



OUT OF THE DEADLOCK:

Tackling the backlash of gender equality with progressive tools

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Europe is witnessing a new backlash against gender equality. This backlash rejects the term ‘gender’ itself, undermining the achievements of gender equality.

The backlash against gender equality is not a mere side effect of financial crisis. It is part of a conscious strategy to create a conservative society. Some Conservative and Far Right movements are unifying in Europe to learn from each other and to develop a common strategy in mobilizing against the concept of “gender”. Hence, the biggest challenge for progressives is to find ways to respond to the opponents of gender equality and to stand up against fundamentalist activism.

This policy brief is offering five policy recommendations for the progressives to tackle the backlash of gender equality. The recommendations have been developed in the framework of the FEPS-FJJ-Boston University collaboration – the Transatlantic gender dialogue – with an outcome of a publication «Woman Up 2».

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1. There is a need to share concrete examples of motivating women to become politically engaged for the progressive cause.

New dialogue needs to be established with target groups that have not been previously engaged in progressive agenda. In the light of the fourth wave of feminism, new grassroots feminist movements need to be engaged in standing up against the backlash of gender equality.

However, before analysing the way in which progressive parties can use the Internet in order to convince women to give them their vote, it is necessary to see how the opponents of gender equality use ICTs in their daily actions and in running their campaigns.

2. A rerouting is needed so that progressives could claim again the ownership over the parity agenda

Progressives should come up with an alternative agenda to construct a new narrative of gender equality in which equality does not mean just “women’s issues”.

Gender equality should be understood as more than just women’s rights in regard with private sphere because it is not only women who are gendered and there is a need to move beyond gender binaries.

3. To be able to break structural inequalities, one must start by breaking austerity

Progressives need to reconsider the neoliberal agenda and abandon a monetarist approach to macroeconomic policies. There is also a need to acknowledge that social policies contribute to and affect macroeconomic performance and that the development of welfare regimes cannot be separated from labour market policies. New, more progressive and equitable alternative agenda must be enforced.

4. There is a need for gender mainstreaming in rethinking various areas – from ICT, to educational policies, security and welfare state.

For instance, implementation of concrete measures should turn gender sensitive peace approaches into reality, e.g. advocating for the inclusion of grassroots women’s organisations, associations and groups in the planning and implementation of gender-sensitive strategies to address security challenges. Another example, higher education needs to provide tools and mechanisms to help female students to recognise and seize opportunities in graduate schools and beyond.

5. The backlash against gender equality cannot be overcome without critically addressing nationalism

The movements opposing gender equality tend to use nationalism in order to fuel conflict and construct an «Enemy» figure out of protectors of human rights. This is an issue often missed and unaddressed. Progressives need to be aware of the strategies and intentions of the fundamentalists.