

FIGHTING THE BACKLASH

FEMINIST & LGBTQI+ FUTURES

COORDINATED BY
ANNABELLE DAWSON
 is junior editorial
 assistant at the *Green
 European Journal*.



In 2049, commentators may look back on 2017 as a pivotal moment in the rebalancing of power in society, which has for so long been unequally distributed according to restrictive gender norms. The #MeToo movement spread with tsunami-like force across borders, cultures, and workplaces, upturning the way we talk about sexual harassment and abuse.

While the hashtag grabbed headlines, far more significant has been the ground gained by the tireless activism of women's and LGBT movements, whose dedicated work has been the bedrock of achievements such as the introduction of consent-based definitions of rape and the legalisation of same-sex marriage in some countries.

Much remains to be done and hard-won gains cannot be taken for granted. In 2019, with illiberal movements on the rise worldwide, the place of women and LGBTQI+ people in society has become a key political battle. From the growing popularity of overtly misogynistic strongmen to brazen attempts to roll back rights, an international backlash which demonises 'gender ideology' and champions 'family values' has been met with grim determination by progressives around the globe. While the fight against the Trumps, Orbáns, and Salvinis of our time is being waged on many fronts, it is unified by the struggle for women's and LGBTQI+ rights.

In this context, this panorama lends an ear to diverse and defiant voices from across Europe, while infographics offer snapshot reminders of the status quo. From Croatia to Germany and from Spain to the Netherlands, feminist and LGBTQI+ activists share perspectives and look to 2049 with hope, pragmatism, and imagination. Combatting structural violence; revolutionising sex education; undoing the gender binary: we hone in on the struggles to define feminist and LGBTQI+ action over the next three decades, seeking to inspire and to connect the dots of resistance.

Human rights of LGBTI people in the EU

Source: ILGA-Europe Annual Review of the Human Rights Situation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex People in Europe (2018). <rainbow-europe.org>

Marriage equality

- National / federal application
- Applicable in some regions only

Registered partnership (similar rights to marriage)

