



Policy Paper  
on  
Achieving Equality Between  
Women & Men

---

*Adopted by the Council of Members  
9-10 November 2007, Brussels (Belgium)*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Being the representative platform of youth organisations in Europe, the YFJ is keenly aware of the paramount problems that inequality between women and men creates for people all over the world, in all parts of society, and in all age groups. The YFJ is also aware of the need for positive actions in favour of those who are disadvantaged; in our case, young people who are excluded from the mainstream.

The YFJ wishes to utilise the same concept in furthering the opportunities of young women and achieving equality between women and men within our own structures on precisely the same grounds, and seeks the support of its members in realising this aim.

This paper has been developed taking into account other YFJ policies aimed at promoting youth autonomy<sup>1</sup>, Human Rights, Equality and Diversity<sup>2</sup>, and Sustainable Development<sup>3</sup>, etc; however, equality between women and men is not something that is derived from another policy - it is an integral element of all policies. This policy paper is based on an earlier version adopted by the YFJ in 1997, "Gender Equality and Women's Policy", the latter having been updated taking into account new policy developments.

The policy paper aims to develop the YFJ views and demands for achieving equality between women and men, in parallel with a process of internal revision of practices, policies and structures, as a model upon which institutions are also encouraged to reflect.

### 1.1 *Policy background*

The YFJ believes that all policies must be gender mainstreamed.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, in practice this is often not the case, although the intention to do so has been affirmed in several important documents, such as in the *Universal Declaration on Human Rights* and more specifically in the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* or the *Convention on the Elimination of*

---

<sup>1</sup> 0052-04 YFJ Policy Paper on Youth Autonomy

<sup>2</sup> 0183-06 YFJ Policy Paper on Equality and Diversity

<sup>3</sup> 0182-06 YFJ Policy Paper on Sustainable Development

<sup>4</sup> In July 1997, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) defined the concept of gender mainstreaming as follows: "Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women as well as of men an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres, so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal of mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality."

*All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*<sup>5</sup>; the *European Convention of Human Rights* and the European Social Charter at the European level; and article 13 of the Treaty establishing the European Community which lays the basis for further EU work in the field of gender mainstreaming. Since these documents were produced, several more policy developments have taken place such as the European Pact for Gender Equality that is an integral part of the EU Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs and the roadmap for equality between women and men 2006-2010.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. POLICY AREAS

Equality between women and men affects all areas of work and therefore the key approach is to have gender sensitive policies. While it is impossible to treat all policy areas in this paper, some policy areas which the YFJ feels have a particularly pronounced gender dimension and necessitate special actions are highlighted. Targeted measures can be found in the attached action plan.

### 2.1 *Gender role division*

The situation of both women and men continues to be greatly influenced by traditional patterns determining their roles in society and their relations to each other. There is a persistent identification of the private sphere as primarily female and the public and economic spheres as primarily male, as well as a notion of appropriate behaviour for members of each sex. The reproduction of these gendered patterns of behaviour has negative consequences for people from all sexes (people feel pressurised to carry out roles that they do not necessarily prescribe themselves to). Gender stereotypes actively impede women's empowerment and men's caring role and contribute to the persistence of gender-based violence and sexual exploitation by, implicitly or explicitly, portraying women as objects.

These roles have many structural causes, which are visible in all areas of life, beginning from the very way children are taken care of, to the career moves that are considered appropriate for women and for men. Although the roles are deeply rooted and reaffirmed by cultural and some religious traditions, they are further enhanced by popular culture, consumerism, and sexism. The different socialisation of women and men contributes to reinforcing existing disadvantages, especially for women, and these factors have to be considered in respect to all policy areas.

---

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/declar.htm> and <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/cedaw.htm>

<sup>6</sup> For more information see <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/>, [http://www.coe.int/t/e/human\\_rights/equality/01\\_overview/Summary.asp#TopOfPage](http://www.coe.int/t/e/human_rights/equality/01_overview/Summary.asp#TopOfPage), and [http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/gender\\_equality/](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/gender_equality/)

Whilst awareness is growing of the fact that women are constrained or even oppressed by rigid role models, gender stereotypes are also very limiting for boys and men - especially with regards to key issues such as fatherhood and parenting, education and under-achievement, health (including sexual health and mental well-being), ethnic minority issues, employment, unemployment and training, violence and crime, and relationships with women and men.

