

EQUINET CONFERENCE

Taking action for Gender Equality: 23 March 2015

Session 4 – Europe in 2020 – Our Vision for Gender Equality

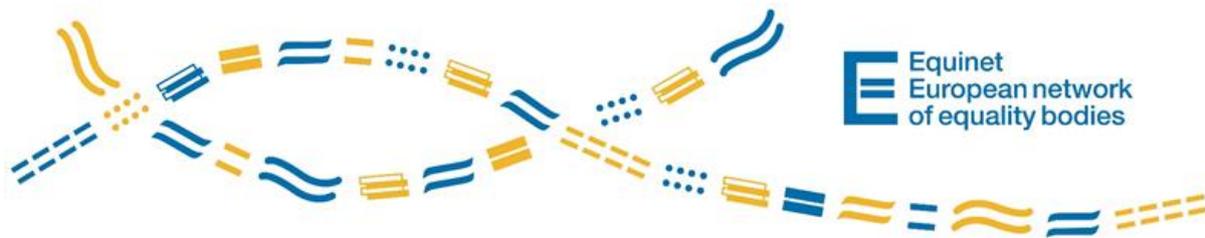
Evelyn Collins, Chair of Equinet

A Vision for 2020

2020 is not that far off, but a lot can happen in five years with determination, foresight and even a bit of good luck. Just imagine, what might Europe be like in 2020 for women and men if we focused attention back on the founding principles of Europe?

Europe would have rediscovered its origins as a Union of values. Article 2 of the Treaties would once again serve as the core guide for policies, priorities and programmes both at European and Member State levels. The commitment to values of “respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights” could now fulfil its promise of creating societies where “pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail”.

This is not completely aspirational – we saw a focus on values and our shared values already opened up during the appointment process for the new Commission in 2014. The hearings in the European Parliament revealed a Commission ready to engage with the values of Article 2. They suggested a Europe that is alienated from its citizens and the imperative of a return to shared values to regain the trust of the citizen.



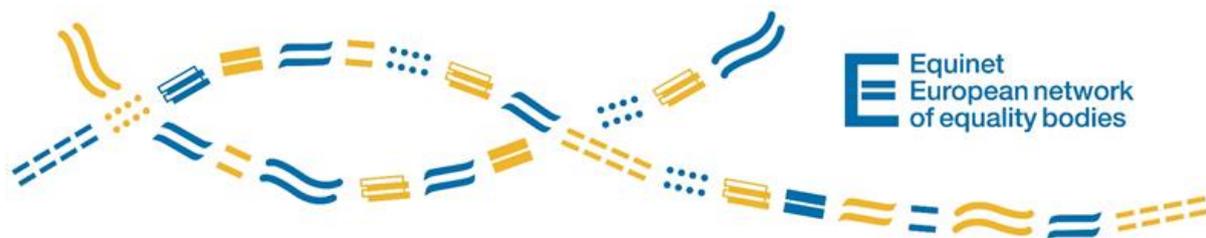
The political guidelines presented by Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission, to the European Parliament committed to Europe as “an area of justice and fundamental rights based on mutual trust”. This was one of his ten priority policy areas. He said, “Our Europe is more than a big common market. It is a Union of shared values, which are spelled out in the Treaties and in the Charter of Fundamental Rights”. “Discrimination” he said “must have no place in our Union”.

He expressed a concern that “Europe has lost some of its credibility. The gap between the European Union and its citizens is widening”. “We are credible to the outside world” he added, “if we demand high standards of ourselves when it comes to fundamental values” and he committed to “appoint a Commissioner who will be in charge of applying the Charter of Fundamental Rights”.

Franz Timmermans, vice President of the European Commission, was charged with advancing the Charter of Fundamental rights. In responding to queries from the European Parliament he stated, the Charter “has represented a giant step forward on the path to making the Union an area of common values”.

