Advocacy strategies in times of crisis: how to address gender equality in the current political agenda


**Starts at:** 24/04/2013, 07:00 CEST (+02:00)  
**Ends at:** 25/04/2013, 21:00 CEST (+02:00)

Some of the key ways to address gender equality are based on (a) ethics – women represent more than 50% of the EU’s population; (b) rights-based approach – women and girls represent the most disadvantaged social group across all other inequalities; (c) proven results – investing in women has been shown to increase social welfare and economic growth.

There is the urgent need to advocate for equality. And, as costs and economic priorities is the key argument to put aside gender equality, using economic benefits of gender equality as a strategy to foster (and preserve) gender equality, seems to be a good pattern. In this frame, equality is addressed not only as a matter of fundamental rights, but also as an economic resource and a driver of wellness.

**Guiding questions:**

· Do you perceive that the rights discourse is no longer effective in advocating for gender equality in the EU?

· What do you think are the current perceptions on gender equality in the context of the economic crisis?

· How is gender equality connected to the current economic and financial crisis?

· What evidence-based advocacy on gender equality do we need?

To read the transcript of the discussion click on the link below:

**File attachments:** online discussion - Advocacy strategies in times of crisis- how to address gender equality in the current political agenda -transcript.pdf

**Facilitators:** Katarzyna Pabijanek, Susi Billingsley
1. *Susi Billingsley* | 24/04/2013, 14:10 EEST (+03:00)

Hello everyone, hopefully you've had a coffee-lunch break and are now fully charged to enter the second part of our discussion.

We have posted four questions for all to consider, we are very much looking forward to hearing your comments!

2. *Carla Fronteddu* | 24/04/2013, 14:13 EEST (+03:00)

Hello everybody,

I think the main problem is that gender equality is still perceived as a cost and not as an investment.

3. *Graziano Di Paola* | 24/04/2013, 14:52 EEST (+03:00)

*Carla Fronteddu* wrote:

Hello everybody,

I think the main problem is that gender equality is still perceived as a cost and not as an investment.

I think we need more evidence based arguments on how much more competitive is a company putting gender equality principles into practice. This is a micro approach easy to understand if supported by stats.

*Comments:*

- *Susi Billingsley* | 24/04/2013, 15:07 EEST (+03:00)
  thanks Graziano, you make a very interesting point, in fact this approach is being discussed tomorrow on panel 3 and 4: the Economic and the Business Case for gender equality, stay tuned :)

4. *Niall Crowley* | 24/04/2013, 14:54 EEST (+03:00)

Hi, I am Niall Crowley, an independent consultant in Ireland. Advocacy for gender equality in the current context of crisis raises some challenges.
Previously I think we focused on advocacy as a means of persuading those in power in relation to gender equality. So the focus was on rights and it was on evidence based advocacy. This does need to continue.

However, the crisis has stimulated a politics that is unresponsive to anything that is seen as falling outside the core concerns that dominate responses to the crisis. The crisis has also revealed a very limited popular demand for gender equality. It is not seen as important or central or as something that should determine what we now do.

In that context maybe the forms of advocacy have to change, maybe the targets for advocacy have to change if we are to establish gender equality more centrally within the value base our societies operate out of?

5. **Dimitris Tsoutsias** | 24/04/2013, 15:26 EEST (+03:00)

Hello all,

I agree with Carla that the efforts for achieving gender equality are often perceived as a burden. Mostly men but also women react, being afraid of what a change will bring in their professional lives. I believe that we should clearly stress the economic benefits of gender equality, especially today and they can be analysed in many levels:

- How companies with women on boards and generally with equal representation of genders achieve better results
- How companies targeting equal representation of genders in their workforce could actually identify better employees
- How the economic independence of women results in a better welfare of their families.
- How much is cost of healthcare due to causes that the absence of gender equality plays a role, e.g. high stress levels.

I do not know if the current economic crisis has anything to do with the lack of gender equality, but that would be a very interesting study to do as well.

However, I do not believe that we should advocate and strive for gender equality only because it brings economic benefits. Wouldn’t we want equality if it was not economically beneficial?

