



PARTIJ VAN DE ARBEID

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Action Plan

Gender: Not just Words but Deeds

Equality and equal treatment regardless of sex or age, sexual orientation and gender identity, religion or ethnic background are not just established by law in many countries but they are also the foundation of our social democratic values. Especially the disadvantages and oppression which are connected with being female seem difficult to overcome; they only become clear when you look at the underlying causes of the problems. Gender is the sum of social, cultural and behavioural aspects which are attributed to sex. Those views and behaviours can put women all over the world in a subordinate role. The liberation from the position of powerlessness and the struggle for equal right, participation and opportunities is a core task of social democracy. This struggle against the increased discrimination of women is at the heart of our movement and it is not limited by territorial, religious and socio-cultural borders.

About girls and boys

In many countries the birth of a newborn is celebrated in a grandiose way; a new life is always a miracle. "Is it a boy or a girl?" is the first question we ask when a baby is born. For most parents it does not make a difference: "as long as it is healthy". Unfortunately this is not a reality everywhere. In some cultures girls are lucky to be born at all. Worldwide millions of baby girls disappear through pre-natal screening and the following gender-selective abortion. But even if you are lucky enough to get through the first selection round then there is still a long way to go. Chance might have it that you are kept at home away from school: just because you are a girl. Even the lucky ones encounter enough obstacles. Does your school have sanitary facilities for girls? Is an arranged marriage or female genital mutilation your cultural heritage? Can you cross the streets safely as a woman? Even if you have overcome all these obstacles and you have a school diploma there is still a long way to go. It is, for instance, still the question whether you will be accepted at the higher education facilities or if you can work in the profession of your choice. Will you ever be financially independent so that you can stand on your own feet in case of a divorce? Do you even have divorce in your country?

Focussing on women and the labour market we can also witness major barriers to gender equality. Many women end up in precarious jobs in the informal sector when becoming a mother and are exposed to dangerous environments or harsh working conditions, sometimes far away from home. Let there be no misunderstanding. This is a worldwide problem and it is not limited to the poorest countries. Problems vary widely from city to the countryside, from country to country and from



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continent to continent. In most rich countries women still earn less than men, are less well represented than men in top jobs in the business world, governmental agencies or in politics; caring tasks often are an exclusively female domain and women are the first victims if there is an economic crisis.

We have a long way to go

And yet many people worldwide are convinced that the emancipation of women, especially in the Western world, has gradually come to completion. In most countries women can go to school, vote and stand as a candidate for a political party, drive, bear children when they want, choose their own partner and divorce when they want. But with all that we are not yet there. Achievements on paper are not enough: not just words but deeds! To tackle the gap between reality and words the awareness of the problem needs to be raised. If you are sitting on a chair it is difficult to imagine how tiring it is to have to stand. It is the same with gender: if you have never consciously been deprived on the basis of your sexual orientation and gender identity it is difficult to imagine that there is a structural inequality. So it starts with awareness. Of our own behaviour and that of others. Of the social agreements and norms which underpin this situation. And of the legal and social struggle for equal rights and opportunities which is far away from being fought worldwide. This continuously demands our attention. That is why the gender equality in general and more specific in relation to decent work has to be a priority on the political agenda. We as social democrats commit ourselves to this cause!

Conventions

Equality between women and men is one of the five fundamental human rights next to security, integrity, freedom and dignity. The preamble of the Declaration on Human Rights adopted at the World Conference on Human Rights in 1993 establishes that the rights contained in the charter also apply to women regardless of tradition or religion. This agreement is not the only one in which women are the focal point. In 1979 the United Nations signed a Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court regards different forms of sexual violence as crimes against humanity. The UN General Assembly resolution adopted in 2000 contains regulations to ban all crimes in the name of honour which are committed against women. The third of the eight UN millennium goals is dedicated to equal opportunities and the empowerment of women. At the Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in 1994 and the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen specific paragraphs were devoted to women and their health. All this is characteristic of the important and relevant role which the U.N. has with the support of women and NGOs that fight for women's rights around the world.

