



European Economic and Social Committee
Workers' Group
President

International Women's Day

International Women's Day gives us the opportunity to reflect on the situation of women in society and what progress we have made in achieving gender equality. There can be no inclusive, sustainable or fair society in modern democracies without strong women's rights and gender-equality.

The Workers' Group is particularly concerned about the growing trend of regressions in women's rights that we are witnessing across Europe. This includes attacks on women's rights to self-determination on issues affecting their bodies, attacks on measures to tackle violence against women and gender-based violence, the prohibition of gender studies, as well as the persisting inequalities such as the gender pay and pensions' gap and the high rates of female poverty.

The right to vote is a fundamental principle of any democratic society. In May, millions of European citizens will have the right to vote for the members of the European Parliament who will represent them for the next five years. The Workers' Group joins the call of the European trade union movement for citizens to vote for progressive politicians who will work for a fairer, more inclusive Europe, and who will stand up for gender equality.

Many Member States are currently celebrating the centenary anniversaries of the introduction of women's suffrage and their right to stand as candidates in elections. However, women are less likely to vote than men, so we particularly encourage them to exercise their democratic right by going out to vote.

The new Work-Life Balance Directive, giving the right to paid parental, paternity and carers leave across Europe, will make a difference to working people's lives and contribute to improved gender equality. It is a good example of the positive added value that the European Union can bring to people's living and working conditions. We need to ensure that the next European Parliament continues to support such measures, as there is still work that needs to be done: we need a future of work in which women no longer lag behind men! A strong European political strategy to achieve gender equality, tackle harassment and violence against women and address other gender inequalities will be key to achieving these aims. This is a key priority for the Workers' Group, which will continue the fight to women's rights and gender equality in the workplace and all spheres of society.

Oliver Röpké
Brussels, 8th March 2019