

## **European union: the commitment of hope, human rights, equality, development and education**

DOI: 10.46932/sfjdv4n1-031

Received in: February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2023

Accepted in: March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2023

**Liliana Rodrigues**

PhD

Institution: University of Madeira - Education Research Centre Campus da Penteada

Address: Praca do Município, 9000-072, Funchal, Portugal

E-mail: lilianagr@staff.uma.pt

### **ABSTRACT**

The European Union is strongly committed to the idea of equal rights and respect for difference in all its dimensions. In this reflection I will address the gender perspective and the importance of foreign policies to strengthen strategies and measures that promote education for equality and its implications in terms of health and personal, social, cultural, and economic empowerment. The vulnerability of girls and young women requires a specific focus on gender issues and access to all levels of education. Thus, education is assumed as a commitment to equality, that is, a broad education for behavior changes in relation to gender violence, involving all men, women, boys, girls and communities. In fact, we consider women's rights to be human rights and we want to show why human rights and their empowerment are fundamental to the development of a region and a country.

**Keywords:** European union, human rights, women empowerment, development, education.

### **1 INTRODUCTION**

With the title - European Union as “the commitment of hope - Human Rights, Development and Education – I am referring to the agreement that cannot be reached without politics, as I understand it, that is, as a place for the formal assumptions of rationality, or put another way, as a defense of freedom and equality. This first and theoretical dimension will not make sense without the practical execution of action plans that must necessarily have, as an ally, the research that analyzes, evaluates, remakes, and builds solid bases of action.

We have ambitious Action Plans for Gender Equality in European Union. What is often lacking is the assessment of the activities put into practice. Of course, it is important to know if the proposed activities are implemented, but it is even more important that we know in a rigorous and reasoned way if they are producing the effects we want. Whether we are going in the right direction or whether we need to change strategies. Not forgetting that these strategies will have different contexts and priorities for each country or region.

This work is a narrative about political commitment of my experience as a member of the European Parliament from 2014 to 2019, on the committees of: Regional Development, Women's Rights and Human

Rights and Culture Committee. But it is also the result of my experience as a researcher and member of the Research Centre of Education at University of Madeira.

## **2 EDUCATION AND EQUALITY**

The political and social commitment to equality requires that we, as citizens, reflect on the idea of the Other as a human being just like me. This reflection, which is essentially philosophical and humanistic, bears the mark of collective intellectual atrophy, that is, it shows that we continue to ask for the most elementary right to exist and to be who we are.

“This commitment to social hegemony and abstract knowledge has accentuated the devaluation [of the other]. (...) The individual is now in the atrophy of the collective commitment that prevents him from exploring the social order” (Rodrigues, L., 2011, pp. 86 e 114)

The main goals of European education can be divided in two intervention domains: 1) improve the feeling of belonging, of shared community, of help and responsibility towards others and 2) introduce young people to the diverse national and regional religious and ethnic identities in Europe. Only in this way can we recognize and understand the diversity in Europe. Only in this way will multicultural communities, as the beginning and end of this Union, be seen crucial to the social design that constitutes the European Union's most fundamental cultural asset.

The first idea that I would like to share is the relationship between gender equality and the educational dimension. We must be able to relate this to the totality of the problem, that is, the diagnosis must be holistic, and we know that gender inequality and education are related to income inequality. For example, when we look for education, training and gender in the European Union we can see that non-employability between 20-64 of age in 2001 is 18% higher in women and in 2016 was 12% higher in women. 2020 - 11.7% higher in women. The unemployment rate in January 2021 was 7.3% and the difference, in 2019, of the unemployment rate was 7.0 % for women and 6.4 % for men. Even with 43% of women having a university degree (ages of 30-34 years) and 34% of men having a higher education diploma.

