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Commission

2023 report on
gender equality
in the EU



*Justice
and Consumers*



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2023 Report on gender equality in the EU

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INTRODUCTION

Equality between women and men is one of the EU's fundamental values and promoting it is an obligation enshrined in the Treaty. The von der Leyen Commission has put gender equality at the forefront of its political actions and set out an ambitious strategy for 2020-2025. The 2020-2025 gender equality strategy is the roadmap for the European Commission's work towards gender equality and sets out the EU's policy objectives and the actions it will take to help achieve them. The goal is a Union of Equality where women and men, girls and boys, in all their diversity, are free to pursue their chosen path in life, have equal opportunities to thrive in, participate in and lead our European society. Drawing from the 2020 – 2025 gender equality strategy, the EU action plan for gender equality and women's empowerment 2021–2025 (GAP III) calls for a gender-equal world.

The year 2022 was the year in which Europe gradually emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic. It was also the third year of implementing the strategy and the year that landmark steps were taken to enhance women's rights and gender equality.

In March, the Commission proposed a Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence. This proposal aims to ensure that all Member States have minimum standards in place for criminalising certain forms of violence against women, protecting and supporting victims, granting them access to justice and preventing such violence from happening in the first place.

In October, the EU adopted the Directive on gender balance on company boards, which introduces targets for the under-represented sex. Ten years after it was proposed by the European Commission, this new EU law will help break the glass ceiling on the boards of listed companies and give to the many women qualified for the top jobs a real chance to get them.

In December, another important breakthrough was reached on the proposal for a directive on pay transparency measures, when the European Parliament and the Council reached an agreement on the Commission's proposal. The new rules will help ensure that the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value, which has been enshrined in the Treaty since 1957, finally becomes a reality on the ground.

Also in December, the Council adopted two Recommendations, which the Commission had put forward as part of the European Care Strategy: one on long-term care and one on early childhood education and care (the Barcelona targets 2030). These initiatives aim to ensure quality, affordable and accessible care services across the European Union and improve the situation for both care receivers and the people caring for them, professionally or informally. Since the vast majority of workers in the care sector are women, and women shoulder the lion's share of informal care, improving care services will benefit gender equality and make it easier for women with care responsibilities to engage in paid work. In line with the objective of the original Barcelona targets from 2002, the Recommendation on the Barcelona Targets 2030 aims to facilitate women's labour market participation. It will also help achieve Member States' commitment under the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan to reach an employment rate of 78 % by 2030, including through halving the gender employment gap.

Furthermore, the Commission adopted in December two proposals to strengthen equality bodies, so that they can combat discrimination in Europe more effectively, including on grounds of sex. The new

legislation aims at strengthening the independence, resources and powers of equality bodies in order to enable them to better fulfil their important role.

Lastly, in February 2023, Member States agreed to move forward with the EU's accession to the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention and request the consent of the European Parliament. This was a historic breakthrough after years of stalemate in the Council and which will allow the EU to finally accede the Convention.

While the European Union made progress on gender equality in the past year, women's rights have also come under pressure around the world. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine brought upheaval to the lives of all Ukrainians, but it has a particular impact on women and girls, exposing them to an increased risk to sexual violence, human trafficking and rape, and forcing many of them to flee the country (an option not available to men). Since the majority of those seeking protection in the EU were women and children, a particular gender-dimension was also witnessed in terms of access to employment, health care services or housing, sometimes further exposing the refugees to gender-based violence.

In Iran, the tragic death of the young woman Mahsa Amini in police custody, after having been arrested for not having properly worn her headscarf, shocked the world and triggered a protest movement. Women's rights continue to be pitilessly eroded also in Afghanistan since the takeover of the Taliban who, in the course of 2022, increasingly pushed women out of the education system and the labour market. The United States Supreme Court in June reversed the landmark decision in *Roe v. Wade*, leading to the subsequent adoption of legislation prohibiting abortion in about half of the US states.

Against this backdrop, the 2023 report on gender equality in the EU takes stock of the main initiatives to promote equality between women and men in the key areas of the Strategy:

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

The report focuses on key actions and achievements to improve gender equality by EU institutions and Member States. It also, gives inspiring examples from the Member States and EU-funded projects in these areas. The report also contains key data on the state of play on gender equality in the EU. This data is also published in the Commission's gender equality strategy monitoring portal.

FREE FROM VIOLENCE AND STEREOTYPES

Gender-based violence, including violence against women and domestic violence, is an extreme form of gender-based discrimination that seriously breaches fundamental rights. This form of violence is aggravated in times of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the current energy crisis and in war times, such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Gender-based violence is still pervasive throughout the European Union and is deeply rooted in social inequalities and unequal power relations between men and women.

Ending gender-based violence

Gender-based violence has a long-term negative impact on victims and witnesses¹. During the COVID-19 pandemic there was a stark increase in domestic violence cases throughout the EU, with women and children locked down at home with their abusers, isolated from social contact and support networks. Additionally, heightened economic pressures during the pandemic increased women's dependence on abusive partners. Data shows that 77 % of women across the EU think that the **COVID-19 pandemic** has led to an increase in physical and emotional violence against women in their country². Furthermore, during the pandemic, the demand for support services for victims such as shelters and helplines increased significantly³.

Women affected by intersectional discrimination are at an even higher risk of gender-based violence. This is discrimination based on a combination of sex and other grounds of discrimination, such as racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. For example, women with disabilities are two to five times more likely to face violence than other women⁴.

There has been a major breakthrough on the EU's accession to the Council of Europe **Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention)**: on 21 February 2023, the Council agreed to move forward with the EU's accession and requested the consent of the European Parliament (which the Treaty requires for the conclusion of international agreements). The decision was taken by qualified majority in line with opinion 1/19 of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU), which, in October 2021, had clarified the modalities of EU accession to the Convention⁵.

Progress has also been made on the negotiations of the Commission's proposal for a **directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence**. The Council Working Group finalised the first reading of the proposal. In the European Parliament, the draft report on the proposed Directive

¹ See <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-based-violence/costs-of-gender-based-violence-in-eu>

² European Parliament: Eurobarometer Flash Survey. Women in times of COVID-19, 2022, p.5. Available at <https://europa.eu/Eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2712>

³ European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE): Gender Equality Index 2022. The COVID-19 pandemic and care, p. 54. Available at <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-equality-index-2022-covid-19-pandemic-and-care>

⁴ In its Resolution on the situation of women with disabilities (2018/26855RSP), the European Parliament also stresses that 34% of women with a health problem or a disability have experienced physical or sexual violence by a partner in their lifetime. Available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legalcontent/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52018IP0484>

⁵ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/02/21/combating-violence-against-women-council-requests-the-consent-of-the-european-parliament-to-conclude-the-istanbul-convention/>

was discussed in meetings of the relevant committees in January and February 2023. The proposal aims to ensure that all Member States have minimum standards in place for criminalising certain forms of violence against women, including rape, female genital mutilation and certain forms of cyber violence. There are also provisions protecting and supporting victims, granting them access to justice and preventing such violence from happening in the first place.

As part of the preparatory work of the Commission's Recommendation **on preventing and combating harmful practices against women and girls**, the Commission organised **four workshops** in 2022 with international and civil society organisations to discuss practices such as female genital mutilation, forced and child marriage, forced abortion and forced sterilisation, and an expert **seminar on harmful practices** with academic experts and representatives of Council of Europe and European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). The seminar focused on culture and violence against women and girls who belong to ethnic minorities, female genital mutilation, best practices to address these issues as well as on prospects and challenges in Member States and at European level.

The Commission's initiative from December 2021 **to trigger a Council decision to extend the list of EU crimes in Article 83(1) TFEU to include hate speech and hate crime** is being discussed in the Council, with a wide majority of the Member States supporting it. Once adopted, the decision would create a legal basis for criminalising offline misogynous hate speech or hate crime, that is to say, hate speech or crime that is motivated by gendered bias. In this sense, the initiative is complementing the proposal for a directive on violence against women and domestic violence which criminalises misogynous hate speech online.

In order to improve the availability, quality and reliability of data on gender-based violence, Eurostat is currently working on an **EU-wide survey on gender-based violence against women and other forms of interpersonal violence**. On 25 November 2022, the survey data from seven Member States were published⁶, and data from other 11 Member States⁷ are due to be published in the course of 2023. Data from the rest of the Member States⁸ that are not directly participating in the Eurostat survey will be collected by EIGE and the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) and are expected to be published in 2024.

New research by EIGE provides a comprehensive analysis of **legal responses to counter femicide in the EU** and offers insights into the legal gaps, challenges and good practices in the provision of justice to victims of femicide and their families, including their right to adequate compensation and comprehensive reparation⁹.

⁶ In September 2022, the countries that have finalised the data collection are Bulgaria, France, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Austria and Slovenia. See <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/gender-based-violence/publications>

⁷ Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Greece, Estonia, Finland, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain.

⁸ Czechia, Germany, Ireland, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Hungary, Romania and Sweden. Italy is not participating in either of the two exercises but will provide comparable data from national sources.

⁹ European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE): report on improving legal responses to counter femicide in the European Union: perspectives from victims and professionals. Available at: <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/improving-legal-responses-counter-femicide-european-union-perspectives-victims-and-professionals>

In June 2022, **Malta** introduced a definition of femicide in the Maltese Criminal Code. In July 2022, **Cyprus** introduced a specific crime of 'femicide' in its Criminal Code. The amendments made in both Member States define femicide as the murder of a woman, because she is a woman. **Malta** and **Cyprus** are the only two Member States that have legal provisions concerning femicide.

Belgium and **Finland** reformed their criminal law to ensure that any sexual activity without consent constitutes the criminal offence of rape, and to criminalise other forms of sexual violence. In Belgium, the legislation centers on the need for consent, introduces new definition of sexual offences and increases penalties in certain cases. Sex work is decriminalised. In Finland, the reform aims to strengthen everyone's right to sexual self-determination and to protect personal integrity. The definition of rape is explicitly based on consent and punishments for sexual offences are stricter.

The Ministry of Social Security and Labour of **Lithuania** launched a large-scale informational and educational campaign – 'I can't be silent' ('**Negaliu tylėti**') to raise public awareness of different types of domestic violence, to inform about prevention measures and how to seek help. The campaign was tailored to emphasise that gender stereotypes may lead to domestic violence and was circulated through eight TV shows on national television, articles in printed and online media and communication campaigns on social networks and outdoor billboards. The campaign was a success with the TV shows being the second most viewed programme in Lithuania after the 'News'.

Portugal has established an **electronic health registry** to collect data on women that have undergone female genital mutilation. It has also established a **multi-agency working group** joining up different ministries and civil society representatives to discuss ways and strategies to prevent and mitigate against female genital mutilation. Moreover, Portugal has put in place **post-graduate courses on female genital mutilation** for health professionals and established **information campaigns at airports** focusing on preventing female genital mutilation.

Gender-based cyber violence

Gender-based cyber violence can spread widely in a fast and easy way. It can take various forms, such as cyberstalking, doxing, digital voyeurism, cyber harassment, non-consensual sharing of intimate or manipulated material and cyber incitement to hatred or violence¹⁰ and it can result from or lead to offline violence. With the increased use of the internet and social media, gender-based cyber violence is escalating. Figures from a 2022 Eurobarometer show that 16 % of EU women

¹⁰ The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) report on Combating Cyber Violence against Women and Girls presents an analysis of existing legal and statistical definitions of the different forms of cyber violence against women across all EU Member States and proposes improvements to existing definitions used for statistical purposes. The report also provides an overview of the legal and policy framework on cyber violence against women and girls at EU, international and national levels, summarizes the key challenges in establishing definitions of cyber-violence and provides new definitions of cyber-violence and its forms. Finally, it proposes recommendations addressed to EU and national actors. Available at <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/combating-cyber-violence-against-women-and-girls>

interviewed reported knowing women in their circle of friends and family who have experienced online harassment or cyber violence¹¹.

Although both women and men can be victims of cyber violence, evidence shows that women and girls are more exposed to it. They often end up withdrawing from the digital sphere, silencing and isolating themselves¹². According to an Amnesty International study, “76% of women said they changed the way they use social media after experiencing cyber harassment, of which online hate speech is a form, and 32% said they ceased posting their opinions on certain issues”¹³.

The past year has seen progress in tackling online violence. The **Regulation on a Single Market for Digital Services, the ‘Digital Services Act’ (DSA)** entered into force in November 2022 and most of its provisions will be applicable from 17 February 2024¹⁴. The DSA creates a safe, predictable and trustworthy online environment where EU citizens and others can exercise their fundamental rights guaranteed in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. The DSA also contains obligations to avoid being exposed to illegal content, including content constituting gender-based violence.

The proposal for a directive on violence against women and domestic violence complements the DSA as it proposes to criminalise the most severe forms of gender-based cyber violence: non-consensual sharing of intimate or manipulated material, cyberstalking, cyber harassment and cyber incitement to hatred violence on the basis of sex or gender¹⁵. Since the DSA does not provide an EU-level definition of what constitutes illegal content, the proposed directive will help make the DSA more effective.

Moreover, the proposal ensures that judicial authorities can order providers of intermediary services to act against cyber violence on their platforms and requires Member States to facilitate self-regulatory measures, such as codes of conduct, by internet service providers in order to reinforce internal mechanisms to tackle material connected to cyber violence and to improve their employees’ training on how to prevent cyber violence and assist and support victims¹⁶.

Finally, the proposal focuses on providing effective access to justice, as well as protection and support to victims of cyber violence, including by enabling victims to report crimes online and providing sufficient capacities and training for law enforcement agencies. It also introduces targeted

¹¹ European Parliament: Eurobarometer Flash Survey. Women in times of COVID-19, 2022, p.8. Available at <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2712>

¹² European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) report on combating cyber violence against women and girls, 2022, p. 7. Available at <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/combating-cyber-violence-against-women-and-girls>

¹³ Amnesty International: Amnesty reveals alarming impact of online abuse against women. On European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) report on combating cyber violence against women and girls, 2022, p.51. Available at <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/combating-cyber-violence-against-women-and-girls>

¹⁴ 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), OJ L 277, 27.10.2022, p. 1–102.

¹⁵ Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on combating violence against women and domestic violence, COM (2022) 105 final, Articles 7, 8, 9 and 10.

¹⁶ Article 42 of the proposal.

preventive measures, such as improving media literacy skills and training activities for relevant professionals¹⁷.

Besides the regulatory framework, the Commission will set up a new voluntary framework to bring together IT platforms and other stakeholders to better tackle the dissemination of gendered online content. This cooperation is being established and will enable to put in place detailed arrangement that will cover not just illegal, but also harmful content.

The protection of girls from online abuse and exploitation is further complemented by the proposed child sexual abuse regulation, which requires online service providers to take responsibility and protect children from abuse in the digital environment. Preparatory work is also under way to revise the 2011 **Directive on combatting the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and child pornography (CSA Directive)**, which provides a common framework for criminal investigations and prosecutions of child sexual abuse as well as measures to support victims and to prevent these crimes from happening in the first place. The upcoming revision will update the definitions of offences, further improve prevention as well as assistance to victims and ensure an increased coordination among all the actors involved at national level as well as among Member States. In 2022, the Commission launched a public consultation on the initiative and conducted an evaluation study which concluded that the legislative framework presents opportunities for improvement, considering the significant societal and technological changes during the last 11 years¹⁸.

The European Commission has supported an Italian Global Thinking Foundation in their Tour 2022 **“Free to ... Live”** on the theme “Cyber security as a response to the digital dimension of gender-based violence” which started in Paris and run through 12 regions of Italy. At the event, regional and local government representatives were present along with Italian civil society and volunteers.

In **Romania**, a partnership between the National Agency for Equal Opportunities between women and men and the Ministry of Education, will involve 10.000 teachers in promoting non-discrimination and equal opportunities. As part of this teachers are encouraged to address the issue of bullying, including **cyber bullying**.

Sex-based harassment at work

Sexual harassment often occurs at work with significant negative consequences for both victims and employers. It is deeply rooted in gender bias and stereotypes and affects women disproportionately¹⁹.

The proposal for a directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence complements the existing gender-equality legislation, adding rules on victims’ support, their access

¹⁷ Articles 16, 27 (c), 36 and 37 of the proposal.

¹⁸ See https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/13073-Combating-child-sexual-abuse-review-of-EU-rules_en

¹⁹ Among women who have experienced sexual harassment at least once since the age of 15, 32 % indicated somebody from the employment context – such as a colleague, a boss or a customer – as a perpetrator. See European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Violence Against Women: an EU-wide survey main results, p.95. Available at <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/violence-against-women-eu-wide-survey-main-results-report>.

to justice as well as on preventing sexual harassment at work²⁰. The proposal requires Member States to ensure that victims can make use of counselling services outside the workplace. These services should also provide advice for employers on how to address such offences appropriately²¹. Member States would also be required to address sexual harassment at work in national policies and establish targeted actions, such as awareness raising campaigns and research and education programmes for sectors where workers are most exposed. In addition, all managers should receive training on how to recognise, prevent and address sexual harassment at work²².

As part of its **mutual learning programme on gender equality**, the Commission organised a seminar on **new approaches to prevent sexual harassment through sustainable cultural change**. The seminar was hosted by Denmark and the Netherlands in September 2022. The good practices shared at the seminar highlighted the importance of prevention. This means educating both boys and girls about sexual consent, relationships and respect from a very early age and raising awareness among the population at large. In 2022, **Denmark** established an **Alliance against Sexual Harassment** - one of 17 initiatives agreed in the wake of the #MeToo movement. It brings together the leaders of 28 employer organisations and trade unions, education and training providers and the youth and volunteer sector, all of which commit to practical actions to combat sexual harassment and promote cultural change, with government funding.

Following revelations of sexual abuse on a popular TV show, the **Dutch** government appointed a Government Commissioner on sexual transgressive behaviour and sexual violence. The Commissioner's role is to give independent advice to the government based on broad consultation and dialogue with stakeholders, civil society and the public. In January 2023, an action plan to address sexual transgressive behaviour and sexual violence was presented²³.

Human Trafficking

Trafficking for sexual exploitation is a form of gender-based violence rooted in gender inequalities. While it can also affect men, women and children are particularly vulnerable to this type of trafficking. According to the most recent data, 68.4% of registered victims of trafficking in the EU were women or girls²⁴. Trafficking for sexual exploitation is a form of violence against women, and therefore a reason why the victims of trafficking are covered by the provisions of the proposal for a

²⁰ Directive 2006/54/EC (Gender Equality Recast Directive) considers sex-based work harassment as a form of discrimination on the grounds of sex in the workplace. Furthermore, Directive 2010/41/EU (the Self-employed Directive) extended the protection against discrimination on grounds of sex, including sex-based and sexual harassment, to the self-employed; Directive 2004/113/EC (The Goods and Services Directive) additionally prohibits sex-based harassment in the access to and supply of goods and services. All these directives, within their scope, require sex-based harassment to be prohibited and sanctioned. They provide for a right to compensation for victims and establish substantive and procedural guarantees, such as protection against re-victimisation, the shift of the burden of proof, and provisions on the roles of equality bodies, social partners and non-governmental organisations.

²¹ Article 30 of the proposal.

²² Articles 36 (8) and 37(3) of the proposal.

²³ See <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/actueel/nieuws/2023/01/13/kabinet-presenteert-actieprogramma-tegen-seksueel-grensoverschrijdend-gedrag-en-seksueel-geweld>

²⁴ See www.neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/trafficking-human-beings-common-plan-address-risks-people-fleeing-war-ukraine-2022-05-11_en

Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence which apply in addition to the EU Anti-trafficking Directive.

In December 2022, the Commission adopted the evaluation of the EU Anti-trafficking Directive and proposal for a revision of the Directive, which was one of the key actions under the 2021-2025 EU strategy on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings, together with the fourth report on the fight against trafficking in human beings, which presents the main statistical trends for 2019-2020 and challenges²⁵. On 9 February 2023, Eurostat published the 2021 statistics on trafficking in human beings²⁶.

In May and September 2022, two **coordinated online joint action days** targeted criminal human trafficking networks. The first one identified criminal networks that were grooming Ukrainian refugees for labour and sexual exploitation via websites and social media platforms and involved law enforcement authorities from 14 Member States. As a result, 9 suspected human traffickers and victims were identified. The second operation involved 20 EU and non-EU countries and was able to identify 20 platforms with possible links to trafficking in human beings, 11 suspects and 45 possible victims (of which 25 with Ukrainian nationality).

In **Sweden**, the Inter-Agency Cooperation on work related crime and the Council for Baltic Sea States launched the **“Before you Go”** campaign targeting Romanians, Bulgarians, Polish and Ukrainians citizens, coming to Sweden to work, to inform them of the Swedish labour market, their rights, and where to seek help. The campaign created one brochure for victims of trafficking and one for professionals and is developing a website.

In **Estonia**, several awareness-raising activities to encourage men and boys to act against gender-based violence are being implemented through Norway Grants projects. In 2022, a **campaign against sex buying (mõtle õige peaga)** was introduced to reduce the number of women being exploited by trafficking or working in prostitution.

Supporting victims of gender-based violence

One of the most important ways to tackle gender-based violence is to offer support to victims. With appropriate support, victims can approach authorities, participate in judicial proceedings, claim compensation and recover from the violence suffered. The proposal for a directive on violence against women and domestic violence establishes comprehensive obligations on Member States to ensure support for victims, such as sufficient number of shelters to address the specific needs of women victims of violence.

²⁵ Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims, COM (2022) 732 final of 19.12.2022. Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the progress made in the fight against trafficking in human beings (fourth report), 2022, COM (2022) 736 final of 19.12.2022.

²⁶ See https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/trafficking-victims-europe-rise-10-and-share-eu-nationals-among-victims-increased-59-2023-02-09_en

In November 2022, the Commission reserved the number 116 016 as an **EU-wide harmonised helpline number for victims of violence against women**²⁷. With this, the Commission followed-up on an initiative of the German Presidency of the Council. As of 30 April 2023, the number will be available for assignment in all Member States and should become operational at least in 15 Member States that committed to provide the service. The proposal for a directive on violence against women and domestic violence obliges all Member States to ensure that helplines for victims are operated under the EU-wide number free of charge and 24/7 so that victims will be able to use the same number when they need help.

Under the **Daphne strand of the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programme** the Commission funds organisations and projects that fight against gender-based violence. In September, 46 projects were awarded a grant with an overall budget of over EUR 30 million²⁸. In December, a **new call for proposal**²⁹ was published to select a limited number of organisations as ‘intermediaries’, to channel EU-funding to national civil society organisations in Member States. Through this cascading scheme, the call will allow funding to reach local and grassroots organisations so they can benefit from EU funding under a simplified framework.

In 2022, the Commission put in place an **awareness raising campaign on victim’s rights**. The campaign raised awareness among people in the EU of professional support services available and their rights of reporting a crime being guaranteed no matter where in the EU they are living. The campaign is targeted to young people aged 18-30 years in the close social circle of a victim who are encouraged to spot signs of victimisation and to encourage them to contact support services.

On 24-25 November 2022, the **Czech Presidency** conference ‘Ending gender-based violence in academia: Towards gender-equal, safe and inclusive research and higher education’ took place, which highlighted the findings of the Horizon 2020-funded UniSAFE³⁰ project. The project included the largest European prevalence survey to date on gender-based violence in academia and launched a **call for action** to work with national authorities, research funding and performing organisations and other stakeholders in the European Research Area towards ending gender-based violence in academia³¹.

Croatia implemented the EU-funded project ‘**Stop violence against women and domestic violence – there is no justification for violence**’. A media campaign with the slogan #empathynow was launched with the purpose of raising public awareness, emphasizing the importance of preventing violence against women and domestic violence, and promoting the helpline 116 016 as part of efforts to prevent violence and protect victims.

²⁷ 2007/116/EC Commission Decision of 15 February 2007 on reserving the national numbering range beginning with 116 for harmonised numbers for harmonised services of social value (notified under document number C(2007) 249).

²⁸ Call for proposals to prevent and combat gender-based violence and violence against children - [Funding & tenders \(europa.eu\)](https://europea.eu)

²⁹ Call for proposals to prevent and combat gender-based violence and violence against children: call to intermediaries (giving financial support to third-party civil society organisations) [Funding & tenders \(europa.eu\)](https://europea.eu)

³⁰ <https://unisafe-gbv.eu/>

³¹ <https://gbv2022.eu/>

The Ministry of Interior of **France** launched the ‘**Ma sécurité**’ app to encourage and facilitate administrative and judicial procedures for women who are victims of violence. This new digital tool, available free of charge on download platforms, is the first mobile application to bring together police and gendarmerie services and aims to make it easier for victims of violence to file a complaint online.

Denmark has set up **specialised teams on domestic violence in every police district of the country**. These teams work to optimise the police’s handling of cases including for example domestic violence, rape or stalking, thereby ensuring that the police has a better understanding and concrete knowledge of trauma, support to victims and protective measures.

Latvia amended its ‘police legislation’ to **allow police officers to separate a person who poses a threat to a victim even when the victim has not filled a written application**. Police officers should also inform the municipal social services wherever a risk of violence has been identified.

Challenging gender stereotypes

Gender stereotypes are harmful societal beliefs that limit the capacity of women and men, girls and boys, in all their diversity, to pursue professional careers or life paths and freely participate in societal life. Gender stereotypes can also lead to gender-based violence since they promote a perception of women as subordinate to men.

As announced in the 2020-2025 gender equality strategy, on 8 March 2023 the Commission is launching a **communication campaign challenging gender stereotypes**³². The campaign tackles stereotypes in different spheres of life, such as career choices, work-life balance, the care gap and decision-making. It represents gender stereotypes as misconceptions limiting everybody’s free choices and has a focus on youth engagement. It will be disseminated on social media platforms. The campaign will also feature a dedicated website which provides more information on gender inequalities.

As part of the mutual learning programme on gender equality, the Commission organised a seminar to facilitate the exchange of good practices between Member States on **promoting the role of men and boys in advancing gender equality and breaking stereotypes**. The seminar was hosted by Ireland and Austria in mid-February 2023. The seminar was an opportunity to exchange knowledge, share good practices and discuss novel approaches to engage men and boys in gender equality efforts (see also below).

In 2022, the Commission selected 21 projects to support gender equality under **the equality and rights strand of CERV** with a total budget of EUR 6.8 million³³. The projects will: (i) promote the equal participation and representation of women and men in political and economic decision-making (see

³² <https://europa.eu/end-gender-stereotypes>

³³ See call for proposals to promote gender equality. Available at <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/home>

also Chapter three); and/or (ii) tackle gender stereotypes, including in advertising and in the media, with a focus on young people.

