

The Brexit is Not Gender Neutral*

An intervention by Gabriele Köhler

What does the Brexit mean for women?

What is good about the EU idea for everyone, whether living in Europe or elsewhere in the world, is the notion of open borders and open minds, giving us a pacifist, human rights-based identity – this promise is still there even if it has been fundamentally violated these past years.

What is good for everyone and especially women and for people who are in difficult situations – migrant workers, many of whom are women - and asylum seekers, many of whom are children - are the EU's core philosophy and values of equality, rights, solidarity, social justice and a (certain degree of) commitment to climate justice.

What is good, especially for young people and children, is the freedom of movement of persons, the coming-together in work and leisure, in culture, sports, in teaching and research. The freedom of movement without visas and work permits could be hollowed out if the British government and the EU do not manage to negotiate an amicable separation.

What is bad about the EU for us women is the EU's neoliberal economic policy – its penchant for deregulated labour markets and its fixation on debilitating fiscal austerity. These policies affect women in the workplace and in the care economy, because they undermine decent work and social security, and systematically underfund the necessary investments in education, health services, and social infrastructure – which need to expand massively. Neoliberal policies deprive us of leisure time. This will not change for people in Britain by leaving the EU – not as long as the UK Conservatives are in power.

There are gender implications also at the global level. The Brexit is by implication a nationalist choice. We as progressive women have a commitment to multilateralism, where the understanding is that not only all people but also all peoples are equal. National interests – perceived or real – need to be negotiated with all other countries' interests to find common, humanist ground. That is why we support entities such as the EU and the UN – with all their faults (which we persistently analyse and patiently work on changing).

So:

- For Europe: We need to come up with “purple flags” - a list of those commitments that must be contained in the Brexit separation package - in the interest of women, of gender equality, the interests of youth, and children's rights in the UK and in the EU.

- Globally: We need to keep our eye trained on the UN ball. We need to make sure the UK meets its commitments to the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Some of the Conservative and pro-Brexit ideology is not conform with the spirit of the agenda of “transforming our world”.

- And last not least - but certainly not a footnote: The selection of the next UN Secretary-General is imminent. The UK is a permanent member of the Security Council and in that capacity will cast their vote for the next Secretary-General. We need to make sure that Mr Cameron or his successor vote for a gender-empowering person with courage. We need an S-G who will boldly defend human rights and promote economic and social justice, climate justice, and gender equality. Now more than ever.

* This short piece originally appeared in the [World Economy & Development In Brief, Issue 1-2/Jan-Jun, Luxembourg](#)