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This document corrects document SWD(2022) 54 final of 08.03.22. The changes made in this corrigendum version did not impact on the substance of the annual report. These changes mainly consist of corrections to footnotes, typos and minor rephrasing of some sentences. The text shall read as follows:

## **COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT**

### **2022 Report on gender equality in the EU**

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## Introduction

The European Commission's Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025<sup>1</sup> sets the current framework for EU action to promote one of its fundamental values, equality between women and men. The year 2021 was the second year of its implementation. It was also the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic, which clearly exposed the persistence of some deep-rooted inequalities in society and in the economy, while simultaneously recalling society's reliance on women and their work, and its continued undervaluation.

This report takes stock of the main initiatives to promote equality between women and men in the past twelve months 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 on gender equality by EU institutions and Member States. It showcases some inspiring practices and innovative projects and presents key trends and the newest available data.

In 2021, the gendered impact of the COVID-19 crisis continued to manifest itself. The disproportionate impact on women threatens to reverse decades of progress on gender equality. This concerns, in particular, the greater care burden brought by lockdowns, the lost income and heightened precariousness, and the steep increase in domestic violence<sup>2</sup>.

Despite these setbacks, the last year brought about important European legislative developments that can become game changers for gender equality. This concerns, in particular, women's pay. Barely nine months after its presentation in March 2021, the European Commission's proposed directive on pay transparency secured a general agreement in the Council, paving the way for negotiations with the European Parliament and final adoption. In a similar vein, the proposal on minimum wage has already reached a decisive stage of negotiations with the co-legislators. The year 2021 was also a busy period for taking forward initiatives to help combat violence against women. The Council reached a general approach on the proposal for a Digital Services Act, which would help to remove illegal content and protect women users online. Furthermore, the Commission plans to adopt, on 8 March 2022, a directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence. With this legislation, the EU will improve the prevention of violence, strengthen the protection and support of victims and facilitate their access to justice. Finally, the Commission proposed that the Council adopt a decision to include hate speech and hate crime in the list of EU crimes. Once agreed by the Council, this would allow the Commission to propose legislation criminalising all forms of hate speech and hate crime, both online and offline, and on all prohibited grounds of discrimination, including sex or gender.

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<sup>1</sup> Available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0152&from=EN>.

<sup>2</sup> Available at <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/giwl/assets/essays-on-equality-december-2021.pdf>.

## FREE FROM VIOLENCE AND STEREOTYPES

**Violence against women and domestic violence remains widespread across the European Union** and beyond. It is a violation of human rights that disproportionately affects women and girls. **It has also been highlighted and exacerbated by COVID-19**<sup>3</sup>. Social distancing and restrictions on movement to contain COVID-19 have trapped women and children at home with their abusers. Spikes in domestic violence and abuse reports during COVID-19 lockdowns were a sad reminder that women frequently face the most danger from people they know. For victims of violence, legal and social support networks were shattered or in some cases never existed, making it very difficult or impossible to seek immediate support or to escape from home<sup>4</sup>. In particular, stakeholders noted an increase in contact to helplines for victims of violence against women and domestic violence during the pandemic; an increase in the demand for specialised support services; an increase of reports to law enforcement and in numbers of emergency protection orders issued in cases of such violence; an increase in risk factors for violence due to the pandemic, coupled with a decrease in accessibility of victim support.<sup>5</sup>

Data from 2021 from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) shows that **experiences of physical violence differ between women and men in relation to some key characteristics**<sup>6</sup>. Violence against women takes place in the private sphere and is systematically under-reported. Other features include criminal proceedings being disrupted, the commonly sexual nature of crimes and/or a high prevalence of elements of coercive control. These features are different compared with most violence experienced by men. For instance, violence against men usually occurs in public settings, is not usually of a sexual nature, and is generally perpetrated by other men. Men are also much less often victims of violence targeting them because of their gender<sup>7</sup>. In addition, while the prevalence of harassment is similar for women and men, recent data shows that 18% of women described it as being of a sexual nature, compared with 6% of men, with a higher prevalence for young women<sup>8</sup>.

Violence against women and domestic violence has a considerable impact on those involved, including victims, witnesses, perpetrators, national authorities, companies and the wider society. Some of the negative social and health impact also gives rise to economic costs. The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) **estimates the cost of gender-based violence across the EU to be**

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<sup>3</sup> European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), *The Covid-19 pandemic and intimate partner violence against women in the EU*, 2021. Available at <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/6af1ff62-82e8-11eb-9ac9-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-197868801>; WHO, "The rise and rise of interpersonal violence – an unintended impact of the COVID-19 response on families", 2020. Available at <https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/disease-prevention/violence-and-injuries/news/news/2020/6/the-rise-and-rise-of-interpersonal-violence-an-unintended-impact-of-the-covid-19-response-on-families>.

<sup>4</sup> European Commission, *Mental health and the pandemic: living, caring, acting! Conference Report*, 2021. Retrieved from: [https://ec.europa.eu/health/other-pages/basic-page/mental-health-and-pandemic-living-caring-acting\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/health/other-pages/basic-page/mental-health-and-pandemic-living-caring-acting_en); Jarnecke, A. M., and Flanagan, J. C., Staying safe during COVID-19: How a pandemic can escalate risk for intimate partner violence and what can be done to provide individuals with resources and support. *Psychological trauma: theory, research, practice, and policy*, 12(S1), S202, 2020. Available at <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32551749/>; Buttell, F., and Ferreira, R. J., The hidden disaster of COVID-19: Intimate partner violence. *Psychological trauma: theory, research, practice, and policy*, 12(S1), S197, 2020. Available at <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2020-43607-001>.

<sup>5</sup> Arenas-Arroyo, E., Fernandez Kranz, D. & Nollenberger, N. 'Intimate Partner Violence under Forced Coexistence and Economic Stress: Evidence from the COVID-19 Pandemic', *Journal of Public Economics*, Vol. 194, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), *Crime, Safety and Victims' Rights*, 2021.

Available at <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2021/fundamental-rights-survey-crime>. This survey collected data from 35,000 people and focuses on respondents' experiences as victims of selected types of crime, including violence and harassment.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> FRA, *Fundamental Rights Report*, 2019. Available at <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2019/fundamental-rights-report-2019>.

**EUR 366 billion per year**<sup>9</sup>, with the costs of violence against women amounting to EUR 289 billion (79%), and costs of EUR 175 billion for domestic and intimate partner violence (of which 87% is carried out against women). These results are around **one third higher than previous estimates**<sup>10</sup>. In addition, a recent European Parliament Research Service (EPRS) study<sup>11</sup> estimates the **overall costs of cyber harassment and cyber stalking** against women at **between EUR 49 and EUR 89.3 billion**<sup>12</sup>.

In 2021, the Commission continued to facilitate mutual learning and exchange of good practices among Member States through the **Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality**. In July 2021, Finland hosted an online seminar on **methodologies on cost estimation of violence against women**, with 16 Member States participating. Finland presented their past and on-going research on the costs of violence against women, as well as some of the main methodological approaches to calculating them. Participants discussed how best to identify victims of violence, the importance of assessing intangible costs, and practical use of the research<sup>13</sup>.

To be able to understand the extent of gender-based violence and provide adequate measures, there is still a **pressing need for better data** on the prevalence of gender-based violence<sup>14</sup>. In 2021, Eurostat continued to work on an EU survey on gender-based violence against women and other forms of interpersonal violence<sup>15</sup>. The questionnaire and methodology were prepared in cooperation with Member States and experts from a range of relevant organisations and stakeholders. The *Methodological manual for the EU survey on gender-based violence against women and other forms of inter-personal violence (EU-GBV)*<sup>16</sup> was published in October 2021.

A **research** project on sexual violence, conducted over 4 years, was published in June 2021 under the name UN-MENAMAIS<sup>17</sup> (understanding the mechanisms, nature, magnitude and impact of **sexual violence in Belgium**). According to the main results of this research, **81% of women and 48% of men declare to have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime**, and 16% of women and 5% of men report having been raped.

<sup>9</sup> EIGE, *The costs of gender-based violence in the European Union*, 2021. Available at <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/costs-gender-based-violence-european-union>. This study considers three main sources of costs: direct cost of services (to victims or to public providers); lost economic output; and physical and emotional impacts measured as a reduction in the quality of life.

<sup>10</sup> This increase can be explained, firstly, due to changes in the offences included in this study and also due to higher incidence of offences.

<sup>11</sup> EPRS, *Combating gender-based violence: Cyberviolence*, European added value assessment, 2021, p. 8. Available at [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/662621/EPRS\\_STU\(2021\)662621\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/662621/EPRS_STU(2021)662621_EN.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> The largest cost related to the loss in terms of quality of life, which accounted for more than half of the overall costs (about 60 % for cyber harassment and about 50 % for cyber stalking). Labour market impacts were also found to be substantial, together accounting for approximately 30 % for cyber harassment and 35 % for cyber stalking, the higher costs for the latter owing to lower labour force participation. Healthcare costs and legal costs, while contributing less to overall costs, were nonetheless substantial.

<sup>13</sup> Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/info/eu-mutual-learning-programme-gender-equality-methodologies-and-good-practices-assessing-costs-violence-against-women-online-7-8-july-2021\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/eu-mutual-learning-programme-gender-equality-methodologies-and-good-practices-assessing-costs-violence-against-women-online-7-8-july-2021_en).

<sup>14</sup> In the Gender Equality Index 2021, no score was given to the EU in the domain of violence, due to a lack of comparable EU-wide data.

<sup>15</sup> The survey implementation at national level started on a voluntary basis in 2020 and currently 18 Member States (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain) and Iceland have started with the process. EIGE, together with the EU's Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), will collect data for the remaining countries to have EU-wide comparable data on violence against women. Data collection is expected to be completed in 2023, and the results will be used to update the domain of violence in the Gender Equality Index 2024. Action is also undertaken to ensure further convergence of administrative data collection.

<sup>16</sup> Eurostat, *Methodological manual for the EU survey on gender-based violence against women and other forms of inter-personal violence (EU-GBV)* (europa.eu), 2021.

Available at <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3859598/13484289/KS-GQ-21-009-EN-N.pdf/1478786c-5fb3-fe31-d759-7bbe0e9066ad?t=1633004533458>.

<sup>17</sup> <https://nicc.fgov.be/un-menamais>

## Ending gender-based violence

The year 2021 saw some developments concerning the EU's accession to the **Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence ('Istanbul Convention')**<sup>18</sup>. In October 2021, **the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) issued its long-awaited opinion**, which clarifies the modalities of EU accession to the Istanbul Convention and its legal basis. The Court notably confirmed that the EU has competence to accede to the Convention on the basis of Articles 82(2) and 84 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) concerning victims' rights and crime prevention. As to the accession process, the Court clarified that there is no legal requirement for unanimity in the Council for acceding to an international convention<sup>19</sup>, even if that Convention is covered only partly by EU competences. Therefore, the EU may accede to the Istanbul Convention even if not all Member States consent to or have ratified it. However, the Court also concedes that the Council has discretion to wait with a vote until the largest possible majority is reached. Based on the Court's opinion, the French Presidency is planning to revise the pending decisions on the conclusion of the Convention and to relaunch negotiations in the Council Working Group. The Commission is cooperating closely with the Presidency.

At the same time, the Commission plans to adopt, on 8 March 2022, a **proposal for a directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence**. This legislative initiative shares the objectives of the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention: ensuring, within the limits of Union competence, that EU Member States have effective measures in place to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence. Once the EU's accession to the Convention is finalised, the proposal will serve to implement the Convention in areas of EU competence. If the accession cannot be finalised, the proposal will constitute an alternative to accession. The Court's opinion confirmed that the EU has the competence to adopt legislation in this field. For the first time, the Commission is proposing a comprehensive framework to effectively combat violence against women and domestic violence. This includes EU-wide criminalisation of the most egregious forms of violence against women and of certain forms of cyber violence, thereby ensuring that the most serious forms of violence against women and domestic violence are sanctioned in Europe. Such criminalisation will notably contribute to addressing challenges in the online space, as the measures in the proposal for a Digital Services Act (DSA) rely on definitions of illegal content in national and EU law. It will also help better protect users from illegal gendered online content in line with the commitments of the Gender Equality Strategy. Furthermore, the proposed Directive contains targeted measures to ensure victims of violence against women and domestic violence are granted access to justice, adequate protection and support and that measures are taken to prevent such violence from happening in the first place.

The proposal aims to address the fragmentation of the current legal framework, and to fill existing gaps in protection at Member State and EU level. It will introduce minimum standards for adequately protecting the fundamental rights of victims, and bring the relevant EU rules up to date with recent societal developments.

On 9 December 2021, the European Commission presented an initiative to trigger a Council decision to **extend the list of EU-crimes in Article 83(1) TFEU to include hate speech and hate crime**. Such a

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<sup>18</sup> The Convention has been signed by all EU Member States, and ratified by 21 (Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden) In July 2020, the Polish government announced its intention to withdraw from the Convention, but this has not yet been enacted. Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence ([CETS No. 210](https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list?module=signatures-by-treaty&treaty=210)). Chart of signatures and ratifications available at <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list?module=signatures-by-treaty&treaty=210>.

<sup>19</sup> This relates to the practice of the Council to require a "common accord" among Member States for the accession to so-called "mixed agreements" which fall partly under Member States and partly under EU competences. The Court clarified that this practice is incompatible with the Treaties.

Council decision would create a new legal basis and allow the Commission to propose hate speech and hate crime to be criminalised at EU level on all prohibited grounds of discrimination<sup>20</sup>. The extension of the list of EU-crimes to hate speech and hate crime will provide the basis for criminalising, not only online but also offline<sup>21</sup>, specific forms of gender-based hate crime and hate speech, thereby complementing the targeted criminalisation proposed under the directive on violence against women and domestic violence.

The two Commission initiatives – the proposed directive on violence against women and the initiative to extend the list of EU-crimes to hate speech and hate crime - respond to calls for EU action from the European Parliament. In particular, **the European Parliament resolution** of September 2021 **called for gender-based violence to be added to the list of EU crimes** under Article 83(1) TFEU<sup>22</sup> and to meet the standards set out in the Istanbul Convention<sup>23</sup>. The European Parliament also adopted, in December 2021, a resolution on gender-based cyber violence<sup>24</sup> (see section on cyberviolence for details).

In June 2021, **Slovenia's** National Assembly adopted an Act Amending the Criminal Code. The proposed amendments supplement the criminal offences of rape and sexual violence under Articles 170 and 171 of the Criminal Code by applying the affirmative consent model (i.e. 'yes means yes') to the basic forms of both acts. Therefore, these acts with the use of force or threats have become qualified forms of these two criminal offences. The criminalisation of rape under the affirmative consent model also includes sexual practices involving penetration with objects.

In September 2021, the **Finnish** government submitted a bill to Parliament to establish the post of a rapporteur on violence against women. Under the bill, the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman would be appointed the rapporteur on violence against women. The rapporteur would monitor violence against women and domestic violence, the functioning of national legislation and the implementation of international obligations, and also monitor and assess measures and policies to prevent and combat violence. Based on information acquired in their work, the rapporteur could issue statements and advice and submit initiatives in addition to the presentation of their observations in public debate and in regular reports to the Parliament and government.

The **WeToo Project**, funded under the EU's Rights, Equality and Citizenship programme, aims at enhancing the capacities of frontline workers (law enforcement agencies, social workers, anti-trafficking and anti-violence operators, women's clinics' medical staff) to identify sexual and gender-based violence cases. It also aims at helping them manage stress and establish trust relationships with victims and survivors, in full respect of their needs (considering the special needs of the most vulnerable groups such as migrant women and girls). The project addresses **protection of mental health**, raising awareness on potential risks (stress, burnout,

<sup>20</sup> This means that the prosecution needs to identify an explicit hate motivation, e.g. the perpetrator having indicated that the act is committed due to their hatred of women, or this being evident in light of other circumstances of the case.

<sup>21</sup> The proposal for a directive on violence against women and domestic violence already criminalises misogynistic hate speech online. The extension of the list of EU-crimes would allow to criminalise such hate speech also offline as well as misogynistic hate crime.

<sup>22</sup> European Parliament resolution of 16 September 2021 with recommendations to the Commission on identifying gender-based violence as a new area of crime listed in Article 83(1) TFEU (2021/2035(INL)). Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0388\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0388_EN.html).

<sup>23</sup> The Parliament also adopted in October 2021 a resolution on the impact of intimate partner violence and custody rights on women and children, also based on an own-initiative legislative report from Parliament's Committees on Legal Affairs (JURI) and on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM). See: European Parliament resolution of 6 October 2021 on the impact of intimate partner violence and custody rights on women and children (2019/2166(INI)). Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0406\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0406_EN.html).

<sup>24</sup> European Parliament resolution of 14 December 2021 with recommendations to the Commission on combating gender-based violence: cyberviolence (2020/2035(INL)), available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0489\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0489_EN.html). The European added value assessment on "Combating gender-based violence: Cyber violence" supported the own-initiative legislative report under the same title (2020/2035(INL)). Available at [EPRS\\_STU\(2021\)662621\\_EN.pdf \(europa.eu\)](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/epfrs/stu/2021/662621_EN.pdf).

compassion fatigue) faced by frontline operators and disseminating measures to mitigate them. It also contribute to improving early detection, protection and support services for victims and survivors. The project is live in **Italy, Bulgaria, Germany, Greece and Serbia**.

The overall objective of the SHINE project (**Sexual Harassment in Nightlife** Entertainment Spots: Control and Prevention), funded under the EU's Rights, Equality and Citizenship programme, is to create a working model for prevention and mitigation of such sexual harassment. The model seeks to be responsive, flexible and adaptable to the local needs and specificities of stakeholders in **Lithuania, Slovenia and France**.

The main objective of the PATTERN project (Prevent And combaT domesTic violEnce against Roma women), funded under the EU's Rights, Equality and Citizenship programme, is to contribute to the prevention and **combating of domestic violence against Roma women** in **Greece, Bulgaria, Portugal**. It enables professionals to respond to domestic violence in a comprehensive way and enhances the capacities of hundreds of Roma cultural mediators and professionals on domestic violence.

In **Portugal**, the ESF funded projects target support for victims of violence. The Portuguese Red Cross aims to create a response of **psychological support for children and young people** victims of domestic violence in 7 municipalities. It aims at a holistic approach to the problem, maximizing networking of various partners involved in mitigating the harmful impacts of domestic violence on children and youth. Partnerships with various entities are protocolled. The GAVA project, "Gabinete de Apoio a Vitima" (**Victim Support Office**) set up a structure of care, monitoring and specialized support to victims of domestic and gender violence that operates in the municipality of Odemira. It also promotes information and awareness-raising activities on domestic violence and gender violence aimed at the local community, in order to consolidate the network of partners and for the effectiveness and efficiency of the response to prevention, protection and assistance to victims.

## Cyber violence against women

Cyber violence against women and intimate partner cyber violence have become increasingly common in recent years, reflecting the increase in the use of the internet and social media overall. It can take a variety of forms, ranging from cyber stalking and non-consensual sharing of private and intimate images or personal data to sexual cyber harassment<sup>25</sup>. **At global level, 23% of women experienced abuse or harassment online**<sup>26</sup>. This could involve receiving offensive or threatening emails or text messages, or finding offensive or threatening comments about oneself disseminated online. Experiences of online and real-life violence are often interlinked, showing that it is important to tackle them together. **Gender-based cyber violence is often part of the continuum of violence that victims experience offline**. While both women and men experience cyber violence and harassment, women are much more often among victims of cyber violence perpetrated based on the

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<sup>25</sup> Council of Europe Cybercrime Convention Committee, (CY), *Mapping study on cyber violence* (T-CY (2017)10), at 6, 2017; European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), *Cyber violence against women and girls*, 2017. Available at <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/cyber-violence-against-women-and-girls>; GenPol Gender & Policy Insights, *When technology meets misogyny. Multi-level, intersectional solutions to digital gender-based violence*, p. 16, 2019. Available at <https://gen-pol.org/2019/11/when-technology-meets-misogyny-multi-level-intersectional-solutions-to-digital-gender-based-violence/>.

<sup>26</sup> CyberSafe. *Cyber violence against women and girls*. Final report 2021, pp. 30-33. Figures vary on this issue, depending on the sample group. The World Wide Web Foundation found in 2020 that 52% of young women were affected by cyber harassment, World Wide Web Foundation blog, "The online crisis facing women and girls threatens global progress on gender equality", 12 March 2020; according to FRA, *Crime, safety and victims' rights*, 2021, 13% of women in Europe experienced cyber harassment, with a higher prevalence of younger women.

victim's sex, in particular sexual forms of cyber violence<sup>27</sup>. In addition, women and girls more often report serious and disturbing forms of such violence, and report feeling more vulnerable after such violence and more harshly judged as victims<sup>28</sup>. In a recent study, more than 50% of all respondents replied they did not dare express political opinions due to fear of online targeting. Women respondents reported expressing their political opinions less often than men do (54% and 47% respectively)<sup>29</sup>.

On 25 November 2021, the **Council agreed its position** ('general approach') on the proposal for a **Digital Services Act (DSA)**<sup>30</sup>. On 20 January 2022, the **European Parliament also gave the green light to open negotiations** with Member States, by adopting its negotiating mandate<sup>31</sup>. As a horizontal regulation, the main aim of the proposed DSA is to keep users safe from illegal goods, content or services, and to protect their fundamental rights online, including by addressing risks of gender-based cyber violence. The proposal follows the principle that what is illegal offline should also be illegal online. It sets out clear gradual responsibilities and accountability for providers of intermediary services, depending on their role in society. The DSA does not provide an EU-level definition of what constitutes such illegal content. The proposed Directive on violence against women and domestic violence complements the DSA by criminalising certain forms of cyber violence. The proposed Directive also contains measures to protect and support victims of cyber violence and to prevent such violence from happening in the first place. This is in line with the **European Parliament's resolution on gender-based cyber violence**<sup>32</sup> of December 2021, in which the Parliament called for EU legislation in this area.

**Slovenia** initiated the project 'Key online', focused on raising awareness of girls in primary and secondary schools. It included workshops to recognise cyber violence and harassment and to inform them about support possibilities if they are experiencing it. Moreover, the project 'The letters hurt' was an awareness-raising campaign addressing the public about gender cyber violence, through posters in places where young people spend their free time (nightclubs, schools, bars, etc.), and with online messaging.

Under the EU funded project '**CYBERSAFE. Changing Attitudes among teenagers on Cyber Violence against Women and Girls**'<sup>33</sup>, nine project partners from various European countries have developed and promoted an innovative experiential educational prevention programme – the CYBERSAFE Toolkit. It includes playful online tools to address the issue of online violence against women and girls among young people (13–16 years old), in a classroom setting. CYBERSAFE promotes healthy relationships and gender equality online. The CYBERSAFE Toolkit provides information and tools to prepare and facilitate four workshops on the issues of gender-based online violence, in order to raise awareness and to **encourage and support young people** to engage in safe and

<sup>27</sup> GenPol Gender & Policy Insights 2019. *When technology meets misogyny. Multi-level, intersectional solutions to digital gender-based violence*, p. 14. CyberSafe 2021, pp. 30-33, 72, referring to the deSHAME project on online sexual harassment and violence. Available at <https://www.childnet.com/our-projects/project-deshame>.

<sup>28</sup> CyberSafe, *Cyber violence against women and girls*. Final report 2021, pp. 38-39. Available at <https://wave-network.org/cybersafe-project-report-cyber-violence-against-women-and-girls/>.

<sup>29</sup> IDZ, *#Hass im Netz – der schleichende Angriff auf die Demokratie*, 2019, pp. 6, 22, 23. Available at <https://www.idz-jena.de/forschung/hass-im-netz-der-schleichende-angriff-auf-unsere-demokratie-2018>.

<sup>30</sup> COM (2020) 825 final, *Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on a Single Market For Digital Services (Digital Services Act) and amending Directive 2000/31/EC*. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020PC0825&from=en>.

<sup>31</sup> Available at <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20220114IPR21017/digital-services-act-regulating-platforms-for-a-safer-online-space-for-users>.

<sup>32</sup> European Parliament resolution of 14 December 2021 with recommendations to the Commission on combating gender-based violence: cyber violence (2020/2035(INL)), available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0489\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0489_EN.html). The European added value assessment on "Combating gender-based violence: Cyber violence" supported the own-initiative legislative report under the same title (2020/2035(INL)). Available at [EPRS\\_STU\(2021\)662621\\_EN.pdf \(europa.eu\)](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/PRS_STU(2021)662621_EN.pdf).

<sup>33</sup> Available at <https://www.stoponlineviolence.eu/>

responsible online behaviour. The project ended in 2021; its final report contains a wealth of data on this phenomenon.

## Sex-based work harassment

**Women are also disproportionately affected by violence at work**, where unequal power relations, low pay, precarious working conditions and other work abuses expose them to violence<sup>34</sup>. About a third of women who have faced sexual harassment in the EU experienced it at work<sup>35</sup>.

