

Social cohesion with a gender perspective, key to reducing inequalities

Gender mainstreaming process in the EUROsociAL+ Programme

SPECIAL REPORT



All the major challenges facing the EU today - including the green and digital transitions and demographic change - have a gender dimension. In order to achieve the goal of gender equality, it is essential to include a gender perspective in all EU policies and processes.
EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025

1. WHAT DO WE MEAN BY SOCIAL COHESION?

In the European Union, the political framework of the *Social Cohesion Strategy* arises from the Maastricht Treaty in 1993. Since then, this and subsequent community agreements incorporate this notion (the Council of Europe, in 2000¹ and, more recently, the Europe 2020 strategy includes the growth approaches of the European Union: smart and inclusive growth, aimed at strengthening employment, social and territorial cohesion). This programmatic framework highlights the fact that “Cohesion Policy must not lose sight of its original objective of reducing economic, social and territorial disparities, focusing on stable long-term priorities”². The EUROsociAL+ Programme structures its social cohesion action based on the definition of this concept: “Social cohesion is an attribute of societies that involves equality of opportunities and allows the population to exercise its fundamental rights and ensures its welfare, without discrimination of any type and while addressing diversity. From an individual perspective, social cohesion means the existence of persons who feel they are a part of a community, participate actively in diverse areas of decision-making and are capable of exercising active citizenship. Social cohesion also involves the development of public policies and solidarity mechanisms between individuals, groups, territories and generations”³.

2. WHY SHOULD SOCIAL COHESION POLICIES INCLUDE A GENDER APPROACH?

Social cohesion is not innate to societies but rather is built. Historically, patriarchal societies have been able to achieve apparent or superficial social cohesion and cover over gender inequalities. Indeed, high levels of social cohesion can exist in extremely unequal contexts. In this sense, the patriarchal structures that persist in today's

1. Agudo Zamora, Miguel. *Constitutional Reform and Social Cohesion*. In: New Public Policies. Multidisciplinary Yearbook for the Modernisation of Public Administrations, pp. 47-65. (Nuevas Políticas Públicas. Anuario multidisciplinar para la modernización de las Administraciones Públicas, pp. 47-65.)

2. European Commission “Regional Development and Cohesion Policy after 2020: questions and answers.”

3. Astelarra, J. (coord.). *Gender and Social Cohesion*. Madrid: Carolina Foundation, 2007, p. 193.

societies can generate social cohesion based on inequalities: “The subjective aspect of belonging to a social group, as occurs with the social construction of gender identity, has meant that women and men have for a long time accepted the existence of hierarchies and inequalities between them as something ‘natural’”⁴.

Gender inequality is a structural problem that can be modified.
Inequalities are “unnecessary, avoidable and unfair”⁵.

We live in unequal societies in which access to and control over resources (such as education and employment, capital and property, and/or the authority of those who participate in decision-making centres) depend on acquired ascriptive characteristics at birth such as those related to biological (e.g. sex, age, etc.), economic (socioeconomic class, etc.) and/or cultural (geographical origin, religious beliefs, gender identity, sexual orientation, etc.) factors.

FIGURE 1. MECHANISMS OF SOCIAL INCLUSION/EXCLUSION: CAUSES OF GENDER-BASED DISCRIMINATION



Source: Own work.

The context of engagement of a social cohesion policy or programme presents different levels of social and economic inequalities, “people will have different opportunities, depending on their belonging to certain socio-economic categories and even on their geographical location, since residing in remote rural areas will not offer the same facilities in terms of education and social mobility as living in an urban centre”⁶. Gender as an analytical category of public policy makes it possible to increase the visibility of the inequalities between men and women, as well as to look in-depth at their causes and possible solutions and, in addition, to act on inequalities to raise levels of social cohesion without neglecting women⁷.

The situation of women, although with variations associated with each national context, reflects the fact that they accumulate significant **inclusion deficits**: they are concentrated in jobs within the informal economy and with lower productivity, with unemployment rates higher than men, a lower percentage of registration in social protection systems, with higher rates of temporary work and needing higher levels of formal education to access the same job as a man. Furthermore, the average wage income of women is lower than that of men (in Latin America it is 17% lower)⁸. The **asymmetries** between the life opportunities of the masculine and feminine gender lead to deficits in the degree of autonomy of women. The notion of autonomy refers to the ability of people,

4. Ibid. pp. 4-5:

5. Whitehead M. The concepts and principles of equity and health. Copenhagen: World Health Organization; 1990. (Document EUR/ICP/RPD/414).

