

Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men

Opinion on Gender Pay Gap

The Opinion of the Advisory Committee does not necessarily reflect the positions of the Member States and does not bind the Member States

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1. INTRODUCTION

Gender equality is a core value of the European Union, enshrined since 1957 in the European Treaties.

The principle of equal pay is also incorporated in the Directive 2006/54/EC on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation (Gender Equality Recast Directive). In line with Article 157 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the Directive states that for the same work or work of equal value, direct and indirect discrimination on grounds of sex with regard to all aspects and conditions of remuneration shall be eliminated.

While the equal pay principle has been an integral part of the Treaties for 60 years and has since been further developed in EU law and national laws of the Member States, it is not yet a reality at work. Women in the EU, across the economy, earn on average over 16% less per hour than men do. However, the gender pay gap varies across EU Member States.

A recent study of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) highlights that women's unequal pay does not just disadvantage women but is a cost for the whole society. There is a strong empirical link between the gender pay gap, GDP, child poverty and skills shortages. As a consequence, the cost of the underuse of women's skills is even economically unjustified¹.

2. CAUSES OF THE GENDER PAY GAP

Gender pay gap is the difference in gross hourly earnings between men and women across the economy. It stands at 16.3% in Europe. Research² identifies some of its drivers:

- Horizontal segregation (women are clustered in low paying occupations or sectors);
- Vertical segregation or glass ceiling (the under-representation of women in senior and leadership positions)³;
- Inequalities in hours spent on home duties, which are reflected in a higher proportion of women working part-time and/or a higher proportion of women making career interruptions⁴. This tends to limit women's career progression, and to lower their hourly wage;
- Insufficient or lack of affordable and quality care services for dependent people (children under 6, elderly and people with disabilities), as well as of flexible working arrangements and adequate family-leave schemes for both women and men.

¹ EIGE (2017), *Economic Benefits of Gender Equality in the European Union. How closing the gender gaps in labour market activity and pay leads to economic growth*, available at: <http://eige.europa.eu/rdc/eige-publications>

² European Network of Experts on Gender Equality (2016), "[Magnitude and impact factors of the gender pay gap in EU Countries](#)"

³ OECD (2017.), *OECD Employment Outlook*: available at <http://www.oecd.org/els/oecd-employment-outlook-19991266.htm>

⁴ Research shows that career interruptions, part-time work and other non-standard work patterns are associated to a penalty in *hourly wage*.

These statistically observable factors do not explain the entire pay gap. Other factors play a role, such as:

- pay discrimination (a woman may be paid less than a man for the same job or for a job of equal value; and work typically done by women is paid less than work typically done by men, even when it is of equal value);
- differences in professional experience or accountable years of service, also related to career interruptions;
- differences in availability to travel, to relocate, to stay long and unpredictable hours or to compete.

This is also related to a culture of “presenteeism” where presence is valued in and of itself, rather than being based on results delivered regardless of where it is delivered from. Each of the drivers contributes only to a part of the gender pay gap, and not all drivers contribute equally in all countries. Moreover, the gender pay gap does not affect all women the same way: race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, level of education, location and other social or personal circumstances of women may affect the parity in earnings with men for work of equal value to different extents.⁵

3. CONTEXT

EU legislative framework on equal pay

The principle of equal pay between women and men is enshrined in Article 157 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

In line with this Treaty provision, the Gender Equality Recast Directive states that for the same work or work to which equal value is attributed, direct and indirect discrimination on grounds of sex with regard to all aspects and conditions of remuneration shall be eliminated. In particular, where a job classification system is used for determining pay, it shall be based on the same criteria for both men and women and so drawn up as to exclude any discrimination on grounds of sex (Article 4).

In 2013, the Commission adopted a Report on the application of Gender Equality Recast Directive⁶. The findings of the Report indicate that the effective implementation of the equal pay principle in practice is hindered by the lack of transparency in pay systems, the lack of legal certainty on the concept of work of equal value in the absence of a definition or clear assessment criteria for the comparison of different jobs, and by procedural obstacles preventing workers from bringing equal pay claims.

In March 2014, the Commission adopted a Recommendation on strengthening the principle of equal pay between men and women through transparency⁷ (Pay transparency

⁵ http://eige.europa.eu/resources/wcms_371804.pdf

⁶ Report on the application of Directive 2006/54/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation (recast), COM(2013) 861 final

⁷ Commission recommendation of 7 March 2014 on strengthening the principle of equal pay between men and women through transparency (2014/124/EU)

Recommendation), inviting Member States to undertake at least one of the following measures and to notify by the end of 2015.

The Recommendation provides a range of concrete measures to be undertaken, including:

- an entitlement to the employees to request information on pay levels, broken down by gender, for categories of employees doing the same work or work of equal value;
- regular reporting by employers on wage structures by category of employee or position, broken down by gender (limited to large and medium companies);
- pay audits in large companies;
- the inclusion of equal pay issues in collective bargaining.

An Evaluation Report on the implementation of the Pay transparency Recommendation was adopted by the European Commission on 20 November 2017.

The Committee acknowledges that closing the gender pay gap continues to be a key political priority for the European Commission. One of the five main priorities of the Commission's Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality (2016-2019) is to reduce gender pay, earnings and pension gaps, and thus fight poverty among women. To that aim, the Commission adopted on the 20 November 2017 an Action Plan 2017-2019 to tackle the gender pay gap from its different angles⁸. It includes a broad and coherent set of activities to tackle the gender pay gap, both legislative and non-legislative initiatives mutually reinforcing each other.

Furthermore, economic empowerment of women has to be reached through the issue of better reconciliation of working life with private life for men and women and better sharing of household and care responsibilities between women and men. The Commission adopted an Initiative for Work-Life Balance⁹, in April 2017, as a key deliverable of the European Pillar of Social Rights. The main reason behind the initiative is to address women's underrepresentation in the labour market by modernising and adapting the current EU legal and policy framework to today's labour market to allow for parents with children or those with dependent relatives to better balance caring and professional responsibilities. It consists of a package of legislative and non-legislative measures to enhance work-life balance for working parents and carers throughout their working life. The legislative proposal focuses on encouraging both men and women to take up part of care responsibilities in their private life through sharing of family-related leaves and flexible working arrangements. The underlying rationale is that certain parts of leaves would be non-transferable and paid. A series of non-legislative measures was also taken, such as the better use of European funds for child care and long care provisions or measures tackling tax disincentives for second earners.

Equal pay would contribute to achieve the goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy such as reaching a satisfying female employment rate (75%) and the creation of more high-skilled jobs. The Commission therefore pays close attention to gender pay gap in the context of the European Semester, and Estonia received a country specific recommendation to adopt adequate measures to eliminate the gender pay gap.

⁸ http://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/just/item-detail.cfm?item_id=607452

⁹ Communication from the commission to the European parliament, the council, the European economic and social committee and the committee of the regions an initiative to support work-life balance for working parents and carers, COM(2017)0252 final, 25 April 2017.

The European Commission additionally promotes the exchange of good practices. A mutual learning seminar on the gender pay gap, held on 20-21 October 2016¹⁰, provided further insight on the practical implementation and impact of the national measures aiming at tackling pay discrimination and the gender pay gap, including measures on pay transparency.

