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2024 report on  
**gender  
equality**  
in the EU

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and Consumers*

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# INTRODUCTION

Gender equality is a core EU value under the Treaties, with the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 delivering on the von der Leyen Commission's commitment to achieving a Union of Equality. The fourth year of the EU's Gender Equality Strategy, 2023, was another successful year for gender equality in the EU.

2023 was a particularly important year for gender equality in the EU. In May, the Pay Transparency Directive was adopted. It aims to strengthen the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value, through pay transparency measures and enforcement mechanisms. The Directive tackles pay secrecy, making it easier for all workers to find out if their gender was a factor in setting their salary and to defend their right to equal pay in court. In June, the EU's accession process to the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (commonly known as the Istanbul Convention) was finally concluded. With the accession, the EU is bound by ambitious and comprehensive standards to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence in the area of judicial cooperation in criminal matters, asylum and non-refoulement and with regard to its institutions and public administration. In December, the Council of the EU reached a provisional agreement with the European Parliament on a new EU directive to strengthen the independence and powers of the national equality bodies. The directive covers the mandate of equality bodies in the area of gender equality in the area of employment and occupation. Most recently, a political agreement has been reached on the proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on combating violence against women and domestic violence. The proposed directive is a milestone - the first comprehensive legal instrument at

EU level to tackle violence against women, which is still too pervasive in the European Union. With this directive all victims of violence against women and domestic violence across the European Union will benefit from the same comprehensive set of measures of protection, support and access to justice.

According to the 2023 Gender Equality Index calculated by the European Institute of Gender Equality (EIGE), the EU score for gender equality stands at 70.2 (out of 100 points), which marks the largest increase (+1.6 points) since the Index began. Improvements were primarily recorded in the domain of time, which covers indicators regarding the distribution of time across economic, care and social activities<sup>1</sup>. However, it should be noted that this gender gap was narrowed not because men increased their contribution to unpaid care and housework, but because women were on average able to reduce theirs, including through other means such as use of new technology.

Also in 2023, Claudia Goldin won the Nobel prize in Economic Sciences for her work advancing 'understanding of women's labour market outcomes'. Her research has demonstrated the impact of unequal distribution of care responsibilities on female labour market participation and the gender pay gap. Her achievement is a testament to the increasing attention that gender equality is attracting in ever more areas of study.

There is still a long way to go, however. Significant gender gaps still exist in the labour market and in decision-making positions, including political representation. Violence against women, including femicide, remains common but there is no single approach across Member States. For example, the

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1 In the sub-domain of care activities. For more information see also: [European Union | 2023 | Gender Equality Index | European Institute for Gender Equality \(europa.eu\)](#)

concept of positive consent ('only yes means yes' instead of 'no means no') is still not recognised by all Member States<sup>2</sup>. Gender stereotypes about the role of women in society still hold true for too many people, including gender-normative attitudes towards care and economic power. Furthermore, as we saw in 2023, women and girls remain particularly vulnerable to the consequences of war and conflict, and have also faced increased restrictions on freedom of expression and a growing backlash against women's rights in various parts of the world. That is why the EU continued its efforts to get the UN Sustainable Development Goal 5 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls' back on track, by enhancing gender mainstreaming in its international partnerships, allocating adequate resources, and strengthening gender-transformative approaches.

Against this backdrop, the 2024 report on gender equality in the EU takes stock of the main initiatives from March 2023 until February 2024 to advance gender equality in the Strategy's key areas<sup>3</sup>, namely:

- Being free from violence and stereotypes;
- Thriving in a gender-equal economy;
- Leading equally throughout society;
- Gender mainstreaming and funding; and
- Promoting gender equality and women's empowerment across the world.

The report focuses on the key actions and achievements of EU institutions in this area. It also provides encouraging examples of legislative and policy developments by Member States (indicated in the boxes), and work by EU-funded projects in the above areas.

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2 Only 13 Member States apply the affirmative consent model, also known as the 'only yes means yes' model, which focuses on an affirmative and freely given expression of consent to determine whether a crime constitutes rape. In other words, this approach recognises that the absence of a verbal 'no' is not an implicit 'yes', meaning that passivity, silence, lack of protest or lack of resistance cannot be deemed to mean consent.

3 See also the Gender Equality Strategy Monitoring Portal which provides readily available data on the state of play regarding the realisation of the policy objectives of the Gender Equality Strategy, identify strengths and opportunities and follow developments over time: [Home | GENDER EQUALITY STRATEGY Monitoring Portal \(europa.eu\)](https://europa.eu/gender-equality-strategy-monitoring-portal)

## FREE FROM VIOLENCE AND STEREOTYPES

The EU gender equality strategy for 2020–2025 recognises the urgency of ensuring that everyone is safe and free from gender-based violence in their homes, their close relationships, their workplaces, in public spaces and online. Ending gender-based violence continued to be a Commission priority in 2023. The issue attracted an increasing amount of media attention, which helped to highlight the urgent need for more substantial action<sup>4</sup>.

### ENDING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

On 6 February 2024, a provisional political agreement was reached on the Commission proposal for a **Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence**<sup>5</sup>. The Directive is a milestone: the first comprehensive legal instrument at EU level to tackle violence against women and domestic violence. With this Directive all victims of violence against women and domestic violence across the EU will benefit from the same comprehensive set of measures of protection, support, and access to justice.

The Directive pursues the dual objective of better safeguarding the rights of victims of violence against women and domestic violence in the EU, on the one hand, and to reducing the prevalence of such violence in the long term, on the other hand. The provisional agreement pursues these objectives, firstly, by introducing minimum rules on the definition of criminal offences of certain forms of violence against women across the EU, both offline and online. These criminalisations entail female genital mutilation, forced marriage, as well as the most widespread forms of cyberviolence (i.e., non-consensual sharing of intimate or

manipulated material, cyber stalking, cyber harassment, cyberflashing and cyber incitement to hatred or violence).

Secondly, the provisional agreement also strengthens protection and access to justice for victims, enhances victim support, reinforcing prevention and improves coordination and cooperation. For example, by requiring Member States to ensure that helplines and rape crisis centres are established, that reporting of such crimes is made safer and easier (including through the possibility of online reporting). Moreover, law enforcement authorities will have to assess if the offender might do further harm to the victim and, in that case, take necessary protection measures, such as the prohibition to enter the home of the victim.

Finally, to ensure better coordination and cooperation, Member States will be encouraged to gather the most important data on violence against women and foster coordination and exchanges of best practices and cooperation in criminal cases, including via Eurojust and the European Judicial Network.

The provisional agreement pays specific attention to victims experiencing intersectional discrimination, such as women with disabilities, undocumented migrant women, LGBTI persons, and women in prostitution, and recognises that they are at a heightened risk of violence.

In 2023, the EU became the 38<sup>th</sup> Party to the Council of Europe **Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence** ('the Istanbul Convention'). As the last step in the accession process, the Council gave its approval on June 1, and the Convention entered into force for the EU on 1 October. The EU has

4 See also [MeToo: MEPs call for more to be done to tackle sexual harassment in the EU | News | European Parliament \(europa.eu\)](#); [Improving legal responses to counter femicide in the European Union: Perspectives from victims and professionals | European Institute for Gender Equality \(europa.eu\)](#)

5 [Violence against women: Council and European Parliament reach deal on EU law - Consilium \(europa.eu\)](#)

acceded to the Convention as regards matters falling within its exclusive competence, namely with regard to matters related to institutions and public administration of the Union<sup>6</sup> and with regard to matters related to judicial cooperation in criminal matters, asylum and non-refoulement<sup>7</sup>. The EU is now bound by ambitious and comprehensive standards to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence, within these areas. This includes funding, policy and legislative measures. This was recently confirmed by the Court of Justice of the European Union in its judgment of 16 January 2024<sup>8</sup>, which states that areas of EU law

which fall within the exclusive competence must be interpreted consistently with the Istanbul Convention, even by Member States that have not yet ratified that Convention. To date, all EU Member States have signed the Istanbul Convention, and all but five have ratified it<sup>9</sup>. Accession to the Istanbul Convention is a boost for EU efforts to eradicate violence against women and domestic violence in the Union. The Commission, as coordinating body, has started the important work of ensuring the implementation of the Convention in the EU.



In March 2023, **Croatia** gave awareness-raising training to civil servants on the Istanbul Convention. It was attended by civil servants from a number of Ministries (Croatian Veterans; Defence; Justice and Public Administration; Health; and Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy). In addition, in April and May 2023, several regional training sessions were held on the topic of ‘preventing gender-based violence’, followed by a second round in October 2023.

The **Advisory Committee on equal opportunities for women and men** met in 2023 to prepare an opinion on the prevention of gender-based violence and domestic violence, including recommendations at EU and national level. The opinion was published in January 2024<sup>10</sup>.

As part of the ongoing preparatory work for its **recommendation on preventing and combating harmful practices against women and girls**, the Commission held a targeted consultation workshop on harmful practices in the healthcare sector to identify specific recommendations.

This area was identified as warranting deeper attention, given healthcare professionals’ crucial role in responding to victims of harmful practices seeking medical care. In some cases, certain forms of harmful practices (e.g. female genital mutilation) will be performed in third countries, but women and girls will continue living with the consequences once they return to the EU. The work on the recommendation is ongoing with the aim of adopting in the course of 2024.

On 6 November 2023, **the Scientific Analysis and Advice on Gender Equality Group (SAAGE)** held a seminar

6 [Council Decision \(EU\) 2023/1075 of 1 June 2023 on the conclusion on behalf of the European Union, of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence with regard to institutions and public administration of the Union, OJ L 143 I, 2.6.2023, p. 1–3. – EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)

7 [Council Decision \(EU\) 2023/1076 of 1 June 2023 on the conclusion, on behalf of the European Union, of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence with regard to matters related to judicial cooperation in criminal matters, asylum and non-refoulement, OJ L 143 I, 2.6.2023, p. 4–6. – EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)

8 [Judgment of 16 January 2024, WS, C-621/21](#), paragraph 46–47.

9 Bulgaria, Czechia, Lithuania, Hungary and Slovakia.

10 [Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men – Opinion on the prevention of gender-based and domestic violence \(europa.eu\)](#)

on obstetric violence, attended by several specialists on the topic and Commission representatives<sup>11</sup>. The topics discussed included the conceptualisation of obstetric and

gynaecological violence as a form of gender-based violence and discrimination, actions taken in different Member States, and policy recommendations.



**Lithuania** has adopted a new law on Protection against Domestic Violence, which entered into force on 1 July 2023. It will implement measures improving protection for victims of domestic violence, and an interinstitutional cooperation mechanism at national and local level between the police, specialised assistance centres, child protection services, hospitals, representatives of municipalities, and other institutions. This should increase the effectiveness of the new preventive measure against domestic violence – an emergency barring order, which will provide victims of domestic violence with immediate protection when a pre-trial investigation is not started due to a lack of evidence.

As announced in the 2020-2025 Gender Equality Strategy, the Commission set up an **EU network on the prevention of gender-based violence and domestic violence** for Member State officials and key stakeholders. The first meeting was held on 29-30 November 2023 on the topic of 'early prevention mechanisms of law enforcement, health and social services, inter-service coordination and data sharing'. The next meeting is planned for 10-11 April 2024. The aim of the network is to provide a space for Member States to:

- discuss violence prevention needs, which are not sufficiently addressed and emerging or potential ways to improve prevention;
- map effective measures and approaches for violence prevention, e.g. how to involve specific target groups and professionals, work with communities, engage men and boys;

- share knowledge and tools for effective risk assessment and detection of vulnerabilities;
- exchange existing good practices and lessons learned.

In 2023, the Commission's **Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN)**<sup>12</sup> developed several activities relating to gender. The two arms of the network, RAN Practitioners and RAN policy support, both addressed this key issue paving the way for an evidence-based, gendered approach to radicalisation. A meeting of the Network's youth and education working group looked at 'Gender-specific resilience building: young men's needs in a changing world'. The aim is to support youth practitioners struggling to deal with increasing misogyny and growing interest in extremist online narratives among the young men they work with<sup>13</sup>. It is important to understand the reasons behind this behaviour; it may be a defence mechanism against a world which these young men

11 [SAAGE Network - Obstetric Violence: Towards new understanding and responses](#)

12 [Radicalisation Awareness Network \(RAN\) - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

13 [RAN Y&E Meeting - How can youth practitioners deal with current polarisation around masculinity? Berlin 12-13 June 2023 - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)



perceive as turning against them – a feeling of vulnerability which extremists exploit<sup>14</sup>.

In February, the **Swedish Presidency** organised a high-level conference 'Economic perspectives on gender-based violence – paving paths to prevention'<sup>15</sup> to explore the

connections between economic empowerment and preventing men's violence against women. In November, **the Spanish Presidency** held an informal ministerial meeting on equality to discuss a common framework to eradicate emerging violence against women<sup>16</sup>.



In June, the parliament in **the Netherlands** voted for a new law on sexual offences<sup>17</sup>. With this law, the government aims to better protect victims of sexual crimes. The law clarifies what constitutes an offence and expands the list of sexually transgressive behaviour. In particular, the new law criminalises having sexual contact if someone knows or should know that the other person has not consented. Further, sexual harassment, both offline and online, is made a punishable offence; so too is exposure to harmful content, including the sending of sexually explicit messages, by adults, to children under the age of 16 (sexting).



In **Finland**, new legislation on sex crimes came into force on 1 January 2023. The new law introduces a broader definition of rape that no longer requires the use of violence or threat of violence and a defenceless victim. In the new legislation, any non-consensual sex act will be considered rape. Unauthorised dissemination of someone else's sexual images was made an offence, and sending unsolicited sexual images is categorised as sexual harassment. The Ministry of Justice has launched a major information campaign about the reform, targeted especially at young adults<sup>18</sup>.

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- 14 Other RAN practitioner and policy support meetings were held on the following topics:  
 - Gender-sensitive approach focusing on trauma in men and boys; See [RAN HEALTH – Gender-sensitive approach focusing on trauma in men and boys – European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#) and the conclusion paper: [RAN HEALTH – Gender-sensitive approach focusing on trauma in men and boys – European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)  
 - Gender-specific approaches: preventive youth work for girls. See [RAN Webinar – Gender-specific approaches: preventive youth work for girls – European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)
- 15 [Economic perspectives on gender-based violence – paving paths to prevention \(archive-it.org\)](#)
- 16 [Informal ministerial meeting on equality \(europa.eu\)](#)
- 17 [Wetsvoorstel seksuele misdrijven | Seksuele misdrijven | Rijksoverheid.nl](#)
- 18 [Seksuaalirikoslaki muuttui – viestintäkampanja ohjaa tietopakettin ääreen \(valtioneuvosto.fi\)](#)



The **Bulgarian** Parliament has adopted an amendment to the Criminal Code that provides for tougher penalties for physical violence. The penalties were toughened after the country was shaken by the case of a 26-year-old man's violence against an 18-year-old ex-girlfriend.



Following a state inquiry in **Malta** into the femicide of Bernice Cassar, killed by her partner while awaiting police action on a protection order breach, the Maltese government has actioned a number of recommendations from the inquiry report. Malta set up its first dedicated domestic violence hub on 29 November 2023, following the launch of the third national strategy on gender-based violence and domestic violence (2023-2028). The hub will be jointly staffed by police officers and social workers. Until recently such services were only available within police stations<sup>19</sup>. Additionally, the domestic violence prevention bill was passed in the Maltese parliament, which enables people to apply for information on the existence of domestic violence convictions against their partner<sup>20</sup>.



On 29 June 2023, the **Belgian** parliament adopted an unprecedented piece of legislation, known as 'the Stop Femicide Law'. This law is not a criminal law but a framework law providing a set of instruments to prevent femicide and to monitor these crimes. Belgium thus becomes the first European country to adopt a comprehensive legal framework to prevent and combat this phenomenon. The Stop Femicide Law distinguished between three types of femicide: intimate femicide (by a partner), non-intimate femicide (for example, where the woman is the victim of a prostitution network) and indirect femicide (for example, when a woman dies following a forced abortion or female genital mutilation). In addition, the law also defines gender-based homicide (when the victim is a transgender man, for example), and concepts relating to violence that can lead to femicide, such as coercive control. The 'gender perspective' is also legally defined for the first time. Though not criminal definitions, these legal concepts can now be used in legislative and judiciary work. The law provides for data collection and analysis relating to femicides and gender-based homicides. It also sets up a scientific committee to analyse individual cases, so lessons can be learned and similar cases prevented and it orders the use of risk assessment and management tools. Lastly, it requires these issues to be covered in mandatory training for police officers and magistrates<sup>21</sup>.

19 [Government says Malta's first domestic violence hub to start operating shortly - The Malta Independent](#)

20 [People can now check on their partners' domestic violence history \(timesofmalta.com\)](#)

21 [Loi sur la prévention et la lutte contre les femicides - \(fgov.be\)](#)



On 15 August 2023, the 'Anti-Violence Act 2.0' entered into force in **Poland**, with amendments to strengthen existing legislation on domestic violence. The measures extend victim protection to include those who have suffered economic violence and cyber-violence. The old term 'family violence' is replaced with the term 'domestic violence' and the Act stipulates that minors are to be treated as victims when they witness violence. Additionally, it introduces psychological and therapeutic programmes for perpetrators, aimed at 'stopping them from using violence and helping them develop self-control and non-violent conflict-management skills'. Perpetrators who refuse to join these programmes will face a prison sentence<sup>22</sup>.

### FUNDING FOR COMBATING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

In 2023, the Commission published a new type of call for proposals under the **Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values** (CERV) Daphne<sup>23</sup> stream: a **call to intermediaries** for proposals to prevent and combat gender-based violence and violence against children. This call targeted organisations and consortia to build capacity and provide financial support to small and grass-roots civil society organisations (CSOs), with a total of EUR 27.5 million available in funding. 12 intermediaries have been selected who will reach out to CSOs involved in combating gender-based violence and violence against children at local, regional national and transnational level, and provide re-granting and capacity building services. Most of the funding is for re-granting (60-80 %). In addition to re-granting, the intermediaries will also support, empower, and build the capacity and sustainability of these CSOs, for example through coaching, knowledge building, thematic training and will promote and ensure respect for EU values.

Seven of the selected proposals focus on gender-based violence and domestic violence, four target violence against children, and one covers both. The activities will run until

2027 and take place across the EU and possibly also in some accession and candidate countries<sup>24</sup>.

### GENDER-BASED CYBER VIOLENCE

Cyber-violence against women and girls continues to proliferate globally. It takes many forms and can have devastating individual, social and economic impacts on victims and their families.

Online misogynistic hate speech, for example, is an everyday phenomenon that has spread with the growth of digital media. The 2023 **Fundamental Rights Agency report on online content moderation**<sup>25</sup> reveals that – across all researched platforms and countries – women are the main targets of online hate. Posts targeting women tend to be more violent than those aimed at other groups, often involving strong and explicit language to threaten women with sexual violence. Women also face higher levels of dehumanising language (comparing people to objects or animals). The phenomenon is exacerbated by the presumed anonymity on the internet and a sense of impunity, which lower people's inhibitions against engaging in such speech. A direct consequence of this type of hate speech is the

22 [Ofiary przemocy zyskały jeszcze większą ochronę i pomoc - Ministerstwo Sprawiedliwości - Portal Gov.pl \(www.gov.pl\)](#)

23 [Funding & tenders - Call for proposals to prevent and combat gender-based violence and violence against children \(europa.eu\)](#)

24 Such as Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Ukraine.

25 [European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights \(FRA\), Online content moderation - Current challenges in detecting hate speech, 2023 \(europa.eu\)](#)

silencing of women online. In some cases, violent or hateful speech can escalate into violence offline.

Over the past year, the Commission has continued to make progress in the fight against gender-based cyber-violence. Since entering into force in November 2022, **the Digital Service Act (DSA)**<sup>26</sup> has successfully achieved all the 2023 milestones on the way to complete enforcement in February 2024. Since 25 April 2023, the Commission has designated **20 very large online platforms (VLOPs) and two very large online search engines (VLOSEs)** as ‘gatekeepers’ in line with the DSA, including X (formerly known as Twitter), Snapchat, Facebook, TikTok, LinkedIn, YouTube, Google and Instagram. These platforms, with at least 45 million monthly active users<sup>27</sup>, are now required to carry out an annual risk assessment to identify, analyse and mitigate a wide array of systemic risks that threaten to undermine people’s fundamental rights. One such systemic risk is the risk of cyber-violence against women and girls, and the related negative consequences for physical and mental wellbeing. Given the vast number of online risks and related harms with a gendered component, the Commission is taking a transversal gender perspective in applying the DSA to VLOPs. For example, the concept of gendered disinformation (e.g. characterising female journalists, advocates or political candidates as not being qualified, lacking the requisite knowledge, intelligence or experience because of their gender) falls within the scope of the DSA. With its risk-based approach, the DSA covers any false or manipulated information intended to cause harm to women or people of diverse genders and sexuality. In this context, the Commission organised the first ever **Digital Services Act stakeholder event** in June 2023 to engage with platform representatives, policymakers, and industry experts<sup>28</sup>. One of the panels considered whether the EU is

doing enough to tackle gender-based violence and cyber-violence, with a focus on the due diligence instruments provided by the DSA<sup>29</sup>.

With the designation of three adult content platforms (Xvideos, Pornhub, and Stripchat) as VLOPs in December 2023, the Commission is poised to address a wide range of illegal activities and practices marked by a gendered dimension, that seem to be prevalent in this particular digital ecosystem. These issues include the dissemination of images depicting child sexual abuse (CSAM), the unauthorised and non-consensual sharing of private images (NCII, see COM/2022/105 final), and broader systemic risks such as human trafficking and modern slavery.

Under the **Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD)**, video-sharing platform providers (and also audiovisual media services providers, meaning broadcasters and on-demand services) are obliged to take appropriate measures to protect the general public from programmes, user-generated videos and audiovisual commercial communications containing incitement to violence or hatred directed against a group of persons or a member of a group based on any of the grounds referred to in Article 21 of the Charter, including discrimination based on sex. The application report of the AVMSD covering the period 2019–2022<sup>30</sup>, published in January 2024, confirms that the revision of the Directive has proven useful for addressing developments in the audiovisual market, such as the growing importance of digital services.

On 8 December 2023, the EU co-legislators reached an agreement on the proposal on harmonised rules on artificial intelligence (AI), the so-called **AI Act** (see also Chapter 4). The draft regulation aims to ensure that AI systems placed

26 [Regulation \(EU\) 2022/1925 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 September 2022 on contestable and fair markets in the digital sector and amending Directives \(EU\) 2019/1937 and \(EU\) 2020/1828 \(Digital Markets Act\), OJ L 265, 12.10.2022](#), p. 1-66.

27 [DSA: Very Large Online Platforms and Search Engines \(europa.eu\)](#) and [Commission designates second set of VLOPs under the DSA \(europa.eu\)](#)

28 [Digital Services Act Stakeholder Event: Shaping the Future of Digital Services | Shaping Europe's digital future \(europa.eu\)](#)

29 For a recording of this session, see [Is the EU doing enough to tackle gender-based and cyber violence? \(youtube.com\)](#)

30 [Staff Working Document, Reporting on the application of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive for the period 2019-2022, 5.1.2024. SWD\(2024\)4 final](#)





The **Danish** parliament unanimously passed a law that will criminalise sexual abuse and exploitation of children and young people. According to the new law, grooming of minors for sexual purpose, i.e. online enticement of children for sexual acts, will be punishable by up to 2 years' imprisonment. Furthermore, online sexual coercion and extortion of children (where the victim is threatened or blackmailed into providing sexual imagery) will under certain circumstances be punishable as rape and thus punishable by up to 8 years' imprisonment (instead of 2).

## SEXUAL HARASSMENT AT WORK

Violence and harassment at work is a widespread and persistent phenomenon, with substantial adverse impacts for employees. This issue is entrenched in gender biases and stereotypes, and disproportionately affects women.

In September 2023, the Council adopted a position (so called 'general approach') on a draft decision inviting Member States to ratify the **Violence and Harassment Convention (ILO Convention 190)**<sup>35</sup>. The 2019 Convention is the first international instrument setting out minimum standards on tackling work-related harassment and violence. Through effective cooperation with the International Labour Organization (ILO), the EU and its Member States played a crucial role in the adoption of the Convention. However, negotiations on the draft decision stalled in late 2020, due to procedural questions raised by some Member States. The final Council decision will be taken after the European Parliament has given its consent. It will pave the way for further ratifications of the Convention by EU Member States.

In December 2023, the Commission adopted an internal **renewed anti-harassment policy**<sup>36</sup>. The new policy package reflects developments at EU and international level, including the entry into force of the Istanbul Convention, ILO

Convention 190, more stringent rules on data protection, and developments in EU case law applicable to harassment. The reform package, which was discussed widely with staff, services and staff representatives, broadened the scope of informal anti-harassment procedure in the Commission and now covers all staff working for the Commission, directly or indirectly and wherever they are based. The renewed framework streamlines and modernises formal and informal redress mechanisms and introduces a new role: the Chief Confidential Counsellor. This senior figure will be the first point of contact for victims wishing to report harassment and all other persons seeking advice on combatting harassment. The Chief Confidential Counsellor will also be responsible for the implementation of the new decision and further development of anti-harassment policy. Training is another important part of the reform, with a particular focus on training for managers, which will become mandatory. Combating harassment goes hand in hand with the efforts to promote a world of work that is safe, respectful, and supports and encourages diversity, all of which are key elements in the overall human resources strategy.

The new **European Research Area (ERA) policy agenda for 2022-2024**<sup>37</sup> sets out several concrete actions relevant to the priority areas set out in the Pact for Research and Innovation<sup>38</sup>. One action, namely Action 5, is concerned with

35 [Decent work for all: Council takes a step forward towards the adoption of the Council decision on violence and harassment convention - Consilium \(europa.eu\)](#)

36 [Daily News 13 / 12 / 2023 \(europa.eu\)](#)

37 [European Research Area Policy Agenda \(europa.eu\)](#)

38 [A pact for RI in Europe \(horizon-europe.gouv.fr\)](#)

promoting gender equality and fostering inclusiveness<sup>39</sup>. More specifically, ERA Action 5 is inspired by and takes note of the 2021 Ljubljana Declaration on Gender Equality in Research & Innovation. It aims to address and counteract sexual harassment within research and academia, amongst other things. A subgroup of the ERA Forum set up for ERA Action 5 in 2023 brings together 22 Member States, 3 associated countries, and 14 EU-level research stakeholder organisations, and will lead the way in delivering of results. One of the four interlinked deliverables for this action is to

ensure gender equality in working environments through institutional change in research organisations and to develop a strategy to counteract **gender-based violence including sexual harassment** in the European research & innovation system<sup>40</sup>. The subgroup's work on the strategy is ongoing and will be made public in 2024. The Commission's flagship event, the European Research and Innovation Days, held in March 2024, will feature a dedicated session on an ERA free from gender-based violence<sup>41</sup>.



The biggest trade union confederation in **Slovenia** (Association of the free trade unions of Slovenia, ZSSS) prepared a freely accessible e-manual on the prevention of gender-based and other types of harassment and mobbing at the workplace. It is intended for workers, union trustees and other union representatives who want to implement a zero-tolerance approach towards all forms of violence. The manual presents the relevant legislation, explains how the topic is dealt with in collective agreements (with examples of good practices) and describes the role of the trade union representative in helping victims. The manual provides a sample workplace harassment diary, a sample declaration of zero tolerance for harassment and violence in the workplace, and a sample agreement to prevent harassment and violence in the workplace.



On 6 July 2023, the **Cypriot** Parliament approved an amendment to the Public Service Law. The amended legislation classifies sexual harassment and harassment in public service as a stand-alone offence. Before the amendment, harassment and sexual harassment were recognised as disciplinary offences involving dishonesty or moral turpitude<sup>42</sup>.

39 [European research area - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://european-research-area.ec.europa.eu/)

40 [Register of Commission expert groups \(europa.eu\)](https://registerofcommissionexpertgroups.ec.europa.eu/)

41 [Research and Innovation Week - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://european-research-area.ec.europa.eu/)

42 [Cyprus Legal News \(cylegalnews.com\)](https://cylegalnews.com/) - in Cypriot Greek

## HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Trafficking in human beings continues to be a serious problem in the EU. This complex criminal phenomenon is systematically addressed through a wide range of EU initiatives. Most victims in the EU are women and girls who are mainly trafficked for sexual exploitation<sup>43</sup>.