The **EU strategic framework on health and safety at work 2021-2027**<sup>36</sup>, adopted in June 2021, acknowledges the negative consequences of workplace violence, harassment and discrimination, whether based on sex or other grounds. In this context, the Commission will support awareness raising on workplace harassment and gender bias and promote gender considerations in design, implementation and reporting. The proposal to authorise Member States to ratify the International Labour Organization Convention No. 190 on combating violence and harassment in the world of work is still pending in the Council<sup>37</sup>. The Convention is the first international instrument that requires parties to prohibit gender-based violence and harassment at work and provides a comprehensive protection, prevention and support framework for victims. Pending the EU's accession to Convention No. 190, the proposal for a Directive on violence against women and domestic violence contains provisions to prevent and appropriately address instances of sexual harassment at work<sup>38</sup>.

The SET THE TONE project (Social Economy Tackling the unfair Treatment of wOmen iN Enterprises), funded under the EU's Rights, Equality and Citizenship programme, aims to have an impact on the mind-set and daily **behaviour practised in the workplace** towards gender stereotypes, sexual harassment, including cyber-harassment. It promotes the active engagement of employers and employees as positive key players in preventing and reporting **sexual harassment** cases in **Belgium, Italy, Spain, Poland and Slovenia**.

The Horizon 2020 funded **UniSAFE project**<sup>39</sup> examines **gender-based violence, including sexual harassment, in academia and higher education**. It will develop tools for policymakers and research organisations to reduce it. The **national reports published in 33 countries** in 2021 cover national and regional policies on gender-based violence targeting universities, research institutes and research funding organisations. Based on these reports, UniSAFE project partners have created a **European baseline of policies in place to combat gender-based violence at legal and policy levels**.

In 2021, **Germany** started a nationwide public awareness campaign, '**Stronger than violence**', which focuses on combating sexual violence in the workplace and aims to **encourage employers and executives to protect their employees against sexism and sexual harassment**. Its objective is to enable employers and employees to

<sup>34</sup> International Labour Organization, *Violence and Harassment against Women and Men in the World of Work*, 2017.

Available at [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_dialogue/---actrav/documents/publication/wcms\\_546645.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---actrav/documents/publication/wcms_546645.pdf).

<sup>35</sup> FRA, *Violence against women: an EU-wide survey. Main results report*, 2014, p. 113. Available at <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/violence-against-women-eu-wide-survey-main-results-report>. According to the Fundamental Rights Agency of the EU (FRA), for women who had faced sexual harassment since they were 15, 32% of perpetrators were from the employment context, such as colleagues, supervisors or clients. When asked whether the perpetrator of sexual harassment was male or female, 71% of victims indicated that the perpetrator of an incident was a man, 2% indicated a female perpetrator, and 21% pointed to both male and female harassers.

<sup>36</sup> Available at <https://osha.europa.eu/en/safety-and-health-legislation/eu-strategic-framework-health-and-safety-work-2021-2027>.

<sup>37</sup> In early 2020, the European Commission put forward a proposal to authorise EU Member States to ratify the Convention.

<sup>38</sup> In particular, Member States will have to ensure that external counselling services provide advice on adequately addressing instances of sexual harassment at the workplace, including on legal remedies available. Moreover, managers will have to participate in training sessions.

<sup>39</sup> Available at <https://unisafe-gbv.eu/>.

recognise sexism and sexual harassment and to encourage them not to look away, and show how to counter them effectively. Decisive action against sexism and sexual harassment in the workplace promotes collaboration based on trust and creates a strong corporate culture full of respect.

## Human trafficking

**Trafficking for sexual exploitation is the most prevalent form of human exploitation in the European Union<sup>40</sup>.** It is a form of gender-based violence, rooted in gender inequalities. Several factors increase the vulnerability of women and girls to trafficking, including gender inequality, poverty, social exclusion, ethnicity, and discrimination<sup>41</sup>. Nearly three quarters (72%) of all victims in the EU and 92% of victims trafficked for sexual exploitation are women and girls. Nearly a quarter of all victims of trafficking are children. Most of the child victims are EU citizens and trafficked for sexual exploitation<sup>42</sup>.

In April 2021, the Commission presented the **EU Strategy on combating trafficking in human beings (2021-2025)**<sup>43</sup>. The strategy addresses trafficking in human beings in a comprehensive way, from prevention to conviction of criminals. It emphasises the protection of victims at all stages, taking into account, in particular, women and child victims, and trafficking for sexual exploitation. It focuses on four areas of actions: reducing the demand that fosters trafficking; breaking the criminal business model of traffickers, both online and offline; supporting, protecting and empowering the victims, especially women and girls; and the international dimension.

**Legislation is one of the most effective tools** because it makes it possible to define the crime, set sanctions and common objectives to prosecute criminals, and protect the victims. As one of the key actions of the strategy, the Commission launched the evaluation of the **EU Anti-trafficking Directive** with a view to reconsider the current framework<sup>44</sup>. As part of this evaluation, the Commission will assess the possibility of having minimum EU rules that criminalise the use of services exploiting victims of trafficking. In addition, the Commission will further support Member States in implementing the Anti-trafficking Directive, including through dedicated funding, in particular as regards the gender specific and child-sensitive aspects.

The Commission also continues to ensure that the anti-trafficking objectives translate into funding actions under the Internal Security Fund (ISF) and the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), with a strong gender and child focus. Both calls take into account the gender specificity of trafficking in human beings.

The objective of the ASSIST project, funded under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, was to develop and deliver gender-specific **legal assistance** and support for female non-EU citizens who are **victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation** in EU Member States in order to contribute towards their integration. To achieve this outcome, the project partners in **Ireland, Italy, Germany, Spain, Belgium and the UK** provided information and overall support to 50 trafficked women. This covered areas central to their integration in

<sup>40</sup> 60% of the registered victims of trafficking in human beings in the EU for the years 2017-2018. Available at: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/5b93c49f-12a0-11eb-9a54-01aa75ed71a1>.

<sup>41</sup> European Parliament resolution (2020/2029(INI)). Available at [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0041\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0041_EN.html).

<sup>42</sup> COM(2020) 661 final, SWD(2020) 226 final, available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/sites/antitrafficking/files/third\\_progress\\_report.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/sites/antitrafficking/files/third_progress_report.pdf); *Data Collection on trafficking in human beings in the EU*, 2020. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/sites/antitrafficking/files/study\\_on\\_data\\_collection\\_on\\_trafficking\\_in\\_human\\_beings\\_in\\_the\\_eu.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/sites/antitrafficking/files/study_on_data_collection_on_trafficking_in_human_beings_in_the_eu.pdf).

<sup>43</sup> COM(2021) 171, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52021DC0171>.

<sup>44</sup> The Commission launched a public consultation on the future of combating trafficking in human beings, including possible ways to reinforce, develop and modernise the existing framework, which is open until 22 March 2022. Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/13106-Fighting-human-trafficking-review-of-EU-rules/public-consultation\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/13106-Fighting-human-trafficking-review-of-EU-rules/public-consultation_en).

Member States. In particular, the assistance provided focused on addressing specific issues: special legal needs; the availability and accessibility of material assistance and safe and appropriate housing, through designated shelters or mainstream services; specialised psychological support; access to training and employment; and overall integration support. Survivors of trafficking played a central role in both the conceptualisation and the implementation of the project. Among the main deliverables of this project was the publication of guidelines on best practice principles of gender-specific legal assistance and integration support to third country national female victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation<sup>45</sup>.

In Cyprus, all victims of trafficking and/or sexual exploitation who are non-EU citizens, both women and men, have free access to employment, just like Cypriots and EU citizens, while their cases are under judicial examination. Victims who wish to work can contact the Public Employment Services where they get support in finding employment from a suitably trained and qualified employment counsellor through a personalised approach. The counsellor cooperates with social welfare officers to be able to guide each person with the purpose of finding an appropriate job where they will feel safe. They also inform victims about Greek and English language courses that they can attend, and about other training opportunities.

In September 2021, the Latvian government adopted the 'Plan for the Prevention of Human Trafficking 2021-2023'. The measures set out in the plan include a total of 31 actions divided into four thematic priorities: (1) *Prevention*, which includes training and education programs, awareness-raising campaigns, among others; (2) *Protection and rights of victims*, including legislative measures and the provision of social services and victim management related to accommodation, medical treatment, mental health services, information, legal services, clothing and food, translation services, education on self-care and self-service skills and support in employment issues and reintegration into society; (3) *Prosecution of perpetrators*; (4) *Partnerships with private and public sectors*, which aim to promote leadership, diversity, trust building and individual-oriented sustainability, and effective communication measures.

## Supporting victims of gender-based violence

A Union of equality must ensure access to justice for all victims of gender-based violence, no matter where in the EU or in what circumstances the crime took place. Having seen a rise in violence against women and domestic violence due to the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>46</sup>, it is even more important to empower victims of violence through adequate support services so they can report crime, participate in criminal proceedings, claim compensation and ultimately recover – as much as possible – from the consequences of violence against women. The upcoming Directive on violence against women and domestic violence is expected to introduce minimum standards for national support services that will respond more directly to the specific needs of victims of violence against women and domestic violence (see above).

In parallel, the Commission is working on the implementation of its first **EU Strategy on victims' rights (2020-2025)**<sup>47</sup> including possible amendments to the Victims' Rights Directive<sup>48</sup>. Moreover, the Commission organised initiatives in the context of the **Victims' Rights Platform**, which brings together the main EU-level stakeholders relevant for victims' rights. Through it, the Commission also aims to facilitate a continuous exchange of best practices and cross-fertilisation between the EU strategy on victims' rights and, for example, the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025. Apart of

<sup>45</sup> Available at [Assisting-Trafficked-Women-Best-practice-principles-of-gender-specific-assistance-IE.pdf](https://immigrantcouncil.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Assisting-Trafficked-Women-Best-practice-principles-of-gender-specific-assistance-IE.pdf) (immigrantcouncil.ie).

<sup>46</sup> FRA, *Crime, safety and victims' rights*, 2021. Available at <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2021/fundamental-rights-survey-crime>.

<sup>47</sup> Available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0258>.

<sup>48</sup> Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12727-Supporting-crime-victims-evaluation-of-the-Victims%E2%80%99-Rights-Directive/public-consultation\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12727-Supporting-crime-victims-evaluation-of-the-Victims%E2%80%99-Rights-Directive/public-consultation_en).

two plenary meetings, the Commission is regularly organising ad hoc meetings of the Victims' Rights Platform dedicated to specific topics. In 2021 these included access to justice for vulnerable adults as victims of crime, and access to justice for irregular migrants as victims of crime, violence against women, among others. The Commission is also currently working on an **EU communication campaign on victims' rights**, to be launched in 2022, which will have a special focus on victims of gender-based violence, domestic violence and hate crime against LGBTIQ people.

Concerning specific support measures, the Commission followed up on the initiative launched in late 2020 by the German Presidency of the Council<sup>49</sup> to set up an **EU-wide helpline for victims of violence against women**, which would allow victims of such violence to use the same number across the EU when they need help and support. So far, a majority of 15 Member States provided written declarations of commitment to provide such a helpline with a 24/7 service free of charge. On this basis, the Commission initiated the reservation of the EU-wide number, which is expected to become operational in the autumn of 2022. Once the number is reserved at EU level, Member States will have to assign the number nationally to a service provider<sup>50</sup>. Additional Member States can always join the EU-wide helpline.

**Funding plays an important role** in supporting victims and survivors, developing new ways to address gender-based violence, training professionals and changing behaviours and attitudes. The Commission continues to fund organisations and projects fighting gender-based violence. This work is currently carried out under the Daphne strand of the **new Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV)**, officially adopted and launched in spring 2021<sup>51</sup>.

A first call for proposals under the Daphne strand (combating gender-based violence and violence against children) was published in the first half of 2021. It focused on two main priorities: firstly, early detection, prevention and protection of and/or support to women, children, young people and LGBTIQ victims or potential victims of violence, with specific attention paid to situations emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic; and secondly, preventing gender-based violence by addressing masculinities and promoting the involvement of men and boys. The indicative budget of this call amounted to EUR 17.7 million. The selection process was completed in October 2021, and a total of 40 projects were awarded funding.

In December 2021, a second call for proposals was published under the Daphne strand with a budget of over EUR 30 million and a focus on the prevention of various forms of gender-based violence, tackling harmful practices against women and girls, improving national data collection on violence against children, and improving child protection systems at national and local level. The selection process for this call will take place during the course of 2022.

The EU-funded **SHE project** proposes to tackle domestic violence against women, by developing and implementing a prevention and support training programme for public administration human resources specialists in **Bulgaria**. The project will contribute to the efforts of ending domestic violence by creating the tools and capacities with which to equip a well-positioned group of professionals to identify, support, and refer victims.

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<sup>49</sup> From June to December 2020.

<sup>50</sup> Some research suggest rising awareness about support available can play a role. A study focusing on Italian data showed that a media campaign aimed at promoting the 1522 helpline which provides support to victims of intimate partner violence, launched by the Italian Government, successfully increased domestic violence reporting by as much as 300% compared to the pre-campaign pre-lockdown average. See at Colagrossi, M., Deiana, C., Geraci, A. and Giua, L., Anti-Abuse Helpline Campaign and Domestic Violence, European Commission, 2020, JRC121795.

<sup>51</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/692. Available at [EUR-Lex - 32021R0692 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#).

The Horizon 2020 funded **RESISTIRE<sup>52</sup> project** examines how policy responses to COVID-19 aggravated gender inequalities and thereby pays particular attention to the increase in gender-based violence. In 2021, the quantitative research on the rise in calls to emergency hotlines and shelters during national lockdowns was conducted and identified a number of best practices for combating gender-based violence and supporting victims at regional, national, and EU level.

The **Spanish-led Fathers' rock project** (Fathers' engagement in the Role Of Care Keeping mothers and children safe) focuses on the prevention of gender-based violence in key perinatal and nursery services. The project aims to establish a multiagency cooperation model to prevent and address domestic violence by working with fathers on emotional and coping skills, accountability, awareness of abusive behaviours, and self-reflection and help-seeking. By involving fathers in perinatal care and engaging them in parenting, the likelihood of violence can be reduced and children's well-being and development is enhanced, as too for the health of relationships and of both parents.

The **X-MEN project** addresses masculinities and the involvement of men and boys at risk or socially excluded in **Portugal, Spain and Croatia**. X-MEN's main goal is the promotion of non-violent masculinities and the development of strategies that break cycles of violence, contributing in this way to sustainable secondary and tertiary violence prevention, while fostering tools and techniques that aim to reduce gender-based violence and promote gender equality.

In 2021, the Commission also selected a number of European networks as long-term partners under the CERV programme. These organisations are eligible to receive operating grants to increase their capacity to contribute to the development and implementation of EU policies in their respective area<sup>53</sup>. The networks End FGM EU, WAVE (Women Against Violence Europe), WWP EN (European Network for the Work with Perpetrators of Domestic Violence), and EFJCA (European Family Justice Centre Alliance) were selected in the area of gender-based violence and EWL (European Women's Lobby) and IPPFEN (International Planned Parenthood Federation) in the field of gender equality.

In **Belgium**, a pilot project continued in Ghent on a mobile alarm system in cases of intimate partner violence. The device consists of an alarm button carried by victims wherever they are, which they can press when they feel threatened by the person stalking them, namely their ex-partner. When a call is received, a police patrol is sent as quickly as possible to the victim's location. This location is not necessarily the victim's home. The advantages of such a system are numerous: the speed of the call and of the follow-up; the accessibility of the system (which is set up at the victim's own request); the involvement of all parties through multidisciplinary consultation and the fact that it is a long-term solution and follow-up for many victims. The scheme was positively evaluated in 2021 and deployment in other areas of the country is under consideration.

In **Croatia**, the Ministry of Interior, the Office for Gender Equality, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the country office of the International Organization for Migration cooperated to start an initiative to create leaflets on gender-based violence for migrant, refugee and asylum seeking women. The idea behind the leaflet is to inform this vulnerable group of women about their rights, services and possibilities to apply for asylum based on gender sensitive interpretation of the 1951 Refugee Convention. The leaflet was printed in 3000 copies in 2021, and will be printed in 3000 copies again in 2022. If it proves to be a successful initiative, the leaflet will be printed on a yearly basis.

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<sup>52</sup> Available at <https://resistire-project.eu/the-project/>.

<sup>53</sup> Cf the call for proposals at [call-fiche\\_cerv-2021-og-fpa\\_en.pdf \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/cerv/2021-og-fpa_en.pdf).

## Challenging gender stereotypes

While there is no single cause for gender inequalities, among the most consistent drivers are harmful social norms and stereotypes<sup>54</sup>. Gender stereotyping can limit the development of the natural talents and abilities of girls and boys, women and men, as well as their educational and professional experiences and life opportunities in general. Gender stereotypes are used to justify and maintain the historical relations of the power of men over women. Therefore, **discriminatory norms and sexist attitudes and biases continue to limit progress for women and girls**, from preventing meaningful political participation and access to sexual and reproductive health services and rights, to exacerbating unpaid care responsibilities, pay disparities, job segregation, and under-representation in the labour market.

In 2021, the Commission continued to support initiatives tackling gender stereotypes at policy level, including through its funding programmes. In this context, and as provided for under the Gender Equality Strategy, the Commission started preparations for an **EU-wide communication campaign aimed at challenging gender stereotypes**. The campaign will cover different areas of life, such as career choices, work-life balance and gender balance in decision-making. The messages will be targeted in particular at young people.

Under the new Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programme, a call for proposals for projects on gender equality was published in November 2021. Together with the promotion of equal participation and representation of women and men in political and economic decision-making, it aims at tackling gender stereotypes, including in advertising and the media, with a focus on young people. The overall budget for the call is EUR 6.8 million.

As part of the inclusion and gender equality dimension of the European Education Area (EEA)<sup>55</sup>, the Commission committed to **challenging gender stereotypes in education** and to addressing other gender-specific problems, such as bullying, online violence and sexual harassment, to which girls and women are primarily exposed. To advance this, the Commission established seven working groups, which include Member States, social partners, NGOs and international organisations and which met for the first time in November 2021. One of these new working groups directly addresses equality and values, focusing on structural reforms to promote equality in education and training. Among other goals, it tackles gaps in information and practices, for example, on understanding of the concept of gender in school education (identifying specific challenges and good practices) or the role of gender stereotypes in school performance and career motivations.

In 2021, the Commission also published **educational toolkits**<sup>56</sup> for teachers and students in primary and secondary schools to identify and question gender stereotypes and discover career opportunities in the transport sector. Currently, only 22 % of the people working in the transport sector are women. The sector is expected to grow and employ more highly skilled workers in the future, especially those with skills in engineering and digital technologies. The toolkits show that the opportunities on offer within the rapidly changing transport sector are not restricted to a particular gender.

The **Austrian STEM-Girls Challenge** is a nationwide initiative and competition in which girls and young women are encouraged to use mathematics, IT/computer science, natural sciences or technology in developing creative ideas to tackle global challenges. Ideas could be submitted until 31 August 2021. The initiative aims to spark more enthusiasm among girls and young women for mathematics, computer science, natural sciences and technology and to counteract the shortage of skilled workers in Austria as a business location.

<sup>54</sup> Council of Europe, 'What causes gender-based violence?' UN Women, 2020. Available at <https://www.coe.int/en/web/gender-matters/what-causes-gender-based-violence>.

<sup>55</sup> Available at <https://education.ec.europa.eu/about/strategic-framework>.

<sup>56</sup> Available at [https://transport.ec.europa.eu/transport-themes/social-issues/women-transport/attractiveness-transport-sector/educational-toolkits-help-fight-gender-stereotypes\\_en](https://transport.ec.europa.eu/transport-themes/social-issues/women-transport/attractiveness-transport-sector/educational-toolkits-help-fight-gender-stereotypes_en).

The EU funded **EQUALS-EU**<sup>57</sup> and **shemakes.eu**<sup>58</sup> projects aim at supporting young women entrepreneurs with digital skills in the ICT and sustainable textile industry, and deconstruct stereotypes through a series of hackathons and innovation camps.

In **Luxembourg**, a youth festival named 'Rock de Rack' was set up. Its theme is equality between women and men and it is open to all classes in secondary education in Luxembourg. Upon registration, up to 200 students can participate in a variety of workshops. In 2021, the general topics were stereotypes and gender-roles in movies, series and associated media. After two series of workshops, all participants watched 'Histoire(s) de femme(s)', a documentary on the evolution of women's rights in Luxembourg, before actively participating in an open dialogue with the Minister of Equality between Women and Men, and experts in the audience.

## THRIVING IN A GENDER-EQUAL ECONOMY

Female employment (20-64) has been increasing steadily over the years, reaching 66.2% in 2020 against 60.6% in 2010, but declined from 2019 by 0.9 percentage points due to COVID-19<sup>59</sup>. This goes along with a pattern of women's educational attainment, with more women completing higher education and obtaining advanced degrees.

Despite these improvements in women's positions in social and professional life, many of the gender gaps have stayed relatively stagnant. The gender pay gap demonstrates very slow progress diminishing to 13% in 2020 as compared to 15.8% in 2010. Women remain the primary caregivers to children and are mainly responsible for household chores. This is the case even in dual-earner families, burdening women with a "second shift" and effectively restraining their participation in paid work. The full-time equivalent employment gender gap amounting to 17.1% in 2020, largely reflecting prevalence of women among part-time workers (29.1% of employed women compared to 7.8% of men in 2020)<sup>60</sup>. At the same time, the organisation of work and working time have not changed substantively and only a few early attempts to test reduced working hours for all are starting to see the light<sup>61</sup>. Equally important, gender norms still prevail and the place of men in society is not evolving to the same extent as that of women. Namely, men occupy higher status jobs, earn more money than women in these jobs, and are less likely to contribute to childrearing and domestic chores. Related to this, women continue to leave the workforce at higher rates than men do after having children or due to other care responsibilities. In 2020, 13.8% of women, as opposed to 1.2% of men, were inactive because they were looking after children or incapacitated adults. Around half (47.6 %) of women, aged 25-54, outside the labour force were in this situation in 2020 in the EU (excluding Germany) due to personal or family responsibilities. In contrast, the corresponding share for men amounted to 7.5%<sup>62</sup>.

While a longer-term impact of the pandemic on the socio-economic situation of women is still to be seen, preliminary data show that the COVID-19 crisis has only reinforced the pre-pandemic situation. In particular, it shows how little the fact that a mother is working in paid employment changes the stereotypical division of care and domestic responsibilities in the couple at home. During the

<sup>57</sup> <https://equals-eu.org/the-project/>

<sup>58</sup> <https://shemakes.eu/>

<sup>59</sup> Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/LFSI\\_EMP\\_A\\_custom\\_2149968/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/LFSI_EMP_A_custom_2149968/default/table?lang=en)

<sup>60</sup> Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/economy-finance/2022\\_european\\_semester\\_proposal\\_for\\_a\\_joint\\_employment\\_report\\_0.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/economy-finance/2022_european_semester_proposal_for_a_joint_employment_report_0.pdf)

<sup>61</sup> Pilot project is run in Spain, see: <https://www.reuters.com/world/the-great-reboot/four-beats-five-pandemic-prompts-shorter-working-week-trials-2021-08-12/> or in the UK, see: <https://www.4dayweek.co.uk/>

<sup>62</sup> Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=People\\_outside\\_the\\_labour\\_force#More\\_people\\_outside\\_the\\_labour\\_force\\_in\\_2020](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=People_outside_the_labour_force#More_people_outside_the_labour_force_in_2020)

pandemic, a greater burden of childcare has fallen on women, regardless of their labour market status. Consequently, female workers were more likely to take part-time roles, reduce their hours or take unpaid leave (see sections below). Thus, the pandemic's effects risk maintaining or even deepening pre-existing gender inequalities and rolling back the progress achieved to date<sup>63</sup>.

## Closing gender gaps in the labour market

**The long-standing challenges related to women's labour market participation have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.** Employment rates in the first year of the pandemic declined for both sexes, but women experienced a steeper fall in working hours than men did during the lockdown periods. Women at childrearing age (aged 25-49) had the lowest chance of obtaining a job in summer 2020<sup>64</sup>. The COVID-19 crisis clearly affected the employment of workers in part-time schemes and on temporary contracts, both of which are particularly widespread among women. In 2020, the share of temporary contracts fell by 1.2 percentage points, the largest decrease ever recorded, dropping to 10.7%. The share of part-time employment in total employment fell from 17.8% in 2019 to 16.6% in 2020<sup>65</sup>. Also some vulnerable groups suffered from the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, for example more job losses and insecurities disproportionately affected migrant women workers<sup>66</sup>. A recent Eurofound and EIGE study shows that since 2010, the Member States with the biggest gender employment gaps have reduced the gap and are converging with the better performing Member States on this issue<sup>67</sup>. However, more recently, the gender employment gap stood at a wide 11p.p. and the EU-27 has not seen convergence for a second year in a row.<sup>68</sup> Many Member States with high gender employment gaps recorded a deterioration in 2020 and it remains to be seen whether the EU will go back to the positive trend from the previous years.

**Female employment plays an important role in a gender-sensitive post-COVID recovery.** In 2021, EU leaders clearly committed to stepping up the fight against gender discrimination. The Porto declaration<sup>69</sup>, signed on 8 May 2021 by the EU heads of state and government, highlighted the European Pillar of Social Rights as a fundamental element of the recovery. EU leaders committed to work actively to close gender gaps in employment, pay and pensions. In a similar vein, Council Conclusions<sup>70</sup>, approved in June 2021, called for stepping up gender equality policies and strengthening the empowerment of women and girls as a political priority, especially in the context of policies responding to the COVID-19 crisis and its aftermath.