How can we further bridge the gender pay gap across Member States?

It is important to have a holistic and comprehensive approach to better tackle the gender pay gap. It has multifaceted underlying causes which must be addressed in order to eliminate the barriers women face with regard to their full and equal participation in the labour market. Therefore, awareness raising in all relevant fields is key.

First of all, closing the gender pay gap implies to identify it clearly, with backed evidence from the implementation of the principle of equal pay in practice¹¹.

Moreover, work-life balance is a persistent challenge, since women are the ones predominantly in charge of care and domestic responsibilities.

In spite of better qualifications, women before 34, earn 10% less than men in 10 Member States (Eurostat, 2015). In order to better include women in the labour market and therefore increase their opportunities, work-life balance policies and combating persisting stereotypes on gender roles are a necessary preliminary step towards gender equality.

Member States have an essential role to play in tackling the issue of the gender pay gap. In fact, an institutional and solid legislative framework is crucial to compensate the lack of income of women.

Useful tools such as equality plans at company and sectoral level and effective sanctions seem to have a positive effect on reducing the gender pay gap. Quotas might also be used, in accordance to European legal framework, even if it must be borne in mind that they fight symptoms more than the deep reasons of the gender gap.

National and local coordination must be strengthened, with the involvement of a diversity of actors, including public authorities at all levels, social partners and civil society organizations.

¹⁰ Cf Mutual Learning Programme (MLP) in gender equality:

https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/justice-and-fundamental-rights/discrimination/gender-equality/who-we-work-gender-equality/mutual-learning-programme-gender-equality_en

¹¹ See section 4.2 of the Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the application of Directive 2006/54/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation (recast), COM (2013)0861 final: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52013DC0861>

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Commission's Action Plan to tackle the gender pay gap prioritizes 8 areas for action:

- 1 - Improving the application of the equal pay principle
- 2 - Combating segregation in occupations and sectors
- 3 - Breaking the ceiling: initiatives to combat vertical segregation
- 4 - Tackling the care penalty
- 5 - Better valorising women's skills, efforts and responsibilities
- 6 - Unveiling inequalities and stereotypes
- 7 - Alerting and informing about the gender pay gap
- 8 - Enhancing partnerships to tackle the gender pay gap

4.1. Improving the application of the equal pay principle¹²

Ensuring the application of the equal pay principle requires, as a first step, more transparency on wages.

The lack of transparency is present at three levels: first, companies hardly ever publish salary scales and the criteria used to set these wages remain unclear; second, there is no legal clear enforcement of pay transparency; and third, the monitoring of the application of national measures is still hardly accomplished or difficult to implement.

The gender pay gap is a complex indicator. Econometric analysis allows separating and measuring the drivers of the gender pay gap¹³.

Together, the observable factors account for major parts of the gender pay gap. The "unexplained" component (10.9 percentage points overall) is not necessarily equivalent to the extent of gender discrimination in wage-setting. It could also be due to the influence of unobserved characteristics (e.g. different negotiation skills). Other dataset and research shows that:

- part of the pay gap can be explained by direct discrimination;¹⁴
- non-cognitive skills seem to have great influence upon the gender pay gap (negotiation skills, ability to compete or to negotiate, interpersonal skills, etc.), without always being conclusive¹⁵. The interplay between pay, gender and non-cognitive skills is complex, as women may actually be penalised for competing or negotiating. The context also

¹² BusinessEurope, CEEP, UEAPME do not share the analysis of the problem and the recommendations put forward by the Opinion in this part.

¹³ European Network of Experts on Gender Equality (2016), "[Magnitude and impact factors of the gender pay gap in EU Countries](#)".

¹⁴ Francine D. Blau and Lawrence M. Kahn (2017), The Gender-Wage Gap: Extent, Trends, and Explanations, *Journal of Economic Literature*, forthcoming.

¹⁵ *ibid*

matters: women tend to negotiate as much as men when it is explicitly stated that wages are negotiable and that negotiation is therefore an appropriate behaviour.

Moreover, existing European data does not fully capture the evolving world of work. Comparable disaggregated statistics is a valuable tool to use to address the gender pay gap since it raises visibility and helps monitor progress, or regression, with regards to gender equality. More statistics, research and analysis are therefore welcomed. In particular, the development of the "platform" economy and its effects upon the gender gap are not clearly identified. The development of "alternative work" might also widen the gender pay gap, since this trend affects more women than men, and is associated to lower pay¹⁶.

The Committee recommends therefore to:

- Take into account life-time earnings and long terms effects of the gender pay gap, especially concerning pensions, and not only the difference between the average earnings of women and men;
- Oblige companies to publish average wages and salary complements and/ or bonuses per gender without imposing unnecessary burden to companies, and make sure the data is shared with employee representatives and taken into account in collective bargaining;
- Improve transparency of pay at individual level by clearly consecrating an individual right to request and obtain information on aggregated pay levels – not on individual pay levels, to prevent creating an adversarial workplace. Furthermore, this right might also be given to local union representatives or other representatives of the personnel.

The gender pay gap is a multifaceted phenomenon. Closing the gender pay gap therefore needs a comprehensive approach, including both legislative and non-legislative actions. It requires the efforts and commitment of all players, decision-makers at EU and national level, and stakeholders.

According to the survey¹⁷, notable proportion of the gender pay gap can only be explained by discriminatory practices, in spite of the normative enshrinement of equality between men and women. The existing evidence indicates a sizeable problem concerning the effective implementation of the principle of equal pay in practice. Non-transparency of pay is a key contributing factor to the persistent pay discrimination and tackling this problem would help to better implement the principle of equal pay and reduce the gender pay gap.

Pay transparency and gender-neutral job evaluation and evaluation systems in collective bargaining and companies are instrumental to reveal gender bias or discrimination in the pay structures of a company, and industry or a sector. They support social partners to take concrete action to ensure the effective implementation of the equal pay principle at the work place level.

The broad variety of wage systems existing in the Member States must however be taken into account. If wage setting policies are, in application of the principle of subsidiarity, better

¹⁶ Krueger and Katz (2016), *The Rise and Nature of Alternative Work Arrangements in the United States, 1995-2015*.

¹⁷ Francine D. Blau and Lawrence M. Kahn (2017), *The Gender-Wage Gap: Extent, Trends, and Explanations*, *Journal of Economic Literature*, forthcoming.

addressed at the national level, the EU might foster the spread of good practices and adopt, to a certain extent, common standards.

The Committee recommends therefore to:

- Adopt legally binding pay transparency requirements such as mandatory pay audits and rules on effective, proportionate and dissuasive sanctions in case of breach, such as common minimum and maximum standards for the amount of financial sanctions;
- Exploring the practice of suing for damages, including lost income (in line with established practice in the field of occupational injury), as well as alternative forms of sanctions (losing public contracts in case of breach) may be fruitful;
- Develop the use of pay calculators that help employees better understand what salary they should receive for a given job, sector, and locality, as already developed in a number of countries (such as France, Spain, Belgium, Netherlands, Austria);
- Encourage the negotiation of gender-neutral job descriptions, pay structures and wages, taking into consideration and equally valuing work of equal value wage increases through cross-sector collective bargaining to better tackle gender pay gap. However, to make sure that cross-sectoral wage increases do not result in an increase for all without tackling the gap, ensure that the value attributed to different types of work is apprehended through the concept of “work of equal value”.

