

Upgrading Democracy in Europe: Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion as Core Drivers

Online Conference and Senior Experts Dialogue

The pandemic has exacerbated several structural divides, including for women and minority groups. Gender Equality (GE) and Diversity & Inclusion need to be supported and defended to build inclusive societies. Bringing together actors who make a difference in various sectors helps to inspire, join forces, and foster collaboration in view of achieving equality. On 2 March 2021, 36 personalities and senior experts on GE and D&I representing EU and international institutions, civil society and business sector showed their strong commitment to achieve the above-mentioned agendas. In a dialogue co-organised by Robert Biedroń MEP (Vice president of FEMM Committee, European Parliament), Claudia de Castro Caldeirinha (Leadership Professor and CEO of REDSCOPE Consulting), and Marilyn Neven (Programme Manager, International IDEA), they exchanged best practices from Covid-19 times and their recommendations for an inclusive post-pandemic recovery. This initiative builds on prior events by organisers on inclusive leadership and gender equality. Other events and dialogues will soon be in the pipeline, to continue facilitating a “space” of cross-sectoral dialogue, informal networking, exchange of good practices, creation of synergies and mutual inspiration.

Robert Biedroń welcomed speakers and participants to the event, recalling that equality, diversity, and inclusion are the key challenges of the post-pandemic recovery. New and tailor-made solutions are required and exchanging ideas and practices can help to inspire and create synergies to move forward respective agendas.

European Commissioner for Equality Helena Dalli opened the discussion by recalling some telling figures on how Covid-19 amplified inequalities. The commissioner then advocated for a collective commitment at the EU, the national and local levels to pursue gender equality and lift the burden for women. This includes creating new working environments, restoring work-life balances, and including men in such efforts. The commissioner advised to turn the situation into an opportunity by strengthening equality and inclusion mechanisms and ensure that responses to the pandemic spurs progress. The implementation of the EU Gender Equality Strategy starts from the reality that inclusion and diversity are enablers of recovery.

Claudia de Castro Caldeirinha continued the discussion by amplifying that exclusion always comes at a high price, as observed in history and illustrated by recent events all over the globe, including in so far stable democracies like the USA. By not listening to or valuing all citizens, non-inclusive leaders often lead their society towards social tensions, conflict, economic downfall, and democratic erosion of institutions. Due to Covid-19's global tsunami, inequality risks are even higher. Crises however also present opportunities for diversity as driver of innovation, performance, resilience, agility, and good decision-making. Well-recognised institutions and companies have shown over decades that gender balanced and inclusive teams are not only right, but the best “business” decision to take. So, time is ripe for gender equality and inclusion of diverse minority groups: the



companies and organisations who prioritise it will see clear advantages of diversity and inclusion, and rebound faster and more effectively from this crisis.

Managing Partner at NautaDutilh **Dirk van Gerven** commented on how he introduced gender equal practices into the very traditional “old boys” working culture of this company and the Law sector, in general. His advice to leaders is to be a role model and make peers and their teams understand that it is in their interest to put gender equality and diversity at the center of their strategies. Speaking about issues in an open dialogue at work is a good first step. Also important is: to promote transparent management, to put the topic high in the leadership weekly meeting, and to ensure equal representation, visibility and opportunities in all projects, teams and processes. Intentionally doing this for a decade now, he has witnessed a gradual rise of interest from men on these issues at his company, even in those who couldn't truly care about the topic in the past. And the company has benefited in many ways, including by attracting and retaining talent. For him, long term engagement and persistence are key assets of an inclusive leader in today's world.

Assita Kanko MEP advised to grasp the opportunities provided by the crisis and to fight for change. She identified three areas to concentrate efforts on within Europe: Improving the safety of women, strengthening the economic security of women, and ending underlying social biases. The lockdown showed deep systematic flaws in protecting women, as illustrated by increase in domestic violence and the struggle of countries and organisations to tackle this issue and find alternative and innovative solutions for providing support to women in danger.

Marilyn Neven showed how Covid-19 impacted gender equality in the world and in Europe based on data from International IDEA's [Global Monitor](#) and highlighted some recommendations stemming from research and impactful in-country projects to promote gender equality and political empowerment of women. Gender equality is a prerequisite for sustainable development. There is a need for more data and research on the one hand, and for transformative agendas on the other to counter the deepening of the pre-existing inequalities in society in the form of response, recovery, and reform.

