

# Women's Equality in the European Union--Promises and Reality: A Work in Progress

Carina Jones, International Studies Program, College of Arts and Sciences  
and Honors College

Faculty Mentor: Sandra Spencer, Ph.D., Women's Studies Program,  
College of Arts and Sciences

## EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP FOR WOMEN?

After the Second World War took its disastrous toll on Europe, a number of European countries began to pursue unity in their industries and markets, with the intent that economic cooperation would act as a safeguard against future conflicts. In the decades since, what began as a common market has developed into today's European Union (EU), a multinational political entity whose goals and authority address not only economic issues, but also questions of national security and social policy.

What impact has this new era in European history had on the women of Europe? Does the European economy now provide different opportunities for them than the markets of the past? Is there a new place for women in multinational politics? Has the new concept of European citizenship changed the way women define their place in society?

While some of these questions have been investigated in current studies, others remain to be addressed in research and in the EU's policies on women and gender.



## GENDER AND LANGUAGE

Traditional ideas about gender remain ingrained in European culture, as everyday language often illustrates. In Polish, for example:

- In the workplace, a person appointed to represent fellow workers' interests is called a "husband of trust," even though this role is predominantly given to a woman.
- When referring to Poland's female diplomats, the masculine word for diplomat is used. The feminine form (*dyplomarka*) still refers to a type of suitcase, from the days when women did not serve as diplomats.
- The feminine form of the word for dean (*dziekanka*) does not refer to a university official, but rather to the supervisor of a student residence hall.

## ABSTRACT

This project analyzes how the formation of the European Union has affected women's roles and status in European society. The EU has established a gender equality policy, which originated with an equal pay for equal work article in the 1957 Treaty of Rome and was more recently expanded with the 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam, which called for an end to all discrimination based on sex. However, the EU's gender equality goals have failed to materialize in many member nations. The aim of this research is to determine to what extent the EU has and has not affected women by examining economic indicators, rates of women's participation in government, and information regarding women's roles in their families before and after the passage of EU gender equality policies.



