

Questions and Answers: What is the EU doing for women's rights and gender equality?

Brussels, 8 March 2018

What are the priorities of the Commission in terms of gender equality?

In December 2015, the Commission presented the "Strategic engagement for gender equality 2016-2019". It represents the work programme for gender equality policy during this Commission's mandate.

The Strategic engagement outlined five priority areas:

- increasing female labour-market participation and the equal economic independence of women and men;
- reducing the gender pay, earnings and pension gaps and thus fighting poverty among women;
- promoting equality between women and men in decision-making;
- combating gender-based violence and protecting and supporting victims; and
- promoting gender equality and women's rights across the world.

In 2017 the European Commission concentrated its efforts on two lines of actions. In November, the Commission announced concrete action to reduce the gender pay gap through an Action Plan to be delivered between now and the end of the Commission's mandate in 2019. In the Action Plan it urges the European Parliament and the Member States to adopt swiftly the work-life balance proposal of April 2017; calls for arrangements to facilitate the adoption of the Directive on gender balance in the largest listed companies, and encourages governments and social partners to adopt concrete measures to improve gender balance in decision-making.

The second line of actions on which the European Commission concentrated its efforts was to combat violence against women and girls. 2017 was dedicated as a Year of Focused Actions on Ending Violence against Women. This year's Annual Fundamental Rights Colloquium on Women's Rights in Turbulent Times, addressed violence and harassment against women in our societies as well as the economic and political inequality between women and men, particularly focusing on the gender pay gap and on work-life balance.

What are the key findings of the 2018 Commission's Report on equality between women and men?

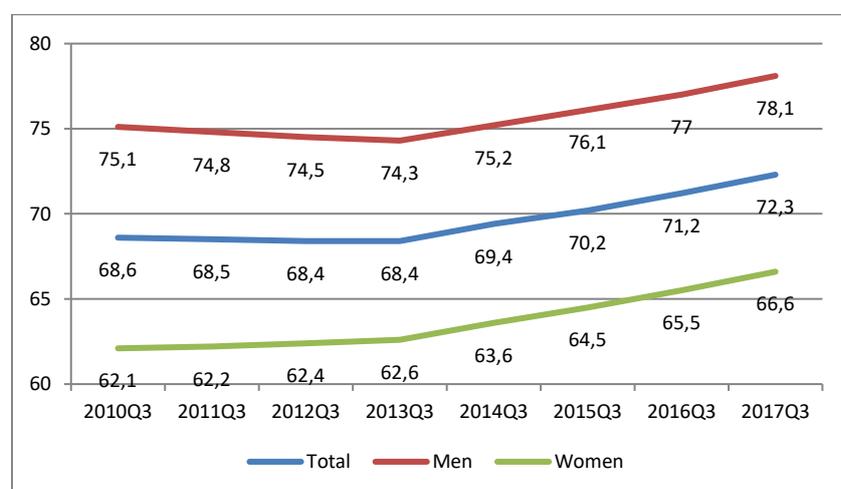
- **Female employment continued increase slowly but steadily and reached 66.6 % in the third quarter of 2017.** Despite this progress, **women are still a long way off achieving full economic independence.** According to a recent [survey](#), in comparison to men, women still tend to be employed less, are employed in lower-paid sectors, work on average 6 hours longer per week than men, but have fewer paid hours, take more career breaks, and face fewer and slower promotions.

- Moreover, **women in the EU still earn on average over 16 % less per hour than men.** The gap varies greatly from one Member State to another, pointing also to a current trade-off between low gender wage gaps and high female employment rates.
- As regards decision-making, **women account for just a quarter of board members in the largest publicly listed companies** registered in EU Member States. France is the only Member State in which there was at least 40 % of each gender at board level.
- **The situation is equally diverse in politics:** National parliaments in Sweden, Finland and Spain included at least 40 % of each gender, while in six countries (Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Latvia, Malta and **HY**) women accounted for less than 20 % of members. Similarly, Governments were gender balanced in France, Germany, Slovenia and Sweden while women were completely absent from the Hungarian government.
- **Gender-based violence remains prominently present in our daily life.** According to the EIGE '[Gender Equality Index 2017: Measurement framework of violence against women](#)', on a scale of 1 to 100, 1 represents a situation where violence is non-existent and 100 represents a situation where violence against women is extremely common, highly severe and not disclosed, **the EU's score is 27.5 out of 100.** The score varies between countries, ranging from 22.1 in Poland to 44.2 in Bulgaria.