When advocating gender equality, a big target audience many times forgotten are men. They should see the clear benefits of equality for them, e.g. the benefit of raising their children, the benefit of not being the only ones who have to provide economic stability to the family, the benefit to develop their personalities breaking the gender stereotypes…
6. *barbara leda kenny* | 24/04/2013, 15:39 EEST (+03:00)

_Niall Crowley_ wrote:

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In that context maybe the forms of advocacy have to change, maybe the targets for advocacy have to change if we are to establish gender equality more centrally within the value base our societies operate out of?

I agree. we should change the way we advocate for gender equality. The paradigm that took us to the crisis was based on inequality and exclusion, and economic and political power were male dominated. Gender equality, and equality at large, could be advocated as a driver for change.

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7. *Susi Billingsley* | 24/04/2013, 15:49 EEST (+03:00)

In times of crisis, the responsible figures for national level policies and public investments’ often argue that gender is a luxury for times of wellness. But there are some issues at that we would like to bring to the attention: countries with a higher level of gender equality - and a higher participation of women in the labour market - suffered less.

While in countries with low participation of women in the labour market, the crisis had a worst impact. The countries suffering the most from the crisis are also those where retrenchments had a hard gender impact worsening the situation of women in terms of equality.

Considering this data how do we move on to find a more accurate framework for gender advocacy?

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8. *Niall Crowley* | 24/04/2013, 16:19 EEST (+03:00)
Susi Billingsley wrote:

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Considering this data how do we move on to find a more accurate framework for gender advocacy?

This is very telling and provides the basis for advocating a gender focus in any analysis and response to the crisis.

Gender equality would in turn though challenge current responses to crisis fundamentally. To achieve such change requires significant popular demand. It will take more than persuading policy makers of this evidence - no easy task in the current context. It will be important to show a strong popular demand for responses to crisis based on gender equality and for a post crisis society that achieves gender equality. Advocacy needs to present evidence to the policy makers just as it needs to empower a new value base across society to achieve this popular demand.

Niall

9. priya alvarez | 24/04/2013, 16:22 EEST (+03:00)

Dimitrios Tsoutsias wrote:

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many thanks for all the important points you have raised, particularly for the specific and practical benefits for men you pointed out. Inclusive advocacy should bring these issues to the forefront.

Comments:
Susi Billingsley | 24/04/2013, 16:35 EEST (+03:00)
dear Priya and Dimitrios, you raised a key point indeed, so do you feel that shifting the paradigm from a "Conciliation " standpoint to one of "Equal sharing " at policy level will actually embrace men into the conversation?

10. Julia Espinosa | 24/04/2013, 16:32 EEST (+03:00)

Hello all:

I am Julia Espinosa, a researcher and evaluator in gender equality and the leader of the ‘Gender and Evaluation’ Thematic Working Group of the European Evaluation Society (EES). It is a pleasure to take part in this discussion.

In the current crisis context, the political focus is on the implementation of economic recipes for promoting economic growth. However, there is not an in-depth discussion on the social effects of this kind of policies and how they are contributing to increase inequality. Indeed, crisis has increased the gender gap (unemployment affects more to women, women have to carry out care activities when the State do not, and so on) and the policies promoted in the last years are also contributing to this situation.

I am not sure about if people consider gender inequality as a central public problem. However, the political decisions are not taking into account this issue as a pre-requisite for development and they are focusing on adjustment policies. They trust on the “trickle-down effect”: if our GDP (Gross domestic product) increases, gender equality data will improve automatically. So, the gender equality is a secondary objective.

Therefore, we should think about advocacy strategies for putting practical and strategic gender needs on the agenda. In this regards, first we need evidence-based data about the increasing of gender inequalities in EU countries and about how they are a great challenge for the social and economic development of these countries. Secondly, we need to show how gender inequalities impact on our daily lives and how they limit the human capabilities as well as the exit to the crisis.