Continued non-compliance with the principle of equal pay for equal work and work of equal value acts as a disincentive for women to enter the job market and has detrimental effects on the EU's employment and growth rates and the achievement of Europe 2020 objectives, particularly as regards the target of a 75% employment rate. One challenge of the implementation on the ground of the principle of equal pay is the notion of "work of equal value" to assess whether someone has been discriminated or not.

The Committee recommends therefore to:

- Raise awareness of the employees and employers about the notion of equal pay for work of equal value, to make them fully aware of what is matter of discriminatory practices and what is not;
- Clarify the notion of work of equal value in line with the case law of the Court of Justice of the European Union with the development of criteria and methodology to assess work of equal value.

The role of equality bodies

To combat discrimination and ensure equal treatment, equality bodies are essential to move from "the law on paper to the law in practice" and to ensure that the legal rights are actually applied on the ground. The Commission in its communication on the EU Justice agenda for 2020,

has also highlighted the key role that equality bodies can play in ensuring effective remedies to citizens¹⁸.

The Committee recommends therefore to:

- Grant national equality bodies sufficient powers and adequate resources to implement all their functions, in particular to promote and support gender equality and good practices by employers, service providers and policy makers; and fully enable them to conduct research and investigations on issues of inequality and discrimination, in particular on the work-place.
- Empower equality bodies to support employers where this is not already the case, including adequate competence and resources to provide training to employers, and/or support companies in drafting equality plans or carrying out pay audits as necessary;
- Strengthen support mechanisms for victims of discrimination, including access to redress by enabling collective complaints on equal pay and reinforcing equality bodies' competences to support victims¹⁹

Generalize good practices

To better tackle gender pay gap and ensure an equal pay between men and women, some Member States have recently adopted legally binding measures to improve pay transparency and also soft measures on a voluntary basis.

In **Germany**, a recently adopted law²⁰ provides an individual right to obtain information about pay for employees in establishments with more than 200 employed persons. In addition, an obligation to report on equality and equal pay of women and men is introduced for employers with more than 500 employees.²¹ In the **United Kingdom**, law²² states that companies with 250 or more employees must annually publish information about gender pay gaps.

In **Spain**, a self-diagnosis gender pay gap tool²³, presented on the occasion of the Equal Pay Day 2015, enables companies to identify and correct wage inequalities between women and men. This tool, developed by the Institute of Women and for Equal Opportunities, allows companies to do a comparative analysis of women and men's salaries, to identify the origins of wage differences, if they exist, and possible actions to correct them. Additionally, the equal pay principle is taken into consideration in company equality plans and in Gender Equality Seal, granted to companies.

Iceland adopted in 2017 the Equal Pay Standard which is a management standard for equal pay. The law requires companies and public institutions with more than 50 employees on a yearly basis to have an equal pay certification.

¹⁸ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, EU Justice Agenda for 2020 – Strengthening trust, mobility and growth within the Union, C(2014)144 final, 11 March 2014.

¹⁹ "Working Paper on Developing Standards for Equality Bodies", Equinet, 2016: http://www.equineteurope.org/IMG/pdf/equinet_workingpaper_standardsnebs.pdf

²⁰ Law of 6th of July 2017 to promote transparency in wage structures

²¹ If the employer is obliged to file a management report in accordance with the Commercial Code (HGB).

²² Equality Act 2010 (Gender Pay gap information), Regulations 2017

²³ The tool can be downloaded at <http://www.igualdadenaempresa.es>

Several countries (**Finland, Austria** and **Spain**) added disclosure requirements on the gender composition of boards in their corporate governance codes or regulation.

France has adopted mandatory quotas for women's representation on company's boards as a tool to redress gender imbalance in decision-making bodies. More recently, a network was created involving public and private organizations to share their good management and recruitment practices ("*Réseau des entreprises et des structures publiques pour l'égalité*").²⁴

Portugal has adopted mandatory quotas for women's representation on company's boards as a tool to redress gender imbalance in decision-making bodies.²⁵ CITE, - Comissão for Equality on Work and Employment has promoted a network involving public and private organizations to share their good management and recruitment practices. It has begun in 2013, with 21 organizations. Since December 2017, the network is composed by 68 organizations. (*iGen - Fórum Organizações para a Igualdade*).²⁶

In **Germany**, policies promote a more gender-equal sharing of paid and unpaid work. Germany encourages part-time work among fathers and an equal sharing of paid and unpaid work. This allowance ('ElterngeldPlus', implemented in 2015) comes with a 'Partnership Bonus' whereby each parent can receive up to four additional months of payments if both parents work part-time simultaneously and in parallel for at least four months.

In **Austria**, since 2011, there is a legal obligation to publish the expected salaries in job vacancy advertisements. Also since then, companies are obliged to draw up internal monitoring reports on pay, i.e. disaggregated by gender. These instruments have been evaluated in 2015. Since 2011, also the online wage calculator based on administrative data provides information on sector and profession specific wage bandwidths. In 2017, the project "Fairer Lohn" was launched and provided a business case for fair and equal wages as well as a comprehensive toolbox for drafting, using and analysing income reports for companies. Moreover, a new law on Gender Equality in Boards, entering into force on January 1st 2018, stipulates that at least 30% of the underrepresented gender in the boards of large and publicly listed companies should be added. Since 2011, the Austrian government has already committed to nominate at least 35% women in boards of companies of which the state owns at least 50%. Austria also has introduced a bonus for a paternal leave and a partnership bonus for couples who share the uptake of child care allowance (Kinderbetreuungsgeld) equally (40%- 60%).

In **Denmark**, due to the low number of laws assessed from a gender perspective, the government introduced a reform requiring all public authorities to incorporate gender equality in all planning and administration and also entails organisation of workshops addressed to ministries to help them introduce a gender-sensitive approach to their work.

In **Belgium**, a law aimed at tackling the gender pay gap was adopted in March 2012. This specific law stimulates social dialogue and promotes active involvement of the social partners working at three levels of negotiation: inter-professional, sectoral and company level. Concretely, at sectoral level, the law establishes a review of all job classifications to make sure they are gender-neutral. At company level, the completion of a report on the pay structure gives the opportunity to start a debate on the gender pay gap within the company in order to enhance transparency about wages.

²⁴ More information can be found here: <http://www.egalite-femmes-hommes.gouv.fr/dossiers/egalite-professionnelle/legalite-un-objectif-partage/le-reseau-des-entreprises-et-des-administrations-pour-legalite-ree/>

²⁵ Law 62/2017, August 1st can be found here: <http://cite.gov.pt/pt/destaques/noticia681.html>

²⁶ More information can be found here: http://cite.gov.pt/pt/acite/iGen_2017.html

In **Sweden**, an act called “Framework for active measures with the aim to promote equal rights and opportunities”, was adopted, targeting all types of discrimination (sex/gender, gender identity or expression, ethnic background, religion or other belief, disability, accessibility, sexual orientation and age). Among the changes is the employer’s duty to conduct pay surveys, which were previously required to be carried out every three years, now to be conducted every year by companies with at least 25 employees.