Tackling gender stereotypes also figures on the agenda of an **expert group on the promotion of supportive learning environments and well-being in school** at the European and national levels, which will kick-start its work in March 2023³⁴. The expert group will address gender specific challenges such as gender stereotypes in education and gender-based (cyber-) bullying and sexual harassment.

In **Austria** a **counselling helpline for men (Männerinfo)** offers professional, free and confidential initial crisis counselling and referrals for further help. Victims are primarily referred to the relevant violence protection centre or the women's helpline. The target group includes both men who use violence or are at risk of self-harming and self-injurious behaviour, as well as men in crises and difficult life situations and their relatives or caregivers. Furthermore, an awareness raising campaign on male violence, the **'Man speak up' campaign' (Mann spricht's an)** informed the population about how violence begins and how can help be provided. The campaign calls in particular on men to intervene when they witness assaults.

In **Germany**, the initiative **YouCodeGirls** aims to inspire girls and young women to code, overcoming gender stereotypes in digital professions. Moreover, the initiative **'Klischeefrei'** (Cliché Free) supports young people in free choice of profession and study. The initiative is an alliance between representatives from the areas of education and training, policy making, business and research aimed at all those involved in the career process.

In **Spain**, a new **self-regulatory Code for advertisement of toys for children** entered into force in December 2022. It bans advertisements aimed at minors that use discriminatory, sexualised or degrading images for girls and encourages using diverse images that are free from gender stereotypes. The Code commits to avoiding the exclusive association of toys with roles, for example, of domestic work or beauty with girls, and of action, physical activity or technology with boys. In addition, toys will not be presented with any indication that they are for one sex or the other. The Ministry of Consumer Affairs also produced a guide to choose toys without sexist stereotypes and launched the campaign **#BeMoreToy** to promote a pedagogical approach to toys and to combat sexist stereotypes.

³⁴ See in this context also the 'Educational toolkits to help fight gender stereotypes' which aim to challenge learners in primary and secondary schools to identify and question gender stereotypes and discover career opportunities in the transport sector: https://transport.ec.europa.eu/transport-themes/social-issues-equality-and-attractiveness-transport-sector/attractiveness-transport-sector/educational-toolkits-help-fight-gender-stereotypes_en

THRIVING IN A GENDER-EQUAL ECONOMY

Although the EU employment rate for women has been increasing in recent years, barriers to women joining and remaining in the labour market persist. These barriers were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, when, during the lockdown periods women experienced a steeper fall in working hours than men³⁵. At the same time, the restrictions and self-isolation obligations imposed during the pandemic have led to more opportunities for flexible working arrangements. In this context, the Work–Life Balance Directive³⁶, that Member States needed to transpose by August 2022, has prompted reforms in some countries to encourage a more equal sharing of parental responsibilities.

Data for 2021 show that some pre-pandemic levels in employment and growth have already been recovered. Although there has been slight progress in the reduction of some gender imbalances in the labour market, visible differences remain. The EU took a number of initiatives during 2022 to support progress on gender equality. Further, the Commission has launched several actions to help those fleeing Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine, most of them women and children, integrate into their host Member States (see Chapter 5).

Closing gender gaps in the labour market

In 2022, the long-standing challenges related to women’s labour market participation continued. These are illustrated by the persistent labour market gender gaps with regard to employment, care, pay and pensions.

The 2021 European Pillar of Social Rights action plan³⁷ set the goal of halving the gender employment gap (compared with 2019) as one of the necessary avenues to reach the target of an overall employment rate of 78 % by 2030. This means that Member States will have to reduce the employment gap from 11.2 percentage points (pps) in 2019 to at least 5.6 pps by 2030, i.e. to decrease the gap by an average of 0.6 pps per year. In 2021, the **gender employment gap** at EU level was 10.8 pps, representing a **decrease of only 0.3 pps** compared with the previous year. Given that the gap only decreased by 1.7 pps over the past 10 years (it stood at 12.5 pps in 2011), significant efforts and far-reaching measures will be needed to even get close to the aim of halving it by 2030, as set out in the European Pillar of Social Rights action plan.

Nevertheless, it is reassuring that, after a contraction in 2020, mostly linked to the pandemic³⁸, women’s participation in the labour market increased again in 2021. It slightly surpassed the 2019 levels (67.1 %), reaching 67.7 % and continues a steady increase over the years. Between 2010 and 2021, **women’s labour market participation** increased by 7.0 pps as compared to an increase of 5.1 pps for men. Employment rates for men are back at pre-pandemic levels (78.5 % in 2021 as compared to 78.3 % in 2019).

³⁵ Mazza, J., Scipioni, M. and Tintori, G., The Labour Market Consequences of COVID-19 for Migrant Workers, 2022. Available at <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/725468>

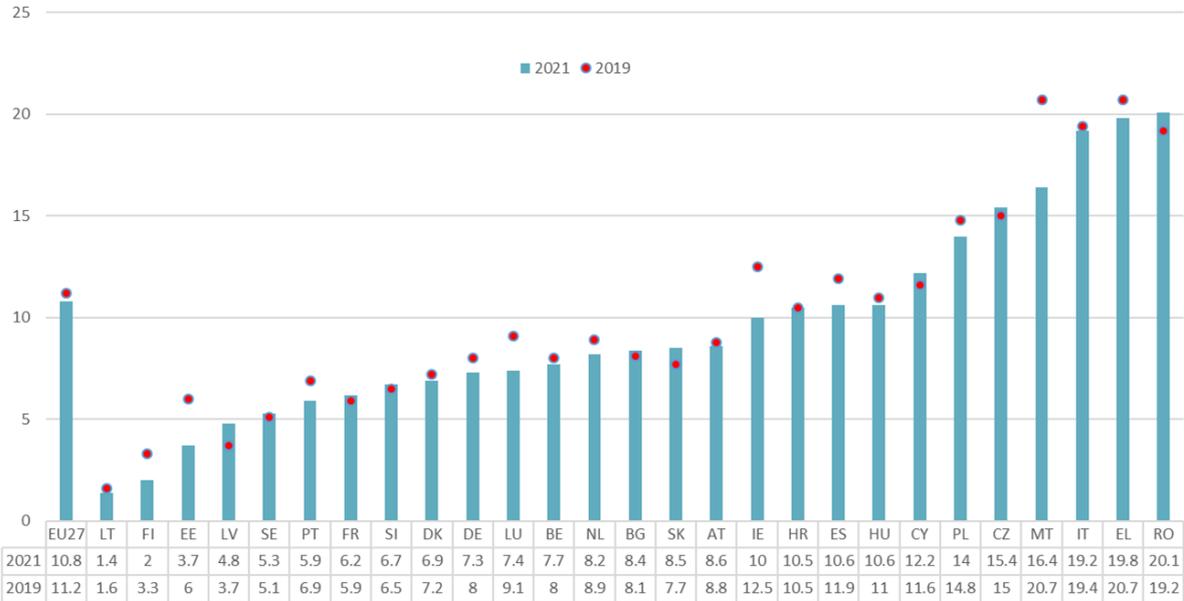
³⁶ Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work–life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU, OJ L 188, 12.07.2019, p. 79-93.

³⁷ The plan was welcomed by leaders at the Porto Social Summit in May 2021 and the European Council in June 2021. See <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/empl/european-pillar-of-social-rights/en/>

³⁸ EIGE, ‘Gender Equality Index 2022: the COVID-19 pandemic and care’, 2022. Available at https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/gender_equality_index_2022_corr.pdf

This encouraging development masks, however, large differences across Member States. The gender employment gap in 2021 ranges from 1.4 pps in Lithuania to 20.1 pps in Romania (Graph 2.1.). Moreover, the gender employment gap even increased in some Member States³⁹ compared with 2019. Though data do not show a greater negative impact of the pandemic on women’s employment rates compared with men’s, women experienced a steeper fall in working hours and an increased care burden⁴⁰.

Graph 2.1. : Gender gap in employment rate, age 20-64, years 2019 and 2021.



Source: Eurostat, [TESEM060](#).

Large differences persist also for **working patterns**: women’s use of part-time work is above that of men in all countries but one (Romania). Since 2019, the incidence of part-time work has on average decreased across the EU-27 for both women and men⁴¹; the **gender gap in part-time employment** consequently moved from 22.7 pps in 2019 to 20.7 pps in 2021. It is worth noting that, in 2021, the gender gap in part-time employment (20.7 pps) was twice as high as that for total employment (10.8 pps). This is mostly linked to the persistently unequal division of care responsibilities between women and men. In 2021, ‘care for adults with disabilities or children’ was the main reason for working part-time for 26.2 % of women compared with only 5.2 % of men, to which ‘family reasons’ add another 6.3 pps for women against 2.2 pps for men.

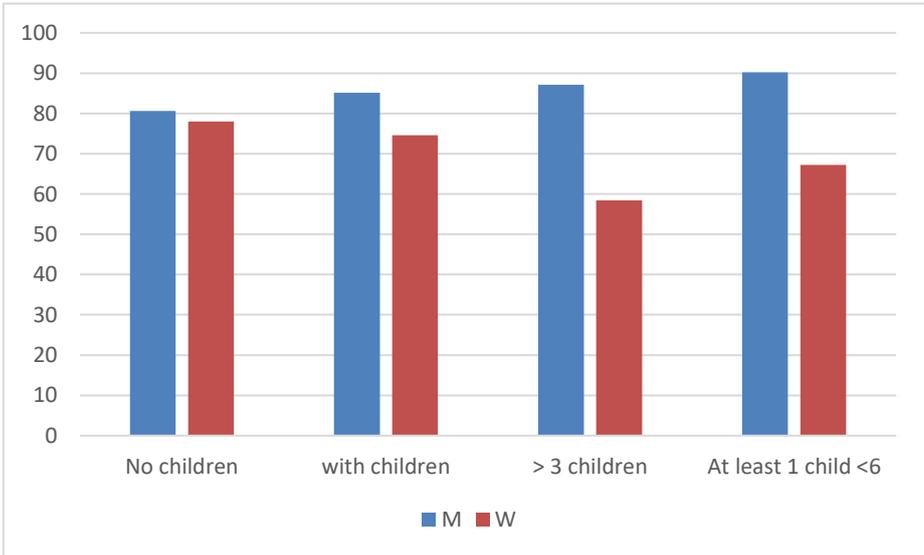
Since rules on part-time work, and its spread, vary across countries, the use of part-time work must be looked at together with overall employment rates and related gender gaps. It is likely that women who cannot opt for part-time work - because it is unavailable, not sufficiently paid or not sufficiently flexible - will simply decide to stay out of the labour market altogether. At EU level, the share of

³⁹ In Latvia, Sweden, France, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Cyprus, Czechia and Romania.
⁴⁰ Eurofound (2022), COVID-19 pandemic and the gender divide at work and home, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. Available at https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef22010en.pdf
⁴¹ In 2019, the share of part-time employment was 29.4 % of women workers and 7.8 % men; in 2021, it was 28.3 % and 7.6 % respectively.

women outside the labour force (as a percentage of their total population) who did not look for a job due to care responsibilities (5.7 %) and other family reasons (2.9 %) was significantly higher than that of men, who, even combining care responsibilities and family reasons, only reached 0.5 %.

Having children tends to have a positive impact on men’s employment while it has the opposite effect for women. Thus, in 2021, the employment rates of workers with at least one child below the age of six, are strikingly different for women and men: on an EU average, it is 90.2 % for men against 67.2 % for women. The highest difference in the employment rate is in Czechia (42.9 % for women vs 97.1 % for men) while the difference is lowest in Portugal (84.2 % for women vs 93.3 % for men). The female employment rate falls further in the case of households with 3 children or more, moving to an EU average of 53.0 % for women vs 86.2 % for men (Graph 2.2). In this category, Romania ranks lowest with a female employment rate of 33.7 % vs 75.6 % for men while Slovenia performs best with a rate of 81.7 % vs 94.4 % for men. The tendency for women with children to be less likely to work while the employment rates of fathers increase remains true for all educational levels. Nevertheless, the gender gap is considerably lower in families with a higher level of education: it stands at 14.2 pps for workers with a tertiary education and at 41.5 pps for workers with less than primary and lower secondary education. Figures also show that the gender gap in employment increases significantly with the number of children: in families with more than 3 children, fewer than 60 % of mothers have a paid job. More specifically female labour market participation for mothers of 3 or more varies between 53 %, if the youngest child is below age 6, and 69.5 %, if the youngest child is at least of age 12, compared to respectively 86.2 % and 88.4 % for men.

Graph 2.2 EU27 Employment rates (25-49 years) by sex, number and age of youngest child, 2021.



Source: Eurostat, [LFST_HHEREDCH](#)

Finally, it should be pointed out that even if theoretically speaking flexible working arrangements such as **teleworking** contribute to achieve work-life balance, men tend to use them for ‘performance enhancing purposes’, while women normally use them to better manage their work-life balance when family responsibilities are present⁴². Research showed that during the pandemic the gender

⁴² See [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/245252/IPOL_BRI\(2022\)719547_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/245252/IPOL_BRI(2022)719547_EN.pdf)

gap in childcare in households with both parents teleworking was reduced. However, research from Germany⁴³ showed that in general men working flexibly spend less time on childcare than those doing office hours. This is because they are expected to benefit from flexible working arrangements to enhance their performance, thus increasing their work intensity or working hours in exchange of additional rewards. In contrast, women often work flexibly to meet family responsibilities, which does not lead to any financial rewards. As a consequence, teleworking may help solve childcare problems, but does not necessarily bring about equal co-responsibility between parents which still seems to rely on gender stereotypes.

These engrained gendered patterns, though slowly fading, underline the importance of appropriate work-life balance policies and effective access to quality and affordable early childhood education and care services. These are necessary to facilitate the return of mothers to the labour market after a period of family leave and to encourage more men to make use of their right to family leaves and part-time work.

The 2022 Education and Training Monitor⁴⁴ highlighted again that women outperform men in virtually all EU-level education statistics. In 2021, the percentage of women obtaining a tertiary education level was 46.8 % against 35.7 % for men⁴⁵; the combined underachievement in reading, maths and science as measured by PISA testing in 2018⁴⁶ was about 3 pps lower and the early school leaving rates⁴⁷ 3.5 pps lower among girls. This has nevertheless not led to the elimination, or reduction, of employment inequalities, the gender pay gap or the unbalanced share of care work. Since significant gender gaps in study choices⁴⁸ also persist, challenging outdated gender stereotypes and biased expectations from girls and boys is still an issue to be addressed by education and training systems.

⁴³ Lott, Y., and Eulgem, L. (2019). Lohnnachteile durch Mutterschaft – helfen flexible Arbeitszeiten? Retrieved from https://www.boeckler.de/pdf/p_wsi_report_49_2019.pdf

⁴⁴ Education and Training Monitor 2022, Comparative report, 2022. Available at <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eac/education-and-training-monitor-2022/downloads/comparative-report/Education-and-Training-Monitor-Comparative-Report.pdf>

⁴⁵ EU Labour Force Survey [LFS]

⁴⁶ OECD's PISA 2018. The OECD's Programme for International Student Achievement (PISA) is conducted every 3 years. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic the 2021 data collection was delayed to 2022 with results to be released by the end of 2023. Therefore the latest available are from 2018.

⁴⁷ The indicator covers 18-24 year-olds without upper secondary educational attainment and no longer in education or training. This rate was 9.7 % in 2021, i.e. approximately 3.1 million young people. Any increase of disengagement from school during COVID-19 will take time before being fully reflected in this assessment. In 2020, there were sizable gender gaps (above 5 pps) in Spain (+8.6), Portugal (+7.5), Cyprus (+6.6) and Italy (+5.2), yet all Member States, except for Spain, managed to decrease gender gaps to below 5 pps in 2021. In Spain, the 2021 gap was - at 7.0 pps - by far the biggest.

⁴⁸ In tertiary education, men are underrepresented in the fields of education (21.5 %); health and welfare (28.1 %); arts and humanities (35.5 %); and social sciences, journalism and information (35.6 %). This contrasts with female enrolment in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) disciplines, where women represent only 31.3 % of enrolled students despite good employment opportunities in this area. Sweden (37.2 %), Romania (36.8 %), Italy (36.2 %) and Poland (35.6 %) are the only Member States where female enrolment shares in STEM disciplines exceed 35 %.

A survey by EIGE⁴⁹ carried out in 2022 offers more insights on the impact of care responsibilities on gender gaps. It shows that different perceptions of gender roles for (unpaid) care work and actual differences in the division of tasks are still visible. In the EU, one European in five (22.9 %), regularly provides informal long-term care, mostly to older relatives (42.5 %). Adding to this care for children, the figures reach almost one European in two (48 %). The consequences of unpaid care work are however different by gender and confirm a tendency for women to take on care work and reduce working hours (15.5 % of women vs 12.2 % of men employed and involved in unpaid care) and for men to instead assume the financial burden by increasing paid work (6.8 % of women vs 10.2 % of men employed and involved in unpaid care), possibly compensating income losses inside the same household.

The availability of quality and affordable care services plays a key role. In the case of care for children, around 80 % of parents using formal early childhood education and care services could access all the care services they needed. For 20 % of parents, there was no availability, at least not when needed, or it was not affordable to meet all their care needs. Interestingly, women and men with unmet needs for childcare services seem to have a different perception of obstacles, with men more often declaring that administrative procedures are too complex (13.5 % of men vs 5.8 % of women) or that their children are not eligible (17.4 % for men vs 10.5 % for women).

Perceptions differ also on the division of care and household responsibilities. When asked about their position on the statement that ‘household work should be shared by partners equally’, less than half of men strongly agree (47.3 %) against almost two thirds of women (62.1 %); adding those who only ‘agree’, figures reach 88 % of women and 81 % of men. Perhaps surprisingly, it would appear that young men (age 16-24) seem to have the most conservative views not only compared with the same age range of women but also with older men: only 73 % of them agree against 87 % of women of the same age range and 85 % of men aged 65-74. In this way, gender norms and stereotypes tend to feed a vicious cycle: the more women are expected to assume more care responsibilities and focus on those, the more men are focusing on their ‘bread-winner role’, occupying higher status jobs, earning more money in these jobs, and being less involved in child-rearing and domestic chores.

A more gender-equal EU would over time have strong, positive impacts on GDP growth, and lead to higher levels of employment and productivity. A recent report by the International Labour Organization⁵⁰ finds ‘a strong investment case’ for creating a transformative package of care policies, based on universal access, that would create a breakthrough pathway for building a better and more gender-equal world of work. Investment in gender-equal leave, universal access to early childhood education and care and long-term care services could generate globally up to 299 million jobs by 2035 with annual investment of USD 5.4 trillion (equivalent to 4.2 % of total annual GDP) by 2035, partly offset by an increase in tax revenue from the additional earnings and employment. For the EU-27 only, this would be 4.4 million more jobs with a 2 pps average reduction in the gender employment gap for early childhood education and care only, and an additional 14 million jobs with

⁴⁹ EIGE (forthcoming), Survey of gender gaps in unpaid care, individual and social activities. The results of the survey will be presented in EIGE’s Gender Equality Index in 2023.

⁵⁰ International Labour Organization, ‘Care at work: Investing in care leave and services for a more gender equal world of work’, 2022. Available at https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_838653.pdf

an average reduction of a further 4 pps in the gender employment gap for long-term care. Considering women's better educational attainment (see above), the ongoing gender gap in employment leaves a large untapped potential that could be used to address skills shortages and help respond to the EU's demographic challenges.

In addition to the unequal division of care responsibilities, the design of **tax and benefits systems** in a number of EU countries also continues to provide disincentives to taking up paid work for second earners, i.e. the partner with the lower salary, who are predominantly women. Although joint taxation schemes are intended to lower the overall tax burden of couples where earnings are unevenly distributed between the partners, they also inflate marginal tax rates for non- or lower earners, as all their income is effectively taxed at the higher marginal rate of the higher-earning partner. This creates an **inactivity trap**, i.e. a situation where taking up a job at a salary one third lower than the partner results in a large part of the earnings being lost in additional taxes and withdrawn benefits. In many Member States, costs for early childhood education and care add to the bill, further reducing the financial incentives for the second earner to take on a paid job. This inactivity trap is above 40 % in Lithuania, Denmark, Slovenia, Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg, and Romania. In contrast, it is less than 20 % in Greece and Estonia, and less than 10 % in Cyprus⁵¹. The contribution of taxation to the inactivity trap is most pronounced in Belgium, Germany, and Romania. The same line applies to increasing working hours or moving to a better paid job (**low-wage trap**): on average in the EU, second earners can lose around one third of their additional earnings. Since 78 % of second earners are women, these 'traps' have significant implications for gender equality.

Every year, under the **European Semester process**⁵², the Commission proposes to the Council a number of country-specific recommendations for policy actions aimed at enhancing coordination among Member States on economic, fiscal, employment and social policy as part of the EU's economic governance framework. The European Semester also provides a framework for coordinating and monitoring Member State efforts in delivering on the principles and rights set out by the European Pillar of Social Rights on equal opportunities and access to the labour market, fair working conditions, and social protection and inclusion. Principle 2 of the Pillar specifically addresses gender equality, and principle 3 equal opportunities. In 2022, the Council, on Commission's proposal, issued country-specific recommendations⁵³ addressing gender equality for three countries (Austria, Germany and Poland), focusing on increasing female labour market participation and the provision of early childhood education and care, and reducing disincentives for second earners⁵⁴.

⁵¹ Proposal for a joint employment report from the Commission and the Council, COM (2022) 783 final. Available at https://commission.europa.eu/publications/2023-european-semester-proposal-joint-employment-report_en

⁵² See https://commission.europa.eu/content/eu-economic-governance-monitoring-prevention-correction/european-semester_en

⁵³ See https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/2022-european-semester-country-specific-recommendations-commission-recommendations_en

⁵⁴ For Germany, it is recommended to take actions to 'improve the tax mix for more inclusive and sustainable growth in particular by improving tax incentives to increase hours worked'; for Austria, to 'boost labour market participation of women, including by enhancing quality childcare services'; for Poland, to 'increase labour market participation including by improving access to childcare and long-term care and remove remaining obstacles to more permanent types of employment'.

In December 2022, the Commission has adopted two proposals⁵⁵ to strengthen the role and independence of **equality bodies** in order to better enforce non-discrimination rules and to prevent discrimination. The new standards address independence and resources of equality bodies, and ensure they have the necessary powers to deal with cases of discrimination and to assist victims effectively. To prevent discrimination the initiative tasks equality bodies with raising awareness and promoting equality.

Addressing the gender pay and the pensions gap

According to the latest figures from 2021, the **gender pay gap (GPG)**⁵⁶ at EU level stands at 12.7 %, having decreased from 14.4 % in 2018 (Graph 2.3). This means that, in the EU, women earn on average⁵⁷ only EUR 0.83 for every euro earned by a man. The GPG decreased in all countries but Hungary, Romania and Portugal. Luxembourg is the first country to ever register a slightly negative GPG of -0.2%.

The gender pay gap focuses only on the employed part of the population. An additional indicator to grasp the overall picture is the difference in overall-earnings, the **gender overall-earnings gap**⁵⁸. While the gender pay gap decreased slightly over the last reporting period, the opposite is the case for the **gender overall-earnings gap**⁵⁹, which increased from 31.1 % in 2014 to 36.2 % in 2018 (latest

⁵⁵ Proposal for a Council Directive 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, and deleting Article 13 of Directive 2000/43/EC and Article 12 of Directive 2004/113/EC, COM(2022) 689 final and Proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council 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 deleting Article 20 of Directive 2006/54/EC and Article 11 of Directive 2010/41/EU, COM(2022) 688 final.

⁵⁶ The (unadjusted) gender pay gap is the difference between average gross hourly earnings of working women and men. It takes into account differences in the average characteristics of men and women in the labour market (e.g. differences in sectors and occupations). It can be explained by a higher concentration of women in lower paid sectors and occupations, i.e. sectoral or occupational gender segregation, which reflects not only average preferences of women and men but also gender stereotypes, social pressure or discrimination when moving up in the hierarchy at company level. It also includes possible gender pay discrimination, even though it does not allow to identify its exact extent.

⁵⁷ There are large divergences between Member States, ranging from a gender pay gap of -0.2% in Luxembourg to 20.5 % in Estonia. The overall decrease was linked to a reduction since 2018 in all Member States with the exception of Romania (+1.4 p.p.), Portugal (+3.0 p.p.) and Hungary (+3.1 p.p.). Progress is steady but slow: the pay gap has only decreased by 3.5 p.p. over the past 10 years.

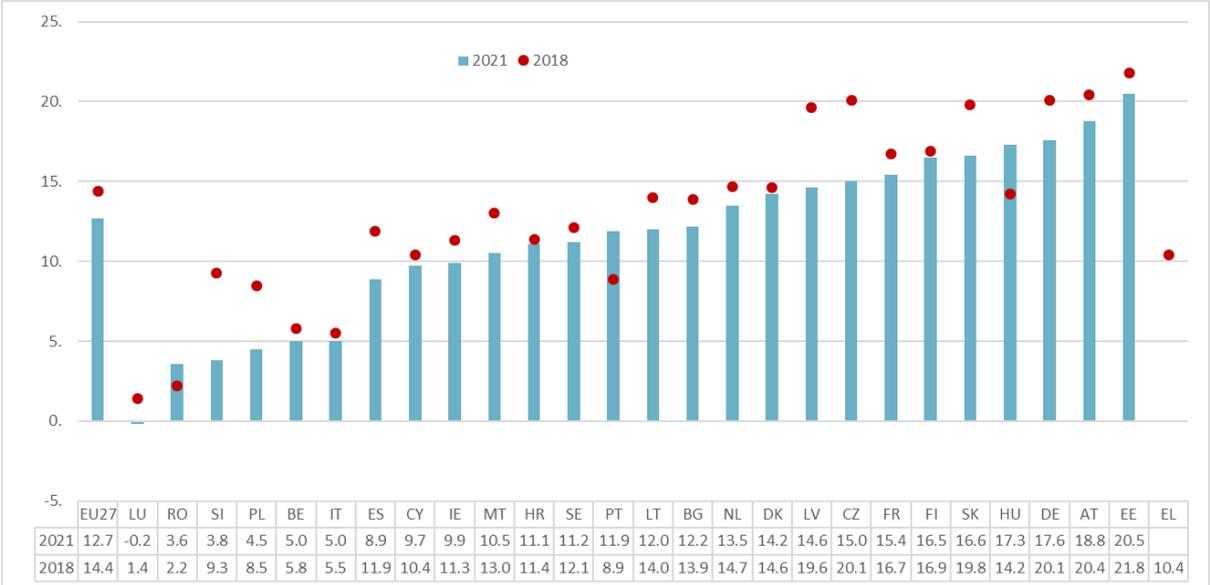
⁵⁸ The gender overall earnings gap is a synthetic indicator. It measures the impact of three combined factors, namely: (1) the average hourly earnings, (2) the monthly average of the number of hours paid (before any adjustment for part-time work) and (3) the employment rate, on the average earnings of all women of working age - whether employed or not employed - compared with men. This indicator helps to better grasp the long-term consequences of the lower, on average, participation of women in the labour market and the worse income conditions at later stages of life. It is also more accurate in assessing the impact of self-selection on the gender pay gap, i.e. the fact that only women who can expect a higher average salary (e.g. because of a higher education level) enter the labour market with the consequence that the gender pay gap is relatively low. This phenomenon reflects the absence of low earning women in the labour market and it is visible in a large gender employment gap.