- National / federal application
- Applicable in some regions only

Joint adoption

- National / federal application

Hate crime law on sexual orientation

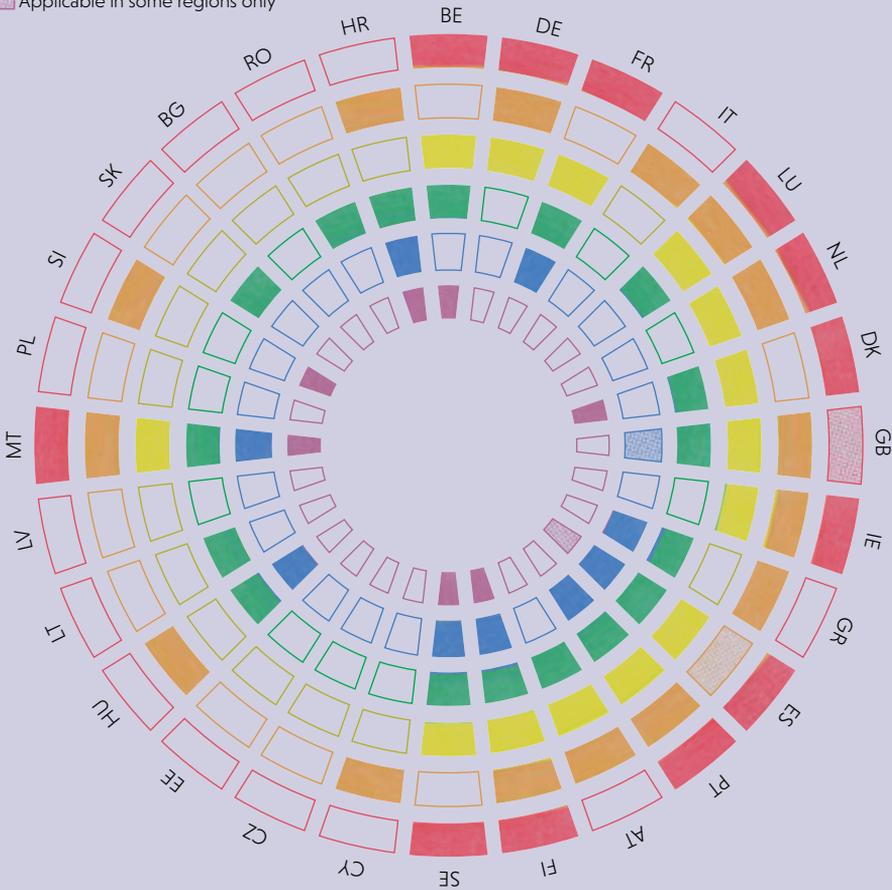
- National / federal application

Hate crime law on gender identity

- National / federal application
- Applicable in some regions only

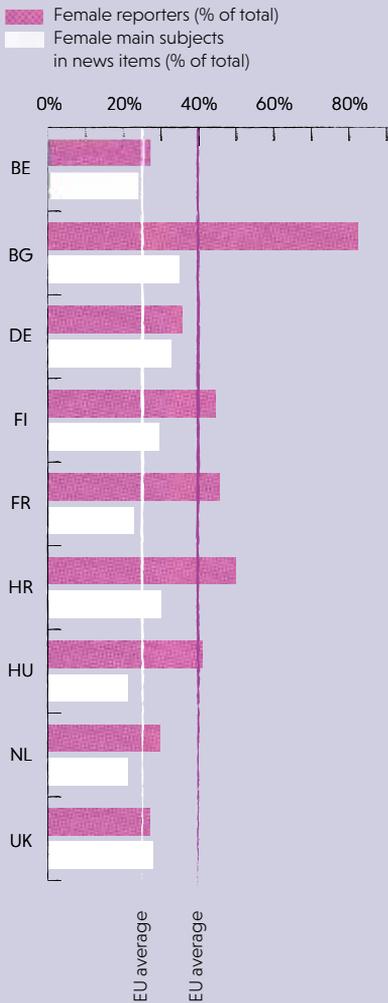
Law on gender expression (anti-discrimination legislation expressly includes gender expression)

- National / federal application
- Applicable in some regions only



Women shaping the news and in the news

Source: EPRS briefing: *Gender equality in the EU's digital and media sectors*. March 2018. Original data from the *Global Media Monitoring Project Report (2015)*. <bit.ly/2GAL75c>



GWENDOLINE LEFEBVRE

is president of the European Women's Lobby and represents Coordination Française pour le Lobby Européen des Femmes in France.

EUROPE

The movement that started with Tarana Burke's #MeToo campaign calling out daily experiences of sexual violence and harassment transformed European society, after which there was no turning back. The women who at that time spoke, denounced, acted, and demonstrated against patriarchal inequalities and violence paved the way for themselves and their daughters to enjoy a more feminist and inclusive environment.

In Europe 2049, solidarity and sisterhood have radically changed our ways of working and governing. Women are everywhere. Parity is now normal in politics, economy, and public spaces. Girls and young women no longer wonder if they can apply for jobs previously considered to be 'male jobs', if they can practise any sport, or if they can be a great scientist, a famous artist or a high-level politician. Female role models show them every day that it is possible.

The economy has been transformed, and the world values the work that benefits humanity most rather than that which just helps the economy. Care work, education, and the arts are celebrated and valued. Women and girls feel safe everywhere, in public space as at home. Adapting their behaviour to avoid domestic and sexual violence belongs to the past. In any case of violence, they can complain easily; their voice is heard and not questioned by police or the judiciary; they are supported and assisted by specific, well-resourced structures.

Buying a human body for sex is no longer allowed as all European countries have passed laws abolishing prostitution. Social structures ensure that women or girls are not vulnerable to exploitation in prostitution or the sex trade and men understand that consent must be freely given.

Over the past decades, Europe has reformed its understanding of migration so that it has become recognised as a normal part of life. The women and girls who migrated to Europe have thrived, contributing to Europe's growing economy and enhancing Europe's continuous societal and cultural maturity. Europe continues to work towards an inclusive process through which global decolonisation is assured, a fair and feminist approach to global politics is practised, and a just, diverse, and inclusive Europe is embraced.

