

Promoting equality between women and men

SUMMARY

The European Union (EU) is committed to eliminating inequalities and promoting gender equality 'in all its activities' and has made considerable advances over the years. Nevertheless, the situation remains uneven across the EU, and in recent times progress has slowed, stalled or even regressed in some areas. Yet, the evidence points clearly to the benefits of gender equality for individuals, the economy and society as a whole.

Public opinion surveys show that a large majority of Europeans agree that promoting gender equality is important for a fair and democratic society, the economy and for them personally and that a growing share of citizens would like the EU to do more in this area. Europeans also expect increased EU action on related policies.

During the last legislative term, as part of a broader gender equality programme, the EU institutions have been working on proposals for new EU laws to improve work-life balance and combat violence against women. Promoting equality between women and men will remain one of the major challenges in the coming years. Demographic trends, technological developments and changes to the way we work are just some of the issues where different impacts on women and men will need to be considered.

Options for further EU involvement could include better implementation and enforcement of existing legislation, moves to modernise it, fill gaps in protection and address emerging issues, and non-legislative measures such as data collection and monitoring, awareness-raising, and support for national and grassroots initiatives. It will require the political will at all levels to tackle issues across a broad spectrum of policies, together with the provision of the necessary institutions, tools and resources to put that resolve into action.

This is an update of an earlier briefing issued in advance of the 2019 European elections.



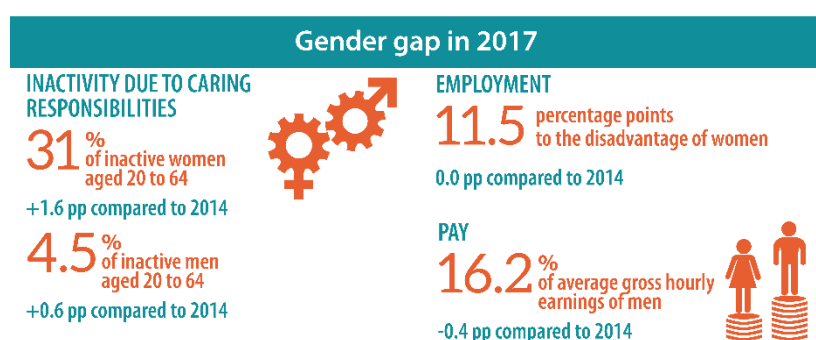
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State of play¹

The European Union (EU) has a long history of action to promote equality between women and men ('gender equality').² Since 1957, when the principle that the sexes should receive equal pay for equal work was [included](#) in Article 119 of the Treaty of Rome, equality between women and men has gained in importance as an EU policy area. Over the subsequent decades, the initial focus on pay and employment equality has broadened to encompass other areas of economic and social policy. At the same time, the approach has shifted from legal protection against discrimination based on sex (equal treatment) to include more proactive measures to overcome the historical disadvantages faced by women and achieve [equality in practice](#), and the adoption of 'gender mainstreaming' to ensure that all new EU policies contribute to this outcome.³

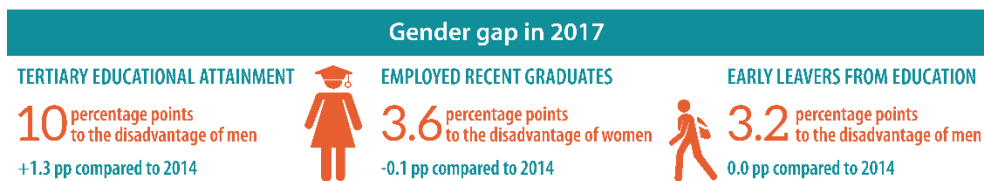
However, EU monitoring shows that action is still needed to achieve the gender equality goal.⁴ By measuring gender gaps over time, the [index](#) developed by the EU's Gender Equality Institute (EIGE) shows that advances have been made over the past [decade](#), but progress has been slow and there are still significant differences between [countries](#). Whilst most score relatively well on [health](#) and [education](#), this still cannot be said of [employment](#), access to [economic and financial resources](#), or [leadership](#), which is the area where most progress has been made, but where the gender gap remains widest. In some EU Member States, progress has stalled or even gone into reverse in some areas, especially regarding [time](#) spent on unpaid care and domestic work, where the gap is increasing. Women's ability to participate equally in society is still affected by disproportionate exposure to [violence](#), with one in three women in Europe having experienced physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15. Analysis is also beginning to illustrate how factors such as age, ethnicity, sexual identity and orientation and disability [intersect](#) with gender, aggravating discrimination and affecting people's life chances.