Based on national experiences, the Committee recommends to:

- Introduce equal pay certification for companies showing efficient practices and results;
- "Generalise" the implementation and monitoring of company equality plans, as a good tool to promote gender equality. Therefore, equal pay information and gender-neutral job evaluations should be included as mandatory for both public and private bodies (above a certain size of employees). Pay audits could be part of the gender equality plan’s monitoring and evaluation process. Additionally, equal pay can also be considered an evaluation criteria where gender equality seals are granted to companies with outstanding practices on gender equality;
- Better raise awareness with the Equal pay day and highlighting actions or measures introduced in Member States to address the pay gap;
- Improve gender neutral job classification systems where these are already in place, and support the dissemination of such systems where they do not yet exist;
- Improve and make available tools for companies to implement the principle of equal pay, such as online self-monitoring tools.

4.2. Combating segregation in occupations and sectors

We can notice female-dominated sectors (such as education, health, care) and male-dominated sectors (sciences, construction, ICT) in the labour market. This segregation, added to gender stereotypes, reinforce the gender pay gap across Member States, and lead to constraining professional choices of future generations.

A significant part of the gender gap is due to the fact that women are over-represented in sectors with low pay levels *ceteris paribus* (i.e. for given worker characteristics). Women are represented twice as much as men in health, education and public administration. When we look at the health and social work sector alone, 80% of those working in this sector are women. In **Romania**, for example, gender segregation according to sector widens the gap by 10.3 percentage points.

How can we attract women in male-dominated sectors and reversely?

Remuneration is a key aspect

In some countries setting minimum wages and cross-sectoral wage-settings mechanisms were efficient tools to raise wages in low-paid sectors or occupations and therefore to combat the gender pay gap. For instance, the introduction of a minimum wage in Germany is estimated to reduce the gender pay gap by 2.5 percentage points, to the extent that it had impact on some lower paid sectors where women were more represented than men. Women should also benefit

from the recent minimum wages' increase in some of the countries with the highest gender pay gap (Czech Republic, Slovakia and the UK). More efforts should be deployed to overcome occupational segregation, especially by negotiating larger wage increases for lower paid workers, particularly in female dominated sectors (the so-called 5 'C's': cleaning, catering, caring, cashiering and clerical work). This should be based on a strategy to level out pay differences between female-dominated sectors and male-dominated sectors. To that extent, particular attention must be paid to low paid sectors, often dominated by women and or/and migrant workers.

Although gender segregation already exists at early biographical stages, it is often widened by later adaptation and the selective behaviour of institutions and employers. Research shows that women who have undertaken sciences and mathematics studies are more likely than their male counterpart to drop out of these sectors after studying. In the Netherlands for instance, one year after graduation 37% of the women with a degree in science or technology works in a technical working environment compared to 64 % of men.²⁷

As a consequence, employers have a key role to play in ensuring inclusive cultures and recruitment. There is a need to strengthen policies targeted at reconciliation and equal sharing of household and care responsibilities, ensuring non-discrimination as well as transparency in recruitment and promotion processes.

Gender stereotypes can affect career choices

Education achievement is not the best predictor of career aspiration and choices. Gender and socio-economic background have an impact on career expectations, even among students of similar performances in science and who reported the same level of enjoyment of science. It is therefore necessary to ensure that educational curricula at all levels eliminate gender traditional stereotyping about the roles of boys/men and girls/women, assuring that educational and professional paths are non-sexist and not conditioned by cultural or social stereotypes. Co-educational learning systems should be implemented and strengthened from early stages, as children and students should be exposed to both male and female role models in staff, teachers, senior students, etc. Additionally, girls and boys should be told about the impact and consequence of gender segregation and about different educational choices and real future career opportunities. Boys and girls should also be given practical experience in sectors dominated by opposite sex.

Employers should try to offer cross-field job offers and create more gender-neutral work policy and welcoming and safe working environment. Companies with gender imbalance (ICT, engineering) should be steered to get more contacts with schools, high schools and vocational training centres. European Social Fund (ESF) should support training and job creation in non-segregated occupations. ESF management authorities should be trained to ensure effective gender mainstreaming.

Targeted support and guidance aiming at challenging stereotypes (girls' day, role models, mentoring programme) may have contributed to close the gender gap in sciences and mathematics studies in some countries (such as the Netherlands). However, robust evaluation is too often lacking²⁸.

²⁷ E. Berkhout & M. Volkerink (2015), *Weglek van bètatechnisch personeel*, SEO Discussion Paper 81

²⁸ See the results of the mutual learning seminar on segregation.

Education and mass-media have a great role to play. Therefore, strong media campaigns to combat stereotypes and challenge the so-called “male” and “female” attitudes and/or behaviours, should be carried out, and sufficient funds to continue campaign for equal pay.

Gender stereotype free career guidance and counselling should be provided at an early age

Counselling can play a crucial role in countering segregation mechanisms by providing students with transparent information about returns to educational investments. Robust evidence shows that girls changed career choices when they have access to information about wages and returns to educational achievements. Detailed information on wages contributed to decrease segregation and improve women’s earnings’ potential²⁹.

The implementation, evaluation and monitoring of Equality Plans in early childcare, schools, vocational learning centres and universities could help address stereotypes from an early stage.

The Committee recommends therefore to:

- Ensure that educational curricula at all levels eliminate gender traditional stereotyping about the roles of boys/men and girls/women, assuring that educational and professional paths are non-sexist and not conditioned by cultural or social stereotypes. Co-educational learning systems should be implemented and strengthened from early stages, as children and students should be exposed to both male and female role models in staff, teachers, senior students, etc.;
- Offer a work culture allowing for work-life balance in better paid sectors and in leadership and decision-making positions;
- Ensure equal and proportional representation of women and men in collective bargaining teams, especially in male dominated sectors, and ensure that pay for equal work and work of equal value is mainstreamed as a concern for collective bargaining in all sectors;
- Encouraging companies with gender imbalance in their workforce (e.g. from ICT, Engineering sectors, etc.) and interested in attracting new and diverse talent, to be in close contact with schools, high schools and vocational training centres so that kids and young people can visit, participate in workshops and know more about the type of career they offer, highlighting the contributions of the underrepresented sex to those sectors, e.g. in STEM³⁰;
- Create positive role-models, making visible female role models in male dominated sectors and vice versa, as well as banning and denouncing stereotyped images of women and men;
- Support tailored and active labour market programs, skills development opportunities and strong media campaigns that encourage women and men not only to enter or move into non-stereotypical spheres but also to remain and advance in their careers.

²⁹ “Gender, information barriers and fields of study choice: a field experiment” Carlo Barone, Antonio Schizzerotto, Giovanni Maria Abbiati, Giulia Assirelli, 2017, LIEPP Working Paper n° 63

³⁰ Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

How can we improve mutual learning between Member States about this issue?

A lot has already been done in terms of mutual learning and there is a general support for further continuation of the programme. Even though conditions vary between Member States and applying concepts from peers can be difficult, the exchange of practice should continue. Both political and technical level should be involved.