⁵⁹ Data available at <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tegges01/default/table>

available year⁶⁰), ranging from 20 % in Lithuania to 44 % in Austria. This means that the average earnings of all women of working age, i.e. whether they were employed or not, were around 36 % lower than the corresponding average earnings of men.

These differences in average earnings cumulate over the course of life and culminate in noticeable average income differences later in life. The worse average economic condition of women results in particular from **their lower pension revenues**. These are primarily linked to labour market inequalities, but the extent to which the pension system is able to compensate for these inequalities varies. Indeed, some design features of the pension system, might respond to or incentivise gendered patterns and the resulting lower social contributions in amount (because of lower average pay and care breaks are not fully taken into account), length of paid work or both.

Graph 2.3. Unadjusted gender pay gap (%), years 2018 and 2021.



Note: The unadjusted gender pay gap covers companies with 10 or more employees in all economic activities except agriculture, forestry and fishing (section A), public administration, defence and compulsory social security (section O), and activities of households as employers, undifferentiated goods and services producing activities of households for own use (section T).

2021 data are provisional for all countries except for DK, FI, HU, MT, SE and SK. Data are estimated for RO and the definition differs for CZ. Data for IE are for 2020. Data for EL are not available.

Source: Eurostat, [SDG_05_20](#)

Indeed, the average **retirement age for women**⁶¹, with few exceptions (Luxembourg, France, Germany, Finland, Ireland and Estonia), tends to be earlier than for men⁶². The resulting **gender pension gap** stands at 27.1 pps in 2021⁶³, meaning that women in the EU aged over 65 received a pension that was on average more than a quarter lower than that of men. While this difference is still

⁶⁰ The indicator has been computed every 4 years in correspondence with the structure of earnings survey data collection as of 2010.

⁶¹ OECD, 'Pensions at a Glance 2021: OECD and G20 Indicators', 2021. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1787/ca401ebd-en>

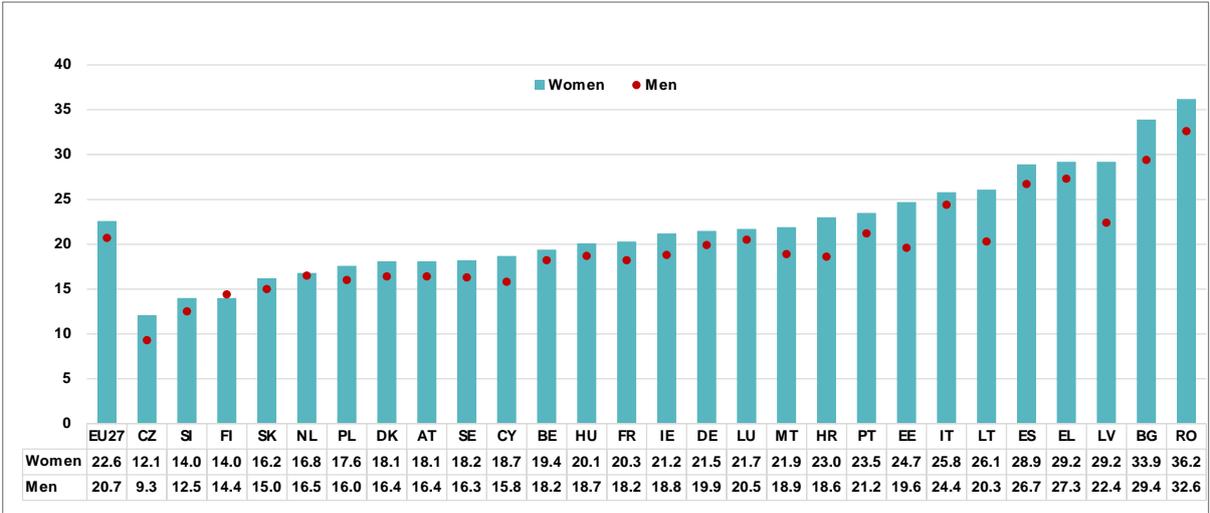
⁶² In 2020, at the EU level, men retire on average almost 10 months later than women. The country with the largest gap in retirement age is Romania where men retire on average at age 65 and women at 61.3.

⁶³ Eurostat, available at https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/ilc_pnp13

considerable, it is an improvement (6.5 pps) compared with 2012 when the gender pension gap stood at 33.6 % for the same countries. Although women receive lower pensions in all Member States, the extent of the gap varies widely⁶⁴. Overall, the gender pension gap is a strong signal of gender inequalities throughout the life cycle, despite the significant progress made to compensate for them in pension systems over the last decades⁶⁵.

As a corollary of the gender earnings and gender pension gaps, **women in the EU in 2021 were still at a higher risk of poverty or social exclusion**⁶⁶ (22.6 % for women vs 20.7 % for men). Czechia is the country where the least proportion of men and women are at risk of poverty or social exclusion (9.3 % and 12.1 % respectively); Romania is at the other end of the spectrum, where 36.2 % of women and 32.6 % of men are at risk of social exclusion. With the exception of Finland, in all countries the proportion of women at risk is higher than the proportion of men at risk (Graph 2.4).

Graph 2.4. Share of population at risk of poverty or social exclusion, EU-27, year 2021.



Note: 2021 values for PL are provisional

Source: Eurostat, [ILC_PEPS01N](#)

Moreover, while the overall proportion of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion decreased, according to Eurostat data, for both men and women between 2015 and 2021 (respectively by 2.3 pps and 2.4 pps), the EU average for older people (over 65 years) has increased slightly across time from 20.6 % for women and 14.7 % for men in 2015, to 22.1 % and 16.2 % in 2021. The gender gap in the at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion rate for the over 65 population has oscillated around 6 pps throughout the years, which is more than twice the gender poverty gap among the total population.

⁶⁴ The largest difference was in Malta (41.5 %), followed by the Netherlands (38.1 %) and Austria (35.8 %). On the other side of the spectrum, the smallest difference in pension income between women and men was recorded in Estonia (3.5 %), followed by Denmark (8.5 %) and Hungary (9.7 %).

⁶⁵ OECD, 'Towards Improved Retirement Savings Outcomes for Women', 2021. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1787/f7b48808-en>

⁶⁶ Though it must be taken into account that the indicator is based on household level variables. For example, the poverty rate is based on the equivalised income with the same value allocated to all household members.

The proportion of single parents at risk of poverty or social exclusion is extremely high, oscillating around 45 % between 2015 and 2021. Women make up the overwhelming majority of this group (83 %). In 2021, the country with the lowest at risk of poverty or social exclusion rate among this group was Slovenia with nearly one in four single-parent households being at risk of poverty or social exclusion (23 %). The highest was Ireland with almost two out of three (58 %). The share of women with disabilities (over 16 years) at risk of poverty or social exclusion is 30.6%, whereas the same figure for women without disabilities is 19.8%⁶⁷.

Addressing the gender pay gap and its root causes is one of the key priorities of the 2020 – 2025 gender equality strategy. In 2022, the EU achieved a major breakthrough on the proposal for a **directive on pay transparency**, which the Commission had put forward in March 2021. Following several months of negotiations between the European Parliament and the Council, in December 2022 the co-legislators reached a provisional agreement⁶⁸ on the pay transparency directive. After the formal adoption of the text of the agreement at the beginning of 2023, it will enter into force on the twentieth day following its publication in the Official Journal of the European Union. The Member States will have 3 years to transpose the directive.

With this directive, the EU addresses the effective enforcement of the equal pay principle between women and men by providing transparency on pay and on pay gaps. Transparency is decisive in empowering workers to detect and prove possible discrimination based on sex. It will shed light on unconscious gender bias in pay settings, thereby helping to raise awareness of the issue among employers and helping them to identify and eliminate discriminatory gender-based pay differences. It will also foster a change in attitudes towards women's pay by stimulating debate around the reasons for structural gender pay differences. Beyond the simple compliance with the principle of equal pay, the new legislation is expected to trigger a review of gender equality policies more generally at company level, and promote closer cooperation between employers and workers' representatives.

The text as provisionally agreed reinforces in some aspects the original Commission proposal and takes a step by step approach when it comes to reporting obligations for employers on pay gaps within their organisation. More specifically, employers with at least 100 employees will have to publish information on pay gaps between female and male workers. In a first stage, employers with at least 250 employees will report every year and employers with between 150 and 249 employees will report every three years. Five years after the transposition of the Directive, employers with between 100 and 149 employees will also have to report every three years. Where pay reporting reveals a gender pay gap of at least 5 % and when the employer cannot justify the gap on the basis of objective gender-neutral factors, employers will have to conduct a pay assessment, in cooperation with workers' representatives.

All employees, irrespective of the size of the company, will have the right to request information from their employer to assess whether they are paid in a non-discriminatory manner compared with

⁶⁷ Eurostat. People at risk of poverty or social exclusion by level of activity limitation, sex and age. Online data code: [HLTH_DPE010](#)

⁶⁸ See https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2014_2019/plmrep/COMMITTEES/CJ21/AG/2023/01-25/1269637EN.pdf

other workers in the same organisation doing equal work or work of equal value. Employers are also required to indicate the initial pay level or its range (based on objective and gender-neutral criteria) to be paid for a specific job without the applicant having to request it. In addition, the directive prohibits employers from asking job applicants about the pay history of their former employment relationship. Confidential contractual clauses restricting workers from disclosing information about their pay are also prohibited. The future directive also provides better access to justice for victims of pay discrimination. The measures include legal standing of equality bodies and workers' representatives in legal or administrative proceedings on behalf of workers, fines to be established for infringements of the equal pay principle, and compensation, including full recovery of back pay and related bonuses or payments in kind.

Moreover, new **work-life balance rights** will make it easier for both parents to combine family and caring responsibilities with paid work, and to share care responsibilities more equally between them. The **Work-Life Balance Directive**⁶⁹, which was adopted in June 2019, had to be transposed into national law by all Member States by 2 August 2022. The Directive introduced paternity leave, carer's leave, a non-transferable right to parental leave and a right to request flexible working arrangements. So far, several Member States have failed to notify national measures fully transposing the legislation. The Commission formally notified these Member States of their failure to comply with EU law in September. A 2022 thematic report on the transposition of the directive⁷⁰ by the European Equality Law Network finds that almost half of EU countries are late in implementing the Directive, with significant implementation gaps in relation to parental leave or allowance, flexible working arrangements and legal protection. The Commission is assessing the completeness and compliance of the national measures notified by each Member State and will take action if and where necessary.

In January 2023, the Council of Ministers in charge of employment and social affairs adopted a Council Recommendation on **adequate minimum income**⁷¹. This initiative will contribute to achieving the European Pillar of Social Rights action plan's target to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion by at least 15 million, including at least 5 million children. Member States are recommended to provide robust social safety nets that guarantee life in dignity at all stages of life while safeguarding incentives to (re)integrate and remain in the labour market for those who can work. The recommended level of minimum income is to be at least equivalent to the national-at-risk-of-poverty threshold, defined as 60 % of median equivalised disposable income after social transfers, or to the monetary value of necessary goods and services, or to another comparable measure established by national law or practice. With a view to promoting gender equality, income security and economic independence of women, young adults and persons with disabilities, it is recommended that Member States ensure the possibility of requesting the minimum income to be provided to individual members of the household. This initiative will contribute to gender equality

⁶⁹ Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU, OJ L 188, 12.7.2019, p. 79-93.

⁷⁰ Available at <https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/5779-the-transposition-of-the-work-life-balance-directive-in-eu-member-states-a-long-way-ahead>

⁷¹ Council Recommendation of 30 January 2023 on adequate minimum income ensuring active inclusion 2023/C 41/01, OJ C 41, 3.2.2023, p. 1-12.

and to economic security of women by recommending Member States to facilitate the receipt by individual members of the households of their share of minimum income.

In February 2022 the EU Court of Justice ruled that a Spanish provision of social security legislation that excludes domestic workers from unemployment insurance is indirectly discriminatory on the grounds of sex, since most of those workers are women⁷². Following the Commission's position, the Court ruled that the provision is contrary to Directive 79/7 on sex equality in statutory social security⁷³, because it places female workers at a particular disadvantage in relation to male workers and is not justified by objective factors unrelated to any discrimination on grounds of sex.

Closing the gender care gap

The relevance of the gender care gap was highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic, when women bore a disproportionate share of the increase in care responsibilities. While the pandemic is behind us, the gender care gap is likely to stay. This is due to the increase in overall need for long term care and the fact that many people in need of long-term care struggle to access high-quality and affordable long-term care services, therefore relying on informal carers (60 % of whom are women⁷⁴) in many Member States.

Gender aspects in care are multi-dimensional. As care receivers, women need more intense long-term care for longer periods of time; on average, they live longer than men but less often in good health. They are, however, often less able to afford the care, due to gender inequalities in pay and pensions accumulated over their lifetime. Estimates show that public costs associated with informal long-term care could amount to around 1 % of GDP, more than half of current public expenditure on long-term care (1.7 % of GDP). As paid caregivers, women represent around 90 % of the care workforce. Care workers often face difficult and stressful working conditions, lack of recognition as well as low wages.

Finally, as unpaid caregivers women are much more affected than men in their capacity to enter or stay in the labour market. Between 2016 and 2021, only around 0.1 % of men were inactive due to care of adults with disabilities or children compared with around 1.2 % of women. The gap widens if we include care responsibilities for other family members: the shares increase to an average of 1.8 % for women against 0.3 % for men. It is estimated that care responsibilities keep 7.7 million women out of the labour market (compared with only 450 000 men) and contribute to the gender employment gap⁷⁵.

The EU addressed this care gap with several initiatives. Most recently, the above mentioned **Work-Life Balance Directive**, which encourages a better sharing of care responsibilities between parents, includes a provision to encourage men to take paternity and parental leave to facilitate the return of women to the labour market after having children.

⁷² Case C-389/20, CJ v TGSS, ECLI:EU:C:2022:120.

⁷³ Directive 79/7/EEC of 19 December 1978 on the progressive implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women in matters of social security, OJ L 6, 10.1.1979, p. 24.

⁷⁴ See <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-equality-index-2019-report/informal-care-older-people-people-disabilities-and-long-term-care-services>

⁷⁵ EIGE, 'Gender inequalities in care and consequences for the labour market', 2021. Available at <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-inequalities-care-and-consequences-labour-market>

In September 2022, the European Commission presented the **European care strategy**⁷⁶. It aimed to ensure quality, affordable and accessible care services across the EU and to support both receivers of care and the people caring for them, professionally or informally. The strategy was accompanied by two proposals for Council recommendations: one on the **revision of the Barcelona targets on early childhood education and care, and one on access to affordable high-quality long-term care**. Both proposals for Council recommendations were adopted in December by the Council of Ministers in charge of employment and social affairs. The Council recommendations provide policy frameworks for reforms and investments at national, regional and local levels. Both cover adequacy, availability and quality of care, and the working conditions of carers and support measures for informal carers. The strategy set out further supportive actions at EU level and calls for action at national level.

A key objective of the **Council Recommendation on access to affordable high-quality long-term care**⁷⁷ is to ensure access to high-quality and affordable long-term care to all those in need. It invites Member States to improve the adequacy of social protection of long-term and expand the offer of care services to ensure a good mix between different care options. It also calls for measures to be taken to address the staff shortages in the care sector and difficult working conditions. In addition, it calls for better support measures for informal carers who choose to provide care, including by helping them to access the necessary training, counselling, healthcare, psychological support and respite care, and by providing them with adequate financial support.

The **Council Recommendation on early childhood education and care: the Barcelona targets for 2030**⁷⁸ includes revised targets for participation of children below the age of 3 in early childhood education and care (ECEC) and an alignment with the existing education target for children from 3 to mandatory primary school age. In addition to quantitative targets, the Recommendation includes a broader focus on intensity of ECEC participation, on increasing participation of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion and, more in general, looking more broadly at measures to facilitate in practice female labour market participation (e.g. with the provision of out of school care for children below age 12), and a gender balanced sharing of care responsibilities (e.g. combating gender stereotypes). Finally, it also insists on the need to ensure quality, accessibility and affordability of education and care, building on the 2019 Recommendation on High Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems and the 2021 Council Recommendation establishing a European Child Guarantee.

As discussed in the first section of the chapter, participation in the labour market is particularly challenging for mothers. Long absences due to family leaves not only make it more difficult to re-enter the labour market but also risk affecting the entire career pattern. This is why ECEC services are so important. However, the availability of affordable and easily accessible high-quality services varies widely across Member States.

⁷⁶ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, COM (2022) 440 final.

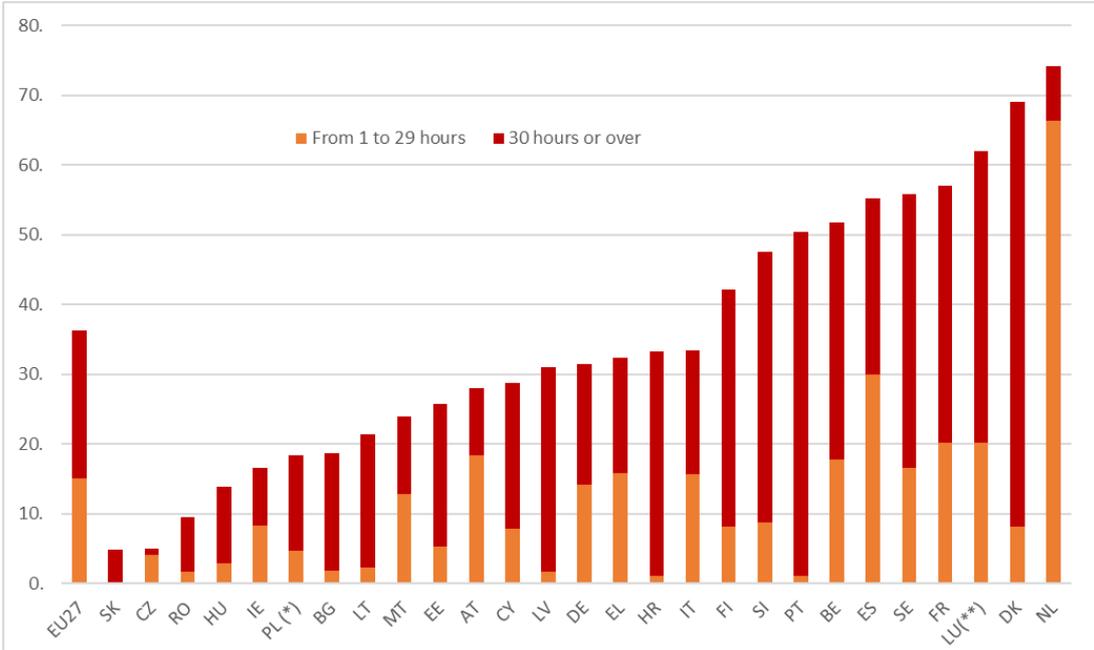
⁷⁷ Council Recommendation of 8 December 2022 on access to affordable high-quality long-term care, OJ C 476, 15.12.2022, p. 1-11.

⁷⁸ Council Recommendation of 8 December 2022 on early childhood education and care: the Barcelona targets for 2030, OJ C 484, 20.12.2022, p.1-12.

In 2021, more than half (50.4 %) of all children in the EU aged less than 3 years were cared for exclusively by their parents, a 3 pps increase compared with 2020. Mothers often take on the larger part. Conversely, more than one third (36.2 %) of children aged less than 3 were in formal care⁷⁹ (- 3.8 pps compared with 2020), and/or one fifth (21.0 %) were cared for by their grandparents, other relatives or professional childminders (+0.2 pps on 2020).

As shown in graph 2.5, Member States differ substantially in the share of children participating in formal ECEC and in their participation by time-intensity. Overall participation varies between 4.9 % in Czechia and 74.2 % in the Netherlands; similarly, the share of children participating for 30 hours or more ranges between 0.8 % in Czechia to 61.0 % in Denmark.

Graph 2.5 Children less than 3 years participating in ECEC by number of hours per week - % over the population of the same age group, 2021.



(*) provisional (**) break in time series

Note: Slovakia data are for 2020

Source: EUROSTAT, [ILC CAINDFORMAL](#)

Meaningful participation in the labour market requires that parents work for a number of hours that delivers a salary at least above social benefits. Therefore, the time-intensity of participation of children in ECEC is a relevant factor in this context. The Recommendation invites Member States to pay attention to this aspect and to monitor this share. The Commission will monitor the progress

⁷⁹ Formal childcare is defined as regulated childcare provided away from the child’s home; it includes, among other things, the time spent at school within compulsory education. Other types of childcare comprise care that is provided by a professional child-minder at the child’s home or at the childminders’ home, as well as care provided by grandparents, other household members (other than parents), other relatives, friends or neighbours.

towards the revised Barcelona targets through a dedicated section in its **gender equality strategy monitoring portal**⁸⁰.

Gender equality was also an important element guiding actions for the recovery after the pandemic. The **Recovery and Resilience Facility** (RRF), which entered into force in February 2021, supports this effort. It mitigates the economic and social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic as the cornerstone of the EU's more than EUR 800 billion NextGenerationEU recovery instrument. The RRF requires Member States to explain how the measures in their recovery and resilience plans are expected to contribute to gender equality when mitigating the impact of the crisis, taking into account the mainstreaming of equality considerations (see Chapter 4 for details).

Achieving equal participation across different sectors of the economy

Gender segregation, i.e. the unequal distribution of women and men, across sectors, occupations and fields of study, remains deeply rooted in the EU. Gender segregation is often linked to gender stereotypes; as such it narrows life choices, and education and employment options. It also contributes to the gender pay gap, to limiting access to certain jobs, and to perpetuating unequal gender power relations in the public and private spheres, therefore further reinforcing gender stereotypes.

Lower participation in a specific sector also has more far-reaching social implications beyond its economic impact. One telling example is the security sector⁸¹, in particular external security. In discussions about armed conflict, women are often overlooked even though they are disproportionately affected. Focus on them is mostly as victims though they have always been important actors on the field. Moreover, women are also underrepresented in sectors considered key to the green transition⁸², which notably include the energy, transport and construction sectors. This is an issue for delivering on the Green Deal and REPower EU, as women represent only one third of people working in renewable energy sector.

At the EU-27 level, gender segregation across both sectors and occupations has remained stable since 2015 although occupational segregation has shrunk slightly since 2019. The gender segregation index reflects the proportion of the employed population that would need to change occupation/sector in order to bring about an even distribution of men and women across occupations or sectors; it therefore varies between 0 % (no segregation) and 50 % (complete segregation). In 2021, it was 19 % on average by sector and 25 % by occupation. These figures are essentially identical to those in 2010, when the index stood at 19.1 % and 24.9 % respectively.

Gender stereotypes might also influence choices in education that can then constrain professional careers. As mentioned, tertiary educational attainment rates are much higher for women. However, the proportion of women graduating in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines, which are better paid and have better career prospects, is persistently lower than that of men and is relatively stable: there are two men graduating in tertiary education in STEM disciplines for every woman. The ratio is slightly better at master's or equivalent level and at doctoral level

⁸⁰ See <https://composite-indicators.jrc.ec.europa.eu/ges-monitor>

⁸¹ See <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-and-security>

⁸² See <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC126047>

(respectively 1.5 and 1.8 men for every woman in 2020)⁸³. Another positive flag is observed in the field of artificial intelligence, where there is an increasing trend of female representation of researchers in international conferences⁸⁴. As the She Figures monitoring report shows, the gender gap widens as seniority levels increase, with only 35% of women in engineering and technology in Grade C positions (the first post in which a newly qualified PhD graduate would typically be recruited within the institutional or corporate system) and only 19 % of women holding full Professorship positions in this field⁸⁵. National policies that address the segregation issue in the labour market most often try to attract more women to sectors with technical content, i.e. STEM and ICT activities. They try less often to attract more men into the care sector, i.e. education, health and welfare activities, possibly because this would also require improving the working conditions and remuneration in that sector.

The **'Greek Innovation Lab for Women'** (#GIL4W) (*Κέντρο Καινοτομίας για τις Γυναίκες*), created in 2022, aims at supporting and promoting research, innovation and women's entrepreneurship in Greece, strengthening STEM fields in education and tackling the under-representation of women in science.

In **Hungary**, the national strategy for the promotion of gender equality aims to promote girls' and women's orientation towards STEM careers by organising **career guidance sessions promoting STEM professions** to young women who are about to choose a career.

At the EU level, the **Digital Decade Policy Programme 2020**⁸⁶ sets the ambitious target to more than double the number of ICT professionals⁸⁷ from 9 to 20 million while promoting the access of women to this field and increasing the number of ICT graduates. The related **Digital education action plan**⁸⁸, which aims to enhance the digital and entrepreneurial competence of girls and women and boost their confidence to use this competence creatively, includes a free online learning programme ('Girls Go Circular') that has already been used by 20 000 girls and aims at reaching 40 00 by 2027.

