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**The Role of Men in Keeping and Promoting  
Women in the Workforce in Europe**

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## **Executive Summary**

This paper explores the recurring dilemma that women still face when having to choose between their professional and their personal lives and the role that men play in it. Starting a family is one of the main reasons why women in Europe and all over the world decide to reduce their working hours or leave the workplace altogether. Demanding schedules, low incomes, the impossibility to reach higher positions within a company and the lack of financial and institutional help, are often cited as reasons why women put a halt to their careers.

Even though progress has been made in the last few decades, women are less present in the workforce than their male counterparts. Different measures have been put into practice to tackle this issue: from policies at European level, to awareness campaigns carried out by non-profit organisations and even private initiatives started up by corporations with the purpose of keeping women in their jobs and facilitate the conciliation of their working and private lives.

However, there is an almost unexplored field that needs to be paid attention to: the role of men in helping women stay (and be promoted) in the labour market. While it is crucial that women are aware of the consequences of abandoning the workplace, men have a vital role in avoiding this from happening, which is surprisingly often obviated.

Men still hold most of the managerial and positions of power worldwide so only when they are made aware and get engaged in keeping and promoting women in the workplace, a true equal gender based society can be achieved.

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## Introduction

Gender equality is a term that is often used in today's society for a wide range of issues that directly involve men and women. One of these issues in particular is that of parity in the workforce between the two genders. Great strides have been made since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but the current situation is by no means of an equal nature.

Women have historically been seen as the lesser of the two sexes when it comes to participating in the workforce. They have been repeatedly discriminated against, received less income than their male counterparts for the same job, and often find themselves without access to managerial positions to further their careers. All this could be improved with men adopting a different role in society.

Men are considered the dominant of the two genders and at work this is no different. This is easily emphasized by the number of top executive positions being occupied by males, a situation that has developed since the beginning of human civilisation. Men would generally speaking be the ones that would feed and protect their families, which made them be seen as the dominant sex.

Even though women make up over half the world's population, their contribution to economic growth is far below its potential according to a study conducted by the International Monetary Fund. (UN Women and the United Nations Global Compact, 2011). The labour market remains segregated by gender and although progress has been made in recent years, gender equality still seems a utopia.

In the EU, gender equality is as present as it has ever been, but perhaps to a lesser extent with regards to the progress women have made since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, more can and must be done to eliminate the remaining vestiges of an aging society with regard to gender equality. It is clear now that some of the remaining obstacles lie in the hands of men, being the ones who currently occupy most top positions and who are often the ones that play a role in the careers of women. Men, also at home, have the power to facilitate an easier balance between the private and professional lives of women. This leaves the question as to what exactly is the role of men in keeping women in the workforce and how can the situation be improved in Europe.

## Gender and Masculinities

In order to understand to what extent genderisation affects women and society in general, it is imperative to first recognise gender differences and their particularities. The website Gendered Innovations defines gender as a “socio-cultural process that refers to cultural and social attitudes that together shape and sanction ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ behaviours”. (Schiebinger, Klinge, Sánchez de Madariaga, Schraudner, & Stefanick, 2011-2013) This term appeared in the late 1960s and it rejected the link between biology and unyielding sex roles expectations. Behaviour and attitudes towards gender are learned. Gender changes throughout history and it differs depending on the different socio-cultural contexts. (Schiebinger, Klinge, Sánchez de Madariaga, Schraudner, & Stefanick, 2011-2013)

Gendered Innovations states that a man can engage in what is usually perceived as a feminine activity such as caring for a sick parent. These terms are used in their plural form because they comprise a wide range of behaviours and attitudes, not only one. There are many and very different types of femininities and masculinities, hence the plural. It is important to keep in mind that femininities and masculinities do not always correspond to biological sex, as what in one culture might be perceived as a ‘masculine’ behaviour might not be seen this way in another. Femininities and masculinities are terms that describe gender identities and they are not defined by biological aspects, but by social and cultural processes.

Masculinities can be divided into different groups as previously mentioned, the largest being the so-called *Hegemonic Masculinity*, a term coined by Professor Raewyn Connell. Men practising Hegemonic Masculinity are more prone to put themselves in the centre of the social order, whereas men that observe other types of masculinities might not. Hegemonic Masculinity, moreover, encourages men from even the most marginalised groups (those belonging to ethnic minorities, lower social classes, etc.) to define their position in regards to other men. Feminism and its gynocentric perspective are completely opposed to this social norm. (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

It is extremely complex to understand the plurality and specifications of all types of masculinities, but “empirical social research shows that this concept was heavily influenced by psychoanalysis” as Connell & Messerschmidt explain in their article *Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept*. Freud was the first author who wrote analytical biographies of male behaviour and Stoller in 1968 made the term ‘gender identity’ popular. Other scholars like Zaretsky, Friedman and Lerner also evidenced the

struggles that men face when not conforming to what is expected of them by convention and what their traditional masculinities dictate.

The term Hegemonic Masculinity was formulated three decades ago with the objective to better understand the different types of male behaviours and how their affiliations and their relationship towards women impacted society. Both in the developed and the developing world, the position of men in the community play a vital part in the way women can or cannot develop.