11. Liisa Horelli | 24/04/2013, 16:37 EEST (+03:00)

Hello, this is the second time I am trying to send my message in the morning. My name is Liisa Horelli and I have worked with gender issues since the early 1980’s. I tried to answer in the morning how I saw the benefits of gender equality through recent history from the Finnish perspective. I use the power point picture (which does not show) of the three waves to equality with different perspectives and strategies that complement each other:
Persp. of Equal Treatment with the strategy of Human rights: Important is all the legislation supporting human rights such as universal suffrage and eligibility for elected office (in 1906 in Finland), compulsory general education for all, Marriage act legal equality of spouses, ILO convention on discrimination, CEDAW, and Equality acts (in Finland, 1987 with several amendments). Of course, the implementation of the rights depend on the political and cultural situation of the country, in the Nordic countries the law is pretty much respected even if there are gaps in practice.

Women’s or men’s perspective, with the strategy of empowerment: the positive action enabling women to participate in a number of projects, for ex. in the structural fund programmes, such as building Women’s Resource Centres, was a gift from the EU.  [http://www.winneteurope.org/web/page.aspx?refid=51](http://www.winneteurope.org/web/page.aspx?refid=51) Similar examples are for men, in the form of paternity leaves.

Gender perspective, with the strategy of mainstreaming: This has provided a wide palette of new things under the gender lense, both horizontally (different fields for ex. biased education and employment markets), local and regional development, supported by the structural funds, as well as vertically, by looking at hierarchical positions and leadership in terms of gender or gender quota.

The benefits and also the gaps within, are categorized often in sectoral terms or themes: participation and decision making, education and training, working life and the economy, the environment, communities and traffic, equality in the media, reconciliation of work and family life, social security and social and health services, preventing violence against women. Some areas or fields have succeeded better, some worse, but the systematic cross-cutting gender order or contract of the nation (region, even locality) and the EU should be more focused on. The systemic impacts are reflected in the general attitudes towards gender issues.

However, what about the future perspectives and their strategies? The political and economic context of Europe and its nations are changing and becoming harsher. We are more and more surrounded by complex wicked problems without borders, which traditional gender mainstreaming has difficulties to deal with. There are new policy instruments based on deliberation, coordination and orchestration of multiple participations and stakeholders on-line and in real-time contexts. They require alignment between multiple levels of government and co-governance processes. This requires new roles for policy makers and also participants. What is the position of gender in this complex context?

Gender activists have to be even more agile to set new agendas, to create new hubs of networking and knowledge sharing and to build novel social practices. Gender is a psycho-social and a socio-cultural construct of “doing gender+ in context”. Therefore, we have to be alert to co-create new enabling structures that allow the doing in context. Maybe the new participatory culture of the digi-age can help. Social media assisted activism and gender-sensitive democratic evaluation might also help? Maybe the new
strategy could be “the co-creation of glocal enabling environments” (local and global; real and virtual or augmented) that can mediate, support and protect.

12. priya alvarez | 24/04/2013, 16:42 EEST (+03:00)

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It seems as if economic growth is at odds with gender equality. Many advocacy efforts focus on economic growth. There is no clear link between economic growth and gender equality except for the fact that women are well educated and therefore an important productive element.

Governments are now focused on cutting expenditure. Gender equality needs public expenditure to provide for services in the care economy that unleash women's potential for the labor market. The alternative is either private expenditure and/or men and women sharing family duties in a more egalitarian way.
If governments cannot spend more money in public services at least they could increase paternity leaves so that parental duties are more equally shared, and women enjoy more opportunities in the labor market.

Comments:

- **Susi Billingsley** | 24/04/2013, 16:50 EEST (+03:00)
  
  Priya which arguments do you feel can be most effective in supporting paternity leave, which carries a fairly high costs in itself, so that policy makers may actually move in this direction?

13. **Liisa Horelli** | 24/04/2013, 16:43 EEST (+03:00)

  Just a quick comment to Julia. The implications of the current economic crisis affect more men than women. Male unemployment is far higher than that of women in Finland.

