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From:	General Secretariat of the Council
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Subject:	Milestones and opportunities for gender equality in the EU *- Beijing Platform + 30 Report by EIGE*

Delegations will find attached the report entitled "Impact driver: marking milestones and opportunities for gender equality in the EU" prepared by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). This report served as a basis for the draft Council Conclusions on “Advancing Gender Equality in the AI-Driven Digital Age: 6th horizontal review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action by the Member States and the EU institutions,” set out in doc. 9408/25.

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Beijing Platform for Action +30 report

Impact driver: marking milestones and opportunities for gender equality in the EU

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Abbreviations

EU Member State codes

BE	Belgium
BG	Bulgaria
CZ	Czechia
DK	Denmark
DE	Germany
EE	Estonia
IE	Ireland
EL	Greece
ES	Spain
FR	France
HR	Croatia
IT	Italy
CY	Cyprus
LV	Latvia

LT	Lithuania
LU	Luxembourg
HU	Hungary
MT	Malta
NL	Netherlands
AT	Austria
PL	Poland
PT	Portugal
RO	Romania
SI	Slovenia
SK	Slovakia
FI	Finland
SE	Sweden
EU	27 EU Member States

Frequently used abbreviations

AI	artificial intelligence
BPfA	Beijing Platform for Action
CARE survey	Survey of Gender Gaps in Unpaid Care, Individual and Social Activities
CPR	Common Provisions Regulation
CSE	comprehensive sexuality education
CSO	civil society organisation
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
DG	directorate-general
DSA	Digital Services Act
DRR	disaster risk reduction
EEAS	European External Action Service
EPSR	European Pillar of Social Rights
EHW	education, health and welfare
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESF+	European Social Fund Plus
EPSCO	Employment, Social Policy, Health, and Consumer Affairs Council

EU	European Union
FEMM Committee	European Parliament Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality
LGBTIQ[1]	lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, queer
LLL	lifelong learning
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MFF	Multiannual Financial Framework
NGO	non-governmental organisation
R&I	research and innovation
RRF	Recovery and Resilience Facility
RRP	Recovery and Resilience Plan
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SRHR	sexual and reproductive health and rights
ICT	information and communication technology
STEM	science, technology, engineering and mathematics
UN	United Nations

[1] This report uses the acronym LGBTIQ following the terminology used in the Union of Equality: LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025. It represents an inclusive umbrella term for persons whose sexual orientation differs from heteronormativity and whose gender identity falls outside binary categories. The language used to represent this very heterogeneous group continuously evolves towards greater inclusion, and different actors and institutions have adopted different versions of the acronym (LGBT, LGBTIQ and LGBTI). The report uses institutions' chosen acronyms when describing the results of their work.

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Executive summary

Gender equality: key to the European Union's success in uncertain times

The European Union is navigating profound global and internal challenges that require coordinated, forward-thinking solutions. Economically, the EU faces slowdown in growth and challenges to competitiveness, exacerbated by an ageing population and shrinking workforce. These pressures highlight the urgent need for sustained innovation and investment. Geopolitical tensions, including Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, have exposed critical vulnerabilities, particularly in energy dependence. Similarly, the global race for technological leadership has revealed weakness of innovation in the EU. At the same time, strengthening anti-democratic forces are testing the EU's commitment to democratic principles, human rights and gender equality.

Gender equality emerges as a critical enabler for EU success in addressing these challenges and achieving its objectives in uncertain times. Empowering women and ensuring their full participation across all sectors can significantly enhance productivity and competitiveness. Diverse leadership and gender-balanced teams drive innovation and are essential to close gaps in high-growth sectors such as digital technology and the green transition industries. Promoting inclusive digital and green transitions will strengthen the EU's global standing and help deliver on commitments to gender equality and sustainability – imperatives for safeguarding the EU's prosperity. Moreover, addressing gender disparities in employment and education will unlock a broader talent pool, mitigating demographic pressures. Gender-responsive policies in areas such as childcare, long-term care and flexible work arrangements, as well as the equitable distribution of unpaid care work between women and men, will also strengthen social cohesion and economic resilience, framing care as a cornerstone of Europe's economy. These policies are not only vital for achieving gender equality, but also essential for fostering a more resilient society – particularly in polycrisis context. The 2024 Gender Equality Index score of 71 (out of 100) shows that the EU is getting closer to achieving gender equality, but progress is slow, and the goal is, as yet, far from realised.

As the EU strives to uphold the common core of Article 2 of Treaty on European Union values and strengthen internal unity, advancing gender equality also reinforces trust and shared values. By keeping gender equality central to its priorities, the EU can address immediate challenges and build a foundation for an equitable and prosperous future for all. This report aims to provide the evidence needed for change and inspire a collective commitment to transforming the EU into a place where everyone can thrive and enjoy gender equality.

Sixth horizontal review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the EU

In this context, the **Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA)**, established at the fourth UN World Conference on Women in 1995, remains more relevant than ever. It serves as a reference framework for eliminating gender inequalities and advancing women's empowerment across its 12 critical areas of concern. With unanimous support from all EU Member States, the BPfA plays a crucial role in shaping the gender equality policies of the EU and its Member States.

To mark the 30th anniversary of the BPfA in 2025, the UN Commission on the Status of Women will review global and regional progress on gender equality, including within the EU. This milestone provides an opportunity to reflect on the advances made, to align these with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and to identify synergies that can drive a fair and sustainable future. Within this framework, EIGE continues to provide essential support, offering annual thematic reviews that inform and guide EU-wide progress towards the achievement of the BPfA's objectives, ensuring gender equality remains central to addressing Europe's most pressing challenges.

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This report is the sixth horizontal review of the implementation of the BPfA in the EU ('BPfA +30') and covers the period 2019-2024. It reviews the EU progress in gender equality across 12 areas of concern since the previous horizontal BPfA review in 2019, highlighting progress and opportunities, as well as challenges that persist or have emerged in recent years. These include issues brought about by digitalisation and multiple crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and ongoing pushbacks against gender equality.

This executive summary of findings from the BPfA +30 review is organised around seven key themes. These highlight key findings that emerge from the review, which cut across multiple areas of the BPfA and are closely interconnected:

1) Thriving in a gender-equal and inclusive economy;
2) Providing gender-responsive social protection and services;
3) Eradicating gender-based violence, stigma and stereotypes;
4) Fostering parity democracy, accountability and gender-responsive institutions;
5) Shaping a digital transformation that promotes gender equality;
6) Advancing a socially fair green transition that leaves no woman or girl behind; and
7) Achieving peaceful and inclusive societies and advancing gender equality across the world.

1) Thriving in a gender-equal and inclusive economy

Since the previous horizontal BPfA review, the EU has made substantial strides in promoting gender equality within the economic sphere. Notable advancements include the introduction of three landmark directives on work-life balance, gender balance in corporate boards, and pay transparency. These legislative measures signal a solid commitment to tackling gender disparities in caregiving responsibilities, decision-making and pay. The European Care Strategy has also been launched by the Commission to ensure high quality, affordable and accessible care services with better working conditions and work-life balance for carers, most of whom are women.

Employment rates among women and men have demonstrated resilience in the face of recent challenges including the COVID-19 pandemic and economic downturns. Yet, gender gaps persist. In 2023, 80 % of men aged 20 to 64 were employed, compared with 70 % of similarly aged women. Slowly rising employment does not guarantee equal opportunities for all groups. Disadvantaged communities such as Roma face severe employment disparities. In 2021, only 28 % of Roma women aged 20-64 were employed, compared with 58 % of Roma men resulting in high prevalence of intergenerational poverty and extreme social and economic exclusion of Roma women.

Time poverty, worsened by increased caregiving demands during the pandemic, further impacted women's ability to balance work and family responsibilities, and often resulted in reduced hours or exit from the workforce. Similarly, while there was a minor reduction of one percentage point in the gender pay gap, it remained at 13 % in 2022.

Gender stereotypes, reinforced by family, culture and institutional influences, exacerbate gender segregation in various sectors. Significant gender disparities remain in the digital and green economies. This is especially apparent in ICT, where women make up only one-fifth of the workforce. This underrepresentation limits women's access to high-paying jobs and their advancement in fields such as artificial intelligence (AI) and renewable energy, where women comprise just one-third of specialists. Similar gaps exist in entrepreneurship, with women making up only 19 % of ICT entrepreneurs and 10 % of startup founders. Gender biases in investment and a lack of financial support for women contribute to the underrepresentation of women in entrepreneurship and innovation. Moreover, unequal access to financial resources creates gender disparities in financial confidence and ability to engage with financial products and build wealth in the long term.

Despite progress in the last five years, women's representation in economic leadership remains low. In the EU, only one in three ministers overseeing economic portfolios such as finance and trade is a

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woman. Since 2019, a woman has led the European Central Bank; however, women hold just two out of 26 seats on its governing council. Meanwhile, the boards of the largest publicly listed companies in the EU consist of 34 % women. This reflects a 6 percentage points increase from 28 % in 2019. While progress has been slow, countries that have adopted corporate quotas and/or targets are seeing rapid gains. These improvements could accelerate as Member States implement the new Directive's targets into national law.

To create a more equitable and inclusive economy, it is essential to address gender gaps as the digital and green transitions reshape the labour market. Key actions include offering targeted support for women in STEM and ICT, tackling barriers to entry and retention, promoting lifelong learning and addressing the underrepresentation of women in entrepreneurship. Enhancing financial literacy and improving women's access to capital will enable them to engage more confidently with investments and business opportunities. Enhancing working conditions in the care sector and encouraging more men to take on both paid and unpaid caregiving roles could help to challenge stereotypes and meet the growing demand for care as the EU population ages. Strengthening work-life balance policies, expanding flexible working options, ensuring equal parental leave, and encouraging companies to adopt gender equality plans with more transparent human resources practices will contribute to building a more inclusive economy. In addition, increasing pay transparency and ensuring that companies report on gender pay gaps will be critical to closing wage disparities and fostering greater accountability regarding the achievement of gender equality within the economic sphere.

2) Providing gender-responsive social protection and services

Over the past five years, the EU has introduced key policies to strengthen gender-responsive social protection and services. Support to parents by better reconciling family aspirations and paid work, notably by ensuring access to high-quality early childhood education and care and long-term care services has been high on the EU policy agenda. Initiatives such as the European Child Guarantee aim to ensure Member States provide essential services for girls and boys at risk of poverty. In addition, two Council Recommendations have promoted safety nets as well as social protection for non-standard workers and the self-employed. The Adequate Minimum Wages Directive, adopted in 2022, establishes a framework for adequate minimum wages. This benefits many women, who are often in low-wage jobs. The Commission's Gender Equality Strategy (2020-2025) and, in particular, various European Parliament resolutions, have underlined the importance of accessible sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) services. These include contraception, menstrual products and abortion, which are fundamental to human dignity and gender equality. Significantly, France and Slovenia are examples of countries that have explicitly enshrined the right to abortion in their constitutions. This provides a benchmark for other Member States in safeguarding SRHR.

Between 2018 and 2023, the shares of women and men at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) fell marginally to 22 % of women and 20 % of men. Yet, women remain more vulnerable to poverty in its multiple dimensions, such as energy poverty, inadequate housing and limited access to finance. Roma women, lone mothers or older women are at a higher risk of income, energy and housing poverty.

Disparities in access to education persist, due to gender biases and biased societal norms. Gender stereotypes, perpetuated by families, teacher biases, gendered learning materials and media, continue to discourage girls from entering STEM fields. Such biases also deter boys from entering traditionally female-dominated careers in fields such as care and education. Educational disparities are especially stark in Roma communities, where 28 % of women and girls lack formal education, compared with 18 % of Roma men and boys. The implementation of comprehensive sexuality education also remains inconsistent across the EU, with only a few Member States addressing issues such as mutual consent and gender-based violence.

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Access to abortion remains unequal across the EU, and in some Member States it is becoming increasingly difficult. Healthcare and care services also require improvements in accessibility, affordability and quality. Women living in rural areas, in particular, face limited access to healthcare. This especially impacts older women, who encounter compounded challenges due to their age and the scarcity of services. Economic barriers such as high costs contribute to unmet health needs, with women being slightly more likely than men to cite cost, waiting times or distance as obstacles. For migrant women, particularly those in an irregular situation, additional barriers such as complex administrative processes and fear of deportation further limit access to healthcare, especially for non-emergency care. By 2035, the population aged 65 or older is expected to grow by 23 %. This contrasts with a projected increase of 7 % in employment in the care sector. This situation highlights an urgent need to address care demands, support the care workforce and improve their working conditions.

To foster comprehensive gender-responsive social protections, it is equally urgent to address issues such as the housing crisis and energy poverty in ways that acknowledge and tackle existing gender disparities. In particular, a robust Anti-Poverty Strategy with clear targets and a well-rounded focus on reducing women's poverty will strengthen social protection across the EU. Lastly, essential steps need to be taken to ensure that public services promote gender equality in various areas. These include the call for gender-responsive high national standards for reproductive and sexual healthcare, in line with international commitments (e.g. BPfA, SDGs); the implementation of gender-sensitive education curricula and creating national standards for comprehensive sexuality education; and educational materials that eliminate gender stereotypes.

3) Eradicating gender-based violence, stigma and stereotypes

In 2023, the EU acceded to the Istanbul Convention, which entered into force for the EU on 1 October 2023. This was followed in 2024 by the adoption of the first EU Directive to combat violence against women and domestic violence. These were historic landmarks in building a comprehensive legal framework against gender-based violence in the EU. The EU has also reinforced its fight against trafficking, delivering the revised Anti-Trafficking Directive and the EU Strategy on Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings (2021-2025). Another milestone is that intersectional discrimination was legally defined at the EU level for the first time in the Pay Transparency Directive.

Despite these achievements, significant challenges persist in fully addressing violence against women. For instance, cyber violence against women and girls, is a growing concern in the digital age. This manifests in various forms, from cyberstalking to the non-consensual sharing of intimate images. Reports of sexual assault and rape rose markedly between 2019 and 2022. Evidence points to a significant rise in attacks and murders specifically targeting transgender individuals in Europe. Roma women face high levels of discrimination and a heightened risk of gender-based violence. Women with disabilities also face high levels of gender-based violence and severe violations of their sexual and reproductive rights. Gender stereotypes and stigma continue to hinder gender equality. For instance, gender-based stigma impedes men from seeking mental health support despite being almost four times more likely than women to die from intentional self-harm.

To build an EU free of gender-based violence, stigma and stereotypes, it is essential to prioritise the transposition into national legislation of the EU Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence. Recognising femicide as an offence distinct from homicide and adopting a consent-based definition of rape across all Member States are key steps to ensuring justice and protection for victims of gender-based violence and sexual violence. Comprehensive and well-funded victim support services are also needed to address the diverse needs of victims of violence against women. Furthermore, the collection of comparable data and the harmonisation of definitions of gender-based violence are necessary to create a robust, coordinated response across Member States.

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Efforts to combat gender-based cyber violence require the enforcement of the Digital Services Act. This means ensuring that online platforms take proactive measures to prevent and address gender-based cyber violence such as cyberstalking, online harassment and the non-consensual sharing of intimate images. It also entails holding platforms accountable for monitoring harmful content, implementing effective reporting mechanisms and removing illegal or abusive material promptly to protect victims and reduce the prevalence of such violence. In addition, improving the legal framework on anti-discrimination would further strengthen protections and accountability across the EU.

Lastly, tackling persistent stereotypes that harm women, girls, men and boys demands sustained efforts from a wide range of stakeholders, including governments, educational and media institutions and civil society. These efforts should encompass public awareness campaigns and educational initiatives to promote gender equality and challenge harmful norms. Specifically, enhancing media literacy and tackling gendered disinformation are critical measures needed to counter the online spread of misogynistic ideologies, particularly among young men and boys, who may resist policies and cultural shifts promoting gender equality. These efforts are vital to ensure everyone in the EU can thrive without fear of gender-based violence, discrimination or harmful stereotypes.

4) Fostering parity democracy, accountability and gender-responsive institutions

The European Commission of 2019-2024 was the most gender-balanced in its history with Ursula von der Leyen as the first woman to serve as President. Building on the progress of the 2019-2024 term, the European Commission for the 2024-229 term continued make strides in achieving gender balance. Apart from the Commission President staying on for the term 2024-2029, four out of six assigned Executive Vice-Presidents were women. After the 2024 elections, women made up 39 % of the European Parliament, a decrease from 41 % in the previous political term. It represents the first-ever decline in the proportion of women MEPs, which had been consistently growing since 1979.

Under the theme of a ‘Union of Equality’ guiding the 2019-2024 Commission, key highlights include the appointment of the first-ever Commissioner for Equality, and the adoption of the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025. This Strategy signalled a solid commitment to gender-targeted actions. It also marked the mainstreaming of a gender equality perspective and intersectionality as the way to achieve gender equality across EU policymaking. Further institutional achievements at EU level include the establishment of the Task Force on Equality to coordinate the equality policy agenda and ensure equality mainstreaming throughout the Commission, and the adoption of a methodology to track gender equality related expenditure as a cross-cutting objective of the EU’s long-term budget. These efforts underline EU progress in institutionalising gender equality, affirming it as a core priority in EU governance and policymaking. In addition, the two parallel directives setting common standards for equality bodies marked a crucial milestone in advancing accountability for gender equality and non-discrimination in the Member States. EU institutions also took steps to protect women politicians, journalists and public figures from misogynistic and anti-democratic attacks. At national level, the representation of women in parliaments has increased by 2 pp since 2018, reaching 33 % in the end of 2024. However, only seven Member States achieved gender balance (FI, SE, DK, ES, BE, AT and NL). In six Member States (IE, SK, EL, RO, CY and HU), women constitute fewer than 25 % of members of parliament. Member States that have legislative gender quotas in place slightly outperform those without them, and the most significant impact is expected in the long run. In 2024, women continue to hold ministerial positions mainly in social affairs, health and education.

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In 2024, most Member States have a senior minister responsible for gender equality. However, variations exist between Member States in terms of the levels of resources, efforts and governmental structures dedicated to ensuring the effective promotion of gender equality and gender mainstreaming across all governmental work. For example, three Member States located the governmental body responsible for gender equality policy at the highest level of the government hierarchy, functioning as an entire ministry, while in most other Member States such governmental bodies are located within a department of a ministry, limiting their power and visibility in promoting gender equality. Over half of the Member States have an active action plan on gender equality and have gender focal points within ministries. Yet, across the Member States, there has been a noticeable decline in the use of gender mainstreaming tools such as gender impact assessments.

Anti-gender movements have grown in visibility and influence since 2019, particularly in the transnational digital space. Such movements are attempting to roll back women's rights in many Member States. Women in politics and public figures continue to face high levels of violence, including cyber-violence, aimed at limiting their participation in decision-making and in the public sphere. Women's rights organisations and activists face increasing attacks, hate speech and funding cuts. Growing evidence indicates that anti-gender discourses online are linked to radicalisation and extremism.

Fostering gender-responsive institutions across the EU requires gender equality and gender mainstreaming to be embedded as central priorities in policymaking and governance. This entails allocating adequate authority, resources and structures at national and EU levels. Coordinating mechanisms dedicated to gender equality at all levels will enhance accountability and ensure coherence in policymaking. Specifically, strengthening gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting is essential for ensuring that policies and funding decisions consistently consider gender impacts and actively promote gender equality.

Achieving parity democracy calls for decisive measures to ensure the balanced participation of women and men in elections and decision-making processes, reflecting democratic principles. This includes implementing legislative gender quotas based on parity (50/50) to achieve equal representation in political decision-making. Equally important is fostering safe and supportive environments in which women's rights organisations and civil society can operate freely, and ensuring that they receive sufficient funding. These efforts need to be reinforced by robust measures to address and prevent violence and harassment, both online and offline – in particular, violence targeting women in public roles, such as politicians, journalists and activists. These actions are indispensable to advancing gender equality in decision-making and safeguarding democratic values across the EU.

5) Shaping a digital transformation that promotes gender equality

The digital transition is at a pivotal moment. Significant efforts are underway to promote gender equality, from education and work to health and communications. Central to this vision is the EU's 2022 Digital Decade policy programme. This aims to double the number of ICT professionals to 20 million by 2030, with a strong emphasis on gender balance and boosting the number of women in STEM. Initiatives such as the Women in Digital strategy – and the broader 2030 Digital Decade – are driving efforts to increase the representation of women in tech. Meanwhile, the New European Innovation Agenda is empowering women innovators through entrepreneurship and leadership programmes. The Digital Services Act (DSA) marked a substantial step forward in combating gender-based violence online by requiring large platforms to mitigate exposure to harmful content. Advances in healthcare technology include AI solutions to ease caregiver burdens and AI-enhanced breast cancer detection. These highlight the potential of digitalisation to support care provision and to improve women's health outcomes.

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A number of challenges hinder a gender-equal digital transition. Women remain underrepresented in the ICT sector – especially in leadership roles – and face persistent pay gaps. Gender stereotypes and male-dominated work cultures, including long working hours and insufficient work-life balance policies, hinder the entry into and retention of women in tech careers. Only 23 % of women with STEM degrees secure tech roles, compared with 44 % of men. Furthermore, many women drop out of tech careers between the ages of 30 and 44 due to lack of work-life balance culture in the workplace. The sector's gender disparities are mirrored in education, with women earning five times fewer degrees in ICT than men. As automation reshapes the labour market, job displacement is a risk for many roles. Meanwhile, women continue to face additional barriers, such as the predominant takeover of unpaid care work , which limit opportunities for upskilling and retraining to transition into emerging jobs.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated workplace digitalisation, but also exacerbated digital disparities, disproportionately impacting carers' productivity and work-life balance. Teleworking is often concentrated in higher-paying jobs that require advanced qualifications, leaving many lower-waged frontline workers (a group in which women are overrepresented) without such opportunities. For those with access to telework, maintaining work-life boundaries and the right to disconnect can be a real challenge. The digital workplace also creates new avenues for violence and harassment. Among teleworkers, women experience harassment or bullying at twice the rate of men (6 %, compared with 3 %).

The increased reliance on AI technologies, transforms hiring, task allocation and performance evaluation processes. AI-driven recruitment processes risk perpetuating gender biases in candidate selection. Both 36 % of women and 31 % of men teleworkers report experiencing increased AI-powered surveillance such as camera and keystroke monitoring to track their remote-work. Women face a higher pressure as they usually experience more caregiving interruptions.

While digitalisation in the healthcare sector appears promising, it still overlooks the needs of women and can perpetuate existing biases and health disparities. For example, many AI algorithms used in diagnostics and treatment are trained on datasets that primarily reflect male patients. This can lead to misdiagnoses for women, particularly of conditions such as cardiovascular disease, where symptoms often differ between women and men. Older women, in particular, face barriers to accessing digital health technologies, further widening the digital divide. In addition, the digital transition has introduced new forms of gender-based violence, such as cyber harassment.

To ensure a digital transition that promotes gender equality for all, there is an urgent need to address systemic digital inequalities and adopt gender-responsive approaches across the various domains of digital transformation. Diverse STEM role models need to be showcased, and education frameworks need to be strengthened to counter gender biases in career aspirations early in children's development. Developments in AI need to adhere to the Artificial Intelligence Act and incorporate gender impact assessments and gender-based violence considerations to prevent discrimination and improve algorithmic accountability. Stringent controls on algorithmic systems will contribute to a safer digital environment.

Furthermore, the equal participation of women needs to be ensured in ICT and all professions related to the digital transition. This requires targeted training, mentorship, funding opportunities and the transformation of workplace cultures to foster gender equality. This transformation should address unconscious biases and establish flexible, supportive work environments with robust gender equality policies. Lastly, it remains essential to expand digital literacy and lifelong learning opportunities, especially for older women and caregivers, while mitigating job displacement risks.

6) Advancing a socially fair green transition that leaves no woman or girl behind

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The green transition is at a critical juncture. The climate and environmental crises are intersecting with gender inequalities to create some of the most pressing sustainable development challenges of our time. The European Green Deal, launched in 2019, aims to achieve climate neutrality in the EU by 2050 and recognises the need for a socially fair transition. However, it has faced criticism for omitting a comprehensive gender-transformative approach. Even so, increasing attention is being paid to gender inequalities in the green transition in the context of EU funds such as the Just Transition Fund and the Social Climate Fund, as well as in EU policies for transport and agriculture.

The social and environmental impacts of the green transition have a gendered dimension. Women are often more environmentally conscious than men, adopting eco-friendly practices in their daily lives. However, responsibilities such as managing household sustainability can reinforce traditional care roles. This perpetuates the association of 'greenness' with femininity and deters men from participating in sustainable practices that are perceived as threats to masculinity. Young women are making significant contributions to climate activism. Despite this, in 2024 the representation of women in formal decision-making processes at the national level and in international climate negotiations remains limited. Globally, the EU's actions disproportionately impact disadvantaged groups, including women in the Global South and indigenous women, who face intensified risks of poverty, exploitation and gender-based violence as a result of climate change.

Women's economic vulnerabilities are exacerbated during climate crises, as they are more likely than men to have unstable jobs, or to have lower incomes and fewer assets than men. Women's caregiving roles put them at the forefront of disaster response. Climate-induced stressors such as heatwaves, floods or droughts have been linked to higher rates of gender-based violence, often in relation to heightened (financial) stress or climate-related migration, including human trafficking. This highlights the needs for climate adaptation measures that adopt a gender perspective. Moreover, gender stereotypes continue to limit women's access to sectors of strategic importance for the green transition. For instance, only 25 % of workers in the energy sector and 17 % in the transport sector are women.

To achieve a gender-responsive green transition, it is essential to prioritise a gender and intersectional perspective across climate and environmental policies. This includes embedding a gender-responsive approach into the implementation of the European Green Deal, ensuring its alignment with the Gender Equality Strategy. This involves embedding gender considerations systematically, rather than treating them as optional, across all key areas of the green transition, including agriculture, energy and transport. Disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation plans require gender-specific needs to be addressed through comprehensive gender impact assessments, ensuring that women's perspectives are integral to resilience planning. Moreover, recognising and supporting unpaid care work, predominantly carried out by women, is vital to addressing the interconnected challenges of climate change and care. At the same time, targeted measures need to address the rise in gender-based violence, which is exacerbated by climate-related crises. Lastly, focused actions are needed to empower women in critical sectors of the green transition. These include providing targeted training, addressing workplace discrimination and actively promoting women's leadership.

7) Achieving peaceful and inclusive societies and advancing gender equality across the world

The EU Women, Peace and Security agenda and Gender Equality Action Plan III 2021-2027 have enhanced the priority given to gender equality considerations in EU external actions. Under GAP III, the Commission pledged to direct 85 % of new actions in external relations towards gender equality. By 2024, 26 Member States had ever adopted a National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. The Commission achieved gender parity in the senior positions in charge of security. Meanwhile, the representation of women in national armed forces has increased steadily over the

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last few years. There has also been an increase in appointments of dedicated gender advisers to EU civilian missions. Most missions now include gender equality concerns in their mandatory induction training. Moreover, the Directive on violence against women and domestic violence has criminalised female genital mutilation (FGM), demonstrating the EU's commitment to eradicating this practice worldwide.

Nonetheless, the EU faces ongoing challenges in addressing increasing migration pressure amid Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine as well as from other conflict zones and due to climate change. Women experience gender-based barriers to seeking asylum, as well as disproportionate discrimination and violence at border controls, in particular affecting racialised women. Many Member States still do not consider the needs of women asylum seekers and refugees. Only six Member States (BE, DK, EL, FR, HU and PT) explicitly acknowledge the risk of FGM as grounds for asylum. In addition, while the Temporary Protection Directive facilitated the entry of millions of Ukrainians seeking refuge in the EU (many of whom were women and girls), many of them face unmet needs in sexual and reproductive healthcare.

Emerging security threats demand innovative approaches that integrate a gender perspective as an effective response to today's complex and rapidly evolving global environment. In the digital era, disinformation exacerbates misogynistic views and creates a fertile ground for violent extremism and anti-feminist, racist and anti-immigration hate speech. Similarly, climate change gives rise to new security challenges, such as gender-based violence against women both within and beyond the EU. Despite these pressing issues, women remain significantly underrepresented in national security agencies, ministerial roles and cybersecurity across the EU.

Strengthening the implementation of the EU's Women, Peace, and Security Agenda remains a critical priority. Achieving this involves conducting gender impact assessments on security policies to mitigate gender-based risks and ensure that EU defence policies uphold women's rights. Gender-responsive measures play a key role in protecting women refugees and asylum-seekers, with a focus on securing adequate reception conditions, access to sexual and reproductive health services and protection from gender-based violence. Revisions to existing frameworks are essential to address these needs effectively.

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Introduction

Gender equality: key to the European Union's success in uncertain times

The European Union faces profound global and internal challenges, including changes to the economic landscape, geopolitical tensions, strengthening anti-democratic forces, and slowdown in innovation. Challenges such as these have exposed significant vulnerabilities, including energy dependence and a shrinking workforce, and have intensified internal debate among Member States. These challenges test the EU's commitment to democratic principles, human rights and gender equality, and highlight that a sustained, coordinated path forwards is of the utmost importance. In these uncertain times, the EU requires forward-thinking solutions, investment and sustained innovation.

Gender equality is a key contributor to EU success in addressing these challenges. To safeguard the EU's prosperity, it is essential to deliver on commitments to gender equality and sustainability. Diverse leadership and gender-balanced teams drive innovation, and inclusive digital and green transitions will strengthen the EU's global standing. Significant enhancements in productivity and competitiveness can be achieved by empowering women and facilitating their full participation in society, particularly in high-growth sectors. Moreover, addressing gender disparities in employment and education will broaden the talent pool, ameliorating demographic pressures. Gender-responsive care policies will strengthen economic resilience and social cohesion, while also highlighting the importance of care work to Europe's economy. These policies are not only vital to achieving gender equality but also essential for fostering a more resilient and inclusive society – particularly in the face of poly-crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, climate and environmental challenges, or the ongoing and increasing economic and security instability exacerbated by geopolitical tensions.

As the EU strives to uphold its core values and democratic principles and strengthen internal unity, advancing gender equality also reinforces trust and shared values. By keeping gender equality central to its priorities, the EU can more effectively address challenges and build a foundation for a fairer, more prosperous future for all. This report provides the evidence needed for change and to inspire a collective commitment to make the EU a place where everyone can thrive and enjoy gender equality.

Sixth horizonal review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the EU

Established in 1995 at the United Nations World Conference on Women, the **Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA)** provides a roadmap for worldwide efforts to end discrimination against women and girls and to improve their status across 12 key areas. Supported unanimously by all EU Member States, the BPfA plays a crucial role in shaping the gender equality policies of the EU and its Member States.

To mark the 30th anniversary of the BPfA in 2025, the 69th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women will review the progress made towards gender equality and women's rights globally, including those within the EU. Given the EU's commitment to integrate the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development into all of its policies, 2025 also marks a pivotal moment at which to review progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and reflect on synergies that can drive a fair and sustainable future (see Annex 1).

Within this framework, EIGE continues to provide essential support, offering annual thematic reviews that inform and guide EU-wide progress towards the achievement of the BPfA's objectives, ensuring gender equality remains central to addressing Europe's most pressing challenges.

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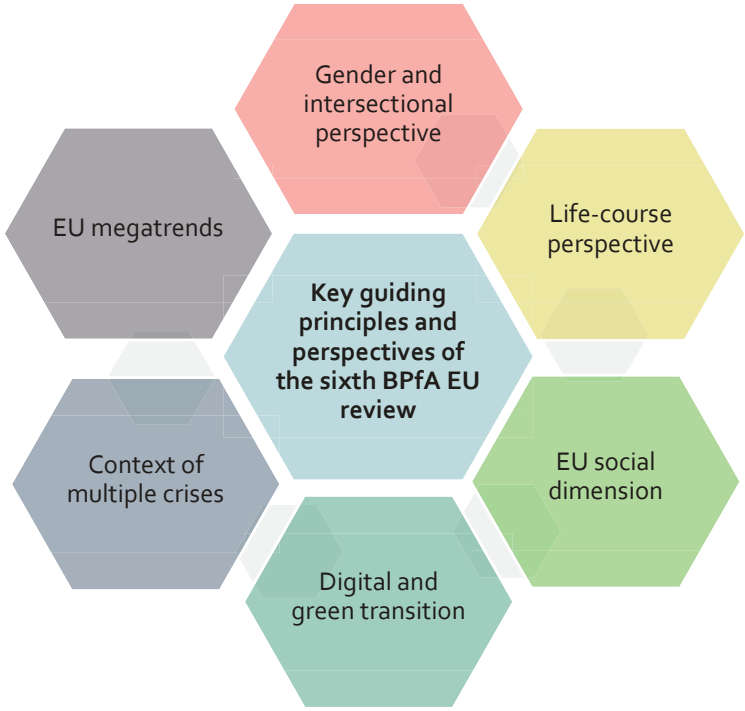
This report is the sixth overarching review of the implementation of the BPfA objectives across 12 areas of concern in the EU ('BPfA +30'). The main objective of this report is to present an overview of the key EU policy developments and trends in gender equality across the 12 critical areas of concern of the BPfA since 2019. It offers evidence on progress, challenges and opportunities for future policy discussions and recommendations. The report also includes examples of legal and policy actions promoting gender equality at EU and national levels.



The analysis focuses on the period following the previous horizontal BPfA review, highlighting key findings 2019 to 2024, or the most recent available findings. It draws on a review of official Beijing indicators and additional EU-wide data. Where data and information are available, intersectional and life-course perspectives are also reflected.

The report takes into account the context of multiple crises and the EU megatrends.

The report consists of three chapters. The first chapter provides an assessment of institutional developments related to gender equality at EU level. The second chapter analyses major trends and developments in the BPfA's 12 areas of concern at EU and national levels. Practical recommendations for action to address key gender equality challenges are presented in the final chapter.

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1Institutional developments at EU level since 2019

This chapter presents the institutional, legal and policy context for gender equality in the EU. It provides an overview of the structures that support gender equality, key legislative developments since 2019, significant policy advances and progress made in mainstreaming a gender perspective into major EU strategies, financial resources and selected policy areas. Further details on legislative and policy developments in the 12 critical areas of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) are included in the progress review for each area in Chapter 2.

1.1 Structures for the promotion of gender equality in the EU

1.1.1 EU institutions and bodies

1.1.1.1 The commitment to gender equality was elevated with the appointment of a Commissioner for Equality and coordinated efforts across the Commission

In the 2019 political guidelines for the EU, the newly elected Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, indicated that 'equality for all and equality in all its senses' was one of the major priorities of the Commission (von der Leyen, 2019b). To demonstrate this commitment, the Commission President appointed for the first time a **Commissioner for Equality**. The mandate of the Commissioner for Equality was to develop EU anti-discrimination legislation, lead the Gender Equality Strategy, and implement the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the EU. The Commissioner's mandate was also to step up the EU's response to gender-based violence, support the EU's accession to the Istanbul Convention, and promote the Work-Life Balance Directive and other new directives (von der Leyen, 2019a).

Following the 2024 European elections, von der Leyen was re-elected as Commission President and a new College of Commissioners was announced. In the new line-up, while equality was maintained as an explicit area of responsibility, it is no longer a standalone portfolio. It has been combined with preparedness and crisis management. In the area of equality, the mandate of the new Commissioner shows a continuation in promoting 'A Union of Equality' as central to the Commission's work over the next five years (von der Leyen, 2024a).

In the Commission, several units across different DGs contribute to achieving gender equality. DG JUST (Justice and Consumers) is central to this effort The **Gender Equality Unit** in DG JUST oversees new legislation and policies on gender equality, the monitoring of the gender equality acquis and operational tasks relating to the planning, monitoring, coordination and central reporting of gender equality and gender mainstreaming activities (EIGE, n.d.-a). Other Units within the Commission also work on gender equality in internal EU policies[2], policies relating to external action[3], and human resources[4].

To support the Commissioner for Equality and the equality mainstreaming efforts within the DGs, in 2020 the Commission set up a **Task Force on Equality,** which encompasses Equality Coordinators and a Secretariat. The role of the **Equality Coordinators** (who are representatives of the DGs and

[2] For instance, the Fundamental Rights Policy Unit in DG JUST contributes to gender equality as a part of the fundamental rights agenda; Gender Sector of Democracy, Equality and Culture Unit in DG RTD (Research and Innovation) works on gender mainstreaming in research and innovation.

[3] The Gender Equality, Human Rights and Democratic Governance Unit in DG INTPA (International Partnerships) and the Human Rights and Civil Society Team within the Thematic Support - Rule of Law, Governance and Security Unit in DG NEAR (Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations) contributed to the EU's external actions by promoting gender equality in international development and partnerships, complementing the work of the European External Action Service (EEAS) (European Union External Action, 2024).

[4] In 2020, the Commission created the Diversity and Inclusion Office as part of DG HR (Human Resources and Security) to implement the commitments of the EU equality policies and promoting a culture of inclusiveness in the organisation. Management Development & Support Unit and Executive Staff Unit in DG HR ensure implementation of the gender balanced management objective.

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the European External Action Service) is to raise awareness of the importance of the equality policy agenda, to mainstream equality into policies developed by their DGs, and to contribute to the implementation of 'Union of Equality' strategies (European Commission, n.d.-k). This includes the development of an Equality Mainstreaming Action Plan for their DGs. **The Secretariat of the Task Force** raises awareness and builds capacity on equality topics and equality mainstreaming across EU policies and activities (European Commission, n.d.-k).

Box 1. Other structures supporting the Commission in the area of gender equality

Initiatives aimed at enhancing collaboration and policy formulation on gender equality in the EU include:

— The **Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men**, which brings together representatives of Member States, civil society, social partner organisations and representatives from international organisations. The Committee assists the Commission in formulating and implementing activities to promote gender equality.

— The **High-Level Group on Gender Mainstreaming** **is an informal group and** comprises of high-level civil servants from the Member State ministries responsible for gender mainstreaming at national level. It supports the EU Presidencies in identifying relevant policy areas and topics of gender equality to be addressed, including as part of BPfA.

— The Commission also collaborates with the Scientific Analysis and Advice on Gender Equality (SAAGE) network and the Network of legal experts in gender equality and non-discrimination

Initiatives aimed at enhancing the collection, analysis and use of data in the EU include:

— Th **Eurostat's Equality and Non-Discrimination Statistics Task Force** develops guidelines for statistical terminology, enhances data dissemination, shares best practices, and suggests improvements for data coverage.

— The **Subgroup on Equality Data**, **set up by the EU High-Level Group on Non-discrimination, Equality and Diversity**, which compiles national practices, assesses data quality, supports the implementation of Commission strategies and fosters knowledge exchange.

1.1.1.2 In the European Parliament, the FEMM Committee remains the core political body in charge of advancing women's rights and gender equality

The **Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (the FEMM Committee)** oversees gender equality topics and is responsible for the implementation and further development of gender mainstreaming in all policy sectors in the European Parliament (see Figure 1). The FEMM Committee is recognised for its vital role in drawing attention to gender inequalities as an integral part of policy developments in the European Parliament. It generally collaborates with other committees on legislative processes, such as the Committees on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) and Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL), by contributing opinions or amendments that introduce a gender perspective into specific legislative files. Between July 2019 and June 2022, FEMM focused on gender mainstreaming in budgets, economic issues, fundamental rights, democracy, labour markets, climate and digitalisation, but its impact on legislative files, especially in the Committees on Budgets (BUDG) and Economic and Monetary Affairs (ECON) Committees, was limited (Samek Lodovici et al., 2023). Despite this, FEMM successfully introduced gender equality considerations into the EU's COVID-19 recovery fund (Elomäki and Kantola, 2023). Since 2016, most of Parliament's committees have adopted gender mainstreaming action plans (European Parliament, n.d.).

Figure 1. Political structures supporting gender equality in the European Parliament

FEMM committee
- Adopts opinions and reports to integrate a gender perspective in the legislative work of the European Parliament
- Coordinates the Network of Members in charge of Gender Mainstreaming
- Conducts targeted actions on gender equality, e.g., workshops, meetings with National Parliaments, sends ad-hoc delegations

Other committees
- Adopt gender mainstreaming plans
- Appoint MEPs in the Network of Members in charge of Gender Mainstreaming

High-level group on gender equality and diversity
- Promotes equal representation of women and men and diversity at all levels of the Parliament
- Ensures a safe and supportive workplace
- Reports on the implementation of the Gender Action Plan

European Parliament's Bureau
- Adopted and monitors the Gender Action Plan (2021)

Source: elaborated by the authors, based on European Parliamentary Research Service. 'Gender Mainstreaming in the European Parliament: State of Play', 2021.

Notably, the FEMM Committee has faced the recurrent threat of losing its specific focus on gender equality by having its competencies merged with other areas of non-discrimination. In 2023, a proposal suggested the restructuring of FEMM into a temporary committee with reduced legislative power, which FEMM opposed (Euractiv, 2023a, 2023b). This case underlines the ongoing risks to dedicated gender equality structures (Euractiv, 2024b) (see also Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women (Area H)). Other structures support gender equality on the administrative side of the Parliament[5].

1.1.1.3 The Council of the European Union lacks a special formation that would regularly gather EU ministers responsible for gender equality

Gender equality is generally addressed in meetings of the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO), which adopts Conclusions on various subjects relating to gender equality and women's rights, primarily focusing on follow-up to the BPfA. Since 2019, the Council has adopted conclusions on gender-equal economies, the gender impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and gender mainstreaming in the EU budget, among others (see the timeline of Conclusions in Annex 4). Other Council formations address gender equality with a nexus on other topics, such as human rights (COHOM[6]) or international partnerships (CODEV-PI[7]). As a substitute for a permanent 'Gender Equality Council', EU Presidencies occasionally organise informal meetings of gender equality ministers. In May 2024, the Belgian Presidency organised the first meeting of EPSCO ministers dedicated entirely to equality issues. The Presidency proposed to include a reference to 'Equality' in the title of the Council configuration "Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs". No formal decision has yet been made (General Secretariat of the Council, 2024). Furthermore, the Council of the EU would benefit from an internal network or task force dedicated to gender mainstreaming in policy and decision-making processes[8].