The Committee recommends therefore to:

- Showcase the success stories within the mutual learning programme, highlighting the business case of gender equality to attract more interest;
- Update the toolkit realized by EU Social Partners for gender equality in practice in 2015;
- Organize regular twinning programmes between key stakeholders (government, women organizations, employees and employers organizations, companies, schools).

In the long-run, how can we deconstruct predominant stereotypes prior to entering the labor market?

On average, non-segregation in the labour market has evolved very slowly, despite numerous EU, international, national, sector initiatives aiming to tackle it.

There is a need to think towards the future and to change mind-sets through education. Cooperation between business and education can also increase the attractiveness of sectors and professions for all women and men. All stakeholders need to be engaged in career counselling and guidance free from gender bias, such as schools, employers, unions, and parents and help in choosing career according to individual abilities, talents, learnings and wishes. Women should be represented at all levels in occupational decision making structures.

There is a need to raise awareness among creators and push for creating and disseminating powerful non-stereotyped characters in comics, toys, games including computer games, cartoons, etc.

The Committee recommends therefore to:

- Target the early childhood as a key period for the construction of gender stereotyping;
- Evaluate curriculum programmes in order to eliminate gender stereotyping about the role of men and women;
- Elaborate and widely disseminate quality educational tools on gender equality, user friendly and accessible to the teaching community;
- Improve teachers, media professionals and media content creators' training on gender issues, making them aware of the presence and effects of gender stereotypes in their practices for children and young people;
- Draw a code of conduct for media and reinforce legislation on sanctions to promote equality of treatment in the workplace and ensure that employees do not experience discrimination on the basis of gender;

- Make universities aware of their responsibility to promote gender equality in their capacity as educational bodies for future managers, by drafting curricula which include tackling gender stereotypes and promotion of gender equality and reconciliation of work and family life;
- Encourage the creation and dissemination of powerful non-stereotyped boys and girls characters in attractive format for children, teenagers and adults (comics, games applications, etc.);
- Introduce gender quotas in school governing board and ensure gender balance in the appointment of officers in position of responsibilities in schools.

4.3. Breaking the glass ceiling: initiatives to combat vertical segregation

The gender pay gap is mainly attributed to observable factors, such as the concentration of women in low-paid jobs. Women are frequently employed as administrative assistants, shop assistants or low-skilled or unskilled workers – these occupations accounting for almost half of the female workforce. Even if younger generations of women are making inroads into some of the higher-earning professional occupations, segregation remains. In a wide range of sectors and occupations, women are confronted with lack of transparency, stereotypes and glass ceiling when it comes to promotion and career prospects. From a microeconomic perspective, it is well established that a range of talents, experience and skills in the boardroom improves business performance and drives economic growth³¹.

How can we improve board gender diversity policies in the EU’s listed companies on stock exchanges?

Stakeholders have developed different ways to promote gender balanced representation on corporate boards. While some companies decided to develop and promote targets on a voluntary basis, a number of countries in Europe adopted legislative actions. Following the Norwegian example (2003), some EU Member states (Spain, 2007; Belgium, France, Italy and Netherlands, 2011; Germany, 2016) have passed “women’s quotas laws”, with different rules in terms of targeted firms, size of the quota, and sanctions for non-compliers. In those countries, changes were more rapid, and reached their targets³².

All in all it could be considered to strengthen the binding character of the EU-level legislation in order to create a minimum-level playing field, while taking into account differences of corporate management systems in Member States.

Setting rules for the better transparency of the selection of board members and better gender balance in corporate boards is an essential tool to move towards the objectives of the EU in terms of social progress and gender equality. Self-regulation is a useful approach as it helps to change attitudes, encourages the business world to start looking for women candidates and creates public debate, it is not however sufficient to achieve more gender-balanced representation on corporate boards in Europe and tackle the root causes of the issue.

³¹ COM(2012) 615 final, p. 13

³² “Quotas have led to More Women on Corporate Boards in Europe”, Simona Comi, Mara Grasseni, Federica Origo and Laura Pagani, in [Global Policy](#), Durnham University, 6 October 2016

New ways of working in selection committees and transparent selection procedures are needed in order to reach out to new potential board members. Clear and formally outlined duties and profile criteria would make the selection more transparent, ensuring that the most suitable persons are chosen. With formal recruitment policies, recruiters may have to expand their perspective and also motivate/justify their choice. This will help recruiting beyond traditional circles and among the huge pool of competent women available in Europe who are ready to serve on boards and executive top management positions.

The Committee recommends therefore to:

- Speed up the adoption of the proposal for a Directive improving the gender balance among non-executive directors of companies listed on stock exchanges and related measures;
- Consider extending the scope of Directive 2014/95/EU of 22 October 2014 amending Directive 2013/34/EU as regards disclosure of non-financial and diversity information on gender pay gaps and promoting of equal opportunities for women by certain large undertakings and groups;
- Encourage companies to commit themselves to develop and implement targeted measures to achieve those targets, by insisting on the positive impact for themselves to adopt such measures;
- Facilitating economic incentives to companies with outstanding practices regarding gender equality, including gender balance in their decision-making bodies. In this regard, public procurement has a great potential to promote gender equality;
- Supporting female leadership training and personal development initiatives, including facilitating cross-mentoring and networking opportunities, as well as initiatives, such as development of databases, that enhance the visibility of professional women. Those measures should be implemented for both the private and public sector;
- Encourage change in organisational culture and management models, by introducing communication programmes for employers and employees to deconstruct perceptions and stereotypes regarding male and female roles, and awareness programmes to achieve fairer distribution of caregiving tasks, given that those responsibilities often prevent women in their careers from having the “critical experiences” which give access to management jobs.

As the glass ceiling affects different layers of society, how can we develop interdisciplinary dialogue and involve the key relevant actors in policy-making?

Real commitment and political will are necessary to gather all the relevant actors in a Forum with experts on gender equality and gender diversity to commit to real actions in the short-term.

Using consultative tools such as advisory groups and permanent expert consultations panels interdisciplinary dialogue needs to be promoted by high-level agents and committed stakeholders, moving from top to down. Social partners and other relevant stakeholders need to be actively involved and they have to be encouraged to drawing up their Equality Plans.

The Committee recommends therefore to:

- Improve awareness (among companies and policy-makers) on the business case of gender diversity in corporate management and mainstreaming the image of women as competent decision makers and leaders;
- Promote and support networks of companies with outstanding policies and practices on gender equality, and on gender balance in decision-making to share their experiences showing other companies the benefits of gender equality for growth and productivity, etc.;
- Encourage social partners to negotiate Equality Plans at company and sectoral level.

How can we create incentives for women to apply for decision-making positions?

By mentoring programmes, creating positive role-models in different fields, but also slowly but steadily **changing the expectations and working culture** of leadership. Being on a top-position can easily ward off women because it's seen "traditionally" as very "masculine" as well as challenging – that is competitive and highly demanding in means of working hours and time as well as human relationships. Changing the essence or even simply the image of leadership is a very difficult thing to do.