The Commission adopted a proposal for a revision of the **EU Anti-Trafficking Directive**<sup>44</sup> in December 2022. On 23 January 2024, the European Parliament and the Council reached a political agreement on **stronger rules to fight trafficking in human beings**<sup>45</sup>. The modified directive will include the exploitation of surrogacy and forced marriage among the forms of exploitation covered in Article 2(3) of the Directive. This requires Member States to criminalise these forms of exploitation in their national criminal law when (or in the case that) all the other constitutive elements of the criminal offence of trafficking in human beings are met. Moreover, knowingly using services provided by victims of trafficking will become a criminal offence. The Directive also provides that the use of communication or information technology for sexual exploitation constitutes an aggravating circumstance.

In October 2023, the Commission delivered on another key action in the EU Strategy on Combating Trafficking in Human

Beings (2021-2025) by launching the **new EU-wide 'End human trafficking. Break the invisible chain'** campaign<sup>46</sup>. The campaign set out to inform the public about the reality behind the different forms of exploitation and urges them to join the fight against it.

The EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator continues to promote and monitor implementation of the **common anti-trafficking plan**<sup>47</sup>. The measures taken as part of the plan contributed to prevent and combat trafficking in human beings. For example, given the high vulnerability of displaced persons from Ukraine and increasingly frequent signs of labour exploitation, Europol coordinated EMPACT Joint Action Days in June 2023 targeting human trafficking for labour exploitation purposes<sup>48</sup>. In September 2023, Europol coordinated a three-day operation targeting online criminal activities that enable human trafficking. The operation focused on websites and social media platforms which the authorities suspected were being used to recruit displaced persons from Ukraine<sup>49</sup>.

Additionally, in April 2023, the Commission started the implementation of six transitional projects for the assistance, support and integration of third country nationals who are victims of trafficking in human beings. The projects have strong gender sensitive elements.

43 Three quarters (75%) of all victims registered in the EU were women and girls. Trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation consistently remains the main form of exploitation within the EU (65% of all registered victims). [Impact Assessment Report accompanying the Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protection its victims, COM/2022/732 final](#)

44 [Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protection its victims, COM/2022/732 final](#)

45 [Fight against human trafficking: Council and European Parliament strike deal to strengthen rules - Consilium \(europa.eu\)](#)

46 [End human trafficking. Break the invisible chain - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

47 [A Common Anti-Trafficking Plan to address the risks of trafficking in human beings and support potential victims among those fleeing the war in Ukraine - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

48 [21 arrested for labour exploitation and 261 victims identified | Europol \(europa.eu\)](#)

49 [Targeted: human traffickers luring victims online | Europol \(europa.eu\)](#)





In **Hungary**, the Ministry of Culture and Innovation has introduced the Award for the protection of human dignity, which is given to a person or organisation for outstanding work in the fight against domestic violence and human trafficking. Up to eight prizes can be awarded each year, with a plaque and cash award.

## SUPPORTING VICTIMS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Victim support is a critical part of efforts to end gender-based violence. Victims who are offered proper support gain the confidence to engage with authorities and take part in legal proceedings. In its 2022 work programme, the Commission announced a possible revision of the victims' rights acquis<sup>50</sup>. In June 2022, the Commission adopted its evaluation of the Victims' Rights Directive<sup>51</sup>. The evaluation shows that over the past ten years, the Victims' Rights Directive has greatly contributed to improving the lives of victims across the EU. However, the evaluation also points that there are still situations where not all victims can fully rely on their rights. To address the problems identified in the evaluation, the Commission adopted a **proposal to revise the Victims' Right** Directive on 12 July 2023<sup>52</sup>. The specific objectives of the proposal and their outcomes have been carefully assessed in the impact assessment for the revision of the Directive<sup>53</sup>. Both the evaluation and the impact assessment included broad targeted and public consultations. The proposed amendments to the Victims' Right Directive relate to five key victims' rights: access to information, improved support and protection, improved

participation in criminal proceedings and easier access to compensation. Discussions on the proposal are underway in Council and Parliament.

**The Victims' Rights Directive** is the main horizontal instrument applicable to victims of all crimes. The Directive fits well with a set of sectorial legislation that responds more directly to the specific needs of victims of specific types of crime, such as victims of trafficking, child victims of sexual exploitation, victims of terrorism, and victims of violence against women and domestic violence.

As outlined above, the provisional agreement on the Commission proposal for a directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence outlines concrete support measures tailored to the specific needs of victims of violence against women or domestic violence, such as the provision of specific support in cases of sexual violence and female genital mutilation, access to national helplines, and increased accessibility of shelters.

In addition, to raise awareness about victims' rights and to promote specialist support and protection for victims with specific needs, such as victims of gender-based violence,

50 [Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220/JHA, OJ L 315, 14.11.2012, p. 57-73.](#)

51 [Commission Staff Working Document - Evaluation of Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220/JHA, SWD/2022/0179 final](#)

52 [Proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2012/29/EU establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220/JHA, COM/2023/424 final](#)

53 [Commission Staff Working Document - Impact Assessment Report Accompanying the document Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2012/29/EU establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220/JHA, SWD/2023/246 final](#)

the Commission has launched the **'Eyes open' campaign on victims' rights**<sup>54</sup>. The campaign aims to create a movement of support and of people willing to see and recognise

victims in their social circle, to help victims use their rights and inform them about the available victim support.



In **Greece**, the government collaborated with Vodafone to create a 'Panic button' app, which women can use to call for immediate help when in danger. The app connects the phone to the police and allows the authorities detect the caller's location so they can intervene promptly. The authorities responsible for providing the service are the Counselling Centres and the Greek Police.



**Italy's** 2023 budget law substantially increased funding for the national strategic plan against male violence against women. For 2024, the law increases financing for victim shelters (EUR 20 million), income support to victims of violence ('freedom income', EUR 10 million), support centres (EUR 5 million), rehabilitation centres for perpetrators (EUR 4 million), and prevention measures (EUR 3 million). The law also establishes an exemption from social security contributions for employers who hire unemployed victims of violence (EUR 1.5 million in 2024).



In 2023, in **Estonia**, the new Victim Support Law came into force. The law introduces for the first time principles governing the treatment of victims and educational requirements for specialists working with victims. It also adds to list of services for victims of human trafficking and introduces principles governing the way those services are provided. The law makes psychological help and support easier to access for victims of domestic and sexual violence recovering from trauma, and the support will now be available regardless of whether criminal charges are brought or not.

54 [Keep your eyes open to the different forms of violence. Victims' Rights \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/en/press-communications/infographic/infographic-eyes-open-campaign-2023-2024)



As part of the Commission's **mutual learning programme on gender equality**, in April 2023 **Romania** hosted a two-day seminar exploring measures to combat domestic violence, including a field trip to the FEMINA emergency centre in Bucharest, a shelter for women and children who are victims of domestic violence. The centre provides 20 beds, as well as social and recreational spaces and a children's playroom. The discussion papers drafted by Member States and a summary report were published on the Commission's website<sup>55</sup>.



The **Swedish** Government is increasing support for local women's and girls' shelters by EUR 4.39 million (SEK 50 million) in 2023, to support those at risk of violence in close relationships, or honour-related violence and oppression. The National Board of Health and Welfare is tasked with distributing the funds to local non-profit women's and girls' shelters given grants for 2023, if they need extra funds. The amount will be proportionate to the funds previously attributed to them<sup>56</sup>.

### CHALLENGING GENDER STEREOTYPES

Gender stereotypes are a root cause of gender inequalities. Gender stereotypes can limit our ability and our aspirations in choosing a field of study or training, pursuing a professional career, and making simple life choices, like picking a hobby. The impact of stereotypes can be even stronger for some people: for instance, if someone has a disability or is from a minority ethnic background, they might experience multiple stereotyping. To tackle gender stereotypes, on March 2023, the European Commission launched an **EU-wide communication campaign to challenge gender stereotypes**<sup>57</sup>, in line with the 2020-2025 Gender Equality Strategy. The **#EndGenderStereotypes** campaign covered gender stereotypes in different areas of life, such as career choices, sharing care responsibilities and decision-making.

The campaign targeted young adults and ran throughout 2023 mostly on social media. The campaign was awarded by Forbes Social Awards 2023.

The Commission has also created an **expert group to develop strategies for creating supportive learning environments and wellbeing in schools**. One of the sub-groups will address gender-specific challenges such as gender stereotypes, gender biases, cyber bullying and sexual harassment. The expert group was launched in March 2023 and will produce EU guidelines for promoting wellbeing, enhancing mental health resilience and preventing bullying at school by March 2024<sup>58</sup>. In the meantime, the network of experts working on the social dimension of education and training (NESET) published a report on 'Achieving student

55 [The EU Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality – Combatting Domestic Violence – Romania – 26-27 April 2023 - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/en/press-communications/infographic/infographic-mutual-learning-programme-on-gender-equality-combatting-domestic-violence-romania-26-27-april-2023)

56 [Extra stöd till de lokala kvinno- och tjejjourerna - Regeringen.se](https://www.regeringen.se/press-och-medier/pressmeddelanden/2023/03/extra-stod-till-de-lokala-kvinno-och-tjejjourerna)

57 [End Gender Stereotypes - European Union \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/en/press-communications/infographic/infographic-end-gender-stereotypes)

58 [New expert group focuses on supporting well-being at school | European Education Area \(europa.eu\)](https://european-council.europa.eu/media/en/press-communications/infographic/infographic-new-expert-group-focuses-on-supporting-well-being-at-school)

well-being for all: educational contexts free of violence<sup>59</sup> and several factsheets:

- ‘Promoting supportive learning environments and supporting wellbeing at school’<sup>60</sup>;
- ‘Social and emotional learning and academic achievement in schools’<sup>61</sup>
- ‘What can schools do about bullying?’<sup>62</sup>
- ‘What motivates children who bully, and can they change?’<sup>63</sup>

In February 2023, Ireland and Austria co-hosted a seminar on the **role of men and boys in advancing gender equality and breaking gender stereotypes**, under the **mutual learning programme on gender equality**. Discussions during the seminar ranged from the need to enhance data collection based on the OECD indicators, how to tackle emerging toxic masculinities amongst young boys, and sustainable funding for projects at local levels. The discussion papers drafted by Member States were published on the Commission website, along with a summary report<sup>64</sup>.



**Ireland** has developed its first, mandatory curriculum on sexual education for 16–18-year-olds for all schools, breaking a tradition of discretionary education on this topic. The curriculum, which is out for public consultation, has an emphasis on healthy relationships, gender stereotypes, and prevention of intimate partner violence. Students will be expected to ‘discuss sexual activity as an aspect of adult relationships characterised by care, respect, consent, intimacy and mutual pleasure’. They will also examine ‘how harmful attitudes around gender are perpetuated in the media, online and in society and discuss strategies for challenging these attitudes and narratives’<sup>65</sup>.



The **BEYOND project**<sup>66</sup>, is coordinated by the Italian Labour Union and was funded from the predecessor of the current funding programme, the 2014–2020 rights, equality and citizenship programme 2014–2020. This project aims to tackle gender equality from a very early age on, by focusing on awareness-raising and training of educators and parents through a variety of methods and tools. The materials developed can be further used for other EU Member States.

59 [Achieving student well-being for all: educational contexts free of violence - NESET \(nesetweb.eu\)](#)

60 [Promoting supportive learning environments and supporting well-being at school \(europa.eu\)](#)

61 [Social and emotional learning and academic achievement in schools - NESET \(nesetweb.eu\)](#)

62 [What can schools do about bullying? - NESET \(nesetweb.eu\)](#)

63 [What motivates children who bully, and can they change? \(nesetweb.eu\)](#)

64 [The EU Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality - The role of men and boys in advancing gender equality and breaking gender stereotypes - Ireland, 16-17 February 2023 - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

65 [Draft Senior Cycle Social, Personal and Health Education \(SPHE\) Specification - For consultation \(ncca.ie\)](#)

66 [Home - BEYOND project - \(beyond-equality.eu\)](#)



The **scientific analysis and advice on gender equality**<sup>67</sup> network organised a thematic seminar entitled 'Women and the media: realising a potential for gender equality' in June 2023. The seminar explored the challenges in media coverage of women (such as lack of participation, misogynistic coverage of violent crimes, and gender stereotyping) and ways to advance gender equality (including good practices). A summary report was published online<sup>68</sup>.

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67 [European network of experts on gender equality - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

68 [SAAGE seminar - Women and the Media: Realising a Potential for Gender Equality](#)

## THRIVING IN A GENDER-EQUAL ECONOMY

In 2022, the EU gender employment gap continued to shrink. Down 0.2 percentage points (pp) on 2021, it now stands at 10.7 pp. While gender inequalities in the labour market remain widespread, this slight decrease is consistent with a long-term trend since 2009, though with marked differences amongst countries.

The World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 pandemic over in May 2023<sup>69</sup>, after it had reclaimed almost 7 million lives. Not yet fully apparent are the long-term economic, social and health impacts of the pandemic, in particular the mental health implications of loneliness, isolation, anxiety and depression and the impact of the lockdowns on education. On the positive side, both women's and men's employment rates have now surpassed their respective 2019 pre-pandemic levels.

As the disruptions associated with the pandemic fade away, protracted geo-political challenges - the continuation of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the ongoing conflict in the Middle East following Hamas' attack on Israel - have impacted supply and pushed up prices. Women suffer disproportionately from inflation and the consequent loss of purchasing power because most low-income workers and pensioners are women.

On the policy side, the need to transpose the Work-Life Balance Directive has significantly shaped national policy developments since 2020. A wide variety of work flexibility measures have been implemented: short-time work, flexible distribution of working hours, part-time work and working from home were all heavily promoted and may help to close gender gaps. Many EU countries have reformed parental, maternity, paternity, and carers' leave for caring for older dependants.

Tackling gender gaps in the labour market, is one of the main objectives of the Gender Equality strategy. Every year, under the European Semester process<sup>70</sup> the Commission proposes to the Council several country-specific recommendations (CSRs) for policy actions aimed at enhancing coordination among Member States on economic, fiscal, employment and social policy as part of the EU's economic governance framework. The European Semester also provides a framework for coordinating and monitoring Member State efforts in delivering on the principles and rights set out by the European Pillar of Social Rights on equal opportunities and access to the labour market, fair working conditions, and social protection and inclusion. Principle 2 of the Pillar specifically addresses gender equality, and principle 3 on equal opportunities. In 2023, the Council, on the Commission's proposal, issued several CSRs<sup>71</sup> in the area of gender equality, among others to Austria and Germany, focusing on increasing female labour market participation and the provision of early childhood education and care [Austria], and reducing disincentives for second earners [Germany]. Other CSRs (for instance in the area of labour market, education and training as well as health and social policies) may also have a positive impact on gender equality, as sometimes also explicitly mentioned in the recitals.

In all Member States, employment rates are higher for men than for women and, as a general pattern, the lower the employment rate for women in a country, the wider the gender employment gap. In 2022, the employment rate for men stood at 80.0 % in the EU while it was at 69.3 % for women, resulting in a gender employment gap of 10.7 pp.

Employment rates for both women and men have been steadily creeping in the last 10 years, interrupted only by the pandemic in 2020. However, since 2018 the upward

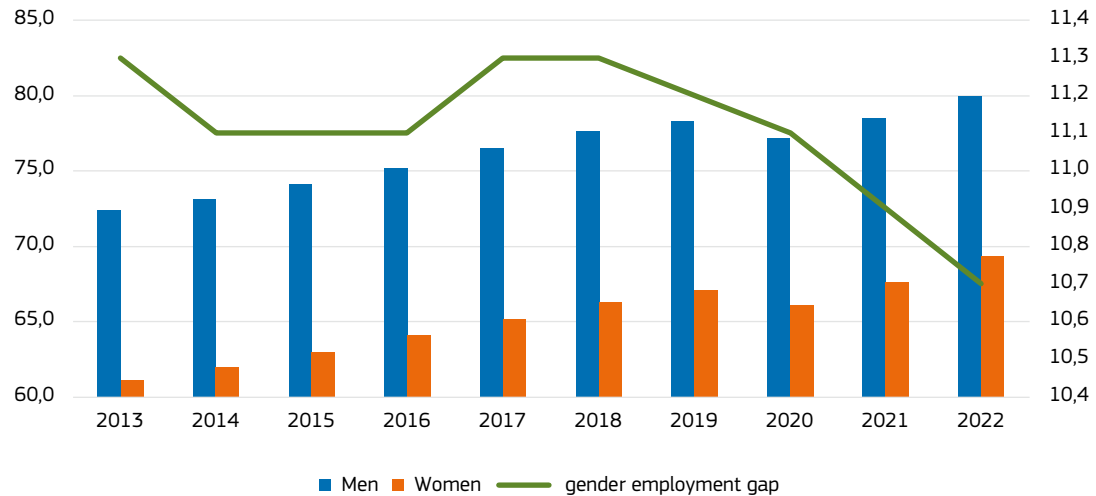
69 [WHO chief declares end to COVID-19 as a global health emergency | UN News](#)

70 [The European Semester - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

71 [2023 European Semester: Country Specific Recommendations / Commission Recommendations - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

trend has been slightly stronger for women, narrowing the gender employment gap from 11.3 pp in 2018 and 10.9 pp in 2021 to 10.7 pp in 2022.

**Figure 1:** Employment rates age 20–64 by sex (percentages, left axis) and gender employment gap (percentage points, right axis) – 2013–2022



Source: Eurostat, ([lfsi\\_emp\\_a](#))

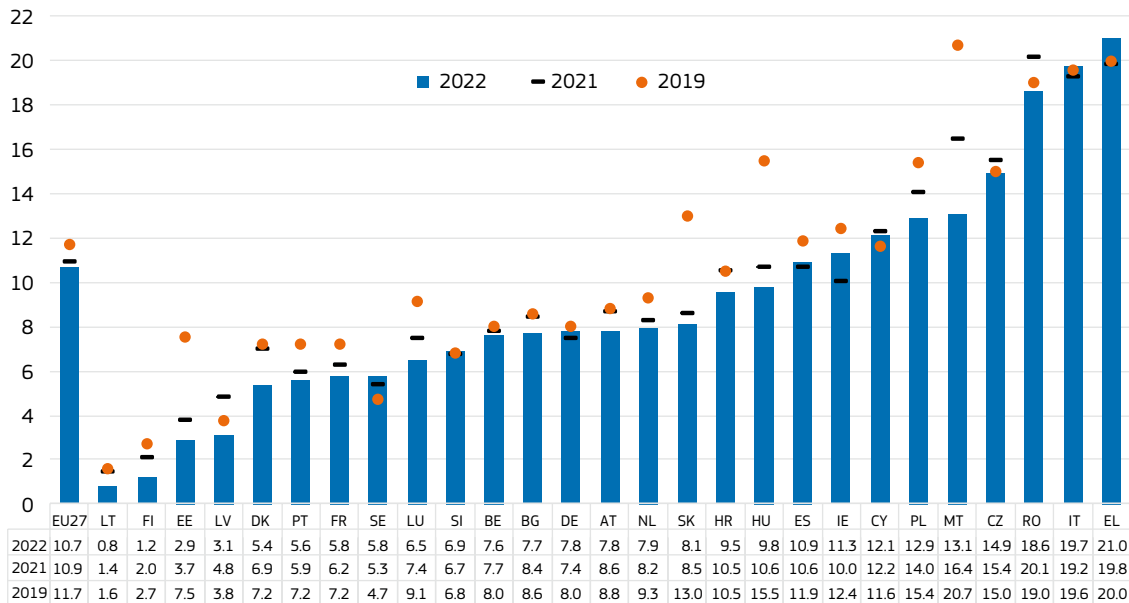
Gender employment gaps vary greatly across countries in the EU. As part of its commitment to promoting inclusive employment, the European Pillar of Social Rights action plan<sup>72</sup> has set a goal to increase overall employment in the EU to 78 % by 2030 and at least halve the gender employment gap compared to 2019. In 2022, the employment rate for people aged 20–64 years in the EU was 74.6 %. However, the gender employment gap has shrunk by just 0.5 pp in the past 3 years. There is therefore some catching up to do to decrease it by a further 5.1 pp by 2030.

In 2022, nine EU Member States (Czechia, Ireland, Greece, Spain, Italy, Cyprus, Malta, Poland, Romania) had greater gender employment gaps than the gap for the EU as a whole. In Italy and Greece just over half of women were employed (55.0 % and 55.9 %, respectively), compared with around three quarters of men (74.7 % and 76.9 %, respectively). The gap actually increased in Greece, Spain, Italy and, particularly, in Ireland. The gap also increased in Sweden (0.5 pp), Germany (0.4 pp) and Slovenia (0.2 pp), which have lower than the EU average gaps. The largest decrease was recorded in Malta (-3.3 pp), followed by Czechia, Denmark, and Latvia (all -1.5 pp). At the other end

72 [Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, COM/2021/102 final](#)

of the spectrum, the gender employment gap was relatively small in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Finland, with gaps of around 3 pp or less.

**Figure 2:** The gender gap in male and female employment rates, persons aged 20-64, years 2019-2022



Source: Eurostat, [lfsa\_ergan].

The gaps are particularly wide for **migrant women**, who generally have worse labour market outcomes than both migrant men and female EU citizens. The reasons for this are multifaceted: Migrant women face additional obstacles to integration compared to migrant men, often having to overcome structural barriers linked to their being both a migrant and female. Increasing the employment rate of migrant women is an objective of the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027.

Age has a clear impact on employment by gender: in 2022, the gap of 4.7 pp among **young people aged 15-24** was

less than half as wide as the gap among those aged 20-64 (10.7 pp). Some countries even had a negative gap, meaning that the employment rate was higher among young women than among young men (in Denmark, Estonia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, and Finland). The differences between countries in young women's employment rates were much greater than the differences for women aged 20-64. They ranged from 75.3 % in the Netherlands to 13.1 % in Greece (a difference of 62.2 pp). The gender employment gap was highest for **workers aged 55 to 64 years** at 12.5 pp in 2022. This was influenced by the increased average duration of working life in the EU, which increased by 5.3 years



for women between 2002 and 2022 compared with 2.9 years for men<sup>73</sup>. Finally, given that the incidence of **part-time work** has fallen slightly at EU level for both women and men<sup>74</sup>, the part-time gender gap has narrowed since 2019 (from 22 pp in 2019 to 20.2 pp in 2022), though it is still almost twice as wide as the gap for total employment. Consequently, the gender employment gap in the **full-time equivalent employment rate** has also narrowed (from 21.6 pp in 2019 to 20.2 pp in 2022).

Another relevant intersection is between gender and disability. Eurostat estimations of disability prevalence in the EU for 2022 show that persons with some or severe disabilities make up around one quarter of the EU population aged 16 and over (27.0 %) and slightly more than one half of the population aged 65 and over (52.2 %)<sup>75</sup>, not including adults living in congregative households (such as residential care homes and hospitals). In 2022, males were less likely than females to report a disability in all of the EU Member States. The largest gender gaps were recorded in Latvia, Portugal, and Romania (at least 9.0 pp). Cyprus, Ireland and Slovenia had the smallest differences between the sexes at less than 2.0 pp. The employment gap of persons with disabilities for the EU27 was 21.4 pp in 2022 and it was larger for men (23.3 pp) than for women (18.9 pp)<sup>76</sup>. This shows not only that the employment gap between persons with and without disabilities remains high -- overall, persons with disabilities have a lower employment rate, are disproportionately affected by unemployment, and leave labour markets earlier -- but that there is also a gender gap experienced by women with disabilities.

Most EU Member States have developed strategies or specific projects to encourage more women to participate in employment as salaried employees or as entrepreneurs. Some countries opted for general employment laws, strategies or plans. Others introduced specific laws, strategies or plans for equal opportunities between women and men, with sections on equal access to employment and reducing gender gaps. Examples include Portugal's 2023-2026 action plan for equality between men and women and Latvia's 2021-2023 plan for the promotion of equal rights and equal opportunities for women and men. Only one country, Slovakia, introduced a specific national action plan for women's employment 2022-2027. Some countries introduced programmes to address specific gaps, such as the gender entrepreneurship gap. For instance, the **Italian** Government introduced a **national certification system for gender equality**<sup>77</sup> -- with an investment of EUR 10 million -- which has already certified 203 companies. Similarly, in the last 8 years, the **Cypriot**, gender equality certification body under the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance certified 67 companies and organisations.

During the pandemic, a large variety of work flexibility measures were implemented to prevent massive unemployment. However, if not correctly designed and used equally by men, working from home, flexible hours, leave and career interruption policies may work against equality in wages and career developments, because it is mainly women (especially low-qualified women) who use them and then suffer the negative income consequences and precariousness often associated with such forms of flexible work.

73 Source: Eurostat, [lfsa\\_ergan\\_Employment rates by sex, age and citizenship \(%\)](#)

74 In 2019, the share of part-time employment was 29.4 % of women workers and 7.8 % men and in 2022, 27.8 % and 7.6 %. Source: Eurostat, [lfst\\_hhptety\\_Percentage of part-time employment by sex, age groups and household composition](#)

75 Source: Eurostat, [hlth\\_silc\\_06\\_Self-perceived long-standing limitations in usual activities due to health problem by sex, age and labour status](#)

76 Source: Eurostat, [hlth\\_dlm200\\_Disability employment gap by level of activity limitation and sex](#)

77 The certification is based on a set of performance indicators related to gender equality policies in the following areas: culture and strategy; governance; human resources (HR) management processes; opportunities for growth and inclusion of women in business; gender pay equity and parental protection and work-life balance. Certified companies are eligible for an exemption from payment of a percentage of the employer's total social security contributions. Further incentives are related to the participation in State aids grants co-financed through European funds and to the participation in public calls where contracting authorities can assign to them a higher score and they are requested lower guarantees. See [Gender Equality Certification System - Home \(pariopportunita.gov.it\)](#)

Several Member States have regulated the right to disconnect (particularly relevant for homeworking) or improved protection for platform workers. Some have bolstered subsidised employment programmes for businesses employing women with flexible arrangements or supported employers who provided company-childcare. Other approaches have featured support services for single-parent families or families in rural areas, including free childcare centres, after-school activities, before-school breakfasts, and summer schools.

Moreover, as part of their measures to implement the **Work-Life Balance Directive**, several countries have introduced or extended parental leave to at least 4 months of which at least 2 months cannot be transferred to the other parent (Denmark, Estonia, Ireland, Spain, France, Cyprus, Latvia, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Finland, and Sweden). Three countries have adopted reforms for merged maternity and paternity leave (Estonia, Spain, and Portugal). Member States have responded to the requirements of the Work-Life Balance Directive by **introducing new paternity leave** of at least 10 working days to be taken on the birth of the worker's child (Bulgaria, Croatia, Latvia, Luxembourg, Hungary, and Malta), or **extending existing leave to 2 weeks or more** (Belgium (20 days), Czechia, France (25 days), Italy, Cyprus, Portugal (28 days), Slovakia and Slovenia). Some Member States (Belgium, Ireland and Spain) have not yet completed their transposition of the Directive and the Commission, in November 2023, decided to refer them to the Court of Justice<sup>78</sup>. The Commission's Network of Legal Experts prepared a Report on the transposition of the Directive in the Member States, based on replies from national experts that should be available in the first quarter of 2024.

However, it is not sufficient to have legal rights: workers should also feel safe to assert those rights and not fear they will be treated unfavourably as a result. In June, together with **EQUINET**, the EU umbrella organisation for equality bodies, the Commission organised a **seminar**<sup>79</sup> on discrimination against workers who used their rights under the Work-Life Balance Directive. At the seminar, good practices were discussed with representatives from equality bodies and labour inspectorates to prevent, detect and tackle unfavourable treatment or discrimination against workers who had made use of family leave or flexible working time arrangements for care reasons. Updates on the latest developments on work-life balance Directive as well as on the Pay transparency Directive (see later) were presented during the **EU Platform of Diversity Charters meeting** in June 2023.