In addition, to design fair and effective policy the gender dimensions of emerging trends will need careful consideration.⁵ In some countries, cuts to public services and other [austerity measures](#) have undermined progress towards women's integration into the labour

market and a more equal division of care responsibilities between women, men and society.⁶ This could have a lasting impact, whilst [population ageing](#) could put further pressure on women to 'fill gaps' in public provision.

[Women](#), young people and migrants are also the groups most likely to be engaged in expanding [non-standard](#) forms of work, which allow more people to engage in the labour market, but are insecure and linked with lower pay, training and maternity benefits. EU data [shows](#) that almost half of women with low qualifications (45 %) work in a precarious job compared to just over a quarter of men with the same level of education (26 %), contributing to an increased risk of [poverty](#) and social exclusion. Conversely, in terms of education outcomes, [boys](#) are currently faring badly. Ensuring that both sexes are equally able to take full advantage of higher paid, higher quality jobs in [expanding](#) sectors will therefore be a key challenge. Europe has a wide gender gap across the digital sector, with girls and women [less likely](#) to have advanced IT skills or a career in ICT, reach specialist and managerial levels, or start their own tech companies. [Analysis](#) also shows that while the [digital revolution](#) is bringing new opportunities for gender equality in areas such as employment and [political activism](#), it comes with a resurgence of [misogyny](#) and new forms of [cyber-violence](#) that can be barriers to women's participation.



There is ample evidence of the benefits of gender equality and its potential to improve the

wellbeing of individuals (women and [men](#)), and outcomes for society and the economy as a whole. In 2018, an [assessment](#) of the costs of gender inequality by the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS) found that the persistent gender pay gap is costing women quantified damage in lost earnings, leading to a higher risk of poverty, economic dependence and an increased risk of intimate partner violence. It also estimated that the gender pay gap will cost the EU an estimated €240 billion in GDP by 2030. From the opposite perspective, [research](#) by EIGE finds that closing gender gaps in areas such as education, labour market activity and wages would create more jobs for both sexes, help to tackle long-standing issues such as occupational segregation and low productivity and have a largely positive effect on GDP per capita. Gender equality policies have an even stronger impact on GDP than some education policies. Although experts advise that tackling all gender inequalities together is better than tackling them individually, [research](#) has shown that gender equality in one domain has a spill-over effect on other domains.

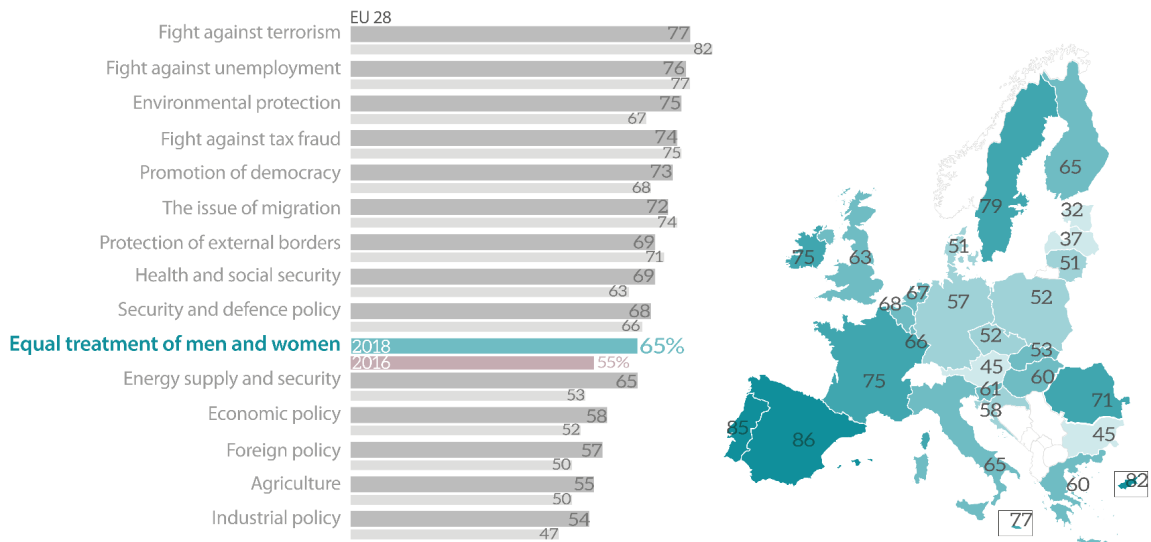
EIGE and other EU agencies are helping to gather the gender-disaggregated statistics and indicators needed to design effective EU and national policies and measure their gender impact, but these are not yet available for all policy areas. The [national bodies](#) responsible for monitoring gender equality have also highlighted funding cuts due to the economic crisis as a key area of concern.