IRELAND

Since gaining independence, Ireland has undergone continued societal and cultural revolutions. Some take place quietly, but most are hard fought over decades, on the streets of our cities, over dinner tables and in the halls of Leinster House with marches, chants, sit-ins, and debates aplenty. Women have always played a central role in this work. Our right to vote; to work; to be free from marital rape; to be with the person we love regardless of their sex; to ensure our consent will be freely given and respected; the repeal of the Eighth Amendment on abortion and legalisation of full reproductive healthcare: each stage of our emancipation has been hard won.

It is these movements that led to the Ireland of 2049. Through the feminist sexual revolution, including mobilisations such as #MeToo, #IBelieveHer, #EndDemand, and #NotConsent, women and girls in Ireland experience less sexualised violence and trust that institutions will support them when they report incidents. Law and policy reforms have gone beyond punitive measures to delivering prevention, shaping a culture where everyone understands the true meaning of consent. Both women and men can have more open sexual relationships based on trust and mutual enjoyment.

The investment in social systems, housing, availability of free and non-gendered education, including comprehensive sexuality education, and seeing role models throughout society – from women in science, technology, engineering, and maths to politics, including a female Taoiseach – means that young girls are inspired and know they can realise their potential. They plan their personal lives, families, and careers knowing there are policies and laws to ensure they will have equal access to opportunities as the boys they grew up with.

Where many parts of Europe faced a conservative, populist, and anti-feminist backlash after the financial crisis of 2008, this came later for Ireland. But with preparation, clear communication, and political reform involving a representative democracy, social progress wins out for the good of all.

By 2049, the Irish Constitution is without influence of patriarchal, religious or colonial structures and instead embodies the spirit of equality, fairness, and inclusion in which it was created. The Irish people make it clear that across all age groups, all corners of the land, regardless of religion and class: we as a people show care and compassion, respect women's freedom, our lives, and personhood. Our constitution, government, justice system, and society values all citizens equally and recognises that a woman's place is wherever she decides it to be.



CATRÍONA GRAHAM

is on the board of directors of the National Women's Council of Ireland and is policy & campaigns officer at the European Women's Lobby.



HUNGARY

In 2049, Hungary is governed by a strong coalition of seven Green parties which all formed at the same house party back in the 2010s. The prime minister is a cultural anthropologist, mother of three children – two of those accidental, the last born in the midst of an election campaign focused on healthcare, public education, and liquorice as a national resource.

The country of circa 10 million people was under an ultra-conservative government during the 2010s and 2020s, which resulted in a series of social catastrophes and the population's rapid impoverishment. The fall of the illiberal regime started with an accident: the entire government was hospitalised due to a severe E. coli contamination, locally known as sausage poisoning, at a party convention. A year-long series of riots then resulted in the declaration of the Fourth Hungarian Republic.

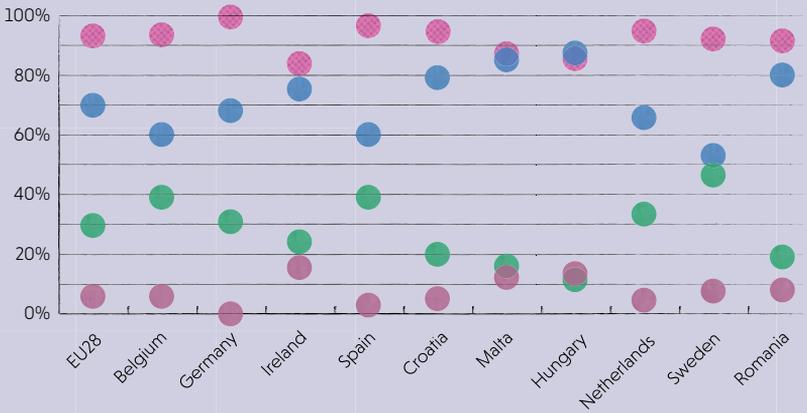
The first government was an ephemeral assembly of hobby guitarists, freelance baristas, and suburban PTA moms, the latter of whom have proven pretty good at all sorts of management tasks. They swiftly introduced a comprehensive social policy to tackle the greatest housing crisis in a century. The Marble Countertop Code regulated the housing market, maximised rents, and provided homes for vulnerable people, lifting weight off the shoulders of mothers and women generally, who no longer needed to stay in abusive or otherwise insufficient relationships. The PTA moms allocated huge amounts of funds to public education and early childhood care, declaring the access to these as social rights. Also, the concept of mother's guilt was penalised. People asking mothers why they did not stay home with their kids can now be sentenced to community service and need to attend awareness courses. The government introduced the concept of online divorce in 2037.