1.1.1.4 EU advisory bodies remain active in promoting gender equality in various areas

The **Committee of the Regions (CoR)** and the **European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)** play major roles in EU policymaking. The CoR is an advisory body to the Council, the European Commission and the European Parliament. It is composed of locally and regionally elected representatives from the 27 Member States. One of its initiatives, 'For more women in politics', aims to improve gender balance in politics, especially at local and regional levels (European Committee of the Regions, n.d.). The EESC, meanwhile, as an advisory body to EU institutions, represents a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including employers, trade unions and social, occupational,

[5] The administrative structures of the European Parliament that also support gender equality are the Equality, Inclusion and Diversity Unit (EIDU), DG PERS; the Equality and diversity coordinators; the Committee on Equal Opportunities and Diversity (COPEC) and the Staff Committee (for more on this, see EPRS, 2021).

[6] Working Party on Human Rights (COHOM) - Consilium

[7] Working Party on Development Cooperation and International Partnerships (CODEV-PI) - Consilium

[8] Under its General Secretariat, the Council of the EU has a Diversity and Inclusion unit dedicated to human resources.

economic and cultural organisations. Since 2020, the EESC has focused on key gender equality issues such as promoting pay transparency, women's entrepreneurship, women's participation in the labour market and the gender dimension of energy poverty (EESC, 2023a, 2023b; European Economic and Social Committee, n.d.). In its Rules of Procedure, the EESC commits to ensure compliance with the principles of gender equality and non-discrimination in all bodies of the Committee.

1.1.1.5 The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) and other EU agencies support gender equality in EU policies and debates with evidence and data

EIGE collects, analyses and disseminates gender equality data to support policy integration. Since 2010, EIGE has aided the Council of the EU in monitoring progress on the BPfA and proposing new indicators, with its reports informing EPSCO Council Conclusions on gender equality. EIGE's Gender Equality Index is recognised as a key benchmark for gender equality in the EU. In recent years, EIGE has become a key research centre and source for gender mainstreaming tools, supporting EU decision-making and policymaking (PPMI, 2023).

EIGE also seeks synergies with other EU agencies, such as the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) and the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA). As part of its thematic research, the FRA includes gender in its data collection and analysis alongside other dimensions such as ethnicity and age (FRA, n.d.). EIGE and the FRA also cooperate to collect data on violence against women (EU GBV survey). Eurofound and EU-OSHA adopt a gender mainstreaming approach in their social, employment and work-related research.

1.1.2 Other organisations at EU level

1.1.2.1 The coordinated gender equality efforts of EU social partners have diminished, despite their vital role in advancing EU social policy

European social partner organisations, including the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), the Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe (BUSINESSEUROPE), the Association of Crafts and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEunited) and Services of General Interest Europe (SGI Europe), play a crucial role in shaping EU social policy – including gender equality – through social dialogue. In recent years, the ETUC has broadened its focus to include issues such as the gender pay gap, harassment and work-life balance. Employers' organisations have focused on women's employment and labour market segregation (Elomäki and Kantola, 2022). Although these organisations signed a Framework for Actions on Gender Equality in 2005, recent efforts have stalled due to disagreements, and joint gender equality initiatives were excluded from the 2019-2021 and 2022-2024 work programmes (Elomäki and Kantola, 2022). Even so, in 2020, the social partners agreed on recommendations to improve childcare services in the EU (ETUC et al., 2020).

Social partners at EU level are also active in 44 sectoral social dialogue committees, operating with the support of the European Commission. At the time of writing, half of their work programmes included gender equality specific actions.

1.1.2.2 European civil society organisations (CSOs) notably contribute to initiating, shaping and providing expertise to develop EU gender equality policy

The BPfA highlights the involvement of civil society organisations (CSOs), especially women's organisations (e.g. the European Women's Lobby), in implementing gender mainstreaming. It calls on governments to collaborate with CSOs for this purpose. However, CSOs also face a growing backlash, including hate speech and violent attacks on activists promoting the rights of women and

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LGBTIQ persons. The adverse effects of these pushbacks are explored in detail in subsequent chapters, including Women in Power and Decision-Making (Area G), Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women (Area H) and Human Rights of Women (Area I)).

1.2 Legislative developments and trends

1.2.1 Since 2019, new directives have strengthened the EU legal framework for gender equality

The EU gender equality acquis, which comprises key Treaty provisions and the Charter of Fundamental Rights, as well as relevant legislation and case law, has been further strengthened since 2019 through the adoption of new directives (as summarised in Figure 2).

The **Work-Life Balance Directive** marks a pivotal advance in EU gender equality policy, moving beyond 30 years of soft law and policy coordination to set concrete minimum standards for parental leave, paternity leave, carers' leave and flexible work arrangements for workers with care responsibilities across all Member States. The adoption of the **Directive on improving gender balance on company boards** and **EU Pay Transparency Directive** demonstrate a commitment to tackling gender disparities in economic decision-making, gender-based pay discrimination and the gender pay gap. Together, these laws make practical steps towards dismantling the 'glass ceiling', offering qualified women a genuine opportunity to secure top positions on company boards.

Figure 2. EU Directives in the area of gender equality since 2019

	Date of proposal	Date of adoption	Date of transposition
Directive on Work-Life Balance for parents and carers (Directive (EU) 2019/1158, 2019) Increase the participation of women in the labour market and the take-up of family-related leave and flexible working arrangements for parents and carers.	2017	2019	2022
Directive on improving the gender balance among directors of listed companies (Directive (EU) 2022/2381, 2022) Establish targets to accelerate progress towards gender balance in corporate boards. By 30 June 2026: – women hold at least 40% of non-executive board positions; – women hold at least 33%.	2012	2022	2024 (expires in 2038)
Pay Transparency Directive (Directive (EU) 2023/970, 2023) Combat pay discrimination and help close the gender pay gap in the EU, first EU directive to recognise 'intersectional discrimination'	2021	2023	2026
Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence (Directive (EU) 2024/1385, 2024) Establish minimum rules to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence in the EU, protect victims and grant them access to justice.	2022	2024	2027
Directives on standards for equality bodies (Council Directive (EU) 2024/1499 and Directive (EU) 2024/1500, 2024) Establish binding standards for equality bodies to improve their effectiveness and guarantee their independence.	2022	2024	2026

Source: elaborated by the authors, based on the relevant directives' and proposals for the directives' texts.

While these directives set important benchmarks for gender equality in the economic sphere, they are considered as minimum standards, therefore some social dimensions remain less well

addressed (EIGE, 2022j). For instance, the Work-Life Balance Directive does not fully capture the diversity of caregiving relationships and family structures (Chieregato, 2020). Meanwhile, the Directive on improving gender balance exempts Member States in which women already hold 30 % of non-executive director roles or 25 % of all director positions, or where similar targets have been set (Article 12, Directive (EU) 2022/2381, 2022). This exemption may result in some countries maintaining minimal targets below gender balance rather than pursuing greater gender representation (EWL, 2022a). In addition, it has been pointed out that the exclusion of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) is a major gap in the Directive on pay transparency (EWL, 2021). All the above directives are explored in greater detail under the relevant BPfA areas in subsequent chapters.

1.2.2 The EU's ratification of the Istanbul Convention and adoption of a new directive marks a historic step towards eradicating violence against women in the EU

Recent achievements towards an EU-wide framework to combat gender-based violence may signal a new, comprehensive approach to gender equality, with the Commission taking action in various fields not previously covered by EU law (EIGE, 2022j). After facing several obstacles, in June 2023, the EU acceded to the **Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence** (the 'Istanbul Convention'). The EU's accession is limited to matters which fall under the EU's external exclusive competencies – that is, matters relating to judicial cooperation, asylum and non-refoulement, the EU institutions and the public administration of the Union (European Parliament, 2023a). Even so, the EU's ratification of the Istanbul Convention can serve as a binding framework towards a unified EU approach to tackling violence against women. As of February 2024, 22 Member States have ratified the Convention[9].

In March 2022, as the ratification of the Istanbul Convention stalled, the Commission proposed a **Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence** at EU level. However, this proposal sparked division between the Parliament and the Council. In June 2023, the Council adopted a general approach that removed the consent-based definition of rape, arguing that it exceeded EU legal competences (Council of the European Union, 2023). The Directive nevertheless adopts a holistic approach to combat violence against women and domestic violence in all spheres of life, including online, by putting forward measures related to prevention, protection, prosecution, victim support and access to justice. The Directive also recognises the female genital mutilation, forced marriage and certain forms of online violence as crimes.

1.3 Policy developments and trends

1.3.1 The Commission President's political guidelines (2019-2024) placed a stronger emphasis on gender equality compared with the previous Commission's term

In her political guidelines, von der Leyen reaffirmed several key principles of gender equality under the heading of a 'Union of Equality' (von der Leyen, 2019b). The 2019-2024 political guidelines represented a shift in the framing of gender equality, making it a fundamental right rather than just an economic issue (Hubert and Jacquot, 2024). This contrasts with Jean-Claude Juncker's 2014-2019 guidelines, which lacked specific mentions of gender equality (EIGE, 2020c; Hubert and Jacquot, 2024). Von der Leyen's guidelines also emphasised equal pay and gender balance on company boards and committed to establishing a gender-equal College of Commissioners. The 2024-2029 political guidelines maintain the framework of working towards a 'Union of Equality', commit to adopting a post-2025 gender equality strategy, and announce a new Roadmap for Women's Rights to be presented on International Women's Day in 2025 (von der Leyen, 2024b).

[9] Bulgaria, Czechia, Hungary, Lithuania and Slovakia have not ratified the Convention.

1.3.2 The Gender Equality Strategy (2020-2025) has made a renewed commitment to the dual approach towards gender equality and intersectionality across the EU policies

In March 2020, the Commission introduced the **Gender Equality Strategy (2020-2025)**. This outlines key objectives and actions to advance towards a gender-equal Europe (European Commission, 2020f), summarised in Figure 3. The Strategy reflects the Commission's commitment to a dual approach to gender equality, combining targeted measures with enhanced gender mainstreaming across all stages of policy design and EU policy areas. The Strategy also emphasises intersectionality as a cross-cutting principle to ensure inclusive implementation.

Figure 3. Gender Equality Strategy (2020-2025): objectives and focus areas

Source: summarised by the authors, based on European Commission. A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 (2020). Retrieved from https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0152

The adoption of the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 as a Communication represented a significant advance over its predecessor, the Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016-2019, which was a staff working document and therefore not endorsed by the College of Commissioners (European Commission, 2015). This document lacked broader political commitment, concrete benchmarks and a designated budget. Without these elements, progress on targets and indicators remained both unmeasurable and unattainable (Debusscher, 2023; EIGE, 2020c; European Court of Auditors, 2021b).

Since adopting the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, the Commission has published annual monitoring reports detailing progress on EU gender equality policies and gender mainstreaming (European Commission, 2021a, 2022a, 2023a). In cooperation with EIGE, the Commission and the JRC have also launched the **Gender Equality Strategy Monitoring Portal** (European Commission, n.d.-e). It focuses on the first three of the six strategic objectives of the Strategy at Member State and EU levels. The European Court of Auditors has, however, highlighted a lack of specific targets and monitoring indicators in the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 to track progress on gender equality, as well as the absence of systematic gender mainstreaming across all EU policy domains (European Court of Auditors, 2021a).

1.3.3 The Commission has adopted other EU policies with significant relevance to gender equality and the 'Union of Equality'

In June 2020, the Commission introduced its first EU Strategy for Victims' Rights (2020-2025), aiming to empower victims of crime including victims of gender-based violence (European

Commission, 2020d). Following this, in 2021, the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) Action Plan was unveiled, highlighting gender equality and setting targets for women's labour market participation and early childhood education (European Commission, 2021r). In 2022, the European Care Strategy was introduced, with the aim of addressing the needs of caregivers, many of whom are women, as well as recipients of care (European Commission, 2022d). To live up to its commitment to build a Union of Equality, in 2020 and 2021 the Commission adopted five equality strategies, which are presented in greater detail in 1.4.5 chapter.

1.4 Developments and trends in gender mainstreaming

1.4.1 Green and digital transitions

1.4.1.1 The European Green Deal recognises the need for a socially fair green transition but falls short of concrete solutions for gender mainstreaming

In December 2019, the European Commission adopted the **European Green Deal** as its growth strategy to make the EU economy sustainable while tackling climate and environmental-related challenges (European Commission, 2019a). One of the strategy's foremost objectives is to lead the EU towards achieving climate neutrality by 2050. To achieve the above goals, the Commission introduced the **Just Transition Mechanism,** the **Just Transition Fund** and the **Social Climate Fund (SCF).** The emphasis on achieving a 'just' and 'socially fair' transition underlines the recognition that certain groups may be disproportionately impacted by climate change.

However, there has been ongoing scrutiny regarding how well the European Green Deal addresses gender equality (Akgüç and Arabadjieva, 2024; EEB and WECF, 2021). It has been observed that the European Green Deal acknowledges gender issues, but does not offer gender-transformative solutions to address entrenched inequalities (EEB and WECF, 2021). The European Green Deal is not fully aligned with the EU dual approach to gender equality. The weak approach to gender equality, including an intersectional perspective, limits support for women and men facing structural and overlapping inequalities, such as for young and elderly persons, ethnic minority or low-income groups (EEB and WECF, 2021). Furthermore, critics argue that the European Green Deal adopts a technoscientific and economic approach that sidelines crucial social dimensions such as care work and gender justice (Akgüç et al., 2022).

1.4.1.2 The Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy aims to advance gender equality in EU transport and mobility policies

The European Green Deal's goal to create a sustainable transport sector also has significant gender implications. Women and men have different travel patterns, with women generally being more reliant on public and sustainable transport. In 2023, women made up just 17% of the transport workforce in the EU, with the highest share noted in Malta (31%) and the lowest share – in Romania (10%). Women also remain underrepresented as workers in the sector, comprising only 17 % of the transport workforce in 2023 (Eurostat, 2025).

The **Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy (SSMS)** outlines the path to reducing emissions from the transport sector and ensuring accessible mobility for transport users (European Parliament, 2021d). The Commission commits to applying equality mainstreaming[10] in transport policy initiatives in the SSMS and to launching initiatives to increase the attractiveness of the transport sector. Several initiatives, such as the 'Women in Transport – EU Platform for Change' (see also Box 43) and the

[10] To help European Commission's staff apply equality mainstreaming in their daily work, a handbook on equality mainstreaming in transport was developed and published: Handbook for equality mainstreaming at DG MOVE - Publications Office of the EU

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network of Ambassadors for #DiversityInTransport, have been launched and are active. Furthermore, the **Connecting Europe Facility** and the **EU New Urban Mobility Framework** recognise the need to consider gendered mobility patterns in measures to enhance public transport (European Commission, 2021g; European Parliament, 2021d). While these two initiatives explicitly mention gender mainstreaming, it remains uncertain how this principle is put into practice.

1.4.1.3 A more robust integration of a gender perspective is essential in EU agricultural policies

The **Farm to Fork Strategy** under the European Green Deal aims to create a fair, healthy, and environmentally sustainable EU food system by reducing the environmental impact of the food chain and increasing its resilience. Although women are more vulnerable to food insecurity – particularly those with lower levels of education and a higher number of children (Grimaccia and Naccarato, 2022) – gender equality is mentioned only briefly in the Strategy, under third-country cooperation, with little focus being given within the EU (EIGE, 2024h). The **Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) 2023-2027**, adopted by the Commission in 2021, promotes gender equality by encouraging the involvement of women in farming. This has been integrated into the CAP objectives for the first time. However, Member States are only recommended, rather than required, to assess the situation of women in the sector and to develop targeted measures (EIGE, 2024h).

1.4.1.4 Gender considerations in the EU digital strategy focus primarily on increasing women's representation in ICT and STEM

In February 2020, the Commission presented the **EU's agenda for shaping Europe's digital future** (European Commission, 2020j). Specifically, this asserts that women can and should pursue fulfilling technological careers. It emphasises the need for European tech to leverage women's skills and competencies. To support this, the Commission aims for the EU to have 20 million employed ICT specialists by 2030 and promotes gender balance in the sector, which is critical for a successful digital transformation. EU efforts to advance the digital transition could benefit from a broader approach, e.g. addressing how gender stereotypes and biases, beginning in education, hinder women's entry into key digital fields, as well as additional challenges in the workforce, including women's limited opportunities for advancement and their underrepresentation in leadership (EIGE, 2020d) (for more on this, see Education and Training of Women (Area B) and Women and the Economy (Area F).

1.4.1.5 The Digital Services Act and AI Act address potential risks related to gender-based violence and discrimination

In 2022, the Commission adopted the **Digital Services Act (DSA),** which aims to ensure a secure and trustworthy online environment for EU citizens and imposes obligations on platforms to prevent exposure to illegal content, including materials that might constitute gender-based violence (Regulation (EU) 2022/2065, 2022). By identifying gender-based violence as a category of systemic risk for large online platforms, the Act urges relevant providers to assess and mitigate current and potential adverse effects. The **AI Act** adopted in 2024 is a part of a wider package of policy measures to support the development of trustworthy AI, which would guarantee safety, fundamental rights and human-centric AI as well as prevent AI discrimination.

1.4.2 Gender equality and gender budgeting in EU financial resources

1.4.2.1 Gender equality is one of the four horizontal principles in the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021-2027, yet least well integrated

The Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), the EU's long-term budget, holds considerable potential to promote gender equality across all financial resources (EIGE, 2019b, 2020c). However,

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the MFF 2014-2020 took a weak stand on gender equality, with little attention being paid to gender equality in its provisions and implementation (EIGE, 2020c; European Court of Auditors, 2021b).

In the MFF 2021-2027, gender equality is considered a horizontal policy priority[11] that should be integrated throughout the implementation and monitoring of relevant programmes (European Commission, n.d.-c; Article 16 (f), IIA on budgetary discipline, 2020). In reality, however, there is limited evidence that gender mainstreaming has been systematically applied when preparing the MFF 2021-2027 programmes (European Court of Auditors, 2021b). Of eight impact assessments audited, only the **European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)** included a gender analysis. The others did not reference gender equality or use sex-disaggregated data (European Court of Auditors, 2021b). Unlike climate and biodiversity objectives, which have specific quantitative targets[12], similar quantitative targets were not adopted for gender equality in the EU budget. According to the European Court of Auditors (2022), gender equality is the least well integrated horizontal priority in the EU's long-term budget.

1.4.2.2 The Cohesion Policy Funds maintain provisions on gender mainstreaming

The Commission has committed to ensuring that specific EU funds integrate a gender perspective (European Commission, 2020f). The **Common Provisions Regulation (CPR)** for the 2021-2027 shared management funds[13] also establishes gender equality as a horizontal principle (Article 9(2), Regulation (EU) 2021/1060, 2021). It mandates that Member States and the Commission must promote equality between women and men and ensure the integration of a gender perspective throughout the preparation, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation of programmes[14].

To support the mapping of programmes that have objectives relating to gender equality, the CPR also introduces a code system for calculating support for gender equality in the **Cohesion Policy funds (the ERDF, ESF+, CF and JTF)** (Regulation (EU) 2021/1060, 2021)[15]. However, this does not constitute a full system to track financing for gender equality throughout the programming cycle, as advocated by stakeholders (EIGE, 2019b). Furthermore, Annex IV of the CPR stipulates that having a 'national strategic framework for gender equality' is an enabling condition applicable to certain specific objectives under the ERDF and the ESF+[16] on enhancing the inclusiveness of the labour market and promoting a gender-balanced labour market, respectively. This means that until this enabling condition is fulfilled, the Commission will not reimburse the expenditure declared by the Member States under the relevant specific objectives.

The ESF+ Regulation[17] includes an article on gender equality, equal opportunities and non-discrimination (Article 6, Regulation (EU) 2021/1057, 2021b). It establishes that Member States and

[11] The horizontal priorities in the EU budget include climate action and biodiversity, digital transformation, alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and gender equality. The definition of gender equality as a horizontal principle reflects the dual approach, which includes specific measures ('the promotion of equality between women and men') alongside gender mainstreaming (EIGE, 2019b).

[12] At least 30 % of the resources available under the MFF 2021-2027 and the Next Generation EU (the European Union Recovery Instrument) are required to address climate objectives, and 7.5 % of annual spending in 2024 and 10 % in 2026 and 2027 have to be dedicated to biodiversity objectives.

[13] These comprise the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF); the European Social Fund + (ESF+); the Cohesion Fund (CF); the Just Transition Fund (JTF); the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF); the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF); the Internal Security Fund (ISF); and the Border Management and Visa Instrument (BMVI).

[14] The CPR also provides for Member States to organise partnership agreements with (among others) relevant bodies responsible for gender equality and civil society, to implement the funds. (Article 8). For each specific objective, each programme must set out actions to safeguard equality, inclusion and non-discrimination (Article 22). Lastly, when selecting operations, the CPR establishes that Managing Authorities have to establish and apply criteria and procedures that ensure gender equality and are non-discriminatory (Article 73).

[15] Gender targeting (01), gender mainstreaming (02) and gender neutral (03). The categorisation of the gender equality dimension is carried out *ex-ante* by Management Authorities at the level of a programme's specific objective.

[16] Applies to the ERDF's specific objective on 'Enhancing the effectiveness and inclusiveness of labour markets and access to quality employment through developing social infrastructure and promoting social economy'; and for ESF+'s specific objective on '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'.

[17] In addition, the ESF+ Regulation establishes that personal data collected for the common indicators used to monitor the implementation of programmes for general support and other specific strands must be broken down by gender (Article 23, Annex I and Annex II).

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the Commission should use the ESF+ to increase the participation of women in employment. In addition, it seeks to improve the reconciliation of work with personal life, and to combat the feminisation of poverty and gender discrimination in the labour market, education and training (Article 6, Regulation (EU) 2021/1057, 2021b). For this purpose, one of the 13 specific objectives of the ESF+ is to promote 'gender-balanced labour market participation, equal working conditions, and a better work-life balance including through access to affordable early childhood education and care and care for dependent persons' (Article 4(c), Regulation (EU) 2021/1057, 2021b).

Overall, beyond the gender equality code system, the enabling condition and Article 6 of the ESF+, the Cohesion Policy funds neither establish further steps to operationalise the horizontal principle of gender equality nor envision the use of gender mainstreaming tools. For instance, there is no thematic objective, quantitative target, or requirement to provide information on how the programming cycle and programme implementation contribute to the achieving gender equality objectives (EIGE, 2019b).

1.4.2.3 In 2023, the Commission introduced a methodology to track gender equality-related expenditure in the EU budget

In the 2023 draft budget, the Commission tested a methodology for tracking expenditure on gender equality across all EU spending programmes, as required by the MFF 2021-2027 IIA on budgetary discipline (see Annex 2). In 2024, the monitoring of gender expenditure was strengthened by the inclusion in statements of gender-disaggregated data per programme (European Commission, 2024b). Reporting on the consolidated data for 2021, 2022 and 2023 indicates that out of a total EU budget of EUR 1,019.07 billion, 11 % contributed concretely to the promotion of gender equality (scores 2 and 1), amounting to EUR 114.36 billion (European Commission, 2024b). In contrast, 20 % had the potential to contribute to this objective (score 0*), while 69 % had no significant bearing on gender equality (score 0). According to the Commission, in 2023, total EU budget expenditure on projects receiving gender scores 2 and 1 increased significantly, compared with the amounts reported for 2021 and 2022 (European Commission, n.d.-d). Despite this increase, there is insufficient evidence backing many programmes' contributions to gender equality.

The assessment criteria used by the Commission to attribute these scores do not align with the minimum criteria used for international standards such as the OECD Gender Equality Marker (OECD, 2016) or EIGE's tool for the Cohesion Policy funds (EIGE, 2022f). For example, the OECD and EIGE would require gender-specific objectives or indicators disaggregated by sex as a minimum criterion to be considered for scores 2 and 1. The Commission does not include these in its methodology (European Court of Auditors, 2022). As observed by the European Court of Auditors (2022), the Commission's methodology also overlooks potential negative impacts of the programmes, focusing solely on whether they reduce gender inequalities without accounting for potential increases in them. Importantly, expenditure tracking is only one tool within gender budgeting, and works best when complemented by other tools to fully assess how funds are spent to promote gender equality (EIGE, 2019a, 2022f). While the Commission's approach marks some progress, further steps are needed to achieve comprehensive gender budgeting.

1.4.2.4 While the Recovery and Resilience Fund (RRF) aims to address the impacts of crises on women, its provisions fall short of the EU's dual approach to gender equality

To support long-term recovery from the COVID-19 crisis at EU level, the European Commission launched the **NextGenerationEU fund**, a temporary recovery instrument. The core element of this fund is the **Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF).** It provides Member States with access to grants and loans to finance reforms and investments aimed at countering the effects of the COVID-19 crisis and achieving sustainable growth.

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The RRF Regulation recognises the adverse impacts of the crisis on women, yet its regulatory provisions in relation to gender equality are limited. The requirement for national recovery and resilience plan (RRP) to include a standalone explanation describing how the plan contributes to 'gender equality and equal opportunities for all and the mainstreaming of those objectives' does not establish a duty on the Member States to include gender-targeted measures in their RRPs and to conduct gender mainstreaming. Due to the lack of formal requirements and the often weak gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting frameworks at national level, gender equality rarely extended beyond the standalone explanation on gender equality (EIGE, 2023f). Only two Member States mainstreamed gender in a comprehensive way in their RRPs. Furthermore, a gender perspective was largely missing from RRPs' measures proposed under the digital and green pillars. Gender-targeted measures, when included in RRPs, tend to focus on promoting women's participation in the labour market, work-life balance as well as equal pay and pensions. Closing gender gaps in care or gender-based violence received less attention (EIGE, 2023f).

1.4.3 Gender equality in the European Semester

1.4.3.1 Most European Semester instruments have enhanced the attention paid to gender gaps in employment, labour market, care, work-life balance and digital skills

The **European Semester** is the EU's framework for coordinating economic and social policies. Since 2018, the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) have been integrated into the European Semester cycle, focusing on equal opportunities, fair working conditions and social protection. The Semester's **Joint Employment Reports (JERs)** and country reports provide valuable analyses of the social situation in the EU, highlighting national challenges and offering recommendations on gender quality (EIGE, 2020c). While **Alert Monitoring Reports (AMR)** focus primarily on economic imbalances, generally with limited attention to gender equality (EIGE, 2020c), the **JERs** make significant efforts to incorporate gender-sensitive monitoring, offering data disaggregated by sex. The impact of COVID-19 on women, particularly in lower-paid sectors, and the need for quality childcare and long-term care services, have been consistently highlighted. Since 2020, the **Employment Guidelines (2020-2023)** have also placed a strong emphasis on gender equality, addressing issues such as the gender pay gap, women's participation in the labour market and leadership roles, as well as work-life balance and pay transparency, while also tackling gender stereotypes.

1.4.3.2 In contrast, gender equality-related, country-specific recommendations have become more scattered since 2019

Country-specific recommendations (CSRs) are a core coordination instrument of the European Semester and have the potential to support gender-responsive economic and structural reforms at national level. However, an analysis of these recommendations over recent years shows that they are primarily gender-blind or have been used instrumentally to promote an economic understanding of gender equality that reproduces hierarchies and inequalities (EIGE, 2020c; Elomäki, 2023; Klatzer and Rinaldi, 2020; O'Dwyer, 2022).

In 2019, several Member States received targeted recommendations to improve women's employment, particularly among women with young children, by enhancing access to affordable, quality childcare and long-term care. One Member State was also advised to address the gender pay gap, while others received guidance on improving care systems (Elomäki, 2023). However, from 2020 onwards, attention to gender-related themes has diminished. In 2021, Member States only received fiscal recommendations. In 2022 and 2023, a handful of Member States received recommendations to improve access to long-term care and early childhood education and care services. Since 2022, the European Semester has been adapted to consider the implementation of the national RRPs. Emerging evidence suggests that, because the Commission expected Member

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States to address gender issues through their recovery plans, this has led to reduced attention in the CSRs (Elomäki, 2023).

While other European Semester instruments have increasingly highlighted gender gaps in employment and the need for improved care systems to support women's labour market participation, the framing of these remains economic, emphasising growth and labour supply rather than social well-being (Cavaghan and Elomäki, 2022; Elomäki, 2023). In addition, over recent years, a vital focus of the CSRs has been to advance investment in energy infrastructure and efficiency. Member States have been recommended to support households in the context of energy price hikes in 2022. By 2023, all Member States were urged to wind down energy support measures while protecting 'the most vulnerable households'. This shift in the focus of the CSRs from social issues to the green transition and energy concerns suggests an emerging trend whereby gender considerations may be overshadowed (Cavaghan and Elomäki, 2022).

1.4.4 Gender mainstreaming in selected EU policy areas

1.4.4.1 The EU has intensified its efforts to integrate gender equality into its external actions

In November 2020, the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy introduced the **Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in External Action 2021-2025**, extended to 2027 (GAP III) (European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2020). Building upon the EU Gender Equality Strategy and GAP II, the Action Plan seeks to promote gender equality in all EU external actions. GAP III adopts a gender-transformative and intersectional approach. Moreover, GAP III has broadened its scope by integrating the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda and addressing the challenges and opportunities presented by the green and digital transitions. This demonstrates a broader understanding of gender equality issues and an expansion of its thematic areas in comparison to GAP II. In addition, the Commission pledged to direct 85 % of new actions in external relations towards gender equality by 2027.

In November 2023, the Commission released a **joint mid-term report on the implementation of GAP III**, highlighting achievements such as improved alignment between policy and programming, resulting in more initiatives and funding for gender equality (European Commission, 2023p). However, the report also stresses the need for further efforts. This includes allocating adequate resources to meet targets and reinforcing gender-transformative approaches to tackle conflicts, climate change, technology-related risks and the backlash against women's rights (Directorate-General for International Partnerships, 2023).

1.4.4.2 The EU has strengthened the adoption of a gender perspective in its funding for research and innovation

The field of research and innovation (R&I) continues to be an area in which the EU adopts a strong gender perspective. Under Horizon 2020, the EU's largest R&I programme, which ran from 2014 to 2020, gender was a cross-cutting issue and was mainstreamed in each of the different parts of the work programme (EIGE, 2022h). The new framework for the period 2021-2027, **Horizon Europe**, aims to intensify these efforts. It requires organisations to have in place a **Gender Equality Plan (GEP)** in order to access funding, and promotes the integration of a gender dimension into research content[18]. The programme also aims to increase gender balance, with a target of 50 % women in expert groups and evaluation committees (European Commission, 2022j, 2024d).

[18] EIGE has developed the Gender Equality in Academia and Research (GEAR) tool to provide guidance for R&I organisations and research funding bodies on developing and implementing an effective and sustainable GEP. Available at: https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gear?language_content_entity=en

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1.4.4.3 The EU Security Union Strategy reinforces commitments to gender equality

In July 2020, the Commission adopted the **EU Security Union Strategy (2020-2025)** (European Commission, 2020l). This emphasises a secure environment for everyone, regardless of racial or ethnic origin, religion, gender, age or sexual orientation. The Strategy advocates for the EU's accession to the Istanbul Convention and the inclusion of violence against women in the list of EU crimes. It also stresses the importance of ensuring that victims of domestic violence and sexual exploitation can access their rights. In addition, the sixth progress report on the Strategy's implementation highlights the need to increase the participation of women in the EU cybersecurity workforce, in which they remain underrepresented (European Commission, 2023e).

1.4.4.4 Initiatives in the area of migration are undergoing significant transformation, risking a lack of attention to gender equality

Migration was a critical policy area in the Commission's political guidelines for 2019-2024 (European Commission, n.d.-h). In March 2022, the Council of the European Union activated the **Temporary Protection Directive (TPD)**, efficiently assisting millions of Ukrainians, many of whom are women and girls, in seeking refuge in the EU (Council of the European Union, 2022b) (for more on this, see Women and Health (Area C) and Women and Armed Conflict (Area E)). In December 2023, the European Parliament and Council reached a political agreement on the **New Pact on Migration and Asylum,** aiming for a balanced distribution of asylum applications among Member States and streamlined border procedures (European Council and Council of the European Union, 2024). However, the Pact drew criticism by civil society organisations, international organisations and some Member States due to the risk of increasing the vulnerability of asylum seekers. Accelerated procedures might undermine safeguards such as legal aid and heighten detention risks, especially for women, children and other vulnerable groups (Amnesty International, 2023b; Human Rights Watch, 2023a).

1.4.5 Gender mainstreaming in the 'Union of Equality' strategies

In line with the 'Union of Equality' agenda and the commitment to use intersectionality as a cross-cutting principle in the Gender Equality Strategy, the Commission has since 2020 adopted strategies in relation to other grounds of discrimination and related fields (compiled in detail in Annex 3).

These strategies adopt a gender perspective to varying degrees and underline the intersectionality of gender with other personal characteristics and identities. However, while some strategies, such as the **EU Youth Strategy** and the EU **Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion, and participation**, acknowledge multiple forms of discrimination, they do not integrate a gender perspective consistently into their objectives and actions (European Commission, 2020, 2022). The **EU Anti-Racism Action Plan** recognises the increased risks women face from emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI)-based facial recognition, which can misclassify women from minority racial or ethnic backgrounds (European Commission, 2020e). However, the plan does not address the specific challenges women face with regard to employment, education, health and housing when experiencing discrimination based on race or ethnicity. Similarly, the **EU Strategy on Combating Antisemitism** emphasises a commitment to non-discrimination. However, it does not fully address how gender discrimination interacts with race, ethnicity and religion (European Commission, 2021k). This inconsistency highlights the need for the more thorough integration of a gender perspective across all strategies.

Overall, certain strategies, such as the **Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**, the **LGBTIQ Equality Strategy** and the **Strategy on the Rights of the Child,** explicitly focus on gender gaps and gender-based violence (European Commission, 2020g, 2021s, 2021h). However, the effectiveness of the 'Union of Equality' and other related strategies would benefit from more consistent application of a gender lens across strategies and a unified framework for monitoring and

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assessing the implementation of these strategies. The use of different reporting methods between strategies complicates the evaluation of progress towards equality in a consistent way.

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2 Policies and developments in the 12 critical areas of concern in the EU since 2019

This chapter reviews key achievements, challenges, policy developments and trends in the 12 BPfA areas of concern since 2019. Additional information is provided in the annexes. Annex 11 examines the links between the BPfA objectives and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a particular focus on SDG 5 – achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. Each BPfA area also highlights how its objectives intersect with other relevant SDGs, demonstrating the broader connections to global development priorities.

2.1 Women and Poverty (Area A)

Under the BPfA, Member States committed to addressing women's poverty and ensuring equal rights and access to economic resources, such as savings and credit. Area A focuses on developing gender-sensitive policies, methodologies and research to meet the specific needs of women in poverty. The officially agreed EU indicators[19] to monitor progress in this area consist of inactivity rates and the intersections of gender with age, family type and migrant status within the at-risk-of-poverty (AROP) rate. However, these indicators only provide a partial view, focusing on income-based and economic measures. For this reason, this chapter addresses additional dimensions that capture the complex reality of poverty.

Area A (Women and Poverty) alignment with SDGs

1.2	Reduce at least by half the proportion of women and men of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions
1.4	Equal rights to economic resources and equal access to basic services, new technology and financial services
5.4	Recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the family
8.5	Achieve full employment and decent work for all women and men

For the BPfA +30 review, the thematic focus and priority topics of Area A include:

Analysing the impact of COVID-19 on heightened time

Understanding the effects of energy poverty on gender inequalities

Tackling the gender repercussions of inadequate housing and homelessness

Examining gender disparities in financial literacy levels

These thematic priorities aim to illustrate the multidimensional nature of poverty experienced by women and men in all their diversity, particularly amid multiple crises and megatrends. The climate change, challenges of digital and labour market transformation, alongside economic downturns resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, conflicts and crises, such as the Russian war of aggression on Ukraine, growing social divisions and persistent inflation, have deepened existing issues and unveiled new dimensions of poverty.

[19] See more information on all BPfA indicators at EIGE's Gender Statistics Database: Beijing Platform for Action | Gender Statistics Database | European Institute for Gender Equality

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2.1.1 EU policy developments

Since 2018, the EU has made significant strides towards addressing poverty and social exclusion. Many initiatives have the potential to positively impact women and men. However, they are not harmonised under a common strategy and do not consistently integrate a gender perspective. The **European Pillar of Social Rights** (EPSR) and its **Action Plan** set an agenda for actions that enhance gender equality and reduce the risk of poverty and social exclusion. The EPSR established a target to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion by at least 15 million by 2030 (compared to 2019), of which at least 5 million should be children. To achieve this, the EU has adopted complementary initiatives that directly address poverty and social exclusion, thereby highlighting the EPSR's role in promoting cohesive social policies.

One such initiative is the European **Child Guarantee**, which aims to ensure that all girls and boys at risk of poverty and social exclusion have access to key services, such as early childhood education and care and healthcare. The non-binding **Council Recommendation on adequate minimum income ensuring active inclusion** seeks to strengthen the safety nets for women and men by combining adequate minimum income benefits with other monetary benefits. The **Council Recommendation on access to social protection for workers and the self-employed** promotes access to social protection for all, in particular for non-standard workers and the self-employed. Lastly, the **Adequate Minimum Wages Directive** establishes a framework for adequate minimum wages. Although minimum wages are seen as a gender-neutral policy, women are more likely than men to earn them, with differing indirect effects on their employment and working hours (Eurofound, 2024).

The EU has also introduced further policies that support the economic empowerment of women and girls. For example, the **Work-Life Balance Directive**, the **European Care Strategy** and two **Council Recommendations on long-term care and early childhood education and care** aim to promote the participation of carers in the labour market. Furthermore, the Political guidelines 2024-2029 emphasise the importance to ensure that new forms of work would not lead to fewer rights and promise to introduce a right to disconnect. These measures will improve work-life balance for workers and carers as well as the resilience of care systems, which can, in turn, reduce time poverty. The **Council Directive on VAT** allows Member States to waive value-added tax on menstrual products, addressing a gender-specific financial burden associated with period poverty.

The **European Green Deal** seeks to ensure a socially fair green transition by addressing energy and transport poverty, promoting clean energy and supporting communities and workers in adapting to sustainability. However, it has faced criticism for being gender-blind and inadequately addressing climate justice from a social perspective – see more on this in Section 1.4.1.1. To prevent gender inequalities being reinforced, measures such as the **Council Recommendation on ensuring a fair transition towards climate neutrality** address employment and social aspects linked to the green transition. This Recommendation identifies women, especially lone mothers and older women, as being at higher risk of energy poverty and housing cost overburden.

Various financial instruments offer a framework for Member States to implement EU-supported measures targeting poverty and social exclusion. With a total budget of more than EUR 99 billion, the **ESF**+ establishes a general objective for Member States and the Commission to combat the feminisation of poverty (Regulation (EU) 2021/1057, 2021a). The Commission reported that between 2021 and 2023, Member States allocated EUR 1.32 billion to interventions primarily focusing on gender equality, and EUR 27.25 billion to interventions in which gender equality is a significant objective (European Commission, 2023m). For the specific objective of promoting gender-balanced labour market participation, equal working conditions and better work-life balance, Member States have programmed EUR 3.6 billion (European Commission, 2023a). Another significant instrument is

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the **ERDF**, with EUR 220 billion dedicated to poverty and social inclusion measures (for more on the Cohesion Policy funds, see Section 1.4.2.2).

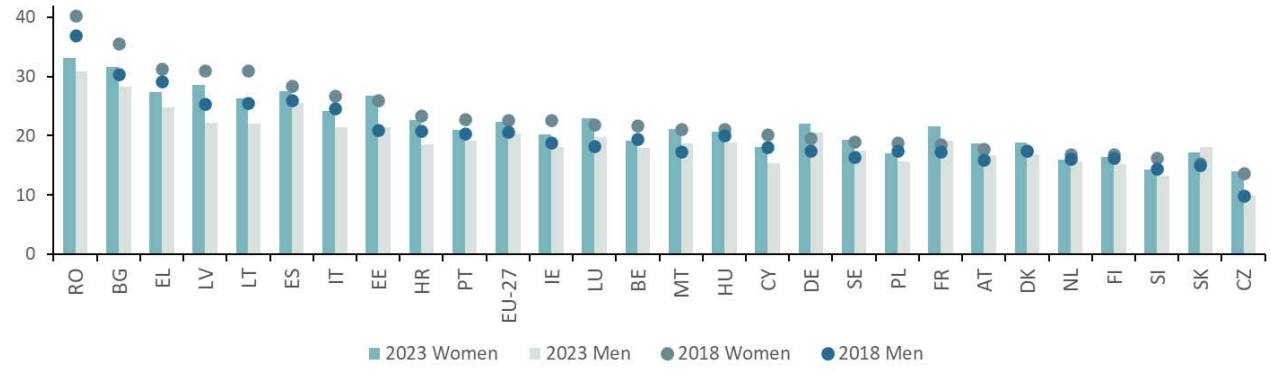
The first ever **EU Anti-Poverty Strategy**, set out in the von der Leyen's 2024-2029 Political Guidelines, presents an opportunity to prioritise poverty reduction at EU level. Reinforcing this strategy through a new Gender Equality Strategy would provide the opportunity to adopt gender-specific measures that address the gendered dimensions of poverty across multiple domains.