Men (and women likewise) are not a homogenous group. There are significant differences in background, education, ethnicity, etc, and while some men can benefit from unequal power relationships, others might in fact be disadvantaged. The report *The Role of Men in Gender Equality – European Strategies and Insights* affirms that there has been a change in the different types of male roles in society and ‘caring masculinity’ has emerged as an important masculine role in which men have started assuming the care-giving role instead of that of the ‘breadwinner’. This phenomenon can also be observed in the workforce. More men have decided to choose careers that were considered as ‘feminine’ just a few decades ago, such as working in nurseries or in schools. (European Commission DG Justice - Unit D2 Gender equality, 2012)

Understanding gender and the different behaviours that men (and women) have towards gender issues is key to modifying behaviours and improving attitudes. By discerning the way men function in society and how masculinities affect the advancement of women, measures can be put in place and equality can be promoted adequately. Social norms and behaviours are learned, so masculinities can be adapted and modified to better accommodate women in society and in the workplace.

## Men and Feminism

With the intention of understanding the reasons why women still have a much less prominent presence in the workforce than their male counterparts, it is essential to examine the relationship between men and feminism. The biggest challenge for men regarding feminism is to see this movement in a positive light. Feminism is perceived as a project led by women and for women, and consequently, something that not only is uninteresting to men, but also against them.

Feminism focuses on women's rights and interests and ensures that gendered issues that are ignored in the mainstream debates, are brought to light. Feminism is *gynocentric* (referring to the adoption of a female point of view on a wide array of social issues), which according to (Doctor of Philosophy) Jonathan Crowe, is a direct response to *androcentrism* (a men's perspective of the world), which is still dominant in mainstream culture.

When men realise that feminism is not about them (especially those educated in a more hegemonic or traditional masculinity), this is seen as a clear opposition to their own interests and their natural reaction is to reject it. Moreover, there is a defensive attitude to feminism due to men feeling they are *the ones to blame*. To a certain extent this is comprehensible, because men are, in fact, an important element of the problem. As Crowe points out: "The easy response would be for feminists to say to men, 'Don't worry, it's not your fault'. The problem is that this is not really true." (Crowe, 2011) There are obviously many males who do treat females with respect but unfortunately the individual and rather scarce actions from a group of men are not enough to eradicate the stigma of a gendered society that oppresses women.

Feminism needs to be understood for what it is: a movement that seeks the well-being of women, that their interests and concerns are heard and a fair and equal treatment in all areas of their personal and professional lives. Feminism is not, therefore, against men, but a movement that looks for the same rights that men have enjoyed since the beginning of times.

Men need to feel responsible for the systematic subjugation of women and if that does not occur, there will be no genuine commitment of men to the advancement of women in society. Engaging men in feminism is by no means an easy task. To do that, a man needs to "reorient his worldview, not only away from his natural self-centred outlook, but in opposition of the prevailing shape of social discourse, which reinforces and nurtures his instinct to place his gender at the centre of the world (androcentrism)". (Crowe, 2011)

It would be a fallacy to say that the advancement of feminism would not alter the privileges that men have traditionally benefited from. However, men and society have a lot to gain from an improved and supportive attitude in relation to feminism. Crowe indicates that “feminism promises an improvement of the relationship between genders and the possibility for men to adopt different social roles to those they are accustomed to”. (Crowe, 2011). This and a richer social environment are fulfilling and simply right.

These barriers can only be overcome when men decide it is time for them to finally fall. Without a deep understanding of what feminism is and without a sincere will to support women’s advancement personally as well as professionally, gender equality cannot be fully achieved.

## Men and Women at Home

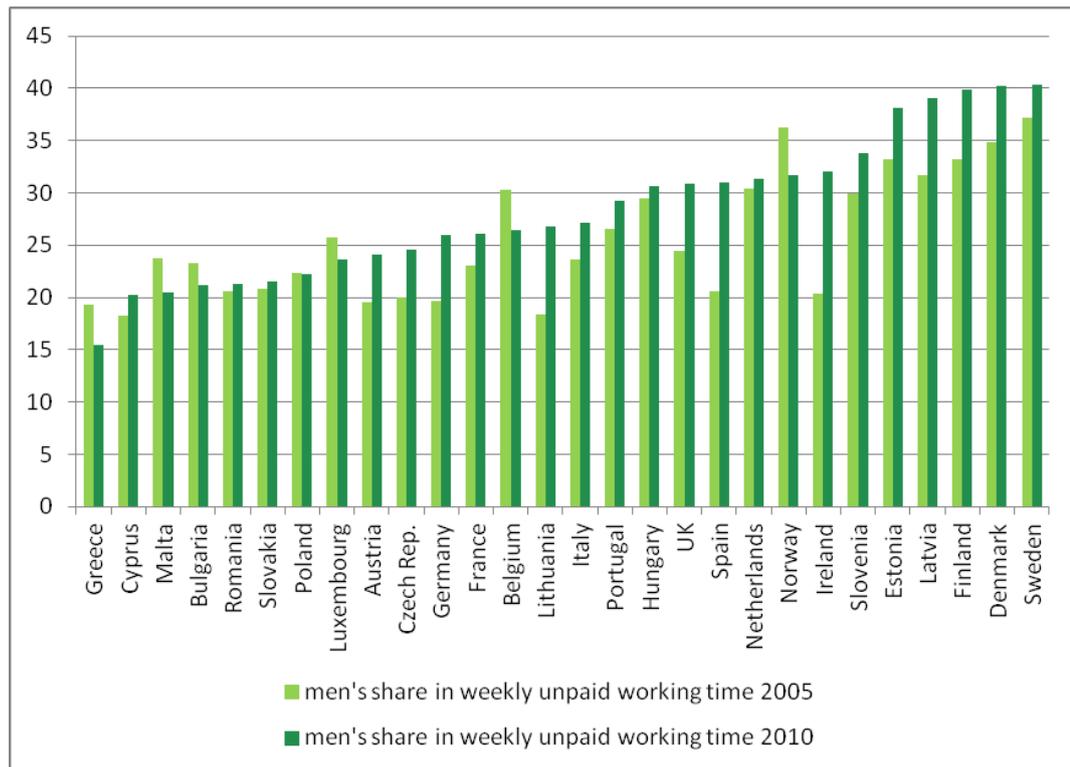
Women are less likely to stay employed or work the same amount of hours after starting a family, let alone accessing and reaching top management positions that require a high level of commitment and time. This is often complicated by the difficulty to balance motherhood and a demanding professional career. The reasons for which women abandon the workplace cannot be solely attributed to how labour, companies and government policies are organised. To comprehend the whole dimension of the issue it is crucial to examine the role that gender plays at home. Men have traditionally held the position of being the 'breadwinner' whereas women have been assigned the 'homemaker' role. The status quo society tends to dictate that the man must go out to earn a living to provide for himself and his family whereas the woman participates in household tasks and raises the children.