What are the latest trends on the economic independence of women?

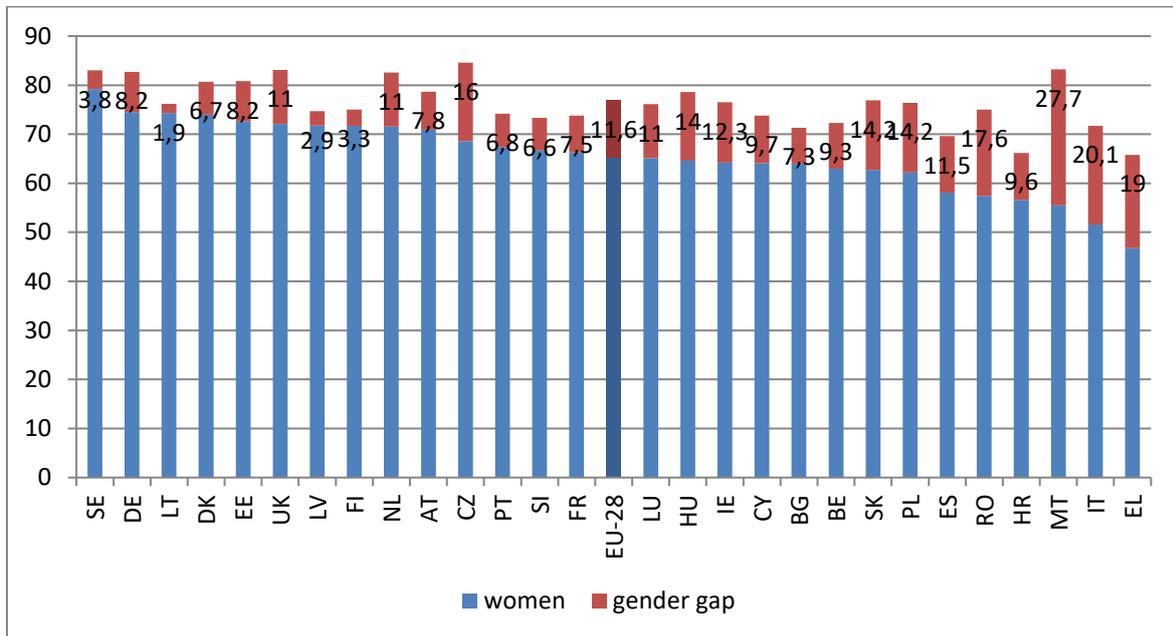
In 2017, female employment continued increase slowly but steadily, similarly to that of men's, and reached 66.6 % in the third quarter of 2017 (see Figure 1). Despite this progress, women are still a long way off achieving full economic independence. The gender gap in employment has stagnated for the last few years at around 11 percentage points (11.5 in 2017q3) and has reached more than 18 percentage points in terms of full-time equivalent. No considerable catch-up has been observed between low and high performing Member States. Greece, Italy, Malta and Romania are among the worst performers on the gender employment gap, compared to the best performers Latvia, Lithuania and Latvia and Sweden (see Figure 2).

Figure 1. EU-28 trends in employment rates, 20-64, by gender



Source: Eurostat, Labour Force Survey

Figure 2. Women's employment rate and gender employment gap, 20-64, per Member State, 2016



Source: Eurostat, Labour Force Survey

The share of women working part-time remains stable at around 30 %, as compared to 8 % for men, though significant country differences can be observed. According to the OECD, gender sorting into part-time work is an important factor keeping women attached to the labour market, especially after they become mothers. But it has one major drawback: part-time work is one of the key factors contributing to the existing gender pay gap, pension gap and the risk of poverty of older women - therefore hampering equal economic independence.

What is the EU doing to address outstanding challenges to female employment in the Member States?

Profound structural changes are needed to the labour markets and in the way they function to encourage more female labour market participation and support dual-earning families. In order to do so, in April 2017 the European Commission adopted a comprehensive package of policy and legal measures. *The initiative on Work-life balance for working parents and careers* includes a proposal for a Directive that aims at modernising EU legislation in the area of family-related leave and flexible working arrangements.

