

Women represent half of Europe's talent. We cannot afford to waste this creative potential.

If we succeed in channelling this potential into the economy we will make a huge leap forward both with regard to the attitudes still present in European societies and the Union's new agenda for more growth, jobs and competitiveness.

Equal opportunities do exist on paper. The EU has produced at least 13 directives on gender equality, the principle is anchored in the EU-Treaty and in the Constitutions and legislative acts of Member States. But the real life data speak a different language.

Never before were women so well educated. But when it comes to entrepreneurship, women are still largely underrepresented.

On the gender pay gap virtually nothing has moved in recent years.

When doing business, women rarely default when it comes to reimbursing their loans.

But access to finance is more difficult for women. This is determined by the banks' quest for collateral. You need to have money in order to borrow money. But only 1% of the world's assets are owned by women.

Despite higher qualifications, despite higher education women remain totally underrepresented among decision makers.

Getting more women into decision making positions is the key to everything. Women can promote their case and market their agenda but the real power lies in decision making. And that is why women ought to take part.

Critical mass is essential to bring about change. One single woman in a decision making body will soon have to adapt her behaviour to be accepted

by the male majority. As a starter, having a few women on a decision making board, could already make a difference.

Yet, all these strategies will help little, if we do not succeed in removing the biggest obstacle for women: reconciling family and working life.

Remaining obstacles call for a policy response. This is why we still need policies geared towards gender both at the national and the European level.