## **3 EMPLOYMENT AND WOMEN RIGHTS**

In employment dimension, in all European Union Member States, more men can find jobs than women. This is compounded for those women who were not born in the European Union. The same occurs in the dimension of political participation of women: the average of regional representation and gender in European Union is 29%. Of the 297 regional assemblies in the EU, only 17 comply with parity. Only Belgium, Spain, France, Sweden and Finland have parity in the order of 40%. With no women in the

political representation of regional assemblies we have countries like Hungary, Italy and Romania. Without any parity, we have Slovakia (where only 10% of the representatives are women)<sup>1</sup>.

In the case of my country, Portugal, the quota law was created in 2006<sup>2</sup>. As a transitional law, it was based on rule that in every three candidates one must be of a different gender. Even with all the efforts we will need another 100 years to achieve parity in political representation between men and women in European Union.

I believe that empowered women mean more and better democracy, more respect for human rights and, above all, to know that the greatest danger I face is not that of being born a woman. Thus, we enter another dimension: the gender and violence. Gender-based violence is the highest form of inequality. But it is also a crime in the civilized world. Data on inequality and violence in the European Union undermine the romantic idea of Europe as the old continent of culture and civilization.

One in three women has suffered some form of physical and / or sexual violence since the age of 15 (rape, mutilation, persecution, beatings, or death). 500,000 women in the EU have been subjected to genital mutilation (180,000 are at risk every year in the United Kingdom, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and Belgium); 13 million women suffered from domestic violence over the course of 12 months; 1 in 20 women has been a victim of rape since the age of 15.

When we look for the history of women's body as a weapon, in the world, the hope is less than nothing: in Rwanda (1994) – 100,000 and 250,000 women were raped during the genocide; in Sierra Leone (1991-2002) - 60,000 women were raped during the civil war; in Liberia (1989-2003) – 40, 000 victims; in Democratic Republic of Congo (since 1998) – 200, 000; in Yugoslavia (1992-1995) - 60,000 declared, but an estimated 1 million. Other cases of countries and groups: Ethiopia, South Sudan, Syria, Russia, Turkey, Poland, Hungary, Lebanon, United States of America, Boko Haram, ISIS and more.

#### 4 MIGRATION AND MARY HONEYBALL'S REPORT

When we look for the relation between gender and migration, we have to analyze what became known in the European Union as Mary Honeyball's Report<sup>3</sup>. In this work by the British Member of the European Parliament, we learn three fundamental ideas:

1. “Women represent on average one third of asylum seekers;
2. Between the beginning of 2015 and the month of November of the same year, about 900.000 people crossed the Mediterranean and reached the coast of Europe, of which women and children represent about 38%;

<sup>1</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docoffic/official/reports/cohesion7/7cr.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/reports/cohesion7/7cr.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254272023\\_Portugal's\\_Quota-Parity\\_Law\\_An\\_Analysis\\_of\\_its\\_Adoption](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254272023_Portugal's_Quota-Parity_Law_An_Analysis_of_its_Adoption)

<sup>3</sup> REPORT on sexual exploitation and prostitution and its impact on gender equality, 2014, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-7-2014-0071\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-7-2014-0071_EN.html)

3. As of 2016, UNHCR presented some data and notes that women and children represent 55% of people who arrive in Greece looking for asylum in the European Union.”

This means that there is a high risk of being a woman. There are higher risks for migrants or refugee women and girls on migration routes to Greece and Macedonia. This also means that these groups are more vulnerable and need additional protection measures. Which leads us to recall the importance of the application of the Istanbul Convention. This agreement is an instrument to combat gender-based violence in Europe and in third countries.