The Directive proposes an EU-wide right to paternity leave and strengthens the existing parental leave. Fathers would be able to take at least 10 working days of paternity leave around the time of birth of the child, compensated at least at the level of sick pay. Also, 4 months of parental leave would be compensated at least at sick pay level and be non-transferable from one parent to the other. Parents would have the right to request to take leave in a flexible way (part-time or in a piecemeal way) and the age of the child up to which parents can take leave would be increased from 8 to 12 years.

The Commission's proposal further introduces carers' leave for workers caring for seriously ill or dependent relatives. Working carers would be able to take 5 days per year, compensated at least at sick pay level.

Finally, the Directive adapts to new working time patterns. The proposal sets rights to request more flexible working arrangements for all working parents of children up to 12 and carers with dependent relatives, not only in terms of time (flexible and/or reduced working hours) but also in terms of place of work (teleworking).

The initiative on Work-life balance for working parents and carers also contains a set of other, mainly of non-legislative measures, that translate into 10 actions. These actions focus on a wide range of issues to improve the work-life balance for men and women with caring responsibilities, including childcare and long term care, and aim at modernising the existing EU legal and policy framework.

The Commission set up a **dedicated Inter-Service Group** to follow up the implementation of the Work-life balance initiative.

What about women in senior positions in the European Commission?

The European Commission is steadily moving towards meeting the **target set by President Jean-Claude Juncker** of ensuring that at least 40 % of the Commission's middle and senior managers are women by the end of the current mandate (2019). Female managers at all levels had reached a total of 37 % on 1 January 2018, up from 30 % at the beginning of the mandate of this Commission (2014). At senior management level, the share of women has increased from 27 % on 1 November 2014 to 35 %. At middle management level, 38 % of managers are women, compared to 31 % when the Juncker Commission took office. The progress comes after efforts to identify, develop and support female talent, targeted training sessions and mentoring, specific management programmes and support for existing and new female networks, and setting individual targets for all Commission departments when it comes to appointing someone to a middle-management role for the first time.

How is the gender pay gap evolving?

Inequalities on the labour market are also reflected in the gender pay gap. For every hour worked women earn on average 16.3% less than men in 2015. Considerable country heterogeneity can be observed among the EU Member States: the gender pay gap varies from 5.5 % in Italy to 26.9 % in Estonia.

Although the magnitude of the gap differs, a number of underlying causes are rather similar across countries. The lack of pay transparency has been recognised as one of the major obstacles to victims of pay discrimination effectively enforcing their rights. Moreover, women in the EU are over-represented in industries with low pay levels and under-represented in well paid industries. Sectoral segregation continues to be one of the most significant contributing factors to the gender pay gap in the EU.

The unequal distribution of caring responsibilities between women and men is one of the major drivers of the gender gaps in employment, working hours and pay.

What is the gender gap in pension?

The gender gap in pensions, which is defined as the gap between the average pre-tax income received as a pension by women and that received by men, is at 36.3 % (+65 age group) in 2016. The gap varies greatly from one Member State to another, depending on past progress on gender equality in the labour market. It is also affected by the design of the national pension system, and depends on the extent to which pension entitlements are linked to earnings-related pension contributions over working careers.

What is the EU doing about the gender pay gap?

The principle of equal pay is included in the EU Treaties and in [Directive](#) on gender equality in the area of employment and occupation. The Directive prohibits direct and indirect discrimination on grounds of sex concerning all aspects of remuneration. It also prohibits sex discrimination in job classification systems used for determining pay. However, the effective application of the existing legal framework on equal pay remains a challenge in all Member States. The Commission is monitoring whether EU law on equal pay is being correctly applied and supports Member States and other stakeholders in properly enforcing the existing rules.

However, the stagnation of the gender pay gap in recent years pleads for further policy measures. The Commission draws attention to the size and general inertia of the gender pay gap in the EU by marking the **European Equal Pay Day**. On 3 November 2017, across the EU women symbolically stopped earning for the rest of the year in comparison to men. First Vice-President Timmermans and Commissioners Thyssen and Jourová issued a [joint statement](#) calling for stepped up policy efforts to fight this injustice.

Subsequently, on 20 November 2017, the Commission adopted an [Action Plan to tackle the gender pay gap 2017-2019](#), reaffirming the Commission's commitment to improving gender equality.