The new **EU-wide employment rate target for 2030**<sup>71</sup> proposed by the Commission via the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan<sup>72</sup>, reaffirms the commitment to an inclusive high employment rate of 78% of the population aged 20 to 64. In order to achieve this overall goal it becomes paramount to progress on gender equality. EU must strive to halve the gender employment gap compared to 2019.. In practical terms, this means that female employment will have to increase at least three times

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<sup>63</sup> See also Council of the European Union, 'Council Conclusions on the Socio-Economic Impact of COVID-19 on Gender Equality' approved under the Portuguese Presidency, 2021, available at <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8884-2021-INIT/en/pdf> and EIGE, 'The Covid-19 pandemic and intimate partner violence against women in the EU', 2021. Available at <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/covid-19-pandemic-and-intimate-partner-violence-against-women-eu>.

<sup>64</sup> EIGE, Gender equality and the socio-economic impact of COVID-19, research note for Portuguese Presidency, 2021.

<sup>65</sup> Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?oldid=542937#Temporary\\_contracts\\_and\\_part-time\\_employment\\_hit\\_by\\_the\\_COVID-19\\_crisis](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?oldid=542937#Temporary_contracts_and_part-time_employment_hit_by_the_COVID-19_crisis).

<sup>66</sup> IOM (2020): COVID-19 and women migrant workers: Impacts and Implications.

<sup>67</sup> Available at [https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef\\_publication/field\\_ef\\_document/ef21041en.pdf](https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef21041en.pdf).

<sup>68</sup> Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/economy-finance/2022\\_european\\_semester\\_proposal\\_for\\_a\\_joint\\_employment\\_report\\_0.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/economy-finance/2022_european_semester_proposal_for_a_joint_employment_report_0.pdf)

<sup>69</sup> Available at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/05/08/the-porto-declaration/>

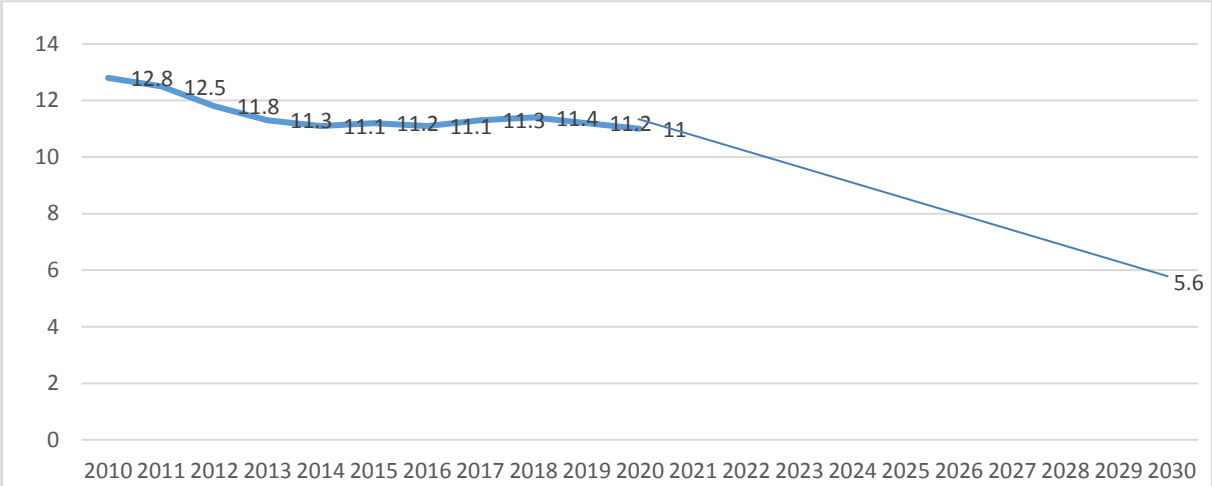
<sup>70</sup> Available at <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8884-2021-INIT/en/pdf>

<sup>71</sup> 'Building a Union of Equality', the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, adopted on 4 March 2021. Available at <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/empl/european-pillar-of-social-rights/en/>.

<sup>72</sup> <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/empl/european-pillar-of-social-rights/en/>

faster than that of men, and go down from about 11 percentage points to about 5.5 percentage points. Considering the negligible improvement in the gender employment gap over the last five years (from 11.2 p.p. in 2015 to 11 p.p. in 2020), this represents a significant challenge for EU and national policymaking<sup>73</sup> – see Figure 1 below. At the same time, addressing gender gaps in employment represents a clear business case as it contributes to growth and is likely to generate positive impacts for productivity<sup>74</sup>, next to its well-established positive impacts on poverty reduction and social inclusion and response to shrinking workforce<sup>75</sup>.

**Figure 1. Gender employment gap (EU 27)**



Source: Eurostat, Labour Force Survey [lfsi\_emp\_a]

The **2021 European Semester** cycle was temporarily adapted to coordinate it with the **Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF)**. The Regulation establishing the Facility<sup>76</sup> requires that national Recovery and Resilience Plans (RRPs) detail how the measures will contribute to gender equality and equal opportunities. Several plans contain specific targets and milestones relevant for gender equality. So far, among the adopted RRPs, 115 measures have a focus on gender equality, and 320 measures have a focus on supporting children and youth<sup>77</sup>. For instance, recovery funds will go towards increasing the supply of childcare facilities and supporting the creation of women’s enterprises in Italy, and will be devoted to expanding childcare services and all-day schooling in Germany. They will be devoted to increase the number of places in early childhood education and care and extend the opening hours in Austria, and support the development of equal pay law for women and men, promoting balanced participation in management positions, and combating occupational segregation in Portugal<sup>78</sup> (see also chapter 4). The country reports under the European Semester, due to be adopted in spring 2022, will provide an overview of the economic and social developments and challenges that Member States are facing, including the challenge of the gender employment gap, where most relevant. The Council called<sup>79</sup> on the Commission to consider women’s situation in the

<sup>73</sup> Available at <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2021/european-jobs-monitor-2021-gender-gaps-and-the-employment-structure>.

<sup>74</sup> Kingma A., Vandeplass A., ‘The Macro-Economic Benefits of Gender Equality’, European Economy Economic Brief, European Commission, Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs, *forthcoming*.

<sup>75</sup> Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/economy-finance/2022\\_european\\_semester\\_proposal\\_for\\_a\\_joint\\_employment\\_report\\_0.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/economy-finance/2022_european_semester_proposal_for_a_joint_employment_report_0.pdf)

<sup>76</sup> Available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32021R0241>.

<sup>77</sup> Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/economy\\_finance/recovery-and-resilience-scoreboard/index.html](https://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/recovery-and-resilience-scoreboard/index.html).

<sup>78</sup> Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/recovery-coronavirus/recovery-and-resilience-facility/recovery-and-resilience-facility-latest\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/recovery-coronavirus/recovery-and-resilience-facility/recovery-and-resilience-facility-latest_en).

<sup>79</sup> Available at <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8884-2021-INIT/en/pdf>.

labour market, and follow a gender mainstreaming approach in all relevant aspects of the European Semester, in line with the 2020 Employment Guidelines where relevant.

EU policies seek to use every lever at their disposal to get more women into the labour market, be it employment in rising sectors such as platform work, support for female entrepreneurship or support from public employment services.

In recent years, the employment potential of **digital labour platforms** emerged in a policy debate, as they are considered a flexible alternative to traditional forms of employment for those with family or care responsibilities. The platform economy is growing rapidly and the situation created by COVID-19 has only accelerated this trend. This reinforced the need to consider the working conditions of workers in the digital platform economy. The share of women working through platforms has grown recently, particularly in online platform work (as opposed to on-location platform work)<sup>80</sup>. The platform economy created opportunities for women who had to remain at home due to childcare and family obligations, but a substantial gender divide between types of tasks can be observed<sup>81</sup>. In December 2021, the Commission proposed a **Directive on improving working conditions in platform work**<sup>82</sup> that takes into account the gender dimension of these developments. The EU continues to support **women's' entrepreneurship** and promote fair and gender-inclusive **innovation and start-up** environments. The **SME Strategy**<sup>83</sup> aims to empower women and girls to start their own business and thus improve the gender balance in this sector. The peer-to-peer learning workshops and communities of practice organised by the Commission support the development of further policy recommendations on how to support women entrepreneurs.

In 2021, the **WEgate**<sup>84</sup>, a European online platform, continued to offer services that connect women entrepreneurs with networks and business organisations, and facilitate their access to online marketplaces, as well as to mentoring, financial literacy training, and peer-to-peer learning. Coaching and mentoring women entrepreneurs and researchers is also an aim of the **Women Leadership Programme**<sup>85</sup>. The Commission-funded **Enterprise Europe Network**<sup>86</sup>, the world's largest support network for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), supports women via the newly established **Thematic Group on Women Entrepreneurship**. Its goals are, among others, to facilitate entrepreneurial learning and help women attract venture capital.

In cooperation with the OECD, the Commission is also conducting studies<sup>87</sup> and designing tools<sup>88</sup> to help Member States to clarify which policies have a genuine positive impact for women's entrepreneurship. It is also financing a project '**Better Incubation**'<sup>89</sup> to stimulate the mainstream incubators to pay more attention to the inclusive aspect of entrepreneurship.

Nevertheless, the **key difficulty and the biggest challenge to growth for female entrepreneurs is access to finance**. Women create one third of all start-ups, but have more difficulties raising finance

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<sup>80</sup> Study to gather evidence on the working conditions of platform workers, by CEPS, EFTHEIA, and HIVA-KU Leuven, March 2020, available at <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=22450&langId=en>.

<sup>81</sup> European Institute for Gender Equality, Artificial intelligence, platform work and gender equality, January 2022; available at <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/artificial-intelligence-platform-work-and-gender-equality-report>

<sup>82</sup> Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12828-Improving-the-working-conditions-of-platform-workers\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12828-Improving-the-working-conditions-of-platform-workers_en).

<sup>83</sup> Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/communication-sme-strategy-march-2020\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/communication-sme-strategy-march-2020_en.pdf).

<sup>84</sup> Available at <https://wegate.eu/>.

<sup>85</sup> Available at [https://eic.ec.europa.eu/eic-funding-opportunities/business-acceleration-services/eic-women-leadership-programme\\_en](https://eic.ec.europa.eu/eic-funding-opportunities/business-acceleration-services/eic-women-leadership-programme_en)

<sup>86</sup> Available at <https://een.ec.europa.eu/about/about>.

<sup>87</sup> OECD/European Commission (2021), *The Missing Entrepreneurs 2021: Policies for Inclusive Entrepreneurship and Self-Employment*, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=8437&furtherPubs=yes>

<sup>88</sup> See the *Better entrepreneurship Policy Tool*, under <https://betterentrepreneurship.eu/>

<sup>89</sup> <https://betterincubation.eu/>

for their ventures than men. According to the State of European Tech 2020 Report<sup>90</sup>, in Europe all-male founding teams received 91% of the capital invested in European tech while 7% of capital went to mixed teams and less than 2% to all-female teams. This situation has been stagnant in recent years, even though women-led companies outperform the market in terms of median revenues at later stages and require less capital while delivering higher returns.

The Commission is exploring how female participation in Europe's **venture capital** and investment landscape can be strengthened. Discussions on how to best ensure gender-smart financing are ongoing as part of negotiations for the roll out of the **InvestEU programme**. A number of measures are envisaged, including:

- increasing the flow of capital to funds that include women in their management and decision-making;
- providing capacity building to financial intermediaries to stimulate investing with a gender perspective;
- encouraging more women into leadership positions in the investment community; raising awareness around the gender investment gap.

The **European Innovation Council** pursues a target of 40% of women-led companies among those invited to pitch projects. The 2021 annual **EU Prize for Women Innovators** received its strongest interest to date. A new initiative – **Women Tech-EU** – was launched in 2021 to support women-led deep tech start-ups.

Action to promote gender equality is also part of the **European Network of Public Employment Services' Strategy**<sup>91</sup>. In February 2021, a webinar<sup>92</sup> on Public Employment Services' approaches to promoting gender equality brought together over 200 participants. It helped those institutions share promising practices, such as gender-neutral recruitment policies, and discuss their general approach to gender equality. In July 2021, the Commission launched a survey on non-discrimination, which aimed to explore the role and activities of Public Employment Services in addressing discrimination, including on the ground of gender. The report will be published in early 2022.

Addressing **gender equality** has been also discussed within **the European Alliance for Apprenticeships**<sup>93</sup> launched by the Commission in July 2020. In June 2021, the public and private sector representatives from across Europe shared their experiences and explored how to close the gap in participation between women and men in apprenticeships and encourage young people to take up career paths, irrespective of gender stereotypes<sup>94</sup>. **Progress on female employment cannot be realistically achieved without a change in the distribution of unpaid work**. The transposition of **the Work-Life Balance Directive**<sup>95</sup> by August 2022 will bring an important incentive and greater possibility to share parental responsibilities within couples where both partners work. It is expected to help counter gender stereotypes and bias related to taking parental leave and, in the longer term, lead to more men being engaged in unpaid work. In 2021, the Commission supported the correct transposition of the Directive through an informal implementation workshop and bilateral exchanges with Member States. Member States are furthermore encouraged to go beyond these minimum standards when reviewing their family leave policies.

Within the European Commission, in 2021, 2,904 female staff took parental and family leave, compared to 1,109 male staff, which represents 2.62 times more. This ratio is comparable to 2020 and 2019.

<sup>90</sup> Available at <https://2020.stateofeuropeantech.com/2019-european-tech-strong-position/>.

<sup>91</sup> Available at <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/empl/pes-network-strategy/en/>.

<sup>92</sup> Available at <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1100&eventsId=1779&furtherEvents=yes>.

<sup>93</sup> Available at <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1147&langId=en>

<sup>94</sup> Available at <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1147&furtherNews=yes&newsId=10030>

<sup>95</sup> Available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52017PC0253>.

Alongside family leave, 1,510 female staff and 282 male staff took a part-time work formula (between 50% and 95% working time) for childcare. This ratio of 5.35 times more women than men using part-time work to care for their children is also comparable to the two previous years.

In **Denmark**, legislation on a parental leave scheme for the self-employed was adopted in December 2020. Thanks to the new law, self-employed workers will enjoy the same rights as employees, in the private sector. The parental leave scheme aims to create better financial conditions for self-employed workers who take parental leave from their business.

**The restrictions and self-isolation obligations imposed by COVID-19 pandemic have created a new opening for change in working methods and helped propagate flexible working.** The share of employed people working from home was already increasing slowly but steadily, but the pandemic has amplified the phenomenon, generating an increase of 6.6 percentage points over a one-year period, up to 21.0% in 2020. Among employees, there have always been relatively more women than men who work (sometimes or usually) from home. With COVID-19, the share of women working from home overcame men also for all employed people: 21.8% of employed women, against 20.4% of employed men in 2020<sup>96</sup>. With some Member States investing in the digitalisation of businesses and the public sector, also under the national recovery and resilience plans (e.g. Germany, Denmark, France or Italy)<sup>97</sup>, this pattern has the potential to turn remote working into more dominant practice. Working from home is expected to stay, especially in countries with high levels of digital preparedness<sup>98</sup>. Normalisation of home-based working could in turn erode gender differences in work patterns and reduce penalties related with flexible working<sup>99</sup>. However, the way home-based work is organised and supported by other policies might influence the take-up between women and men and its overall impact on gender equality<sup>100</sup>.

In this regard, the Commission, in its EU strategic framework on health and safety at work 2021-2027, focuses on psychosocial risks and invites the social partners to find commonly agreed solutions to address challenges raised by telework, digitalisation, and the right to disconnect, building on the European Social Partners Framework Agreement on digitalisation<sup>101</sup>. Within its own administration, the Commission promotes and monitors an equal use of flexible working arrangements by all employees. A dedicated multi-service team is currently developing a new policy on **flexible working methods** and the return to work, in the post-pandemic context.

## Achieving equal participation across different sectors of the economy

Despite closing gender employment gaps overall, jobs in the EU are not becoming more gender mixed. The share of gender-mixed jobs in EU employment even declined from 27% to 18% between

<sup>96</sup> In 2006, 7.3% of female employees worked from home against 6.1% of male; in 2019, this share amounted to 11.6% for women against 10.6% for men; and in 2020, almost one-fifth (19.7%) of women against 17.7% of men. See: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Employment\\_-\\_annual\\_statistics#Remote\\_work\\_significantly\\_up\\_in\\_2020](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Employment_-_annual_statistics#Remote_work_significantly_up_in_2020).

<sup>97</sup> Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/recovery-coronavirus/recovery-and-resilience-facility/recovery-and-resilience-facility-latest\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/recovery-coronavirus/recovery-and-resilience-facility/recovery-and-resilience-facility-latest_en).

<sup>98</sup> Adrjan, P., et al. (2021), "Will it stay or will it go? Analysing developments in telework during COVID-19 using online job postings data", OECD Productivity Working Papers, No. 30, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/aed3816e-en>.

<sup>99</sup> Available at <https://www.etui.org/sites/default/files/2021-01/06-Chapter4-The%20Covid%E2%80%9119%20crisis%20and%20gender%20equality.pdf>.

<sup>100</sup> Tomei, M. (2021), Teleworking: A Curse or a Blessing for Gender Equality and Work-Life Balance?, Intereconomics, Volume 56, 2021 Number 5, <https://www.intereconomics.eu/contents/year/2021/number/5/article/teleworking-a-curse-or-a-blessing-for-gender-equality-and-work-life-balance.html>

<sup>101</sup> Available at [https://www.etuc.org/system/files/document/file2020-06/Final%2022%2006%2020\\_Agreement%20on%20Digitalisation%202020.pdf](https://www.etuc.org/system/files/document/file2020-06/Final%2022%2006%2020_Agreement%20on%20Digitalisation%202020.pdf)

1998 and 2019<sup>102</sup>. **Gender segregation across sectors and occupations and across fields of study remains a deeply rooted inequality in the EU.** Women account for the majority of employment in sectors of education, and human health and social work (over 70%), and also in occupational groups of services, sales and clerical support workers (over 60%)<sup>103</sup>. In contrast, women remain severely under-represented in certain jobs. According to the latest **She Figures**<sup>104</sup> study, women represent only 24.9% of self-employed professionals in technical professions, such as science and engineering or ICT. The gap is particularly wide in the technology field. Only 1 in 3 STEM tertiary graduates is female, women represent only 20% of ICT graduates<sup>105</sup>. There has been a marginal increase in the share of female scientists and engineers in the EU-27, which has risen from 39% in 2011 to 41% in 2020. Between 2015 and 2019, the number of women grew, on average, at a faster average rate than the number of men in all scientific and technical employment categories, giving hope that some positive changes are underway in this segment of the EU labour market.

**The sectoral and occupational gender imbalances contribute to disparities in the quality of jobs** held by women and men and the higher concentration of women in part-time, temporary, low-paid and precarious employment.

**The European Commission pursues a number of policy initiatives to attract more women to professions and sectors where they are currently under-represented.** Attracting more women to tech studies and subsequent ICT career development can help satisfy the demand in strategically important economic sectors. In 2021, the Commission continued to monitor progress towards related targets and assess Member States' performance. In particular, the latest **Women in Digital Scoreboard**<sup>106</sup> confirms that there is still a substantial gender gap in specialist digital skills, though the gap is closing in internet user skills. Europe's digital transformation, guided by the **Digital Compass**<sup>107</sup>, pursues the EU target of 20 million employed ICT specialists, with convergence between women and men, by 2030. This is of particular relevance, bearing in mind that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a major impact on the digital transformation of the workplace and the ICT sector as such, and shaping gender-inclusive digital policies is a priority for the Commission as well as for several Member States.

The projects funded by the EU under the call '**Enhancing Digital and Entrepreneurial Competences in Girls and Women**'<sup>108</sup> focus on reinforcing the digital and entrepreneurial skills of girls and women and boosting their confidence to use them creatively to spot opportunities, innovate and create value for society. Moreover, under the Recovery and Resilience Facility, several Member States are investing in digital skills (e.g. AT, CZ, DE, IT, SI)<sup>109</sup>.

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<sup>102</sup> Available at [https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef\\_publication/field\\_ef\\_document/ef21009en.pdf](https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef21009en.pdf).

<sup>103</sup> Available at [https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef\\_publication/field\\_ef\\_document/ef21041en.pdf](https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef21041en.pdf).

<sup>104</sup> Available at <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/61564e1f-d55e-11eb-895a-01aa75ed71a1>.

<sup>105</sup> Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/product?code=educ\\_uoe\\_grad02](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/product?code=educ_uoe_grad02)

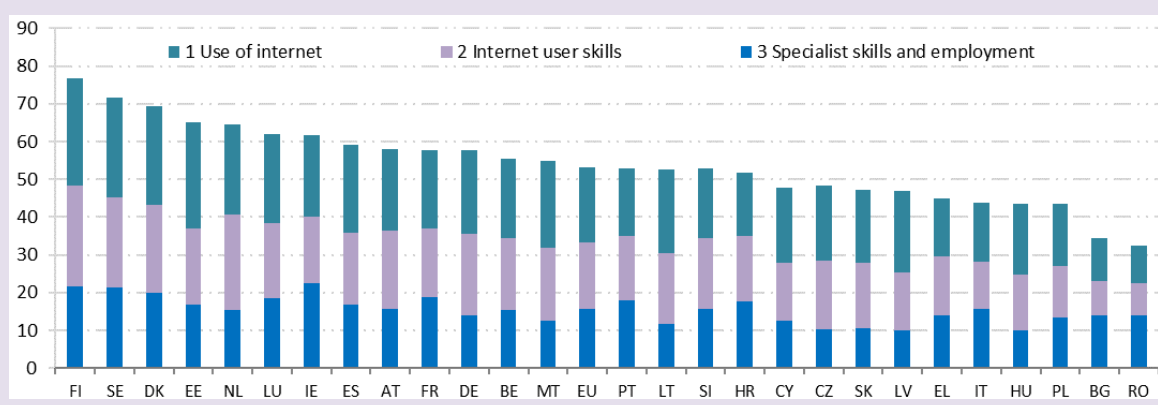
<sup>106</sup> Available at <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/women-digital-scoreboard-2021>.

<sup>107</sup> Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/europes-digital-decade-digital-targets-2030\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/europes-digital-decade-digital-targets-2030_en).

<sup>108</sup> Available at <https://digital-skills-jobs.europa.eu/en/opportunities/funding/enhancing-digital-and-entrepreneurial-competences-girls-and-women>.

<sup>109</sup> Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/recovery-coronavirus/recovery-and-resilience-facility/recovery-and-resilience-facility-latest\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/recovery-coronavirus/recovery-and-resilience-facility/recovery-and-resilience-facility-latest_en).

**Figure 2: Women in Digital Scoreboard — ranking of Member States**



Networks, sector role models and more gender-disaggregated data can be a driving force in sectoral policies. The work of the **‘Women in Transport – EU Platform for change’**<sup>110</sup> continues and facilitates sharing of best practice among organisations committed to increasing female employment in transport. Several initiatives to collect gender-disaggregated data in transport have been carried out and concluded (see box below).

**TinnGo - Transport Innovation Gender Observatory**<sup>111</sup>, a 3-year project funded under the EU’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme. TinnGO goes even beyond a traditional women’s perspective in transport and focuses on an intersectional perspective in mobility needs and the use of ICT leading to Gender Smart Mobility. Data collection is ensured through an Open Data Repository.

**The Diamond Project**<sup>112</sup>, also under Horizon 2020, provides an European reference tool for obtaining knowledge, recommendations and support on gender inclusion in current and future transport systems. It analyses and converts data into knowledge with notions of impartiality to move towards a more inclusive and efficient transportation system from a gendered perspective. The project identifies and evaluates specific measures to meet the needs and expectations of women as users of different modes of transport and as workers in the sector.

The **Equality Platform for the Energy Sector**<sup>113</sup>, launched by the Commission in October 2021, aims to offer a space for discussion on equality-related issues, focusing on concrete actions and stimulating the implementation of equality-driven measures in the workplace in the EU. A study<sup>114</sup> published in September 2021 on collecting gender-disaggregated data on the employment and participation of women and men in the energy sector is a first step to trigger good practices of gender-disaggregated data collection, forming an objective basis for designing gender-aware policies and initiatives in this area. The Commission will also invest in **data collection**, consolidation and analysis on **women working in the maritime sector**, to promote gender balance in the maritime and blue economy professions<sup>115</sup>.

The **Creative Europe programme** (2021-27) supports projects which directly address gender equality and support careers for female talent. An overview of best practice projects based on the previous programme period (2014-2020) should be published by the Commission by March 2022.

<sup>110</sup> Available at [https://transport.ec.europa.eu/transport-themes/social-issues/women-transport/women-transport-eu-platform-change\\_en](https://transport.ec.europa.eu/transport-themes/social-issues/women-transport/women-transport-eu-platform-change_en)

<sup>111</sup> Available at <https://www.tinngo.eu/>.

<sup>112</sup> Available at <https://diamond-project.eu/>.