2.1.2 Key challenges and trends

2.1.2.1 In the EU more than 90 million people are at risk of poverty or social exclusion, with women continuing to be more affected

Between 2018 and 2023, there were no major changes in estimated number of women (51 million) and men (44 million) in the EU that are at risk of poverty or social exclusion[20] (AROPE). Proportionately, the risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU affected 22% of women and 20% of men in 2023. The risk of poverty or social exclusion varied widely between Member States (see Figure 4), with rates for women ranging from 33 % in Romania to 14 % in Czechia and Slovenia, and for men, from 31 % in Romania to 10 % in Czechia.

Figure 4. Persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion, by sex and country (% of total population, 2018 and 2023)



Source: Eurostat, EU SILC, ilc_pepso1n.

Note: EU-SILC break in time series for the HR data in 2023.

The AROPE indicator primarily grasps cross-country and household-type disparities in the risk of poverty and social exclusion. However, this measure underestimates actual gender gaps, as household-level measurements often mask differences between men and women within the same household, largely due to the underlying assumption that household economic resources are equally pooled and shared among household members. Thereby, the captured gender gaps primarily reflect disparities arising from a higher share of women than men being in single adult households, such as single parents or older people living alone. In 2022, 48% of lone mother households and 38% of lone father households in the EU were at risk of poverty (AROP) [21]. This significant gender gap shows how gendered structural barriers and caregiving responsibilities lead to higher poverty risks for lone mothers than for lone fathers. At the same time, it highlights the vulnerability of lone parent households compared to general population, where AROP rates are 22% for women and 19% for men.

[20] The official Beijing indicator is the at-risk-of-poverty (AROP) rate, which captures the share of the population with an equivalised disposable income below 60 % of the national median income after social transfers. This report, however, uses the AROPE rate, an EU headline indicator, as it provides a more comprehensive assessment of poverty and social exclusion by capturing the number of persons experiencing at least one of the following three conditions: monetary poverty after social transfers, severe material and social deprivation, or low work intensity.

[21] EIGE calculations based on EU-SILC 2022 micro-data.

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The combined effect of gender and other power dynamics places certain demographic groups at a greater risk of poverty or social exclusion (see Figure 5). Whereas women and men from non-EU countries and inactive women and men experience the highest risks among all of the groups analysed, the largest gender gap, at 5 pp, is observed among older people aged 65 or above. Compared to men, the heightened risk among older women is linked to gender disparities in employment and income throughout their lives, which subsequently affects their pensions (EIGE, 2020d). Women's limited participation in the labour market is often caused by their disproportionate caregiving and household responsibilities, which results in fewer paid work hours and in low-paid and precarious employment (EIGE, 2020d).

Figure 5. Persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion, by sub-group (% of population, EU, 2018 and 2023)

	Women	Men	Gender gap (pp) in 2023	Gender gap (pp) in 2018	Gap change since 2018
Disability					
Without disabilities	19	17	2	2	
With disabilities	30	28	2	2	
Citizenship					
EU citizen	29	27	2	3	
Non-EU citizen	47	44	3	1	
Age					
15-24	27	26	1	2	
25-54	20	19	1	1	
55-64	23	20	3	3	
65+	22	17	5	6	
Education					
Low	36	33	3	2	
Medium	21	18	3	2	
High	11	10	1	1	
Activity and employment					
Employed	11	12	-1	-1	
Not employed	33	31	2	2	
Inactive	43	45	-2	-5	
Retired	21	17	4	4	
Overall					
Total Population	22	20	2	2	

Gap decreased No change Gap increased

Source: Eurostat, EU SILC, ilc_peps01n, ilc_peps02n, ilc_peps04n, ilc_peps05n, hlth_dpe010.

Notes: Authors' own calculations for the gender gap in 2023 and 2018. The dimension 'disability' refers to the population aged 16 or over. The dimensions 'citizenship', 'education' and 'activity and employment' refer to the population aged 18 or over. Data included for EU citizens in 2018 and 2023 under the section 'citizenship' are of low reliability (due to the small sample size). Educational attainment includes people who have completed ISCED levels 0–2 (Low), ISCED level 3 or 4 (Medium), or ISCED levels 5–8 (High). Gap changes: positive, where they have decreased since 2018 (in green, gender gap change ≥-1); negative, where they have increased since 2018 (in red, gender gap change ≥1), and no change since 2018 (in yellow, =0).

Trans people experience increased vulnerability to poverty due to the violence they face from their families and society because of their gender identity (ILGA-Europe, 2023b). In the 2019 FRA LGBTI Survey II, 46 % of trans respondents reported difficulty in making ends meet, and 54 % of trans women reported financial hardship (Karsay, 2021). Roma communities are also disproportionately affected, with 80 % living below the national poverty threshold in 2021 across eight surveyed EU countries (EL, ES, HR, HU, IT, PL, PT and RO), as well as North Macedonia and Serbia (FRA, 2022b). This disparity is further shaped by gendered employment patterns, as only 28 % of Roma women aged 20 to 64 are employed, compared with to 58 % of comparable Roma men (FRA, 2022b).

Overall, while AROPE rate provides valuable insights into key dimensions of poverty and social exclusion, it falls short in capturing the extent of gender inequalities in these areas- such as the extent of unpaid care responsibilities and gender unequal access to resources, including individual access to jobs. Beyond the dimensions measured by AROPE, other dimensions of poverty - such

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as time poverty, energy and transport poverty, inadequate housing, homelessness, or period poverty, or autonomy to access and manage financial and economic resources - also carry significant gender equality implications and are closely linked to who is at greater risk of poverty and social exclusion.

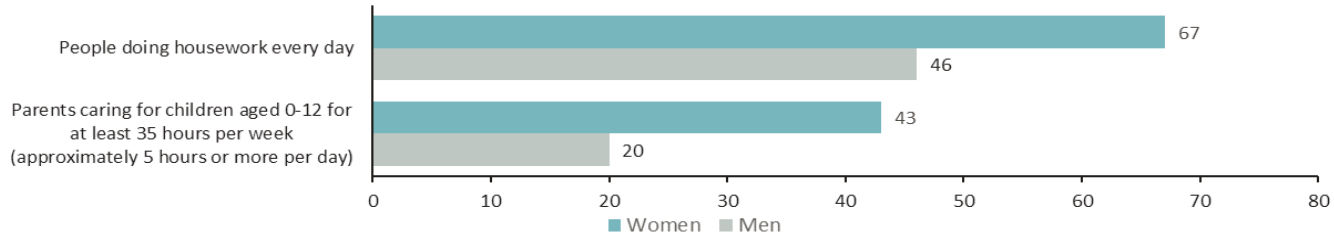
2.1.2.2 Time poverty caused by unpaid care and household responsibilities restricts women's economic independence – a problem worsened by COVID-19

Time poverty is defined as a lack of available time after accounting for paid employment, unpaid work, study and other basic life necessities. It deprives individuals of the time and autonomy needed to ensure decent working conditions, financial independence, training and access to basic resources and services necessary for a healthy life. This type of poverty also prevents people from participating fully in their communities and societies.

Source: European Parliament. 'Report on women's poverty in Europe', 2022

Women in the EU are more prone to experiencing time poverty than men due to spending a greater amount of time on unpaid work, such as caregiving or housework (Aloè, 2023; Giménez-Nadal and Molina, 2020; Giurge, et al., 2020) – see Figure 6. As a result, women devote less time than men to social activities (EIGE, 2023j). In 2022, only 29 % of working women in the EU engaged in sporting, cultural or leisure activities outside their home at least daily or several times a week, compared to 34 % of men (EIGE, 2023j).

Figure 6. People providing childcare and doing housework every day, by sex (% of 18-74 respondents, EU, 2024)



Source: EIGE's CARE survey 2nd wave (2024).

Time poverty particularly limits women's ability to engage in full-time employment, reducing their income potential and increasing their reliance on low-wage or part-time jobs, which in turn increases their risk of poverty (Rodgers, 2023). This issue became more pronounced during the COVID-19 pandemic, as remote work and the closure of schools and childcare services intensified more women's than men's uptake of care responsibilities, revealing a tendency to fall back on gender stereotypical family patterns for work-life balance (Alfano, et al., 2024; Blázquez, et al., 2024; Caki, 2022). As a result, women's work-life balance suffered disproportionately, with 18 % of women reducing their paid working hours, compared with only 3 % of men, who were far less affected by increased need of caregiving (EIGE, 2021c).

In a Flash Eurobarometer survey conducted in 2022, which focused solely on female respondents, 38 % of women reported that the pandemic had negatively impacted their income, with 25 % attributing this to an increase in unpaid work at home[22] (European Parliament, 2022b). This reduction in working hours affected women's financial independence, with around one in five women becoming more financially dependent on their partner, relatives or friends (European Parliament, 2022g). According to EIGE's estimates, government policies to mitigate the pandemic's impact on incomes had either poverty reducing or neutral effect on poverty among working-age women and men.

[22] The Flash Eurobarometer survey gathered women's opinions on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on violence against women, mental health and women's working lives. It was conducted exclusively among women and girls (EU citizens) aged 15 years and over (European Parliament, 2022g).

Without these temporary measures, the COVID-19 labour market shock would have led to higher poverty rates (EIGE, 2023f). Nonetheless, these tax-benefit measures were short-term, and their positive effects on poverty were also temporary.

2.1.2.3 Following the pandemic and the war in Ukraine, the surge in energy prices is disproportionately impacting women

Since 2020, energy prices have risen significantly, initially triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequently intensified by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine (Carfora et al., 2022). Even though prices have fallen since the peak of the crisis, they remain higher than pre-pandemic levels (Hansens and Kálmán, 2024). In this context, energy poverty has surged as a pressing concern in the EU, affecting daily life (EIGE, 2023j).

Energy poverty lacks an official definition in the EU. It generally refers to a household's lack of access to essential energy services, such as heating, hot water, cooling, lighting and energy to power appliances. Energy poverty often results from a combination of inadequate income, poor energy efficiency and high energy prices. It is typically measured at household rather than individual level, which can obscure the true extent of women's energy poverty.

Source: European Parliament, 'Gender aspects of energy poverty', 2023

Between 2018 and 2023, the proportion of both women and men aged 16 and over who could not keep their homes adequately warm rose from 7 % to 9 % (Eurostat, 2024j). For those with a limiting or severely limiting disability, the rate rose by 4 pp, reaching 16 % for women and 15 % for men (Eurostat, 2024j). Women are at a higher risk of experiencing energy poverty than men due to gender inequalities in the economic, social and decision-making spheres, such as lower earnings and increased time spent at home, which may expose them to more adverse physical and mental health outcomes (Papadimitriou et al., 2023). In 2022, more women than men fell behind in paying their energy bills, with lone mothers and women who live alone facing the greatest difficulties (Eurofound, 2022b).

Climate change, including more frequent and intense heat waves, is making summer energy poverty a pressing issue, especially in Southern Europe (Torrego-Gómez et al., 2024). Research from Spain shows that women-led households, particularly older women over 65 who live alone, are most affected (Heredia et al., 2022; Núñez-Peiró et al., 2021). Research and quantitative data for the EU on summer poverty is still limited, with The most comprehensive and recent data provided by a 2012 ad-hoc EU-SILC module, which found that 19 % of the EU population struggled to keep their homes cool during summer (Eurostat, 2023d). Since then, accelerating global warming is further exacerbating the issue.

Box 2. Fighting energy poverty among women in Mediterranean areas

Between September 2019 and August 2023, the Horizon 2020-funded EmpowerMed project was launched to combat energy poverty in coastal Mediterranean areas, including Zadar (**Croatia**), Marseille (**France**), Padova (**Italy**), Obala (**Slovenia**) and Barcelona (**Spain**). The project aimed to alleviate energy poverty and improve the health of those affected, with a particular focus on women. Its actions included installing energy-saving devices, energy advice training, group meetings on energy and health, and advocacy campaigns.

2.1.2.4 Lack of affordable and good-quality housing is limiting housing access for women and men

The EU faces a severe shortage of affordable, quality housing (Colomb and Gallent, 2022; Delclós and Vidal, 2021; Housing Europe, 2023), with rents rising by 10 pp and house prices by 33 pp between 2018 and 2023 (Eurostat, 2024g, 2024h). Such increases, outpacing inflation and average wage growth (Kálmán, 2022), affect household spending on housing. The impact of this is evident

in the housing cost overburden rate, which measures the percentage of people living in households that spend at least 40 % of their disposable income on housing. Among those at risk of poverty, the burden is three times higher than that of the total population, affecting 34 % of women and 33 % of men in this group (Eurostat, 2024i).

Soaring housing prices have become one of the most significant challenges for young people trying to gain independence (Eurofound, 2024). As of 2023, 45 % of women and 54 % of men aged 18 to 34 in the EU still lived with their parents (Eurostat, 2024s). While men are more likely to remain at home longer, societal expectations often pressure women to leave their homes earlier, in particular because of traditional gender roles around caregiving and starting families (Klimova Chaloupkova, 2023). Even when young women and men manage to secure housing, limited financial resources mean that they are likely to rent rather than buy (Eurofound, 2023). This reliance on rented housing can lead to inadequate living conditions. For instance, in 2023, 26 % of young women and men aged 15 to 29 lived in overcrowded households, which is 9 pp higher than in the total population (Eurostat, 2024n).

Members of the LGBTIQ community face heightened vulnerability in the housing crisis due to societal norms and expectations surrounding gender and sexual orientation. These pressures often lead to identity-related family conflicts, lack of institutional support and social rejection, all of which can make it harder to access stable housing and essential resources (FEANTSA, 2023; Pettas, et al., 2022; Sauvaire and Stella, 2022).

Gender inequalities in pay make women particularly vulnerable to rising housing prices (Baptista et al., 2017; Equinet, 2020). For victims of gender-based violence, limited options for affordable and quality housing can trap them in or lead them back to abusive situations (Bretherton and Mayock, 2021). Housing insecurity among women often goes underreported, partly due to restrictive definitions of homelessness that focus on emergency shelters and rough sleeping (European Parliament, 2022e). Due to stigma and a fear of male-dominated service settings, women are more likely than men to delay seeking formal homeless services until all informal options have been exhausted (Bretherton and Mayock, 2021; Sales and Guijarro, 2017). As a result, women in particular experience forms of hidden homelessness, such as in the case of lone mothers and their children staying with friends or family (Mayock and Sheridan, 2020).

2.1.2.5 There has been an increase in initiatives to combat period poverty across Member States, but EU-wide data are needed to understand the full extent of this issue

Period poverty is defined as a lack of access to menstrual products, proper sanitation facilities and menstrual education. Due to gender stereotypes and stigma, women and girls may be reluctant to talk about their periods and feel uncomfortable asking others for menstrual products if they are having problems obtaining them. As a multidimensional issue with far-reaching consequences, period poverty impacts both health and societal participation. The lack of access to safe and hygienic period products can force women and girls to use unsafe alternatives or to extend the use of products beyond safe limits. This can lead to serious health issues and hinder societal participation, causing women and girls to miss school, work or social activities.

Sources: Jaafar, H. et al. (2023), Period Poverty: A Neglected Public Health Issue; and Holst, A.S. et al. (2022) Experiences of menstrual inequity and menstrual health among women and people who menstruate in the Barcelona area (Spain): a qualitative study.
Image: generated with ChatGPT

Awareness of period poverty in the EU has increased in recent years following advocacy from civil society (Santana de Almeida, 2021). Since 2018, a few initiatives at EU and Member State levels have been implemented to tackle the issue. These efforts include providing free products in schools, universities and prisons, as exemplified an initiative in France, reported in Box 3.

Estimates suggest that women in the EU spend an average of EUR 27,000 on period products throughout their lifetime (European Parliament, 2021g). Despite this significant expenditure, comprehensive data on period poverty remain scarce. Limited and inconsistent data from Member

States suggest that around 1 in 10 women experience period poverty (European Commission, n.d.-g; Heerts, 2022). The current cost-of-living crisis further reduces women's ability to afford essential supplies such as period products (Feenstra et al., 2024).

Box 3. Addressing period poverty in France

A survey conducted among 6,500 women in **France** showed that 13 % of respondents had, at some point in their lifetimes, had to choose between purchasing period products or purchasing an essential item such as food (DW, 2021). In 2021, a budget of EUR 5 million was allocated to funding initiatives to address period poverty, which affects almost 2 million women annually in the country (European Commission, 2022a). As part of these initiatives, during the 2020-2021 school year, the Lille region introduced a programme offering free period products in high schools. Starting in 2024, France plans to introduce reimbursement for reusable sanitary protection for all young women under the age of 25.

2.1.2.6 Gender inequalities in care, pay and decision-making limit women's financial independence, which increases their risk of poverty

The BPfA emphasises the need for women to have control over economic resources, including access to savings, credit mechanisms and financial institutions. Such access strengthens resilience against economic shocks and fosters financial security, helping prevent poverty (Innovations for Poverty Action, 2017; Müller et al., 2024). However, systemic factors such as gendered caregiving roles and unequal pay, limit women's opportunities for financial planning and independence, impacting their long-term financial resilience and well-being (EIGE, 2024c). Gender differences in digital skills, particularly among older, rural and lower-income women, affect digital financial literacy, creating barriers as services become increasingly digitalised (EAPN, 2022; European Commission and OECD, 2022) (EAPN, 2022; European Commission and OECD, 2022; Ray et al., 2022; Tandi, 2022).

A 2023 Eurobarometer shows that only 13 % of women in the EU reported a high level of financial literacy, compared with 24 % of men (European Commission, 2023k). In terms of retirement security, 74 % of women reported feeling confident in their long-term financial security, compared with 81 % of men. Meanwhile, 30 % of women, compared with 37 % of men, said they had sufficient savings to cover six months of expenses if their income ceased (European Commission, 2023k). These disparities are rooted in broader gender inequalities rather than women's inherent lack of financial capabilities. Systemic factors, such as gender gaps in employment, in pay and wealth and women's underrepresentation in decision-making roles, limit their opportunities to engage in strategic and longer-term financial planning of own or household's financial resources (EIGE, 2024c). In addition, traditional financial literacy metrics often emphasise knowledge of riskier investments, which are more likely to be pursued by men than women, while the everyday financial management tasks frequently managed by women are undervalued (P. Fisher and Yao, 2017; Hung et al., 2012). This approach may inadequately reflect the diverse financial competencies and reflect gender stereotypes.

Economic violence can also impede victims' ability to develop financial literacy (L. Johnson et al., 2022). The perpetrator's use of economic control, exploitation and sabotage (as defined in EIGE, 2023o) reinforces financial dependence and limits the victim's access to resources and opportunities such as education and employment. With inflation at its highest level in decades, the ongoing cost-of-living crisis can potentially lead to more frequent and severe instances of economic violence. This is because financial difficulties increase stress and heighten the potential for family conflicts (European Parliament, 2021f; Zumsteeg, 2022). For more on economic violence, see Violence Against Women (Area D).

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2.2 Education and Training of Women (Area B)

The BPfA's objectives in Area B focus on developing non-discriminatory education and training, ensuring equal access to education and promoting life-long learning and training for women and girls. Area B aims to enhance women's access to vocational training, science and technology. It also advocates for lifelong education and training for women and seeks to develop gender-sensitive educational content and teaching methods to promote gender equality.

The officially agreed EU indicators to monitor progress in this area focus on women and men graduates in tertiary and vocational education in STEM and in the field of education, health and welfare (EHW), as well as the employment rate of women and men by the higher level of education attained, and the number of women and men in academic staff positions. The current indicators partially address key EU challenges, including horizontal and vertical segregation, but do not account for the impact of gender stereotypes and intersecting characteristics, as well as gender-based violence in educational settings.

Area B (Education and Training of Women) alignment with SDGs

5.2	Eliminate violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres
5b	Enhance the use of technology to promote the empowerment of women
4.3	Equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education
4.5	Eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable

For the BPfA +30 review, the thematic focus and priority topics of Area B include:

Addressing gender segregation in education

Promoting STEM education among women and girls and equal lifelong learning opportunities

Adopting a gender perspective in education policies amid a digital transition

Tackling gender-based violence in education settings

These topics highlight the need to ensure that education systems across the EU champion gender equality in order to address pressing challenges to our economies and to our democracies, including disinformation and anti-gender mobilisation. In the context of the green transition and digital economy, it is also essential to leverage education to address skills shortages and close the gender gap, ensuring both women and men are included in all areas.

2.2.1 EU policy developments

Addressing gender gaps and unequal opportunities in education and training for girls and boys, women and men in all their diversity is a key element of the strategic framework for cooperation to achieve the **European Education Area (EEA)** (Council of the European Union, 2021), falling under the first EEA strategic priority on *Improving quality, equity, inclusion and success for all in education and training*. The previous **Strategic Framework for Education and Training (ET2020)** primarily focused on addressing specific gender-related issues such as promoting equal participation in education and careers, especially in science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM). The EEA (see Figure 7) emphasises the integration of gender-sensitive practices into overall strategies, comprehensive school education curricula and methods.

Figure 7. Gender equality objectives of the EEA

Source: Council Resolution of 26 February 2021 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030)

The EEA also focuses on building societal resilience and preparing for the green and digital transitions (Council of the European Union, 2021). Several key initiatives, such as the **Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027 (DEAP)** (European Commission, 2020b) and the updated **European Skills Agenda (ESA),** promote women's participation in STEM studies and careers. Practical elements of the DEAP[23] include creating gender-inclusive digital education content and advocating for flexible learning paths. Other initiatives in this realm include the **Women in Digital Strategy** and **Europe's Digital Decade,** which aims to achieve the employment of 20 million ICT specialists by 2030, alongside efforts to achieve an increased representation of women in the field. However, such a goal may prove overly ambitious, given the persistent challenges relating to women's representation in the sector. Other efforts have focused on training and skills development to improve youth employment opportunities in the EU. For example, the **Youth Guarantee** provides a framework for young people to receive guidance and promotes technical and soft skills. Or aiming to enhance the attractiveness and sustainability of higher education careers as outlined in the Council Recommendation adopted in late 2024.

In the area of research, the EU has continuously expanded the possibilities of the **European Research Area (ERA)** to function as a catalyst to advance gender equality (European Commission, 2022h). The EU's ongoing commitment to gender mainstreaming in R&I has been reinforced by the introduction of **Gender Equality Plans,** which are required to access Horizon Europe funding (see Section 1.4.4). Other recent commitments to fostering gender equality, diversity and inclusiveness are outlined in initiatives such as the **EU Prize for Women Innovators** and the **manifesto for gender-inclusive STE(A)M[24] education and careers** (European Commission, 2023h)**.**

Overall, EU policy for education and training provides a comprehensive framework to address persistent and emerging gender equality issues. However, despite the EU's recognition of key issues, progress has been limited due to the insufficient implementation of gender mainstreaming and targeted actions at national level (Evagorou et al., 2024; European Commission et al., 2023n). To address the deeply rooted gender roles and stereotypes that shape the educational choices and future academic and professional trajectories of young women and men, consistent policy efforts are needed that involve communities, parents, teachers and other key stakeholders.

2.2.2 Key challenges and trends

2.2.2.1 Member States have made significant strides in gender parity in educational attainment

Member States have maintained steady gender parity levels in educational attainment over the past five years. In 2022, 56 % of bachelor's degree graduates were women, while doctoral degrees were split almost evenly between women (48 %) and men (52 %). Gender parity also exists among vocational education graduates (Eurostat, 2024f).

Despite progress in educational attainment, women still face disadvantages after graduation. While young men are more likely to leave school early than young women (11 %, compared with 8 %) (van

[23] For instance, DEAP includes Girls Go Circular and ESTEAM Fests initiatives aimed at empowering more girls and women to pursue STEM studies and careers.
[24] The STEAM approach to STEM refers to the inclusion of arts, social sciences and the humanities in STEM education or careers.

Driel et al., 2023), women are overrepresented among NEETs (persons not in employment, education, or training), particularly in Romania, Czechia, Poland and Hungary (Eurostat, 2023b). This suggests that although young women may graduate at higher rates, there are still barriers which restrict their involvement in the labour market. Persistent gender stereotyping, occupational segregation, gender inequalities in caregiving roles and societal expectations often limit women's access to certain jobs, especially in higher-paying sectors (Mathys, 2019; UNESCO, 2021b).

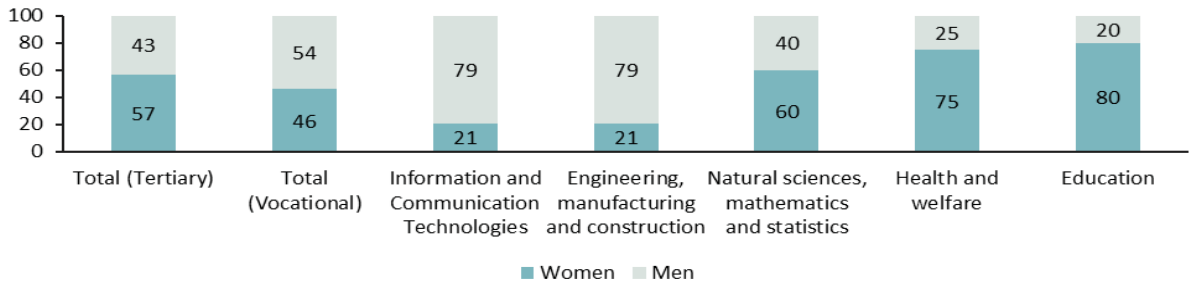
Moreover, advancements in access to education does not guarantee equal opportunities for all groups. For instance, communities in disadvantaged conditions such as Roma face severe educational disparities. Only a quarter of Roma children were enrolled in early education (FRA, 2022b), with cultural norms in the community disproportionately affecting women and girls. Estimates show that 28 % of Roma women and girls lack formal education, compared with 18 % of Roma men and boys (Andrei et al., 2015).

2.2.2.2 Horizontal segregation persists as gender stereotypes influence students' career choices

Systemic gender stereotypes originating in the educational sector significantly influence women's experiences in the labour market, leading to gender disparities in specific industries (EIGE, 2024r). For example, only around a fifth of engineering, manufacturing, construction and ICT graduates are women (see Figure 8). As a result, in 2023 women made up just one-fifth of the ICT workforce (De Luca, 2023). Similarly, the strong association of women with care roles is evident in early childhood education, where 95 % of teachers are women (Eurostat, 2022a).

Demographic shifts in the EU, such as an ageing population and migration patterns, are increasing demand for healthcare professionals - a field in which women are significantly overrepresented. In 2022, nearly three times as many women graduated from health and welfare programmes compared with men (Eurostat, 2024f) (see also Section 2.3.2.4 in Women and Health (Area C). In the long term, men's avoidance of women dominated educational paths poses challenges in terms of meeting rising demands for care, particularly in nursing (OECD and European Union, 2022).

Figure 8. Graduates in tertiary education, by sex and field of education (%, EU, 2022)



Source: Eurostat, UOE education statistics, educ_uoe_grado2.

Women are also significantly underrepresented in R&I and among scientists in high-technology sectors. In 2019, only one-fifth of the nearly 32 million scientists and engineers in these sectors across the EU were women (Eurostat, 2023a). At EU-level, only 5 % of inventor teams are gender balanced (European Commission, 2024g). These disparities largely stem from the unequal appreciation of women and men and the differing capabilities that continue to be attributed to them. It is essential that these structural barriers and implicit biases in research and academia are addressed in order to foster greater inclusivity in R&I (see Box 4 on efforts at national level).

Box 4. Advancing gender equality in academia and the careers of women in research

In 2019, the Research Council of **Finland**, formerly the Academy of Finland, a governmental funding body for scientific research, adopted its Equality and Non-Discrimination Plan (2019-2020). This plan aims to integrate gender equality and non-discrimination into all aspects of its operations, focusing on enhancing processes, communication, and staff competencies. Key objectives include supporting the careers of young and women researchers and advancing gender equality within scientific research (Academy of Finland, 2019).

The unequal representation of women and men in various professions is linked not only to societal stereotypes (EIGE, 2017b) but also to cultural discouragement (European Parliament, 2021c), a lack of role models (van Driel et al., 2023) and unconscious bias in recruitment and workplace culture (European Commission, 2020a; Kube et al., 2024). Schools, VET and higher education institutions perpetuate gender gaps early on. Teachers' gender biases, whether conscious or unconscious, can shape grading and students' career paths, with boys often being praised for their achievements in STEM subjects and girls for reading and the humanities (van Driel et al., 2023).

Meanwhile, boys' limited engagement and poorer outcomes in reading are linked to stereotypes that label reading as 'feminine'. PISA 2022 study shows strong gender differences in underachievement in reading, with boys in the EU underperforming girls by more than 5 percentage points in all Member States, with the difference exceeding 10 percentage points in around half of the Member States (European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2024). In turn, traditional norms of masculinity encourage disruptive behaviour (European Commission, 2021q). These societal expectations make it equally challenging for men to enter female-dominated careers such as teaching, as they face pressure for not conforming to masculine ideals (European Commission, 2021q). Similarly, adhering to gender roles and stereotypes continues to divert girls away from STEM fields (Evagorou et al., 2024).

2.2.2.3 The green and digital transitions offer new opportunities to increase women's involvement in STEM and tackle skills mismatch through lifelong learning

Digitalisation profoundly impacts all aspects of life, requiring individuals to continuously update their digital skills. The need for constant retraining highlights the growing importance of lifelong learning (LLL), including in the context of adaptation to climate change (ILO, 2021c). However, globally, only one-third of AI and renewable energy specialists are women (World Economic Forum, 2023). This underlines the need to remove barriers that hinder women from pursuing LLL, thereby enabling them to contribute to sustainable development and to the green and digital transitions (see Box 5 for examples of action at national level) (UN Women, 2023b).

Box 5. Addressing the skilled labour demands of the green transition to support women

In 2020, **Austria's** Ministry of Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology established the Just Transition Working Group on training and reskilling. This initiative aims to address the skilled labour demands of the green transition. Training is targeted towards girls, young women, those seeking retraining, unemployed persons, socially disadvantaged individuals and people with disabilities.

Supported by the **German** government and led by the non-governmental organisation LIFE, the Ökothek initiative has been offering extensive career support to women from diverse backgrounds in Berlin for more than a decade. Ökothek provides workshops covering current environmental and climate issues, as well as sessions empowering women to build the confidence to pursue sustainable career pathways. Between 2021 and 2024, more than 1,000 women took part in Ökothek's activities (EIGE, 2024i).

Digital skills, in particular, are essential for work and life. Overall, men possess slightly higher levels of advanced digital skills than women (see Figure 9), yet women consistently demonstrate strong proficiency in digital skills. Among young people aged 16-24, more women (72 %) have basic or above basic digital skills compared with men (68 %) (Eurostat, 2024k). Meanwhile, older women are

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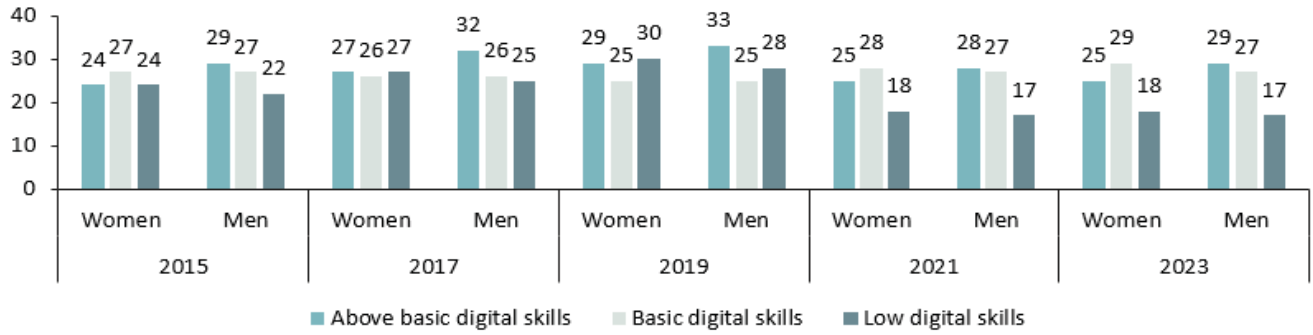
especially disadvantaged (Eurostat, 2024k). The widest gap exists in the 55-74 age group, where 18 % of men possess above-basic skills, compared with only 11 % of women.

Figure 9. Individuals' level of digital skills, by sex (% of population aged 16-74, EU, 2015 – 2023)



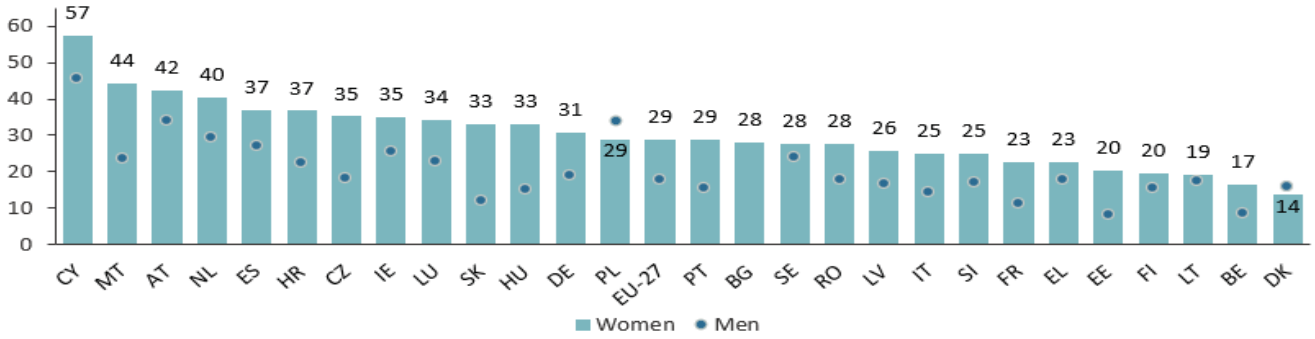
Source: Eurostat, isoc_sk_dskl_i21, isoc_sk_dskl_i

Note: break in time in 2019 for CZ, IT, LV, LU; low reliability for IT in 2017.

The rising demand for digital skills (European Commission, 2023o) presents an opportunity to improve gender balance in a sector that is as male-dominated as ICT, highlighting the importance of increasing women's access to these skills. However, such a focus should not imply that women lack the necessary capabilities. Rather, it underlines the need to address broader systemic issues within the industry that shape and limit women's ambitions (Ryan and Morgenroth, 2024). For example, persistent wage inequality and ingrained stereotypes continue to obstruct progress towards gender parity in ICT (for more on this, see Women and the Economy (Area F)).

Addressing these structural barriers requires not only a commitment to life-long learning (LLL), but also for LLL opportunities to be designed to account for gendered challenges. While women in the EU participate in LLL activities more frequently than men (EIGE, 2019a), participation varies widely between Member States (see Figure 10). Family responsibilities pose a greater barrier to LLL for women than for men, thus correlating with women's tendency to take career breaks for caregiving (EIGE, 2023a). Research shows that improving the accessibility and affordability of formal childcare services is essential to ensuring that both women and men can participate continuously in the labour market and in LLL activities (EIGE, 2019c), ensuring a better re-enter to the workforce after caregiving breaks (Doerr, 2022.

Figure 10. Persons not participating in formal or non-formal education and training due to family reasons, by sex and country (% of population aged 18-69, 2022)



Source: Eurostat, trng_aes_176.

Note: data are missing for BG (men); reliability is low for DK (women); reliability is low for DK, LT and SK (men).

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2.2.2.4 Increased use of digital technologies in learning and working reveals gender gaps in tech skills and highlights the need to support teachers with AI integration in classrooms

While girls and young women have made notable strides in digital competencies, challenges remain in building self-confidence in digital skills and in navigating gender biases in education and technology. While 68 % of girls aged 16-19 in the EU have basic or above-basic digital skills – slightly exceeding the figure for boys (65 %) – the reverse gender gap occurs in relation to more advanced skills (Eurostat, 2024a). In the EU, only 9 % of 16 to 24-year-old women have programming skills, compared with 19 % of similarly aged men, highlighting a disparity in coding and software development (OECD, 2023d). Furthermore, issues with self-confidence persist, with boys often overestimating their digital skills while girls underestimate theirs (EIGE, 2020d). Also, more women (27 %) than men (17 %) voice concerns about having insufficient time or confidence with regard to learning about AI (OrielSquare, 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the shift to distance learning but also worsened existing educational disparities for students who have limited access to digital resources or who experience learning challenges (De Witte and François, 2023). Over one-quarter of adolescents reported that the COVID-19 pandemic had negatively affected their school performance, with girls reporting greater impacts than boys[25] (Cosma et al., 2023). Among those students who reported high levels of psychological health complaints related to the pandemic, 34 % of girls experienced negative impacts on school performance, compared with 14 % of boys (Cosma et al., 2023). The pandemic had a larger negative impact on women in academic research and teaching, as they faced greater challenges than men in maintaining research outputs and in reconciling teaching activities with personal life, mainly due to their increased shouldering of care responsibilities for children and/or dependent people (Peña et al, 2022). Acknowledging gendered impacts is crucial to implementing tailored support initiatives that address the specific needs of affected groups, such as the initiative profiled in Box 6.

Box 6. Supporting women in academia juggling professional and care responsibilities

The project 'Equalizing Opportunities for Researchers Balancing Work and Parental Care During the Covid-19 Pandemic' by POB Society of the Future at Jagiellonian University, **Poland,** offered grants to support researchers juggling professional and care responsibilities for children up to 15 years of age. These 'pro-equality mini grants' aimed to reduce inequalities in research and publications, in particular benefiting women in academia, who often face greater caregiving burdens. The programme allows researchers to delegate work in which they can be replaced by other people (assistants, translators, proofreaders), thereby allowing them to focus on preparing scientific publications.

The increasing use in learning of online and digital resources such as artificial intelligence (AI) also introduces new uncertainties around gender bias in the classroom. Many educators still lack the necessary support and confidence to integrate modern technological tools into teaching practices (OECD, 2023c). Female teachers are more worried about their lack of confidence in learning about AI, while male teachers are more likely than their female counterparts to use AI tools in the classroom (OrielSquare, 2023). At the same time, AI systems used in learning may rely on gender stereotypes concerning behaviours, characteristics and roles – see Section 2.10.2.5 on Women and the Media (Area J).

[25] Based on survey results from 17 EU Member States and Kazakhstan, the Republic of Moldova, Serbia and the United Kingdom (Scotland).

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2.2.2.5 Education can reduce gender discrimination by promoting values of equality and respect, leading to a more inclusive and democratic society

The BPfA urges countries to develop curricula, textbooks and pedagogies that are free from gender stereotypes. Despite this call, existing toolkits to identify and question gender stereotypes, as well as efforts at EU and national level (see Box 7), educational materials in the EU often continue to reinforce gender stereotypes, affecting the aspirations and perceptions of young students (UNESCO, 2020; European Commission et al., 2023n). One significant issue is the lack of female role models in educational materials. Studies have found that prominent male figures are typically highlighted, while women's contributions are either minimised or omitted, particularly in subjects such as history and science (Van de Rozenberg et al., 2023). The language and imagery in these materials often also perpetuate stereotypical depictions of women and men (UNESCO, 2020; European Commission et al., 2023n). Men are frequently described as 'clever' or 'responsible', terms that convey agency and capability. At the same time, women are often portrayed in passive or supportive roles, if they are present at all. Such portrayals, subtle as they might seem, carry implicit messages about gendered roles and behaviours, shaping young learners' career ambitions and worldviews.

Box 7. Addressing gender bias in learning materials

The GirlsInScience project of Leiden University in the **Netherlands** provides insights into gender representation in educational materials. A comprehensive analysis of more than 20,000 characters appearing in textbooks reveals areas in which women are underrepresented, such as in scientific, athletic and technical roles. The project also looked into the impact of students' gender on grading patterns among teachers. The team produced practical guidelines for educational publishers on improving inclusivity in textbooks, emphasising the need to include more women, people of colour and LGBTIQ characters (European Commission, 2022f; Van Veen et al., 2022).

Efforts to counteract gender stereotypes can include the proactive removal of biased materials from reading lists (European Commission et al., 2023n) and increasing the representation of women and girls in textbooks to emphasise their contributions to various fields (De la Torre-Sierra and Guichot-Reina, 2022). Teachers can play a crucial role by identifying gender biases in learning materials and discussing these with students (see, for example, Box 8). When gender equality is not confined to specific lessons or subjects, such as civic education, but integrated across the curriculum, it enables students to recognise and challenge various gender stereotypes, promoting a more inclusive and democratic society.

Box 8. Providing teachers with practical tools to tackle gender stereotypes in classrooms

The 'Growing up Equal' project addresses gender stereotypes in primary education (3rd and 4th grades) in **Bulgaria**. By providing teachers and school administrations with guidelines and tools to effectively tackle gender stereotypes in educational settings, it aims to raise awareness among education professionals about the impact of stereotypes on life choices, starting from primary education (Development Aid, 2021). Meanwhile, the 'KINDER' project, supported by EU funding, aimed to develop gender-responsive training and resources for early childhood educators in **Spain**, **Portugal** and **Croatia**. The project ended in 2023 and produced outputs include policy reports and educational guidelines that integrate gender-related themes into pedagogical practices across these countries[26].