The Action Plan takes a holistic approach and addresses all the different root causes of the gender pay gap: sectoral segregation, vertical segregation, prevailing stereotypes, a lack of work-life balance, and proper enforcement of the equal pay principle.

It comprises a broad and coherent set of 20 concrete actions to be delivered in the next 2 years, namely 2018-2019. It will therefore require the effort and commitment of all players, including decision-makers at EU and national level.

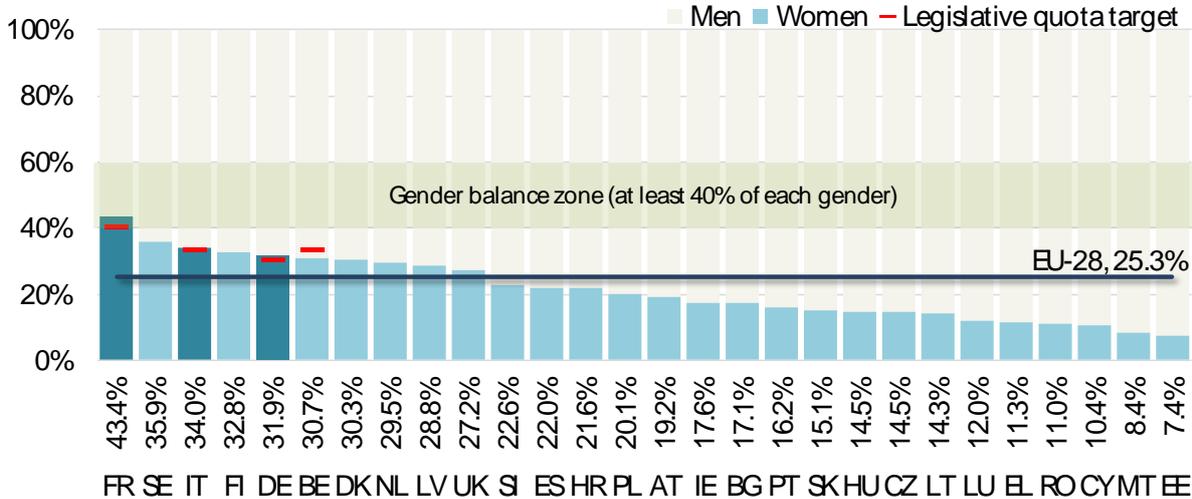
Are women breaking the glass-ceiling in companies?

Data collected by the EIGE show that in October 2017, women accounted for just a quarter (25.3 %) of **board members in the largest publicly listed companies** registered in EU Member States. France (43.4 %) was the only Member State in which there was at least 40 % of each gender at board level, a figure that has been achieved by introducing a legislative quota in 2011 requiring companies to meet a 40 % target by January 2017. A further nine countries had at least 25 % women on boards (Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy, Latvia Netherlands, Sweden and the UK).

Progress was made in just a few Member States, principally as a result of **legislative or other forms of positive measures** to promote gender balance, and much more still needs to be done to achieve further and sustainable progress. In half of the Member States (14), men still outnumber women in the boards of large companies by at least 4 to 1 (i.e. less than 20 %

women), while in Malta and Estonia women account for less than 10 % of board members (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Representation of women and men on the boards of the largest listed companies in the EU, October 2017



Source: European Institute for Gender Equality, Gender Statistics Database

What has the EU done to promote gender equality on company boards?

The EU’s Action Plan on tackling the gender pay gap reiterates the Commission’s commitment to break the glass-ceiling. The Commission is determined to work towards the adoption of the 2012 proposal for a Directive, for the under-represented gender to represent at least 40 % of non-executive directors, to ensure transparent selection of board members; and to encourage governments to adopt strategies with concrete measures to ensure improved gender balance in decision making.

