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Commission

2025 report on
**gender
equality**
in the EU

*Justice
and Consumers*



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2025 Report on gender equality in the EU

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INTRODUCTION

2024 was an important year for gender equality in the EU. In May, the first-ever Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence as well as two Directives on strengthening the role of equality bodies were adopted. The former introduced inter alia EU-level definitions of a number of crimes, in particular regarding cyberviolence. The Directive implements, reinforces and complements the ratification of the Istanbul Convention by the EU in 2023. This is much needed: the EU-wide survey on gender-based violence, carried out by Eurostat, the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights and the European Institute for Gender Equality and published in November 2024¹, shows that violence against women is still pervasive: one in three women have experienced physical (including threats) or sexual violence in adulthood, one in six have experienced sexual violence, including rape and one in five women have faced domestic violence – specifically physical or sexual violence from their partner, a relative, or another member of their household.

The **Eurobarometer on gender stereotypes**² was carried out in parallel with a flash Eurobarometer specifically focusing on gender stereotypes in the context of violence against women³. While in some areas (such as on the impact of full-time jobs of mothers on family life and roles of women and men) there are slight improvements compared with past years, this is not the case across the board (e.g. as for natural competence to perform household tasks). Results also reveal an increased polarisation of views between young women and young men, with young men tending to agree more with stereotypical views.

The Eurobarometer on gender stereotypes shows that people in the EU agree that gender equality is beneficial for society. Three quarters of respondents agree that men would also benefit from equality between women and men. Yet, there is still a significant level of agreement with stereotypical statements. Around one quarter of the respondents think that it is unattractive for women to express strong opinions in public.

There are also other positive signs. According to the 2024 Gender Equality Index compiled by the European Institute for Gender Equality⁴, the score for gender equality across the EU is 71 out of 100 points, an improvement of 7.9 points since 2010, with small yet positive progress towards a ‘Union of Equality’ over the last year. At the current pace it would therefore take around 60 years to reach gender equality.

Against this background, the 2025 report on gender equality in the EU takes stock of the main initiatives from March 2024 until February 2025 to advance gender equality in the Gender Equality Strategy’s key areas⁵, namely:

¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/gender-based-violence>.

² Special Eurobarometer 545 on Gender Stereotypes covered perceptions of gender equality and general stereotypes about gender roles and attributes and acceptable behaviours; perceptions of gender stereotypes concerning family and professional life and perceptions of gender stereotypes in politics and in leadership positions. Available [online](#).

³ Flash Eurobarometer 544 covered gender stereotypes in the context of violence against women. Available [online](#).

⁴ <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2024>.

⁵ 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: <https://composite-indicators.jrc.ec.europa.eu/ges-monitor>.

- ending gender-based violence and challenging stereotypes;
- thriving in a gender-equal economy;
- leading equally in all areas of 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 and Member States in this area over the past year. It also provides encouraging examples of national initiatives on gender equality and of EU-funded projects aimed at gender equality (in boxes).

This edition of the report is the fifth one covering the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025. It mostly looks back at the last year of the first Commission headed by President Von der Leyen, though it also covers the first months of her second mandate, which started on 1 December 2024, with a new college of Commissioners, including a Commissioner for Equality, Ms Lahbib.

On 5 March 2025, the Commission plans to adopt a Roadmap for women's rights a key deliverable of President von der Leyen's political guidelines. The Roadmap will set out the key gender equality principles for the years ahead. It will help frame the work for a new Gender Equality Strategy and serve as a compass towards greater gender equality in the EU. Progress made will be reflected in the future editions of the Gender Equality Report. A new Gender Equality Strategy post 2025 will present the concrete actions, measures and initiatives that the EU intends to undertake over the next several years. Both, the roadmap and the strategy will be the opportunity to keep momentum on still much needed policy changes that will eventually allow the long-term vision for full gender equality set out in the roadmap to become a reality.

Moreover, see the regional gender equality monitor developed by the JRC in cooperation with DG REGIO includes a Female Achievement Index (FemAI) and a Female Disadvantage Index (FemDI).

FREE FROM VIOLENCE AND STEREOTYPES

Gender-based violence remains one of our society's biggest challenges. Gruesome cases continue to make the headlines, and have a profound resonance throughout Europe. They are stark reminder that gender-based violence is deeply rooted in and perpetuates gender inequality. It has a profound physical, psychological, and economic impact on victims, hindering their ability to participate fully in society. This is why ending gender-based violence is one of the pillars of the 2020 - 2025 gender equality strategy. In 2024, the Commission continued to address this issue.

Ending gender-based violence

On 7 May 2024, the **Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence** was adopted.⁶ It entered into force on 14 June 2024, and Member States have until 14 June 2027 to transpose it into national legislation and policy. The Commission will work closely together with the Member States to ensure timely and complete transposition. The Directive is a milestone: it is the first comprehensive legal instrument at EU level that tackles violence against women and domestic violence.

The Directive has a dual objective: it aims to better safeguard the rights of victims of violence against women and domestic violence across the EU, and to reduce the prevalence of such violence in the long term. It criminalises female genital mutilation, forced marriage and the most common forms of cyberviolence (non-consensual sharing of intimate or manipulated material, cyber stalking, cyber harassment, as well as cyber incitement to gender-based hate speech). It also provides targeted measures of protection, support, and access to justice for victims of any form of violence against women and domestic violence where criminalised under national or EU law. Finally, it requires Member States to take preventive measures, including specific measures to prevent rape and to promote the central role of consent in sexual relationships.

The Directive is based on the **Istanbul Convention** of which it implements provisions in the area of judicial cooperation in criminal matters in EU law. The EU's accession to the Convention sent a powerful message to the world that the EU is steadfast in its commitment to ending violence against women and domestic violence. The Commission has been appointed as the EU's coordinating body under the Convention, meaning that it is responsible for the coordination, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and measures to prevent and combat all forms of violence covered by the Convention.

In 2024 the Commission took several important steps to uphold and implement the ambitious and comprehensive standards set by the Convention. In May and December 2024, the Commission participated at the bi-annual meetings of the Committee of the Parties to the Istanbul Convention. During the meetings, the EU participated in the adoption of recommendations and conclusions to state parties on their implementation of the Convention based on reports by GREVIO⁷, the body of independent experts responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Convention by its Parties.

⁶ Directive (EU) 2024/1385 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on combating violence against women and domestic violence, OJ L 2024/1385, 24.5.24.

⁷ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/grevio>.

In January 2025, GREVIO launched its baseline evaluation procedure of the EU's implementation of the Convention. The EU is required to submit an official report on the legislative and other measures taken to give effect to the provisions of the Convention on the basis of a questionnaire⁸. This will be followed by an evaluation visit in May/June 2026 whereafter GREVIO will issue a report on the measures taken by the EU to implement the Convention. The Commission as the Union's coordinating body, responsible for fulfilling the reporting obligations under the Convention's monitoring mechanism, has been asked to distribute the questionnaire to the institutions, bodies and agencies, in co-ordinating their replies and in submitting a consolidated version of the EU's Report to GREVIO by 28 November 2025.

In 2024, **Latvia** made a huge step forward in the fight against violence against women and domestic violence by becoming the 39th Party to the Istanbul Convention, which entered into force for Latvia on 1 May 2024.⁹ Additionally, Latvia developed its first National Plan for the Prevention and Combating of Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence for 2024-2029. The plan has four directions of action: (1) preventing violence against women and domestic violence; (2) providing and improving support measures for victims of violence; (3) strengthening the responsibility of perpetrators and providing rehabilitation services to reduce violent behaviour; (4) establishing a unified and coordinated policy to combat and prevent violence against women and domestic violence.

In 2024, the Commission organised two meetings of the EU's **network on prevention of gender-based violence and domestic violence**, in April and November. The April meeting focused on 'Engaging young people, in particular young men and boys: The role of education and digital media'. Participants from EU Member States brought forth their specialised expertise in addressing the challenges associated with preventing gender-based violence and domestic violence and shared national best practices in the field of education. The discussions centred on formal and informal education, digital education, and selected communication campaigns from various countries. The November meeting focused on 'Non-consensual intimate images (NCII) and cyber hate speech on the basis of gender: issues of prevention after the entry into force of the Violence against Women Directive (VAW Directive)'. EU Member States shared national best practices in the field of prevention of gender-based NCII abuse and cyber hate speech. The discussions centred on preventive measures against NCII abuse and cyber hate speech, on engaging online platforms and media, and on a series of selected campaigns suggested by participants.

Another key deliverable in 2024 was the release of the EU gender-based violence (EU-GBV) survey data¹⁰ for all EU countries. Eurostat coordinated data collection in 18 EU countries, where the survey was implemented by national statistical authorities. Italy shared comparable data for the main indicators based on its national survey. For 8 EU countries the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) and the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) coordinated the data collection in accordance with the EU-GBV survey guidelines. A release of EU-wide data by Eurostat, FRA and EIGE, including a joint publication, took place on 25 November 2024. The report presents key results of the EU gender-based violence survey based on data from all 27 Member

⁸ <https://rm.coe.int/questionnaire-on-legislative-and-other-measures-giving-effect-to-the-p/1680b34281>.

⁹ To date, all EU Member States have signed the Istanbul Convention, and all but five have ratified it.

¹⁰ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/gender-based-violence/database>.

States¹¹. Across the EU, 114 023 women were interviewed about their experiences¹². The report focuses on the prevalence of various forms of violence against women in the EU. The EU gender-based violence survey also collects specific data about women's experiences of violence, including on the consequences of violence and contacts with different services that provide assistance to victims, as survivors of violence. Key results of the survey show that 1 in 3 women in the EU have experienced physical or sexual violence or threats in their adulthood. 1 in 6 women in the EU have experienced sexual violence in their adulthood. When it comes to domestic violence, home is often not a safe place for many women, as 1 in 5 have faced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner, a relative, or another member of their household. One of the main issues identified in the survey is the non-reporting of violence: although a majority of women who have experienced violence have spoken to a person close to them about this, only 1 in 5 have contacted a healthcare or social service provider, and just 1 in 8 have reported the incident to the police¹³.

In 2024, the Commission continued to provide dedicated funding for projects benefiting civil society organisations and public institutions that implement specific actions, including preventing and combating gender-based violence, under the **Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) Programme**.

Under the **2024 CERV Daphne call for proposals** (on preventing and combating gender-based violence and violence against children)¹⁴, a record number of 498 proposals were submitted, covering the call's four priorities: (i) large-scale and long-term transnational actions on tackling gender-based violence; (ii) actions for the protection of and support for victims and survivors of gender-based violence; (iii) actions for the prevention of gender-based violence in the domestic sphere, in intimate relationships, and online, including through targeted actions with perpetrators; and (iv) targeted actions making integrated child protection systems work in practice. Following the evaluation of the proposals, 30 proposals were selected for a total budget of EUR 24.5 million.

Specific initiatives target **child sexual abuse (CSA)**, a heinous crime that profoundly affects children's safety and well-being. It takes place both offline and online, leading to physical, mental, and emotional trauma and often resulting in lifelong consequences. While CSA affects both girls and boys, it has a clear gender dimension. Based on UNICEF global estimates, **1 in 5 girls** and **1 in 7 boys** experience some form of sexual violence before their 18th birthday¹⁵. Girls remain the primary victims of **online child sexual abuse**. In 2023, **97 %** of the online reports of online child sexual abuse material processed by the Internet Watch Foundation showed the **sexual abuse of girls only**¹⁶. With regard to **offenders**, although prevalence data is scarce, some studies indicate that around **3 % of the male population** could have a paedophilic disorder¹⁷.

¹¹ Eurostat, FRA, EIGE (2024), *EU gender-based violence survey – Key results. Experience of women in the EU-27*, Publication Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. Available [online](#).

¹² The survey represents women aged 18-74 in the EU.

¹³ A selection of these indicators will be displayed on the Gender Equality Strategy Monitoring <https://composite-indicators.jrc.ec.europa.eu/ges-monitor>.

¹⁴ <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/topic-details/cerv-2024-daphne?keywords=CERV-2024-DAPHNE&programmePart=>

¹⁵ <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/violence/sexual-violence/>.

¹⁶ <https://www.iwf.org.uk/annual-report-2023/trends-and-data/unique-image-analysis/>.

¹⁷ <https://www.msmanuals.com/professional/psychiatric-disorders/paraphilias-and-paraphilic-disorders/pedophilic-disorder>.

The **EU strategy for a more effective fight against child sexual abuse**¹⁸ is the key reference framework for EU actions in this field during the 2020 – 2025 period. The Strategy includes 8 initiatives, legislative and non-legislative, to put in place a strong legal framework and facilitate a coordinated approach across the many actors involved in protecting and supporting children - spanning across prevention, assistance to victims and investigations and prosecutions.

Under this framework, negotiations advanced throughout 2024 on the Commission's proposal for a Regulation to prevent and combat child sexual abuse. On 6 February 2024, the Commission also proposed a **recast of the Directive 2011/93/EU**¹⁹ to strengthen criminal law on child sexual abuse and sexual exploitation. The revised rules expand the definitions of offences, introducing higher penalties and more specific requirements for prevention and assistance to victims.

Further in line with the EU strategy, the **Interim Regulation**, which entered into force on 2 August 2021, enables service providers to continue their voluntary practices to detect and report child sexual abuse online and remove child sexual abuse material. In February 2024 the co-legislators agreed to extend the interim rules until 3 April 2026²⁰.

Work continued to set up the **child sexual abuse prevention network (CSAPN)**²¹, which will bring together researchers, frontline practitioners and other stakeholders working in the field. The CSAPN will aim to help EU Member States put in place usable, rigorously evaluated and effective prevention measures, and facilitate the exchange of best practices to help reduce the prevalence of child sexual abuse in the EU.

The Commission continued engaging in multi-stakeholder cooperation to prevent and combat child sexual abuse, e.g. by supporting the **We Protect Global Alliance Against Child Sexual Abuse Online (WPGA)**²², promoting engagement with online service providers through the **EU Internet Forum (EUIF)**²³, and pursuing operational cooperation with law enforcement through Europol's European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (**EMPACT**)²⁴

Several projects funded under the Internal Security Fund and Horizon Europe supported the implementation of the EU Strategy on a more effective fight against child sexual abuse. The projects covered a wide scope of activities, ranging from the development of tools for law enforcement, to awareness raising for children and young people, assistance to victims and survivors, and perpetrator prevention programmes.

¹⁸ https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/internal-security/protecting-children-sexual-abuse/what-eu-doing-protect-children-sexual-abuse_en.

¹⁹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2024%3A60%3AFIN>.

²⁰ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/04/29/the-council-gives-the-final-green-light-to-the-prolongation-of-a-child-sexual-abuse-protection-measure/>.

²¹ https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/child-sexual-abuse-prevention-network-csapn_en.

²² <https://www.weprotect.org/>.

²³ https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/european-union-internet-forum_en.

²⁴ <https://www.europol.europa.eu/crime-areas-and-statistics/empact>.

On 13-14 June 2024, **Latvia and Portugal** co-hosted a **mutual learning seminar** in Riga on 'Challenging for change: working with perpetrators of gender-based violence and domestic violence' which was attended by 14 other Member States and by representatives of the Commission, EIGE and the European Network for the Work with Perpetrators of Domestic Violence. It addressed issues such as accessibility and design of services for perpetrators of gender-based violence and domestic violence, how to incorporate gender equality aspects into these services, and how to evaluate them²⁵.

One of the successful projects funded under the DAPHNE strand in 2021 is XAJI: **Active Youth Network for Equality**: promoting the role of youth and role model men for violence against women prevention and gender equality. It was implemented from 1 June 2022 to 30 June 2024 and carried out training, capacity-building and awareness raising for young people, including teenage boys (between 12 and 15 years old), to prevent violence and help to detect abusive patterns and promote egalitarian and gender-equal attitudes and relational models. The project trained almost 200 teenagers, 40 % of whom were boys, in 10 schools in Spain (Catalonia) and Portugal. Following the implementation of the project, schools committed to extend the training to the next school year (2024/2025), and school professionals in other schools expressed their willingness to invite the XAJI project team to receive training on the themes addressed by the project.

Croatia amended its Criminal Code (Official Gazette, 36/24)²⁶ to define gender-based violence as 'violence directed against a woman because she is a woman, and forms of violence which disproportionately affect women'. The amendments also introduced a new felony: 'severe murder of a woman' (femicide). To determine whether a case falls under the crime of femicide, Croatian authorities will assess whether the victim has been intentionally hurt due to her gender. Also, 'severe murder of a woman' has been added to the catalogue of felonies with no statute of limitation.

²⁵ https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/who-we-work-gender-equality/mutual-learning-programme-gender-equality_en.

²⁶ https://narodne-novine.nn.hr/clanci/sluzbeni/2024_03_36_570.html.

At the 2024 European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Award, cities in **Slovenia**, Spain and Sweden were the winners of a specific award dedicated to authorities enabling safe towns, cities and regions for women in all their diversity, by addressing violence against women. The Gold Award went to the city of Ljubljana, Slovenia, for supporting solidarity efforts, in collaboration with civil society, to set up a comprehensive support system addressing violence against women. The Silver Award went to the city of **Miranda de Ebro**, Spain, for bringing policymakers, educators, social services and civil society together with active participation of affected women, for example through an initiative involving law enforcement authorities and social services to provide safe shelter and emergency accommodation to victims. The Bronze Award went to the municipality of **Växjö**, Sweden for its strategic planning in funding, support, and awareness-raising, as well as for its dedicated department addressing violence against women.²⁷

In **Czechia**, an amendment to the Criminal Code (Act No. 40/2009 Coll.)²⁸ came into effect in January 2025 that redefines the crime of rape and strengthens legal protection for victims of domestic and gender-based violence. Under the new definition, any instance of sexual intercourse without the victim's consent will be qualified as rape; the use of physical force is no longer required. Situations where the victim 'freezes' will be explicitly recognised as rape. The bill found support from both the government parties and the opposition.

In the second half of 2023, the **Bulgarian** Ministry of Labour and Social Policy with the assistance of the coordinators for equality between women and men at district level developed a compendium of local practices for prevention of various forms of violence and support of victims. The compendium collects local policies and implemented measures and initiatives, as shared by 21 district administrations, while bringing to the fore established good practices. The aim is to disseminate the wealth of local experience, to strengthen exchanges, and to help rethink existing policies and create new ones.²⁹

Gender-based cyber violence

Gender-based cyber violence continues to dominate the lives of too many women and girls across the EU. The **2020-2025 EU gender equality strategy**³⁰ recognises that online violence targeting women has become pervasive with specific, vicious consequences for women's mental and psychological health. This is unacceptable and a barrier to women's participation in public life, and thereby also a threat to democracy. Since the strategy was presented, the issue of gender based cyber violence has become even more prevalent.

The adoption of the **Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence**³¹ has been a major milestone in the fight against gender-based cyber violence. It provides uniform criminal

²⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/av/ip_24_2285.

²⁸ <https://mzp.gov.cz/web/mzp/tiskove-zpravy/-/clanek/poslanci-jednomyslne-schvalili-redefinici-znasilneni-kopirovat->.

²⁹ <https://www.mlsp.government.bg/uploads/41/test/2023-sbornik-s-praktiki-nasilie-po-oblasti.pdf>.

³⁰ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, COM(2020) 152 final.

³¹ Directive (EU) 2024/1385 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on combating violence against women and domestic violence, OJ L, 2024/1385, 24.5.2024.

law definitions of the most common forms of cyberviolence, requires Member States to ensure the removal of certain online content criminalised under the Directive and the provision of specialist support services for victims of cybercrimes. The Directive also encourages self-regulatory cooperation between platforms, including through the establishment of codes of conduct.

Furthermore, the **Digital Services Act (DSA)**³² is a crucial EU Regulation in relation to online platforms and the related risks, including the dissemination of discriminatory content, e.g. the spread of gender-based cyber violent content on online platforms.

Women, particularly those facing multiple forms of discrimination, including in public life, are disproportionately targeted by different types of gender-based cyber violence³³, such as online harassment, stalking, doxing, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, and the use of deepfake images designed to harm and discredit them. Under the risk assessment framework of the DSA, very large online platforms (VLOPs) and search engines (VLOSEs) are obliged to identify, assess and effectively mitigate systemic risks, including the dissemination of gender-based violent content, stemming from the design, functioning or use of their services, as well as from potential misuse by the users. Such mitigation measures should be reasonable, proportionate, effective, and tailored to the specific systemic risks, to mitigate physical, sexual, psychological, social, political or economic harm.

Under the DSA, online platforms are required to publish transparency reports containing information on their content moderation practices. Referring to the EU Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence, the implementing act outlines categories for the reporting of content moderation decisions affecting women and girls. These include cyber bullying and intimidation, cyber harassment and cyber stalking, gendered disinformation, illegal incitement to violence and hatred, non-consensual sharing of intimate material, including deepfake or similar technology³⁴. Providers must publish the first harmonised reports in the beginning of 2026. In addition, the DSA mandates providers to grant access to data for research on detection, identification and understanding of systemic risks in the EU and on the adequacy, efficiency and impacts of risk mitigation measures taken by providers.

To protect women's safety online, the Commission is in the process of facilitating the development of a new framework for cooperation between internet platforms, as one of the last deliverables announced in the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025.

The AI Act³⁵ bans very harmful systems that may enable gender-based violence. Concretely, it prohibits harmful AI practices that can be used to perpetuate or facilitate violence against women

³² Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 October 2022 on a Single Market For Digital Services and amending Directive 2000/31/EC (Digital Services Act) (Text with EEA relevance), OJ L 277, 27.10.2022, p. 1.

³³ Hicks, J. (2021). Global evidence on the prevalence and impact of online gender-based violence. K4D Helpdesk Report. Institute of Development Studies. [DOI:10.19088/K4D.2021.140](https://doi.org/10.19088/K4D.2021.140).

³⁴ Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) of 4 November 2024 laying down templates concerning the transparency reporting obligations of providers of intermediary services and of providers of online platforms under Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of the European Parliament and of the Council, C(2024) 7005 final and Annex to the Commission implementing Regulation (EU), C(2024) 7005 final.

³⁵ Regulation (EU) 2024/1689 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 laying down harmonised rules on artificial intelligence and amending Regulations (EC) No 300/2008, (EU) No 167/2013, (EU)

and girls, such as manipulative or exploitative AI systems to track, and manipulate individuals, including women and girls, in significantly harmful ways. Moreover, the Act mandates transparency requirements for synthetically generated content, including deep-fakes.

Finally, with the designation of four adult content platform as VLOPs, the Commission addresses a range of illegal content, activities and practices with a gendered dimension such as dissemination of child sexual abuse material, non-consensual sharing of intimate or manipulated material, trafficking in human beings and modern slavery. In 2024, the Commission sent to three of them (Pornhub, Stripchat and XVideos) requests for information under the DSA to request the companies to provide more detailed information on the measures taken to diligently assess and mitigate risks related to the protection of minors online, the dissemination of illegal content and the prevention of and risks of gender-based violence. The Commission also requested details on age assurance mechanisms adopted by these platforms. Further, the Commission is collaborating with experts on digital pornography to map out the legal framework for the regulation of adult content online at EU and Member State levels. They are also providing an overview of the pornographic industry and establishing an evidence pipeline to identify and analyse systemic risks and the effectiveness of related mitigation measures.

In February, EIGE published a report proposing a measurement framework for Member States to use to measure the statistical prevalence, incidence and reported cases of specific cyber-violence against women and girls forms and to report the data collected in a comparable way³⁶.

In 2024, in **Estonia** a **guide on cyber violence for professionals** working with victims was translated and published. It provides valuable support and practical recommendations for effectively and sensitively assisting victims, managing risks, and helping restore victims' sense of security. Designed to facilitate the work of specialists, this guide offers concrete instructions and best practices. As a vital resource, it helps improve professionals understanding of the impact of cyber violence and ensures comprehensive support for every individual affected.

Sexual harassment at work

Women have the right to live and work free from violence and harassment. However, while this is generally accepted, violence and harassment remain pervasive in the world of work. According to recent data from the EU survey on gender-based violence, 4.3 % of ever-working women had experienced sexual harassment at work in the last 12 months, 12.8 % in the last five years and 30.8 % during adulthood. Only 37.3 % had reported the episode to an official support service or police or officials at work.

Violence against and harassment of women at the workplace hampers women's empowerment, it restricts their access to the labour market and perpetuates occupational gender segregation. It is often rooted in unequal gender power dynamics, gender stereotypes, patriarchal values and historical inequalities between men and women.

No 168/2013, (EU) 2018/858, (EU) 2018/1139 and (EU) 2019/2144 and Directives 2014/90/EU, (EU) 2016/797 and (EU) 2020/1828 (Artificial Intelligence Act) (Text with EEA relevance).

³⁶ EIGE (2025), Combating cyber violence against women and girls: Developing an EU measurement framework, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. Available [online](#).

On 25 March 2024, after three and a half years of negotiations, the Council agreed to invite Member States to ratify the **Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) of the International Labour Organization**³⁷. The EU and its Member States played an active role in the adoption of Convention No. 190 at the 108th International Labour Conference in 2019. So far, 12 EU Member States have ratified the Convention: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Romania and Spain.

Gender-based harassment at work is also a problem within the area of research and innovation (R&I).³⁸ To counter this phenomenon, the European Research Area (ERA) Forum sub-group 'Inclusive Gender Equality' in close cooperation with the European Commission developed in 2024, a **Zero-tolerance code of conduct on counteracting gender-based violence, including sexual harassment, in the EU research and innovation system**³⁹. The code of conduct, developed by the ERA Forum sub-group aims to address incidents of gender-based violence in research and higher education environments by setting out a common approach, definitions, and a list of principles to guide Member States and other stakeholders and individuals, to create a European R&I environment free from all forms of gender-based violence, based on the values of gender equality and inclusiveness, respect, dignity and safety. To support the code of the conduct and its principles, the Horizon Europe project GenderSAFE published a pledge⁴⁰ and invited stakeholders, practitioners as well as students to join a dedicated community of practice⁴¹.

Further, in 2024, in cooperation with Member States and R&I stakeholders, a panel discussion 'Towards an ERA Free from Gender-Based Violence in Science' was organised during the Research & Innovation Days⁴².

Trafficking in human beings

Trafficking in human beings is a crime that destroys individuals' lives by depriving them of their dignity, freedom and fundamental rights. It is often a violent crime committed by organised criminal networks.

One of the major deliverables of the **2021-2025 EU strategy on combatting trafficking in human beings** in 2024 was the evaluation of the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive and the adoption of the amended **Anti-Trafficking Directive**⁴³. The amended **Anti-Trafficking Directive** further strengthens prevention, victim support and cross-border cooperation. It emphasises a gender-sensitive approach, ensuring better protection for women, children, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups. The amended Directive includes the exploitation of surrogacy, of forced marriage and of illegal adoption among the forms of exploitation. It also places a higher emphasis on the online

³⁷ Council Decision (EU) 2024/2018 of 25 March 2024 inviting Member States to ratify the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No 190) of the International Labour organization (OJ L 2024/1018, 2.4.2024, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dec/2024/1018/oj>.

³⁸ <https://unisafe-gbv.eu/project-news/results-from-the-largest-european-survey-on-gender-based-violence-in-academia/>.

³⁹ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/6ce8aef5-70b3-11ef-a8ba-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.

⁴⁰ <https://gendersafe.eu/the-gendersafe-pledge-for-zero-tolerance-to-gender-based-violence/>.

⁴¹ <https://gendersafe.eu/community-of-practice/>.

⁴² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9-L-evh48GU>.

⁴³ Directive (EU) 2024/1712 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024, amending Directive 2011/36/EU, on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims, OJ L 2024/1712, 24.6.2024.

dimension, by considering sexual exploitation committed through the use of information and communication technologies as an aggravating circumstance. Moreover, the knowing use of services provided by victims of trafficking, such as prostitution services, becomes a criminal offence with the aim of reducing the demand that fosters trafficking. EU-wide data collection on trafficking in human beings based on specific indicators becomes mandatory, providing more comprehensive insights and enhancing the knowledge about the phenomenon.