## 5 THE CASE OF UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

In case of United States or America (USA) the panorama it's not much better: “On average, nearly 20 people per minute are physically abused by an intimate partner in the United States. For one year, this equates to more than 10 million women and men. (...) 1 in 4 women and 1 in 9 men experience severe intimate partner physical violence, intimate partner contact sexual violence, and/or intimate partner stalking with impacts such as injury, fearfulness, post-traumatic stress disorder, use of victim services, contraction of sexually transmitted diseases, etc.” (Statistics in <https://ncadv.org/STATISTICS>). In same report we find that

“1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men have been victims of severe physical violence (e.g. beating, burning, strangling) by an intimate partner in their lifetime; (...) 1 in 7 women and 1 in 18 men have been stalked by an intimate partner during their lifetime to the point in which they felt very fearful or believed that they or someone close to them would be harmed or killed; (...) On a typical day, there are more than 20,000 phone calls placed to domestic violence hotlines nationwide; (...) The presence of a gun in a domestic violence situation increases the risk of homicide by 500%; (...) Intimate partner violence accounts for 15% of all violent crime” (Ibidem).

The situation is so bad in USA as it is in Europe. In many other countries we don't know because we don't have data to compare. It will be important to compare first by continents and only then by country and regions. From Asia and Africa, we have disaggregated data that does not give us a view of the whole. Without this perspective, it becomes difficult to act with a solid logic of development through education.

To know, for example, the correlation between arms liberalization policies and domestic violence. In case of USA, where these policies are visible, we have a 19% correlation of cases of domestic violence involving weapons. More data can be found in the report Statistics of USA online. Did you know that in USA women between the ages of 18-24 are most commonly abused by an intimate partner? Like in Europe, domestic victimization is correlated with a higher rate of depression and suicidal behavior and in USA “only 34% of people who are injured by intimate partners receive medical care for their injuries” (Ibidem).

Five years ago, the worst countries to be a woman were: Yemen, Chad, Niger, Afghanistan and Ivory Coast. The best ones: Slovenia, Switzerland, Germany, Denmark and Austria. There then seems to be a relationship between respect for human rights, defense of equality and the development of a country and its regions. If we aim for a more egalitarian and developed society, a change in mentality is necessary. This will only be possible if we are able to combat inequality and if we assume that education is a unique instrument to fight against all forms of discrimination, including gender.

## **6 EDUCATION AND GENDER EQUALITY AS TOOLS FOR DEVELOPMENT**

For equality happen, it is important that schools, as spaces for learning and knowledge, also become places of awareness and prevention, with continuous and structured campaigns against violence, intimidation and harassment, especially online harassment because it is less visible. We need education, formal or non-formal, that addresses issues of social inequality from a gender perspective.

It is necessary to encourage women to enter the so-called hard and digital scientific areas, and for that we need support measures and incentives. It is also necessary to endow all people in educational contexts with attitudes, values, skills and knowledge, not only focused on personal success, but also so that it is possible to achieve our goals as a community for a more egalitarian Europe.

It is still urgent to assume the idea of Curriculum as an instrument of power and carry out a critical analysis of education, realizing that education and school are places where not only knowledge is certified, but class and gender positions. Educational institutions have an obligation to fulfill Europe and for that they must be at the forefront in teacher training as these are the agents of social change. Education for gender equality should be a goal in the educational policies of the different Member States and, as such, should count on universities and research centers in the production of knowledge in this field.

Human rights and, with greater emphasis, gender equality is not a minor issue in education and development of a globalized world. It is a question of justice, democracy and freedom. Without the freedom to be, we will be educating a legion of uncritical and amorphous beings. If we assume that the school is a place of social reproduction, then we will be in a position to pursue what unites us most: the equality of existing and of being who I am.

## **7 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The Global Gender Gap Report, in 2018, indicates that overall, the distance covered in terms of equality is 68%. In other words, until now there is still an average difference of 32% between the sexes. The greatest gender gap is in political women empowerment, which today maintains a difference of 77.1%. Of the 149 countries assessed, only 17 currently have women as Heads of State. Only 18% of ministers in the world are women. Women hold only 34% of management and administrative positions

(in the countries where the data are available) and less than 7% in the worst performing countries (Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Pakistan).