Finally, in January 2023, the Commission presented an initiative to strengthen and promote **social dialogue** with concrete measures at national and EU level. The Commission Communication<sup>80</sup> stresses the importance of reinforcing women's presence in social partners' organisations. Around half of the 44 sectoral social dialogue committees operating at EU level include gender-equality-specific actions in their work programme. The initiative also included a proposal for a **Council Recommendation on strengthening social dialogue** in the EU<sup>81</sup>, which the Council then adopted in June. This requires Member States to support national social partners' participation in social dialogue, including in collective bargaining and in implementation of EU level autonomous social partner agreements, for example by promoting gender equality and equal opportunities for all in terms of representation and thematic priorities.

78 [The Commission refers Belgium, Ireland and Spain \(europa.eu\)](#)

79 [Seminar: Work-Life Balance Directive – Equinet \(equineteurope.org\)](#)

80 [Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on strengthening social dialogue in the European Union: harnessing its full potential for managing fair transitions, COM\(2023\) 40 final](#)

81 [Council Recommendation on strengthening social dialogue in the European Union, 13 June 2023, 10542/23](#)

## CLOSING THE GENDER CARE GAP

One of the main reasons behind differences in employment patterns for women and men is the gendered division of care responsibilities, particularly for children. As the recent winner of the Nobel Prize in economics, Dr. Claudia Goldin, said: 'We are never going to have gender equality until we also have couple equity'<sup>82</sup>.

In most Member States, the impact of parenthood is reflected in lower female employment rates<sup>83</sup> and higher rates of part-time employment among women. In 2022, at EU level, the employment rate for women aged 25-54 with children was 73.7 %, compared to 91.0 % for men with children, i.e. a gender employment gap of 17.3 pp among adults with children against 3.8 pp among workers without

children<sup>84</sup>. Among employed women with children, 31.5 % were in part-time employment compared to 4.9 % of men.

In 2022, employment rates for women did not change much (at around 77 % on average) with the number of children up to two children, while women with three children or more had an average employment rate of 59.5 %. Educational attainment level also has a big effect on female employment rates. Clearly, opportunities for and financial incentives of work vary according to educational level. Still, broadly speaking, the more children, the wider the employment gap between women with low and high levels of education. The employment rate for one-child mothers educated to tertiary level is 87.1 %, compared with 81.7 % for mothers with three or more children. In contrast, for mothers educated to primary level the employment rate is 53.6 % with one child and 30.8 % with three children or more.

**Figure 3:** Gender employment gap (age 25-54) by number of children and education level – 2022

	No children	1 child	2 children	3 children or more
All ISCED (*)	3.8	14.6	17.1	28.0
ISCED 0-2	13.3	28.9	36.6	42.5
ISCED 3-4	4.8	16.1	20.5	31.3
ISCED 5-8	1.3	8.5	9.4	14.3

Source: Eurostat, [lfst\\_hheredch](#)

(\*) International Standard Classification of Education is the reference international classification for organising education programmes and related qualifications by levels and fields

For men the picture is rather different: the employment rate is lowest for men without children (82.5 % in 2022); it increases with the number of children (92.4 % in 2022)

up to two children and only then starts to fall with the third child (87.5 %), though by less than for women. This pattern is the same irrespective of educational level. Moreover,

82 [EIGE Index 2023 Press Release\\_FIN\\_EN.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

83 On average, differences in the employment rates among women between mothers and non-mothers are twice as high for migrants as for the native-born. While individual and cultural preferences are often cited to explain lower activity rates, evidence suggests that migrant women do not choose inactivity voluntarily. Migrant mothers also report higher levels of underemployment and involuntary part-time employment – See [OECD, International Migration Outlook, 2023](#)

84 Source: Eurostat, [lfst\\_hheredty, Employment rate by sex, age groups, educational attainment level and household composition \(%\)](#)

regardless of the number of children, the employment gap between men with low and high levels of education is not as large as for women (max. 3 pp between ISCED<sup>85</sup> 0-2 and ISCED 5-8).

Independently of children, the employment gap between men and women is wider for those with lower levels of education. In 2022, among all workers with a high level of education (with and without children), the gender employment gap was 5.3 pp overall. However, it was 11.9 pp for those with a medium level, and 22.1 pp for those with a low level of educational attainment. Between 2009 and 2022, the number of employed people with a low level of education fell by 24.6 %. This fall followed the significant and steady decline in the population aged 20-64 years with a low level of education. Conversely, the number of employed people with a high level of education increased by 46.4 %, marking the biggest change recorded over this period.

A combination of care services, leaves and flexible work arrangements can support work-life balance and, if well designed, improve gender equality in the labour market. Following the 2022 European Care strategy, Member States have recommitted to increasing the availability of affordable high quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) for children up to compulsory primary school age by setting new **'Barcelona targets'** to be reached by 2030<sup>86</sup>.

According to the EU-SILC indicators for the new Barcelona targets, 35.7 % of children aged under 3 years received ECEC in 2022 (ranging from 2.3 % in Slovakia to 74.7 % in Denmark)<sup>87</sup>. Regarding the second target, 89.2 % of children aged between 3 years and the initial compulsory school age received ECEC. The participation rate of children (aged between 3 and the compulsory primary school age) in ECE (early childhood education), according to the UOE data collection<sup>88</sup>, was 92.7 % in 2021.<sup>89</sup>

It should be noted that the EU statistics on income and living conditions (EU-SILC) and the UNESCO OECD Eurostat (UOE) joint data collection are different data sources having different methodologies, target populations, scopes, and definitions. EU-SILC is a data collection at individual level and relates to persons and households, data is collected through surveys from individuals and, where available, taken from registers while the UOE framework provides internationally comparable administrative data on education systems across countries<sup>90</sup>.

Household income is an important factor in ECEC participation patterns. Children in the lowest quintile tend to receive less ECEC than their peers in the highest quintile. Children in the highest quintile receive the most ECEC. This might be linked to several factors, such as parents being able to afford longer hours of childcare or using those longer hours

85 International Standard Classification of Education is the reference international classification for organising education programmes and related qualifications by levels and fields. For more information see [International Standard Classification of Education \(ISCED\) | UNESCO UIS](#)

86 [Council Recommendation of 8 December 2022 on early childhood education and care: the Barcelona targets for 2030, OJ C 484, 20.12.2022, p.1-12.](#)

87 Source: Eurostat, [ilc\\_caindform25, children in formal childcare or education](#)

88 [UNESCO OECD Eurostat \(UOE\) joint data collection – methodology - Statistics Explained \(europa.eu\)](#)

89 The reference indicator for participation of children below the age of 3 is the new EU-SILC indicator on children in formal childcare or education. The indicator for children of age between age 3 and compulsory primary education is the same indicator used for the target for the European Education Area. It is based on administrative data from the UOE data collection and takes into account the requirements of services to qualify as ISCED 02 category. It is therefore not directly comparable with the similar indicator computed with EU-SILC survey data. Moreover, UOE data are available with a longer time lag than EU-SILC data.

90 In terms of scope, the UOE indicator encompasses early childhood education (ECE) while the EU-SILC indicator relates to early childhood education and care (ECEC). The UOE indicator used for the Barcelona Targets purposes refers to the age of the child at the time of the school year while the EU-SILC indicator relates to the calendar year. Finally, UOE data considers the compulsory primary school age (ISCED level 1) and EU-SILC the initial compulsory school age, which depending on the country, starts at the beginning of primary education (ISCED level 1) or at the end of pre- primary education (ISCED level 0).

to be in full-time employment (which in turn facilitates higher income). In 2022, 65.2 % of children below 3 years in the EU were not in formal childcare compared to 24.8 % who received ECEC for at least 25 hours a week and 9.9 % who received up to 24 hours per week.

The Recommendation pays special attention to take-up of ECEC for children from disadvantaged backgrounds and to closing the ECEC participation gap between children at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROE) and non-AROE children. While AROE children tended to receive less ECEC (in 2022, 17.9 % of children aged less than three years in AROE situation against 46.2 % for non-AROE children)<sup>91</sup>, they stand to benefit most from it in terms of wellbeing and educational outcome and from the potential for raised earnings by carers, mothers in particular.

This attention given to ECEC for AROE children is consistent with the Council recommendation establishing a **European Child Guarantee**<sup>92</sup>. The Recommendation, unanimously adopted in June 2021, calls upon Member States to guarantee for children in need (i.e. AROE children, taking into account their specific disadvantages):

- effective and free access to high-quality early childhood education and care;
- education and school-based activities;
- at least one healthy meal each school day;
- healthcare;
- effective access to healthy nutrition and suitable housing.

The Recommendation points to the need to consider the gender perspective, particularly as regards the enabling policy framework, and measures to prevent and reduce early school leaving. By October 2023, most Member States had prepared their national action plans for implementation of the European Child Guarantee. The first round of two-yearly progress reports by the Member States is expected in March 2024.

The EU Strategy on the rights of the child, that was accompanied by the proposal for a Council Recommendation on the European Child Guarantee, addresses the issue of gender equality for children in several areas. In particular, it mentions as key action for the European Commission to table a recommendation on the prevention of harmful practices against women and girls, including female genital mutilation.

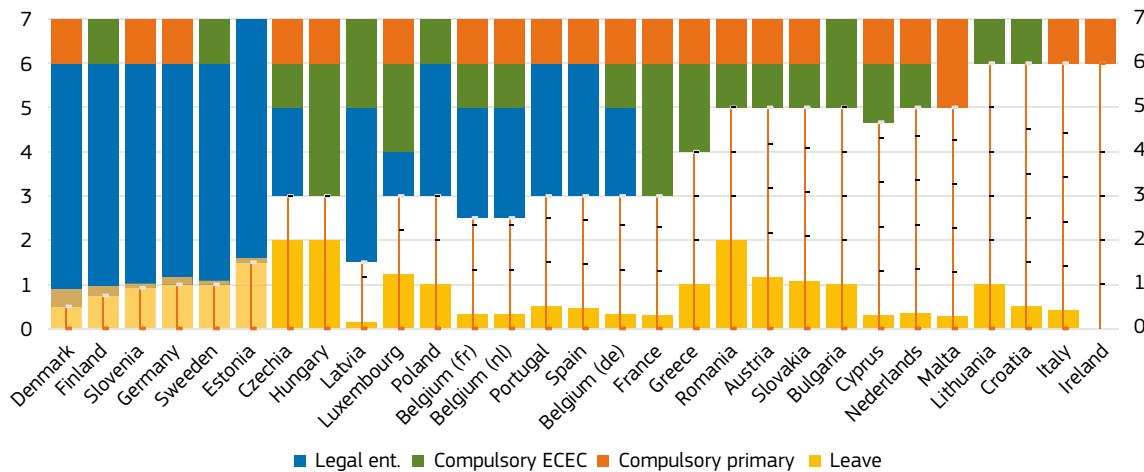
As for **children between age 3 and compulsory primary education age**<sup>93</sup>, a majority of Member States have converged towards – or stagnated around – ECEC participation rates above 90 %. Six Member States (Belgium, Denmark, France, Ireland, Spain and Sweden) have already reached the EU-level 2030 target. In the 2013-2021 period, five outliers emerged with rates below 80 % rates in 2021 and slow progress over time (Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece (2019), Romania and Slovakia). In these countries, participation rates for 3-year-olds are particularly low, below 70 %<sup>94</sup>. Despite substantial progress in previous years, in particular in Ireland, Cyprus, Poland, Finland and Lithuania, the EU average ECEC participation rate among 3 year-olds, at 87.9 % in 2021 (UOE data), has not improved in the last 3 years.

91 Source: Eurostat, [ilc\\_caindform25\\_children in formal childcare or education](#)

92 [Council Recommendation \(EU\) 2021/1004 of June 2021 establishing a European Child Guarantee, OJ L 223, 22.06.2021, p. 14-23.](#)

93 Source: Eurostat, [educ\\_uoe\\_enra21\\_Pupils from age 3 to the starting age of compulsory education at primary level by sex - % of the population of the corresponding age](#)

94 The 2021 ECEC participation rates for Greece are not available, but its 2020 ECEC participation rate among 3-year-olds stood at 33.9 %.

**Figure 4: The 'childcare gap'**


Source: Eurydice, 2023. Note: the childcare gap can be defined as the amount of time a child is not covered either by childcare leave or a guaranteed place in ECEC. The space between two bullets equals one year.

Wider participation in ECEC is often associated with a legal entitlement to an ECEC place or is automatic when attendance is compulsory<sup>95</sup>. Differences in the age at which children have a guaranteed place in ECEC<sup>96</sup> vary widely and if there is no complementary parental leave, families will struggle with the 'childcare gap', i.e. a period during which at least one carer, more often women, will have to provide for childcare and may be forced to stop working or reduce working hours. Several education systems provide for publicly subsidised ECEC from around the age of three or four even if it not a legal entitlement, but many Member States still leave a considerable gap of 1-6 years between the leave entitlement and a guaranteed ECEC place.

Finally, caring for persons with **long-term care** (LTC) needs affects female participation in the labour market, too. While the share of women and men providing informal LTC was similar in 2022 (22 % of women and 21 % of men), 17 % of women reduced their working hours because of care responsibilities, compared with 12 % of men. Moreover, 73 % of men providing informal LTC are supported by other care services used by their care recipient. By contrast, only 61 % of female informal LTC carers are supported by such services, resulting in higher work intensity for them<sup>97</sup>. With current demographic trends, this will become increasingly problematic both for the individuals concerned and from a social sustainability perspective, which was also highlighted

95 Currently ECEC attendance as of age of 3 is compulsory only in Hungary and France.

96 Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Latvia, Slovenia, Finland and Sweden guarantee a place in ECEC from an early age (6-18 months); the three Communities of Belgium, Czechia, Spain, France, Luxembourg, Hungary, Poland and Portugal guarantee a place in publicly subsidised ECEC from the age of 3 years or a little earlier. See [Eurydice \(European Education and Culture Executive Agency\), Structural indicators for monitoring education and training systems in Europe 2023 \(europa.eu\)](#) for details.

97 [A Better Work-Life Balance: Bridging the gender care gap | European Institute for Gender Equality \(europa.eu\)](#)

in the Communication Demographic change in Europe<sup>98</sup>. This is more of an issue for women as they tend to live longer than men and therefore have higher needs for LTC, but they also tend to be less able to afford it, partly because they tend to change working patterns to be able to provide informal care, resulting in lower pensions (see next section).

The 2022 European Care Strategy also included EU-level measures and a **Council Recommendation on access to affordable, high-quality LTC** aimed at improving the situation of both care receivers and providers<sup>99</sup>. Against this background, the Commission launched a strategic partnership with the WHO in July 2023. One of the aims of the partnership is to provide training content to support informal carers. Finally, Member States are called on to improve working conditions for care workers, who are still mostly women, and address skills needs and the shortage of workers. At EU level, the Commission launched a new **sectoral social dialogue committee for social services**<sup>100</sup>, which will discuss working conditions and wages in the sector. Furthermore, the new large-scale partnership for LTC under the Pact for Skills, launched in April, is committed to training

at least 60 % of the long-term care workforce (3.8 million workers) every year by 2030<sup>101</sup>.

Good working conditions, wages and access to training will not only improve the situation of the many women working in the sector but also attract more men into the sector.

## ADDRESSING THE GENDER PAY AND PENSIONS GAP

Though the gender pay gap<sup>102</sup> has been narrowing over the last decade, it is still above 10 % in most Member States. For the EU as a whole, the **unadjusted gender pay gap (GPG)** stood at 12.7 % in 2022 (compared to 16.4 % in 2012) and remained above 15 % in Czechia, Germany, Estonia, Latvia, Hungary, Austria, Slovakia, and Finland. This meant a range of 22 pp, from - 0.7 % in Luxembourg to 21.3 % in Estonia (Figure 5). The combined effect of gender gaps in employment, working hours and pay leads to a high overall gender earnings gap<sup>103</sup> (36.2 % in the EU in 2018).

98 In October 2023, the Commission adopted a Communication presenting a set of policy tools available to Member States for managing demographic change and its impacts on the EU's society and economy, including its global competitiveness: [Communication from the Commission to the European parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Demographic change in Europe: a toolbox for action, 11.10.23, COM\(2023\) 577 final](#)

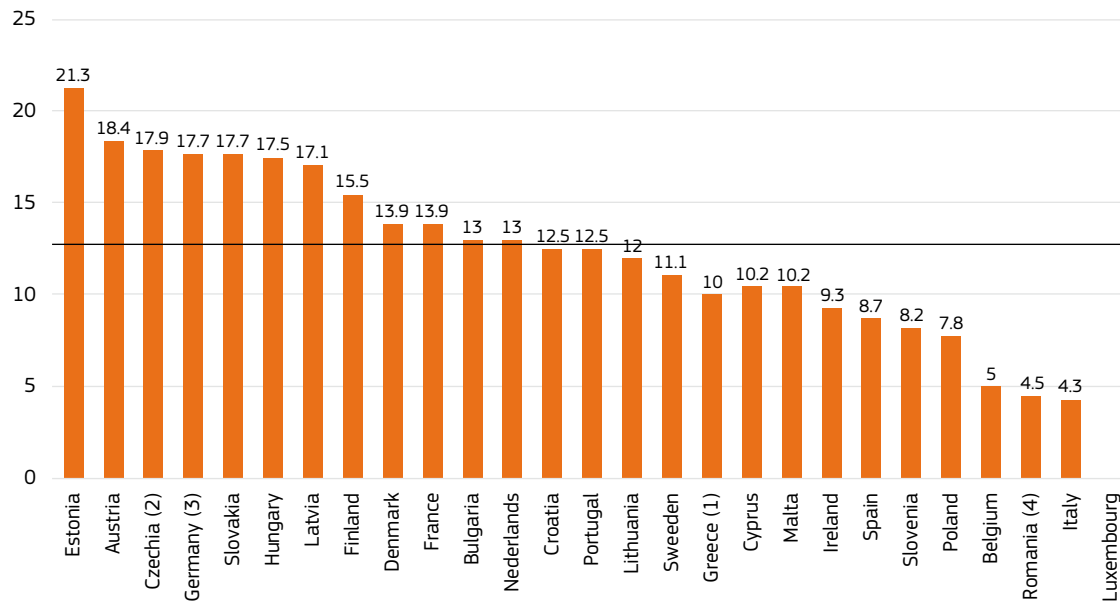
99 [Council Recommendation of 8 December 2022 on access to affordable high-quality long-term care, OJ C 476, 15.12.2022, p. 1-11.](#)

100 [Commission decision setting up the European social dialogue committee for social services - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

101 [Pact for Skills: launch of large-scale skills partnership for long-term care - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

102 The unadjusted gender pay gap is defined as the difference between the average gross hourly earnings of men and women expressed as a percentage of the average gross hourly earnings of men.

103 Source: Eurostat, [teqges01, Gender overall earnings gap](#)

**Figure 5: The unadjusted gender pay gap, 2022**

Source: Eurostat, [sdg\\_05\\_20](#)

**Note:** For all the countries except Czechia: data for enterprises employing 10 or more employees, NACE Rev. 2 B-S\_X\_0, Industry, construction and services (except public administration, defense, compulsory social security); Czechia: data for enterprises employing 1 or more employees, NACE Rev. 2 B-S\_X\_0, Industry, construction and services (except public administration, defense, compulsory social security); All data are provisional except for Denmark, Ireland, Hungary, Malta, Poland and Slovakia.

(<sup>1</sup>) 2018 data; (<sup>2</sup>) Definition differs; (<sup>3</sup>) break in time series; (<sup>4</sup>) estimated.

In some cases, a very low or even negative GPG (meaning that women's average gross hourly earnings are higher than men's) might be linked to a 'self-selection bias', if women's employment rate is very low. This basically means that women that chose to work have on average higher skills and education levels than men, and therefore better pay perspectives, while women that refrain from entering the labour market mostly have lower skills and education levels and low pay perspectives. It is important to consider

this possibility in the interpretation of the GPG. It is also important to bear in mind that the GPG does not measure 'gender pay discrimination'. In its unadjusted form, it simply measures the difference between the average of all earnings of men and women. This is a broader concept than 'equal pay for work of equal value'.

To shed light on the detailed reasons for this difference in average pay by sex, the GPG can be broken down into two



components<sup>104</sup>. The part statistically explained by differences in the average characteristics of male and female employees, and the part that stems from differences in financial returns for the same characteristics. The first part is ‘explained GPG’ and results, for example, from men and women specialising in different jobs (i.e. sectoral and occupational segregation), differences in working time and differences in education level. These differences might well depend on gender stereotypes or other constraints applying more to women than men and must be addressed. However, they do not reflect a difference in pay for same work or work of equal value by the same employer only on grounds of sex (i.e. pay discrimination). Once this part of the GPG is filtered out what remains is a residual component due to other variables that have been omitted or are not measurable. For the EU as a whole in 2018<sup>105</sup> the explained GPG accounted for less than one third of the unadjusted GPG. In other words, the largest part of the GPG is due to non-observable factors, possibly including gender pay discrimination, which in turn relates to non-transparent wage structures.

The **Directive on pay transparency** entered into effect in June 2023 aims to improve the information available in this respect<sup>106</sup>. The new rules will provide for more transparency and effective enforcement of the equal pay principle between women and men and improve access to justice for victims of pay discrimination. This will help ensure that systemic gender bias and undervaluation of women’s work in companies are detected and eradicated by providing a clear framework and criteria for the assessment of work of equal value.

The Directive introduces an obligation for employers to disclose the level or range of initial pay in the job vacancy notice or before the job interview and forbids them to ask prospective workers about their pay history. Moreover, employees will have the right to ask their employer for information on their individual pay level and on average pay levels, broken down by sex, for categories of workers doing the same work or work of equal value. This right will exist for all employees, irrespective of the size of the company. Finally, employers with at least 100 employees will have to publish information on the gender pay gap in their organisation. In a first stage, employers with at least 250 employees will report every year and employers with between 150 and 249 employees will report every 3 years. Eventually – 5 years after a Member State has implemented the Directive – employers with between 100 and 149 employees will also have to report every 3 years. If pay reporting reveals a gender pay gap of 5 % or more that the employer cannot justify by objective gender-neutral factors, employers will have to carry out a pay assessment, in cooperation with workers’ representatives. In case an employer does not comply with pay transparency obligations, the burden of proof in pay discrimination cases will be directly shifted on the employer who will also have to fully compensate victims in case of pay discrimination. Equality bodies, workers’ representatives or other relevant organisations will be entitled to act on behalf or in support of victims in court.

In December 2023, the Council of the EU reached a **provisional agreement**<sup>107</sup> with the European Parliament on a new law to strengthen the independence and powers of national **equality bodies**. The Directive sets out binding

104 Eurostat (2022), [Gender pay gaps in the European Union — a statistical analysis — Revision 1, 2021 edition - Products Statistical working papers - Eurostat \(europa.eu\)](#)

105 The computation of the GPG is based on data from the Structure of Earnings Survey (SES) carried out every four years. The last available data set is for 2018. See [Structure of earnings survey 2018 - earn\\_ses2018 Metadata](#)

106 [Directive \(EU\) 2023/970 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 May 2023 to strengthen the application of the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value between men and women through pay transparency and enforcement mechanisms, OJ L 132, 17.5.2023](#), p. 21-44.

107 [Standards for equality bodies: Council strikes deal with Parliament](#)

standards for equality bodies dealing with equal treatment and opportunities between women and men in the area of employment and occupation<sup>108</sup>. It requires Member States to ensure that equality bodies are independent and have sufficient resources and powers to carry out their mandate.

The European Commission intends to support the development of tools and methodologies for EU employers to correct any unwarranted gender pay differences. In 2023, it allocated about EUR 4 million under the **CERV programme**<sup>109</sup> to support implementation of the Pay Transparency Directive in Member States, in particular for tools and methodologies for assessing work of equal value. Member States have until June 2026 to implement the Directive in national law.

As mentioned in the previous section, another factor influencing participation in the labour market and therefore pay levels is the impact of care responsibilities by gender. Career interruptions, lower working hours and adapting working patterns to care responsibilities in general result in a loss of revenues that cumulates over the life-course. Specific data on this are not available, but the GPG is generally much lower for new labour market entrants and tends to widen with age.

The GPG is a key driver of gender differences in old age poverty. The gender pension gap persists, although it narrowed from 33.1 % in 2010 to 27.6 % in 2020 and 26.0 % in 2022<sup>110</sup>. At the same time, the gender difference in the at-risk-of-poverty rate for people over 65 moved from -6.83 in 2014 to -8.47 in 2022<sup>111</sup>. The Social Protection Committee and the European Commission publish a pension adequacy

report every three years. The 2024 report will mainstream the gender dimension and provide extensive analysis on the gender pension gap and good practices to address it. The Commission also financed an external study supporting the monitoring of care credits in occupational pension schemes. The study aimed to identify how care periods (childcare and LTC) are treated in fully funded occupational pension schemes and if any care credits are provided. The study will offer an EU-wide overview and five case studies (Belgium, Denmark, Spain, Netherlands, and Sweden). The report will be available in 2024.

Every year, the Commission draws attention to the importance of eliminating the GPG by marking Equal Pay Day – the day on which the average salary of women symbolically stops being paid. In 2023, it was on 15 November<sup>112</sup>.

### **ACHIEVING EQUAL PARTICIPATION ACROSS DIFFERENT SECTORS OF THE ECONOMY**

Sectoral segregation is one of the reasons behind the GPG. Women tend to be overrepresented in sectors with average low pay, often because jobs in these sectors are considered ‘women’s work’, such as care and education. As highlighted in the European Care strategy, these are also sectors in which labour shortages are increasingly prominent and likely to increase with population ageing and especially in rural areas. Low pay may also be linked to gender stereotypes which characterise the soft skills required for care, such as communication, empathy or cooperation, as skills that would come naturally to women and gender bias which attributes low economic value to such work.

108 It is expected that European Parliament will have a final plenary vote in April 2024 on this Directive and on a parallel Directive with similar content, based on 19 TFEU (on which Member States reached unanimity in February 2024) and applying, among others, to Gender equality in fields of goods and services and social security.

109 [Call-fiche\\_cerv-2024-ge\\_en \(europa.eu\)](#)

110 Source: Eurostat, [ilc\\_pnp13, Gender pension gap by age group](#)

111 The indicator is defined as the absolute difference between males and females in the at-risk-of-poverty rate for single-person households. Source: Eurostat, [ilc\\_pnp12, Gender differences in the at-risk-of-poverty rate by age](#)

112 [Equal Pay Day - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

In January 2023, the Commission set up an expert group to help monitor the national implementation of the **Directive on adequate minimum wages**<sup>113</sup> by Member States. The group's specific objective is to discuss progress in implementing the Directive through national law. The Directive establishes a framework for the adequacy of statutory minimum wages, promoting collective bargaining on wage-setting, and giving workers effective access to minimum wage protection in the EU. Member States must adopt the measures required to comply with the Directive by 15 November 2024<sup>114</sup>.

Gender stereotypes place constraints on life choices, education and employment options. In turn, these constraints perpetuate stereotypes and more broadly, unequal gender power relations in the public and private spheres<sup>115</sup>. Though it is difficult to gauge to what extent differences in the average of choices are linked to differences in average preferences, reflect gender stereotypes or a combination of both, differences in patterns are visible. For example, even if there are more women than men university graduates in the EU, the proportion of women students in STEM disciplines (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), which have better pay and career prospects, is persistently lower than the proportion of men. As a telling example, while men in the last 10 years were on average around 46 % of tertiary graduates, they concentrated in the ICT sector and represented just over 80 % of total ICT graduates; in other words, women graduates in the ICT sector were less than 2 % of female graduates, increasing only 0.6 pp between 2013 and 2021<sup>116</sup>.

And the situation is not improving at EU level. In the labour market, gender segregation across both sectors and occupations has remained stable since 2019, with very

tiny reductions in 2022. Strong correlations are observed between gender segregation in economic sectors on the one hand and occupations on the other: In countries where sectoral gender segregation is high, gender occupational segregation also tends to be high. National policies addressing gender segregation in economic sectors, occupations and education most commonly target sectors with stronger technical content, basically STEM and ICT activities, which tend to have higher levels of pay; education, health and welfare sectors are not addressed by policies as often.