In the framework of the **2021-2027 Erasmus+ programme**, which promotes full respect for the right to equality between women and men, the right to non-discrimination, and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, the EU funded a number of initiatives. **The European strategy for universities**⁸⁹, presented at the beginning of the 2022 European Year of Youth,

⁸³ Education and Training Monitor, 2022. Available at <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eac/education-and-training-monitor-2022/en/comparative-report/foreword.html>

⁸⁴ Indicator Gender diversity index, produced in the context of DivinAI (Diversity in Artificial Intelligence), an initiative of the HUMAINT project at Joint Research Centre (EC). The indicator is included in the AI Watch Index 2021 (Righi et al., 2022, available at <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC128744>

⁸⁵ European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, She figures 2021 : gender in research and innovation : statistics and indicators, Publications Office, 2021, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/06090>

⁸⁶ DECISION (EU) 2022/2481 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 14 December 2022 establishing the Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030 (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022D2481&from=EN>)

⁸⁷ See <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/desi-human-capital>

⁸⁸ See <https://education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/digital-education/action-plan>

⁸⁹ Communication from the Commission on a European strategy for universities, COM(2022) 16 final.

prioritises increasing both the gender balance of students and academic staff and the total pool of skills and competences in STEM. The different projects and initiatives which the Commission is supporting in line with the European Strategy for Universities are highlighted in a factsheet that was published on International Day for Women and Girls in Science 2023⁹⁰. The **EU STEM Coalition**⁹¹, an EU-wide network, works to build better STEM education in Europe, supported by the Erasmus+ programme. It is encouraged to develop new higher education curricula for engineering and ICT based on the STEAM approach. STEAM embraces the creative potential of connecting STEM disciplines with the arts, the humanities, and the social sciences. This is a powerful vehicle for making STEM subjects and careers more widely attractive. Several European Universities alliances are addressing the STEM challenge as part of their strategies. For example, in 2022, the EUT+ European Universities alliance launched the **“Women in Tech”**⁹² manifesto. The Commission is supporting girls and women through a series of ESTEAM (Entrepreneurship + STEAM)⁹³ Festivals and online communities whose goal is to enhance their digital and entrepreneurial competences, boost their confidence, and encourage them to study and take up careers in ESTEAM. During the ESTEAM Fests and challenges, girls and women learn to use those competencies creatively to spot opportunities, innovate and create value for society.

In 2022, the European Institute for Innovation and Technology launched a cross-KIC (Knowledge and Innovation Community) activity called **Supernovas**⁹⁴, dedicated to women’s entrepreneurship. Activities focus on mentorship and coaching and the organisation of dedicated events, including identifying start-ups and scale-ups from high-tech or deep-tech fields seeking to hire more women and matching them with young women from STEM careers. This support aims at improving the gender balance in entrepreneurship by having more women in the high-tech and deep-tech environments, more women entrepreneurs growing and getting funded, and more women becoming active and lead investors in innovation, and hence shaping the innovations available in the market.

The pilot project ‘GEM’ - Empower Girls to Embrace their Digital and Entrepreneurial Potential⁹⁵ run two summer camps in 10 countries and has established a European GEM network of schools, universities, high educational institutions, businesses, NGOs, (non-formal) education providers, ministries, municipalities, and STEM/educational research centres to exchange best practices to support girls in STEM education, studies and careers. In the framework of the InvestEU Programme, the Guarantee Agreement signed with the main implementing partner, the European Investment Bank (EIB) Group in Spring 2022 introduced a dedicated gender target: approximately 25 % of equity intermediaries that will benefit from InvestEU support must comply with predefined gender criteria. The criteria set out minimum representation of women in the management and decision-making of financial intermediaries. This will allow more funding flow to diverse Venture Capital and Private Equity Funds and help improve their gender balance in the long term.

⁹⁰ European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, EU support to strengthen gender equality in STEM, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023,

<https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/719121>

⁹¹ See <https://www.stemcoalition.eu/>

⁹² Available at <https://www.univ-tech.eu/manifesto-and-identity#>

⁹³ See https://eisma.ec.europa.eu/esteam-fests-and-communities-girls-and-women_en

⁹⁴ See <https://www.eitmanufacturing.eu/what-we-do/cross-kic-transversal-activities/supernovas/>

⁹⁵ See <https://icse.eu/international-projects/gem/>

Other EU-funded initiatives addressed entrepreneurship. The Commission has sponsored **WEgate**⁹⁶, a European platform that helps to create real opportunities for women to do business, expand their network and learn from mentors and peers how to achieve their full potential. This has complemented the mentoring and support activities that the Enterprise Europe Network had put in place for women entrepreneurs. Since women have access to smaller and less efficient networks, mostly including family, friends, and educators, the mission of WEgate is to connect women entrepreneurs to support organisations and to other women they could do business with. **EWA (Empowering Women in Agri-food)**⁹⁷ is a 6-month incubation programme containing specific training and personalised mentoring to promote female entrepreneurship in the agri-food sector. Similarly, the **LEADERS – women innovators in manufacturing**⁹⁸ programme supports women innovators (i.e. professionals, researchers, entrepreneurs) in developing solutions to address manufacturing-related challenges specifically in regions and countries with a modest innovation performance. Also, as announced in the social economy action plan adopted in December 2021, the **Youth Entrepreneurship Policy Academy** was prepared in 2022 (for a kick-off in early 2023) and it has a specific focus on women entrepreneurship. The Commission also financed a project on the ground in order to make several business incubators more mindful to the situation of underrepresented groups in entrepreneurship such as women (project “better incubation”). The project delivered its final results in 2022⁹⁹.

The **Women in Urban Mobility**¹⁰⁰ project focuses on raising awareness of female perspectives and gender equality in the urban mobility sector. The **female innovators in urban mobility programme**¹⁰¹ equips more women with an innovative and entrepreneurial mind and skillset to gain competence in leadership, networking and collaboration to take the next step in their career. The Commission continued to support the ‘**Women in Transport – EU Platform for Change**’, which gathers organisations committed to increasing female employment in transport and facilitates the sharing of best practices. The Women in Transport Platform also cooperated with the rail industry in the context of the European Year of Rail to launch a ‘**Women in Rail Award**’, with an awards ceremony on 8 March 2022¹⁰². In November 2022, the Commission has launched a new network of Diversity Ambassadors in Transport, which aims to raise awareness on measures, initiatives or actions that promote equality, diversity and inclusiveness in the transport workforce and for transport users¹⁰³.

Finally, under the **European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund 2021-2027**, the Commission launched in May 2022 a new call dedicated to **Women in the Blue Economy**¹⁰⁴. This aims to increase women’s participation in the blue economy, improve data collection, advance gender equality, and

⁹⁶ See <https://www.wegate.eu/>

⁹⁷ See <https://www.eitfood.eu/projects/ewa-empowering-women-in-agrifood-2022>

⁹⁸ See <https://www.eitmanufacturing.eu/calls/leaders-call-now-open/>

⁹⁹ See <https://betterincubation.eu/>

¹⁰⁰ See <https://www.eiturbanmobility.eu/projects/women-in-urban-mobility-2/>

¹⁰¹ See <https://www.unternehmertum.de/en/landingpages/female-innovators-in-urban-mobility-program>

¹⁰² See https://transport.ec.europa.eu/news/european-commission-announces-winners-women-rail-award-2022-03-08_en

¹⁰³ https://transport.ec.europa.eu/transport-themes/social-issues-equality-and-attractiveness-transport-sector/equality/diversity-ambassadors-transport_en

¹⁰⁴ See https://cinea.ec.europa.eu/news-events/news/women-blue-economy-call-proposals-now-open-2022-05-17_en

promote women's leadership. Its total budget is EUR 3 million. The Commission also promoted gender equality in advisory bodies since, despite the fact that women have a big role in fisheries (i.e. in the supply chain, preparing nets, selling), they are often invisible or undervalued simply because they are not as present aboard fishing vessels. Socio-economic data, including the number of women working in the field, were collected for the first time in 2022 under the data collection framework¹⁰⁵.

¹⁰⁵ See <https://datacollection.jrc.ec.europa.eu/>

LEADING EQUALLY THROUGH SOCIETY

Having more women in management or leadership positions has a positive impact on the business environment and in politics. For several years now, studies have shown that a good gender balance in leadership improves the performance of companies, drives economic growth, and contributes to good governance and public trust¹⁰⁶. More fundamentally, the equal participation of women and men in decision-making is a matter of fairness and fundamental rights. That is why gender balance in decision-making is one of the priorities of the Commission's 2020-2025 gender equality strategy.

Despite the benefits of gender equality, in 2022, women continued to be outnumbered by men in decision-making bodies in political and economic spheres throughout the EU. The 2022 Gender Equality Index¹⁰⁷, published by the EIGE, shows that the EU score in the area of power has increased by 2.2 pps in recent years, however the overall score of 57.2 is the lowest of all the domains covered by the index.

Women in political decision-making

Women represent half of EU's population and therefore society cannot afford to waste their talent, skills, knowledge and creativity. We need the equal participation of women and men in political decision-making positions to better reflect the composition of society and thereby strengthen our democracy.

The Commission noted in its report on the 2019 elections¹⁰⁸, that while the European Parliament reflects a better gender balance¹⁰⁹, there is still progress to be made on the democratic participation of women. For the 2024 elections it committed to put a specific focus on women, among other groups and to promote specific actions to achieve gender balance in decision-making and in politics¹¹⁰.

¹⁰⁶ See Rose, C. 'Does female board representation influence firm performance? The Danish evidence', *Corporate Governance. An International Review*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 2007, pp. 404-413; van der Walt, N., Ingley, C., 'Board Dynamics and the Influence of Professional Background, Gender and Ethnic Diversity of Directors' *Corporate Governance*, Vol. 11, No. 3, 2003, pp. 218-234; and Profeta, P., 'Gender Equality in Decision-Making Positions: The Efficiency Gains', *Inefficient Inequality: The Economic Costs of Gender Inequality in Europe*, Vol. 52, No. 1, *Intereconomics*, 2017, pp. 34-37.

¹⁰⁷ EIGE, *Gender Equality Index 2022 – Gender Equality Index 2022: The COVID-19 pandemic and care*. Available at <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-equality-index-2022-covid-19-pandemic-and-care>

¹⁰⁸ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council and the European Economic and Social Committee, report on the 2019 elections to the European Parliament. Available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0252>

¹⁰⁹ 751 MEPs were elected from 190 political parties from 28 Member States. 61% are new to the parliament, 60% are men, and 40% are women (an increase of three percentage points compared to 2014). As noted in the Staff Working Document accompanying the Report on the 2019 elections to the European Parliament, the participation and representation of women increased in the 2019 elections to the European Parliament. Turnout increased among women compared to the previous election, reducing the gender gap in voter turnout from 4 pps in 2014 to 3 pps. The number of female MEPs also increased from 37% to 39.4%.

¹¹⁰ The 2020 Citizenship Report observed that many Member States took specific measures to improve the participation of women in the EU elections. These included linking the allocation of public funding for political parties to promoting the political participation of women, quota systems for candidate lists and introducing a general obligation for political parties to have gender-balanced lists of candidates. It also mentioned, as particular challenges to women's political participation, online hate speech and cyber

Following the Commission's November 2021 proposal to amend the Regulation on the **statute and funding of European political parties**¹¹¹, the Council reached its general approach in March 2022. The European Parliament adopted its position in September 2022. The Commission proposal aims at making the funding of European political parties more transparent and includes provisions on improving gender equality. Drawing on Article 23 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, the proposal provides for an obligation for European political parties to include rules on gender equality in their statutes. The proposal also provides for an obligation for European political parties to include in the application to receive funding from the general budget of the European Union evidence demonstrating that its member parties have maintained on their websites in the previous 12 months information on gender representation among the candidates at the last elections to the European Parliament and on the trend in gender representation among their members in the European Parliament. The European Parliament has proposed amendments to further improve the gender balance and strengthen gender equality¹¹². One of the amendments proposed is that the governing bodies of European political parties and European political foundations should be gender balanced and that European political parties should adopt a gender equality plan (GEP), which would include mechanisms to ensure the active participation of women. Since autumn 2022, negotiations on the proposed act have been taking place between the European Parliament and the Council. It is unclear whether the Regulation will be adopted in time for the 2024 elections to the European Parliament.

Another relevant proposal is the Electoral Act. On 3 May 2022, the European Parliament adopted a proposal for a Council Regulation on the election of the members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage. This Regulation would repeal Council Decision (76/787/ECSC, EEC, Euratom) and the Act on the election of the members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage annexed to that decision¹¹³. The proposal was submitted to the Council in line with Article 223(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union on 19 May 2022. A key political objective of the proposal is to ensure that the common rules for the European Parliament elections ensure gender equality through quotas or zipped lists, where male and female candidates alternate. The Regulation must be adopted by the Council by unanimity under a special legislative procedure set out in Article 223(1) and it will enter into force only after their approval by the Member States in accordance with their respective constitutional requirements.

In 2022, the topic of gender equality in elections and in democratic participation was discussed in meetings of the **European Cooperation Network on Elections**, including with the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (**ODIHR**) of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (**OSCE**).

violence against women in politics which can, for instance, discourage female candidates from running for office. Available at https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2020-12/eu_citizenship_report_2020_-_empowering_citizens_and_protecting_their_rights_en.pdf

¹¹¹ Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the statute of funding of the European political parties and European political foundations (recast), COM(2021), 734 final.

¹¹² See https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0328_EN.html

¹¹³ Proposal for a COUNCIL REGULATION on the election of the Members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage, repealing Council Decision 76/787/ECSC, EEC, Euratom and the Act concerning the election of the members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage annexed to that Decision ('EU Electoral Law')

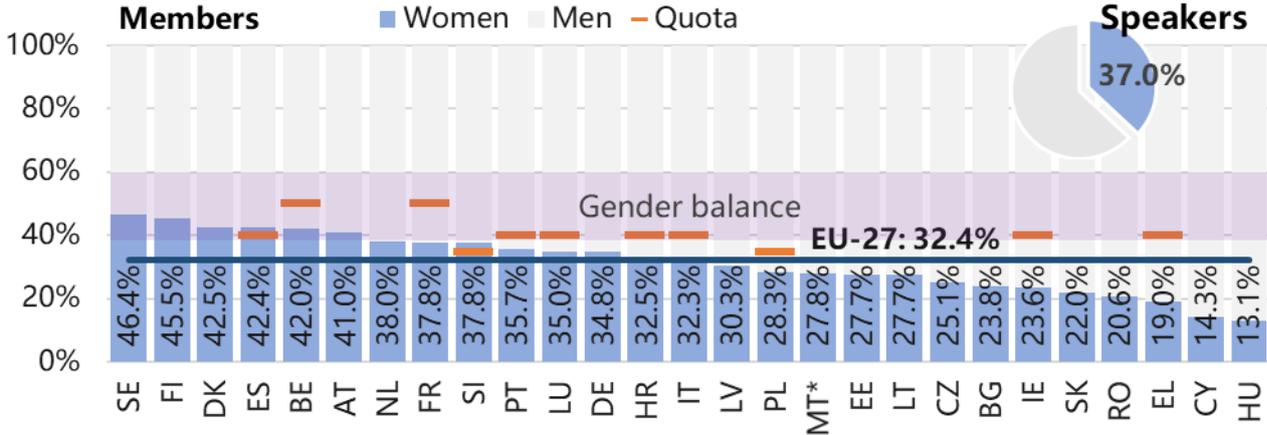
To gain more insight into the topic of women in political decision-making, the European Equality Law Network (EELN)¹¹⁴, which is funded by the Commission, carried out a **study on the promotion of gender-balanced political decision-making** in the EU, Iceland, Lichtenstein, Norway and the United Kingdom¹¹⁵. The study maps the current legal and policy frameworks to promote a better gender balance in decision-making in political life. It identifies several obstacles to women's participation in politics, referred to as the 'five Cs': care, cash, confidence, culture and candidate selection. The report shows that countries have different approaches to promoting women in decision-making positions in legislatures, the leadership of political parties and executives, and that the countries that have taken action rely heavily on quotas. The study also finds that well-designed quotas work, especially when they are accompanied by efficient enforcement measures, but stresses that other factors are also important, such as flexible and family-friendly working conditions and measures to encourage institutional and cultural transformation.

The study shows that Member States are taking a range of measures to promote more women in political decision-making. However, despite these efforts, the proportion of women members in unicameral or lower houses of parliament has decreased from 33.2 % in November 2021 to 32.4 % in 2022. This is the biggest drop since the EIGE started collecting data in 2004. Only six Member States achieved a good gender balance, with women making up more than 40 % of members of parliament in (in descending order) Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Spain, Belgium and Austria (Figure 1). At the same time, fewer than 25 % of members of parliament are women in Bulgaria, Ireland, Slovakia, Romania, Greece, Cyprus and Hungary. Ten Member States have a woman speaker or chair of the single or lower house, compared to nine Member States in 2021. Since data was first collected in 2004, six Member States have not had a woman in this role, compared to nine in 2021.

¹¹⁴ See <https://www.equalitylaw.eu/>

¹¹⁵ The promotion of gender-balance in political decision making by Biljana Kotevska and Vera Pavlou, EELN, forthcoming.

Figure 1: Share of women and men in single or lower houses of national parliaments in the EU, November 2022

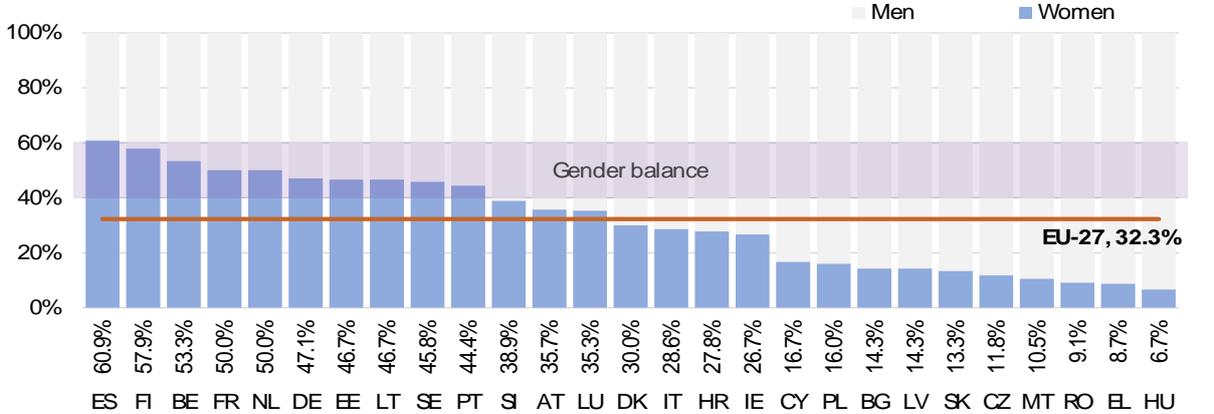


Source: EIGE Gender Statistics Database: National parliaments

Notes: Quotas exist in Belgium & France (50 %); Greece, Ireland, Spain, Croatia, Italy, Luxembourg & Portugal (40 %); Poland & Slovenia (35 %).

At governmental level, in November 2022, Denmark, Estonia, France, Italy, Lithuania and Finland had a woman prime minister (Figure 2). Since 2004, 16 of the 27 Member States have had a woman prime minister compared to 13 in 2021.

Figure 2: Share of women and men in national governments (prime ministers and senior ministers), November 2022



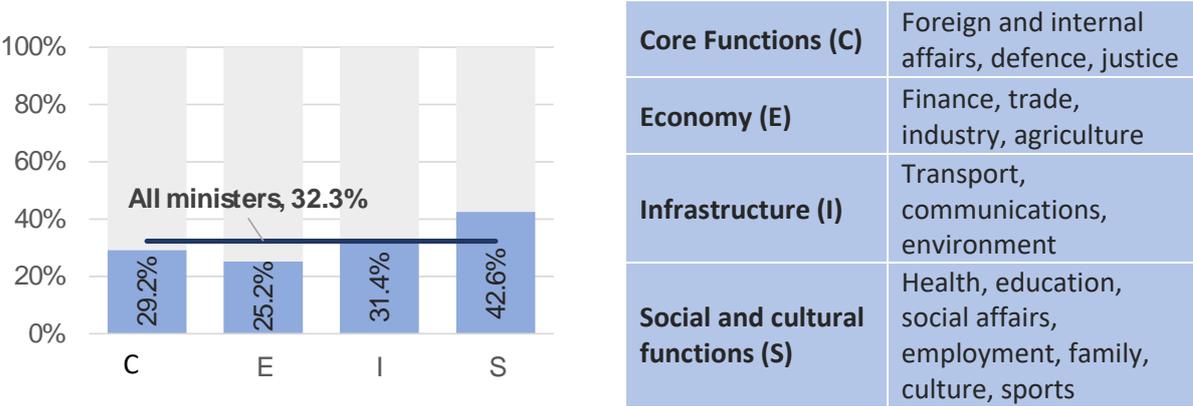
Source: EIGE Gender Statistics Database: National governments

The percentage of women across the EU who are senior ministers is almost one third (32.3 %) similar to the figure for members in national parliaments. In ten countries, governments were gender-balanced¹¹⁶: Spain, Finland, Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Germany, Estonia, Lithuania, Sweden and Portugal while in some countries governments still consisted largely of men. This is the case, for instance, in Romania, Greece and Hungary, where less than 10 % of ministers are women. The share of women leaders of major political parties is the same as in 2021 (26 %). The figure for party leaders, although low, represents an improvement of 10 pps compared to 2011. For party deputy leaders, the share of women increased from 33.8 % to 37.1 %.

¹¹⁶ At least 40 % of each gender.

While it is essential to address the issue of the under-representation of women in governments, it is also important to look at the portfolios of female ministers, since evidence suggests that they are given fewer opportunities to influence the political landscape and receive portfolios with a lower political priority. Data from November 2022 show that, although women hold 32.3 % of senior ministerial positions, they account for a smaller share of ministers with portfolios in the area of ‘core functions’, i.e. foreign and internal affairs, defence or justice (29.2 %), economy (25.2 %), and infrastructure (31.4 %) portfolios and a significantly higher proportion of ministers with social or cultural portfolios (42.6 %) (Figure 3). This imbalance suggests, as it has in previous years, that the allocation of ministerial portfolios is not gender neutral¹¹⁷.

Figure 3: Share of women ministers by type of portfolio



Situation in the 27 EU Member States in November 2022.

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

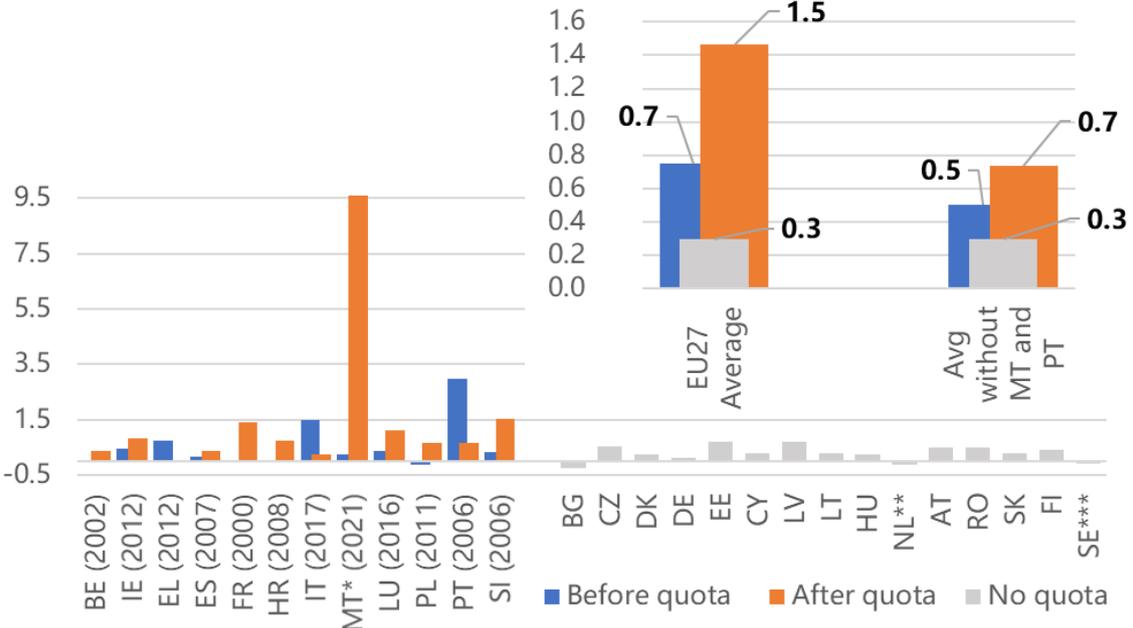
Until now, 11 Member States¹¹⁸ have adopted laws on gender quotas for lists of candidates in national elections. Malta does not have a quota for candidate lists but recently introduced a ‘gender corrective mechanism’ for its parliament as a whole, which makes it possible to add up to 12 additional seats if the proportion of the underrepresented gender is below 40 %. As already mentioned, quotas can have a positive impact on the number of women in decision-making. This is supported by data (see Figure 4) which show that there is a difference in the rate of change in the gender balance before and after introducing a quota. Countries with quotas in place have a higher annual rate of change. In these countries, the rate doubled (1.5 pps per year) compared to the pre-quota period (0.7 pps per year)¹¹⁹ and is five times higher than the rate of change in Member States without quotas (0.3 pps per year).

¹¹⁷ EIGE statistics database. Data last updated in December 2022. [Indicator: National governments: ministers by seniority and function of government | Gender Statistics Database | European Institute for Gender Equality \(europa.eu\)](#).

¹¹⁸ Belgium, Ireland, Greece, Spain, France, Croatia, Italy, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal and Slovenia.

¹¹⁹ The overall pre-quota and post-quota differences, however, are largely affected by the data from Malta and Portugal. In Malta, there was an increase of 14 pps after the adoption of the ‘gender corrective mechanism’ and in Portugal the share of women jumped by 5 percentage points after the quota was applied. If these Member States are left out, the average pre-quota rate is 0.5 pps per year and 0.7 pps per year post-quota.

Figure 4 – Average annual change (pps per year) in the proportion of women in the single or lower houses of national parliaments of EU Member States before and after the adoption of legislative quotas



Source: EIGE calculations based on data from EIGE Gender Statistics Database. National parliaments

Notes: Situations in the 27 EU Member States from 2004 (4th quarter) to 2022 (4th quarter). The year in brackets is the year when the legislative quota was adopted. No 'before quota' data for BE and FR (quotas in place before the start of the available time span).

* (MT) Malta does not have a legislative quota for candidate lists but a 'gender correction mechanism' for the whole parliament of up to 12 additional seats if the proportion of the underrepresented gender is less than 40 %.

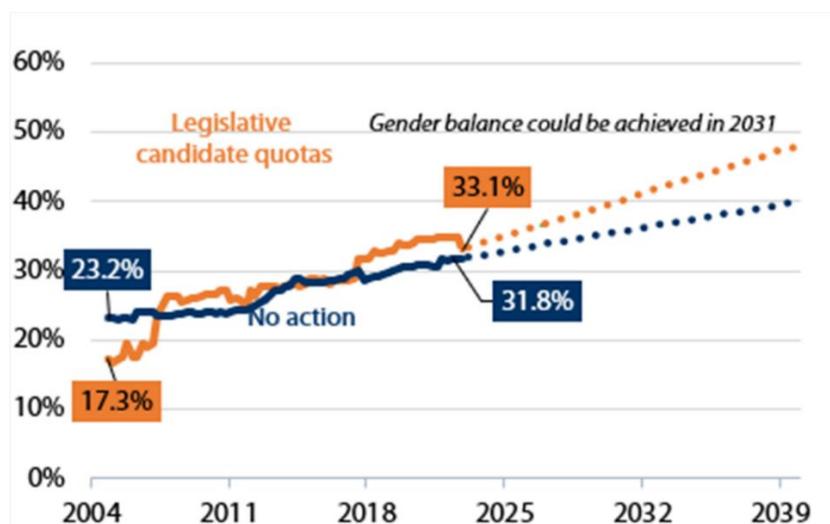
** (NL) Proportion of women already 40 % or more at the start of the time span (2004).