As young people are often the targets of many gender-stereotyping cultures, for example through media, there is a great deal that youth organisations can address in this regard. The YFJ stresses, in particular, the importance of being more attentive to the performances, perceptions and stereotyping of traditional gender roles and images and the promotion of equal relations between women and men through the breaking up of gender roles. Both formal and non-formal education institutions and organisations play an important role in introducing gender sensitive thinking into curricula and programmes.

## *2.2 The social and economic position of young women*

### *2.2.1 Employment and poverty*

When looking into poverty and employment rates there are clear inequalities between women and men; women run a higher risk of being un- or underemployed and/or living in poverty. Even those who are employed are often underpaid, the pay-gap to men in the EU25 is 15 percent in full-time employment and even larger for part-time workers<sup>7</sup>. The reasons for this situation are manifold. To begin with, the labour market continues to be segregated along gender lines with women predominantly employed in lower paid, less secure jobs and sectors: for example, almost one third of the women in the EU work part-time<sup>8</sup>. Even when working in high paid sectors, women get paid less than their male colleagues.

Reconciling professional and private life is particularly difficult for women as they traditionally take on a much larger share of domestic and family responsibilities than men tend to. Consequently women suffer most from the absence of child care facilities and a lack of flexibility from the side of employers. There is a sharp drop in women's employment after childbirth in the EU, while there is a rise in employment among men, who are in turn denied the possibility of spending time with their children. Finally, women are much less represented in decision-making positions, not only on the political level but also in the labour market (the 'glass ceiling'<sup>9</sup>) which has to be

---

<sup>7</sup> For a study on the gender pay gap see [http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/publications/2006/ke7606200\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/publications/2006/ke7606200_en.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> EUROSTAT referring to EU 27

<sup>9</sup> Glass ceiling is a term referring to the invisible barrier that prevents women from rising to the top levels of organisations.

underlined as being among the reasons for the lack of gender-sensitive policies.

This situation does not only result in lower incomes, but also in social exclusion<sup>10</sup>. This is particularly true for young women from migrant, ethnic and other minority backgrounds, or women with disabilities who are even more vulnerable to poverty and unemployment. These groups need to be specifically targeted in programmes aimed at young people. However, all policies aimed at tackling poverty and employment need to take into account a gender dimension. The YFJ therefore calls for the full implementation of the European Pact for Gender Equality and the EU Roadmap for Gender Equality.

### 2.2.2 Young parents

Parenthood, planned and unplanned, is an issue for many young people throughout Europe. In particular for women, parenthood often presents barriers to further education, future career perspectives and to general participation in life outside the home, including in civil society. The lack of state run or private affordable childcare prevents many young mothers from re-entering the labour market. Non-employment can be a form of social exclusion and isolation as many mothers are expected to take a larger share of the responsibilities as parents when, for example, a child is sick at home. These barriers are structural, economic, and attitudinal.

The social and economic value of work done in the home and family should be recognised and men should be encouraged to take a more equal share in it. Women and men have equal responsibilities for this work and it is important that young men are given the rights and opportunities to take up this responsibility and are targeted or included in solutions that promote better parenting and family welfare. It should however be noted that due to social barriers, traditions and economic factors, even where such a legal framework is in place, only very few men take up these responsibilities.

Still, in today's society, women are portrayed as the 'care givers' and men as the 'breadwinners'. This leads to negative aspects for both men and women in different aspects of society. In custody cases, gender often plays a key role in the outcome of rulings, and fathers often face hard odds, when fighting for the custody of their children.

Therefore, parental rights and benefits should not be addressed solely to women and the costs of maternity and parental leave, inasmuch as they are paid for by the private sector, should be spread among the employers of the

---

<sup>10</sup> A huge problem that we leave untouched here is the poverty of elderly women who end up with very low pensions after a life of unpaid care work or low paid labour work. For more information see [http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net/newsletter/2006/PRSI-PRSI\\_news\\_06-3\\_en\\_150906.pdf](http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net/newsletter/2006/PRSI-PRSI_news_06-3_en_150906.pdf)

parents in charge. The YFJ emphasises the importance of encouraging the participation of parents in civil society by facilitating, either financially or physically, childcare provisions.<sup>11</sup>

An important aspect of the lives of young parents is the upbringing of their children. It is necessary to provide both mothers and fathers with education and advice on how to support their children, covering issues such as boundary-setting, discipline and role modelling as a way to break through gender stereotypes from a young age. These should also aim to engage young fathers actively in taking an equal share of responsibility in the upbringing of children.