2.2.2.6 Gender-based violence in educational settings affects women's safety and the well-being of students and staff

Gender-based violence in research and education is a persistent issue in the EU, as evidenced by studies (Anitha and Lewis, 2018; Bondestam, 2024) and recognised by policy declarations (Council of the European Union, 2020). For example, a 2022 UniSafe survey of staff and students from 46

[26] More about the project: *https://kinder.ces.uc.pt/about/*

research organisations across 15 European countries found that two in three survey respondents had experienced at least one form of gender-based violence[27] (Lipinsky et al., 2022). Greater proportions of women (66 %) and non-binary people (74 %) reported such experiences in comparison to men (56 %).

In a national survey conducted in Sweden, more than half of female PhD students reported experiencing some form of undesired sexual attention since they had taken up their positions (Rudolfsson et al., 2022). Similarly, an Irish national survey on sexual violence found that 6 in 10 students had encountered sexualised comments (Higher Education Authority, 2022). A 2020 report by the European Research and Innovation Area Committee noted that the majority of Member States lack coherent measures to combat gender-based violence in higher education (ERAC, 2020). Even where measures exist (see, for example, Box 9), there is often a lack of coherent implementation policies.

Box 9. Preventing gender-based violence in higher education and research institutions

In **Ireland**, the Higher Education Authority launched the 'Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment in Higher Education Institutions Implementation Plan, 2022-2024' in October 2022. The Plan was developed on the basis of national surveys of students and staff, and aims to create a system for students to disclose incidents, as well as institutional policies and initiatives based on consent (Higher Education Authority, 2022).

The "Zero-Tolerance Code of Conduct: Counteracting gender-based violence, including sexual harassment, in the EU research and innovation system", published in 2024, was developed by the European Research Area Forum subgroup on inclusive gender equality, in cooperation with the European Commission. The Code aims to address incidents of gender-based violence in research and higher education environments by setting out a common approach, definitions, and a list of principles to guide Member States and other stakeholders (European Commission: Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, 2024b).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, girls more than boys have faced heightened exposure to cyberbullying, with studies pointing to parental control being a protective factor against cyberbullying for boys more than girls as well as overall lack of institutional resources for victims (Marinoni et al., 2023; Rebollo-Catalan and Mayor-Buzon, 2020).Most victims of cyberbullying in schools have previously been bullied offline, with a significant percentage experiencing both online and offline forms of bullying (UNESCO, 2019). See Section 2.4.2.4 in Violence Against Women (Area D) and Section 2.12.2.4 in The Girl Child (Area L) for discussions about violence against women and girls in cyberspace.

2.3 Women and Health (Area C)

Under the BPfA, the Member States have committed to upholding women's right to the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health, acknowledging that enjoying this right is essential for their well-being and participation in all areas of public and private life. Area C aims to ensure universal access to quality healthcare services for women, including sexual and reproductive healthcare. It also aims to reduce those health risks specific to women, to address mental health issues and to combat discrimination in healthcare settings. Lastly, it also calls for increased research and data collection on women's health issues in order to better inform policies and programmes[28].

The officially agreed EU indicators to track progress in Area C cover healthy life years, access to healthcare, and deaths due to cardiovascular diseases. Notable gaps include the lack of data on sexual and reproductive health and rights, the role of women in health governance and gender balance in medical research from an intersectional perspective.

[27] These include psychological violence, sexual harassment, economic violence, online violence, physical violence and sexual violence.

[28] 'Sexual and reproductive rights are covered both in Area C- Women and Health and Area I- The Human Rights of Women'

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For the BPfA +30 review, the thematic focus and priority topics of Area C include:

Assessing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the physical and mental health of women and men

Promoting gender-sensitive and intersectional quality healthcare and preventive programmes

Tackling violence against women as patients and healthcare professionals

Providing safe and high-quality sexual and reproductive health services

The above thematic priorities aim to address critical health challenges, both current and future, that affect women and men in all their diversity, such as an ageing population. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed significant vulnerabilities in our healthcare systems. Current multiple threats, such as climate change and the Russian aggression against Ukraine, further highlight the necessity of incorporating gender and intersectional perspectives into health policies and research. Integrating this approach is crucial to recognising the diverse and interconnected factors that influence the health of women and men and in ensuring equitable healthcare solutions, particularly in preparation for future crises.

2.3.1 EU policy developments

With health policies primarily falling under the competence of the Member States, the EU's role in public health has traditionally been of a complementary nature. However, the EU's involvement in public health has grown in response to major health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic (UNESCO, 2020; European Commission et al., 2023n). Article 168 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union provides the legal basis for EU actions in the areas of public health, disease prevention and cross-border health coordination. The EU also encourages a 'Health in All Policies' approach to integrate health considerations into various policy sectors.

The right to access healthcare is enshrined in Principle 16 of **the European Pillar of Social Rights** (**EPSR)**. Its Action Plan encourages Member States to digitalise healthcare systems and tackle health inequalities. However, these efforts have fallen short, with evidence suggesting that digitalisation is worsening disparities for low-income groups, particularly women (EAPN, 2022). Building on this focus on digitalisation, the Commission has announced an **AI Strategy** aimed at enhancing industrial uses of AI in public services including healthcare, demonstrating its commitment to technological advancements in the health sector (von der Leyen, 2024b). Nonetheless, careful implementation is required to prevent the further reinforcement of existing inequalities.

One of the key policy developments relevant to health is the 2022 **European Care Strategy**, which aims to address health and social care disparities across the EU. The Strategy provides a roadmap for Member States to improve long-term care. This, in the context of demographic change, can support the health and well-being of women and men in old age. However, because the Strategy

mainly focuses on formal care, it lacks provisions aimed at informal carers as well as any binding measures to mitigate health impacts on caregivers (see also Women and the Economy (Area F)). Moreover, in the **Communication on demographic change in Europe**, the Commission indicates the importance of gender equality to EU and national policies that address demographic change. The Communication notes that policies should enhance women's adequate access to the labour market, broaden the provision of affordable, high-quality childcare and long-term care, and ensure that policy solutions empower current and future generations (European Commission, 2023g).

In a broader sense, the **EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025** commits to facilitating the sharing of good practices between Member States and stakeholders with regard to the gender aspects of health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). The Strategy recognises gender-specific health risks and integrates gender considerations into initiatives such as the **EU Beating Cancer Plan** (European Commission, 2021e). This Plan includes a new Cancer Screening Scheme targeting 90 % of the population for breast, cervical and colorectal cancers by 2025. As another example, the new **Clinical Trials Regulation** requires the sex of participants in clinical trials to be considered, thereby addressing concerns about potential adverse side effects that are more common among, or exclusive to, women (Regulation (EU) No 2022/641, 2022).

The **EU4Health programme 2021-2027** is a Union funding programme that implements EU health legislative and non-legislative priorities. In 2023, the European Commission's performance review of the EU4Health Programme has estimated the volume of interventions with a likely positive impact on gender equality to amount to EUR 178.1 million which is an increase compared to the programme's two previous years (European Commission, 2023). Its Regulation suggests the possibility of supporting studies on the influence of gender on disease characteristics to enhance knowledge, prevention, diagnosis, monitoring and treatment (Regulation (EU) 2021/522, 2021 recital 25). Although the data collected through the programme is not yet disaggregated by sex, thus hampering gender analysis, data allowing disaggregation by sex is expected in 2025.Under this framework, the Commission also launched the 'Healthier together' EU non-communicable diseases initiative in 2022 to help Member States prevent and manage diseases like cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, or neurological disorders. The initiative promotes "age, gender and culture-sensitive strategies" across all its areas to enhance effectiveness.

In June 2021, the European Parliament passed a **Resolution on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in the EU,** urging the EU to support Member States in upholding these rights as essential to human dignity (European Parliament, 2021e). The Resolution emphasised access to abortion (see also Human Rights of Women (Area I)), contraception, fertility treatments, birth-related healthcare and menstrual products as basic goods, while advocating for the rights of intersex persons and the establishment of an EU Special Envoy on SRHR. The Resolution also highlighted abuses including gynaecological and obstetric violence, calling on Member States to implement informed procedures to ensure consent and better training for healthcare professionals. BPfA also calls for actions on SRHR, stressing provision of financial and institutional support for research on safe, effective, affordable and acceptable methods and technologies for the reproductive and sexual health of women and men. It also emphasises the need to provide appropriate material, financial and logistical assistance to youth non-governmental organisations, empowering them to address youth concerns in the area of health, including sexual and reproductive health.

In response to heightened public attention towards mental health, which has been amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic, in July 2022 the Parliament adopted a **Resolution on mental health in the digital workplace** (European Parliament, 2022c). This addressed work-related mental health issues and gender inequalities. However, the Resolution overlooked the mental health challenges faced by women during life events such as pregnancy and menopause (Alblooshi et al., 2023). In addition, in June 2023, the Commission adopted a **Communication on a comprehensive approach to mental health** (European Commission, 2023f) urging Member States to implement a prevention-oriented

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approach, integrating mental health into EU policies as a public health priority. The Communication adopts an intersectional perspective, focusing on vulnerable populations that may experience multiple forms of discrimination, such as lone mothers in poverty, persons with disabilities, refugees and displaced persons, young people and LGBTIQ persons.

2.3.2 Key challenges and trends

2.3.2.1 Healthcare systems and technology can improve health outcomes, by addressing embedded gender disparities more effectively

Advances in healthcare systems across the EU have improved living standards, reducing infectious diseases and leading to longer, healthier lives for all. Nonetheless, the Gender Equality Index shows slow progress in gender equality in health, with the shares of women and men who perceive their health as very good or good falling in two thirds of Member States (EIGE, 2024r). Many conditions sensitive to sex and gender lack sufficient research, funding and resources, including prioritisation.

On the positive side, new technologies such as e-health and AI provide new opportunities to further enhance healthcare and the detection of diseases (see Box 10). However, they have also introduced certain challenges, including a lack of gender equality perspective in digital health solutions. This may be due to the exclusion from the app design of women, particularly those with racial or ethnic minority backgrounds (Figueroa et al., 2021). For example, many fitness and health-tracking apps overlook the specific health needs of women, such as menstrual health (Cifor and Garcia, 2020). Similarly, AI can exacerbate gender, age and racial biases, leading to adverse health outcomes (Ulnicane, 2024). The current accountability framework also places responsibility for AI-related errors on medical professionals (C.-W. Park et al., 2020), adding pressure to a strained sector and potentially exacerbating stress and anxiety among its predominantly female workforce.

Box 10. Expanded use of AI improves successful diagnosis rate for breast cancer

In **Denmark**, Transpara, an AI tool designed to read mammograms, has been employed to enhance the efficiency of breast cancer screenings, reducing radiologists' workload by 63 %. A 2022 study indicated that the sensitivity of AI-based screenings was comparable to that of radiologists, and that the AI-based approach outperformed the traditional double readings by radiologists, producing 2 % fewer false positives. (Lauritzen et al., 2022).

The rise of digitalisation, along with unhealthy lifestyles, pollution and climate change, is also creating new gendered health challenges (EXPH, 2019; Tong et al., 2022). Sedentary behaviours, driven by the prolonged use of digital devices and increased screen time, are contributing to rising rates of obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular diseases (Bailey et al., 2019). Poor dietary choices, influenced by the widespread availability of processed foods, as well as income and time poverty (see Women and Poverty (Area A)), further exacerbate these health issues (Silva et al., 2023), particularly for lone parents and caregivers, who are mostly women (Venn and Strazdins, 2017). Digitalisation has also introduced stressors that affect mental health. Hyper-connectivity and the pressure associated with social media can lead to anxiety, depression and other mental health disorders, which are more common among girls than boys (for more on this, see Section 2.12.2.2).

2.3.2.2 The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted gender disparities in health, from infection rates to access to sexual and reproductive services

The COVID-19 pandemic prompted gender disparities in healthy life years and longevity, contributing to an increase in the gender gap in life expectancy (see Figure 11).

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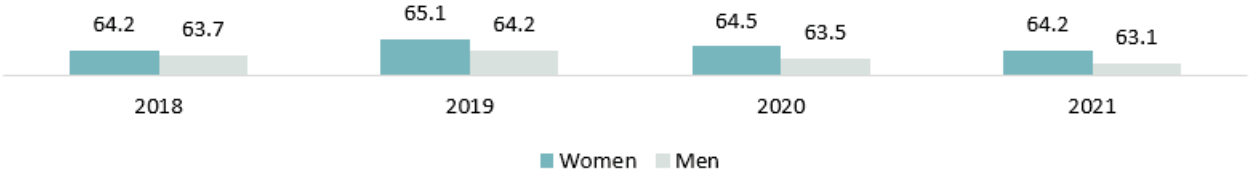
Figure 11. Healthy life years by sex (year, EU, 2018 – 2021)



Source: Eurostat, hlth_hlye.

Note: break in time series for LU in 2020 and 2021.

Attempts to live up to hegemonic masculinity can negatively impact men's health and well-being in various ways, contributing to men's experience of a lower number of healthy life years. It can push men towards behaviours that damage their health (Berke et al., 2020). In 2019, 13 % of men in the EU consumed alcohol daily, compared with 4 % of women (Eurostat, 2021a). Furthermore, in 2019, 22 % of men in the EU were daily smokers of cigarettes, compared with 15 % of women (Eurostat, 2022b).

he COVID-19 pandemic contributed to a decline in healthy life years for both women and men. Its gender-specific effects illustrate a phenomenon known as the gender paradox in the pandemic's impact (Bambra et al., 2021). While men's life expectancies have shortened and they experienced higher mortality rates during the COVID-19 pandemic, infection rates were higher among women, due to their predominant roles in frontline healthcare, where they comprise 76 % of the workforce in the EU (EIGE, 2023b).

The gender paradox in health reveals a significant disparity: while women generally live longer than men, they often spend fewer of those years in good health. This paradox is attributed to a mix of biological factors, such as hormones that may protect women from chronic diseases, behavioural patterns and social determinants of health. Studies show that in Europe, the health disparities between women and men are also influenced by societal gender norms.

Source: summarised by the authors, based on Doyal, L. (1995). What makes women sick: Gender and the political economy of health; and Bird, C. and Rieker, P. (2012). Gender and health: The effects of constrained choices and social policies. Cambridge University Press.

In addition, the pandemic disrupted women's access to sexual and reproductive health services, including contraception and abortion (van Benschoten et al., 2022). It also exacerbated intimate partner violence, with the number of cases reported rising significantly during lockdowns (for more, see Section 2.4.2.22.4.2.4).

2.3.2.3 The pandemic exposed significant gender disparities in mental health impacts, with evidence showing the need to address stigmas affecting women and men

Lockdowns across many Member States severely disrupted work-life balance, resulting in the loss of income and jobs, increased care responsibilities and heightened mental strain (EIGE, 2022g; European Commission, 2021m). Mothers more than fathers faced increased parental stress and burnout during the COVID-19 pandemic (M. Johnson et al., 2021). While women more than men generally were more likely to experience sadness and depression, job loss was associated with depression deterioriation only for men (Paccagnella and Pongiglione, 2022). More broadly, the 2023 Flash Eurobarometer on mental health found that men generally felt calmer and less tired than women, who often juggle work and family responsibilities. It also showed that women's mental health was more affected by global events (including the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian aggression against Ukraine, the climate crisis and food and energy crisis) as well as social media's impact on young women compared to young men (European Commission, 2023g) .

While women and men experience emotions to the same extent, women tend to be more aware of them and engage in more varied emotional regulation strategies, including receiving diagnoses and

treatment for depression (Swetlitz, 2021). In contrast, although men also experience mental health challenges, they are less likely to seek help due to gender norms and traditional notions of masculinity that discourage being perceived as vulnerable and seeking psychological support (Gough and Novikova, 2020). The stigma that delays or prevents them from accessing necessary mental health services (Baker et al., 2020; Croft et al., 2021), is one of the contributing factors that men are four times more likely than women to die by suicide (Eurostat, 2023e). This stigma has a particularly detrimental impact on men who experience socio-economic challenges and discrimination, including gay, bisexual and trans men, men with refugee status, men with migrant backgrounds and those belonging to ethnic minorities, and men who are homeless or in prison (Baker et al., 2020). Disproportionate stress and social pressures due to having a non-normative sexual orientation can increase the risk of substance use and health risk behaviours, including of contracting sexually transmitted diseases (Lu et al., 2019).

Public awareness of mental health grew during the pandemic, sparking greater media attention and efforts to reduce stigma (Mitchell et al., 2023), though challenges remain. For example, the digitalisation of mental health services has created accessibility challenges for vulnerable groups that lack internet access or digital skills, such as homeless individuals, older people, people with limited language skills and people living in rural or remote areas (EAPN, 2022; Haimi M., 2023).

2.3.2.4 The gender equality gap in the healthcare sector affects both patients and workers

Most Member States are experiencing severe shortages of healthcare workers (WHO, 2022c). The current number of care workers and their job conditions do not match the trend of expanding and evolving care demands in the context of an ageing population and the changing nature of families (EIGE, 2023a; ILO, 2018). As WHO highlights, the crisis in the healthcare workforce is a crisis of both healthcare and gender equality (Kluge et al., 2023).

Gender inequalities in unpaid care work and its undervaluation translate into gender disparities at work, particularly in the care sector (ILO, 2018). Although women constitute 76 % of the health workforce in Europe (EIGE, 2023b), they face a 24 % pay gap (WHO, 2022d), worse working conditions and higher rates of workplace violence and sexual harassment, as well as occupying fewer leadership positions than men (Kuhlmann et al., 2023).

Access to healthcare is especially limited in rural areas, where older women and men face compounded inequalities due to age and limited healthcare access (Carson et al., 2024). Regional disparities across the EU worsen this issue, as shortages of family doctors and public infrastructure leave those living in poverty – particularly women and older people – with long waiting lists and inaccessible private facilities. This situation is further aggravated by the greater number of private hospitals compared with public ones, which exacerbates, regional and socio-economic disparities (EAPN, 2022), with women slightly more likely than men to report cost, waiting list or distance as reasons for their needs remaining unmet (Eurostat, 2024t).

To address care deficits in the Global North, women from the Global South are moving to provide essential services – a phenomenon known as the ‘global care chain’ (Donato and Gabaccia, 2015; Gammage, 2021). This trend reflects a growing demand for labour in the care economy, where migrant women dominate the workforce (Meardi, 2024). However, this dynamic intensifies care deficits in the Global South and poses challenges for migrant women, such as family separation and adverse mental health impacts (WHO, 2017). Moreover, migrant women working in these sectors are often employed in low-paid and highly exploitative roles with limited access to support services, a situation worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic (ILO, 2021b).

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2.3.2.5 Improving working conditions in the healthcare sector includes tackling the violence disproportionately faced by healthcare workers and caregivers

Healthcare professionals, predominantly women, face a high risk of workplace violence from both colleagues and patients, with 23 % of EU healthcare workers experiencing negative behaviours, including violence, in 2021 (European Policy Centre, 2023). Female nurses are twice as likely to be subjected to such violence compared with other professional groups (European Nursing Research Foundation, 2022). In addition, migrant and ethnic minority nurses often face discrimination and prejudice from patients and colleagues, leading to biased attitudes, unfair treatment and unequal professional opportunities (Antón-Solanas et al., 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic intensified these issues, resulting in increased verbal and physical abuse, though the severity of this is often underreported (European Policy Centre, 2023). This violence significantly impacts the physical and mental health of healthcare workers, the majority of whom are women (EIGE, 2021b).

Additionally, informal caregivers, predominantly women, report poorer physical health, including higher risks of chronic conditions such as hypertension, cardiovascular disease (Zajdel M et al., 2023) and mental health issues, including depression and anxiety (Petrini et al., 2019). High levels of caregiver stress and burnout can diminish care quality, leading to neglect and poor health outcomes for recipients (Bom J. et al, 2018). ICT-based solutions can alleviate caregiver burden (Madara Marasinghe, 2016). For instance, digital tools provide crucial support for caregivers of Alzheimer's patients, aiding in disease understanding and crisis management (Martínez-Alcalá et al., 2016). In addition, these technologies enable caregivers to monitor the health status of frail individuals through features such as activity tracking and assessing the risk of falls (Medrano-Gil et al., 2018).

2.3.2.6 An ageing population reveals heightened vulnerabilities for older women, particularly with regard to abuse in long-term care settings

The population of the EU aged 15 to 64 is expected to decline (Eurostat, 2023c), while the older population is expected to grow substantially. By 2100, centenarian women are expected to outnumber centenarian men by three to one (Eurostat, 2023c). This demographic shift will intensify pressure on welfare and health systems, given the growing demand for care and supporting technologies.

'Gendered ageism' describes the intersection of age and gender discrimination, with older women facing unique challenges due to the combined effects of both. These challenges are particularly pronounced in settings such as nursing homes and long-term care facilities, where older women are at an increased risk of violence, both from caregivers and healthcare professionals. This includes coercive and controlling behaviours such as withholding medications, assistive devices or essential aspects of care, as well as neglect and financial abuse[29] (WHO, HRP, UN Women, 2024). Despite the severe impact of such abuse, it remains largely underreported in global and national data.

2.3.2.7 Women are particularly vulnerable to cardiovascular diseases and antimicrobial resistance due to biological, socio-economic and environmental factors

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) is a leading cause of death among women. It is worsened by climate change, which increases cardiovascular risks as a result of rising temperatures and air pollution (K.R. Smith and et al., 2014; WHO, 2024). Women face heightened vulnerability due to socio-economic disparities, caregiving stress and gender-specific health factors (WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2020). For example, reproductive health conditions, such as early or late menarche,

[29] Definitions of economic and financial abuse are often ambiguous and vary between studies. For instance, some survey instruments on violence against older persons focus on the theft of money and possessions, while others consider coercion or impersonation resulting in the surrender of rights or property or signing/changing a legal document, enabling the abuser to obtain property or services.

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polycystic ovary syndrome and complications during pregnancy constitute unique cardiovascular risks (O'Kelly et al., 2022).

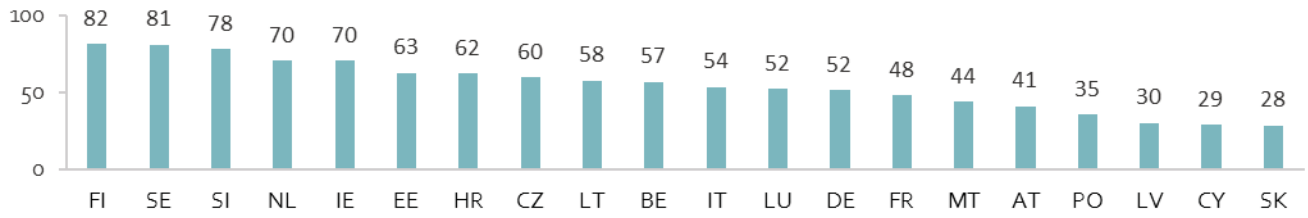
While CVD mortality rates have declined, they have decreased more slowly for women (Andrade et al., 2023). CVD in women remains underdiagnosed and undertreated (Vogel et al., 2021). Women often present atypical symptoms such as nausea, back and neck pain or fatigue, which are frequently misattributed to non-cardiac causes – unlike men, whose chest pain is more readily recognised as indicative of cardiac issues (Haider et al., 2020). This disparity in diagnosis and treatment can be attributed not only to biological differences but also to the influence of gender stereotypes and insufficient knowledge among healthcare providers regarding gender-specific presentations of CVD (Al Hamid A. et al., 2024).

Antimicrobial resistance is also a gendered health risk. Women's medical treatments for childbirth, abortion and urinary tract infections expose them to drug-resistant pathogens (Ny et al., 2019). Moreover, since more women work in health, education and welfare, they are more exposed to infectious agents (Lewandowski et al., 2021; WHO, 2007).

2.3.2.8 Despite the effectiveness of early detection in reducing breast cancer mortality, screening rates vary significantly between EU countries

In 2022, 374,800 women and 4,400 men were estimated to be diagnosed with breast cancer in the EU, In the same year, 95,800 women and 1,200 men were estimated to die from it. Half of new breast cancer cases, primarily occurred in women aged 45-69, and among men if 70 years or more. (European Commission, 2023b). Early detection through screening can significantly reduce mortality, however, screening rates vary significantly between EU countries (see Figure 12), revealing disparities in access to life-saving services for women. To address these disparities, Box 11 highlights recent efforts in Poland to expand prevention screening programmes.

Figure 12. Breast cancer screening rates among women, by country (% of population aged 50-69, 2022)



Source: Eurostat, hlth_ps_prev.

Note: programme-based data. The rate shown is the proportion of women aged 50 to 69 who received a mammogram within the preceding two years (or according to the specific screening frequency recommended in each country). This is shown as a proportion of women eligible for an organised screening programme. Data are not available for BG, DK, EL, HU, ES, PT and RO. Data for DE and FI are estimated. Data for FR and LU are provisional. Definitions differ for SE, SK. Definition differs and data are provisional for IE. Break in time series and definition differs for MT.

Box 11. Expanding prevention screening programmes in Poland

In 2023, **Poland's** Ministry of Health expanded breast and cervical cancer screening programmes to include women aged 45-74, broadening the previous range of 50-69. Free cytology screenings, previously limited to women aged 25-59, were extended to include those aged 25-64 (Ministry of Health of Poland, 2023b). In additional, the HPV vaccine was made available for free to all children aged 9-18 (Ministry of Health of Poland, 2023a).

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2.3.2.9 The troubling prevalence of gynaecological and obstetric violence across the EU highlights the urgent need for a unified definition and improved data collection

Despite the lack of a universally accepted definition, **gynaecological and obstetric violence** refers to various forms of mistreatment experienced during obstetric and gynaecological care. This includes psychological, physical and sexual abuse, such as humiliation, lack of privacy, coercion and non-consensual medical procedures, verbal abuse, forced medical actions such as sterilisation and abortion without consent and unnecessary procedures, including certain labour inductions and caesarean sections. It also involves the refusal or delay of essential care, such as pain management, abortion services and the denial of a birth companion.

Source: (European Parliament, 2024f)

There is a lack of high-quality EU-wide data on these specific forms of violence, highlighting the need for improved data collection to fully understand these phenomena. Existing studies reveal worrying trends at Member State level. A 2021 survey in Belgium revealed widespread obstetric violence (OV), with consent absent in 49% of medical procedures and 40% of women reporting experiencing OV (Guiot and Cosentino, 2024). In Portugal, 62 % of women reported that their consent was not sought for the use of instruments during childbirth (Costa et al., 2022). In Finland, 38 % of women described undergoing violent or painful procedures during childbirth (Immonen et al., 2019). In Germany, between 20 % and 33 % of women have experienced verbal abuse in obstetric settings (Beck-Hiestermann et al., 2023). In Spain, around 35 % of women encountered sarcastic or discrediting remarks (Mena-Tudela et al., 2020). CSOs can play an important role in addressing these issues by raising awareness, advocating for change and supporting women who experience mistreatment, as shown in Box 12.

These findings not only highlight the need for better data but also underline broader gender disparities in sexual and reproductive healthcare – see also Human Rights of Women (Area I). The WHO has emphasised that the development of male contraceptives is crucial to achieve gender equality, advocating for family planning as a shared responsibility (WHO, 2022b). At present, the only effective contraceptive methods readily available for men are condoms and vasectomy, highlighting the need for the development of safer and less invasive male contraceptives (Sitruk-Ware and Wang, 2024). Another example is universal vaccination against HPV to prevent genital cancer and warts. Vaccination of both girls and boys, as promoted through Europe's Beating Cancer Plan, would provide greater levels of protection for all, and free women and girls from the sole responsibility for preventing an HPV infection and from stigma (European Cancer Organisation, 2020).

Box 12. Advocacy and legal support against obstetric violence in Italy and Belgium

- In **Italy**, advocacy efforts and legal cases have raised awareness of obstetric violence, prompting discussions among both medical professionals and policymakers. Civil society organisations such as Osservatorio sulla Violenza Ostetrica (Ovoitalia) and activists have supported women who have experienced mistreatment during childbirth, advocating for policy changes and promoting the adoption of guidelines to prevent and address obstetric violence (Ovoitalia n.d.)
- **In Belgium**, significant policy developments have been observed, with obstetric and gynaecological violence included into several key strategic documents at both federal and regional levels (European Parliament, 2024d). For example, the *Belgian National Action Plan to Fight Gender-Based Violence (2021–2025)* acknowledges the existence of this form of violence and emphasises its prevention, despite it not being covered under the Istanbul Convention.

2.3.2.10 The intersection of gender and migration status creates unique challenges to healthcare access for women, especially those in irregular situations

Asylum seekers, refugees and undocumented migrants in the EU face numerous barriers to accessing healthcare, including limited social protections, language and administrative challenges, fear of deportation and discriminatory sexist or racist practices (O'Donnell, 2018; Sawadogo et al.,

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2023). While these obstacles impact both migrant women and men, migrant women – particularly those in irregular situations – face unique challenges due to the intersection of gender and migrant status, which amplifies their marginalisation and vulnerability. These challenges make it harder for migrant women to access care for chronic illness, disability, long-term health needs and SRHR services (European Network of Migrant Women, 2023). Many lack access to maternity and non-emergency healthcare, often forcing them to work until late in their pregnancy or to return to work prematurely, with serious consequences for both their health and that of their children (Fair et al., 2020; ILO, 2021a). The digitalisation of healthcare further complicates access, as it requires strong digital skills, language proficiency and at least basic administrative and legal knowledge (Buchert et al., 2023).

Since the outset of Russia's war against Ukraine, more than 8 million people, mostly women and children, have become displaced across EU. While the TPD grants women and girls access to essential SRH services, significant gaps remain in emergency contraception, safe abortion and psychological support (EIGE, 2024o). Practical and financial barriers further limit access. These include high costs, language issues and restrictive national legislation, such as requirements for prescriptions, parental consent and age limits. Overall, only half of the 26 Member States surveyed provide free sexual health and reproductive services for such individuals (EIGE, 2024o). Referral mechanisms for victims of conflict-related sexual violence are poorly coordinated, leaving rape crisis centres, NGOs and women's rights organisations to bridge critical gaps in SRHR services (for more on this, see Section 2.5.2.4).

2.3.2.11 A gender responsive approach, including intersectional perspective, is essential to equitably advance medical knowledge and practice

An intersectional approach in understanding of treatment response and health outcomes for women and men in all their diversity is still lacking (Gross et al., 2022; Subramaniapillai et al., 2024). For example, a review of 75 clinical trials on COVID-19 vaccines found that only 24 % of them disaggregated outcomes by sex and just 13 % considered implications separately for both women and men (Heidari et al., 2021). This is despite the documented sex differences in vaccine side effects and gendered patterns of vaccine hesitancy (Brady et al., 2021). Failing to incorporate sex and gender into biomedical research leads to significant societal and financial costs. Though estimates on economic costs are rare, adverse drug reactions (ADR) that disproportionately affect women, have been associated with over 66 % of ADR-attributable deaths in the EU, leading to an estimated annual cost of EUR 52 billion (Care4everyBody, n.d.).

2.4 Violence Against Women (Area D)

Under the BPfA, all EU Member States have committed to preventing and eradicating violence against women. This commitment is based on three strategic objectives: developing and implementing integrated measures to prevent and eliminate violence against women; enhancing data collection and research on violence against women; and combating the trafficking of women and providing support to victims.

Since 2002, 10 EU indicators have tracked progress towards these objectives (EIGE, n.d.-b), focusing on the profiles of female victims and male perpetrators of domestic violence, workplace sexual harassment, support services and state measures. These indicators have significant shortcomings. In terms of conceptualisation, the current indicators assess domestic violence rather than intimate partner violence, while other forms of violence against women are not addressed. Furthermore, the scarcity of comparable data across the EU complicates the measurement of progress (EIGE, 2020c), though the recent EU-wide gender-based violence survey, which collected data from 2020 to 2024, sheds an important light on violence prevalence (EIGE, 2024q).

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Area D (Violence Against Women) alignment with SDGs

5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation

For the BPfA +30 review, the thematic focus and priority topics of Area D include:

Combating femicide, sexual violence and intimate partner violence

Adopting a uniform approach to cyber violence

Harmonising definitions and strengthening data

Tackling female genital mutilation and

Recent crises have intensified the challenges involved in combating violence against women. The COVID-19 pandemic led to increased intimate partner violence and exposed gaps in support for vulnerable groups. The digital transformation has fuelled cyber violence (EIGE, 2022c), and climate change and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine have increased the risks of trafficking and gender-based violence (Cimino and Degani, 2023; UN Women, 2020b). Rising reports of sexual violence highlight the need for stronger prevention and response measures, but conflicting definitions of rape lead to inaction (European Parliament, 2024c). The chapter underlines the urgent priorities and future actions needed to effectively combat violence against women in the EU.

2.4.1 EU policy developments

Since 2019, the EU has undertaken significant legal and policy developments to address violence against women, beginning with the **EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025.** This outlines a firm commitment to ending violence against women (European Commission, 2020f). In June 2023, the EU's ratification of the **Istanbul Convention** marked a major step forward in establishing a comprehensive legal framework to eliminate violence against women (Council of Europe, 2023b). Further solidifying these efforts, the adoption of the new **Directive to combat violence against women and domestic violence** in May 2024 represented another critical milestone (Directive (EU) 2024/1385, 2024). The Directive introduced the first-ever EU rules to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence. It establishes minimum rules concerning the definition of criminal offences and penalties in the areas of sexual exploitation of women and children and cyber violence and the rights of victims. It also sets out provisions relating to early intervention, prevention and protection of victims (European Parliament, 2024g) (see Figure 13).

Figure 13. Main provisions of the Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence

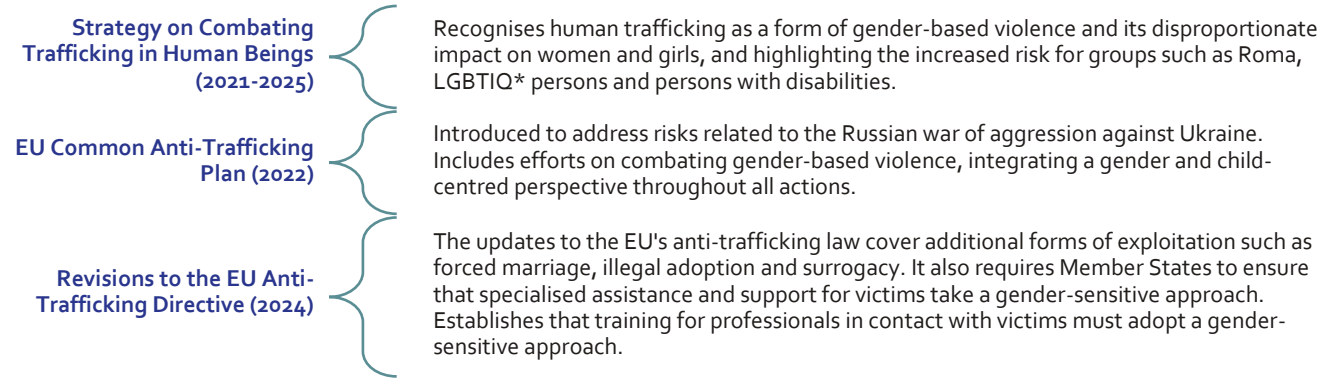
Harmonised definitions of female genital mutilation and forced marriage	Harmonised definitions of various forms of online violence	Reporting and access to justice, early intervention, protection and support
Adoption of a victim-centred and intersectional approach for groups at risk	Prevention addressing the root causes of violence and harmful stereotypes	Accurate data collection improving data comparability and standardisation

Source: summarised by the authors, based on Directive (EU) 2024/1385, 2024

In June 2020, the European Commission introduced the **EU Strategy on Victims' Rights (2020-2025)** to enhance support and protection for victims of crime, in particular, women disproportionately

affected by domestic violence, sexual assault and trafficking (European Commission, 2020d). The strategy calls for tailored support and prevention that focuses on challenging harmful attitudes and behaviours which perpetuate violence against women. The EU has also launched comprehensive measures to combat human trafficking (see Figure 14).

Figure 14. Overview of the EU legal and policy framework to tackle human trafficking



Source: summarised by the authors, based on Directive (EU) 2024/1712, 2024a; European Commission, 2021j, 2022b, 2024e.

In 2023, the Commission proposed amendments to the **Victims' Rights Directive** to improve victims' access to information, support services and legal protection, with the aim of ensuring a more victim-centred justice system. While these amendments acknowledge the specific vulnerabilities of children and women victims of violence, they neglect other disadvantaged groups, such as LBTQI* and women from ethnic minorities. The revisions to the **Anti-Trafficking Directive** also aim to improve victim identification and access to justice, including addressing the specific needs of children (Directive (EU) 2024/1712, 2024b; OSCE, 2021). However, the potential for overlooking or misidentifying victims who do not conform with typical trafficking victim stereotypes, including men and boys, remains unaddressed (Directive (EU) 2024/1712, 2024b; OSCE, 2021).

2.4.2 Key challenges and trends

2.4.2.1 Recognising femicide as a distinct criminal offence is vital to effectively tackling this gender-based crime

Femicide is the most extreme form of violence against women. Official reports from 17 Member States reveal that 788 women were killed by their intimate partner or a family member in 2022 (Eurostat, 2024l). Comprehensive data and qualitative insights on this issue remain limited across the EU. The available data may underestimate the scope of this issue by overlooking orphaned children, bereaved parents and the siblings of murdered women as direct victims (EIGE, 2023h).

At EU level, there is a lack of consensus on a standardised definition, which often leads to femicide being classified under general homicide and obscuring its true prevalence (EIGE, 2023p, 2023h). Defining femicide as 'the killing of a woman or girl because of her gender' (EIGE, 2023p) is critical to understanding its unique root causes, which are linked to gender discrimination and power imbalances, and to fostering effective investigations and preventive measures (UN Women, 2020c). Spain became the first Member State to systematically count and record different types of femicide in 2021, setting a precedent for comprehensive data collection to better grasp the scope and severity of femicide (Ministerio de Igualdad, Gobierno de España, 2021) (see also Box 13 for developments in Malta, Cyprus, Belgium and Croatia).

Box 13. Recognition of femicide as a distinct crime in Malta, Cyprus, Belgium and Croatia

— In June 2022, **Malta** officially recognised femicide as a distinct criminal offence, following unanimous approval by Parliament (Ministry for Equality, Research and Innovation and Ministry for Justice and Governance, 2022).

— In July 2022, **Cyprus** passed a new law making femicide a separate crime punishable by a potential lifetime jail sentence (CYLAW, 2022).

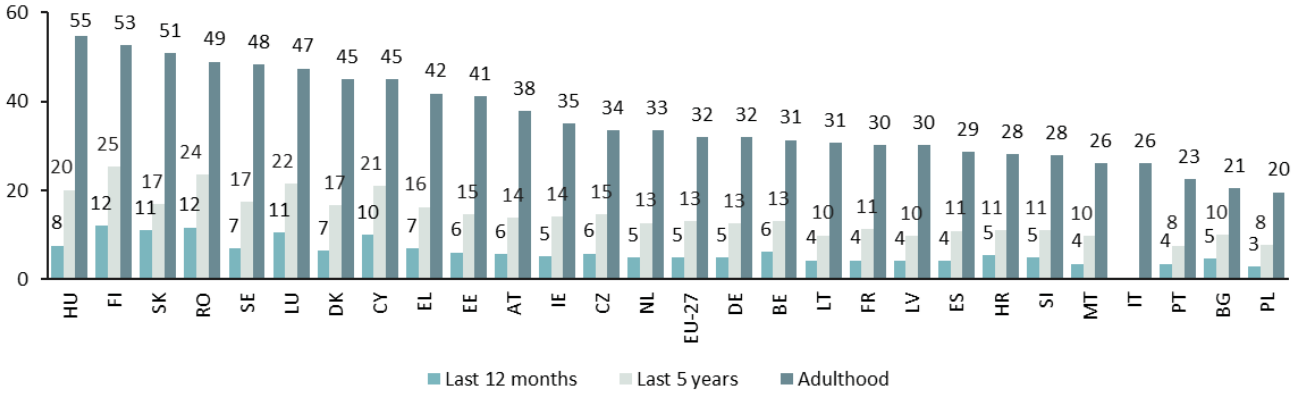
— In July 2023, **Belgium** introduced significant legislation aimed at addressing femicide and gender-related killings. The law distinguishes between intimate femicide, non-intimate femicide and indirect femicide (Chambre des représentants, 2023).

— In March 2024, **Croatia's** parliament approved a bill to make femicide a specific criminal offence. The new legislation imposes stringent sentences ranging from 10 to 40 years for perpetrators of violence against women (Ministarstvo pravosuđa, uprave i digitalne transformacije, 2024).

2.4.2.2 The prevalence of intimate partner violence against women demands urgent action to enhance targeted measures across the EU

Intimate partner violence is the most common form of violence against women. It encompasses any act of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence occurring between former or current spouses or partners, regardless of whether the perpetrator shares or shared the same residence as the victim (EIGE, 2023p). Based on the EU gender-based violence survey (wave 2021), around one-third (32%) of women in the EU have experienced violence by an intimate partner during their adulthood (see Figure 15 for a breakdown per Member State).

Figure 15. Ever-partnered women who have experienced violence by an intimate partner, by occurrence of last episode and country (%, 18-74, 2021-2024)



Source: The EU gender-based violence survey (2021 wave), data collection coordinated by Eurostat, FRA and EIGE; Eurostat, gbv_ipv_occ.

Note: reliability of the data for the last 12 months in IE is low; for IT, definitions differ, and data from the last 12 months and last 5 years are not available;

EU are estimates and do not include IT.

Women aged 18-29 are more likely to report intimate partner violence than other age group (Eurostat, 2024e). This increased reporting among younger women is likely to reflect a greater awareness of their rights (Cho et al., 2015) and may be influenced by improved access to support services, changing societal attitudes and relationship dynamics (Pathak et al., 2019). For some examples of measures taken by Latvia, Lithuania and Portugal to strengthen their legal frameworks on domestic violence, see Box 14.