The Commission put forward a number of sectoral initiatives to support equal participation of women in the labour market. Especially in ICT sector, there is a severe and persistent gender gap which impacts on how digital solutions are designed and deployed. In 2022, 81.1 % of employed ICT specialist were male<sup>117</sup>. Leveraging women's contributions is therefore essential for tackling the shortage of ICT specialists and building an inclusive digital Europe. At EU level, the 2030 Digital Decade policy programme sets the ambitious target of more than double the number of ICT professionals from 9 million to 20 million in the Union by 2030, with convergence between women and men, and increasing the number of ICT graduates.

The **Digital Europe programme**, now includes a specific coordination and support action (CSA), called 'Girls and Women in Digital'. This CSA aims to enhance girls' and women's involvement in ICT, advancing on the Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030 target mentioned above as well as on the Women in Digital Declaration goal of equality in tech. The main objectives of this action are to identify obstacles hindering girls and women in ICT, showcase effective actions to boost their representation, and create a network of expertise and a community of practice

113 [Directive \(EU\) 2022/2041 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on adequate minimum wages in the European Union, OJ L 275, 25.10.2022, p. 33-47.](#)

114 The Directive is currently challenged before the Court of Justice, see case C-19/23

115 [EIGE, Study and work in the EU: set apart by gender, 2018](#)

116 Source: Eurostat, [educ\\_uae\\_enrt03\\_Students enrolled in tertiary education by education level, programme orientation, sex and field of education](#)

117 [ICT specialists in employment - Statistics Explained \(europa.eu\)](#)

to support their participation in the digital sector across Europe. The call text was published on 15 February ('Girls and Women in Digital' on the Funding and Tenders Portal), and the call itself will open for project proposals at the end of February 2024<sup>118</sup>.

In May 2023<sup>119</sup>, as part of the Digital Europe programme, the Commission launched an open call for proposals for a large-scale project (EUR 6 million) to boost digital skills among young people, particularly girls. One of the main objectives of this call is to scale up the **EU Code Week** initiative to spread computational thinking and coding to as many people as possible. Given that half of all EU Code Week participants are female, the initiative will help closing the gender gap among ICT specialists and graduates in the EU. In addition, it offers targeted measures, including role models and support, often lacking for girls and young women - to overcome the lack of confidence and negative stereotypes.

The Commission also maintained previous programmes: the **Women TechEU** (see also Chapter 3) scheme to fund deep-tech start-ups led by women in the 2023-2024 Horizon Europe work programme, with a total indicative budget of EUR 15 million<sup>120</sup>; the **Girls Go Circular**<sup>121</sup> free online learning programme for 14-19 year old girls, which has trained over 38 000 girls and by the end of 2024 will be available in all EU Member States and beyond; and the **ESTEAM Fests** for girls and women<sup>122</sup>. So far, a total of 7 Women Fests and 8 Girls Fests were organised, reaching 1529 girls and women across 9 countries. The focus is on building participants' confidence while boosting their digital and entrepreneurial competences through training.

The **Erasmus+ Programme** promotes equal opportunities by reaching out to people with fewer opportunities. The 2024 annual work programme includes measures to: foster gender balance in higher education institutions, across fields of study and in leadership positions; support girls' interest in STEMs and overcome gender stereotypes in education and educational careers; promote gender balance in traditionally 'male' or 'female' professions and address gender and other stereotypes in the vocational, education and training (VET) sector; achieve greater gender balance in ICT-related studies and professions; overcome the obstacles preventing girls and women from pursuing a VET career in the green/clean technology sector and increase the participation of women in the sector; and promote gender equality through sport.

The **Council Recommendation on improving the provision of digital skills in education and training**<sup>123</sup>, adopted on 23 November 2023, looks at the educational offer of digital skills at all levels (basic, advanced and specialist skills) and for all sections of the population (e.g. young people, adults and professionals) in an inclusive manner and as part of a lifelong learning. The Recommendations calls on Member States to close the gender gap in digital skills levels for teachers; promote diversity and a gender-balanced uptake and reduce any possible stereotype in the teaching and learning of IT; prioritise efforts to close the gender and pay gaps and provide targeted up- and reskilling opportunities for girls and women at all levels of education and training. It also welcomed the Commission's intention to support Member States in promoting gender-sensitive teaching of digital skills in primary and secondary education. The Commission would do this by identifying innovative scalable teaching practices to address institutional and cultural barriers to girls' aspirations and their access to ICT studies and careers in the EU.

118 [Funding & tenders \(europa.eu\)](#)

119 [Digital Europe Programme's multiannual work programme for 2023 - 2024 | Shaping Europe's digital future \(europa.eu\)](#)

120 [Women TechEU - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

121 [Girls Go Circular | Digital and Entrepreneurial Skills for the Circular Economy \(eit-girlsgocircular.eu\)](#)

122 [ESTEAM Fests and Communities for girls and women - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

123 [Council Recommendation on improving the provision of digital skills and competences in education and training of 23 November 2023, 15740/23](#)

In 2023, the **Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA)**, which is the EU's reference programme for doctoral education and postdoctoral training since 1996, continued to organise outreach events such as the 'European Researcher Nights', 'Researchers at Schools' and 'Science is Wonderful!', which place great importance on the promotion of female role models in science and research and inspire girls and women to participate in science and innovation. MSCA continued to promote gender balance in research and research management teams and considered the gender dimension in research and innovation content, contributing to ensuring that female researchers make up at least 42 % of MSCA fellows, far above the average EU research population.

The calls for proposals under the **prerogative budget lines for social dialogue** contain a general condition that the activities funded should pay sufficient attention to gender equality and avoid discrimination. The findings from the evaluation of the 2023 calls are not yet available. However, in 2023, as an outcome of the prerogative calls for 2022, the Commission started funding gender equality projects in the agriculture, foods and drinks, tourism and domestic work sectors, and for industrial relations as mobilising levers of gender equality in employment.

The Commission has supported various projects for gender equality in the construction sector and the topic is one of the recommendations for actions of the **transition pathway for construction**<sup>124</sup>. The recent **'blueprint for sectoral cooperation on skills – construction'** provided an overview of various initiatives in this regard<sup>125</sup>. The topic is also an important part of the Pact for Skills in construction initiative. In October the High-Level Construction Forum

organised a webinar on these two flagship initiatives, also tackling equality in construction. The construction sector suffers from an overall poor public perception connected to low job security, tough working conditions and health and safety concerns. Construction is also stereotypically seen as a 'man's job'. Amidst the well-recognised shortage of skills in the sector, several Member States and industrial stakeholders have launched initiatives to attract more women into construction, and to help female workers advance in their construction careers. In the **Pact for Skills**<sup>126</sup>, the gender dimension is present in the commitments of 18 of the large-scale skills partnerships. The **European Alliance for Apprenticeships** gave a webinar in November 2023 on apprenticeships in the construction sector. It looks at gender stereotypes in the sector and presented an initiative to attract women into it<sup>127</sup>. In addition, a community of practice on social inclusion and gender equality was set up in 2023 among interested members of the Alliance.

In May, on European Maritime Day, two projects from the **'Women in the Blue Economy'** call supported under the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund<sup>128</sup> (EUR 2.5 million) were launched in Brest (France).<sup>129</sup> The objective behind the call is to help increase the participation of women in different sectors of the Blue Economy, such as fisheries, aquaculture, shipbuilding, maritime transport, offshore renewable energy, blue bioeconomy, etc. across the European sea basins. One of the main outputs of the projects is increased knowledge and data on gender equality in the blue economy. The projects also help sustainable blue economy sectors to embrace deep, structural change to facilitate the inclusion of women and provide them with the necessary tools and visibility to get involved in the

124 [DocsRoom - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

125 [Construction Blueprint - construction industry](#)

126 [Homepage of Pact for skills \(europa.eu\)](#)

127 [Webinar: Apprenticeships in construction – driving the green transition in the EU through the Renovation Wave - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

128 [Regulation \(EU\) 2021/1139 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 July 2021 establishing the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund](#)

129 [Women in the Blue Economy projects ready to start: Think Big, go Blue! - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

blue economy<sup>130</sup>. In its external action, the EU negotiations sustainable fisheries partnership agreements with third countries, where among others it supports projects with women as main beneficiaries.

In the transport sector the Commission continued to support the **'Women in Transport – EU platform for change'**<sup>131</sup>, which brings together organisations and companies committed to increasing female employment in transport and facilitates the sharing of best practices. The platform has attracted several new members who are proposing actions to promote and support women workers in the transport sector. The platform also participates in stakeholder events and cooperated with the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union and the maritime industry (the least gender-balanced transport sector) to organise 'Honours for Diversity and Inclusion in Maritime'. The objective was to give awards to and showcase teams, organisations and individuals who are making a significant contribution to improving gender balance, equality, diversity and inclusion

in the maritime sector at EU and international level. The Belgian Presidency will host an award ceremony on International Women's Day 2024 (8 March) in the framework of a conference on the wellbeing of seafarers<sup>132</sup>.

The network of **Diversity Ambassadors in Transport**<sup>133</sup>, which took on more than 80 members in 2023, its first year of existence, aims promote diversity, equality and inclusion within the EU transport sector, through raising awareness and sharing information on and developing and implementing initiatives to promote diversity in the EU transport sector, both from the perspective of transport workers and transport users. Women's perspective as users in transport is particularly relevant as they tend to be more sensitive than men to mobility constraints as they often face longer total trips divided into shorter, more frequent, more dispersed and complicated trips during the day, making use of different transport modes ('trip chaining') due to many household and caring chores. Moreover, they tend to be less likely to be able to afford a car<sup>134</sup>.

130 [WOMEN IN BLUE ECONOMY | WIN\\_BIG \(winbigproject.eu\)](#) and [Winblue Project \(winblue-project.eu\)](#)

131 [Women in Transport – EU Platform for change - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

132 [Brussels Conference on the Wellbeing of Seafarers](#)

133 [Diversity Ambassadors in Transport - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

134 See JRC, '[Transport Poverty: A systematic literature review in Europe](#)', 2022.

## LEADING EQUALLY THROUGH SOCIETY

There was some progress in women's leadership in the EU in 2023, but it was limited and is not yet sustainable. Data from the Gender Equality Index 2023 published by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), presented in greater detail below, shows that despite some progress in the domain of power<sup>135</sup> achieving gender parity in decision-making is a long way off.

Women must be empowered to participate throughout the political process, from casting ballots to standing as candidates for election. During the Polish national elections in October 2023, women voters' turnout reached its highest level in the history of democratic elections in Poland – 72.9 %. This has been partly attributed to the prominence of women's rights issues in manifestos but indicates a general increase in the mobilisation of women.

Women in all areas of public life, particularly politicians<sup>136</sup>, journalists, and women working in civil society, **constantly face online violence and hate**. These gendered online attacks, ranging from misogynistic comments to threats, can also **escalate to physical violence**, stalking, and in extreme instances, femicide<sup>137</sup>. This is a factor to bear in mind when looking at the most recent data.

### WOMEN IN POLITICAL DECISION-MAKING

With the European Parliament elections taking place from 6-9 June 2024, public attention has turned to the status of women in politics, from the widely discussed barriers to entry to the emerging issue of retention.

On 6 March 2024, the Commission held a **high-level event in Brussels on women in public life** in the context of the upcoming elections, with panels covering women in politics, journalism, and civil society. The panels discussed the problem of women leaving public-facing positions earlier than their male counterparts, despite gains made in increasing representation, with the aim of coming up with a catalogue of concrete solutions to end this trend, including engagement of media platforms, regulatory bodies, and the political parties themselves.

Following its latest state of play briefing on women in politics<sup>138</sup>, the **European Parliament published an analysis of the use of quotas** as part of their thematic research for the elections. Gender quotas are one of the most commonly cited measures to increase women's representation in political decision-making, but remain highly controversial amongst Member States. Research shows that overall, quotas improve gender balance in politics if well designed and accompanied by effective penalties. Some countries achieved gender balance without resorting to the use of quotas (including Denmark, Finland, Sweden), although this could be influenced by other socio-cultural factors<sup>139</sup>.

As of July 2023, **11 Member States** (Belgium, Greece, Spain, France, Croatia, Italy, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Romania and Slovenia) have binding gender quotas for European elections in their legislation. The two EU countries that apply the single transferable vote system (Ireland and Malta) have binding gender quotas for national elections, but not for European ones.

<sup>135</sup> The Gender Equality Index is a tool to measure the progress of gender equality in the EU. Core areas covered in the Index are work, money, knowledge, time, power and health.

<sup>136</sup> For more information, see also [JRC, 'Breaking the silence: Violence against women in politics', February 2024](#)

<sup>137</sup> ['Online vitriol could undo decades of political progress, warns Dutch deputy PM', The Guardian, November 2023](#)

<sup>138</sup> European Parliamentary Research Service, ['Women in politics in the EU', March 2023.](#)

<sup>139</sup> European Parliamentary Research Service, ['Towards gender balance in the European Elections. Electoral quotas – What can they achieve?', September 2023.](#)

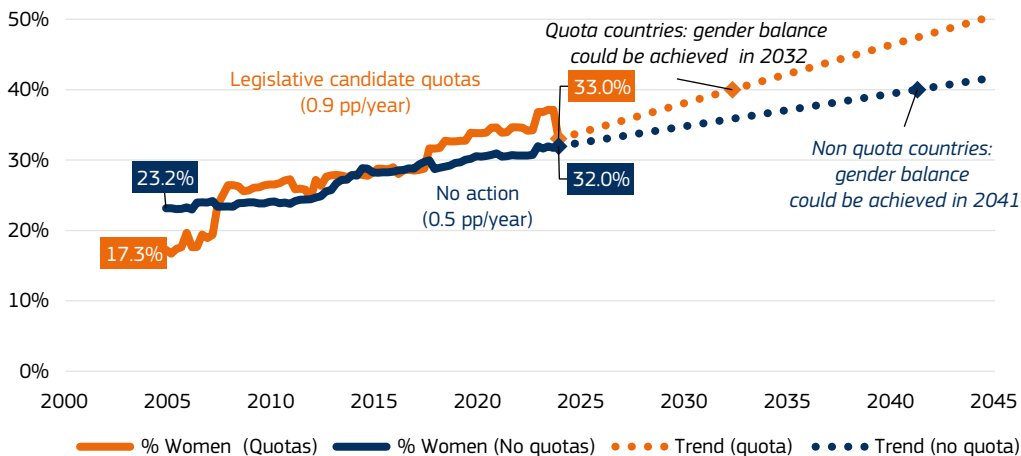


In some countries which do not have legislative quotas, some political parties have **voluntary internal quotas**, which can allow for greater ambition. For example, in Germany, the Alliance 90/The Greens (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen) setting a quota for 50 % women, one of the top two places and all uneven places afterwards reserved for women if candidates available, The Left (Die Linke), Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) making use of zipped lists<sup>140</sup>, and the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU) adopting a rule in September 2022 for women to fill 50 % of the top 10 positions on their list by 2025<sup>141</sup>.

Research by EIGE indicates that regardless of voluntary quotas, **countries with no legislative quotas may take longer to achieve gender balanced parliaments**. EIGE's

projection focuses on a 'quota group' which consists of: Belgium, Ireland, Greece, Spain, France, Croatia, Italy, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal and Slovenia. With the caveat that the composition of the groups of countries with/without quotas changes over time, both the quota group and the no-quota group reached similar levels of women's representation (33.0 % vs 32.0 %, respectively). However, EIGE's projections estimate that if their respective rates of change continue, countries with legislated quotas could achieve gender balance in under 9 years (by 2032), while the no quota group will take a further 9 years (by 2041). Although applying a quota to candidate lists does not guarantee that a similar share of women is elected, the data overall show that applying legislative quotas has a positive impact, with those without progressing at a slower speed.

**Figure 1:** Proportion of women in the single/lower houses of national parliaments in EU Member States with and without legislative quotas or action, 2004Q4-2023Q4



Source: Own calculations based on data from EIGE Gender Statistics Database: [National parliaments](#)

Notes: Data exclude HR for 2004-2006. Countries added progressively to the quota group as legislation was adopted. MT is included in the quota group. RO is included in the non-quota group.

140 Practice of parties alternating men and women candidates in lists where citizens vote for a party, rather than an individual.

141 European Parliamentary Research Service, [Towards gender balance in the European Elections, Electoral quotas – What can they achieve?](#), September 2023.



A **'High Level Event on Elections'** took place on 23-24 October. The event featured a session on the importance of inclusive political representation, applying an intersectional lens. Key speakers included Women Political Leaders network, with the discussion focused on principles and strategies to achieve increased representation of women in elections across the EU. Member States have discussed inclusive participation and participation of women in elections also in the meetings of European Cooperation Network on Elections.

The **Commission Recommendation on inclusive and resilient electoral processes** contains recommendations on gender equality identifying a number of measures for Member States. These include encouraging gender balance in governing bodies of electoral management bodies, promoting measures such as alternating women and men on candidate lists, and linking the allocation of public funding for political parties to gender parity, internal party policies and training.<sup>142</sup> In the Commission's Guide on good practices in Member States addressing the participation of citizens with disabilities in the electoral process there is an explicit reference to the impact of intersecting characteristics such

as age, gender, and socio-economic status on their political participation<sup>143</sup>. The Guide recognises that despite significant efforts made at different levels to tackle these issues, much work remains to be done to support the exercise of democratic and electoral rights of citizens with disabilities.

The latest figures show that **only 6 Member States achieved a gender balance above 40 %** among their members of parliament (single/lower house), with Sweden reaching 46.6 % and Finland a close second at 46 %. At the other end of the scale, women make up less than 25 % of members of parliament in 7 Member States. In descending order these are Bulgaria, Ireland, Slovakia, Greece, Romania, Cyprus, and Hungary<sup>144</sup>.

The overall proportion of women members in single or lower houses of parliament **currently stands at 33 %**<sup>145</sup>. This is a slight increase, following a fall from 33.2 % to 32.4 % in 2022. Given that the **European Parliament currently has a gender balance of members**<sup>146</sup> of 40 % women and 60 % men<sup>147</sup>, progress at national level has somewhat stagnated in recent years. This illustrates the amount of work still needed to achieve equal representation.

142 [Commission Recommendation \(EU\) 2023/2829 of 12 December 2023 on inclusive and resilient electoral processes in the Union and enhancing the European nature and efficient conduct of the elections to the European Parliament, OJ L 2023/2829, 20.12.2023.](#)

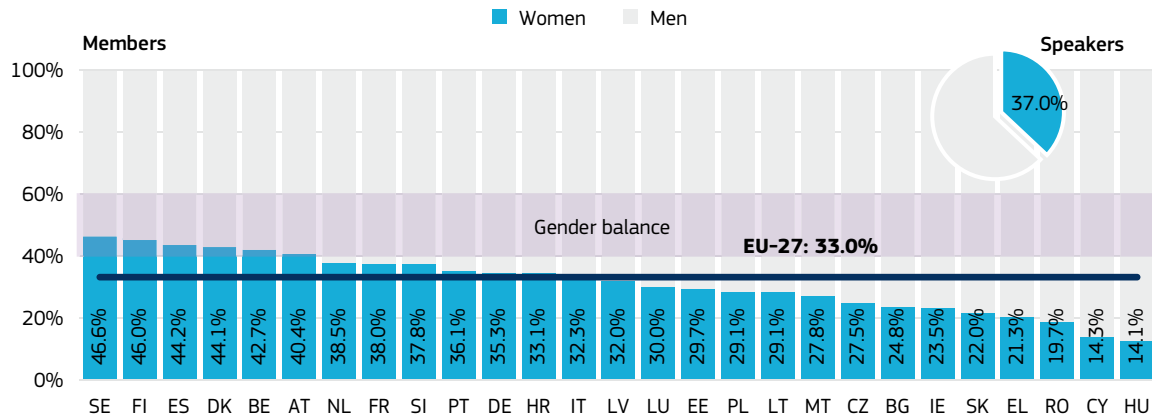
143 European Commission, ['Guide of good electoral practices in Member States addressing the participation of citizens with disabilities in the electoral process' European Commission, December 2023](#)

144 Source: EIGE gender statistics database, Database last updated December 2023. [Indicator: women in decision-making | politics | National parliaments: presidents and members](#)

145 Source: EIGE gender statistics database. Data last updated December 2023. [Indicator: women in decision-making | politics | National parliaments: presidents and members](#)

146 The standard measurement of 'gender balance' applied for participation in political decision-making is at least 40 % of each gender, with national standards varying within this range.

147 Source: EIGE gender statistics database. Data last updated December 2023. [Indicator: women in decision-making | politics | European parliament: president and members](#)

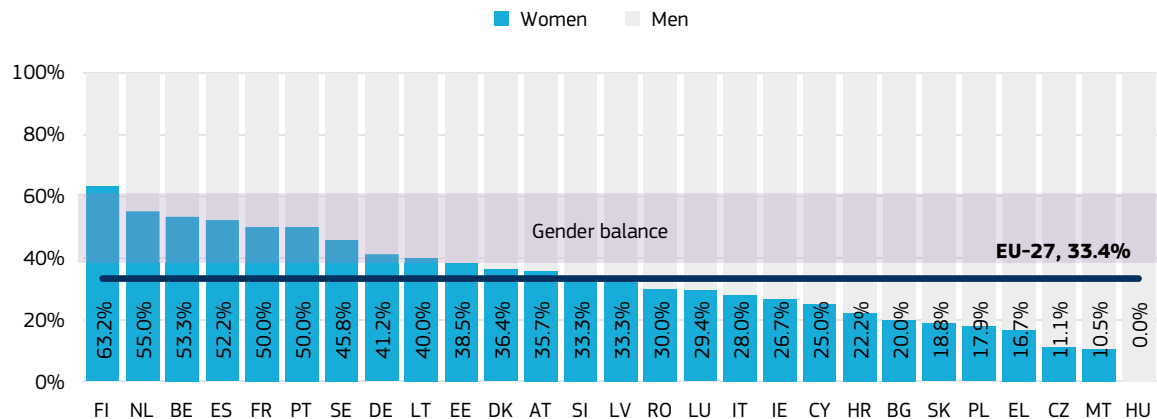
**Figure 2: Percentage of women and men in single or lower houses of national parliaments in the EU December 2023**

Source: EIGE Gender Statistics Database: [National parliaments](#)

The **percentage of female senior ministers across the EU is 33.4 %**, an increase of 1 pp from 32.4 % in 2022<sup>148</sup>. In **8 Member States a gender balance of at least 40 %** was achieved at senior level (Belgium, Germany, Spain, France, Lithuania, Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden).

This is a slight decrease from 2022 when 10 Member States reported gender balance. At the opposite ends of the spectrum, **Finland reported having a majority of women (63.2 %)**, while **Hungary currently does not have a single woman senior minister**.

148 Source: EIGE gender statistics database. Data last updated December 2023. [Indicator: women in decision-making | politics | National governments: ministers by seniority and function of government](#)

**Figure 3:** Share of women and men in governments (senior ministers), November 2023

Source: EIGE Gender Statistics Database

While women's representation overall in governments is a sound starting point, it is also relevant to consider the portfolio's assigned to women and whether these can be considered 'core functions' (such as foreign and international affairs, defence, and justice) or more side-lined portfolios, such as social affairs or culture.

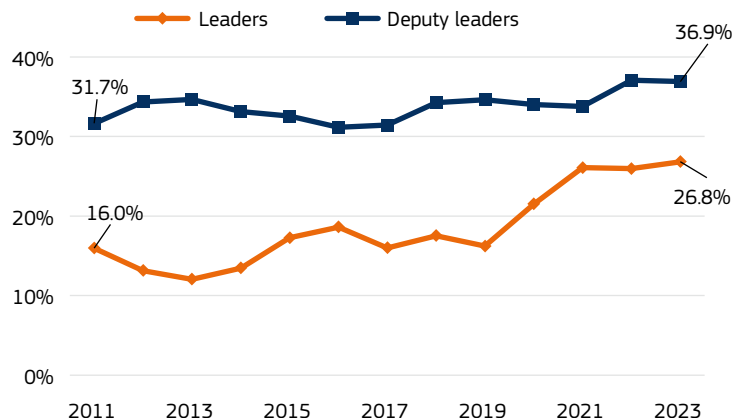
In 2023, women accounted for a smaller share of portfolios in core functions. Men made up the majority of economic portfolio holders (78.8 %) - an increase from 74.8 % in 2022. At the same time, women ministers were more likely to be responsible for social or cultural portfolios at 49 %

(increase from 42.6 % in 2022), although they are still technically under-represented. This shows that the attribution of ministerial portfolios is not gender neutral<sup>149</sup>.

Closer inspection of other leading positions within national systems demonstrates the 'leaky pipeline' theory in action, with **only 10 out of 27 national parliaments having a woman as speaker of the house** and fewer female prime ministers. As of December 2023 there were **6 women prime ministers within the EU**<sup>150</sup>. The change in the French government in January 2024 has reduced the number of women prime ministers to 5.

149 Source: EIGE gender statistics database. Data last updated December 2023. [Indicator: women in decision-making | politics | National governments: ministers by seniority and function of government](#)

150 Source: EIGE gender statistics database. Data last updated December 2023. [Indicator: women in decision-making | politics | National governments: presidents and prime-ministers](#)

**Figure 4:** Share of women leaders and deputy leaders of major political parties, EU-27, 2011-2023

Source: EIGE Gender Statistics Database

Similarly, looking at how responsibilities are divided within political parties level it is clear that cultural barriers exist. Only 26.8 % of political parties in the EU have women leaders, whereas 36.9 % of deputy party leaders are women. This shows that, while women are not seen as being incompatible with leadership they are not an automatic choice<sup>151</sup>.

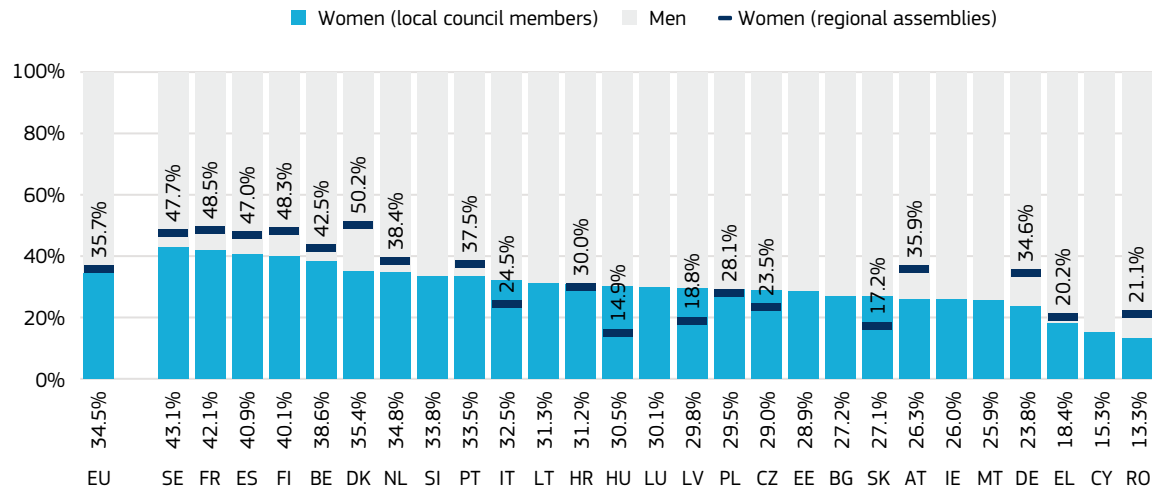
The same pattern is also seen in gender-balanced institutions like the European Parliament, where the balance in membership is not reflected in committee participation. In over half the committees (14 out of 26), less than 39 % of members are women. Moreover, the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, which is tasked with overseeing issues such as defence of democracy and gender parity, has the smallest proportion of women members at less than 15 %<sup>152</sup>.

The latest data from November 2023 show that women accounted for 35.7 % of members of regional assemblies across the EU, and 34.5 % of members of local/municipal councils (figure 5). These figures are boosted by France, which accounts for 56 % of the total number of councillors in the EU. Excluding France, the share of women councillors across the EU Member States drops to 28.6 %.

Of the 19 Member States which have a regional level endowed with powers of self-government, only four Member States (Spain, France, Finland and Sweden) have at least 40 % members of each gender in both local/municipal and regional assemblies.

