

Momentum 2013 –
Track 10: Europe – a progress?

**New gender equality challenges in the context of new economic
governance mechanisms in the European Union**

Is the financial crisis used as an opportunity to reinforce neoliberal and neo-conservative
economic policy frameworks within the European Union?

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Abstract

In the aftermath of the financial crisis the European Union is fundamentally transforming its economic governance processes and procedures. Starting with the decision on a new 10 year economic policy strategy, the Europe 2020 strategy, the EU has introduced the European semester to align different economic policy coordination processes and decided on the Euro Plus Pact. Besides these “soft” coordination mechanism, the legal basis has been transformed, namely with a series of legislative acts on economic governance (Sixpack; Twopack). Furthermore, the Fiscal Compact (Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union), an intergovernmental treaty, entered into force on 1 January 2013 for the 16 EU member states which completed ratification prior of this date. These rules and regulations tighten fiscal policy in the European Union leading to a permanent austerity course of public finances in the member states.

In November 2012 the EU Commission presented the ‘Blueprint for a Deep and Genuine Economic and Monetary Union’ and in March 2013 it proposed the ‘Convergence and Competitiveness Instrument’ as well as the ‘Ex ante coordination of plans for major economic policy reforms’. These reforms aim to raise competitiveness of all member countries by putting general downward pressure on wages.

Based on an analysis of the elements of the new economic policy coordination architecture, the paper explores the impact of the economic governance regime in the European Union on gender equality. The main research question is whether and how the new regime contributes to reinforce neo-conservative and neoliberal economic policies and which repercussions this could have on the gender equality regimes in the European Union.

To provide a basis for a comprehensive analysis of gender equality implications of the new European governance mechanisms, an analytical framework is presented, which is informed by discussions on gender equality implications of structural adjustment programs in the global South and feminist economists’ work on gender and macroeconomics. Among others, the framework addresses the gender bias of the macroeconomic policy rules and gender equality repercussions on institutions, democratic processes, participation of women as well

as shifts in power and influence but also social norms and attitudes, impact on living conditions, labour market, care work, ownership structures and the changing role of state institutions.

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