<sup>113</sup> Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/energy/topics/energy-strategy/equality-platform-energy-sector\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/energy/topics/energy-strategy/equality-platform-energy-sector_en).

<sup>114</sup> Available at <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/2c7e5b81-15cd-11ec-b4fe-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.

<sup>115</sup> Available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52021DC0240&from=EN>.

The EU **Digital Education Action Plan**<sup>116</sup> addresses the gender gap in STEM education. The **Girls Go Circular Project**<sup>117</sup>, coordinated by the European Institute of Innovation and Technology, consists of a series of training activities for female students in secondary education on digital and entrepreneurial skills. The project has already trained over 2,300 girls, and aims to empower 50,000 girls to embrace STEM and ICT by 2027.

STEM is also a priority in the Erasmus+ strategy partnerships call (cooperation projects). This includes a specific focus on developing STEM programmes and teaching practices specifically addressing the gender dimension. Also, the **Erasmus+ 2021 and 2022 work programmes** set the goal of attracting more female students to higher education studies in STEM and offer guidance and mentorship activities for female students to pursue STEM fields of study, and transition to STEM occupations. The importance of STEM is outlined in the new **European strategy for universities**<sup>118</sup>, adopted in January 2022. The Strategy will help boost the attractiveness of STEM studies and careers, with focused actions to attract girls and women, and by encouraging a cross-disciplinary and innovative teaching and learning approach in schools, Vocational Education and Training (VET) and higher education.

The Commission will carry on with its support to the participation of girls in STEM through the 2022 call for **Partnerships for innovation: Forward-Looking Projects**<sup>119</sup> targeting higher education institutions and the wider higher education communities. The new Partnerships will focus on higher education programmes for engineering and advanced ICT (advanced technologies such as AI, high performance computing and cybersecurity) and on guidance and mentorship programmes for female students to pursue STEM fields of study, and transition to STEM occupations. Counselling, guidance and mentoring of young people could also embed gender bias and other forms of discrimination. The new **MEDIA programme** develops projects to empower women through skills training and mentoring programmes and a dedicated communication campaign – to promote a wide range of professions and encourage more women into the audio-visual and news media sectors.

Knowing the drawbacks of the unequal share of unpaid work, the **importance of work organisation and working conditions** cannot be forgotten when attracting women to a specific profession. A new Commission study<sup>120</sup> identifies good **staff scheduling and rostering practices in the transport sector** and makes practical recommendations on how to improve staff and shift scheduling systems to respond to the needs of a diverse transport workforce, notably in terms of improving their work-life balance. The recommendations also cater for employers' needs, and in particular ensuring operational continuity. The study and its results aim to share good practice among stakeholders. Achieving equal participation among various sectors is not only about attracting women to various professions. It is also about **making certain occupations more appealing for men**. Teaching is an example of a profession that does not represent the diversity of current societies<sup>121</sup>. At the same time, it has an important influence on children's understanding of gender roles. Diversifying this workforce has a significant potential to improve the development of children's attitudes towards

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<sup>116</sup> Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/digital-education-action-plan\\_en#:~:text=The%20Digital%20Education%20Action%20Plan%20%282021-2027%29%20outlines%20the,used%20at%20an%20unprecedented%20scale%20in%20education%20](https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/digital-education-action-plan_en#:~:text=The%20Digital%20Education%20Action%20Plan%20%282021-2027%29%20outlines%20the,used%20at%20an%20unprecedented%20scale%20in%20education%20).

<sup>117</sup> Available at <https://eit-girlsgocircular.eu/>.

<sup>118</sup> - Available at [Commission Communication on a European strategy for universities | European Education Area \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/education/communication/communication-action-plan_en#:~:text=Commission%20Communication%20on%20a%20European%20strategy%20for%20universities%20|%20European%20Education%20Area%20(europa.eu).).

<sup>119</sup> Available at [Partnerships for Innovation - Forward-Looking Projects - Cross-sectoral priorities | European Education Area \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/education/communication/communication-action-plan_en#:~:text=Partnerships%20for%20Innovation%20-%20Forward-Looking%20Projects%20-%20Cross-sectoral%20priorities%20|%20European%20Education%20Area%20(europa.eu).).

<sup>120</sup> Available at [https://transport.ec.europa.eu/transport-themes/social-issues/women-transport/attractiveness-transport-sector/study-good-staff\\_en](https://transport.ec.europa.eu/transport-themes/social-issues/women-transport/attractiveness-transport-sector/study-good-staff_en).

<sup>121</sup> On average, around 97% of teachers in pre-primary education are women. See: OECD, 'Starting Strong 2017: Key OECD Indicators on Early Childhood Education and Care', OECD Publishing, Paris, 2017.

gender roles. This issue was addressed in a Commission report<sup>122</sup> on how to recruit, train and motivate well-qualified staff, published in February 2021. Many good practice examples can inspire Member States to work actively on diversifying the workforce in the early childhood education and care sector.

The introduction of a **social conditionality in the Common Agricultural Policy** is expected to positively impact the participation of women in agriculture, who often make up a significant proportion of seasonal and part-time farm workers. Social conditionality requires beneficiaries to respect elements of European social and labour law as a precondition for receiving funds. It will be enforced by compliance checks, carried out by labour authorities.

## Addressing the gender pay and pensions gap

**Despite long-time improvements to women's expertise and participation in professional life, pay differences remain stagnant.** Progress on narrowing the gender pay gap has been, and continues to be, slow – 13% in 2020 against 13.7% in 2019, and 14.4% in 2018. This trend also risks being reversed as a consequence of the pandemic. A recent study<sup>123</sup> has found that women face higher earnings losses than men after job displacement. The impact of the COVID-19 crisis on income losses has been higher for women than men, due to a larger prevalence of women in the affected sectors<sup>124</sup>.

Since spring 2020, all Member States have introduced some income support measures for those affected by the pandemic. However, **women were less able than men to access the offered income support**, either because protection schemes were not available in the sectors of their work (or, if they were, they provided lower benefits), or because they did not meet eligibility criteria. Women predominantly work in sectors, types of firms or jobs that were not or were less covered by specific crisis-related job protection schemes, such as for instance low-wage, domestic, temporary or part-time workers, workers in mini-jobs<sup>125</sup>. Furthermore, due to shorter or interrupted careers, women have more difficulties meeting eligibility criteria that are relevant for contributory-based benefits for example, unemployment, sick leave or parental leave benefits. The type of income support women receive, compared with men, reflects their different positions in the job market, as well as their disproportionate burden of care duties. The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to have increased the risk of poverty and social exclusion, especially for lone mothers and their children.

**The COVID-19 pandemic has left low-paid workers more vulnerable.** In this context, the adoption of the initiative on **adequate minimum wages** for workers is particularly important. Women represent about 60% of minimum-wage earners in the EU. Minimum wage policies have a great potential to support gender equality by helping to close the gender pay gap and lifting women out of poverty. Following the adoption of the Commission proposal in October 2020, the Council reached an agreement on this issue in December 2021 and negotiations with the European Parliament are ongoing<sup>126</sup>. If Member States increased their existing statutory minimum wages to 50% of the average wage or 60% of the median wage, the gender pay gap would be reduced by 5% in the EU-27 on average, having an indirect positive effect on the gender pension gap as well<sup>127</sup>.

<sup>122</sup> Available at <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/47ba3c3a-6789-11eb-aeb5-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-191896611%C2%A0>.

<sup>123</sup> Illing H., Schmieder J.F., Trenkle S., The Gender Gap in Earnings Losses after Job Displacement, IZA DISCUSSION PAPER NO. 14724, 2021. Available at <https://docs.iza.org/dp14724.pdf>.

<sup>124</sup> Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Impact\\_of\\_COVID-19\\_on\\_employment\\_income\\_-\\_advanced\\_estimates&stable=1](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Impact_of_COVID-19_on_employment_income_-_advanced_estimates&stable=1).

<sup>125</sup> Rubery, J. and Tavora, I., 'The Covid-19 crisis and gender equality: risks and opportunities', Social Policy in the EU: state of play, 2020. Available at <https://www.etui.org/sites/default/files/2021-01/06-Chapter4-The%20Covid%E2%80%9119%20crisis%20and%20gender%20equality.pdf>.

<sup>126</sup> Available at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/12/06/council-agrees-on-mandate-for-negotiations-on-a-eu-framework-on-adequate-minimum-wages/>.

<sup>127</sup> Available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=SWD:2020:0245:FIN:EN:PDF>.

Given the merely marginal evolution in the gender pay gap indicator, the Commission marked **European Equal Pay Day**<sup>128</sup> again on 10 November 2021, drawing media attention to the persistence of the gender pay gap in the EU and the importance of pay transparency for equal pay.

In **Ireland**, the Gender Pay Gap Information Act was signed into law on 13 July 2021. The Act will require pay reporting from employers with 250 or more workers but will extend over time to organisations with 50 or more employees. Organisations will be required to indicate the reasons for any gender pay differentials that are reported.

**Pay transparency enables employees, and in particular women, to detect pay discrimination and enforce their right to equal pay for equal work, or work of equal value.** Currently, the pay information available to EU workers in labour markets is clearly insufficient. Disclosing more pay information to understand the sources of inequity could be a game changer. A strengthened legal framework could demystify pay differences and lessen gender stereotypes and biases, nudging a mind-shift in the workplace and benefitting society overall.

That is the aim of the **Commission proposal on pay transparency**, adopted on 4 March 2021. The proposed Directive seeks to empower workers by giving them concrete tools to claim their equal pay rights. Workers are granted the right to information on pay in their respective companies, and their access to justice is improved through receptive judicial procedures. Most importantly, the proposed Directive attempts to strengthen the application of equal pay by putting more responsibility on companies and inducing proactive action by them. Pay reporting and joint pay assessment measures seek to encourage more effort internally within companies to follow up on compliance with equal pay, by addressing the systemic discrimination and bias that remain hidden in pay structures and mechanisms.

The Council managed to reach an agreement on the proposed directive in December 2021, paving the way for the start of negotiations with the European Parliament<sup>129</sup>. In the European Parliament, work is well under way and the FEMM and EMPL Committee are expected to adopt their report in spring 2022. Negotiations between the Council and the Parliament are due to start immediately afterwards.

In **Spain**, guidance and a free advisory service regarding the design and implementation of gender equality measures and plans have been provided to companies to support the implementation of the new legislation adopted in 2020. A guide published in 2021 includes practical and simple methodology to implement the gender equality plans, with technical guidelines, tools and models on the negotiation process, on how to make a good diagnosis or gender equality assessment, and on equal pay.

In **Cyprus**, to enforce equal pay rights, a target of 300 inspections was set for 2021. The inspections are preventive, aiming to provide information to both employers and employees on the legislation, and practical guidance for employers regarding compliance, but they also seek to identify cases of pay discrimination.

**The available statistical data is not detailed enough to give a satisfying picture of the reasons for differences in pay.** A recent statistical analysis of the gender pay gap published by Eurostat<sup>130</sup> demonstrates that the unexplained residual part represents about 4/5 of the overall gap. Such a large residual gap in pay, after correcting for the different average characteristics of working women and men, suggests a need for further analytical work in that respect.

The new data being collected through the **EU Labour Force Survey** since 1 January 2021 represents a potential for further work on gender pay differences<sup>131</sup>. This data will be available as of 2023 and

<sup>128</sup> Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_21\\_5806](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_5806).

<sup>129</sup> Available at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/12/06/council-agrees-on-common-position-to-tackle-gender-pay-gap/>.

<sup>130</sup> Available at <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-statistical-working-papers/-/ks-tc-21-004>.

<sup>131</sup> The gross monthly income from employees' main job collected under Regulation 2019/1700 includes median and mean income, as well as additional information on income distribution, allowing a more in-depth analysis of the gender pay gap.

would enable to explore a more detailed breakdown of the gender pay gap, including measuring the impact of career breaks on earnings. This will improve understanding of the gender pay gap and its determinants. The Commission is also working on a proposal to revise **European labour market statistics on businesses**<sup>132</sup> and regulate the voluntary collection of annual gender pay gap data, to secure future data transmissions and improve the quality of the EU indicator. The related public consultation opened in February 2022<sup>133</sup>.

**The differences between the pension amounts received by women and men remain large and narrow only slowly.** The gender pension gap is about twice the size of the gender pay gap – it stood at 29.5% in 2019, compared to 35.3% in 2010. This yields a gender gap in old-age poverty that is much larger than in working age and makes it especially challenging for women to maintain adequate living standards throughout retirement or afford the necessary long-term care. In 2021 the Commission continued its efforts to have a meaningful debate with Member States on pension systems and the gender pension gap. The **Pension Adequacy report**<sup>134</sup>, published in June 2021, reiterated that the EU should continue to support national efforts to ensure adequate pensions, including by promoting gender equality in pensions and pension credits for care-related career breaks. It will serve as the basis for future assessments of pension reforms. Pension systems could protect family-related career breaks in a way that also encourages equal sharing of family responsibilities between men and women. They also could be adapted to help ensure that non-standard forms of work are neither excluded from the sharing of risks and resources, nor disadvantaged by the rules based on their status. Tax rebates or tax supplements have a significant impact on reducing or increasing poverty, in particular for women.

**Mind the GAP in Pensions project (MIGAPE)**<sup>135</sup> is an EU-funded research project aiming to improve the understanding of the gender pension gap. It shows that a substantial part of the gap observed today derives from the fact that in most EU countries, currently retired women had shorter careers and lower pay, relative to men, than women who are active now and who will retire in the coming decades. At the same time, the project found that pension systems vary a lot in their degree of compensation for care periods. Compensating elements in the pension system might be equally as important for the gender pension gap as the (indirect) effect of periods of care.

## Closing the gender care gap

**The COVID-19 pandemic underlined the high value of care.** It brought clear and striking growth in number of hours per week allocated to childcare and domestic chores within households. Even though the time spent by men on care work increased during the pandemic, data from national and European levels show that women bear the brunt of care obligations.

In addition, studies suggest that the care burden increased for women regardless of whether they carried on working in their main job or not – leading to a clear increase in the absolute size of the childcare gender gap. Women’s relative share in the various household tasks, such as cooking, cleaning and doing the laundry was hardly affected by changes in their time constraints linked to their working life, while men’s involvement was more dependent on their paid working hours<sup>136</sup>.

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<sup>132</sup> Available at <https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/13266-European-labour-market-statistics-on-businesses-LMB-en>.

<sup>133</sup> Available at <https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/13266-European-labour-market-statistics-on-businesses-LMB-public-consultation-en>

<sup>134</sup> Available at <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/4ee6cadd-cd83-11eb-ac72-01aa75ed71a1>.

<sup>135</sup> The Migape project is a collaboration between researchers from CEPS, the Federal Planning Bureau and the KU Leuven in Belgium, the ICS/University of Lisbon, Portugal, the IER in Slovenia, LISER in Luxembourg and the University of Liechtenstein in Liechtenstein. Available at <http://www.migape.eu/index.html>.

<sup>136</sup> JRC, ‘Division of childcare and household work among men and women during the Covid-19 crisis’, Policy Brief, *forthcoming*.

A similar pattern emerged for looking after older parents or relatives with disabilities: the first lockdown period saw women spend 4.5 hours a week on average caring for older family members, or those with disabilities, compared with 2.8 hours for men. According to recent figures from EIGE<sup>137</sup>, gender inequalities in sharing informal long-term care within households remain notable: 58% of women perceive themselves as almost always or for the most part providing informal care compared to 43% of men. Moreover, informal care is still a much more inflexible work-life balance factor for women than for men. Only 68% of women with informal care duties are engaged in paid work activities (employment, self-employment, paid apprenticeship or internship), whereas 81% of men do so.

In **Austria**, several policies were introduced to support single parents, such as simplified access to advance child support or a Corona Family Hardship Fund. Single mothers (about 90 percent of single parents in Austria are women) have been especially severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Policies to address the care gap are key to improving work-life balance and especially to ensuring women can engage and continue to participate in the labour market. The **new EU headline employment target for 2030** includes a complementary ambition to increase the provision of formal early childhood education and care.

The lack of early childhood education and care services as well as other care services have an important influence on women's uptake of long-term family leave, employment in part-time work or even permanent withdrawal from the labour market. It is also associated with reduced women's earnings and slower career progression, which can contribute strongly to the gender pay gap and later on to the pension gap and poverty in old age. The Commission aims to encourage improvements in the provision of early childhood education and care in the Member States.

The Commission's preparatory work on a **European Care Strategy** is ongoing. The package envisaged for the second half of 2022 will address both carers and recipients of care, from childcare to long-term care, and put the gender dimension into the foreground of necessary changes. It will include a Commission Communication on a European Care Strategy, a proposal for a **Council Recommendation to revise the Barcelona targets** on childcare and a proposal for a **Council Recommendation on long-term care**. The latter will build on a Long-Term Care Report<sup>138</sup> prepared jointly in 2021 by the Social Protection Committee and the European Commission, and on a broad consultation process launched by the Commission in January 2021<sup>139</sup> involving national administrations, employers, trade unions, civil society and the public at large<sup>140</sup>.

In **Hungary**, a special 'grandparent childcare benefit' enables the parents of the children to go back to work, and leave the grandparent to take care of the child. The recipient of the benefit is allowed to work only at home. The amount of the benefit is determined on the basis of the grandparent's income and the duration of the grandparent's childcare benefit is taken as a period of normal work, so contributions are made to the pension fund.

Earlier, in March 2021, the Commission adopted a proposal for a Council Recommendation establishing a **European Child Guarantee**. The **Council adopted the Recommendation in June 2021**<sup>141</sup>. It guarantees effective and free access to early childhood education and care, education and school-based activities – both important elements in lessening the burden of care responsibilities on women. Nearly all Member States nominated their national Child Guarantee Coordinators and are

<sup>137</sup> EIGE, *Gender inequalities in informal long-term care*, Statistical Brief, 2022.

<sup>138</sup> Available at <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=24079&langId=en>.

<sup>139</sup> Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/green\\_paper\\_ageing\\_2021\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/green_paper_ageing_2021_en.pdf).

<sup>140</sup> Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/swd\\_2021\\_282\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/swd_2021_282_en.pdf).

<sup>141</sup> Available at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/06/14/access-to-key-services-for-children-in-need-council-agrees-european-child-guarantee/#:~:text=The%20European%20Child%20Guarantee%20is%20the%20first%20EU-level,Social%20Rights%2C%20on%20childcare%20and%20support%20for%20children>.

now preparing the National Action Plans implementing the Recommendation, to be submitted to the Commission by 15 March 2022.

## LEADING EQUALLY THROUGHOUT SOCIETY

**Women are still significantly under-represented in decision-making positions** in all fields. **Only a minority make it to the highest positions.** Despite some encouraging achievements in certain Member States, progress remains slow and uneven across the EU. Many Member States do not have significant measures to address this matter and the gap between Member States continues to increase.

The **EU has come only halfway** towards gender equality in decision-making positions in major political, economic and social institutions. Barriers to women's representation and participation remain part of the EU's reality. The Gender Equality Index 2021<sup>142</sup>, published by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), shows that the domain of power is the one showing fastest progress, although it remains the lowest of all domains, with a score of 55 points (out of 100).

Root causes of female under-representation include traditional gender roles and stereotypes, unequal sharing of household and care responsibilities, as well as political and working cultures favouring long working hours that clash with care responsibilities traditionally assigned to women. Women can also be subject to harassment and bullying in the workplace, with the emergence of online violence as an increasing concern. These factors discourage and limit women's participation in politics and public life, and ultimately hinder gender equality in decision-making.

**The pandemic highlighted the lack of gender balance in decision-making also in highly feminised sectors.** Women make up 70% of health professionals and 80% of health associate professionals in the EU<sup>143</sup>. However, this majority does not carry over into leadership positions in the healthcare sector. During the pandemic and until March 2021, **only 1 in 4 EU health ministers and 4 out of 10 junior ministers or vice-ministers were women**<sup>144</sup>. In a recent study, EIGE provides a preliminary overview of decision-making during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study shows that, in 2021, women accounted for 31.6% (18 out of 57) of national government ministers and 45.6% of members of parliamentary committees dealing with COVID-19 or health<sup>145</sup>.

The small number of women in decision-making positions or as experts in key roles influenced the composition of national task forces to tackle the pandemic. This increased the likelihood of **women's needs being left out of the solutions to address the pandemic**<sup>146</sup>. Such gender gaps in decision-making strengthen unequal power structures and potentially weaken COVID-19 responses, since health and health problems vary by gender<sup>147</sup>.

In this context, the **beneficial effects of gender equality and diversity in decision-making are clear.** Academic research has been focusing on these benefits. Having both men and women involved in decision-making broadens perspectives, boosts creativity and innovation, increases competitiveness

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<sup>142</sup> EIGE, Gender Equality Index 2021 – Health, 2021. Available at <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-equality-index-2021-health>.

<sup>143</sup> EIGE, Study and work in the EU: set apart by gender - Review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the EU Member States, 2018, (ISBN 978-92-9493-894- 7, available at <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/study-and-work-eu-set-apart-gender-report>).

<sup>144</sup> EIGE, Gender Equality Index 2021 – Health, 2021. Available at <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-equality-index-2021-health>.

<sup>145</sup> EIGE, *Data on COVID-19 decision-making*, 2022, forthcoming.

<sup>146</sup> van Daalen, K. R., Bajnoczki, C., Chowdhury, M., Dada, S., Khorsand, P., Socha, A., Torres, I., 'Symptoms of a broken system: the gender gaps in COVID-19 decision-making', *BMJ Global Health*, 5(10), e003549, 2020.

<sup>147</sup> Davies, S., and Bennett, B., A gendered human rights analysis of Ebola and Zika: locating gender in global health emergencies. *International Affairs*, 92(5), 2016, pp. 1041-1060.

and productivity, diversifies the pool of talents and skills, improves the process of decision-making, and may better represent various shareholders<sup>148</sup>.

Therefore, gender balance in management and leadership functions contributes to improving the lives of people living in the EU. Under this premise, the European Commission has made gender balance in decision-making one of the three main pillars of the 2020-2025 EU gender equality strategy. Various measures of the strategy help achieve this goal, including tackling the gender pay gap, promoting better work-life balance for parents and carers, and combating gender-based violence.

The **Commission, as an employer, continues its commitment to reaching gender parity for all its own management levels**. At the beginning of President von der Leyen's mandate, in December 2019, the share of women in senior management was 36.6% and the share of women in middle management was 41.5%. By 1 January 2022, the share of women in management functions had increased by 6.7 percentage points at senior management level (43.3%) and by 4.2 percentage points at middle management level (45.7%). This means that **women hold 45.2% of all management positions** within the Commission. The Commission has also promoted a **50% target for women managers** in executive agencies by 2024. Furthermore, when it comes to its staff in decentralised agencies, the Commission is committed to drawing up gender-balanced shortlists for senior managers to the greatest extent possible.

**The Commission has one of the highest shares of women in leadership positions** of all public administrations worldwide. Nevertheless, the Commission continues to take additional measures, with a view to reaching gender parity by the end of the current Commission mandate. To reach its targets, the Commission has taken supporting measures that notably include quantitative targets for female appointments and leadership development programmes. Following the success in recent years of the **Female Talent Development Programme**, a fourth edition was launched in November 2021. This programme aims to further develop the management skills of female team leaders below Head of Unit level. It supports the Commission's commitment to increase gender balance in management. The 2022 edition will include cross-DG senior management mentoring, a personalised skills assessment, one-on-one coaching sessions, a dedicated training path and Commission-wide networking events with peers and managers.

## Women in political decision-making

Achieving gender parity in representative politics is not only required to uphold social justice and women's rights. It is also an important **condition of effective democracy and good governance** that strengthens and enhances the democratic system. Despite this being a key EU objective, women remain severely under-represented in our democratic institutions. This under-representation is a serious democratic deficit that needs to be addressed urgently.

Despite an encouraging improvement in a number of EU Member States, **men still continue to outnumber women in positions of political power** in Member States' parliaments and governments. On average across the EU<sup>149</sup>, women account for 33% of members of national parliaments<sup>150</sup> and 32%

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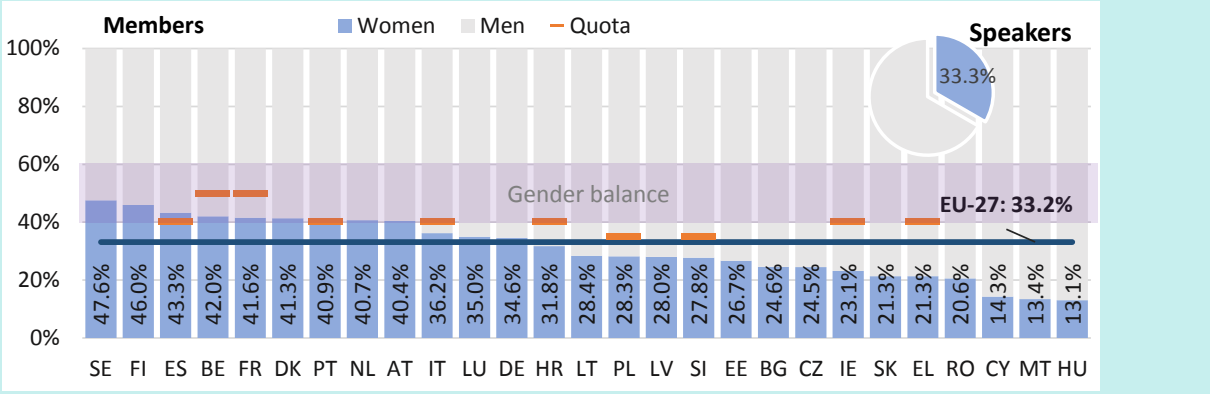
<sup>148</sup> See Rose, C. 'Does female board representation influence firm performance? The Danish evidence', *Corporate Governance. An International Review*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 2007, pp. 404-413; van der Walt, N., Ingley, C., 'Board Dynamics and the Influence of Professional Background, Gender and Ethnic 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.