In the area of migration, a call⁴⁴ for proposals was published in May 2024, with a budget of EUR 6 million under the **2021-2027 Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF)**⁴⁵. The call aims to strengthen the assistance, support and integration of third-country national victims of trafficking in human beings who are third-country nationals. The call focuses on prevention, identification of victims, raising awareness of trafficking, and providing support to victims of labour and sexual exploitation, as well as victims of forced criminality. This includes specialised assistance to and support for third-country national victims of trafficking in human beings, taking into account their specific needs, such as age, sex, and the physical and psychological consequences of the form(s) of exploitation they have been subjected to.

In addition, in November 2023, the 3-year **VANGUARD** project was funded within the Horizon Europe Cluster 3 “Civil Security for Society” with the EU contribution of EUR 4.5 million. This project aims at strengthening the fight against trafficking in human beings (THB) at the nexus of advanced technological solutions, understanding, awareness raising, and training, in order to disrupt the trafficking chain at an early stage and address the culture of impunity. In particular, VANGUARD will provide an improved intelligence picture of THB, with particular focus on THB for purposes of sexual exploitation, labour exploitation, and forced criminality.

The **EMPACT operational action plan on trafficking in human beings**⁴⁶ has been strengthened to address the risks of trafficking in the face of the unprecedentedly high number of vulnerable people, mostly women and children, seeking protection in the EU due to Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine. The specific focus of the operational actions has been maintained in the new operational action plan for 2024-2025 and is now fully incorporated into several actions, for instance on labour exploitation, child trafficking or web monitoring.

Supporting victims of gender-based violence

Aside from the adoption of the VAW Directive in May 2024, which sets out tailored measures of support for victims of gender-based violence (see section ‘Ending gender-based violence’ above), in 2024, progress was made in revising the **Victims’ Rights Directive**: on 14 June, the Council adopted a general approach on the text⁴⁷ and in April, the Parliament approved its mandate to enter into inter-institutional negotiations. Trilogues started end 2024.⁴⁸ The proposal, adopted by the Commission on 12 July 2023, aims to further strengthen the rights of victims of crime in the EU, including the rights

⁴⁴ AMIF-2024-TF2-AG-THB.

⁴⁵ Regulation (EU) 2021/1147 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 July 2021 establishing the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund.

⁴⁶ https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/law-enforcement-cooperation/empact-fighting-crime-together_en.

⁴⁷ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/06/13/victims-rights-council-finalises-position-on-strengthened-eu-law/>.

⁴⁸ [https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/en/procedure-file?reference=2023/0250\(COD\)](https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/en/procedure-file?reference=2023/0250(COD)).

of the most vulnerable victims, such as victims of violence against women and domestic violence⁴⁹. In doing so, it aims to tackle the problems identified in **the evaluation of the Victim's Rights Directive** adopted in June 2022⁵⁰.

In addition, under the **EU strategy on victims' rights (2020 – 2025)**⁵¹, the Commission is working on non-legislative actions to improve the rights of victims of gender-based and domestic violence in the EU. Such actions include: (i) the promotion of structures providing targeted and integrated support to victims with special needs, such as victims of gender-based and domestic violence; and (ii) the implementation of **the EU campaign on victims' rights** which includes a strand on gender-based violence⁵². An important addition to the campaign is the book *The Girl Who Kept Her Eyes Open*. It raises awareness of the rights of victims of war crimes (who are mostly women and children) under EU rules and encourages the people in the EU to have their 'eyes open' to their situation. Furthermore, within the scope of Cluster 3 'Civil Security for Society' of Horizon Europe, two projects are funded, IMPROVE and ISEDA, for a total of EUR 5.7 million of the EU contribution, aimed at countering violence against women and domestic violence from prevention via detection to the victim's support, using a combination of technological and societal approaches.

The German Parliament passed a **law⁵³ to prevent 'sidewalk harassment'** by abortion opponents in the immediate vicinity of counselling centres for pregnant women and abortion clinics. The law aims to effectively protect pregnant women from this increasing kind of harassment and to ensure that they can freely take advantage of counselling services and have access to facilities that carry out abortions. The law came into force on 13 November 2024.

⁴⁹ 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.

⁵⁰ 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.

⁵¹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions EU Strategy on Victims' Rights (2020-2025), COM/2020/258 Final.

⁵² <https://victims-rights.campaign.europa.eu/en/country/all/crimes>.

⁵³ <https://dip.bundestag.de/vorgang/zweites-gesetz-zur-%C3%A4nderung-des-schwangerschaftskonfliktgesetzes/308701>.

In July 2024, **Austria** published a ‘Violence protection strategy for coordination and cooperation with a focus on counselling for women affected by violence’, which was developed under the lead of the Directorate-General for Women and Equality in a participatory process, involving over 200 stakeholders. The aim of the strategy is to support all women and girls victims of violence at an early stage. In addition, strategic priorities are set in the overall institutional system of violence protection and prevention in line with the Istanbul Convention, which will help strengthen the rights of women and girls⁵⁴.

Challenging gender stereotypes

In the beginning of 2024, the Commission wrapped up its campaign on challenging gender stereotypes. The #EndGenderStereotypes⁵⁵ campaign targeted young adults mostly on social media, but also through influencers and media outreach. The campaign tackled gender stereotypes in different areas of life, such as career choices, sharing care responsibilities and decision-making. The campaign was awarded by Forbes Social Awards 2023. The materials in all EU languages remain available on the campaign website and can be downloaded and used by stakeholders.

In 2024, the Commission published two Eurobarometer surveys on gender stereotypes: a flash Eurobarometer on gender stereotypes related to violence against women (November) and another one covering gender stereotypes more broadly (December).

On 25 November 2024, the Commission published the results of the flash Eurobarometer survey which was conducted to gain a better understanding of attitudes of Europeans towards violence, and the relativisation of violent or humiliating behaviours⁵⁶. The results showed that a majority of Europeans disagree with the objectification of women and stereotypes about sexual violence, but also that some stereotypes persist, particularly in some Member States. For instance, while more than 9 in 10 respondents (93 %), on average across the EU, disagree with the statement ‘**a husband or boyfriend can have sex with his wife or girlfriend without her consent**’, this share ranges from 85 % in Denmark to 97 % in Luxembourg and Malta. Similarly, while, on average across the EU 92 % of respondents consider it **unacceptable for a man to occasionally slap his wife/girlfriend**, women are more likely to find it unacceptable than men (95 % vs 89 %), and percentages range from 87 % in Finland to 97 % in Luxembourg⁵⁷.

Finally, on awareness and perception of the issue of violence against women, about 7 in 10 respondents (71 %), on average, agree that **intimate partner violence against women is ‘very common’ or ‘fairly common’ in their country** while only a third of respondents (33 %) reply the same about intimate partner violence against men. Again, there is large variation across countries, from

⁵⁴ <https://www.coordination-vaw.gv.at/nachrichten/gewaltschutzstrategie-zur-koordinierung-und-vernetzung-mit-fokus-auf-beratung-gewaltbetroffener-frauen-soll-beratungsnetz-sichtbarer-machen.html> and <https://www.bundeskanzleramt.gv.at/bundeskanzleramt/nachrichten-der-bundesregierung/2024/07/frauenministerin-susanne-raab-praesentiert-oesterreichweite-gewaltschutzstrategie.html>.

⁵⁵ https://end-gender-stereotypes.campaign.europa.eu/index_en.

⁵⁶ <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3252>.

⁵⁷ For Lithuania, the percentage is 55 %, but it was excluded from the computation of the average as an outlier. The result might be due to a translation issue with the word ‘slapping’ that does not have a precise translation to Lithuanian and might have been interpreted as a less severe form of physical aggression.

91 % in Romania to 44 % in Denmark, and by gender with 78 % of women thinking that intimate partner violence against women is common in their country against 63 % of men.

Another Special Eurobarometer⁵⁸ survey explored perceptions around gender stereotypes, and the extent to which these are still common among EU citizens. Questions were related to gender roles and acceptable behaviours; gender stereotypes concerning family and professional life; and gender stereotypes in politics and in leadership positions. The survey partly built on previous Special Eurobarometer studies on gender equality conducted on the topic of 'Gender equality' in 2009⁵⁹, 2014⁶⁰ and 2017⁶¹.

Results show that some gender stereotypes are still quite widespread. More than six in ten respondents agree that women are more likely to make decisions based on their emotions and about four in ten agree that the most important role of a man is to earn money (42 %, -1 pp since 2017) and that the most important role of a woman is to take care of her home and family (38 %, -6 pp). Variations in perceptions across EU MS reach 64 percentage points.

Most stereotypes around work-life decisions are rejected overall, but significant proportions still hold stereotypical views on women's socially desired behaviours. For example, only slightly above half (51 %, +3 percentage points since 2009) agree that, if the father's pay is lower than that of the mother, he is the one who should give up work to look after the children, if a family decides one parent has to do so. Findings are mixed also when it comes to perceptions of gender attributes at home with one in five respondents agreeing that for important family decisions men should have a final say and views are split on whether, overall, men are naturally less competent than women to perform household tasks (49 % 'agree' vs 49 % 'disagree').

⁵⁸ <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2974>.

⁵⁹ <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/808>.

⁶⁰ <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2048>.

⁶¹ <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2154>.

THRIVING IN A GENDER-EQUAL ECONOMY

2024 saw some encouraging economic trends for gender equality. Latest data available (for 2023) showed that women's employment in the EU surpassed the 70 % mark for the first time ever. This development took place against the background of an overall increase in employment rate in the EU to 75.3 %. Moreover, though the increase for women was lower than in the previous two years, it was higher than the increase for men. This resulted in the lowest gender employment gap of the last decade at 10.2 percentage points (pp) (-0.5 pp on 2023). This development is consistent with a long-term trend since 2009, though with marked differences among countries.

This positive trend is reflected in other gender gap indicators. According to the International Labour Organization's 2024 Global Gender Gap Report⁶², the overall increase in labour market participation mirrors a shift to a larger share of female, older, highly educated workers, enabled by an increase in labour mobility, subsidised childcare, and family leave policies, job-retention schemes, and delayed retirement. However, the International Labour Organization ILO also points out that a lack of public and private investment in childcare and other formal care services, and longstanding unequal attitudes towards care activities at large push the economic and social cost of caregiving predominantly on to women. This translates into a large untapped potential for our economies as highlighted e.g. by estimates by EIGE that foresee an employment rate of 80 % by 2050 if there are substantial gender equality improvements⁶³.

Closing gender gaps in the labour market

In all Member States, employment rates are higher for men than for women. As a general pattern, the lower the employment rate for women in a country, the wider the gender employment gap is. In 2023, the employment rate for men stood at 80.4 % in the EU while it was at 70.2 % for women, resulting in a gender employment gap of 10.2 pp.⁶⁴

Employment rates for both women and men have consistently and slowly increased in the last 10 years, only interrupted by the pandemic in 2020. However, since 2018 the increase for women has tended to be slightly higher and therefore the resulting gender employment gap lowered from 11.3 pp in 2018 and 11.0 pp in 2020 to 10.2 pp in 2023.

Gender employment gaps vary greatly across countries and regions in the EU. As part of its commitment to promoting inclusive employment, the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan⁶⁵ has set a goal to reach an overall increase in employment in the EU to 78 % by 2030 including by striving to at least halve the gender employment gap compared to 2019. In 2023, the employment rate for people aged 20-64 in the EU was 75.3 %, so the 2030 target seems to be within reach. In 2023, the gender employment gap decreased by -0.5 pp, more than in the previous year.

⁶² ILO, *Global Gender GAP report*, 2024. Available [online](#).

⁶³ EIGE, *Economic Benefits of Gender Equality in the European Union*, 2017. Available [online](#).

⁶⁴ Eurostat ([lfsa_ergan](#)).

⁶⁵ 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.

Figure 1 Employment rates age 20–64 by sex and gender employment gap (right axis) –2014-2023

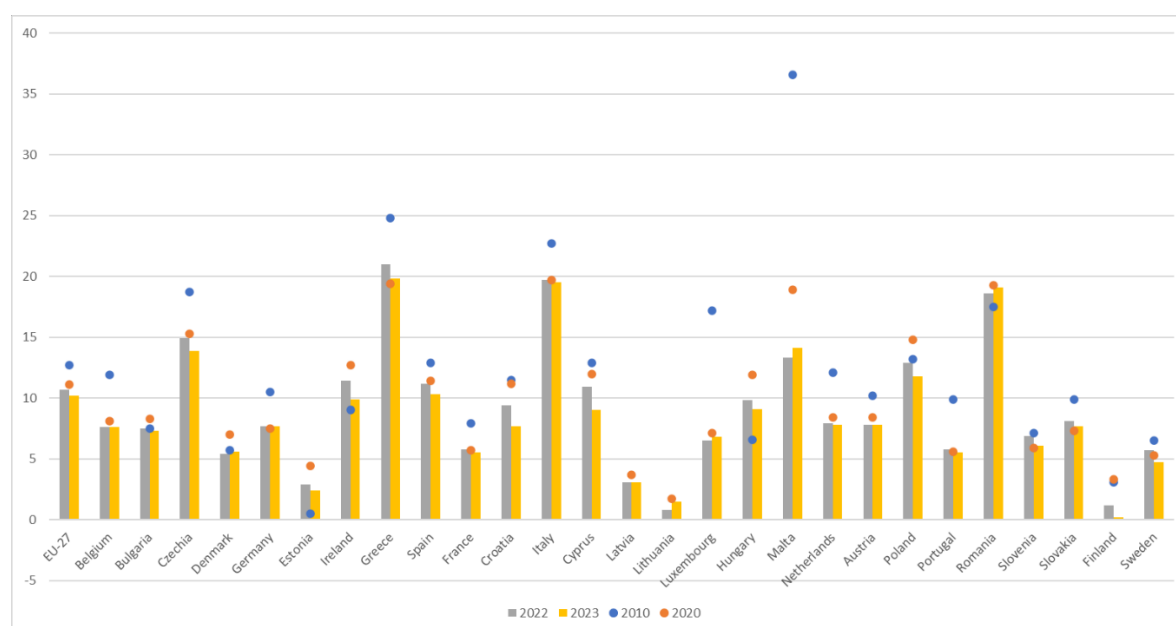


Source: Eurostat, [\[lfsi_emp_a\]](#)

Note: The gender gap is defined as the difference between women’s and men’s employment rate in percentage points.

In 2023, only seven EU Member States (Spain, Poland, Czechia, Malta, Romania, Italy and Greece) had greater gender employment gaps than the gap for the EU as a whole. In Italy, Greece and Romania female employment rates were particularly low at below 60 % (56.5 %, 57.6 % and 59.1 %, respectively), compared with around three quarters of men (76.0 %, 77.4 % and 78.2 %, respectively).

Figure 2 Gender gap in male and female employment rates, ages 20–64, 2010, 2020, 2022, 2023



Source: Eurostat, [\[lfsa_ergan\]](#).

The reduction in the gender employment gap in most countries since 2010 mirrors an increase in overall employment rates with male employment increasing less than female employment. In Malta, the increase for women is particularly remarkable with over 32 pp in 13 years, though the gender employment gap remains high. This change has been supported by policy measures to attract more

women to the labour market such as tax breaks and national insurance payments for years taken to take care of children, training programmes, free childcare and free school transport.

There are significant differences in the gender employment gap across EU regions, and they are persistent over time. In less developed regions of the EU, the gender employment gap in 2022 (16 pp) was around double that in more developed (8 pp) and transition regions (9 pp). The gap was much wider in southern Member States (15 pp) than in north-western (7 pp) and eastern ones (12 pp). It was over 20 pp in all regions in Greece, southern Italy and the eastern regions in Romania (Figure 3). The employment rate of women increased relative to that of men in more developed and transition regions between 2013 and 2022, as well as in north-western Member States. Conversely, it declined in less developed regions and in southern countries where employment rates are lower and high-quality and affordable childcare is lacking.⁶⁶

The gender employment gap varies a lot by age group: among young **people aged between 15 and 24**, the gap continues to be the lowest at 4.3 pp in 2023. In some countries, it was even negative, meaning that the employment rate was higher among young women than among young men (Ireland, Lithuania, Denmark, Finland and Estonia). It should be noted, however, that there are marked differences across countries in the employment rate of women in this age group, ranging between 76.2 % in the Netherlands and 13.7 % in Romania. For **people aged 20 to 24 years** it increases to 6.3 pp and peaks for the age category 55-64 at 12.1 pp, with large differences across countries. This is influenced by the increased average duration of working life⁶⁷ for men in the EU: with 39.0 years of expected duration of working life for men, and 34.7 years for women, the gender gap was 4.3 years in 2023, largely due to a bigger share of informal care responsibilities pushing women out of the labour market earlier than men. At the same time, the gender gap in effective retirement age did substantially reduce over the last decade, with the effective retirement age increasing in most countries between 2014 and 2023 for both genders. Overall, women's effective retirement age increased more than men's in 18 countries⁶⁸. In nine of those countries⁶⁹, women's effective retirement age increased more than men's by more than a year. Seven countries have lower pensionable ages for women than for men⁷⁰.

These gender gaps are even wider for people with children - reflecting the disproportionate impact of parenthood on women's careers. In 2023, at EU level, the employment rate for women aged 25-54 with children was 74.9 %, compared to 91.9 % for men with children. The gender employment gap thus reached 17.0 pp among those with children, while it stood at 4 pp among those without children.

⁶⁶ See European Commission: Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, Durán Laguna, J., D'Apice, P., Grzegorzewska, M., De Franceschi, F. et al., *Ninth report on economic, social and territorial cohesion*, Durán Laguna, J.(editor), Publications Office of the European Union, 2024. Available [online](#).

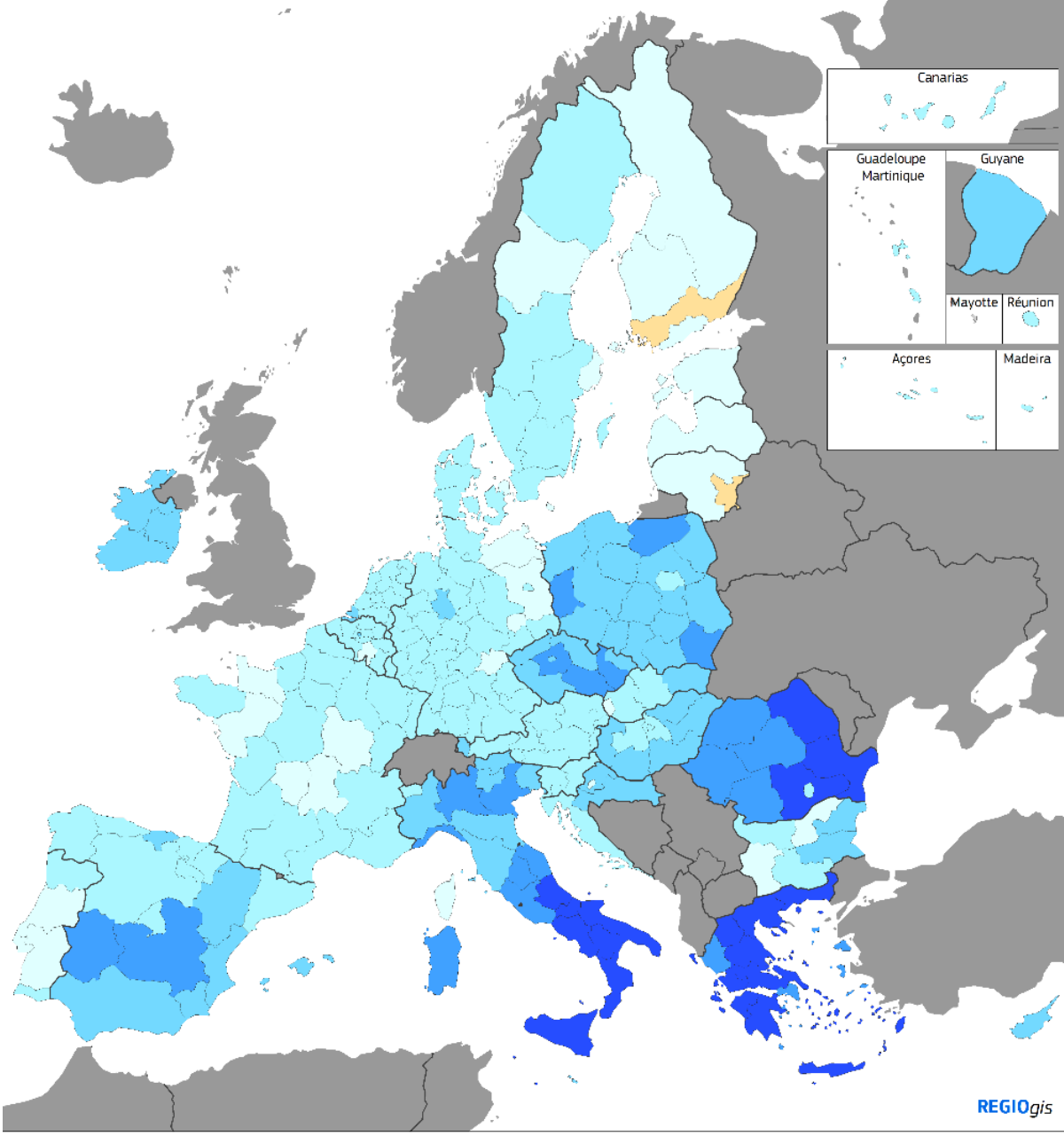
⁶⁷ The indicator on duration of working life is an estimation of the number of years a person, currently aged 15 years, is expected to be in the labour force (i.e. to be employed or unemployed) throughout their life. It aims to provide a different point of view on the labour market, looking at the entire life cycle of people in the labour force rather than on specific states in the life cycle, such as youth unemployment or early withdrawal from the labour force.

⁶⁸ BE, CY, CZ, DK, EE, EL, HR, HU, IE, IT, LT, LU, LV, NL, RO, SE, SI, SK.

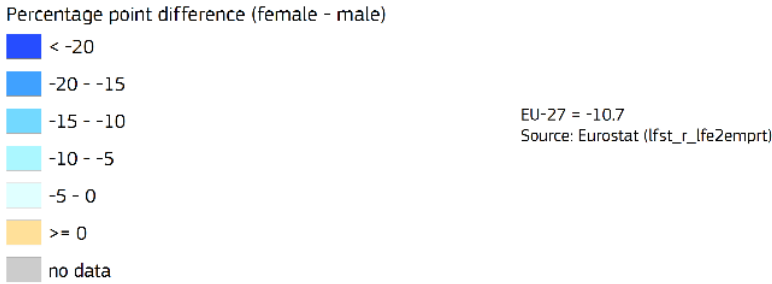
⁶⁹ CY, CZ, DK, EL, HR, IE, LT, SI, SK.

⁷⁰ AT, BG, CZ, HR, PL, RO, SK.

Figure 3: Regional variation in the gender employment gap in the EU, 2022



Difference between female and male employment rates (ages 20-64), 2022



0 500 km

© EuroGeographics Association for the administrative boundaries

Source: DG REGIO elaboration, based on Eurostat [[lfst_r_lfe2emprt](#)]

The gender employment gap is also wider when considering full-time equivalent (FTE) employment⁷¹, as the share of part-time work is much higher among women than men (27.9 % compared to 7.7 % in 2023). The gender gap in part-time employment remained stable over the last years (20.6 pp in 2021 and 20.2 pp in 2022). In 2023, the largest gender gaps in part-time employment were recorded in the Netherlands (42.3 pp), Austria (41.8 pp), Germany (36.9 pp) and Belgium (27.4 pp).

The gender employment gap continues to be high for migrant women. For female non-EU citizens, the employment rate was 20 pp lower than for female nationals in 2023. This gap can be contrasted with a gap of 5.7 pp for male non-EU citizens. The overqualification rate for migrant women remained high: In 2023, 42.9 % of tertiary educated female non-EU citizens worked in low- or medium-skilled occupations, compared to 36.2 % of male non-EU citizens and 21.3 % of female nationals.

Looking at the incidence of **part-time work⁷²**, in 2023, 17.1 % of employed people in the EU were part-timers. In 2023, the growth rate of part-time employment (+2.0 %) exceeded that of full-time employment (+0.8 %) for the first time in a decade. However, the overall share of part-time is gradually declining.

The reasons reported by part-time workers aged 25-64 for their working-time arrangements show what factors influenced this choice: for women care of adults with disabilities or children is the most relevant one (29.5 % of women part-timers against 8.2 % of men part-timers); for men it is not finding a full-time job (18.1 % for women against 27.5 % for men).

The relevance of having children shows as a factor in the propensity to work part-time by number of children of people aged 25-54: almost one third (31.8 %) of employed women with children in the EU worked part-time in 2023, compared to 5.0 % of men, with the highest shares in Austria (69.2 %), the Netherlands (67.9 %), and Germany (65.4 %). This share is higher than among women without children across all educational levels. Similarly to what happens for full time working (See 2023 Annual report), the situation is opposite for men: the share of male part-timers with children was lower than the share of those without children for all educational levels (see Figure 4). In most countries, the impact of parenthood is thus reflected in both female employment rate and the share of part-time employment among women – with Germany, Austria and Italy combining high impact on both employment rates and working hours.

These statistics demonstrate that in most countries, having children impacts women's employment rates and their propensity to work part-time compared to men.

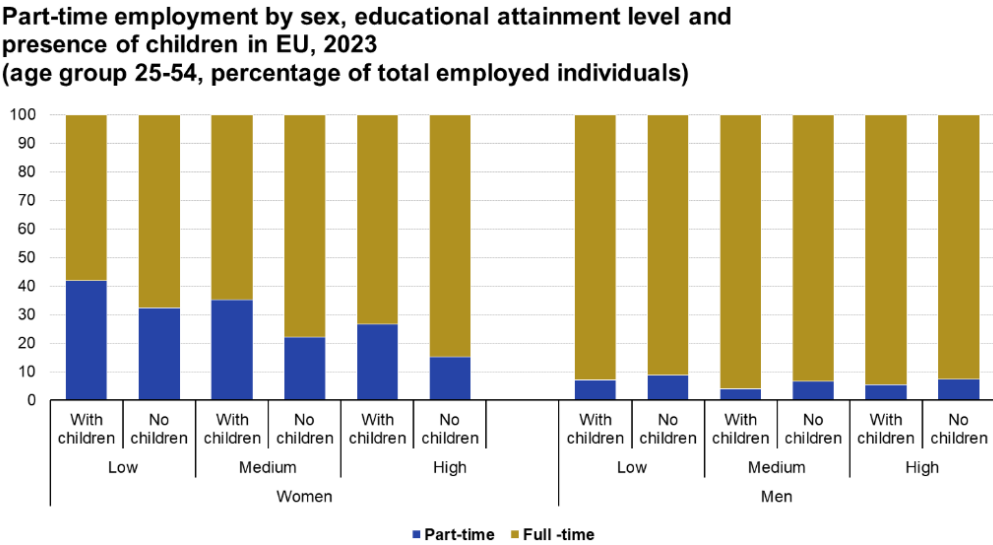
In addition, national tax systems may discourage labour market participation of second earners, who are predominantly women. For example, joint taxation reduces second earners' incentives to work or extend working hours (e.g. by transitioning from part-time to full-time employment). In 2023, the highest 'inactivity traps' (where tax and benefit withdrawal significantly discourages second earners

⁷¹ Joint Employment Report, 2025.