In the EU today, this division is not as prevalent as it used to be prior to the struggles lived in the continent in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but it would be ignorant to overlook that this is still a pressing issue with regards to taking part in the workforce. No matter the progress, (which is undoubtedly there), women still end up falling back into the 'homemaker role'.

There are many other concerns linked to women deciding to work less hours or just stop working. Because women and men's lives differ greatly, social protection systems fail to provide women with adequate financial and social protection, leaving them with a low or inexistent retirement allowance because they "did not make any or enough payments to pension schemes" as the report *Beijing +15: The Platform for Action and the European Union* carried out by the Swedish Presidency of the Council unveiled in 2009.

Education also plays a major role at home. As stated in the section on men and feminism, men tend to focus on educational programmes not related to household issues whereas women do. With having little or no experience in terms of taking part in domestic tasks, men are less likely to do so and are more inclined to focus on what they do know which keeps women at home, or forces them to return to the 'homemaker' position. Men are generally paid more and as such it is more feasible for them to work and for the women to stay home and take care of the house.

It is interesting to note that in Northern European countries men have become more involved with gender equality. Even though there are some exceptions, Nordic countries are at the top of the list when it comes to sharing household tasks as the graph below shows:



Source EWCS 2005-2010 (European Commission DG Justice - Unit D2 Gender equality, 2012)

Countries like Ireland, Spain, Finland, Denmark and Lithuania show significant changes as well, with an increase of men sharing domestic work. In other Member States like Belgium, Bulgaria and Greece, however, there was a decrease in men's share in weekly unpaid work.

To ensure that childcare and household work is shared equally, parental leaves need to be available for both men and women, so that they can benefit from a fulfilling career in balance with their personal lives. (McKinsey & Company, 2013)

In Sweden, for instance, there is a tax free gender bonus given to parents who share parental leave days (up to 1800 Euros per child), so this encourages Swedish couples to co-parent and share their leave, which in return promotes equality of opportunities for both genders. (European Commission DG Justice - Unit D2 Gender equality, 2012).

With improved family policy relating to employment and dissolution of the gender inequality in the education system, men and women can truly begin to share household tasks more accordingly without fear of an economic setback.

## Men and Women at Work

Seeing how the state of affairs is at home, it does not come as a surprise that at the status of men and women at work are notably different as well.

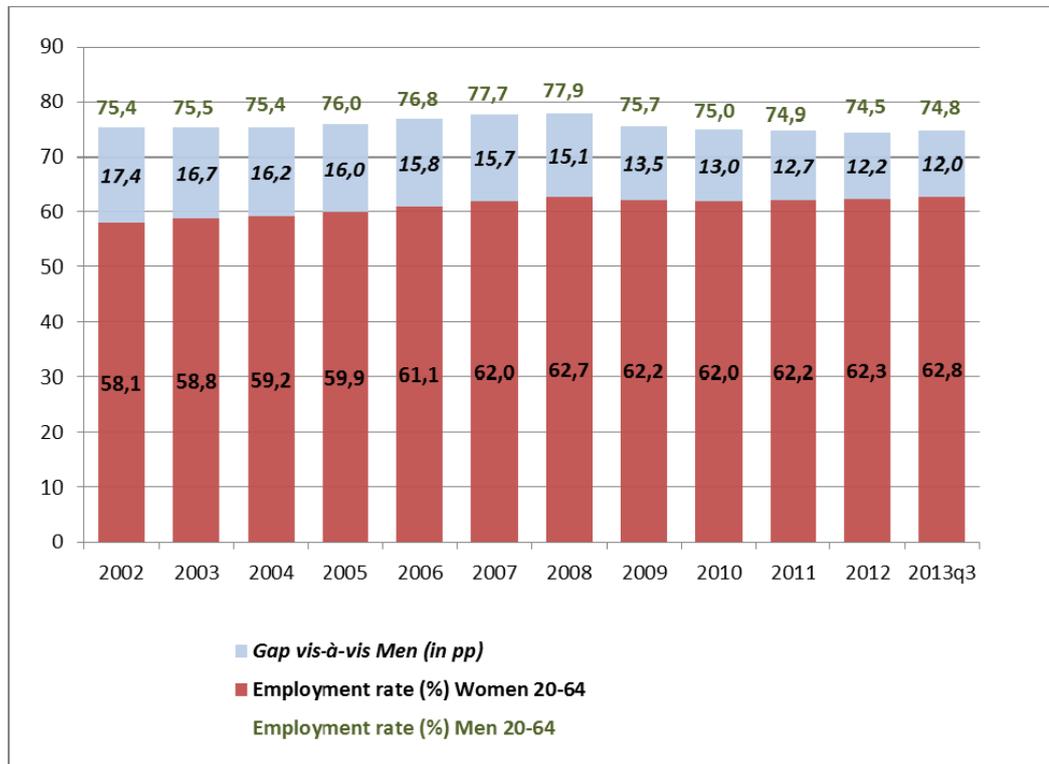
Even though more men have started adopting a more 'caring' type of masculinity in recent years, gender segregation in the labour market is still a reality. Boys and girls are still choosing professions traditionally linked to their gender such as engineering, construction and manufacturing for men, and social and care-taking professions for women. In fact, the European Commission Directorate-General for Justice reported that from 2000 to 2009 the participation rate of men in fields like health and education fell.