The guitar hippies pushed through a decentralised energy policy called Operation Hemp Sweater, which focused on renewable resources and energy efficiency. The baristas campaigned for trade deals which supported small-scale agricultural producers and business owners, thus securing the living of about a third of the population. They also set up a giant mushroom plant to recycle their coffee grounds. Everybody hates mushrooms in Hungary now.

Since this rapid and controversial consolidation process, the greatest debates of the nation have been centred around substance abuse ('the Battle of Chardonnay or Pinot Gris' decimated the first government) and train delays. Men are still legal in Hungary.



RÉKA KINGA PAPP
is editor-in-chief
at *Eurozine*.



Who calls the shots? Women in decision-making roles in the EU

Source: EIGE (2018)
CEO data 2018 Q3 & Q4
Parliaments data 2018 Q4

- Men as CEOs of largest listed companies (% of total)
- Women as CEOs of largest listed companies (% of total)
- Men in national parliaments (% of total)
- Women in national parliaments (% of total)

ROMANIA

If Mădălina, an 18-year-old woman born to a family of street beggars, mother to a one-year-old and carrying the second child of an unemployed man, were to walk into hospital for a check-up in 2049, she would benefit from a systemic approach. This approach would be the result of years of research and grassroots pilot interventions in rural Romania where poverty affects almost half the population, especially women, and where cultural stereotypes make social mobility almost unthinkable. Mădălina's poverty is intergenerational; her mother and grandmother endured it, and now her children fight the same economic hardship and social stigma. She is supposed to bear both poverty and violence, keeping her family fed and her husband happy.

Professionals will talk with Mădălina's extended family to make them partners in the process, not enemies, and she will be paired with a mentor chosen for her specific needs. Institutions and extended communities will have stopped victim-blaming, a common practice 30 years previously: "Pregnant again? You never change!" An electronic system now tracks each vulnerable individual's access to public services, reducing bureaucracy and overcoming people's reluctance to access social services out of shame or illiteracy. The fight against poverty will have made progress since becoming a national priority when Romania's income inequality became the highest in the European Union.

Cultural stereotypes will still be present in 2049, but institutions and professionals will be trained to understand them, not to perpetuate them. If Mădălina were to walk through the Bucharest metro of 2019 asking for money to buy formula and nappies, many passengers would scold her, telling her that because she enjoyed having children raising them is not their problem. Policemen would kick her off the train and social workers would threaten to take her children and put her in jail. No one would offer her help. If the same scenario were to play out in 2049, passengers could put her in contact with the national programme against poverty through a free hotline where she could learn about her rights and options. The population would understand why intergenerational poverty is so tough to overcome and they would feel part of the effort to prevent it.



ANA MARIA CIOBANU

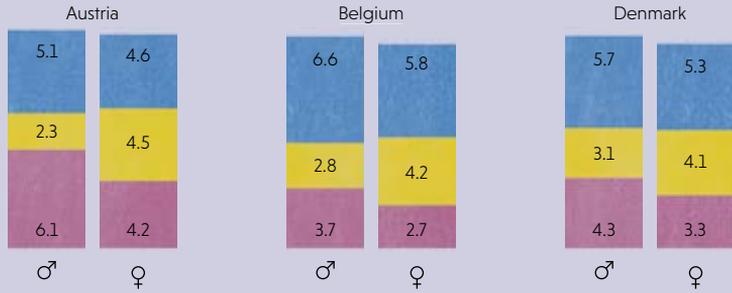
is a reporter at *DoR*, a Romanian narrative journalism magazine, and host of the podcast *Mothers*.