⁷² <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?oldid=612325#Highlights>.

from entering the labour market) were seen in Lithuania, Slovenia, Denmark, Luxemburg, Belgium and Germany.⁷³

Figure 4 Part-time employment



Source: Eurostat LFS ad hoc extraction



Most EU countries have developed strategies or specific projects to encourage the equal sharing of caring responsibilities between men and women, in turn allowing women to participate in employment on a more equal basis compared to men, as salaried employees or as entrepreneurs. Working against discrimination and for gender equality and equal opportunities is one of the core goals of the Pact for Skills. Several Pact partnerships are working to address gender equality, and increase women’s labour market participation and up and reskilling uptake in key sectors of industry. Examples include increased participation of women and young people in space-related careers, (**Space for Geo Partnerships**⁷⁴), or addressing the lack of women in ICT and STEM sectors (**Digital and microelectronics Partnerships**⁷⁵), ensuring upskilling and reskilling programmes for women, youth, immigrants, and disadvantaged groups exceed the workforce share of these groups by 20 % (**Tourism**⁷⁶) or achieving a 5 % yearly increase in women's leadership positions (**Textiles**⁷⁷).

The availability of flexible working arrangements can encourage such increased participation by women with care responsibilities since it allows them to better combine private and professional life. During the pandemic, a large variety of work flexibility measures were implemented to prevent massive unemployment. Many employers have maintained, at least to some extent, these practices. However, recent research⁷⁸ highlighted that telework, flexible hours, leave and career interruption

⁷³ European Commission: Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, *Joint Employment Report 2025 – Commission proposal*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2025. Available [online](#).

⁷⁴ <https://www.space4geo.eu/>.

⁷⁵ https://pact-for-skills.ec.europa.eu/about/industrial-ecosystems-and-partnerships/microelectronics_en.

⁷⁶ https://pact-for-skills.ec.europa.eu/about/industrial-ecosystems-and-partnerships/tourism_en.

⁷⁷ https://pact-for-skills.ec.europa.eu/about/industrial-ecosystems-and-partnerships/textiles_en.

⁷⁸ European Commission: Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers and Chung, H., *Flexible working arrangements and gender equality in Europe*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024. Available [online](#).

policies may work against gender equality in wages and career development, because women tend to use them more often. If not properly designed and integrated in the workplace culture using these work arrangements might result in negative career consequences. Unequal gender division of household labour between men and women is one of the reasons for gender-based part-time work. Moreover, if part-time working is seen largely as an arrangement for mothers, this could also increase the bias against part-time workers – namely that they are allegedly not as committed, motivated and productive as other workers, despite evidence that shows otherwise. This is then exacerbated by the fact that fathers tend instead to work longer hours and therefore better meet the ideal worker standard⁷⁹. Therefore, it is important to promote a better uptake of family leaves and flexible working arrangements by men as well as a more equal sharing of care responsibilities at home between both genders.

In order to enable parents and people with caring responsibilities to better balance their work and family lives and to encourage a better sharing of care responsibilities, the Work-Life Balance Directive introduced paid paternity leave, strengthened parental leave, introduced carers' leave and the extension to carers of the right to request flexible working arrangements (FWA). Workers who request or take family leave and FWA are legally protected against discrimination through several measures. The deadline for the transposition of most of the provisions of the Directive into national law was 2 August 2022 but Member States were given an additional two years (until 2 August 2024) to transpose the payment of the allowance for the last two weeks of parental leave. In January 2024, the Commission took three Member States to the Court of Justice of the European Union for failure to communicate complete transposition of the Work-Life Balance Directive.

In 2024, the **Slovak** National Centre for Human Rights and the non-governmental organisation *Možnosť voľby* launched an online awareness raising campaign for gender equality. The campaign focused on promoting shared values and fighting gender stereotypes. During the campaign, well known influencers posted short videos on Instagram with the hashtag #spolunamtoide. The campaign is part of the project *Promoting gender equality and work-life balance* in Slovakia.

The Commission is in the process of examining the transposed legislation to ensure that the rules have been transposed correctly. On 7 March 2024, the European Equality Law Network, published its second report on the transposition of the Work-Life Balance Directive in EU Member States. According to this report, 'the transposition of the WLB Directive is generally satisfactory in just one Member State, leaving 26 countries with important implementation gaps. The research shows that the main problems occur in relation to parental leave and/or compensation, FWA and legal protection against discrimination. There are fewer gaps in the case of paternity leave and compensation, force majeure leave and the personal scope of the Directive. The position in relation to carers' leave lies somewhere in between⁸⁰.

⁷⁹ Williams, J., *Unbending gender: Why family and work conflict and what to do about it*. Oxford University Press, 1999.

⁸⁰ European Commission: Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, Burri, S., De la Corte-Rodríguez, M., Böök, B. and van Hoof, F., *The transposition of the Work-Life Balance Directive in EU Member States (II) – Considerable work still to be done*, Burri, S.(editor), Böök, B.(editor) and van Hoof, F.(editor), Publications Office of the European Union, 2024. Available [online](#).

Closing the gender care gap

One of the main reasons behind differences in employment patterns for women and men is the gendered division of unpaid care responsibilities, particularly of unpaid care as for children.

New data collected by EIGE⁸¹ confirm that women bear the major part of childcare responsibilities. More than half of women with children under 12 years old spend at least 5 hours caring for their children per day compared to less than 1 in 3 men (56 % vs 26 %). This translates into around 50 % of women and just 6 % of men being primarily responsible for their children's personal and physical care. Indeed, there are visible differences also in the type of activities men provide for their children: 38 % of men spend between 1 and 3 hours a day doing leisure activities, compared to 29 % of women.

Therefore, it is not surprising that, as highlighted in the previous section, women with childcare responsibilities are less involved in paid employment than men, tend to work part-time more frequently, and suffer the long-term consequences in terms of reduced career development opportunities, salaries and pensions. In particular, the large majority of stay-at-home parents are women (11 % of women compared to only 1 % of men).

According to the indicators for the 'Barcelona targets', i.e. the targets for participation of children below mandatory school age in early childhood education and care (ECEC) originally set by the European Council in 2002 and revised in 2022, participation of children in ECEC was 37.5 % for children below age 3 (ranging from 2.3 % in Slovakia and 74.7 % in Denmark) in 2023⁸² and 93.1 % for children between the age of three and compulsory primary education age in 2022.⁸³

The level of income of the household plays a significant role in participation patterns. Children from lowest socio-economic background (lowest quintile) tend to participate less in ECEC than their more affluent peers in the highest quintile. This might be linked to several reasons including that the parents can better afford longer hours of childcare or that parents use those longer hours to take full employment (which in turn facilitates higher income)⁸⁴.

Regional and territorial disparities in access to quality and inclusive ECEC persist. According to the 9th Cohesion Report, participation in ECEC between three and primary school age in 2021 is also on average much lower in less developed regions (87.0 %) than in transition (94.9 %) or more developed (93.2 %) ones. Whilst most of the regions in France, Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, Sweden and Spain have met the 95 % target, participation in all regions in Greece and Croatia, Romania and Bulgaria remains below 80 %. In the case of regions in Romania and Bulgaria, the participation rates have even decreased.

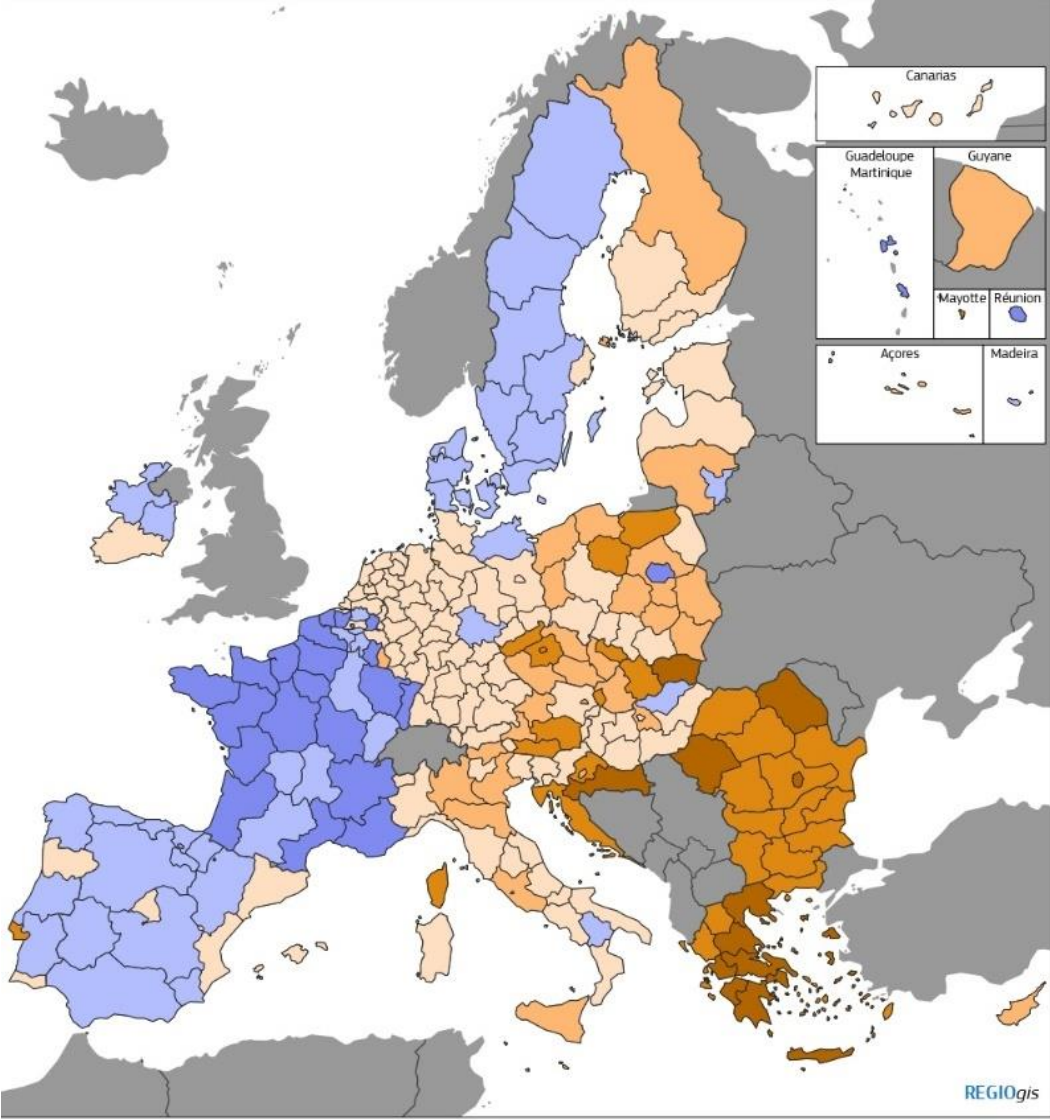
⁸¹ See <https://eige.europa.eu/about/projects/survey-gender-gaps-unpaid-care-individual-and-social-activities-care-1st-wave>.

⁸² See [ilc_caindform25](#).

⁸³ The reference indicator for participation of children below the age of 3 is the same as for the 2002 Barcelona targets. The reference indicator for children between the age 3 and compulsory primary education age is now the same as the one used for the target for the European Education Area. It is based on administrative data from the UNESCO OECD Eurostat (UOE) joint data collection and takes into account the requirements of services to qualify as ISCED 02 category. Therefore, it is 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.

⁸⁴ See [ilc_caindform25](#).

Figure 5 - Participation in ECEC between three and primary school age, 2021



Map 2.9 Participation rates in early childhood education, 2021

% of children from age 3 to the starting age of compulsory education at primary level

 < 75	 95 - 100
 75 - 85	 = 100
 85 - 90	 no data
 90 - 95	

EU-27 = 92.5
 Participation in ECEC rate target: 96 % in 2030.
 EL 2019, DE NUTS 1, NL NUTS 0.
 Source: Eurostat [educ_uae_enra22] and DG REGIO estimates.

0 500 km

© EuroGeographics Association for the administrative boundaries

Source: DG REGIO elaboration, based on Eurostat

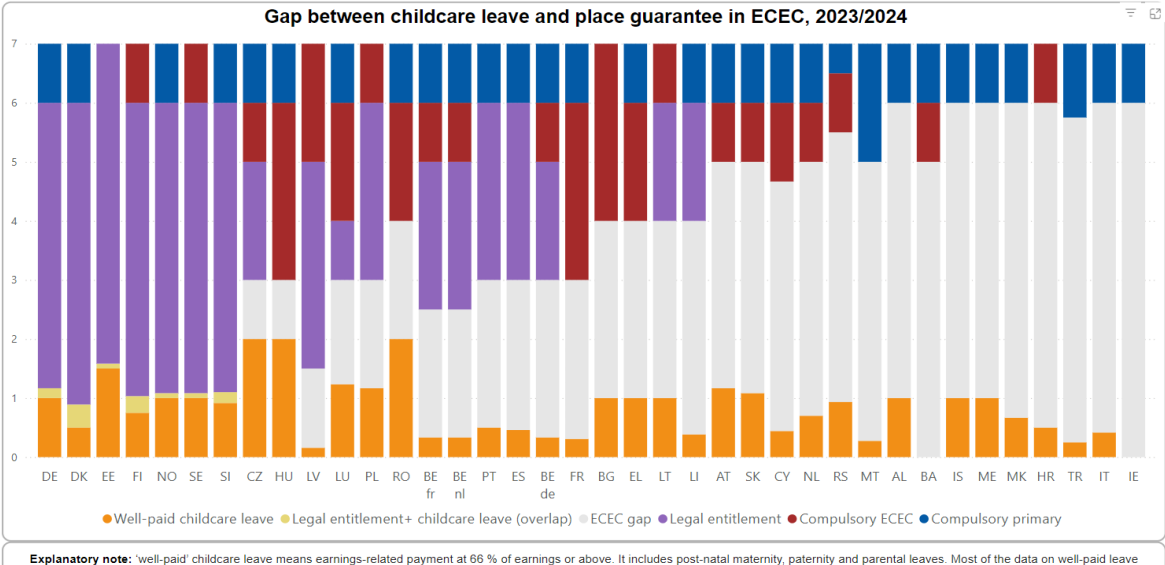
The Council Recommendation of 8 December 2022 on early childhood education and care: the Barcelona targets for 2030⁸⁵ invites member States to encourage participation of children from disadvantaged background and, more specifically, to close the gap in participation between children at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) and non AROPE children. In addition, the Council

⁸⁵ 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.

Recommendation of 14 June 2021 establishing a European Child Guarantee guides Member States to guarantee for children AROPE effective and free access to high quality ECEC. Yet children AROPE still participate less in ECEC: in 2023, 74.8 % of children AROPE were not participating in ECEC compared to 59.0 % of children non-AROE⁸⁶. However, children AROPE benefit more from participation⁸⁷ both in terms of their well-being and educational outcomes and in terms of the possible additional income their parents, mothers in particular, can generate by participating in the labour market⁸⁸.

As for **children between the age of three and compulsory primary education age**, participation rates are much higher, with most Member States achieving or converging towards the 90 % target⁸⁹. Only two countries, Romania and Slovakia, are still below 80 %. Worryingly, Romania has also been on a declining trend in the last five years.

Figure 6 - “Childcare gap”



Source: [Early childhood education and care \(ECEC\)](#). Note: the childcare gap can be defined as the amount of time during which a child needs to be cared for not covered either by childcare leave or a guaranteed place in ECEC. The space between two bullets equals one year.

Member States with higher participation rates in ECEC often grant a right to an ECEC place or make attendance compulsory⁹⁰. Differences in the age at which children have a guaranteed place in ECEC⁹¹

⁸⁶ See [ilc_caindform25](#).
⁸⁷ Narazani, E., Christl, M., & Figari, F. (2024). More childcare for the poor? Budgetary impacts and female labour supply responses in Italy, Austria and Hungary. *Applied Economics Letters*, 1–6. Available [online](#).
⁸⁸ For more details on ECEC systems see European Education and Culture Executive Agency: Eurydice, *Key data on early childhood education and care in Europe 2025 – Eurydice report*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2025. Available [online](#). This third edition of the report includes international comparisons, analysing ECEC systems across the 27 Member States and 10 partner countries, as well as national information sheets outlining the main aspects of each country’s ECEC system.
⁸⁹ The 2021 ECEC participation rates for Greece are not available, but its 2020 ECEC participation rate among 3 year-olds stood at 33.9 %. As mentioned in footnote 50, the target for participation in ECEC of children of age between 3 and compulsory schooling is based on UOE data, i.e. not on EU-SILC data.
⁹⁰ Currently, ECEC attendance from the age of 3 is compulsory only in Hungary and France.
⁹¹ 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 guaranty a place in publicly subsidised ECEC from the age three or a little earlier. See the 2023 Eurydice report for details.

vary widely in the EU. Where parental leave does not last long enough, families struggle with the ‘**childcare gap**’, i.e. a period during which they will have to provide for childcare themselves and are possibly forced to interrupt or reduce their paid work. While several education systems provide publicly subsidised ECEC from around the age of three or four (whether or not as a legal entitlement), many Member States still leave a considerable gap of one to six years between the entitlement to parental leave and a guaranteed place in ECEC.

The gendered impact of care work is relatively more balanced for long-term care (LTC) and, considering demographic trends with increasing share of elderly people and declining number of children overall, will likely continue this way. An estimated 52 million people in the EU provide informal LTC, and informal LTC caregivers account for almost 80 % of long-term carers. A significant proportion of carers (42 % of women and 38 % of men) provide LTC on a daily basis. However, again, women shoulder a major part of LTC tasks. For instance, approximately 41 % of women bear primary responsibility for providing the most demanding personal and emotional care compared to only 16 % for men.

In the EU, women are more likely than men to provide informal LTC (19.1 % versus 14.8 %), particularly within the 45-64 age group. Furthermore, women tend to dedicate more time to informal care. This disparity may be partly explained by the fact that male informal caregivers are more likely to seek and receive support from formal LTC services (73 %) than their female counterparts (61 %). As announced in the 2022 European care strategy⁹², the Commission launched – among other things - a strategic partnership with the World Health Organization in 2023. One of the aims of the partnership is to prepare a toolkit to support informal carers, which is currently under preparation and should be ready in the summer of 2025.

In 2024, the implementation of a new large-scale partnership for LTC under the Pact for Skills continued. Launched in April 2023, the initiative is committed to train at least 60 % of the LTC workforce (3.8 million workers) every year by 2030. Moreover, the Commission launched a new sectorial social dialogue committee for social services to discuss working conditions and wages in the sector playing an important role for addressing shortages of labour in the care sector. The Commission also continues in line with its 2023 Communication on Strengthening social dialogue in the EU to promote social dialogue at EU level by supporting the activities of the cross-industry Social Dialogue Committee and the Sectoral Social Dialogue Committees. Currently, about half of the 44 sectoral social dialogue committees include specific actions on gender equality in their work programme.

The 2024 report on Employment and Social Developments in Europe⁹³ provides an assessment of the convergence over time of labour market outcomes and related attitudes through a gender lens. It shows that involvement of women in unpaid care has dropped somewhat (-6 pp) since 2007. However, this decrease was at least partly due to an increased availability of formal childcare services rather than due to higher involvement of men in care responsibilities. At the same time, however, the share of women doing housework on a daily basis dropped by 16 pp while that of men

⁹² Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social committee and the Committee of the Regions on the European care strategy, COM(2022)440 final.

⁹³ <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/empl/esde-2024/>.

increased by 10 pp. In 2022, 1 in 4 men in the EU were involved daily in unpaid care, and around 1 in 3 in housework. For women, the shares were 34 % and 63 %, respectively.

Gender gaps in unpaid care and household work vary considerably between Member States. In several countries, the share of women involved daily in unpaid care is at least 15 pp higher than men, while in others there is little difference. Although the magnitude of differences across countries has remained similar since 2007, some evidence points towards countries with larger gaps catching up with those with smaller gaps. The gender gap in housework varies between 12 pp and 44 pp across countries. The gap has converged since 2016, but concerning the countries with the largest gaps were not part of this process.

These differences might be rooted in gender stereotypes about the role of women and men in the world of work. A paper on ‘gender attitudes towards work across EU Member States’, published in September 2024⁹⁴, provides a detailed analysis of gender attitudes towards work across the EU⁹⁵. It also discusses how such attitudes can affect gender gaps in the labour market and within households. The paper shows that most people in the EU support gender equality in the labour market and within households. A third has mixed attitudes, holding egalitarian beliefs in some areas only. Finally, around one tenth of respondents holds views that support the traditional gender roles such as that women should prioritise their family responsibilities over their career or that for important family decisions men should have a final say. The aggregate picture should not obscure considerable geographical variation - while egalitarian attitudes are widespread in some Member States (particularly in northern EU countries), they are much less common in others.

Following the 2024 **Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV)** call for proposals on gender equality, out of the 196 proposals received, 25 projects were selected for funding. Most of them (17) will focus on **tackling the root causes of the gender care gap** by promoting a gender transformative approach and challenging gender stereotypes. In particular, projects will: (i) promote family-friendly practices in companies encouraging the take up of the new rights under the Work-life Balance Directive by both women and men (for example family leaves), (ii) prevent and protect against any form of unfavourable treatment and discrimination of women during and after pregnancy, including when taking up family leave and flexible work arrangements; and (iii) raise awareness of the value of care work.

The remaining eight selected projects, proposed by national authorities, will support the implementation of the Pay Transparency Directive, especially its Article 4 on developing guidance, tools and awareness raising for gender-sensitive job evaluation and classification systems. Most projects will start at the beginning of 2025 and will last two years.

A recent Eurobarometer on gender stereotypes seems to confirm this hypothesis. There is a positive shift in attitudes towards gender equality with three quarters of respondents agreeing that men also benefit from equality between women and men, but gender stereotypes persist: about 4 in 10 people in the EU agree that the most important role of a man is to earn money (42 %, -1 pp since

⁹⁴ https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/employment-and-social-developments-europe-egalitarian-traditional-or-neither-gender-attitudes_en.

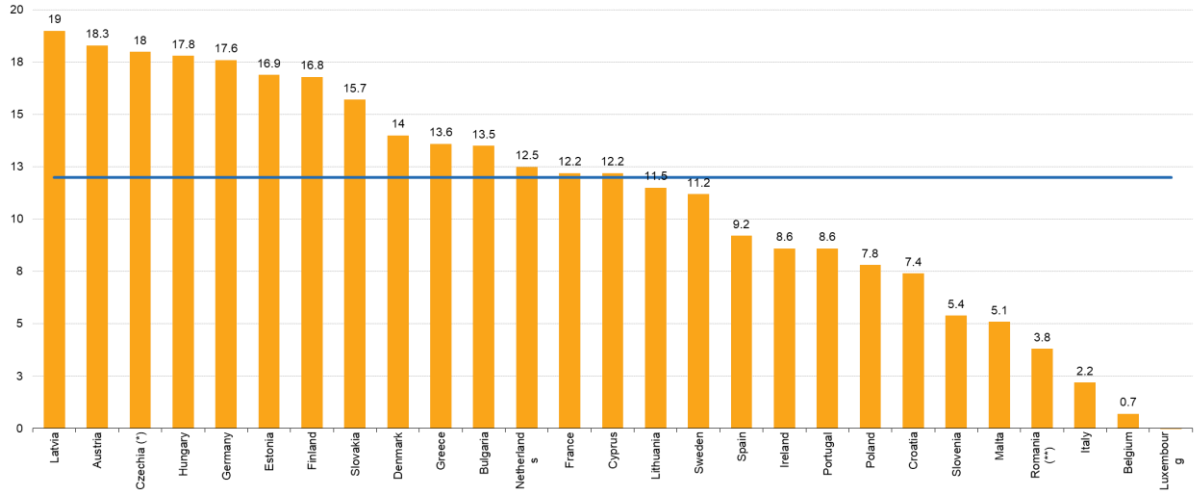
⁹⁵ Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, *Egalitarian, traditional or neither? Gender attitudes towards work across EU Member States*, 2024. Available [online](#).

2017) and that the most important role of a woman is to take care of her home and family (38 %, - 6 pp); half agree that men are naturally less competent than women to perform household tasks (49 %).

Addressing the gender pay and pension gaps

Though the gender pay gap has been narrowing over the last decade, its level is still above 10 % in most countries. In 2023, the EU27 **unadjusted gender pay gap**⁹⁶, based mostly on provisional data, stands at 12.0 % on EU average⁹⁷ (compared to 16.0 % in 2013) and remains above 15 % in Estonia, Austria, Czechia, Germany, Slovakia, Hungary, Latvia and Finland. The situation varies considerably across Member States, ranging from - 0.9 % in Luxembourg to 19 % in Latvia (Figure 7).

Figure 7 - Unadjusted gender pay gap, 2023



Source: Eurostat (online data code: [sdg_05_20](#))

Note: NACE Rev. 2 B to S (-O). Data are provisional for the 27 countries. (*) For Czechia definition differs; (**) For Romania break in time series

It is important to recall that sometimes a very low or even negative gender pay gap, i.e. a situation where women’s average gross hourly earnings are higher than men’s, might be linked to a self-selection bias when the employment rate is significantly lower for women than for men. In other words, in some Member States, it is mostly women with comparatively higher education levels and therefore higher salaries, that engage in the labour market. It is also important to recall that the gender pay gap 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, covering also differences resulting from sectoral and occupational segregation, i.e. the fact that women predominantly work in lower paid sectors and are under-represented in (better paid) management positions. Recent research also highlighted that segregation might increasingly depend on sorting

⁹⁶ The unadjusted gender pay gap is defined as the difference between average gross hourly earnings of male paid employees and of female paid employees as a percentage of average gross hourly earnings of male paid employees. All employees working in firms with 10 or more employees, without restrictions for age and hours worked, are included.

⁹⁷ The GPG is computed on the basis of data collected every four years through the Structure of earnings survey (SES). In the years in-between two data collections, the GPG are estimated and then benchmarked after a new data release.

into establishments, occupations and jobs, i.e. the fact that women tend to concentrate e.g. in lower paying enterprises because they offer better work-life balance⁹⁸.

Every year, the Commission recalls the importance of eliminating the gender pay gap by marking Equal pay day – the day on which the average salary of women symbolically stops being paid. In 2024, Equal pay day was the same as in 2023 – 15 November –, since the gender pay gap had not changed⁹⁹.

In June 2024, **Austria** launched the 'Equal Pay Netz'¹⁰⁰ (Equal Pay Network) as a measure to counter the gender pay gap. It is co-financed by Austria's Federal Ministry for Labour and Economy and the EU (European Social Fund Plus+). The goal of this project is to create four pilot 'Equal Pay Regions' across Austria: two in the tourism sector and two in the industrial sector. In each region, various activities are planned to analyse, address and discuss the drivers of the gender pay gap with regional stakeholders and (inter)national experts. In addition to this regional networking and capacity building, knowledge creation and sharing will be achieved through active public relations.

In 2024, the Commission organised two implementation workshops on the **Pay Transparency Directive**¹⁰¹ to assist Member States in transposing the Directive. The Directive, which was adopted in May 2023, aims to strengthen the equal pay principle between men and women through pay transparency and enforcement mechanisms. The European Commission dedicated about EUR 4 million under **CERV programme**¹⁰² to projects carried out by Member States to develop: (i) tools and methodologies for European employers to correct any unjustified gender pay differences identified through the implementation of the Directive and (ii) methodologies to assess what is work of equal value. Eight projects were awarded in 2024.

In 2024, **Estonia** launched the 'Pay Mirror' - a digital tool that provides statistics on the gender pay gap in organisations using administrative data, including actual wages (bonuses included), employment dates, workload, and position. Statistics Estonia computes the set of indicators at the request of any employer with at least three male and three female employees, and the indicators are only accessible to the employer. Since Estonian administrative data do not separate basic wages from bonuses, the Pay Mirror reflects actual paid wages adjusted for workload, excluding absences due to incapacity or child leave (state-compensated). Indicators in the tool include gender pay gaps based on average pay and median pay, average and median pay for women and men, gender gaps by occupation and gaps in irregular pay.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ See <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41562-022-01470-z.pdf>.

⁹⁹ https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/equal-pay/equal-pay-day_en#what-is-the-european-equal-pay-day.
¹⁰⁰ <https://www.equalpaynetz.at/>.

¹⁰¹ 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.

¹⁰² https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/cerv/wp-call/2024/call-fiche_cerv-2024-ge_en.pdf.