Box 14. Strengthening legal measures against domestic violence

— In July 2023, **Latvia** revised its police legislation to enable police officers to separate individuals who pose a threat to a victim without requiring the victim to file a written application (Law Library of Congress, 2023).

— **Lithuania's** new law on Protection against Domestic Violence, effective from 1 July 2023, promotes collaboration between national and local authorities, including the police, support centres, child protection services, hospitals and municipal representatives. This initiative is designed to bolster the effectiveness of a new emergency barring order. The webpage of the Ministry of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania provides more information, increasing awareness of the new measures.

— In January 2023, a law was approved in **Portugal** to enable spouses to avoid the previously mandatory conciliation/mediation phase in the divorce procedure when one of them is suspected or convicted of domestic violence offences (CIG, 2023).

Although not always the case, violence against women is predominantly perpetrated by men (Flood, 2022; FRA, 2014). Harmful stereotypes about masculinity that are passed on to men and boys teach them to respond to conflict with violence, to compete and to dominate their partners and others (MenEngage Alliance, 2018). Both the Istanbul Convention and the EU Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence establish the importance of working with perpetrators and fighting gender stereotypes and gender roles. This can be done through comprehensive sexuality education and educational programmes that promote critical reflection on gender roles, violence and relationships between men and women (Fleming et al., 2015; MenEngage Alliance, 2018). Evidence suggests that men may overestimate how comfortable other men are around sexist behaviours, which may lead them to refrain from speaking up out of fear of other people's reactions, particularly in male-dominated contexts (Flood, 2022). Encouraging men to speak up and increase their knowledge and skills on how to intervene could be an effective way in challenging discriminatory gender norms (MenEngage Alliance, 2018).

The COVID-19 pandemic worsened intimate partner violence in the EU due to new stressors such as infection risks, financial constraints and increased isolation (McNeil et al., 2023). In particular, this affected trans women, women with disabilities and migrant women (EIGE, 2021b). Despite improvements, the availability of support services such as helplines and shelters (WAVE, 2023) remains insufficient (see Table A6, in Annex 4). During the COVID-19 pandemic, only a few EU Member States (ES, HR, PT) included measures addressing violence against women in their Recovery and Resilience Plans (EIGE, 2023g) (for examples of some Member States' efforts to tackle intimate partner violence during the COVID-19 pandemic, see Box 15).

Even before the crisis, resources were already limited, and the pandemic further diverted funding towards crisis management (EIGE, 2021d). As a result, support services faced heightened challenges, with insufficient funding and lack of government guidance limiting their ability to provide adequate services to victims (EIGE, 2021d). In line with the Directive on combating violence against women, EIGE will collaborate with relevant stakeholders to support Member States in mapping the availability of these services in the coming years.

Box 15. Examples of efforts to tackle intimate partner violence in Member States during the COVID-19 pandemic

— In **Ireland,** a national interagency plan was implemented to address domestic abuse as part of the country's COVID-19 response. The judicial services maintained the provision of services by giving priority to domestic violence cases (EIGE, 2021d).

— In **Spain,** the government introduced the code word 'Mascarilla 19' as a discreet communication method for victims of gender-based violence to seek assistance during lockdown. This collaborative effort involved healthcare workers, police and service providers. Similar strategies have been adopted by other countries (EIGE, 2021d).

— In **Slovenia,** the police initiated awareness-raising efforts to empower victims to report violence and assure them that support remained accessible despite the pandemic (EIGE, 2021d).

— In **Bulgaria,** the SHE project aims to combat domestic violence against women by creating and implementing a training programme for human resources specialists in public administration. This initiative responded to the increased need for workplace-based support during COVID-19 lockdowns, aiming to empower professionals to identify, assist, and refer victims effectively (Institute of Public Administration, 2021).

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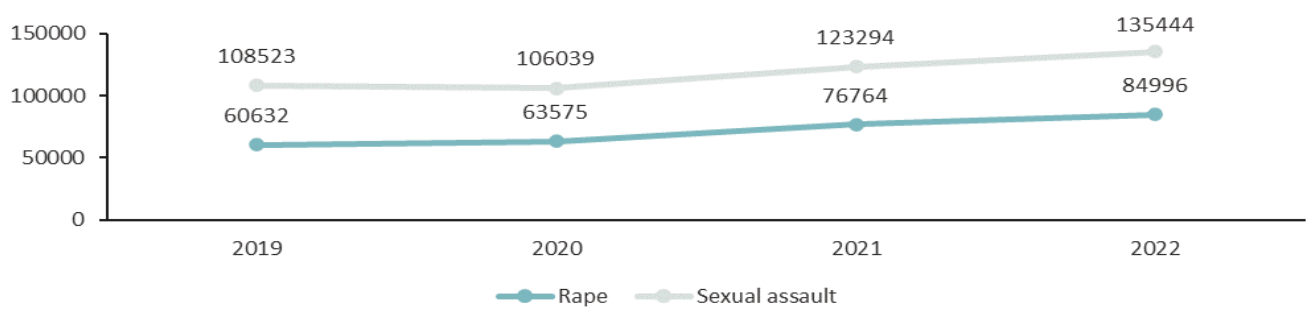
2.4.2.3 The higher rate of sexual violence and harassment in the EU underlines the urgent need for improved prevention and response strategies

The definition of rape in legal systems remains contentious. Human rights and women's organisations advocate for a consent-based definition, arguing that the force-based approach contributes to underreporting and inadequate prosecution (EWL, 2023a; Human Rights Watch, 2023b). It excludes behaviours that undermine a victim's autonomy and lead to unwanted sexual acts (Dowds, 2020; Schneider, 2020). However, proving consent is challenging and often shifts the focus to the victim's actions instead of the offender's behaviour (Dowds, 2020; Schneider, 2020). Intense debates over the adoption of an EU-wide consent-based definition of rape led to its omission from the Directive on combating violence against women (Peseckyte, 2023). However, the Directive sets out measures relating to awareness-raising campaigns or programmes, the making available and distribution of consent education material and the wide dissemination of information on measures of rape prevention. A consent-based definition of rape applies in those Member States that have ratified the Istanbul Convention (EWL, 2024a).

Despite critical underreporting issues, recorded offences related to sexual assault and rape increased markedly between 2019 and 2022 (see Figure 16). In 2022, there was a 25 % increase in documented cases of sexual assault against women in the EU and reported cases of rape surged by 40 % compared with 2019. Women also remain disproportionately vulnerable to sexual harassment in the workplace. Available data reveal that around one in three (31 %) of women who have ever worked have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace in their adulthood in the EU (see Figure 17 for the situation per Member State). In the youngest age group (18-29 years), two in five women (42 %) have experienced sexual harassment at work (EIGE, 2024q).

Increased reports of violence may reflect different trends. On the positive side, it may reflect greater awareness and willingness among survivors to speak out, influenced by movements such as #MeToo (see also Section 2.10.2.4). On the negative side, it may also point to increasing violence rates. Regular data collection is key to better understand, distinguish and respond to negative developments.

Figure 16. Total number of recorded offences of rape and sexual assault (EU, 2019-2022)

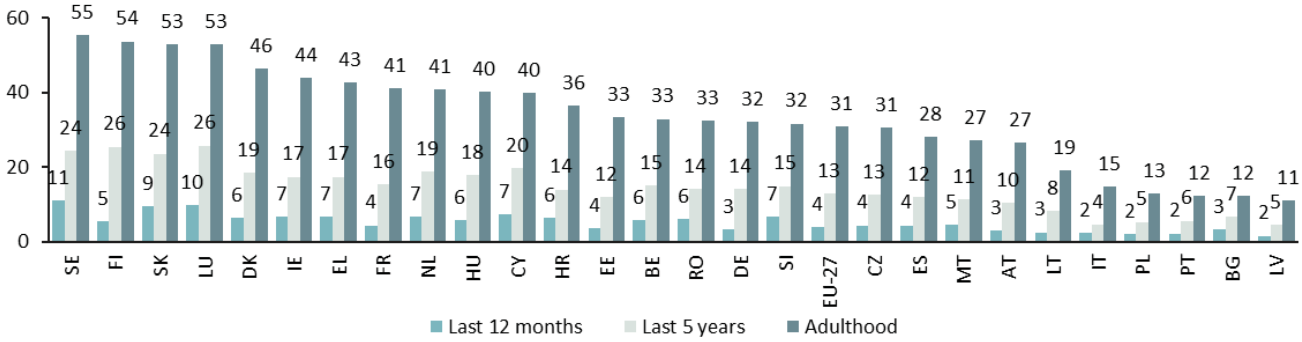


Source: Eurostat, crim_off_cat.

Note: data for rape not available for IT (2019-2022); data for sexual assault not available for IT, LU, HU (2019-2022).

Improving confidence in the judicial system is crucial to counter underreporting and grant victims the right to a fair trial, as outlined in Article 47 of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights. Women continue to report lower levels of confidence in the judicial system than men and their representation across judicial roles is highly varied. Women remain underrepresented in law enforcement, comprising 30 % of prison staff and 20 % of police officers, compared with 28 % and 18 % in 2019 (Eurostat, 2024p). By 2022, women made up 64 % of judges, up from 57 % in 2019.

Figure 17. Percentage of ever-working women who have experienced sexual harassment at work, by occurrence of last episode and country (%, 18-74, 2021-2024)



Source: The EU gender-based violence survey (2021 wave), data collection coordinated by Eurostat, FRA and EIGE; Eurostat, gbv_shw_occ.
Note: definitions differ in IT; EU-27 figures are estimates.

2.4.2.4 Adopting a unified approach to cyber violence and enhancing digital safeguards are key to addressing online risks that particularly affect younger women

Cyber violence against women and girls is rooted in power imbalances and is a growing concern in the digital age, driven by the increased use of digital technologies and amplified by the exponential growth of user online presence (EIGE, 2025a). Women face disproportionate dangers online, such as cyberstalking, harassment, doxing[30] and the non-consensual sharing of intimate images (Hofstetter and Pourmalek, 2023; K. Park, et al., 2023). Generative artificial intelligence applications, automation and generative algorithms greatly exacerbate cyber-violence, as they extend the reach of perpetrators, enabling them to commit violent acts, such as automated harassment, image-based sexual abuse or online discrimination at a distance (EIGE, 2025a). The ensuing consequences are vast, including harm to physical and mental health, reduced online participation, negative impact on relationships, employment and economic situation (EIGE, 2022d; K. Park et al., 2023).

The 2020 FRA survey found that more than 13 % of women across the EU have experienced cyber harassment in the past five years. This share rises to 25 % among young women (aged 16-29) (FRA, 2020). Different age groups experience varying forms of cyber violence, with cyberbullying and image abuse mostly affecting girls and younger women, and cyber harassment and identity theft impacting older women (EIGE, 2022c). Reporting and responses vary between Member States due to factors such as awareness, cultural attitudes and legal frameworks (FRA, 2020) (see Figure 18). Lesbian, bisexual and transgender women, women from racial minorities or from different religious groups experience stronger cyber violence due to the multiplicative effect of discrimination, violence and hate crimes (Lomba et al., 2021). These groups may also experience higher mental health impacts from cyber violence due to this multiplicative effect (Lomba et al., 2021).

Figure 18. Percentage of women aged 16-29 reporting experiences of cyber-harassment in the past 12 months, by country (% of the population, 2020)

[30] Doxing refers to online researching and publishing of private information on the internet to publicly expose and shame the person targeted (EWL, 2017).

Source: FRA Fundamental Rights survey, 2020, a_har12m_cyb.
Note: the survey conducted in Bulgaria involved a small sample size. The survey asked about the following acts of cyber-harassment: incidents in which somebody 1) sent you emails or text messages that were offensive or threatening, 2) posted offensive or threatening material about you on the internet, e.g. on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat, LinkedIn, Twitter or WhatsApp.

The EU VAW Directive provides for uniform criminal law definitions of the most common forms of cyber violence (non-consensual sharing of intimate or manipulated material (including "deepfakes"), cyber stalking, cyber harassment (including cyberflashing and doxing), and cyber incitement to violence or hatred based on gender). It also requires Member States to ensure the removal of certain online content criminalised under the Directive and the provision of specialist support services for victims of cybercrimes. National policies often focus on protecting children and youth from cyber violence, overlooking its gender dimension (EIGE, 2022c). Romania is the only Member State with laws that specifically define cyber violence. Several Member States (e.g., EL, IT, CY, SI) have adopted laws that tackle specific types of cyber violence (such as cyber bullying, cyber harassment and cyber stalking), while other Member States address cyber violence in domestic violence policies (BG, CZ, DE, ES, IT, MT, PT, RO) (EIGE, 2022c).

To support Member States to tackle cyber-violence, in 2024, EIGE developed a measurement framework, definitions, indicators, recommendations for cross-border collaboration (EIGE, 2025a) and guidance for digital platforms on implementing gender-sensitive policies (EIGE, 2024s). This research shows that digital platforms face challenges in addressing cyber violence again women and girls, including due to persistence of gender-neutral language and approaches, lack of recognition that cyber-violence crosses platforms and physical boundaries, or due to lack of adequate training and support for human content moderators. On the positive side, automated moderation can enhance cyber-violence policing alongside human effort, social media can provide valuable data on perpetrators' behaviours and incidents of cyber-violence, whereas methods like data scraping and digital ethnography can offer deep insights into cyber-violence against women and girls.

2.4.2.5 Comprehensive data collection requires harmonised definitions of violence against women at EU level

The Istanbul Convention strengthens the international legal framework on violence against women by harmonising standards through specific requirements. This leads to agreed-upon definitions, rights and principles, enhancing monitoring frameworks and data collection across Member States. Countries, regardless of ratification, can use the Convention as a reference to improve their national frameworks. A unified approach supports better data collection and monitoring, essential for assessing progress and implementing effective policies.

Source: Meurens et al., 2020.

Differences in classifications, recording practices and definitions create significant data gaps, limiting a comprehensive understanding of the prevalence, causes and impacts of violence against women. In addition to standardised definitions, there is a need for data collection to include critical variables such as sexual orientation, migration background and disability status to fully understand violence against women at the intersection of these factors (EIGE, 2023o) (see also Human Rights of Women (Area I). The Directive on combating violence against women requires improved data collection through surveys and administrative sources (Article 44). EIGE will continue to support Member States in implementing these provisions (see Annex 6 for more on EIGE's work on data collection).

Psychological and economic violence are significant aspects of violence against women, recognised as part of domestic violence by the Directive on combating violence against women. Psychological violence, such as emotional abuse, coercive control, stalking and harassment is widespread in the EU and often accompanies or precedes other forms of violence against women (EIGE, 2022b). For

example, the EU gender-based violence survey (wave 2021) shows that a lifetime intimate partner violence against women is higher – 32 % – when psychological violence is included (EIGE, 2024q).

Psychological violence and coercive control are criminalised in some form in all EU Member States, usually under domestic violence legislation or general provisions. EIGE (2022b) found that such criminalisation can have limitations with many criminal offences not matching well to the behaviour typical of these forms of violence. In 2021, only five countries had specific laws targeting psychological violence or coercive control (DK, IE, FR, HU, ES). Belgium has a legal definition on coercive control in its legislation on femicide (see Box 13).

Economic violence disproportionately affects women with disabilities, as well as women with migrant backgrounds and from ethnic or religious minorities (EIGE, 2024c). According to EU-GBV survey[31], 8 % of (ever-partnered) women experienced their partners (ever) forbidding them to work or controlling family finances and excessively controlling their expenses. Despite this, only nine Member States (BE, BG, HR, LT, HU, MT, SI, SK) have explicitly criminalised it in their domestic violence legislation (EIGE, 2023o).

Stalking is a significant concern for women in the EU (see Figure 19). It is defined by the Istanbul Convention as 'the intentional conduct of repeatedly engaging in threatening conduct directed at another person, causing her or him to fear for her or his safety' (Article 34). Stalking can extend to ICT-facilitated forms such as cyberstalking (De Vido and Sosa, 2021).

Figure 19. Percentage of women who have experienced stalking, by occurrence of last episode and country (%, 17-84, 2021-2024)

Source: The EU gender-based violence survey (2021 wave), data collection coordinated by Eurostat, FRA and EIGE; Eurostat, gbv_st_occ.
Note: no data available for IT, low reliability for 'last 5 years' (AT, NL, PL) and for 'last 12 months' (AT, CY, CZ, DE, HU, IE, LT, NL, PL, RO, SI); EU-27 figures are estimates.

While all Member States criminalise stalking, definitions vary, with some focusing on perpetrators' actions or intent and others requiring victims to show behavioural changes as a consequence of being stalked (EIGE, 2022b). There is an ongoing debate about whether psychological impacts such as distress and fear should be elements of stalking (Fissel et al., 2024; Logan and Walker, 2021). Some argue that fear is a central feature of stalking; it allows it to be differentiated from harassment and is linked to the higher impact experienced by the victims (Chan and Sheridan, 2020; Logan and Walker, 2021). However, critics worry that these subjective experiences are hard to prove and may cause some cases or early signs of stalking to be overlooked if they do not cause the victims to fear (Fissel et al., 2024; Van Der Aa, 2018).

[31] Eurostat calculations based on EIGE's request; more survey results could be found here EU gender-based violence survey: Key results | European Institute for Gender Equality

2.4.2.6 Strengthening responses to female genital mutilation and enhancing digital safeguards against human trafficking are crucial to effectively tackle other forms of gender-based violence

The EU has strengthened its commitment to combating female genital mutilation (FGM) globally by prioritising it in the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy and in the EU GAP III. In 2020, the Parliament also adopted a resolution outlining an EU strategy to globally eradicate FGM (European Parliament, 2020a). The Directive on combating violence against women criminalises FGM explicitly for the first time in EU law.

All EU Member States have criminalised FGM, but legal specifics vary. In 20 Member States, FGM is explicitly mentioned in criminal law. In contrast, others (BG, CZ, LV, HU, PL, SI and SK) use general criminal legislation, which can pose challenges due to vague definitions (EIGE, 2022e). Only six Member States (BE, DK, EL, FR, HU, PT) explicitly recognise the risk of FGM as grounds for asylum (EIGE, 2022e). Despite limited data, EIGE estimates that between 2011 and 2019, up to 93,042 girls in 13 Member States were at risk of FGM (EIGE, 2022e)[32]. The use of technology (for example, cross-border social media forums) has shown promising results in overcoming challenges in engaging with affected communities to raise awareness and tackle the cross-border nature of FGM (OHCHR, 2024).

The latest evidence from the EU shows that the EU has reinforced its fight against trafficking (European Commission, 2024h). From 2021 to 2022, the number of registered victims has increased by almost 21% due to better detection of victims. The majority of victims during this period were non-EU citizens (54%) and women and girls (65%), who were mostly trafficked for sexual exploitation (92% of the cases). Despite progress, challenges persist, such as low numbers of prosecutions and convictions, difficulties in collecting evidence or online trafficking. New challenges emerge, including new forms of exploitation and the link with high level criminal organisations.

Box 16. Raising awareness about human trafficking and the exploitation of women

- In 2022, **Estonia** launched the campaign 'Mõtle õige peaga' ('Think With the Right Head') to combat the exploitation of women through trafficking or working in prostitution (European Commission, 2023a).
- In 2024, the European Commission launched an awareness raising campaign 'End human trafficking. Break the invisible chain' to inform citizens on the reality of this crime and to help put an end to the trafficking in human beings. End human trafficking. Break the invisible chain - European Commission

The increasing use of technology and online platforms, which accelerated during Covid -19 pandemic, has also been noted in human trafficking, with traffickers exploiting social media, dating apps and online job ads to recruit victims (Council of Europe, 2022a). Recruitment strategies include the 'lover boy' technique, which recently targeted Ukrainian women refugees on Tinder (Townsend, 2022). The volume of online data, encrypted communications and limited technical expertise in law enforcement make investigating these crimes difficult (Council of Europe, 2022a).

2.5 Women and Armed Conflict (Area E)

Under the BPfA, Member States committed to six strategic objectives to address the challenges faced by women in armed conflicts: increasing women's role in conflict resolution, protecting women in conflict zones, reducing military spending, promoting non-violent conflict resolution, addressing

[32] The 13 Member States surveyed in EIGE's studies are AT, LU, DK, ES, IT, EL, BE, FR, MT, CY, SE, PT and IE. These results reflect a high-risk scenario. A low-risk scenario suggests that migration and acculturation have lowered the prevalence of FGM among first-generation migrants, with the risk still being present but diminished among second-generation migrants. In contrast, in a high-risk scenario, the prevalence of FGM remains unchanged for both first- and second-generation migrants, unaffected by migration and acculturation (EIGE, 2022e).

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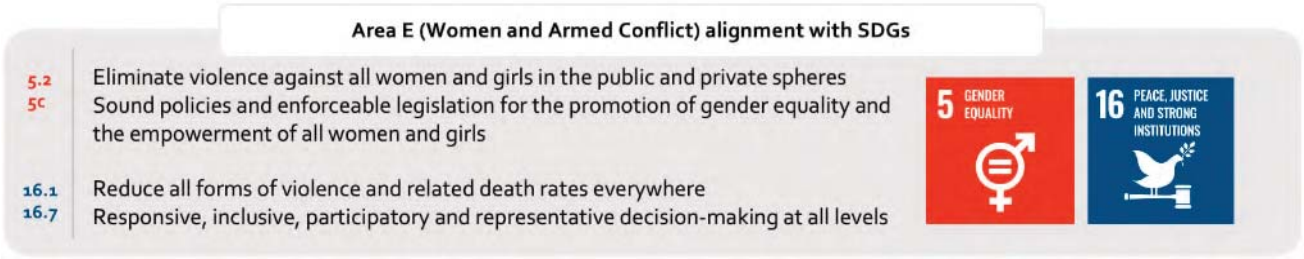
human rights violations, supporting peacebuilding efforts and providing aid to refugee women and other displaced women in need of international protection.

To help monitor progress in Area E, four EU indicators were agreed upon. These encompass gender equality training for diplomatic, civilian and military defence staff; women's participation in conflict prevention and resolution; resource allocation for gender equality in conflict-affected countries; and the status of migrant and asylum-seekers women from conflict-affected areas. However, these indicators are subject to persistent challenges in data collection, making it difficult to effectively evaluate progress, among other limitations (EIGE, 2020c).



For the BPfA +30 review, the thematic focus and priority topics of Area E include:

Recognising gender-specific security challenges in the context of digitalisation and climate change

Improving women's representation in the security and defence sectors

Adopting a gender-sensitive perspective into security strategies and humanitarian action

These thematic priorities bring a gender and intersectional lens to debates on emerging security threats such as terrorism, cybersecurity and climate change. They emphasise women's vital role in peacebuilding and conflict resolution in the EU and beyond, calling for gender-responsive security policies that value women's experiences and reduce the gender-based impacts of conflict.

2.5.1 EU policy developments

In 2018, the EU adopted its first-ever **Council Conclusions on Women, Peace and Security (WPS)**, establishing the **EU Strategic Approach to WPS** (Council of the European Union, 2018). This builds upon the principles of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) – a landmark resolution that addresses the disproportionate impact of armed conflict on women and girls and calls for their greater involvement in peace and security efforts (UN Security Council, 2000).

Following this, in July 2019, the Council of the EU adopted the **EU Action Plan on WPS 2019-2024** (Council of the European Union, 2019). This puts into action the 2018 Council Conclusions by focusing on six objectives: participation, gender mainstreaming, leading by example, prevention, protection and relief, and recovery, accompanied by a detailed achievement plan. Incorporating the WPS agenda as a thematic priority under **the Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in External Action 2021-2027 (GAP III)** has expanded the scope of gender equality efforts in external actions. Member States engaged in WPS have primarily concentrated on assisting partner countries by bolstering CSOs, combating sexual and gender-based violence and promoting women's involvement and leadership in peacebuilding initiatives (European Commission, 2023p). The **2022 Council Conclusions on WPS** emphasised the need for further efforts across the Member States (Council of the European Union, 2022a). In 2024, all Member States except Hungary

have adopted a **National Action Plan (NAP) on WPS** at some point, though some now require renewal (WILPF, n.d.).

Further reinforcing these commitments, in October 2020, the European Parliament adopted a **Resolution on gender equality in the EU's foreign and security policy** (European Parliament, 2020c). This resolution calls on the EU and Member States to continue enhancing the rights of women and girls through the EU's foreign and security actions and to embrace a feminist approach to foreign and security policy. As of April 2024, Germany, Spain, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Slovenia have formally introduced such a feminist foreign policy. In 2014 Sweden adopted the world's first feminist foreign policy but then abandoned it in 2022. (Human Rights Watch, 2022c; UN Women, 2023a).

To further address gender disparities in security policies, the EEAS launched the Strategy and Action Plan to Enhance Women's Participation in Civilian Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) Missions 2021-2024 in December 2021 (EEAS, 2021a). Its objective is for at least 40 % of international staff to be women by 2024. To achieve this goal, the Strategy focus on promoting equality in hiring, retention and career growth, ensuring an inclusive, harassment-free workplace, engaging leadership to drive change, and strengthening strategic communication.

Despite progress, gender perspective remains inadequately integrated into strategies addressing violent extremism, radicalization, and terrorism, despite research highlighting its critical importance (DCAF et al., 2020; OSCE, 2022). For example, the **2020 Counter-Terrorism Agenda** does not include a gender perspective (European Commission, 2020k).

The EU security agenda also addresses the challenges posed by climate change. In 2023, the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy issued a **Joint Communication outlining the EU's strategy to address the growing impact of climate change and environmental degradation on peace, security, and defence** (European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2023). The document calls for a gender-focused approach to climate-related security, noting the disproportionate effects of climate change on women and on communities in disadvantaged conditions. Critics argue that gender inequalities are still regarded as a secondary concern in the EU's external climate policy, which reinforces stereotypes of women from the Global South as vulnerable (Allwood, 2021). This can lead to the minimisation of the impacts they experience, of the cross-border nature of climate change, and of the challenges faced by different groups (Allwood, 2021).

2.5.2 Key challenges and trends

2.5.2.1 The new security paradigm requires a gender-responsive approach to address the impacts of the growth of cyberspace and of climate change on gender equality

Emerging security threats emphasise the need for innovative approaches that include a gender lens in response to the complex and dynamic global landscape. For instance, it is essential to address gender in cybersecurity due to the unique risks women face online, such as harassment, surveillance, doxing, cyberstalking, disinformation and the unauthorised sharing of intimate images (Hofstetter and Pourmalek, 2023). Advanced technologies, including AI and smart devices, introduce new gender-specific cyber threats and forms of intimate partner violence (Slupska, 2019). The underrepresentation of women in the cybersecurity workforce, at just 11 % in Europe in 2020, is also a factor limiting the diversity of perspectives needed for comprehensive solutions (European Commission, 2020m). As a result, digital technologies risk reinforcing existing gender biases and oppressive structures, leading to greater insecurity and instability.

The **changing security paradigm** requires adaptation to diverse threats and technological advances such as AI, autonomous weapons and quantum technologies. Geopolitical shifts, hybrid threats and societal pressures call for new legal frameworks and cooperation. Emerging innovations such as the 'metaverse' present opportunities but also pose challenges, including the potential use of AI and biotechnologies in hybrid warfare.

Source: European Commission, 2023c

Violent extremism is another growing threat, exacerbated by digital spaces that amplify gendered narratives. Violent misogyny, often rooted in beliefs in male supremacy (DeCook and Kelly, 2021), is linked to both violence against women and violent extremism. Perpetrators of violence against women are noted to particularly support extremism, with many of them having histories of violent extremism, radicalisation and terrorism as well as committing violence against women (OSCE, 2022). Digital platforms increasingly connect anti-gender rhetoric with radicalisation, fuelling violence both online and offline (Hofstetter and Pourmalek, 2023).

Online extremism and hybrid threats are highly gendered, with content and messages often reinforcing gender stereotypes and targeting specific gender audiences (Scheuble and Oezmen, 2022). As an example, far-right groups have used the hijab in disinformation campaigns to incite anti-immigrant sentiments under the pretence of defending women's rights (Freedman et al., 2021). Such tactics often involve creating false stories (for example, about sexual violence) specifically to divide communities (Freedman et al., 2021).

Addressing the nexus between climate change and security is also crucial to prevent further gender inequalities. While comprehensive EU data are lacking, Member States are likely to face some negative trends. For example women often experience gender-based violence during climate change related displacement, while facing inadequate security and lack of privacy and stability (Moumita and Desai, 2021).

2.5.2.2 Women's representation in the security and defence sectors has improved in the EU and most Member States, but progress is slow

The BPfA emphasises the importance of women's full and equal participation in conflict prevention and resolution. At EU level, progress is noted in women's representation in institutions and agencies addressing security concerns (EIGE, 2023j). The European Commission has achieved overall gender parity in senior positions dealing with security and defence, though with progress uneven across specific directorates. For example, beginning of 2025, leadership in the European Commission's DG for Defence Industry and Space was entirely male (see Table 1). Despite progress, gender disparities remain high within the European Parliament's security and defence committees and women are also significantly underrepresented in top executive roles across EU agencies specialising in security. The data from February 2025, for example showed, that while the EU Parliament's Committee on Security and Defence has a woman as Chair, its all four Vice-Chairs were men (see Table 1). Similarly, at the European Defence Agency (EDA), both the Head and Chief Executive are men, and only two of the six members (17 %) of the management team are women.

At national level, progress in appointing women as defence ministers across the Member States has been slow. As of 2023, only seven women held this crucial position (AT, BE, CZ, ES, LV, NL, and PT) (EIGE, 2023j). Women also occupy just six out of the 25 senior minister roles overseeing migration and border control in the EU, down from eight in 2019 (EIGE, 2023j)[33]. This minimal change highlights the persistent influence of gender norms and stereotypes in allocating high-profile ministerial roles.

[33] EIGE, Gender Statistics Database (unpublished microdata). This excludes Belgium and Portugal, which have no cabinet-level minister specifically handling migration and border control. Instead, these responsibilities fall to junior ministers.

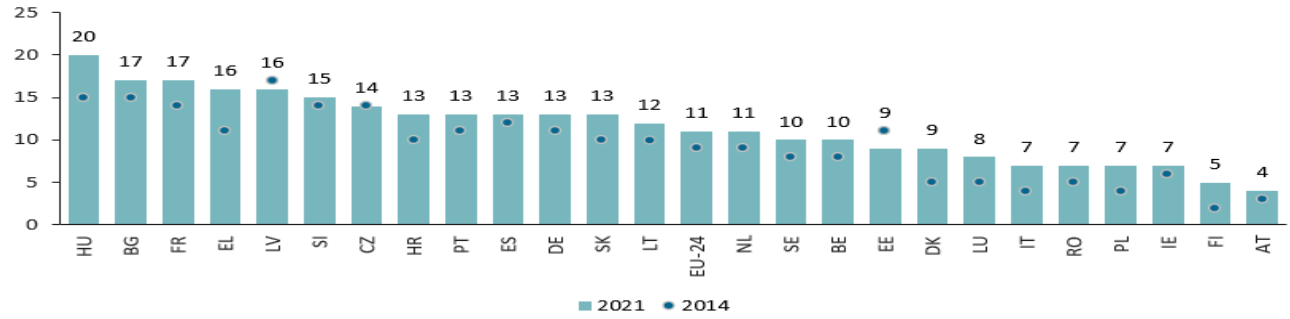
Table 1. Women's representation in EU institutions and agencies that address security concerns, 2025

European Commission	European Parliament	EU agencies
• The leadership of the **Directorate-General (DG) for Migration and Home Affairs** includes a man as Commissioner and acting Director General is a woman (she is also Deputy Director) , the other wo Deputy Directors being men. • In contrast, the **DG for Defence Industry and Space** is led by men in both the Commissioner and Director General roles. • The **EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator** is currently a woman.	• The **Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE)** is chaired by a man, with two of the four vice-chairs being women. Women constitute 49 % of its 75 members. • The **Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET)** is also chaired by a man, with only one woman among its four Vice-Chairs. Women represent just 18 % of its 79 members. • The **Committee on Security and Defence (SEDE)** has a woman Chair and all four Vice-Chairs are men, yet only 23 % of its 43 members are women.	• At the **European Defence Agency (EDA)**, both the Head and Chief Executive are men, and only two of the six members (17 %) of the management team are women. • The **European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA)** has a male Executive Director. • At the **European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex)**, the Executive Director is a man, and one of three Deputy Executive Directors is a woman. • The **European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol)** is led by a female Executive Director, with all three Deputy Directors being men.

Source: EIGE presentation of data from publicly available sources (February, 2025)

Across those Member States which were either NATO members or partners, the most recent data available from 2021 showed that women comprised only 11 % of national armed forces. Since 2014, most Member States have seen a slow but steady rise in women's participation in national armed forces (see Figure 20 and Box 17), except for slight declines in Latvia and Estonia.

Figure 20. Proportion of women as full-time members of national armed forces (%, EU, 2014 and 2021)



Source: NATO, 2014 and 2021 summaries of the national reports of NATO member and partner nations.

Note: Austria and Ireland are NATO partner nations; Finland was a partner nation until joining NATO in 2023. The latest available data for the Netherlands, Denmark, Romania, Poland and Ireland are from 2020. Data for Malta are unavailable. Cyprus is neither a NATO member nor a partner.

Women and LGTBIQ persons continue to face discrimination, harassment and violence based on their sex, sexual orientation or gender identity, that impede their full and equal participation in the armed forces in the EU (EUROMIL, 2024). Gendered disinformation marginalises women and maintains male-dominated power structures by reinforcing harmful narratives (Prudhoe et al., 2024). In addition, structural and logistical issues exist, such as inadequate facilities, childcare and poorly adapted uniforms (Atkins, 2018; Strand et al., 2022). Combined with insufficient access to training, the absence of mentorship opportunities and unequal treatment (Siplane, 2017), this results in women being underrepresented in the military sector, especially at a senior level.

Box 17. Women in military conscription in the EU

In 2017, **Sweden** became the first EU country to adopt a **'gender-neutral' mandatory military service,** requiring both women and men to serve (Persson and Sundevall, 2019). This has led to an annual increase in the number of women joining the military (Swedish Armed Forces, 2020). As of 2023, women made up 24 % of the total number of staff

employed in the Swedish Armed Forces (Swedish Armed Forces, 2024). However, progress has been uneven, with more women joining the Navy and Air Force than the Army (Swedish Armed Forces, 2020; Swedish Defence University, 2023). In March 2024, **Denmark** introduced a draft bill to include women in military conscription, although debates are still ongoing (Euroactiv, 2024). Other Member States such as **Finland, Lithuania** and **Estonia** allow women to apply for military service voluntarily, which is a common approach in most Member States (Persson and Sundevall, 2019).

2.5.2.3 EU's humanitarian and civilian missions have made considerable strides in institutionalising gender equality, but more efforts are needed

Appointing gender advisers and implementing regular gender-related training are essential to integrate a gender perspective into the work of EU Common Security and Defence (CSDP). From 2015 to 2020, there was a notable increase in gender adviser positions in civilian missions (EEAS, 2022). The adoption of internal gender focal point networks has been significantly strengthened, increasing from just two missions having such networks in 2015 to nine out of 12 missions in 2020 (EEAS, 2022). However, these roles often lack adequate resources and staffing them in military missions remains a challenge (EEAS, 2022). In December 2020, women made up 29% of all personnel in civilian CSD missions, with 24% of international staff being women (EEAS, 2021). Among international staff, women represented 26% of contracted staff and 23% of seconded personnel, with the number of women seconded by Member States declining since 2015. This highlights the need for increased efforts to promote gender equality within CSDP missions.

Most CSDP missions now also include human rights and gender aspects in their mandatory induction training, and new specialised training courses have been introduced on topics such as gender-based violence and the UNSCR 1325 (EEAS, 2022). However, not all staff categories receive sufficient gender-related training, and training responsibilities are fragmented across Member States (EEAS, 2022). According to the Commission, in 2021, 96 % of all initiatives funded by the Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations department effectively integrated gender and age considerations (DG ECHO, 2023). Funding allocated to tackling gender-based violence within EU humanitarian policies has also increased significantly (DG ECHO, 2023). Despite these advances, research shows that many projects which claim to integrate gender equality considerations do not meet OECD's minimum recommended criteria, as many projects fail to assess and address unintended consequences, including gender-based violence (Grabowski and Essick, 2020).

2.5.2.4 Responding to the gender-specific challenges faced by refugee and asylum-seeking women is key

Between 2019 and 2023, asylum applications in the EU increased steadily, except of a brief decline in 2020, probably due to the COVID-19 pandemic (see Figure 21). The most recent data shows that in 2024, the EU had a slight annual decrease in asylum applications .

In 2023, women made up 30 % of asylum applicants at the EU level, a decrease from 37 % in 2019. This reduction reflects the gendered obstacles that hinder women's ability to reach the EU and claim asylum (Freedman, 2023). In countries of origin, women experience greater economic barriers, such as a lower ability to generate income, but also barriers related to patriarchal practices that hinder their autonomy to migrate (ILO, 2021b; Schiele, 2024). Research shows that the higher the gender inequality in a country, the lower the relative number of female asylum-seekers (Schiele, 2024).

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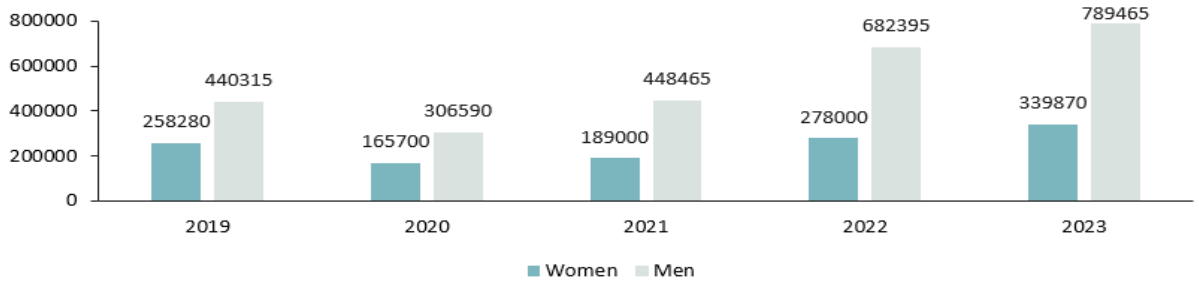
Figure 21. Total number of asylum applications by sex (EU, 2019-2023)



Source: Eurostat, Asylum statistics, migr_asyappctza

Racialised women from Africa, the Middle East and South Asia also often face discrimination and violence at border controls and upon arrival in EU host countries (Amnesty International, 2022b; Human Rights Watch, 2022b). Increasingly restrictive border and migration regimes in Member States have created additional risks for refugee women. For example, policies that externalise asylum (shifting the processing of asylum claims to other regions) can increase the risk of gender-based violence (Freedman, 2024). Blocking entry or returning asylum-seekers to their departure point may expose refugee women to detention and severe violence against women in their countries of origin. Migrant women and girls who have experienced sexual and gender-based violence require tailored support from local authorities to address their specific needs and ensure their safety (for an example, see Box 18).

Box 18. Supporting migrant women and girls who experience sexual and gender-based violence

The Equalcity project, funded by the EU's Rights, Equality, and Citizenship programme, helps local authorities to support and protect migrants at risk or who have survived sexual and gender-based violence. As part of this project, the NGO Femmes en détresse A.S.B.L in **Luxembourg** has developed a toolbox to offer tailored support to migrant women and girls who have experienced sexual and gender-based violence. This toolbox is intended for use by frontline professionals and practitioners working with migrant communities, especially women and girls, in medical, psycho-social, legal, administrative or general assistance roles.

The **Belgian** Institute for the Equality of Women and Men, together with migrant organisations and Ukrainian refugees, developed a practical toolkit *Recognition, detection and referral of signs of sexual violence in (Ukrainian) refugees*. The toolkit targets professionals, providing practical tips for supporting victims of sexual violence and references to other projects aiding refugees at risk of sexual violence.

Since the start of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, there has been a significant influx of Ukrainian refugees to the EU, mainly women and children (UN Women and CARE International, 2022). In response, the EU activated the TPD to offer immediate and collective protection. In 2022, 83 % of temporary protection statuses were granted to Ukrainian women, compared with 17 % being granted to Ukrainian men. In 2023, women (76 %) continued to outnumber men (24 %). With some exceptions, Ukrainian men aged 18-60 are not allowed to leave the country. The TPD is currently in effect until March 2026. The uncertainty of temporary extensions complicates opportunities for refugees to build sustainable futures, for example, in employment and education (Picum, 2024).

Despite the vital support provided by the TPD, reports indicate that Ukrainian women and girls remain highly vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse, and often face difficulties in accessing sexual and reproductive health services (EIGE, 2024o) – see also Section 2.3.2.10. Referral mechanisms for victims of conflict-related sexual violence in the EU are currently inconsistent, with many Member States lacking national guidelines and specialised training to adequately address the needs of these victims (EIGE, 2024o). Roma and LBTQI* women refugees from Ukraine encounter additional barriers, such as a lack of legal documentation, discrimination and persecution based on their ethnicity, gender identity or sexual orientation (NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and

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Security, 2022). The challenges faced by Ukrainian refugees highlight the broader and urgent need for continuous efforts to implement gender-sensitive protective measures within the EU's refugee policies, ensuring that women and men from all countries of origin are adequately supported.

2.6 Women and the Economy (Area F)

Under the BPfA, Member States have committed to advancing gender equality within the economy. Area F aims to promote women's economic rights and independence by facilitating their equal access to resources, employment, markets, finance and trade, while also promoting appropriate working conditions. In addition, it seeks to recognise unpaid care work, calling for shared care responsibilities and the provision of social services.