<sup>149</sup> EIGE statistics database. Data updated in November 2021. Available at [Politics | Gender Statistics Database | European Institute for Gender Equality \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>150</sup> Lower or single houses.

of senior<sup>151</sup> ministers in governments. Furthermore, only 26% of leaders of major political parties are women<sup>152</sup>.

**Figure 1: Share of women and men in single or lower houses of national parliaments in the EU, November 2021**



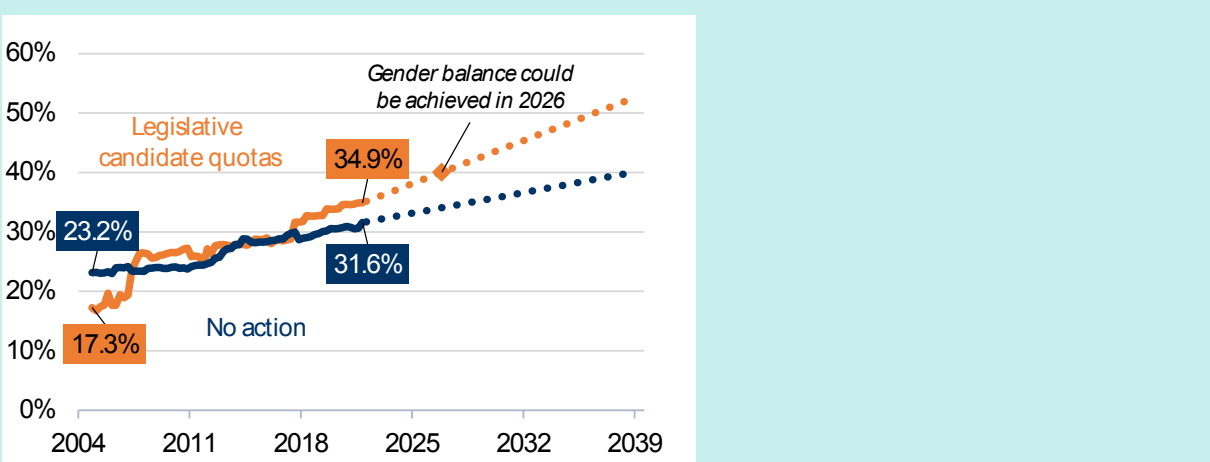
Source: EIGE Gender Statistics Database: [National parliaments](#)

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

In November 2021, the combined members of single or lower houses of **national parliaments in Member States** comprised **66.8% men and 33.2% women**. The proportion of women members represents an all-time high, but still **two out of every three members are men**.

At the top of the ranking are Sweden, Finland, Spain, Belgium, France, Denmark, Portugal, Netherlands, and Austria, where the share of each gender represented in parliament is at least 40%. At the other end of the spectrum, women account for only one in seven members or fewer in the parliaments of Cyprus, Malta, and Hungary (Figure 1). Nine Member States currently have a woman speaker or chair of the single or lower house of parliament. However, another nine have not had a woman in this role since data were first collected in 2003.

**Figure 2: Share of women in single or lower houses of national parliaments by type of action, EU-27, 2004-2039**



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

There is clear evidence that **legislative action can stimulate progress**. Legislative quotas requiring a gender-balanced list of candidates are currently in place in 11 Member States<sup>153</sup>. Among these

<sup>151</sup> Ministers that have a seat in the cabinet.

<sup>152</sup> Major political parties are those with at least 5 % of seats in any national level parliament.

countries, France, Portugal, Ireland and Luxembourg have financial penalties in place for those political parties that do not comply with the quota requirements. However, without additional rules that ensure equal visibility of women and men candidates within the relevant electoral system (e.g. using the zipper system, in which women and men candidates alternate on a party's list), the quotas alone may not be enough to translate compliant candidate lists into electoral results.

Nevertheless, since 2004, the proportion of women members of parliament in countries with legislative candidate quotas has doubled from 17.3% to 34.9%. Countries without such a measure started from a higher base (23.2%) but ended lower (31.6%) (Figure 2)<sup>154</sup>. If both groups continue at this pace, **countries with legislated quotas will achieve gender balance (i.e. at least 40% of each gender) in 5 years (2026). The no action group will take closer to two decades (2038).**

At local level, women hold a third of seats in regional assemblies (34.6%) and their executive bodies (35.0%). However, they account for much lower proportions of their respective leaders (22.1% and 14.3%). In 2021, women also held over a third of the seats in local or municipal assemblies (34.4%) but accounted for **less than a fifth of mayors or council leaders (17.4%)**<sup>155</sup>.

The Commission's working paper on gender equality in the EU regions confirms that, **over the past decade, progress has been extremely slow.** The paper also shows that there is a clear need for action to accelerate the rate of change. According to this study, in 2021, women made up at least half of the members of regional assemblies in only 16 out of 285 cases across the EU. Two regional assemblies in Hungary had no women at all. In several regional assemblies in Hungary and Romania, less than 10% of members were women. Regional assemblies in Spain, France, Sweden and Finland had the highest share of women: 40% or more<sup>156</sup>.

At EU level, the overall trend since 2004 shows a slow but steady **increase** in the proportion of **women Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), from 30.3% to 39.1%** in November 2021. According to a recent European Parliament report<sup>157</sup>, the representation of women in the EP is higher than the world average (25.5 % in April 2021)<sup>158</sup> and the EU average (30.4 % in early 2021)<sup>159</sup> for national parliaments. **Yet, men today still comprise a larger proportion (60.9%) of MEPs.** While half of Member States have at least 40% of each gender among their MEPs, the majority of members in the remaining portion are men. Most notably, men account for 85% of Romanian MEPs and Cyprus has no women MEPs at all. With the recent election of Roberta Metsola as President of the European Parliament<sup>160</sup>, on 18 January 2022, two out of three EU top jobs are now held by women<sup>161</sup>.

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<sup>153</sup> In chronological order: France (50%, 2000); Belgium (50%, 2002); Portugal (33%, 2006); Slovenia (35%, 2006); Spain (40%, 2007); Greece (33%, 2008); Croatia (40%, 2008); Poland (35%, 2011); Ireland (30%, 2012); Italy (40%, 2017). Also Luxembourg introduced a quota (40% in 2016), but did not fully implement it in the 2018 elections (to be considered in next election expected in 2023).

<sup>154</sup> In Luxembourg, a 40% quota was introduced in 2016 but will not be fully applied until the next elections (expected in 2023). Therefore, Luxembourg was included in the "no action" group.

<sup>155</sup> EIGE statistics database. Data updated in November 2021. Available at [Politics | Gender Statistics Database | European Institute for Gender Equality \(europa.eu\)](https://eige.europa.eu/politics/gender-statistics-database).

<sup>156</sup> European Commission, *Mapping the glass ceiling: the EU regions where women thrive and where they are held back. Monitoring EU regional gender equality with the female achievement and disadvantage indices*, 2021. Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docgener/work/gem2021/gender\\_equality\\_monitor\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/work/gem2021/gender_equality_monitor_en.pdf).

<sup>157</sup> European Parliamentary Research Service, 'Gender mainstreaming in the European Parliament. State of Play', 2021. Available at

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/694216/EPRS\\_STU\(2021\)694216\\_EN.pdf#:~:text=The%20gender%20mainstreaming%20policy%20was%20formally%20launched%20by,the%20state%20of%20gender%20mainstreaming%20in%20the%20EP.](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/694216/EPRS_STU(2021)694216_EN.pdf#:~:text=The%20gender%20mainstreaming%20policy%20was%20formally%20launched%20by,the%20state%20of%20gender%20mainstreaming%20in%20the%20EP.)

<sup>158</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union, Global and regional averages of women in national parliaments.

<sup>159</sup> European Parliament, 'Women in the European Parliament, Equality', Inclusion and Diversity Unit, DG Personnel, March 2021.

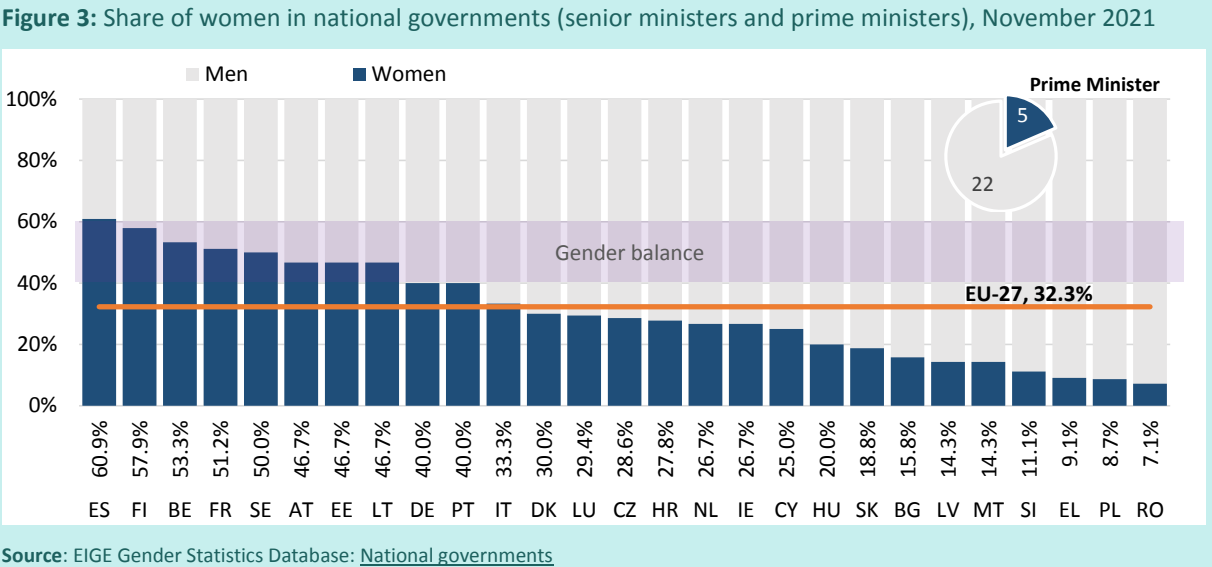
<sup>160</sup> Roberta Metsola (Malta, European People's Party), has been a MEP since 2013. See more at <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20220114IPR21012/roberta-metsola-elected-new-president-of-the-european-parliament>.

Nevertheless, this is only the third time since the first European Parliament elections in 1979 that a woman has been elected President of the Parliament. **On average, a woman was elected President of the European Parliament every 20 years**<sup>162</sup>.

In view of the 2024 European Parliament elections, the Commission proposed in November 2021 **revised rules on the statute and funding of European political parties**<sup>163</sup>. In order to promote gender equality, the proposal provides that European political parties will be required to include their internal rules on gender equality in their statutes and to provide evidence on gender representation when applying for EU funding.

Looking at the situation in government, Estonia and Sweden elected their first-ever women prime ministers in 2021<sup>164</sup>. Overall, however, the picture remains rather grim: in December 2021, **only 5 Member States had a woman prime minister** (Finland, Lithuania, Denmark, Estonia and Sweden). To date, only half of the Member States (13 out of 27) have had a woman prime minister since 2004.

In November 2021, **men accounted for more than two thirds of senior ministers** (i.e. those with a seat in the cabinet) (67.7% men, 32.3% women). Governments were gender-balanced (i.e. at least 40% of each gender) in only 10 Member States (Spain, Finland, Belgium, France, Sweden, Austria, Estonia, Lithuania, Germany, and Portugal). Governments remained very predominantly male in Greece (9.1% women), Poland (8.7%) and Romania (7.1%) (Figure 3).

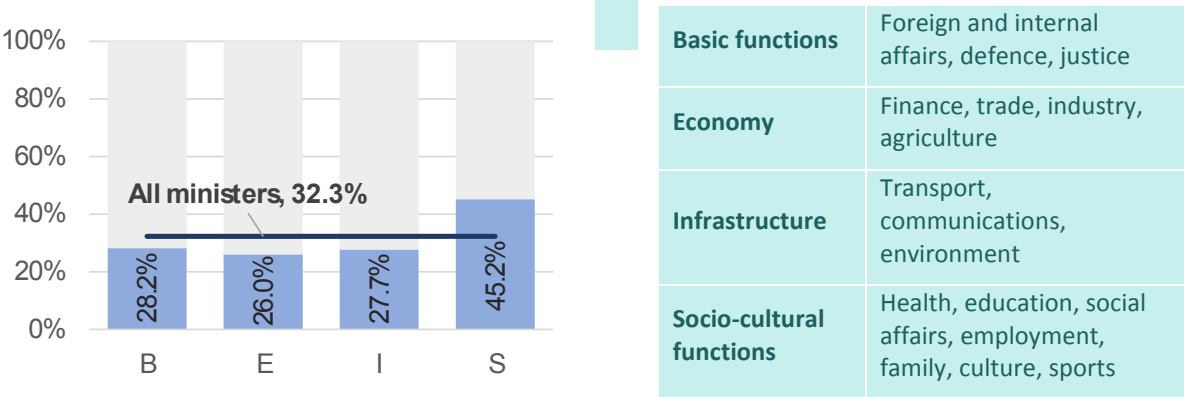


On average across the EU, the gender balance in national governments (senior ministers) has improved progressively since 2004. It has risen from 20.9% at the end of 2004 to the current 32.2%, at an average rate of 0.7 percentage points per year. At this rate, **it will take more than a decade to achieve a share of at least 40% of each gender in the national governments** of the 27 EU Member States<sup>165</sup>.

<sup>161</sup> Together with Roberta Metsola, Ursula von der Leyen, Commission President.  
<sup>162</sup> Simone Veil was the first woman elected President of the European Parliament (1979-1982), followed by Nicole Fontaine (1999-2002).  
<sup>163</sup> Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the statute and funding of European political parties and European political foundations (recast), COM (2021) 734 of 25 November 2021.  
<sup>164</sup> See at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/26/estonia-first-female-pm-appointed-as-new-government-takes-power> and at <https://www.politico.eu/article/magdalena-andersson-sweden-elections-europe-birgitta-ohlsson/>.  
<sup>165</sup> EIGE statistics database. Data updated in November 2021. Available at [Politics | Gender Statistics Database | European Institute for Gender Equality \(europa.eu\)](#).

The continued under-representation of women in government is a fundamental concern. In addition, there is evidence to suggest that **women reaching cabinet level are given fewer opportunities** to influence the political landscape. They also receive portfolios with lower political priority. Data from November 2021 shows that they account for a smaller share of ministers with foreign affairs, internal affairs, defence or justice portfolios (28.2%), economy portfolios (26.0%), and infrastructure portfolios (27.7%). However, they account for a **significantly higher proportion of ministers with sociocultural portfolios (45.2%)**. This uneven distribution suggests that the allocation of ministerial portfolios is not gender-neutral and that women are not getting a fair share of the higher-profile portfolios (Figure 4)<sup>166</sup>.

**Figure 4:** Share of women ministers by type of portfolio, EU-27, November 2021



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

Political parties are seen as the gatekeepers of gender equality in political representation as they select candidates and present them to the electorate. While many political parties have put in place voluntary gender quotas for candidates (independently of any legislation that may apply), a significant gender imbalance remains in their internal structures. **Women lead only one quarter of major political parties** in EU Member States (26.1%).

Equal opportunities for participation is essential for representative democracy at all levels – European, national, regional and local - but many barriers are still to be overcome. Violence against women politicians remains as one of these barriers. According to a 2018 study by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, **85.2% of interviewed women parliamentarians had experienced psychological violence** during their terms in office<sup>167</sup>. Half of the respondents – 46.9% – reported having received death threats or threats of rape and beatings directed against themselves or against their children and other family members. These were mainly delivered through social media and e-mail. **Gendered disinformation** consists of deliberately misleading information that relies on negative depictions of women. **Misogynistic narratives** represent women either as enemies or as weak victims. Disinformation is also used to undermine women’s political commitments and question their decision-making capabilities<sup>168</sup>.

Funding plays an important role in reaching a more equal representation of women in leadership positions. The Commission continues to fund organisations and projects under the CERV programme. A call for proposals for projects on gender equality was published in November 2021. The first

<sup>166</sup> EIGE statistics database. Data updated in November 2021. Available at [Politics | Gender Statistics Database | European Institute for Gender Equality \(europa.eu\)](#).

<sup>167</sup> Available at <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2018-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-in-parliaments-in-europe>.

<sup>168</sup> Sessa, M., *Misogyny and Misinformation: An analysis of gendered disinformation tactics during the COVID-19 pandemic*, DisinfoLab, 2020. Available at: <https://www.disinfo.eu/publications/misogyny-and-misinformation%3A-an-analysis-of-gendered-disinformation-tactics-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>.

priority of this call is to promote equal participation and representation of women and men in political and economic decision-making. This priority aims at supporting Member States and relevant stakeholders in developing, identifying and disseminating strategies, actions, tools, and good practices. These should effectively promote gender balance in politics, in public debates and in management and leadership positions in the corporate sector. The call responds to the commitment of the Gender Equality Strategy to ‘promote the participation of women as voters and candidates in the 2024 European Parliament elections, in collaboration with the European Parliament, national parliaments, Member States and civil society, including through funding and promoting best practices’.

In **Finland**, the project **Gender Matters?** (2019-2021), funded under the EU’s Rights, Equality and Citizenship programme, helped to promote gender equality in the media, politics and the corporate sector. It provided training sessions and information for journalists on elections and decision-making. The project also aimed to promote a more inclusive and intersectional understanding of gender.

The EU-funded project **Mayoress** (2019-2021), focused on empowerment and networking of women mayors from **Germany, France, Poland** and **Austria**. The objective was to increase the representation of women in local leadership positions and mayor’s offices. The project also aimed to raise public awareness of the need to improve gender equality in local leadership positions. The project concluded with an international online conference on 20 September 2021 entitled *Mayoress! Women in Local Leadership*. The conference brought together women mayors, civil society representatives and experts on this topic. The German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth supported this initiative, and German Federal Minister Christine Lambrecht opened the conference.

In **Cyprus**, the National Machinery for Women’s Rights and the office of the Gender Equality Commissioner launched a series of educational seminars in December 2021. The seminars aim to increase women’s participation and will continue on a regular and systematic basis during the first semester of 2022. The aim of the educational seminars is to strengthen and empower women’s participation in politics in decision-making bodies. This should strengthen democracy and promote equality. The target group is young women who are interested in getting involved in the political sphere and who are active in a political party, a trade-union, voluntary spheres, or society. The seminars are entitled “Gender and Politics”, “Skills”, and “Political Involvement and Readiness”.

## Women in economic decision-making

**Women’s representation in corporate leadership is improving, but progress remains painfully slow and there are notable differences between Member States.** European companies have a long way to go to achieve gender-balanced leadership. In 2021, around **30% of board members of the EU’s largest publicly listed companies were women**. Although this figure is an all-time high, it still represents the lowest annual increase since 2010. **Since 2016, the pace of change has slowed considerably**<sup>169</sup>. The Gender Diversity Index (GDI) 2021<sup>170</sup> confirms this slow tendency. The overall GDI score across the 668 companies in the survey by European Women on Boards has improved by only 5%, from 0.56 in 2020 to 0.59 in 2021<sup>171</sup>.

<sup>169</sup> EIGE statistics database. Data updated in October 2021. Available at [Business and finance | Gender Statistics Database | European Institute for Gender Equality \(europa.eu\)](#).

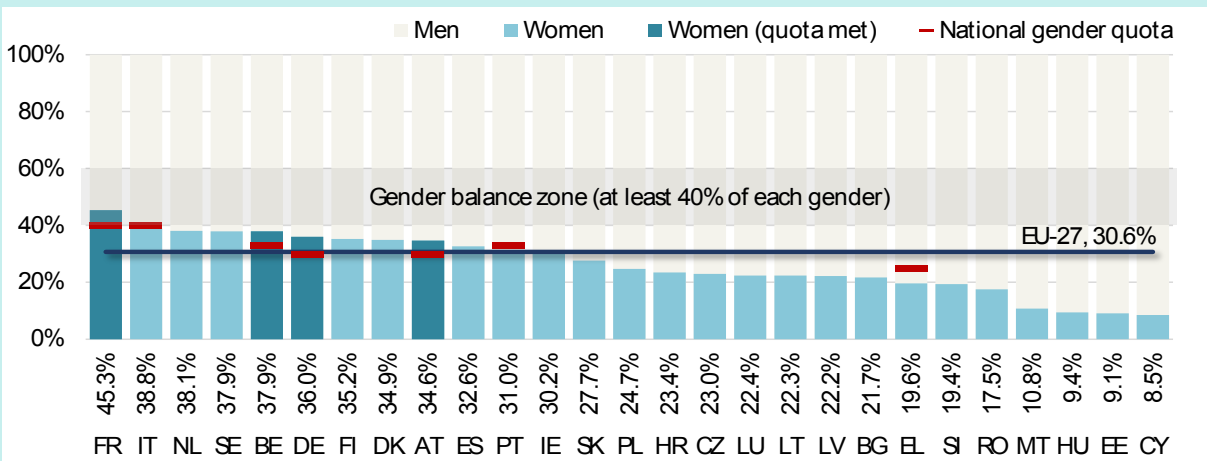
<sup>170</sup> European Women on Boards, [2021-Gender-Diversity-Index.pdf \(europeanwomenonboards.eu\)](#).

<sup>171</sup> A company with a score of 1 will usually have around 50% of women in leadership— sometimes a little more, sometimes a little less. An average company with a GDI of 0.59 points has the following share of women in leadership roles: 30% of all leadership positions (board, executive level and board committees) are held by women; 35% of board members are women; 19% of executives are women; and 36% of committee members are women.

France remains the only Member State with at least 40% of each gender on companies' boards. Italy (38.8%) and the Netherlands (38.1%) are close to this mark. Women account for at least a third of board members also in Sweden, Belgium, Germany, Finland, Denmark, and Austria. In seven countries, however, women still account for less than a fifth of board members (Figure 5).

Over a quarter (28%) of the EU's largest listed companies have at least 40% of each gender among board members. Yet around one in five still have all-male boards, including more than half of the companies covered in Estonia, Cyprus, and Hungary.

**Figure 5:** Share of women and men on the boards of the EU's largest listed companies, October 2021



Source: EIGE, Gender Statistics Database

National gender quota targets set in France and Italy (40%), Belgium and Portugal (33%), Germany and Austria (30%), Greece (25%).

Government action to promote a more gender-balanced representation in corporate leadership can entail 'soft' measures, aimed at encouraging companies to self-regulate and take action independently. Government action can also entail 'hard' regulatory approaches, for example applying legally binding quotas to ensure minimum representation of each gender - in some cases with sanctions for companies that do not comply.

According to the latest data from EIGE<sup>172</sup>, **national gender quotas** (from 25 to 40%) currently apply to the boards of listed companies in **seven Member States**<sup>173</sup>. In addition, in 2021, the lower and upper houses of the parliament of the Netherlands approved a law introducing a 33% quota, which entered into force in January 2022.

**Ten Member States have taken a softer approach**<sup>174</sup>, using a wide range of measures and initiatives with various degrees of stringency and specificity. Spain has equality legislation that recommends having at least 40% of each gender on company boards, but this recommendation is not enforceable. Slovenia has a legislative quota for state-owned companies but not for publicly listed companies. Other countries in this group have preferred to encourage companies to self-regulate to redress gender imbalances in boardrooms (e.g., Denmark and Ireland). The remaining **nine Member States have not taken any substantial action**<sup>175</sup>.

**Legislative action to address gender imbalances in economic decision-making continues to drive progress.** In October 2021, women accounted for 36.4% of the board members of the largest listed companies in countries with national gender quotas, compared with 30.3% in countries with soft

<sup>172</sup> EIGE statistics database. Data updated in October 2021. Available at [Business and finance | Gender Statistics Database | European Institute for Gender Equality \(europa.eu\)](https://businessandfinance.europa.eu/gender-statistics-database/).

<sup>173</sup> France, Italy, Belgium, Portugal, Germany, Austria and Greece.

<sup>174</sup> Denmark, Estonia, Ireland, Spain, Luxembourg, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Finland and Sweden.