  Liisa

14. **Tindara Addabbo** | 24/04/2013, 16:53 EEST (+03:00)

Hello to everybody from Tindara Addabbo (European Gender Budgeting Network & Department of Economics Marco Biagi University of Modena & Reggio Emilia - Italy). Perhaps because I come from Italy - one of the EU countries where sharp gender inequalities in different areas are still persistent though the benefits connected with the achievement of gender equality we discussed upon in the morning should be clear enough - I would say that there is a urgent need for evidence-based advocacy. I take Susi's comment on tackling this issue in the crisis from a gender budgeting perspective: when the resources are limited there is even a more urgent scope for their efficient distribution. And achieving gender equality to get a positive effect on economic growth and human development should be really a must. As Susi points out the differences with respect to the effect of the crisis in countries characterized by a different level of gender equality can be referred to as a good macroeconomic example of the need to improve on gender equality and to advocate for it. I think that it is important also to focus at the micro level. From this perspective (taking into account also other participants' relevant contributions in this direction) I think it can be important to collect evidence on how firms and institutions characterized by higher gender equality and by the implementation of policies able to improve gender equality (for instance in terms of work life balance promoting also fathers' involvement) reacted to the crisis. I think that evidence based advocacy at this micro level should be very effective too in increasing firms and institutions case for reaching gender equality. And I agree with Dimitrios and Priya's point on the relevance for men too of higher gender equality.
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The ENEGE network report as well as the EWL's one on the impact on women of the crisis, even if their standpoints might diverge, agree on the need of gender budgeting as a pre-assessment tool. Still I am not an economist and I wonder: could we say that cuts are only apparently and on the short term convenient but consequences of cuts on the long term might be much more expensive?

What are in your opinion the key arguments to advocate for gender budgeting in order to achieve equality?

thanks, Barbara
There is not much work done on growth and gender equality as Julia says but Asa Lofstrom did do a piece of work in 2009 for the Swedish presidency that linked a gender equal labour market with significant increases in GDP.

However if gender equality is to be a driver for change as Barbara suggests then we will need gender budgeting but we will need more - evidence and passion I think. We should be concerned with civil society and the quality of the push for gender equality from civil society.

Civil society is one of the casualties of the crisis too - this has weakened women's voices through various associations. This area needs reinvigoration so that it has resources but also so that it evolves and becomes fit for purpose in these very difficult times.

17. Niall Crowley | 24/04/2013, 17:15 EEST (+03:00)

barbara leda kenny wrote:

tindara wrote:

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What are in your opinion the key arguments to advocate for gender budgeting in order to achieve equality?

The ENEGE report also pointed up how equality mainstreaming had not been implemented in most of the policy proposals brought forward to respond to the crisis and how the equality infrastructure had been diminished as part of fiscal consolidation policies. Both points which highlight the need for new forms of advocacy.

18. Tindara Addabbo | 24/04/2013, 17:24 EEST (+03:00)

I'll step in again...to reply to Barbara's interesting point. Let's take cuts in public childcare. These cuts can be regarded more as a transfer towards those in the family who are the main carers and in countries like Italy, where women still bring the most relevant load of childcare within the family and in paid work, this can actually translate into an opening up of the gap, at the disadvantage of women, in labour participation. Moreover cuts in high quality childcare services can result also in a decrease of children's well being (in different dimensions...). Something that can be seen as a cut in public spending in the short run can therefore bring about more costs in the medium-long run and an immediate transfer of costs in caring. These effects are neglected if the gender impact of public policies is not assessed.

Stressing the relevance of gender equality per se as a target of public policies I can add that diversity at work (both paid and unpaid) can bring about positive effects not only to the direct beneficiaries of the policy but to the working environment and to the people cared for - if we consider the process of social reproduction. There is a need to collect the existent evidence (often fragmented not only in different data set but approached by different disciplines) and to look for new data in order to provide a system of indicators with the purpose of advocating for gender equality and of setting the base for a thorough gender policy evaluation that is particularly relevant in the time of crisis and in shaping the way out of the crisis.

19. Victoria Sánchez Esteban | 24/04/2013, 17:30 EEST (+03:00)

Hello everybody. To answer these difficult questions several points of view should be considered, what fortunately this discussion enables. My perspective is the evaluation of public policies (I am an independent consultant and member of the European Evaluation
Society) and I think that of course gathering more evidences can establish a stronger ground for any advocacy strategy.