However, the most serious challenge may be the current [backlash](#) against gender equality both globally and within the EU itself, which threatens to erode existing achievements, diminish protections against discrimination and block further progress. The areas in which it is materialising – key areas of the institutional and policy framework; certain policy fields, including education, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and violence against women; and the working environment of women's rights NGOs – are common across countries.⁷ In some EU Member States, national equality bodies also [report](#) that they are coming under increased political pressure. Their EU body, Equinet, has [warned](#) that levels of inequality, intolerance and discrimination are on the rise amidst a populist discourse that is often hostile to fundamental values, making it all the more important for the EU to maintain its commitment to equality between women and men and women's rights as one of its core values.

Public expectations for EU involvement⁸

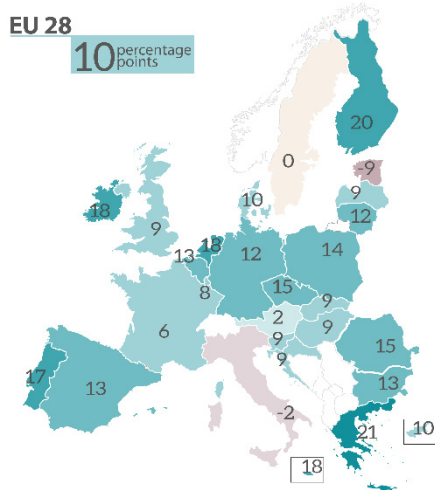
According to surveys, a large majority of Europeans think that promoting gender equality is important for a fair and democratic society (91 %), for the economy (87 %) and for them personally (84 %) (Eurobarometer 465 from 2017). A comparative Eurobarometer survey on citizens' 'perceptions and expectations', conducted for the European Parliament in 2016 and 2018, shows that the share of EU citizens who would like the EU to intervene more in this policy area has risen from 55 % to 65 %.⁹ There are some significant differences across Member States. The strongest support for increased EU action is registered in Spain (86 %), Portugal (85 %), and Cyprus (82 %). The weakest support for more EU action is expressed by citizens in Latvia (37 %) and Estonia (32 %).

Percentage of respondents who would like the EU to intervene more than at present



Source: EPRS based on Eurobarometer [85.1 - 2016](#); [89.2 - 2018](#).

Expectations for more EU action than at present: percentage points difference between 2016 and 2018



Source: EPRS based on Eurobarometer [85.1 - 2016](#); [89.2 - 2018](#).

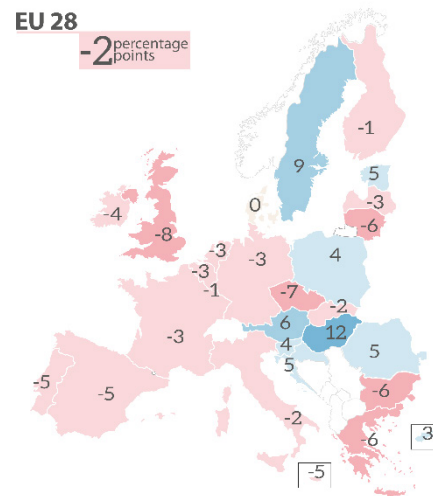
The overall increase in support for increased EU involvement in equal treatment of men and women is 10 percentage points. It is the second highest increase amongst all areas researched. The most prominent changes are registered in Greece (increase of 21 percentage points) and Finland (increase of 20 percentage points). An exception to the general trend is seen only in Estonia and Italy with a decrease of respectively nine and two percentage points in the expectations for more involvement.

Only half or less than half of citizens think gender equality has been achieved in politics, at work and in leadership positions in companies and other organisations. The majority think there is a gender pay gap in their country and that this is unacceptable. Around 70 % would support legal measures to ensure parity between men and women in politics. When it comes to domestic violence against women, 74 % of Europeans think that this is common in their country.

Looking in particular at EU action in the field of equal treatment between men and women, 46 % of Europeans evaluate it as adequate. This is the only policy area covered in the survey where the evaluation of EU action as adequate has decreased, although the drop is only two percentage points. However, this is not a universal trend across the EU. While the most significant decreases in the proportion of people who evaluate EU action as adequate is registered in the Czech Republic and the UK (with drops from 66 % to 59 % and 55 % to 47 %), the opposite trend is registered in nine Member States. The most significant increase is registered in Hungary and Sweden (where the share rose from 47 % to 59 % and from 22 % to 31 %).