But the important role of the U.N. unfortunately does not mean that in all those places where women suffer discrimination and violence measures are taken to fight against it. In 79 countries there is no legislation against domestic violence, in 127 countries you cannot tackle sexual



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harassment of women by means of the law. Especially when it comes to sexual harassment on the shop-floor protection is often limited or absent. In many parts of the world the subjugation of women is connected to the property and family laws in conjunction with national or customary regulations, tradition or religion. These are also often the countries which have refused to sign the agreements reached within the framework of the United Nations.

Countries such as Iran, Somalia and Sudan did not sign the UN Convention on Women's Rights which is telling for the way women are treated in these countries. Equality between women and men is non-existent. This can also be said of the right to security. In countries such as China, India, Pakistan or Bangladesh millions of women are missing from the statistics. To have to pay for a dowry or to have to produce a male heir necessary for the worshipping of the ancestors can, especially in combination with poverty, be seen as the cause for selective abortion, baby killing and the very high number of deaths amongst young girls. But even if you survive all this there is no guarantee for a safe existence; the arranged marriages at a very young age and the early pregnancies are also grounds for domestic violence and high death rates. According to the World Health Organization there are about 140 million women in Sub-Saharan Africa which have been circumcised which is a violation of the Right to Integrity. All this is due to the absence of the Right to Freedom as a fundamental right. In the Arab countries the subordination of women is even anchored by law, and in those countries where the Sharia Law is seen as the main legal source the situation is even worse.

The elimination of disadvantages and the oppression of women, the improvement of the female situation needs to start with the acknowledgement of the five mentioned human rights which are also women's rights since 1993. But also in countries where from a legal perspective everything seems to be fine, the violation of human rights is tolerated when it concerns women. According to UNICEF, 200.000 male tourists are involved in sex tourism in which the turnover is more than 5 billion euro. The sex industry and female trafficking are still on the rise, and commercial exploitation of women is encouraged by the Internet. Also new problems such as cyberdating, "sxting" and grooming deserve our attention. What need to be addressed as well are the forced marriages of oftentimes young Muslim girls in Western Europe. In France alone this amounted to 70.000 children a couple of years ago. These are all infringements of fundamental human rights such as the right to dignity and integrity.

This year we are celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action. Not one single country in the world has achieved gender equality and thus around the world countries have to take action and deliver on women's rights and gender equality. While the UN has reached an agreement on having gender equality and women's rights as a Stand-Alone Goal part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's), as progressives we want to be more ambitious and ensure that gender equality is an integral part of all SDGs and that adequate funding is allocated to gender equality. We need to ensure that progress in women's rights remains positive and growing in the next years to come and for the next generations of women around the world.



One in three

Your mother, neighbour or I: the chances are high that one of us has been victimized by physical or sexual violence in our lifetime. Be it by a partner, a colleague or an unknown person on the street: the current world is still quite an unsafe place for women. According to a recent study by the European Agency of Fundamental Rights in Vienna, 45 percent of Dutch women, for instance, said that they had become a victim of physical or sexual violence once or multiple times since the age of 15. That is quite a bit higher than the European average of 33 percent. At least 4 percent of women said they had been raped. That is about 9 million women and is more than the whole population of Austria! The same study showed that almost 75 percent of the interviewed women in management positions had to deal with sexual harassment on the job. One out of four of such incidents happened in the year prior to the study.

Not only in Europe is the insecurity of women a problem. All over the world many crimes are committed against women on the grounds of loss of the honour of the husbands and families and based on the idea that the female body is foremost to be seen as the property of her husband or that of her family. Religion should not be misused to violate women's rights. Such views are in conflict with the right to integrity. Furthermore this is the basis for the most general form of violence against women: rape. According to estimates by police in South Africa every 36 seconds a woman is raped whilst in Egypt one out of ten women says they have been sexually assaulted on the street. The recent uproar in India about the brutal rape and murder of a young student has of course led to a social debate about the position of women and girls in the community but it has not yet led to a solution for the deeply rooted problem with new victims as sad evidence.

