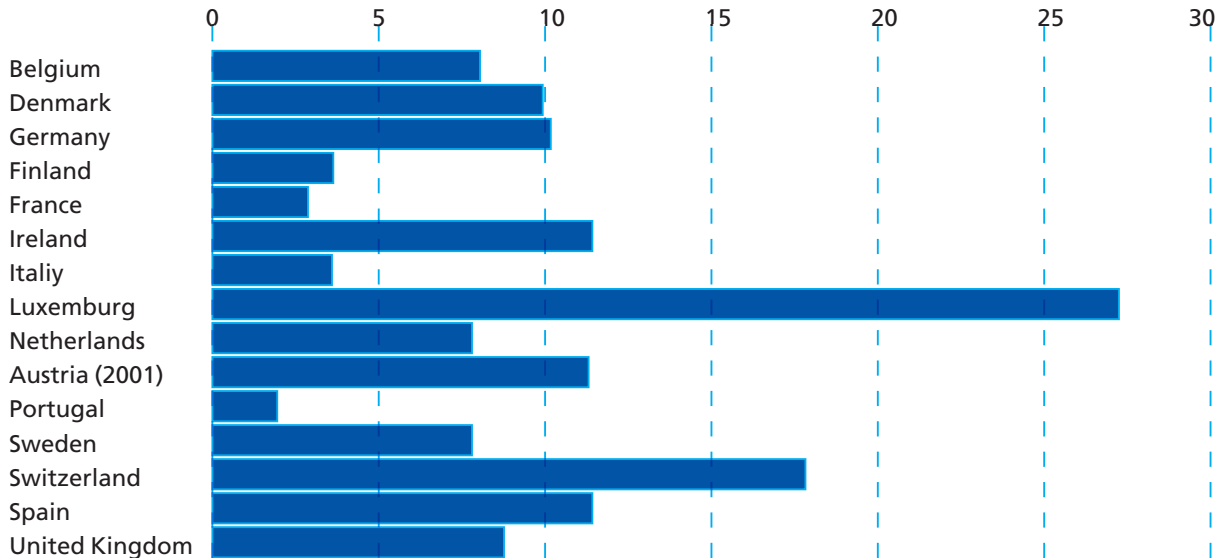
At present worldwide just under 90 million people are living as migrant workers with their families outside their countries of origin, either legally or illegally. Europe is one of the regions attracting the most migrant workers, similarly to North America and some of the Asian countries. The majority of the people leaving their countries in search of work are now women. Many of them have completed apprenticeships or studies but either find no work or work that is so badly paid that even low-paid jobs abroad are more profitable. There are various reasons for work migration: the intention to support their families or to enable their children to have better education or even the wish to enjoy some degree of luxury. The women often leave their families behind and their children in the care of relatives or friends.

As the legal requirements for immigration to work in the European member states are relatively difficult to meet, temporary and illegal work migration has increased greatly in Europe over recent years.

Immigrant workers find employment mostly in the building trades, in agriculture, transport, restaurants, in domestic service and in prostitution. The last-named areas are those where most women are to be found; the domestic services sector has boomed in Europe. As the categorisation of housework as women's work has not changed at all, this means that women are subject to double work loads or have to seek household help. But as local employees are mostly too expensive, cheaper (illegal) workers from countries with a lower standard of living are in demand.



Immigration into the EU and Switzerland per 1,000 of the total population in 2002. (Immigration per 1,000)



Data according to Eurostat, Council of Europe and national statistics authorities



The greatest problems of illegal immigrant workers are their illegal status and their dependence on their employers. As a result, their working conditions are usually considerably worse than those of legally employed people (lower wages, no contracts, longer working hours). But as they fear losing their jobs, they tolerate these working conditions.

In the European Union the legal regulation in these matters still takes place at national level; a common European regulation is however being prepared. A first draft guideline is to be presented in the second half of this year. In addition, illegal migration is to be

combated at its roots, firstly by taking action against people smugglers, secondly by increasing support of projects to reduce unemployment in the countries of origin of the (work) migrants with the aim of reducing the pressure to emigrate.

It is also necessary to legalise the status of those care workers who are already in the country, affording them unlimited residence permits. In order to prevent the continuation of reduced wages exerting pressure on employment, it is the duty of the state to ensure that qualified workers can enjoy legal employment with regular social security benefits.



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