

Information sheet on gender equality

A few facts and figures¹

Equality between women and men is a fundamental value of the European Union, dating back to the 1957 Treaty of Rome, which established the principle of equal pay for equal work. Since then, the EU has continued to tackle gender-based discrimination and today Europe is one of the safest and fairest places for women in the world. However for many women these rights are not yet a reality. Statistics show that women are under-represented in decision-making positions in politics and business and still earn on average 16 % less than men across the EU. Gender-based violence and harassment remain widespread.²

Gender gap in 2017

What is the European Union doing / Main EU legislation and policies³

The EU aims to give women the same opportunities as men in the work place, such as equal pay, and to help both men and women to strike a better balance between work and other areas of life. Another major priority is to stop violence against women and girls and to promote gender equality in the EU and across the world. The EU also promotes equality between men and women in decision-making positions.⁴

- **Principle of gender equality and non-discrimination** in the Treaty on the European Union;⁵
- Directive 2004/113/EC of 13 December 2004 implementing the principle of equal treatment between men and women in the access to and supply of goods and services;
- Directive 2006/54/EC of 5 July 2006 on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation. This directive defines direct and indirect discrimination, harassment and sexual harassment. It also encourages employers to take preventive measures to combat sexual harassment, reinforces the sanctions for discrimination, and provides for the setting-up within the Member States of bodies responsible for promoting equal treatment between women and men;
- Council Directive 2010/18/EU of 8 March 2010 implementing the revised Framework Agreement on parental leave;
- Directive 2010/41/EU of 7 July 2010 on the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity in a self-employed capacity;

The European Commission adopted a **Strategic engagement on gender equality 2016-19**. It focuses on the following 5 priority areas:

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

The strategic engagement sets out objectives in each of these priority areas and identifies more than 30 concrete actions. It reaffirms commitment to gender mainstreaming: a gender equality perspective needs to be integrated into all EU policies as well as into EU funding programmes.

1. Source: https://www.eurostat.europa.eu/frqData/studies/9916/2016/28272/EN/55_38/2016028272_EN.pdf
 2. Source: <http://publications.europa.eu/webpub/com/factsheets/women/en/>
 3. Source: https://www.eurostat.europa.eu/frqData/studies/9916/2016/28272/EN/55_38/2016028272_EN.pdf
 4. Source: <http://publications.europa.eu/webpub/com/factsheets/women/en/>
 5. Articles 2 and 3(1) of the Treaty on European Union

In order to promote **equal economic independence**⁶ the EC among others adopted [an initiative to address the work-life balance challenges faced by working parents and carers](#) and promotes [female entrepreneurship and self-employment](#).

Equal Pay for Equal Work⁷ is one of the European Union's founding principles. In line with EU law, people who have suffered pay discrimination can take legal action without fear of retaliation from their employer. The European Commission (EC) adopted the [EU Action Plan 2017-2019: Tackling the Gender Pay Gap](#) in November 2017 which takes a holistic approach and addresses the various root causes of the gender pay gap.

Gender Balance in Decision-Making Positions⁸ is also a priority for the EC. It raises awareness on this issue, supports many groups concerned (governments, social partners, NGOs, business...) to design and implement EU-wide activities on gender balance in leadership positions and promotes networking and the exchange of good practices. In November 2012 the European Commission proposed legislation to increase the number of women on corporate boards by 40% in publicly listed companies⁹.

In the field of external action the EU implements its action plan, set in the working document on ['Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Transforming the Lives of girls and Women through EU External Relations, 2016-2020'](#).

EU CSOs' work on gender equality

The [European Women's Lobby \(EWL\)](#) brings together the women's movements in Europe to influence the general public and European Institutions in support of women's human rights and equality between women and men. EWL for instance developed [strategies](#) to achieve more women elected in the European Parliament in the 2019 elections, and as many women as men in the College of Commissioners. It also uses the EU Directive on women on boards as a tool to push for more women in the boards of big companies, as well as in other institutions, such as public institutions, middle-sized companies, university juries, courts, banks and media.¹⁰

For more information

- The [European Institute for Gender Equality \(EIGE\)](#) is an autonomous body of the European Union, established to strengthen the promotion of gender equality, including gender mainstreaming in all EU policies and the resulting national policies, as well as the fight against discrimination based on sex. It also aims at raising EU citizens' awareness of gender equality.
- The [EU Agency for Fundamental Rights](#) collects and analyses information and data; provides assistance and expertise; and communicates to raise rights awareness.
- [National Gender Equality Bodies](#)
- [Network of Legal Experts in Gender Equality and Non-Discrimination](#)¹¹
- [European Network of Experts on Gender Equality](#)
- [2019 European Commission Report on Equality Between Men and Women in the EU](#)
- [European Commission Factsheet](#) : Questions and Answers: What is the EU doing for women's rights and gender equality?

6. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/equal-economic-independence_en

7. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/equal-pay_en

8. Source: https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-balance-decision-making-positions_en

9. Source: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1441109473231&uri=CELEX%3A52012PC0614>

10. Source: <https://womenlobby.org/Women-in-Business-7447>

11. Source: <https://www.equalitylaw.eu/>