<sup>151</sup> Source: EIGE gender statistics database. Data last updated December 2023. [Indicator: women in decision-making | politics | Major political parties: leader and deputy leaders](#)

<sup>152</sup> 'EU Parliament seeks to improve gender balance on committees'. POLITICO, November 2023

**Figure 5:** Share of women in regional assemblies and local councils in EU Member States (member), 2023

Source: EIGE Gender Statistics Database.

Note: There are no regions endowed with powers of self-government in BG, EE, IE, CY, LT, LU, MT, or SI. Data for regional assemblies in Portugal cover only Azores and Madeira.



In **Slovakia**, the 'Zakružkuj ženu' [Circle the Woman] Initiative is a civil association that campaigns for equal representation of women in politics. It was set up by experts on the topic of equal representation of women, women activists, as well as other volunteers who want to create a balanced society. It grew from the 'Circle the Woman' campaign, which raised awareness of voting for women candidates in the 2023 parliamentary elections.<sup>153</sup>

**In the key fields of climate and security, women are under-represented in international diplomacy**, which is lagging behind trends at national and European level. According to the annual gender composition report compiled by the Secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), while the number of women participating in negotiations has gradually increased, they are not evenly spread across ranks, with a

clear difference between sessions with political and high-level segments, and those focused on technical discussions. At the 27<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on **Climate Change (COP27)** in Sharm-el-Sheikh in 2022, which includes a high-level political segment, 29% of heads and deputy heads of delegation were women, with 37% of all Party delegates. At the following technical negotiations in June 2023 (SB58), the

<sup>153</sup> [Gender-based hate in the Slovak pre-election period, Globesec, October 2023](#)

percentage of female heads and deputy heads of delegation was 37 %, with a gender balance of 50 % was achieved among Party delegates for the first time. The annual gender composition report published by the UNFCCC secretariat also demonstrates a clear relationship between age/seniority and female representation in both cases, with female representation dropping steeply as age/seniority increases<sup>154</sup>.

Although intergovernmental policies concerning women, peace and security are of growing importance, women are

still greatly underrepresented in the corridors of power within multilateral organisations like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the United Nations. A statistical brief published by EIGE in June 2023 highlighted that in addition to low levels of participation in general, the figures for women in leadership positions in such operations significantly decreases to as little as 1 in 5 leadership positions among NATO civilian staff, and 11 % among commanders in UN peacekeeping missions<sup>155</sup>.



In **Ireland**, the non-partisan **Women for Election organisation** began rolling out tailored training programmes through their 'EQUIP Campaign School' for potential candidates ahead of the local and European Parliament elections, to be held at the same time in June 2024. The programmes, some of which are organised in association with local authorities, consist of a comprehensive package covering public speaking skills, campaign management, finances, and media trainings. In addition to group training, all participants are offered the opportunity to participate in a one-to-one mentoring programme with current women politicians<sup>156</sup>.



The government in **the Netherlands** finances the strategic alliance 'Equal Representation in Politics' (Politica), a 5-year programme launched in 2023. The alliance is a collaboration between several social and expert organisations, and encourages equal representation and the participation of women in Dutch politics, in all their diversity. The alliance does this by working with governments and political parties, establishing training programmes and networks, and researching the barriers that women face to become politically active<sup>157</sup>.

154 UNFCCC, 'Gender composition report by the secretariat', September 2023

155 EIGE, '4 in 5 NATO Council Representatives are Men: The Need for More Female Representation', July 2023

156 Women for Election, 'EQUIP Campaign School'

157 WO=MEN, 'Stem op een Vrouw - Alliantie Politica'



The **issue of voting rights for women politicians on maternity leave** made headlines in 2023 at both national and European level. Barriers to participation remain despite the continued trend of working from home in other sectors. In the European Parliament, MEPs called for better rules on voting rights including delegation, pairing, and voting remotely during maternity leave<sup>158</sup>.



In October 2023, the '**Girls in Politics**'<sup>159</sup> project in **Austria** was expanded. Girls and young women aged 6-18 years old were invited to shadow mayors as they went about their everyday work on International Day of the Girl Child (11 October). Over 80 municipalities took part in the event, which aimed to challenge gender stereotypes and motivate girls and young women to engage in local politics. The overall project is run in cooperation with the Federal Chancellery's Division for Women and Equality and the Austrian Federation of Municipalities.



In July 2023, **France** passed a law designed to **achieve gender balance faster at senior levels within the civil service**. This followed a report by the Senate's Gender Equality Commission assessing the 'Sauvadet law', passed in 2012 and requiring 40% of new civil service appointments to go to the under-represented sex. The new law **raises the minimum percentage for senior positions to 50 %** of new appointments. The new law also set a quota of 50 % for each sex for appointments to ministerial offices (*cabinets*) and to the President's Office. From 2027, public authorities will have to ensure that at least 40 % of senior and managerial positions are occupied by women or men. They have 3 years to comply before **potential financial penalties** apply.<sup>160</sup>



In **Germany**, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women, and Youth provides support to the **Helene Weber College**, a cross-party initiative that aims to increase women's participation in politics. The corresponding Helene Weber Prize is awarded to outstanding local female politicians nominated by members of the Bundestag. Future activities include a focus on supporting honorary mayors, migrant women, and women with disabilities<sup>161</sup>.

158 [MEPs call for maternity and paternity leave to allow them to be represented after birth of their children](https://ec.europa.eu/press/2023/07/13/130723_01). Agence Europe. ([agenceurope.eu](https://agenceurope.eu))

159 [Girls in Politics - Bundeskanzleramt Österreich](https://www.bka.gv.at/aktuelles/2023/10/11/111023_01)

160 [Parité dans la haute fonction publique femmes Loi du 19 juillet 2023](https://www.vie-publique.fr/actualite/la-actualite/1600000-parite-dans-la-haute-fonction-publique-femmes-loi-du-19-juillet-2023) ([vie-publique.fr](https://vie-publique.fr))

161 [Helene Weber-Kolleg | Deutschlandweite und parteiübergreifende Plattform für Kommunalpolitikerinnen](https://www.frauen-macht-politik.de/) ([frauen-macht-politik.de](https://frauen-macht-politik.de/))

In line with the commitment of President von der Leyen's Political Guidelines, the Commission worked steadily since the beginning of the current mandate and made sustainable progress in reaching gender balance at all levels of management. Since December 2019, the share of women in management positions has increased by almost 12 pp at senior management level to 48.1 % and by 7 pp at middle management level to 48.6 %. This means that on 1 March 2024 women held 48.5 % of all management positions within the Commission.

The Commission also aims to have a balanced share of female managers in the executive agencies by the end of 2024. Executive agencies need to have appropriate action plans in place to reach that aim. At present, 3 of the 6 executive agency directors are women (50 %). The Commission's corporate Female Talent Development Programme, which consists of tailored coaching, support and preparation for higher management and leadership responsibilities, has also proven successful in increasing the gender balance in management. Another 95 female colleagues participated in the fifth round of this programme, which ran until December 2023. Out of 545 eligible women who took part in the first five rounds, 180 (33 % of participants) are appointed to a Head of Unit position. The call for applications for the sixth round, which will start in March 2024, was launched in October 2023.

Additionally, tailored coaching programmes have been set up both for middle managers who aspire to become senior managers and for established senior managers aiming to develop within their current position or preparing for higher responsibilities. So far, 174 women (142 middle managers and 32 senior managers) have participated or are participating in these programmes.

Regarding the European External Action Service, since December 2019, the share of women in management increased by 18.5 % to 37.7 %. With one-third of managers emanating from Member States, the challenge is to secure women's applications, especially to Head of Delegation posts. In 2023, over just one rotation exercise, the share of women with ambassadorial duties went from 31.7 % to 35.5 %, an increase of 15 pp for a total of 50 posts out of 144 Delegations.

### WOMEN IN ECONOMIC DECISION-MAKING

In the economic sphere, women continue to be outnumbered by men in corporate decision-making bodies throughout the EU – despite their capabilities and educational achievements. To tackle this under-representation, the **Directive on improving gender balance on corporate boards**<sup>162</sup> which entered into force in December 2022, requires listed companies to have at least 40 % of each gender amongst the members of non-executive boards, or 33 % amongst all directors. To assist Member States in implementing the Directive in national law by the end of 2024, the Commission held a workshop in November 2023 at which it clarified a number of questions and Member States' representatives had an opportunity to discuss implementation issues with their peers.

EIGE's latest data registers a slight increase in the number of women on the boards of the largest listed companies<sup>163</sup>. In 2023, 33.8 % of board members<sup>164</sup> of the EU's largest publicly listed companies were women, marking an **all-time high**, compared to 32.2 % in 2022. So far, 12 Member States have reached the target of at least 33% women amongst all board members: Austria (33.6 %),

<sup>162</sup> [Directive \(EU\) 2022/2381 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 November 2022 on improving the gender balance among directors of listed companies and related measures, OJ L 315/44, 7.12.23, p. 44-59](#)

<sup>163</sup> Source: EIGE gender statistics database. Data last updated December 2023. [Indicator: women and men in decision-making | business and finance | business | Largest listed companies: board members](#)

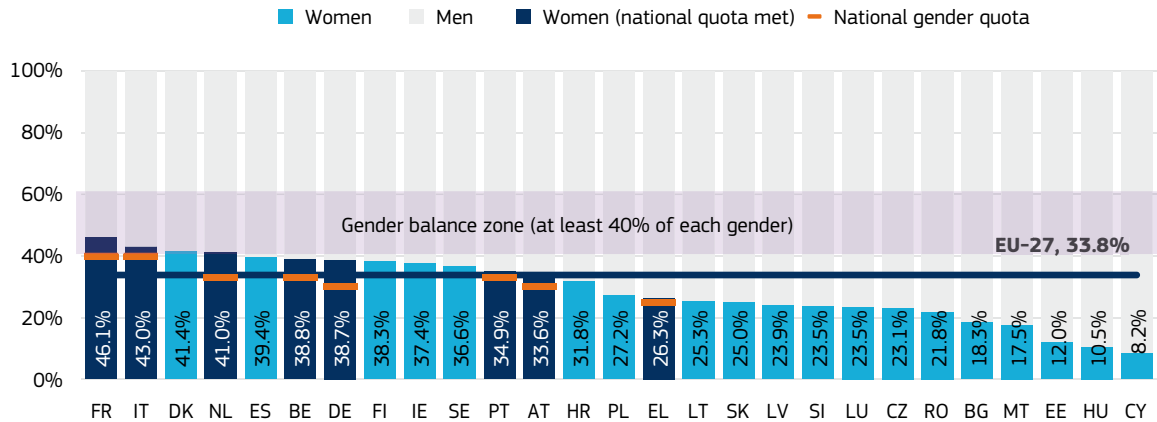
<sup>164</sup> Data cover all members of the highest decision-making body in each company (i.e. chairperson, non-executive directors, senior executives and employee representatives, where present). The highest decision-making body is usually termed the supervisory board (in case of a two-tier governance system) or the board of directors (in a unitary system).



Portugal (34.9 %), Sweden (36.6 %), Ireland (37.4 %), Finland (38.3 %), Germany (38.7 %), Belgium (38.8 %), Spain (39.4 %) the Netherlands (41.0 %), Denmark (41.4 %), Italy (43.0 %), and France (46.1 %). The share of women non-executives<sup>165</sup> in 8 Member States meets the proposed EU target of at least 40 %: Italy (49.0 %), France (48.2%),

Spain (44.6 %), Ireland (43.9 %), Portugal (43.8 %), the Netherlands (42.4 %), Belgium (41.4 %), and Denmark (41.4 %). In other Member States<sup>166</sup>, the gender-balance is more skewed with women accounting for less than a fifth (8.2 % to 18.3 %) of board members in the largest listed companies<sup>167</sup>.

**Figure 6:** Share of women and men on the boards of the largest listed companies in the EU, October 2023



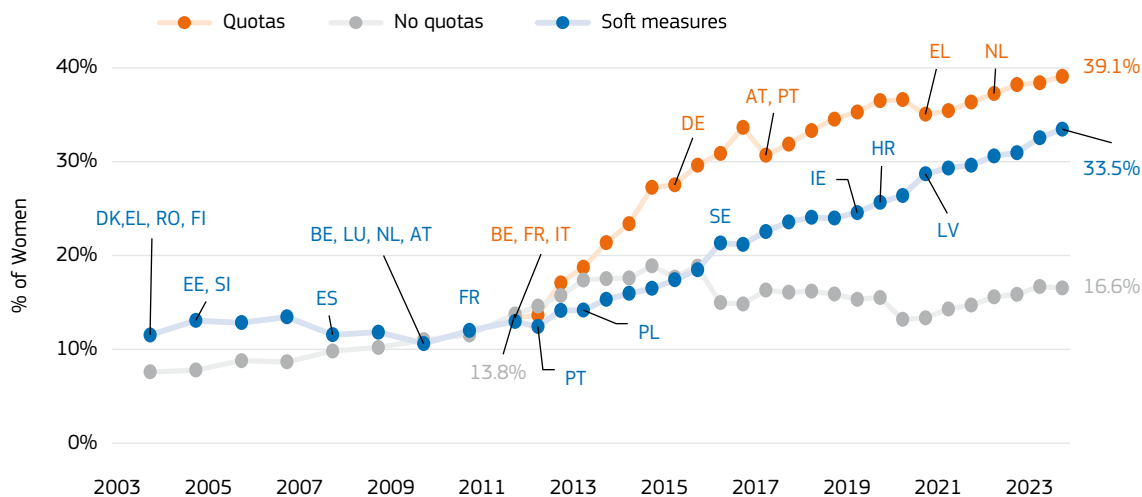
Source: EIGE, Gender statistics

<sup>165</sup> Non-executives: non-executive members of the two highest decision-making bodies in each company. The two highest decision-making bodies are usually referred to as the supervisory board and the management board (in case of a two-tier governance system) and the board of directors and executive/management committee (in a unitary system). Employee representatives participating in the highest decision-making board are included in the count of non-executive members.

<sup>166</sup> Bulgaria, Estonia, Cyprus, Hungary, and Malta.

<sup>167</sup> EIGE data is based on a representative sample of companies in the Member States, so these figures may not necessarily be identical once Member States start reporting to the European Commission under the Directive 2022/2381 (by 29 December 2025).

**Figure 7:** Share of women on boards of the largest listed companies in EU Members States by type of national measure (2003 – 2023)



Source: EIGE's own calculations based on data from its gender statistics database

Several Member States have measures in place to promote gender balance on boards ranging from 'soft' measures to 'hard' legislative measures such as legally binding quotas. Figure 7 shows the **impact of legal quotas**. Member States with quotas have a higher share of women on boards of the largest listed companies (39.1 %) than those with soft measures (33.5 %) and Member States with no measures in place (16.6 %). The data also provide some other interesting insights<sup>168</sup>. If we zoom out and look at the bigger picture and the developments over a longer period, then four phases can be distinguished in terms of the rate of progress (see Figure 8). In the first phase (2003-2010) progress was very slow, with an average increase of 0.5 pp a year. In the second phase (2010-2015), the average progress was 2.1 pp a year. Legislative quotas introduced in Germany, France and Italy were the main reason for this rapid improvement. In the third phase (2015-2021),

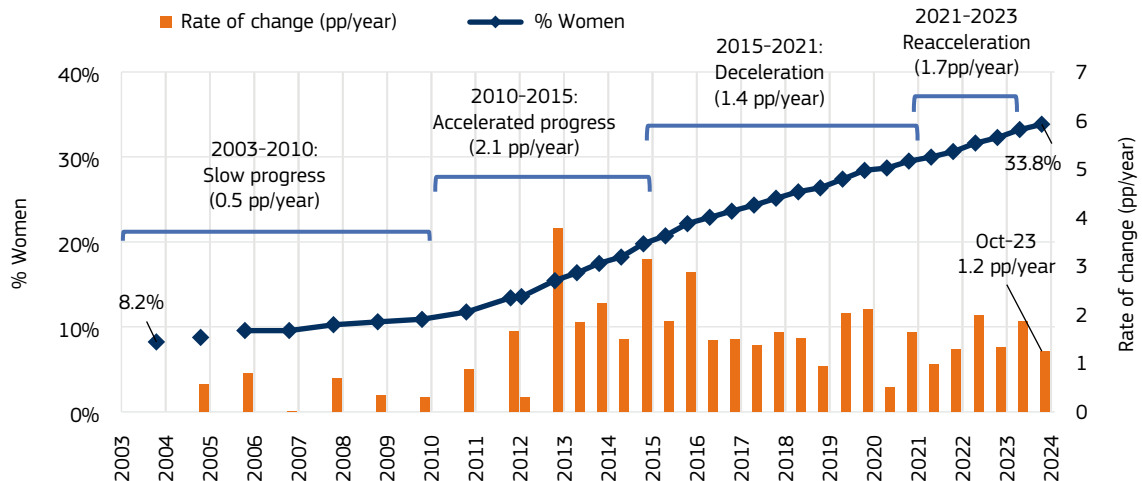
progress slowed (1.4 pp) as countries gradually achieved or moved closer to their respective legislative targets. The last phase shows an increase to 1.7 pp a year, possibly in response to the discussion about the Directive. The latest numbers indicate this resurgence may have come to a halt, given that current representation of women on EU boards stands at 33.8 %, reflecting a modest increase of 0.6 pp, equivalent to an annual rate of change of just 1.2 pp a year. However, with Member States set to implement the Directive in the course of this year, it is anticipated that the rate of change will pick up again.

Despite advancements in achieving gender balance at the board level, primarily driven by legislative efforts in certain Member States, only a minimal number of women makes it to top leadership roles within listed companies. Although women now account more than 30 % of board members,

<sup>168</sup> EIGE started collecting data in 2003.

their numbers in board chairs (8.1 %) or CEO positions (7.8 %) remain markedly low<sup>169</sup>. And in some countries, the number of women in these roles is even decreasing<sup>170</sup>.

**Figure 8:** share of women on the boards of the largest listed companies in the EU, 2003-2023 (%)



Source: EIGE calculations based on data from EIGE, Gender Statistics Database

Notes: Data exclude CZ, LT, MT, and PL for 2003 and HR for 2003-2006 (countries added to the data collection in 2004 and 2007 respectively).

In 2023, in the **EU financial institutions**, men still outnumber women in decision-making, occupying 79.7 % of the highest decision-making positions<sup>171</sup>. Although two out of the three institutions were led by women in 2023 (the European Central Bank and the European Investment Fund),

compared to one in 2022, the board of these institutions continue to be male-dominated<sup>172</sup>. In 2023, the executive board of the European Central Bank (ECB) had 2 women among its 6 members<sup>173</sup> and the governing council included the same 2 women among its 26 members<sup>174</sup>. In the same

169 Source: EIGE gender statistics database. Data last updated December 2023. [Indicator: women and men in decision-making | Largest listed companies: presidents](#)

170 'In Germany, women CEOs at top firms become even rarer, study shows'. [Nasdaq, January 2024](#)

171 European Central Bank, European Investment Bank and the European Investment Fund. Source: EIGE statistics database. Data last updated July 2023. [Indicator: women and men decision-making | business and finance | finance | European financial institutions: presidents and members](#)

172 Source: EIGE gender statistics database. Data last updated July 2023. [Indicator: women and men in decision-making | business and finance | finance | European financial institutions: presidents and members](#)

173 European Central Bank, 'Executive Board'. <https://www.ecb.europa.eu/ecb/orga/decisions/eb/html/index.en.html>

174 European Central Bank, 'Governing Council'. <https://www.ecb.europa.eu/ecb/orga/decisions/govc/html/index.en.html>

year, 5 out of 27 members of the board of governors of the European Investment Bank (EIB) were women<sup>175</sup> and 7 of the 27 members of the board of directors were women<sup>176</sup>. On 1 January 2024, Nadia Calviño replaced Werner Hoyer as the eight president of the EIB – and the first woman to lead this institution<sup>177</sup>. In the European Investment Fund, 2 of the 6 members of the board of directors were women<sup>178</sup>.

At national level, women accounted for 29.3 % of key decision-makers (i.e. members of the highest decision-making bodies) in **central banks**, compared to 28.4 % in 2022<sup>179</sup>. They also hold 40.4 % of deputy governor positions, compared to 33.3 % in 2022<sup>180</sup>. At national level, there is gender-balanced representation amongst women and men in the central banks of 9 Member States (Germany, Ireland,

Spain, France, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Portugal). Despite these encouraging trends, **the governors of all EU national central banks are men**<sup>181</sup>.

Similarly, women are underrepresented in Venture Capital (VC), with only 10-12 % of VC investors being women and 30 % of investment committees having women members<sup>182</sup>. VC is a vital source of **financing** for high-growth start-ups and the fact that most investment decisions are being made by all male investors, might have an impact on the financing received by female start-up founders. According to the State of European Tech 2023 Report by Atomico, in Europe 15 % of all VC funding in Europe went to mixed teams and women-only teams received 3 %<sup>183</sup>.



In **Spain**, the Institute of Women has continued to develop the '**Talentia 360**'<sup>184</sup> women in decision-making programme. For the professional promotion of women, the programme set out to empower them for leadership, making female talent visible and increasing the number of women in positions of responsibility, both in business and in the State Security Forces. Talentia 360 is a complete professional promotion and development programme, including specialised training, coaching and networking for board-ready women.

175 This board comprises Ministers designated by each of the Member States, usually Finance Minister.

176 [European Investment Bank, Board of Directors \(eib.org\)](#)

177 European Investment Bank, '[Nadia Calviño takes over as EIB President, January 2024](#)'

178 European Investment Fund, [Board of Directors \(eif.org\)](#)

179 Source: EIGE gender statistics database. Data last updated September 2023. [Indicator: women in decision-making | business and finance | finance | Central banks: governors, deputy/vice-governors, and members](#)

180 Source: EIGE gender statistics database. Date last updated September 2023. [Indicator: women in decision-making | business and finance | Central banks: governors, deputy/vice-governors, and members | Gender Statistics Database | European Institute for Gender Equality \(europa.eu\)](#)

181 Source: EIGE gender statistics database. Date last updated September 2023. [Indicator: women in decision-making | business and finance | Central banks: governors](#)

182 European Women in VC, '[Achieving Superior Returns with Gender Diversity in European Venture Capital Firms](#)' September 2023.

183 State of European Tech, '[State of European Tech Report 2023](#)'

184 Instituto de las Mujeres, '[El Instituto de las Mujeres y FOI ponen en marcha una nueva edición de Talentia 360. Mujeres Directivas](#)'



To promote the strategic development of an inclusive and diverse work environment, **Latvia's** the Society Integration Foundations launched the Diversity Mentor Programme - an initiative to support employers. Participants will have the opportunity not only to expand their knowledge about diversity, but also to design a specific solution for their workplace, for example, to produce a diversity and inclusion strategy or develop an internal training programme. They will also be able to work with experienced experts, representatives from other organisations and other participants.

The Commission is also committed to promoting women in leadership positions and closing the gender gap in **technology and innovation**. Empirical evidence shows that female entrepreneurs have significantly lower access to financing of their companies. EU-based women-founded companies represent 2.4 % of total venture capital VC invested in European start-ups<sup>185</sup>. Deep-tech accounts for over a quarter of Europe's start-up ecosystem, with European deep tech companies now valued at a combined EUR 700 billion and counting. Yet women remain severely underrepresented in the decision-making, financing, data used for algorithms, and an overall solutions design across the industries. Founded on innovation in engineering and advances in science, deep-tech start-ups tend to have longer research and development cycles, and often take more time and capital to build than other start-ups. The risk of failure is high in the first few years if they do not receive the right support and investment early on. Women in deep tech often face the additional hurdle of gender bias and stereotypes, particularly prevalent in sectors like technology, for example when seeking access to finance. After a successful pilot<sup>186</sup>, **Women TechEU** launched a second call to boost innovation in the EU's **female-led deep-tech sector**, with an increased budget of EUR 10 million and an improved scheme design for 2023-2024 with EUR 15 million budget. Funded under

Horizon Europe's European Innovation Ecosystems work programme, 134 selected companies will be able to receive, an individual grant of EUR 75 000 in 2023 to support the initial steps in their innovation process and the growth of their company. Furthermore, all female founders are eligible for a tailored mentoring and coaching under the European Innovation Council (EIC) Women Leadership programme, and dedicated networking opportunities across the EU<sup>187</sup>.

**The European Institute of Innovation and Technology** (EIT) is intensifying synergies with other EU programmes to improve the promotion of female entrepreneurship and leadership. For example, in 2023, with the EIC, the EIT launched a joint Prize on **Women Innovators 2024** (prize to be awarded during EIC Summit in March 2024)<sup>188</sup>. It will also continue work with the EIC and SME Executive Agency, EISMEA, on the EIC's Women Leadership programme and extend the programme to more EIT women entrepreneurs. The EIT is also working to build a women's investors network under the Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) **SUPERNOVAS** programme<sup>189</sup> and organise regular meetings.

To improve gender diversity in Venture Capital and Private Equity, under the InvestEU programme the Commission and

185 ['EIF Working Paper 2023/87, Female access to finance', February 2023.](#)

186 Under the Women TechEU pilot call, 50 promising deep-tech start-ups from the EU Member States and Associated Countries received targeted funding and first-class coaching and mentoring.

187 European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency, ['Second edition of WomenTechEU supports 134 female-led deep-tech companies with an increased budget of 10 million euro'](#), April 2023.

188 [European Innovation Council, 'European Prize for Women Innovators' European Commission](#)

189 EIT Food, ['Supernovas'](#)

the EIB Group agreed on targeted 'gender criteria' applied to financial intermediaries supported by the Programme. This means that at least 25 % of Venture Capital and Private Equity Funds supported under the equity products implemented by the European Investment Fund should include women in the key decision-making positions.

Moreover, in 2024 the Commission intends to launch a European Network of gender-conscious investors **Women InvestEU**. This aims to build capacity of women investors, share good practice, facilitate networking, learning and matchmaking with female-led and gender-diverse companies.

## GENDER MAINSTREAMING

Gender mainstreaming is a strategic approach that seeks to integrate a gender equality perspective into every aspect of policy, planning, and decision-making processes. Gender mainstreaming makes gender equality an integral part of broad or sectoral policies, legislative initiatives or funding programmes. If applied systematically, gender mainstreaming can significantly transform society and institutions. This is why, the 2020–2025 gender equality strategy is built on a dual approach consisting of specific initiatives to address gender inequalities and gender mainstreaming.

Throughout 2023, the Commission continued to make progress on mainstreaming gender equality across different EU policy areas such as health, research and innovation, education, and budgeting. The Commission's Task Force on Equality<sup>190</sup> continued to support equality mainstreaming, including gender mainstreaming. The Equality Coordinators, active throughout the Commission, focused on the integration of equality considerations into the Commission's policy initiatives and the implementation and monitoring of equality mainstreaming work plans. They continued to run equality working groups to develop and monitor work on mainstreaming equality in the Directorate-General or office in question. This chapter reports on initiatives to promote gender equality in different EU policy areas.

### GENDER EQUALITY IN DIFFERENT EU POLICY AREAS

One of the biggest challenges for society in the years ahead is how to effectively manage **climate change**. The urgent need for gender mainstreaming was underlined in a UN Women report suggesting that by 2050, climate change may push up to 158 million more women and girls into poverty and see 236 million more face food insecurity<sup>191</sup>. With this in mind, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) focused its work in 2023 on identifying ways to integrate gender and intersectional perspectives into Green Deal policies<sup>192</sup>. EIGE also launched the **#3StepsForward: Why the Green Deal needs a gender perspective** campaign<sup>193</sup>. As part of this, the 2023 Gender Equality Index was devoted to the European Green Deal's fair transition and its implications for gender equality. The Index analysed several aspects including the public's opinions on climate change, energy, transport and decision-making<sup>194</sup>. It also pointed out that gender inequalities affect how individuals deal with climate change, experience its effects and have the opportunity to participate in the labour force and in decision-making around the green transition. EIGE also participated in COP28 side-events to raise awareness of the need to incorporate a gender perspective into climate-related policies<sup>195</sup>.