*** (SE) Proportion of women 40 % or more at the start and end of the time-span.

With these rates of change, countries with legally binding quotas will achieve a gender balance in 2031, while Member States without quotas or other comparable initiatives will only reach a gender balance in 2039. There are examples, however, of cases where quotas did not result in change, for instance in Greece (Figure 5). Although the quota was increased from 30 % to 40 % in March 2019, women still account for only 19 % of members of parliament. This lack of progress may partly be because the Greek quota law does not specify the position of female candidates within the lists or how the seats are distributed across districts. In Italy, the average post-quota rate of change¹²⁰ was the same as in countries with no quota in place. The EELN study, outlined above, concluded that to be effective quotas need to be well-designed and properly implemented through effective enforcement mechanisms.

¹²⁰ At least 40 % of each gender in candidate lists.

Figure 5: Share of women in single or lower houses of national parliaments by type of initiative



Situation in the 27 EU Member States from 2004 (4th quarter) to 2022 (4th quarter)

Source: EIGE's own calculations based on data from its Gender Statistics Database: [national parliaments](#)

At a regional level, data shows that women are slightly better represented in regional assemblies (35.1 %) and their executive bodies (36.1 %), compared to the national level (32.4 %). This is also the case for representation at local level where women account over a third of the seats (34.5 %) ¹²¹ in local or municipal assemblies. Less than a fifth of mayors or council leaders, however, are women (17.7 %) ¹²².

In **Germany**, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth is supporting a programme that aims to increase the share of women in local politics. The 'Municipality action programme – women into politics' (*Aktionsprogramm Kommune – Frauen in die Politik*¹²³) was launched in February 2002 by the European Academy for Women in Politics and Economy in Berlin (EAF Berlin) and the German Association of rural women (*Deutscher LandFrauenverband*). The programme offers advice, mentoring and exchange of best practices in the participating regions. It specifically aims to tackle the obstacles for women in (local) politics by ensuring better time-management of meetings, improving the availability of childcare, increasing remuneration and ensuring a respectful debating culture in town halls. In parallel, the EAF is conducting a study on the topic 'Getting involved in politics as a parent – good practices to ensure the reconciliation of family, work and a voluntary role in local government' (*Mit Kind in die Politik – Gute Praktiken für die Vereinbarkeit von Familie, Beruf und kommunalpolitischem Ehrenamt*).

¹²¹ EIGE statistics database. Data last updated in August 2022. Available at [Indicator: women and men in decision-making | politics | local/municipal councils | member of the municipal council](#)

¹²² EIGE statistics database. Data last updated in August 2022. Available at [Indicator: women and men in decision-making | politics | local/municipal councils | mayors or other leaders](#)

¹²³ <https://www.frauen-in-die-politik.com/programm>

In autumn 2022, the pilot project 'Girls in politics'¹²⁴ was launched in **Austria**, by the Austrian Federation of Municipalities and the Directorate-General for Women and Equality. On the International Day of the Girl Child (11 October) mayoresses from all over Austria were 'shadowed' by girls and young women from 6 to 18 years. The girls and young women accompanied the mayoresses in their everyday work to get an insight into local politics. The aim of the project is to make female role models visible and to motivate girls and young women to engage in local politics. At the same time, the project helped to strengthen exchanges and dialogue between political decision makers and young women and girls.

In July 2022, the Commission awarded several projects funding under a dedicated call for proposals on gender equality in political and economic decision-making under the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programme. One aim of the call for proposals was promoting the equal participation and representation of women and men in political and economic decision-making and tackling gender stereotypes, with a focus on young people (see examples in following boxes).

The project '**Rewriting the story: tackling media gender stereotypes in political and public life**' is led by the International Federation of Journalists in Belgium and includes two Italian partner organisations¹²⁵. It will address barriers to the fair representation and portrayal of women and men in political life. The project seeks to spark reforms in European media with regard to newsroom culture, policies and processes, and to improve professional understanding and practices concerning the portrayal of women and men in political and public life. The aim is that, as a result of this work, people will be empowered to make informed decisions, especially about elections. The project will work with frontline journalists, news media managers, journalists' unions and associations, gender experts, media self-regulatory bodies, women active in political life, academics and, crucially, the next generation of media professionals.

The project '**HerStory**' (Combating gender stereotypes by highlighting women's contribution to history) is led by the University of Salamanca in Spain, with eight other organisations from eight Member States participating. It endeavours to showcase the contribution of women throughout history and to address the lack of visibility of women in local histories. A key component of this project is the use of technological tools to create a journey of transnational digital history, making the footprint of women in history more visible in cities across Europe.

The Slovenian project '**Empowering Women in Active society**' aims to address the factors that limit young women's political engagement. It will tackle gender stereotypes and beliefs about women in the political sphere and civic participation and strive to empower women, individually as well as systemically, and create better opportunities for young women to get involved in politics and participate in civic life.

¹²⁴ See <https://www.bundeskanzleramt.gv.at/agenda/frauen-und-gleichstellung/gleichstellung-am-arbeitsmarkt/girls-in-politics/informationen-fuer-teilnehmende-buergermeisterinnen.html>

¹²⁵ See <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/ethics/article/rewriting-the-story-new-project-to-improve-gender-portrayal-in-politics.html>

In addition to the projects funded by the gender equality call, the 2022 call for proposals on citizens' engagement and participation also included a priority on the 2024 European Parliament elections. One of the expected impacts is defined as 'strengthening democratic participation, with a special focus on inclusion of younger and older people, women in all their diversity, mobile EU citizens and people with disabilities'.

Adequate representation of women is essential not only in legislatures and executives but also in other decision-making processes in the public sphere. This is particularly relevant in times of crisis. EIGE looked back at the COVID-19 pandemic and collected data on the gender balance among key decision-makers involved in coordinating the COVID-19 response. This research shows that women were at the forefront of decision-making in the fight against COVID-19¹²⁶. In particular, women accounting for 43.3 %¹²⁷ of members of Member States' scientific advisory bodies responsible for supporting governments on public health aspects of the pandemic. The same was true for parliamentary committees with responsibility for COVID-19 or health issues in the 27 EU Member States, where women accounted for 44.7 % of leaders and 45.6 % of their members.

EIGE also noted positive developments in the EU institutions. There are four women amongst 6 members of the European Commission Coronavirus Response Team, led by the President of the Commission, which coordinates the COVID-19 response at EU level¹²⁸. Moreover, the two EU agencies that played an important role during the pandemic, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control and the European Medicines Agency, both have a woman as their executive head and a woman chairing their respective governing bodies. Also, women now account for 51.6 % of the combined members of the management boards of the two agencies, compared to 42.4 % in 2021¹²⁹.

Looking to the challenges ahead, the picture is not quite as bright in the field of the environment and climate change. Data shows that women are often under-represented in this area. For instance, women account for only 36.4 % of the members of the Bureau of the Conference of Parties (COP) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change¹³⁰. The situation is better, however, when it comes to political positions in the EU. In the private offices of the Commissioners dealing with the environment, women (58.6 % of staff) outnumber men¹³¹. This is also the case at the senior management level in the Directorates-Generals concerned where women account for 60 % of directors¹³². In the European Parliament, 43.4 % of the members of the committees related to the

¹²⁶ <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs/data-talks/women-forefront-decision-making-fight-against-covid-19-pandemic>

¹²⁷ EIGE statistics database. Data last updated in August 2022. Available at [Indicator: women and men in decision-making | COVID-19 | national level | scientific advisory committees](#)

¹²⁸ EIGE statistics database. Data last updated in August 2022. Available at [Indicator: women and men in decision-making | COVID-19 | European level | ECCRT](#)

¹²⁹ EIGE statistics database. Data last updated in August 2022. Available at [Indicator: women in decision-making | COVID-19 | European level | members highest decision-making body](#)

¹³⁰ EIGE statistics database. Data last updated in December 2022. Available at [Indicator: women in decision-making | UNFCCC | members of the bureau](#)

¹³¹ EIGE statistics database. Data last updated in December 2022. Available at [Indicator: women in decision-making | environment related DGs of the EC political positions | member of the cabinet](#)

¹³² EIGE statistics database. Data updated in December 2022. Available at [women in decision-making | environment related DGs of the EC | directors](#)

environment are women¹³³. Furthermore, women account for 26.7 % of members of the highest decision-making bodies in the European agencies¹³⁴ working in areas related to the environment and climate change¹³⁵. Three of the eight agencies have a women as a chair of the management board or regulatory board – the Agency for the Cooperation of the Energy Regulators, the European Environment Agency and the European Union Agency for Railways¹³⁶. At the national level, women make up 33.1 % of ministers in all Member States dealing with environment or climate change, while at the parliamentary level, 30.4 % of the members of the committees dealing with the environment and climate change are women¹³⁷.

As an employer, the **Commission is committed to reaching gender parity at all levels of management**. Since December 2019, the share of women in management functions has increased by 7 pps at senior management level (43.6 %) and by 5.7 pps at middle management level (47.2 %). This means that women hold 46.5 % off all **management positions** within the Commission. The Commission also aims at a balanced share of female **managers** in the executive agencies by the end of 2024. Executive Agencies need to ensure that appropriate action plans are in place to reach that aim.

The Commission's corporate female talent development programme, which consists of tailored coaching, support and preparation for higher management and leadership responsibilities, has also proven successful in increasing the gender balance in management. Out of a total of 329 eligible women who have taken part in first three editions, 130 (amounting to 39.5 % of participants) have been appointed to a Head of Unit position. 121 further female colleagues participated in the 4th edition of this programme, which ran until December 2022. Following the call for applications for the 5th edition, 105 candidates were selected for the programme starting in March 2023.

Women in economic decision-making

Today, women's educational attainment is higher than men's and women are willing to take on leadership responsibilities. However, they remain significantly under-represented in corporate decision-making. Progress in improving female representation on corporate boards and in business leadership positions remains very slow and uneven across the EU. This cannot be explained by a lack of availability of skilled women with the ambition to lead. Long-standing and systemic entry barriers

¹³³ EIGE statistics database. Data last updated in December 2022. Available at [Indicator: women and in decision-making | environment and climate change | EU institutions and Agencies | committees in the EP | members](#)

¹³⁴ Agency for the Cooperation of the Energy Regulators (ACER), Community Plant Variety Office (CPVO), European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA), European Environment Agency (EEA), European Joint Undertaking for ITER and the development of Fusion Energy (Fusion for Energy), European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA), European Union Agency for Railways (ERA) and European Union Agency for the Space Programme (EUSPA).

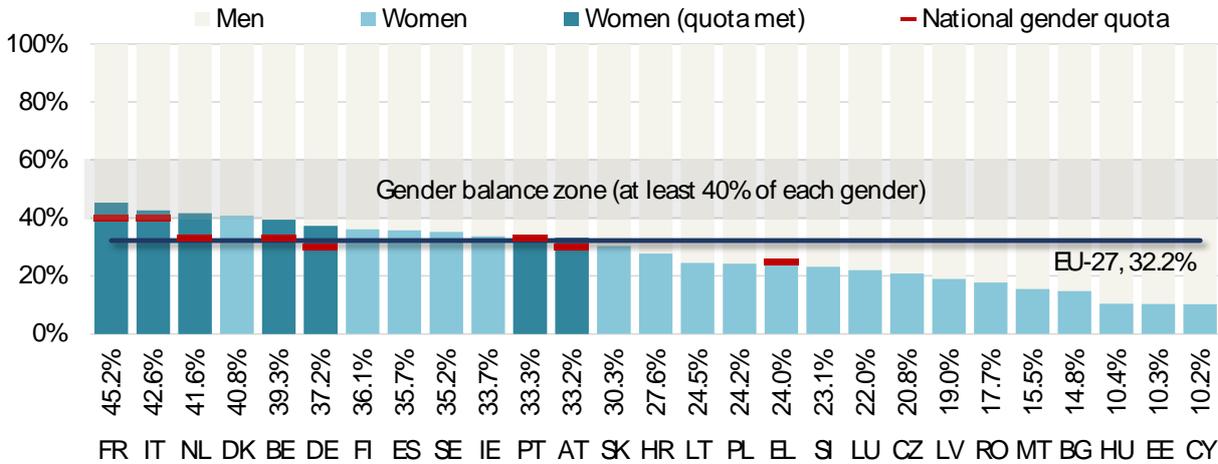
¹³⁵ EIGE statistics database. Data last updated in December 2022. [Indicator: women and men in decision-making | environment and climate change | European agencies | member of the highest decision-making body](#)

¹³⁶ EIGE statistics database. Data last updated in December 2022. Available at [Indicator: women and in decision-making | environment and climate change | EU institutions and agencies | president or chair](#)

¹³⁷ EIGE statistics database. Data updated in December 2022. Available at [Indicator: women and men in decision-making | environment and climate change | decision-making at national level | parliamentary committees](#)

into corporate boards and leadership positions, known as the ‘glass-ceiling’, persist and will not disappear without additional action. According to the latest data from the EIGE¹³⁸, in 2022 around 32.2 % of board members of the EU’s largest publicly listed companies were women compared to 30 % in 2021. Currently France, Italy, the Netherlands and Denmark are the countries where the largest listed companies have at least 40 % of each gender on their boards. Germany, Finland, Spain, Sweden, Ireland, Portugal and Austria have reached the 33 % target for all board members. In the other Member States women are even more outnumbered than men making up less than a fifth of board members and only 10 % in some Member States. Until now, eight Member States set gender quotas for the boards of listed companies¹³⁹.

Figure 6: Share of women and men on the boards of the largest listed companies in the EU, October 2022



Source: EIGE, Gender Statistics Database

To address the issue of the under-representation of women in corporate management and tackle the lack of transparency in selecting board members, in 2012 the European Commission proposed legislation aimed at improving the gender balance in corporate decision-making positions in the EU’s largest listed companies.

Ten years later, Directive (EU) 2022/2381 on improving the gender balance among the directors of listed companies¹⁴⁰, was finally adopted by the European Parliament and the Council. This achievement fulfilled one of the commitments of Commission President von der Leyen in her political guidelines 2019-2024¹⁴¹.

The directive marks a turning point in the EU’s gender equality policy and ensures more rapid and even progress across all EU Member States. It entered into force on 27 December 2022. Member States must transpose its provisions into national law within two years.

¹³⁸ EIGE statistics database. Data last updated in December 2022. Available at [Indicator: women and men in decision-making | business and finance | business \(eige.europa.eu\)](https://eige.europa.eu/indicators/women-and-men-in-decision-making-business-and-finance-business)

¹³⁹ France, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Portugal, Germany, Austria and Greece.

¹⁴⁰ Directive (EU) 2022/2381 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 November 2022 on improving the gender balance among directors of listed companies and related measures, OJ L 315/44 7.12.12., p. 44- 59.

¹⁴¹ See <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/43a17056-ebf1-11e9-9c4e-01aa75ed71a1>

The new directive sets targets for large listed companies in the EU to accelerate progress towards gender balance in their boards. The aim is for the under-represented sex to make up at least 40 % among non-executive board members or 33 % of all directors of by 30 June 2026.

Companies that will have a lower share will be required to make appointments on the basis of a comparative analysis of the qualification of candidates. This analysis should apply by applying clear, gender-neutral and unambiguous criteria and companies must ensure that applicants are assessed objectively based on their individual merits and irrespective of gender. This approach respects a candidate's qualifications and merit as the decisive criteria and ensures that suitability, competence and professional performance, not gender, will remain the key factors in the selection process. When two candidates are equally qualified the choice should be made in favour of the underrepresented sex. The criteria for board positions are to be established by the companies themselves.

Large listed companies will also have to make individual commitments to reach a gender balance among their executive board members. Companies that fail to meet the objective of the directive must report the reasons why and the measures they are taking to address this shortcoming. Member States must put in place penalties for companies that fail to comply with selection and reporting obligations. These penalties must be effective, proportionate and dissuasive, and could include fines and the cancellation or annulment of the contested director's appointment. Member States will also have to publish information on companies that are reaching targets, thereby creating peer-pressure to complement state enforcement mechanisms.

The directive will ensure that gender balance in the corporate boards of listed companies is improved across the EU, while allowing flexibility for Member States that have adopted equally effective measures. It recognises that some Member States have chosen other promising options for improving gender balance on company boards, and allows them to pursue their respective approaches, provided that these deliver concrete results, instead of having to follow the procedural requirements related to transparent selection of board members.

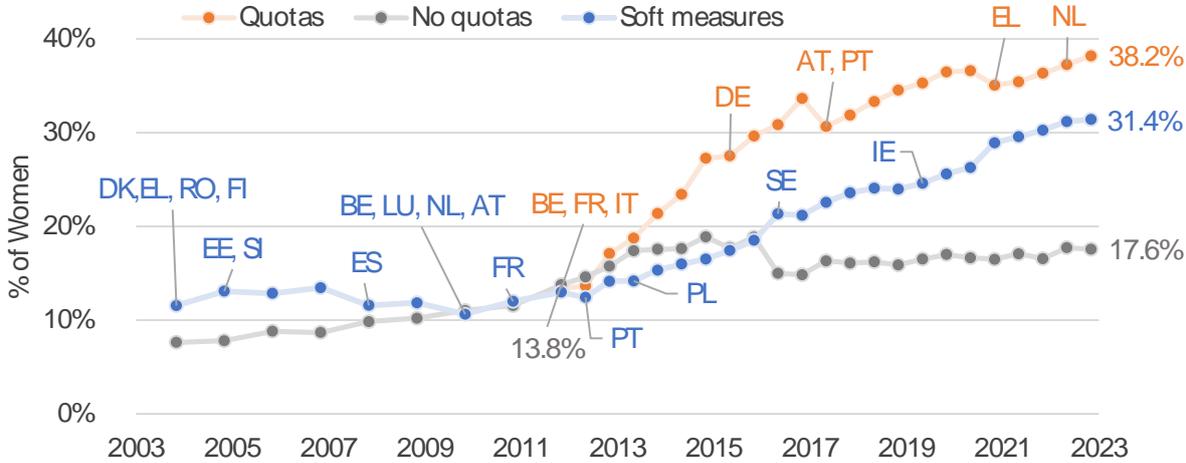
Member States' actions to promote a more gender balanced representation in corporate leadership vary from 'soft' measures, referring to instruments aimed at encouraging companies to self-regulate and take action independently, through to 'hard' regulatory approaches. 'Hard' approaches include legally binding quotas for the minimum representation of each gender. Figure 7 shows the impact and importance of binding measures to tackle women's under-representation in corporate management.

Figure 7 shows that the share of women on boards of the largest listed companies in the EU is bigger in Member States with quota (38.2 %) than in those with soft measures (31.4 %) and in Member States with no measures in place (17.6 %).

In the field of financial institutions, the gender balance further improved on the boards of national central banks. Women now account for 28.4 % of key decision makers (26.4 % in 2021). The number

of women holding the position of deputy governor also improved from 28.3 % in 2021 to 33.3 % in 2022¹⁴². However, all the governors of the national central banks in the EU are men¹⁴³.

Figure 7: Share of women on boards of the largest listed companies in EU Member States by type of action at national level (2003-2022)



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

In May 2022, the **Danish** Parliament passed legislation to promote a more equal gender composition in the management and boards of private companies and in the public sector. The new law entered into force in January 2023. The companies and institutions covered by the law must set targets for gender composition in the upper management levels in addition to boards. They must also be transparent about the target figures and the trend in the gender composition with a publicly accessible website. Several public institutions are covered as well, e.g. municipalities and regions.

In June 2022, the **Belgian** Institute for Gender Equality published a report¹⁴⁴ on the **Quota Act on the representation of women on boards of directors**, which shows that the proportion of women on boards quadrupled between 2008 and 2020, from 8.3 % to 34.1 %. In 2020, 98.2 % of companies complied with the law. Recommendations on how to improve the law are being considered: to increase gender quotas’ threshold to 40 % and organise better monitoring of the implementation of the law concerned.

European financial institutions and their boards continue to be male dominated in 2022. Two of three financial institutions (the European Investment Bank and European Investment Fund) were led by men while the European Central Bank was led by a woman¹⁴⁵. Further, the executive board of the

¹⁴² EIGE statistics database. Data last updated in July 2022. Available at [Indicator: women and men in decision-making | business and finance | central banks: deputy/vice-governors \(eige.europa.eu\)](https://eige.europa.eu/indicators/women-and-men-in-decision-making-business-and-finance-central-banks-deputyvice-governors)

¹⁴³ EIGE statistics database. Data last updated in July 2022. Available at [Indicator: women and men in decision-making | business and finance | central banks: governors \(eige.europa.eu\)](https://eige.europa.eu/indicators/women-and-men-in-decision-making-business-and-finance-central-banks-governors)

¹⁴⁴ https://igvm-iefh.belgium.be/fr/actualite/loi_quotas_quatre_fois_plus_de_femmes_dans_les_conseils_dadministration

¹⁴⁵ EIGE statistics database. Data last updated in July 2022. [Indicator: women and men in decision-making | business and finance | European financial institutions: presidents or chair \(eige.europa.eu\)](https://eige.europa.eu/indicators/women-and-men-in-decision-making-business-and-finance-European-financial-institutions-presidents-or-chair)

European Central Bank counted only two women among its six members¹⁴⁶ and the governing council counted the same two women among its 25 members¹⁴⁷. In the same year, 10 of the 27 members of the board of the European Investment Bank¹⁴⁸ and two of the six members of the board of directors of the European Investment Fund were women¹⁴⁹. Further, the European Supervisory Authorities have several women in their top management; the chair and executive director of the European Securities and Markets Authority (ESMA) are women and the Chair of the European Insurance and Occupational Pensions Authority (EIOPA) is also a women.

¹⁴⁶ <https://www.ecb.europa.eu/ecb/orga/decisions/eb/html/index.en.html>

¹⁴⁷ <https://www.ecb.europa.eu/ecb/orga/decisions/govc/html/index.en.html>

¹⁴⁸ <https://www.eib.org/en/about/governance-and-structure/statutory-bodies/board-directors/index.htm>

¹⁴⁹ https://www.eif.org/who_we_are/governance/board_of_directors/index.htm

GENDER MAINSTREAMING

Gender mainstreaming is the process of integrating a gender perspective into the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies, programmes, and projects in all areas and at all levels. It is a powerful tool to ensure that gender equality is integrated into all aspects of policymaking, rather than being treated as a stand-alone issue. Gender mainstreaming therefore has significant potential for promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls¹⁵⁰.

Throughout 2022, the EU continued to make progress on mainstreaming gender into its policies including policies addressing recent challenges such as the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine. The Commission's **Task Force on Equality** continued to support equality mainstreaming, including gender mainstreaming. The Equality Coordinators, active in all Commission services, focused on the integration of equality considerations in the Commission's policy initiatives and the implementation and monitoring of **equality mainstreaming work plans**. They continued to run equality working groups to drive, develop and monitor work on mainstreaming equality in the Directorate-General or office¹⁵¹. The Secretariat of the Task Force on Equality organised trainings on equality mainstreaming, including specific ones on gender mainstreaming, open to equality coordinators and all Commission staff. This section provides insight into what has been achieved by the EU institutions on gender mainstreaming and highlights good practices from the Member States.

Gender equality in different EU policy areas

The Russian invasion of Ukraine intensified the increase in energy prices that started during the pandemic and exacerbated energy poverty¹⁵². The latter disproportionately affects women and women-led households¹⁵³. Following the publication of a toolbox for tackling rising energy prices in

¹⁵⁰ EIGE published a report that presents the results of the data collection and analysis of the status of gender equality and gender mainstreaming across the EU. EIGE, *The pathway to progress: strengthening effective structures for gender equality and gender mainstreaming in the EU*, 2023. Available at <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/pathway-progress-strengthening-effective-structures-gender-equality-and-gender-mainstreaming-eu>

¹⁵¹ To promote a more inclusive workplace, DG **ECFIN** organised dedicated training sessions on inclusive leadership and equality mainstreaming, strengthened awareness of possibilities to receive psychological support and launched a broad campaign to tackle micro-aggressions in the workplace. In addition, a training programme was set up for female colleagues with management aspirations. An episode of *OCEAN*, a Euronews series supported by DG **MARE**, showcased female blue economy entrepreneurs. The Fisheries and aquaculture monitoring, evaluation and local network support (FAMENET support unit) gathered together success stories of funded projects with a gender equality dimension. Some examples are the Report on FLAG Support to Women in Fisheries and Aquaculture and Good Practice projects. DG **MOVE** commissioned an external support contract to help its staff apply equality mainstreaming by identifying gaps in policies, initiatives and actions and developing targeted training. DG **REGIO**'s Equality Coordinator hosted a workshop on gender equality for REGIO staff during International Women's week. On International Women's Day, DG **REFORM**'s Equality project team organised an online event on gender equality issues with an awareness- raising discussion on gender equality in policy making and on the ground.

¹⁵² Energy poverty occurs when energy bills represent a high percentage of consumers' income, or when they must reduce their household's energy consumption to a degree that negatively impacts their health and well-being.

¹⁵³ JRC, *Energy poverty and gender in the EU: the missing debate*, 2023. Available at <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC132612> ; see also the conclusions of the conference "Women and energy poverty" held by the TEN Committee of the European Economic and Social Committee on 9 November 2022 <https://www.europeanlawmonitor.org/latest-eu-news/energypoverty->

autumn 2021¹⁵⁴, in 2022, the Commission took further measures to fight high energy prices and ensure security of supply, including by proposing a new emergency regulation to address high gas prices in October¹⁵⁵. In April, it established the **Commission Energy Poverty and Vulnerable Consumers Coordination Group**, which aims to provide EU countries with a space to exchange best practices and increase coordination of policy measures to support vulnerable and energy-poor households¹⁵⁶. Moreover, the **'Equality platform for the energy sector'** established in 2021 to offer a space for discussing issues relating to equality in all its senses, continued to facilitate, in 2022, exchanges of experiences and highlighting best practices¹⁵⁷. While measures reducing energy prices indirectly benefit women given that they are predominantly affected by energy poverty, civil society actors have called for the gender dimension to be better taken into account in energy policy making.

