



## The Equality of European Citizens and the Inequality of European Women

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**Abstract:** *This report aims to address issues related to gender inequalities. Furthermore, it reflects differences between men and women related to labour market conditions, education, healthcare, and politics, which are extremely important for illustrating the various gender inequalities. They easily and comfortably remain unnoticed in a society having almost no awareness and sensitivity to this topic.*

*Nowadays equality is guaranteed by the Constitution throughout the EU, but in some countries, such as the Republic of Bulgaria, it is somewhat "unsubstantial" through the traditional concept of rights, depending on individual natural qualities. Traditions and roles of both sexes determine the position of women and men in society, leading to a gender equality gap.*

*The aim is result analysis to provide the most comprehensive overview of changes at a national level, regional peculiarities, and socio-demographic differences, and trends compared to past periods.*

**Keywords:** *equality, inequality, men, women*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Along with the "important" themes of justice, security, migration, one of the European Union priorities that remained most unnoticed for Bulgaria is gender equality policy. In fact, equality between men and women is one of EU fundamental values, which has been established in its founding instruments - in the 1957 Treaty of Rome, this subject is present as the principle of "equal payment for equal work".

Nowadays equality is guaranteed by Constitution throughout the EU, but in some countries, such as ours, it is somewhat "unsubstantial" through the traditional concept of rights, depending on individual natural qualities. Traditions and roles of both sexes determine the position of women and men in society from their earliest age. They may influence, for example, the choice of education of young men and women. These solutions are influenced by traditional values and concepts of manner of work or the social groups to which they belong.

While, gender equality is not recognized as a social and political problem on a social and political level in Bulgaria, and the notion that there is no "gender problem" still exists, four fields of inequality are clearly outlined at an EU level, **which may and must be influenced by policy measures**. These fields are:

- pay gaps and pension gaps, related to them;
- participation in decision-making in politics and business;
- economic independence
- gender-based violence.

Huge data volume from various EU institutions clearly demonstrates [1] in each of these fields that women stand in a non-privileged position versus men. Gender inequality reports and analyzes are crucial to the illustration of various gender inequalities that easily and comfortably remain unnoticed in a society like ours having almost no awareness and sensitivity to gender inequality.

After ten years of EU membership, Bulgaria has adopted a Law on Equality between Women and Men [2], but failed to overcome this inequality. Within a year Bulgaria demonstrated significant progress in terms of gender inequality overcoming [3]. In 2017 our country ranked 18 from 32<sup>nd</sup> position a year earlier in the ranking of the Gender Equality World Economic Forum.

Despite the progress that has been achieved in the last year, men and women continue to be unequal in a number of areas, for example, women in our country receive 13.5 per cent less than men and hold disproportionately few leadership positions in Parliament, local authorities, and business.

Through its activities, the EU seeks to change attitudes to the roles of the sexes - at the workplace and in society as a whole. Gender equality and better use of women's talents and skills play a key role in elimination of pay gap between men and women and in achieving the goals of Europe 2020 - EU's growth strategy during this decade. The strategy aims to create a greater number and better work places, to achieve a higher level of employment for women within the overall objective of reaching a 75% employment rate for 20-64 year old persons and to guarantee that by 2020 the number of people, who are exposed to risk of poverty and social exclusion shall be reduced by 20 million.

### Equality Paradoxes

The pay gap between women and men is a major problem which is due to a number of interrelated factors and reflects discrimination and gender inequality on the labor market, but the subjects also concerns: unemployment and social insecurity, gender-based labour division, domestic work, and even the division into a public and private sphere, as well as immigration processes. Based on European Commission data, Bulgaria accounts for 14.7% of pay inequality, with an average value of 16.4% in Europe. Overall EU statistics demonstrates surprising results, as in countries such as Slovenia, Malta, Poland, Italy, and Romania the so-called gender pay gap is below 10%. And in countries such as Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, even Germany and Austria, this index exceeds 20%, as in Estonia it reaches 30%.

Gender pay gap is a complex issue as it continues existing even nowadays due to the more general inequality between women and men in economy and society. Women's skills are often underestimated because they are considered to reflect "female" qualities rather than acquired skills and qualifications. For example, a nurse earns less than a medical equipment technician, although their level of qualification is comparable. This may lead to gender-based preferences upon wage determination and assessment of the value of work done by women.

Throughout the EU, however, profession-based inequalities remain - women are poorly represented in professions such as science, mathematics, computers, engineering. Women earn 16% less per hour than men and more often break their careers due to maternity or unemployment or go to part-time jobs. As a result, the total income gap is 41% and in pensions it is 40%. These differences are due to numerous reasons - the concentration of women in low-paid sectors (e.g. education) and on relatively low positions, excessive engagement in the area of unpaid work (mainly childcare and housework), career breaks due to maternity, discrimination. Women carry the burden of unpaid labour and child care, they often work less hours. The distribution of household obligations and children care in the family is equally uneven. Furthermore, they usually work in sectors and have jobs that allow them to combine work and family responsibilities. As a result, women are more likely to work part-time, to be employed on low-paid positions and not to take leadership positions. The problem of violence against women still remains - every third woman in the EU has experienced some form of physical or sexual violence.