Fairness and solidarity are defining principles of the **European Green Deal**. At international level, Member States have endorsed the UN Sustainable Development Goals

190 [The Task Force on Equality of the European Commission - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

191 [As climate change pushes millions of women into poverty, UN Women calls for a new feminist climate justice approach | UN Women – Headquarters](#)

192 The Green Deal covers various areas, including energy, biodiversity, sustainable mobility, food and agriculture, building and renovation and the move towards a circular economy. The Deal also aims to help ensure a just and socially fair transition.

193 [#3StepsForward: Why the Green Deal needs a gender perspective | European Institute for Gender Equality \(europa.eu\)](#)

194 [Gender Equality Index 2023: Towards a green transition in transport and energy | European Institute for Gender Equality \(europa.eu\)](#)

195 [Gender equality @ COP28: a newsfeed | European Institute for Gender Equality \(europa.eu\)](#)

(SDG's) and the Paris Agreement<sup>196 197</sup>. In 2023, the Council endorsed a set of key messages<sup>198</sup> reporting on the state of the implementation of the **Council Recommendation on ensuring a fair transition towards climate neutrality** of June 2022<sup>199</sup>. Many Member States reported that they had implemented or were implementing measures to increase women's participation in sectors that are crucial for the transition, notably by giving women opportunities to re-skill and up-skill and implementing targeted measures to help them access finance and entrepreneurship<sup>200</sup>. The **toolkit for just transition regions, 'Considering gender in regional transformations'**<sup>201</sup>, provides guidance on managing the gender-related impacts of the just transition locally and regionally. The toolkit focuses on the different challenges women, girls, men and boys face in regions receiving support from the Just Transition Fund (JTF) to become climate-neutral.

Increasing attention is being paid to equality in the energy sector. The **Equality Platform for the Energy Sector** currently has 28 members, 4 of whom joined this year<sup>202</sup>. Launched in 2021 by the European Commission, the Platform is a space for energy stakeholders to network and share good practices for promoting equality, diversity and inclusion in their activities – ultimately to bring about social change through the workplaces. The platform's 2023 meetings covered anti-racism and anti-discriminatory practices in attracting, managing, and retaining talent in the energy

sector. Member organisations, currently based in 10 different Member States, put forward concrete diversity and inclusion measures and report regularly on its implementation. The platform also develops resources and materials on topics of equality.

In 2023, the European Commission joined the **Equal by 30 Campaign**<sup>203</sup>, an initiative of the Clean Energy Ministerial<sup>204</sup>, aimed at promoting women's participation and leadership, accelerating gender equality and diversity in the clean energy transition and closing the gender gap by 2030.

In January 2024, the Joint Research Centre (JRC) published a Science for Policy report, on the link between **gender equality and the energy transition** that touches upon some of the EU's broader gender equality strategy goals<sup>205</sup>. The report provides a comprehensive analysis of the intricate relationship between gender disparities and women's participation in the energy transition focusing on two key aspects: the role of women in the energy transition and the gender lens in the context of energy poverty. The report emphasises the importance of inclusive policies in guaranteeing women's active engagement and representation in the energy industry, not just as customers but also as decision-makers and innovators. It highlights the significance of breaking down traditional policy silos, providing a road map for a more integrated and comprehensive approach to addressing the complex causes of energy poverty.

196 [Paris Agreement on climate change - Consilium \(europa.eu\)](#)

197 At international level, Member States have endorsed the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals and ratified the Paris Agreement, both of which refer to the imperatives of a just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs, as well as the need for adaptation and capacity-building to be gender responsive.

198 [Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council \(Employment and social policy\) - Consilium \(europa.eu\)](#)

199 [Council Recommendation of 16 June 2022 on ensuring a fair transition towards climate neutrality 2022/C 243/04 ST/9107/2022/INIT, OJ C 243, 27 June 2022, p. 35](#). The Recommendation provides guidance on how to address the impacts of the transition on workers and households, including the specific challenges women face.

200 [Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council \(Employment and social policy\) - Consilium \(europa.eu\)](#)

201 [Considering gender in regional transformations: A toolkit for just transition regions \(europa.eu\)](#) A video on the toolkit is available on YouTube: [Just Transition Platform toolkit: Considering gender in regional transformations \(youtube.com\)](#)

202 [Our members \(europa.eu\)](#)

203 [Equal by 30 campaign | Clean Energy Ministerial](#)

204 The Clean Energy Ministerial is a high-level global forum to promote policies and programmes that advance the clean energy transition.

205 [JRC.' Gender and Energy: the effects of the energy transition on women', 2024.](#)



In the area of **transport**, the Commission is coming up to its commitment made in the **Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy**<sup>206</sup> by developing training material to help staff and other interested parties to apply equality mainstreaming, including gender mainstreaming, to its transport policy and other related activities and initiatives. Integrating an equality and gender perspective will help ensure that the transport system leaves no-one behind, and is accessible, reliable, and affordable taking into account the needs of transport users and workers in all their diversity.

In response to the provision within the **Common Agriculture Policy (2023–2027)**<sup>207</sup> to enhance the position of women in farming, 2023 was the kick off year for the Member States for the implementation of their CAP Strategic Plans. Two examples of gender mainstreaming can be found in the CAP Strategic Plans for Spain and Ireland. Spain has included a top-up to the complementary income support to young farmers in the case of young female farmers. Ireland has provided a higher level of support for women in the on-farm capital investment scheme. In addition, the majority of Member States will include at least 50% of women in the decision-making bodies for LEADER<sup>208</sup>.

Another increasingly pressing challenge is **artificial intelligence (AI)**. AI brings opportunities as well as new challenges

for gender equality and the effective protection of the right not to be discriminated against. While the use of AI can help detect and reduce discrimination in human decision-making, if not properly designed, it can compound biases that reproduce or reinforce stereotypes and discriminatory outcomes. To address these new challenges, the European Commission proposed the AI Act, which was agreed by the EU co-legislators on 8 December 2023 and expected to be adopted in April 2024. The objective of the Act is to promote trustworthy and human-centric AI and ensure that AI systems used in the EU are safe and respect European values and fundamental rights, including the right not to be discriminated against as enshrined in EU equality legislation. The AI Act takes a risk-based approach, introducing new mandatory requirements for high-risk AI systems that can have a significant impact on people's health, safety and fundamental rights. These systems need to fulfil a series of requirements and checks before they can be placed on the market to avoid and minimise, among others, the risk of bias and discrimination<sup>209</sup>. The AI Act furthermore bans some particularly harmful practices such as social scoring of individuals leading to detrimental or unfavourable treatment, harmful manipulation and exploitation of vulnerabilities and biometric categorisation systems classifying individuals according to certain protected characteristics inferred or deduced from biometric data. The AI Act also

206 [Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy](#)

207 [CAP 2023-27 – European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

208 LEADER is a 'bottom up' approach, in which farmers, rural businesses, local organisations, public authorities and individuals from different sectors come together to form local action groups (LAGs). LAGs prepare their own local development strategies and manage their own respective budgets. The LEADER approach strengthens bonds in local communities, encourages innovations across sectors, and facilitates knowledge sharing amongst LAGs at national and EU-wide levels. Thanks to its success over 30 years, the LEADER approach has been adopted by the European regional development fund (ERFD), the European social fund (ESF) and the European maritime and fisheries fund (EMFF) as part of wider community led local development (CLLD). Today LEADER / CLLD groups manage tens of thousands of projects with economic, cultural, social and environmental benefits in rural Europe.

209 The risk of discrimination should be assessed by the provider and appropriate bias detection, correction and other mitigating measures implemented throughout the system's lifecycle, including prior testing before release.

- High-risk AI systems must also be trained and tested with sufficiently representative and quality datasets to minimise the risk of unfair biases embedded in the algorithms.
- High-risk AI systems must be technically robust and accurate to guarantee that the technology is fit for purpose and false positive/negative results do not disproportionately affect protected groups (e.g. racial or ethnic origin, sex, age, gender etc.).
- High-risk AI systems must also be sufficiently transparent and traceable and have appropriate documentation that may be used in ex post checks and investigations to determine if people have been discriminated against.
- The proposed human oversight measures will also ensure that users pay due attention to the risk of automation, while a system is in operation.

provides remedies to persons affected by the use of high-risk AI systems such as the right to know such systems are used, the right to request an explanation of decisions taken by or informed by such high-risk AI systems and right to a complaint to a competent market surveillance authority. Specific new transparency rules are also introduced for general purpose AI models and strengthened obligations for risk assessment and management for the most impact models presenting systemic risks, including risks of generation and dissemination of harmful, illegal or discriminatory content. For AI systems used internally in the Commission, In January 2024, the AI@EC Communication<sup>210</sup> was adopted to anticipate and prepare itself and put in place the first actions for the operationalisation of the AI Act, once adopted.

**Health** is another area with gender differences for instance in cancer screening, drug use and access to drug treatment<sup>211</sup> or mental health. In 2023, disability and employment status were added as new inequality dimensions to the **European Cancer Inequality Registry**, a flagship initiative of Europe's Beating Cancer Plan<sup>212</sup>. The Registry, launched in 2022, identifies trends in, and disparities between, Member States and regions, across several dimensions in cancer prevention and care<sup>213</sup> by pooling data from authoritative national and international sources. By pinpointing key inequalities, the initiative can guide relevant investment and interventions at EU, national and regional levels. A factsheet on breast cancer screening has also been added to the registry.

Also, as part of Europe's Beating Cancer Plan, in May 2023 the Commission launched the communication campaign **#GetScreenedEU** to raise awareness of the need for and benefits of cancer screening. The campaign focuses on screening for breast, cervical and colorectal cancer, thereby

addressing both women's and men's health. Its main target audience is adults aged 40-60 from disadvantaged parts of the population as defined by the EU Cancer Inequalities Registry. Studies show that this group has lower participation rates in nationally organised population-based cancer screening programmes. The campaign is EU-wide and its content is available in all EU languages. Its campaign website, Cancer Screening Campaign<sup>214</sup>, reminds people to take the time to have a cancer screening test that could be life-saving.

The digitalisation of health data, together with the use of new technologies, can support the development of better screening mechanisms and standardise tasks, while avoiding potential gender-based bias. In September 2023, the **European Federation for Cancer Images (EUCAIM) project**<sup>215</sup>, delivered the first version of a digital infrastructure linking over 200 000 image series of about 20 000 individuals. The platform is the keystone of the **European Cancer Imaging Initiative**, one of the flagships of Europe's Beating Cancer Plan. The initiative's aim is to foster innovation and the use of digital technologies, including artificial intelligence, in cancer treatment and care, for more precise and faster clinical decision-making, diagnostics, treatments and predictive medicine for cancer patients.

In the area of health, financial support is also available, with more than EUR 70 million committed or programmed under the EU4Health Programme and EUR 60 million under Horizon Europe. The **SOLACE** (Strengthening the screening of Lung Cancer in Europe) project includes a dedicated pilot study to further the knowledge of lung cancer programmes and the participation in lung cancer screening programmes amongst women, as up to now, they have

210 [Artificial Intelligence in the European Commission \(AI@EC\) Communication – European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

211 See also the miniguide [Women and drugs: health and social responses of the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction \(EMCDDA\)](#)

212 [Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on Europe's Beating Cancer Plan, COM\(2021\) 44 final](#)

213 [European Cancer Inequalities Registry \(ECIR\) | ECIR – European Cancer Inequalities Registry \(europa.eu\)](#)

214 [Cancer Screening Campaign \(europa.eu\)](#)

215 [Home - Cancer Image Europe](#)

been underrepresented in most clinical trials<sup>216</sup>. The project started in April 2023 and will run until 2026.

In 2023, the Commission also developed a proposal for a **Council Recommendation on vaccine-preventable cancers**<sup>217</sup> to support Member States in addressing the cancer risks related to infection with Human papillomaviruses and Hepatitis B virus by boosting the uptake of vaccination. Regarding Human papillomaviruses, the initiative aims to support Member States in reaching the goal set in the Europe's Beating Cancer Plan of fully vaccinating at least 90 % of the EU target population of girls and

significantly increasing the vaccination of boys by 2030. The proposal was adopted by the Commission on 31 January 2024. Finally, there are gender inequalities in mental health, too<sup>218</sup>. The **Communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health**, published on 7 June 2023, addresses gender issues in mental health, such as inequalities, gender-based violence and discrimination<sup>219</sup>. Supporting victims of crime by improving their access to psychological and mental health support and EU guidance on breaking through stigma and addressing discrimination are two relevant flagship initiatives.



**The Spanish** Presidency held a conference 'The Guarantee of Sexual and Reproductive Rights in Europe' in Zaragoza on 27-28<sup>th</sup> September 2023<sup>220</sup>. The event centred around highlighting the relevance of guaranteeing equal rights in the field of sexuality and reproduction. Several roundtables were organised around themes such as abortion and sexual and reproductive health, new sexual rights and sexual education. The event promoted the adoption of a Joint Ministerial Declaration on the Guarantee of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in the European Union, which was signed by 15 Member States<sup>221</sup>.

The increasing popularity of women's **sports** competitions has brought several gender inequalities to the fore. The Council of Europe and the EU have therefore teamed up and to continue their co-operation on gender equality in sport as

part of the framework of the joint '**All in Plus**' project<sup>222</sup> to highlight the benefits of gender equality in sport. The project's key objectives are to ensure that the relative invisibility of women in sport and the continuing lack of awareness of

216 [SOLACE - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

217 [Proposal for a Council Recommendation on vaccine-preventable cancers, 31.1.2024, COM\(2024\) 45 final](#)

218 A recent Flash Eurobarometer, published on 9 October 2023 ahead of World Mental Health Day, showed for example that:

- in their day-to-day lives men felt more calm and less tired than women;
- men's mental health was less affected by world events (the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, the climate crisis, unemployment, rising food and energy costs);
- women are also slightly more likely than men to believe that the use of social media has a negative impact on the mental health of children and young people.

More information on the health survey: [Mental health - October 2023 - Eurobarometer survey \(europa.eu\)](#)

219 [Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a comprehensive approach to mental health, COM/2023/298 final](#)

220 [Conference on guaranteeing sexual and reproductive rights in Europe \(europa.eu\)](#)

221 [Declaración ministerial conjunta sobre la garantía de la salud y los derechos sexuales y reproductivos en la unión europea \(igualdad.gob.es\)](#)

222 Runs from March 2023 till February 2025. More information: [Launch of the 'All In Plus' joint EU-CoE project - Sport](#)

gender imbalance in sport and related matters are brought clearly to the fore<sup>223</sup>. The **Be Equal award** was given during the **2023 EU Sports Forum** to projects that recognise the added value of gender equality in sport, provide safe sporting environments for girls, and empower women to develop resilience and self-confidence<sup>224</sup>. Also during the 2023 EU Sports Forum<sup>225</sup>, stakeholders and experts shared their views on challenges and opportunities in sport in high-level group discussions, panels and interactive sessions<sup>226</sup>.

Gender equality in sport was also on the agenda of **the Gender Equality Conference** organised by the Spanish Presidency on 14 and 15 November in Madrid and supported by the European Commission<sup>227</sup>.

On 24 November 2023, the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council adopted **Council Conclusions on women and equality in the field of sport**<sup>228</sup>. The Council Conclusions acknowledge a persistent gender inequality in participation in sport and physical activity, while highlighting that gender equality is an EU sports policy objective. Despite the progress made and with notable differences across sports and Member States, women's participation in sport and physical activity is lower than men's due to practical, personal, sociocultural, and structural barriers. This means that there are also fewer women in coaching, officiating and leadership positions. Recognising that gender-based discrimination can lead to the exclusion of women from participating in sports, the Conclusions call on Member States and the sports movement to prevent and combat

harassment, violence and hate speech in sports. Finally, they also highlight the importance of the visibility and media coverage of women's sports competitions to improve the public perception of the value of women's participation in sport and its importance in society and they point out the need for public investment in sport, fairly distributed between women and men.

Barriers to women's equal participation also exist in the **space sector**, where women remain a minority. As part of the **Pact for Skills**, in April 2023, a large-scale **Skills Partnership for the space sector** was launched<sup>229</sup>. The partnership will pursue equal and inclusive access to training to activate more people for the space sector labour market, in particular women and young people. **CASSINI**, the space entrepreneurship programme, continued in 2023 addressing gender equality and diversity in space by implementing various strategies such as inclusive communication, partnering with diverse stakeholders, and ensuring balanced representation in events. 2023 data shows that in its first year of activities with CASSINI Matchmaking<sup>230</sup>, 18 % of participants were female, a figure that will hopefully improve in the following years.

In **research and innovation (R&I)**, gender inequalities also persist. Horizon Europe, the EU's current framework programme for Research and Innovation has increased its commitment to gender equality in R&I through concrete provisions, including: the introduction of Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) as an eligibility criterion for certain categories of

223 The project is structured around three pillars: (1) data collection and analysis in six key areas (leadership, coaching/officiating, participation, media/communication, gender-based violence in sport, gender equality policies and programmes); (2) creation of an online resource centre containing best practice examples; (3) work with and through the media to ensure greater awareness-raising of gender inequalities in sport.

224 At the 2023 EU Sport Forum, the Be Equal prize was awarded to Kaja Klub Zlatorog from Slovenia. See also: [Meet the winners of the #BeInclusive EU Sport Awards 2022 | Sport \(europa.eu\)](#)

225 [EU Sport Forum | Sport \(europa.eu\)](#)

226 [EU Sport Forum 2023: a success story | Sport \(europa.eu\)](#)

227 [Conference on 'Gender equality in sport' \(europa.eu\)](#)

228 [Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on women and equality in the field of sport, OJ C, C/2023.1362, 1.12.2023.](#)

229 [Pact for Skills: Launch of large-scale Skills Partnership in the space sector - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#) [Pact for Skills: launch of large-scale Skills Partnership in the space sector - Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

230 CASSINI Matchmaking brings startups, scaleups and SMEs to start a conversation with corporates and investors to accelerate their business.

legal entities wishing to participate in the Programme. On 15 March 2023, key messages of a study<sup>231</sup>, investigating the impact EU and national policies and programmes supporting or imposing **gender equality plans** (GEPs) in research organisations had on gender equality across the European Research Area, were presented to the public showcasing examples of good practices, and policy recommendations.

On the occasion of the International Women's Day, the winners of a new annual **EU Award for Gender Equality Champions** were announced by the European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, Mariya Gabriel on 8 March 2023<sup>232</sup>. This award, funded under Horizon Europe, aims to recognise and celebrate the outstanding results achieved by European academic and research organisations through the implementation of Gender Equality Plans. It is also intended to create a community of champions who can then inspire other academic and research organisations to become gender equality champions themselves. Each of the four winning academic institutions received EUR 100 000 and the second edition will be awarded in Q2 2024. In 2024, the European Commission intends to publish the latest tri-annual edition of its flagship statistical report monitoring the state of gender equality in R&I across Europe and beyond, the **She Figures report**. This edition will include a new pilot composite **Index**, which will serve as a benchmark on how the EU and its Member States perform in gender equality in R&I.

In 2023, the **European Institute of Innovation and Technology** (EIT), Europe's largest innovation network

strengthening innovation with a mission to create jobs and deliver sustainable and smart growth, has officially appointed a Gender Coordinator as part of its updated **Gender Equality policy 2022-2027**<sup>233</sup>, and started including gender in the job description and performance mechanisms, so to ensure gender mainstreaming is embedded in the organisational structure and capacity of the EIT. The EIT Gender Mainstreaming Policy has led to a more equal access for women to EIT activities in the fields of education and training, business support and innovation activities<sup>234</sup>.

On 14 December 2023, the Council and the European Parliament reached a provisional agreement on the **Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive** (CSDDD), following a proposal tabled by the Commission in February 2022. The proposed Directive sets requirements for large European companies and for non-European companies with significant EU turnover to address adverse impacts on human rights and on the environment in their own operations and in their chains of activities inside and outside the EU. In particular, after the provisional agreement, the CSDDD refers in its annex to the prohibition of unequal treatment in employment, unless justified by the requirements of the employment in question in accordance with International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions<sup>235</sup>; unequal treatment includes, in particular, the payment of unequal remuneration for work of equal value and the discrimination on grounds of national extraction or social origin, race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion. The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women is referred to in Recital 25a together with the International Convention on

231 Video available on YouTube: [Impact of Gender Equality Plans across the European Research Area - YouTube](#)

232 [EU Award for Gender Equality Champions - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

233 [Gender Equality Policy 2022-2027 \(europa.eu\)](#)

234 The EIT Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) have a strategy in place aiming at ensuring at least 40 % female students enrolled in EIT labelled MSc/PhD, at least 40 % female graduates from EIT labelled MSc/PhD programmes, and at least 50 % female participants in (non-degree) education and training by Q4/2024. Moreover, the EIT with its KICs is aiming at a minimum of 25 % of KIC supported start-ups/scale-ups under a female CEO/owner, and an increased percentage of start-ups created by students enrolled and graduates from EIT labelled MSc and PhD programmes having a female CEO/owner by Q4/2024.

235 Articles 2 and 3 of the [International Labour Organisation Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 \(No. 100\)](#), Articles 1 and 2 of the [International Labour Organisation Discrimination \(Employment and Occupation\) Convention, 1958 \(No. 111\)](#) and Article 7 of the [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#)

the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, as further international measures to be taken into consideration by companies when identifying and addressing human rights abuses.

In product safety, more attention is being paid to gender-related aspects<sup>236</sup>. Gender differences can affect health and safety and must be taken into account at the product research and development stage. In April 2023, the legislators adopted the **General Product Safety Regulation** (GPSR) to strengthen product safety rules<sup>237</sup>. The Regulation, which entered into force on 12 June 2023 and will apply from 13 December onwards, reinforces the safety rules for products sold both offline and online and acknowledges that products could present different risks for different genders. According to the GPSR, these risks should be taken into account in standardisation activities to avoid differences in safety levels and a resulting gender safety

gap. In particular, when assessing product safety, economic operators (manufacturers, importers and distributors) will need to take the impact of gender differences on health and safety into consideration<sup>238</sup>.

In early 2024, the Commission published a study<sup>239</sup> on the **inclusiveness of anthropometric provisions in harmonised European standards**<sup>240</sup>. The study assessed the harmonised standards for 22 pieces of EU legislation in the policy area of machinery and equipment<sup>241</sup>. This assessment aimed to determine whether the standards that have an anthropometric dimension sufficiently consider the diversity of the European population, including factors such as gender and age, and the various anthropometric measurements (e.g. height, weight and strength). In line with recent approaches developed to evaluate the accessibility and gender-responsiveness of standards, the adequacy of each anthropometric standard was evaluated using these four dimensions: i) anthropometric coverage<sup>242</sup>, ii) statistical inclusiveness<sup>243</sup>, iii)

236 See for more information on the topic: [European Parliament's Policy Department for Citizen's Rights and Constitutional Affairs, The impact of the gender data gap on consumer protection, 2023](#)

237 [Regulation \(EU\) 2023/988 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 May 2023 on general product safety, amending Regulation \(EU\) No 1035/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council and Directive \(EU\) 2020/1828 of the European Parliament and the Council, and repealing Directive 2001/95/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council and Council Directive 87/357/EEC, OJ L 135, 25.5.2023, p. 1-51.](#)

238 [Consumer product safety - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

239 [European Commission, Study on the inclusiveness of anthropometrics in European harmonised standards, 2024 \(europa.eu\)](#)

240 Standards are technical specifications setting out requirements for products, production processes, services or test methods. They are developed by industry and market actors following some basic principles such as consensus, openness, transparency and non-discrimination. Standards ensure interoperability and safety, reduce costs and facilitate companies' integration into the value chain and trade. See also: [European standards \(europa.eu\)](#). A harmonised standard is a European standard developed by a recognised European standards organisation: CEN (Comité Européen de Normalisation), CENELEC (Comité Européen de Normalisation Électrotechnique), or ETSI (European Telecommunications Standards Institute) upon request of the European Commission. The use of these standards is voluntary. Manufacturers, other economic operators, and conformity assessment bodies can use harmonised standards to demonstrate that products, services, or processes comply with relevant EU legislation. See also: [Harmonised Standards \(europa.eu\)](#)

241 Machinery Directive 2006/42/EC; Lifts Directive 2014/33/EU; Personal protective equipment Regulation (EU) 2016/425; Pressure Equipment Directive 2014/68/EU; Simple Pressure Vessels Directive 2014/29/EU; Aerosol Dispensers Directive 75/324/EEC; Equipment for potentially explosive atmospheres Directive 2014/34/EU; Cableway Installations Regulation (EU) 2016/424; Recreational Craft Directive 2013/53/EU; Gas Appliances Regulation (EU) 2016/426; Noise emissions from outdoor equipment Directive 2000/14/EC; Low Voltage Directive 2014/35/EU; Electromagnetic Compatibility Directive 2014/30/EU; Radio Equipment Directive 2014/53/EU; Bottles as measuring containers Directive 75/107/EE; Pre-packaged products Directive 76/211/EEC; Units of measurement Directive 80/181/EEC; Pack sizes Directive 2007/45/EC; Metrology framework Directive 2009/34/EC; Repeal product specific Directives 2011/17/EU; Non-Automatic Weighing Instruments Directive 2014/31/EU; Measuring Instruments Directive 2014/32/EU.

242 'Have all relevant anthropometric dimensions been considered?'. It investigates to what extent each standard covers all relevant anthropometric dimensions (size, structure, composition).

243 The statistical inclusiveness dimension aims to answer the question 'Have representative statistical measures been used?' by investigating to what extent the standard was developed using data representative of the European population.

data transparency<sup>244</sup>, and iv) data representativeness<sup>245</sup>. The study's main deliverable is a list of the assessed standards prioritised according to the need to update them to improve their inclusiveness. The methodology for assessing and prioritising the standards was developed so it could be used to assess standards in other policy areas. Finally, to shed light on the practical implications of making standards inclusive, two workshops with standardisers, practitioners and academia were held to discuss a specific standard each. This work is being done alongside related work, notably, but not limited to, the work of the United Nation's Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) on gender-responsive standards<sup>246</sup>. The Commission's study goes beyond gender-responsiveness by considering the diversity of the European population generally. The European standardisation world has taken a lot of interest in the study. Among others, CEN-CENELEC, who have developed most of the standards assessed, organised a webinar on inclusive standards<sup>247</sup>.

It is also important to pay attention to gender in **occupational safety and health** (OSH). In its **EU strategic framework on health and safety at work 2021-2027**<sup>248</sup>, the Commission committed itself to providing guidelines on protecting workers against exposure to hazardous medicinal products (HMPs) by 2022. HMPs are used to treat a wide range of medical conditions including cancer treatment and can cause unintended effects in people other than the patients themselves, such as the workers who are exposed to them. Guidance for the safe management of hazardous medicinal products at work, including cytotoxics was published in April 2023<sup>249</sup>. These guidelines focus on the protection of female workers since they represent the majority of health workers in the EU (78 % in Q3 2020). Special attention is given to working women, during pregnancy, in the period after birth and during breastfeeding.



To gather all the information of interest to municipalities, the **Ministry of Equality between Women and Men in Luxembourg** has developed a thematic website<sup>250</sup> on the promotion of gender equality locally. On the site, which gives separate access to political representatives, municipal staff and the general public, users can find information on all the cross-cutting aspects of municipal activities and the integration of gender equality into a municipality's various fields of action. There is also an interactive map, with precise information about what equality measures have been implemented in each of Luxembourg's 100 municipalities.

244 The transparency dimension aims to answer the question 'Have relevant underlying anthropometric studies/data been cited?' by investigating the transparency of the data and studies used to develop the standard.

245 The data representativeness dimension aims to answer the question 'Have disaggregated data been used/diversity of the human body been acknowledged?' by investigating to what extent the data used to develop a standard are representative of the European population.

246 [Gender-Responsive Standards | UNECE](#)

247 [Webinar 'Inclusive standards: European Commission's study on Anthropometrics in harmonized standards \(DG GROW\)' - CEN-CENELEC \(cencenelec.eu\)](#)

248 [Communication From the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, EU Strategic Framework on health and safety at work 2021-2027 Occupational safety and health in a changing world of work, COM\(2021\)323 final](#)

249 [European Commission, Guidance for the safe management of hazardous medicinal products at work | Safety and health at work EU-OSHA \(europa.eu\)](#)

250 [Megacommunes | Accueil](#)



## GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN THE EU BUDGET

EU funding is an effective tool to put EU policy objectives into practice and bring about policy change. Under the Swedish Presidency in the first half of 2023, Member States adopted Council Conclusions on Mainstreaming a gender equality perspective in policies, programmes, and budgets<sup>251</sup>. The Conclusions called on the Commission to ensure that gender equality considerations are integrated into the implementation of the EU budget by fully implementing the European Commission's methodology for tracking gender equality expenditure in it<sup>252</sup>. In 2023, the Commission took further steps to make the gender dimension a more prominent part of its funding programmes<sup>253</sup>.