The energy sector continues to be one of the sectors where gender balance remains a challenge. A statistical tool published by the International Energy Agency shows that the energy sector is a male dominated field and women are under-represented in this sector¹⁵⁸. In order to tackle these inequalities, the European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA) has launched a **study on gender balance in the research and innovation (R&I) field to improve the role of women in the energy transition**, under Horizon Europe. This study will look at barriers, good practices and recommendations on how to improve the role of women in the R&I field for the energy transition. Further, the **Clean Energy Ministerial Equality Initiative** (former Clean Energy Education and Empowerment, C3E) aimed at advancing the transition to a low carbon economy by closing gender gaps in the energy sector has extended its programming period for the next 5 years¹⁵⁹.

In the area of **agriculture**, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) 2023-2027, includes for the first time a specific reference to the need to **support women in farming**. In the process of the preparation of the CAP Strategic Plans Member States were required to assess the situation of women in farming and in rural areas and address the related challenges in their strategic plans. By end 2022, the Commission approved all 28 CAP Strategic Plans, the majority of which include measures that aim at enhancing the position of female farmers or rural women. In addition, the majority of Member States committed to involve women's rights organisations in the Monitoring Committees for CAP Strategic Plans. In the context of the **EU Rural Action Plan**¹⁶⁰, the EU CAP Network organised a workshop on

[women-more-likely-to-be-affected-than-men.html](#). See disaggregated data by gender at the JRC report on energy poverty indicators: Koukoufikis, G. and Uihlein, A., Energy poverty, transport poverty and living conditions - An analysis of EU data and socioeconomic indicators, EUR 31000 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2022, ISBN 978-92-76-48396-0, doi:10.2760/198712, JRC128084.

¹⁵⁴ The toolbox lists a range of short and medium-term initiatives that can be taken at national level to support and help the most vulnerable consumers.

¹⁵⁵ See https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_6225

¹⁵⁶ Commission Decision (EU) 2022/589 of 6 April 2022 establishing the composition and the operational provisions of setting up the Commission Energy Poverty and Vulnerable Consumers Coordination Group, OJ L 112, 11.4.2022, p.67-72; see also https://energy.ec.europa.eu/topics/markets-and-consumers/energy-consumer-rights/energy-poverty-eu_en

¹⁵⁷ https://energy.ec.europa.eu/topics/energy-strategy/equality-platform-energy-sector_en

¹⁵⁸ The International Energy Agency (IEA) developed a dedicated online statistical tool 'Gender and Energy Data Explorer'. It contains data on gender gaps in the energy sector: <https://www.iea.org/data-and-statistics/data-tools/gender-and-energy-data-explorer?Topic=Employment&Indicator=Gender+wage+gap+conditional+on+skills>

¹⁵⁹ C(2022)9083 of 16 December 2022

¹⁶⁰ See https://rural-vision.europa.eu/index_en

advancing gender equality in rural areas in the EU¹⁶¹ to enhance the understanding of key challenges faced by women in rural areas across the EU, focusing on access to employment, decision-making processes and services.

For the first time in **Spain**, a gender balance approach will be applied in the distribution of the CAP strategic plan's financial aid: targeted, additional financing will be granted to women farmers who are already active in agriculture or who want to start a new business¹⁶². In Ireland, to attract and retain women farmers, a gender balance approach will be applied in the distribution of the CAP plan's financial aid. Women farmers will also receive bonuses for investments and will benefit from female focused groups for knowledge transfer¹⁶³.

Sport has a big potential to contribute to gender equality. Attendance at the 2022 UEFA's Women's Euro tournaments was twice as high compared to previous tournaments¹⁶⁴, with over 250 million people watching worldwide. It also raised awareness about equal pay in sports: overall earnings, particularly for the top ten highest-paid women, have seen a 23 % increase since 2020¹⁶⁵ and sponsorship investment is predicted to grow annually by 146 %¹⁶⁶. The selection of three female referees to officiate for the first time at the latest FIFA's Men's World Cup also boosted gender equality in football. Despite these positive developments, women still only held 14 % of all top decision-making position in European Union Member States' sports federations. Women are also less active in sports than men, to the detriment of their health and well-being¹⁶⁷.

The European Commission supported gender equality in sports through several initiatives in 2022. The High-Level Group on Gender Equality in sport finalised a report¹⁶⁸ tackling imbalances related to girls and women's participation in sport, including media coverage as well as gender-based violence. Experts also proposed an action plan with concrete measures for achieving a more gender equal sport sector in Europe, such as establishing a #BeEqual award to reward projects promoting the empowerment and participation of women and girls in sport¹⁶⁹.

In the **space sector**, women represent only around 1 in 5 space industry workers¹⁷⁰. EU Space Week dedicated one session to Women in Space and the barriers to their inclusion. In December 2022, the

¹⁶¹ https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/advancing-gender-equality-rural-areas-eu-2022-11-15_en

¹⁶² https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-09/csp-a-a-glance-spain_en.pdf

¹⁶³ https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-10/csp-at-a-glance-ireland_en_1.pdf

¹⁶⁴ <https://www.uefa.com/news/0276-15748cb0ba74-f342af5f57b8-1000--attendance-record-smashed/>

¹⁶⁵ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/brettknight/2022/01/13/the-highest-paid-female-athletes-score-a-record-167-million/?sh=762158f278cc>

¹⁶⁶ <https://www.nielsen.com/insights/2022/fans-are-changing-the-game/>

¹⁶⁷ Available at <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2668>

¹⁶⁸ European Commission, 'Towards more gender equality in sport: recommendations and action plan from the High Level Group on Gender Equality in sport, 2022. Available at <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/684ab3af-9f57-11ec-83e1-01aa75ed71a1>

¹⁶⁹ <https://sport.ec.europa.eu/news/beinclusive-eu-sport-awards-2022-now-open-for-submission>

¹⁷⁰ See for instance <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1182949/astronaut-space-gender/>. Within this context, it was a major step forward for gender equality that Samantha Cristoforetti became the first European woman to be the Commander of the International Space Station in 2022 https://www.esa.int/Science_Exploration/Human_and_Robotic_Exploration/Minerva/ESA_astronaut_Samantha_Cristoforetti_becomes_first_European_female_ISS_commander

Commission published the results of an innovative demographic survey of the EU defence, aeronautics and space sector with the aim to better design equality policies for the sector¹⁷¹. The main finding was that the defence, aeronautics and space sectors should be more equal, diverse and inclusive as 53.4 % of surveyed professionals disclosed having been victims of discrimination at least once. Of this group, 63.8 % affirmed that nothing had changed since, and unfair and unequal treatment still occurred. More specifically, women appear to have encountered discrimination and unequal treatment more frequently than men (73 % vs 32 % respectively) and considered their gender to be the most recurrent cause of discrimination (94 %).

In the field of **education and training**, the **Commission proposal for a Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success**¹⁷² adopted on 30 June 2022 recommends that Member States collect regularly and systematically sex disaggregate data on learners to be able to better assess factors having a negative or positive effect on learning outcomes. The proposal includes recommendations to address gender disparities in education, in particular in view of achieving the EU-level target for reducing early school leaving (below 9 % by 2030) and the share of low achievement (in basic skills) to below 15 %. Furthermore, the progress report on the European Education Area¹⁷³ presents trends towards the EU-level targets¹⁷⁴ in a sex-disaggregated manner. The 2022 Education and Training Monitor includes a gender equality comparative analysis and demonstrates key equity challenges.

In **education**, gender equality measures are particularly targeted at creating a better gender balance in certain fields of study such as STEM, with ICT, engineering, manufacturing and construction presenting the lowest participation rates of women. In 2022, the **Working Group on Equality and Values in education and training**¹⁷⁵ has pointed to additional elements such as the revision of textbooks and digital resources through a gender equality lens and the need for gender-sensitive teaching as of early childhood education and care. Other issues that need more attention include the underperformance of boys (with its negative implications both for the individuals themselves and society as a whole), whole-school approaches as effective vehicles for promoting non-traditional career choices and fighting gender-based bullying (including cyber-bullying).

¹⁷¹ European Commission, 'Union of equality: EU defence industry, aeronautics and space sectors: final report, 2022. Available at <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/1eabc182-7f4f-11ed-9887-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

¹⁷² Proposal for a Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success, COM(2022)316 final.

¹⁷³ Available at: <https://education.ec.europa.eu/news/building-the-european-education-area-progress-report-published>

¹⁷⁴ By 2030, at least 96 % of children between 3 years old and the starting age for compulsory primary education should participate in early childhood education and care; by 2030, the share of early leavers from education and training should be less than 9 %; by 2025, the share of recent VET graduates who benefit from exposure to work-based learning during their vocational education and training should be at least 60 %; by 2030, the share of 25-34 year-olds with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 45 %; by 2025, at least 47 % of adults aged 25-64 should have participated in learning over the previous 12 months; by 2030, the share of low-achieving 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science should be less than 15 %; by 2030, the share of low-achieving eight-graders in computer and information literacy should be less than 15 %.

¹⁷⁵ The working group meetings focused among other on gender segregation in education and career choices and the disparate performance of boys and girls across areas. A policy issue paper highlights key challenges, inspiring practices to overcome them, key research insights, relevant initiatives of the Commission, other institutions as well as international organisations. Available at <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/d36b1bdf-adae-11ed-8912-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

In the framework of the 2020 **Council Recommendation on vocational education and training**, Member States have submitted their national implementation plans in 2022. Some of these plans promote gender equality and include specific actions for women such as guidance; monitoring; mobility pilot project for women, targeted action on digital skills and STEM.

In the field of **research**, 2022 saw the launch of the **European Research Area (ERA)** Policy Agenda 2022-2024¹⁷⁶ – the core research policy framework involving the Commission, Member States and associated countries as well as EU-level research stakeholder organisations, represented in the ERA Forum – which contains an action specifically dedicated to promoting gender equality and fostering inclusiveness in research and innovation (R&I), with a set of policy deliverables including the development of an EU baseline on a zero-tolerance approach to gender-based violence in R&I. A subgroup of the ERA Forum dedicated to the implementation of ERA Action 5 will officially kick-off its activities in March 2023. The ‘Widening Participation and Strengthening the European Research Area’ (WIDERA) work programme part of Horizon Europe is translating the implementation of this ERA policy into funding support for various actions and projects, several of which launched in 2022, including a policy report on approaches to inclusive gender equality in R&I¹⁷⁷. To address the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women researchers’ careers and productivity, a Horizon Europe Expert Group has been investigating the issue throughout 2022 and will produce a report in spring 2023 to help strengthen gender equality in the ERA in the recovery period¹⁷⁸. Moreover, in the framework of the **Marie Skłodowska-Curie Action Conference (MSCA)** in May 2022¹⁷⁹, France organised the workshop “Supporting gender equality with and within MSCA: closing the gender gap in research and supporting the career development of female researchers”. The session reviewed a wide range of perspectives on the current state of gender equality in research and innovation and provided recommendations such as integrating the gender dimension more strongly in research content and provide better guidance to applicants¹⁸⁰.

Concerning the **culture and the creative sector**, the Commission and the Member States within the Open Method of Coordination (OMC)¹⁸¹ **produced a report on gender equality in the cultural and**

¹⁷⁶ The ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024 was adopted by Member States as part of the Council Conclusions on the future governance of the European Research Area, see annex:

<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14308-2021-INIT/en/pdf>

¹⁷⁷ European Commission, Research and Innovation (September 2022): Approaches to inclusive gender equality in research and innovation (R&I). Available at <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/006a43e7-3eda-11ed-92ed-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

¹⁷⁸ <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/expert-groups-register/screen/expert-groups/consult?lang=en&groupID=3817>

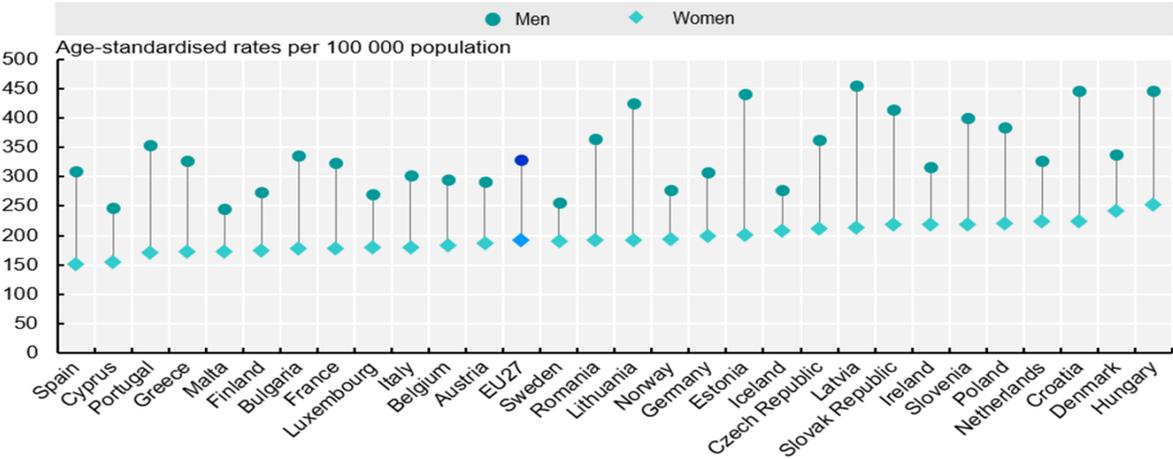
¹⁷⁹ <https://marie-sklodowska-curie-actions.ec.europa.eu/event/conference-next-generation-msca-opening-a-new-era-for-change>

¹⁸⁰ Other recommendations addressed the dissemination of MSCA best practice examples and share practices and included concrete suggestions to review some aspects of the program to foster more women participation and stronger obligations to better address issues faced by female researchers. Further, in the context of implementation of MSCA gender equality plans, working mentorship schemes and representation were flagged as crucial aspects to support women participation in fields and sectors that are currently predominantly male.

¹⁸¹ <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/policies/cultural-policy-cooperation-at-the-eu-level>

creative sectors¹⁸². In March 2022, as part of the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union, France organised the ‘Forum Egalité’¹⁸³ to discuss the main challenges identified in the report. As a follow-up to the OMC report, the Commission continued working on the improvement of available data and gender statistics in the cultural and creative sectors. Work is ongoing to establish a sub-section covering gender equality in culture on Eurostat’s website.

The Commission is also mainstreaming gender into its **health policy**. Cancer has a different impact on women and men throughout the entire disease pathway. Europe’s Beating Cancer Plan¹⁸⁴ acknowledges these differences and includes a gender perspective in several areas such as research and innovation, prevention, early detection, care, patients and reducing inequalities. The European Cancer Inequalities Registry¹⁸⁵, launched in February 2022, is one of the Cancer Plan flagship initiatives that helps Member States address inequalities including sex inequalities, in cancer care by helping them to better understand their strengths and weaknesses. In February 2023, the Commission published 29 Country Cancer Factsheets assessing the situation of cancer care at national level, including inequalities and specific challenges such as large variations in cancer mortality within countries, by sex:



The digitalisation of health data, together with the use of new technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and high-performance computing, can support the development of better screening mechanisms and standardise tasks, while avoiding potential bias on the basis of gender. The **European Cancer Imaging Initiative** was launched in January 2023¹⁸⁶ to develop an EU ‘atlas’ of cancer-related images and make anonymised images accessible to hospitals, researchers and innovators.

¹⁸² European Commission, ‘Towards gender equality in the cultural and creative sectors: report of the OMC working group of Member States’ experts, 2021. Available at <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/36e9028b-c73b-11eb-a925-01aa75ed71a1>

¹⁸³ <https://www.institutfrancais.com/en/magazine/close-up/forum-about-gender-equality-in-europe-on-8-9-and-10-march-in-angers>

¹⁸⁴ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on Europe’s Beating Cancer Plan, COM(2021) 44 final.

¹⁸⁵ <https://cancer-inequalities.jrc.ec.europa.eu/>

¹⁸⁶ <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/events/european-cancer-imaging-initiative-launch-event>

The gender dimension also needs to be taken into account in the early detection of cancer. Following a Commission proposal from September 2022, the Council of the EU adopted a **Council Recommendation on cancer screening** on 9 December 2022¹⁸⁷, updating a previous Council Recommendation from 2003. The Recommendation stresses that due account should be taken of the specific needs of men and women, and that gender equality aspects must be considered before decisions can be made on the implementation of screening programmes. The Recommendation aims to help Member States ensure that 90 % of the EU population who qualify for breast, cervical and colorectal cancer screenings are offered such screenings by 2025, and to expand organised cancer screening to include lung, prostate and, under certain circumstances, gastric cancers¹⁸⁸.

As part of the Commission's mutual learning programme on gender equality, **France and Belgium** co-hosted a seminar on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) where they shared their good practices¹⁸⁹. **France** presented the National Sexual Health Strategy 2017-2030, which is a transversal commitment across ministries and stakeholders to implement a comprehensive rights-based action plan to promote SRHR, including the access to appropriate contraception, actions to reduce unwanted pregnancies and address discrimination and sexual violence. To achieve these goals, from 2022, the government has made contraception free for all women under 25 years and has improved access to abortion. **Belgium** has also improved access to contraception by reducing costs for the users. Since 2020, most contraception is free for young people up to the age of 25 and for low-income and vulnerable persons. Emergency contraception is free for everyone independent of age. Belgium also has mandatory classes for sexuality education both in French-speaking and Flemish-speaking regions.

Artificial intelligence can also lead to gender biases and to perpetuation of stereotypes. In December 2022, the Council reached a general approach on the draft **Artificial Intelligence Act**¹⁹⁰, thereby paving the way for negotiations with the European Parliament. The proposed AI Act, which the Commission put forward in 2021, aims to ensure that artificial intelligence systems placed on the EU market and used in the EU are safe and respect existing law on fundamental rights and EU values. New mandatory requirements aim to guarantee that false positive or negative results do not disproportionately affect specific groups such as women. High-risk systems will need to be trained and tested with representative dataset to minimise the risk of embedded gender biases and ensure that these can be addressed through appropriate bias detection, correction and other mitigating measures. They must also be traceable and auditable, so that possible breaches of gender equality obligations can be investigated and addressed by national competent authorities and courts.

¹⁸⁷ 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, OJ C 473, 13.12.2022, p. 1-10.

¹⁸⁸ Financial support is available, with EUR 31.2 million earmarked in the AWP 2022 and €38.5 million in the AWP 2023 of the EU4Health Programme and €60 million under Horizon Europe while additional EU funding may also be available under regional, cohesion and social funds.

¹⁸⁹ https://commission.europa.eu/publications/eu-mutual-learning-programme-gender-equality-sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-rights-seminar_en

¹⁹⁰ https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/12/06/artificial-intelligence-act-council-calls-for-promoting-safe-ai-that-respects-fundamental-rights/?utm_source=dsms-auto&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Artificial+Intelligence+Act%3a+Council+calls+for+promoting+safe+AI+that+respects+fundamental+rights

The **Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD)** entered into force on 5 January 2023¹⁹¹ and revises and strengthens the reporting requirements on environmental, social and governance matters introduced by the Non-Financial Reporting Directive¹⁹² and Directive 2013/34/EU¹⁹³. The CSRD introduces sustainability reporting standards to be adopted as Commission's delegated acts. This will ensure more uniform sustainability reporting across the Union. The standards will specify the information that undertakings concerned should disclose on social factors, including working conditions, social partner involvement, collective bargaining, equality, non-discrimination, diversity and inclusion, and human rights¹⁹⁴. Under the CSRD companies are, among others, required to include a reference to gender in the description of the diversity policy applied in relation to the company's administrative, management and supervisory bodies. In addition, companies will have to report about equal treatment and opportunities for all, including gender equality and equal pay for work of equal value, training and skills development, the employment and inclusion of people with disabilities, measures against violence and harassment in the workplace, and diversity.

On 23 February 2022, the Commission adopted a proposal for a **Directive on corporate sustainability due diligence**¹⁹⁵. The aim of this Directive is to foster sustainable and responsible corporate behaviour and to anchor human rights and environmental considerations in companies' operations and corporate governance. More concretely, EU companies will have to take due account of the impact of their activities on human rights included in international conventions. These include, as for gender equality, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the International Labour Organisation's 1951 Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100) and its 1958 Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No. 111). This will help prevent and address impacts that EU companies' activities may have on women's rights in their value chains inside and outside Europe.

Another relevant area for gender mainstreaming is public procurement. In 2022, EIGE carried out a project on '**supporting gender equality in the economy through public procurement**' which looked at how gender-responsive public procurement (GRPP) contributes to a gender-equal distribution of economic resources in the EU¹⁹⁶. To address the low rates of implementation of GRPP in most EU countries, EIGE issued a step-by-step toolkit¹⁹⁷. It recommends EU institutions to recognise the role

¹⁹¹ Directive (EU) 2022/464 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 December 2022, amending Regulation (EU) No 537/2014, Directive 2004/109/EC, Directive 2006/43/EC and Directive 2013/34/EU, as regards corporate sustainability reporting, OJ L 322, 16.12.2022, p. 15-80.

¹⁹² Directive 2014/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 October 2014 amending Directive 2013/34/EU as regards disclosure of non-financial and diversity information by certain large undertakings and groups, OJ L 330, 15.11.2014, p. 1-9.

¹⁹³ Directive 2013/34/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 on the annual financial statements, consolidated financial statements and related reports of certain types of undertakings, amending Directive 2006/43/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council and repealing Council Directives 78/660/EEC and 83/349/EEC, OJ L 182, 29.6.2013, p. 19-76.

¹⁹⁴ The Non-Financial reporting Directive only required undertakings to describe the diversity policy applied in relation to its administrative, management and supervisory body, the objectives of that diversity policy, and how it was implemented.

¹⁹⁵ Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and the Council on Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence and amending Directive (EU) 2019/1937, COM(2022) 71 final.

¹⁹⁶ EIGE, 'Gender-responsive public procurement in the EU, 2022. Available at <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-responsive-public-procurement-eu-report>

¹⁹⁷ Available at <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/grpp>

of GRPP in the EU legal and policy frameworks and that national, regional and local procurement policies, strategies and guidance clearly identify gender equality as an essential aim of procurement. The Commission continued to promote, in 2022, its 2021 'Buying Social' guide on gender-responsive public procurement. A webinar on gender equality and public procurement in February 2022 presented the Toolbox on Gender-responsive public procurement developed by EIGE, and showcased a good practice in the field in the Basque Country¹⁹⁸.

On 1 August 2022, the President of the **City of Kraków signed the Gender Equality Plan**, which consists of a diagnosis of the current state of gender equality, followed by a Gender Action Plan based on four strategic objectives: (1) awareness-raising on equal treatment and antidiscrimination including countering gender-based violence, (2) work-life balance for employees, (3) equal representation of women and men at all levels and in all bodies, including consultative and participatory bodies within the City Hall and other municipal entities and (4) gender mainstreaming in all municipal strategies, policies and programmes, as well as implemented and subcontracted research projects. Kraków is also the **first Polish city that has joined the Femcity Network** – a network of European cities and municipalities aimed at exchanging successful models and good practices in the field of local and regional women's policy.

Gender mainstreaming in the EU budget

In line with the 2020-2025 gender equality strategy and the recommendations of the European Court of Auditors (ECA)¹⁹⁹, the Commission has developed a **methodology to track all EU spending programmes' contributions to gender equality under the 2021-2027 multiannual framework**. The methodology was piloted in the 2023 draft budget²⁰⁰ and found that 11 spending programmes contribute to gender equality and 29 programmes have the potential to do so if adequately gender mainstreamed (for a total of 99% of budgetary spending). By contrast, only 8 out of 48 spending programmes (1% of budgetary spending) have no significant impact on gender equality. The Commission also launched in 2022 a pilot project to explore how to mainstream gender equality in spending programmes that have the potential to do so.

2022 also marked the first full year of implementing the **national recovery and resilience plans (RRPs)**²⁰¹ which were adopted under the Regulation establishing the **Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF)**. The RRF requires the RRP to detail how their measures contribute to gender equality and equal opportunities. The Review published in July 2022 included an analysis of the contribution made by the RRF to tackling gender inequalities²⁰². The Commission also published a thematic

¹⁹⁸ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q_JUKdzz8nc&list=PLmwlOnkG0dPEi_pnJ7Rlos_Z8EBoXaABY&index=14

¹⁹⁹ ECA special report, 'Gender mainstreaming in the EU budget: time to turn words into action.' Available at <https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/Pages/DocItem.aspx?did=58678>

²⁰⁰ Draft general budget of the European Union, 2023 financial year, Working Document Part I, 2023 COM(2022) 400. An overview of the findings is available in the horizontal section of the programme statements with individual analysis in section 6.4 of each programme.

²⁰¹ Regulation (EU) 2021/241 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 February 2021 establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility, OJ L 57, 18.02.2021, p.17-75.

²⁰² Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council Review report on the implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility, COM (2022) 383 final.

analysis of equality in the RRF in January 2023²⁰³. In Consultation with Member States, the Commission identified more than 130 measures with a focus on gender equality, directly or indirectly contributing to the six policy pillars of the RRF Regulation. This is done both through reforms and investments, for instance:

- i. supporting green and digital up/re-skilling among women (e.g. Belgium, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, and Sweden);
- ii. increasing representation of girls and women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and information and communications technologies (ICT, e.g. Portugal and Italy);
- iii. incentivising entrepreneurship among women and increase their access to finance (e.g. Cyprus, France, Italy, Portugal, Slovenia, and Spain);
- iv. improving the availability of early childhood education and care facilities, which is also expected to increase women's labour market participation (e.g. Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Slovakia and Spain);
- v. supporting the integration of women in the labour market and reducing the gender pension gap (e.g. Austria, Croatia, Cyprus, Italy, Slovenia and Spain); and
- vi. improving the delivery of healthcare to women and the working conditions in professional activities predominantly carried out by women, such as nursing (e.g. Austria and Sweden).

The **Bulgarian** national recovery plan extensively addresses challenges in the area of social and territorial cohesion. It includes reforms and investments enhancing equal access to quality education and promoting participation in early childhood education, with a reform making pre-school education mandatory from the age of 4 and investments in educational infrastructures, including kindergartens.

Under the **European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)**, the Member States have the obligation to mainstream gender equality, non-discrimination and equal opportunities as well as to support specific targeted actions in the areas covered. One of the 13 specific objectives under ESF+, is 'promoting a gender-balanced labour market participation, equal working conditions, and a better work-life balance including through access to affordable early childhood education and care and care for dependent persons'. Under this specific objective the Member States have programmed measures amounting to EUR 3.6 billion. However, gender-relevant measures can be financed as well under other ESF+ specific objectives. If the entire ESF+ is taken into account, the measures promoting women's labour market participation amount to over EUR 1.7 billion, while the programmed work-life balance interventions amount to EUR 2 billion. Member States indicated that the ESF+ contribution to gender equality reaches EUR 55.5 billion, representing more than a third of the total ESF+ resources, of which EUR 6.7 billion devoted to gender targeted measures.