Average hours spent per day (including weekends) by men and women aged 15-64 on different activities

Source: OECD (accessed 2019) <bit.ly/25djj06>

- **Paid work or study:**
remunerated employment, school/university, commuting
- **Unpaid work:**
routine housework, child/adult care, volunteering, related travel
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This data excludes time spent on personal care (sleeping, eating and drinking, personal hygiene) and other activities (e.g. spiritual, religious or civic obligations).



UNITED KINGDOM

The fight for women’s suffrage in the UK was never just for ‘the vote’ as an end in itself. As Emmeline Pankhurst put it, “We are here not because we are law-breakers; we are here in our efforts to become law-makers.” With a foot in the door in 1918 women began pushing for legislative change. Within a decade they obtained access to the legal profession, unemployment benefits, and local authority healthcare during pregnancy and maternity; they had also secured the same divorce, property, parental, and finally voting rights as men.

Gains have been made but women remain outnumbered across every area of power and decision-making. Society’s attitude to the female reproductive role remains the greatest barrier to the equal participation of women as a group. Our social and political world was built by and for male-bodied people; until legislation, policy, custom, and the very structure of the workplace are shaped as much by female needs as by male, women will continue to be disadvantaged.

First, by 2022: all-women shortlists across all parties. Not all women in positions of power prioritise the interests of women as a group, but they are far more likely than men to do so. A recent bill to decriminalise abortion was approved by 83 per cent of the 118 female MPs present, as opposed to only 50 per cent of the 225 male MPs present. With more women MPs across all parties, total control of fertility (total decriminalisation of abortion, access to sterilisation) should be achievable by 2025.

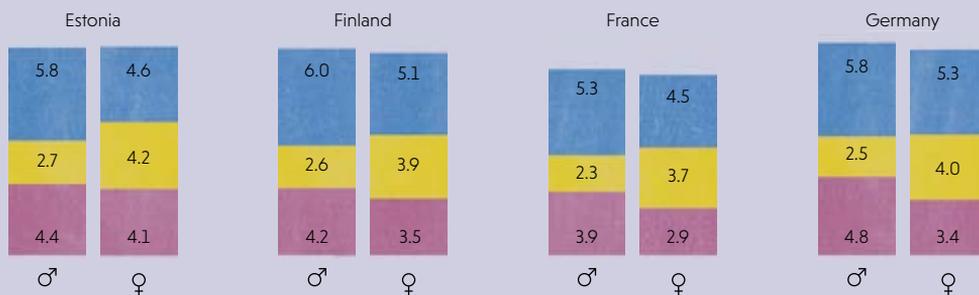
While women should not be forced to have unwanted children, neither should they be penalised for carrying out a role society needs them to play. By 2028, we need maternity leave paid by the state so that employers have no reason to discriminate against women, and equal paternity leave for men so women’s careers don’t take the hit by default. State-funded childcare must be reorganised and stepped up between now and 2040, not just in term time and not excluding the poorest households as under the present system, with fair pay for workers, more than 90 per cent of whom are women (and paid less than male colleagues). And by 2030 we should see menopause policies across the public and private sectors that target employment discrimination against what is another consequence of the female reproductive role.

These are the barest basics on which we could build real change by 2049.



Laura Gallagher

lives in Bristol, UK, where she works with three different women’s organisations.



GERMANY

In 2049 in Germany, I want to be able to use a public bathroom without being harassed or kicked out, no matter what I wear. I want to be able to seek the healthcare and hormones I need without having to submit myself to binary trans narratives. I want people with beards to be complimented for wearing dresses, make-up, and high heels, and I want people to be valued, promoted, and elected for their empathy and compassion. Each person is free to live comfortably in their own skin, without any requirements – from society, from the medical sphere or the state – to be feminine or masculine. I want to live in a world beyond gender.