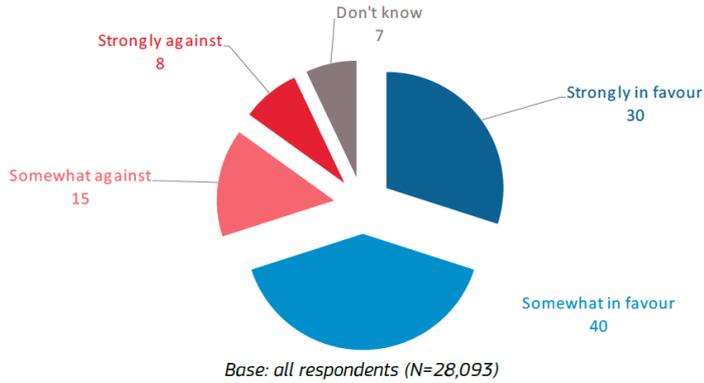
Moreover, **Directive 2014/95/EU on disclosure of non-financial and diversity information** requires certain large companies (above 500 employees) to disclose information about sustainability matters, including environmental, social, human rights and corruption issues. The Directive also requires large listed companies to disclose a description of the diversity policy applied to the company's administrative, management and supervisory bodies on aspects such as age, gender, educational and professional backgrounds, the objectives of that diversity policy, and how it has been implemented and the results in the reporting period. If no such policy is applied, the statement must explain why this is the case.

What do Europeans think about gender equality in politics?

Despite the persistent under-representation of women in decision-making in politics, Europeans support a fairer distribution of power. According to the latest **Eurobarometer Survey on Gender Equality**, 70 % of Europeans are in favour of legal measures to ensure parity between women and men in politics (Figure 4) and 86 % think that they can be represented by female politicians (Figure 5). The majority of respondents (54 %) think that there should be more women in political decision-making positions (Figure 6). However, gendered stereotypes continue to persist explaining the low numbers of women in politics. At least 35 % of Europeans believe men are more ambitious than women and 34 % think that women are less interested than men in positions of responsibility in politics (Figure 7).

Figure 4:

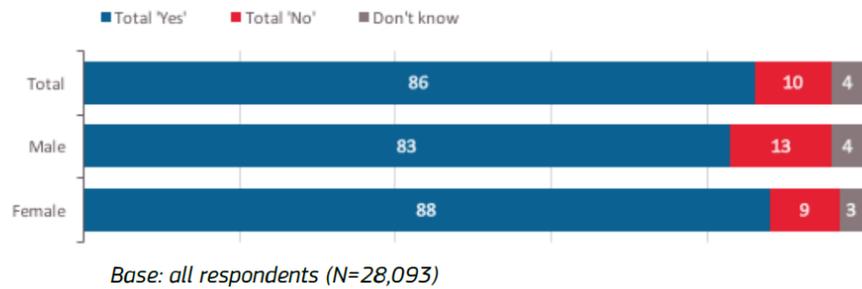
QC11 Are you in favour or against legal measures to ensure parity between men and women in politics?
(% - EU)



Source:

Figure 5:

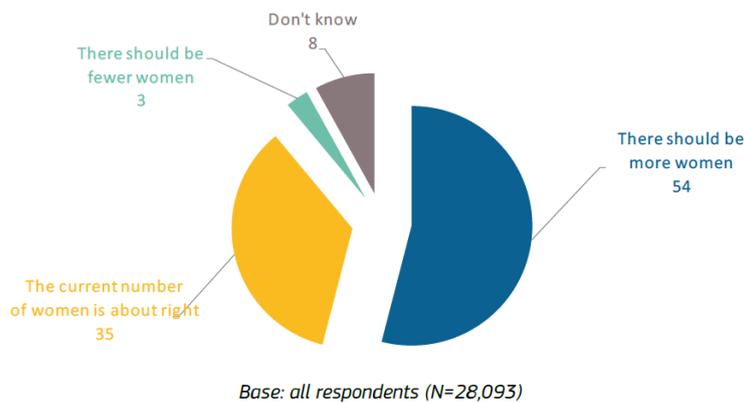
QC9 Do you think that a female political representative can represent your interests?
(% - EU)



Source:

Figure 6:

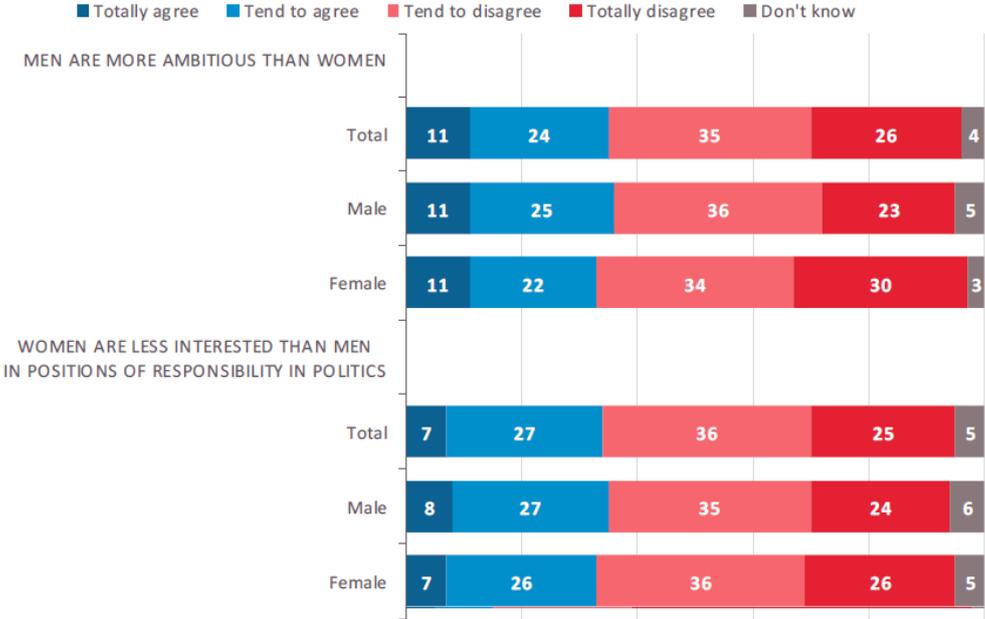
QC8 In your opinion, which of the following statements regarding the number of women currently in political decision-making positions in (OUR COUNTRY) applies best?
(% - EU)



Source:

Figure 7:

QC7 Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.
(% - EU)



Base: all respondents (N=28,093)

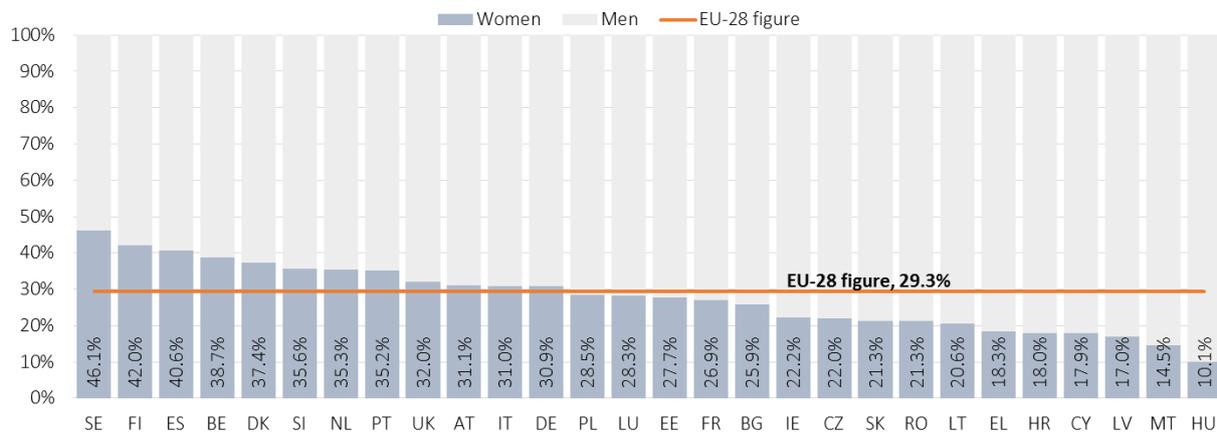
Source:

How is the situation evolving in national politics?

Most national parliaments do not reflect the diversity of the electorate. Women continue to be under-represented in decision-making positions at all levels. Indeed, in most EU Member States, parliaments and governments at all levels fail to reflect the composition of the societies they represent.

Although the proportion of women members in the single/lower houses of **national parliaments** in the EU has increased from 22.1 % in October 2004 to 29.3 % in November 2017, the rate of progress is far too slow. Moreover, women accounted only for 16.9 % of leaders of major political parties (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Representation of women and men in single/lower houses of parliament, November 2017



Source: EIGE Gender Statistics Database.

What the EU does to combat gender-based violence?

Even before women started to voice their experiences of sexual assault and harassment in the professional context on social media (*#MeToo*), the EU supported this outcry of women throughout its campaigns and actions.

Throughout 2017, the Commission has engaged with different stakeholders and facilitated networking and partnerships and allowed actors to share best-practices and improve support structures for victims of gender-based violence.