The Commission's **InvestEU Programme**, which is implemented in cooperation with the European Investment Bank Group (EIBG), has several measures in place that have a focus on gender equality.

²⁰³ European Commission, 'Recovery and Resilience Scoreboard, Thematic analysis: equality', 2023. Available at https://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/recovery-and-resilience-scoreboard/assets/thematic_analysis/scoreboard_thematic_analysis_equality.pdf

For example, the guarantee agreement signed in March 2022 between the Commission and the EIBG includes relevant targets in promoting the presence of women in decision-making positions in private equity under the Small and Medium-sized Enterprise Window, the Research Innovation and Development Window and the Social investments and Skills' Window. In addition, a Sub-group on gender equality was established in 2022 under the Advisory Board of InvestEU, with the objectives to prepare a draft report on assessing and reporting gender equality impact under InvestEU, report on methods for assessing and reporting the gender equality impact, share best practices in investment and capacity building for gender equality and reflect on areas for further research/pilots. The report will be delivered in the first half of 2023. Other relevant measures are the social sustainability proofing envisaged by the InvestEU programmes Regulation²⁰⁴ and the related Commission's Notice on Technical guidance on sustainability proofing for the InvestEU Fund²⁰⁵. The Regulation establishes the requirement of estimating the impact of projects supported by the EU by means of the InvestEU programme on gender equality. The requirement applies to projects in all the sectors of activity covered by InvestEU, namely, sustainable infrastructures, research, innovation and digitisation, financing for small and medium-sized businesses and social investments.

The Commission's Notice on Technical guidance on sustainability proofing for the InvestEU Fund provides detailed information on how to assess projects' impacts on gender equality. The guidance applies both at the stage of initial screening and at the stage of adopting measures in view of ensuring that negative impacts are avoided and positive impacts on gender equality are maximised and adequately reported. The purpose of the guidance is to help implementing partners, financial intermediaries, and project promoters/final recipients' deal with the InvestEU Regulation's sustainability proofing requirements in the ex-ante assessments. The EIB group as the first InvestEU Implementing Partner started to apply the guidance in 2022. Other implementing partners will do so after signing the InvestEU Guarantee Agreement, in their due diligence for the projects that are to receive InvestEU support. The mid-term review of the InvestEU Programme planned for 2024 will also cover the applicability of the sustainability proofing guidance.

To support the enforcement of gender equality plans as an eligibility criterion for research organisations, higher education institutions and public bodies in the **EU's funding programme for research and innovation, Horizon Europe**, the Commission has developed a detailed guidance document to help organisations meet the new eligibility criterion and offered a series of online training sessions, mutual learning workshops and webinars targeting in priority EU Member States and associated countries which have larger numbers of organisations that do not yet have a plan in place²⁰⁶. In addition, a new EU **Award for Gender Equality Champions** has been launched in July 2022 to recognise academic and research organisations that have achieved outstanding results in implementing gender equality plans.

²⁰⁴ Regulation (EU) of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 March 2021 establishing the InvestEU programme and amending Regulation (EU) 2015/2017, OJ L 107/30 24.03.2021, p. 30-89.

²⁰⁵ Commission Notice – Technical guidance on sustainability proofing for the InvestEU Fund, OJ C 280, 13.07.2021.

²⁰⁶ Italy (28 January 2022), Bosnia and Herzegovina (23 February), Romania (25 March), Poland (28 April) and the three Baltic countries (25 May). A dedicated webinar for Legal Entity Appointed Representatives (LEARs) but of relevance for all future applicants to Horizon Europe took place on 23 June.

Furthermore, the Commission continued to provide **targeted funding for gender studies and intersectional research** under the Horizon Europe 2021-2022 work programme, which will be continued in future work programmes. From the 2021-2022 work programme, four projects have been started on the topic of *'Tackling gender, racial and other biases in AI'*²⁰⁷ and five projects on the topic of *'Feminisms for a new age of Democracy'*²⁰⁸, and three more projects have been selected under the topic on *'Gender and social, economic and cultural empowerment'*. Two projects supporting the development of intersectional inclusive gender equality plans and policies in the European Research Area, funded under the 2021 WIDERA work programme, kicked off in 2022. One project has also been selected under the WIDERA 2022 call on the *'Living lab for gender-responsive innovation'*²⁰⁹.

The second **Women TechEU** call for proposals was launched in June 2022. It will continue to support deep-tech start-ups, such as AI, biotech, health tech, clean tech, and ICT, led by women with grants of 75, 000 EUR, as well as with mentoring and coaching, and helps them grow into tomorrow's deep-tech champions²¹⁰.

The **Creative Europe Programme**²¹¹ specifically acknowledges the role of women in the creative process as audience members and as professionals. Strategies to ensure gender balance are a cross-cutting priority in all strands of the Programme as of the 2021 work plan. A large number of projects aiming at strengthening gender equality in cultural and creative projects, including mentorship projects and sector specific evaluations are financed²¹². In addition, the programme also includes an explicit inclusiveness priority to encourage projects to explore, test and disseminate innovative gender equality practices. The 2022 Cooperation project call²¹³ for instance selected eight projects that directly addressed 'Gender and Women' equality in various artistic fields such as architecture and for the first time a project addressing the role of women in the field of comics.

²⁰⁷ <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/topic-details/horizon-cl4-2021-human-01-24>

²⁰⁸ <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/topic-details/horizon-cl2-2021-democracy-01-03>

²⁰⁹ <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/topic-details/horizon-widera-2022-era-01-80>

²¹⁰ https://eisma.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-launches-second-edition-women-techeu-2022-06-21_en

²¹¹ Regulation (EU) 2021/818 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 establishing the Creative Europe programme (2021 to 2027) and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1295/2013, OJ L 189, 28.5.2021, p. 34-60.

²¹² See for instance MEWEM, a Europe-wide mentoring programme to encourage women entrepreneurs in the music industry; KEYCHANGE, a global network and movement for restructuring the music industry and reach full gender equality; or Centre Stage, a European collaborative project for professional women artists proposing mentoring activities and skill development programmes for women or gender minorities to build their capacities, create new career opportunities and establish new role models; Wom@rts, promoting works created by female artists, which so far supported nearly 1100 women and non-binary artists through training, networking, conferences and workshops, and artist residencies. Another category of projects aims at developing artistic content to address important issues such as violence against women, raising awareness and generating positive social change. See also <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/aebc62b7-8fa5-11ec-8c40-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

²¹³ <https://culture.ec.europa.eu/news/creative-europe-european-commission-launches-call-for-european-cooperation-projects-for-2022>

The European audiovisual industry has a particularly prominent position for promoting the Commission's gender equality strategy, given the societal impact of storytelling for people in Europe. Since 2021, the Commission asked all applicants for calls under the **Creative Europe MEDIA strand** to include a diversity and gender strategy in their project. The analysis of the evaluations of the 2022 call for proposals shows that audiovisual companies and organisations have given a central place to the issue of diversity and gender both regarding the structure of their organisations and the content of their projects.

The **Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme (CERV)**²¹⁴, continued to promote the EU's core values and rights (including gender equality), to support citizens' engagement and participation, and to prevent and combat violence against women and other forms of violence against children and vulnerable groups (see Chapter 1 and 3 for details on projects).

The Commission continues to support the development and implementation of gender budgeting and gender mainstreaming in Member States by inviting Member States to submit requests for technical support addressing gender equality issues through a Technical Support Instrument (TSI) 2022 flagship project on **Gender Mainstreaming in Public Policy and Budgeting**²¹⁵. The flagship led to a multi-country project with participation of 7 Member States represented at different levels (national (IE, PT, RO, EL IT), sub-national (the Länder of Berlin, Hamburg and Sachsen-Anhalt) and local (City of Strasbourg). An Italian request was converted into a stand-alone project on Women's empowerment through gender mainstreaming and gender certification for businesses.

Intersectionality in implementing gender equality policy

Women are a heterogeneous group and may face intersectional discrimination based on several personal characteristics. That is why it is important to take the intersectionality of gender with other grounds of discrimination - racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation - into account.

The Pay Transparency Directive²¹⁶ proposed by the Commission in March 2021 incorporates intersectional discrimination in the definition of discrimination under the directive. It is the first time that an EU legislative instrument does so not only in the introductory recitals but in its binding provisions. The agreement reached by the Council, to be formally adopted, endorses the definition. Courts and other competent authorities will be able to take due account of intersectional discrimination, in particular for substantive and procedural purposes, including deciding on the appropriate comparator, assessing proportionality, and to determine, where relevant, the level of compensation to be awarded or penalties to be imposed.

²¹⁴ Regulation (EU) 2021/692 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 April 2021 establishing the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1381/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council and Council Regulation (EU) No 390/2014, OJ L 156, 5.5.2021, p. 1-20.

²¹⁵ https://reform-support.ec.europa.eu/what-we-do/revenue-administration-and-public-financial-management/gender-mainstreaming-public-policy-and-budget-processes_en

²¹⁶ Proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council 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, COM (2021) 93 final.

Intersectionality has also been integrated in the Commission's proposal for a directive on violence against women. The proposal refers to the specific obligation of Member States to take into consideration the increased risk of violence faced by victims with intersectional discrimination. Further, the proposal also includes specific obligations to take into account their enhanced protection and support needs when carrying out the individual assessments.

The employment gap between persons with and without disabilities amounts to 23 pp. About 49 % of women with disabilities are employed in comparison to 53 % of men with disabilities²¹⁷. The **Flagship Disability Employment Package** launched on 20 September 2022 takes the gender perspective into account. For example, the European Network of Public Employment Services Practitioner toolkit on strengthening PES to improve the labour market outcomes for people with disabilities²¹⁸ includes a practice on "Diversity plans for employers," that also considers the gender aspect. The deliverable on Career Guidance for People with Disabilities in Europe: Evidence from the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training's (Cedefop) Inventory of lifelong guidance systems and practices to be published in 2023 will also look at practices from a gender angle.

On 9 January 2023, the Commission published an assessment report of the Member States' national Roma strategic frameworks, which they were asked to adopt under the EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, adopted in 2020 as part of its overall political priority to advance the Union of Equality²¹⁹. This Communication takes stock of national Roma strategic frameworks (NRSFs), assesses the commitments made by the Member States and provides guidance on any improvements needed. Some NRSFs have proposed measures to address intersectional or multiple discrimination, including dedicated actions to tackle the specific challenges faced by Roma women.

Following up on its commitment to promote positive narratives and Roma role-models, and to combat antigypsyism, stereotyping, anti-Roma rhetoric and hate speech, the Commission is cooperating with the Council of Europe through the project "Equality and Freedom from Discrimination for Roma" EQUIROM, which was launched in December 2022 and runs until 2024. The project aims to fight and prevent antigypsyism and discrimination and promote equality for Roma people. More specifically, the project aims to empower Roma people - in particular Roma women and young people - to be or to become front-runners in the fight against antigypsyism and gender stereotypes.

²¹⁷ European Commission, European Semester 2020-2021 synthesis report on disability equality. Available at [KE-07-21-078-EN-N.pdf](#)

²¹⁸ Available at <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&furtherNews=yes&newsId=10387>

²¹⁹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, assessment report of the Member States' national Roma strategic frameworks, COM(2023) 7 final.

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT ACROSS THE WORLD

Gender equality is far from being a reality in many countries. The death of Mahsa Amini, after being detained by Iran's morality police, ignited protests in Iran and sparked worldwide protests in solidarity with Iranians. This tragic event eventually led to the Islamic Regime of Iran being expelled from the UN Commission on the Status of Women. Similar outrage came from the unacceptable restrictions of women's and girls' rights since the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan.

The EU plays a key role in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment also beyond its borders through its external actions. The EU's support to third countries²²⁰ strongly incorporates the principle of gender equality, including through quantifiable gender equality objectives for new actions as established by the main financial instrument for the EU's external action, the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe Regulation (NDICI Global Europe)²²¹.

The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine

Following Russia's unjustified invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the EU swiftly put in place several new initiatives to respond to the humanitarian crisis triggered by the war. According to UN estimates, **17.7 million** people were in need of civil protection assistance in Ukraine during 2022, of whom **3.7 million** required assistance because of gender-based violence. Ensuring rapid and effective protection services to those people affected by the conflict, particularly those affected by structural discrimination or inequalities, such as women and children,²²² has remained a priority for the EU throughout the past year. While the Russian war of aggression brought upheaval to the lives of all Ukrainians, and severely impacted their economy and their infrastructure, this report focuses on the gender dimension of the war and of the EU's actions in support of the people affected by it. This concerns notably support to victims of conflict-related sexual violence and human trafficking, which predominantly affects women and girls. It also concerns the EU's support to persons fleeing the war in Ukraine and seeking refuge in EU Member States, since 90% of them are women and children²²³.

While violence, armed conflicts and war have long-lasting consequences for both women and men, they have a particular impact on women and girls. During conflicts, violence against women and girls, including sexual assaults and exploitation, increases two to three times²²⁴. Rape and sexual violence are regularly used as weapons and tactics of war, and the war in Ukraine is no exception. These

²²⁰ This includes candidate countries for EU accession, potential candidates, countries with a European Perspective and European Neighbourhood Policy countries.

²²¹ At least 85 % of new actions implemented under the Instrument should have gender equality as a principal or a significant objective, as defined by the gender equality policy marker of the OECD Development Assistance Committee. At least 5 % of those actions should have gender equality and women's and girls' rights and empowerment as a principal objective.

²²² 90 % of those fleeing the war are women and children. Lindsay Stark, Kim Thuy Seelinger, Reine-Marcella Ibala, Yana Tovpeko, Denis Mukwege, Prevention of conflict-related sexual violence in Ukraine and globally, *The Lancet*, Volume 399, Issue 10342, 2022, available at <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0140673622008406>

²²³ Since the outbreak of the war, men between 18 and 60 years of age are – with few exceptions - not allowed to leave the country.

²²⁴ Ionela Ciolan, European Policy Centre: Putin's war on Ukrainian Women, 2022. Available at <https://epc.eu/en/publications/Putins-war-on-Ukrainian-women~468c8c>

criminal acts are typically committed in front of the local population with the aim of weakening civilian resistance²²⁵. If used systematically, they qualify as war crimes and crimes against humanity under international law²²⁶.

In the first weeks following the onset of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the EU launched **six new crisis response measures worth EUR 80.75 million** to promote humanitarian law, support accountability for war crimes and crimes against humanity, identify missing persons and assist the Ukrainian authorities and key stakeholders in protecting civilians, prepare the early recovery of liberated areas, safeguard cultural heritage and provide support to the International Criminal Court for the investigation and prosecution of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Support to investigation of war crimes and crimes against humanity includes conflict-related sexual violence. One of these crisis response measures includes EUR 6 million to actions dedicated to **survivors of conflict-related sexual violence**, most of whom are girls, by supporting local Ukrainian women's organisations to strengthen their capacities as first responders.

These crisis response measures are implemented in close cooperation with already planned humanitarian and development cooperation assistance. For instance, the Commission is funding the **International Rescue Committee (EUR 6.5 million)** to ensure that protection services are provided to survivors of **sexual and gender-based violence**, in particular women and girls. These services include psychosocial support, management of cases of gender-based violence, and measures to reduce the risk of gender-based violence and to improve child protection. In addition, the International Rescue Committee provides individual case management to survivors of gender-based violence who seek support within dedicated spaces for women and girls in local community centres²²⁷.

Moreover, the Commission contributed **EUR 1.5 million to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)** to provide immediate humanitarian response for women and girls, by ensuring access to **sexual and reproductive health services**. This includes the provision of dignity kits, gender-based violence awareness raising materials, as well as specialised services for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence²²⁸. The EU has also worked closely with Ukrainian authorities to guarantee the medical evacuation, when necessary, of women and girls and to provide them with the necessary medical treatment.

²²⁵ When committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack, rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilisation, or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity are considered as crimes against humanity under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, 2002, Article 7 (g). Available at <https://iccforum.com/rome-statute>

²²⁶ Available at https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/europe/ukraine_en

²²⁷ As of December 2022, the International Rescue Committee has five established offices in Ukraine (Vinnytsia, Odesa, Dnipro, Kharkiv and Kyiv) and is working in newly liberated areas such as Mikhaylov.

²²⁸ Since March 2022, UNFPA has provided information about life-saving gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health services to over 5 million women; psychosocial support to over 32.000 women via the mobile teams or via the hotline; access to sexual and reproductive health services to over 10.000 women via mobile clinics.

Under the **EU4Health programme**²²⁹, a contribution agreement of **EUR 28.4 million** was signed with the International Federation of Red Cross Association and another **EUR 3 million** call for proposals for non-governmental organisations was launched to support the mental health of people fleeing the war in Ukraine, predominantly women and children. The selected projects will implement best practices to improve mental health and psychological well-being in migrant and refugee populations, with a focus on those affected by the war in Ukraine.

In order to help prosecute war crimes committed in Ukraine, including sexual violence and rape, in May 2022 **the Commission proposed to enable Eurojust to collect and store evidence on war crimes**. Following the Council's adoption, the revised Eurojust regulation entered into force on 1 June 2022²³⁰. In the following months, the Genocide Network, in cooperation with Eurojust and the European Judicial Training Network, held a series of training sessions for national authorities focusing on the investigation and prosecution of war crimes in Ukraine. In November 2022, the Genocide Network Secretariat, the European Judicial Training Network and the European Commission organised a workshop on **investigating and prosecuting sexual violence**, which was attended by judicial practitioners from Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Slovakia, Romania and Ukraine²³¹.

The risk of human trafficking of women and girls is also aggravated during war times. Therefore, a **common anti-trafficking plan addressing the risks of trafficking in human beings and protecting potential victims among those fleeing Ukraine** has been developed and implemented under the lead of the EU Anti-Trafficking coordinator in close cooperation with EU Agencies, Member States, civil society organisations, Ukraine and Moldova²³². As part of the plan, the Commission has launched a **dedicated webpage for people fleeing Ukraine** that contains practical advice on how to avoid falling into the hands of human traffickers. It also published a list of dedicated emergency anti-trafficking helplines to help potential victims²³³. Moreover, the EU as well as Member States funded **awareness raising communication campaigns** including tips on how to prevent human trafficking²³⁴.

The EU has liaised closely with the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict to implement the **Framework on cooperation between the Government of Ukraine and the UN on prevention and response to conflict-related sexual violence**²³⁵. In April 2022, the mandate of the **EU Advisory Mission for Civilian Security Sector Reform in Ukraine** was amended to include the capacity to investigate any international crimes committed in the context of

²²⁹ Available at https://health.ec.europa.eu/funding/eu4health-programme-2021-2027-vision-healthier-european-union_en

²³⁰ Regulation (EU) 2018/1727 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 November 2018 on the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation (Eurojust), and replacing and repealing Council Decision 2002/187/JHA, OJ L 295, 21.11.2018, p. 138–183.

²³¹ Available at <https://www.eurojust.europa.eu/eurojust-and-the-war-in-ukraine>

²³² Available at https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/anti-trafficking-plan-protect-people-fleeing-war-ukraine-2022-05-11_en

²³³ Available at https://eu-solidarity-ukraine.ec.europa.eu/information-people-fleeing-war-ukraine/stay-safe-while-travelling-eu_en#safety-from-trafficking

²³⁴ Available at https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/ukraine/eu-and-iom-launch-all-ukrainian-awareness-raising-campaign-prevention-human_en?s=232

²³⁵ Available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/ukraine/framework-cooperation-between-government-ukraine-and-un-prevention-and-response>

Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, including conflict-related sexual violence²³⁶. Moreover, the EUR 1 Mio project "We Act" supporting women's economic empowerment and fight against domestic violence has been repurposed to support medical staff and hospitals of Ukraine in the war time. The EU also provided support to local civil society organisations and first responders and to specialised investigation teams led by the office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine. Another project addressing the issue of the gender based violence at local level and providing practical assistance to the victims and families in vulnerable situations relocating from the occupied territories has been concluded with the Ukrainian civil society organisation "Gender Budgeting Bureau". A comprehensive action implemented by the United Nations Development Programme "EU4Recovery" includes a number of activities related to the assistance to the survivors of gender-based violence. These include capacity building of the governmental officials as well as social services provision to the target groups.

In order to support persons fleeing the war in Ukraine and seeking refuge in the Member States, most of them women and children, the EU activated the **Temporary Protection Directive** immediately after the onset of the war. The Directive became applicable on 4 March 2022 and provides a legal framework for granting, extending or ending the temporary protection of persons fleeing the war in Ukraine. The Directive also specifies the rights for beneficiaries of temporary protection, notably access to accommodation, healthcare and the EU's labour market. It also offers access to education for children.

An important priority for those fleeing the war is to find a job in their host country, ideally one that matches their level of qualification. The Commission set up a **dedicated website**²³⁷ **about possibilities to access the labour market** as well as rights as workers or self-employed in the EU, including the right to protection against discrimination, especially during pregnancy and early parenthood, minimum wages, and work-life balance policies. The website also contains information about early childhood education and care, and education services. The Commission also outlined concrete actions which Member States could take to open the labour market to people fleeing the war in Ukraine, notably by supporting the public employment services in identifying skills and competences and matchmaking jobseekers with employers as well as upskilling and reskilling measures²³⁸. In this context, the Commission encouraged Member States to use EU funding to put in place integration policies and measures adapted to women's needs, and measures to promote access to employment, counselling and training, including language courses.

In April 2022, the Commission issued a **Recommendation to Member States on the recognition of qualifications for people fleeing Russia's invasion of Ukraine**²³⁹, and followed this in June with **Guidelines on fast track recognition of Ukrainian academic qualifications**²⁴⁰. The aim was to further support learning periods of higher education students and academic staff fleeing the Russian war of aggression. In June 2022, the Commission also published **Guidance for access to the labour market**,

²³⁶ See <https://www.euam-ukraine.eu/>

²³⁷ See https://eu-solidarity-ukraine.ec.europa.eu/information-people-fleeing-war-ukraine_en

²³⁸ Commission Communication on 'Welcoming those fleeing the war in Ukraine' from 23 March 2022.

²³⁹ Commission Recommendation (EU) 2022/554 of 5 April 2022 on the recognition of qualifications for people fleeing Russia's invasion of Ukraine, OJ L 107I, 6.4.2022, pp. 1-8.

²⁴⁰ Available at <https://education.ec.europa.eu/document/guidelines-on-fast-track-recognition-of-ukrainian-academic-qualifications>

vocational education and training and adult learning of people fleeing the war²⁴¹. This guidance also provides examples of measures that Member States can put in place on the basis of lessons learned and good practices from previous crises.

To ensure the accurate assessment and validation of skills of those fleeing the war in Ukraine, the Commission supplemented its guidance on the recognition of professional and academic qualifications and **added Ukraine to its Skills Profile Tool for Third-Country Nationals**. The Commission is also working on improving the comparability of Ukrainian qualifications under the European Qualifications Framework.

Matching skills with job opportunities is equally important. Therefore, the Commission²⁴² set up an **EU Talent Pool pilot initiative**²⁴³ **for beneficiaries of temporary protection**. The objective is to launch an EU-wide web portal enabling people fleeing the war, including women, both to manifest their interest in finding work and to indicate their skills. This enables Member States to gain an overview of the skills available among this group of individuals present in Member States and to facilitate matching them with employers.

To facilitate the **integration of Ukrainian children into national school systems**, the **EU Education Solidarity Group for Ukraine** supports those countries hosting school-age children displaced from Ukraine. It does this by pooling available expertise and providing guidance through the existing tools and mechanisms under the European Education Area strategic framework. The Commission supported national and local authorities by providing a practical manual for the integration of displaced children in early childhood education and care facilities and schools²⁴⁴.

Various initiatives made it easier for Member States to use EU funding to support the people fleeing the war in Ukraine. In April 2022, the **Cohesion's Action for Refugees in Europe (CARE)** introduced maximum flexibility for Member States to use unspent money under the 2014-2020 Cohesion policy to provide emergency assistance to people fleeing the war in Ukraine and to support their integration into the host societies through investments in housing, education, employment, health, social inclusion and care, or other social services. Cohesion policy assistance thereby complements support from the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and other funding sources. In addition, pre-financing payments under the cohesion policy funds have been increased, especially for Member States receiving the highest number of people fleeing the war in Ukraine from Ukraine in proportion to their population. The Commission has paid more than EUR 3.5 billion in advance

²⁴¹ Communication from the Commission on Guidance for access to the labour market, vocational education and training and adult learning of people fleeing Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, C (2022), 4050 final.

²⁴² Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions' 'Attracting skills and talent to the EU', COM(2022) 657 final.

²⁴³ See https://eures.ec.europa.eu/eu-talent-pool-pilot_en

²⁴⁴ See <https://www.schooleducationgateway.eu/en/pub/resources/publications/practical-manual-on-refugees.htm>

payments to Member States to help them manage the arrival of people fleeing the war in Ukraine on their territory²⁴⁵.

Examples of EU-funded projects supporting labour market integration for people fleeing the war in Ukraine include the **Fast track action boost (FAB)** project in Austria, Germany, Italy, Spain and Sweden which is supported by the Employment and Social Innovation programme (EaSI) and finances fast-track integration pathways to the labour market for refugees and their families, with a special focus on female refugees. The European Social Fund supports the “Skills validation centres” project in Belgium, which helps people with professional experience fleeing Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine to get their skills validated officially and free of charge. This official recognition helps to prove skills to an employer, resume training or gain access to a profession.

In order to support Ukrainian academics, the Commission launched the **Marie Skłodowska-Curie Action for Ukraine (MSC4Ukraine) fellowship scheme**. With a total budget of EUR 25 million, MSC4Ukraine will provide fellowships for doctoral candidates and post-doctoral researchers to continue their work in academic or non-academic organisations in EU Member States and countries associated to Horizon Europe. The scheme will also allow them to re-establish themselves in Ukraine when it will be possible to rebuild the country's research and innovation capacity. The first researchers were selected in February 2023, of which 65% are women.

In April, Commissioner Dalli held a meeting with 22 civil society organisations active in the area of equality to listen to their concerns in the context of Russia's war against Ukraine. The discussions focused on the heightened risks faced by women, children and minority individuals in the context of the war. She also met in June with the Wrocław Women's and Equality Councils at Wrocław Town Hall to discuss the challenges faced by local authorities in welcoming people fleeing the war and how the EU can collaborate with them towards achieving equality for all.