According to McKinsey&Company, there is no such thing as a glass ceiling when it comes to women reaching higher positions within a company but rather a leaky pipeline. This leaky pipeline is leaking women at all levels, not only at the top. "In Europe, women sitting in executive committees are five times less likely than men to become a CEO". (McKinsey & Company, 2013). In 2012, McKinsey&Company, which has been conducting different reports about gender diversity in a series of studies called *Women Matter*, carried out a benchmark of over 200 European companies which were already implementing measures to encourage gender diversity. McKinsey has been following these companies but very little progress has been done. This is in part due to time. Any new measure or policy takes time to be effective but also it needs to be implemented well and most importantly maintained and closely monitored.

Lack of ambition is not an issue, as women have very similar levels of aspirations and drive to get the job they want. McKinsey suggests in their study that although 79% of women and 81% of men aspire to reach a mid or senior management position, only 58% of women are confident they will reach the top. Furthermore, corporate culture matters. A company where men are more engaged in gender diversity and supporting women, is a company in which more women will defy the leaky pipeline. While in 2013 more men were positive about the effect of gender diversity than ever, there is still a worrying lack of awareness. Male respondents of the *Women Matter 2013* report did not think that women faced more difficulties than men to reach managerial positions. Nonetheless, they did see parenting and combining a career more challenging for women. (McKinsey & Company, 2013)

The graph below does not necessarily reflect that women are remaining in the workforce, but implies that women are occupying it more than before. While this can be seen as a step in the right direction for gender equality, it does not indicate that women

are remaining in the workforce on a fulltime basis nor having employment in a higher position.



Source: Eurostat, LFS (Labour Force Survey), 2013Q3 means data of the third quarter of 2013

In the public sphere things do not differ much. Men are much more likely to occupy *state power positions*, exactly “ten times more likely than women to hold office as a member of the parliament (an average across all countries of the world)”. (Connell R. , 1995)

In the workforce women have a precarious position. They have to balance out their personal ambitions and their work ambitions, because the two as it stands now are difficult to combine. The most notable is pregnancy, which is undoubtedly a large hurdle in today’s society in bringing forth true gender equality.

The growing number of women entering the workforce, and an increasingly ageing population has changed the way in which family arrangements are made. According to the EIGE this transformations in society have resulted into a shift from the traditional ‘breadwinner’ role attributed to men, providing the main income for his family and the ‘caring’ role of women, who performed unpaid care at home and outside the house. Childcare is not shared equally, even when women work outside the house: “The biggest challenge for women is not motherhood, but the fact that childcare is still mainly the mother’s responsibility”. (Reingarde, Borza, Paats, Kyriacou, & Merolla, 2012)

Men simply have fewer obligations at home, which allow them to reach for a more demanding job or a higher position within the company they currently work for. According to the *Report on Progress on Equality Between Women and Men in 2013* prepared by the EC: "Women spend an average of 26 hours on care and household activities, compared with 9 hours for men". (European Commission, 2014)

So where the numbers might indicate that women in the workforce are on the rise, the reality of the situation is that the struggles they endure at home are still affecting them in the workplace.

### Why are women leaving the workplace?

Inevitably, women often leave the workplace or give up on getting the promotion they are after due to the difficulty that combining motherhood and a career poses. However, there are other reasons that drive women away from the workplace.

Men play a major role here as well. While education, social norms and the relationship between women and men in the household are important, corporate culture should not be underestimated. One of the most recurring causes for women to abandon a company is lack of opportunities and job promotions. Mentoring is vital to help women advance their careers. However, the chances for female workers to get mentors or move in circles in which they can be noticed and later promoted are scarce. This causes frustration and makes many educated and capable females to give up on their jobs. Some of them leave to find a better opportunity somewhere else. Many go on maternity leave to come back as part-timers or not come back at all.

Women do not always leave their jobs because of the incompatibility of family responsibilities and work. In many cases while they might be working for companies that offer flexible work schedules or that provide tools to conciliate their work and private life better, the problem is found at home. The fact that the majority of men do not take up household tasks places an enormous burden on women. Even with a flexible work schedule, the amount of time sometimes required to successfully fulfil household tasks becomes too demanding on both a mental and physical level.

In some cases, there is also a financial impulse that keeps women out of the workforce. If a man is capable of attaining employment with sufficient salary while not taking part in household tasks and negating any benefit from the woman's salary (also in

part due to the pay gap), there is simply no incentive for her to continue working while trying to share household tasks.

### Why is important to keep women in the workforce?

With all the work and improved social policies put forth the gender equality gap still remains. It is essential to strive and do more to keep women in the workforce not only to improve the economy of a country, but also the relation between the two genders. Such an improvement will undoubtedly benefit the economy over time, due to the fact that the people with the right skill set will be hired for a position regardless of gender.