The Charter of Fundamental Rights has, of course, a particular commitment to gender equality. It sets out that “Equality between men and women must be ensured in all areas, including employment, work and pay” in the Chapter on Equality.

Commissioner Jourova, from whom we heard this morning, continued this focus on values in her presentation to the European Parliament. “The European Union” she highlighted “is unique in its way of life and the values



that it espouses and we must continuously work to defend and uphold these fundamental rights”. She committed to “spearhead efforts across the Commission” in gender mainstreaming and to “support a stand-alone gender equality goal and gender mainstreaming in other goals in the post-2015 agenda”.

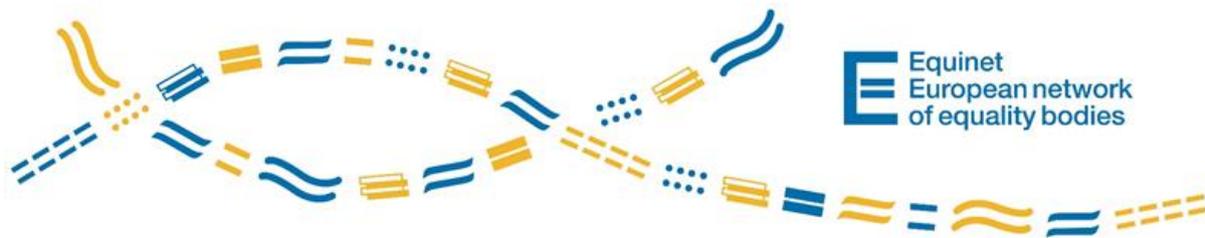
Values

Values are important. Values are sometimes dismissed as intangible. A focus on values is often misunderstood as an avoidance of real practical commitments. This fails to appreciate the importance of values and the potential in a return to our shared European value base. Values can promote, guide and drive change for gender equality.

Values are the beliefs, ideals, principles that we hold to be important. The European Union is unique in setting out, in its founding documents, the shared beliefs, ideals and principles that we hold to be important across all the Member States.

At an individual level our values guide our attitudes and behaviours. They inform our choices. Imagine what might happen if the political and administrative leaders of the European Union and of the Member States worked systematically from a value base of equality, dignity, and non-discrimination.

Values guide the policies, procedures and practices of organisations. They inform the issues that organisations prioritise. Imagine what might happen if the institutions of the European Union and the Member States operated expressly from a value base of equality, dignity, and non-discrimination.



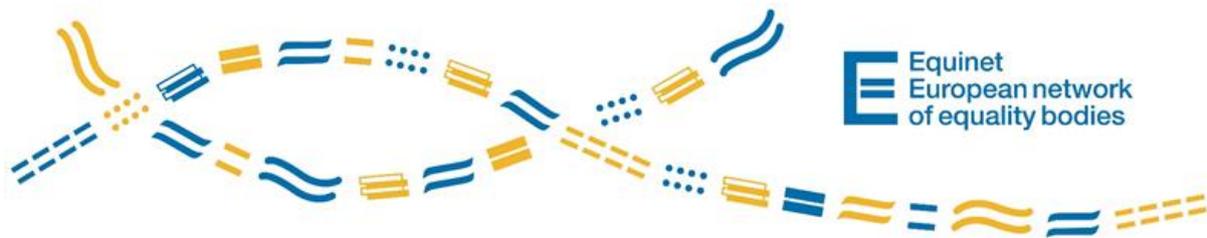
Valuing non-discrimination, dignity and equality would advance gender equality and change the context within which we work for gender equality. Non-discrimination would ensure fairness in our policies, procedures and practices. Dignity would ensure respect is a cornerstone of policies, procedures and practices and that relationships of care, love and solidarity are nurtured. Equality would ensure balance for men and women in the distribution of resources, of power and influence, and of status and standing.

In 2020 the Europe that is developed based on this renewal of shared values would look very different. Let's consider 5 main areas.

1. *Equal treatment legislation* would have been further developed to underpin this value base, to sustain the fight against discrimination and to deepen our pursuit of equality.