6. Rodríguez, Mabel. Gender mainstreaming in EUROsociAL II. Madrid: FIIAPP, 2005, p. 5.

7. Ibid. p. 13.

8. ECLAC average (2016). In: https://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/news/files/nota_18_brechas_salarios.pdf

particularly women, “to make free and informed decisions about their lives, in order to be and do things based on their own aspirations and desires, in the historical context that makes them possible”⁹.

The **ownership of citizenship rights** implies that all people (without distinctions of gender, race, ethnicity, age, socioeconomic group and geographic location) are included in the dynamics of development and in the benefits of social well-being that such development generates. **For there to be social cohesion, it is necessary to take action with regard to the obstacles that prevent the exercise of effective citizenship by those more socially disadvantaged profiles**¹⁰. The presence of structural inequalities can affect one's perception of belonging to a community. Those who suffer deficits in their citizenship status, as well as a lack of opportunities in life, are more likely to swell the ranks of people suffering from social exclusion, increasing their feeling of marginalisation and, in turn, lowering their trust in existing democratic institutions and mechanisms.

In the Latin American and Caribbean region, effective citizenship has its roots in a dominant historical pattern of the white male conqueror, coloniser, landowner, etc., involving a hierarchy of rights associated with skin colour, gender, cultural codes and the ownership of labour and capital. Faced with this hegemonic group with full citizenship rights, groups facing discrimination have more precarious access to resources (education, employment, health, etc.) and lack the political and cultural recognition of their values, aspirations and ways of life¹¹. Citizenship grants people “the right to access social resources and thus has implications regarding the ‘distribution of social welfare’”¹², giving rise to social phenomena such as what is known as the “gender paradox of social cohesion”.

The gender paradox of social cohesion

Gender relations play a crucial role for States and the market in the social welfare production chain, a structure which is historical, varying between countries and throughout the modernisation process. In Latin American societies, where there are often informal, non-state welfare regimes, the labour market tends to be insufficiently capable of incorporating the population, the State protects people in a fragmented way and, consequently, too many burdens are laid at the door of the family, while community-based forms of social protection become ever more significant. Thus, whether within families or in community-based forms, **welfare regimes in Latin America are largely based on the unpaid work of women**¹³.

The “**gender paradox of social cohesion**” is the name given to the social phenomenon characterised by the fact that while women act as “the main **providers of social cohesion** in terms of care and forms of relationship”, they are in turn “the main group of people **excluded from social cohesion** in terms of equal opportunities, citizenship and participation”¹⁴. That is, they assume the costs of caring for life, providing a necessary “shield” for prevention and social protection, but they are not able to participate in the benefits of social welfare to the same extent as the population as a whole.

9. ECLAC. The autonomy of women in changing economic scenarios. Santiago: ECLAC, 2019, p. 18.

10. Op. Cit. Social cohesion in Latin America and the Caribbean: a peremptory review of some of its dimensions, p. 6.

11. Sojo, Ana; Uthoff, Andras (Eds.). Social cohesion in Latin America and the Caribbean: a peremptory review of some of its dimensions. Santiago, Chile: ECLAC, 2007, p. 42.

12. Fraser, Nancy; Gordon, Linda. Contract versus charity: a reconsideration of the relationship between civil citizenship and social citizenship. In: Isegoría: Journal of Moral and Political Philosophy, no. 6, 1992, pp. 65-82.

13. Op. Cit. Inclusive social protection and gender:

14. López, Irene (coord.). Gender and Social Cohesion Policies. Madrid: International and Ibero-American Foundation for Administration and Public Policies (FIIAPP), 2007, pp. 23-24.

Consequently, **“social security in market economies is based, in addition to the goods and services of the universal public offering, on a given composition of paid work and unpaid work, the latter falling mainly to women”**¹⁵. This is **the characteristic social welfare pattern of States in the OECD context**: a “combined and interdependent mode” of production and distribution of welfare between the State, the market and the family¹⁶. This relationship of interdependence has been evident during the pandemic caused by COVID-19: while most economic sectors suffered setbacks, Unpaid Household and Care Work (TDCR) increased¹⁷ its contribution to GDP in Argentina reached 16%¹⁸, and in Colombia 22%¹⁹).

Redistributive policies, such as fiscal policies, are based on national accounting systems that do not recognise the income or savings that the contributions of unpaid work assumed by women (in education, health, care of dependent and non-dependent persons etc.) represent for the States. In this way, “the State has acquired a **historical public debt with women**, not only in terms of recognition as contribution (income) but also in terms of public investment and orientation of the national budget towards equal opportunities, the promotion of women’s rights and gender equality, since, precisely, and despite their contribution, women are excluded from social cohesion in terms of citizenship and effective exercise of their rights”²⁰.