It does not need further explanation that as long as the security of women in public transport, on the street, at school, at home or at the workplace cannot be guaranteed, women and girls cannot participate in an equal manner in society. It is therefore of utmost importance that the social taboo to discuss the issue of violence against women be broken and that within organisations, schools, businesses and the government more attention be paid to the issue of security. This process begins with the awareness of women and girls themselves, but also requires an active contribution by men and boys because a safer world is made together.

Barriers on the job market

In September 2014 the G20 ministers of social affairs and employment came together in Australia to discuss the prevention of structural unemployment, the creation of better jobs and the expansion of the labour market participation. The following has been included into the final act about the empowerment of the position and participation of women:

"We recognise that promoting greater participation by women in the labour market, and improving the quality of their employment, would contribute to stronger and more inclusive growth. Therefore, we commit to take the steps needed to close gender gaps in opportunities and labour market outcomes."



The gaps! These are manifold when it comes to women and men on the labour market. It is the salary gap but also the access to and the opportunities on the labour market, right to a living wage and lawful benefits, including maternity leave. This is also confirmed by international organisations such as the IMF. But although Christine Lagarde herself underlines the importance of female leadership she recently had to admit that ‘the IMF staff considers gender issues a distraction from the more pressing problems of financial stability or monetary policy’.

Gender issues a distraction!?! Knowing that the reduction of gender gaps and the rise in the participation of women in the economy by improving the access to (quality) jobs contributes to a stronger economy? Gender issues are not a distraction but precisely ‘a more pressing problem of financial stability’. If you look at a problem such as that of the shrinking workforce in the G20 countries then that is particularly a gender issue. The labour market participation of women lies at about 57% as opposed to 83% of men. This is an enormous chance to expand the job offer for women and to mitigate the negative effects of a shrinking workforce. In this way we would not only work to create an inclusive and diverse labour market but also make a significant contribution to the economic growth of countries.

Fortunately the female labour market participation is increasing and women are more equally represented in middle management, but women are still over-represented in low-paying jobs and informal economies such as that of domestic workers. At the same time women are still underrepresented at the top or CEO level. And although women now work more outside of the home, the responsibility for the household and the caring for the children is still mainly their task. As a result women have a double workload, having paid job and an unpaid task at home. As long as policy makers and political leaders do not see the tackling of this inequality as an urgent issue and it is not made part of economic growth stimulation and job creation no real progress can be reached in solving the inequality on the labour market.

The self-sufficiency of girls and women must be increased. In Uganda they achieve this by way of the Empowerment and Livelihoods for Adolescents programme. This programme teaches professional skills to girls and offers them training for jobs on the local market. In addition to the economic benefit this programme shows that the participating girls have much more control over their sexual and reproductive health. But also the fight for living wages should be part of the fight for gender equality, as the effect of such a measure would be felt especially by women.

Women and power

‘Investing in gender equality is not only the right thing to do, it’s also the smart thing to do’ as stated by the World Bank in 2012 at the presentation of the results of their yearly World Development Report. What became clear? Women invest more than 90% of their available income in their family, whereas men only invest 30% to 40%. The United Nations had the effect on investing in female farmers researched and came to the conclusion that if female farmers had equal access to information, knowledge, land and materials as men they would produce 30% to 40% more food and with that it is estimated that 100 to 150 million people would not suffer from hunger anymore.



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Also in the business world you had better take the factor women seriously. Research by Dow Jones shows that start-ups with more female executives have more chances of being successful whilst Credit Suisse has calculated that companies with at least one woman on the board of directors do better at the stock market and are more stable in times of crisis. The OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) confirmed these findings. In a worldwide database they have stored information from 162 countries since 2006. From those records the same picture arises: the more women in power the better a country performs economically.