When only half of the population's talent is used, everybody loses. Companies have a smaller pool of candidates to choose from and therefore fewer chances to use the skills and abilities of that half that is being ignored. Moreover, companies that have more women on boards achieve 42% higher return on sales and 66% higher return on invested capital as the report *Women Mean Business* reveals. (Raconteur, 2012). On top of that, McKinsey's *Women Matter* report notes that companies with more gender diversity on their executive committees perform better (an average of 56%), than those with few or no women on them. McKinsey also highlighted that "the shortage of skilled workers which is expected to reach 40 million people by 2030, would be nearly solved with an equal participation of women in the workforce". (McKinsey & Company, 2013)

Women account now for 37% of the population between 30 and 34 years old who attained a tertiary education level, 30% were men. Not using the talents and skills of these large percentage of citizens is non-sense and a big loss both for society and businesses. (European Commission DG Justice - Unit D2 Gender equality, 2012)

Another aspect to take into account is that employment policies encouraging flexible working hours or part-time work might seem as great alternatives for women to balance motherhood and their professional careers, but there are serious consequences for women who opt for them. On the one hand, the chances for a woman to advance her career or occupy a higher position in an organisation are scarce if she works part-time. On the other hand, because her contributions to pension schemes are lower, she will receive a much smaller income when she retires. Again, women are put in a less than desirable situation that "not only affects their present but also their future" as indicated by the EIGE's report *Reconciliation of work and family life* (Reingarde, Borza, Paats, Kyriacou, & Merolla, 2012). On top of that, United Nations Development Fund for Women

claims that women represent 70% of the world's poor today, a certainly worrying figure. (UN Women and the United Nations Global Compact, 2011).

Besides the personal gains that women will obtain from staying in the workforce, everyone else will benefit as well. Economic growth, personal fulfilment, a more just and equal society and a better relationship between genders are just a few of the advantages that go hand in hand with keeping women in the labour market. UNIFEM points out that when women are given the opportunity of equality in the workplace, the results are remarkable: "Women's work has contributed more to global growth than China, estimated The Economist in 2006." In addition, UNIFEM indicates that "by simply increasing women's employment in the Eurozone, the GDP in the EU would increase by 13%". (UN Women and the United Nations Global Compact, 2011)

Men have a vital role in keeping and promoting women in the workplace. As they still hold most of the managerial positions, their ability to sponsor a female co-worker is essential for women to advance in the workplace, as there are still very few female managers out there. Mentors can help by providing feedback, encouraging their employees to apply for a new vacancy and provide guidance. Sponsors, on the other hand, can do more: they can enhance the visibility of their female employees and help them in advancing their career: "Women need more than mentoring to launch the job they want". (Hewlett, 2013)

Women have to be able to develop professionally, be financially independent, advance their careers but also have the chance to not give up on having a family. If men do not have to choose between one and another, women should not either. That is true equality.

## What is being done?

### At EU level

Before the financial crisis of 2008, European women were slowly but steadily catching up with men in the workforce. The employment rate rose from 55% in 1997 to 62.8% in 2007 (a 6.9% increase), while their male counterparts gained 2.6 percentage points according to the European Commission. However, men employment in 1997 was already at 75.3%. Unemployment is still high among European citizens but many more women were inactive in 2012, an astonishing 30.5% compared to a 17% of unemployed men. Even though the gender gap has decreased since 2007, women are still abandoning the labour market and searching for a job in higher numbers than men. (EC - DG for Justice, 2012)

One of the common principles of the European Union is equality between genders. This fundamental right is essential to recover from the economic crisis in a sustainable and fair way. Gender equality not only narrows the pay gap that still exists in Europe, but also facilitates economic growth, as seen in the last 50 years. However, there is still a lot to do to make use of the full potential of a gender-equal society. As indicated by the European Commission, an equal participation rate of men and women in the workforce by 2020 would increase the GDP per capita of Member States in about 12.4% by 2030 which would contribute enormously to the economic recovery of the area. Although gender gaps in employment and unemployment, pay and poverty have decreased in the past few years, there are major challenges that still hinder the objective of a more gender-equal Europe. Violence against women, the balance between work and family and a stronger participation of women in decision-making are still subjects that require attention.

In this context, the European Union launched in 2010 a 10-year growth strategy called Europe 2020 to overcome the financial crisis that countries in the Eurozone are currently enduring. On the site *Europe 2020 in a nutshell*, five main targets are identified covering areas such as employment; research and development; climate and energy, education, social inclusion and poverty reduction. (European Commission, 2014).

Following the Europe 2020 objectives, the EC decided to carry out an extensive report in 2012 that assessed the situation of women and men, the changes that had been made until that date and the challenges that Member States are facing. This report: *Strategy for equality between women and man 2010-2015*, was based on the 5 priority areas defined by the Commission: Equal economic independence for women and men;

equal pay for work of equal value; equality in decision making; dignity, integrity and ending of gender violence and promoting gender equality beyond the EU. (EC - DG for Justice, 2012). Yet, it targets gender inequality with a stronger focus on problematic areas that are still untouched, namely affordable and more available childcare centres that would be key for the contribution of women to economic growth and higher representation of women in decision-making positions. While women are increasingly becoming an important part of the workforce, they are still underrepresented in executive boards. On top of that, gender-violence is still a pressing issue in many European countries and significant changes have been made to tackle it.