The officially agreed EU indicators to monitor progress in this area include the representation of women and men in occupations within science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and educational, health and welfare (EHW) fields, self-, full- and part-time employment rates and the gender pay gap. Although these indicators highlight barriers to women's participation in the labour market, they do not address the underlying causes and dynamics, such as discrimination in hiring practices and the unequal sharing of unpaid care work.

Area F (Women and the Economy) alignment with SDGs

5.4	Recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the family
5.b	Use enabling technology to promote the empowerment of women
8.3	Promote policies that support decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, including through access to financial services
8.8	Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments, in particular for women migrant workers and those in precarious employment
10.4	Adopt fiscal, wage and social protection policies that achieve greater equality

For the BPfA +30 review, the thematic focus and priority topics of Area F include:

Addressing gender gaps in employment and caregiving responsibilities

Tackling the gender effects of COVID-19 on the digitalisation of work

Promoting women's financial independence and women's

Analysing women's participation in jobs for the digital and green transitions

This thematic focus highlights the critical importance of increasing women's economic opportunities and independence to achieve gender equality in the context of multiple crises and accelerated technological change. The COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine and consequent economic downturns have greatly affected women's participation in the labour market. Such disruptions make it imperative to embed gender equality within the digital and green transitions, ensuring that both women and men benefit from these changes.

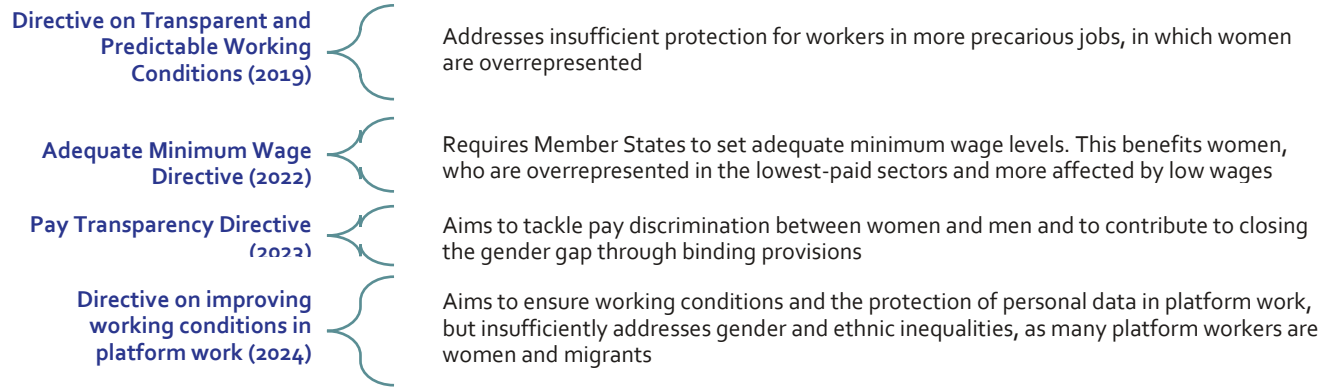
2.6.1 EU policy developments

Since 2018, the EU has made significant strides in fostering social inclusion by promoting gender equality in the labour market. Measures have been adopted to combat the effects of crises, close the gender care gap, ensure decent working conditions, reduce the gender pay gap and achieve equal participation across different sectors of the economy, including those of the digital transition. Section 2.1.2.6 in Women and Poverty (Area A) reviews some of these developments.

However, further actions are needed to ensure full and equal participation in the labour market. Crucial to progress towards the targets of the **European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan** is addressing the unequal distribution of unpaid work between women and men and promoting work-life balance policies. Examples of measures that tackle the gender care gap include the **European Care Strategy,** which aims to support Member States ensure quality, affordable and accessible care services through a range of EU-level actions, with a particular focus on LTC workforce (European Commission, 2022d). The Strategy is supported by the two **Council Recommendations on access to affordable high-quality long-term care and early childhood education and care**. The **Work-Life Balance Directive** also seeks to improve families' access to leave and flexible work arrangements to facilitate women's participation in the labour market and more equitable share of unpaid care duties. However, it allows Member States to make entitlements and benefits conditional on a minimum duration of work, thereby risking the exclusion of a growing number of workers in unstable and non-standard employment.

Since 2019, four key Directives have been adopted to ensure decent working conditions, including flexibility and security for workers in the digital economy:

Figure 22. Overview of the new Directives promoting gender equality in the labour market



Source: summarised by the authors, based on Directive (EU) 2019/1152, 2019; Directive (EU) 2022/2041, 2022; Directive (EU) 2023/970, 2023; Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on improving working conditions in platform work, 2024.

In the realm of emerging technologies, the **Artificial Intelligence Act** (AI Act) addresses gender equality and non-discrimination by identifying high-risk systems that could perpetuate patterns of discrimination against women (Lütz, 2022) (see more in Women and the Media (Area J)). Finally, policies aimed at achieving equal participation across various economic sectors have also been enacted. For instance, the **New European Innovation Agenda** supports women innovators through entrepreneurship and leadership programmes. Moreover, the **Council Recommendation on strengthening social dialogue** promotes gender equality and equal opportunities among social partners.

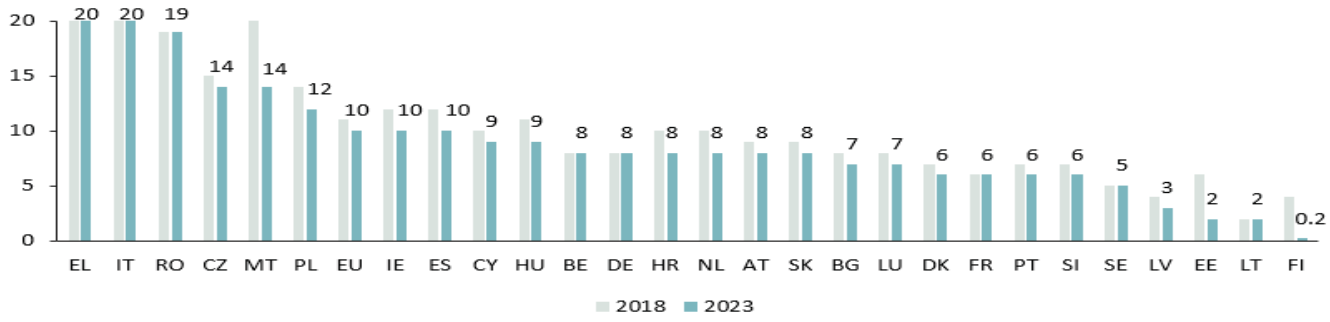
2.6.2 Key challenges and trends

2.6.2.1 Labour market participation of women and men has remained resilient in the face of crises, but significant measures are still needed to meet the EU 2030 target

Labour market participation across the EU has shown resilience in the face of recent crises, with employment levels among both women and men being maintained or even increasing. Since 2018, participation rates have increased, even amid challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine, high inflation and economic slowdowns (European Commission, 2023i).

Despite these gains, gender inequalities in labour market participation persist. In 2023, while 80 % of men aged 20 to 64 were employed, only 70 % of women in the same age group were in the workforce, revealing a persistent gender employment gap (Figure 23).

Figure 23. Gender employment gap by country (percentage points, EU, 2018 and 2023)



Source: Eurostat, EU LFS, lfsi_emp_a.

Note: authors' own calculations, based on the difference between the employment rates of women and men aged 20 to 64. Break in time series for IT in 2018; for DK and HR in 2023.

Having children widens the employment gap more significantly for women than for men, and this disparity persists across all levels of education and across different citizenship categories (see Figure 24). This underscores the importance of adopting an intersectional perspective (see Box 19), as further understanding of how gender interacts with other factors—such as education, ethnicity, and migrant status— shape strong inequalities in the labour market and beyond.

Figure 24. Gender employment gap by the number of children, citizenship, age and education level (percentage points, EU, 2018 and 2023)

Characteristic	Women	Men	Gender gap (pp) 2023	Gender gap (pp) 2018	Gap change
Number of children < 6 years old					
No children	68	75	-7	-8	gap decreased
1 child	71	83	-12	-24	gap decreased
2 children	73	90	-17	-27	gap decreased
3 children or more	57	84	-27	-35	gap decreased
Citizenship					
EU-27 citizen	67	75	-8	-10	gap decreased
Non-EU-27 citizen	49	71	-22	-21	gap increased
Age					
15 to 24	33	37	-4	-4	no change
25 to 54	77	87	-10	-12	gap decreased
55 to 64	58	70	-12	-14	gap decreased
65 to 74	8	14	-6	-5	gap increased
Education					
Low	38	54	-16	-17	gap decreased
Medium	67	78	-11	-12	gap decreased
High	84	89	-5	-7	gap decreased
Total					
Age: 20 to 64	70	80	-10	-11	gap decreased

gap decreased no change gap increased

Source: Eurostat, EU LFS, lfsa_ergaed, lfst_hheredch, lfsa_ergan

Notes: EU-LFS break in time series. Age group for Education is 15-64; age group for Citizenship is 15-64; age group for Number of children is 18-64. Educational attainment includes people who have completed ISCED levels 0–2 (Low), ISCED level 3 or 4 (Medium) or ISCED levels 5–8 (High). Gap changes: positive, where they have decreased since 2018 (in green, gender gap change ≥-1); negative, where they have increased since 2018 (in red, gender gap change ≥1), and no change since 2018 (in yellow, gender gap increases/decreases between -1 and 1 pp).

During the pandemic, women's employment was disproportionately affected, with younger women and those in low-paid sectors experiencing the most significant job losses. While men also faced job losses, the sectors hit hardest by the pandemic, such as hospitality and retail, employed a higher proportion of women (EIGE, 2022k).

Box 19. Tackling gender and racial inequalities through targeted support for Roma women

The **Czech** Strategy for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation (Strategy for Roma integration) 2021-2030 identifies the status of Roma women as a horizontal, cross-cutting priority. It includes measures to improve employment opportunities, such as conducting research on economically inactive Roma women and creating more effective employment support programmes, particularly for Roma women. In addition, the Government Council for Gender Equality set up the Working Group on Issues of Roma Women in 2021 to ensure the coordination of goals and measures related to gender equality among Roma, as outlined in the Strategy for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation 2021-2030 and the Strategy for Gender Equality 2021-2030 (Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, 2021).

By 2021, women's labour market participation surpassed its 2019 pre-pandemic levels (European Commission, 2023a). Between 2021 and 2023, the employment rate for women aged 20-64 increased by 2.6 pp, compared with a 1.9 pp increase for men (Eurostat, 2024b). If Member States continue to strengthen their efforts, they can further narrow the gender employment gap from 10 pp in 2023 to approximately 5.8 pp at EU level, moving to the 2030 target set by the EPSR Action Plan[34]. As exemplified by the initiative in Box 20, engaging directly with private sector stakeholders may accelerate this progress, for example by addressing barriers to entering the workplace.

[34] EPSR's target for 2030 is to at least halve the gender employment gap compared with the gap of 11.7 pp in 2019 (European Commission, 2021r).

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Box 20. Expanding inclusion and diversity practices in the workplace

Latvia's Society Integration Foundation launched the Diversity Mentor Programme to support employers in fostering inclusive workplaces. Participants in the programme had the chance to expand their knowledge about diversity and to design tailored solutions for their workplaces, such as developing a diversity and inclusion strategy or creating internal training programmes. The programme specifically supports the inclusion of women in the workplace (Community Integration Foundation, 2023).

2.6.2.2 Addressing gender gaps in pay and wealth is essential to support women's financial independence

Financial independence requires financial ability, which reflects financial literacy and self-efficacy – that is, the confidence to make sound financial decisions. Given the multidimensional nature of the term, EIGE proposed a multidimensional, gender-sensitive framework for measuring financial independence. It suggests assessing financial independence across three core dimensions: (1) income, (2) wealth and (3) power and control (EIGE, 2024c), and shows close interlinks between them.

In terms of income, the unadjusted gender pay gap indicates continued disparities in earnings between women and men. Despite narrowing over the past five years and ongoing efforts by Member States at the legislative level (see an example in Box 21), the gap at the EU level remained at 13 % in 2022, down from 14 % in 2018 (Eurostat, 2024c). The gap varies significantly across Member States but remains above 10 % in most countries. Estonia records the highest gap at 21 %, while Luxembourg has the lowest at -1 %. From a life-course perspective, the gender pension gap, which stood at 26 % in the EU in 2022, demonstrates the impact of accumulated lifetime gender inequalities (Eurostat, 2024d). These include gender disparities in working hours, time spent out of the labour market due to caregiving responsibilities and labour market segregation, as women are concentrated in lower-paying sectors (European Parliament, 2019b).

Box 21. Addressing the gender pay gap in Ireland

In **Ireland,** the Gender Pay Gap Information Act was enacted in 2021. This mandates the disclosure of pay information by employers with a workforce of 250 or more – a requirement that will later expand to include organisations with at least 50 employees (Gender Pay Gap Information Act, 2021). Organisations will need to explain any gender disparities in pay identified (European Commission, 2022a).

While related, the gender wealth gap and the gender income gap may be influenced by different factors and reflect distinct trends. Although the income gap contributes to the wealth gap between women and men, it is not the only factor. For example, research notes that the wealth gap between men and women in France is widening (from 9% in 1998 to 16% in 2015), even though wage inequalities are decreasing (Leleu, Alofs, Harmel and Peters, 2024). Gender gaps in wealth widen during its accumulation and transmission within families, driven by persistent, under-explored inequalities. Economically weaker partners within couples, predominantly still women, may be disadvantaged in full comprehension of the legal effects of wealth accumulation, whereas notaries, as under Belgian law, could fulfil such a gap, but are lacking gender sensitive training for awareness and adequate action (Leleu, Alofs, Harmel and Peters, 2024).

While EU-wide data are not available, studies from various Member States show that the gender wealth gap widens with age to the detriment of women, especially for women in couples with children compared with those without (EIGE, 2024c; Meriküll et al., 2021; Qureshi, 2023). According to the 2022 Global Gender Wealth Equity Report[35], based on data from 11 Member States (BE, DK, DE,

[35] The Global Gender Wealth Equity Index estimates how women and men accumulate wealth over their careers by projecting various sources of wealth, such as state and mandatory benefits, employer-sponsored retirement plans, real estate and personal savings. The

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IE, ES, FR, IT, NL, AT, PL, SE), Norway, United Kingdom and Switzerland, the gap in accumulated wealth is most prominent for women in senior positions (Bessière and Gollac, 2021; WTW, 2022). Among those in senior positions, women have 34 % less wealth than men. In turn, women in frontline operational roles have 11 % less wealth than men in the same roles (Bessière and Gollac, 2021; WTW, 2022). This disparity results from the gender pay gap and slower career advancement for women in senior roles compared to men (WTW, 2022).

Amid ongoing economic challenges in the EU, including the cost-of-living crisis, gender inequalities in financial independence are likely to worsen and disproportionately affect women (Eurofound, 2022b; European Parliament, 2024e). Supporting women's equal participation in the economy and addressing economic abuse are key steps towards enabling them to take control of their financial futures and to lead secure, independent lives. For more on economic violence, see also Section 2.4.2.5 in Violence Against Women (Area D).

2.6.2.3 Women's entrepreneurship is growing, but further support is needed for women-led STEM and ICT ventures

The gender gap in wealth is influenced by a number of economic factors such as self-employment and entrepreneurship, in which men participate more than women (EIGE, 2024c). For instance, between 2018 and 2022, only 6 % of women in the EU were actively involved in starting or managing a new business (OECD/European Commission, 2023). Although women make up nearly 40 % of all entrepreneurs (European Investment Bank, 2020), they account for just 19 % of entrepreneurs in the ICT sector and 10 % of startup founders (European Commission, 2019c).

The funding gap is particularly stark in the STEM sector. In the EU, venture capital-backed tech companies with all-male founding teams secure 93 % of the capital invested. All-women teams secure only 2 % (Pitchbook, 2024). This imbalance is partly due to the underrepresentation of women in investment decision-making roles. As a result, men investors tend to view women-led ventures as riskier and see entrepreneurship as mostly a male field (European Investment Bank, 2020). Despite these challenges, women founded tech scale-ups - defined as ventures with over 50 employees and funding since 2017- recently grew faster than their competitors and were notably more focused on positively impacting society (European Institute of Innovation & Technology, 2023). Addressing gender biases and increasing support for women entrepreneurs (as in an example of Box 22), particularly in male-dominated sectors like STEM, presents an opportunity to drive innovation, foster inclusive growth and create a more sustainable and equitable economy for all.

Box 22. Promoting female entrepreneurship in Italy

In September 2021, the **Italian** government established a EUR 400 million fund *Initiative* to enhance women's entrepreneurship. It aims to refine existing support frameworks for women entrepreneurs to boost their impact, help implement already active entrepreneurial projects and offer support for women-led startups through mentoring and technical-managerial assistance.

2.6.2.4 A more equal sharing of caregiving responsibilities and access to formal care services is essential to enable women's full participation in the labour market

Workplace culture significantly impacts the ability of fathers to take parental leave. This is often shaped by traditional stereotypes that view childcare as primarily a mother's role, particularly in heterosexual couples (Andersen, 2018; Närvi and Salmi, 2019). Fathers in same-sex couples experience greater flexibility, as workplaces may be more accepting of childcare responsibilities in these cases (Evertsson and Malmquist, 2023). Financial factors and job security also impact the

model shows how wealth accumulation is affected by different job types and salary levels, using a sample of roles that represent the workforce. The chosen roles are based on WTW's Global 50 data, which represents the typical working population of WTW's clients in each country.

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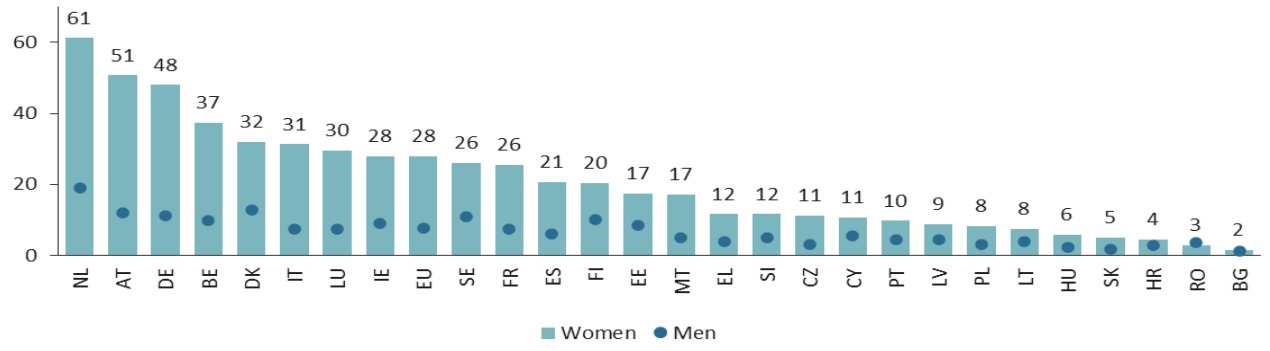
take-up of parental leave by fathers (Närvi and Salmi, 2019). In addition, fathers with higher incomes and stable positions are better able to take leave. Those in insecure jobs or who have recently been unemployed may prioritise income stability (Närvi and Salmi, 2019). Many fathers resort to alternatives such as unpaid time off, taking annual leave or part-time work to participate more actively in childcare, exacerbating gender inequalities for those less able to sustain income loss (Evertsson and Malmquist, 2023).

Traditional gender roles frame men as primary breadwinners while women are expected to prioritise family and caregiving responsibilities over career ambitions (Hanlon, 2012; Aarntzen et al., 2023). Although the attitudes towards gender roles in the labour market have seen considerable change, e.g. in 2021 for around 60 % of the EU population women's career ambitions are not secondary to their family responsibilities while men are no longer thought of as the sole providers for the family, the attitudes towards sharing unpaid care housework have seen less change (European Commission, 2024i). As a result, women continue to shoulder the overwhelming majority of unpaid care work (UNECE and UN Women, 2021). According to EIGE's 2024 CARE survey (2nd wave), around 43 % of women with children under 12 years old spend at least 35 hours per week (approximately 5 hours or more per day) day on childcare, compared with 20% of men.

In 2023, women in all Member States except Romania worked part-time more often than men (see Figure 25). Among those providing long-term care in 2022, 42 % of women worked part-time, compared with 29 % of men (EIGE, 2023a). In 2023, 26 % of women said their main reason for engaging in part-time work was the need to care for adults with disabilities or children, in contrast to 6 % of men (Eurostat, 2024m, 2024o). These disproportionate care duties and lack of access to formal care services negatively impact women's work-life balance, lifetime earnings, career advancement and overall economic productivity (Zacharenko and Elomäki, 2022). This struggle is reflected in employment rates, with the gender employment gap widening with the number of children (see Figure 24).

Figure 25. Part-time employment by country, sex and age (% of the total employment, 20-64, EU, 2023)



Source: Eurostat, EU LFS, lfsa_eppga

Due to the ageing population and increasing demand for long-term care, more targeted policies are needed to reduce the burden on caregivers (for an example, see Box 23), who remain predominantly women (Chieregato, 2020; EDF, 2022b; EIGE, 2021c). Despite a projected 23 % increase in the population aged 65 or older by 2035, anticipated employment growth in the care sector is only 7 % (CEDEFOP, 2023). Reskilling and upskilling men for roles in the care sector can widen job opportunities for men within local areas and help to challenge traditional gender stereotypes (Boys in Care, 2019). For example, this could be done by integrating emotional and physical caregiving into vocational training and promoting healthier forms of masculinity. Ultimately, this shift could help reframe care work as a shared societal responsibility, rather than the responsibility of women.

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The reconciliation of paid work and care dilemmas have received a lots of research and policy attention. The most recent research findings of the rEUsilience project[36] suggest a care trilemma which refers to the trade-offs in key-decisions that families occupied with care tasks, especially low resourced families, are forced to make when they face three types of resource scarcity: paid work that can be accommodated with care, too little income support when paid work is not available and time scarcity. For example, working in full time job or additional hours might improve material conditions but leave less time to self-care and care for family members. This trilemma could be resolved by providing an adequate and universal system of child-related income support; as well as adequate, flexible and inclusive childcare and parental leave policies; and lastly, universal family support services which can offer general as well as specific family support (Daly, 2024; Leon & Cerrillo, 2023).

Box 23. Fostering a better work-life balance in Greece while creating formal employment in the care sector

In 2020, **Greece** launched the 'Neighbourhood Babysitters' programme, aimed at fostering better work-life balance and creating formal employment opportunities in the care sector, thereby reducing informal work. This initiative offers childcare services for infants up to 2.5 years old, managed by certified caregivers. It also provides financial assistance to parents, which they can use to compensate a certified caregiver.

2.6.2.5 The digital transition facilitates remote work, which introduces new opportunities and challenges for women and men teleworkers

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated workplace digitalisation by emphasising the importance of digital tools in facilitating remote work (European Commission, 2023i). This shift has highlighted remote work as a flexible work arrangement that can enhance work-life balance, shorten commuting time and offer opportunities to employees with reduced mobility (Niasse, 2024). Despite these benefits, the widespread adoption of remote work has also revealed a growing gap between those who can take advantage of such arrangements and those who cannot. Specifically, remote roles are often concentrated in higher-paying jobs that require advanced qualifications, leaving many lower-waged frontline workers (a group in which women are overrepresented) without access to such opportunities (Lambert et al., 2023).

Even for those with access to remote work, challenges such as maintaining work-life boundaries and having the right to disconnect can undermine its advantages. For instance, increased stress and disrupted work-life balance became common during the pandemic, particularly for mothers balancing work and caregiving responsibilities (Arabadjieva and Franklin, 2023). Additionally, many women who telework due to caregiving responsibilities often become 'invisible' to employers and colleagues. This invisibility can limit their opportunities for career advancement, pay rises and promotions (Arabadjieva and Franklin, 2023; UNESCO et al., 2022). The resulting isolation and limited face-to-face interactions may also lead to loneliness and emotional strain, hindering long-term professional growth (Flynn, Wheildon, and Powell, 2024).

Teleworking has also been associated with other health issues, such as fatigue, headaches, eyestrain and anxiety, which are reported significantly more often by teleworkers than on-site workers (Vargas Llave et al., 2020). These health problems contribute to psychosocial risk factors that can adversely affect mental and physical health, with women being particularly vulnerable (EU-OSHA, 2021) – see more in Section 2.3.2.5 in Women and Health (Area C). The digital workplace also creates new avenues for violence and harassment, as technology blurs the lines between personal and professional communication, allowing misconduct to go unnoticed (York, 2022). Among teleworkers, women experience harassment or bullying at twice the rate of men (6 %,

[36] Risks, Resources and Inequalities: Increasing Resilience in European Families — rEUsilience

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compared with 3 %) and face violence or verbal abuse more frequently (9 %, compared to 6 %) (EU-OSHA, 2024).

2.6.2.6 The use of AI technologies in recruitment and human resource management creates new risks relating to gender bias and discrimination

The digital transition in the labour market has increased reliance on AI technologies, transforming hiring, task allocation and performance evaluation processes. The use of AI-driven systems in recruitment raises concerns over gender bias, limited worker autonomy and impacts on well-being (Nguyen and Mateescu, 2019). For instance, hiring algorithms are often trained on data predominantly from white men, which can create biases against candidates based on gender, race or disability (EIGE, 2022a).

Employers may also use AI-powered surveillance technologies such as camera and keystroke monitoring to track their remote-working employees (Skelton, 2020). Both 36 % of women and 31 % of men teleworkers report experiencing increased surveillance through digital technologies[37] (EU-OSHA, 2024). The algorithmic standards used in AI surveillance systems are typically developed using limited data based on men with no disabilities (De Stefano, 2015). This can unfairly penalise workers whose behaviour, speed or work practices differ from these narrow standards. Women face a higher risk of being penalised, as they are more likely to be primary caregivers and may need to leave their workstations to deal with family interruptions while working from home (EIGE, 2022a). Platform workers, who are more often subject to algorithmic management such as customer ratings and performance scores, as opposed to traditional managerial oversight (European Commission, 2019b; Hannák, et al., 2017; Westhoff, 2023), are left with limited support structures to address workplace issues. This means that heightened psycho-social risks, unfair treatment based on gender or age and sexual harassment remain underreported (EIGE, 2022a).

2.6.2.7 Addressing horizontal gender segregation is crucial for both women and men to benefit fully from the digital and green transitions in the labour market

As the green and digital transitions advance, the demand for skilled workers in sectors such as STEM, ICT, energy and transport is expected to grow (Janta, et al., 2023). However, these sectors already face skill shortages, which are likely to be exacerbated by the increasing demand (European Commission, 2023i). At the same time, these fields are marked by structural gender segregation, with men making up the majority of the workforce. This imbalance means that women may not benefit fully from the opportunities emerging in these industries.

In addition to gender stereotypes that shape educational choices (see Section 2.2.2.2 in Education and Training of Women (Area B)), another key factor contributing to gender occupational segregation is the ‘leaky pipeline’ phenomenon (Chowdhury et al., 2021). This refers to the gradual loss of women from certain fields as they face challenges that make it difficult to remain and advance in their careers (Berry et al., 2022). For example, women in ICT jobs leave the sector at higher rates than men due to the gender pay gap, gender stereotypes about men’s ‘better suitability’, a lack of women in leadership roles and slower career advancement in a male-dominated industry (EIGE, 2023j). Consequently, there remains a largely untapped pool of female talent.

In the rapidly evolving field of AI, as of 2020, there was an upward trajectory in the worldwide representation of women among researchers at international conferences, suggesting a positive development (Righi et al., 2022). However, as AI professionals progress in their careers, the effects of the ‘leaky pipeline’ become more pronounced. In 2019, while women in the EU and UK constituted

[37] Based on 2022 EU-OSHA survey, covering all EU Member States, plus Iceland and Norway.

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almost 20 % of AI professionals with 0-2 years of experience, this number dropped to just 12 % among those with more than 10 years' experience (Linkedin, 2019).

2.7 Women in Power and Decision-Making (Area G)

Under the BPfA, Member States committed to promoting the equal representation and participation of women in decision-making and leadership roles across all areas of life, recognising gender equality as key to fair governance. Area G calls for electoral systems to be revised and for the use of positive actions such as quotas to achieve gender parity in public office and to transform organisational cultures to remove discriminatory practices. The officially agreed EU indicators to track progress in Area G cover the representation of women in different areas of public life and decision-making (such as parliaments at all levels, political parties, civil service, Supreme Courts, Central Banks, company boards and social partners). However, they do not fully measure whether women's and men's roles are equally important or if policies are promoting gender balance effectively.

Area G (Women in Power and Decision-Making) alignment with SDGs

5.5 Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life

For the BPfA +30 review, the thematic focus and priority topics of Area G include:

Improving gender balance in power and political decision-making

Promoting the equal and full participation of women in politics

Recognising women's participation in civil society movements

Advancing gender balance in economic decision-making and other areas

These priority topics reflect the need to ensure that decision-making processes in the EU equally reflect the perspectives and needs of women and men in all their diversity. Following the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing climate crisis and the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine, inclusive leadership and gender balance in all spheres of power matter more than ever.

2.7.1 EU policy developments

Achieving gender balance in decision-making is a key priority of the **EU Gender Equality Strategy** (European Commission, 2020f), but the EU's competence to promote gender balance in decision-making varies by policy area. EU efforts have focused on improving gender balance in economic decision-making, along with some initiatives to enhance parity democracy in the European Parliament. Adopting **Directive (EU) 2022/2381 on improving the gender balance among the directors of listed companies** was a key step towards addressing the under-representation of women in corporate management and improving transparency in the selection of board members (see Figure 2). It requires large, listed EU companies to achieve gender balance on their boards by 30 June 2026, with a target of at least 40 % of non-executive board members or 33 % of all directors.

There is ongoing debate about the introduction of EU-level legislation to ease the inclusion of gender equality provisions in the election of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) (EIGE, 2024g). In May 2022, the European Parliament adopted a **proposal for a Council Regulation concerning**

the election of MEPs via direct universal suffrage (European Parliament, 2022b). This proposed the implementation of quotas or zipped lists, alternating women and men candidates but without specifying the quota percentage or penalties for non-compliance (EPRS, 2022). In addition, provisions were suggested for the temporary replacement of MEPs on maternity, paternity or parental leave and long sick leave.

In 2021, the European Commission proposed amendments to the **Regulation on the statute and funding of European political parties** (European Commission, 2021o), mandating that European political parties incorporate rules on gender equality into their statutes. The European Parliament has acknowledged that voluntary measures have proven insufficient to achieve gender parity in the Parliament and has proposed amendments to ensure gender balance in the governing bodies of European political parties and foundations, as well as proposing the adoption of Gender Equality Plans (European Commission, 2021c). Because all of these changes require unanimous support from the Member States and remain under discussion, no new EU-level measures were introduced in the 2024 elections.

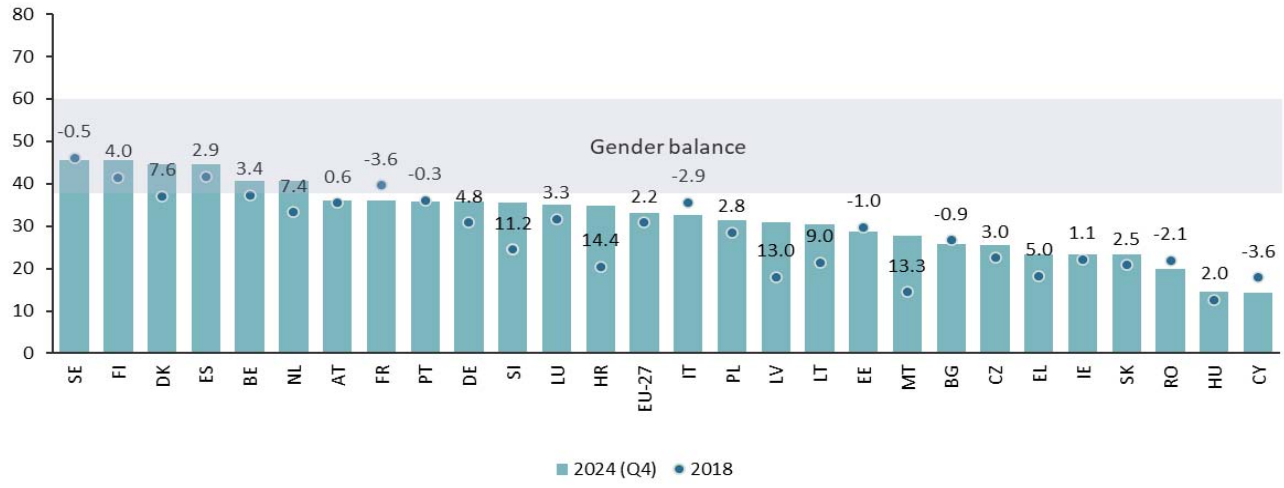
2.7.2 Key challenges and trends

2.7.2.1 The European Parliament and Commission in 2019-2024 were the most gender-balanced in history, but women's presence in national parliaments remains low

The 2019-2024 European Commission numbered 12 women and 14 men and was chaired by a woman president. At the beginning of the 2019-2024 term, women comprised 40.7% of MEPs in the European Parliament (EIGE, 2024g). The share of women fell to 39 % in the second half of 2022, due to the post-Brexit restructuring of seats (EIGE, 2024g). By the end of the mandate, women made up 39.7 % of MEPs, exceeding the EU average for national/federal parliaments (33 %). In a historic turn, following the 2024 elections, the share of women MEPs reduced for the first time since the first direct elections in 1979 (EIGE, 2024a). After the June 2024 elections, women now occupy 38.7 % of seats in the European Parliament (EIGE, 2024a).

The representation of women in national parliaments varies greatly by country, from 46 % women in Sweden and Finland to 14 % in Cyprus, end of 2024. Although the EU average has increased by 2 pp since 2018, setbacks have been seen in 8 Member States (BG, CY, EE, FR, IT, PT, RO, SE) (see Figure 26).

Figure 26. Seats held by women in the single/lower house of the national/federal parliaments by country (% of seats, pp difference, 2018 and 2024, Q4)



Source: EIGE, Gender Statistics Database, Data collection on women and men in decision-making (WMID); the values above the bars on the figure represent the percentage point difference between 2018 and Q4 of 2024 in the number of seats held by women in the single/lower house of the national/federal parliament, by country.
Note: Gender balance is defined as 40% to 60% of women or men.

Notable increases in women's representation have been observed in Croatia and Malta (with rises of 14 pp and 13 pp, respectively). Only seven Member States achieved gender balance, with women making up more than 40 % of members of national/federal parliaments in FI, SE, DK, ES, BE, AT and NL. In six Member States, women constitute less than 25 % of parliament members (IE, SK, EL, RO, CY and HU).

At the beginning of 2024, five Member States (DK, EE, IT, LV, LT) had a woman prime minister[38]. Women represented approximately one-third (34 %) of all senior ministers across the EU. Although women are gaining representation in the national ministries of some Member States, they frequently hold ministerial positions in policy areas, typically linked to traditional women's roles, such as social affairs, health and education. Only one in three ministers in the EU with an economic (finance, trade, agriculture), infrastructure (transport, environment) or core portfolio such as foreign affairs and defence is a woman (EIGE, 2024j). For examples of attempts to promote women's participation in politics in Slovakia, Ireland, Austria and Slovenia, see Box 24.

Box 24. Efforts to promote equal representation and participation of women in politics

— In **Slovakia**, a civil association called 'Zakrúžkuj ženu' (Circle the Woman) actively campaigns for the equal representation of women in politics. Founded by experts, activists and volunteers dedicated to creating a balanced society, it originated from the 'Circle the Woman' campaign, which promoted voting for women candidates in the 2023 parliamentary elections (Kazar et al., 2023).

— In **Ireland**, the Irish Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality, created in 2019, aimed to develop recommendations to the Oireachtas (the bicameral parliament of Ireland) on addressing gender inequality through inclusive public participation. These recommendations included key proposals such as extending gender quotas in elections and public-funded bodies, family leave for elected representatives, and flexible work arrangements. Despite being considered groundbreaking, a 2024 referendum to amend a sexist constitutional article concerning women's roles in the home failed to gain enough support (Citizens' Assembly, 2021, n.d.; Joint Committee on Gender Equality, Houses of the Oireachtas, 2022; Bürgerrat, 2024)

— Since 2022, to mark the International Day of the Girl, the **Austrian** Directorate General for Women and Equality and the Association of the Austrian Municipalities (Österreichischer Gemeindebund) launched the "Girls in Politics" Initiative. This program allows girls aged 6 to 18 to shadow their mayoresses or mayors for a day, giving them firsthand exposure to regional politics, challenging gender stereotypes, and inspiring interest in politics.

— **Slovenia**'s 2022 'Empowering Women in Active Society' project, implemented by the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, focused on overcoming barriers to young women's participation in politics by challenging gender stereotypes and promoting their civic and political engagement.

Despite overall improvements since 2018, the leadership of major political parties (i.e. parties with at least 5 % of seats in the national parliament) remains predominantly in men's hands. In 2024, women accounted for only 26 % of party leaders, representing an 8 pp increase since 2018 (EIGE, 2024d). The share of women among deputy leaders has decreased by 1 pp since 2018, with women accounting for 34 % of these positions in 2024 (EIGE, 2024d).

2.7.2.2 Legislative actions stimulate progress towards gender-balanced decision-making, but more efforts are needed, including comprehensive and intersectional data

CEDAW's 2024 General Recommendation No. 40 on equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems calls for women's and men's equal access to and equal power within decision-making systems (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2024).

[38] The prime ministers of Estonia and Italy are the first women in their countries to serve in this role.

The Recommendation draws a roadmap to 50:50 parity and states that lower targets for women's representation in decision-making are incompatible with the goal of eliminating discrimination against women (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2024).

As of March 2024, 11 EU Member States had legislative quotas for parliaments: BE, FR (50 %); IE, EL, ES, HR, IT, LU and PT (40 %); PL and SI (35 %) (see more in Annex 4). Research shows that quotas are effective in promoting gender balance, especially if they are well-designed and enforced with penalties (EPRS, 2023). In 2023, Member States with quotas slightly outperformed those without[39] (34 %, compared with 33 %) (EIGE, 2024n). These results become more significant in the long run, as countries with quotas are projected to achieve gender balance by 2031, compared with 2039 for those without (EIGE, 2024n; European Commission, 2024a). Therefore, progress appears slower among those countries without quotas. However, even if the quota target is met on electoral lists, this does not necessarily translate into meeting the target in terms of elected seats (EPRS, 2023). This highlights the need for higher quotas and enforcement mechanisms, including sanctions for non-compliance and placement rules to ensure equal visibility for women and men (EPRS, 2023).

Intersectional data, although very scant, reveal the under-representation of certain groups, such as Roma women (EPRS, 2024b). Following Brexit, while racialised women made up 57 % of racialised MEPs in 2019-2024, up from 39 % in the previous mandate (ENAR, 2024), overall ethnic minority representation in the European Parliament remains low (4 %), despite such groups constituting 10 % of the population (ENAR, 2019, 2020). In national parliaments, women's representation remains more or less consistent until the age of 50 (36–37 %) but declines from there, with women over 70 holding fewer than 20 % of seats. Only 4 % of MPs in the EU are under the age of 30 – out of which, 37 % are women (EIGE, 2024g). No EU Member States have specific measures in place to promote the political participation of the women from minority groups (European Commission, 2023q). The lack of data based on racial or ethnic identity hinders efforts to address intersectional inequalities.

2.7.2.3 The increasing violence against women active in politics poses a significant challenge to their political participation and political rights

Violence against women in politics takes various forms, aimed at controlling and limiting their participation in decision-making. Hostile environments, stereotypes and discrimination create a chilling effect. This deters women from political engagement (National Democratic Institute, 2021), worsens their underrepresentation, discourages future generations from entering politics (EIGE, 2022c, 2024g; EPRS, 2024a) and provides a fertile ground for violence to thrive (EPRS, 2024a). A 2018 survey by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE)[40] revealed high levels of sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians in Europe (see Figure 27). Women under 40 in particular were targeted, with 76 % of such women reporting acts of online violence, especially for their political views and women's rights advocacy.

[39] Taking into account Member States in which quotas are voluntary or where no measures have been implemented.

[40] The joint survey conducted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) was based on responses from 123 women from 45 European countries, including 25 Member States. There were no respondents from Malta or Slovakia.

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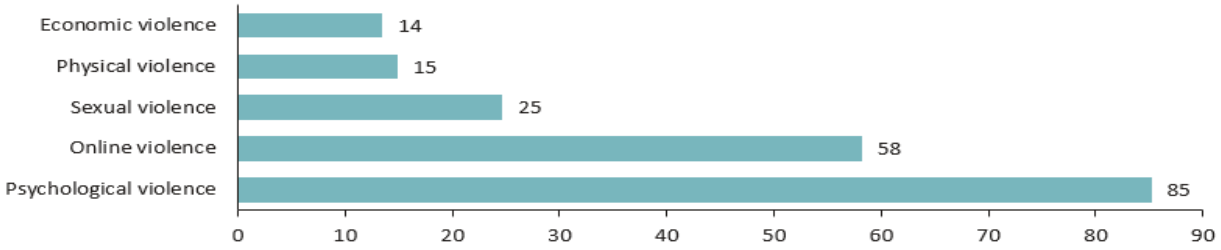
Figure 27. Forms of violence experienced by women parliamentarians in Europe (% of all women parliamentarians surveyed, 2018)



Source: IPU-PACE survey, 2018.