Despite the slightly negative overall trend in the evaluation of current EU action, there are still more EU citizens who evaluate action on equal treatment of men and women as adequate (46 %) than as insufficient (40 %).

Perception of EU action as adequate at present: percentage points difference between 2016 and 2018



Source: EPRS based on Eurobarometer [85.1 - 2016](#); [89.2 - 2018](#).

EU framework

Legal framework

The Treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights make gender equality one of the core values and aims of the EU, which has committed to eliminating inequalities and promoting gender equality 'in all its activities'.¹⁰ On this basis, the European Union has introduced legislation in its areas of competence. It has also used 'soft instruments' such as recommendations, funding and exchanges of good practice to support action in the Member States, and established structures to promote and monitor progress. In addition, the case law of the European Court of Justice has played a key role in defining the concepts and scope of EU policy in this field.

Since the introduction of the first directives in this area in the 1970s, the EU has developed extensive [legislation on gender equality](#), primarily in the field of employment, covering equal pay, social security, employment, working conditions and harassment ([Directive 2006/54/EC](#)); self-employment ([Directive 2010/41/EU](#)), and guaranteed rights to maternity and parental leave (Directives [92/85/EEC](#) and [2010/18/EU](#)). The EU framework also includes legislation on equal access to goods and services ([Directive 2004/113/EC](#)) and protection for victims of trafficking and crime (Directives [2011/36/EU](#) and [2012/29/EU](#)). This binding EU law prohibits direct and indirect discrimination, victimisation and harassment and allows for affirmative action. It is seen to have given crucial impetus to gender discrimination law in the Member States and has created legally enforceable rights for individuals.

International commitments

In addition to its own legal framework, the EU and its Member States have substantive commitments to gender equality under international human rights treaties and agreements, many of which the EU has helped to shape and some of which go further than EU standards.

The United Nations (UN) Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women ([CEDAW](#)), the [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#) and the [2030 Agenda for](#)

[Sustainable Development](#) set standards and measurable targets for achieving equality between women and men and gauging progress in Europe. The EU's review of the Beijing Platform in 2015 [concluded](#) that increased efforts had had an impact, but women and girls were still at a disadvantage in Europe in all 12 areas of concern (poverty; education; health; violence; armed conflict; the economy; power and decision-making; mechanisms for women's advancement; women's human rights; the media; the environment; and the girl child). The EU has developed its own [indicators](#) for monitoring [progress](#) towards the gender equality goals in the 2030 Agenda, focusing on violence, education, employment and leadership.

In the Council of Europe framework, all EU Member States have ratified the European Convention on Human Rights ([ECHR](#)) and the EU has a legal obligation to [accede](#) to it, which could establish an additional basis for policies conducive to substantive gender equality. Twenty-one Member States have [ratified](#) the Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence ([Istanbul Convention](#)), the first legally binding international instrument on preventing and combating violence against women and girls. [Ratification](#) by the EU could help to provide more equal protection for women across Europe against all forms of violence.

Policy framework

Proposals for legislation and a range of non-legislative measures for advancing equality between women and men are set out in comprehensive multi-annual policy programmes. The European Commission's current programme, [Strategic engagement for gender equality 2016-2019](#), acts as a basis for cooperation between the Commission, the other European institutions, Member States and stakeholders, as part of the [European Pact](#) for equality between women and men (2011-2020). Its priorities are the same as for the [2010-2015 strategy](#), namely: **closing the gaps in employment, pay, pensions, and decision-making; eradicating gender-based violence and supporting victims; and promoting gender equality and women's rights across the world**. There are also commitments to address multiple discrimination, promote gender mainstreaming and ensure that a gender equality perspective is adopted in the post-2020 generation of EU funding programmes.

As defined by the European Commission in 1996, [gender mainstreaming](#) means 'not restricting efforts to promote equality to the implementation of specific measures to help women, but mobilising all general policies and measures specifically for the purpose of achieving equality'. Gender mainstreaming is not just about women, but about ensuring that women's as well as men's experiences and concerns are built into policy design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and that both individual rights and structural inequalities are addressed. It also entails looking at institutions and how they work, including gender representation within policy areas and decision-making structures.