At the same time, **accessible and affordable child care or other dependent's care** possibilities for all women and men is a prerequisite for a stronger participation of women in the labour market.

Since women still do the major part of care work, for women with children good childcare-facilities as well as part-time Leadership programmes could serve as an incentive. It is important to adopt measures to enable the reconciliation of work, private and family life and supporting a more equal sharing of household and care responsibilities; more reasonable working-hours and methods; specific leadership training, coaching and mentoring programmes for women; etc.

However, it must be borne in mind that these measures will have a greater impact on newcomers in the labour market, since women who might qualify for decision making positions are generally older: the impact of new work-life balance schemes will be less important.

Changing of the stereotypes on the image of a female leader and models of leadership in general, including role models, could be enhanced by cooperation with media – by regularly publishing positive stories of top-position women, giving all women a voice on more prominent and credible issues on prime time etc.

Furthermore, other actions should include mentoring programs to counteract informal networks, ensuring work-life balance policies apply to senior management and decision making positions as well as lower down in the organization, ensuring transparent recruitment processes to leadership positions, fostering women's networks that can identify talent and potential leadership skills. The identification of talents and the promotion of opportunities for women to apply for decision-making positions via employers' federations and business schools' alumni associations would also create better career opportunities.

The Committee recommends therefore to:

- Speed up the adoption of the 2017 Commission Proposal on Work-life balance for parents and carers³³;
- Involve public employment services, vocational training bodies, social partners and companies in coaching, cross-mentoring and networking activities for women;
- Promote and support measures aiming at changing the stereotyped image of a female leader.

How can we sanction employers that do not comply with the equal opportunity principle?

According to the jurisprudence of the CJEU, sanctions should be "effective", "proportionate" and "dissuasive". Various sanctions are possible depending on the specific corporate law of the Member State, such as the publication of a final decision on a sanction, including the identity of the liable legal person, disclosing and publishing company figures on gender equality, temporary exclusion from entitlement to access to public funding or public contracts, etc. Although the "name and shame" approach cannot effectively replace sanctions, such an approach can effectively complement it. For example, the United Kingdom's "comply or explain" approach, actively supported and monitored by its government, has seen the representation of women on boards increase from 13% in 2010 to 27% in 2016.

National Equality bodies and/or Labour Inspectorates bodies have varying functions and powers, and while some are able to issue monetary sanctions, many have recourse mainly to public naming and shaming, which can be an effective sanction vis-à-vis employers concerned with their public image. Such sanctioning has to take into consideration the individual wishes of the complainant, who may be wary of public exposure. Excluding companies that fail to live up to the legal standards of equal pay from public procurement contracts can also send a strong signal of commitment to equal pay.

Certain national equality bodies have the power to initiate *ex officio* investigations without recourse to an individual complaint. When finding breaches of equal treatment legislation, such equality bodies may be able to sanction the offending employer. Any provision on sanctions should take into consideration the possibility of sanctioning structural discrimination by an employer, and not only individual compensation for single victim(s) of discrimination that decide to make a complaint.

The Committee recommends therefore to:

- Have a holistic and complementary approach mixing both legally binding measures and non-legislative measures;
- Ensure that sanctions in Member States are "effective", "proportionate" and "dissuasive";
- Develop targeted the "name and shame" approaches, complementing binding measures;
- Consider enhancing the role of national equality bodies and/or labour inspectorate bodies by

³³ Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU.

ensuring their powers enable them to address the structural aspects of discrimination, alongside providing support to individual complainants.

4.4. Tackling the care penalty

In comparison with men, women still devote a much bigger proportion of their time to children and other dependents' care and domestic housework.

These activities impose huge constraints on the way they can engage with the labour market, which results in potentially discouraging women to be fully involved in their professional activities through what is called the "double burden". This phenomenon is called "motherhood penalty" or "care penalty". This is not only at the time when there are small children in the household, but might also be the case towards the end of the career, when care responsibilities for other relatives, such as elderly parents, partner and possibly grandchildren are more intensive. Women are more likely than men to adapt their work engagement in function of their care responsibilities, children or other dependent relatives, which can be translated in different ways; through leaving the labour market temporarily or permanently or reduce their working hours, again temporarily or permanently or taking those jobs which are compatible with their care responsibilities. Furthermore, transfers back from part time to full time jobs are not always facilitated. This might result in women either having shorter working careers, taking part time and/or lower paid jobs, for a substantial proportion of their working life, which results not only in a gap in pay during their working life, but also in their pensions.

How can we further insist on work-life balance measures?

A mind-shift for men and women to combine work and private life better

A holistic set of measures is needed in order to tackle this issue to the full extent, facilitating in particular the participation of women on the labour market. Indeed, it is not one measure specifically but a set of measures to allow both men and women to combine work with private care responsibilities. The proposal for a Directive on Work-Life Balance is welcomed by the Committee. The initiative includes both legislative and non-legislative measures on a wide range of elements to facilitate work-life balance for working parents and carers.

The Committee believes that the proposed directive carries the potential of a cultural and mindset shift that could enable both men and women in Europe as equal earners and equal carers.

Gender stereotypes affect care activities. An important element to reach a more equal sharing is to break down gender stereotypes and encourage men to take up an equal share of household chores as well as care responsibilities.

A life course perspective on work-life balance

Different care needs arise in different phases in one's life. With a view of avoiding that women would prematurely withdraw from the labour market, with possible implications for their economic independence, pay and pensions, it is important to ensure that different care needs are considered throughout one's life, children, grandchildren and other dependents, such as people with disabilities, seriously ill or elderly relatives throughout one's life course. Quality and accessible care-facilities of all kinds as well as personal and household services could assist workers with care responsibilities and avoid their withdrawal from the labour market. Throughout the life course, it is important to encourage and assist workers in re-entering the

labour market after care or other career breaks. However, a more equal sharing of households and care responsibilities between women and men is also needed.

Improve rights including capacity building to implement rights

Legally binding standards can be a useful step to initiate societal change. As a consequence, the Committee welcomes the inclusion of non-transferable parental leave and paternity leave. It could be considered to go further and provide "care credits" for the periods of leave to be counted for pension rights, something which is not addressed in the Communication on work-life balance. Care credits would equally help to reduce the gender pension gap which currently stands at 40%, in particular by cushioning the negative impact on pensions while not hindering carers to re-entry the labour market. Such issues need to be solved at the appropriate level, such as company or national level. Furthermore, time taken out during family leave should be taken into account for pay increases and pension entitlements. Transferability of working time options, from full time to part time and vice versa are important elements to allow workers to adapt their working hours to their care responsibilities at certain phases in their working life. The feasibility of these measures in small businesses should be taken into account.

The current legal framework protecting persons from maternity and pregnancy discrimination has not changed following failure to progress on the Maternity Leave Directive. Equality bodies in Belgium, Finland, Northern Ireland, and Great Britain have conducted studies³⁴ on the subject), and uncovered the need to continue the conversation on protection during pregnancy and maternity. Dismissal protection will be discussed at an Equinet capacity building seminar for equality bodies and labour inspectorates organized with the European Commission in 2018.