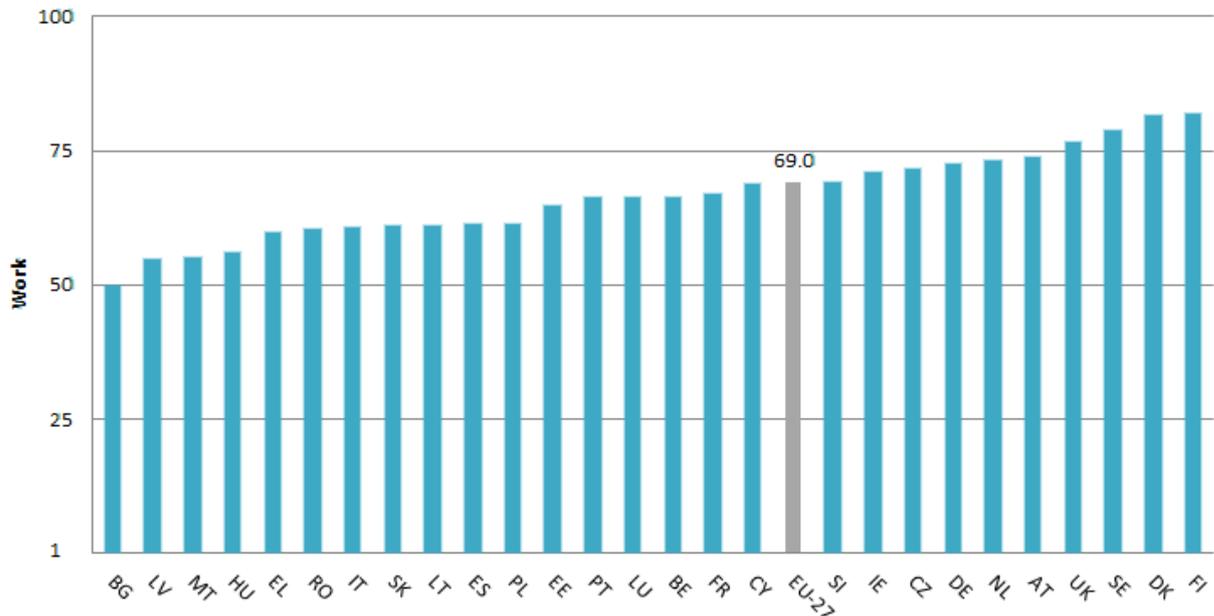
Both at European and national level, 2012 was a year in which new projects and initiatives were implemented to palliate the effects of gender inequality. These new measures and policies aim to improve the current situation but that are useful in the long term, as well. However, it is imperative that regular monitoring takes place, Without it, there cannot be any evidence that the policies and changes made by the EU as a whole and Member States individually, are improving the working and living conditions of women. This is why the European Commission introduced an assessment tool to measure gender equality in the *Roadmap for Equality between Women and Men 2006-2010*, incorporating it in the *Action Plan of the Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2010-2015*. This tool was taken on by the European Institute of Gender Equality from the very moment in which it was inaugurated in 2010.

### The EIGE

EIGE is a European Union agency supporting the EU and its Member States in a joint effort to promote gender equality as well as fighting gender-based discrimination. It also raises awareness about gender inequality and its consequences. The institute gathers and analyses information and data concerning gender issues and it facilitates the integration of the gender aspect into all policy areas. Its main objective is to promote dialogue among all actors, including EU citizens, governments and private enterprise. (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2011)

To help in determining levels of gender equality, the EIGE formulated a tool to ascertain to what level a country has achieved total gender equality. This tool, known as the Gender Equality Index, “is formed by combining gender indicators, according to a conceptual framework, into a single summary measure. It consists of six core domains (work, money, knowledge, time, power and health) and two satellite domains (intersecting inequalities and violence)”. (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2013)

Specifically in the work domain, the tool can be used to illustrate gender equality. In the graph below, Bulgaria (represented by the country code BG) scores the lowest whereas Finland (FI) scores the highest.



Scores of the Gender Equality Index by Member State in the domain of work, 2010 (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2013)

This tool illustrates that the problem of gender equality between men and women does exist. However, as with all indexes based on complex calculations, there is room for error and/or misinterpretation and as such, the index should not be treated as a definitive tool, but more of an aid in progressing towards gender equality.

### The European Women's Lobby

Although the European Women's Lobby was born as an NGO in 1990, today the EWL receives strong support from the European Commission to ensure that women's interests at European level are defended and made known to the public. The EU activities are expanding and changing and this has an inevitable effect on women's lives. Women and organisations promoting and supporting women's rights needed to be aware of EU legislation that affected them. Moreover, EWL was born due to the need to create a bridge between the EU institutions and the female European citizens. The EWL has been providing information to decision-makers since its creation over 20 years ago, and its input is taken into consideration when there is new legislation or policies to prepare. Along with their mission, the EWL also acts as a link between women's organisations and