Financial framework

Gender equality and gender mainstreaming are currently financed through a vast array of actions under various EU funding programmes and ad hoc instruments. The [EU strategy](#) for gender equality for 2016-2019 states that a total of €6.17 billion has been allocated for achieving its gender equality goals under eleven different funds.¹¹

It is largely up to the Member States to manage funds on the ground, but the EU can influence allocations towards gender equality goals. Evaluations [show](#) that EU funds are complementary to the legal options and help support their implementation. They also improve the effectiveness of social policies and anti-discrimination measures implemented at national level and ensure that support is available even in financially constrained Member States that might not otherwise invest in such measures.

In-depth gender impact evaluations have been conducted for some funds. The assessment of [Horizon 2020](#) shows progress has been made in promoting gender equality. Data quality concerns remain, and there are still monitoring problems, but the number of gender-flagged topics has increased and gender balance in decision-making is close to being achieved.

However, while in-depth gender impact evaluations of some funds show progress, the effectiveness of funding for gender equality could be improved. Although in 2013, the Parliament, the Council and the Commission [agreed](#) that annual budgetary procedures for the 2014-2020 [Multi-Annual Financial Framework](#) (MFF) would incorporate a gender perspective, [EPRS research](#) finds that there is no clear gender strategy in the MFF, and it is often impossible to determine which, if any, resources are allocated to achieving gender objectives within programmes. The MFF mid-term review did not address gender mainstreaming. It is also difficult to identify EU gender equality funding when it is financed by instruments outside the EU budget.

Studies commissioned by the European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) on the [EU budget for gender equality](#) and the use of EU funding in [selected Member States](#) also find that the high-level commitment to gender equality is not reflected in spending and that gender budgeting is not systematically applied in the EU budget and across all funding programmes.

As defined by the European Institute for Gender Equality, [gender budgeting](#) is a strategy to achieve gender equality by focusing on how public resources are collected and spent. Its purpose is to promote accountability and transparency, increase gender responsive participation in the budget process and to advance gender equality and women's rights, making it a very powerful [tool](#) for gender mainstreaming. It includes the gender perspective in all the phases of the budget cycle. The EU has [committed](#) to supporting gender budgeting, but in spite of that it has still not been systematically applied in the EU general budget.

One issue is that [gender indicators](#) and [gender-disaggregated data](#) are not systematically used in monitoring and evaluating EU-funded initiatives, making it difficult to show where there has been a positive impact or where there are failings. Another is that a gender perspective is rarely adopted in policy fields not seen as immediately related to gender equality, such as ICT, transport, business and environmental policies, but where a gender impact may in fact be felt.

Deliveries of the 2014-2019 parliamentary term

The Commission introduced two major new initiatives as part of the new [European Pillar of Social Rights](#):

- The [Gender Pay Gap Action Plan](#), to be delivered by 2019, sets out 20 concrete actions to address the root causes, including support for projects to tackle stereotypes and segregation in education, training and the labour market and improve gender balance in management and decision-making in companies.
- The [Work-life Balance Package](#) was introduced to replace a 2008 [proposal](#) on maternity leave that was withdrawn in 2015, and is broader in scope. Its [legislative measures](#) include modernising the existing EU law on parental leave and establishing EU-wide rights to carers' and paternity leave, pay during leave, and flexible working arrangements for parents and carers. Non-legislative measures include support for affordable childcare across the EU.

Regarding [violence against women](#), the EU signed the Istanbul Convention in 2017. [Ratification](#) must now be decided by the Council and approved by the European Parliament. In addition, the Commission [surveyed](#) public opinion and held a 12-month awareness raising and prevention [campaign](#), with €15 million funding for grassroots projects by national authorities and NGOs. EIGE and Eurostat have been [improving](#) the collection of comparable data, and a new EU-wide survey is underway. The [Spotlight initiative](#), launched together with the UN to tackle all forms of violence against women and girls globally, will run between 2017 and 2023 and has an initial investment of €500 million, with the EU as main contributor.

In external relations and development cooperation, the term was marked by the introduction of a new [Gender Action Plan 2016-2020](#) (GAPII), closely aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. [Accession countries](#) must also meet gender equality targets.

Other initiatives introduced during the last term included a new [strategy](#) to boost women's participation in the digital sector.

Action by the European Parliament

The European Parliament has consistently taken a strong, proactive stance on advancing gender equality, stressing the need to deliver on EU commitments. Its [longstanding](#) Committee on [Women's Rights and Gender Equality](#) (FEMM) has been in the vanguard in highlighting issues.

Both the Parliament and the Council supported the priorities set out in the Commission's 2016-2019 strategic engagement for gender equality. However, both had [called](#) for an ambitious post-2015 EU strategy and were disappointed at the [downgrading](#) of its political status by the Commission. Parliament also criticised the absence of a dedicated budget and concrete benchmarks needed to measure and achieve progress. Both institutions want to see a stronger framework for promoting gender equality, more integrated with other EU and international strategies.