¹⁰³ <https://www.mkm.ee/too-ja-vordsed-voimalused/vordsed-voimalused-ja-sooline-vordoiguslikkus/palgapeegel>

In May 2024, two EU directives to strengthen the role of equality bodies were adopted.¹⁰⁴ One of these Directives sets out binding standards for equality bodies dealing with equal treatment and opportunities between women and men in the area of employment and occupation. It requires Member States to ensure that equality bodies are independent and have sufficient resources and powers to carry out their mandate¹⁰⁵. To support the transposition process, the Commission set up an expert group on the implementation of EU equality law, composed of representatives of Member States and Equinet – European umbrella of equality bodies – with FRA and EIGE as observers. The group drafted a number of guidance documents, and set up a wiki online space to exchange on the Directives. The group will also assist the Commission in the early preparation of the implementing act establishing the common list of indicators.

After retirement, the gender pay gap translates into a difference in revenues in old age. The gender pension gap is on a declining trend from 33.9 % in 2010 to 27.6 % in 2020, also because of lower female pension shifting out of the computation. Nevertheless, the gender pension gap stood still at 25.4 % in 2023¹⁰⁶. In other words, in 2023 women aged 65-79 received a gross pension that was on average one fourth lower than that of men in the same age group. The extent of this gap varies considerably among EU countries, ranging from as high as 43.9 % in Malta, 39.9 % in the Netherlands and 36.4 % in Luxembourg to 4 % in Slovenia, 4.6 % in Denmark and 5.8 % in Estonia. Besides employment and wage patterns, career breaks are also a major factor contributing to the gender pension gap. Finally, lower financial literacy can hamper women's retirement planning, calling for financial education and pension transparency measures. At the same time, the gender pension gap among retired workers aged +65 and above who are at risk of poverty increased from 3.1 pp in 2010 to 3.6 in 2015 and 3.7 in 2023¹⁰⁷.

The pension adequacy report is produced every three years by the Social Protection Committee and the European Commission. The latest edition of the report, published in June 2024, contains a thematic chapter on inequalities in old age, and gives particular emphasis to the gender dimension, including the gender pension gap and the gender pension coverage gap¹⁰⁸. It shows that, linked to the fact that old-age pensions count on average for four-fifths of total income in old-age, older women continue to be more exposed to poverty risks than older men in all Member States. Being single in old age carries a higher poverty risk for women than for men. In 2023, more than 1 in 5 women aged 75 and above were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU.

¹⁰⁴ Council Directive (EU) 2024/1499 of 7 May on standards for equality bodies in the field of equal treatment between persons irrespective of their racial or ethnic origin, equal treatment in the field of employment and occupation between persons irrespective of their religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, equal treatment between women and men in matters of social security and in the access to and supply of goods and services, OJ L 2024/1499, 29.5.2024 and Directive (EU) 2024/1500 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on standards for equality bodies in the field of equal treatment and equal opportunities between women and men in matters of employment and occupation, and amending Directive 2006/54/EC and Directive 2010/41/EU, OJ L, 2024/1500, 29.05.2024.

¹⁰⁵ The Commission also monitors developments related to the independence and functioning of equality bodies in the context of its annual Rule of Law Report.

¹⁰⁶ [Gender pension gap by age group \[ilc_pnp13_custom_8619195\]](#).

¹⁰⁷ Eurostat, [At-risk-of-poverty rate by poverty threshold and most frequent activity in the previous year \[ilc_li04_custom_15156745\]](#).

¹⁰⁸ In June 2023, the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council adopted Council Conclusions on pension adequacy for the Social Protection Committee and the Commission to further develop the analysis on gender gaps in old age and to develop reliable and up-to-date indicators for monitoring gender gaps in pension benefits and pension coverage. See [ilc_pnp14](#).

Since 2006, the **Finnish government**, together with central labour market organisations, has been implementing equal pay programmes to reduce the **gender pay gap**. The objective of the latest programme is to reduce the pay gap to at least 14.5 % in 2024-2027. The measures focus on pay systems and pay awareness, equality planning at workplaces, the dismantling of the gender-based division of labour, and the reconciliation of work and family life. Due to changes in the operating environment, the programme includes discussions between private sector trade unions about their possible participation in equal pay programmes.¹⁰⁹

In July 2024, the Commission published a study supporting the monitoring of care credits in occupational pension schemes. The study looks at how care periods (for children and LTC) are treated in fully funded occupational pension schemes and whether any care credits are provided¹¹⁰.

Achieving equal participation across different sectors of the economy

Sectoral segregation is one of the reasons behind the gender pay gap. Women tend to be over-represented in sectors with average lower pay, often because the jobs in these sectors are undervalued and considered ‘women’s job’, such as care and education. As highlighted also in the European care strategy, these are also sectors in which labour shortages are increasingly prominent and likely to increase with population ageing, especially in rural areas. Low pay may also be linked to gender stereotypes that equate the soft skills required for care – such as communication, empathy or cooperation – with skills that would come naturally to women and that are not properly recognised in the economic value of their work.

Gender segregation of the labour market contributes to shortages by reducing the efficiency of labour supply allocation. Labour shortages are evident in occupations and sectors where men account for the majority of workers (e.g. STEM occupations, where men represent 80 % of workers), as well as in some jobs where women comprise the majority of workers (e.g. healthcare occupations, where women represent 80 % of workers). Persistent gender segregation reduces the pool of people available to fill new vacancies, exacerbating difficulties in finding workers, especially in times of rising demand. Measures aimed at reducing gender segregation offer important opportunities to ensure that increased labour market participation of women alleviates labour shortages. Currently, women remain unlikely to progress into hard-to-fill vacancies in male-dominated occupations. At the same time, relying almost exclusively on women’s work does not generate sufficient labour supply to satisfy the demand for specific services such as nursing, personal care, or cleaning. Improving working conditions and pay in these jobs is likely to play an important role in attracting additional workers.

Directive (EU) 2022/2041 of 19 October 2022 on **adequate minimum wages**¹¹¹ came into force on 15 November 2024. It requires all Member States to set up a framework to ensure the adequacy of statutory minimum wages, promote collective bargaining on wage setting, and improve the effective

¹⁰⁹ <https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/165735> and <https://stm.fi/en/gender-equality/equal-pay>.

¹¹⁰ Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, *Study supporting the monitoring of care credits in occupational pension schemes*, 2024. Available [online](#).

¹¹¹ 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.

access of workers to minimum wage protection in the EU¹¹². One of the effects of wage adequacy will be to reduce the gender pay gap. In fact, Article 5(1) of the Directive mentions the reduction of the gender pay gap as an underlying aim of the establishment of procedures for the setting and updating of adequate statutory minimum wages.

The Commission put forward a number of sectoral initiatives to support equal participation in the labour market. Especially **in the ICT sector**, there is a severe and persistent gender gap that impacts on how digital solutions are designed and deployed. In 2023, 80.6 % of ICT specialists in the EU were men¹¹³. Therefore, stimulating more women to become ICT specialist is essential for tackling the shortage of ICT specialists and building an inclusive and competitive digital Europe. At EU level, the Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030 sets the ambitious target of more than doubling the number of ICT professionals from 9 to 20 million while promoting the access of women to this field and increasing the number of ICT graduates.

There is also a notable underrepresentation of women in **intangible value sectors**, such as in design. A recent EUIPO study on *Women in Design* highlights the persistent gender gap in the EU's design industry, where only 24 % of designers are women.¹¹⁴ It also reveals a significant pay disparity, with female designers earning 12.8 % less than their male counterparts. This underrepresentation extends to registered Community designs, where just 21 % of filings by EU-based owners in 2022 included at least one female designer. Globally, WIPO statistics show that women accounted for only 21 % of listed designers in industrial design applications in 2022.¹¹⁵ While this figure has doubled since 2001, WIPO estimates that, at the current rate, gender parity will not be reached until 2099. A similar gender imbalance exists in the **patent field**. A 2022 European Patent Office (EPO) study found that fewer than one in seven inventors in Europe were women, despite some progress over time.¹¹⁶ In the field of geographical indications, studies underscore the involvement of women in the production phase of certain non-agricultural geographical indications, particularly in sectors like lace, embroidery, tapestry, glass, ceramics, and wool products, with some products having more than 81 % female labour.¹¹⁷ However, in more physically demanding sectors like stone and marble production, firearms, knives, women are underrepresented, comprising only about 20 % of the workforce,¹¹⁸ indicating room for improvement in gender parity across different non-agricultural GI sectors. Moreover, Women in **intellectual property professions** face significant challenges. A 2017 study for the European Parliament found that full gender equality in the legal profession remains elusive.¹¹⁹ The disparity is particularly evident in career progression, with far fewer women in senior roles compared to entry-level positions across law firms, the judiciary, and other branches of the legal field. This is why, the Commission has supported specific gender-related goals in the EUIPO's

¹¹² Denmark challenged the Directive before the Court of Justice of the European Union. Case C-19/23 of the CJEU. On 14 January 2025, the Advocate General recommended that the Directive be declared null and void in its entirety because it exceeds EU competences in this area. The decision of the Court itself is outstanding.

¹¹³ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=ICT_specialists_in_employment.

¹¹⁴ <https://www.euipo.europa.eu/en/news/women-designers-underrepresented-and-paid-less-in-the-eu-study-reveals>.

¹¹⁵ https://www.wipo.int/pressroom/en/articles/2023/article_0004.html.

¹¹⁶ <https://www.epo.org/en/news-events/news/fewer-1-7-inventors-europe-are-women>

¹¹⁷ <https://ec.europa.eu/docsroom/documents/14897>

¹¹⁸ Idem.

¹¹⁹ [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/596804/IPOL_STU\(2017\)596804_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/596804/IPOL_STU(2017)596804_EN.pdf)

Strategic Plan for 2030¹²⁰. The EUIPO will work not only to achieve gender parity in its own operations, but also to reasons for gender imbalances in intellectual property and to develop target programmes to increase the participation of underrepresented groups in the intellectual property system in Europe.

The **Digital Europe Programme** now includes WIDCON¹²¹, a specific coordination and support action to set up a network of expertise and a community of stakeholders to identify good practices and promote women participation in ICT across the EU. To help Member States progress towards the Digital Decade target, the action will produce several outcomes: (i) a report identifying the main obstacles for girls and women in choosing to study or work in the ICT field and setting out possible measures to increase the number of women in ICT; (ii) an overview of relevant national and regional strategies and measures; and (iii) a forum to report on progress and discuss successful and promising initiatives for getting more women in ICT.

Under the Digital Europe Programme funding continues for the EU code week, a grassroots initiative launched in 2013. EU code week aims at spreading computational thinking and coding to as many people as possible, as well as to boost the development of digital skills from an early age, particularly of girls, to encourage them to pursue studies in STEM disciplines and take up a career in ICT as women take up only one third of STEM graduates¹²² and one in five women are ICT specialist¹²³.

Other relevant Commission initiatives include: the EIC women leadership programme, the preparatory action on gender investment gap events across EU, the **Women TechEU** scheme (see also Chapter 3)¹²⁴, and the **Women and Girls in STEM Forum** (see Chapter 4 for further details).

As part of the Digital Education Action Plan, the Commission continued to support the **Girls Go Circular project**,¹²⁵ a free online learning programme and the ESTEAM Fests.¹²⁶ In 2024, Girls Go Circular trained the digital and entrepreneurial competences of 15.000 14-19 year-old-girls across Europe. The **ESTEAM Fests** focused on building the confidence of participants, while improving their digital and entrepreneurial competences. They have been extended for an additional year (2025) to have more time to develop and launch the final ESTEAM guide and organise two additional Girls Fests. Since 2022, 22 ESTEAM fests have reached 1.898 women and girls across 13 countries. Online, 2.149 girls and women have been reached from 38 countries.

A 2024 report on the gender gap in STEM education¹²⁷ consolidates current research findings, policy analyses and best practices in relation to gender disparities in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education. The report highlights the multifaceted nature of the gender gap in STEM education and careers calling for a multi-level approach that encompasses educational reforms, policy interventions, societal attitude shifts and targeted support mechanisms to bridge this gap effectively. Addressing the gender gap in STEM is not only a matter of educational equity but also

¹²⁰ [strategic-plan-2030_en.pdf](#)

¹²¹ <https://bdva.eu/news/widcon-women-in-digital-project-kick-off/>.

¹²² <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20240308-2>

¹²³ Employed ICT specialists by sex [isoc_sks_itcps]

¹²⁴ https://eismea.ec.europa.eu/programmes/european-innovation-ecosystems/women-techeu_en.

¹²⁵ <https://eit-girlsgocircular.eu/>.

¹²⁶ https://eismea.ec.europa.eu/esteam-fests-and-communities-girls-and-women_en.

¹²⁷ <https://education.ec.europa.eu/eu/news/new-report-addresses-the-gender-gap-in-stem-education-across-educational-levels>.

an issue of critical economic and societal concern, given the increasing importance of STEM fields in navigating the modern world, driving innovation, and addressing global challenges.

Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA), the EU's flagship programme for the training, skills, mobility and career development of researchers at all stages of their careers, continued to encourage equality in research teams through a gender-friendly and inclusive approach that pays attention to gender mainstreaming at all levels and continued to include work-life balance provisions to encourage higher participation of women in research and innovation. The MSCA continued placing a great importance on the promotion of female role models, including outstanding MSCA supervisors, coordinators and fellows that inspire girls and women all over the world to participate in science. In 2024, the events organised under the MSCA, the 'European Researcher Nights', 'Researchers at Schools' and 'Science is Wonderful!', placed great importance on the promotion of female role models that inspire girls to participate in science and research. In 2024, Prof. Rana Sanyal, an MSCA alumnus, was the winner of the 2024 European Prize for Women Innovators.

Under the European Education Area, the **Council Recommendation on attractive and sustainable careers in higher education**¹²⁸, adopted in November 2024, includes data and recommendations on promoting diversity, inclusion and gender equality in academic careers.

The 2024 **Erasmus+** call for proposals for European policy experimentation is supporting projects that are developing ways to overcome the obstacles preventing girls and women from participating in vocational education and training and pursuing a career in the green/ net-zero technology sector, through campaigns, mentoring programmes, career guidance and role models among other actions¹²⁹.

The Commission coordinated and co-chaired the **Talent for Growth Task Force**¹³⁰ as part of the EU-US Trade and Technology Council cooperation¹³¹. The task force acted as a platform for sharing policies, tools and data on skills development in both regions to drive development of the talent and skills needed for emerging and existing technologies. One of the four workstreams focused on the topic of attracting women, young people and other under-represented groups to technology jobs¹³². The task force concluded its work on 4 April 2024.

Calls for proposals under the budget lines dedicated to **social dialogue** contain a general condition that the activities funded under them should pay adequate attention to gender equality and avoid discrimination. In 2024, two calls were launched: one on support for social dialogue, and one on information and training measures for workers' organisations. Thanks to these calls, which are annual calls, the Commission funds various projects dedicated to gender equality. Some of them are

¹²⁸ Council Recommendation of 25 November 2024 on attractive and sustainable careers in higher education, C/2024/7282.

¹²⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/erasmus/wp-call/2024/call-fiche_erasmus-edu-2024-pol-exp_en.pdf.

¹³⁰ https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies-and-activities/skills-and-qualifications/working-together/eu-us-talent-growth-task-force_en.

¹³¹ https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world/eu-us-trade-and-technology-council_en.

¹³² The workstream activity report and dedicated analytical paper by the OECD on this topic, including recommendations and best practices collected through a survey and a peer learning workshop, can be found [here](#).

sector-specific (commerce, implementation of the social partners' agreement on women in rail, care, postal sector). Others have a cross-sector dimension, and typically enable national and EU-level social partners to share policy recommendations and good practice on relevant dimensions of equality, such as the gender pay gap and pay transparency. Some projects have a strong gender impact as they focus on the capacity of social partners in sectors with a largely female workforce (e.g. care, nursing).

Finally, with support of the CERV programme through the Academy of European Law, six **seminars to train judges and legal practitioners on EU gender equality legislation** were organised, in cooperation with the European Commission. In 2024 over 300 academics, judges and legal practitioners were trained during these seminars, which were also held in other languages than English (most frequently in the national languages of the countries concerned). The seminars were held in Prague, Copenhagen, Sofia, Lisbon, Paris and Trier. They aimed to equip participants with sound knowledge of the essential aspects of EU gender equality legislation and its interpretation by the Court of Justice of the European Union. They included workshops to discuss practical cases in working groups to allow the participants to better familiarise themselves with the practical aspects of applying EU equality law.

LEADING EQUALLY THROUGH SOCIETY

In 2024, some progress was made to advance women's leadership, but it remains limited and is not yet sustainable. This happens notwithstanding an increasingly widening gender gap in tertiary education attainment for women which is now 10.9 p.p. higher than for men¹³³.

As shown by 2024 EIGE Index data, there have been advancements for women in decision-making, but achieving gender parity in decision-making is still a distant goal. Women's participation across all sectors of public life – especially in politics, journalism, and in civil society – is confronted with stronger violence and hate, particularly online.

Women in political decision-making

The 2024 Eurobarometer shows that most Europeans reject stereotypes on attitudes and abilities of **women and men in leadership** positions. They, for instance, agree (55 %) that temporary measures (e.g. quotas) are necessary to overcome the existing underrepresentation of women in politics, and think that having more women in politics leads to better policy decisions. However, more than one in five still holds stereotypical views such as that women are not ambitious enough to get the more senior positions in an organisation¹³⁴ and that 'men make better leaders than women'. There is also a polarisation by age, which is larger for younger people: the gap in agreement rates between women and men aged 15-24 is by 1/3 larger than for the older age groups¹³⁵. For the statement 'women are too emotional to be good leaders' the gap in agreement between young women and men is twice as large as between older women and men¹³⁶. This shows that there is greater polarisation of views between women and men among the 15–24-year-olds than among older age groups.

After the June 2024 elections, 277 women (38.5 %) and 441 men (61.3 %) took up their seats in the new European Parliament in July 2024¹³⁷. For the first time since direct elections to the European Parliament were introduced in 1979, the proportion of female Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) decreased compared to the situation just before the election in April 2024 (39.7 %) and compared to the situation right after the 2019 European election (40.7 %)¹³⁸. On the positive side, the newly elected MEPs re-elected two women, Ms. Metsola as Parliament President and Ms. Von der Leyen as President of the European Commission¹³⁹.

Against the background of the 2024 elections to the European Parliament and other elections at national and local level, Member States discussed political participation of women in the framework of the European cooperation network on elections. In particular, Member States reported on the participation of women standing as candidates. They also provided feedback on measures taken to

¹³³ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Gender_statistics#Highlights.

¹³⁴ In 21 countries, more than half agree that having more women in politics leads to better policy decisions, with the highest numbers found in Portugal (83 %), Greece (79 %) and Italy (78 %).

¹³⁵ A gap of 18 pp among 15-24-year-olds, compared to 11 to 12 pp among those aged 25+.

¹³⁶ A gap of 13 pp among 15-24-year-olds, compared to 6 to 9 pp among those aged 25+; see <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2974>.

¹³⁷ <https://results.elections.europa.eu/en/mep-gender-balance/2024-2029/>. One person was recorded with gender 'other'.

¹³⁸ The female representation dropped to 39.4 % after the United Kingdom's MEPs left the Parliament in March 2020.

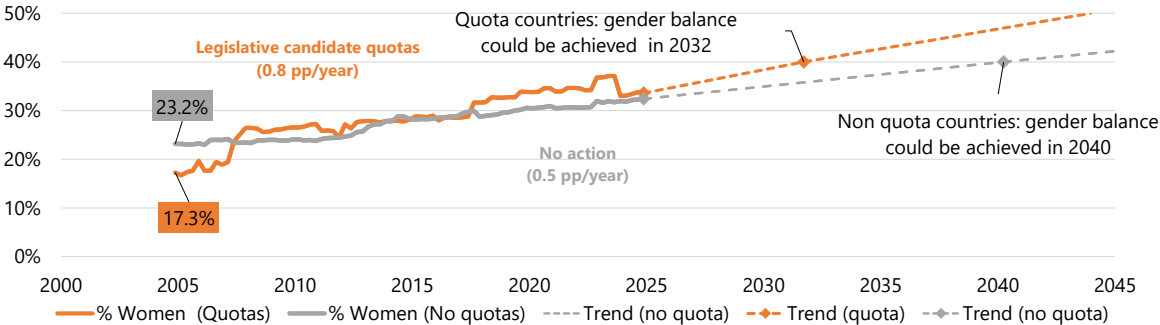
¹³⁹ <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs/data-talks/despite-hopes-progress-european-parliament-elections-led-decline-womens-representation>.

support gender equality in access to and participation in elections, as a follow up to the 2023 Commission Recommendation on inclusive and resilient electoral processes¹⁴⁰. Discussions also covered the situation of political participation of the Roma population and especially Roma women, and safety of candidates.

So far, 11 Member States have adopted legislative gender quotas applicable to the lists of candidates for national elections¹⁴¹. Of the 11 countries, 10 also had legislative quotas applicable to European elections. Most of these quotas set a minimum quota for each gender (35 %-59 %) in the list of candidates. Some laws include specific provisions like ‘zipped lists’ where men and women have to be alternated or rank every certain number of positions. Malta has a ‘gender corrective’ mechanism that automatically allocates up to 12 additional seats to the under-represented gender if less than 40 % of each gender is elected.

In 2024, data from EIGE suggests (see Figure 1) that female participation in national parliaments increases slightly faster in Member States with quotas than in Member States without quotas. If this trend continues, Member States with quotas could achieve gender parity by 2032 and Member States without quotas by 2040.

Figure 1: Proportion of women in the single/lower houses of national parliaments in EU Member States with and without legislative quotas or action, Q4-2004-Q4-2024



Source: Own calculations based on data from the EIGE Gender Statistics Database: [National parliaments](#)
Notes: Data exclude Croatia for 2004-2006, the country was added to the data collection in 2007. Countries were progressively added to the quota group as legislation was adopted. Malta is included in the quota group. Romania is included in the non-quota group.

Data from November 2024 show that, again, in only six Member States, women make up more than 40 % of members of parliament (single/lower house), with Sweden reaching 45.6 %, Finland 45.5 %, Denmark 44.7 %, Spain 44.6 % and both Belgium and the Netherlands 40.7 %¹⁴². At the other end of the scale, women make up less than 25 % of members of parliament in five Member States. In descending order these are Ireland, Slovakia, Romania, Hungary and Cyprus.

¹⁴⁰ 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.
¹⁴¹ Belgium, Ireland, Greece, Spain, France, Croatia, Italy, Luxembourg, Poland, Poland and Slovenia.
¹⁴² Source: EIGE Statistics Database. Data last updated November 2024. [Indicator: women in decision-making | politics | National parliaments: presidents and members.](#)

On EU average, the proportion of women members of single/lower houses of parliament currently stands at 33.1 % (figure 2)¹⁴³. This is a very slight increase compared to 2023 (33 %) but marks an upward trend for a second year in a row following a fall from 33.2 % to 32.4 % in 2022. Progress at national level has slowed in recent years. This highlights that more work is required to get more women into politics.

In Slovenia, the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, together with the University of Maribor, the University for Adult Education Celje and the Institute for political management implemented the **EWA project**, co-financed by the EU's CERV programme from 2022 to 2024. The EWA project aimed to increase the political participation of young women by changing beliefs about women in politics and civic participation that are based on gender stereotypes. The project's activities were designed to empower women, both individually and systemically, by creating better opportunities for women's active participation in the political and civic sphere.¹⁴⁴

In 2024, **Cyprus'** Commissioner for Gender Equality in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth held a written essay competition for female graduates with the title '**If I was a Minister, what would I change**'. The action was targeted at graduate female students, encouraging them to choose an issue and write an essay on what could work better in all areas of activity. The winners of the competition then shadowed ministers, both women and men, for a day. Young girls had the opportunity to discuss with ministers, to participate in meetings with ministers but also to stimulate the discussion between policy makers and young girls. This contest will be repeated every year and it is aiming to motivate young women to engage in politics.

Belgium commissioned a study on **sexism in politics** during last year's election period. The objective of the study was to understand whether, how, and why candidates are victims of sexism, grasp its consequences and suggest ways of combating sexist behaviour during election campaigns. Nearly 44 000 reactions to social media posts of candidates were analysed during the campaign period ahead of the June 2024 Belgian elections, and 25 in-depth interviews were conducted. The study concluded that female candidates are more often the target of sexism and hostility more generally, and that sexism takes many forms and occurs in many different places, online and offline. It has a severe impact on the mental well-being and political ambitions of women, which poses a threat to democracy¹⁴⁵.

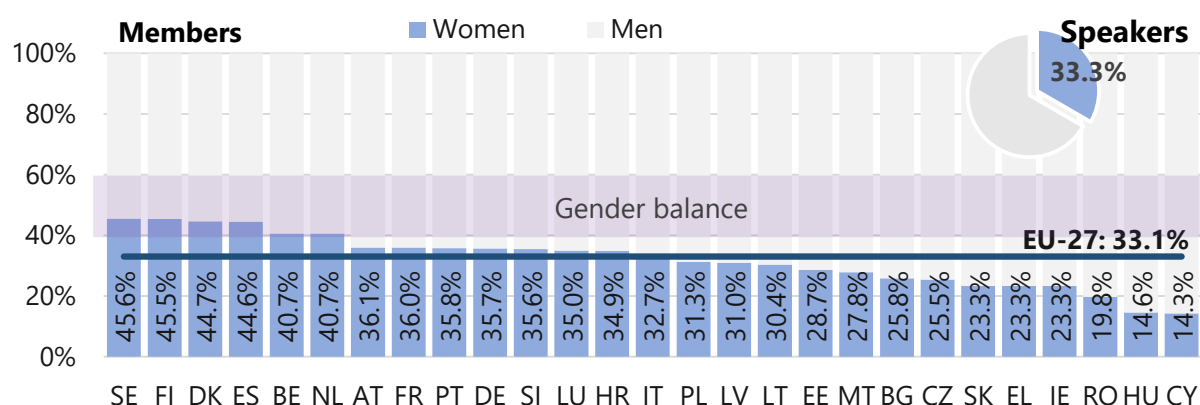
¹⁴³ Source: EIGE Statistics Database. Data last updated November 2024. [Indicator: women in decision-making | politics | National parliaments: presidents and members.](#)

¹⁴⁴ <https://ewa.si/en/>.

¹⁴⁵ https://igvm-iefh.belgium.be/fr/actualite/le_sexisme_et_lhostilite_durant_la_campagne_electorale_impactent_surtout_les_candidates.

In **Spain**, Organic Law 2/2024 on parity representation and balanced presence of women and men¹⁴⁶ was approved in August 2024. It seeks to go further in breaking the glass ceiling in political and economic decision-making, by introducing mandatory zipped lists and explicitly requiring balanced representation (neither sex being allowed to make up more than 60 % or less than 40 %) in constitutional bodies or bodies of constitutional relevance, and when appointing ministers and vice-presidents, and people at the highest level of responsibility in the general state administration as well as in other relevant bodies.