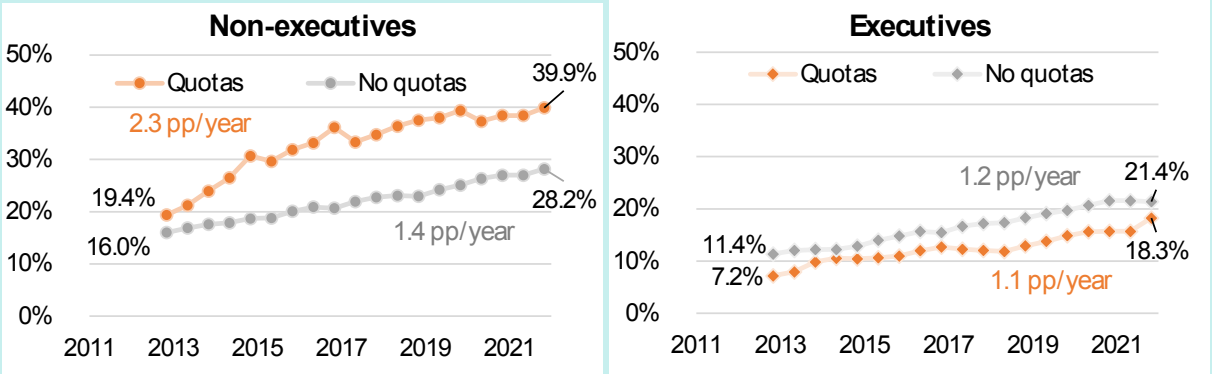
<sup>175</sup> Bulgaria, Czechia, Croatia, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta and Slovakia.

measures, and just 16.6% in countries that have taken no action at all. Quotas have more than tripled the rate of change from 0.8 to 2.9 percentage points per year. Progress in countries without legislative measures (i.e. with soft measures or no action) lingers at just 0.7 percentage points per year.

The top jobs are still largely occupied by men. Although numbers have at least doubled since 2012, women still only hold **less than 1 in 10 board chair and chief executive officer positions** (respectively 8.5% and 7.8% in October 2021). Legislative action has had a clear positive impact on the representation of women in boards. However, quotas typically only apply to the top-level board. Such boards tend wholly or predominantly (depending on the local corporate governance system) to comprise non-executives so that executive positions are not affected. **Women now account for a third (33.3%) of non-executives but only for around one fifth (20.2%) of senior executives** (Figure 6). As a result, progress towards gender parity among executives is also slow and very few women reach top positions in large companies (1.0 percentage points per year compared with 1.5 percentage points per year among non-executives since 2016)<sup>176</sup>.

After having been blocked in the Council for ten years, a breakthrough is within reach concerning the proposal for a **directive on improving the gender balance among non-executive directors of companies listed on stock exchanges**. In February 2022, the new German and Dutch governments announced their intention to support the proposal, thereby paving the way for a general approach to be reached at the Employment and Social Affairs Council in mid-March. This directive’s adoption will be a major step on the road to effective gender equality in the EU. It will send a clear message that the EU economy makes the best use of its talents. Throughout the years, the Commission remained determined to unblock this important piece of legislation. In January 2022, it reaffirmed its determination at the highest political level, with President von der Leyen announcing that **‘it is time to move forward with this file’**<sup>177</sup>.

**Figure 6:** Share of women among executives and non-executives of the largest listed companies in the EU-27 by type of action at national level, October 2012 to October 2021



Source: EIGE’s own calculations based on data from its Gender Statistics Database  
 Notes: The quota group progressively includes Member States with national gender quotas based on the year of adoption: Belgium, France, and Italy since 2011; Germany since 2015; Austria and Portugal since 2017; Greece since October 2020.

On **financial institutions**, the gender balance on the boards of national central banks in the EU is improving, but very slowly. Women now account for just over a quarter (26.4%) of key decision-

<sup>176</sup> EIGE statistics database. Data updated in October 2021. Available at [Business and finance | Gender Statistics Database | European Institute for Gender Equality \(europa.eu\)](https://www.eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics-database).

<sup>177</sup> See at <https://www.ft.com/content/d98e6634-ef76-4cf3-8477-628e0d9d2acb>.

makers (i.e. members of the highest decision-making bodies). They also hold 28.3% of deputy governor positions, but **the governors of all EU national central banks are men**. At this rate of change, it will take another 22.5 years to achieve at least 40% women in decision-making bodies of national central banks.

Historically, European financial institutions have also been run largely by men. Despite the appointment of Christine Lagarde as the first female president of the European Central Bank (ECB), the boards of these institutions continue to be male dominated. In 2021, the executive board of the ECB counted only 2 women among its 6 members<sup>178</sup>. During the same year, 8 of the 27 members of the board of the European Investment Bank (EIB)<sup>179</sup> and 2 of the 6 members of the board of directors of the European Investment Fund (EIF)<sup>180</sup> were women.

The European Innovation Council aims to invite 40% women-led companies to pitch their projects. In 2021, it continued to award the **annual EU Prize for Women Innovators**, receiving the strongest interest to date. It also launched the new **Women TechEU initiative** to support women-led deep tech start-ups. Finally, it launched the **Women Leadership Programme** to improve skills and promote networking. This programme aims to coach and mentor women entrepreneurs and researchers.

On 3 June 2020, the **Austrian** Council of Ministers adopted a resolution to increase the proportion of women on the supervisory board of state-affiliated companies. The proportion should increase from 35% to 40% over the course of the current legislative period, which ends in 2024. State-affiliated companies include all companies with a federal share of at least 50%. Annual progress reports monitor the situation. They showed an average proportion of women of 45.3% by the end of 2020.

In **France**, the conference on economic and professional equality (Assises de l'égalité économique et professionnelle) produces a yearly ranking of the SBF120 companies based on women's representation in their governing bodies. The ranking compares the 120 largest French companies' commitment to increasing the share of women in their management bodies and more broadly to achieving professional equality between women and men. The ranking is based on figures provided by companies on a voluntary and declarative basis.

## GENDER MAINSTREAMING

Gender mainstreaming remains a key part of the European Commission's gender equality policy, as outlined in the **gender equality strategy**. The strategy highlights that including gender equality issues into policymaking in all fields is key to success, as the challenges affecting the EU today all have a gender dimension. Any policy to meet these challenges will only be effective if the gender perspective is taken into account at all stages of policy making, from design to implementation.

### Gender equality in EU policies

The Commission's commitment to mainstream gender across EU policies continued to yield results in 2021. On top of various actions mentioned already in previous sections, this section presents **several EU initiatives launched in 2021 that have an important gender dimension**, including initiatives

<sup>178</sup> <https://www.ecb.europa.eu/ecb/orga/decisions/eb/html/index.en.html>.

<sup>179</sup> <https://www.eib.org/en/about/governance-and-structure/statutory-bodies/board-directors/index.htm>.

<sup>180</sup> The EIF board of directors normally has seven members (including the chairman). Alternates are not counted. At the time of data collection in January 2022 the EIF website showed only six members (four men, two women) ([https://www.eif.org/who\\_we\\_are/governance/board\\_of\\_directors/index.htm](https://www.eif.org/who_we_are/governance/board_of_directors/index.htm)).

linked to the green and digital transition and others for instance in agriculture, health and media policy.

The EU strategy on adaptation to climate change<sup>181</sup> adopted in February 2021 recognises the knowledge gaps in adaptation and highlights the need to draw on science to improve our understanding of the interaction between climate hazards and socioeconomic vulnerabilities and inequalities, including those experienced by women. The strategy recognises that the impacts of climate change are not the same for everyone. It focuses on ensuring that adaptation measures factor in different adaptive capabilities of men and women, older people, people with disabilities, displaced and socially marginalised persons. The Commission report summarising the state of implementation during its first year will be published in the first quarter of 2022.

For the European Green Deal, the Commission integrated the gender perspective into the policies of the **Fit for 55 package**. Women and men are not equally affected by policies tackling climate change as there are more women in energy poverty than men. Therefore, the proposal for a **Social Climate Fund**<sup>182</sup> recognises that women, who represent 85% of single-parent families, are particularly affected by the proposed carbon pricing. It therefore calls for gender equality and equal opportunities to be an integral part of the social climate plans. In parallel, work has started in the Commission to obtain reliable and complete data sources and to develop guidance on how best to address the social and labour aspects of the climate transition. This work will be supported by research into gender issues in relation to the European Green Deal conducted by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)<sup>183</sup>. The resulting data will be made available in EIGE's 2023 Gender Equality Index and will be used to mainstream gender into this package of files under the heading Fit for 55.

Under the **European Climate Law**<sup>184</sup>, adopted on 20 June 2021, the Commission will help disseminate science-based information about the social and gender equality aspects of climate change, including through the Climate Pact<sup>185</sup>. In 2021, the Climate Pact has sought to achieve gender balance amongst Climate Ambassadors. Currently, the Pact has 265 women ambassadors, 331 men ambassadors, and 5 that did not state their gender.

The Commission also continued its work to implement the Enhanced Lima work programme and its gender action plan<sup>186</sup> in the context of the **United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow**. In 2021, the EU and the Member States exchanged evidence and raised awareness on the gender-differentiated impacts of climate change, the role of women as agents of change, and opportunities for women<sup>187</sup>.

The transition to a climate neutral economy brings quality jobs to the labour market and creates the opportunity for reduction of gender gaps. The Commission presented in December 2021, a proposal for a **Council Recommendation on ensuring a fair transition towards climate neutrality**. It calls for mainstreaming gender equality in climate mitigation strategies and accompanying social and

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<sup>181</sup> Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/clima/eu-action/adaptation-climate-change/eu-adaptation-strategy\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/clima/eu-action/adaptation-climate-change/eu-adaptation-strategy_en).

<sup>182</sup> Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/social-climate-fund\\_with-annex\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/social-climate-fund_with-annex_en.pdf)

<sup>183</sup> This is set out in EIGE's single programming document 2021-2023, <https://eige.europa.eu/about/documents-registry/eiges-2021-2023-single-programming-document>.

<sup>184</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/1119 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 June 2021 establishing the framework for achieving climate neutrality and amending Regulations (EC) No 401/2009 and (EU) 2018/1999 ('European Climate Law') (OJ L 243, 9.7.2021, p. 1).

<sup>185</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic And Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, European Climate Pact, Brussels, 9.12.2020 (COM(2020) 788 final).

<sup>186</sup> Available at [https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cp2019\\_13a01E.pdf](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cp2019_13a01E.pdf).

<sup>187</sup> Available at <https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/SubmissionsStaging/Documents/202111090956--SI-11-09-2021%20EU%20Submission%20on%20Gender.pdf>.

employment policies, notably regarding active labour market policies, skills and training and social protection<sup>188</sup>.

**Artificial intelligence (AI)** can have a different impact on women as compared to men if AI systems are not properly designed and used. AI can for instance lead to gender biases in recruitment and to the perpetuation of stereotypes. To address these problems, the Commission presented in April 2021 a **proposal for a Regulation on Artificial Intelligence (AI Act)**<sup>189</sup>. New mandatory requirements for all high-risk AI systems have the objective of making these systems technically robust to guarantee that the technology is fit for purpose and false positive or negative results are not disproportionately affecting protected groups such as women. High-risk systems will also need to be trained and tested with sufficiently representative dataset to minimise the risk of unfair gender biases embedded in the model and ensure that these can be addressed through appropriate bias detection, correction and other mitigating measures. They must also be traceable and auditable, ensuring that appropriate documentation is kept, including of the data used to train the algorithm that would be key for possible breaches of gender equality obligations to be investigated and addressed by national authorities and courts.

In the Council Conclusions approved in December 2021<sup>190</sup>, and supported by EIGE's research report on AI, platform work and gender equality<sup>191</sup>, the Council called for concrete steps to improve awareness of gender equality issues in AI research and in all sectors where AI is designed, developed and used. It also called upon Member States to ensure algorithmic transparency in the use of AI, including addressing the problem of historically biased input data. In these Conclusions, Member States were also called upon to enhance their efforts to achieve a balanced representation of women and men in occupations related to the creation and deployment of AI tools and in AI research. In particular, by seeking to ensure that when AI is used for the management of human resources, it promotes transparency and gender equality, particularly in the areas of pay, training, access to promotion, and career progression.

In higher **education policy**, the Commission adopted two proposals in January 2022: the **European strategy for universities**<sup>192</sup> and a proposal for a **Council recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation**<sup>193</sup>. These initiatives aim to address the persistent gender gaps in higher education, and include measures to address the under-representation of women in STEM fields. The proposals also aim at promoting gender balance in the governance structures of higher education institutions and integrating the gender equality dimension in curricula by universities. Higher education institutions are encouraged to adopt voluntary targets for gender balance and gender equality plans.

In agricultural policy, the gender dimension has been successfully integrated into the **new Common Agricultural Policy 2023-2027 (CAP)**, which the Commission adopted in December 2021<sup>194</sup>. Under the

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COM(2021) 801 final

<sup>189</sup> Available at <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/european-approach-artificial-intelligence>.

<sup>190</sup> Council of the European Union, 'Council Conclusions on the Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Gender Equality in the Labour Market' approved under the Slovenian Presidency, 2021, available at <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14750-2021-INIT/en/pdf>.

<sup>191</sup> EIGE, *Artificial intelligence, platform work and gender equality*, 2022. Available at <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/artificial-intelligence-platform-work-and-gender-equality-report>.

<sup>192</sup> [Commission Communication on a European strategy for universities | European Education Area \(europa.eu\)](#), 2022.

<sup>193</sup> Available at [proposal-council-recommendation-bridges-european-higher-education-cooperation.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#).

<sup>194</sup> Starting in 2023, the new specific objective (h) refers explicitly to women and promoting gender equality, including the participation of women in farming. [https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key-policies/common-agricultural-policy/new-cap-2023-27\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key-policies/common-agricultural-policy/new-cap-2023-27_en).

new policy, as of 2023, Member States will be required to assess the situation of women in farming and in rural areas and address related challenges in their strategic plans. Member States will need to involve the bodies responsible for gender equality in the process of preparing their CAP strategic plans. They will also be required to strengthen their capacity in gender mainstreaming and in the collection of sex-disaggregated data. On data collection, Member States will have to report the number of beneficiaries as well as the number of new farmers by gender. To guide Commission staff in their assessment of the national strategic plans under the CAP, the Commission has developed a **toolkit** on how to implement this specific objective. In addition, **The Long Term Vision for EU Rural Areas**<sup>195</sup> adopted in 2021 includes a flagship initiative ‘**Social resilience and Women in rural areas**’ that will contribute to fighting gender inequalities.

The gender dimension of **regional development** in the EU was emphasised with the launch of the first edition of the **EU Regional Gender Equality Monitor**<sup>196</sup>, which highlights inequalities in women’s achievements and disadvantages across EU regions. The socioeconomic monitoring provided on the dedicated platform<sup>197</sup> is the first to capture aspects of gender equality at regional level for almost all EU regions<sup>198</sup>, and has the potential to lead to a better targeting of regional policy action. Throughout 2021, the Commission raised awareness and provided support to Member State authorities on mainstreaming gender equality in **cohesion policy**, also during several webinars.

In **customs policy**, in 2021, the Commission joined the **Network for Gender Equality and Diversity in Customs**, launched by the World Customs Organisation in November. The Network advocates for the need to and the benefits of implementing gender-responsive and inclusive policies in customs worldwide, and to foster and promote exchanges of experience at international level. It also encourages greater and long-term support from senior management on this matter.

In 2021, the Commission also worked to raise awareness of equality as a priority for the community working on **defence industry and space policy** and to publicise the free tools available to help companies working in the space sector. The first Equality, Diversity and Inclusion workshop for the occasion of EU Diversity Month was an opportunity to listen to the concerns and suggestions voiced by the community, as well to promote the EU Diversity Charter. At the end of 2021, the Commission launched a mapping project to assess a state of play and develop the demographic characterisation, including the six dimensions of equality, of the EU defence, aeronautics and space sector.

The Commission is also mainstreaming gender into its **health policy**. The gender sensitivity principle is an integral part of **Europe’s Beating Cancer Plan**, and related policy action, research and funding. In November 2021, the Commission created the Cancer Inequalities Registry to map the situation in the Member States and regions and reduce cancer inequalities. Breast cancer accounts for 13.3% of all new cancer cases diagnosed in EU-27 countries. This makes it the most frequently occurring cancer. Financing initiatives on prevention, early detection, proper diagnosis and treatment on improving quality of life of patients and survivors is part of 2021 EU4Health spending<sup>199</sup>. The Commission proposal to update the Council Recommendation on cancer screening is in preparation and scheduled for adoption in 2022. The EU also targets the elimination of cervical cancer<sup>200</sup> and other cancers (head-and-neck and anal cancers) caused by human papilloma virus (HPV). This virus

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<sup>195</sup> Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/strategy/strategy\\_documents/documents/ltvra-c2021-345\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/strategy/strategy_documents/documents/ltvra-c2021-345_en.pdf)

<sup>196</sup> Available at [Mapping the glass ceiling: the EU regions where women thrive and where they are held back - Regional Policy - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/strategy/strategy_documents/documents/ltvra-c2021-345_en.pdf). A pilot exercise was conducted in 2019, however based on a less rich set of indicators. The EC plans to update the monitor every three years.

<sup>197</sup> Available at <https://urban.jrc.ec.europa.eu/regional-gender-equality/en>.

<sup>198</sup> French overseas regions are excluded due to lack of data.

<sup>199</sup> A total of EUR 13.5 million on prevention, EUR 15.5 million on early detection, EUR 26.2 million on adequate diagnosis and treatment and EUR 17.9 million on improving quality of life of patients and survivors.

<sup>200</sup> **Cervical cancer** estimates made in 2020 predict 30 500 new cases, with around 13 400 women dying from the disease, representing 2.4% of all cancer deaths in women.

affects women and girls disproportionately. One of the flagship initiatives of Europe's Beating Cancer Plan is to vaccinate at least 90% of the target population of girls in the EU and to significantly increase the vaccination of boys by 2030. In 2021, the EU4Health programme provided grants to Member States to set up a Joint Action on HPV vaccination that will help roll-out vaccination programmes for girls and boys, and it awarded grants to stakeholders to improve access to HPV vaccination. To mark World Cancer Day 2022, the Commission organised an event on 2 February 2022, especially focused on women. The event marked an official launch of the Joint Action on HPV vaccination and the Cancer Inequalities Registry. The Registry will identify trends between Member States and regions, including on gender-based inequalities in cancer prevention and care.

**In a recent resolution<sup>201</sup>, the European Parliament stressed that sexual and reproductive health is an essential component of good health** and urged the Commission to provide support to Member States in guaranteeing universal access to sexual and reproductive health services in the framework of the EU4Health Programme. The Parliament also urged all Member States to ensure universal access to safe and legal abortion, and guarantee that abortion on request is legal in early pregnancy, and beyond if the mother's health is in danger.

The **EU strategic framework on health and safety at work<sup>202</sup> 2021-2027**, adopted in June 2021, highlights the importance of recognising diversity, including gender differences and inequalities, and fighting discrimination in the workforce, which is vital in ensuring the safety and health of both women and men workers, including when assessing risks at work. In the COVID-19 pandemic context, the risks of ill-adapted tools and equipment (e.g. women in the healthcare sector having to wear personal protective equipment designed for men) were highlighted as an example. The framework promotes initiatives to avoid gender bias when assessing and prioritising risks for action by ensuring gender representation in consultations of workers; training adapted to employees' personal situation; and risks in occupations that have long been overlooked or considered as 'light work' (e.g. carers or cleaners) are recognised. In addition, it addresses change, prevention and preparedness in occupational safety and health through measures that are gender sensitive and tailored to the circumstances of all workers.

There are **specific gender vulnerabilities in the way men and women are affected by the environment** (for example, related to harmful chemicals such as endocrine disruptors and persistent organic pollutants). The programme for the environment and climate action (LIFE Regulation), adopted in April 2021, supports ongoing work in this area<sup>203</sup>. The aim is to strengthen the legal framework in order to support innovation for safe and sustainable chemicals. A gender perspective is included at project level. For example, the 'Mother and Infant dyads' project aims to improve knowledge and support public health policies addressing the correlation between levels of maternal exposure to endocrine disrupting chemicals and milk contamination and the health status of infants<sup>204</sup>.

In the field of **research and innovation**, gender equality was strengthened as a policy priority under the European Research Area Policy Agenda<sup>205</sup>, in line with the Ljubljana Declaration on Gender

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<sup>201</sup> 'Sexual and reproductive health and rights in the EU, in the frame of women's health', European Parliament resolution of 24 June 2021 on the situation of sexual and reproductive health and rights in the EU, in the frame of women's health (2020/2215(INI)), available at <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20210621IPR06637/eu-countries-should-ensure-universal-access-to-sexual-and-reproductive-health>

<sup>202</sup> Available at <https://osha.europa.eu/en/safety-and-health-legislation/eu-strategic-framework-health-and-safety-work-2021-2027>.

<sup>203</sup> Available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021R0783&from=EN>.

<sup>204</sup> LIFE18 ENV/IT/000460, available at: [https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/life/publicWebsite/index.cfm?fuseaction=search.dspPage&n\\_proj\\_id=7211](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/life/publicWebsite/index.cfm?fuseaction=search.dspPage&n_proj_id=7211)

<sup>205</sup> Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/research\\_and\\_innovation/strategy\\_on\\_research\\_and\\_innovation/documents/ec\\_rtd\\_era-policy-agenda-2021.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/research_and_innovation/strategy_on_research_and_innovation/documents/ec_rtd_era-policy-agenda-2021.pdf)

Equality in Research and Innovation<sup>206</sup>. Gender equality is one of the six priorities in the **Work Plan for Culture 2019-2022**. One resulting action is the report entitled *Towards gender equality in the cultural and creative sectors*, published in June 2021<sup>207</sup>. It provides recommendations from the expert working group on the most persistent gender gaps – including unequal access to leadership positions, resources and the art market, segregation of the labour market, pay gap and gender stereotypes and sexual violence. It also calls for better data on gender gaps across the cultural and creative sectors, and highlights the impacts of COVID-19 on gender equality. The report lists 250 good practices covering the whole EU. Some are cross-sectoral; others focus on specific sectors – music, literature, visual arts etc. They encompass grass-root and bottom-up initiatives, and as such can be a source of inspiration to all groups involved in this work.

Concerning **media policy**, the Commission launched a **communication campaign CharactHer**<sup>208</sup> in the margins of the Cannes Film Festival in July 2021 by Vice President Vera Jourová. The goal is to encourage media industries to foster inclusion and representativeness, reflecting the diversity of our European societies. The campaign published portraits of 12 women professionals from different backgrounds and sectors every week until the end of 2021 on the website [Character.eu](https://character.eu) as well as on social media, TV and in schools.

**France** allocated a budget of EUR 5 million in 2021 to tackle period poverty, which affects nearly 2 million women each year, especially adolescent girls and students. In the 2020-2021 school year, the region of Lille provided free period products in 64 high schools. University residences and university health services have also been equipped with dispensers with free period products.

In **Germany**, the Third Gender Equality Report published by the Federal Government includes an expert opinion on how digitalisation can be shaped in a gender-equitable way. The Expert Commission presents the effects, opportunities and risks of digital transformation for the lives of women and men – and how they differ between the genders. In addition, it provides recommendations on how to shape digitalisation in a way that promotes gender equality in order to offer equal opportunities

In **Sweden**, the **Gender Mainstreaming in Academia initiative** has been extended to cover 2021. All Swedish publicly funded institutions of higher education together with Chalmers University of Technology and Jönköping University took part in this initiative, that began in 2016. The Swedish Gender Equality Agency continued to provide structured and long-term support. Results so far include the development of different working methods, change in routines and promoting ways of counteracting gender stereotypes in study choices, promoting gender equal career paths and ensuring a more gender-balanced distribution of resources.

In 2021, in the context of the **EU's mutual learning programme, Sweden and Czechia** co-hosted a **seminar on gender equality, mental health and gender mainstreaming health policies**<sup>209</sup>, in which 11 Member States participated. The seminar was an opportunity to discuss gender and health issues. These issues have become even more pressing due to the unprecedented challenges to mental wellbeing posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, including its impact on women and young people. The participants highlighted the importance of an intersectional approach and shared good practices on, for example, regular monitoring of school student health, counselling for young people and comprehensive sexuality education in schools.

<sup>206</sup> [https://slovenian-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/media/tcplkngd/ljubljana-declaration-on-gender-equality-in-research-and-innovation-\\_endorsed\\_final.pdf](https://slovenian-presidency.consilium.europa.eu/media/tcplkngd/ljubljana-declaration-on-gender-equality-in-research-and-innovation-_endorsed_final.pdf)

<sup>207</sup> Available at <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/103b765e-c79c-11eb-a925-01aa75ed71a1>.

<sup>208</sup> Available at <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/commission-launches-character-campaign-supporting-diversity-and-inclusion-film-and-media>.

<sup>209</sup> Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/eu-mutual-learning-programme-gender-equality-gender-equality-mental-health-and-gender-mainstreaming-health-policies-online-seminar-18-19-november-2021\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/eu-mutual-learning-programme-gender-equality-gender-equality-mental-health-and-gender-mainstreaming-health-policies-online-seminar-18-19-november-2021_en).