During the last term, Parliament called on the Commission to monitor the implementation of existing EU gender equality legislation more effectively and carried out its own assessments of the [Employment Equality Directive](#), the [Directive on gender equality in access to goods and services](#), the [Victims' Rights Directive](#), and the [European Protection Order](#). It also assessed the [Gender Action Plan](#) and [reported](#) on progress towards gender equality in the EU.

There are several areas where EU action has so far fallen short of Parliament's calls, including:

- **Combating violence against women:** In 2014 Parliament [called](#) not only for EU accession to the Istanbul Convention but also for an EU directive containing binding measures to [protect women from violence](#) and a combination of other measures, including: strengthening the legal basis by adding gender-based violence to the crimes listed in Article 83(1) TFEU; the establishment of a coherent system for collecting statistics in Member States; a European Observatory; and the adoption of an EU-wide strategy and action plan to combat violence against women. Parliament continued to push for progress on these recommendations, for example in its resolutions of [9 June 2015](#), [24 November 2016](#), [14 March 2017](#) and [12 September 2017](#). It is also [calling](#) for broader EU accession to the Istanbul Convention, going beyond the areas currently proposed.
- **Equal Pay:** Parliament has been [calling](#) for a revision of the existing directive since 2008. Its 2015 [implementation assessment](#) found that equal pay provisions are not being fully applied or enforced and called for new legislation, incorporating measures to strengthen pay transparency, together with effective means of enforcement, such as mandatory pay audits for large companies.
- **Work-Life Balance:** Parliament has long highlighted the cumulative impact of gender imbalances in pay, overall earnings, family and caring responsibilities and career patterns on [women's pensions](#) and [work-life balance](#). It has also flagged the precarious situation of [care and domestic workers](#), who enable others to balance work and family life. The Parliament and the Council adopted the new work-life balance proposal before the end of the last term. It covers several longstanding EP demands, e.g. for strengthening the provision of non-transferable parental leave for fathers and paid paternity leave.
- **Funding:** Parliament has concluded that EU [funding](#) should be used much more proactively to achieve gender equality goals, with more use of ERDF funding to support investment in affordable childcare and care for other dependents, a reverse of the drop in funding for combating violence against women and more funding for grassroots organisations and equality bodies. It has also called for gender budgeting to be applied in all EU budget lines and in all future EU funding programmes, with clear targets, specified resources and systematic monitoring.

In addition, Parliament drew attention during the last term to action that could be taken on emerging and topical issues, including:

- Steps to take account of the specific needs of [women and girls in asylum procedures](#), including EU-wide gender guidelines as part of wider reforms to migration and asylum policy;
- Action to tackle [emerging forms of gender-based violence](#) such as cyberstalking and online harassment and to take account of the specific needs of vulnerable groups, such as child victims, women with disabilities, refugee and LGBTI women;
- Steps to give women access to legal [sexual and reproductive health services](#);
- Proposals for improving women's representation and participation in the [media, digital](#) and [STEM](#) sectors;
- The adoption of a more gender-sensitive approach in [climate change](#) policy and in [trade policy](#), by including a chapter on gender in EU trade agreements.

Potential for the future

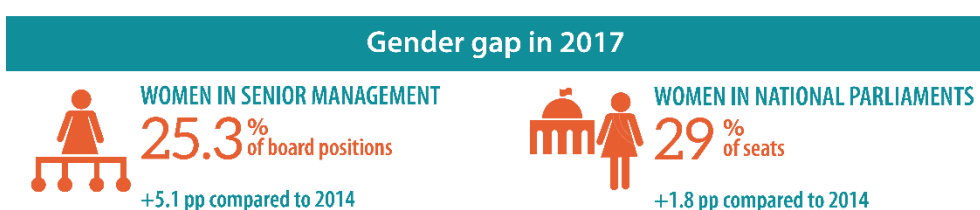
There are several options for further EU involvement or support that could help to tackle persistent gender gaps and speed up progress. These could include better implementation and enforcement of existing EU gender equality legislation, moves to modernise it or introduce new legislation to fill gaps in protection or address emerging issues, and further non-legislative measures such as data collection and monitoring, benchmarking, awareness-raising, and funding and support for the Member States, national equality bodies and grassroots organisations. Academic researchers and advocacy groups for women's rights would also like the EU to be more ambitious in tackling the structural roots of inequality, such as gender stereotyping, gender-based violence and uneven access to reproductive health and rights, and to pay more attention to the specific situation of different groups of women and '[intersecting](#)' forms of discrimination.