But not just from an economic perspective does gender balance pay off. Also the society at large benefits from increased equality. In Ghana, as the number of women who own land increases so does the amount spent on food. In India, an increased number of women in public administration positions by means of a quota system resulted in an increase in investments in public facilities, such as water, sanitary facilities but also irrigation and schooling, as well as a significant decrease in corruption. Moreover, in villages with female leaders bribes occurred on fewer occasions than in villages with male leaders as was revealed by a World Bank report.

Notwithstanding all this evidence that a healthy men-women balance also produces a healthier economy the rise of women to top positions on a global level is stagnating. Almost a century after women have gained the right to vote, better access to higher education, started working in professions which were previously only accessible by men there is still no country on earth where women have equal access to power and influence as men. In the Dutch parliament there are as many as 16 groups. Of those only one is lead by a woman. Gender balance does not come by itself and deserves our continuous attention also (and maybe especially) at the top. That is where the impact of women is indeed the highest. Measures aimed at promoting women to top positions are of utmost importance, not only for women but for society as a whole. Not because it has to be done but because it works. In Australia the Male Champions initiative works together with male CEOs from the business world and leaders within the government to jointly push for a considerable and sustainable increase in the representation of women in leadership positions.

Education and labour market

To get paid work, to achieve economic independence, education is a fundamental pre-requisite. Therefore, education was made one of the millennium goals which have to be achieved between 2000 and 2015. From the yearly progress reports it is clear that improvements are made but still about 57 million children are deprived from basic education. More than half of those are girls. The lower level of the secondary school is inaccessible for 71 million children. More than half of those are girls as well. In Sub-Sahara Africa, West and South Asia the gap between boys and girls is the widest. However, when girls finish elementary school they usually go on to secondary school. This is the case in Latin America and the Caribbean. According to UNICEF, education for girls benefits the whole of society. They marry later and have fewer children, and more often they want to make sure their children go to school



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Although a lot still needs to change in order to improve access to education for all children and to overcome the existing differences between boys and girls in this area, there is evidence of improvement. But the set goals will not be achieved in 2015 so they demand more political pressure and financial input. Therefore, the European Union has given priority in its development budget to education and care especially for girls. Recent studies by the ILO in 80 countries show that a better access by women to education leads to an increased female participation on the labour market. In the meantime 40% of jobs worldwide are held by women. But from a legal and political perspective women are far behind notwithstanding the fact that in the last few years the number of female parliamentarians and female ministers has increased.

The World Economic Forum has found in its Global Gender Gap Report 2014 that the economic inequality between women and men is slowly diminishing. If this trend continues economic equality will be achieved in about 81 years. And if in the same report it is stated how useful the participation of women on the labour market is, not only for them but also for the national income whilst the children are also better educated, then such a timeline sounds unbearable.



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We, progressives from around the world do not want to wait four generations for gender equality to become reality. We want to act in the here and now and make real progress. Not just words, but also deeds. Therefore, we are committed to the following points of action:

Action Points Decent Work and Gender Equality

1. Awareness of the issue is crucial. It is the urgency which is lacking with policy makers and political leaders. That is why we have to put the gender issue on the top of the political agenda. The momentum for the equality of women in the workplace must be given a new impetus. There is evidence of progress but the stated goals will not be achieved in 2015 so they demand more political and financial input. We call upon all our parties, leaders and representatives to be at the forefront of this struggle, in particular in 2015 which marks the 20th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action and the preparation of the Sustainable Development Goals
2. Political, economic and social participation of women is first and foremost a human right and a matter of justice. Culture should evolve, but when it contradicts fundamental rights, fundamental rights should prevail. Increasing the participation of women in the labour market is a way to empower women and a benefit for the whole society. Furthermore it is increasing the national income. Gender budgeting is a tool to promote the fulfilment of women's rights
3. Women are predominant in lower-paying jobs and in the informal sector, where social protection benefits in case of illness or job loss are non-existent. Progressives stand for the realisation of decent work for all worldwide (in line with our political and ideological principles and ILO conventions and standards). We should stand up for secure, socially just and regulated employment protecting workers rights in the formal and informal economy. This implies a disaggregated approach to targeting the most vulnerable, excluded worldwide, women being a majority in these groups. Education and training of tangible skills are important to improve chances of women on the labour market. Equal pay for equal work is not a choice but a must.
4. Women are often the first victims of a financial crisis or a divorce. Poverty seems to be a more disproportionate burden on the shoulders of women, especially when they are the breadwinner. Social democrats strive for empowerment and financial independence of women: Leave no woman behind! The struggle for living wages and social protection floors should also be part of the feminist agenda, since such measures would have an extremely positive effect on the position of many women and their families.
5. Still too few women occupy top positions in companies, on the labour market or in politics. To promote and encourage changes in this respect the support and cooperation of men is of undeniable value. The endeavour to reach maximum participation of women in top positions is a priority for us. Give a good example and the rest will follow. We support the idea of gender quotas as a transitional instrument for increasing women's political and economic representation and economic representation which is a step towards substantive equality with the aim to achieve a gender equality based democracy.
6. The barriers which prevent women from participating in an equal manner must be eliminated. Hereby our attention has to reach further than the labour market alone otherwise the danger of low paid and precarious jobs will remain. We are convinced that women and men should have the same opportunities for developing a career and taking care of the family. Therefore we



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support a work life balance for both women and men. Arrangements for maternity and parental leave are fundamental for securing a basic income for mothers and fathers. Therefore public, affordable and high-quality care provisions with universal access to health, education, housing, childcare and social security will be one of our political priorities. One of the ways to tackle this issue is to give young women and girls (new) knowledge and opportunities to enhance their ability of self-sufficiency and self-determination.

7. This is why legal barriers must be taken down. Too many countries are far behind in their legislation to protect women in the labour market. There are countries where women need permission from their spouses to be able to work or to obtain official identification documents.
8. Women have to be able to safely perform in the workplace. Public safety is the basis for being able to live your life and go to work. Sexual harassment and violence must be dealt with on a structural level. We are committed to the bodily integrity of women as such, we urge all governments to combat gender based violence and call for the ratification and full implementation of the Convention to Eliminate all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and an optional protocol and other human rights' instruments, such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We also support the establishment of centres for abused women and projects that help to break down the taboo on this topic.
9. We need to keep fighting for equal and full access to sexual and reproductive rights of all women, including sexual education, medical assistance, contraceptives and abortion, regardless of their status, origin or ethnicity. Ensuring sexual and reproductive rights contributes towards women's social, political and economical empowerment.
10. Discrimination in the workplace must be countered and abolished because it is a breach of women's rights. We strive for equality, equity and economic justice for everyone, no matter what sexual orientation or gender identity. This also includes countering/combating of gender stereotypes in education, in society and on the labour market.
11. We advocate cooperation with social partners. Not only the governments, unions and employers need to take action in increasing women's representation and participation, but women and the women's movement as well. We need to give space and support the new and young feminist movements as well as organisations that represent informal workers. They play a crucial role and deserve our support in shaping the women's rights of the 21st century.
12. Entrepreneurship and property rights. Worldwide fewer women than men own property or housing or a company. No difference must be made in the inheritance law between women and men. In many countries women can only access property via male family members. This injustice needs to be addressed. We strive to guarantee women's land tenure and land use rights and want to improve access to capital for women.
13. In order to secure food sovereignty of women, we advocate a recognition of smallholder farmers, particularly women, as key economic actors whose right to use and own land should be protected against land grabbing through legally binding safeguards.
14. Equal representation of women and men starts within our own political party family. We are committed to realise parity within our parliamentary groups and governments and in our party structures on the national, regional and local level. Part of this endeavour is supporting women to become a candidate. Changing the world starts at home. Not just words, but deeds.