## Gender mainstreaming in the EU budget

EU funding is an effective tool to promote EU policy objectives and bring about policy change. Gender mainstreaming in the EU budget is therefore particularly important to make progress on gender equality. **The Commission has taken further steps to enhance the gender dimension in its funding programmes under the current multiannual budget for 2021-2027.**

In particular, it strengthened the gender equality requirements in the Cohesion policy funding programmes, such as the **European Regional Development Fund** and the **European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)**. The legislative framework<sup>210</sup> includes a requirement for Member States to organise a partnership with competent national and regional authorities, including relevant civil society organisations and bodies such as those responsible for promoting fundamental rights and gender equality. Gender equality is also a crosscutting principle, meaning that gender equality and a gender perspective must be factored in and promoted **throughout all stages of the process** to prepare, implement, monitor and evaluate programmes.

There are also stronger enabling conditions for funding to ensure there is a supportive environment for cohesion policy investments to be effective and efficient. When selecting operations, Member States must set and apply criteria and procedures that are non-discriminatory, transparent, that achieve gender equality and take account of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. Member States that want to invest in enhancing the effectiveness and inclusiveness of labour markets and access to quality employment through developing social infrastructure and promoting social economy under the ERDF and in and promoting a gender-balanced labour market participation, equal working conditions, and a better work/life balance including through access to affordable childcare, and care for dependent persons under ESF+ must also present a **national strategic framework for gender equality**.

Beyond the mainstreaming obligation, Member States also have the obligation to support targeted actions for gender equality. Further, the ESF+ is available to support vulnerable groups and together with the other funds (for example Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund) contribute to labour market integration and social inclusion of migrant women.

A new requirement to track the funding for gender equality has been introduced for the cohesion policy funds, which allow for better monitoring of the gender targeted and mainstreaming investments.

The Commission, while negotiating the new partnership agreements and programmes, will assess the Member States commitment to the horizontal principles and specific targeted actions as well as the new tracking mechanism for gender related expenditure introduced by the Common Provisions Regulation.

Mitigating the social and economic impact of the crisis on women is also a clear objective of the **EU Recovery and Resilience Facility**, as set out in Article 4 of its founding Regulation<sup>211</sup>. The national plans adopted in 2021 include measures with a focus on gender equality (see also chapter 2). For instance, the RRF will support reforms to reduce gender pay gap, combat inequality between women and men, support upskilling of women and encourage flexible working arrangements. As regards investments, the RRF will help Member States improve social and early childcare infrastructures, introduce gender-equality certificates for companies, deliver trainings to boost women's entrepreneurial skills, establish a support line for women in rural and urban areas and better regulate

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<sup>210</sup> The legislative framework for the 2021-2027 Cohesion policy programmes is established by the Common provisions Regulation and programme specific regulations, published on 30 June 2021. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/information/legislation/regulations/](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/legislation/regulations/).

<sup>211</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/241 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 February 2021 establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility.

professions being traditionally taken up by women (domestic work, social care etc.). This is in line with the Council Conclusions approved in June 2021, which called for steps to mitigate the exacerbating effect of the COVID-19 crisis on some of the long-term disadvantages experienced by women and to ensure that gender equality becomes a driver for recovery. With the Recovery and Resilience Facility supporting national recovery and resilience plans, the EU has the tools to build back better. The Regulation states that gender equality and equal opportunities for all, and the mainstreaming of those objectives should be taken into account and promoted throughout the preparation and implementation of recovery and resilience plans. The Commission will monitor progress on the commitments made by the Member States and disbursements from the Facility are conditional upon the fulfilment of legally binding milestones and targets. For this purpose, the Commission adopted in November 2021 rules setting out common indicators on which Member States have to report twice a year<sup>212</sup>. A number of these indicators require Member States to collect data disaggregated by gender.

In **France**, companies receiving funds under the Recovery and Resilience Facility must publish a composite index on gender equality. The index measures several aspects such as equal pay, distribution of promotions and salary increases. Companies must set internal targets for a number of sub-indicators and failure to meet the targets may lead to financial penalties.

In **Austria**, the national recovery plan includes a provision on rights to transfer pension entitlements between parents, to mitigate the effect of career breaks and subsequent low lifetime incomes due to unpaid care work, which disproportionately affect women because they are more often responsible for childcare.

In **Czechia**, the recovery plan was designed to increase the labour market participation of women with young children through ample investment in pre-school facilities for children below the age of three. Similarly, in order to address the low availability of kindergarten facilities and its impact on women's participation in the labour market and on children's later school performance, **Slovakia** announced a new legal entitlement to pre-school education for children from the age of three.

The **Maltese** recovery plan includes the promotion of remote working solutions for the public administration in order to enable a better work life-balance and the implementation of measures included in the recently updated Employment Strategy for older workers (aged 55 to 64), low-skilled adults and on the gender employment gap.

Supporting gender balance is also an important guiding principle under the **InvestEU Programme**, the EU's flagship investment support instrument. It places a strong emphasis on measures promoting gender equality across its all four policy windows, namely the Sustainable Infrastructure Window; the Research, Innovation and Digitisation Window; the Small and Medium-sized Enterprises; and the Social Investment and Skills Window. Following the Investment Guidelines<sup>213</sup>, financial products designed under any of these policy windows should take into consideration the promotion of gender equality. In particular, such products will include measures incentivising female-led and diverse investment funds, which in turn – as research shows – invest more into women-led companies. In addition, dedicated technical assistance and capacity building will be provided to improve access to finance for women-founded and women-led companies; to increase women's representation in the investment community by identifying barriers, strengthening women's capacity, challenging unconscious bias; and to increase awareness of the gender funding gap.

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<sup>212</sup> Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2021/2106 of 28 September 2021 on supplementing Regulation (EU) 2021/241 of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Recovery and Resilience Facility by setting out the common indicators and the detailed elements of the recovery and resilience scoreboard, and its Annex, OJ 2021 L 429/83.

<sup>213</sup> Available at [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.L\\_.2021.234.01.0018.01.ENG&toc=OJ%3AL%3A2021%3A234%3ATOC](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.L_.2021.234.01.0018.01.ENG&toc=OJ%3AL%3A2021%3A234%3ATOC)

In the field of **research and innovation**, the adoption of the **Horizon Europe funding programme** in April 2021<sup>214</sup> marks a step change for gender equality. From 2022 onwards, public bodies, research organisations, universities and higher education institutions must have a gender equality plan in place to be eligible for EU funding. This requirement aims to systematically tackle the chronic under-representation of women in STEM and in the research community in general and is likely to become a real game changer. To help organisations in the Member States to get ready to apply the new eligibility criterion, the European Commission launched in 2021 a **European knowledge and support facility on institutional change through gender equality plans**<sup>215</sup>. This includes detailed guidance<sup>216</sup>, specific training sessions for countries that have a low amount of gender equality plans in place, and mutual learning workshops. Moreover, to ensure that research and innovation outputs are gender-sensitive and take biological and sociological differences into account, integrating the gender dimension into research proposals has become a requirement by default. Lastly, **gender balance in teams** has been strengthened as a ranking criterion for *ex-aequo* proposals.

**More and more EU spending programmes set inclusion and diversity obligations.** A diversity criterion was added to all funding schemes under **Creative Europe MEDIA**, which is part of the Creative Europe programme. All applicants must submit their proposals together with a diversity and inclusiveness strategy, which then has an impact on the selection of the projects to be evaluated and awarded. In line with the Implementing Decision setting out a framework of inclusion measures for **the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes**<sup>217</sup>, published in November 2021, participating organisations are invited to cover inclusion and diversity aspects in line with their needs and those of their community.

**The Commission also seeks to promote gender equality directly through its public procurement procedures.** In May 2021 it published the **'Buying Social' guide**<sup>218</sup> on taking account of social considerations in **public procurement**. It aims to provide practical guidance and recommendations to public buyers on how to integrate social policy objectives throughout the whole procurement process, and it includes examples and practices of how to factor in gender equality considerations. The guide is promoted through the Commission's communication channels and a series of online talks, each tackling a specific social objective in public procurement. After the first two events held at the end of 2021, a talk on promoting gender equality through public procurement is scheduled in February 2022.

The dedicated Commission funding programmes are also important instruments to promote progress on gender equality, in particular the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme (CERV), which was mentioned above<sup>219</sup>. Under the budget for the 'Equality and Rights' and 'Daphne' strands, EUR 261 million is allocated to activities that include the promotion of gender equality and prevention and combating gender-based violence. At least EUR 190 million specifically dedicated to gender-based violence and EUR 71 million to gender equality over the course of the programme. In 2021, the Commission published three calls for proposals under the Daphne and Gender Equality strands, with a total budget of EUR 54.5 million (see also Chapters 1 and 2).

**The EU continues to provide targeted funding for gender studies and intersectional research.** In 2021, this was the case of the Horizon Europe programme calls for proposals, namely 'Feminism for

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<sup>214</sup> Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe_en).

<sup>215</sup> Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/strategy/strategy-2020-2024/democracy-and-rights/gender-equality-research-and-innovation\\_en#gender-equality-plans-as-an-eligibility-criterion-in-horizon-europe](https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/strategy/strategy-2020-2024/democracy-and-rights/gender-equality-research-and-innovation_en#gender-equality-plans-as-an-eligibility-criterion-in-horizon-europe).

<sup>216</sup> Available at <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/ffcb06c3-200a-11ec-bd8e-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-232129669>.

<sup>217</sup> Available at [Commission Implementing Decision - framework of inclusion measures of Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps 2021-27 | Erasmus+ \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/erasmus-plus/erasmus-plus-programme/erasmus-plus-programme-2021-27_en).

<sup>218</sup> Available at <https://ec.europa.eu/docsroom/documents/45767>.

<sup>219</sup> See Regulation (EU) 2021/692, and launched in a four-day conference, the civil dialogue week in May 2021.

a new age of democracy’ and ‘Gender and social, economic and cultural empowerment’, as well as ‘Tackling gender, race and other biases in AI’. A budget of EUR 2.5 million has been also allocated under the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund<sup>220</sup> work programme 2022-2023 to promote gender equality in the **blue economy sectors**. The culture strand of Creative Europe includes the necessity to reflect on gender equality in all projects.

**The European Commission is working on a pilot methodology to track expenditure that promotes gender equality in the EU’s multiannual budget for 2021-2027<sup>221</sup>.** This work responds to calls by Member States, the European Parliament, as well as recommendations by the European Court of Auditors<sup>222</sup> to step up the commitment to gender mainstreaming in the EU’s long-term budget. The budget tracking method is being developed as a collaborative Commission-wide project and it feeds in input from external stakeholders, such as the EIGE, the European University Institute in Florence and the OECD. The Commission aims at testing the pilot methodology across all EU spending programmes in the context of Draft Budget 2023. A series of dedicated training sessions for the Commission’s budgetary officers has been organised in 2021 to build up institutional knowledge and to support the development and future implementation of this expenditure tracking methodology. From 2022 onwards, a recurrent specialised training on the inclusion of the gender equality dimension in the EU budget will be introduced.

**The Commission supports the development and implementation of gender mainstreaming in policy and funding also in the Member States.** In 2021, in the framework of the Technical Support Instrument, it launched a flagship project entitled ‘**Gender mainstreaming in public policy and budget processes**’<sup>223</sup>. This project was developed in close cooperation with the European Institute for Gender Equality, to provide the best possible expertise to the Member States on gender mainstreaming in any policy chosen by the Member State and in gender budgeting in particular. The Commission has received nine requests from different Member States related to this flagship project, of which seven were selected, and one will be covered partially. The projects will start in 2022.

## Gender mainstreaming structures and processes

Within the Commission, the dedicated **Task Force on Equality**, composed of an Equality Coordinator in each Directorate-General of the Commission and in the European External Action Service and of a task force secretariat, continued to support the Commission’s work in equality mainstreaming, including gender mainstreaming. In 2021, the work of Equality Coordinators focused on development of their respective services’ **equality mainstreaming work plans**, in which they specify how equality aspects, including gender equality, should be incorporated in their Directorates-General’ activities and initiatives. Several services set up equality working groups, to drive, develop and monitor the service’s work on mainstreaming equality, together with the Equality Coordinators<sup>224</sup>. Trainings on

<sup>220</sup> Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/oceans-and-fisheries/funding/emfaf\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/oceans-and-fisheries/funding/emfaf_en).

<sup>221</sup> Regulation: the Inter-institutional Agreement (IIA) underpinning the EU’s multiannual budget, available at [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/eu-budget/how-it-works/budget-law/interinstitutional-agreement\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/eu-budget/how-it-works/budget-law/interinstitutional-agreement_en)

<sup>222</sup> ECA special report, ‘Gender mainstreaming in the EU budget: time to turn words into action.’ Available at: [https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR21\\_10/SR\\_Gender\\_mainstreaming\\_EN.pdf](https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR21_10/SR_Gender_mainstreaming_EN.pdf)

<sup>223</sup> Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/b1\\_-\\_gender\\_mainstreaming.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/b1_-_gender_mainstreaming.pdf)

<sup>224</sup> For example, both Directorate-General for **Energy (DG ENER)** and for **Mobility and Transport (MOVE)** created informal networks of colleagues from different Directorates, whose goal is to bring forward the Commission’s equality agenda by promoting equality in these DGs, contributing to the work of the Taskforce on Equality and developing initiatives concerning equality matters in the energy sector. In October 2021, the senior management of DG for **Economic and Financial Affairs (ECFIN)** adopted an equality plan containing a list of 22 actions to mainstream equality (including gender equality) into the internal and the external dimension of ECFIN’s work. The ECFIN equality plan was drafted by the ECFIN Group on Equality Mainstreaming, a cross-DG working group, which will also oversee implementation of the plan. Similarly, in July 2021, both DG for **Maritime Affairs and Fisheries** and DG for **Mobility and Transport** adopted their equality work

equality mainstreaming, including specific ones on gender mainstreaming, were provided to equality coordinators and to all Commission staff.

Equality coordinators cooperate closely and exchange best practices on gender mainstreaming also in the context of coordination structures such as the **inter-service group on equality between women and men**.

The revised **better regulation guidelines and tools** published by the Commission in November 2021<sup>225</sup> strengthen the identification and analysis of gender equality impacts in relevant impact assessments and evaluations.

In April 2021, the European Parliament adopted the roadmap to implement its new gender action plan. It includes a range of specific actions and, for the first time, it also covers the political groups in Parliament. It sets out specific actions together with timelines (milestones) to help monitor progress. The actions include the Parliament's repeated calls for gender impact assessments and gender budgeting, improved coordination between the different bodies responsible for gender mainstreaming within the Parliament, and building up in-house gender mainstreaming awareness and capacity<sup>226</sup>. For instance, in June 2021, EIGE provided a training on gender impact assessments for MEPs and their assistants (and further training courses are planned for the future).

**The Belgian federal government** adopted, in June 2021, the Federal Gender Mainstreaming Plan 2020-2024. This plan identifies a large number of policies where the government is committed to gender mainstreaming. In terms of capacity building, it has organised training sessions on gender mainstreaming for key stakeholders in the government, including several ministerial cabinets.

In **Spain**, one of the specific targets of the plan for gender equality developed in the General State Administration and in its public bodies is gender mainstreaming. This target applies in particular when analysing and designing strategies with a gender perspective, when carrying out gender impact assessments, gender budgeting and when defining and applying gender indicators in all internal policies of the administration. The plan also provides for training for certain groups (occupational safety and health committees, confidential advisers, human resources managers, legal or communication departments etc.) to acquire knowledge, tools and instruments to integrate the gender perspective in their work. For example, the Ministry for Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge is putting in place a new working group for gender mainstreaming to work across the sectoral policies of the Ministry.

plans, which sets out a roadmap to strengthen and mainstream equality in its initiatives, including in the area of gender. DG **Budget** (BUDG) has nominated two equality coordinators to be part of the Task Force for Equality, one focusing on mainstreaming gender equality within DG BUDG itself and another on supervising the development of a gender equality tracking method for the EU budget as a whole. DG BUDG has also nominated seven Equality Focus Points who are part of the BUDG Equality Task Force, which was launched in Q2 2021 as a platform for pre-screening gender equality relevance initiatives or files within their Directorate. DG for **Structural Reform Support** (REFORM) has a well-established equality project team led by DG REFORM Equality Coordinator and composed of at least one member from each unit in the DG. The team meets, on average, every fortnight. The DG REFORM Equality team has prepared a draft work plan on mainstreaming equality, which envisages 30 concrete actions. DG for Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion (EMPL) has adopted its Equality mainstreaming plan and has set up a dedicated webpage to facilitate awareness raising and share information on equality issues within the DG.

<sup>225</sup> Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/law-making-process/planning-and-proposing-law/better-regulation-why-and-how/better-regulation-guidelines-and-toolbox\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/law-making-process/planning-and-proposing-law/better-regulation-why-and-how/better-regulation-guidelines-and-toolbox_en)

<sup>226</sup> Available at [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/694216/EPRS\\_STU\(2021\)694216\\_EN.pdf#:~:text=The%20gender%20mainstreaming%20policy%20was%20formally%20launched%20by,the%20state%20of%20gender%20mainstreaming%20in%20the%20EP.](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/694216/EPRS_STU(2021)694216_EN.pdf#:~:text=The%20gender%20mainstreaming%20policy%20was%20formally%20launched%20by,the%20state%20of%20gender%20mainstreaming%20in%20the%20EP.)

**Estonia** has publicised a virtual gender equality competence centre developed by the Ministry of Social Affairs under the Norway Grants project. The aim of the centre is to publicise information about gender equality, including principles, legislation, concepts, indicators, studies, relevance to different policy fields among other aspects, both for the public but also more specifically to policymakers, educationalists and employers. It will make further training modules for self-learning available to at least one main target group of the centre in 2022.

In **Romania**, the National Agency for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men (ANES) launched a series of measures that aim to prevent and combat discrimination based on gender, including gender-based violence. It has also raised awareness of the real benefits to society of respecting and promoting the principle of equal opportunities and treatment of women and men. In addition to running a national campaign to boost awareness of moral harassment in the workplace, Romania has run an awareness raising and competition campaign entitled 'Advertising for Equality' in partnership with the Faculty of Political Science of the University of Bucharest. The campaign aims to promote gender-sensitive advertising by advertising companies and to encourage advertising companies to promote, respect and encourage gender equality through the messages and adverts they send out.

Externally, many of the **sectoral social dialogue committees** supported by the Commission (e.g. in the sectors of performing arts, audio-visual, railways, road transport, aviation, maritime, ports, and inland waterways transport), and cross-industry social partners, give high priority to discussing gender equality at work. Although these are autonomous discussions by social partners, the Commission supports them with technical and logistical support for meetings and with presentations by Commission services when requested by the social partners. In the field of railways, these efforts led to the signing of a European Social Partner Agreement on Women in Rail, in November 2021, by the Community of European Railway and Infrastructure Companies (CER) and the European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF). The new autonomous agreement promotes gender equality and gender diversity in the rail sector, while also covering the prevention of violence and harassment<sup>227</sup>.

More importantly, some of the Commission funded projects under the dedicated budget lines for social dialogue include a gender component. For example, a joint project on the role of social partners in preventing third-party violence and harassment at work<sup>228</sup> and a project on visualising and measuring the role of industrial relations in addressing gender equality took place in September 2021. This research project of several social partners aims to develop a sound understanding of the role of industrial relations players in shaping progress towards gender equality in European labour markets, at both national and European level<sup>229</sup>.

## Intersectionality in implementing gender equality policy

**Intersectionality is a cross-cutting principle to follow when implementing the gender equality strategy**<sup>230</sup>. Understanding and addressing how the intersection of sex with other personal characteristics or identities contributes to unique experiences of discrimination is crucial to properly

<sup>227</sup> Available at <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=10097&furtherNews=yes>.

<sup>228</sup> VS/2021/0046. Available at <https://www.epsu.org/article/project-third-party-violence-and-harassment>.

<sup>229</sup> (VIRAGE) VS/2020/0115. Available at <https://www.ceps.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Gender-equality-and-industrial-relations-in-the-EU-an-analytical-framework.pdf>.

<sup>230</sup> EIGE defines 'intersectionality' as an 'analytical tool for studying, understanding and responding to the ways in which sex and gender intersect with other personal characteristics/identities, and how these intersections contribute to unique experiences of discrimination' (See: <https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1263>). According to Article 10 TFEU, when 'defining and implementing its policies and activities, the Union shall aim to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation'.

address gender equality challenges. Intersectionality is also inherent to the implementation of the EU's other strategic frameworks on equality<sup>231</sup>. The European Commission's Task Force on Equality helps integrate the principle of intersectionality into gender equality policy, as it works to mainstream five other strands of equality in addition to gender.

Intersectionality has been integrated in the **Commission's proposal for a directive on pay transparency**<sup>232</sup> and is also an important element of the upcoming **proposal for a directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence**. In the first proposal, the definition of gender pay discrimination includes intersectional discrimination (involving combination of grounds of sex on the one hand, and racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation on the other hand) and must be taken into account in the legal framework. The second proposal aims to ensure that Member States pay specific attention to the heightened risk of violence against women and domestic violence experienced by victims who face discrimination due to the combination of their gender or sex with other grounds of prohibited discrimination so as to cater for their enhanced protection and support needs.

Intersectionality features prominently in the implementation of the EU Roma Strategic Framework, which requires Member States to set out targets and measures for specific groups in their national Roma strategic frameworks, including for Roma women. The aim is to reflect diversity among Roma people and to encourage gender-responsive measures. In particular, the joint Council of Europe/European Commission programme '**Roma Women's Access to Justice**'<sup>233</sup>, was implemented in 2021 in Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Romania to address multiple aspects of discrimination and improve access to justice for Roma women. Among other achievements, the programme boosted professional resources and capacity at national level among the judiciary, law enforcement and human rights advocates to combat discrimination against Roma women.

The actions set out under the **LGBTIQ Equality Strategy** are also being implemented. In particular, the Commission set up an LGBTIQ equality subgroup in 2021 under the High-Level Group on non-discrimination, equality and diversity to support and monitor progress in the Member States, including progress in developing national action plans on LGBTIQ equality. The above-mentioned Commission initiative to trigger a Council decision to extend the list of 'EU crimes' (Article 83 TFEU) to hate crime and hate speech would result in creating a legal basis for the Commission to propose, at a second stage, the criminalisation of hate speech and hate crime, including when targeted at LGBTIQ people.

To implement the **EU strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities**, the Commission created a Disability Platform<sup>234</sup>, which held its first meeting in December 2021. The Platform is composed of representatives of the Commission, Member States, and the EU-level civil society organisations. It will be a forum to discuss policy developments in the field of disability (including women with disabilities), which will include discussing individual actions of the new strategy, exchanging good practice, and it will reflect diversity among people with disabilities.

Finally, intersectionality has also featured in the work to implement the **EU anti-racism action plan**. On 30 September 2021, the Commission organised a roundtable on equality data bringing together key stakeholders to examine obstacles to the collection of data related to racial or ethnic origin and identify ways to achieve a more harmonised approach, including on intersectional data as regards,

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<sup>231</sup> See the frameworks: the EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation for 2020- 2030, the LGBTIQ equality strategy 2020-2025, the EU anti-racism action plan 2020-2025 and the strategy on the rights of persons with disabilities for 2021-2030.

<sup>232</sup> Available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52021PC0093>.

<sup>233</sup> Available at [Roma Women's Access to Justice - phase 3 \(JUSTROM3\) \(coe.int\)](https://romea.europa.eu/romea/romea-3).

<sup>234</sup> The Commission Decision C(2021) 7591 setting up the group of experts "Disability Platform", available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32021D1111%2801%29&qid=1643887864981>

for instance, religion or belief and gender. The subgroup presented the guidance note on improving the collection and use of equality data based on ethnic and racial origin at this round table meeting.

## Monitoring the gender equality strategy

To monitor progress towards the objectives in the gender equality strategy, and to track the state of play on gender equality in the EU over time, the Commission has developed a tailor-made monitoring framework in collaboration with the European Institute for Gender Equality. Launched in March 2021, the monitoring framework is comprised of indicators reflecting the main aspects and key policy objectives of the strategy. An online platform, **the Gender Equality Strategy Monitoring Portal**<sup>235</sup>, makes data on the indicators available to all stakeholders, which can then feed into policymaking and public debate. Over the past year, the Commission has developed and fine-tuned the monitoring framework to improve the indicators and the user-friendliness of the online portal.

## PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT ACROSS THE WORLD

The EU has long demonstrated its commitment to protecting and promoting gender equality in relations with third countries. It is a key political objective of its external action and common foreign and security policy. It aims at accelerating progress on empowering and promoting the rights of women and girls towards an equal world. The EU also aims at safeguarding advances in gender equality to fulfil its international obligations and commitments. These include the **Beijing Platform for Action**, the **Women, Peace and Security agenda** and the United Nations **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**.

## Mainstreaming gender in the EU's external action

EU external action is guided by the objectives set out in the **EU action plan on gender equality and women's empowerment in external relations 2021-2025 (Gender Action Plan (GAP) III)**<sup>236</sup> and in the **EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024**<sup>237</sup>. In particular, the GAP III gives direction and guidance for applying and monitoring gender mainstreaming across various sectors of activity and measuring its results at country, regional and international levels. It also provides a policy framework to scale up EU engagement on gender equality, implementing a gender-transformative, rights-based and intersectional approach across its policy and programming work. Gender equality is an integral part of the EU's political and human rights dialogues with third countries and regional organisations, being also integrated into actions in multilateral and regional human rights fora. As of 2021, the EU's commitment to gender equality in external action is further reinforced by the appointment of the new Ambassador for Gender and Diversity.