Access to affordable and high quality care arrangements when needed

Affordable and high quality social infrastructure such as care services play a crucial role in ensuring that men and women can combine work with private life throughout their working life, and facilitating their participation on the labour market. They should be flexible, affordable, accessible and adapted to new working time patterns of workers. High quality care depends on fair working conditions within care services, in particular on adequate pay and career opportunities. It is also important to ensure that schooling hours are adapted to working parents or are combined with affordable and high quality after school care systems. This goes together with tackling the idea that childcare services have a necessarily negative impact on children's health and personal development. Contrary evidence can be found, particularly for children from disadvantaged groups³⁵.

OECD reports showed that in Canada, Ireland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Switzerland and the United States, childcare costs can claim more than 20% of the disposable family income of a two-child dual-earner couple on moderate earnings, while rising to above 40% in the UK.

The Committee recommends therefore to:

- Develop more intensively the actions announced in the 2017 Commission Communication on an Initiative for Work Life balance for Parents and Carers. Give more visibility to the outcomes of these actions as an inspiration for further action by all social actors;

³⁴ <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/managing-pregnancy-and-maternity-workplace/pregnancy-and-maternity-discrimination-research-findings>

³⁵ OECD, Starting Strong 2017, Key OECD Indicators on Early Childhood Education and Care, 2017

- Continue the monitoring of the application of the Maternity leave Directive and ensure better implementation of legislation and promote compliance, in particular through a specific study on enforcement of dismissal protection and unfavourable treatment, continuous capacity building activities for equality bodies and other respective labour market supervisory bodies, and other awareness raising measures;
- Organise awareness raising campaigns to make visible the benefits of work-life balance arrangements, also for fathers to make use of them, for their children, for companies and for society as a whole, tackle gender stereotypes with regard to work and care throughout the life course;
- Monitor the “Barcelona targets” on child care, and introduce new targets for other care needs throughout the life cycle. Establish peer-to-peer exchange for member states on care infrastructure. Encourage investments in care economy by all actors in the field, including the European Investment Bank or European Structural funds, in line with the Strategy on Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment adopted in December 2016;
- Support public investment in facilities for early childhood and elderly care centres as well as care for the elderly wishing to continue living in the community;
- Promote quality jobs in the care economy as a way of recognising its value;
- Promote decent work for care professionals, recognise, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work through public and/or accessible private care services and changes, when necessary, in social infrastructures.

How can we encourage men to bear family and caring responsibilities?

Tackle prejudices with regard to men and women's roles in society

One of the crucial elements is to change cultural prejudices. Having more men involved in care and working in the care economy and redefine the notion of masculinity by including nurturing capabilities is fundamental. This would go hand in hand with tackling stereotypes and cultural assumptions with regards to men and women's work. This would include the creation of a climate where men share care responsibilities more equally with women.

Incentive men and women to take up care leave

In order to encourage both men and women to take up parts of the care leave, it is important to make it financially attractive for both parents to take up this leave and to ensure protection against discrimination for both women and men when taking or planning leaves.

Three elements could play a role in the determination whether men also take up some of the care leave: payment of the leave, earmarking of certain periods of leave for each of the parents, and adding a financial bonus for the second parent to take up some of the leave. Next to this, flexible work arrangements with regard to time and space can assist both men and women to combine better work and family life.

A family-friendly work environment

Company culture and practices also play a role in the engagement of both parents in care at home. Hence it would be important to encourage companies and to develop a business case for family-friendly work practices in companies. These family-friendly work policies should explicitly target both women and men.

The Committee recommends therefore to:

- Speed-up the adoption of the Proposal for a Directive on Work-life balance for parents and carers, focusing on a more equal sharing of care leaves and flexible working time arrangements;
- Develop awareness raising campaigns to tackle cultural prejudices with regard to men and women's roles in society, including both in work and in private care and insisting on the positive impact of work-life balance for fathers, mothers and families as well as economic return of public investment in care services;
- Encourage businesses and institutions to adopt family-friendly practices, in male-dominated sectors especially;
- Combat discrimination in the up-take of statutory leave, family leaves and flexible work arrangements. Men are also victims of this type of discrimination;
- Involve men especially those in leadership roles as active participants and agents of change. The promotion of gender equality could benefit from the example of male public figures from politics and business sectors arguing publicly in favour of men's right to be caregivers and to structure their working time so as to reconciling their careers and family life.

4.5. Drawing full benefits of women's skills, efforts and responsibilities

Women and men need to be equally acknowledged for their professional efforts and performances. In fact, female-dominated sectors offer lower-paid jobs, which are unlikely to attract the most ambitious individuals.

What initiatives can be undertaken to promote jobs in terms of wages and skills in those fields?

Reappraisal of female dominated sectors with a focus on better pay and more career opportunities are needed. There is a scope for potential involvement of government and incentives from EU in this respect. Paid care work should be rewarded with an adequate remuneration.

An objective approach to equal pay for work of equal value is needed.

The Committee recommends therefore to:

- Launch a high-level public debate on the central role for growth and sustainability of childcare, elderly care, self-care, and caregiving, including the (monetary) value generated by these sectors for society and the extent to which this is remunerated with a view to re-valuing this type of work in line with the principles laid down in

jurisprudence on work of equal value;

- Set a clear framework for gender neutral job evaluations, and highlight the benefits of such evaluation systems for companies;
- Show that gender neutral job evaluations do not imply gender stereotypes which are often found when comparing commercial with technical job evaluations.

How can we solve the persistent issue of gender bias in professional orientations?

It is not possible to change gender bias in professional orientations overnight. Education, awareness raising and cooperation of key stakeholders are essential to that aim. Gender divides in skills starts early, but are evitable. For instance, gaps in sciences are in favour of boys in some countries, and in favour of girls in other countries and, while, gender gaps in mathematics are in favour of boys in most countries, this is systematically the case (e. g. in Finland).

Quality educational tools should be developed and widely disseminated.

The Committee recommends therefore to:

- Promote training and awareness raising activities on gender equality and unconscious gender bias to combat occupational segregation: for public employment services, teachers, career facilitators, families and staff members of schools, universities, vocational centres, etc.;
- Facilitate the cooperation of all stakeholders involved in career counselling and train them on gender equality and unconscious gender bias;
- Tackle gender pay gap in entrepreneurship by supporting access to funding and support programmes aimed at women entrepreneurs.

4.6. Unveiling inequalities and stereotypes

Tackling the gender pay gap requires adequate knowledge about the problems and their extent to be able to propose the adequate remedies. Often, incomplete data about the gender pay gap exist and do not permit to understand the complexity of the issue from its different angles in order to have a complete picture of the problem faced by companies or public administrations in a given Member State. There is especially a need to reinforce access to gender disaggregated data (at national, sectoral, local and company level) that show and/or impact on pay inequalities. Good quality and gender specific data (i.e. on non-basic pay elements such as bonuses, overtime payments and other benefits, etc.) is vitally important to eliminate the gender pay gap.

Only complete and accurate data would allow the relevant measures to be taken to tackle gender pay gap. Continuous work to provide the relevant and complete data about gender pay gap is therefore needed.

