



EUCIS-LLL Statement

Gender equality – Success factor for lifelong learning strategies

Brussels, 9 March 2015

On 8 March the International Women's Day took place, highlighting progress all over the world in reaching equality for women's social, economic and political participation. This year the UN theme "Empowering Women - Empowering Humanity: Picture It!" envisions a world where each woman and girl can exercise her choices, such as participating in politics, getting an education, having an income, and living in societies free from violence and discrimination. On the 20th anniversary of Beijing Platform for Action facts show that there is still a long road ahead to reach those goals. EUCIS-LLL thus calls for a greater attention to gender equality notably by mainstreaming it in lifelong learning strategies in order to empower girls and women and build more prosperous and fairer societies.

Gender equality is one of the **common values and founding principles of the European Union**, and yet, according to the EIGE Gender Equality Index, the EU scores only 54 out of 100. Namely, average woman earns **16% less** than a man in the EU. Even though **60%** of EU university graduates are women, they are later heavily **underrepresented in senior and top positions** in the world of work. Women have limited access to lifelong learning and have more fragmented careers, and are still often victims of gender-based discrimination and violence. Gender equality can contribute to the Lisbon objective of a growth that is smart, inclusive and sustainable. For instance, OECD projections show that gender equality would result in a **12.4% increase in GDP** per capita by 2030. Moreover, it is a powerful way of consolidating our democracies and paving the way to fairer societies. The timing is very relevant – in the European Year of Development, the EU should become a **champion of gender equality in the world**.

Gender-based discrimination in education is both a cause and a consequence of broader forms of gender inequality in society. "*For a sustainable social change we need to empower girls and women at all levels of education so that they can achieve their full potential with a special focus on guidance*", says Joke Van Der Leeuw Roord, EUCIS-LLL Secretary General. Indeed, even though girls and boys perform equally in schools and at universities in these areas, **only a third** of European scientists and engineers are women. OECD research confirmed that career choices are more linked to **attitude and confidence** and not to performance. We need initiatives to support young women to attend post-compulsory education and career paths which will ensure higher earnings later on. Finally, it is important to mention that gender equality concerns boys as well. The worrying number of **male early-school leavers** in the EU (13.2% compared to 10.6% girls) must be urgently lowered, while gender-based stereotypes are equally harmful to men and boys. When traditional gender roles and stereotypes start being challenged inside the classroom girls and boys have increased chances of **achieving their full potential and well-being**.

EUCIS-LLL calls for **mainstreaming gender equality in lifelong learning strategies**. Gender-based stereotypes already start in early childhood and care, for instance, with "**male**" and "**female**" toys. It is high time we develop **gender-sensitive curricula and teaching materials free of discrimination**, which are influencing children's educational and career paths alike later on. This includes fostering tolerance as regards sexual orientation and identity and fighting gender bullying and homophobia. We also need **sexual health education** in our schools, to make sure girls and boys learn together what healthy relationships are, based on consent and reciprocity. Partnerships between civil society organisations, communities and educational institutions can make this dialogue happen and should be supported at all levels. Better linking social and educational policies is essential; **childcare and schooling hours** for instance are a strong obstacle to full gender equality. These aspects of parenthood are still too often considered private matters and not part of a comprehensive policy to create equal opportunities for women and men. The teaching profession should also be made more attractive to men. Gender equality

and parity should be ensured at all levels of our education systems, with a special focus on **disadvantaged women and girls**, such as the Roma, migrants and refugees, women and girls with disabilities and others.

“Education is a game changer for the empowerment of girls and women”, said Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO. It is a crucial tool against (gender) inequality and must be effectively used in order to lead to a greater political, social and economic involvement of women in our societies!

⁽¹⁾ Public hearing on empowering women and girls through education, European Parliament, FEMM Committee, 5 March