Gender mainstreaming in the EU's external action

The 2021-2025 EU **action plan on gender equality and women's empowerment in external relations (gender action plan (GAP) III)**²⁴⁶ provides a policy framework towards meeting international commitments on gender equality, which is a cross-cutting priority of the EU international relations and partnerships. One of the main GAP III targets is to ensure that by 2025, at least 85 % of the EU's new external actions contribute to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Out of these, 5 % should have gender as principal objective²⁴⁷ and there should be at least one gender-targeted action per country and per region. To reach this target, gender mainstreaming across all

²⁴⁵ For example the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) can be mobilised to set up integration policies and measures adapted to the needs of women seeking, or benefiting from, protection in the EU as well as measures to promote access to employment, counselling and training, including language courses, with Member States having the flexibility to tailor the support to individual needs.

²⁴⁶ 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. Available at https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/news-and-events/news/gender-action-plan-putting-women-and-girls-rights-heart-global-recovery-gender-equal-world-2020-11-25_en

²⁴⁷ Targets for all financing instruments are aligned with the Regulation establishing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI Global Europe).

external policies and sectors has been stepped up, starting with the integration of GAP III objectives in the NDICI-Global Europe multiannual programmes, and a gender-transformative, rights-based and intersectional approach is being promoted. The GAP III provides a set of objectives and indicators to monitor progress and measure results, across all sectors, including in programmes supporting a fair and inclusive green transition and digital transformation²⁴⁸.

The 2022 annual report on the implementation of the EU's external action instruments in 2021²⁴⁹ concludes that overall, the share of new external actions that contributed to gender equality continued to increase substantially, reaching an all-time high of 70 % in 2021. Provisional data for 2022 indicates a further increase. The mid-term progress report on GAP III implementation will be published in November 2023.

GAPIII has succeeded to generate a more strategic EU engagement in each partner country based on new or updated gender country profiles and extensive consultations. By now, 129 GAP III Country level implementation plans (CLIP)²⁵⁰ are finalised framing political work, dialogue and programmes.

GAP III also integrated the Team Europe approach, aimed at strengthening coherent and strategic EU engagement at all levels through increased coordination, joint initiatives and sharing knowledge and expertise with the Member States. For instance, the Team Europe Initiative (TEI) on 'Human-centred Digitalisation' in Kenya supports improved connectivity and access to the internet, with a specific focus on women and youth, and women participation in TVET and the digital economy. Examples of Team Europe Initiatives (TEI) with gender equality as a principal objective include the regional TEI for the advancement of sexual and reproductive health and rights in sub-Saharan Africa and the TEI on 'gender equality through women's empowerment' in Zimbabwe, which aims to increase women's participation and influence in decision-making and the economy²⁵¹.

In many countries, actions targeting gender as a principal objective have been or are about to be launched in line with the GAP III target. For example, in Africa, the programme "Breaking the Glass Ceiling" in **Tanzania** aims at addressing gender based violence, support to sexual reproductive health and rights, women economic empowerment, political participation (EUR 90 million). A programme to support civil society in **Cameroun** aims to contribute to gender equality, peace and social cohesion in conflict-affected regions (EUR 17 million). In **Guinea-Conakry**, a programme focuses on women entrepreneurship (EUR 10 million). In Uganda, the 'Gender for Development Uganda G4DU' action (EUR 60 million) is part of a wider TEI on demography and social inclusion. In Asia, the project "Empowered Women for a Prosperous **Nepal**" (Shashakta Mahilharu, Sambriddha Nepal) aims to advance the full realisation of Nepalese women's and girls' human rights and socio-economic agency, and help unlock their potential (EUR 22.2 million.). The EU is also funding the EU-**Viet Nam** Women-led Green Partnership Programme (EUR 15 million). Finally, in South America, a programme in **Peru**

²⁴⁸ For more details about the Objectives and Indicators see <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020SC0284>

²⁴⁹ European Commission, '2022 Annual report on the Implementation of the EU's External Action Instruments in 2021', 2022. Available at <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/f6c333e4-7b63-11ed-9887-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-search>

²⁵⁰ The list of public available CLIPs and Gender Country Profile is available at <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/country-level-implementation-plans-clips---gender>

²⁵¹ A detailed overview of Team Europe Initiatives can be found on the Capacity4Dev portal is available at <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/tei-jp-tracker/>

on Strengthening Prevention and Justice on Violence against Women aims to reduce impunity and tolerance of violence against women (EUR 6.75 million). In Georgia, the programme "EU 4 Gender Equality: Together Against Gender Stereotypes and Gender-Based Violence" seeks to strengthen equal rights and opportunities for women and men by shifting social perceptions around gender roles, tackling gender stereotypes and increasing men's participation in childcare and other domestic responsibilities.

Furthermore, significant steps were taken in 2022 to **integrate the gender perspective in investments made by the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+)**. The Commission set up a working group with international financial institutions and development finance institutions to jointly support gender lens investing and to encourage financial officers to take a gender and human rights-based approach to investment operations.

The EU also remained committed to integrating the GAP III targets into its blending and guarantee programmes. For instance, the **Women's Financial Inclusion Facility**, which falls under the blending programme of the EU external investment plan reached a total budget of EUR 88.7 million in 2022²⁵².

In 2022, the EU's engagement and cooperation with governments, civil society and the private sector continued to focus on enhancing the gender perspective in all country, regional and multilateral programmes. Furthermore, EU Delegations have **strengthened political and policy dialogue on gender equality and women's empowerment**, including with women's rights and other civil society organisations. A high-level structured dialogue with civil society organisations on implementing GAP III is hosted annually. The most recent edition took place on 1 December 2022. The European Commission has also launched a call for proposals in December 2022 on strengthening global civil society umbrella organisations, with a specific category for women's rights organisations and feminist movements²⁵³.

The **WeEmpowerAsia** project, which ended in August 2022, aimed to increase women's leadership and participation in the private sector through capacity-building training for women entrepreneurs and support to the private sector in implementing gender-sensitive business practices. The project took place in China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. WeEmpowerAsia is recognised in the region as a flagship **EU-UN project on women's economic empowerment**, thanks to extensive engagement and campaigns such as the annual Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) awards introduced under the project (the principles were introduced by UN Women and the UN Global Compact in 2010) to encourage companies to apply the WEPs. Some of the main results achieved by the project include: (i) the training of more than 3000 women entrepreneurs to start, retain and expand their businesses; (ii) activating more than 1500 companies to commit to the WEPs, and contribute to policy processes that support the creation of more gender-equitable economies in the Asia; (iii) mobilising over 300 key advocates for women's empowerment.

²⁵² Available at https://ec.europa.eu/eu-external-investment-plan/projects/womens-financial-inclusion-facility-wfif_en

²⁵³ See <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/europeaid/online-services/index.cfm?do=publi.welcome&nbPubliList=15&orderby=upd&orderbyad=Desc&searchtype=RS&ofr=175018>

As part of GAP III; the EU continues to work on the implementation of the **EU strategic approach to women, peace and security (WPS)** and its action plan. In March 2022, Heads of State adopted the **Strategic Compass for a stronger EU security and defence in the next decade**²⁵⁴, expressing strong commitment to delivering on the EU objectives on women, peace and security. Within the framework of the initiative '**Capacity Building in Support of Security and Development**' and the 2014-2022 multiannual programme of the instrument contributing to stability and peace, the EU and UN Women have partnered up to implement the **project 'Promoting Women, Peace and Security with military actors in transition countries in Africa'** (with EU funding of EUR 2.78 million, 2022-2025). The project aims to ensure that military actors can effectively mobilise the transformative potential of the WPS agenda to enhance women's participation in the armed forces, with a particular focus on the Central African Republic and Mozambique. It promotes the equal participation of women in the security sector at all levels, including in the military. In addition, it supports the inclusion of gender perspectives in planning and carrying out operations and activities in stability operations and (post-) conflict settings.

The EU presented a thorough '**Follow-up baseline study on integrating human rights and gender equality into the European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy**' in May 2022²⁵⁵. The report measures progress against baselines established in the original 2016 baseline study²⁵⁶ and makes a number of recommendations. In line with these recommendations, the EU has continued to invest in improving capabilities by conducting mandatory pre-deployment training on WPS issues and through in-mission training, including courses for around 60 Gender Focal Points networks in Common Security and Defence Policy missions.

The EU continues to put gender equality, women's empowerment and the implementation of the WPS agenda at the heart of its cooperation with regional partners, such as the African Union, the League of Arab States, the Union for the Mediterranean, the Organization of American States, the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. For instance, the EU has been a driving force behind the **Regional Acceleration of Resolution 1325 mechanism** – a platform to exchange best practices and lessons learned among the participating organisations.

Another example of international cooperation on gender is the follow up to **the EU-African Union Summit** in February 2022, where the EU reaffirmed its commitment to the protection of human rights, gender equality and women's empowerment, democracy, good governance and the rule of law. As a key follow up to the summit, on 15 December 2022 European and African partners launched a new Team Europe Initiative to improve **sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)**

²⁵⁴ See <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/03/21/a-strategic-compass-for-a-stronger-eu-security-and-defence-in-the-next-decade/>

²⁵⁵ Working document of the European External Action Service, Report on the Follow-up Baseline Study on Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality into the European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy, EEAS(2022)405. Available at <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9198-2022-INIT/en/pdf>

²⁵⁶ Working document of the European External Action Service, Report on the Baseline Study on Integration Human Rights and Gender info the European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy, EEAS (2016) 990. Available at https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/baseline_study_report.pdf

in Africa²⁵⁷, particularly among adolescent girls and young women. The intention is to ensure a wide and balanced coverage across Western, Central, Eastern and Southern African countries. The initiative brings new and ongoing regional and national SRHR programmes together under a common approach that aims to increase the programmes' effectiveness and impact on development. Funding from the EU budget includes EUR 60 million in new funds for 2023–2027 and EU Member States are expected to make significant new financial commitments in the coming years in line with the objectives of the initiatives.

The project '**Supporting Arab Women at the Table (SAWT): Women as Actors in Peace Processes**' continues to provide mentorship for women leaders and mediators across the Middle East and North Africa (EUR 3 million, 2020-2023). Implemented by the Arab Reform Initiative, the project aims to quantitatively and qualitatively increase women's meaningful inclusion in political and peace processes in Iraq, Libya, Palestine²⁵⁸, Syria and Yemen. The project aims to increase women's ability to better participate in political and peace processes, establish post-conflict gender egalitarian frameworks, and contribute to the long-term success of post-conflict reconciliation and reconstruction. In 2022, the main outputs included the organisation of several national dialogues (in Yemen and in Iraq), an informal peace process event in Libya, and the drafting and publication of a policy dialogue report²⁵⁹. Representatives of the project partners also participated in the Paris Peace Forum²⁶⁰. The project also saw the graduation of a SAWT Fellowship cohort, providing women with (among other things) the tools and leadership skills needed to advance an inclusive peace and security agenda and to establish network of advocates from different areas of expertise who can lobby for more inclusive peace and security platforms²⁶¹. In October 2022 the Youth Action Plan in EU External Action announced the plans to launch a new **Youth and Women in Democracy Initiative** worth EUR 40 million which aims at increasing the voice and leadership of youth and women by strengthening their rights, empowerment, and participation in public and political affairs.

In partnership with the UN, the EU continues to provide funding for studies on gender mainstreaming and gender-responsive support across community-based activities and recovery measures under the project '**EU-UN Support to the States in Central Asia for their citizens returned from conflict zones**' (EUR 1.44 million, 2021-2022). In addition, UN Women has adapted its training module on Gender and Preventing Violent Extremism to the context of Central Asia. This training is expected to be rolled out in 2023.

The EU continues to invest in and monitor the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan, following the Taliban takeover in August 2021. After several months of in-depth discussions with Afghan women, the EU set up an **Afghan Women Leaders Forum (AWLF)** in March 2022. The forum consists of over 60 Afghan women leaders from diverse backgrounds and aims to ensure that Afghan women have their right to participate in the political dialogue concerning Afghanistan. A visit of representatives of the AWLF to the Human Rights Council in Geneva in September 2022, where they

²⁵⁷ See https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_22_7738

²⁵⁸ This designation shall not be construed as a recognition of the state of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of Member States on this issue.

²⁵⁹ See <https://sanaacenter.org/publications/main-publications/18590>

²⁶⁰ See <https://parispeaceforum.org/project/supporting-arab-women-at-the-table-sawt/>

²⁶¹ See <https://www.arab-reform.net/sawt-fellowship/>

met with EU Member States and the UN Special Rapporteur, Richard Bennett, is an example of how women's voices are contributing to the political dialogue.

Similarly, the project '**Advancing Women's Participation in the Syrian Political Process**' (EUR 1.33 million, 2020-2022) continues to support the work of the **Syrian Women's Advisory Board**, which encourages women and men to champion women's rights and equality through networking, capacity-building and funding. It also aims to strengthen women's participation in the political process, by increasing local mediation and dialogue efforts.

Throughout 2022, the EU Ambassador for Gender and Diversity, has continued to provide guidance to the EEAS and EU delegations around the world to ingrain a gender perspective in EU diplomacy, political dialogue and policy decisions. Promoting gender-responsive leadership plays an important role in achieving this goal. In line with the GAP III commitment to lead by example and boost internal capacities, in 2022 the EU, with the support of the Swedish Government agency, the Folke Bernadotte Academy, developed a pilot **gender-responsive leadership programme for senior managers** which ran for four months, starting in October 2022. A session on gender-responsive leadership was also included in the annual European Union Ambassadors Conference, which took place in Brussels in October 2022.

In 2022, the EU also continued mainstreaming gender and age in its **humanitarian action** across all the sectors where it intervenes based on the staff working document 'Gender: different deeds, adapted assistance'. By mainstreaming gender the EU has ensured that humanitarian aid was delivered in a safe and accessible way, thus increasing its effectiveness and impact on beneficiaries.

The EU's international action against gender-based violence

In 2022, the EU continued to support activities under the **EU-UN Spotlight Initiative**, the largest global initiative in this area (with a budget of EUR 500 million), which aims to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls by 2030. In June 2022, the Spotlight Initiative published its Global Annual Progress report 2021²⁶², which confirms the solid achievements of the initiative and provides an extensive overview of good and innovative practices across all programmes. The main results include:

- National budgets to address violence against women and girls increased eightfold.
- Over 1.6 million women and girls have been provided with services addressing gender-based violence.
- 2.5 million young people have joined programmes, both in and outside schools, that promote gender-equitable norms and values.
- Campaigns to change people's behaviour, in at least 29 languages, have reached nearly 130 million people.
- USD 179 million has been allocated so far to civil society, women's and grassroots organisations. Of the USD 144.5 million delivered to civil society organisations (an increase of almost USD 48 million from 2020):
 - 72 % has gone to women's organisations;

²⁶² <https://spotlightinitiative.org/publications/spotlight-initiative-global-annual-narrative-progress-report-2021>

- 78 % has gone to national, local and grassroots organisations;
- 40 % has gone to new partners.

The report also highlights that social media, including the Spotlight Initiative’s flagship campaign on ending violence against women and girls (#WithHer), remained an effective way to challenge harmful gender norms and stereotypes. With the participation of EU and UN representatives, civil society partners, and international content creators, the campaign has reached over 146 million users across Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

In addition to the Spotlight Initiative, the EU allocated approximately EUR 41.3 million in 2022 from its humanitarian aid budget for targeted actions to prevent, mitigate and respond to gender-based violence in emergencies. A further approximately EUR 23.5 million were allocated to accommodate the sexual and reproductive health and rights needs of women and girls in humanitarian situations.

In terms of advocacy, at the first-ever **European Humanitarian Forum** in March 2022, the EU hosted a high-level event that focused on preventing and responding to gender-based violence. The EU also hosted a high-level event at the 76th United Nations General Assembly in September 2022, focused on ensuring accountability to survivors of conflict-related sexual violence.

Since 2020, the EU has also provided EUR 2 million in support to the **Global Fund for Survivors of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence**. The fund facilitates access to reparations and other forms of redress globally to survivors of conflict-related sexual violence across the world. The EU has funded interim reparative measures projects in several countries, including the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic (CAR), Guinea, Iraq, and Nigeria, and in Türkiye. In total, 2 272 survivors have been covered by interim reparative measures so far.

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

As part of its regional and multilateral engagement, the EU continued to work with the UN system, including UN Women²⁶³, the United Nations Population Fund²⁶⁴ and UNICEF²⁶⁵. For instance, the EU remained a vocal advocate for women’s and girl’s full enjoyment of all human rights at the **Human Rights Council** (HRC). The EU co-sponsored several resolutions on the elimination of discrimination against women and girls, and strived to achieve gender mainstreaming in all of the HRC’s work. In addition, the EU supported the full implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Finally, the EU continued to promote the work of women human rights defenders, women’s (rights) organisations and youth-led organisations in various multilateral forums.

The EU participated in the 66th session of the **Commission on the Status of Women**, which took place at the UN Headquarters in New York in March 2022. The EU invited civil society representatives as part of its delegation headed by Commissioner Dalli and organised side events as part of its outreach²⁶⁶. The conclusions²⁶⁷ agreed by the parties focus, in particular, on the interlinkages

²⁶³ <https://www.unwomen.org/en>

²⁶⁴ <https://www.unfpa.org/>

²⁶⁵ <https://www.unicef.org/>

²⁶⁶ This included for instance the EU informal ministerial breakfast.

²⁶⁷ Available at <https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw66-2022/session-outcomes>

between environmental degradation, climate change and gender equality and call for new efforts to address the disproportionate impact of climate change, disasters and pollution on women and girls, notably those in vulnerable situations. In the margins of the meeting, 53 states and the EU issued a statement to “[...] condemn the Russian aggression against Ukraine and to reaffirm our full support to Ukraine and its people, in particular the women and girls in Ukraine”.

The EU continued to be a supporter and partner of the **Generation Equality Forum**, which is a global multi-stakeholder initiative launched in 2021 to advance women’s rights and gender equality across the world. More specifically, the EU continues to be a co-leader of the Action Coalition on Gender-based Violence and the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies²⁶⁸. On 23 September 2022, multi-stakeholder leaders and allies gathered at the first **Generation Equality Accountability Moment** to reflect on one year of progress and reaffirm accountability and transparency as the cornerstones for the success of the Generation Equality Forum. This event brought together a group of partners to review and track the initial implementation of more than 2,500 commitments across the six Action Coalitions and the Compact and launched the first annual Accountability Report²⁶⁹. The report reveals positive initial indications of progress, with close to 80 per cent of Commitment Makers who reported already working on implementing their pledges.

In August 2022, the Indonesian presidency of the G20 convened the second **G20 Ministerial Conference on Women’s Empowerment**. The Conference brought together ministers responsible for gender equality and women’s empowerment from G20 countries and other invited countries, delegations from relevant international organisations representatives of official G20 engagement groups and initiatives and, social partners. Building upon exchanges of best practices and lessons learned, the Conference focused attention on critical issues to close gender gaps and support women’s empowerment globally, particularly in a post-Covid-19 global economy.

During Germany’s G7 presidency, gender equality was also high on the agenda, as highlighted by the appointment of a Gender Equality Advisory Council (GEAC) by the German Chancellor²⁷⁰. During this term, the EU played a pivotal role in the **G7’s Working Group on Gender Equality**. In particular, the Group supported gender mainstreaming in all ministerial tracks and the design of a new accountability framework. The first deliverable of this framework, the gender-gap dashboard²⁷¹, was endorsed by the G7 leaders in July 2022.

In October 2022, the fifth **Union for the Mediterranean** Ministerial meeting on strengthening the role of women in society was held in Madrid under the co-presidency of Jordan and the European Commission. The Member States of the Union for the Mediterranean adopted a declaration²⁷² with concrete and operational recommendations, actions and measures to accelerate the strengthening

²⁶⁸ <https://www.calltoactiongbv.com/>

²⁶⁹ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/09/generation-equality-accountability-report-2022>

²⁷⁰ <https://www.g7germany.de/g7-en/current-information/gender-equality-advisory-council-2056238>

²⁷¹ The G7 Dashboard on Gender Gaps includes 12 indicators and will be produced and updated on an annual basis. It aims to monitor progress on gender equality in G7 countries using a framework based on agreed gender equality indicators drawn from existing data sets: <https://www.g7germany.de/g7-en/news/g7-articles/dashboard-on-gender-gaps-2058296>

²⁷² Available at https://ufmsecretariat.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/5th_UfM_Declaration_StrengtheningRoleWomenSociety_Final_EN.pdf

of women's role in the Euro-Mediterranean region, focused on four priority areas. These are: enhancing legal frameworks; improving women's access to leadership in public life and decision-making; increasing women's participation in economic life, and combating and preventing violence against women and girls²⁷³. The adoption of the Ministerial declaration was followed by a high-level regional conference entitled 'Women for the Mediterranean'²⁷⁴ which gathered over 100 high-level representatives and international experts.

Gender and trade and business

Promoting gender equality and women's economic empowerment is also a priority for the EU's trade policy. The EU promotes gender equality through several channels: multilaterally, for example in the **World Trade Organization** (WTO) and the **International Labour Organization** (ILO), bilaterally through **Free Trade Agreements** and unilaterally through the **Generalised Scheme of Preferences**.

From the outset, the EU has been a strong proponent of the 2017 **Buenos Aires Joint Declaration on Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment**. The EU has been active in the Informal **Working Group on trade and gender in the WTO** since its creation in the autumn of 2020, which demonstrates our commitment to bringing gender to the attention of the multilateral community.

In this context, in 2022, the Commission launched a project with **the International Trade Centre**²⁷⁵ that will help it to understand how to apply a gender lens to the work of the **WTO**, to encourage greater gender equality and boost women's economic empowerment. The four webinars held in the autumn of 2022 discussed the themes of trade facilitation, e-commerce, government procurement and investment facilitation, exploring current problems and the possibilities for improvements in gender equality.

The Commission is also working closely with the ILO. The EU and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland are funding the **Trade for Decent Work** project, which is carried out by the ILO. The EU provided more than EUR 7.5 million in funding for the project between 2019 and 2022. The aim of the project is to improve the application of ILO fundamental conventions in selected countries that trade with the EU, including through improved working conditions for women and respecting fundamental conventions 100 and 111 on equal remuneration and non-discrimination.

EU trade agreements contain commitments on the implementation of fundamental ILO conventions targeting non-discrimination in employment (including the ratification and implementation of ILO conventions 100 and 111 on equal remuneration and non-discrimination), in a specific chapter on trade and sustainable development. In June 2022, the EU concluded negotiations for a comprehensive trade agreement with New Zealand that includes a trade and sustainable

²⁷³ The commitments include: (i) promoting the transition to formal employment for female workers; (ii) supporting and encouraging women's entrepreneurship; (iii) promoting gender equality and inclusive models of leadership from early childhood education in all fields, including in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM); (iv) expanding gender-responsive finance for climate and environmental action to reach women's organisations, businesses and cooperatives; (v) adopting comprehensive laws that define and criminalise all forms of violence against women and girls, including cyber violence.

²⁷⁴ <https://ufmsecretariat.org/event/women-conference-mediterranean-2022/>

²⁷⁵ <https://intracen.org/our-work/topics/inclusive-trade/womens-economic-empowerment>

development chapter in which the parties commit to advancing relevant UN and ILO conventions on women's economic empowerment and gender equality, including cooperation in international forums to promote these objectives. In December, political agreement was reached on modernising the EU-Chile trade agreement, which includes a dedicated chapter on trade and gender equality.

Under its **Generalised Scheme of Preferences**, the EU monitors how beneficiary countries respect the principles of core international conventions on promoting women's rights and gender equality, in particular the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women the Convention concerning Equal Remuneration of Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value, and the Convention concerning Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation.

In the field of **business**, the Commission raised the budget of the **Investment Climate Reform (ICR) Facility** by EUR 10 million. This technical assistance programme focuses on supporting reforms in the business environment for women entrepreneurs and women in the labour market. In 2022, the EU launched a new Team Europe Initiative (TEI), called '**Investing in Young Businesses in Africa**'. The initiative aims to help early-stage businesses and young entrepreneurs in Africa by providing financial and technical support at the early stages of their development. Within this initiative, a working group has been set up that will focus on how to increase the impact of innovative finance on women entrepreneurs.

Conclusion

In 2022, gender equality has repeatedly made it to the headlines, often highlighting that women's rights were put at risk. Beyond the EU's borders, the developments in Iran and Afghanistan shocked the world. In the United States, the reversal of the landmark decision in *Roe v. Wade* by the United States Supreme Court in June and the subsequent adoption of legislation prohibiting abortion in about half of the US states, sparked strong criticism and concerns about women's rights.

The 2022 Global Gender Index estimated that at the current rate of progress, it will take 132 years to reach full parity and close the overall gender gap on a global scale. The 2022 Gender Equality Index, which the European Institute for Gender Equality presented in October 2022, also painted a grim picture based on 2020 data: For the first year since its inception in 2013, the index would have shown a negative trend had it not been for the small progress made in the area of leadership. In the next years, the impact of the ongoing crisis on gender equality – the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and the related economic and energy crisis – will be reflected in these indices. Unless decisive measures are taken, there is a serious risk of regression in gender equality in the coming years.

But there have also been positive news on gender equality. The adoption of European legislation on gender-balance on company boards turns a page after ten long years of stalemate. It shows that Europe is serious about gender diversity in decision-making. The political agreement on a pay transparency directive paves the way for swift formal adoption of this milestone legislation, which will have an effect on the culture of the workplace of millions of workers. With the Recommendation on the Barcelona targets 2030, the European Union supports women who wish to pursue their professional development by setting ambitious benchmarks and standards for early childhood education and care.

Looking at the challenges ahead, in order to ensure that both men and women benefit from the opportunities of the green and digital transitions, a gender equality perspective needs to be integrated at all stages of the policy cycle. At present, women and girls are largely left out of the opportunities presented by this twin transition – mainly due to deeply rooted gender stereotypes, which disincentivize women to choose a career in the science, technology, engineering, and maths (STEM) fields or prevent them from taking on leadership positions in these sectors.

In 2024, the elections of the European Parliament will take place. The equal presence of women in legislatures, their leadership and their perspective is essential for democracy because it reflects a more accurate representation of society. The current European parliament is more gender-balanced than the previous one, with a positive trend from 15 % in 1979 to 39 % in 2019. However, Europe can and must do better. In order to reach a genuine gender balance, it will be crucial to promote the participation of women as candidates in the upcoming elections. This requires multi-dimensional efforts to overcome the current obstacles, which prevent women from entering or staying in politics.