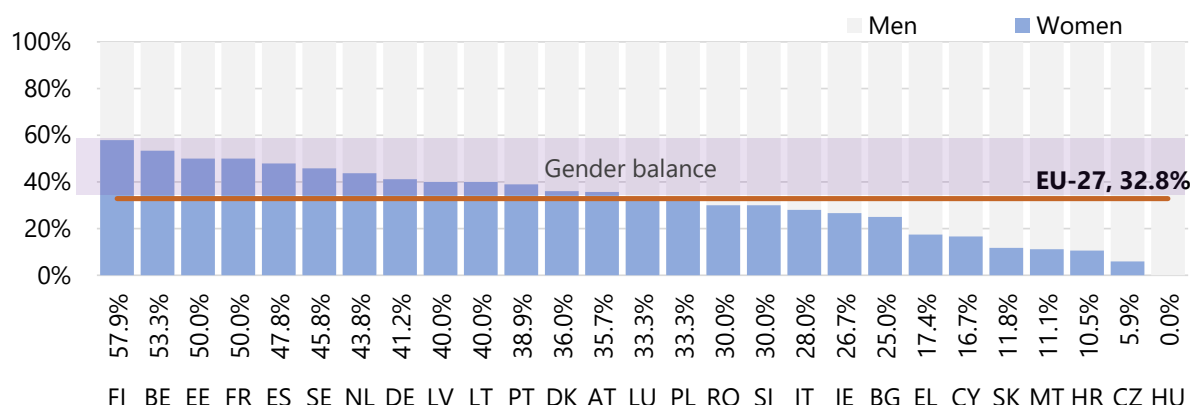
Figure 2: Percentage of women and men in single and lower houses of national parliaments in the EU, November 2024



Source: EIGE Gender Statistics Database

On EU average, the percentage of female senior ministers dropped from 33.4 % in 2023 to 32.8 % in 2024, a decrease of 0.6 pp. Nevertheless, in 9 Member States, at least 40 % of senior ministers were women (Belgium, Germany, Estonia, Spain, France, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Finland and Sweden). This is one Member State more than last year. At the opposite ends of the spectrum, Finland reported having a majority of women (57.9 %), while Hungary currently does not have a single woman senior minister.

Figure 3: Share of women and men in governments (senior ministers), November 2024



Source: EIGE Gender Statistics Database

¹⁴⁶ <https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2024-15936>.

Women's representation in government is important, but it is equally important to examine the specific portfolios held by women. EIGE's analysis shows that although women hold almost one third of senior ministerial positions, they account for only a smaller share of ministers with portfolios in 'core functions', i.e. foreign and internal affairs, defence or justice (25.9 %)¹⁴⁷, economy (24.3 %)¹⁴⁸, and infrastructure (32.5 %)¹⁴⁹ portfolios and a significantly higher proportion of ministers with social or cultural portfolios (48 %)¹⁵⁰. This is a longstanding pattern that points to a distribution of ministerial portfolios that somehow reflects gender stereotypes.

Looking at women leading positions in national systems, only 9 out of 27 national parliaments, one less than in 2023, had a woman as speaker of the house¹⁵¹. As of December 2024, there were 4 (6 in 2023) women heads of government in the EU and 3 women presidents out of 21 (3 in 2023).¹⁵²

Not only the number of women in leading positions in national systems is declining. When one looks at how responsibilities are divided in political parties, one sees the same trend. Only 25.8 % (26.8 % in 2023)¹⁵³ of political parties in the EU have women leaders, whereas 33.5 % (36.9 % in 2023) of deputy party leaders are women¹⁵⁴.

At regional level, we see a different trend. The latest data from November 2024 show that the number of women in regional assemblies and municipal councils has increased, though slightly. They accounted for 36.3 % (35.7 % in 2023)¹⁵⁵ of members of regional assemblies across the EU, and 34.8 % (34.5 % in 2023) of members of local/municipal councils (Figure 4)¹⁵⁶.

In only 4 of the 19 Member States (4 in 2023) that have a regional level endowed with powers of self-government, each gender makes up at least 40 % of the member of both local/municipal and regional assemblies.

¹⁴⁷ Source: EIGE Statistics Database. Last updated in November 2024. [Indicator: women in decision-making | politics | National governments: ministers by seniority and function of government | basic functions.](#)

¹⁴⁸ Source: EIGE Statistics Database. Last updated in November 2024. [Indicator: women in decision-making | politics | National governments: ministers by seniority and function of government | Economic functions.](#)

¹⁴⁹ Source: EIGE Statistics Database. Last updated in November 2024. [Indicator: women in decision-making | politics | National governments: ministers by seniority and function of government | infrastructure functions.](#)

¹⁵⁰ Source: EIGE Statistics Database. Last updated in November 2024. [Indicator: women in decision-making | politics | National governments: ministers by seniority and function of government | socio-cultural functions.](#)

¹⁵¹ Source: EIGE Statistics Database. Last updated in November 2024. [Indicator: women in decision-making | politics | National parliaments: presidents and members | speaker of the house.](#)

¹⁵² Source: EIGE Statistics Database. Last updated in November 2024. [Indicator: women in decision-making | politics | National governments: presidents and prime-ministers | Head of government](#) and [Indicator: women in decision-making | politics | National governments: presidents and prime-ministers | president.](#)

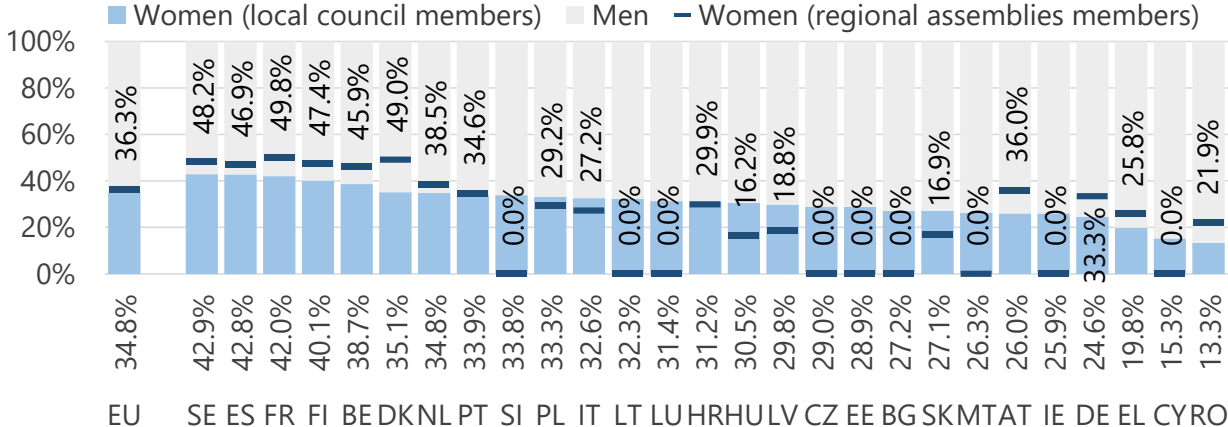
¹⁵³ Source: EIGE Statistics Database. Last updated in July 2024. [Indicator: women in decision-making | politics | Major political parties: party leader.](#)

¹⁵⁴ Source: EIGE Statistics Database. Last updated in July 2024. [Indicator: women in decision-making | politics | Major political parties: deputy leaders.](#)

¹⁵⁵ Source: EIGE statistics database. Last updated November 2024. [Indicator: women in decision-making | politics | Regional assemblies: members.](#)

¹⁵⁶ Source: EIGE statistics database. Last updated November 2024. [Indicator: women in decision-making | politics | Local/municipal councils: members.](#)

Figure 4: Share of women members in regional assemblies and local councils in EU Member States, 2024



Source: EIGE Gender Statistics Database

Note: There are no regions endowed with powers of self-government in Bulgaria, Estonia, Ireland, Cyprus, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, or Slovenia. Data for regional assemblies in Portugal only cover the Azores and Madeira.

Progress continued also in the judiciary power with Supreme courts members moving from 43.5 % to 45.1 % (vs 37.2 % in 2014) and President of the court from 37 to 40.7 % (29.6 % in 2014).

At European Commission level, while the previous Commission started out with 13 women out of 27, the new College of Commissioners reaches only gender balance, with 11 women out of 27 (40.7 %). This figure constitutes a significant improvement compared to the situation after receiving the first set of nominations from Members States. Moreover, President von der Leyen decided to reverse the proportion at the level of the six Executive Vice-Presidents, by appointing four women and two men.

At management level, the Commission made considerable progress in reaching gender balance. During the first von der Leyen Commission, female appointments to senior management positions increased from 37 % to 48 % and from 42 % to 49 % in middle management positions, reaching 49 % overall¹⁵⁷. This unprecedented increase in female representation at management level required the combined efforts of all Commission departments. It was achieved through talent development programmes for female staff and specific targets for Directorates-General (DGs), while ensuring that all appointments were based on merit.

The Commission continued to closely monitor management appointments to ensure gender balance is maintained. The Commission has been developing initiatives to build a talent pipeline and measures to support gender-balanced appointments.

The Commission’s corporate **Female Talent Development Programme**, which consists of tailored training, coaching, support and preparation for middle management, has also proven successful in facilitating the gender balance in management. Some 96 female colleagues are participating in the sixth round of this programme, which runs until February 2025. Out of a total of 545 women who took part in the first five rounds, 200 (37 % of participants) have since been appointed to a Head of Unit position.

¹⁵⁷ Data on 1 January 2025.

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, 185 women (151 middle managers and 34 senior managers) have participated or are participating in these programmes.

The Commission reached a proportion of 51 % female middle managers in the executive agencies in January 2025. Among senior managers, currently 4 out of 6 Directors of executive agencies are women.

Progress has also been made **to promote gender-responsive leadership in the EU's external action**. In line with the EU's Gender Action Plan in External Relations (GAP III), the EU has rolled out a **Gender-Responsive Leadership programme**, with the support of the Swedish Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA). As of December 2024, 80 % of European External Action Service Headquarters senior managers are trained in at least one of the two modules, while a network of 73 Gender Focal Points (GFPs) covering almost all EEAS divisions has been established, and offers monthly trainings on gender mainstreaming and exchange of best practices.

The Civilian Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) Compact adopted in May 2023 also committed to enhancing gender-responsive leadership in the missions and set the goal of having 40 % of women among the international staff. All civilian CSDP missions are meant to include dedicated Gender Advisers and gender focal point networks. Starting in early 2024, the induction training for CSDP Heads of Mission includes components on gender-responsive leadership.

Women in economic decision-making

In the economic sphere, women remain underrepresented in corporate decision-making bodies across the EU. To tackle this issue, the EU adopted the Directive on improving gender balance on corporate boards¹⁵⁸, which requires large EU listed companies to attain at least 40 % of each gender among the members of non-executive boards, or 33 % among all directors by 30 June 2026. Companies that fall short of the targets are mandated to implement the procedural requirements ensuring the transparency of the selection process, and report on the measures taken or planned to achieve gender-balanced representation on their boards. These requirements have to be enforced by penalties.

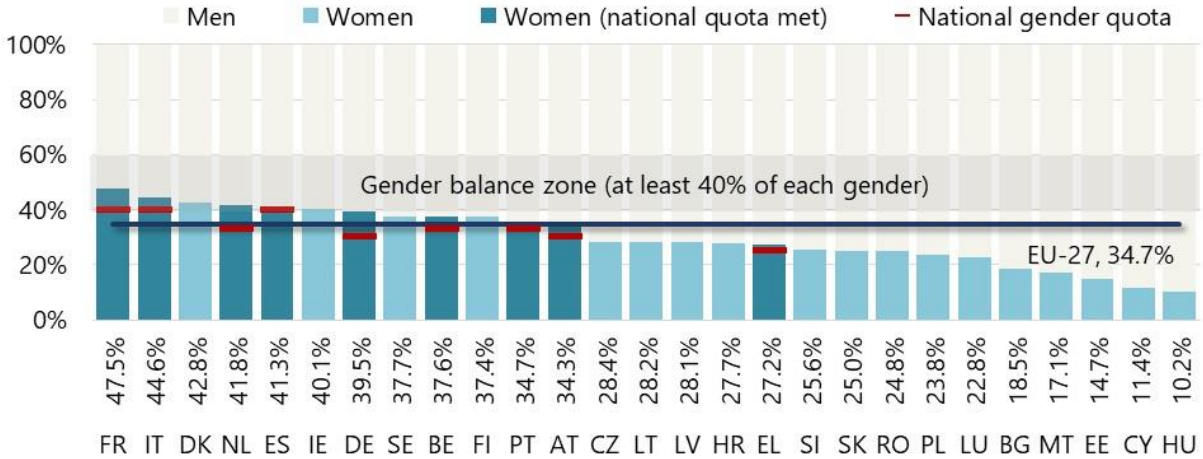
The Directive had to be transposed by 28 December 2024. So far, 17 Member States have failed to notify national measures fully transposing the legislation. In February 2025, the Commission formally notified these Member States of their failure to comply with EU law.

EIGE's latest data show an increase in the numbers of women on the boards of the largest listed companies, representing a new high. In 2024, 34.7 % of board members of the EU's publicly listed

¹⁵⁸ 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, 7.12.2022, p. 44.

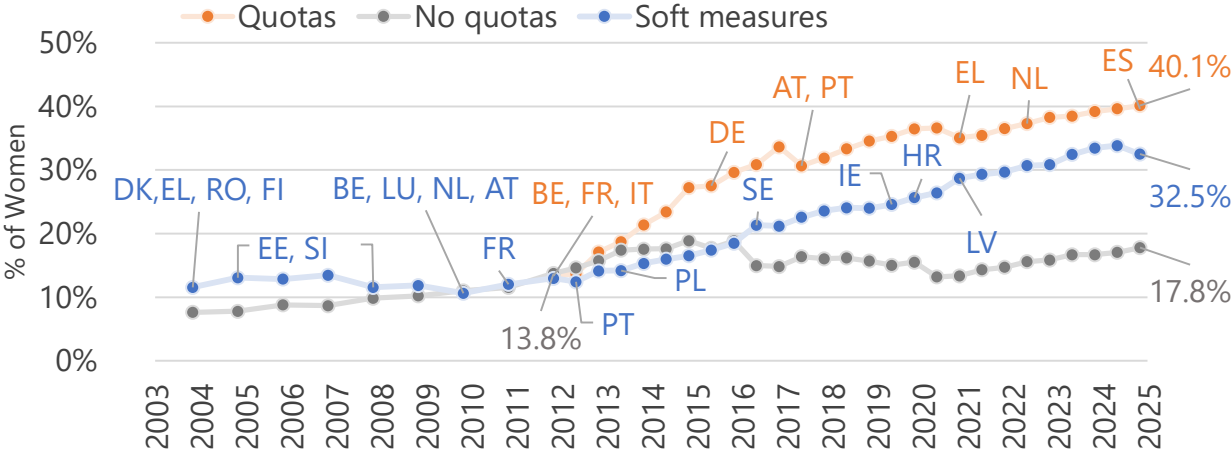
companies were women, compared to 33.8 % in 2023¹⁵⁹. Of all Member States, 12 reached the target of at least 33 % women among all board members¹⁶⁰.

Figure 5: Share of women and men on the boards of the largest listed companies in the EU, October 2024



Source: EIGE, Gender Statistics

Figure 6: Proportion of women on the boards of the largest listed companies in EU Member States with and without national gender quotas, 2003 to October 2024



Source: EIGE’s own calculations based on data from its Gender Statistics Database

Notes: Data exclude Czechia, Lithuania, Malta, and Poland for 2003 and Croatia for 2003-2006 (countries added to the data collection in 2004 and 2007 respectively). Countries are included in the relevant group based on the year of adoption of legislation/soft measure. Soft measures: Denmark, Greece, Romania, Finland (2003 October), Estonia, Slovenia (2004 October), Spain (2007 October), Belgium, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Austria (2009

¹⁵⁹ Source: EIGE Statistics Database. Last updated in November 2024. [Indicator: women in decision-making | business and finance | Largest listed companies: board members.](#)

¹⁶⁰ Austria (34.3 %), Portugal (34.7 %), Finland (37.4 %), Belgium (37.6 %), Sweden (37.7 %), Germany (39.5 %), Ireland (40.1 %), Spain (41.3 %), the Netherlands (41.8 %), Denmark (42.8 %), Italy (44.6 %), and France (47.5 %). This is the same number as in 2023. Regarding the share of women non-executives, eight Member States meet the proposed EU target of at least 40 % (Figure 7): Italy (50 %), France (49.8 %), Ireland (46.7 %), Spain (46.2 %), Portugal (44.2 %), the Netherlands (43.1 %), Denmark (42.8 %) and Belgium (40.3 %).

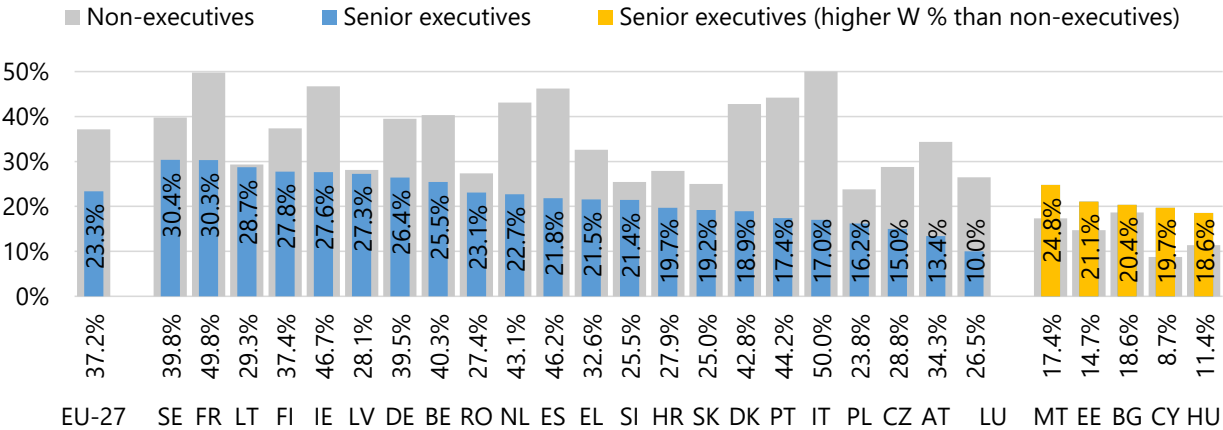
October), France (2010 October), Portugal (2012 October), Poland (2013 April), Sweden (2016 April), Ireland (2019 April), Croatia (2019 October), Latvia (2020 October). Quota: Belgium, France, Italy (2011 October), Germany (2015 April), Austria, Portugal (2017 April), Greece (2020 October), Netherlands (2022 April), Spain (2024 October).

Government initiatives to achieve greater gender parity in corporate leadership span a spectrum of approaches, ranging from non-mandatory 'soft' measures that encourage voluntary action by companies, to more stringent 'hard' regulatory approaches that impose legally binding quotas, accompanied by penalties for non-compliance.

Since 2014, there has been a noticeable improvement in the representation of women on the boards of the largest companies across most EU Member States, albeit with varying degrees of progress. Countries that have implemented some type of action, have generally experienced more significant improvements in women's representation, although some exceptions do exist.

After a period of accelerated progress between 2010 and 2015, mainly driven by improvements in France, Italy and Germany, progress has slowed down as countries gradually achieved or moved closer to their respective legislative target (Figure 6).

Figure 7: Share of women among executive and non-executive members of the two highest decision-making bodies of the largest listed companies in the EU-27, October 2024



Source: EIGE Gender Statistics Database

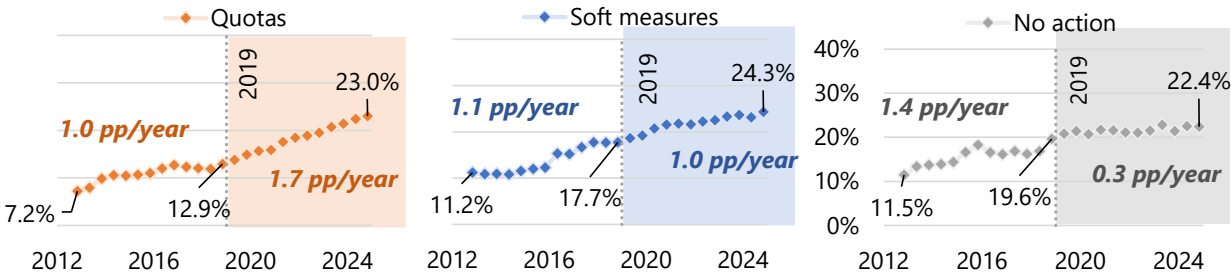
The share of women occupying non-executive roles in the top two decision-making bodies of the EU's largest listed companies was 37.2 %. However, the share of women in executive positions is significantly lower (23.3 %). This disparity (fewer women executives than non-executives) is observed in most EU Member States (22 of 27).

In eight Member States the non-executives are gender balanced (Figure 7). When looking at executives, women account for less than 3 in 10 executives in all EU Member States.

Legislative efforts at national level have played a major role in the significant increase in the representation of women at board level. Typically, quotas only apply to the top-level board, which is often composed of non-executives, so that executive positions may not be affected as much. However, an increasing number of countries are extending legislative measures to include senior executive roles.

From 2012 to 2019, countries with quotas, countries with soft measures, and countries with no action displayed similar annual rates of increase in the share of women executives. **Since 2019, the rate of change for women executives in Member States with quotas increased, whereas in Member States with soft measures or no action, the pace of change has, in fact, decreased.** With the faster pace of change, the share of women executives in quota countries (23.0 %) reached a level similar to that in the groups of countries with soft measures (24.3 %) and countries with no action (22.4 %) despite starting from a lower share of women executives in 2019 (12.9 % vs. 17.7 % and 19.6 %, respectively).

Figure 8: Share of women among executive members of the two highest decision-making bodies of the largest listed companies in the EU-27, by type of action, October 2012 to October 2024



Source: own calculations based on data from the EIGE Gender Statistics Database

Notes: The quota group includes Member States with national gender quotas progressively based on the year of adoption: Belgium, France and Italy since 2011; Germany since 2015; Austria and Portugal since 2017; Greece since 2020; the Netherlands since April 2022; and Spain since August 2024. In cases with several measures, the earliest year of adoption is used to categorise countries in the relevant group. See the Annex for details.

Although women now account for more than 30 % of board members, **the number of women in board chairs or chief executive officer positions (8.8 % and 8.5 %, respectively) remains low.**

Also, in 2024, men continued to outnumber women in decision-making in financial institutions. Although all three of the EU’s **financial institutions** were led by women, compared to only two in 2023¹⁶¹, the boards of these institutions continue to be dominated by men, who occupy 84.7 % (79.7 % in 2023) of board seats, meaning that the share of women dropped from 20.3 % in 2023 to 15.3 % in 2024¹⁶².

At national level, the number of women in key decision-making positions (i.e. members of the highest decision-making bodies) in **central banks increased to 32 %** compared to 29.3 % in 2023¹⁶³. Women also hold 36.2 % of deputy governor positions, compared to 37.5 % in 2023.¹⁶⁴ At national level, there is gender-balanced representation among women and men in the central bank of only six Member States (Lithuania, France, Luxembourg, Italy, Portugal and Ireland). When we look at the

¹⁶¹ Source: EIGE Gender Statistics Database. Last updated in July 2024. [Indicator: women in decision-making | business and finance | finance | European financial institutions: president or chair.](#)

¹⁶² Source: EIGE Gender Statistics Database. Last updated in July 2024. [Indicator: European financial institutions: presidents and members | Gender Statistics Database | European Institute for Gender Equality.](#)

¹⁶³ Source: EIGE Gender Statistics Database. Last updated on 6 December 2024 [Indicator: women in decision-making | business and finance | finance | Central banks: members of all key decision-making bodies.](#)

¹⁶⁴ Source: EIGE Gender Statistics Database. Last updated on 6 December 2024. [Indicator: women in decision-making | business and finance | finance | Central banks: deputy/vice-governors.](#)

governors of central banks in Member States, Spain has appointed a female governor in 2024 while the other 26 governors remain men, as in 2023¹⁶⁵.

Moreover, according to the European Financial Services Boardroom Monitor by EY, the **gender pay gap is widening for non-executive board members in the financial services sector**: Women were paid 36 % less than men on average in 2023 on the boards of banks, insurers and asset managers, compared with a 31 % disparity in 2019. Women are being paid less when serving on board committees such as audit and nomination. Female committee chairs are earning half of their male counterparts and committee members 75 % less. Meanwhile in the US and Canada, the gap between male and female boardroom pay narrowed in 2023 from 2019, to 5 % from 7 %, EY found. Women also earned almost as much as men when they were appointed to chairs or members of board committees in North America.

Women are also under-represented in entrepreneurship, as women represent only 32 % of the EU self-employed. They only make up 31 % of start-up entrepreneurs, including in deep tech. To support women leading deep tech start-ups, the **Women TechEU** consortium launched two calls in 2024.¹⁶⁶ Each selected startup receives a EUR 75.000 grant. The Women TechEU scheme was launched as a pilot scheme in 2021 and became a fully-fledged initiative in 2022¹⁶⁷. The scheme supports European early-stage deep tech start-ups for at least six months at the time of submission, founded or co-founded by women, holding a top management position (chief executive officer, chief technology officer, chief scientific officer, or equivalent). Besides the grants, women founders can also benefit from coaching, mentoring, networking and targeted training under the European Innovation Council (EIC) Women Leadership Programme¹⁶⁸.

To **promote women's participation in innovation** under the EIC, several measures have been implemented in line with the EIC Board's publication *Statement on Gender & Diversity in EIC*¹⁶⁹. These measures aim to foster a more inclusive and diverse innovation ecosystem. The participation of women principal investigators and coordinators in EIC projects is also closely tracked, and women-led consortia in transition. In 2024, to support the growth of female founders in deep tech startups, the **EIC Women Leadership Programme** offered training, mentoring, and networking opportunities for women entrepreneurs and researchers seeking leadership positions in business.

In addition to these measures, the EIC funds **GENDEX**, a pilot project started in 2024 to collect and analyse gender and diversity data across the innovation ecosystem and to create a gender and diversity index.¹⁷⁰ The EIC has initiated a gender investment gap procurement action, which aims to collect, harmonise and share diversity data across the innovation ecosystem, including at EIC and EU level, as well as in the venture capital sector. This will help develop baselines, monitor progress, and inform targeted actions to promote diversity and inclusion in the innovation ecosystem.

¹⁶⁵ Source: EIGE Gender Statistics Database. Last updated on 6 December 2024. [Indicator: women in decision-making | business and finance | finance | Central banks: governors.](#)

¹⁶⁶ <https://womentecheuropa.eu/>.

¹⁶⁷ The European Innovation Ecosystems part of the Horizon Europe work programme aims among others to promote female leadership and talent in innovation, including deep-tech, to build fairer, more inclusive, and more prosperous innovation ecosystems in the EU.

¹⁶⁸ https://eic.ec.europa.eu/eic-funding-opportunities/bas/eic-women-leadership-programme_en.

¹⁶⁹ https://eic.ec.europa.eu/document/download/8d2b88ac-2516-4f03-bc10-f3e5641ecdf1_en?filename=EIC_Gender_Diversity%20statement_June%202021.pdf.

¹⁷⁰ <https://eurogendex.org/>.

Further, a call for applications for the **EU Prize for Women Innovators** was launched in 2024. This prize celebrates the women entrepreneurs behind Europe's most game-changing innovations, and will award nine prizes in three categories¹⁷¹. The prize awards women whose disruptive innovations are driving positive change for people and planet.

Women are also significantly under-represented in **investment**, with only 9 % of investors being women, according to She Figures 2024 report. Additionally, women continue to face significant barriers in accessing funding, both as entrepreneurs and as investors. Despite evidence that female-led startups deliver strong returns, only a fraction of venture capital in the EU is invested in companies founded or co-founded by women.

Structural biases, risk-averse investment patterns, and a lack of diverse decision-makers in financial institutions and venture capital funds contribute to this persistent gap. The **InvestEU Programme** introduced, for the first-time, gender criteria that apply to equity financial intermediaries. The criteria focus on gender diversity in venture capital and private equity funds at different levels of decision-making (senior management, investment committees). At least 25 % of financial intermediaries supported by InvestEU through the European Investment Bank Group (main implementing partner) have to comply with the gender criteria¹⁷². According to first implementation results, the 25 % target has already been exceeded.

Moreover, the InvestEU Advisory Hub continued to provide advisory services related to gender, including through the annual Empowering Equity Conference for women investors, a mentorship programme for fund managers,¹⁷³ a recently launched study on financial products by banks and other lenders focusing on women and women-led businesses, and a training programme for banks on gender issues to be launched in March 2025.