Further scope for legislation

Where EU gender equality legislation already exists, further [steps](#) could be taken to ensure that it is implemented and enforced more consistently and effectively. In addition, the standards in the existing legislation may need to be [updated](#) to conform to new requirements. Moreover, EU legislation has not covered all the policy areas where gender inequality occurs, notably regarding:

- **Violence against women**, where there is no EU-level legislation outside the specific areas of sexual harassment and trafficking. EU accession to the Istanbul Convention and an EU directive would help to ensure agreed minimum standards on prevention, protection and prosecution for all EU Member States;
- **Education**, where there is no EU-level legislation guaranteeing the right to gender equality;
- **Protection against discrimination**, which is still lacking because of [gaps](#) in the existing EU framework. This does not yet provide the same level of protection against discrimination on all grounds (sex, religion and belief, disability, age and sexual orientation) across all areas (employment, social security and healthcare, goods and services, education and social advantages); for sex, the current legislation covers the first three areas. An [Equal Treatment Directive](#), as proposed back in 2008, would ensure that equality is promoted evenly across all the different discrimination grounds.

However, during the last legislative term, the **equal treatment** proposal and a [proposed directive](#)



on **gender balance on company boards** (2012) remained stalled in the

Council because Member States were unable to reach an agreement. The Juncker Commission and the last European Parliament pushed for these outstanding legislative files to be adopted, but this did not happen before the end of the term. The work-life balance file was successfully completed before the end of the term, but work on the EU accession to the Istanbul Convention is far from being completed.

One difficulty is that the Treaties do not give the EU a straightforward legal basis for addressing some fields such as violence against women, which are decisive for gender equality, whilst other areas of public concern lie beyond the EU's core legislative competences.¹² However, the biggest point of contention in most files is **subsidiarity**, with some Member States questioning whether the EU has the mandate to legislate on certain issues. The matter is aggravated in some areas that are crucial for gender equality, for example, **social policy**, where unanimity is required in the Council for legislation to be adopted. This is a longstanding issue. While some countries fear the watering down of existing standards, others are wary of the costs of new legislation, making it difficult to introduce standards above the lowest common denominator.

Budgetary outlook

Under the Commission [proposal](#) for the next Multiannual Financial Framework (2021-2027), funding for gender equality will continue to be spread across several funds. Some funding programmes have a bigger gender equality dimension than others:

- The [Rights and Values Programme](#), which is part of the Justice, Rights and Values Fund, replaces two programmes from the 2014-2020 cycle, the Rights, Equality and Citizenship programme and Europe for Citizens programme, and has been allocated €641 705 000. It will dedicate a substantial amount to gender equality under the **equality and rights strand**, the focus of which is on preventing and combating inequalities and discrimination, and which includes gender and the promotion of gender mainstreaming; and the **Daphne strand**, with a focus on preventing and combating violence and supporting and protecting victims.
- The [European Social Fund Plus](#) (ESF+) proposal includes a specific objective of 'promoting women's labour market participation, a better work/life balance including access to childcare, a healthy and well-adapted working environment addressing health risks, adaptation of workers, enterprises and entrepreneurs to change, and active and healthy ageing'. It re-states gender equality as one of its principles and proposes gender disaggregated data as one of the indicators.
- The [Horizon Europe](#) proposal follows on from Horizon 2020 and one of its stated aims is the elimination of gender inequalities and promotion of equality between women and men in research and innovation.

Other proposals that mention gender equality, although their gender perspective may not be as developed, are the new [Erasmus](#) proposal, [IPA III](#), and the [European Regional Development Fund](#) and [the Cohesion Fund](#). The [Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument](#) (NDICI) proposal incorporates several instruments that had a gender equality dimension in the previous MFF: the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI), the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) and the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR). It also includes the current extra-budgetary European Development Fund (EDF). It lists gender equality and women's empowerment as one of its general principles, and states that gender equality is mainstreamed in the programme.

Gender budgeting [experts](#) and [NGOs](#) stress that there is scope for better inclusion of gender equality objectives in the new MFF proposal, which requires consent from the Parliament.

Policy strategies and debates

The [white paper](#) on the Future of Europe re-affirms the EU's political commitment to gender equality, underlining the need to fight for it in the context of population ageing, the shrinking of the working age population and the importance of breaking down the persistent barriers to women's participation. The reflection paper on the [future of EU finances](#) also stresses that funding can provide added value in upholding EU principles, including equality.