In line with the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 and the mandate received to implement it by means of the interinstitutional agreement accompanying the **2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework** (MFF), the Commission has developed a **methodology to track all EU spending programmes'** contributions to gender equality<sup>254</sup>. The methodology, a work in progress, was implemented in a pilot in the 2023 Draft Budget (DB2023) and again for the 2024 Draft Budget (DB2024) and it is currently being implemented in reporting exercise for the 2025 Draft Budget (DB 2025). Using this methodology, programmes received a score (score 0, 0\*, 1 or 2) based on their contributions

to gender equality<sup>255</sup>. Thanks to more granular reporting, interventions that fall into the 0\* category have been progressively re-evaluated and re-assigned to the appropriate scores. As a result, in the DB2024 (reporting on 2022 expenditures), the percentage of expenditure with score 0\* decreased from 95% in DB2023 (reporting on 2021 expenditures) to 73%, and several shared management programmes under cohesion policy<sup>256</sup> were reported on at a higher level of granularity (Common Provisions Regulation programmes). In 2023, the Commission continued the pilot project to explore how to further reinforce the gender dimension into EU spending programmes. One specific issue was the analysis of gender-related data, the exploration of critical data gaps, their ringfencing and proposing how to improve them. Looking at the current reporting exercise for the Budget 2025 preparation, DGs/Services are instructed to make further advancements in gender reporting, in particular in reducing the EU budget expenditure under score 0\*. As novelty, this year they are requested to include in the Programme Performance Statements (PPS) of the funding programmes all available gender-disaggregated data relevant to assess the promotion of gender equality by the programme. Similarly, in the recently agreed amendments in the context of the recast the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union (Financial Regulation), it was established that, where appropriate, the information collected in relation to the EU funding programmes'

251 [Council Conclusions on Mainstreaming gender equality perspective in policies, programmes and budgets, 9026/23](#)

252 [AGENCE EUROPE - Towards conclusions to promote inclusion of a gender dimension \(agenceurope.eu\)](#)

253 See also Article 9(2), [Regulation \(EU\) 2021/1060 Regulation \(EU\) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and financial rules for those and for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy. \(europa.eu\)](#): 'Member States and the Commission shall ensure that equality between men and women, gender mainstreaming and the integration of a gender perspective are taken into account and promoted throughout the preparation, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation of programmes.'

254 [Gender equality mainstreaming - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

255 Score 2: interventions whose principal objective is to improve gender equality.

Score 1: interventions having gender equality as an important and deliberate objective (but not as the main reason for the intervention).

Score 0\*: having the potential to contribute to gender equality.

Score 0: not having a significant bearing on gender equality.

256 After the adoption of majority of the programmes under cohesion policy in 2022, significant contributions to both gender targeting and mainstreaming actions were reported under the European Regional Development Fund in the areas of enhancing research and innovation, growth and competitiveness of SMEs, renewable energy, sustainable urban mobility and transport, education infrastructure, among others. See [Cohesion policy: supporting gender equality | Data | European Structural and Investment Funds \(europa.eu\)](#)



indicators should be broken down by gender and collected in a way allowing aggregation of such data across all relevant programmes. This will therefore become a general requirement for the next generation of funding programmes under the next MFF.

Also, to further integrate the gender equality dimension into its budgetary procedures, the Commission continues to offer **specialised training on gender mainstreaming in the EU budget**. The training is delivered by the European University Institute in Florence towards relevant Commission staff and implementing officers from Member States.

In 2023, for the first time for cohesion policy the **gender tracking information** system captured information on the gender contribution of the **cohesion policy funds** (European Regional Development Fund, European Social Fund + and the Just Transition Fund). Based on the adopted programmes, over 30 % (EUR 110 billion) of all cohesion policy investments will support gender equality in the 2021-2027 period, either through direct gender equality measures or gender mainstreaming. The intensity of support to gender equality varies based on the nature of the different funds, by country and by the specific objectives being pursued. Member States have screened their cohesion programmes to identify actions with a positive impact on gender equality during the preparation phase. As the actions become more concrete during the implementation phase, funding could

be moved from gender neutral to gender sensitive. A data story illustrating the funding to support gender equality actions was published on 8 March 2023 on the Cohesion Policy Open Data Platform<sup>257</sup>.

As communicated in the 2023 **Annual Report on the Recovery and Resilience Facility** (RRF)<sup>258</sup>, Member States are progressing with the implementation of measures under their national recovery and resilience plans (RRPs) with a focus on gender equality. Member States' RRFs contribute to gender equality in several ways and through many reforms and investments that are aimed at contributing to equal opportunities in general. The Commission, in consultation with Member States, identified over 130 measures in the 27 plans adopted with a focus on gender equality<sup>259</sup>. These measures are spread out over all six policy priorities under the RRF<sup>260</sup> and benefit gender equality sometimes in a direct way, sometimes more indirectly. As the **Thematic Analysis on Equality**<sup>261</sup> reports, many measures in the RRFs (such as healthcare and long-term care reforms), although not identified as such, may also positively effect gender equality, for instance by improving working conditions in female-dominated sectors or by reducing informal care responsibilities<sup>262</sup>. The **RRF Scoreboard** also includes data on final beneficiaries that are disaggregated by gender for some indicators<sup>263</sup>. For instance, women currently outweigh men regarding their participation in education or training opportunities supported by the RRF. More women than men

257 [Cohesion policy: supporting gender equality | Data | European Structural and Investment Funds \(europa.eu\)](#)

258 [Recovery and Resilience Facility Annual Report 2023 - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

259 Using the methodology for reporting social expenditure as set out in Delegated Regulation (EU) 2021/2105, the Commission has identified measures with a focus on gender equality. The Commission has applied this methodology not only to social measures, but also to all other measures in adopted RRFs having a focus on gender equality, to get a better overall picture of what measures are in the plans, although furthering gender equality does not have to be the main aim of the measures in question. Measures not identified as such may also have an impact on gender equality.

260 [Recovery and Resilience Scoreboard \(europa.eu\)](#)

261 [European Commission, Recovery and Resilience Scoreboard, Thematic Analysis: equality](#)

262 More detailed analysis can be found in the Staff Working Documents adopted by the European Commission for each endorsed plan, as well as in the Thematic Analysis on Equality on the RRF Scoreboard

263 The RRF Scoreboard has a set of common indicators linked to the objectives of the RRF. These show the progress of the implementation of the RRFs towards common objectives, as well as the overall performance of the RRF. Member States collect the common indicators data and report their numbers to the European Commission twice a year, at the end of February and the end of August. In total, the Commission, the Member States and the European Parliament have identified 14 common indicators across all six policy pillars of Delegated Regulation EU 2021/2106.

are also in employment or engaged in job searching activities as a result of an RRF intervention<sup>264</sup>.

During the most recent annual RRF reporting period (until September 2023), 25 (sub-)measures in the 27 RRFs with a focus on gender equality contain milestones or targets that have been reached, including 20 since 1 March 2023. For instance, Croatia has adopted a new labour law with provisions for more flexibility in working time and the place of work, as well as provisions aimed at reducing the gender pay gap. Italy has made an investment to support the creation and growth of companies led by women, by setting up a new fund and reinforcing two existing ones. It has also set up a gender equality certification system to incentivise corporate practices conducive to gender equality. So far, the focus has mainly been on implementing important reforms under the RRFs, but it is now gradually shifting towards making *investments*. Many reforms, expected to have a lasting effect, are often complemented by resulting RRF investments, while also ensuring synergies with investments made under cohesion policy funding.

The Commission helps Member States to ensure that RRF measures are conducive to gender equality and equal opportunities for all. In March 2023, the **informal expert group on the implementation of the RRF**, a forum for the Commission and national governments to discuss cross-cutting aspects of the implementation of the RRF, had an exchange of good practices to help Member States include and mainstream (gender-) equality considerations in the REPowerEU chapter (which most Member States added to their RRFs until the end of 2023), in the revised RRFs and in their implementation<sup>265</sup> (for instance through gender-sensitive budgeting and procurement).

Under the **InvestEU Programme**, the Commission monitors the implementation of gender-smart financing – which supports, empowers and inspires female founders of companies and investors<sup>266</sup> – by the programme’s Implementing Partners such as the European Investment Fund (EIF), through regular reporting and through stakeholders’ meetings. For the InvestEU Programme, gender mainstreaming is ensured at the stage of (1) the development of the financial products and their implementation, and (2) operational reporting. Since 2023, the Commission has been working on a proposal to revise the Methodology for Key Performance and Monitoring Indicators<sup>267</sup> to add indicators for investments to support gender equality.

Women remain underrepresented when it comes to investment, both as beneficiaries of investment and as decision-makers. To raise awareness of the gender gap in investments, the InvestEU Advisory Board set up a sub-working group on gender equality to prepare a draft report on assessing and reporting gender equality impact under InvestEU amongst others. The sub-working group finalised its report in April 2023<sup>268</sup>. Based on the work of the sub-group, the InvestEU Advisory Board issued recommendations for InvestEU implementation on 7 December 2023. The recommendations include, among others, the gender-impact reporting (where the work is already ongoing, see paragraph above), amending the existing evaluation scoreboard to allow attribution of additional points to gender-supporting investments and strengthening the communication of best practices on mainstreaming gender in projects in various policy areas.

The Commission supports Member States’ efforts, inter alia, in gender mainstreaming under the **Technical Support**

264 Data as of 12 October 2024 from the RRF Scoreboard.

265 The minutes of expert group meetings are available on the Register of Commission expert groups and other similar entities: [Register of Commission expert groups and other similar entities \(europa.eu\)](https://registerofcommission.europa.eu/expert-groups-and-other-similar-entities)

266 Defined for indirect equity, when the investment operations fulfil at least one of the following criteria 1) management team composed of at least one third of female partners (i.e. when the management team is composed of up to four partners there would be one or two female partners); or 2) senior investment team has at least 40% of female representation; or 3) at least 40 % of female representation on the investment committee.

267 [InvestEU Steering Board - Methodology for InvestEU Key Performance and Monitoring Indicators.pdf \(europa.eu\)](https://registerofcommission.europa.eu/investeu-steering-board-methodology-for-investeu-key-performance-and-monitoring-indicators.pdf)

268 [Minutes - Fifth meeting of the AB of InvestEU programme](https://registerofcommission.europa.eu/minutes-fifth-meeting-of-the-ab-of-investeu-programme)

**Instrument**<sup>269</sup>. In 2023, 7 Member States received support for **gender mainstreaming in public policy and budget processes**<sup>270</sup>. The technical support strengthens gender responsive budgeting and impact assessments within Member States at national, regional and local level, also in the context of the recovery and resilience plans and other EU

funds and programmes. The support emphasises the introduction of gender mainstreaming tools in various sectors and promotes ongoing training and capacity development for administrations to improve their technical competence and implement gender policies effectively.



**Portugal** is one of the Member States participating in the Commission's flagship project on '**Gender Mainstreaming in Public Policy and Budgeting**', to train public officials to mainstream gender in public policies through gender-sensitive budgeting and gender impact assessment methodologies. The project is funded by the Technical Support Instrument and implemented by the French government agency Expertise France, in partnership with the European University Institute-School of International Governance and EIGE. The Portuguese Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality (CIG) was one of the national authorities selected for the project, which will run until 30 November 2024. The project is expected to lead to stronger data collection, better assessment of the gender impact of public policies, legislation and budgeting, and to improve methodologies and tools for better gender budgeting.

Inclusion and diversity, especially gender balance, remains a cross-cutting issue in all the actions published under the **Creative Europe 2023 Annual Work Programme**<sup>271</sup>. In line with the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, special attention is being paid to gender equality as a driver of creativity, economic growth and innovation. Under this work programme, new calls for multi-annual actions are launched for 4 years. Among these multi-annual actions, the European platforms for the promotion of emerging artists and the European Networks of Cultural and Creative Organisations serve to mainstream good practices in the creative and cultural sectors. Both actions must promote a fair, inclusive environment for cultural professions and look at effective ways of tackling the gender gap and fighting discrimination. New rounds for individual mobility and

residency actions calls under the Culture Moves Europe mobility scheme were launched in October 2023<sup>272</sup>. This call supports gender equality by providing a top-up for parents of children under 10 years old to help cover childcare-related costs during their mobility.

Horizon Europe, the EU's Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (R&I), continued to provide dedicated funding for gender studies and intersectional research. The Horizon Europe Work Programme 2023-2024<sup>273</sup> includes for example, under Cluster 2 (Culture, Creativity, and Inclusive Society) a call topic investigating gender roles in extremist movements and their impact on democracy<sup>274</sup> and projects are just being launched under a topic dedicated to intersectionality and equality in deliberative and participatory

269 [Technical Support Instrument \(TSI\) \(europa.eu\)](#)

270 [Gender mainstreaming in public policy and budget processes - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

271 [Annual Work Programmes | Culture and Creativity \(europa.eu\)](#)

272 [Culture Moves Europe call for artists opens again | Culture and Creativity \(europa.eu\)](#)

273 [Horizon work programme 1.1. Widening participation and strengthening the European research area \(europa.eu\)](#)

274 HORIZON-CL2-2024-DEMOCRACY-01-04 and HORIZON-CL2-2024-DEMOCRACY-01-05.

democratic spaces<sup>275</sup>. Additionally, the 'Widening participation and Strengthening the European Research Area (ERA)' Programme Part aims to strengthen gender equality within R&I<sup>276</sup> through funding projects e.g. to facilitate the implementation of a zero-tolerance approach towards gender-based violence in the ERA, to support the implementation of an EU Manifesto for STE(A)M education and R&I career paths, and to support research organisations to develop inclusive Gender Equality Plans.

The CERV programme, continued to promote EU values (including gender equality), to support citizens' engagement and participation, and to prevent and combat violence against women, as well as violence against children and vulnerable groups (see Chapter 1 for more information).

### INTERSECTIONALITY IN IMPLEMENTING GENDER EQUALITY POLICY

Women and girls are a heterogeneous group who may face intersectional discrimination based on several personal characteristics. That is why it is important to take the intersectionality of gender with other grounds of discrimination – racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation – into account. All five Union of Equality strategies adopted in 2020 and 2021 stress that intersectionality leads to unique experiences of discrimination<sup>277</sup>.

The employment gap between persons with and without disabilities amounts to 21.4 pp. Particular attention should be

given to women when it comes to employment of persons with disabilities. About 48 % of women with disabilities are employed in comparison to 54 % of men with disabilities and 69 % of women without disabilities<sup>278</sup>. About 28 % of women with disabilities are employed full time compared to about 40 % of men with disabilities. In 2023, the Commission continued to roll out the deliverables of the Disability Employment Package, including through the Disability platform Employment package sub-group set up in September 2022. Some deliverables include a study of alternative employment models, a catalogue of positive actions on hiring incentives<sup>279</sup> and guidelines on reasonable accommodation<sup>280</sup>. The Disability Employment Package is one of the seven flagship initiatives of the **2021-2030 Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities**. The Strategy promotes an intersectional perspective, addressing specific barriers faced by persons with disabilities who are at the intersection of identities (gender, racial, ethnic, sexual, religious), or in a difficult socioeconomic or other vulnerable situation.

Intersectionality is also included in the **Directive on pay transparency**, which entered into force in May 2023<sup>281</sup>. The Directive defines intersectional discrimination<sup>282</sup> and clarifies the concept further in several recitals<sup>283</sup>. The aim of this provision is to give a clear mandate to courts to take into account any combination of sex and other grounds of discrimination when redressing gender pay discrimination. The provision stresses the importance of making visible and validating the harm that intersectional discrimination does, and its specific nature.

275 [Funding & tenders \(europa.eu\)](#)

276 These calls are HORIZON-WIDERA-2024-ERA-01-10: Policy coordination to support all aspects of inclusive gender equality plans and policies in the ERA and HORIZON-WIDERA-2024-ERA-01-11: to support the implementation of inclusive gender equality plans.

277 [The Union of Equality – European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

278 [European Semester 2022 mainstreaming disability equality, July 2023](#)

279 [Publications catalogue – Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion – European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

280 To be published in 2024.

281 [Directive \(EU\) 2023/970 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 May 2023 to strengthen the application of the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value between men and women through pay transparency and an enforcement mechanism, OJ L 132, 17.5.2023, p.21.](#)

282 Article 3(2)(e).

283 Recitals 25, 32, 50.

The **Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence Directive** also defines intersectional discrimination and highlights that people facing intersectional discrimination are at a heightened risk of violence. These victims should consequently receive specific protection and support.

Finally, the upcoming **Directives setting standards for the independence and powers of equality bodies** are expected to include references to intersectionality. They jointly cover the six grounds of discrimination protected under the EU Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. They are scheduled to be adopted in spring 2024.

## PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT ACROSS THE WORLD

Women and girls' rights continue to be under attack across the globe. A rise in armed conflict has left women and girls disproportionately exposed to gender-based violence and to the effects of war<sup>284</sup>, be it in new conflicts, as in Gaza and in Sudan, in ongoing ones such as Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, or in protracted and sometimes seemingly forgotten crises as in Myanmar, Yemen or the Democratic Republic of the Congo<sup>285</sup>.

Brave women and girls, women human rights defenders and women's organisations have continued to be at the forefront of the fight for gender equality. Narges Mohammadi was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her fight against the oppression of women in Iran and her fight to promote human rights and freedom for all, while Jina Mahsa Amini and the Women, Life, Freedom Movement in Iran received the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize for freedom of thought<sup>286</sup>.

The EU is committed to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment through its external action, including in multilateral fora where strategies and practices on

intersecting issues can be raised, such as the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities<sup>287</sup> and the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)<sup>288</sup>. Additionally, the EU has incorporated the principle of gender equality in its support for partner countries<sup>289</sup>, and set measurable gender equality objectives for new initiatives under all EU external action instruments in accordance with the EU Gender Action Plan III (GAP III)<sup>290</sup>: the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe Regulation (NDICI Global Europe)<sup>291</sup>, the Instrument for Pre-accession assistance (IPA III) and the common foreign and security policy (CFSP) instrument.

### *RUSSIA'S WAR OF AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE*

In 2023, the EU continued supporting the people of Ukraine, as Russia's unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression against the country raged on. According to the UN, 17.6 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance because of the war<sup>292</sup>. On 28 September 2023, the Council of the EU

284 [Secretary-General's address to the General Assembly | United Nations Secretary-General](#)

285 [Forgotten crises – European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

286 [Narges Mohammadi – Facts – 2023 – NobelPrize.org](#) and [2023 Sakharov Prize laureate: Jina Mahsa Amini and the Woman, Life, Freedom Movement in Iran | Think Tank | European Parliament \(europa.eu\)](#)

287 The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is the body of independent experts which monitors the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) by the States Parties. The Committee meets in Geneva and normally hold two or three sessions per year.

288 Ana Peláez Narváez was elected as the new Chairperson of the CEDAW Committee, being the first woman with a disability to chair the Committee.

289 This includes candidate countries for EU accession, potential candidates, countries with a European Perspective and European Neighbourhood Policy countries.

290 [Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council on EU Gender Action Plan III \(GAP III\). Join/2020/17 final](#)

291 At least 85 % of new actions implemented under the Instrument should have gender equality as a principal or a significant objective, as defined by the gender equality policy marker of the OECD Development Assistance Committee. At least 5 % of those actions should have gender equality and women's and girls' rights and empowerment as a principal objective.

292 [Ukraine Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023 \(December 2022\) \[EN/UK\] – Ukraine | ReliefWeb](#)

agreed to extend the **Temporary Protection Directive (TPD)** until 4 March 2025<sup>293</sup>, thereby extending protection for 4.2 million people who found refuge in Europe after being forced to flee, including women and girls, who make up most of the displaced persons from Ukraine in Europe. On 8 November 2023, the European Commission adopted the 2023 enlargement package, and on 14 December 2023, the European Council decided to open accession negotiations with Ukraine<sup>294</sup>.

The EU has continued to **support victims of gender-based violence**, and to mainstream gender equality in its crisis response and support to Ukraine. In the context of the international day on the elimination of sexual violence in conflict in 2023, the Ambassador for Gender and Diversity conducted a mission to Ukraine to support policies and approaches addressing sexual violence in war, touching upon the impact of the war on sexual and gender-based violence, as well as gender equality in future recovery planning. Support to victims of conflict-related sexual violence (EUR 6 million, allocated in 2022) continued throughout the year through three projects. The first is implemented by the Ukrainian Women's Fund to support local Ukrainian women's organisations, in order to strengthen their capacities as first responders to victims of conflict-related sexual violence in Ukraine and promote knowledge-sharing amongst them. Secondly, a project implemented by Global Rights Compliance provides hands-on support and expertise on investigating cases of conflict-related sexual violence to the Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine via mobile justice teams. Finally, a project implemented by the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Conflict-Related Sexual Violence will support the Government of Ukraine with specialised Women Protection Advisors in line

ministries and the implementation of a national action plan on violence against women.

In Moldova, a crisis response action (EUR 4 million) supports the resilience of host communities and local authorities in their response to the influx of displaced persons from Ukraine, with a focus on access to basic services, including the reception, referral and protection of individuals with enhanced vulnerability to sexual exploitation and trafficking such as women and children.

In October 2023, the Commission launched a new strand of the **EU campaign on victims' rights on supporting victims of war-related crimes** – mostly women and children – who fled the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine to the EU Member States. Through a children's book 'The Girl Who Kept Her Eyes Open', the Commission aims to raise awareness about their rights under the EU rules and encourage the EU citizens to have the 'eyes open' to their situation<sup>295</sup>.

The EU also supports gender equality in Ukraine through its **EU Advisory Mission (EUAM) Ukraine**. This is part of the Mission's broader objective to support Ukraine in developing sustainable, accountable and efficient security services that strengthen the rule of law<sup>296</sup>. For instance, the EUAM supports the implementation of the Council of Europe's Convention of Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, helps address conflict-related sexual violence as an aspect of the international crimes committed by the Russian Federation Armed Forces, and assists with implementing gender-sensitive reforms of human resource policies in law enforcement agencies. The EU-funded **PRAVO/Justice project** supported the Office of the Prosecutor General to organise the third United

293 [Extension of temporary protection agreed for those displaced from Ukraine | European Website on Integration \(europa.eu\)](#)

294 [Commission adopts 2023 Enlargement package, recommends to open negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova, to grant candidate status to Georgia and to open accession negotiations with BiH, once the necessary degree of compliance is achieved - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

295 [Children's book - The Girl Who Kept Her Eyes Open](#)

296 The EAU is the EU's civilian Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) mission. For more information: [EUAM Ukraine | EUAM Ukraine \(euam-ukraine.eu\)](#)

for Justice Conference (U4J) dedicated to conflict-related sexual violence in Kyiv on 5 May 2023, with 6 experts from EUAM Ukraine participating in the conference<sup>297</sup>. Both PRAVO and EUAM Ukraine are active members of the Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV) Working Group, supporting the Ukrainian CRSV Unit of the Office of the Prosecutor General. The EUAM worked closely with Ukraine to support the implementation of Ukraine's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. Progress on gender equality was also discussed with Ukraine during the Human Rights Dialogue on 26 April 2023<sup>298</sup>.

Gender equality was also given due consideration in the EU's **mental health support for Ukrainian displaced persons**. In partnership with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the EU4Health programme<sup>299</sup> is funding the provision of psychological first aid and trauma support for forcibly displaced people in 25 countries, including 22 EU member states, Norway, Iceland and Ukraine.

### GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN THE EU'S EXTERNAL ACTION

The **EU action plan on gender equality and women's empowerment in external relations** (Gender Action Plan (GAP) III) puts gender equality at the forefront of the EU's external agenda in line with the Sustainable Development Goals and other international commitments, making it a cross-cutting priority of EU international relations and partnerships. To reach the objectives of GAP III, **gender mainstreaming** across all external policies and sectors is essential. One of the main GAP III targets is to ensure that by 2025, at least 85 % of the EU's new external actions

contribute to gender equality and to the empowerment of women and girls. The number of external actions with gender equality as a principal or significant objective has increased significantly as a result, from 64.71 % in 2019 to 72 % in 2022. In terms of funding, commitments that promote gender equality and women's empowerment as a significant or principal objective increased from 74.2 % in 2021 (EUR 9 325 million out of a total of EUR 12 588 million) to 77.5 % in 2022 (EUR 13 075 million out of a total of EUR 16 880 million).

In November 2023, a joint **mid-term report on the implementation of the GAP III** was adopted, providing qualitative and quantitative data on the results and progress achieved towards institutional targets and policy objectives<sup>300</sup>. Through a more strategic EU vision and increased efforts to include a gender equality perspective in all EU external action, the EU has encouraged political leaders to place the human rights and empowerment of women and girls at the forefront of the political agenda. The EU has supported partner countries and civil society in improving gender equality, including through women and girls' increased protection against gender-based violence, expanded participation in public and political life, greater access to education, health and social protection and economic empowerment. Overall, GAP III has resulted in more gender-responsive EU actions, better gender-lens investments and more funding for gender equality and women and girls' empowerment. Major new EU initiatives and programmes have been launched at global, regional and national level, including several Team Europe initiatives supporting women and girls' empowerment – from sexual and reproductive health and rights to equal access to quality education, or access to finance for young female entrepreneurs. In order to build on these achievements towards a gender-equal

297 The PRAVO/Justice project supported the organisation of two previous United for Justice (U4J) conferences, which took place in March in Lviv and in Bucha.

298 [Ukraine: 8th Human Rights Dialogue takes place in Kyiv | EEAS \(europa.eu\)](#)

299 [EU4Health programme 2021-2027 – a vision for a healthier European Union - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

300 [Joint report to the European Parliament and the Council of 20 November 2023, Joint mid-term report on the implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan III \(GAP III\), JOIN\(2023\)36 final](#)



world, the EU decided in November 2023 to extend the duration of the Gender Action Plan from 2025 until 2027, thereby aligning it with the 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework.

In parallel, efforts have continued to make **EU-funded humanitarian aid** more sensitive to the differentiated needs and capacities of women, girls, men and boys, including by using a gender-age marker. Since 2021, the EU also prioritises education in emergencies projects that target at least 50% girls. The EU has also continued to roll out gender-responsive leadership training for its senior and delegation staff, in collaboration with the Swedish Government agency Folke Bernadotte Academy.

As such, gender equality continued to be included as a priority within many **political, security and human rights dialogues**, for instance the one held with Kazakhstan on 9 March 2023<sup>301</sup>. Such dialogues have contributed to the implementation of international commitments, the drafting and implementation of national gender strategies and plans, the integration of the gender dimension into sectoral laws and policies and gender-responsive budgeting. Examples include the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act in Sierra Leone; the multi-stakeholder coalition for decent work and social protection for women in agriculture in Tunisia; and the gender equality action plan for the justice sector in Vietnam.

Through its **External Investment Plan**, the EU continues to promote women's entrepreneurship and labour market participation in partner countries in the EU Neighbourhood

region and Africa<sup>302</sup>, for instance through the Africa Caribbean and Pacific gender facility, where the European Commission supports the European Investment Bank (EIB) to lend to African local and regional banks to improve women's access to finance and entrepreneurship, and the 2021 Team Europe initiative 'Investing in Young Businesses in Africa' (IYBA)<sup>303</sup>. In 2023, the Women's Economic Empowerment Working Group finalised a report supporting the EU, Member States and European financing institutions in a Team Europe approach to target more financial and technical support to women entrepreneurs. The report was also used to co-create a new IYBA program supporting women entrepreneurs in Africa (the IYBA WE4A), and the Investment Climate Reform (ICR) facility co-funded by the EU. In 2023, the ICR facility strengthened the work on WEE with a EUR 10 million EU top-up to focus on Business Environment Reforms supporting women's participation in the economy. For instance, based on the support provided through the ICR Facility, the Tanzania Agricultural Development Bank Limited (TADB) launched a Gender Scheme in March 2023. The Scheme will address financial and non-financial challenges women and youth face by relaxing some of the terms and conditions of existing bank products, allowing for wider access to credit facilities throughout the value chain<sup>304</sup>.