To complement these actions, in 2024 the Commission launched the European Network of Gender-Conscious Investors **WomenINvestEU**¹⁷⁴. The network brings together leading players from across the investment supply chain, with the common goal of increasing gender-focused investing to enable many more women-led businesses to access investment across Europe. The network will provide opportunities for members to forge connections and engage each other through networking events, as well as create new pathways for women to enter the sector and become decision-makers. Throughout the project, WomenINvestEU will also aim to educate and raise awareness on the benefits of gender focused investment, engaging key players from all across Europe in the effort to address inequality, while recruiting and empowering more women to pursue a career in finance.

¹⁷¹ https://eic.ec.europa.eu/eic-prizes/european-prize-women-innovators-powered-eic-eit_en.

¹⁷² Under InvestEU, a fund is considered to adhere to the gender criteria if it satisfies at least one of the following principles: its management team is composed of at least one third of female partners, its senior investment team provides for at least 40 % of female representation, or at least 40 % of female representation is provided in its investment committee.

¹⁷³ <https://engage.eif.org/diversity-inclusion/mentorship>.

¹⁷⁴ <https://women-invest.ec.europa.eu/>.

GENDER MAINSTREAMING

Integrating gender considerations into all EU policies, i.e. gender mainstreaming, is crucial for achieving gender equality. The 2020-2025 gender equality strategy emphasises gender mainstreaming as a key tool in promoting a fair redistribution of power, influence, and resources, and ensuring equal opportunities for women, men, girls, and boys in all their diversity. Moreover, it also ensures that policies do not inadvertently reinforce existing gender inequalities.

Throughout 2024, the Commission continued to mainstream gender equality across EU policy areas such as health, research and innovation and education. The secretariat of the Commission's Task Force on Equality¹⁷⁵ continued to support gender mainstreaming, as part of broader equality mainstreaming by raising awareness, providing relevant training, and facilitating the work of the Equality Coordinators. These Equality Coordinators, who are active in every Directorate-General (DG) or service of the Commission as well as the European External Action Service, focused on integrating equality considerations into the Commission's policy initiatives and in their internal functioning, as per their equality mainstreaming work plans.

Gender equality in different EU policy areas

One of the most pressing concerns for society in the years to come will be finding a way to manage climate change. As mentioned in the **Communication on managing climate risks – protecting people and prosperity**, 'climate risks are especially felt by the people in vulnerable situations due to a range of socio-economic factors such as income, gender, age, disability, health, and social exclusion (particularly affecting migrants, ethnic minorities, and indigenous peoples). Pre-existing disadvantages reduce the capacity to recover from climate-induced disasters'¹⁷⁶.

In October 2024, EIGE published a report setting out 12 good practices on **mainstreaming gender in the European Green Deal Policy**¹⁷⁷. While these good practices demonstrate that gender mainstreaming is being implemented in different European Green Deal policy areas, the report highlights that further improvement is required at both EU and Member State level to effectively embed gender mainstreaming strategies and utilise relevant tools.

As part of the GREENA project¹⁷⁸, EIGE developed a **step-by-step toolkit** to carry out a gender-responsive evaluation of progress towards the gender equality-related objectives set out in policies, programmes and projects for an environmental and sustainable future for all¹⁷⁹. The toolkit includes examples from four policy areas – transport, energy, agriculture and the circular economy – and helps to identify gender implications of environmental issues.

The **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change** (UNFCCC) pays due attention to gender-responsiveness in climate action. In 2024, Member States and the European Commission

¹⁷⁵ See [The Task Force on Equality of the European Commission - European Commission](#)

¹⁷⁶ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Managing climate risks – protection people and prosperity, COM(2024)91 final.

¹⁷⁷ https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/publications/good-practices-gender-mainstreaming-european-green-deal-towards-more-gender-equal-and-greener-europe?language_content_entity=en.

¹⁷⁸ The GREENA project is developing approaches and practical tools to simultaneously integrate environmental and climate action concerns along with gender equality issues into evaluations.

¹⁷⁹ <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gender-responsive-evaluation-greena>.

jointly prepared a submission for the UNFCCC’s final review of the progress in implementing the actions contained in the 2019-2024 Gender Action Plan (GAP) and on future work to be undertaken gender and climate change. Under the concluded GAP, parties to the Paris Agreement agreed to set objectives and actions in five priority areas that aim to: (i) advance knowledge and understanding of gender-responsive climate action; (ii) coherently mainstreaming these objectives and actions into the UNFCCC and the work of parties, the secretariat, United Nations entities and all stakeholders at all levels; and (iii) ensure women’s full, equal and meaningful participation in the UNFCCC process.

‘Strengthening gender mainstreaming in EU climate policies’ (WomenInClimate) is a trans-national project funded from the CERV Citizens’ engagement and participation call for proposals¹⁸⁰, led by the European Women’s Lobby. The project started in 2024. It aims to convey women’s messages and propose inclusive solutions to decision-makers, as well as provide decision-makers with comprehensive information and data to shape effective, gender-responsive climate policies. It engages civil society organisations in 6 EU Member States: the Netherlands, Bulgaria, Romania, Czechia, Portugal and Finland.

According to a study published by the European Commission in 2024 on “Gender balance in the R&I field to improve the role of women in the energy transition”¹⁸¹ women make up only 25 % of the EU energy sector workforce and 22 % of research and innovation roles. To achieve minimal gender balance by 2050, the report estimates 200,000 more women are needed in the energy sector. In this regard, the energy sector is also increasingly paying attention to equality. In 2024, 11 new members joined the **Equality Platform for the Energy Sector**, bringing the total membership to 39 members. Launched in 2021 by the European Commission, the platform is a space for energy stakeholders to network and share good practices to promote equality, diversity and inclusion in their activities – ultimately to bring out social change through the workplace. The platform’s 2024 meetings covered the topics of how to support women to become sustainable energy entrepreneurs and intrapreneurs, as well as how to use artificial intelligence (AI) in the energy sector in a responsible and non-discriminatory manner¹⁸². The member organisations, which are based in 13 different Member States, suggest practical diversity and inclusion measures and report regularly on their implementation. Finally, during the **European Sustainable Energy Week (EUSEW)**, the **EUSEW Women in Energy Award** was won by Rita Gomes, who has redefined solar solutions in Portugal¹⁸³. The EUSEW Women in Energy Award recognises women who lead outstanding activities that help to advance the clean energy transition in Europe. It places particular focus on efforts to drive the gender mainstreaming agenda and support equality and equal opportunities in the energy sector.

¹⁸⁰ <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/topic-details/cerv-2023-citizens-civ>

¹⁸¹ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/feac18b5-dd44-11ee-b9d9-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

¹⁸² https://energy.ec.europa.eu/topics/energy-strategy/equality-platform-energy-sector/news-and-events_en.

¹⁸³ https://sustainable-energy-week.ec.europa.eu/awards/eusew-2024-awards-winners_en#:~:text=Rita%20Gomes%20won%20the%20award,clean%20energy%20transition%20in%20Europe.

On 21-22 February 2024, The Netherlands and Slovenia co-hosted a seminar on the **synergies between gender equality and climate action** in The Hague. The seminar considered ways to achieve a transformative approach to ensure a green and gender-equal future. Discussions covered several key gender equality topics, notably the importance of gender-disaggregated and intersectional data, enhancing the role of women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects and jobs, and promoting women's leadership in ensuring a gender-equal just transition¹⁸⁴.

In the area of Migration one of the most important developments is the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, consisting of 10 legal instruments, and it was adopted in May 2024¹⁸⁵. Together, the set of reforms established a new legal foundation for a fairer and more efficient way of managing migration while protecting fundamental rights of asylum applicants and beneficiaries of international protection.

Regarding the gender dimension, the Pact requires to take into account the specific needs of vulnerable groups, including women and girls. It foresees gender-sensitive approach when assessing asylum applications and when providing reception conditions, such as accommodation or health care. The Pact furthermore ensures that women and girls who face gender-based violence, such as sexual violence, trafficking, and female genital mutilation, are recognised as particularly vulnerable and are provided with necessary care.

In August 2024, the **Prague Public Transit Company**, in collaboration with the non-governmental organisation Konsent and the Office of the Government of **Czechia**, launched a public awareness **campaign entitled 'Harassment does not belong in public transport. Or anywhere else'**¹⁸⁶. The initiative aimed to reduce harassment by educating passengers on how to recognise behaviour amounting to harassment and encouraging them to intervene if they become aware of such behaviour. Campaign posters were placed at 150 locations across Prague, including bus stops as well as on the buses and trams. Reports show that a fifth of the Czech population has seen the campaign, with 66 % finding it useful (79 % of women and 52 % of men). Given its success, the Government Council for Gender Equality has endorsed the campaign and recommended that by other local authorities adopt it to combat harassment in other Czech cities.

In the area of transport, the Commission in 2024 developed and published a **handbook for equality mainstreaming in transport**¹⁸⁷. The handbook should help both staff, and external stakeholders to embed equality in transport policy making. The Commission continued to support the activities of the **European network of Ambassadors for #DiversityInTransport**, to raise awareness and drive change at local and company level. The Commission also continued to support the **'Women in Transport – EU Platform for change'**, which brings together transport stakeholders committed to increasing

¹⁸⁴ https://commission.europa.eu/publications/eu-mutual-learning-programme-gender-equality-synergies-between-gender-equality-and-climate-action_en.

¹⁸⁵ https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/migration-and-asylum/pact-migration-and-asylum_en.

¹⁸⁶ <https://vlada.gov.cz/ppov/rovne-prilezitosti-zen-a-muzu/aktuality/tz-rada-vlady-pro-rovnost-zen-a-muzu-podporila-a-doporucila-kampan-proti-sexualnimu-obtezovani-v-doprave-dalsim-uzemnim-samospravnym-celkum-215750/>.

¹⁸⁷ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/e8600d42-31e7-11ef-a61b-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

female employment in transport and facilitates the exchange of good practices¹⁸⁸. These initiatives are part of the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy¹⁸⁹ and aim to increase the attractiveness of the transport sector and to address staff shortages in an ageing sector which is little diverse.

Recent development in the **health sector** related to advancements in digital health data and cutting-edge technologies such as AI and high-performance computing technologies can support better screening mechanisms and standardisation of tasks but must be properly designed in order to avoid potential bias. The **European Cancer Imaging Initiative**¹⁹⁰ was set up in 2022 to develop an EU ‘atlas’ of cancer-related images and make anonymised images accessible to hospitals, researchers and innovators. It achieved a major success in 2024: the cornerstone of the initiative, the federated European infrastructure for cancer images data, developed by the European Federation for Cancer Images project, delivered the first version of a digital infrastructure in September 2024. As of November 2024, the catalogue was populated with 47 datasets with a total of over 35 000 subjects.

In 2024, pilot studies were launched for several EU-funded projects that contribute to implementing the Council Recommendation on cancer screening¹⁹¹. The **SOLACE** (strengthening the screening of lung cancer in Europe) project¹⁹², carried out a pilot study to improve women’s participation in lung cancer screening programmes, as they are underrepresented in most clinical trials¹⁹³. Specific awareness-raising material targeting women and highlighting that lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer deaths for women, was distributed at the pilot study sites in 10 EU Member States throughout 2024.

EUCanScreen project, which implements cancer screening programmes, was launched in June 2024 in 29 countries and will run for four years¹⁹⁴. One important workstream of the project will examine individual and systemic barriers to cervical and breast cancer screening.

On 21 June 2024, the Council adopted the **Council Recommendation on vaccine-preventable cancers**¹⁹⁵ based on the Commission’s proposal of January 2024. The Recommendation aims to help Member States boost the uptake of vaccination against human papillomaviruses among both girls and boys.

¹⁸⁸ https://transport.ec.europa.eu/transport-themes/social-issues-equality-and-attractiveness-transport-sector/equality/women-transport-eu-platform-change_en.

¹⁸⁹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/AUTO/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0789>

¹⁹⁰ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/cancer-imaging>.

¹⁹¹ Council Recommendation of 9 December 2022 on strengthening prevention through early detection: A new EU approach on cancer screening replacing Council Recommendation 2003/878/EC 2022/C 473/01, OJ C 473, 13.12.2022, p. 1.

¹⁹² https://health.ec.europa.eu/non-communicable-diseases/cancer/europes-beating-cancer-plan-eu4health-financed-projects/projects/solace_en.

¹⁹³ <https://europeanlung.org/solace/2024/08/23/updates-from-solace-pilots/>.

¹⁹⁴ https://hadea.ec.europa.eu/news/three-new-eu4health-joint-actions-fields-cancer-mental-health-and-medical-ionising-radiations-2024-08-09_en.

¹⁹⁵ Council Recommendation of 21 June 2024 on vaccine-preventable cancers, (C/2024/4259).

In Sweden, **10 government agencies under the leadership of the Public Health Agency of Sweden**, including the National Board of Health and Welfare, the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society, and the Swedish Migration Agency, have set up a joint commission with the task of offsetting health disparities within the population. They have been commissioned to **strengthen and promote sexual and reproductive health and rights** focusing on geographic areas with poor socio-economic conditions and a high prevalence of, for instance, restrictions on individuals' sexuality or the right to freely choose one's partner. The project runs from 2024 to 2027 and costs approximately SEK 31 million¹⁹⁶.

In the area of sport, outcomes from the **'All In Plus: Promoting Greater Gender Equality in Sport'** joint EU-Council of Europe project highlights both progress and persistent disparities in gender equality across European sport. The report is based on data collected in 21 jurisdictions and provides a comprehensive analysis of gender equality in six key areas¹⁹⁷.

The new 2024-2027 **EU Work Plan for Sport** was adopted¹⁹⁸, listing a 'safe environment in sport' and 'gender equality' as priority areas.¹⁹⁹ Furthermore, in April 2024, the **EU Sport Forum** featured a session with women athletes on the topic of gender equality. During the Forum, the **#BeEqual prize** was handed to Denmark's Idrætsforbund for a project that aims to include girls with an ethnic minority background and empower them to join sport clubs²⁰⁰. Additionally, these efforts were complemented by EU-funded projects, such a Horizon Europe project 'SUPPORTER'²⁰¹. With a budget of EUR 1 million, this project is supporting eight sports higher education institutions from Central and Eastern Europe in developing their own intersectional, innovative, inclusive and impactful gender equality plans, explicitly addressing gender-based violence and sexual harassment. It has delivered many trainings, still accessible online, on data collection and analysis on gender-based violence in sports, inclusive communication, and also the possibilities of sport to make a difference in gender-based violence in sport higher education²⁰².

In France, the **'Terrain d'égalité'** ('Grounds of Equality') state-run label aims to promote gender equality and to prevent and combat discrimination and gender-based violence (GBV) in sports. Aimed at major international sporting events in France, the label is awarded on the basis of criteria such as the appointing equality referents and setting up a GBV hotline. A dedicated kit on preventing gender-based violence was made available to all organisers of sporting events. In 2024, the 'Terrain d'Egalité' label has been awarded to the organising committee of the 2024 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games in Paris.

The **European space sector** is on an upward trajectory towards gender equality but faces many challenges in terms of workforce. A comprehensive analysis identified that the industry is ageing,

¹⁹⁶ <https://www.regeringen.se/pressmeddelanden/2024/10/satsning-for-att-starka-sexuell-och-reproduktiv-halsa-och-rattigheter-med-fokus-pa-att-na-ut-i-omraden-dar-utanforskapet-ar-stort/>.

¹⁹⁷ [Resources - ALL IN: Towards gender balance in sport](#)

¹⁹⁸ <https://sport.ec.europa.eu/news/adoption-of-new-eu-work-plan-for-sport-2024-2027>.

¹⁹⁹ Under I: 'Integrity and values in sport'.

²⁰⁰ <https://sport.ec.europa.eu/news/meet-the-winners-of-the-beinclusive-eu-sport-awards-2023>.

²⁰¹ <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101094529>.

²⁰² <https://www.supporter-project.eu/capacity-building-gender-equality/>.

male-dominated and contending with a critical gap between the hard and soft skills provided by educational curricula and the skills the sector needs²⁰³.

On 7 June 2024, the Commission published a policy report entitled '**Transition pathway for the aerospace ecosystem**'²⁰⁴. The 53 actions which the report identified for implementation, seven specifically focus on ensuring fairness, diversity and inclusion in the aerospace sector, including through targeted education from an early stage in the education process²⁰⁵.

Structural barriers to gender equality also persist in **research and innovation (R&I)**. In 2024, the Commission's **Horizon Europe** programme continued to enforce the requirement for applicants from all public bodies and higher education institutions to have a **gender equality plan (GEP)** in place in order to be eligible for funding²⁰⁶.

According to the **study 'Impact of gender equality plans across the European Research Area'**²⁰⁷, published by the Commission in 2024, the introduction of the GEP eligibility criterion in the Horizon Europe programme and policy developments at national levels led to a significantly increased number of institutions adopting comprehensive gender equality policies, or which have created or updated their plans²⁰⁸. Some private organisations have even voluntarily implemented GEPs. The GEP eligibility criterion in the Horizon Europe programme has also provided a clear definition of what is expected of a GEP, has helped coordinate efforts among stakeholders and has facilitated mutual learning. This has fostered a more inclusive research environment and has contributed to the overall goal of gender equality in R&I. One key lesson learned is the importance of continuous monitoring and evaluating GEPs to ensure they are effectively implemented and achieve their intended outcomes. Also, more needs to be done to ensure that GEPs are inclusive and take into account possible intersectionalities.

On 15 May 2024, three new academic and research organisations that achieved outstanding results through implementing their GEPs²⁰⁹ received **EU Awards for Gender Equality Champions**. These new winners are joining a community of champions who inspire other academic and research organisations to become gender equality champions themselves, and to raise public awareness of the importance of addressing gender equality in academic and research organisations through institutional change. The implementation of inclusive GEPs was further incentivised by the Horizon Europe WIDERA Programme, which launched a call for proposals entitled 'Support to the implementation of inclusive gender equality plans', resulting in funding for projects including GEPINC²¹⁰, INCLUDE²¹¹ and SEE-ERA²¹².

²⁰³ OECD (2023), *The Space Economy in Figures: Responding to Global Challenges*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

²⁰⁴ https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/document/download/b0ae5705-0e5f-4c4a-bbbb-26a79f32a104_en?filename=Transition%20Pathway%20%20Aerospace%20Ecosystem%20%20EN.pdf.

²⁰⁵ See for instance Action 53 of the Transition Pathway.

²⁰⁶ More information on eligibility criterion in Horizon Europe: https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/strategy/strategy-research-and-innovation/democracy-and-rights/gender-equality-research-and-innovation_en#gender-equality-plans-as-an-eligibility-criterion-in-horizon-europe.
²⁰⁷ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/7ab4a0e8-749d-11ef-a8ba-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.

²⁰⁸ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/7ab4a0e8-749d-11ef-a8ba-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.
²⁰⁹ https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/news/all-research-and-innovation-news/new-winners-announced-eu-gender-equality-champions-research-and-innovation-2024-05-15_en.

²¹⁰ <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101187961>.

²¹¹ <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101188452>.

Horizon Europe ‘Cluster 2: Culture, Creativity, and Inclusive Society’ included a call for proposals on “Gender roles in extremist movements and their impact on democracy”, which funded three projects - EMMELO²¹³, MEN4DEM²¹⁴, and YOU-DARE²¹⁵ - with a total budget of EUR 8.6 million. These projects will contribute to the development of evidence-based insights and innovative approaches to address the rise of extremist, identitarian, and nationalist movements, with a focus on the construction and impact of gender roles within these movements. Additional projects have been funded to address structural inequalities through an intersectional approach, for instance research on the socio-economic impacts of loneliness. Under Cluster 3, a call for funding on radicalisation and gender has been launched with a budget of EUR 3 million. Lastly, four projects on intersectionality and equality in deliberative and participatory democratic spaces, totalling EUR 9.5 million have kicked off their activities in 2024: INSPIRE²¹⁶, iDEM²¹⁷, EU-CIEMBLY²¹⁸, and SINCRONY²¹⁹. These projects will contribute to reinvigorating democracy and enhancing citizen participation by designing and piloting democratic innovations, where overcoming the accumulation and intersection of discrimination or stigmatisation is a core part of the process.

In terms of the requirement under Horizon Europe to integrate the gender dimension in the research and innovation work, the latest data shows that 81 % of R&I proposals now consider the gender dimension. There has also been an increase in terms of the gender balance objective of Horizon Europe, in particular for women in key roles: 43.5 % of members in expert panels are women (up from 42 % under Horizon 2020) and 48.7 % in advisory groups (up from 43 %). Also the share of women-led consortia has risen from 23 % to 31 %.

Turning to gender equality in AI, four projects under the Horizon Europe Programme call ‘Tackling gender, race, and other biases in AI (RIA)’ continued to make significant strides in 2024 **on identifying and mitigating biases in AI systems**. For instance, the FINDHR project²²⁰, MAMMOth²²¹, the BIAS project²²², and AEQUITAS²²³ have created the AI Fairness Cluster²²⁴, whose mission is to foster trust and confidence in AI systems across various domains, including healthcare, finance, human resources, and education. In this framework, they have organised various workshops during 2024,

²¹² <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101188467>.

²¹³ <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101177204>.

²¹⁴ <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101177356>.

²¹⁵ <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101178147>.

²¹⁶ <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101132292>.

²¹⁷ <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101132431>.

²¹⁸ <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101132694>.

²¹⁹ <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101132459>.

²²⁰ <https://findhr.unipi.it/>. The project has developed new methodologies to ascertain discrimination risks and produce less biased outcomes. FINDHR has successfully created tools and guidelines for fairness-aware AI in recruitment. The project has also provided extensive training for HR professionals and developers on algorithmic fairness.

²²¹ <https://mammoth-ai.eu/> is developing standardised AI solutions to address biases across all phases of AI system development. The project has advanced technologies to evaluate and mitigate biases in multimodal data, including text, images and networks.

²²² <https://www.biasproject.eu/> is developing standardised AI solutions to address biases across all phases of AI system development. The project has advanced technologies to evaluate and mitigate biases in multimodal data, including text, images, and networks.

²²³ <https://www.aequitas-project.eu/>. The project focuses on creating fairness-through-design guidelines and methodologies for developing bias-free AI systems. The project has generated synthetic datasets and real use cases to test and validate its bias mitigation solutions. In 2024, it published a comprehensive fair-by-design methodology as well as a report on social impact based on bias diagnosis.

²²⁴ <https://aifairnesscluster.eu/>.

including the **AI Fairness Cluster Inaugural Conference** and a workshop on AI biases. In addition, three projects under the topic ‘Gender and social, economic and cultural empowerment²²⁵ are working on tackling gender stereotypes and fostering women’s empowerment across different domains, including the energy sector, migration, and public institutions²²⁶.

The European **Artificial Intelligence Act (AI Act)** entered into force in August 2024. The Act²²⁷ addresses potential risks to individuals’ health, safety, and fundamental rights, including the rights to equality and non-discrimination, while promoting innovation and uptake of trustworthy AI. It prohibits certain AI practices posing unacceptable risk (such as manipulative techniques, exploitation of vulnerabilities or biometric classification to infer sexual orientation and sex life), and subjects AI systems posing high-risk to fundamental rights and safety to specific requirements, such as human oversight, data governance, risk management, transparency. Furthermore, the Act establishes transparency requirements for certain AI systems models, including those that are intended to interact directly with natural persons, generate synthetic data (e.g. *deepfakes*), and emotion recognition or biometric categorisation systems.

In the area of **agriculture and rural policy**, in line with growing concerns around mental health challenges in rural regions, the Commission is paying more attention to the specific factors affecting mental health within the farming community. Long working hours, geographical and social isolation, financial uncertainty, climate concerns, and economic issues are specific problems faced by those in the farming profession, which need to be addressed through comprehensive mental health support. However, farmers face significant barriers to accessing mental health care, due to both their geographical isolation and the stigma around seeking external help. In 2024, the Commission, in cooperation with the common agricultural policy network, organised an event supporting the **mental health of farmers**²²⁸. The gender dimension was very important at this workshop, as women farmers and men farmers tend to cope with mental health issues in a different way²²⁹. The conclusions from

²²⁵ HORIZON-CL2-2022-TRANSFORMATIONS-01-05.

²²⁶ For the latest update on EU-funded projects, please refer to <https://cordis.europa.eu/projects>. The **gEneSys** project aims to advance women’s participation in the clean energy transition and shows how applying a gender lens to knowledge on the energy transition can help achieve equitable energy transition outcomes. The project conducted a systematic literature review on the nexus between gender and the energy transition and identified stereotypes in education material on the energy transition and STEM studies. <https://genesys-project.eu/about/>. The **ReIncluGen** project focuses on inclusion and gender empowerment with a special emphasis on the experiences of women with a migration background in Europe. The project conducted a first mapping of gender policies in different national contexts and analysed attitudes towards gender equality in Belgium, Poland, Italy, Spain, and Austria. To challenge stereotypes about migrant women, it has launched a photography competition for women with a migration background to show what gender empowerment means to them. <https://www.uantwerpen.be/en/projects/reincludgen/about/>. The **RE-WIRING** project analyses the root causes of gendered power hierarchies in the EU and beyond, including in education, media representation, and employment. It produced a taxonomy of different concepts of power hierarchies and created a toolkit on better representation of women in the workplace. See <https://re-wiring.eu/>.

²²⁷ Regulation (EU) 2024/1689 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 laying down harmonised rules on artificial intelligence and amending Regulations (EC) No 300/2008, (EU) No 167/2013, (EU) No 168/2013, (EU) 2018/858, (EU) 2018/1139 and (EU) 2019/2144 and Directives 2014/90/EU, (EU) 2016/797 and (EU) 2020/1828 (Artificial Intelligence Act, OJ L 2024/1689, 12.07.2024).

²²⁸ https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/supporting-mental-health-farmers-and-farming-communities_en.

²²⁹ <https://app.farmres.eu/summary-report>.

this workshop will be transmitted to farm advisory services and will feed into the preparation of the post-2027 common agriculture policy²³⁰.

Gender equality is also mainstreamed in policy initiatives tackling demographic developments in regions affected by a sharp decline in the working age population in conjunction with a low and stagnating share of people with a post-secondary education and significant departure of young people at regional level. The Communication ‘Harnessing talent in Europe’s regions’²³¹ and its related ‘**Talent Booster Mechanism**’²³² encompass various activities including technical assistance for regions, working groups related to demographic change, and support for shrinking cities through the **European Urban Initiative**.²³³ The second call for projects under initiative on ‘harnessing talent in shrinking cities’ focused on addressing equality considerations, in particular women’s entrepreneurship and equal access to qualifications and employment²³⁴. In May 2024, four projects were selected to focus on testing innovative and creative solutions to attract and harness talent in shrinking cities. Moreover, these cities will establish transfer partnerships with 12 additional cities interested in this type of innovation²³⁵.

Gender considerations are often overlooked in urban planning and design. On 10 October 2024, during the **2024 Week of Region and Cities**, the European Committee of the Regions and the European Commission organised a workshop on ‘Cities for all: **Gender-inclusive urban planning and design**’²³⁶. The workshop explored how cities and regions can be reimagined to better meet the needs of women and non-binary individuals and as a result improve accessibility and inclusivity for all.

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science of the Netherlands commissioned a research institute (Movisie) to research gender mainstreaming practices in the Netherlands and beyond. The final product, published in September 2024, consists of a desk study and a report based on interviews with government officials from various ministries.²³⁷ The research paid special attention to the supporting and hindering factors that civil servants experience in the field of gender mainstreaming. Based on the findings, Movisie recommends: 1) creating greater commitment from leadership, 2) improving the gender test in the central method for policy making (*Beleidskompas*), and 3) improving the knowledge and skills of policy officers and others involved in policy making.

²³⁰ More information on women in Agriculture: two projects on women in farming are funded under Horizon Europe: <https://fliara.eu/> and <https://www.grassceiling.eu/>.

²³¹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Harnessing talent in Europe’s regions, COM(2023)32 final.

²³² https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/communities-and-networks/harnessing-talent-platform/talent-booster-mechanism_en.

²³³ <https://www.urban-initiative.eu/>.

