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THE EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL AND GENDER EQUALITY

(Conference Paper) ⁷⁴

O ACORDO VERDE EUROPEU E A IGUALDADE DE GÉNERO

(Notas de Conferência)

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Climate change and environmental degradation are an existential threat to Europe and the world.

Despite significant progress in the European Union over the last decades (till now what the European Union has achieved was modernizing the economy and reducing the emissions), pollution still heavily impacts our health and the environment.

Women and men working in sectors most dependent on the weather, such as agriculture and tourism, are likely to be most affected.

Women are increasingly being seen as more vulnerable than men to the effects of climate change because they represent the majority of the world's poor and are proportionally more dependent on threatened natural resources.

Women also tend to play a greater role than men in natural resource management – farming, planting, protecting, and caring for seedlings and small trees – and in ensuring nutrition and as care providers for their families. Otherwise, worldwide, women have less access than men to resources that would enhance their capacity to adapt to climate change, including land, credit, agricultural inputs, decision-making bodies, technology, and training services.

⁷⁴ Paper presented at LSA 2022, in Lisbon.

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For many women working in the informal sector and in small enterprises, lacking capital and access to credit and information, recovering from the devastating effects of environmental disasters is nearly impossible.

Furthermore, climate change is endangering efforts to realize the internationally agreed Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

This said, the involvement and commitment of States, the public in general, all the stakeholders and even Scholars are crucial to tackle climate and environmental-related challenges that are this generation's defining task.

The European Green Deal (11.12.2019) is a response to these challenges and EU's plan to make Europe a sustainable economy.

It is a new growing strategy that aims to transform the European Union into a fair and prosperous society, with a modern, resource-efficient, and competitive economy where there are no net emissions of greenhouse gases by 2050 and where economic growth is decoupled from resource use, moving towards a clean and circular economy.

It also aims to protect, conserve, and enhance the European Union's natural capital and the protection of the health and the well-being of citizens from environmental-related risks and impacts.

This putting people first, in particular women, and paying attention to the regions, industries and workers who will face the greatest challenges.

To secure this, we must ensure that pollution is reduced to levels which are no longer expected to be harmful for health and natural ecosystems and respect the boundaries our planet can cope with.

This means that we need to rethink the way goods and services are designed, produced, delivered, performed and/or used and disposed of and include pollution prevention in all relevant European Union policies.

We could think this is not the right time to develop the Green Deal, as we are in the midst of a global pandemic, caused by Covid-19, which challenges seem to be endless. The social-economic consequences with the obligation of lockdown and standstill of most of the activities all around the world, side by side with climate change were and still are dramatic and affect the poorest and most marginalized segments of society, including vulnerable women. Covid-19 has increased the gender gap and exposed the weaknesses of an already fragile global economy.

From the point of view of policy responses, particularly the process of greening of the economy, climate change points to the need for a transition towards a sustainable economy.

The transition to climate neutrality will bring significant opportunities, such as potential for economic growth, for new business models and markets and technological development.

This implies the creation of green jobs. However, green jobs are expected to proliferate, to a large extent, in sectors with historically limited female representation, such as construction, manufacturing, engineering or energy.

So, it would be important that the shift towards green jobs includes a gender perspective. It's already known that women are more likely than men to end up with low-paying jobs and they are more likely to suffer from low levels of employment security and limited social mobility.

In fact, actually, there is a growing gap between men's and women's participation in the digital sector, in education, career and entrepreneurship. Women remain overrepresented in traditionally precarious sectors and part-time employment, the most severely affected by Covid-19 crisis.

Precariousness is likely to involve a dependency on the income of other persons, such as a partner or relatives; it usually involves lower wages, which in the case of women implies increasing the gender pay gap; it is also a long-term impact on women's pensions and contributes to increasing the gender pension gap, among other issues.

President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, said: "*Gender equality is a core principle of the European Union, but it is not yet a reality. In business, politics and society, we can only reach our full potential if we use all our talent and diversity. Using only half of the population, half of the ideas or half of the energy is not good enough*".

So, now is time to think and plan a green and inclusive recovery of all the economic sectors and seize the opportunity to reduce their environmental and climate impact and promote the gender equality.

As global challenges of climate change and environmental degradation require a global response, the European Union will develop a stronger 'green deal diplomacy' focused on convincing and supporting others to take on their share of promoting more sustainable development and will work closely with Member States to mobilize all diplomatic channels both bilateral and multilateral.

These challenges have the potential to increase social and regional disparities in the EU as well as hamper the decarbonization efforts. Therefore, the ensuing deep modernization process will have to be managed well, ensuring a fair and socially acceptable transition for all in the spirit of inclusiveness and solidarity. The social consequences of the transition cannot be addressed post factum. Both the EU and the Member States must consider social implications from the outset and deploy all relevant policies to the fullest to mitigate this challenge so that nobody is left behind.

The public should remain a driving force of the green transition and should have the means to get more actively involved in developing and implementing new policies.

In short, economic recovery, global warming, climate change, gender equality and sustainability are among the main challenges of our time. But all we want is a healthy and equal planet for all.