The EU is also working closely with international and development financing institutions to increase the impact of innovative finance and to further integrate a gender perspective in investments made by the **European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+)**. A guidance on the application of the OECD Development Assistance Coordination (DAC) **gender equality marker** to EFSD+ funded

301 [EU-Kazakhstan: Annual Human Rights Dialogue and Subcommittee on Justice and Home Affairs meetings | EEAS \(europa.eu\)](#)

302 [Factsheet EU External Investment Plan \(europa.eu\)](#)

303 The IYBA helps start-ups and young entrepreneurs - especially women - in Africa launch, consolidate, and grow strong, inclusive, sustainable businesses and create decent jobs. Its dedicated Women's Economic Empowerment working group focuses on focus on increasing the impact of innovative finance for women entrepreneurs. For more information, please see: [Investing in Young Businesses in Africa \(IYBA\) | Capacity4dev \(europa.eu\)](#)

304 The ICR facility (ICR) facility supports public and private organisations in African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries, and promotes business environment reforms fostering an enabling environment for women's economic participation. For more information, please see: [Startpage | ICR Facility \(icr-facility.eu\)](#)

guarantee and blending operations<sup>305</sup> has been published in mid-2023. The marker is a qualitative statistical tool to record development activities that target gender equality as a policy objective<sup>306</sup>. A series of webinars on gender lens investing in Global Gateway sectors, aimed at enhancing European Commission and partner banks capacities in the field, was launched in coordination with the banks<sup>307</sup>. Furthermore, under Investment Window 4 of the EFSD+, in 2023 EIB with the backing of the Commission signed EUR 158 m dedicated to women entrepreneurs and/or SMEs providing quality leadership and employment opportunities for women – or services and products that close gender gaps. This was facilitated through 11 financial institutions in 9 countries<sup>308</sup> applying EIB's gender tag and the 2x criteria.

A further example is the EU-Organisation of Africa, Caribbean and Pacific States programme (OACPS) 'Women Entrepreneurship for Africa (WE4A)', in partnership with the deutsche Gesellschaft für internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and Tony Elumelu Foundation (TEF), which supports women entrepreneurs in Sub-Saharan Africa with funding and entrepreneurship training to help them navigate the start-up and early growth phases of their businesses<sup>309</sup>. Between 2021 and 2023, the programme supported over

2,400 women with training and seed capital. Selected entrepreneurs also benefited from an acceleration and growth programme, as well as additional funding to help them move to the growth stage. The second phase of the programme is launching in 2024.

Gender equality is also a key element of the **EU's engagement with candidate and potential candidate countries**<sup>310</sup>. In its yearly Enlargement Package, the European Commission provides a detailed assessment of the state of play in each candidate country and potential candidates, and sets out guidelines on reform priorities. The Package always includes an assessment of gender equality and women's rights. For the first time, the 2023 edition included reports on Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. Moreover, as part of the 2023 screening of the 'fundamentals' cluster' in North Macedonia and Albania<sup>311</sup>, an in-depth assessment of gender equality and women's rights was conducted<sup>312</sup>.

Gender equality also features prominently in the EU's programming efforts in the neighbourhood region and the enlargement area. In 2022<sup>313</sup>, 134 actions undertaken in this framework featured gender equality as 'an important and deliberate objective', and a further five listed it as

305 The European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+) is part of the EU's investment framework for external action. It ensures world-wide coverage for blending, guarantees and other financial operations. It is included in the EU's long-term budget programme for external action: [Global Europe – NDICI](#).

306 [DAC gender equality policy marker – OECD](#)

307 Recording and resources related to those trainings are available here: (i) [Gender lens investing webinar](#) organised in January 2023; [Gender smart climate finance](#) organised in September 2023 and facilitated by the EIB; [Gender smart digital investments](#) organised in October 2023 and facilitated by FINNFUND, [Enhancing care provisions in investment projects](#) organised in November 2023 and facilitated by the EBRD.

308 Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Mauritania, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia.

309 [Women Entrepreneurship for Africa \(tonyelumelufoundation.org\)](#)

310 In the context of accession negotiations, the European Commission monitors relevant developments under the Political Criteria and Chapters 19 (Social Policy and Employment), 23 (Judiciary and Fundamental Rights) and 24 (Justice, Freedom and Security).

311 The European Union opened accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia in 2022, and therefore started a 'screening process' in 2023, which the report on the fundamentals' cluster forms part of.

312 In the context of accession negotiations, the European Commission monitors relevant developments under the Political Criteria and Chapters 19 (Social Policy and Employment), 23 (Judiciary and Fundamental Rights) and 24 (Justice, Freedom and Security).

313 Annual findings are finalised in the second quarter of the following year; therefore, 2023 data is currently unavailable.

main objective, as indicated by monitoring conducted in the framework of the EU Gender Action Plan III<sup>314</sup>. On 18 October 2023, the **Eastern Partnership Working Group for Gender Equality** was launched and its first meeting held in Brussels. This Working Group will meet bi-annually at a regional level to discuss issues pertaining to gender equality, exchange best practices and provide input into the Eastern Partnership policies. The first meeting focused on the Eastern Partnership priority 'resilient, sustainable and integrated economies', with an emphasis on women's economic empowerment. It was co-chaired by the Ambassador for Gender and Diversity, and included representatives of partner countries, civil society (including from Belarus), EU Member States, and EU institutions.

Gender equality, as well as inequality, discrimination and exclusion more broadly were a priority under the Conflict prevention, peacebuilding and crisis preparedness part of the Peace, Stability and Conflict Prevention NDICI Global Europe Thematic Programme for 2022. Following a call for proposals launched in May 2023, the project 'Soomaliya oo Nabad ah: Building Inclusive Early Warning & Early Response Systems at the Community Level' in Somalia was selected and will be implemented over the next two years.

As part of GAP III, the EU continued to work on the implementation of the **EU Strategic Approach to Women, Peace and Security (WPS)** and its action plan. The EU supported **women's equal political and leadership in peace processes across the globe**, with flagship projects such as 'Advancing Women's Participation in the Syrian Political Process' and 'SAWT – Supporting Arab Women at the Table: Women as Actors in Peace Processes'.

The EU continued to integrate a gender perspective and deliver on the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda in **Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and operations**, among others through the implementation of the Strategic Compass and of the Civilian CSDP Compact, which was renewed in spring 2023. From October 2023 onwards, the OECD **Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Gender Equality Marker** will be used in civilian CSDP budgets. According to an initial screening, most civilian CSDP missions already contribute to gender equality<sup>315</sup>. As foreseen in the '**Updated toolset for EU Conflict Analysis and Conflict Early Warning**'<sup>316</sup>, the EU is also in the process of updating the EU Conflict Analysis methodology to influence EU programming and actions in a more gender-responsive and conflict-sensitive manner. With this effort, the EU aims at having an **EU Gender Responsive Conflict Analysis (GRCA)** methodology that, from the outset, systematically identifies the different experiences, needs, roles and interests of different women, men, boys and girls from diverse backgrounds in conflict and in peace. To feed into this process, an EPLO-CSDN dialogue was also held in September 2023. In parallel, preparations for an **EU-UN Joint Gender Responsive Conflict Analysis (GRCA)**, as foreseen in the Strategic Compass, have been initiated, and the analysis itself will take place in 2024.

Women's rights, empowerment and inclusion in **Afghanistan** remained prioritised in the EU's external action throughout 2023. The EU-facilitated **Afghan Women Leaders Forum**, which includes exiled leaders from diverse backgrounds, continued to meet virtually throughout the year to work for women's voices in political dialogues and engaged in a number of advocacy initiatives. One in-person meeting of the forum focusing on gender persecution was

314 This is based on the OECD gender marker. Gender Marker G1 is defined as follows: 'Gender equality is an important and deliberate objective, but not the principal reason for undertaking the project/ programme', while for Gender Marker G2 'Gender equality is the main objective of the project/ programme and is fundamental in its design and expected results. The project/programme would not have been undertaken without this gender equality objective'.

315 Based on the initial screening, in 2023 12 out of 13 missions scored 1 (meaning that they contribute to gender equality), whereas one mission scored 0 (no contribution to gender equality).

316 [Joint Staff Working Document, Updated toolset for EU Conflict Analysis and Conflict Early Warning Objectives, processes and guidance, SWD\(2023\) 295 final](#)

held in The Hague and included a dialogue with the ICC Deputy Prosecutor Nazhat Shameem Khan.

Gender equality has also been integrated in the EU-funded Afghanistan Inclusive Dialogue Initiative (AIDI) project. With the brain drain after the Taliban takeover in August 2021, investing in basic training has been essential. As such, Afghan partner organisations have trained several hundred women and supported the organisation of local chapters of the Afghan Women's Chamber of Commerce and Industries throughout the country. As the business sector is still allowed to have female employees, empowering woman business leaders can also serve to promote women's inclusion in Afghanistan more broadly. Following the ban on NGOs hiring Afghan women, partners provide office equipment and solar panels to help female employees work from home and remain part of the work force.

In **Myanmar**, through the Joint Peace Fund (JPF)<sup>317</sup>, the EU supports the **Women, Peace and Security** agenda by funding sub-grants for projects strengthening women's leadership, supporting civil society voices and their inclusion in conflict management, as well as initiatives contributing to inclusive pathways to peace and conflict transformation. One project for instance focuses on supporting women's leadership in short- and long-term discussions about a federal democratic future for Myanmar, and on including WPS perspectives in legal and policy frameworks developed by pro-democracy actors. It also developed protection and prevention mechanisms to ensure that women human rights defenders, peacebuilders and political activists are protected. The EU-funded **Nexus Response Mechanism** (NRM) also launched a call for proposals in 2023 for a new component focusing on Women's leadership, Peace and Security.

Moreover, the **new peace mediation guidelines**<sup>318</sup> of the **EU's External Action Service (EEAS)**, issued in

October 2023, feature an updated chapter on **women, peace and security**, which highlights the importance of gender-responsive mediation approaches and processes, and emphasise the need to include women in all 'tracks' of peace mediation and in all parts of a peace process. The EU aims at strengthening the engagement of **women mediators**, also in collaboration with partners. WPS and peace mediation are part of the agenda of the Dialogues on Conflict Prevention and Peace Mediation with **International and Regional Organisations** such as the United Nations, the African Union or the ECOWAS. The **2023 EU Community of Practice on Peace Mediation**<sup>319</sup> contributed to this aim in relations with **civil society**: it brought together women mediators from different world regions and highlighted the role of women mediators and the need for institutional (political and financial) support to make peace processes inclusive and sustainable. In addition, a **study on women peace mediator networks** finalised in December 2023 provides an overview of existing regional women mediators networks, their objectives, mandates, operational capacities and support needs, as well as strategic recommendations for the EU to better support and collaborate with such networks.

The efforts on Women, Peace and Security translate into concrete support on the ground. For instance, the EU organised a Mental Health and Psychosocial support (MPHSS) workshop for **Sudanese women** in November 2023, to support their resilience as they engage in peace and democratic efforts during their exile in Uganda. A meeting between the Office for the Ambassador Gender and Diversity of the EU and **Syrian and Libyan women** from the **EU-supported Arab Reform Initiative** (SWAT, see above) allowed them to share feedback and recommendations on how the EU may support to women in their region.

The EU is also prioritising gender equality in its **fight against terrorism and violent extremism**. Together with

317 [Joint Peace Fund](#)

318 [EEAS Peace Mediation Guidelines 2023.pdf \(squarespace.com\)](#)

319 [EU Community of Practice on Peace Mediation 2023](#)

its co-chair Egypt, the EU has made gender mainstreaming a priority of the **Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF)** for the period 2022-2024. At an event co-hosted by the EU and Spain in April 2023 new EU Guidelines on 'Promoting the Role of Women in the Criminal Justice Response to Terrorism', developed with Women in International Security (WIIS) were presented. To take this forward, a new EU counter-terrorism facility is due to be established in spring 2024, among others with the aim to enhance women's active and meaningful participation and representation in security and counterterrorism across the globe.

### THE EU'S INTERNATIONAL ACTION AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

In a 2023 report on the state of funding on gender-based violence, UN Women reported that, in 2022, less than 1 % of overseas development assistance spending targeted gender-based violence<sup>320</sup>. Against this trend, the EU is committed to combating gender-based violence in its external action and has increased its financial commitments towards this goal on an annual basis in recent years, with EUR 282 million being allocated in 2022 compared to EUR 60 million in 2021. In addition, EUR 41.3 million have been spent on gender-based violence in humanitarian responses in 2022 (compared to EUR 33.1 million in 2021)<sup>321</sup>.

The EU continues to support the **Spotlight Initiative**, the largest global initiative aiming to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls by 2030<sup>322</sup>. By the end

of 2022, thanks to the Spotlight Initiative, 477 laws or policies were signed or strengthened to end violence against women and girls, nearly 2.5 million women and girls accessed gender-based violence services, and more than 1 750 civil society organisations received financial support<sup>323</sup>. A final evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative is being carried out and results will be issued by the end of 2024. On 18 September 2023, the European Commission signed the programme '**ACT – Advocacy, Coalition Building and Transformative Feminist Action to End Violence against Women**' during the 78th UN General Assembly (UNGA78) High-Level Week<sup>324</sup>. This builds on the Spotlight Initiative's results and lessons learned in 26 countries to empower women's organisations at regional and global levels<sup>325</sup>, and contributes to its sustainability.

The European Union has also used restrictive measures (sanctions) as a tool in its gender equality policy toolbox in order to enhance accountability. Designations for sexual and gender-based violence were adopted under a number of EU sanctions regimes, most recently under the **EU's Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime (EUGHRSR)**. On 7 March 2023, ahead of International Women's Day, the EU imposed **sanctions** under its **Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime (EUGHRSR)** for serious human rights violations related to violence against women and girls<sup>326</sup>. These restrictive measures targeted nine individuals and three entities, including high-ranking members of the Russian armed forces, whose units systematically participated in acts of sexual and gender-based violence in Ukraine in March-April 2022.

320 [Less than 1 % of aid spending targets gender-based violence, according to new reports | UN Women – Headquarters](#)

321 [Joint Mid-Term Implementation Report on the Implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan \(GAP III\), p. 9](#)

322 The Spotlight initiative was launched with a seed funding commitment of EUR 500 million from the European Union. For more information see [Spotlight Initiative](#)

323 For full results see [Spotlight Initiative Impact Report 2021-2022: Driving change for a better tomorrow | Spotlight Initiative](#)

324 [EU and UN Women to boost women's rights coalitions on ending violence against women - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

325 See [Spotlight's Initiative's 2022 Global Annual Report \(spotlightinitiative.org\)](#)

326 [Violence against women and girls: EU sanctions nine individuals and three entities under its Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime - Consilium \(europa.eu\)](#)

In addition, a further six individuals responsible for gender-based violence<sup>327</sup> were sanctioned on 20 July 2023. These include the acting Taliban Ministers of Education and Justice and the acting Taliban Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Afghanistan because of their role in depriving Afghan girls and women of their right to education, access to justice and equal treatment between men and women. The measures also target a senior officer of the South Sudanese armed forces, a leading figure of the Popular Front for the Rebirth of Central African Republic, and a commander of the 30th Motorized Rifle Brigade of the Russian armed forces because they committed widespread attacks against the civilian population in the countries where they operated, which systematically included sexual and gender-based violence, including as a means to terrorise the population.

The EU kept supporting the prevention, mitigation and response to sexual and gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence, through funding and advocacy activities<sup>328</sup>. In addition to the Spotlight Initiative, the EU allocated approximately EUR 47 million in 2023 from its humanitarian aid budget for targeted actions to prevent, mitigate and respond to gender-based violence in emergencies. A further approximately EUR 31.5 million was allocated to accommodate the sexual and reproductive health and rights needs of women and girls in humanitarian situations. The EU pursued its efforts to ensure that its humanitarian aid and crisis responses were gender-responsive promoting equitable partnerships with women-led and women's

rights organisations, who are often frontline responders to gender-based violence<sup>329</sup>. The third assessment of Gender and Age Marker<sup>330</sup> of the European Commission's Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO), which helps assess the gender-responsiveness of a humanitarian project, indicated that 96 % of all EU humanitarian aid in 2021 had integrated gender and age considerations 'strongly' or 'to a certain extent'<sup>331</sup>.

During the **European Humanitarian Forum** in March 2023, the EU also hosted a high-level event highlighting the **situation of women and girls in Afghanistan**<sup>332</sup>. In Asia, the EU supported a number of gender equality projects and initiatives, including in **Indonesia** and **Myanmar**. The EU is the largest contributor to **Indonesia's Women's Rights Commission** (Komnas Perempuan). Following the adoption of a landmark Sexual Crime Law in April 2022, the EU scaled up its financial support to Komnas Perempuan in 2023. In a context of increasing<sup>333</sup> gender-based violence rates and low trust in state-administered health services in **Myanmar**, the EU kept a strong focus on supporting gender-based violence response and access to services for women and girls, including access to sexual and reproductive health and rights. During the second phase of the **Women and Girls First programme** (2019-2023), over 120 000 persons accessed gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health and rights services thanks to EU funding.

327 [Human rights violations: EU lists 18 individuals and five entities responsible for gender-based violence and linked to the Navalny and Kara-Murza cases - Consilium \(europa.eu\)](#)

328 On June 2023, the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual violence in Conflict, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Conflict issued a [joint statement: Joint Statement I EFAS \(europa.eu\)](#)

329 In March 2023, DG ECHO issued a Guidance note on promoting equitable partnerships with local responders in humanitarian settings acknowledging important role of local women-led and women's rights organisations.

330 [Gender age marker toolkit \(europa.eu\)](#)

331 [Gender Age Marker 2018-2021 \(europa.eu\)](#)

332 [EHF - Co-Hosts Summary by the European Commission and the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the EU - March 2023.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

333 [The United Nations in Indonesia welcomes the Indonesian Parliament's approval of the Sexual Violence Crime Bill \(RUU TPKS\) into law on 12 April 2022 | United Nations in Indonesia](#)



## THE EU'S GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS AND MULTILATERAL EFFORTS ON GENDER EQUALITY

As part of its regional and multilateral engagement, the EU continued to collaborate and engage with the **United Nations** system, including **UN Women, the United Nations Population Fund and UNICEF**. The EU remained a vocal advocate for women's and girl's full enjoyment of all human rights at the Human Rights Council (HRC) and the UN General Assembly Third Committee. For instance, in September 2023 the EU called for integration of a gender perspective across the human rights architecture in the Human Rights Council. The EU supported several resolutions related to gender equality and the elimination of discrimination against women and girls<sup>334</sup>, and strived to achieve gender mainstreaming across the Human Rights Council's work. In addition, the EU supported the full implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Finally, the EU continued to promote the work of women human rights defenders, women's (rights) organisations and youth-led organisations in various multilateral fora.

The EU participated in the **67<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)**, which took place at the UN Headquarters in New York in March 2023. The EU invited civil society representatives as part of its delegation headed by Vice-President Jourova, and organised side events as part of its outreach. The conclusions agreed by the parties focus on the **interlinkages between technologies, digital developments and gender equality**, and call for new efforts to **address the risks and harness the benefits of technologies for gender equality**. The EU followed an ambitious agenda meant to enhance the implementation of measures on Women, Peace and Security

(WPS), and participated in a conference titled 'A gender equal world with technologies, digitalisation and AI – what is our roadmap?'

During the **78<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the United Nations (UNGA78)**, the EU emphasised the need to strengthen the New Agenda for Peace by '**implementing the Women, Peace and Security agenda in all its dimensions**'<sup>335</sup>. The EU also participated in a side event on 'Survivor-centered approach to preventing and responding to conflict-related sexual violence: Ukraine-UN experience and the crucial role of Women's NGOs' with Under-Secretary-General Pramila Patten.

On 21 June 2023, the EU Delegation in New York hosted an **Action Coalition strategic dialogue**, marking the anniversary of the **ILO Convention No. 190 on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work**; in September 2023, the Council of the EU reached agreement to invite Member States to accede to this Convention (see Chapter 1). The Action Coalition convened leaders and commitment-makers, including civil society organisations, member states, the private sector and trade unions together with the Group of Friends to Eliminate Violence against Women and Girls.

The Commission continued to be a supporter and partner of the **Generation Equality Forum**, a global multi-stakeholder initiative launched in 2021 to advance women's rights and gender equality across the world<sup>336</sup>. As co-leader of the Action Coalition on Gender-based Violence, the Commission participated in the **Generation Equality Accountability Mid-Point Moment** in September 2023, to reflect on progress and reaffirm the need for accountability and transparency as cornerstones of the Generation Equality Forum's success. A Mid-Point Moment event, convened by

334 See for instance [Resolution on 'Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly'](#)

335 The [Council Conclusions on EU priorities at the United Nations during the 78th session of the United Nations General Assembly, September 2023 – September 2024](#) explicitly state that the EU will vigorously promote and scale up international efforts towards gender equality, the advancement and full enjoyment of all human rights by all women and girls and their empowerment, in line with its international commitments.

336 [Generation Equality Forum](#)

UN Women under the co-leadership of the Governments of Iceland and Tanzania, provided an important opportunity to mobilise sustained attention to and investment in gender equality as an accelerator for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). On this occasion, the European Commission pledged EUR 22 million to support Women's Rights Organisations and Feminist Movements.

The EU as co-presidency of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), together with Jordan, contributes to promoting initiatives with concrete regional impact on the Mediterranean shores. Building on the four priority areas of the 5th UfM Ministerial Declaration on Strengthening the Role of Women in Societies, approved in Madrid in October 2022, the EU is working with UfM on enhancing legal frameworks; improving women's access to leadership; raising women's participation in economic life and combatting violence against women and girls.

The EU continued to advocate for and promote gender equality in the framework of key multilateral fora, such as the **G7 and the G20**. During **Japan's G7 presidency in 2023**, gender equality remained high on the agenda. The EU played a pivotal role in the G7's **Working Group on Gender Equality**, which supported gender mainstreaming in all G7 ministerial tracks and the further development of the gender equality accountability framework. On the occasion of the Leaders' Summit, the second edition of the **Gender-Gap Dashboard** was published – an annual deliverable aimed at monitoring progress towards gender equality in the G7 countries and the EU<sup>337</sup>. A G7 Ministerial Meeting on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment took place in Nikko in June 2023, and gave representatives of G7 countries and the EU the opportunity to discuss challenges related to

gender equality and women's empowerment faced by the international community. On 15 December 2023, the first G7 Gender Equality Implementation Report was published<sup>338</sup>. The report was prepared by the OECD at the request of the G7 Japanese Presidency, and complements the G7 Gender Gaps Dashboard as part of the G7 Gender Equality Accountability framework.

In August 2023, the **G20 Indian presidency** convened a **Ministerial Conference on Women's Empowerment** in Gujarat, focused on 'Women-Led Inclusive Development as Cusp of Inter-Generational Transformation', which was the occasion for the G20 and the EU to reaffirm their commitment to achieving gender equality and women's empowerment to accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals<sup>339</sup>. In January 2024, the G20 Brazilian presidency established a dedicated working group on gender equality.

## TRADE AND GENDER EQUALITY

The EU is committed to promoting gender equality and women's economic empowerment through trade policy. In the **World Trade Organization (WTO)**, the EU is an active member of the **Informal Working Group on Trade and Gender**<sup>340</sup>. In this context, the Commission continued its cooperation with the International Trade Centre<sup>341</sup> to **apply a gender lens to the work of the WTO**, encourage greater gender equality and boost women's economic empowerment. This project led to the publication of a gender lens analytical framework<sup>342</sup> and four thematic reports, which look at the themes of trade facilitation, e-commerce, government procurement and investment facilitation through

337 [G7 Ministerial Meeting on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Nikko, Tochigi](#)

338 [G7 Gender Equality Implementation Report 2023: Promoting Gender Equality Through G7 Policy | en | OECD](#)

339 Attendees, including the EU, committed to advance gender equality by prioritizing the following areas: (i) Education, a game-changing pathway to Women's Empowerment; (ii) Women's Entrepreneurship, a win-win for Equity and Economy; (iii) Creating a Partnership for Promoting Women's Leadership at all Levels including at the grassroots and (iv) Women and Girls as Change-makers in Climate Resilience Action with Digital Skilling.

340 [WTO | Informal Working Group on Trade and Gender](#)

341 [Women's economic empowerment | ITC \(intracen.org\)](#)

342 [A Gender Analytical Framework for the agreements and work of the World Trade Organization | ITC \(intracen.org\)](#)



a gender lens. The results of the project were discussed in a public webinar<sup>343</sup>.

**EU trade agreements** have **dedicated trade and gender equality provisions** with an increasing number of countries. In 2023, the EU signed trade agreements with **New Zealand, Chile** and **Kenya** with legally binding and enforceable provisions on gender equality<sup>344</sup>. These include a commitment to effectively implement relevant UN and ILO conventions on women's economic empowerment and gender equality, such as the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Under the **EU's Generalised Scheme of Preferences**, the EU monitors how beneficiary countries respect the principles of core international conventions on promoting women's rights and gender equality<sup>345</sup>. All *ex-ante* and *ex-post* evaluations of trade agreements now contain a dedicated gender analysis; this was the case for the *ex-post* evaluations of trade agreements with **Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Georgia and Moldova**<sup>346</sup>, completed in 2023. To support the ongoing negotiations of a trade agreement with **India**, a Sustainability Impact Assessment including an analysis of the possible impact on gender equality was also started in 2023.

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343 [Applying a gender lens to the agreements and work of the World Trade Organization | ITC \(intracen.org\)](#)

344 [EU-Kenya agreement \(europa.eu\)](#)

345 This applies in particular to in particular the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Convention concerning Equal Remuneration of Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value, and the Convention concerning Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation.

346 [Ex-post evaluations \(europa.eu\)](#)

## CONCLUSION

By the time of publication of this report, legislative negotiations between the European Parliament and the Council have come to an end to allow the texts of the draft laws to be fine-tuned, translated and formally adopted by both institutions before the European Parliament breaks for the 2023 European elections. As the implementation of the Gender Equality Strategy enters its final stage, the focus will be on ensuring that the legislation adopted in 2023 is fully and effectively transposed and implemented. This will ensure that the measures highlighted in this report will actually become a reality on the ground in the EU.

On 6-9 June 2024, over 400 million people will be invited to determine the future of the EU during the European Parliament elections. This is a period of reflection, but also an opportunity to refocus efforts in areas that need it most and decide what course EU citizens want the EU to take when it comes to its future and gender equality.

The takeaway from 2023 is clear – despite significant gains in both legislation and policy the EU is still far from being truly gender equal. The biggest demonstration of this is the persistent state of fear that women and girls find themselves in on a daily basis. The growth of anti-feminist movements in Europe and globally is also a cause for concern.

According to the 2023 UN Gender Social Norms Index<sup>347</sup>, which quantifies biases against women in political, educational, economic and physical integrity dimensions, almost 90% of those surveyed hold fundamental biases against women. The index, covering 85% of the world's population, shows that nearly half of them believe that men make better political leaders than women, and 2 in 5 people believe that men make better business executives. This holds true across developing and developed countries, and is despite growing research showing that women's full participation can only benefit economic development<sup>348</sup>. The Index's most worrying finding is that a 25% of the world's population believe it is justified for a man to beat his wife<sup>349</sup>.

With this data of the state of play at hand and the progress made in 2023, we have the opportunity in June to chose and continue building on the foundation laid for a Union of Equality, where all women and girls are free and can thrive and lead. The European Elections in June are also an opportunity to give women the space, voice and role to participate in the European democratic process and to shape the future of Europe. A Europe that represents, speaks out and works for 228 741 176<sup>350</sup> women and girls in all their diversity.

347 [2023 Gender Social Norms Index \(GSNI\) | Human Development Reports \(undp.org\)](#)

348 [Economic benefits of gender equality briefing paper](#)

349 See [2023 Gender Social Norms Index \(GSNI\)](#), p.6.

350 [Population, female - European Union | Data \(worldbank.org\)](#)

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