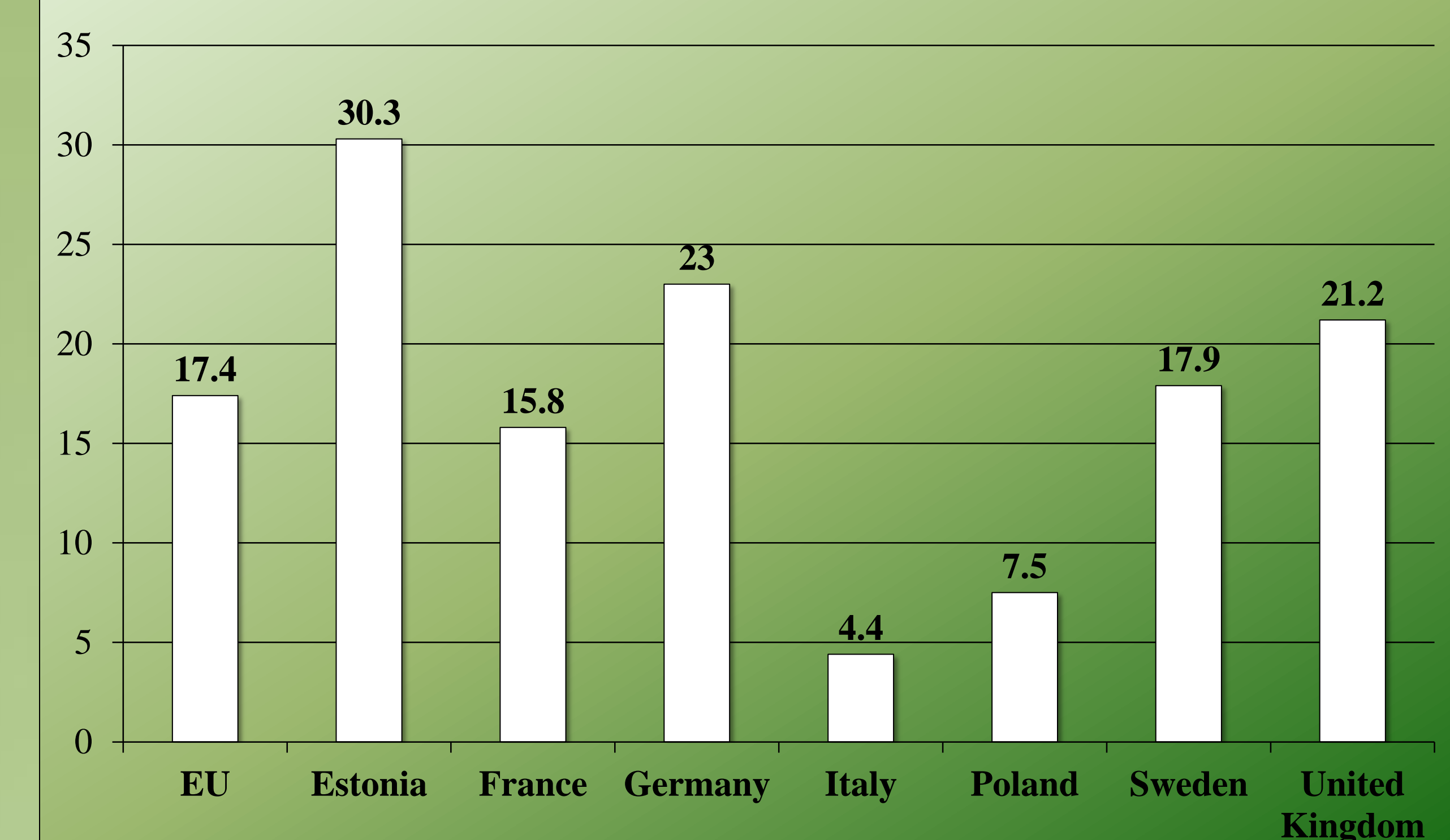
## LITERATURE REVIEW

1. The European Union (EU) has professed a goal of promoting gender equality through a number of agreements and resolutions (Rossilli, 1999).
  - The 1957 Treaty of Rome mandated equal pay for equal work.
  - In 1997, the Treaty of Amsterdam took the EU's gender policy beyond economics for the first time with its Social Policy Agreement, which requires the Union to take action against any discrimination based on sex.
2. Though some changes have occurred since the introduction of these policies, many inequalities remain, according to four studies that Kumari conducted (2001).
  - Europe has achieved equality in "social development indicators" such as literacy and health.
  - More women have entered the labor market.
  - There remains a gender pay gap in all EU member states, despite the equal pay for equal work law.
  - Not as many career fields are open to women as to men, and women do not advance in their careers as far as men do.
  - Tax laws and social security benefits also reflect gender bias.
3. Traditional ideas remain powerful in areas other than the labor market, such as the public arena of politics or women's private lives, as the situation of women in Poland illustrates (Platek, 2004).
  - Women are underrepresented in Polish government.
  - The Polish language lacks vocabulary to describe women in traditionally male jobs or men in traditionally female professions.
  - Traditional expectations regarding women's personal goals have not changed, as they are encouraged to focus on the roles of wife and mother above career or education.
4. New goals for change mean the need for new research.
  - Some member states have no research assessing the impact of EU policies on their female citizens.
  - Just as the EU's gender equality policy now addresses areas beyond the economy, more research should examine changes in women's situation not only in the labor market, but also in family, politics, education, and more.

## METHODOLOGY

This project will examine a variety of data, including statistics on the European economy, the number of women active in the political structure of the EU and governments of member nations, and studies analyzing women's responsibilities and contributions to their families and communities. Data from multiple years will be compared to determine what changes have occurred over time. Information from before and after the passage of major EU policies on women will be contrasted to determine what changes may have occurred as a result of government and to assess how effectively these policies have been realized.

## EUROPE'S GENDER PAY GAP



This chart shows the unadjusted percent difference in men's and women's average gross hourly earnings according to Eurostat's 2007 data (*EU campaign, 2009*). Even when the wage data are adjusted for age difference, education, and experience level, women still make less than men, especially at the highest income levels (Kumari, 2001).

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