Teenage pregnancy is another major challenge in the lives of young people. It is paramount for the life of a teenage mother to ensure that there are educational opportunities and support schemes available for pregnant students or students with children. It is also imperative to have financial and child-care support available for teenage parents.

### 2.2.3 Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights are central to any discussion concerning young people. The availability, accessibility and affordability of information and counselling services as well as of free contraceptives are crucial to the sexual and reproductive health of young people. Women often have fewer resources, and even when access to information is available, women face larger social pressure from their sexual partners to engage in unsafe sex. The shockingly rapid increase of HIV/Aids<sup>12</sup> and other sexually transmitted infections (STI) among young women, especially in Eastern, South-Eastern Europe, the Baltic and the Caucasus countries, illustrates the urgent need for information and sexual education focused equally on both male and female anatomy.

Particularly in societies and communities where more traditional and religious beliefs are prevalent, it can be extremely difficult for young people, especially women, to obtain information on anything related to their sexual orientation or sexual health. Emphasis should be placed on all partners ensuring sexual intercourse is practised safely, despite the risk of pregnancy placing women in a necessarily more vulnerable position.

Not understanding their bodies and its sexual and reproductive functions can prevent young women from taking the appropriate actions and precautions when facing pregnancy and/or STIs. It is young women who make up more than 60 percent of the 15-24 year olds living with HIV<sup>13</sup>. Moreover, even when not

---

<sup>11</sup> 0971-06 YFJ Contribution to the European Commission's first-stage consultation on reconciliation of professional, private and family life

<sup>12</sup> For more information see <http://www.unfpa.org/hiv/women/report/index.htm>

<sup>13</sup> [http://unifem.org/gender\\_issues/hiv\\_aids/facts\\_figures.php#1](http://unifem.org/gender_issues/hiv_aids/facts_figures.php#1)

HIV positive themselves, women are taking on the largest burden in caring for family members that are HIV positive.

Young women are also the worst affected by the lack of access to sexual and reproductive health services. Every year almost 20 million women, mainly those experiencing poverty, undergo unsafe abortions putting their lives and health at risk<sup>14</sup>. This figure could be greatly reduced if all women had the freedom of choice, information and access to free and legal abortions, as well as to high quality and gender sensitive health care.

#### 2.2.4 Gender based violence

Gender based violence includes both psychological and physical violence in which some of the most vulnerable groups are young girls, women experiencing poverty, migrant women, sex workers, homosexuals, bisexuals and transgender individuals<sup>15</sup>. Gender relations, especially masculinities depicting women as objects or as inferior can impede the possibilities for men to expressing emotion, and are an important cause of these forms of violence. Women are more exposed to violence in the media and pornography and are much more frequently sexually harassed in the workplace, in public places and even in organisations.

One of the major causes of death and disability of women aged 16-44 around the world is violence against women<sup>16</sup>. Being one of the most widespread violations of human rights, it is often not acknowledged as the huge epidemic it is. It takes place in the context of a societal framework in which there is an unequal power balance and is not restricted to any particular ethnic group or social class. Although in the majority of cases violence occurs within the family or within an intimate relationship, sexual violence by non-partners (such as acquaintances, colleagues, relatives, friends, or strangers) is also very common. Approximately one in five<sup>17</sup> women in the world becomes a victim of rape or attempted rape during their lifetime.

In its definition of gender-based violence, the YFJ also includes the 130 million women who have undergone female genital mutilation and the two million girls that each year are at risk of mutilation, as well as the victims of honour killings and involuntary, pre-arranged marriages. The latter usually leads to a situation where young girls are forced into both marriage and sexual intercourse, and deprived of any right to decide their own futures. Moreover, political violence, such as systematic rape in conflict zones makes women one of the most vulnerable groups in conflicts all over the world. Focused action

---

<sup>14</sup> World Health Organization. 1997. Abortion: A Tabulation of Available Data on the Frequency and Mortality of Unsafe Abortion, Third Edition. Geneva: World Health Organization

<sup>15</sup> 0558-06 YFJ Policy Paper on Violence

<sup>16</sup> [http://unifem.org/gender\\_issues/violence\\_against\\_women/facts\\_figures.php](http://unifem.org/gender_issues/violence_against_women/facts_figures.php)

<sup>17</sup> [http://unifem.org/gender\\_issues/violence\\_against\\_women/facts\\_figures.php?page=3](http://unifem.org/gender_issues/violence_against_women/facts_figures.php?page=3)

<sup>18</sup> [http://unifem.org/gender\\_issues/violence\\_against\\_women/facts\\_figures.php?page=4](http://unifem.org/gender_issues/violence_against_women/facts_figures.php?page=4)

from both international institutions and governments is needed to combat violence against women on a global level.