Top and senior participants focused their interventions by exchanging views on effective diversity and gender-sensitive responses, taking into account an intersectional approach. They shared recommendations and lessons on how it is crucial to focus on a gender-balanced recovery, that would preserve Europe's democratic values. They also commented on how EU's Gender equality Strategy 2020-2025 needs to be translated into policy and actions at various levels and in various sectors to advance inclusive political and economic leadership. Among many of the leaders inputs, here are a few:

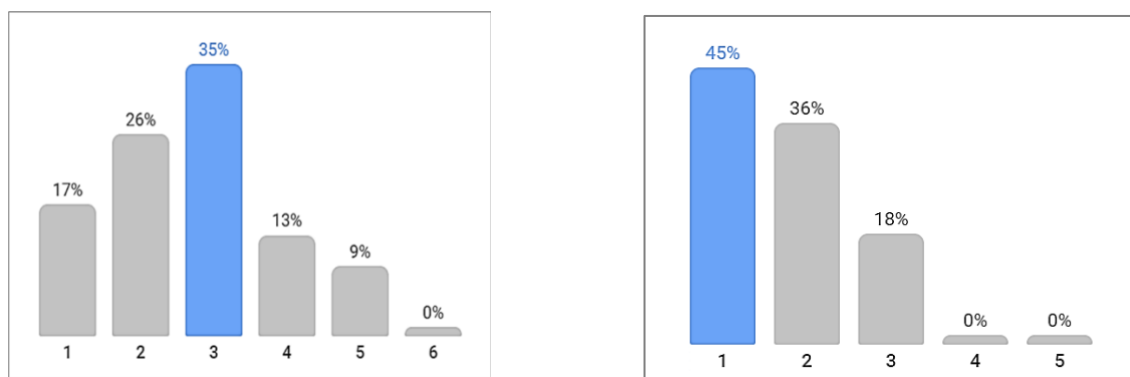
Carlien Scheele (European Institute for Gender Equality) has opened the debate by introducing the latest EIGE reports highlighting that actions and adequate funding are urgently needed to address the disproportional impact of the pandemics to women's rights and opportunities. **Joanna Maycock** (EWL) urged to increase the ambition from stopping inequality to advancing equality and seize the opportunities for transformative change. **Louise Harvey** (FTI Consulting) raised the need for male ambassadors and influencers, and invited women to



take every opportunity to support other women in their daily lives. **Agnes Hubert** (GenderFivePlus) advised to rethink the issue of care in public policies, achieve a parity democracy in number and content, and review priorities on growth (green, social and then economic). **Emine Bozkurt** (EU High-Level Group on Gender Equality in Sport) called upon the EU to take a role in health care sector policies and equal pay. **Constance Kann** (EIB) pointed at the risks of gendered impact of climate change and **Katrin Hugendubel** (ILGA EUROPE) at existing gaps in data on minority groups.

Participants were asked whether the **necessary policies and support mechanisms (funding, etc.) being put in place to protect women and minority groups** currently and during the post-pandemic recovery. Figure 1 below shows results of the separate Slido's Questions: left chart shows perception of protection to women, while right chart shows perception of protection of minority groups. Results rank from (1) strongly disagree, to (2)strongly agree. 78% participants voted on the negative side, i.e. that there are not enough measures (policies and funding) to adequately support women. Even lower, 99% of the participants think that nothing or very little is done to protect minority groups, especially women from these groups. The group discussed this results and shared perspectives, resources and data on the impact of the pandemic on GE and D&I, and on their actions to counter the negative trends (*please see recommendations list and resources list below*). Ideas were also exchanged on how to deal with 'old boys clubs' in organisations and the strategic role played by women and men leaders and senior actors.

