When I last contributed to the Girls' Rights Gazette back in 2014, I stated that “women remain under-represented in our parliaments”. Since then, the European Parliament has seen a slight increase in its number of female members, going from 34.9 to 36.1 percent of seats held by women.[1] This relatively low number is telling of the fact that even though girls and women make up approximately 50 percent of the global population, that share isn’t reflected in seats in Parliaments or other decision-making positions – in either public or private institutions. The under-representation of women in such positions in turn affects the type of policies that come out of these spaces. The European Union is no exception. I have been calling and will continuing to call for the EU to step up gender mainstreaming all its policies, programmes and funding. Regardless of the many commitments made to tackle gender inequalities, including women’s access to leadership positions, there is still a long way for the EU to go.

For transformative change to take place, gender equality must become a driving social and political issue and power holders must use their authority to challenge the deeply held negative attitudes that perpetuate misogyny, waste talent and impoverish all our lives. For example, I expect to see the EU's international commitment to the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development backed-up by the required resources in the next EU budget. The time is ripe to make sure that we use all the tools we have at our disposal to make gender equality a priority and make sure that women are equally represented at all levels of power and decision-making – whether political, social, economic or financial. As recently highlighted by the EP
Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality, if gender-sensitive budgeting became an integral part of all the stages of the budgetary procedure, we would be promoting gender equality and thereby contributing to transformative change in the lives of girls and women.

In the run-up to the International Day of the Girl on 11 October, I believe we need to reflect on what we can do to unlock girls’ power. It’s about putting in place policies that protect and respect girls’ and young women’s civil and political rights and that provide for their empowerment, engagement and participation. It’s about investing in their ability to shape their own future and that of their societies. And it’s about creating the opportunities and the spaces to make sure that girls’ and women’s voices are heard on the issues that matter most to us. Only by taking these actions will we be able to go from 50% of the worlds’ population to 50% of seats.

Nothing about us without us!

Read the full article

Watch the video

Aneeka: I believe in the power of collective action
Young activist Aneeka McNamara took over Metro Trains in Melbourne, Australia last year to highlight the safety concerns of young women. The experience has convinced her of the importance and power of collective action in the fight for gender equality.

“I see a lot of potential for change in my generation of youth as we grow up and become the next generation of leaders. I see so much power and strength in collective youth-led action and I believe we have the ability to construct the world we want to live in tomorrow.”

Read Aneeka’s blog

BruxELLES: 14 young people take pictures of the Belgian capital to illustrate sexual harassment in public space

An exhibition by and for young people
From the North to the South, from the East to the West of Brussels, teenagers express their opinion and give a voice to young people on the issue of sexism in the public space. Their goal is to challenge political decision-makers to act to make public space safer for girls. As both leaders and activists, the youth photographed hundreds of locations and situations, staged and witnessed.

Sexism in public space
Through their images, young people share their experience of sexism in the public space. Girls live it every day. In public transport, in the streets, on their way to school... and boys too.

One clear message
As true activists, they speak to local decision-makers: "Listen to us, let us participate in politics and build together a more egalitarian and safe city for all". In their eyes and voices, we see the motivation to continue to break the taboo of harassment, to question the trivialised sexist behaviour and to persuade everyone to commit to the fight against sexism in the world.

“Going out at night is different for girls and boys. We go out with friends but we go back home sooner than the boys and make sure to be with other people. A better lightning would help a lot: everyone will feel safer in the city”
Copyright picture: Plan International
This project was realized with the support of Canon and the Brussels-Capital Region
Note, all photos are either staged or witnessed

Gender equality: Picture it!

Since 2015, UN Women together with the European Commission, the Belgian Development Cooperation and UNRIC has launched comic and cartoon competitions in the EU, Nigeria, Vietnam, Indonesia and Ukraine on the theme “Gender Equality: Picture it!”. Young artists and art students aged 18 to 28 were invited to illustrate their understanding of gender equality. The Girls’ Rights Gazette is happy to feature a cartoon by Dieksa Bebadito from Indonesia in this edition!
Girls’ lives and lived realities deserve to be front page news, but too often they are invisible and unheard. The Girls’ Rights Gazette is dedicated to highlighting the realities girls around the world face in the pursuit of their rights, as well as demonstrating the transformative power of girls and women as drivers of change and development. It is produced by Plan International EU Office for the European Week of Action for Girls 2018. If you would like further information about this publication, please contact the editor.

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