So in 2020, there will be a comprehensive legal framework in place to combat discrimination across all sectors, with sanctions that are both proportionate and dissuasive. There will be a well-informed judiciary across the EU making good decisions in cases of discrimination.

This legal framework will rest on our shared values of non-discrimination and dignity. So, too, a culture of compliance that emerges among policy makers, employers and service providers will rest on these values. This culture of compliance among all relevant actors means that the equal treatment legislation becomes more of a safety net and rarely needs to be called on. That means the elimination, in particular, of pregnancy related discrimination and sexual harassment.

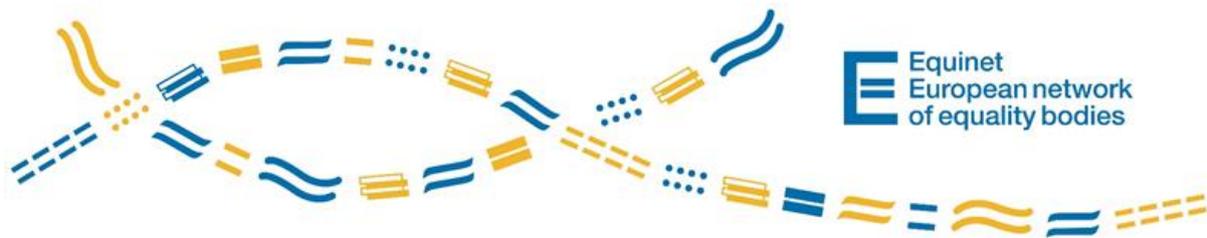


The shared value of equality would also inspire the emergence and enactment of a new generation of equal treatment legislation. The emphasis in this new legislation will be on imposing duties on public sector bodies to have regard to equality in carrying out their functions and on private sector organisations to be planned and systematic in their approach to equality.

These duties would stimulate and secure cultural change in these different organisations. They will make decisions and operate out of a value base of equality, dignity and non-discrimination. These duties would secure a proactive approach by policy makers, employers and service providers to change the situation and experience of women and to advance the achievement of equality.

Women and men would thus have real choices. The gender pay gap, the gender employment gap, and the gender unemployment gap are thus undermined and begin to drop rapidly. Vertical and occupational segregation in the labour market are part of history.

2. Equality bodies would emerge as champions and guardians of the shared value base and its commitment to equality, dignity and non-discrimination. As their work on discrimination dwindles for lack of demand, their focus would shift to innovation and supporting innovation in the pursuit of equality. They will be known now for establishing and supporting new ways of making policy, organising employment and the labour market, and providing public and private services based on a value base of non-discrimination, dignity and equality. This work and

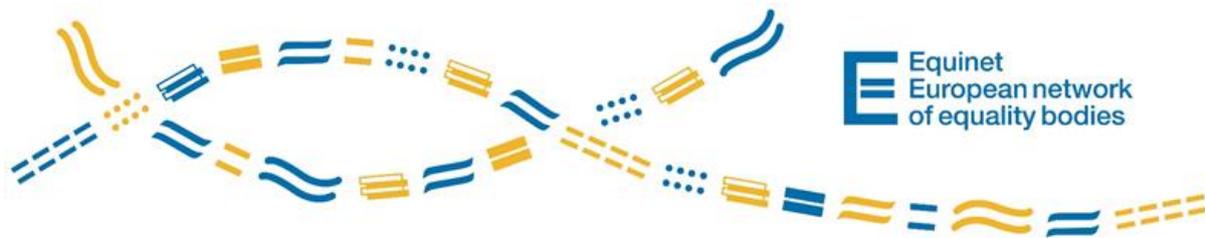


their effectiveness in doing it would be underpinned by ambitious European level standards for equality bodies.

In 2020, Equality bodies will play a lead role in supporting, monitoring and enforcing the positive duties on the public and private sector enshrined in the new generation equal treatment legislation.