²³⁴ <https://www.urban-initiative.eu/innovative-actions-harnessing-talent>.

²³⁵ <https://www.urban-initiative.eu/calls-proposals/second-call-proposals-innovative-actions>.

²³⁶ <https://regions-and-cities.europa.eu/programme/2023/sessions/31619>.

²³⁷ <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2024/09/30/gendermainstreaming-bij-de-rijksoverheid-een-gedragwetenschappelijk-onderzoek>.

Malta is actively working to eliminate systemic biases and ensure a more equitable legal framework. In 2024, the Human Rights Directorate engaged an independent legal reviewer to examine all Maltese legislation to identify provisions that create unnecessary distinctions between men and women and present options to eliminate such differentiation. The analysis is carried out with the assistance of the inter-ministerial committee set up to support the implementation of gender equality and mainstreaming strategy and action plan (GEMSAP).

An important but often overlooked area for gender equality mainstreaming is the setting of technical standards at European (and international) level. Until today, in many standards the average male body is taken for reference, including European harmonised standards. This results in products being less safe for women than for men. Due to the pandemic, the problem of ill-fitting facial masks has received the most attention. However, the same problem occurs across all kinds of sectors and products. Women are more likely to be seriously injured or die in a car accident, and less likely to have the required grip strength to operate machinery and equipment safely. This issue is however not limited to the female population. There are also large variations among the male population in the European Union. It is essential to consider how gender (and other factors such as ethnic origin) impacts the technical requirements and application of standards in order to effectively ensure the safe use of a product or equipment. This will also benefit women in all their diversity. Relevant considerations include physical differences like average size and weight or grip strength.

In early 2024, the Commission published a study²³⁸ on the **inclusiveness of anthropometric provisions in harmonised European standards**²³⁹. One important finding from the study is that standard setting organisations (such as CEN and CENELEC) lack anthropometric data about the European population in all its diversity. Relevant considerations include physical differences like average size and weight or grip strength. The available data are statistically not representative and/or incomplete, i.e., not covering all EU Member States and/or necessary anthropometric parameters and are often outdated. The study concluded that it is necessary to make an inventory of, update and complete the available **anthropometric data** to cover all EU Member States and necessary anthropometric dimensions in a statistically robust manner. For this purpose, the Commission has awarded CEN-CENELEC a standardisation action grant to carry out a gap analysis and

²³⁸ European Commission: Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, *Study on the inclusiveness of anthropometrics in European harmonised standards* – Final report, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, available [online](#). The study assessed the harmonised standards for 22 pieces of EU legislation in the policy area of machinery and equipment. It 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).

²³⁹ 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: https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/single-market/european-standards_en 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: https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/single-market/european-standards/harmonised-standards_en.

develop options for gathering the missing data from a large representative sample of the EU population.

Cars are currently tested in crash test with a male dummy that is 176cm tall and weighs 70kg. As a result, technical progress in reactive head restraints led to a 70 % reduction of the proportion of permanent medical impairment for male drivers and a 13 % increase for female drivers²⁴⁰. As part of the **UNECE's work on vehicle regulations**, an informal working group on Equitable Occupant Protection has taken up work under European lead to address these kinds of issues.

In 2024, several legislative initiatives entered into force which refer to gender equality. On 25 July 2024, the Directive on **corporate sustainability due diligence** entered into force²⁴¹. A number of guidelines, to be issued by the Commission before Directive enters into application, will help companies to conduct due diligence, for example on sharing of resources and information, and stakeholder engagement. Among others, the Directive sets requirements for large European companies and for non-European companies with significant EU turnover to identify and prevent, mitigate or bring to an end, adverse human rights and environmental impacts in their own operations, those of their subsidiaries and, where related to their chain(s) of activities, those of their business partners in the EU and globally. Under the new rules, any form of discrimination will need to be addressed. In particular, the Directive 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 Conventions. This includes, in particular: (a) unequal remuneration for work of equal value; and (b) discrimination on grounds of national extraction or social origin, race, colour, sex, religion or political opinion. The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women is referred to in recital 33 as a further international instrument that may need to be taken into consideration by companies when identifying and addressing human rights abuses. In order to better support responsible business practices, in February 2025, the Commission adopted an Omnibus package²⁴² to simplify due diligence requirements and reducing regulatory burden, while preserving the original policy objectives. Under the proposal, Member States will have to transpose the Directive into national law and communicate the relevant texts to the Commission by 26 July 2027. One year later, the rules will start to apply to the first group of companies, following a staggered approach (with full application on 26 July 2029).

The new **General Product Safety Regulation**²⁴³ applies as of 13 December 2024. It strengthens safety rules for products sold both offline and online and specifies that gender differences must be taken

²⁴⁰ Kullgren, A., & Krafft, M. (2010, September). Gender analysis on whiplash seat effectiveness: results from real-world crashes. In *Proc. IRCOB Conf., Hanover (Germany)* (pp. 17-28).

²⁴¹ By July 2026 EU Member States have to transpose it into their national legislation and one year later (26 July 2027) it will start to apply for the first group of companies (the largest ones), following a staggered approach (with full application after five years from entry into force, i.e. July 2029).

²⁴² https://commission.europa.eu/business-economy-euro/doing-business-eu/sustainability-due-diligence-responsible-business/corporate-sustainability-due-diligence_en

²⁴³ Regulation (EU) 2023/988 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 May 2023 on general product safety, amending Regulation (EU) No 1025/2012 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, 23.5.2023, p. 1.

into account in the risk assessment of the products and in standardisation activities. The Commission supports all stakeholders in the implementation of this new Regulation.

Directive (EU) 2024/869 entered into force on 9 April 2024, **amending the Carcinogens, Mutagens and Reprotoxic Substances Directive (Directive 2004/37/EC) and the Chemical Agents Directive (Directive 98/24/EC)**, as regards the limit values for lead and its inorganic compounds (a major occupational reprotoxicant) and for diisocyanates²⁴⁴. Directive (2024/869) revises the 40 year old current limit values²⁴⁵ for lead and its compounds under the Carcinogen, Mutagens and Reprotoxic Substances Directive. The Directive also improves the protection for female workers of childbearing age with specific recommendations on blood lead levels.

Gender mainstreaming in the EU budget

In line with the 2020-2025 gender equality strategy, **NextGenerationEU and the 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework (MFF)** provide a wide range of EU funding and budgetary guarantee instruments to support initiatives promoting gender equality. EU funding is notably provided to improve the situation for women seeking or in work, including their work-life balance. This includes investing in care facilities, supporting female entrepreneurship, combating gender segregation in certain professions, and addressing the imbalanced representation of girls and boys in some sectors of education and training. Furthermore, dedicated funding is provided for projects benefiting civil-society organisations and public institutions that implement specific initiatives, including preventing and combating gender-based violence.

The Commission developed a **methodology to measure EU budget programme-level expenditure promoting gender equality** in the 2021-2027 MFF²⁴⁶. In this endeavour, the Commission benefited from fruitful exchanges with EIGE, and constructive engagement with the European Court of Auditors for the publication of their special report on gender mainstreaming in the EU budget (May 2021). The methodology was used for the first time across all spending programmes for the financial year 2021, in the context of the 2023 draft budget. This was ahead of the commitments under the interinstitutional agreement accompanying the 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework, in terms of both timeline and scope. For the financial year 2023, in the context of the 2025 draft budget, the methodology and the monitoring of gender expenditure has been enhanced with the inclusion in the 'programme performance statements'²⁴⁷ of the **gender disaggregated data** available per programme, in the limits of the programme regulations and implementation agreements. This includes a wide array of gender-disaggregated data aimed at improving the monitoring of the performance of the programme in relation to gender equality.

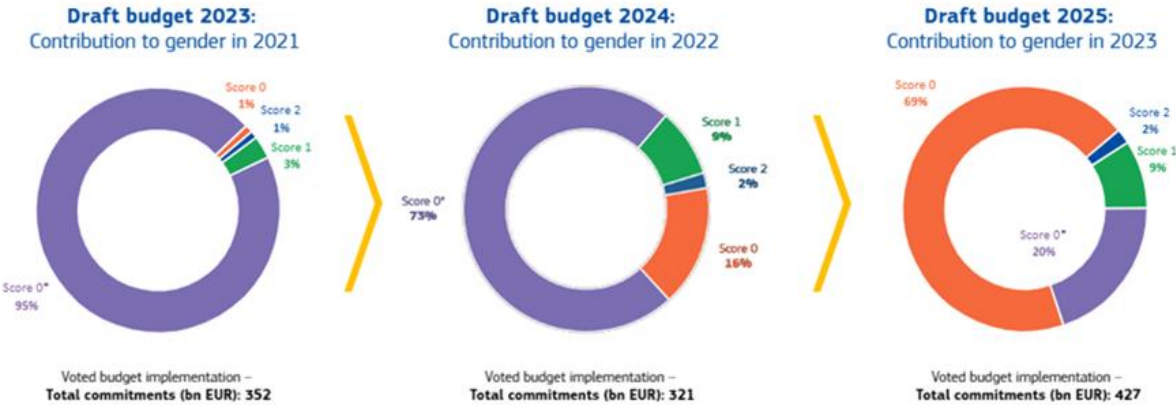
²⁴⁴ Directive (EU) 2024/869 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 March 2024 amending Directive 2004/37/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council and Council Directive 98/24/EC as regards the limit values for lead and its inorganic compounds and for diisocyanates, OJ L, 2024/869, 19.3.2024.

²⁴⁵ Occupational exposure limit value (OEL) and biological limit value.

²⁴⁶ https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/eu-budget/performance-and-reporting/horizontal-priorities/gender-equality-mainstreaming_en . See also point 16, letter f of the Interinstitutional Agreement on budgetary discipline, on cooperation in budgetary matters and on sound financial management, as well as on new own resources available at [EUR-Lex - 32020Q1222\(01\) - EN - EUR-Lex](#)

²⁴⁷ [Programme Performance Statements - European Commission](#)

In line with the methodology, each specific intervention within a programme must be assigned to a gender score.²⁴⁸ In 2023, 11 % of the EU budget contributed in practice to promoting gender equality (scores 2 and 1), representing EUR 48 billion, while 20 % has the potential to contribute (score 0*) to this objective. This percentage steadily decreased from 95 % since the initial application of this methodology.



As communicated in the 2024 annual report on the **Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF)**²⁴⁹, Member States are implementing measures in their national recovery and resilience plans (RRPs) that contribute to gender equality specifically or to equal opportunities in general. **The Commission, in consultation with Member States, identified 136 measures overall with a focus on gender equality.** As the thematic analysis on equality reports, many more measures in the RRP (such as those related to healthcare and long-term care reforms), although not identified as such, may also positively impact gender equality, for instance by improving working conditions in female-dominated sectors or by reducing informal care responsibilities.

During the most recent annual RRF reporting period (until September 2024), measures with a focus on gender equality show notable progress in implementation. Of the 253 milestones and targets associated with these measures, 102, or 40 %, **were reported by Member States as completed or assessed by the Commission as fulfilled**; 22 % were also positively assessed in payment requests. For instance, Estonia developed a prototype of a digital gender pay-gap tool for employers (see also Chapter 2). In Spain, a social plan for sport foresees renovating the public sports infrastructure while financing actions that promote the participation of women in sports.

²⁴⁸ **Score 2:** interventions whose principal objective is to improve gender equality corresponded to 2 % of the EU budget implemented in 2023 and were included in 13 programmes.
Score 1: interventions having gender equality as an important and deliberate objective (but not as the main reason for the intervention) corresponded to 9 % of the EU budget implemented in 2023 and were included in 16 programmes.
Score 0*: interventions having the potential to contribute to gender equality corresponded to 20 % of the EU budget implemented in 2023 and were included in 30 programmes.
Score 0: interventions not having a significant bearing on gender equality corresponded to 69 % of the EU budget implemented in 2023 and were included in 29 programmes.

²⁴⁹ Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility, COM(2024)474 final.

The Commission works together with Member States to ensure that RRF measures are conducive to gender equality and equal opportunities for all. For example, through the informal expert group on implementing of the RRF (a forum for the Commission and national governments to discuss cross cutting aspects of the implementation of the RRF), exchanges of good practices have helped Member States include and mainstream (gender-) equality considerations in the REPowerEU chapter, and in the revised RRFs and the way they are implemented (for instance through gender- sensitive budgeting and procurement).

As of 2024, Member States have allocated over 30 % (EUR 110 billion) of all Cohesion policy investments (incl. the Just Transition Fund) to measures supporting gender equality in the 2021-2027 period. The **European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)** continues to be the cohesion policy fund with the largest allocations for measures to promote gender equality (EUR 4.3 billion) and gender mainstreaming (EUR 80.8 billion). Gender mainstreaming and gender targeting measures under ERDF and JTF amount to approximately EUR 20 billion and EUR 6 billion respectively ²⁵⁰. The gender dimension of the ESF+ also includes gender equality as a horizontal cross-cutting principle. All Member States and regions are required to have effective mechanisms in place to ensure compliance with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, including for gender equality and national strategic frameworks for gender equality, to underpin relevant Cohesion policy support.

Moreover, Member States and the Commission must 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.

In 2024, gender equality and inclusion remained a cross-cutting issue for the actions of the **Creative Europe Programme**. All beneficiaries had to consider equality in designing and implementing their project and this aspect was focused on when evaluating of project applications²⁵¹. In 2024, the Programme launched a new round for multiannual actions for the European Networks of cultural and creative organisations and for the European platforms of emerging artists. Both serve to spread good practices among their members and the artists that they train, notably on the topic of gender equality.

Both **Erasmus+** and the **European Solidarity Corps** programmes highlight inclusion and diversity among their main priorities, to promote equal opportunities and access, inclusion, diversity and fairness across all their actions. The implementation of the priority has been enhanced following the development of the **Framework on inclusion measures**²⁵² and the **Inclusion and Diversity Strategy**²⁵³ in 2021 to support organisations to better address the barriers different target groups may face, including also barriers linked to gender discrimination. For example, the European Solidarity Corps

²⁵⁰ Gender mainstreaming reflects one of the categorisation systems in cohesion policy: <https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/stories/s/Cohesion-policy-supporting-gender-equality/gkxm-7hxd>.

²⁵¹ <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/news/creative-europe-in-2025-focus-on-green-and-digital-transitions-on-strengthening-social-and-economic-resilience>.

²⁵² Commission Implementing Decision - framework of inclusion measures of Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps 2021-27: <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/document/commission-decision-framework-inclusion-2021-27>

²⁵³ Implementation guidelines - Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Inclusion and Diversity Strategy: <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/document/implementation-guidelines-erasmus-and-european-solidarity-corps-inclusion-and-diversity-strategy>

report for the period 2021-2023 emphasises the support the Programme gives to gender equality and encouragement to all genders to participate in its activities. The Programme has a steady average of 63 % of the provided opportunities being taken up by women, including in the reporting period of this report.

In November 2024 the **InvestEU** Steering Board adopted a new Key Performance Indicator measuring the impact of investments supporting gender equality, which has now been added to the KPI/KMI methodology. This allows InvestEU Implementing Partners to report, on a best effort basis, on the impact of their operations, across all policy windows on gender equality. Furthermore, thanks to financing through the InvestEU Advisory Hub, the European Investment Bank Group launched two assignments: a recent study on the financial products and gender policies of banks; and a training programme for banks wishing to provide support (financial or other) for women entrepreneurs. The training programme will be available to all interested financial institutions starting March 2025.

The Commission also helps Member States to support public officials to mainstream gender in public policies and budget processes on many administrative levels. This should help ensure that public money is used to foster gender equality²⁵⁴. The **flagship project gender mainstreaming in public policy and budget processes** helps the beneficiary administrations to analyse policies and budgeting processes from a gender mainstreaming perspective. Support, funded via the Technical Support Instrument, is provided for training and implementing good practices, methodologies and tools to mainstream gender (equality) throughout the policy-making process. The project also facilitates peer learning opportunities between the participating Member State authorities. Four more administrations joined in 2024, taking the total to 13 administrations in 9 countries²⁵⁵.

Looking ahead to the post-2027 multiannual financial framework, the new EU **financial regulation (recast)** published on 29 September 2024²⁵⁶ now includes a provision²⁵⁷ requiring that all EU budget programmes and activities, where feasible and appropriate in accordance with the relevant sector-specific rules, to be implemented taking into account the principle of gender equality and in accordance with appropriate gender mainstreaming methodology. In addition, all data collected in relation to the spending programmes' performance indicators should be gender-disaggregated, where appropriate²⁵⁸.

Intersectionality in implementing gender equality policy

Women constitute a diverse group, exposed to various forms of intersectional discrimination stemming from multiple situations. To effectively address these disparities, it is important to consider the intersectionality of gender with other key factors of discrimination such as the socio-economic situation, ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

²⁵⁴ https://reform-support.ec.europa.eu/what-we-do/revenue-administration-and-public-financial-management/gender-mainstreaming-public-policy-and-budget-processes_en.

²⁵⁵ Cyprus, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Romania, and Spain are currently receiving technical assistance to mainstream gender in public policies through the Technical Support Instrument.

²⁵⁶ Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/2509 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 September 2024 on the financial rules applicable to the general budget of the Union (recast). Available [online](#).

²⁵⁷ Article 33.2 (f) of the Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/2509.

²⁵⁸ Article 33.3 of the Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2024/2509.

There are currently more than 100 million persons with disabilities in the EU. With higher number of women disabilities, a disability gender gap could be observed for all age groups ranging from 1.4-2.0 points for people between 16 and 44 to 6.3 points higher for people aged 85 years and over. However, the gender gap was relatively narrow if referred to only severe disabilities, at 1.4 points across all age groups. Persons with disabilities experience a higher prevalence rate of violence and discrimination and face a higher risk of being subjected to harmful practices (such as forced sterilisation) than persons without disabilities. As announced in the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, the Commission is working to table a Recommendation on the prevention of harmful practices, including the need for effective pre-emptive measures and acknowledging the importance of education. It is planned that the future Recommendation will identify concrete actions that Member States would be recommended to undertake to prevent and combat such practices most effectively on the ground; the Recommendation will therefore be partly complementary to the directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence.

Women with disabilities face higher risk of poverty and social exclusion than men with disabilities (29.8 % compared to 27.6 %). The employment gap between persons with and without disabilities amounts to 23 pp. Only about 20 % of women with disabilities in the EU work full time compared to 29 % of men with disabilities and 48 % of women without disabilities. According to EIGE Gender Equality Index, women with disabilities earn just 16,822 purchasing power standard (PPS), while women without disabilities earn on average 20,100 PPS. The **Disability Employment Package** aims to improve the employment rate of persons with disabilities.

The perspective of women and girls with disabilities is also relevant in policies to accelerate the transition from institutional care to community-based services and independent living for persons with disabilities. This is highlighted in the Commission Notice Guidance on independent living and inclusion in the community of persons with disabilities in the context of EU funding which takes on board the diversity of disabilities as well as intersectionality of discrimination that individuals may face²⁵⁹.

On 25 September 2024, the Commission adopted a **report on the implementation of the national Roma strategic framework**²⁶⁰. The report highlights promising initiatives targeting Roma women, such as the Hungary's "Growing Opportunities", which provides training in social care and healthcare primarily to Roma women and Spain's Calí programme, which promotes equal opportunities and social and labour inclusion for Roma women and combats multiple forms of discrimination. The EU Roma Strategic Framework emphasises the importance of empowering Roma women. It sets several EU-level targets for the EU and Member States to achieve by 2030, including the goal of reducing the gender employment gap between Roma men and Roma women by at least half.

²⁵⁹ Commission Notice, guidance on independent living and inclusion in the community of persons with disabilities in the context of EU funding, OJ L (C/2024/7188), 29.11.2024.

²⁶⁰ Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the implementation of the national Roma Strategic framework in light of the EU Roma strategic Framework for equality, inclusion and participation and the Council Recommendation on Roma Equality, inclusion and participation, COM(2024)422 final.

On 7 and 14 May 2024, two **Directives on standards for equality bodies** were adopted²⁶¹. They jointly cover the six grounds of discrimination protected under the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and contain references to intersectionality²⁶². The new standards apply to the mandate, independence, resources, tasks and powers of equality bodies, to ensure that they can fulfil their roles in promoting equality and assisting victims of discrimination across Europe on all the grounds and the fields protected under the EU equality legislation, all over the EU. Member States are required to transpose the directives by 19 June 2026. By the same date, the Commission will adopt an implementing act laying down a list of common indicators on the functioning of equality bodies.

²⁶¹ Council Directive (EU) 2024/1499 of 7 May 2024, on standards for equality bodies in the field of equal treatment between persons irrespective of their racial or ethnic origin, equal treatment in matters of employment and occupation between persons irrespective of their religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, equal treatment between women and men in matters of social security and in the access to and supply of goods and services, and amending Directives 2000/43/EC and 2004/113/EC, OJ L 2024/1499, 29.5.2024 and Directive (EU) 2024/1500 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on standards for equality bodies in the field of equal treatment and equal opportunities between women and men in matters of employment and occupation, and amending Directives 2006/54/EC and 2010/41/EU, OJ L 2024/1500, 29.5.2024.

²⁶² See preamble 15 and article 5 (2) Directive (EU) 2024/1500.

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT ACROSS THE WORLD

In 2024, conflicts around the globe raged on, putting the lives of women and girls at risk in places ranging from Sudan to Gaza, and disproportionately exposing them to gender-based violence. Severe political setbacks also occurred, threatening women's rights. In June, **Argentina's** National Institute Against Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racism was shut down as well as the Undersecretariat for Protection against Gender-based Violence, which had replaced the dissolved Ministry of Women, Gender and Diversity. **Afghanistan's** gender apartheid reached tragic new heights, with the *de facto* Taliban administration passing measures that went as far as banning women's voices in public – thereby effectively erasing women from public life. Lawmakers in **Iraq** proposed amendments to the country's Personal Status Law that could lower the age of consent and allow marriage for girls as young as nine years old. Other possible setbacks were avoided, providing ground for cautious hope: in July, **the Gambian Parliament** rejected a bill that would have repealed the ban on female genital mutilation (FGM) that has been in place in the country since 2015. Against this troubled backdrop, the EU's continued international leadership on gender equality and support for women's rights and women-led civil society organisations matters more than ever.

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine

19 November 2024 marked 1 000 days since the start of Russia's full-scale war on Ukraine²⁶³. In 2024, the UN estimated that 14.6 million Ukrainians, almost 40 % of the country's population, will need humanitarian assistance. With over 6 million Ukrainians having fled the country currently in the EU²⁶⁴, continued support to Ukraine remains a priority for the EU.

In July 2024, the EU imposed restrictive measures against four people and two entities under the **European Union's Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime** for serious human rights abuses worldwide, including torture and systematic and widespread sexual and gender-based violence.²⁶⁵ The designations included the head of the so-called 'penitentiary service', as installed by Moscow in the temporarily occupied Kherson region in Ukraine. Under his command, a widespread and systematic pattern of human rights violations has been documented in detention facilities in areas under the control of the Russian occupation authorities, ranging from torture to other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, as well as punishment and sexual and gender-based violence.

The mandate of the **European Union Advisory Mission in Ukraine** (EUAM Ukraine), a civilian mission under the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) was renewed in May 2024 and includes a gender expert and an expert on conflict-related sexual violence²⁶⁶. The mandate plans to improve Ukrainian agencies and institutions' capacity to investigate and prosecute international crimes, such as war crimes, including conflict-related sexual violence. The EUAM works with both governmental authorities and civil society on addressing international crimes²⁶⁷, applying a victim-centred approach in its efforts to strengthen accountability for conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence. The

²⁶³ https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/news-stories/stories/1000-days-russias-full-scale-war-ukraine-5-facts-you-need-know_en. For Ukrainians, the conflict started even earlier – in 2014 in Ukraine's Donbas region, while in 2022, the humanitarian situation in Ukraine was already considered a 'forgotten crisis'.

²⁶⁴ <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>.

²⁶⁵ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/07/22/sexual-and-gender-based-violence-council-lists-four-individuals-and-two-entities-under-the-eu-s-global-human-rights-sanctions-regime/>.

²⁶⁶ <https://www.euam-ukraine.eu/>.

²⁶⁷ <https://www.euam-ukraine.eu/news/war-crimes-documentation-in-ukraine-building-a-network-for-justice/>.

EUAM continues to work closely with Ukraine to support the implementation of Ukraine's national action plan on women, peace and security and on gender mainstreaming, within the framework of Ukraine's overarching strategy for the reform of the entire law enforcement sector²⁶⁸. Progress on gender equality was also discussed with Ukraine during the Human Rights Dialogue on 25 April 2024.

Gender equality is fully mainstreamed across the EU's support to Ukraine. The EU is dedicated to ensuring full accountability for conflict-related sexual violence committed during Russia's full-scale invasion and strives to bring a gender-responsive, survivor-centred and trauma-sensitive approach in all efforts to respond to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and its impact on women and girls. Through the EU4Recovery programme, implemented by UN Women, the EU supports actions to prevent gender-based violence and provide support to victims and survivors²⁶⁹. The programme also seeks to strengthen access to justice by legally empowering victims and survivors, and strengthening the capacities of those involved in the justice sector.

Given the unprecedentedly high number of vulnerable people, mostly women and children, arriving in the EU because of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the EU has stepped up its efforts to address the risks of trafficking in human beings (THB) by strengthening the EMPACT THB operational action plan. The **EMPACT (European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats)** is a security initiative driven by EU Member States to identify, prioritise and address threats posed by organised and serious international crime²⁷⁰. A specific Operational Action within EMPACT THB has been developed under the coordination of Europol to address trafficking related to Eastern Partnership countries, in particular Ukraine and Moldova, with a specific focus on the risk of exploitation of temporarily displaced persons from Ukraine. In Moldova, a gender-responsive crisis response project supports vulnerable communities by improving access to basic services.

Gender equality is also given due consideration in the **EU's mental health support for Ukrainian displaced persons**, the majority of whom are women and children. The EU4Health programme has allocated over EUR 3 million to fund NGO-led projects to improve the mental health and psychological well-being of displaced persons from Ukraine, both inside the country itself and in the EU. The programme is also funding the provision of psychological first aid and trauma support for forcibly displaced people in 28 countries²⁷¹ in partnership with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. The project has a budget of EUR 31.2 million and seeks to provide support to victims as well as improve the capabilities of first responders, in a context where forced displacement has driven an increase in gender-based violence with severe negative mental health impact on victims. As 62 % of the displaced people from Ukraine in the project countries are women, the project places a strong emphasis on gender. Women also play a key role as frontline responders, as they make up 73.5 % of the first line responders trained in psychological first aid and psycho-social support. By October 2024, a total of 23,680 health professionals, volunteers, first aid responders and

²⁶⁸ <https://www.euam-ukraine.eu/news/ukraine-endorses-strategic-law-enforcement-reform-plan-to-align-with-eu-standards/>.

²⁶⁹ <https://www.undp.org/ukraine/projects/eu4recovery-empowering-communities-ukraine-eu4recovery#:~:text=EU4Recovery%20is%20employing%20an%20area,of%20individuals%20at%20community%20level.>

²⁷⁰ https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/law-enforcement-cooperation/empact-fighting-crime-together_en.

²⁷¹ 23 EU Member States, plus Norway, Iceland, Moldova, Montenegro and Ukraine.

other professionals have been trained to provide psychological first aid and mental health and psycho-social support, while around 500,000 displaced persons had obtained support.

Gender mainstreaming in the EU's external action

The EU promotes gender equality and women's empowerment in its international partnerships, political and human rights dialogues with non-EU countries, in EU trade policy as well as in the EU's neighbourhood and enlargement policies. The **EU action plan on gender equality and women's empowerment in external relations** (Gender Action Plan GAP III), adopted in 2021 and extended until 2027, continues to guide efforts to place gender equality at the forefront of the EU's external action.²⁷² It provides for **gender mainstreaming** across all external policies and sectors, from EU-funded humanitarian aid to civilian CSDP missions, but also in investments made by the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus or in the EU's engagement with its neighbourhood region, including candidate countries and potential candidates. GAP III sets the ambitious target that by 2025, at least **85 % of the EU's new external actions must contribute to gender equality and to the empowerment of women and girls**. Cumulative data for 2021-2023 shows that 78.4 % of all external actions are gender responsive or targeted²⁷³ – a significant increase from 64.7 % in 2019.