I agree that gender budgeting should be a must (‘not even one Euro to policies which can worsen or even consolidate current inequities’) and there are other possibilities which already exist that, at least in Spain, are not always performing perfectly. For example, any new Law must be accompanied by the assessment of its potential impact on different areas, mainly economic, environmental and social areas. Social areas, in turn, should include a gender analysis, and they sometimes do, although it is not always as specific and relevant as desired.

So insisting in fulfilling some of the requirements already established may be another small building block for a new advocacy strategy, together with all the possibilities which are being mentioned.

20. Niall Crowley | 24/04/2013, 17:35 EEST (+03:00)

Thanks Susi, that is useful.

We do need tools of course for a more incisive cultural dialogue. I am not sure that we have these available to us. Would be great if some information on this??

Then of course we need the more incisive cultural discourse so the tools we have a more effectively used. We, like described by Victoria in Spain, have a lot of these tools in Ireland but they are not properly used - tends to become a tick box exercise. With a more incisive cultural discourse going on this could change and they tools really could deliver.

Comments:

- Susi Billingsley | 24/04/2013, 17:39 EEST (+03:00)

   Earlier on @Liisa Horelli was saying in her post "Gender activists have to be even more agile to set new agendas, to create new hubs of networking and knowledge sharing and to build novel social practices. Gender is a psycho-social and a socio-cultural construct of “doing gender+ in context”. Therefore, we have to be alert to co-create new enabling structures that allow the doing in context. Maybe the new participatory culture of the digi-age can help. Social media assisted activism and gender-sensitive democratic evaluation might also help? Maybe the new strategy could be “the co-creation of glocal enabling environments” (local and global; real and virtual or augmented) that can mediate, support and protect” What do you think?

21. Tindara Addabbo | 24/04/2013, 17:52 EEST (+03:00)
Just a quick comment upon this stimulating discussion: I would say that civil society should be involved in the process of gender budgeting and should have a voice. Perhaps neglecting this voice and detaching it from decisionmaking can be considered at the root of a model of development still characterized by sharp gender inequalities even if we know that reaching gender equality is beneficial from many points of view...a way to listen and to advocate for these voices to be listened to should be found. Experiments in this direction exist and give promising results.

22. Susi Billingsley | 24/04/2013, 17:55 EEST (+03:00)

Dear all, we are about to close the on line discussion in about 10 minutes, at 5pm sharp. As a reminder we would like to alert everyone that comments are still welcome even after the actual closure.

We will be on tomorrow, staring at 9am with session 3: tackling the Economic Case for Gender Equality. We are looking forward to engaging with all of you for another lively time session together :)

23. barbara leda kenny | 24/04/2013, 17:56 EEST (+03:00)

tindara wrote:

Just a quick comment upon this stimulating discussion: I would say that civil society should be involved in the process of gender budgeting and should have a voice. Perhaps neglecting this voice and detaching it from decisionmaking can be considered at the root of a model of development still characterized by sharp gender inequalities even if we know that reaching gender equality is beneficial from many points of view...a way to listen and to advocate for these voices to be listened to should be found. Experiments in this direction exist and give promising results.

Thanks Tindara, if you have links to examples it would be great!

24. Angela O'Hagan | 24/04/2013, 17:59 EEST (+03:00)

Hello again,

I think the "rights discourse" still has a long way to run, in part as I don't think it has been fully understood or maximised in campaigning.
There is a wealth of evidence pointing to the gender-blind measures that many governments, at all levels, have imposed under their austerity and recovery plans. The UK Women's Budget Group, for example, has consistently highlighted the negative implications of many of the measures cutting public spending, deconstructing social protection (called welfare reform), and reforming the public sector which have significant consequences for women's employment and income levels.

Arguably a connection between gender equality and the economic crisis is that many policy responses have been damaging for women and therefore have had a regressive effect on women's economic and social equality. The changed nature of the labour market as a result of job losses due to public spending and public service reform, for example, has impacted on women's employment status and labour market participation, for example.

