

Overcoming Regression in Women's Rights and Gender Equality: What are the Progressive Answers?

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Despite of some important progress made in regards to gender equality in recent years, we observe a relapse of acquired women's rights and gender equality in Europe at the moment. Therefore, we shed light on the recent developments in Europe and discussed possible progressive answers to counter the regression.

Pro-Life Movement is threatening women's rights

In the first part of the event the speakers mapped the current situation in Europe. It became clear that backlashes on gender rights are seen in the whole of Europe and are not restricted to national borders. Eastern as well as Western European countries face the same problems with regards to gender inequality.

In regards to this, it was pointed out that gender rights are not only threatened by different fundamental groups. In some countries, governments play a role as well, for example by closing down women's and emergency shelters. Special attention must be paid to the growing Pro-Life-Movement in several European countries as they are not only threatening women's right to abort but also LGBTI rights as they aggressively promote traditional gender roles.



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Another aspect that is important to watch is the structural set-up and the role of EU funding, supporting not only the work of gender activists, but anti-gender actors as well.

Special focus was laid on the “backlash” narrative and its importance with regard to its underlining meaning as it lacks a clear definition and does not necessarily reflect the reality. Often, the “backlash” by anti-gender actors precedes any changes with regard to women's rights, forcing gender activists into a defensive position. This argument presented the starting point for more practical approaches in order to find

suitable solutions to counter regression trends in Europe.

Think about unusual alliances

One way to do so is by introducing a different education system where students from an early age on learn critical thinking and the great importance of gender equality. Additionally, it was argued that feminist movements and gender activists shall leave their “progressive bubble”. They need to reconnect with the citizens on the ground, both to understand their fears and motives, and to counter prejudices by explaining the objectives of gender campaigns.

To do so, they should reassess new and unusual alliances. Forces should be joined for example with grassroots organizations that do not necessarily focus on gender issues as such: a successful example is the support of the recent nurses-movement in Hungary, which implicitly promoted gen-

der equality by campaigning for fair payment in a female-dominated sector. Besides, by working with other actors, gender activists see and comprehend the needs of the general public and enter into dialogue with citizens. Thereby, they relate society’s desires to the range of gender issues, and, consequently, also widen the spectrum of awareness in society.

The dynamics of power and the relation to gender inequality were highlighted as well. To redress them, we should not overlook the importance of trade unions. With their ability to use direct action, unions as well as institutions are able to correct the balance of power and move forward in terms of collective action and solidarity.

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