The 'Team Europe' approach, which brings together the EU, its Member States with their diplomatic network, finance institutions and implementing organisations, as well as the EIB and the EBRD, to improve coordination and scale up European impact on the international scene, is at the heart of the EU's approach in external action. It has enabled gender equality efforts to be fully integrated into the EUR 300 billion **Global Gateway strategy** – in education, health, digital, energy, and climate change – contributing to more inclusive fair, green and digital transitions. Recently launched targeted actions promote, amongst others, decent work and the fight against gender-based violence in **Bangladesh**, gender-responsive social protection in **Malawi**, gender equality, peace and social cohesion in conflict-affected regions in **Cameroon**, the women-led green transition in **Vietnam**, and inclusion and social cohesion in **Latin America and the Caribbean**.

Working closely with International and development financing institutions, the EU aims to increase the impact of innovative finance and to further integrate a gender perspective in investments made by the **EFSD+**, to promote women's access to finance, entrepreneurship and labour market participation, among others. 72 % of all reported EFSD+ operations in 2023 are gender mainstreamed.

The EU continues to strive to make the humanitarian aid it funds more sensitive to the differentiated needs and capacities of women, girls, men and boys, including by requiring partners to conduct gender-sensitive risk analyses,²⁷⁴ and by using a **gender-age marker** to track and measure the extent to which EU-funded humanitarian actions integrate gender and age considerations.²⁷⁵ This tool has

²⁷² Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council, EU Gender Action Plan (GAP) III – An ambitious agenda for gender equality and women's empowerment in EU external action, JOIN(2020) 17 final.

²⁷³ 85 % of actions under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe, 75 % under the 2021-2027 Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance, and 28 % under the common foreign security policy, 88 % of humanitarian aid operations in 2022 and 87 % in 2023.

²⁷⁴ Gender-sensitive risk analyses help gain greater insight into the roles, access to resources, existing inequalities and supportive local structures, specific needs, vulnerabilities, risks, coping strategies and capacities of women, girls, boys and men.

²⁷⁵ Gender-Age Marker Toolkit, https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/policies/sectoral/gender_age_marker_toolkit.pdf.

been used continuously since 2014, and aims at improving the quality of humanitarian aid by making sure that each action is gender- and age-sensitive. The EU has also consistently funded the fight against gender-based violence and support to **the sexual and reproductive health and rights** needs of women and girls in humanitarian situations. Two sessions of the **2024 Civil Protection Forum** focused on gender inclusion – respectively in civil protection teams and inclusive emergency shelters. A page dedicated to inclusion has also been created as part of the Union Civil Protection Knowledge Network.²⁷⁶

Gender equality is also a key element of the EU's engagement with candidate and potential candidate countries. 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. In the context of accession negotiations, the European Commission also continuously monitors gender equality developments and countries' efforts to combat gender-based violence. In June 2024, the **European Union opened accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova**, meaning that the European Commission intends to carry out an assessment of the state of gender equality and women's rights in both countries.

Following the launch of the **Eastern Partnership (EaP) Working Group for Gender Equality** in October 2023 – a platform to enhance the implementation of gender equality across all five long-term policy priorities of the EaP –, three successful events were held in February, May and December 2024, allowing participants to discuss challenges, good practices and lessons learned in terms of gender equality policy and programmes.

The EU's global partnerships and multilateral efforts on gender equality

The EU continued to seize every opportunity to promote and advocate for women's and girls' full enjoyment of all human rights through its global and multilateral engagements. It closely collaborated with the **United Nations system**, including UN Women, the United Nations Population Fund, UNICEF, the Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly Third Committee. The EU continued to support the full implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and to promote the work of women human rights defenders, women's (rights) organisations and youth-led organisations in various multilateral fora. The EU is also monitoring and supporting the operationalisation of Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality at all levels of governance, through research aiming to empower local governments to adapt global targets to their specific contexts as part of the Local SDGs project²⁷⁷.

The EU participated in the **68th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW68)**, which took place at the UN Headquarters in New York in March 2024. The EU invited civil society

²⁷⁶ <https://civil-protection-knowledge-network.europa.eu/about-knowledge-network>.

²⁷⁷ The JRC's Local SDGs project reflects the EU's commitment to mainstreaming gender equality across all SDGs and levels of governance. The *Not Another SDG 5 Booklet* synthesizes challenges, best practices, and recommendations for gender equality in the EU, with a focus on empowering local governments to adapt global targets to their unique contexts. Further research currently under review aims to enhance the monitoring frameworks for SDG5 by promoting gender-disaggregated data, participatory approaches, and intersectional analysis, thereby fostering transformative policies that bridge the gap between global ambitions and local realities.

representatives as part of its delegation headed by former EU Commissioner for Equality Helena Dalli. The EU also organised four side events as part of its outreach, including an intergenerational dialogue hosted and moderated by the EU Youth Delegates, entitled ‘HerPower: Power of Education for Gender Equality’, in partnership with UNICEF. The EU consolidated its role as a well-coordinated progressive regional bloc at CSW68. The outcome document is unique in its **application of a gender lens to poverty eradication, social policies and major issues of international finance** such as debt, taxation, international trade, and the reform of the international financial architecture. The text makes strong commitments for women’s legal capacity, economic autonomy, independence, underpinned by their right to work and based on equal sharing of care and domestic responsibilities between women and men in a household. It also makes a commitment to invest in the care economy.

As co-leader of the Action Coalition on Gender-Based Violence, the European Commission continued to be a supporter and partner of **Generation Equality Forum**, a global multi-stakeholder initiative launched in 2021 to advance women’s rights and gender equality across the world.²⁷⁸ As such, the Commission supported better coordination with various stakeholders, including civil society, to promote gender equality in the Global Digital Compact, the Pact for the Future and the 79th United Nations General Assembly²⁷⁹. The 2024 Accountability Report highlights the tangible progress towards gender equality goals that Generation Equality Forum and its dedicated commitment-makers have successfully secured²⁸⁰.

In the margins of the **29th UN Climate Change Conference**, held in Baku in November 2024, the EU organised a panel discussion on ‘Investing in Gender Equality for a Fair and Green Transition’ jointly with the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, and with the cooperation of UN Women. The discussion highlighted the gendered impact of the climate crisis: women and girls experience the greatest impact of climate change while gender inequalities are amplified as a consequences of climate change. However, women’s rights organisations can play a key role in decision-making processes related to climate financing.

The EU continued to advocate for and promote gender equality in the framework of key multilateral fora, such as the **G7** and the **G20**. The EU played a pivotal role in the **G7’s Working Group on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment**. It contributed to discussions on the fight against gender-based violence and women’s economic empowerment in G7 societies and globally, including during a G7 Ministerial Meeting on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment that took place in Matera in October 2024. The third edition of the Dashboard on Gender Gaps²⁸¹, an annual deliverable to monitor progress towards gender equality in the G7 countries and the EU since 2022, was published in June 2024, ahead of the G7 Leaders’ Summit.

2024 also marked the first year of existence of the dedicated **Women’s Empowerment working group in the framework of the G20**, as announced in the 2023 Delhi Leaders’ Declaration. Under the

²⁷⁸ <https://commitments.generationequality.org/>.

²⁷⁹ <https://www.un.org/techenvoy/global-digital-compact>; <https://www.un.org/en/summit-of-the-future/pact-for-the-future>; <https://www.un.org/en/high-level-week-2024>.

²⁸⁰ <https://commitments.generationequality.org/accountability-report-2024>.

²⁸¹ <https://www.pariopportunita.gov.it/it/news-e-media/news/2024/g7-dashboard-on-gender-gaps-2024-eng/#:~:text=The%20Dashboard%20on%20Gender%20Gaps,opportunities%20between%20men%20and%20women>.

aegis of the Brazilian Presidency, discussions focused on equality, including autonomy and the care economy, on confronting misogyny and violence, and on climate change. A G20 ministerial meeting on women's empowerment took place in Brasilia in October 2024. This provided the opportunity for G20 countries and the EU to reaffirm their commitment to achieving gender equality and women's empowerment and to accelerating progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, as reported in a dedicated Chair's statement²⁸².

Gender equality also remains at the centre of the EU's partnerships with different organisations and regions across the world. The EU continues to support the **Union for the Mediterranean (UfM)** in implementing the 5th UfM Ministerial Declaration on Strengthening the Role of Women in Societies, adopted in Madrid in October 2022, with a focus 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 also supports youth-led actions driven by UfM as well as the Anna Lindh Foundation²⁸³.

Ending gender-based violence

The EU's commitment to ending gender-based violence has steadily translated into practical measures and funding over the past few years. In 2023 and 2024, the EU allocated approximately **EUR 50 million** from its **humanitarian aid budget** for targeted actions to prevent, mitigate and respond to gender-based violence in emergencies – up from EUR 41.3 million in 2022 and EUR 33.1 million in 2021.

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, launched in 2017 by the EU with the United Nations. Six years after its launch, the Spotlight Initiative has been fully implemented in five regions through 26 country programmes, 5 regional programmes and two programmes with UN Trust Funds. Thanks to its success, it was selected as one of the 12 high impact initiatives within the framework of the SDGs. As Spotlight enters its 2.0 phase, the EU and the UN are working to sustain the achievements and knowledge built by the initiative through the EUR 16.5 million **Spotlight Initiative High-Impact Programme for Violence Elimination by 2030**, and by continuing to invest in new country and regional programmes. At country level, the European Commission has so far provided EUR 36 million to Spotlight 2.0 in Uganda, Sierra Leone, and Ecuador, while EUR 20 million are in the pipeline for a second phase of the Africa Regional Programme.

Spotlight's flagship **digital engagement campaign #WithHer** is at the heart of the EU's efforts to combat the gender stereotypes and harmful social norms, one of the root causes of gender-based violence. #WithHer focuses on curating online conversations among cultural influencers and providing a platform for the stories of activists and survivors. The campaign has reached **more than 224 million users** on X (formerly Twitter), Facebook and Instagram since 2021, and **significantly contributes to challenge harmful gender norms and stereotypes** through its carefully designed messages. The success of the #WithHer campaign led to the launch of the **WithHer Fund** to provide

²⁸² <https://www.g20.utoronto.ca/2024/241011-women-chair-statement.html>.

²⁸³ For instance, the UfM Youth Forum, the UfM Med Youth Lab 2024, the UfM workshops and meetings on Women Empowerment, the Anna Lindh Foundation Young Civil Society Leadership Programme, or the Mediterranean Youth in Action programme.

resources directly to a cohort of six **grassroots women’s organisations** working to end violence against women and girls. Approximately 70 % of funds (USD 500.000), have gone directly to grantee organisations as flexible unrestricted grants, enabling grantees to cover core organisational costs that are rarely covered by project-based funding.

With the EU GAP III action plan on gender equality, the EU committed to increase financial and political support for **women’s rights and feminist organisations** in partner countries, and to counter the shrinking space for civil society which exacerbates the backlash against women’s human rights, limiting people’s ability to hold their governments accountable. Women’s rights organisations and feminist movements play a critical role in driving long-term progress, addressing the structural drivers of gender inequality, such as patriarchal systems, harmful societal norms, and cultural practices that perpetuate gender-based violence and discrimination. The EUR 22 million **Advocacy, Coalition Building and Transformative Feminist Action to End Violence against Women programme**, which was launched at the margins of the 2024 UN Summit of the Future, is another practical deliverable of the EU’s commitment to end violence against women and girls.

In parallel, the EU has used every tool at its disposal to combat the plight of gender-based violence in emergencies and conflict-related sexual violence. The EU contributed EUR 2 million to the **Global Survivors’ Fund**, funding reparations and redress for victims of conflict-related sexual violence. In several countries around the world, the Global Survivors’ Fund’s work has led governments to take first steps in developing related legislation and conceptualising reparation programmes. So far, more than 3,000 survivors have received or started receiving comprehensive interim reparative measures through projects in Guinea, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, and Türkiye (including survivors from Syria). In September 2024, the EU also convened the first high-level dialogue between the European Commission’s Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operation and the United Nations Population Fund. The EU worked closely with the **UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict** and facilitated an exchange with the Political and Security Committee. To mark the International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict, on 19 June, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, and the UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Pramila Patten, released a joint statement.

Restrictive measures (sanctions) are another key tool for the EU to strengthen accountability for gender-based conflict-related sexual violence. In April 2024, the EU imposed restrictive measures against three entities under its **Global Human Rights Sanctions (EUGHRSR)** over widespread sexual and gender-based violence in view of their responsibilities in the brutal and indiscriminate terrorist attacks that occurred across Israel on 7 October 2023.²⁸⁴ In parallel, the EU has continually called for an immediate ceasefire, for an end to attacks on civilians and to the destruction of key civilian infrastructure, and for the protection of displaced persons. The EU has actively supported and engaged with international partners on tangible irreversible steps towards the two-state solution, including by launching in September 2024 the Global Alliance for the implementation of the Two-State Solution. The initiative, which is co-led by the EU, comprises 100 participating states and

²⁸⁴ Council Decision (CFSP) 2024/1074. The listed entities are the Al-Quds Brigades, the armed wing of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad which the EU has designated as terrorist organisation; the Nukhba Force, a special forces unit of the EU-designated terrorist organisation Hamas; and the Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas.

international organisations, provides a platform for cooperation with regional and international partners to safeguard and advance a political settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The EU has also significantly increased its humanitarian aid in 2024, with EUR 237 million allocated to Palestine²⁸⁵, and sought to support women and girls in Palestine through initiatives that address gender-based violence and protection activities. On 18 January 2025, the High Representative issued a statement on behalf of the EU warmly welcoming the ceasefire agreement in Gaza, which provides for the phased release of the hostages, end hostilities and ease the humanitarian suffering in Gaza.²⁸⁶ Upon expiry of phase one of the ceasefire deal in March 2025, the EU called for a rapid resumption of negotiations on the second phase.

The EU also supports dedicated projects tackling gender-based violence. These range from providing support to survivors of gender-based violence and helping document and report human rights violations against women and girls in **Ethiopia**²⁸⁷, to challenging gender stereotypes in the **Eastern Partnership**²⁸⁸, and strengthening referral systems for victims and survivors and supporting the design of gender-sensitive legislation on cyber violence in the **Western Balkans**²⁸⁹.

Women, peace and security

The EU continued to work on the implementation of the EU Strategic Approach to Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and its action plan, working to further engrain a gender equality perspective in EU diplomacy, political dialogue and policy decisions. The timeframe of the **EU action plan on women, peace and security** (WPS) was extended to 2027, in order to align it with the multi-annual financial framework and GAP III. At the UN Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security on 25 October 2024, EU Ambassador for Gender and Diversity Ronner-Grubacic delivered a statement on 'Women's participation in international peace and security from theory to practice'.

The EU contributed to the Women, Peace and Security agenda by

- supporting projects on gender equality and security and peacekeeping in **Moldova** as well as in **Mongolia, Indonesia** and **other Asian countries** through support to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (**ASEAN**);
- supporting demining efforts so that internally displaced people in **Azerbaijan** can safely return;
- supporting women's leadership in early warning and civilian protection mechanisms in **Myanmar**;
- adopting a National action plan on WPS in **Vietnam**;

²⁸⁵ This designation shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of the Member States on this issue.

²⁸⁶ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2025/01/18/israelpalestine-statement-by-the-high-representative-on-behalf-of-the-eu-welcoming-the-ceasefire-and-hostage-deal-in-gaza/>.

²⁸⁷ 'Strengthening Survivor-Centred Responses: Holistic, Comprehensive, Survivor-Centred Gender Based Violence (GBV) in Emergencies programming in Tigray' (EUR 5 million, 12/2021-08/2024), and 'Enhancing Access to Justice for GBV Survivors through Local Engagement in Afar and Amhara regions of Ethiopia' (EUR 1 million, 12/2023-06/2025).

²⁸⁸ 'EU 4 Gender Equality: Together Against Gender Stereotypes and Gender-Based Violence II' programme, implemented by UNFPA and UN Women.

²⁸⁹ 'EU4 Gender Equality – Women's Economic Empowerment and Ending Violence Against Women' implemented in Western Balkan Countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia). *This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

- supporting the set up of formal community early-warning and early response systems in **Somalia**; and
- supporting the institutionalisation and localisation of the WPS agenda in the **Philippines**.

The EU has also used its diplomatic power to

- organise diplomatic briefings on WPS in **Indonesia** and for **ASEAN**;
- organise a host donor group on gender equality in **Turkmenistan**;
- put women's rights on the agenda of the human rights dialogues between the EU and **Indonesia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Laos, Kazakhstan** and **Uzbekistan**; and
- host various meetings with women human rights defenders and supported them directly, for example in **Pakistan**.

Common security and defence policy (CSDP) missions and operations under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument's thematic programme peace, stability and conflict prevention continued to play a key role in delivering on the WPS agenda. In line with the Civilian Operations Commander Operational Guidelines on gender mainstreaming, the missions implement a wide variety of gender mainstreaming measures in their monitoring, mentoring, advising and training activities. Prevention and protection are essential aspects of the missions' mandates, guiding their work in preventing and protecting women and girls from conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence. They also aim to enhance women's participation in the civilian security sector reform by supporting relevant women's association, increasing the possibilities for women to advance in their careers and reforming human resource policies in a gender-sensitive way.

The EU also continued to meet with representatives of women's non-governmental bodies from different parts of the world, and to support the full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership of women and girls in conflict prevention and resolution. A particular focus remained to **strengthen the role of women mediators in all mediation tracks**, with the help of a gender adviser who supports the EU's mediation facility to ensure a gender-responsive approach in all mediation assignments. The EU provided support to women as 'insider mediators'²⁹⁰ in different conflict contexts through implementing partners, and commissioned a study on Regional women mediators networks. The EU also organised regular exchanges on the role of regional women mediators networks and facilitated the EU Community of Practice on Peace Mediation and a workshop on mediation and transitional justice (both in October 2024).

The EU provided targeted support to increase women's participation in the **Middle East** Peace Process. The EUR 1 million **Women's Advisory Board** project, currently in its second phase, supports women's participation in the Syrian peace process. The Women's Advisory Board is the first gender inclusion mechanism created for a UN Special Political Mission. The Board is a group of 15 women from Syria formed in 2016, tasked with advising the UN Special Envoy on all aspects of the political process. It aims to ensure substantial representation of women in the peace talks when engaging with local, national, regional, and international political stakeholders. The group has succeeded in

²⁹⁰ Insider Mediation is a transformative, grassroots approach to peacebuilding in which trusted community members, known as Insider Mediators, resolve local conflicts through dialogue.

bringing together voices from all constituencies, including on more contentious issues such as the preparation of a draft Constitution.

In **Sudan**, the EU provided support for an inclusive political process with an emphasis on the role of (young) Sudanese women through three rounds of civilian stakeholder consultations and a dedicated Youth Dialogue, in addition to support for victims of sexual conflict-related violence. In **Ethiopia**, further mental health and psychosocial support and support for victims of sexual conflict-related violence are planned, to complement existing political dialogues. In the **Central African Republic** and **Mozambique**, the EU funded a project aiming to increase women's effective participation in the armed forces and in interactions between the military and civilian populations. In Bangsaramo, an autonomous region of the **Philippines**, the **Programme on Assistance for Camp Transformation through Inclusion, Violence Prevention, and Economic Empowerment** mainstreams a gender perspective in its efforts to turn the six major declared camps of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front into peaceful and productive communities.

A **new EU gender-responsive conflict analysis methodology** was also defined in early 2024, as provided for in the EU Strategic Compass, based on a joint EU-UN **gender-responsive conflict analysis exercise** which took place between May and September 2024. The exercise piloted both the joint methodology (integrating United Nations Development Programme and EU methodologies) and the joint EU-UN partnership approach.

The human rights situation of women and girls in **Afghanistan** has continued to worsen in 2024. With the codification of a 'morality law' in August 2024, the Taliban have institutionalized a formal system of discrimination, limiting women's ability to participate not only in politics, but also in social, economic and educational activities. The ban on secondary education persists, and the Taliban continue to systematically restrict access to the formal education system, limiting the choice of education options, and even curtailing education abroad. Exceptions in some sectors such that were initially spared, such as health, have since been rolled back (women were barred from attending medical training in December 2024). The bans on female employees in NGOs (December 2022) and UN agencies (April 2023) have not been lifted. The Prevention of Vice, Promotion of Virtue (PVPV) de facto Ministry has gained additional enforcement powers and continues to enforce economic, social, private and political restrictions against women. Women are regularly subjected to corporal punishment (also in public) by sharia courts.

The EU remains committed to supporting Afghan women and maintains a regular dialogue with women and women's rights activists still in Afghanistan, while also facilitating the safe passage of human rights defenders out of Afghanistan. Since July 2024, the EU Delegation in Afghanistan also acts as co-chair of the gender and human rights sector technical working group in the framework of the Afghanistan Coordination Group. Through the EUR 6 million Afghanistan Inclusive Dialogue Initiative project, the EU supports the integration of women's voices in dialogue formats through training and development for women professionals in Afghanistan (in the media, health and business sectors where women are still allowed to work by Taliban legislation). In addition, through a EUR 15 million partnership with United Nations Development Programme, the EU is actively supporting women's economic empowerment in the private sector.

The EU is implementing and also closely monitoring the principled delivery of aid, in line with the 'for women by women' principle agreed with other major international donors. As part of these

efforts, through a EUR 15 million partnership with UN Women, the EU has funded a gender profile for Afghanistan for 2024 to help to quantify and qualify the extent to which the new Taliban-imposed laws are restricting and inflicting social harm on women, as well as recommendations for how these restrictions can be addressed.

Equal participation and economic empowerment

The EU is committed to women's equal, full and meaningful participation in society, including in the political and economic sphere. The EU aims to foster women's political leadership, as well as their participation in key international sectors where they are under-represented, such as counter-terrorism. In terms of economic empowerment, the EU supports women's participation in the twin digital and green transitions, through gender-responsive investments, and promotes gender equality through trade policy.

In March 2024, the EU launched a new component of its **Women and Youth Democratic Engagement Initiative**²⁹¹, a collaborative effort that aims to advance women's full and effective participation in politics and decision-making worldwide. Funded with EUR 11.5 million for a period of three years, this programme addresses the persistent barriers that hinder women's representation in public life, including entrenched gender stereotypes and discriminatory practices.

The EU also supports a study on **women's political participation and leadership in ASEAN**, working together with the ASEAN Committee on Women. The Study aims to provide recommendations by 2025 to institutionalise a mechanism for tracking regional progress in women's political participation and leadership.

Already in 2022, the Council of the European Union recognised that the global effort to **prevent and counter terrorism and violent extremism** should entail a strong gender-responsive dimension. The EU's efforts to implement this vision include support for gender mainstreaming in the work of the **Global Counter Terrorism Forum**, as well as a new project on 'Women in counter-terrorism' (EUR 3.5 Million) due to be launched in 2025, which will seek to increase women's active and meaningful participation and representation in security and counterterrorism across the globe. As part of the **CT JUST programme**, the European Commission aims to increase the presence of women in law enforcement agencies to improve the capabilities of the authorities along the whole anti-terrorist criminal chain. In the southern Mediterranean, the EU-funded 'Momentum' regional project partnering with Interpol strengthens gender mainstreaming in law enforcement institutions. The **Investment Climate Reform facility** co-funded by the EU strengthened its work on business environment reforms facilitating women's participation in the economy. The EU continued to promote women's entrepreneurship and access to work through the **Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) gender facility**, whereby the European Commission supports the European Investment Bank to lend to African local and regional banks to improve women's access to finance and entrepreneurship, and the Team Europe initiative '**Investing in Young Businesses in Africa**' (IYBA). In 2024, a new IYBA programme Market Creation Platform was approved to support young and growing businesses, in particular women-led businesses.

²⁹¹ https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/news-and-events/news/eu-and-partners-launch-wyde-womens-leadership-initiative-2024-03-14_en.

The EU also promoted and supported women's economic empowerment in its neighbourhood region, for instance through the **regional Team Europe Initiative on Jobs through Trade and Investment in the Southern Neighbourhood**, the first regional action fully dedicated to improving access to finance and financial inclusion for women entrepreneurs in the southern Mediterranean, and through the regional **'EU 4 Gender Equality – Women's Economic Empowerment and Ending Violence Against Women'** programme, which seeks to promote women and girls' participation in society and to boost women's economic potential.

The EU continued to be an active member of the **informal working group on trade and gender** in the World Trade Organization. At the 13th Ministerial Conference in 2024, the informal working group launched, together with the working group on micro, small and medium enterprises, a compendium of financial inclusion initiatives for women entrepreneurs. The EU also worked with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) on the **Trade for Decent Work** project, which aims to improve the application of ILO fundamental conventions in selected countries that trade with the EU, including by improving working conditions for women and ensuring compliance with fundamental conventions 100 and 111 on equal remuneration and non-discrimination. The EU provided more than EUR 9 million in funding for the project between 2019 and 2024.

Trade and gender equality objectives are an integral part of **EU trade and investment agreements**. In 2024 and in early 2025, agreements with Angola, Chile, Kenya and New Zealand entered into force containing **legally binding and enforceable commitments on gender equality**. In December 2024, the EU and Mercosur reached a political agreement on a trade agreement which contains similar provisions. As part of the work under the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) Trade and Gender Recommendations, the EU and Canada organised two workshops on trade and gender equality in 2024. Under the EU's Generalised Scheme of Preferences, the EU monitors beneficiary countries' compliance with the principles of core international conventions on promoting women's rights and gender equality.

To better understand the impact of trade on women, all the Commission's *ex-ante* and *ex-post* evaluations of trade agreements contain a dedicated gender analysis. In 2024, the *ex-post* evaluation of the Economic Partnership Agreement between the EU and the Southern African Development Community countries was concluded. In addition, the Commission launched in 2024 *ex-post* evaluations of the EU-Canada and the EU-Japan trade agreements, which also include dedicated gender analyses, with results expected in 2025.

Conclusion

As we approach the end of the 2020-2025 gender equality strategy, we see that the journey to achieving full gender equality remains a long and arduous one. Following the 2024 European Parliament election, we saw for the first time in the European Parliament's history a decline in the share of women Members. The headlines in the past year from Afghanistan's ban on women's participation in public life to the harrowing case of Gisèle Pelicot in France, serve as stark reminders that progress on gender equality is fragile and that it still takes extraordinary resilience to fight for women's rights.

Moreover, women continue to be under-represented in decision-making positions and to bear the brunt of care and household tasks. Yet these persisting challenges must be compared to the advances in recent years, which would have been unthinkable only a couple of decades back. The first mandate of President von der Leyen (2019-2024) has been consequential in terms of EU legislation on gender equality, which has brought important developments in equal pay, gender-balanced company boards, work-life balance and combating violence against women. Coordinated common efforts are now needed to ensure that these pieces of legislation are properly implemented, so that the rights and dignity of women and girls will finally and consistently be enforced, protected and promoted.

It is clear that we need to do much more. EIGE's Gender Equality Index shows that Europe is heading in the right direction, but progress varies greatly among Member States with a major gap between the highest and lowest scoring Member State. In addition, the ongoing struggles women face in certain Member States and outside the EU against restrictions and backsliding on women's rights for instance in Iran where women resist to compulsory veiling, underscore the need for continued action and vigilance. When change does not come naturally, it is our collective responsibility to take action.

In light of these challenges, striving for equality for all and equality in all of its senses will continue to be central to the Commission's work throughout the next five years. The upcoming roadmap for women's rights will reaffirm the fundamental right of equality between women and men in all areas of life. It will offer a vital opportunity to reflect and strategise on long-term goals of the Union of equality that we want to eventually build together.