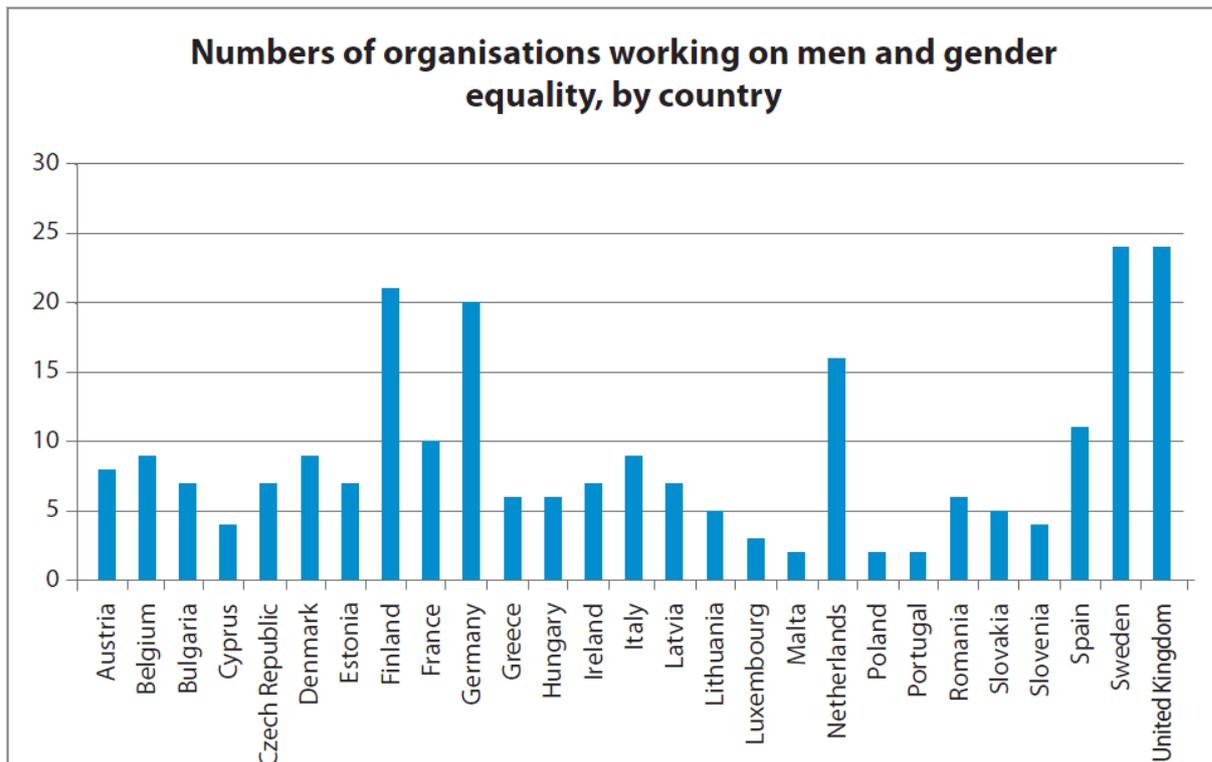
institutions and it holds an advisory status in the UN and the Council of Europe as stated on their website. (European Women's Lobby, 2010)

The EWL is responsible of many campaigns to raise awareness and aiming to improve women's economic independence including the conciliation of their private and professional lives as well as social inclusion and poverty reduction. Through their campaign *Who Cares?* in 2006, the EWL requested changes in the maternity and parental leaves at European level and the provision of care services for dependants. (Swedish Presidency of the Council of the EU, 2009)

### Non-Profit Organisations

There are currently a number of non-profit organisations that have tried to improve gender equality, especially in the last few decades. Non-governmental organisations have been vital to bring to light the different issues that gender inequality poses.

The report *The Involvement of Men in Gender Equality in the EU* conducted by EIGE reveals that most of the organisations that work on gender equality are NGOs, an astonishing 67%. Most of these non-governmental organisations work on gender equality in general, focusing only secondarily on men. Some of these organisations, however, focus on training and educating men for gender equality. The AHIGE in Spain, for instance, is involved in activities such as training for men from experts in the field promoting equality sensitisation and gender awareness in schools. Other interesting programs are *Male Responsibility at Home* and a magazine for new parents in which childcare is explained to new fathers. (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2012). In Sweden, Man for Jamstalldhet advocates work on gender equality policies. It aims to transform men's attitudes and behaviours by providing training services in schools, town-halls and in the workplace. In some Member States located in the central and eastern part of Europe, women's non-profit organisations play a key role in policy-making and implementation. These NGOs, mainly in Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania and Slovakia, act as advisors and consultants in reforming processes to achieve gender equality at national level. (Swedish Presidency of the Council of the EU, 2009)



Source: Ruxton & v.d. Gaag, 2012, p.22

Despite the fact that NGOs have advocated change, a major issue is shared among them: a too-generic programme. Many of them deal with all issues related to women, ranging from social exclusion to domestic violence, but very few focus on one in particular. While intentions are good, results are not, as it is virtually impossible to tackle all the different problems linked to gender. A more specific and specialised approach would most likely deliver better results.

### In the Corporate World

The majority of Member States do not have a specific legislation in which gender quota is imposed in their corporate boards. Increasing gender balance on boards has become an objective for many companies not only because it is fair but also for making executive boards more efficient. When there is gender diversity, performance improves, companies have a wider access to qualified candidates and better corporate governance is achieved. “European countries have different approaches to company boards, corporate self-regulation (as it is the case in the UK, Austria, Germany and Poland) and national mandatory targets (like the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Italy, Iceland and Belgium)” (Doldor, Langenbucher, & Nagy, 2013). Due to this, very slow progress has been made in this area. Vivienne Redding, VP of the European Union and Commissioner

for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship proposed that by 2020, 40% of women should be part of company boards. (EC - DG for Justice, 2012)

Corporate businesses have also applied their own strategies to eliminate inequality between genders and promote women. BNP Paribas, for example, advocates for a quota system to guarantee a fair mix of genders on their executive boards: "Having different profiles around the table will clearly reinforce the power to be challenging and self-critical" notes Claire Godding, Diversity Manager at BNP Paribas. One of the reasons why women do not reach the top is lack of information and connections. Women are as educated as their male fellow workers but they often miss the opportunity to serve board committees. This happens because women themselves do not seek the position or are unaware of the possibilities they have to apply for it. The network circles that facilitate men to reach managerial positions are often inexistent in women's networks. This stops them from advancing in their career and keeps them from joining the boards. *MixCity* was created by BNP Paribas with the objective of making networking easier for men and women. The main goal of this initiative is to make women visible and to have a healthier gender mix at all corporate levels. (European Women's Lobby, 2013)