GAP III aligns with the funding commitment under **the new EU foreign policy funding programme, the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI – Global Europe)** with a budget of EUR 79 billion<sup>238</sup>. It sets an ambitious target that at least 85% of all new actions should contribute to gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment. At least 5% of

<sup>235</sup> Available at <https://composite-indicators.jrc.ec.europa.eu/ges-monitor>.

<sup>236</sup> Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/news/gender-action-plan-putting-women-and-girls-rights-heart-global-recovery-gender-equal-world\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/news/gender-action-plan-putting-women-and-girls-rights-heart-global-recovery-gender-equal-world_en).

<sup>237</sup> Available at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/46838/st12848-en20.pdf>.

<sup>238</sup> Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/global-europe-neighbourhood-development-and-international-cooperation-instrument\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/global-europe-neighbourhood-development-and-international-cooperation-instrument_en).

these actions should promote gender equality as a principal objective. To reach these targets, the funding programme sets out concrete objectives and indicators for applying and monitoring gender mainstreaming and measuring results<sup>239</sup>.

In 2021, EU engagement, dialogue and partnership continued to focus on ensuring that the gender perspective is mainstreamed in all regional and multilateral programmes and activities. As part of the NDICI-Global Europe programming exercise, specific instructions and guidance led to the integration of the gender perspective in all multiannual indicative programmes (or equivalent), defining priorities and actions for the 2021-2027 period, and the set-up of the GAP III country-level implementation plans. These country plans, a new tool under GAP III, ensure a shared EU vision and consistent approach between the EU and its Member States ('Team Europe'), increased alignment, and strong ownership and participation of all local players. The plans were developed by each EU Delegation in cooperation with EU Member States, based on a gender analysis, and in dialogue with national governments and authorities, the private sector and civil society, including grassroots, youth and women's organisations.

The **first annual reporting** exercise on the institutional and strategic objectives of GAP III was launched in November 2021, with results to be issued in autumn 2022 in the Annual Report on the implementation of the European Union's instruments for financing external actions. As of February 2022, **120 GAP III country-level action plans** have been submitted from EU delegations in third countries and from EU delegations to international organisations (notably the UN in New York and Geneva, the OSCE, and the Holy See and UN organisations in Rome). They are already proving to be a useful tool for localising EU action to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment.

Under the **Human Rights and Democracy thematic programme**<sup>240</sup> and the **Global Europe Civil Society Organisations programme**<sup>241</sup>, actions will focus on support to women's human rights defenders and women's movements, women's and girls' political empowerment and participation in the public sphere. EU global action on gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment<sup>242</sup> will promote legislative reform in partner countries and help build alliances to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality. It will further focus on the eradication of sexual and gender-based violence, building on the European Commission's co-lead in the **Generation Equality Forum** and on the **EU-UN Spotlight Initiative** and replicating its lessons learned by supporting knowledge building and encouraging further donors' mobilisation.

The objective that at least 85% of all new actions have to be **gender-responsive also applies to blending and guarantee programmes** financed by the EU in third countries. The EU External Investment Plan blending programme **Women's Financial Inclusion Facility**<sup>243</sup> has now reached a total of EUR 65 million. By 2021, it had invested in four portfolio companies selected to reach women who have been underserved by financial services. Since 2021, the technical assistance component of

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<sup>239</sup> In 2020, the share of new external actions (programmes and projects) that contributed to gender equality and women's empowerment reached 68%, a continuous increase from 58% in 2016.

<sup>240</sup> Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/topics/human-rights\\_en#header-1942](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/topics/human-rights_en#header-1942).

<sup>241</sup> Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/news/global-europe-eu-launches-global-eu15-billion-programme-support-civil-society-organisations\\_en#:~:text=The%20Global%20Europe%20Civil%20Society%20Organisations%20programme%2C%20funded,Civil%20Society%20Organisations%20and%20Local%20Authorities%20programme%202014-2020](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/news/global-europe-eu-launches-global-eu15-billion-programme-support-civil-society-organisations_en#:~:text=The%20Global%20Europe%20Civil%20Society%20Organisations%20programme%2C%20funded,Civil%20Society%20Organisations%20and%20Local%20Authorities%20programme%202014-2020).

<sup>242</sup> Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/mip-2021-c2021-9157-global-challenges-annex\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/mip-2021-c2021-9157-global-challenges-annex_en.pdf).

<sup>243</sup> Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/eu-external-investment-plan/projects/womens-financial-inclusion-facility-wfif\\_en#:~:text=The%20Women%E2%80%99s%20Financial%20Inclusion%20Facility%20will%20promote%20gender,inclusion%20in%20support%20of%20the%20Sustainable%20Development%20Goals](https://ec.europa.eu/eu-external-investment-plan/projects/womens-financial-inclusion-facility-wfif_en#:~:text=The%20Women%E2%80%99s%20Financial%20Inclusion%20Facility%20will%20promote%20gender,inclusion%20in%20support%20of%20the%20Sustainable%20Development%20Goals).

the programme also supports investee financial service providers to improve their gender performance.<sup>244</sup>

Working towards the GAP III objective of promoting gender responsive leadership, the Commission and the European External Action Service have continued in 2021 to support staff at headquarters, in EU delegations and in regional teams by **providing coaching and training on gender, age and diversity**.<sup>245</sup>

The GAP III emphasises the need to forge strong partnerships and close cooperation with civil society and local authority partners throughout its implementation. To this end, the European Commission and the European External Action Service have launched a **structured dialogue**. The first annual event on 25 November 2021 brought together EU decision-makers and representatives from more than 80 civil society and local authority networks at European, regional and global levels. It focused on fostering a strategic approach, increasing alignment and local ownership for the promotion of gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment.

The EU continues to implement the **EU Strategic Approach to Women, Peace and Security (WPS)** and its action plan as part of GAP III. Mandatory training for staff in the EU's common security and defence policy (CSDP) missions on WPS, including conflict-related sexual violence, plays an important role. Furthermore, several CSDP missions are training local law enforcement and security officers on gender equality, women, peace and security, and international humanitarian law. Following the Council Conclusions of December 2020<sup>246</sup>, a new **Concept on EU Peace Mediation** is being used by a gender-balanced pool of EU peace mediators. The first-ever Guidelines on Peace Mediation<sup>247</sup> support EU mediators and implementing partners in translating EU mediation principles into practice. In addition, mentorship for women leaders and mediators is provided through the Women as Actors in Peace Processes project (EUR 3 million, 2020-2023). The project aims at effective participation of women in peace processes, through networking, funding and capacity building. Activities focus on the Middle East and North Africa.

Moreover, one of the prime EU external instruments for rapid crisis response and conflict prevention – the **Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace**<sup>248</sup> and **Rapid Response Actions**<sup>249</sup> (which now forms part of the Global Europe programme) has been increasingly mobilised to promote Women, Peace and Security. In 2021, more than 70% of new actions had gender equality and the participation of women in peace processes either as their main objective or as a significant component<sup>250</sup>.

In a similar vein, EU-funded **humanitarian action** has experienced positive improvements in gender mainstreaming, gender targeted actions, and capacity building – as demonstrated in a recent evaluation for the years 2014-2018<sup>251</sup>. Humanitarian policies on gender and humanitarian protection

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<sup>244</sup> For example, the EU funded the creation of a dedicated Kenya risk-sharing facility (EUR 19.2 million) that ensures access to finance, under appropriate conditions, for women and youth-owned/led agribusinesses. Other projects, with a total volume of more than EUR 200 million, mainly benefit micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, with a specific focus on women's empowerment and gender equality.

<sup>245</sup> A series of coaching sessions was rolled out in 2021, focusing on: gender and cultural barriers; gender and security; gender and peace negotiations/mediation; and children's rights. Further thematic training and webinars focused on gender mainstreaming across policy priorities such as jobs and growth, green transition, digital transformation and migration.

<sup>246</sup> Available at <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13573-2020-INIT/en/pdf>.

<sup>247</sup> Available at [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eeas\\_mediation\\_guidelines\\_14122020.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eeas_mediation_guidelines_14122020.pdf).

<sup>248</sup> Available at [https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/instrument-contributing-stability-and-peace-icsp/422/instrument-contributing-stability-and-peace-icsp\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/instrument-contributing-stability-and-peace-icsp/422/instrument-contributing-stability-and-peace-icsp_en).

<sup>249</sup> Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/fpi/what-we-do/conflict-prevention-peace-and-stability\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/fpi/what-we-do/conflict-prevention-peace-and-stability_en).

<sup>250</sup> For example, the project Preventing Violent Extremism: Integrating Gender Perspectives supports the inclusion of women-led grassroots and civil society organisations in intergovernmental platforms. They look at current challenges and possible responses to violent extremism and participate in UN-led counter-terrorism policymaking processes, with a particular focus on Jordan and Pakistan.

<sup>251</sup> Evaluation of the EU's implementation of the DG ECHO Thematic Policy Document "Gender:

are in place, as well as a humanitarian gender-age marker<sup>252</sup>. The latest **European Commission Communication on Humanitarian Action**, adopted in March 2021, maintains the aim to protect women caught in crisis situations as a strong feature of the EU's humanitarian aid. In line with the Gender Action Plan, it includes the prevention, mitigation and response to sexual and gender-based violence and sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment. The Communication also stresses the European Union's continued commitment to be an active member of the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies<sup>253</sup>.

Still, the 85% goal represents a unique challenge for EU-funded projects in this domain, due to the notion of humanitarian projects that need to comply with the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. In certain circumstances, the long-term aim of gender equality might be endangered by any initiative's short-term unintended consequences that could violate the 'do no harm' principle of humanitarian projects: e.g. women experiencing intimate partners' violence for participation in women's empowerment projects. For that reason, even if all humanitarian aid projects mainstream gender, they do not necessarily have a specific gender equality component as a specific objective. The **Gender-Age Marker** assessment used for project selection includes gender analysis, but also the integration of 'do no harm' mitigating/preventing measures and participation of gender-age groups. It results from the assessment that, **on average, almost 90% of projects mainstream gender-age well or to some extent.**

The EU supports the promotion of gender equality also in the **enlargement and neighbourhood regions**. For instance, the EU ensures that gender is mainstreamed through the **EU accession process** and that the EU gender equality *acquis* is transposed in candidate and potential candidate countries<sup>254</sup>. In 2021, the region continued to demonstrate progress in this area.

In 2021, the capacities of beneficiaries of the **Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance** were further strengthened, with support from the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)<sup>255</sup>, in both gender mainstreaming and monitoring of gender equality, by developing tools such as gender equality indices and data collection on women and men in decision-making. In the Eastern Neighbourhood the regional programme **EU4Gender Equality – Together against gender stereotypes and gender-based violence**<sup>256</sup> continued in 2021, and has reached more than 3.4 million people in the Eastern partner countries with actions challenging gender stereotypes. With **20 Fathers' Clubs** opening across the region, men are engaged in active fatherhood and caregiving, gender equality, and violence prevention. In addition, the **EU4Gender Equality: Reform Helpdesk**<sup>257</sup> was launched in 2021, and supports Eastern partnership governments' reform work towards equal opportunities for women and men.

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Different Needs, Adapted Assistance" of July 2013 (2014-2018), Final Report, April 2021, available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/echo/funding-evaluations/evaluations/thematic-evaluations\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/funding-evaluations/evaluations/thematic-evaluations_en)

<sup>252</sup> Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/echo/what/humanitarian-aid/gender-and-age-sensitive-aid\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/what/humanitarian-aid/gender-and-age-sensitive-aid_en).

<sup>253</sup> Available at <https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/hacommunication2021.pdf>.

<sup>254</sup> The UN Women Fund for Gender Equality has allocated for that aim respectively: EUR 2 million in Serbia (2021-2024), EUR 0.5 million in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2020-2022), and EUR 0.7 million in Albania (2021-2023).

<sup>255</sup> The EU has a strong commitment to help the region on their path to EU accession. The project 'Increased capacity of EU candidate countries and potential candidates to measure and monitor the impact of gender equality policies' is being implemented by EIGE over the period 2018-2022.

<sup>256</sup> The initiative was implemented jointly by UN Women and UNFPA in the six Eastern Partnership countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. With a total budget of EUR 7.875 million and an EU contribution of EUR 7.5 million, it was launched in March 2020 for a duration of 36 months. See: <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/eu-4-gender-equality>.

<sup>257</sup> Available at <https://euneighbourseast.eu/news-and-stories/publications/eu4-gender-equality-reform-helpdesk/>.

## Multilateral efforts for women's empowerment

As part of its multilateral engagement, the EU continues to engage actively with the UN system, including DPPA<sup>258</sup> and DPO<sup>259</sup>, UN WOMEN<sup>260</sup>, UNDP<sup>261</sup> and UNFPA<sup>262</sup>. During 2021, the UN-EU strategic partnership on peace operations and crisis management presented new priorities for 2022-2024. Women, Peace and Security will continue to form the first priority of this partnership. Furthermore, the EU participated actively in the 65th session of the **Commission on the Status of Women** (CSW), the main international intergovernmental body dedicated exclusively to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Moreover, EU engagement in the **Generation Equality Forum**<sup>263</sup> is a catalyst for collective action by bringing commitments for gender equality. The European Commission in its role as co-leader of the Gender-Based Violence action coalition notably participated and contributed to the shaping of the 'Global acceleration plan'<sup>264</sup>. In addition, as part of the preparations for the third joint EU NATO declaration, and building on the cooperation on Women, Peace and Security in the current and second joint declaration, work on new joint WPS priorities started in 2021.

Key partnerships of the EU with the UN strengthen multilateralism and contribute to important policy development and business model changes on women's empowerment in Asia, in the Americas and in the G7 and G20 fora. In May 2021, for the first time ever, the **G20** held a conference dedicated exclusively to the issue of women's empowerment. It brought attention to the quality of women's roles within society and the implementation of policies aimed at increasing women's participation in the public and private sphere, the protection of their rights, and tackling gender-based violence. In the course of 2021, the EU played a pivotal role in the Working Group on Gender Equality under the UK Presidency of the G7 and in the technical Working Group on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence. In particular, in the G7, it supported gender mainstreaming in all ministerial tracks and the design of a new accountability framework.

The **We Empower programme**<sup>265</sup> (EUR 22.5 million), which was jointly put in place by the EU, UN Women and the International Labour Organization (ILO) to promote economic empowerment of women at work through responsible business conduct, was evaluated in 2021. The evaluation concluded that the programme contributed to increasing public and private sector commitment to gender equality and to women's empowerment in the world of work at all levels.<sup>266</sup>

## The EU's external action against gender-based violence

**The EU continued to challenge harmful gender norms and stereotypes, which perpetuate violence against women worldwide.** In partnership with the UN, the Commission continued its supported actions under the **EU-UN Spotlight Initiative** – the largest worldwide initiative (EUR 500 million) and one that is unique in terms of global strategy and theory of change to prevent and eliminate all forms

<sup>258</sup> Available at <https://dppa.un.org/en>.

<sup>259</sup> Available at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/department-of-peace-operations>.

<sup>260</sup> Available at <https://www.unwomen.org/en>.

<sup>261</sup> Available at <https://www.undp.org/>.

<sup>262</sup> Available at <https://www.unfpa.org/>.

<sup>263</sup> GEF is a civil society centred, multi-stakeholder global gathering for gender equality, convened by UN Women and co-hosted by the governments of France and Mexico, in partnership with civil society and youth. Available at <https://forum.generationequality.org/>.

<sup>264</sup> Available at <https://forum.generationequality.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/UNW%20-%20GAP%20Report%20-%20EN.pdf>.

<sup>265</sup> See at <https://www.empowerwomen.org/en/projects/we-empower-g7>.

<sup>266</sup> In particular, the programme enabled the EU to engage with Asian and Latin American networks of women entrepreneurs, public institutions, and the private sector to ensure full implementation of the Women's Empowerment Principles, see also

<https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2021/Womens-Empowerment-Principles-A-snapshot-of-350-companies-in-the-G7-en.pdf>.

of violence against women and girls. Since mid-2021, implementation is ongoing in 26 countries and 6 regions. The Annual Report issued in May 2021 and a Mid-Term Assessment of the initiative in 12 countries confirmed the relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of the Spotlight Initiative. This initiative was assessed with solid results and innovative, comprehensive, multi-layered, transformative, inclusive and participatory approaches, notably during the COVID-19 crisis.

The Commission remains committed to preventing gender-based violence in humanitarian crises. In 2021, the EU continued to be an active member of the global initiative **Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies**<sup>267</sup>, which brings together more than 90 partners comprising governments and donors, international organisations and non-governmental organisations. Under a new Call to Action Road Map covering the period 2021-2025, the EU committed to a series of actions:

- implementation of relevant policies;
- capacity-building of staff and partners;
- advocacy on gender-based violence in emergencies and the Call to Action;
- support to survivors of gender-based violence;
- annual tracking and reporting on funding to the Grand Bargain;
- integration of gender-based violence risk mitigation in all aspects of humanitarian assistance;
- promotion of participation of gender and age groups in all aspects of humanitarian assistance; and
- strengthening the nexus approach in preventing and responding to gender-based violence.

Estimates show that in 2021, the EU allocated approximately EUR 33.1 million in humanitarian aid to prevent and respond to gender-based violence under its protection and health programming. Furthermore, in 2021, the EU allocated approximately EUR 29.7 million to reproductive health from its humanitarian health programming.

In 2021, the EU supported the **Global Fund for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence**. The Fund seeks to fill the existing gap between the rights of survivors of conflict-related sexual violence and their access to reparations. Its implementation already started with a number of pilot projects in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea and Iraq<sup>268</sup>.

**Ending violence against women is also an important part of accession strategy in the Western Balkans and Turkey.** Anchored in the normative frameworks of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Istanbul Convention, the programme “Implementing norms, changing minds”<sup>269</sup> builds on partnerships with civil society organisations and led to a number of important legislative changes in the region. For example, in North Macedonia, the Criminal Code is being revised to include provisions set down in the Istanbul Convention and the new Law on Gender-Based Violence and Domestic Violence, in compliance with the Istanbul Convention, was unanimously adopted by the Parliament in January 2021. In a similar vein, delivering on the Istanbul Convention is part of the EU’s support to reforms in the Eastern Partnership and Mediterranean. For example, the Partnership for Good Governance: Women’s access to justice project<sup>270</sup> continued to support the **delivery of the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention** and other European gender equality standards in the Eastern partner countries. In addition, bilateral projects to

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<sup>267</sup> Available at <https://www.calltoactiongbv.com/>.

<sup>268</sup> Available at [Projects — Global Survivor Fund \(globalsurvivorsfund.org\)](https://www.projects-global-survivor-fund.org/).

<sup>269</sup> *Implementing norms, changing minds*, Phase II project with a total budget of EUR 6,263,734; implementation 1 February 2020 to 31 July 2023.

<sup>270</sup> Available at <https://www.coe.int/en/web/genderequality/strengthening-access-to-justice-for-women-victims-of-violence-2019-2021->.

promote gender equality and combat gender-based violence were carried out in all Eastern partner countries.

The EU continues to support and monitor the situation for women and girls in **Afghanistan**. The European External Action Service is having an ongoing dialogue with Afghan women, including women leaders, to inform our understanding and decision-making and to monitor whether the conditions set by the Foreign Affairs Council are met, in a complementary and supportive way to the UN Special Rapporteur (to be in place by March 2022). Strengthening resilience and empowerment of women and girls affected by the **Syrian crisis** is part of the EU Regional Trust Fund<sup>271</sup> programme run in Iraq, Jordan and Turkey (EUR 12.5 million). It also focuses on better access to decent work and economic opportunities.

## Gender and trade

**The Commission continues to promote the gender dimension in trade agreements.** It is systematically included in its **effectiveness assessments** of EU trade agreements: before negotiations through impact assessments, during negotiations in sustainability impact assessments and for applied agreements in *ex post* evaluations. A specific **trade and gender article** is also being included in the Trade and Sustainable Development chapter in ongoing deepened trade negotiations (e.g. Economic Partnership Agreements<sup>272</sup>, EU-Eastern and Southern Africa<sup>273</sup> and New Zealand<sup>274</sup>). A separate dedicated **gender chapter** has been included in the **Chile** agreement as a pilot project.

In the context of the Trade and Gender Recommendation under the EU-**Canada** Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), and to mark International Women's Day, Canada and the EU co-hosted, in March 2021, a webinar to take stock of recent developments in regard to gender, trade and standards. Going forward, the trade and gender focal points for Canada and the EU will consider how this event could serve as a model for future work to support applying a gender perspective to other committee work under CETA.

In 2021, the Commission worked on the follow-up of the 2017 *Joint Declaration on Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment*. In October, it launched a **gender-lens project**<sup>275</sup> together with the International Trade Centre.

In 2021, the EU co-sponsored a new **Joint Ministerial Declaration on the Advancement of Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment within Trade**<sup>276</sup> for the 12th WTO Ministerial Conference (MC12)<sup>277</sup>. By 15 December 2021, the declaration had gained 121 co-sponsors, including the US (absent from the Buenos Aires Declaration). The Declaration is expected to be adopted at the latest at MC12, but this could also happen earlier.

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<sup>271</sup> Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/trustfund-syria-region/index\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/trustfund-syria-region/index_en).

<sup>272</sup> Available at <https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/development/economic-partnerships/#:~:text=On%20October%202019%2C%20the%20EU%20started%20negotiations,of%20round%20reports%20and%20textual%20proposals%20being%20negotiated,t,African%2C%20Caribbean%20and%20Pacific%20%28ACP%29%20countries%20and%20regions>.

<sup>273</sup> Available at <https://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/press/index.cfm?id=2110#:~:text=On%20October%202019%2C%20the%20EU%20started%20negotiations,of%20round%20reports%20and%20textual%20proposals%20being%20negotiated>.

<sup>274</sup> Available at <https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/countries/new-zealand/>.

<sup>275</sup> Available at [https://www.wto.org/english/tratop\\_e/womenandtrade\\_e/230621\\_eu.pdf](https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/womenandtrade_e/230621_eu.pdf).

<sup>276</sup> Available at <https://docs.wto.org/dol2fe/Pages/SS/directdoc.aspx?filename=q:/WT/MIN21/4R1.pdf&Open=True>.

<sup>277</sup> Available at [https://www.wto.org/english/thewto\\_e/minist\\_e/mc12\\_e/mc12\\_e.htm](https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/minist_e/mc12_e/mc12_e.htm).

## Conclusion

Gender equality gained momentum in recent years. It became more prominent in the media, in international debates, and attracted a clearly increased commitment on the political scene. In the European Commission, Commissioner Dalli, supported by a dedicated task force, took responsibility for reflecting women's issues across its policies and advancing the gender equality agenda. In 2021, for instance, this work resulted in the strengthening of the identification and analysis of gender equality impacts in better regulation procedures, in particular in impact assessments and evaluations produced by the Commission.

At the same time, gender equality continued to be under pressure in certain Member States and outside the EU, with a tendency in some countries to restrict and backslide on women's rights.

Looking ahead, it will remain important to counter the setbacks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, especially given that studies<sup>278</sup> show that the socioeconomic impact of the crisis might last much longer for women than for men. In order to counter any further set back and empower women economically, the Commission has set the target to halve the gender employment gap by 2030 through the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan. Women can only thrive on the labour market and contribute fully, if their opportunities in and access to the labour market are facilitated with concrete actions. Increasing the provision of formal early childhood education and care will support the overall employment rate target. It will give weight to prioritising measures to promote women's labour market participation, including under the Recovery and Resilience Facility. The upcoming revision of the Barcelona targets on childcare as part of the European Care Strategy is envisaged to be adopted in September 2022. Together with the investment in childcare and long-term care services under their national recovery plans, the revised targets will encourage positive development towards women's employment and empowerment. Moreover, the general trend in homeworking and the visible acceleration in the availability and uptake of remote work also created a new opening for faster implementation of measures under the Work-Life Balance Directive (which Member States have to implement by August 2022), and towards a more equal sharing of unpaid work, especially in dual-income couples.

In the area of leadership, the changes in government in some Member States brought a breakthrough in negotiations of 'gender balance on company boards' proposal, and its adoption finally seems within reach after 10 years<sup>279</sup>. As President von der Leyen said on the occasion of the presentation of the 2021 Gender Diversity Index<sup>280</sup>: 'It is the knock-on effect that matters. As more diverse boards hire more diverse CEOs who in turn hire more diverse managers, that is what counts. We are making progress, but not fast enough, not everywhere in the European Union and not nearly enough. So it is clear that we need to do much more. When change does not come naturally, regulatory action is needed. The numbers speak for themselves. Legislation works. I will push, as President of the Commission, to ensure that our proposal on Women on Boards becomes European Union law. We cannot afford to lose another ten years.'

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<sup>278</sup> EIGE, *Gender equality and the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic*, 2021. Available at <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-equality-and-socio-economic-impact-covid-19-pandemic>.

<sup>279</sup> See at <https://www.ft.com/content/d98e6634-ef76-4cf3-8477-628e0d9d2acb>

<sup>280</sup> See at [Introducing EWOB's 2021 Gender Diversity Index by Ursula von der Leyen - YouTube](#).