

Gender Equality as a Means to Boost Economic Growth

di Roberta Caragnano e Valentina Sorci

One year after the launching of the *Strategy for equality between women and men 2010 – 2015*, adopted on 21 September 2010, and after the implementation of the policies provided in the European strategy *Europe 2020*, it is now time to take stock of the work done so far.

The main goal of the above-mentioned strategies is to raise awareness among all the relevant actors at EU level, as well as to provide decision-makers with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively support the implementation of gender equality in all domains, also encouraging them to adopt a positive attitude and to act consistently with EU gender equity policies. Integrating equality between women and men into all Community policies and activities is a top priority. Gender equality is closely related to the EC development cooperation's overarching goal of poverty reduction, in that it contributes to an effective and sustainable development. The EC approach to gender equality is twofold and includes the strategy of mainstreaming as well as specific measures for women.

The 27 Member States have provided a framework and a number of tools to develop a new Europe in the context of a severe international economic crisis. The year 2010 marked a turning point in the evolution of European policies aimed at supporting employment. The well-known targets to be reached by that date, identified by the Lisbon European Council in 2000, have now expired, thus giving us the opportunity to take stock of what has been achieved and what has been left undone, with a view to defining a new starting point aimed at turning the European Union into a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy with high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion. The constant changes that took place over the last years called for the adoption of a new strategy defining the new approach of the European Union (*Europe 2020: An European strategy for a smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth*, in *Adapt Bulletin*, 2010 No. 8). The European Commission has proposed five measurable and achievable EU targets for the next decade, to be transposed into national goals that will steer the process towards greater gender equality. In the context of such changes the EU developed the *Strategy for equality between women and men 2010 - 2015*. The road map, that will be updated every five years, gives new momentum to the Agenda 2006-2010, and represents the European Commission's work program on gender equality. It provides a comprehensive framework committing the Commission to promote gender equality into all its policies in the areas of equal economic independence for women and men, equal pay for work of equal value, equality in decision-making; dignity, integrity, eradication of gender violence, and so on. The strategy highlights the contribution of gender equality to economic growth and sustainable development, and supports the implementation of the gender equality dimension in the *Europe 2020 Strategy*. All these issues have been discussed during the conference *Equality between women and men* that took place last September in Brussels. The conference was aimed at exploring the causes and consequences of the slow progress in advancing gender equality with a view to identifying ideas and initiatives that could give a new impulse to the process towards greater gender equality.

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