Issues such as domestic violence need to be particularly targeted in work with boys and men, as an understanding of violence perpetrated by men is essential and needs to include a focus on loss of control, the wider socialisation of men, as well as sexism and abuses of power effected by men. Targeted work on the empowerment of girls and women should also seek to enable them to stand up against this phenomenon and to break down oppressive domestic power relations.

Youth work can play a significant role in assuring safe spaces where violence and bullying is not only unacceptable, but where young people will become advocates for respectful interaction.

#### 2.2.5 Young Women and Trafficking

One of the most heinous crimes carried out against women is trafficking. Every year an estimated 600 000 to 800 000<sup>19</sup> people are trafficked over international borders mostly for sexual exploitation, with 80% of trafficked persons being women and girls<sup>20</sup>. A large proportion of them are trafficked into the European Union and come from Eastern Europe. Trafficking is a modern form of the slave trade in which women are persuaded, forced or in some cases literally abducted to travel to richer areas, often under false promises of work, and end up being forced to become sex workers under the worst possible circumstances. This severe human rights abuse is a global problem in need of global solutions. The inequalities between the poor and the rich, and between women and men are the primary causes for trafficking.

The YFJ calls on all countries to implement and execute immediately the *UN Convention against Trans-national Organised Crime* and the *Protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons* while at the same time insisting on better legal and post-trauma support for victims both in the countries of origin and the countries to which women are trafficked. Preventive measures including better information in the countries of origin are vital to tackling the problem of trafficking in women.

#### 2.2.6 Young women and multiple discrimination

Young women are not a homogeneous group, no more than young people in general are. Being young and a woman already posits two potential grounds for discrimination in life which are further added to when placed in parallel with other identities young women can have, such as being: a migrant, disabled, lesbian, transsexual, bisexual, from a rural area, in poverty, a single parent, or

---

<sup>19</sup> [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/public/story\\_page/015-2856-327-11-47-902-20051125STO02855-2005-23-11-2005/default\\_en.htm](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/public/story_page/015-2856-327-11-47-902-20051125STO02855-2005-23-11-2005/default_en.htm)

<sup>20</sup> ILO [www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org)



pregnant. In their personal situation these groups of young women face even greater barriers which can often lead them into a vicious life circle. Persons who face additional barriers should receive specific support for empowerment. The youth movement can make a positive contribution in defending and supporting the rights of these groups by organising specific activities and ensuring their participation through affirmative action.

In relation to the responsibility of Europe to work on the legal recognition of multiple discrimination, YFJ insists all policies and positions taken on any issue consider and demonstrate specifically how young women from minority groups are affected to progress towards its elimination. The YFJ stands side by side with all young people facing discrimination in Europe and in particular draws attention to those facing multiple discrimination: current EU legislation (Article 13 TEC) only address cases of discrimination on single grounds, without reflecting the multiplicity of people's identities which can often lead to them to being discriminated on multiple grounds

### *2.3 Gender and Education*

Equality of access to education and vocational training is a precondition for women's full participation in society and their successful integration into the labour market as well as a means to counteract the progressive inequalities in the labour market.

School is one of the first and strongest instances of socialisation into gender-specific patterns of behaviour that a child confronts, and this socialisation continues towards higher levels of education. Hetero-normative behaviour is often encouraged by structures and curricula, and staff and students are taught to relate to each other on the basis of sex, not personality. Educational materials are also often gender biased and derived from a hetero-normative perception of the world.

Despite changes in recent times, education remains an area in which gender segregation is very much in evidence with both women and men choosing fields of studies that to a large extent follow old gender stereotypes, both in secondary and tertiary level. The result is that although women make up a majority of European graduates, they largely remain in lower paid jobs and are largely neglected in life-long learning strategies. Female dominated fields are the least paid while in higher positions in all fields (including the female dominated sectors - 'glass elevator'<sup>21</sup>) women are still underrepresented. Women's participation in the decision-making structures of educational institutions is vital to the promotion of equal opportunities in education. School

---

<sup>21</sup> glass elevator is sometimes used to describe the rapid promotion of men over women, especially into management, in female-dominated fields

Students and Higher Education Students' Unions have a valuable role to play in addressing this issue through their work.