Figure 1:



List of some priorities/recommendation made during the event:

- Ensure commitment from leadership on equality and inclusion and their action; ensure that leadership teams in any organisation support internal diversity and inclusion programmes;
- Ensure diversity in emergency and recovery decision groups; achieve 50% of women of diverse origins in all decision-making bodies and levels; mainstream gender and diversity, including gin budgeting;
- Make gender and inclusion impact assessments mandatory in view of recovery measures;
- Increase work flexibility during the crisis and promote equal burden sharing (relief burden on women); and encourage men to telework;



- Understand the major problems for women and minority groups; build an action plan; develop policies; and evaluate regularly;
- Draft and enforce internal gender action plans;
- Provide financial support where needed; ensure gender-targeted public funding;
- Inspire men to become equality ambassadors;
- Ensure reliable and cheaper childcare;
- Invest more in data-collection and research;
- Ensure access of women and minority groups to political finance;
- Step up actions and initiatives to counter gender-based violence;
- Include a gender perspective in all development support;
- Re-think society so as to change traditions, behaviors and practices that are discriminatory or divisive in subtle ways;
- Ensure intersectional assessments and approaches to policies;
- Show flexibility in adjusting projects and programmes to allow for emergency responses;
- Alleviate co-funding requirements for NGOs during the crisis;
- Assist countries on gender budgeting and set clear targets;
- Collect sufficient and comparable data on the gender gaps in all the sectors to support policy-making;
- Activate flexible working policies and hours for all employees;
- Launch a resource portal with tools & resources to support employees and leaders navigating the pandemic;
- Deploy employee assistance programmes to aid employees on mental health and domestic violence;
- Set clear targets on 50/50 interview slates and diverse interview panels to decrease bias; and
- Provide a bonus to enable employees to set-up home office equipment

Specific recommendations were also made by Claudia de Castro Caldeirinha, collected [here](#).

Speakers and senior experts agreed that major adjustment solutions are needed to stop the current backsliding of rights and opportunities of women and minorities and called upon all sectors to join forces.

Resources and articles about the event (by co-organisers):

- (Re)Watch the video of this Senior Experts Dialogue [PART 1](#) (Public part, only)
- Web [article](#) “Gender equality and diversity & inclusion are at the core”, with specific recommendations by Claudia de Castro Caldeirinha, Redscope Consulting
- Web [article](#) “United in Diversity - with EU Commissioner Helena Dalli”
- Web [article](#) “Collaborating for women’s empowerment and inclusion: Senior experts and actors of change put heads together in a cross-sectoral dialogue”, Marilyn Neven, International IDEA

Some Resources and Reference articles mentioned during the event:

- Gender Equality [Index](#), European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)
- Covid-19 and gender equality [resources](#), EIGE
- Sexism at work Handbook and [publications](#), EIGE



- EWL Policy [Brief](#) and resources “Putting equality between women and men at the heart of the response to COVID-19 across Europe”, European Women’s Lobby (EWL)
- Impact assessment [Report](#) “COVID-19 impacts on LGBTI communities in Europe and Central Asia: A rapid assessment report”, ILGA-Europe
- Interactive [Map](#) “COVID-19 impact on racialised communities: interactive EU-wide map”, European Network Against Racism (ENAR)
- Cisco [initiatives](#) “Five ways Cisco Systems is enabling an inclusive future”, Cisco Systems
- [Toolkit](#) for employers “Women of Color at the Workplace”, European Network Against Racism (ENAR)
- [Report](#) on “Intersectional discrimination in Europe”, ENAR
- [Report](#) “Towards a gendered Recovery in the EU: Women and Equality in the Aftermath of the Covid19 Pandemic”, GenderFivePlus
- International IDEA’s [Global Monitor](#) on the Impact of Covid-19 on Democracy and Human Rights
- [Report](#) from prior event “Championing Gender Equality & Inclusive Leadership Within The New EU Legislature” by MEP Robert Biedroń and REDSCOPE
- iKnowPolitics [Resource hub](#) on gender-sensitive responses to Covid-19
- [Report](#) on “Improving gender equality during and after the Covid-19 pandemic”, Frances Fitzgerald MEP, European Parliament
- [Study](#) on the “Gendered impact of the Covid-19 crisis and post-crisis period”, FEMM Committee, European Parliament
- [Study](#) on “Achieving gender equality in the face of the pandemic and existing challenges”, European Parliament
- Policy Brief Global State of Democracy [In Focus](#) “Taking stock of progress on gender equality”, March 2020, International IDEA