Preparations for a new post-2019 EU gender equality strategy will provide a focus for debate on the future direction, scope and scale of EU action. Speaking on the way forward, the 2014-2019 European Commissioner, Věra Jourová, [stressed](#) the challenge of achieving results in an area that requires legislation, but also funding and support for organisations, and influencing mind-sets that are slow to change. This means setting realistic goals and using combinations of instruments, for instance, in increasing women's political representation and participation, a mixture of quotas and voluntary schemes.

MAIN REFERENCES

EIGE, [Gender Equality Index 2017: Measuring gender equality in the European Union 2005-2015 - Report](#), October 2017

European Commission, [Report on equality between women and men in the EU 2018](#), April 2018

European Parliament, [Equality and the Fight against Racism and Xenophobia: Cost of Non-Europe Report](#), March 2018

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Data in the infographics throughout this briefing, produced by Nadejda Kresnichka-Nikolchova, are from Eurostat: [sdg 04 10](#); [SDG 04 20](#); [sdg 04 50](#); [sdg 05 20](#); [sdg 05 30](#); [sdg 05 40](#); [sdg 05 50](#); [sdg 05 60](#).
- ² The term 'sex' refers primarily to the biological differences between women and men. The term 'gender' is broader in that it also comprises social differences, such as roles and behaviours attributed to women and men within the family and in society.
- ³ For an overview of the development of gender equality policies in the EU, see: Woodward, A.E. From equal treatment to gender mainstreaming and diversity management, in *Gendering the European Union: New approaches to Old Democratic Deficits*; Abels G. and Mushaben, J.M. (Eds), Palgrave Macmillan, 2012 and Jacquot S. *Transformations in EU gender equality: From emergence to dismantling*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.
- ⁴ Sources for data on gender equality at EU and national level include: the European Union's Statistics Office Eurostat, particularly its regular [overview and explanation of gender statistics](#) with key indicators from fields such as education, the labour market, earnings and health; [Eurofound](#), EIGE's [gender statistics database](#), including comprehensive data on [women in decision-making](#); and the European Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), particularly its [survey](#) on violence against women. Analyses of progress and gaps can be found in EIGE's Index reports and the European Commission's annual reports on equality between women and men.
- ⁵ In some policy areas, such as education and employment, the gender dimension is evident. In others, such as trade or climate change, it may be less immediately apparent. Yet, across the spectrum, including in these seemingly 'neutral' fields, policy may have different impacts on women and men and may inadvertently perpetuate inequality or discrimination. EIGE's [database](#) on gender mainstreaming illustrates the relevance of a gender perspective in specific policy areas.
- ⁶ The ILO [notes](#) that some EU countries, such as France, Germany, Poland and Slovakia, raised the level of support to families during the crisis in the form of access to early childhood education and care and tax credits, and increases in the duration, scope and levels of benefits for maternity and parental leave.
- ⁷ For more information on the backlash against gender equality, see: Kuhar, R. and Paternotte, D. (Eds) *Anti-Gender, Mobilizing against Equality Campaigns in Europe*. Rowman and Littlefields. 2017.
- ⁸ This section has been drafted by Alina Dobрева, with graphics by Nadejda Kresnichka-Nikolchova.
- ⁹ The survey used the term 'equal treatment of men and women'.
- ¹⁰ The key Treaty articles are: Articles 2 and 3(3) [TEU](#) and Article 23 of the [Charter](#) of Fundamental Rights, making gender equality a core value and aim of the Union and its Member States; Article 8 TFEU on gender mainstreaming in all

activities; Article 19 TFEU, giving the EU the competence to introduce legislation to combat gender-based discrimination; Article 157 TFEU establishing the principle of equal pay for work of equal value and giving the EU a legal basis for gender equality law in employment; and Article 157(4) TFEU and Article 23 of the Charter of fundamental Rights, which recognise positive action as a method of achieving gender equality.

- ¹¹ The funds in question are: the [European Structural and Investment Funds](#); the [Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme](#); the [Horizon 2020 Framework Programme for Research and Innovation](#); [Erasmus +](#); the [Connecting Europe Facility](#); the [Asylum, Migration and Integration Funds](#); the [Development Cooperation Instrument](#); the [European Neighbourhood Instrument](#); the [European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights](#); and the [Programme for Employment and Social Innovation](#).
- ¹² For a detailed analysis of EU competences and legal bases for gender equality in the Treaties, see for example, Dagmar Schiek, 'Article 23 - Equality between Women and Men' in Peers et al, (Eds) *The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights: A Commentary*, Hart Publishing, 2014, p. 635.

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