The promotion of equality between women and men “constitutes a challenge of the first order to overcome the ‘gender paradox of social cohesion’ and reach higher levels of social cohesion in a society”²¹. In this sense, **social cohesion policies** should take into account that **“a good part of public spending is financed with the contribution of unpaid work by women”**²².

Recapitulating what has been argued in this section, on the one hand it seems that promoting social cohesion by itself is not enough to reduce inequalities and guarantee equal opportunities between women and men. Social cohesion policies can cause gender inequalities (albeit unconsciously) if they do not incorporate mechanisms, such as the integration of the gender perspective, that can alter the predominant tendency towards the reproduction of inequality, activate measures that benefit women and explicitly seek to advance gender equality.

On the other hand, from an individual perspective, a high degree of social inequality can generate a deterioration in the levels of social cohesion. Promotion of gender equality by public authorities can have a direct impact on higher rates of social cohesion since directing policies to reduce gender gaps and guarantee women’s citizenship rights entails benefits for the population as a whole and this can increase the feeling of ownership and trust in democratic institutions.

15. Op. Cit. Social cohesion in Latin America and the Caribbean: a peremptory review of some of its dimensions, p. 74.

16. Op. Cit. Astelarra, J. (coord.), p. 81.

17. ECLAC prepares the National Time Use Surveys (ENUT) for each of the Latin American countries; focuses on counting time spent on unpaid care work as part of the overall workload and its contribution to national GDP.

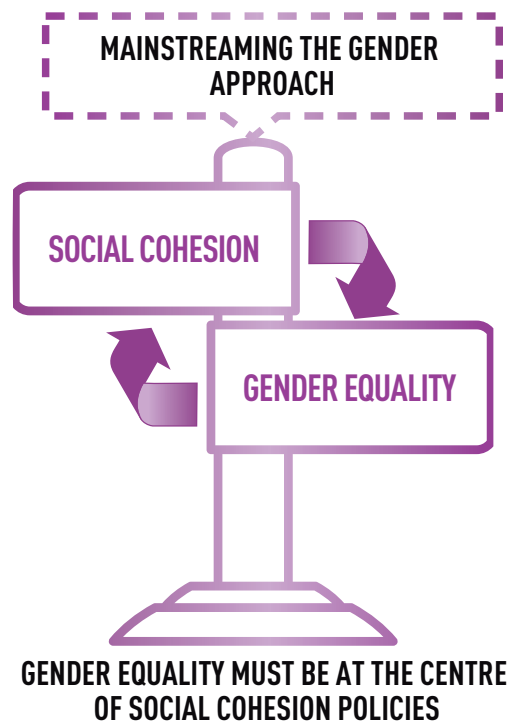
18. Ministry of Economy of Argentina (2020). Care, a strategic economic sector: Measurement of the contribution of Unpaid Household Work and Care to Gross Domestic Product.

19. UN Women Colombia; DANE Colombia (May 2020). Unpaid care in Colombia: gender gaps.

20. Op. Cit. López Irene (coord.), pp. 20-21.

21. Ibid., p. 25.

22. Ibid., pp. 23-24.



The actions of States in the face of socioeconomic inequalities and the recognition of all people in society, serve to strengthen social cohesion. Gender equality must be placed at the centre of social cohesion policies as it is key to reducing inequalities, avoiding the perpetuation of the perverse tendency towards the reproduction of inequality and guaranteeing full citizenship for the entire population.

3. HOW CAN THE SOCIAL COHESION STRATEGY PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY?

The gender paradox of social cohesion shows the unequal distribution of the benefits of growth. A social cohesion policy or programme considers the objective of “acting to change the social reality and promoting higher human development indices for the population as a whole, as well as promoting more equality in the access to and enjoyment of socio-economic rights and assets”²³. Success in achieving social cohesion is conditioned by the existence of the same opportunities and ensuring non-discrimination against people due to their gender. Acting to promote growth that contributes a sense of well-being to a population and whose members, both women and men, develop a feeling of trust and belonging within a community, will be achieved only to the extent that public policies act for the benefit of all people equally and allow their social integration. The objective of cohesion policies with a gender approach is to contribute to what is called **substantive (or de facto)** equality: so that “people, women and men and the population as a whole can achieve the full exercise of their rights and that these are effective in their daily lives”²⁴. The promulgation of laws and the elaboration and implementation of public policies in favour of women represents a great advance (**formal or de jure**²⁵ equality), but to achieve substantive equality it is necessary for the laws and policies to guarantee that women have the same opportunities as men in different social and personal

23. Ibid. It should be clarified that, in this text, the expression “human development indices” refers to improvements in the Human Development processes of a given context and does not refer to the specific indicator of the “Human Development Index” (HDI), since this latter index has been questioned for not reflecting data on “Human Development” as a whole (this is a broader concept than the three variables that make up this specific index: GDP per capita, education and life expectancy).