There is not one single strategy for reaching a world beyond gender. We are all used to being gendered, to a gendered world. For many trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming people, being gendered is violent. Gender as a social construct is inherently unequal. Patriarchy as a social institution is woven into gender itself. But we can and should deconstruct gender, play with it, ridicule it, and work towards institutional and legal frameworks which support and protect such actions.

The German state should pave the way for this to be possible. At the end of 2018, Germany officially recognised that there is more than men and women by introducing a reluctant third gender option (divers) for official records, but failed to implement a law which recognises and supports all those who do not conform to the binary gender norm of dyadic, cis-gender men and women.

In my 2049, no state, medical practitioner or psychologist cuts my right to self-determination. Anyone can change their legal gender marker without so-called experts writing reports about their 'real' gender, expensive court proceedings, or any other dehumanising procedure. Newborn babies are not classified as male, female or divers but can choose themselves if and what kind of gender marker they would like to have later in life. Changing or removing the gender marker is possible regardless of how one's body looks, of biological difference, and is possible for everyone who lives in Germany, regardless of their nationality. This would be a small step towards dismantling gender.



LOUKA JULE GOETZKE

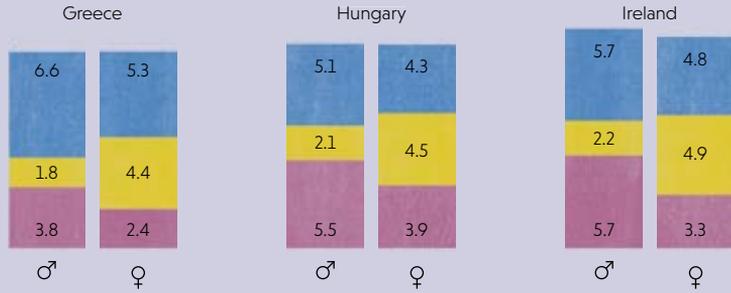
is an editor, writer, and gender chaotic activist for a world without narrow conceptions of gender.

Average hours spent per day (including weekends) by men and women aged 15-64 on different activities

Source: OECD (accessed 2019) <bit.ly/25djj06>

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THE NETHERLANDS

The world's oldest profession is simultaneously the world's most stigmatised and criminalised one. Moral and religious claims about the intrinsic harmful nature of sex work and politics of criminalisation have dominated decision-making for ages. Yet it has occurred in (almost) all human societies throughout (almost) all of our history. Independent of political choices for legalisation or (partial) criminalisation, sex work has always existed and will continue to be around for a long time to come. In this sense, the question is not whether we want sex work, but how to deal with it.

When dealing with sex work, our first challenge is cultural. Being an escort in the Netherlands for six years, I found that the stigma surrounding sex work is often a bigger problem than sex work itself. Stigma closets sex workers, and they must often make difficult choices alone. If sex workers do not feel safe to talk to their relatives, healthcare providers, and the authorities about their job, how can we as a society provide them with safety and support? And how will sex workers ever feel safe to share their stories if they fear that disclosing their job will be met with disrespect and judgement, or worse, exclusion and discrimination?

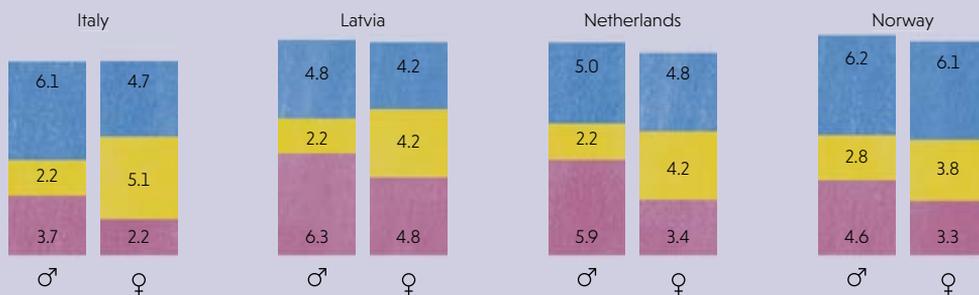
Our second challenge is political. Politics of (partial) criminalisation are not only systematically unsuccessful in their desire to eradicate sex work, they are also harmful to the sex workers' sovereignty over their bodies, labour conditions, safety, and sexual health. Criminalising sex work pushes the sector underground where control of labour conditions and access to social, health, and police services to sex workers becomes harder. This counts as much for the so-called Swedish model (criminalise only clients) as for full criminalisation.