So how have men contributed to improve the situation in the corporate world? Sponsoring would be one of the answers. Currently most of the managerial positions are held by men and the trend shows that even though women now have access to managerial positions, their male co-workers are still outnumbering them. The reasons for women to abandon their jobs or to not reach the top are diverse. According to the European Commission's Network to Promote Women in Decision-making and Politics and the Economy: "gender stereotyping, absence of female leaders on the top, women's exclusion from formal and informal networks and gender bias in recruitment are some of the main issues that keep women from reaching their objectives". Career choices, work-life balance and personal ambition also play a big part. Equally, one of the key elements that would help women enhance their careers and stay in the workforce would have to do with mentors and sponsors. In organisations of all kinds, senior men can be both the sponsors and the gatekeepers and the only way to change the second is to engage them to promote women to decision-making positions. The underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions is not exclusively a women's issue but it does affect more women men. (European Commission's Network to Promote Women in Decision-making in Politics and Economy, 2012). Senior men, who often have the power to promote women, show little or no interest in the subject, fearing losing their own status or simply ignoring the problem. In order to make them conscious and care about the issue, senior men need to become aware of the gender bias that still exists.

## Conclusion

The role of men in keeping and promoting the participation of women in the workforce is that they are the key to true gender equality. The male psyche is still fixated on traditional values that no longer have a place in today's society.

With men primarily occupying the top positions in the workforce, they are still more likely to promote someone of the same gender due to the possible household considerations that women might have or simply because of their traditional values. The men in these positions have also played a part in setting up the scene of inadequate concessions for women with regarding to balancing their personal lives and offering unfair salaries with respect to their male counterparts.

In the education system, where young men and women decide their futures, it is because of men that the future disparity is set. Based on what happens at home, young minds are shaped to think that the situation with men being the breadwinner and women doing household tasks is that of the norm.

While gender equality has traditionally been concerned with women and their actions, in the last two decades the focus has shifted to men gradually. Men's attitudes are imperative to improve the status of women and men's problems need to be addressed by gender equality policies to facilitate their engagement in the subject.

In a vicious cycle the traditional male values are still passed down despite reasonable efforts by different organizations. It is true that progress has been made, however, the essential notion that men are in the dominant position remains. Only when men make a serious effort to take a step back will both genders be equal in the workforce.

## Recommendations

- **Education and training** - From a very early age, trainings and campaigns to raise awareness about gender inequality should be conducted in schools. Teacher training and educational programs directed to students needs to be encouraged and later monitored and evaluated. This way, institutions at national level and later at EU level will be able to assess the results of such initiatives and programmes. Gender awareness programs need to be integrated in the school curriculum in order to fight discrimination, eliminate gender stereotypes and promote gender equality.

Even though it is easier and more cost-effective to train children, adult training in good gender practices is crucial to reverse the current situation. Gender awareness campaigns in the media, in companies, adult schools, community centres and educational institutions are vital to raise awareness about the limitations and discrimination that women still face in the workplace.

Education in all its forms (in primary schools, through seminars, courses, and trainings at work...) is an essential part of this changing process. Men will only engage into helping women stay and be promoted in the workplace when they are aware of the differences that keep them from doing so. It is imperative for them to understand that if they do not, everyone loses in the long term.

- **Work-life balance** - Political programmes need to focus on this aspect allowing flexible forms of employment for men, in order to share the responsibility of childcare with their partners. While working part-time is a valid option for many women, men need to be willing to share childcare and household tasks and allow women to have a career if they choose to do so. Gender policies need to be implemented at all levels to be effective. Even though governments and EU institutions have adopted some interesting measures to engage men (and society in general) in gender equality in the workplace, it is not enough. Monitoring and evaluating policies and legislation is vital to an equal gender society.
- **Changing company culture** - While many men have progressively changed their views and attitudes to gender in their personal lives, the corporate world seems to still be stuck in a male dominated mindset. Company culture matters and to ensure the participation and promotion of female individuals in the workforce, companies need to restructure themselves from the core. Reviewing recruitment processes, changing advertising patterns and raising awareness among employees about gender and the consequences that ignoring gender differences imply, is vital for a healthier balance work-life not only for female employees, but

also for men. Because most company boards are still dominated by men, engaging senior executives in improving gender equality is the key to keep women employed and active in the labour market.

- **Targeting men in powerful positions** - When a man with a powerful and respected role speaks up for gender equality, his actions will more likely be imitated by men and society in general. This will translate into better opportunities for women to stay active in the workforce and to be promoted for positions that are still reserved mainly to men. Leading by example is an excellent way to showcase company and personal commitment to gender equal workplaces. Media balance is extremely important as well. Media roles such as journalists need to be balanced as well, breaking with stereotypes such as women hostesses or male sports reporters. This will help women enter positions that were traditionally held by men and will allow men to explore different work areas that were originally reserved to women.
- **Maternity and paternity leaves** - To ensure that career progression is equal for men and women, parental leaves need to be equalised. Leaves to take care of the children (or for other powerful reasons) need to be allowed for women but also for men. Flexible working times need to be offered to both genders, so that responsibility of domestic work is shared. This way, men and women can benefit from a fulfilling career and a good balance with their personal lives.
- **Awareness campaigns targeted to men** - It is important to invest in socially-inclusive gender campaigns that highlight the perks of gender equality not only for women but for society in general. Engaging men and encouraging them to make a difference by participating in this change process is crucial to succeed.
- **Women leading by example** - Women need to continue raising their voices and speaking up. Conforming with tradition, social norms and masculine standards that dominate our society will not help men understand that their engagement is very much needed. Tradition and culture are difficult to change overnight, but it is possible to progressively change attitudes and behaviours. Some women might choose leaving the workplace; some simply feel they have to. Making men aware of the reasons why women leave their jobs and why they would rather stay are important for men to start taking action and preventing this from happening.

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