24. Building trust for social cohesion. Madrid: EUROsociAL, 2019, pp. 88-89.

25. Formal or *de jure* equality: this refers to the adoption of laws and public policies that promote equality for men and women before the law.

spheres, that is, States must remove all obstacles to equality being achieved effectively, in deeds and results, thus ensuring that the disadvantages associated with the situation of women are not maintained.

The contribution to gender equality by social cohesion policies will depend on identifying gender inequalities in each context of action (geographic and social/cultural; country/region, and scope of incidence) and on the ability to structure a response to the specific needs so as not to reproduce or even extend the existing asymmetries between women and men, but rather contribute to their eradication or reduction. In turn, in order to make progress in the reduction of gender inequality, it is essential to channel the effective participation of women. Achieving gender equality and guaranteeing the fundamental rights of women contributes to the reduction of other dimensions of social inequality since not only does it affect the proportional half of each disadvantaged group, but it also promotes the principle of equal opportunities and non-discrimination, as well as the transformation of asymmetric social relations that underpin different hegemonic systems of oppression, building more just societies that seek the well-being of the majority of the population.

Designing public policies on social cohesion with a perspective that takes into account gender equality, entails linking a permeable and interdisciplinary knowledge such as the gender dimension with the multidisciplinary field in changing social contexts in which the EUROsociAL+ Programme has an impact. No policy is gender-neutral, all public actions from their different spheres of incidence affect the living conditions of women and men, hence the relevance of this approach and its mainstream nature, which is why the EUROsociAL+ Programme must work through inter-area coordination to promote a multidisciplinary perspective (democratic governance, social policies and gender equality) while promoting intersectorality. Mainstreaming the gender approach in the Actions of the EUROsociAL+ Programme in terms of social cohesion, so they have an impact on inequalities in numerous areas of women's lives, would mean promoting mainstreaming measures in each of the lines of action such as:

Mainstreaming aspects of the three areas

- DEFINING THE RELEVANCE OF THE GENDER APPROACH WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF SOCIAL COHESION (multidisciplinary field and in changing contexts).
- ENSURING COMPLIANCE WITH INTERNATIONAL, STATE AND LOCAL REGULATIONS ON GENDER EQUALITY, EMPOWERMENT AND NON-DISCRIMINATION (alignment with international standards such as CEDAW, Agenda 2030, Human Rights, ILO, etc.). Example: ESTABLISHING THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE ACTIONS TO THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GOALS OF SDG 5: "ACHIEVE GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWER ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS."
- APPLYING THE GENDER APPROACH IN A MAINSTREAMING WAY while also taking an INTERSECTORAL VIEW
- PROMOTING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PRINCIPLE OF EQUAL TREATMENT AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN AND MEN, AND POSITIVE ACTIONS.
- PERFORMING GENDER ANALYSIS BASED ON DATA BROKEN DOWN INTO SEX AND GENDER INDICATORS, TO HIGHLIGHT AND HAVE AN IMPACT ON INEQUALITIES BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN IN PUBLIC POLICY DECISION-MAKING.
- ASSUMING THE PRINCIPLE OF PARITY AND PARTICIPATION/REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN AT ALL LEVELS OF DECISION-MAKING (e.g. including WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS).
- DEVELOPING NATIONAL INTEGRATED CARE SYSTEMS (SNIC).
- REDISTRIBUTIVE TAX POLICIES THAT ALLOW THE COLLECTION OF PUBLIC FUNDS AND THE ORIENTATION OF EXPENDITURE TO GENDER EQUALITY POLICIES.

- INVESTMENT IN INFRASTRUCTURE AND SOCIAL PROTECTION MEASURES THAT BENEFIT WOMEN AND CONTRIBUTE TO CHANGING ASYMMETRICAL GENDER RELATIONSHIPS AND HIERARCHIES.
- STRENGTHENING THE INTERINSTITUTIONAL COOPERATION (involving the Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women in the different countries) AND INTRAINSTITUTIONAL COOPERATION (gender units, authorities/departments or personnel responsible for gender equality within public bodies).