The YFJ demands the introduction of support schemes to young people in all fields of education, particularly where those fields have been traditionally dominated by one sex or other, and will be particularly attentive to the educational and training needs of young women in all educational systems.

The YFJ believes that harassment in schools and higher education institutions can lead young women and men into persistent exclusion and have an impact on their mental health, not only while in education, but also later in life. Necessary measures such as anti-harassment policies and gender sensitivity training for teachers need to be introduced at the different levels of education.

#### *2.4 Gender and Development*

Global poverty has specific and very serious implications for the status of young women, with 70 percent of the people living in extreme poverty being women<sup>22</sup> and 64% of the illiterate, women<sup>23</sup>. Since poverty traps women in multiple layers of discrimination and hinders their ability to exercise their rights, ending the feminisation of poverty has always been a core priority of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). Not only do women bear a disproportionate burden of the world's poverty, but in some cases, globalization widens the gap, with women losing more than their share of jobs, benefits and labour rights. From tax systems to trade regimes, however, economic policies and institutions still mostly fail to take gender disparities into account. The feminisation of poverty is aggravated instead of alleviated by processes of modernisation and development.

Moreover, policies on international development cooperation should start from a commitment to promote and protect women's rights and to combat gender-based inequalities. Young women need to be involved in defining development projects, programmes and policies coming from both governmental institutions and non governmental organisations.

### **3. THE PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG WOMEN IN POLITICAL LIFE**

Political representation is of the utmost importance for the realisation of equality between women and men. In representative and governmental bodies most of the policies outlined above are decided upon without having an equal representation of women and men, which leads to the exclusion of

---

<sup>22</sup> reference <http://www.unpac.ca/economy/wompoverty2.html>

<sup>23</sup> <http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php>  
[URL\\_ID=40338&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php?URL_ID=40338&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)

women's issues and perspectives from the agenda. The participation of women in politics in Europe, and indeed all over the world, remains worryingly low with, for example, only 19,8% of Europe's Members of National Parliaments being women<sup>24</sup>. In addition, women are expected to perform to a higher level than men for the same level of recognition. These problems need to be addressed urgently. Affirmative action should be put in place in order to ensure that this gap is decreased and eliminated. It is important that youth organisations, especially political organisations, work strongly on encouraging their parties to take this element into account when deciding upon candidates for different positions. In this context, intergenerational solidarity among women is also important, and older women (as is more often the case) represented in decision-making bodies should promote the participation of younger women, while at the same time serving as their role-models.

The gap between women's and men's rates of participation at various levels within youth organisations still prevails and at the top level there is a vast imbalance. By many, this imbalance is often not noticed or perceived. Therefore, it could be fruitful for youth organisations to internally evaluate their work from a gender perspective, measuring the participation of women and men as well as analysing why there might be a discrepancy. It is also important to empower young women to take part in the different structures of an organisation. A particular regard has to be taken to young people that might face multiple barriers such as young women from minority backgrounds. Apart from evaluating the situation and addressing the shortcomings that might arise from the evaluation, there should also be internal structures within youth organisations for women's and gender issues to be raised.

#### **4. THE ROLE OF YOUNG MEN IN THE STRUGGLE FOR EQUALITY BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN**

Equality between women and men will not be achieved through the efforts of women alone: only when women and men join forces to change traditional gender patterns collectively will genuine gender equality be possible. Therefore it is important that all men, but especially current and future male leaders, take part in the struggle for the elimination of inequalities between women and men.

The YFJ will work to ensure that sex based privileges and gender patterns are broken up and that men take a stand and contribute to the struggle for gender equality, which will be beneficial for both women and men. Their role is fundamental in developing wider understanding, particularly amongst men, of existing inequalities and of how men can address this problem. The differences in sensitivity among men towards the question of equality between sexes is

---

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>

often determined by economic and social conditions, social status, sexuality, disability, geography, religion and culture; therefore suitable approaches need to be found when working with men on education for gender equality. Gender-sensitive youth work has also to develop approaches to address different forms of oppression - in particular sexism and homophobia.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

This policy paper not only lays the basis for the future policy work of the European Youth Forum on achieving equality between women and men, but aims at ensuring an internal process, which will turn the statements into practice and give stronger credibility to the YFJ when advocating for external action as a way of ensuring a gender equal society

The YFJ believes that the approach that is being taken in including a strong internal and external dimension will inspire Member Organisations to get actively engaged and contribute in making a difference on the national and European level in their sphere of work, while pressuring institutions and decision-makers to give strong responses for the achievement of the equality between women and men.