However, full parity, regarding political and economic leadership, is already a reality in five countries: Bahamas, Colombia, Jamaica, Lao People's Democratic Republic and the Philippines. Women spend on average twice as much time on housework and other unpaid activities as men. In the same report (GAP II) projecting current trends into the future, the gender gap will be closed in 108 years in the 106 countries covered since the first edition of the report. The indicator on economic and political empowerment is the biggest challenge, and it will take 202 and 107 years, in particular, to finish.

There is a visible effort and positive results in mainstreaming gender equality and women's empowerment in the core of European Union institutions, Member States and external relations and cooperation programs. However, Gender Action Plan II is disproportionately focused on quantitative data and analysis. Of course, it is important to know if the proposed activities are implemented, but it is even more important that we know in a rigorous and reasoned way if they are producing the effects we want. Whether we are going in the right direction or whether we need to change strategies. Not forgetting that these strategies will have to take into account the different contexts and priorities for each country or region.

We must wait for the results of Gender Action Plan III and hope for better results worldwide.



## Gender Action Plan

### II

1. Ensuring girls' and women's physical and psychological integrity .
2. Promoting the economic and social rights / empowerment of girls and women.
3. Strengthening girls' and women's voice and participation.
4. Shifting the Commission services' and the EEAS' institutional culture to more effectively deliver on EU commitments.

### III

1. 85% of all new actions throughout external relations will contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment by 2025.
2. Shared strategic vision and close cooperation with Member States and partners at multilateral, regional and country level.
3. GAP III calls for accelerating progress, focusing on the key thematic areas of engagement.
4. Leading by example.
5. Measuring results.

Resources: Gender Action Plan II and III – European Commission

Our goals should be common with a unique strategy: the intransigent defense of human rights as a sign of hope and as the “raison d'être” of humanity in us. Thus, we must have mainstreaming gender into sector policy dialogue and create a policy research for building knowledge on gender equality and

women's empowerment. With a regular dialogue and coordination, of Civil Society Organizations and other stakeholders such as human rights, health, or environmental actors and regular data collection on violence against women and girls, to draw up country-specific recommendations and to promote a fair development in our communities.



## REFERENCES

- European Commission (2016-2020). Gender Action Plan II. Brussels. In <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/62f7aa16-c438-11e7-9b01-01aa75ed71a1>
- European Commission (2021-2025). Gender Action Plan III. Brussels. In [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_2184](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_2184)
- European Commission. (2017). My Region, My Europe, Our Future - Seventh report on economic, social and territorial cohesion. Brussels. DG REGIO. In [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docoffic/official/reports/cohesion7/7cr.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/reports/cohesion7/7cr.pdf)
- Mary Honeyball (2014). REPORT on sexual exploitation and prostitution and its impact on gender equality. Brussels: European Parliament in [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-7-2014-0071\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-7-2014-0071_EN.html)
- Ncadv (2019). Statistics. Colorado: Speak. in <https://ncadv.org/STATISTICS>
- Rodrigues L. & Fraga N. (Org.) (2018). *Europa, Educação e Cidadania*. Funchal: CIE-UMa. ISBN 978-898-54390-0-3
- Rodrigues, L. (2011). *Ensino Profissional: o estigma das mãos mais do que a cabeça*. Mangualde: Ed. Pedago. ISBN: 978-989-8449-11-5
- Rodrigues, L. et al. (2019). Crise migratória ou crise de humanismo? J. S. Morgado, J. Sousa, A. F. Moreira e A. Vieira (Orgs.). *Currículo, Formação e Internacionalização: desafios contemporâneos*. (pp. 34-40). Minho: CIEEd. ISBN: 978.989-8525-57-4. E-book.
- Rodrigues, L. et al. (2017). Transforming our world, achieving sustainable development model. In C. Reuter & E. Stetter (Coords.). *Progressive lab for sustainable development: from vision to action*. (pp. 15-29). Brussels: Foundation for European Progressive Studies and SOLIDAR. ISBN: 978-2-930769-13-5.