In 2049, the world needs a different approach to sex work built on destigmatisation, legalisation, and sex worker-led solutions. By then sex work should be treated with respect, dignity and as an equal and worthy job. This implies access to banking services, social insurances, and retirement schemes. Governments should use these regulations not to suppress or limit sex work but to provide safety, health, and good working conditions. None of this can be successfully accomplished if we do not involve sex workers in our decision-making. In 2049 we can create a brighter future for sex workers and all of us if we offer our respect and listen to them.



LYLE MUNS

is a political science student and escort in Amsterdam. He was the chairman of DWARS (the youth organisation of the Dutch Green party) and spokesperson of PROUD (the Dutch union for sex workers).



BELGIUM

We have come a long way when you consider that the general acceptance of sex education as a public responsibility is not that old. In Belgium it was illegal to promote contraceptives until 1973. Before then, sex educators and feminist activists had to secretly provide information on sexuality in backrooms, their flyers at times seized by the police. In today's Belgium, we get sex education in schools, but there are few spaces where adults can deepen their understanding of sexuality, despite a great want for this among adults of all ages. By 2049, we need broadly accessible spaces where adults can learn about the finer points of consent, touch, anatomy, and play.

By 2049, sex education should help people to navigate an ever more digital and visual world. Not by scaring them, but by making them more resilient, informed, and creative. Let's not wring our hands about porn, for example – let's teach young people how to critically consume it and help them find their way to queer or feminist porn that takes into account the ethics of production and portrays alternative sexual scripts.

Fear is still an integral subtext of sex education, and in particular female sexuality, which conjures up fears of pregnancy, assault, and lost innocence. Pleasure and consent should take central stage instead. Consent is not about being a prude. It is about grasping the fundamental connection between the capacity to say no and be respected for this, and the capacity to give a lusty yes and to be respected for this. For men, this is just as important. Sex education should give them the opportunity to reflect upon the sexual and gender stereotypes that stifle their lives as well, especially with conservative political movements on the rise worldwide in which the control of female sexuality is yet again turned into a pillar of hegemonic male identity.

By 2049, the starting point of sex education should be that there are many different bodies and many different sexual identities. For now, ethnic and cultural diversity and LGBTQ+ perspectives are too often treated as an add-on to the normal sex ed curriculum, while other forms of bodily difference – such as people with disabilities – are hardly ever considered. New social contexts will always give rise to new ways in which we have to reinvent sexual liberation, but taking into account the above can bring us a step closer.



ANAÏS VAN ERTVELDE

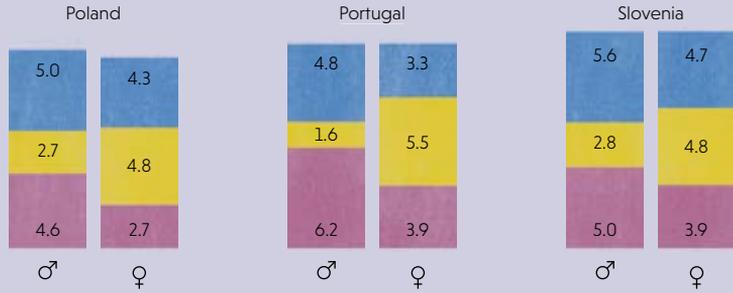
is a historian at Leiden University and co-producer of the podcast *Vuile Lakens* (Dirty Sheets), which was published as a book in 2017.

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CROATIA

“We are angry, we are ready to resist, we are looking for a change”, chanted thousands of people in several Croatian cities during night marches for International Women’s Day 2018. Every day since then we have witnessed how the lives of women in Croatia continue to be treated as irrelevant. For every 10 cases of sexism and misogyny, we win one small victory and the extent to which violence against women is institutionalised is increasingly obvious. The current government is preparing to pass a new abortion law that draws on the ‘expertise’ of a committee mainly made up of gynaecologists who exercise their right to ‘conscientiously object’. Some of them are linked to the neoconservative and clerical fundamentalist groups which sprouted after the 2013 referendum that resulted in the ban of same-sex marriage. There is a reasonable fear that the government will try to introduce mandatory counselling and waiting periods into the new abortion law, which would be extremely detrimental to reproductive health and rights.