They will set out and support the implementation of standards by which public bodies will have regard to equality in carrying out their functions and in giving practical expression to values of equality, dignity and non-discrimination in policy making, employment, programme design, service delivery and procurement by these bodies. This will ensure that public bodies set out their objectives for equality, dignity, and non-discrimination, identify the issues within their remit in relation to these values that need to be addressed, and assess the potential and actual impact of their work on these objectives and issues.

Equality bodies will set out and support the implementation of standards for private sector organisations to be planned and systematic in their approach to equality and to give practical expression to values of equality, dignity and non-discrimination in their policies, procedures and practices. This will ensure these organisations have an equality policy in place to advance policy, procedure and practice based on these values within the organisation; provide training to staff to implement this equality policy; and implement an equality plan to address issues identified within their organisation in relation to the values of equality, dignity and non-discrimination.

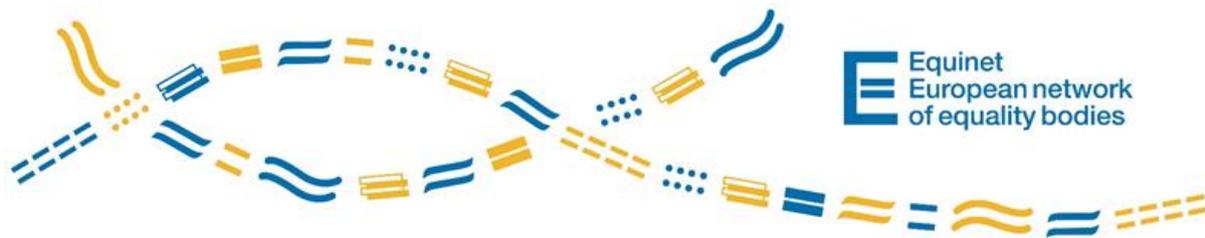


3. *The Europe 2020 strategy would become an exemplar of gender mainstreaming. It would reflect that gender equality is a pre-requisite for growth, sustainability, and inclusion. The values of non-discrimination, dignity and equality would become the touchstone against which decisions, policies and programmes under the strategy are assessed at European and national level.*

Equality, dignity and non-discrimination will be established as key horizontal principles to guide the implementation of each element of the Europe 2020 strategy. A specific goal will be set in relation to equality, dignity and non-discrimination with its own targets and flagship initiatives.

National Reform Programmes will take account of the different situations and experiences of women and men, include specific actions to advance gender equality, and reflect the values of equality, dignity and non-discrimination. Country Specific Recommendations will include a particular focus on these values and ensuring that they are given practical expression at Member State level; and equality bodies will be fully engaged with the process of preparing National Reform Programmes at Member State level.

4. *The manner in which values are generated in our societies would be a focus for action at European and Member State level. This action would seek to challenge activities within sectors such as the media, advertising, and education that undermine values of equality, dignity and non-discrimination. It would nurture and support the promotion and communication of these values by these different sectors.*



The concern with values will lead to legal and practice interventions in the sectors where values are generated and perpetuated. Gender stereotypes will be a particular target in this regard. This will acknowledge the need for cultural change if gender equality is to be achieved.

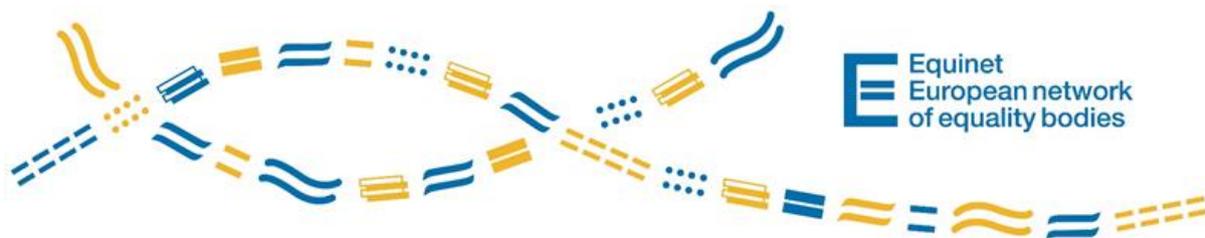
The media and the advertising industry will be governed by equality legislation. This will require media and advertising organisations to promote imagery and reportage based on the real life situation of women and men and to eliminate any stereotyping in this imagery and reportage.