- The [social media campaign: NON.NO.NEIN campaign – Say NO! Stop violence against women](#) launched in 2017 raised awareness and funded concrete projects that address violence against women. 15 million euros in funding were made available for Member States, local governments, relevant professionals and civil society organisations across Europe to intensify their actions and campaigns to combat violence against women. In this context, lawyers, doctors, teachers and police, among others, were trained to improve their support for victims and to prevent gender-based violence. This campaign will continue throughout 2018.
- In February the Maltese Presidency Council hosted a [conference](#) focusing on gender-based violence in the context of intersectional discrimination and women’s access to justice and services.
- Under the **Mutual Learning Programme in gender equality** the Commission organised an exchange of good practices among Member States’ governmental representatives. Good practices included Denmark’s policy and legislation on digital sexual abuse and France’s campaign addressing sexual harassment on public transport.
- The **Annual Colloquium on Fundamental Rights** held on 20-21 November in Brussels focused on ‘[Women’s Rights in Turbulent Times](#)’. Violence against women was one of the core topics at the Colloquium, which brought together more than 400 participants including ministers from about half of the Member States, international organisations, leading academics, social partners, business representatives, civil society actors, journalists and media professionals.
- **The first step to build a global alliance to fight violence against women and girls at global level** was taken in December between the Commission, the

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Council of Europe and UN Women. A joint communiqué was issued confirming the institutions' commitment to intensify the collaboration to work together towards establishing by the end of 2018 a global alliance to end violence against women and girls.

In addition to actions under the Gender Equality and Justice policies, the European Commission focuses on violence against women in a range of other policy areas, such as **trade, migration and home affairs, transport and in external cooperation**. Furthermore, the European Social Fund supports targeted actions to combat violence against women, particularly women with disabilities and the most vulnerable or deprived.

Regarding, trafficking of women and girls, the anti-trafficking directive sets forth an obligation for support measures to be gender specific. Finally, the newly adopted set of policy priorities adopted by the Commission on 4 December 2017 places gender at its core, with a set of actions dedicated on addressing the gender dimension of this grave human rights violation and heinous crime.

Internally, the European Commission has measures in place to prevent all forms of harassment inside Commission itself. A recently adopted diversity and inclusion strategy reinforces these measures and includes further preventive measures. In light of the sexual harassment cases at work that women recently made public (#MeToo), the Commission also decided to review its internal rules. The aim is to have a new, updated anti-harassment policy in place in 2018.

What is the Istanbul Convention?

As of November, all EU Member States have signed the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence ([Istanbul Convention](#)), and 17 countries have ratified it. The Convention is the first instrument in Europe to set legally binding standards to prevent violence against women and domestic violence, protect its victims and punish perpetrators. After the Commission's proposal in March 2016, the EU signed the Istanbul Convention on 13 June 2017. Work is ongoing on the Council Decision that will enable it to be concluded in 2018. The Convention will enable Member States to develop a common framework to combat violence against women.

What does the EU do to tackle stereotypes in the labour market?

In 2017, the **Commission** action tackling the stereotypes that drive differences in the employment of women and men in different fields focused on the transport and the ICT sector, where around 20 % of all workers are women.

- Automation and digitalisation bring about new opportunities for women in transport. A [study](#) published in July 2017 on '*Making the EU transport sector attractive to future generations*' gave recommendations on how to attract more women to this sector. In 2017, a reflection was engaged with a wide range of stakeholders on possible actions that could be taken at EU and national level, as well as within companies and training institutions.
- In November 2017, the **Women in Transport-EU Platform for Change** was launched by Violeta Bulc, EU Commissioner for Transport, and Georges Dassis, President of the European Economic and Social Committee, with the support of Kadri Simson, Minister of Economic Affairs and Infrastructure of Estonia and of Karima

Delli, Chair of the Transport Committee of the European Parliament. The Platform was developed in cooperation with different stakeholders, including social partners, to improve female employment in transport. Committed EU organisations come together to share the action they have taken on equal opportunities.