Gendered disinformation, often racially charged, portrays women candidates as unqualified or overly emotional (Allen, 2023; Thakur and Hankerson, 2021), diverting focus from policy discussions to personal attacks. According to the IPU-PACE survey, one-third of women parliamentarians reported that such violence affected their freedom of expression, leading them to become more cautious and to seek less visibility (IPU and PACE, 2018). Similarly, a 2023 survey by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions[41] reported on the consequences of violence experienced by elected women in local and regional roles. These included impacts on private life (30 %), changes in behaviours (27 %), quitting social media or restricting access to their accounts (22 %), becoming less vocal about a political conflict (21 %), withdrawing from public life (12 %), and deciding not to run for office again (9 %) (Council of European Municipalities and Regions, 2023).

2.7.2.4 Beyond party politics, women leaders in civil society movements in the EU face unique challenges in achieving systemic change

Civil society organisations are critical drivers of gender equality in the EU. However, those CSOs working for gender equality and women's rights face various challenges, including funding cuts and attacks from anti-gender movements (see also Sections 2.8.2.6 and 2.9.2.1). Beyond those organisations that work specifically on gender equality, CSOs play a key social, environmental and economic role in the EU today. However, women's leadership in these organisations has frequently been overlooked (Lang, 2021).

Feminist leadership promotes systemic change by challenging traditional power structures and fostering more equitable systems. It calls for a shift from conventional 'hero-style', individualistic leadership to relational, collaborative models based on collective power, coalition-building, care, diversity and inclusion as central elements of leadership.

Source: summarised by the authors, based on Charveriat et al., 2024.

A survey of 148 women CSO leaders at EU and Member State levels revealed widespread burnout among them (Charveriat et al., 2024). Many experienced exhaustion and poor health due to overwork and the financial insecurity faced by CSOs. Despite being a feminised sector, men still dominate senior positions and the boards of CSOs. Many organisations retain outdated patriarchal leadership structures, hindering the ability of women leaders to enact transformative change (Charveriat et al., 2024). These challenges threaten the missions of CSOs and the potential for women to drive change within their organisations and in European societies. Box 25 provides examples of initiatives to support leadership by women.

[41] The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) survey was based on responses from 2424 elected women at local, intermediate and regional levels in 31 European countries.

Box 25. Examples of projects aiming to support women leaders

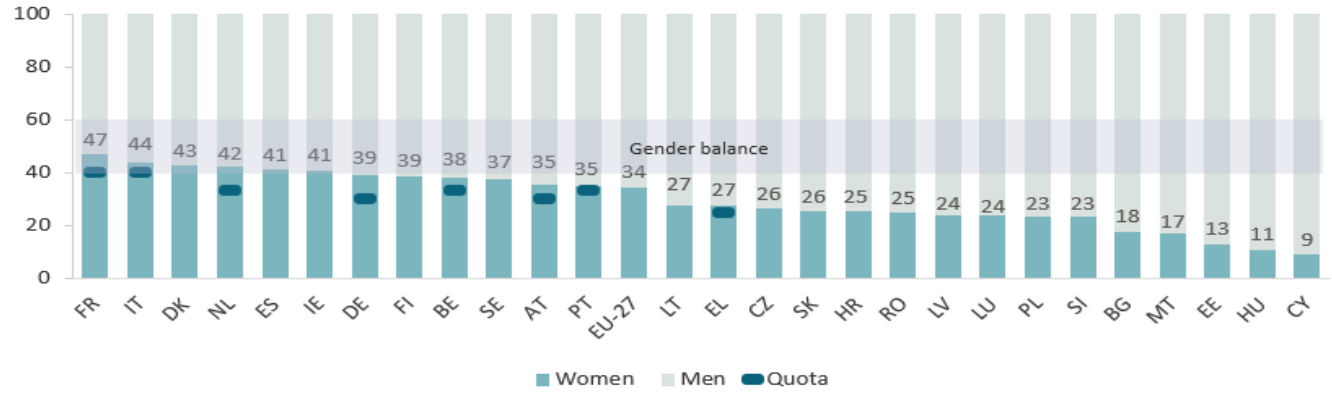
— Women entrepreneurs, particularly in ICT and STEM sectors, face challenges in accessing funding for new businesses. To address this, the EU-funded Women TechEU programme (2024-2026) supports women-led tech startups in Europe. Aiming to promote a gender-balanced entrepreneurship ecosystem, the programme targets early-stage startups founded or co-founded by women in top management roles (CEO, CTO, etc.). It will support 160 beneficiaries, providing personalised business development programmes, including mentoring and training as well as EUR 75,000 in grants.

— In 2020, the Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA), **Sweden**'s government agency for peace, security and development, launched the Gender-Responsive Leadership Initiative. This includes an online learning programme for leaders and managers in organisations such as the EU, UN, OSCE and African Union. The programme includes workshops, skills practice and personal coaching to help leaders promote gender equality in peace and security work.

2.7.2.5 The proportion of women on the boards of the largest listed companies in the EU has reached an all-time high, but economic decisions are still mostly taken by men

In 2024, the boards[42] of the largest publicly listed companies registered in the EU comprised only 34 % women. This is an increase of 6 pp since 2019 (when the figure was 28 %),yet remains below the gender balance threshold of 40 %. Six Member States achieved the gender balance level of 40 % on their boards (see Figure 28), while setbacks occurred in four Member States compared with 2019 (HU, LV, SI and SK). This is despite the large body of literature showing a positive correlation between gender diversity on boards and corporate innovation as well as greater investments in climate change innovation and the sustainability agenda (García-Sánchez et al., 2023; Griffin et al., 2021).

Figure 28. Positions held by women and men on the boards of the largest listed companies, by country (% of board members, 2024, B1)



Source: EIGE, Gender Statistics Database, Data collection on women and men in decision-making (WMID).

Note: binding quotas: BE (33 %), DE (30 %), EL (25 %) from 2020, FR (40 %), IT (40 %), NL (33 %) from 2022, AT (30 %), PT (33 %).

Progress towards the better representation of women on boards has been slow, but countries with corporate quotas have seen rapid improvements (EIGE, 2023i, 2024f). In 2023, women made up over 39 % of board members in the eight EU Member States with quotas (BE, DE, EL, FR, IT, NL, AT and PT), compared with 34 % in those using soft measures (DK, EE, IE, ES, HR, LV, LU, PL, RO, SI, FI and SE), and just 17 % in countries that took no action (BG, CZ, CY, LT, HU, MT and SK) (EIGE, 2024f).

[42] Board members: data cover all members of the highest decision-making body in each company (i.e. chairperson, non-executive directors, senior executives and employee representatives, where present). The highest decision-making body is usually termed the supervisory board (in case of a two-tier governance system) or the board of directors (in a unitary system). More information available at: Women and men in decision-making | Gender Statistics Database | European Institute for Gender Equality

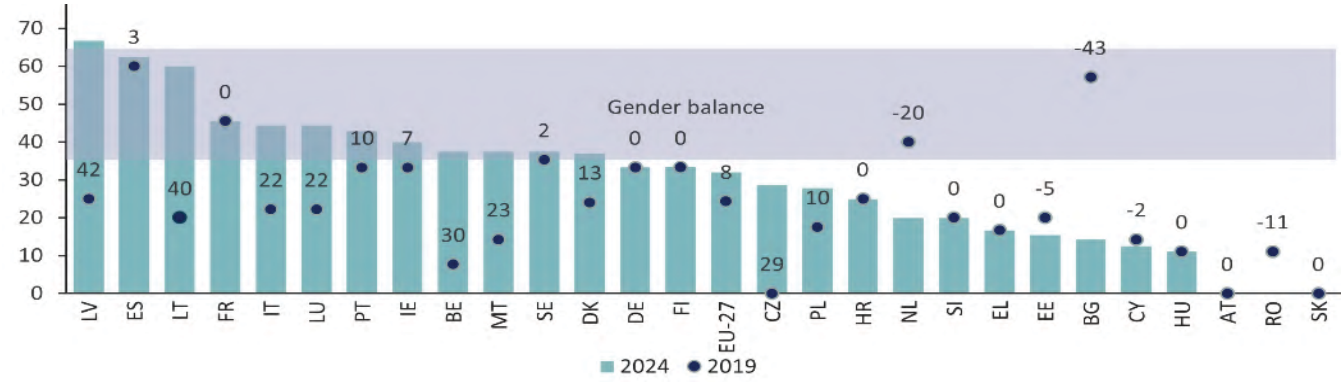
This highlights the effectiveness of quotas in promoting gender balance on boards (EIGE, 2023i, 2024f). Member States with binding quotas have already met or are closer to meeting the 2026 targets set by the Directive, while countries without quotas (e.g. BG, CY, EE, HU, MT and RO) still lag behind. Although the proportion of women in top executive roles such as CEOs has remained around 8 % since 2019, there has been a 6 pp increase in women in senior executive positions, reaching 23 % in 2024. However, only 9 % of women occupy the seat of president (EIGE, 2024e).

2.7.2.6 Since 2019, a woman has led the European Central Bank, but gender imbalance persists in central banks across the EU

Research indicates that greater gender balance in central banks leads to more proactive monetary policies (Masciandaro et al., 2020). Despite this, women remain underrepresented in the European Central Bank (ECB), with only two women on its 26-member governing council. Christine Lagarde became the first woman President of (ECB) in 2019.

On average, women made up 32 % of the decision-making bodies of national central banks (see Figure 29), an increase from 24 % in 2019. However, key decisions in Austria, Romania and Slovakia are made exclusively by men. In September 2024, despite progress in deputy governor roles, with women holding 38 % of these positions (up from 28 % in 2019), the roles of governor of all national bank in the EU (except for Spain) are held by men. Despite their higher educational attainment, women continue to face a glass ceiling that limits their ability to reach leadership positions (European Commission, 2023a). Among others, barriers include women being assigned positions with lower visibility with fewer networking opportunities, lack of mentorship, gender stereotypes and differential treatment between women and men that undermines women's confidence and self-esteem (Babic and Hansez, 2021; Taparia and Lenka, 2022).

Figure 29. Positions held by women in the decision-making bodies of the central banks, by country (% of members, pp difference, 2019 and 2024)



Source: EIGE, Gender Statistics Database, Data collection on women and men in decision-making (WMID).

Note: count includes the Governor, Deputy/Vice-governors, Members of all key decision-making bodies. The values above the bars on the figure represent the percentage point difference between 2019 and 2024 (September).

2.7.2.7 Gradual improvements have occurred in recent years, but the number of women in decision-making positions in research and sports remains low

Women remain under-represented in decision-making roles across key social institutions. In science, women hold 28 % of seats in the highest decision-making bodies of national academies, a 5 pp increase since 2019. Gender balance in research funding organisations[43] was achieved in 2021. By

[43] Self-governed funding organisations allocating national public funds to research organisations, programmes or projects in the countries covered. For these organisations, a chairperson and members of the highest decision-making body are counted. In cases where there is no research funding organisation fulfilling these criteria, the Ministry responsible for allocating the funds is covered and the decision-

2024, women represented 43 % of the members of the highest decision-making bodies of these organisations. Country disparities persist, especially in the nine Member States in which less than one-third of decision-makers are women (in descending order: IT, CZ, BE, PL, CY, HR, HU, EL and SK) (EIGE, 2023d).

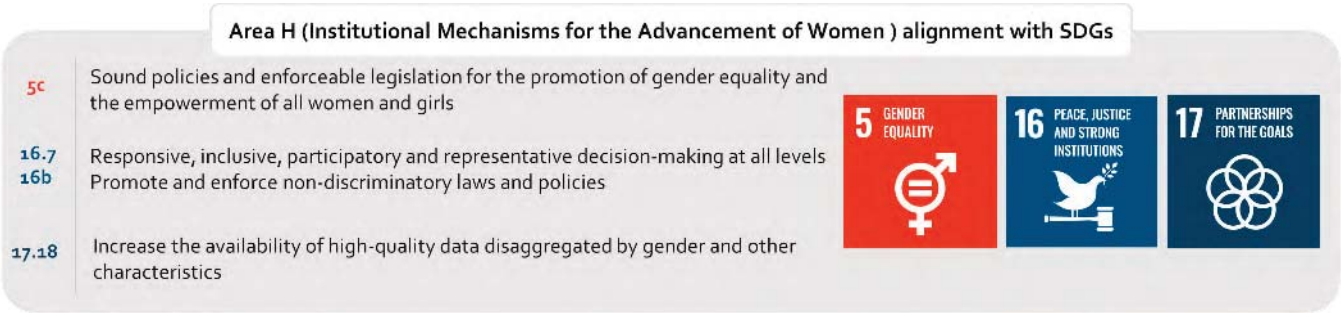
A significant gender imbalance remains in the sports sector. In 2023, only 22 % of members of national sports federation boards were women. This is a slight rise from 16 % in 2019, according to data on the top 10 most popular sports in each country (EIGE, 2024m). For examples on the introduction of gender quotas in sports leadership in France, Spain and Greece, see Box 26.

Box 26. Gender quotas in sports leadership

Despite the increasing participation of women in sports and their achievements as elite athletes, their representation in top sports management positions remains limited. Few countries have adopted gender quotas in sports decision-making. **France** mandated gender parity in sports federation leadership in 2014, while **Spain** has introduced a 33 % quota for National Sports Federation boards (Valiente, 2022). In 2020, **Greece** passed legislation requiring that at least one-third of candidates for management board positions, including the president, be women (Government of the Hellenic Republic, 2023). The limited use of gender quotas in EU sports leadership signals an opportunity for more further action to boost women's representation.

2.8 Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women (Area H)

Under the BPfA, all Member States have committed to establish institutional mechanisms to promote, advocate and support gender equality and the mainstreaming of gender equality concerns across policy areas. In the EU, institutional mechanisms entail governmental, independent and other bodies for the promotion of gender equality and make sure women's rights are supported and protected in all areas of society. The objectives of Area H include ensuring a high level of governmental responsibility for gender equality, integrating a gender perspective into all policymaking, and disseminating gender-disaggregated data and information.



This section reviews the indicators in Area H on the status of institutional mechanisms in the Member States:

makers are identified on a case-by-case basis due to inherent differences. More information available at: Women and men in decision-making | Gender Statistics Database | European Institute for Gender Equality

Governmental commitment, structures and accountability for

Resources allocated to national gender equality bodies

The use of gender mainstreaming methods and tools in policymaking

The production and dissemination of sex-disaggregated statistics

Advances in these institutional mechanisms underpin progress in the other areas of the BPfA – making them vital to achieving gender equality (EIGE, 2020a).

2.8.1 EU policy developments

The main policy development at EU level in the area of institutional mechanisms since 2019 concerns the adoption of the two parallel directives strengthening the independence and functioning of the EU's **equality bodies**.

In 2022, the Commission put forward two 'parallel proposals' with different legal bases to establish minimum binding standards for equality bodies to enhance their mandate and effectiveness (European Commission, n.d.-b). Adopted in 2024, one of the directives focuses on equality between men and women in employment and occupation, while the other concerns sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age and sexual orientation[44] (Council Directive (EU) 2024/1499, 2024; Directive (EU) 2024/1500, 2024). Together, they establish EU-wide minimum requirements for equality bodies, listed in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Provisions of the Equality Bodies Directives

Mandate: extension of the competencies of equality bodies to combat discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief, disability, age and sexual orientation in the area of employment, and discrimination based on sex in the area of social security.	**Enhanced powers:** empowering equality bodies to investigate discrimination cases, issue opinions or binding decisions, act in courts and propose an alternative dispute resolution mechanism, such as conciliation or mediation, to the parties in a complaint procedure.
Sufficient resources: obligations for Member States to provide equality bodies with the human, technical and financial resources necessary to exercise all their competencies effectively.	**Consultation on law- and policymaking process:** public institutions are asked to consult equality bodies on matters related to discrimination and equal treatment.
Independence: legal requirements for equality bodies to be free from external influence.	**Awareness-raising and prevention:** equality bodies need to be empowered to promote equality effectively.
Accessibility: equality bodies' services are required to be free and accessible to all victims.	**Reporting:** equality bodies are required to produce regular reports on the state of equal treatment and discrimination.

Source: summary prepared by Equinet, 2024a.

Member States already had an obligation under EU Equal Treatment Directives[45] to designate an independent equality body to promote equality and combat discrimination (Equinet, 2023). However, the previous provisions left considerable discretion to the Member States regarding the mandate, independence and resources of these equality bodies. This resulted in unequal protection against

[44] Specifically, the second directive establishes binding standards for equality bodies in the field of: a) equal treatment between persons irrespective of their racial or ethnic origin; b) equal treatment in matters of employment and occupation between persons irrespective of their religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation; and, c) equal treatment between women and men in matters of social security and in the access to and supply of goods and services.

[45] Council Directive 2000/43/EC, 2000; Council Directive 2004/113/EC, 2004; Directive 2010/41/EU, 2010; European Parliament, 2006.

discrimination across the EU (Equinet, 2023). The new standards for the independence and functioning of equality bodies will ensure more effective protection from discrimination for everyone in the EU. Member States are required to transpose the Directives into national law by 2026. Furthermore, the European Network of Equality Bodies (Equinet) supports national equality bodies in promoting equality and combating discrimination while strengthening their capacities at EU level through collaboration, expertise and contributions to the development and implementation of EU equality policies and legislation (Equinet, 2024b).

The EU has limited competences to regulate governmental gender equality bodies at national level. **Governmental gender equality bodies** are bodies within government whose purpose is to design, coordinate and implement government policies for gender equality. Such bodies are located as ministries, departments within ministerial structures, or can also be a government agency (EIGE, 2023c).

The EU works with Member States to support gender mainstreaming through collective learning and collaboration, for example, through the **High-Level Group on gender mainstreaming**. In addition, the **Sub-group on Equality Data** of the High-Level Group on Non-discrimination, Equality and Diversity supports Member States in collecting data that reflect inequalities (see also Box 1 in Section 1.1.1.1).

The Commission also coordinates the **Mutual Learning Programme in gender equality** to support the exchange of good practices among the Member States (European Commission, n.d.-l). In 2022, the Commission (DG REFORM now Commission's Reform and Investment Task Force) also launched a flagship project on **Gender Mainstreaming in Public Policy and Budgeting** as part of the Technical Support Instrument (TSI), which provides funds for Member States to design and implement resilience-enhancing reforms. Up to 2025, the project has supported 13 beneficiary authorities in identifying good practices, building their capacities and providing tested methodologies to implement gender budgeting (European Commission, 2022i; EIGE, 2023e). EIGE also reestablished the **Thematic Network on Gender Mainstreaming** in 2019 to provide a space for practitioners in the Member States and EU institutions to exchange information (EIGE, 2023e). In addition, the Commission has acknowledged the importance of enhancing engagement with CSOs and of protecting their work, given their crucial role in tackling societal challenges and upholding human rights (von der Leyen, 2024b).

2.8.2 Key challenges and trends

2.8.2.1 Member States are committed to promoting gender equality, but institutional mechanisms to make it happen need to be strengthened

Area H, unlike other areas, uniquely relies on four EIGE collected indicators to monitor progress and track changes in gender equality policies and structures across EU Member States. In 2021, EIGE revised the conceptual and measurement framework for these indicators. This revision shifted the focus from assessing the presence of gender equality and gender mainstreaming structures and processes, to evaluating their actual effectiveness in practice since the adoption of the BPfA. Based on this updated framework, EIGE conducted two *ad hoc* data collection exercises in 2021 and 2024. Data was collected between April and May in 2024. Annex 5 provides further methodological information of this data collection.

For monitoring purposes, 'national gender equality bodies' refer to two types of bodies: governmental gender equality bodies (within government) and independent gender equality bodies (outside government). Data collected by EIGE in 2024 about institutional mechanisms show little change across the Member States compared with the situation in 2021. When summarised as an EU

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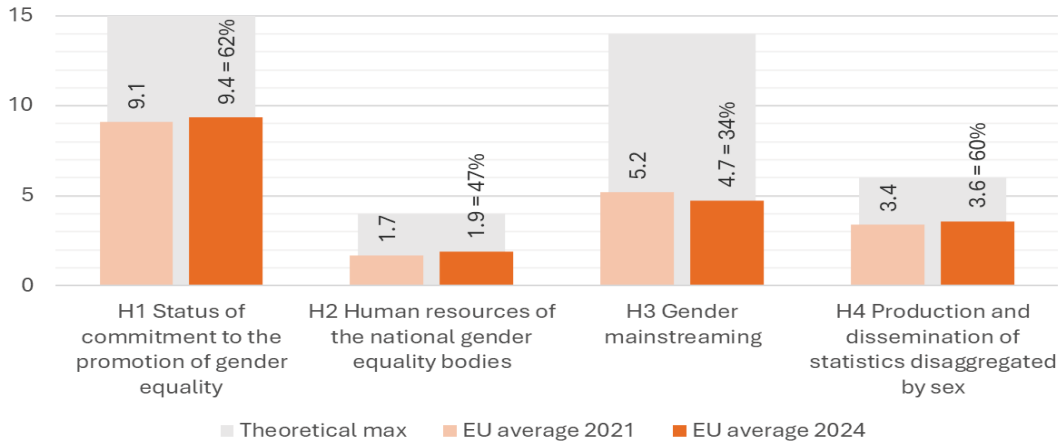
average (see Figure 30). Compared to 2021, in 2024, minor progress was made in the commitment to promote gender equality, in the resourcing of independent gender equality bodies and in the production and dissemination of statistics disaggregated by sex, in 2024 compared to 2021. However, there has been a notable decline in the use of dedicated tools and methods for gender mainstreaming in this period.

Figure 30. Average score for each indicator in relation to its theoretical maximum (% EU-25 and EU-27, 2021 and 2024)



Source: EIGE, Data collection on institutional mechanisms, 2021, 2024.
Note: data for 2021 exclude IE and FR (hence EU-25) and are incomplete for HU.

2.8.2.2 Responsibility for promoting gender equality is vested in the highest levels of government across the Member States, but more efforts are needed to translate into a concrete and well-resourced gender equality strategy or action plan

Figure 31 summarises EU average and Member States' scores regarding the status of their commitment to promoting gender equality within governmental structures across various indicators. Scores were generally high in terms of visible commitments to the promotion of gender equality, with an average combined score of 70% for the three sub-indicators dealing with the highest level of responsibility in government (H1a, 91%), the position of the gender equality body within the government hierarchy (H1c, 52%), and the scope of the mandate of that body (H1d, 67%) (EIGE, 2025b).

Placing the responsibility for promoting gender equality on a senior minister[46] should increase their power to promote gender equality across the government (EIGE, 2023c). In 2024, all but five Member States (BE, EL, MT, PT and SK) have a senior minister with direct responsibility for promoting gender equality. This situation is slightly worse than in 2021, since three countries (MT, PT and SK) have demoted this responsibility to a junior minister[47], while two Member States have raised their commitment to gender equality to the highest level (PL and RO).

[46] Member of the government who has a seat on the cabinet or council of ministers.
[47] Members of the government who do not have a seat on the cabinet.

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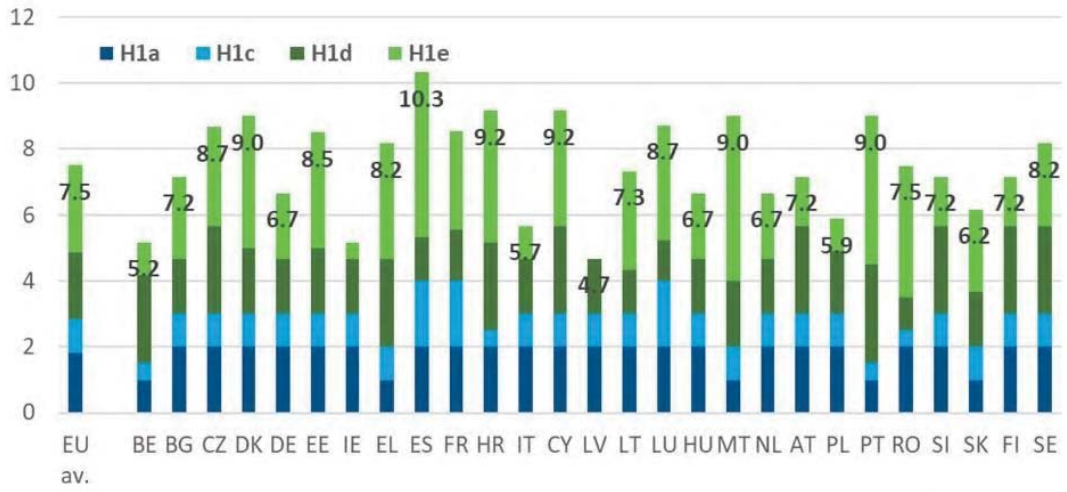
Figure 31. Status of commitment to the promotion of gender equality (H1, governmental commitment only- H1a to H1e, 2024)



Source: EIGE, Data collection on institutional mechanisms, 2024.

The location of governmental gender equality bodies is crucial, as those that are given a full ministry have greater authority in promoting gender equality, while those situated within a department or a governmental agency may face more limitations (EIGE, 2023c). In 2024, three Member States (FR, ES, LU) had positioned their governmental gender equality bodies at the highest level – that is, as an entire ministry. The remaining Member States located their governmental gender equality bodies either as a section or department of a ministry or as a governmental agency. Compared to being an entire ministry, such positioning of governmental gender equality bodies may provide a lower visibility and power, such as to influence policymaking.

In 2024 (April-May), governmental accountability for gender equality continued to be limited in many Member States. Nine Member States did not have an overarching gender equality strategy (BE, IE, FR, HU, LV, LT, AT, PL and PT). 15 Member States had an active action plan exclusively on gender equality (BG, CZ, EE, EL, ES, FR, HR, CY, LT, LU, HU, MT, PT, RO and SK). In 11 Member States (BE, ES, LT, LU, NL, MT, AT, PT, RO, SE) the governmental body responsible for the promotion of gender equality reported to parliament at least once a year.

2.8.2.3 Resourcing for gender equality bodies and strengthened capacity to focus on gender equality within bodies with wider equalities remit, calls for further efforts.

On average in 2024, Member States scored 47 % for this indicator, suggesting that both governmental and independent gender equality bodies are under-resourced (scoring an average of 49 % and 45 % respectively, Figure 30).

More than half of Member States in 2024 have a governmental body whose gender equality mandate is combined with other non-discrimination and equality-related functions. Nearly all governmental bodies were found to be empowered to carry out all relevant functions relating to gender equality. Yet, when a governmental body with a mandate for gender equality is combined with other non-discrimination areas, this may limit its capacity to focus specifically on promoting gender equality through policies, awareness raising and information, due to insufficient resources.

A similar trend was found among independent bodies, most of which have a mandate for gender equality combined with other non-discrimination areas. In 2024, five Member States (BE, ES, IT, PT and FI) have an independent body exclusively focusing on gender equality, thereby increasing its capacity to focus its efforts on gender equality.

Effective institutional mechanisms for gender equality demand adequate human and financial resources (EIGE, 2023c). In 2024, five countries score the maximum possible for a well-resourced governmental gender equality body (2 points) and nine score 1.5 out of the maximum possible of 2 for independent gender equality bodies. Eleven governmental bodies have fewer than five personnel dedicated to gender equality and nine independent bodies have fewer than 10 staff working on gender equality. Table 3 provides further detail on the scoring of indicator H2 by sub-indicator, grouping countries according to the size band for each type of body and showing (a) where total staff numbers have been adjusted to reflect time spent on gender equality issues and (b) where the data cover multiple bodies.

Table 3. Personnel resources working on gender equality, by type of body, 2024[48]

Personnel	<5	5-10	10-25	25-100	100+
Score	**0**	**0.5**	**1**	**1.5**	**2**
Governmental bodies (H2a)	BG*, LV*, HU*, PL*, SK*	EE*, IE*, HR, CY**, LT*, SI	CZ, DK**, LU, MT*, NL*, FI	BE, IT*, AT**, PT**, RO*	DE**, EL**, ES**, FR**, SE**
Independent bodies (H2b)	CZ, IT, LU, MT, PL	DK, EE, CY, SI	DE, HR, LV, LT, AT, PT, RO, SK, FI*	BE, BG, IE, EL, ES, FR, HU, NL, SE	

Source: EIGE, Data collection on institutional mechanisms, 2024

* Data covers at least one body with a mandate for gender equality combined with other equality-related functions for which the total number of staff was adjusted for the estimated proportion of time dedicated to gender issues.

** Data covers at least one body with a wider equality remit where staff work 75-100% of the time on gender issues; thus, the total number of staff was not adjusted (upper limit of the range always used as the adjustment factor).

Error! Reference source not found. Annex 4Resource limitation makes it challenging for bodies to fulfil the increasingly demanding tasks and functions necessary for an effective national gender equality machinery, especially given their new responsibilities arising from initiatives such as the Pay Transparency Directive (see Box 27) and the Directives on equality bodies.

Box 27.Equality bodies and the Pay Transparency Directive

Under the **Pay Transparency Directive,** equality bodies are involved in tackling gender-based pay discrimination (Directive (EU) 2023/970, 2023) and have the right to request information on gender pay gaps, to engage in court proceedings on behalf or in support of workers in cases of alleged infringements, and to monitor compliance with pay transparency measures (Equinet, 2022). As outlined by the Directive, equality bodies should be sufficiently resourced to perform these tasks effectively. Example of good practices include (Equinet, 2022):

— The Institute of Women in Spain, which participates in bi-annual meetings to monitor the effective implementation of the equal pay regulation in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Equality and social partners.

— The Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency (FADA) in Germany provides the 'Eg-check.de' tool for gender-oriented wage analysis, allowing employers and employee representatives to assess pay regulations and practices for potential discrimination.

— The Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner in Estonia, in collaboration with various institutions, has developed a web-based 'Earnings application'. This provides transparency regarding occupation-based gender composition and wage gaps.

[48] For data collected in 2012 and 2018, this result was normalised by expressing resources per million population or per million persons employed. In practice, this tends to give higher results for smaller countries and lower results for larger countries. The 2021 study used absolute numbers which, despite some inherent risks to comparability, was justified on the basis that a minimum number of people is required to deliver effective services, regardless of the size of the country. As a result of changes in the measurement framework, the data are not comparable with previous data collections (EIGE, 2023n).

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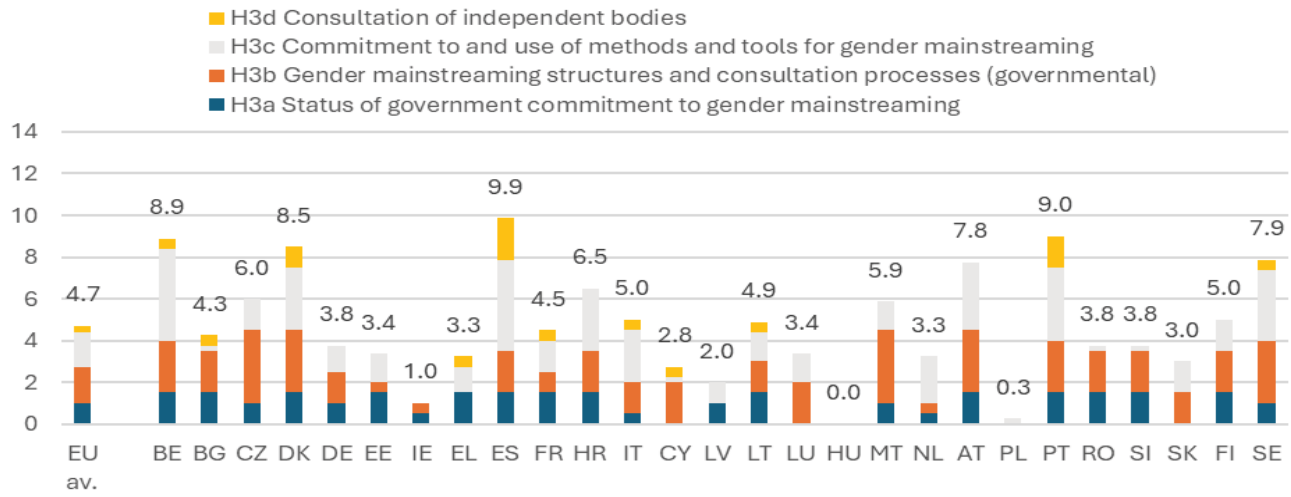
2.8.2.4 Across the Member States, there is significant room for improvement in the use of gender mainstreaming tools such as gender impact assessments and gender budgeting

Despite some notable exceptions (in BE, DK, ES, AT, PT and SE), the implementation of gender mainstreaming remains uneven across the Member States (see Figure 32). Commitment to and the use of gender mainstreaming structures and tools has seen a notable decline in 2024 compared with previous years, making it the weakest aspect of institutional mechanisms, with an average score of 34 %. Comparison for the 25 Member States with data in both years shows that the average score has gone down by 2 percentage points since 2021, falling from 37 % to 35 % The data shows that independent gender equality bodies are not routinely consulted on new policy/legislation (H3d, 16 %) and the application of gender mainstreaming tools (e.g. gender budgeting, gender impact assessment, effective training of staff) is patchily implemented in most Member States (H3c, 28%).

Figure 32. Commitment, structures and methods for Gender mainstreaming (H3, total score out of 14, 2024)



Source: EIGE, Data collection on institutional mechanisms, 2024.

As of 2024, all Member States except five (CY, LU, HU, PL and SK) have adopted some form of commitment to the implementation of gender mainstreaming. However, these commitments are not always legally binding. This is key, because EIGE's research shows that the practical implementation of gender mainstreaming is more prevalent in those Member States with legislation mandating the use of gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting (EIGE, 2023n). In 2024, only a few Member States (BE, CZ, ES, FR, AT, PT and FI) possess dedicated structures such as units, departments or internal working groups specifically dedicated to gender mainstreaming within each ministry. Over half of Member States (BE, BG, CZ, DK, ES, FR, HR, CY, LT, LU, MT, AT, RO, SI, FI, SE) have gender focal points in ministries – that is, contact persons for gender mainstreaming and/or an interministerial group, a coordinating body or a network of contact persons to conduct gender mainstreaming.

In terms of the methods used for gender mainstreaming, in 2024 most Member States have a legal obligation to carry out *ex-ante* gender impact assessments (see Figure 33). The use of gender budgeting is limited and, in many Member States, is still a relatively unknown method (see **Error! Reference source not found.**). Similarly, gender training for government staff occurs on an *ad hoc* basis in most Member States.

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Figure 33. Governments' commitment to ex-ante gender impact assessment (2024)

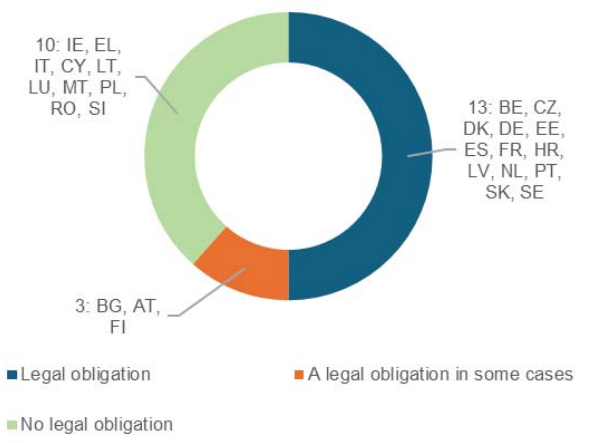
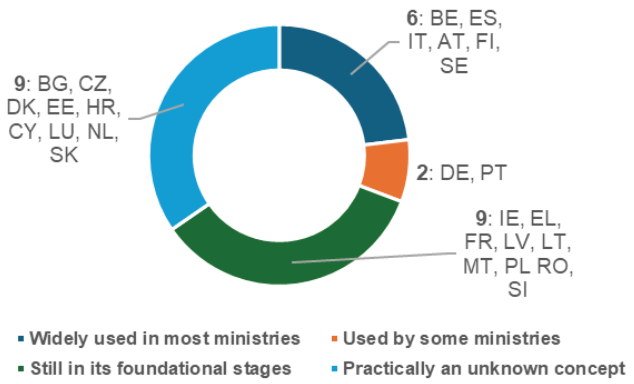


Figure 34. Gender budgeting in ministerial budgets (2024)



Source: EIGE, Data collection institutional mechanisms, 2024.

Note: no data for HU

However, some Member States have made significant strides by integrating gender equality considerations into their Recovery and Resilience Plans (RRPs), demonstrating the potential for gender mainstreaming in national policy frameworks (see Box 28).

Box 28. Gender mainstreaming in the Recovery and Resilience Plans (RRPs)

Spain and Italy established gender equality as a fundamental priority in their RRPs, employing gender mainstreaming tools and integrating gender considerations.

Spain's RRP identified gender equality challenges within the policy areas addressed, mainstreamed gender into the objectives of measures and acknowledged gender gaps in the sector for each measure. Commitment to gender equality from high-level political leadership played a crucial role in advancing gender mainstreaming in Spain's RRP, supported by existing gender equality structures within each ministry and established processes such as the gender impact assessment for the national budget (EIGE, 2023f).

Similarly, Italy's RRP included an *ex-ante* gender analysis for each of its six priority pillars, based on sex-disaggregated data and evidence from the Department of Equal Opportunities. In addition, the interventions under each measure were classified according to their contribution to gender equality based on qualitative and quantitative assessments carried out as part of an *ex-ante* evaluation by the Italian Ministry of Economy (EIGE, 2023f).

Gender-responsive public procurement (GRPP) is another key method for integrating a gender perspective into public policies and expenditures as public institutions in the EU are major investors, spending some €2 trillion per year on the purchase of goods, services and works. Their procurement practices can directly promote gender equality, support sustainable procurement and improve efficiency in public spending (EIGE, 2022l) (see Box 29 for national examples).

Box 29. Examples of gender-responsive public procurement in Belgium and Spain

Though the legal framework on GRPP remains limited across Member States, notable examples include (EIGE, 2022i):

— The city of **Brussels (Belgium)** incorporated GRPP into its fourth action plan for equality between women and men (2020-2022), focusing on the training of procurement officers on gender issues.

— In **Spain**, public administration applies social criteria in its public contracts, including a gender perspective. The national Institute of Women provides guidance on GRPP. Equally, other bodies in charge of gender equality at local and regional levels have achieved the systematic integration of a gender perspective into public procurement.

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Gender equality bodies play a key role in promoting GRPP through coordination, awareness raising, training and collaboration on the drafting of instruments and guides alongside public administrations. In 2022, EIGE also launched a step-by-step toolkit to support the implementation of GRPP by contracting authorities at all levels in the EU (EIGE, 2022i). Other levels of administration also have an important role to play in supporting broader gender equality objectives. For instance, municipalities, being closer to the citizens they serve, are in a unique position to address gender equality in a practical and targeted manner, as exemplified in Box 30.

Box 30. Example of the promotion of gender equality at municipal level in Luxembourg

Luxembourg's Ministry of Equality between Women and Men has created a thematic website to centralise information relevant to municipalities on promoting gender equality locally. The website offers separate access for political representatives, municipal staff and the public, and provides comprehensive details on integrating gender equality across municipal activities. It features an interactive map detailing specific equality measures implemented in each of Luxembourg's 100 municipalities (Ministère de l'Égalité des genres et de la Diversité., n.d.).

2.8.2.5 The commitment of governments to producing statistics disaggregated by sex is generally in place, but does not translate into the effective dissemination of gender statistics

In 2024, nine Member States (BE, BG, ES, FR, HR, IT, MT, RO and SE) have in place a legal obligation for the national statistical office to collect statistics disaggregated by sex. This is a strong obligation on a centralised body that is best placed to collect and disseminate statistics to all policymakers (for examples, see Box 31). However, such a commitment to collecting statistics does not clearly correlate with the more effective dissemination of gender statistics. As of 2024, greater efforts are needed in seven Member States (BG, EE, EL, IT, CY, MT and PL) as they score a third (33 %) or less of the maximum possible for indicator H4. A website is an important tool for disseminating such statistics to support gender mainstreaming, but 10 Member States in 2024 do not possess a website (or section of a website) dedicated to this purpose (BG, EE, EL, HR, IT, CY, MT, PL, RO and SI).

Box 31. Example of data collection and dissemination efforts concerning women's green entrepreneurship

Led by the Gender Equality Unit of the **Spanish** Ministry for Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge (MITERD), this initiative focuses on gathering gender-sensitive data on women's roles in the ecological transition, especially in rural areas. Key project's activities include:

— The development and dissemination of sex-disaggregated indicators and gender-sensitive analysis across green entrepreneurship and rural business sectors.

— Conducting comparative studies with EU countries and temporal analyses to track progress.

— Using diverse data sources such as the Spanish Labour Force Survey, the EU-LFS and the Gender Entrepreneurship Monitor for in-depth insights.

This initiative has created a database on women's involvement in rural and green entrepreneurship to inform evidence-based policymaking and enhance women's participation in these sectors. The initiative aligns with the European Green Deal, the Spanish RRP, the Spanish Just Transition Strategy and the Spanish Strategic Plan for the Effective Equality of Women and Men (2022-2025) (EIGE, 2024; Ministerio para la Transición Ecológica y el Reto Demográfico, 2023).

2.8.2.6 Emerging trends in government and politics paint a mixed picture for governmental and civil society actors working for gender equality

The BPfA +25 review already highlighted the shrinking space for civil society amid an organised resistance to women's rights that has emerged from campaigning against so-called 'gender

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ideology'[49] (EIGE, 2020c). These efforts have restricted the operating space and funding for CSOs and activists advocating for women's rights and LGBTIQ rights (EIGE, 2022j; FRA, 2021). They have also contributed to a spike in attacks targeting CSOs and activists, including hate speech, abusive lawsuits, property damage and violent physical attacks (EIGE, 2022j; FRA, 2021) – see also Human Rights of Women (Area I).