Public discourse will no longer be characterised by intolerance generally as the values of equality, dignity and non-discrimination will be at the heart of our society.

Schools likewise will be under a duty to promote values of equality, dignity and non-discrimination and supports will be developed to enable all these organisations to implement such duties and to ensure they do so to a high standard.

Equality bodies will make a key contribution in this regard. This work will also be made simpler by the reality that there will be balanced numbers of women and men in senior positions in these sectors. Leadership in these, and in other sectors such as political life, will be judged on potential, performance and contribution and not on what individuals are wearing.

5. The new context created by the focus on shared values would begin to shape practice in the private domain with a *new and more equal division of caring and housework*. The new context would inevitably



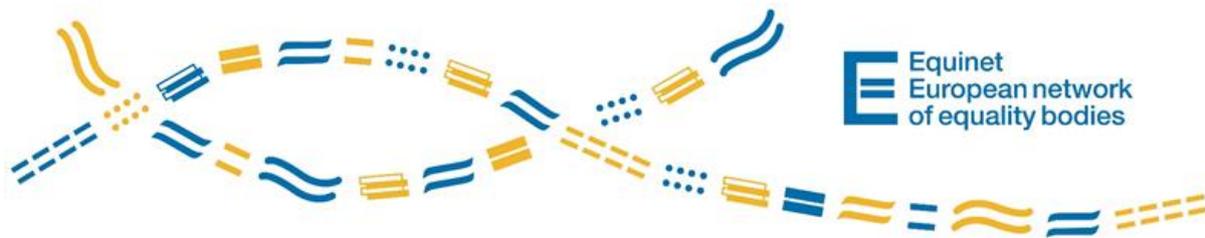
and by design shape and encourage an individual valuing of non-discrimination, dignity and equality and the giving practical expression to these values within the home.

The private sphere will change where wider society values equality, dignity and non-discrimination and where these values predominate in the public domain. Values of equality, dignity and non-discrimination would work against domestic violence. They would underpin a new role for men in caring and household work. The time penalty whereby women work longer hours than men will be eliminated with a more equal sharing of unpaid work.

The private sphere will also be encouraged to change by public institutions committed to values of equality, dignity and non-discrimination. Key tools that reach into the private sphere are statutory leave provisions and flexible working arrangements. Statutory leave arrangements will be designed to enable caring by men and women, to ensure take-up by men, and to sustain the link of both women and men to the labour market. Flexible working arrangements will become a right. Men and women will have a right to request such arrangements and to have their request fully considered. Employers will be supported to design and implement flexible working arrangements. And good quality, affordable, accessible childcare will be universally available.

Conclusion

Visions tend to be utopian, and can often be dismissed as utopian. But, that way we never get to consider where we are going and how quickly



we want to get there. Let's not fall into the trap of dismissing visions as utopian just because of the current harsh environment for gender equality. We have the right to expect all the different developments that form part of the vision I have set out. They are pragmatic, good for women and, therefore, good for society.

We should not have to wait decades for this vision to become real. The time-frame to 2020 is right and just. We cannot accept the current rate of progress. The European Commission has estimated that, at the current rate of progress it would be another seventy years before equal pay is achieved, forty years before housework is equally shared, thirty years before the employment rate for women is 70%, and twenty years before there is gender balance in politics. This cannot be acceptable.

Values have a power to drive and shape change in our societies. We live in a Europe of shared values. Let's mobilise those values now, ensure they are given practical expression, and enable them to transform our societies in the short term.