- **A declaration to ensure equal opportunities for women and men in the transport sector** was publicly signed on 27 November 2017 during the conference launching the [Platform](#) and is now available online to gather further signatures. A related webpage includes an online module that can be used for the exchange of good practices.
- The **‘Women in digital age’ study** (*forthcoming*) sheds light on factors influencing women’s participation in the digital sector. Once women are in the digital sector, they tend to leave it at a greater rate than men. This is particularly clear in the 30 to 44 age range, which is the prime working age and the key stage in a person’s professional development. This age range is also the period when most Europeans have their first child and/or have to take care of small children. This ‘drop-out phenomenon’ of women from digital jobs has an economic cost. The annual productivity loss for the European economy due to women leaving their digital jobs is estimated at 16.1 billion euro. The study highlights some innovative approaches to address the digital gender gap, which persist despite many structured efforts.
- At the request of the **Bulgarian Presidency** of the Council, EIGE is preparing a **document on ‘Women in the Digital World’** to further steer the policy debate under the Bulgarian Presidency.
- After 1 year, the **Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition** has over 300 members, with nearly 90 organisations having pledged to tackle the digital skills gap. The pledging organisations have provided online and face-to-face training, digital skills certifications, awareness raising, job placements and internships to millions of Europeans. The main target audience of the pledges are primary and secondary school students.
- The first **Digital Opportunity traineeships** were announced in December 2017. They will offer students traineeships in digital areas in another EU country. The aim is to give students of all disciplines the opportunity to get hands-on digital experience in fields demanded by the market. The initiative will provide cross-border traineeships for up to 6 000 students and recent graduates between 2018 and 2020. The first traineeships will start in spring 2018. Interns will receive an allowance of around 500 euro per month, for an average of 5 months. The pilot project will be financed by the EU’s Horizon 2020 research funding programme and implemented through Erasmus+. Members of the Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition have been mobilised to offer the internships.

What is the EU doing to help promote gender equality outside the European Union?

The EU, as a global actor, promotes gender equality and women’s and girls’ empowerment in all its actions across the world. For this reason, it works closely with partner countries, the United Nations, and non-governmental actors, in particular women’s organisations and advocates for gender equality. The EU’s action in this field follows an all-encompassing approach to addressing gender inequalities worldwide. The EU is actively engaged with partner countries in multilateral fora to consistently contribute to advancing the gender equality agenda, notably at annual sessions of the UN Committee on the Status of Women (CSW) and the sessions of the UN Human Rights Council as the key policy-making UN fora.

The EU also supports the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, as well as the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICDP).

During 2017 the following key initiatives were launched:

- In close cooperation with the European External Action Service, the Commission, on behalf of the EU, has played a key role in preparing the [G7 Roadmap for a Gender Responsive Economic Environment](#) officially adopted by G7 Leaders at the May 2017 Taormina Summit. This was the first G7 ministerial meeting dedicated to the topic of gender equality. The Roadmap focuses on structural policies falling within central governments' jurisdiction and that are likely to have the greatest impact on delivering gender equality.
- The EU plays an active role in maximising progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which form part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. To that end, Eurostat published a document entitled '[Sustainable development in the European Union – 2017 monitoring report on progress towards the SDGs in an EU context](#)'. The report marks the beginning of Eurostat's regular monitoring of progress towards the SDGs in an EU context.
- Contributing to the in-depth review of SDG5, last year's report on equality between women and men in the EU reported on work on SDG5, its targets and indicators. In response to the reporting request regarding the EU's contribution to the SDGs, the 2017 report on equality between women and men in the EU was presented at the 2017 United Nations High-Level Political Forum for Sustainable Development by Commissioner Mimica on 17 July.
- The Commission is [also committed to preventing gender-based violence](#) in humanitarian crises. On 21 June 2017, the EU took over from Sweden in leading the global initiative '[Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies](#)'. In humanitarian crises, gender-based violence is often widespread. The call to action brings together nearly 70 humanitarian organisations with one mission: to recognise gender-based violence as life-threatening and addressing it from the earliest onset of a crisis. During its leadership until the end of 2018, the [EU works on the following four priorities](#): (1) Increasing advocacy on the need to prevent and respond to gender-based violence, (2) Increase focus on prevention of gender-based violence in emergencies, (3) Bring the Call to Action to the field, where it can have the biggest impact., and (4) Implement commitments, following the Call to Action Roadmap 2016-2020.
- The full implementation of the EU framework for '**Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Transforming the Lives of Girls and Women through EU External Relations 2016-2020**'. In rolling out the call to action road map under the Enhanced Response Capacity Programme, DG ECHO allocated 1 million euro to capacity building in 2017.