The Committee recommends therefore to:

- Improve equality data collection and national statistical analysis on gender pay gap;
- Support disaggregated data collection that would enable capturing intersectional and multiple discrimination to reach vulnerable target groups with evidence based policies to tackle the gender pay gap;
- Change Article 2(1) of Council Regulation (EC) No 530/1999 of 9 March 1999 concerning structural statistics on earnings and on labour costs by minimizing the four-yearly intervals to two-yearly intervals;
- Consider to take into account businesses with less than ten employees in the above-mentioned Council Regulation.

But if data collection is crucial to tackle efficiently gender pay gap, it seems also necessary to better raise awareness of the issue and the impact on gender stereotypes at company level.

The Committee recommends therefore to:

- Improve the training of management and HR responsible at company's level so that companies can better assess the impact of stereotypes and respective discriminatory policies and practices on pay;
- Make available support and training for management and HR personnel on how to manage diversity, including flexible working arrangements and statutory leave in the context of work-life balance policies.

Gender stereotypes in the workplace as well as the lack of transparency have a considerable impact on both long-term earnings and pensions, resulting in strong disparities between men and women. In order to fight against gender stereotypes and unveil inequalities, it appears crucial to fight against gender stereotypes in professional opportunities to tackle the issue from its source.

The Committee recommends therefore to:

- Raise awareness of the politicians about the persisting gender stereotypes to add credibility and urgency to this issue;
- Alert education and mass media about this issue so that they can fight against gender stereotypes;
- Facilitate career choices free from gender stereotypes and help children to choose a career in accordance with their own individual ability, talents, learnings and wishes.

4.7. Alerting and informing about the gender pay gap

Today, technology is at the heart of our society. As broadcasting information is faster and faster, it is necessary to raise awareness through these digital channels (especially via social networks). This has the potential to reach a wider audience, including those who no longer use other channels. Indeed, the way to inform the audience on these issues needs to be done in a package of measures using a wide range of tools, such as social media.

Influential actors like Google, Facebook or Twitter can play a role in raising awareness on gender equality, making visible inequalities and actions for equality, for instance through promoting female role models and breaking traditional stereotypes.

To that extent, government and institutions could encourage social networks and ICT companies to make visible prominent women in different areas of society, culture and economy in which they are underrepresented and to celebrate important dates with regard to gender equality in a worldwide, European and national context. The ICT companies are furthermore generally willing to support good causes and take up their social role, such as through free ads and promotion of certain hashtags for certain cases if an appealing content and case is presented to them.

The Committee recommends therefore to:

- Approach and involve the largest tech companies in the promotion of actions tackling the gender pay gap, gender stereotypes and encouragement to give positive examples on gender equality via social media as well as celebration of important dates in relation to gender equality at national, European and worldwide level. Those companies could also be persuaded to finance scholarships to promote more women in STEM fields, researches on the identification and control of sexist practices in the Net, etc.;
- Promote the use of the Big Data methodology to avoid sexist and non- inclusive references (terms, phrases, thematic, ideas, etc.), and therefore avoiding generating subsequent contents or connections (truncating links). Additionally, automatic correctors of terms (or suggestions of alternative use) should be incorporated, and depending of the importance of the sexist practices detected, ICT companies should collaborate with the authorities denouncing sexist content and attitudes, or related crimes.

How can we develop the interest of younger generations in these issues through modern communication tools?

In order for an issue such as the gender pay gap to be picked up by younger generations, any information shared on the topic must be interesting, useful, unique and catchy. Therefore it is important to keep abreast of the latest developments in presenting information in an appealing, playful way, adapted to the younger generations.

It is useful to involve young people in the development of these tools. An added bonus would be to get youth biggest influencers involved in the spreading of the message, e.g. you-tubers, famous singers and actors, athletes etc.

In a more general way, it could be useful to address the issue of unconscious gender bias in media in general, through the adoption and implementation of a code of ethics on non-sexist language and image of women and men in these media.

The Committee recommends therefore to:

- Use catchy information sharing tools used by younger generations with regard to present information on facts and issues related to gender pay gap, its causes and remedies;
- Educate youth biggest influencers (e.g. youtubers, famous singers/actors and actresses and athletes, youth programmes conductors, etc.) on the impact of unconscious gender bias;
- Encourage the adoption of a code of ethics on non-sexist language and image of women and men.

4.8. Enhancing partnerships to tackle the gender pay gap

As all Member States are concerned with gender inequalities, it is crucial to have a broad approach engaging a broad spectrum of stakeholders and equality bodies to enable an effective exchange of good practice from different angles. The whole society must be engaged in a cross-disciplinary dynamic. Furthermore, it is therefore crucial that funding possibilities are made available in order to support stakeholders in continuing to play a role in campaigning for equal opportunities in the labour market and informing employees about their rights. Efficient partnerships to tackle the gender pay gap can be an interesting solution if sufficient transparency, political will and adequate funding is allocated. Key prerequisite for this is a fully-fledged Strategy on Equality between Women and Men with clear priorities and commitments of the EU institutions and Member States. Strengthening the cooperation as well as mutual learning among member states could be achieved by assuring sufficient thematic funding and programs at EU level and national levels.

Coordination of the different actors can be supported by national equality bodies, where this body is mandated to provide assistance to employers in the form of training and/or guidance on the one hand, and support to victims of discrimination on the other hand.

Elaborating and broader disseminating good educational tools on gender equality, user friendly and easily accessible to employers and employee representatives participating in collective bargaining would be highly useful.

Raising awareness among companies on the latest international and national studies on gender equality as a fundamental right, also considering gender equality as a productive and necessary investment to attain a better company performance, to increase labour productivity, to enhance governance and performance, to increase workplace innovation and to reduce employee turnover.

Collaborating with social partners and companies, reinforcing not only collective bargaining, but also promoting pilot EU programmes with companies with outstanding gender equality policies. In this regard, the European Commission could also work with important European companies that are present in different EU countries.

Collaborating with the Media at National and EU level due to its crucial role in creating opinion and promoting cultural change, to ensure a more equal presence (time-shares) and subject-matter discussion of women and men in society and economy. Debates and best practices on gender equality across EU could be disseminated in prime time.

The Committee recommends therefore to:

- Institutionalise a permanent and structured process of dialogue on gender equality with the social partners as well as with companies and civil society;
- Create spaces for dialogue between all the actors involved as well as the exchange of data analysis, needs and practices. Reinforced Equality Bodies could be part of this dialogue and coordinate the dissemination and publicity of the resulting information;
- Consider financial and reputation-based incentives to companies to cooperate;
- Making the business case to employers that tackling the gender pay gap will bring many benefits;
- Involve national and multinational stakeholders in consultations and national meetings on European Semester and country specific recommendations;
- Ensure availability of funding for stakeholders enabling their activities in the area of gender equality;
- Strengthen mutual learning, utilise web-based e-learning programmes;
- Adopt a fully-fledged EU Strategy on Equality between Women and Men where the closing gender pay, pension, life-long earnings and poverty gaps to be prioritized – by clarifying roles of all stakeholders concerned;
- Improve comparability of the gender pay gap indicators and data sources by defining at the European level common standards of measures;
- Improve statistics regarding the adjusted gender pay gap all over Europe, in order to have a more detailed analysis of the impact of both observable and non-observable factors upon it.