For some policy makers and employers there has also been a perception that advancing gender equality is an acceptable objective in "good times", but an unaffordable luxury in harder economic times.

Evidence-based advocacy on the economic case for equality is essential. This could/should include, for example, analysis on how current economic and welfare models continue to render women and women's unpaid economic contribution invisible, the economic benefits of universal childcare and investment in care provision generally.

Niall mentioned earlier the need to change the targets for advocacy if we are to change the values base from which gender equality is argued. I think that is absolutely part of the change in advocacy, and one of the reason why gender budget analysis and gender analysis across the policy process are so important.

Angela

25. Susi Billingsley | 24/04/2013, 18:04 EEST (+03:00)

Thank you all for being present in this discussion today with your inspiring and thought provoking statements and questions, we wish you all a good evening and we very much look forward to having you online tomorrow with us!

You are welcome to keep on posting and commenting on both panels today, though the live session is over now.

26. Tindara Addabbo | 24/04/2013, 19:16 EEST (+03:00)
Hello again. I know the time of the online discussion is over, this is to reply to Barbara's question referring to some Italian participatory experiences. The first participatory well being gender budgeting experience carried out in Italy regards a high school in Modena and is referred to at the end of ‘A Social-reproduction and Well-being Approach to Gender Budgets: Experiments at Local Government Level in Italy’ by Antonella Picchio, Francesca Corrado, Giovanna Badalassi and myself (Chapter 5, in Florence Degavre, John Eriksen, Elisabetta Addis and Paloma de Villota (eds), Gender and Well-being. The Role of Institutions, Ashgate, 2011). A wider analysis on this experience is available but in Italian as a working paper by Francesca Corrado ‘De-costruzione del bilancio scolastico nell’approccio ben-essere: Che genere di bilancio?’ (‘De-constructing the school budget in the well-being approach: What kind of budget?’) CAPPaper n. 74 downloadable at http://www.capp.unimore.it/pubbl/cappapers.html. This experience is currently being extended to other public schools in the Emilia Romagna region and to Universities as a tool of participatory well being gender budgets. Application at local municipality level includes also San Giuliano Terme a municipality in Tuscany.

27. Irene Rosales | 25/04/2013, 13:52 EEST (+03:00)

Hello everybody,

I could not join the live discussion yesterday but I want to leave my comment to this interesting discussion. I am Irene Rosales, spanish evaluator and gender equality expert working in Brussels.

I agree that gender activists should be more agile to set new agendas. And would like to also convey the message that we should be aware of how the agenda setting and the decision making are currently being developed.

More specifically, I would like to refer to the so-called Economic Governance at the EU level (the European Semester) in which broadly speaking several institutions are involved at different stages with very different roles and power capacities (Commission, Member States, Council of Ministers, Council and Parliament). This new and very complex decision making process is serving to set the political agenda of reforms at national level but gender equality is not being sufficiently taken into account. Firstly, the objective of gender equality is not an explicit goal of the Europe 2020 Strategy and, secondly, gender equality perspective is not properly being mainstreamed in the whole process of the European Semester. Gender equality is basically narrowly framed in terms of employment. But, even in this field, new concepts blind to gender are being promoted such as “second earners”.

In my opinion there is a need to advocate for the inclusion of gender perspective in the European Semester process from the approach of proven results of gender equality in the social and economic fields. But an ethics and rights based approach needs be also promoted and must be our ground for advocacy. So, if there is a need to promote gender
equality into these new complex processes of political decision as they are setting the agenda and the political priorities, there is also a need to go beyond these economic priorities and advocate for including new perspectives and priorities. If not the risk is that some of the important goals of the feminist agenda (gender-based violence, etc.) are irremediably left out of the political agenda.

Finally, I also consider that it is fundamental to carry out rigorous evaluation from a gender equality perspective of the public policies and the reforms proposed and the ones that are currently being implemented in order to assess its impacts in terms of gender equality and women's rights. Ex ante gender impact assessment, intermediate evaluations and expost evaluations are fundamental to be able to assess the achievement or backlashes in terms of gender equality.

Sorry for the very long post but as you can see I was yesterday thinking on it!

Irene