In these circumstances, resistance is our duty. We fight back. Women stood up for their right to sexual and reproductive health by starting the movement #BreakTheSilence. Protests are organised to fight against the unwillingness of state institutions to protect women from violence.

Our hopes and clearly impossible dreams for 30 years’ time would see significant improvements in all aspects of the fight against gender-based violence. In our vision for 2049, women are seen and treated as equals in a country where the Istanbul Convention is properly implemented.¹ Progressive secular health and sexual education is taught in all schools and the women’s movement and feminist theory and practice are part of the school curriculum. Fundamentalist groups connected with the Catholic Church are politically irrelevant and have no say over women’s right to abortion. Abortion is free and available to all women. Women’s economic and social rights are respected in a country where capitalism is finally defeated. The challenges to overcome include everything from growing fascist tendencies in society, to everyday sexism in leftist groups. Let the feminist force be with us.

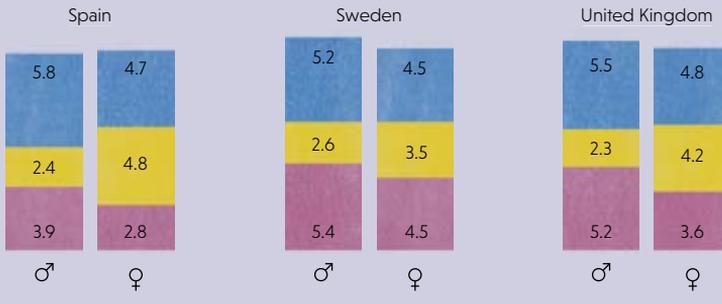


IVANA ŽIVKOVIĆ
is a journalist and co-founder of the feminist collective fAKTIV in Croatia.



JELENA TEŠIJA
is a co-founder of fAKTIV and has MAs in journalism and gender studies.

¹ The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence was signed in 2011 and came into force in 2014.



SPAIN

In Spain, we are on the right track to achieve a much better situation for women by 2049. However, as gender-based violence is a reflection of inequality between men and women, it is hard to believe that it will disappear completely in the next 30 years.

It is crucial to understand that by reducing inequality we can reduce violence. So long as the gender pay gap and the feminisation of poverty continue to exist, so will the optimal conditions for women to suffer at the hands of sexism. Measures that protect women from violent abuse are just as important as those that lessen the pay gap or reinforce feminist economics, such as equal parental leave. A good starting point is to accept that economic, symbolic, and institutional violence are also forms of gender-based violence.

Starting to talk about our freedoms is fundamental too. Every time a woman is raped it is important to see it as the violation of her sexual freedom. Deepening this discourse of freedom can help society create a new sexual culture that is not centred around rape or violence, and that redefines the way we relate to each other as men and women. A few years ago, discussions about consensual sex would have been unthinkable in Spain, but we have recently managed to enshrine this in law. Arriving at this new sexual culture, it will be the norm for all schools to teach sex education, and to talk about the types of emotional and sexual relationships we like.

We must ask ourselves who our policies are aimed at. Health policies, for example, are often designed for white, middle-aged men, even though we are not all affected by the same health problems. Proposals must adopt an intersectional perspective, aiming to achieve better standards of living for the 99 per cent by simultaneously taking into account gender, sexual orientation, social class, ethnicity, race, religion, etc. Any other approach will be a failure for feminism, and an even greater failure for the construction of a tolerable future society for everyone. Such a perspective in the future will likely raise new bioethical conflicts, no doubt concerning fertility, how to adapt our bodies to our sexual identity, and the consequences of increased life expectancy.



**ÁNGELA
RODRÍGUEZ
MARTÍNEZ**

is a member of parliament for Podemos in Spain.