The higher risk of poverty among women, especially among those in retirement age (gender gap based on this index is 5 percentage points), as well as among single mothers and representatives of some disadvantaged groups, such as ethnic minorities and immigrants is clearly distinguishable.

Gender equality lies in the basis of European community values. From an economic point of view, it is necessary to achieve maximum growth in the EU, and the use of women's potential is a prerequisite for process acceleration. This also includes providing them with greater and guaranteed access to responsible, managerial positions both at an institutional and business level.

### Missing Foundations of Equal Opportunities between Sexes

In 2013, the European Commission introduced a proposal to impose a 40% quota on women in the management boards of public companies. It has not yet been adopted by all Member States, some of which formally declare their objection. Bulgaria is one of them, and its grounds are that the decision on fixed quotas should be made on a national level. Although the right to gender-based non-discrimination is guaranteed in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, it is up to the Member States to decide how to work towards achievement of results under a given Directive. According to the European Institute for Gender Equality Index, the average value for gender parity in Bulgaria is only 38.5%, with an average value of 52.9% for the EU.

Bulgaria is not very much different from the general picture in the sphere of paid labor, and it is worth mentioning that in our country women work almost on a par with men (the difference in employment of men and women in 2016 is only 6%, which is the same in some Scandinavian countries only) and pay gaps are lower than those for the EU [4]. And if that sounds good at first glance, the overall picture is not so wonderful. The Gender Equality Index for 2016, drawn up by the European Institute for Gender Equality, positions Bulgaria among the countries with the lowest gender equality. Data review shows that in the European context, Bulgarian women are particularly unprivileged versus men in terms of their time.

Despite almost equal participation on the labor market, women in Bulgaria are much more involved in children and grandchildren care, housework and cooking than other women in the EU. "Women's work is endless," we say, and it seems that this is indeed the case. This work, which is ultimately unpaid, is considered to be "typically feminine" and this leads to its general undervaluation and disregard. Over-committed at home, along with her professional duties, Bulgarian woman experiences serious time constraints, which inevitably represent autonomy limitations, as well. As it happens at home and is implicitly accepted as a social norm, inequality at home remains unnoticed or denied, although it seriously undermines family life quality and women's participation on the labor market. Indeed, inequality in unpaid labor (mainly childcare and domestic work) is one of the areas characterized by most persistent gender inequality, even in the most developed economies, and this is easily apparent from the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development [5] (OECD) data.

The second aspect of the "time" factor as assessed by the Gender Equality Index – the sphere of leisure time, cultural and sporting activities is closely related to this fact. Women in Bulgaria have much less leisure time than men, and these differences are significantly higher than the EU average. Significant differences in the use of time between women and men in Bulgaria are also visible on the website of the National Statistical Institute [6], which show that **every day** women in Bulgaria spend two hours more time in housework than men and have an hour less leisure time.

Furthermore, the majority of part-time employees in the EU are women - 34.9%, versus only 8.6% of men. This has a negative impact on career development, training opportunities, pension rights and unemployment benefits.

### What are the EU Policies to Overcome Gender Inequality and What is Intended for the 2016-2020 Period?

The EU aim is to integrate gender equality perspective into every aspect of EU policies - this is the well-known principle of gender mainstreaming. The overall aim is to change stereotypes about the roles of men and women. Specific targets are set, such as that men and women employment to equalize and reach 75% by 2020.

Another specific goal is to ensure that children have access to kindergarten and crèches to allow mothers to fully engage in paid work. This is also an area where Bulgaria lags behind - in the age group of 3 to 7, only about 60% of children attend kindergarten (the EU target for this age group is 90%). Adequate participation of women in business decision-making should be achieved through 40% participation of women in company boards. Along with these, many other goals are also envisaged - to support and protect the victims of gender-based violence, to support the participation of parents in work and a more equal distribution of child care leave (maternity and paternity), promotion of female entrepreneurship, etc. To achieve them, funding of € 6 billion is foreseen for the EU as a whole. For the Bulgarian conditions, the problems shall be addressed more seriously and they shall be included in public and political agenda.

Despite all efforts, according to Global Gender Gap [7], the World Economic Forum evaluation shows that it will take 100 years to eliminate the gap between genders. As far as labour condition differences are concerned the necessary time shall be twice as much - 217 years. In other words, women and men may be professionally equal in the distant 2234.

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