This situation creates a chilling effect on civil society and reduces policymakers' ambition to tackle gender equality issues. For instance, topics like SRHR, including comprehensive sexuality education, same-sex marriage and LGBTIQ rights are made increasingly contentious at the national and EU level (EIGE, 2022j). Furthermore, recent political trends and movements opposing gender equality are gaining power in a growing number of Member States. This can make it increasingly difficult to advance gender equality legislation and to maintain and strengthen institutional mechanisms (Guerrina, et al., 2023).

Furthermore, across the Member States, the involvement of CSOs in shaping gender equality policies is inconsistent and often *ad-hoc* (EIGE, 2024k). The absence of systematic procedures and regular consultation processes hampers both transparency and inclusivity. In addition, governments frequently rely on unpaid contributions, which weigh most heavily on smaller organisations that bring diverse perspectives (EIGE, 2024k). The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this shrinking space, as many Member States neglected to engage women's organisations in decision-making and did not consult them during the preparation of their recovery plans (EIGE, 2023g).

Despite the current challenges, significant opportunities exist to strengthen institutional mechanisms and the work of gender equality actors in civil society. For example, digital communication tools can boost engagement among civil society and gender experts, especially for underrepresented groups in decision-making spaces, such as young and rural women. Equally, the digital transformation of governments and administrations can provide unique opportunities to develop built-in gender mainstreaming tools as part of public policy and budget-making, and to improve the systematic collection of administrative sex-disaggregated data

For details of some efforts to support gender equality efforts from CSOs, see Box 32.

Box 32. Funding for women's rights and gender equality organisations

— The **EU Citizenship, Equality, Rights and Values** programme, with a total budget for 2021-2027 of EUR 1,6 billion, provides funding to organisations at all levels working to support EU rights and values, including those promoting gender equality, gender mainstreaming and working to end gender-based violence (European Commission, n.d.-a).

— The **Alliance for Gender Equality in Europe**, established in 2021, is the only pooled fund bringing together diverse donors to advance gender equality and women's rights in Europe. It was created to support an underfunded sector driven by limited support from national governments, as well the allocation of EU funds in this area mostly to the Global South, and weak philanthropic involvement. Through the adoption of an intersectional approach, the Alliance provides funding to and strengthens the capacity of small, frontline organisations working on gender equality across Europe (Alliance for Gender Equality in Europe, 2023).

2.9 Human Rights of Women (Area I)

The BPfA's objectives in Area I affirm the universality of women's human rights across all spheres and emphasise sexual and reproductive rights, including the freedom to choose if and when to have children. These objectives call for the ratification and implementation of international human rights instruments such as the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)**, which all EU Member States have ratified. The objectives also urge governments

[49] 'Gender ideology' is a concept created as a purposeful misinterpretation of the term 'gender' to gather support for restrictive traditional gender roles, the traditional family and criticism of various progressive causes seen as challenging these beliefs (EIGE, 2020c).

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to integrate women's rights into national laws, addressing features such as race, disability and socio-economic status.

The EU lacks indicators to track the progress of the BPfA objectives in Area I. EIGE suggests examining the ratification and enforcement of fundamental human rights treaties and legislation and reviewing the rights of the most socio-economically disadvantaged women, including those with disabilities, Roma, LBTIQ persons, and migrant women (EIGE, 2020b).

For the BPfA +30 review, the thematic focus and priority topics of Area I include:

Strengthening democratic processes and institutions

Ensuring access to safe abortion

Tackling intersectional discrimination and gender-based violence

These topics shed light on current threats to women's human rights in the EU, including democratic backsliding, anti-gender movements and multidimensional crises. These forces have exposed vulnerabilities in democratic institutions, undermined legal protections and endangered access to essential SRHR, including abortion. They have also intensified socio-economic disparities, perpetuating intersectional discrimination and violence, particularly against LBTQI* women, women with disabilities and women from ethnic minorities.

2.9.1 EU policy developments

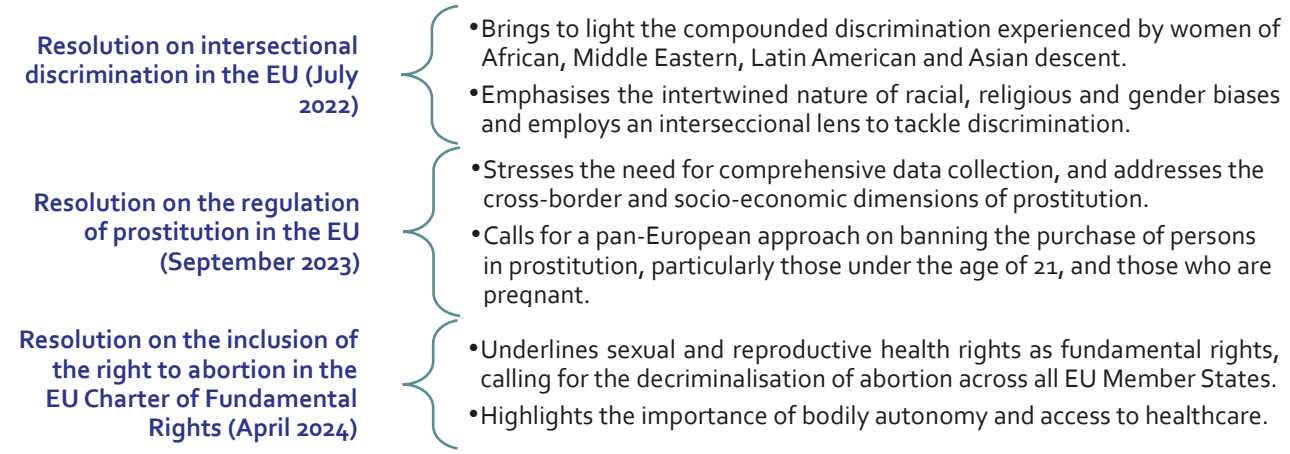
Under von der Leyen's Commission 2019-2024, the priority 'A new push for European Democracy' and the 'Union of Equality' theme saw several new strategies and action plans aimed at women's human rights. These included the **European Democracy Action Plan**, **EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025**, **LGBTIQ Equality Strategy**, and the **Roma Strategic Framework (2020-2030)** (see more in Section 1.4.5). The **Pay Transparency Directive** marked a milestone in legally defining intersectional discrimination (Council of the European Union and the European Council, 2023), and the adoption of the **Directives on equality bodies** was also a significant milestone (see more in Section 2.8.1 of Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women (Area H)). However, progress on an **Anti-discrimination Directive** (European Commission, 2008) has stalled due to the inability to reach unanimity in the Council despite growing support (European Parliament, 2024a). This Directive would enforce the principle of equal treatment outside the labour market, irrespective of age, disability, sexual orientation or religious belief.

In December 2021, the Commission issued a **Communication to expand the list of EU crimes to include hate speech and hate crime**, covering bases such as gender, sexuality, race and religion (European Commission, 2021d). The Communication acknowledges the specific threats faced by women, particularly online, with groups such as the 'manosphere' and 'incels' amplifying misogynistic rhetoric. If adopted by the Council, the Communication would create a legal basis for

criminalising offline misogynistic hate speech or hate crimes. The initiative aims to complement the Directive on violence against women and domestic violence, which specifically criminalises misogynistic hate speech online (European Commission, 2023a).

In recent years, the Parliament urged action on intersectional discrimination. Although European Parliament resolutions are non-binding, they reflect ongoing concerns at the EU level (see Figure 35). It has also advocated for the inclusion of abortion rights into the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. This stance challenges the influence of conservative movements, which oppose so-called 'gender ideology' and promote anti-abortion policies (Beláňová, 2020; Kováts, 2017; Vida, 2019).

Figure 35. Overview of the European Parliament's recent resolutions to address human rights of women



Source: summarised by the authors, based on European Parliament, 2022e, 2023c, 2024d.

The EU Parliament has called for common **EU guidelines to harmonise protection and support for persons in prostitution**, emphasising the need to address the root causes of exploitation, such as poverty and discrimination (see e.g. Resolution 2022/2139). The Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights has reinforced the need for a human rights-based approach to the protection of sex workers' rights, safety and bodily autonomy, while acknowledging that this cannot be secured through the criminalisation of sex work (Commissioner for Human Rights, 2024). Prostitution remains a contentious issue also among civil society groups. Some advocate for the decriminalisation of sex work and the protection of sex workers' rights (Amnesty International, 2022c; European Sex Workers Rights Alliance, 2024). Others oppose the recognition of prostitution as work, arguing it could legitimise exploitation, and call for its abolition (European Network of Migrant Women, 2019; EWL, 2024b).

2.9.2 Key challenges and trends

2.9.2.1 A strong democracy is crucial for the promotion of gender equality, ensuring women's rights and dismantling discriminatory practices in the EU

Since 2019, anti-feminist and anti-gender movements have gained momentum in their attempts to roll back women's rights, particularly in areas such as violence against women and SRHR. These movements align with the rise of new governing systems in which emotional appeals and personal beliefs dominate politics, and anti-democratic actors gain influence (European Commission, n.d.-j). Anti-gender mobilisation has become a transnational movement, uniting politicians, parties and organisations across the EU to undermine women's rights (Graff and Korolczuk, 2022).

Often, populist and far-right parties openly oppose gender equality (Kantola and Lombardo, 2021). Gender equality and democracy are closely linked. Democratic principles support gender equality, while feminist movements promote democratisation by challenging exclusion and advocating for social justice (Bellamy et al., 2018; Lombardo, Kantola, and Rubio-Marin, 2021). Anti-gender

movements thrive in backsliding democracies and are essential in de-democratisation attempts, pushing for traditional gender and heteronormative norms (Butler, 2021). These movements thrive on the fake arguments that feminists hate men and they promote the idea of men as the victims of discrimination as a result of gender equality policies (Hopkins-Doyle et al., 2024; Vázquez et al., 2024). These movements are often backed by religious, conservative and nationalist groups and rely on clandestine transnational funding systems. They work to discredit women's rights organisations, compete for resources and influence policy (EPF, 2021; Ortiz, Allen, Nagel, and Smith, 2023; UN Women, 2020a). As a result, women's rights organisations face both physical and verbal threats and are targeted with online attacks, surveillance, criminalisation, legal restrictions and strategic lawsuits (European Commission, 2023d).

In some Member States, the Istanbul Convention has been framed as an attack against the traditional heterosexual family, leading to opposition and even regression, particularly with regard to measures aimed at preventing and countering gender-based violence (EIGE, 2022j; Roggeband and Krizsán, 2021). As observed by international organisations, anti-gender policies in Poland and Hungary have resulted in rollbacks in SRHR, increased restrictions on LGBTIQ persons and educational reforms promoting traditional family values (Amnesty International, 2024a; Human Rights Watch, 2022a). To counter these trends, the European Commission adopted the European Democracy Action Plan in 2020. This plan aims to protect and strengthen democracy across Member States, by taking proactive steps against anti-democratic actions and hate speech that discourage women and other groups from political engagement (European Commission, 2020i). The Commission has also called on Member States to monitor the civic space to ensure CSOs working on women's rights, SRHR and the rights of LGBTIQ persons are protected and can operate without fear of attacks, online or offline (European Commission, 2023d).

2.9.2.2 Access to legal and safe abortion is essential to women's human rights, yet it remains uneven across the EU

The provision of legal and safe abortion is a fundamental component of women's rights to life and the prohibition of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, as outlined in the CEDAW Convention (CEDAW Committee, 2022 2023). The historical development of the right to abortion varies across EU countries (Leskošek, 2022). In Slovenia, for example, abortion was unconditionally recognised in the 1974 constitution, contributing to fewer abortions due to creating conditions for inclusive parenting and wider childcare possibilities within social and institutional structures (Ibid). In a recent move, France enshrined the right to abortion in its constitution in 2024, marking a historic move amid global rollbacks on abortion rights (Congrès, 2024). These landmark decisions set powerful standards for other Member States, addressing mounting concerns over global threats to SRHR. Positive developments, though less extensive, have also been observed in other countries, such as Malta (see Box 33).

Box 33. Progress towards the decriminalisation of abortion in Malta

In response to pressure from national and international human rights organisations, **Malta** introduced a new law in June 2023 permitting abortion, but only when a woman's life or health is at risk (*Government Gazette of Malta,* 2023). The criminal code previously enforced a strict ban on abortion in all situations with severe penalties, including imprisonment, for those involved in performing or assisting abortions (Center for Reproductive Rights, 2023b). Despite progress, critics call for more comprehensive reforms to guarantee access to safe and legal abortion (Amnesty International, 2023c).

In contrast, some countries have tightened abortion rules and access. As of 2022, it became mandatory in Hungary that doctors sign a document confirming that the pregnant women listened to the heartbeat of the foetus before the procedure (Dyer, 2022). Poland also implemented a near-total abortion ban in 2021, only allowing the procedure if the pregnant woman's life or health was at risk or if the pregnancy resulted from a crime (Amnesty International, 2024b). In 2024, the Polish

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Parliament began discussing amendments to liberalise the law, potentially allowing abortion until the 12th week of pregnancy, but securing the parliamentary majority necessary to reform the abortion law may not yet be possible (Amnesty, 2024c).

Access to abortion remains restricted across the EU, even where it is legal. In 2021, only 13 Member States covered abortion through national health insurance (BE, DK, EL, ES, FI, FR, IE, IT, LU, NL, PT, SE and SI) (EPF for Sexual and Reproductive Rights and IPPF, 2021). In other countries, the lack of coverage creates financial barriers, particularly for low-income women. In addition, mandatory waiting periods in 9 Member States (BE, DE, HU, IE, IT, LV, LU, PT and SK) cause further delays (Center for Reproductive Rights, 2023a). Gynaecologists' ability to conscientiously object also creates geographical barriers and inequalities in access to abortion. In Italy, for example, 65 % of gynaecologists refuse to perform abortions (Italian Minister of Health, 2022).

These barriers disproportionately impact women from lower socio-economic backgrounds and ethnic minorities or those living in rural areas (WHO, 2022a). Transgender and non-binary individuals encounter additional challenges when seeking abortions; for example, due to discrimination and inadequate training among healthcare providers (Fiorilli and Ruocco, 2019; Saadat et al., 2024).

These barriers disproportionately impact women from lower socio-economic backgrounds and ethnic minorities or those living in rural areas (WHO, 2022a). Transgender and non-binary individuals encounter additional challenges when seeking abortions; for example, due to discrimination and inadequate training among healthcare providers (Fiorilli and Ruocco, 2019; Saadat et al., 2024).

Violence and harassment outside abortion clinics are growing issues across the EU, creating hostile environments for those seeking abortions, as well as for providers and pro-abortion activists. Incidents include verbal abuse, physical threats and aggressions (Amnesty International, 2023a; Fiala et al., 2023). The international funding that supports these movements reveals transnational efforts by anti-gender groups to roll back women's SRHRs (Amnesty International, 2023a; EPF, 2021). For examples of national attempts in Ireland and Spain to ensure safe access to abortion clinics, see Box 34.

Box 34. National efforts to ensure safe access to abortion clinics

In **Ireland,** the Safe Access Zones Act 2024 establishes safe and legally defined access zones 100 metres from an entrance or exit to premises where a general practitioner and/or gynaecologist/obstetrician provides services. Within these zones, certain conduct aimed at impeding access to or influencing decisions concerning termination of pregnancy services is now prohibited. The law defines penalties for violations, including fines and imprisonment (Safe Access Zones Bill, 2023; Department of Health, 2024). In 2022, **Spain** also passed a law that criminalises gatherings in front of abortion clinics. Anybody who attempts to prevent people from exercising their right to abortion through harassment, insults, intimidation or threats faces a jail term of between 3 and 12 months or community service (Ley Orgánica 4/2022, 2022).

2.9.2.3 Addressing the unique experiences of women from ethnic minorities and religious groups is essential to advancing the human rights of all women

Roma women continue to face high levels of discrimination and a heightened risk of gender-based violence across the EU. In 2021, an average of 35 % of Roma women and men in eight Member States (CZ, EL, ES, HR, HU, IT, PT and RO) reported experiencing discrimination in key areas of life due to their ethnicity, with little change since 2016 (FRA, 2022b). Between 2012 and 2020, Roma inclusion policies in the EU demonstrated insufficient gender sensitivity (Sanchís-Ramón et al., 2023). In 2023, only 24 % of Eurobarometer respondents believed that efforts to integrate Roma populations in their countries were effective (European Commission, 2023h).

Roma women face specific challenges in employment, education and healthcare. In 2021, only 28 % of Roma women aged 20-64 were employed, compared with 58 % of Roma men in the same age group (FRA, 2022b). Only 26 % of Roma women (compared with 37 % of Roma men) had completed

upper-secondary education. Additionally, 16 % of Roma women (compared with 13 % of Roma men) faced difficulties in accessing healthcare, often due to discrimination and financial barriers (FRA, 2022b). For an example of a transnational project aiming to address domestic violence against Roma women, see Box 35.

Box 35. Addressing gender-based violence against Roma women

The PATTERN project, supported by the EU's Rights, Equality and Citizenship programme, aims to prevent and combat domestic violence against Roma women in **Greece, Bulgaria** and **Portugal**. This initiative aims to enhance the skills of Roma cultural mediators and professionals in handling cases of domestic violence.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, racial discrimination, stigmatisation and violence against individuals of Asian descent increased significantly, with Asian women being disproportionately affected (Wang and Madrisotti, 2023). Far-right parties exploited the crisis to foster xenophobic narratives, promoting fear and exclusion (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

Islamophobia has surged in the EU, in particular targeting Muslim women (Amnesty International, 2022a). For example, displaying religious symbols and attire in schools and workplaces has become contentious in some Member States. A 2023 ruling from the EU's top court permitting bans on religious symbols in government offices (Court of Justice of The European Union, 2023) may lead to further restrictions. This could force Muslim women into financial instability and social exclusion if they are forced to choose between religious practices and employment (Open Society, 2022).

Migrant women in precarious situations face greater risks of domestic violence (Khaligh et al., 2022). Many are not adequately protected, especially if their residency rights depend on a family member. The Citizens' Rights Directive 2004/38/EC allows victims to retain their residency rights after divorce or separation (Article 13). However, it requires them to be economically active and to have comprehensive health insurance. This contrasts with the protective approach in Article 59 of the Istanbul Convention. This requirement of the Directive is problematic since, in the EU, women constitute a slight majority of the migrant population, but migrant women are more often economically inactive than migrant men (Blower-Nassiri, 2023).

2.9.2.4 Legal protections for LGBTIQ persons have been expanded, although the situation remains uneven across Member States

Article 21 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights recognises sexual orientation among the grounds for discrimination but does not explicitly cover gender identity or expression (ILGA-Europe, n.d.). Protection is mainly limited to employment, leaving gaps in social protection, healthcare, education and access to goods and services (ILGA-Europe, n.d.). The 2020 EU LGBTIQ Equality Strategy marked a significant step forward in promoting and supporting LGBTIQ rights in the EU. Another important step was taken in 2021 by the European Parliament, declaring the EU an LGBTIQ Freedom Zone in response to discriminatory actions in Poland and Hungary (European Parliament, 2021b). While national protections remain uneven, positive legal trends have emerged since 2019 (see Table 4).

Table 4. Protection of LGBTIQ rights Across Member States since 2019

Legal recognition of same-sex couples
As of 2024, 17 EU Member States have legalised same-sex marriage (AT, BE, DK, FI, FR, DE, EE, EL, IE, LU, LV, MT, NL, PT, ES, SE and SI), up from 13 in 2019. In total, 19 Member States still recognise same-sex registered partnerships, but some (BE, DK, FR, DE, IE and SE) have transitioned to exclusively recognising marriage for same-sex couples, phasing out new registered partnerships but maintaining rights for those already in such partnerships. Bulgaria, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia continue to provide no legal recognition for same-sex couples.
Right to joint adoption, medically assisted insemination and trans parenthood

In 2024, **joint adoption** for same-sex couples was legally recognised in 17 Member States (AT, BE, DE, DK, EE, EL, FI, FR, HR, IE, LU, MT, NL, PT, SI, ES and SE), up from 12 in 2019. In 2024, **medically assisted insemination** for same-sex couples was available in 13 Member States (AT, BE, DK, EE, FI, FR, IE, LU, MT, NL, PT, ES and SE), up from 11 in 2019. **Trans parenthood** was recognised in five Member States in 2024 (BE, FI, MT, SI and SE), up from two in 2019.
Legal recognition of non-binary gender
As of 2024, only Germany gives full legal recognition to non-binary gender identity, while Malta and Denmark offer partial recognition. In 2019, the Belgian Constitutional Court ruled the 2017 Trans Law unconstitutional in that it didn't allow for non-binary and genderfluid persons to change their birth certificate in order to correctly register their gender identity. In 2023 an amendment was passed, allowing genderfluid persons to use the administrative procedure for legal gender recognition multiple times (before the change was possible only once), responding partially to the Court's ruling. In France, the Court of Justice of the European Union declared it unlawful for the national railway to collect civil titles, potentially advancing non-binary rights across the EU. Nevertheless, seven Member States (BG, CY, CZ, HU, LV, RO and SK) still require compulsory sterilisation for legal gender recognition (ILGA-Europe, 2024a). The situation in Czechia may soon improve following a ruling by the Constitutional Court in May 2024, which declared that mandatory sterilisation as a prerequisite for legal gender recognition violates individuals' fundamental rights to bodily integrity and personal autonomy. Czech lawmakers have been given until mid-2025 to address this issue.

Source: ILGA-Europe, 2019, 2022, 2024a, 2024b.

Despite decreases in rates of discrimination against lesbian and bisexual women as well as gay and bisexual men from 2019 to 2023, transgender individuals still face higher levels of discrimination (FRA, 2024). In 2023, 64 % of transgender women and 63 % of transgender men reported experiencing discrimination in the preceding year, the highest rates among LGBTIQ groups (FRA, 2024). Evidence points to a significant rise in attacks and murders specifically targeting transgender individuals in Europe (ILGA-Europe, 2023a). LGBTIQ persons underreport discrimination and violence. This is due to a belief that reporting will not lead to any change (49 %), fear of not being taken seriously (33 %) and lack of trust in authorities (31 %) (FRA, 2024). For an example of legislative progress for the protection of LGBTIQ rights in Portugal, see Box 36.

Box 36. Legislative advances in the protection of LGBTIQ rights

Portugal's Law No. 15/2024 bans forced conversion practices related to sexual orientation and gender identity, with penalties of up to three years' imprisonment or fines for attempts to alter these traits, and up to five years for irreversible medical or surgical interventions (CIG, 2024). In 2021, Portugal had issued Law No. 85/2021 prohibiting discrimination on the basis of gender identity or sexual orientation with regard to the eligibility to donate blood (CIG, 2021b).

2.9.2.5 Women with disabilities in the EU are at heightened risk of gender-based violence and endure unique forms of abuse that exploit their specific vulnerabilities

In the EU, approximately 33 % of women who have ever had a partner and who have some form of disability and 49 % of such women with severe disabilities, have experienced violence by an intimate partner (Eurostat, 2021b). Financial abuse is a widespread form of violence against women with disabilities (García-Cuéllar et al., 2023). Financial dependency further limits autonomy and traps victims in abusive situations (Council of Europe, 2022b). Sexual violence is experienced by around double the proportion of women with disabilities compared with non-disabled women (Ledingham et al., 2022).

Women with disabilities are also exposed to specific forms of abuse, including withdrawing or controlling essential support for independent living and communication, such as wheelchairs or communication assistance (Women Enabled International, n.d.). For an example of legislative progress in protecting the rights of disabled people in France, see Box 37. Other forms of abuse include inhibiting help with crucial daily activities such as bathing, eating and menstrual management (Council of Europe, 2022b). In institutional settings, reporting is made difficult due to isolation, power imbalances and lack of access to external help (Council of Europe, 2022b).

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Box 37. Separating spousal income for the Allowance for Disabled Adults in France

The policy of separating spousal income for the Allowance for Disabled Adults (AAH) in **France** came into effect in October 2023, individualising the resources used to allocate the allowance. This aims to enhance financial autonomy for persons with disabilities by excluding household income from the eligibility criteria and considering only the personal income of the person with disabilities. This allows beneficiaries to receive adequate support without being financially dependent on their spouse's income (République Française, 2023).

Women with disabilities also face significant violations of their SRHR, including involuntary sterilisation, contraception and abortion. In total, 13 Member States still allow forced sterilisation, citing reasons such as the individual's 'best interests' or 'protection from abuse' (EDF, 2022a). Women and girls with disabilities face harmful stereotypes that deny and ignore their sexuality. They are often excluded from sexuality education, thereby increasing their vulnerability to sexual violence (Council of Europe, 2022b). Their underrepresentation in decision-making bodies such as national parliaments, disability coordination mechanisms and gender institutions limit their influence on issues that affect them (EIGE, 2024g; UN Women, 2019).

However, women with disabilities are emerging as influential leaders, particularly through social media, showing leadership and the potential for transformative political impact (UN Women, 2019). They are also challenging stereotypes and misrepresentations in traditional media (Flanagan, 2023). For example, by sharing their experiences on social media, queer neurodivergent and wheelchair users are helping to combat stereotypes that portray persons with disabilities as straight, white and cis-gender (Flanagan, 2023).

2.10 Women and the Media (Area J)

Under Area J of the BPfA, all Member States have committed to promoting gender equality in the media. This includes increasing women's participation and access to expression and decision-making roles in media and new communication technologies, as well as promoting balanced, non-stereotyped portrayals of women in the media.

The officially agreed EU indicators to track progress in Area J cover the representation of women in decision-making roles and the boards of media organisations and the existence of policies promoting gender equality within these entities. However, due to the emergence of new media platforms and digital technologies, these indicators fall short of adequately capturing gender representation and portrayal in the media industry.

For the BPfA +30 review, the thematic focus and priority topics of Area J include:

Fostering women's participation in decision-making in the media industry

Promoting equal, fair and safe working conditions for women and men in the media industry

Tackling gender-based cyber violence against media professionals and public figures

Challenging gender stereotypes in media, amplified by AI

These priority topics reflect how the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the digital transformation of communication environments, bringing to light new and emerging challenges in gender equality. These include unequal participation in digital developments, as well as online and offline gender-based violence that affects women journalists and public figures. There are also enduring challenges, such as precarious working conditions, which particularly affect women in the media industry. Amid the AI-fuelled digital revolution, in which the media plays a pivotal role, achieving full and gender-equal representation, tackling gender stereotypes and improving conditions in the media industry are crucial for women to benefit from technological advancements fully.

2.10.1 EU policy developments

Within the EU, a shared competence exists over certain aspects of women and the media, particularly those elements that fall within consumer protection, such as advertising. However, the fragmentation of the media sector, which spans both traditional and digital platforms, has led to diverse regulatory approaches among Member States. For example, advertising, news media, cultural products and digital technologies are often regulated as separate policy domains in various countries.

While gender equality in the media has long been an EU concern, actions have intensified since 2019. The **EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025** recognises the pervasive nature of online violence targeting women and girls and the far-reaching effects of cyber violence, cyber harassment and cyberbullying on social media platforms. It also highlights the need to combat gender stereotypes and violence against women in the media and digital sphere.

The European Parliament has taken steps to address gender disparities in the digital realm. The **Resolution with recommendations to the Commission on combating gender-based violence: cyberviolence** stressed the rise of cyber violence and called for measures to combat and criminalise gender-based violence online (European Parliament, 2021a). Building upon this, the **Directive on combating violence against women** acknowledges the specific challenges faced by women journalists, women politicians and human rights defenders, who are particularly vulnerable to cyber violence due to both their gender and profession (see also Section 2.7.2.3). This concern was previously highlighted in the Commission's 2021 **Recommendation on the protection, safety and empowerment of journalists and other media professionals**. This Recommendation acknowledges that women journalists, as well as those from minority groups and those reporting on equality issues, are particularly vulnerable to discrimination, threats and attacks (European Commission, 2021b).

Nevertheless, challenges persist in translating policy goals into tangible outcomes. Soft measures, such as self-regulatory initiatives and codes of conduct, predominate in the EU context with regard to both traditional and digital media. The limited results in fostering gender equality in the media through such soft measures invite the consideration of more robust frameworks to address systemic inequalities and promote gender diversity within media organisations and content (Cusumano et al., 2021; Jørgensen and Zuleta, 2020; Vega Montiel, 2021).

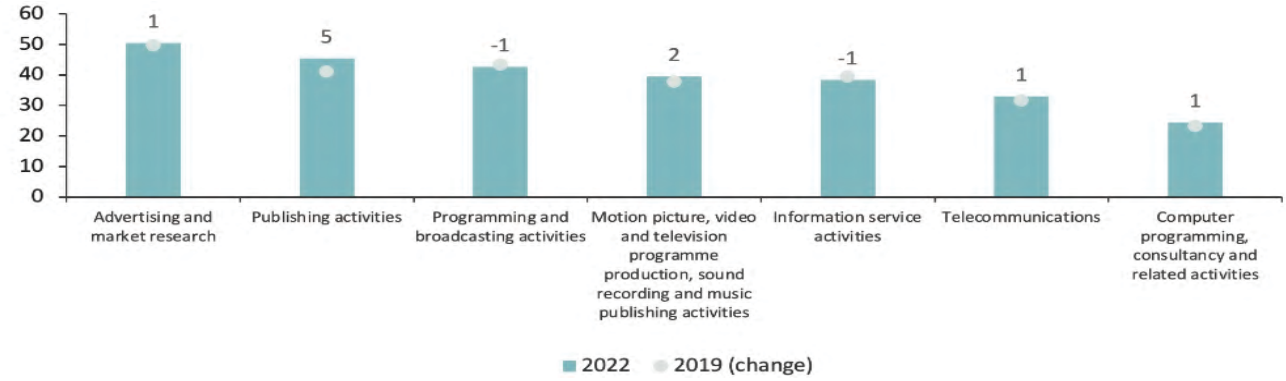
While the **DSA** (Regulation (EU) 2022/2065, 2022) and the **AI Act** (Regulation (EU) 2024/1689, n.d.) represent significant steps forward in regulating the digital landscape, they fall short in addressing certain gender-specific concerns. The DSA aims to create a secure online environment and mitigate risks, including that of gender-based violence. However, it does not address the negative impacts of social media on women and girls from an intersectional perspective (Allen, 2023; EIGE, 2024p). Similarly, the AI Act, while promoting transparency and non-discriminatory AI technology, fails to address the specific challenges women face, such as biases in AI recruitment and processes that perpetuate patterns of discrimination.

2.10.2 Key challenges and trends

2.10.2.1 Gender balance has been achieved in some media professions, but there are patterns of stagnation across the multi-faceted professions of the media industry

The rapid expansion of the media industry and its growing need for a skilled workforce have paved the way for the increased involvement of women in various sectors. As shown in Figure 36, in 2022, women made up 51 % of those employed in programming and broadcasting, 46 % in publishing and 43 % in advertising and market research, thereby achieving gender balance. However, aside from a 5 pp increase in publishing activities, progress since 2019 has been limited. This shows stagnation in the level of women's representation in media professions. Jobs in computer programming, consultancy and related activities are predominantly held by men, with only 24 % of women occupying such roles in 2022. Women are also significantly under-represented in telecommunications (33 %) and information service activities (38 %). Despite the expansion of the media industry, since 2019 women have continued to be under-represented across various sub-sectors and occupations – including photographers, writers, producers, social media content creators and others – reflecting persistent gender segregation within the sector.

Figure 36. Women employed in media-related sectors of activity (percentage point difference, EU, 2019 and 2022)



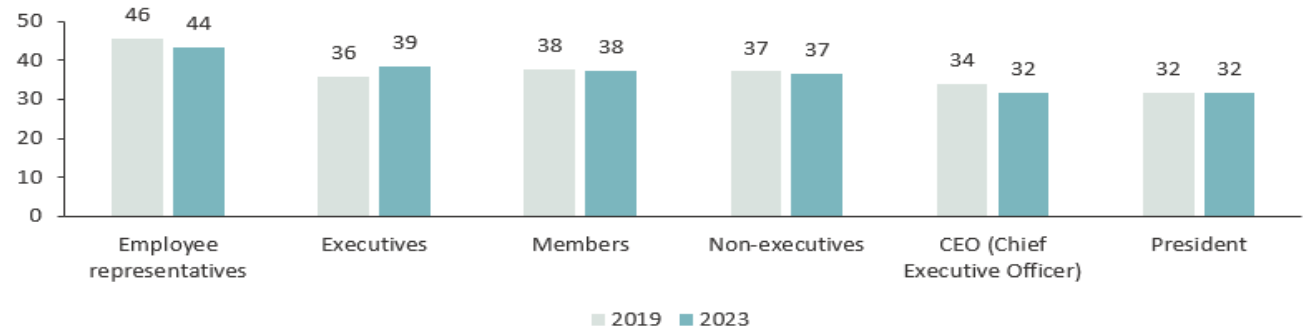
Source: Eurostat, EU LFS, lfsa_egan22d.The values above the bars on the figure represent the percentage point difference between 2019 and 2022.

Similarly, significant gender disparities can be seen in the film industry, with a clear vertical segregation in prestigious creative roles. Women accounted for just 26 % of directors, 11 % of cinematographers and 10 % of composers in European films from 2018 to 2022. In contrast, the gender ratio on-screen is more balanced, with women making up 41 % of lead actors during the same period (European Audiovisual Observatory, 2023). However, data show that the presence of at least one female co-director leads to greater gender balance within film crews. For instance, between 2018 and 2022, the share of female screenwriters increased from 29 % to 77 % in films directed by at least one woman (European Audiovisual Observatory, 2023).

Despite the efforts made, progress in increasing the number of women in decision-making roles within media organisations remains slow. From 2019 to 2023, beyond a marginal increase of 3 pp among executive members, women's representation has remained relatively stable among

presidents and board members, but has decreased among CEOs, employee representatives and non-executive members (see Figure 37). Similarly, as of 2023, women accounted for only 37 % of members of media regulatory authorities, reflecting a marginal increase of 3 % since 2019. While 14 Member States have reached gender balance in these authorities (in descending order: BG, IE, FI, PL, AT, LV, EE, RO, NL, ES, FR, DK, LU, IT and SE), women still account for less than one-third of members in 10 Member States (in descending order: DE, CY, HR, LT, CZ, BE, MT, PT, SI and HU).

Figure 37. Proportion of women among employee representatives, executives, board members, non-executives, chief executives and presidents in national public broadcasters (%, EU, 2019-2022)



Source: EIGE, Gender Statistics Database, Data collection on women and men in decision-making (WMID).

2.10.2.2 Working conditions for women in media sectors are affected by multiple crises and are challenged by digitalisation

Women in the media often face obstacles due to the disproportionate amount of unpaid care work they have to take on . For example, many women in the industry struggle to balance long working hours with family responsibilities. This challenge intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic, when work collided with increased caregiving duties. These pressures limit women's career advancement and contribute to ongoing gender pay gaps, as setbacks early on in women's careers can be difficult to overcome later on (International Federation of Journalists, 2020).

Women working in the cultural and creative sectors struggle to combine paid and unpaid work due to poor working conditions, atypical work patterns, irregular income and weak social protections, further exacerbated by limited access to care services. These challenges increase the vulnerability of women to underpaid or unpaid work, and they are more likely to be subject to discrimination and harassment (European Parliament, 2023e). These concerns have led to the adoption of a proposal for an EU framework to improve the living and working conditions for cultural and creative workers (European Parliament, 2023e). As exemplified by Box 38, Germany offers a promising model for addressing such issues.

A recent survey on the status and Working Conditions of Artists and Cultural and Creative Sectors (CCS) Professionals in Europe highlights that women are disproportionately affected. The findings indicate that 48 % of women, compared with 42 % of men, reported poor working conditions. Furthermore, 88 % of women artists and CCS professionals indicated that they were unfairly remunerated for their efforts, while 75 % of women respondents (compared with 64 % of men) reported having insufficient access to social protections (Panteia and Culture Action Europe, 2024).

Box 38. How Germany ensures social security for freelance journalists

In **Germany**, the **Künstlersozialversicherungsgesetz (KSVG),** also referred to as the Artists' Social Security Act, provides social security coverage for freelance artists and publicists, including journalists. This law ensures that freelance professionals in these fields have access to the same social security benefits as employees, protecting them against social risks such as illness, retirement and unemployment. Freelance women journalists receive comprehensive social security coverage, including health insurance, pension contributions, maternity leave and unemployment benefits (Künstlersozialkasse – The Artists' Social Security Fund, 2023).

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2.10.2.3 The media play a pivotal role in shaping societal perceptions and challenging gender norms and stereotypes, which persist in news media coverage

In a 'mediatised' society, voice and visibility in the media constitute valuable resources that can be converted into societal influence (Djerf-Pierre and Edström, 2020). Gender equality in the media goes beyond mere numbers. Instead, it is a state in which women and men, in all their diversity, have equal status in media organisations and content (Djerf-Pierre and Edström, 2020). However, news media coverage often lacks a gender dimension and fails to challenge gender stereotypes. Although it has always proved a subjective challenge to define which stories challenge gender stereotypes, the 6th edition of the Global Media Monitoring Project found that, in 2020, only 2 % of stories in Europe[50] clearly challenged gender stereotypes (GMMP, 2020).

In particular, stories on topics related to violence and women often fail to challenge stereotypes (GMMP, 2020). For instance, in televised news about COVID-19, health specialists were the experts most often featured, yet only one in three was a woman, despite women constituting the majority of the workforce in the health sector, particularly in lower-ranking roles (GMMP, 2020) (for more on this, see Section 2.3.2.4 in Women and Health (Area C)). Moreover, by failing to challenge entrenched gender norms and attitudes, news media coverage of gender-based violence can contribute to normalising and perpetuating the very injustices that are the focus of these stories.

Box 39. Promoting a fair portrayal of women and men in the media

— The project Rewriting the Story: Gender, Media and Politics is an EU-funded project led by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) in collaboration with the University of Padova (Italy) and the Permanent Conference of the Mediterranean Audiovisual Operators (COPEAM). It aims to address barriers to the fair representation of women and men in politics and public life by tackling stereotypes. The project focuses on enhancing the skills of journalists, media students and public broadcasters in gender-sensitive political reporting, while promoting a gender-equal newsroom culture and gender-transformative media policies (International Federation of Journalists, 2022).

— In 2021, the Ministry of Social Security and Labour of **Lithuania** supported a large-scale informational and educational campaign to emphasise that gender stereotypes may lead to domestic violence. It was launched in response to an increase of domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. The campaign was circulated through eight TV shows on national television called 'I can't be silent' ('Negaliu tylėti'), as well as articles in print and online media and communication campaigns on social networks and outdoor billboards (Ministry of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania, 2021).

2.10.2.4 While social media has been instrumental in amplifying women's voices, the escalation of cyber violence against women poses significant challenges to women's professional and civic participation

Online platforms have emerged as critical arenas in the fight for gender equality and women's rights, with both feminist and anti-feminist groups leveraging these spaces to advance their agendas (Holm, 2022). For example, social media movements such as #MeToo and Time's Up have brought attention to gender-based violence (Botti et al., 2019; Levy and Mattsson, 2023). Initially focusing on the entertainment and film sectors, these movements have catalysed broader reforms and discussions that promote a culture of accountability aimed at addressing gender inequality in the media and implementing stricter anti-harassment policies (Nordic Council of Ministers and NIKK, 2018). These efforts have also prompted calls for greater diversity in the representation of women in the media (Garrido and Zaptsi, 2021).

Cyber violence disproportionately affects women in positions of power, particularly if they are young or belong to certain ethnic or sexual minority groups, deterring them from participating in public

[50] List of participating countries: Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, England, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Greenland, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, the Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Scotland, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and Wales.

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discourse (UNESCO, 2021a) (see also Section 2.7.2.3 in Women in Power and Decision-Making (Area G)). Women politicians and journalists experience higher levels of online harassment, often focusing on physical threats including sexual violence[51]. Experiences of harassment or aggressive interactions silence individual women, limiting the freedom of the press and democratic dialogue while also creating a chilling effect on those women who are considering entry into these professions (IPU and PACE, 2018; K. Park et al., 2023).

2.10.2.5 AI technologies hold immense potential to tackle gender stereotypes and disparities in media, but their effectiveness depends on addressing existing biases

AI has the potential to notably enhance the diversity and accessibility of media content. Advances in deep learning are enhancing the effectiveness of AI tools in detecting gender-based violence and online harassment (Novitzky et al., 2023; Vyawahare et al., 2024). Meanwhile, speech recognition and automated captioning innovations are making media more accessible to persons with disabilities (Guo et al., 2020).

However, AI systems may inadvertently perpetuate gender stereotypes, leading to discriminatory outcomes and exacerbating gender disparities (Council of Europe, 2022a; EIGE, 2022a). Targeted advertising and content recommendation algorithms on social media platforms contribute significantly to this issue, since they rely on demographic data and user behaviour to personalise content. For instance, AI may disproportionately show job ads for male-dominated fields to men while displaying jobs in typically feminised sectors to women, perpetuating occupational segregation, such as in STEM (Lambrecht and Tucker, 2016). Similarly, social media ads for beauty products targeted at women frequently reinforce narrow beauty ideals, perpetuating gender stereotypes (Fosch-Villaronga et al., 2021).

Content moderation algorithms also show biases. For example, Instagram has been criticised for 'shadowbanning'[52] women's content, especially when it involves nudity or sexuality, while similar content involving men's bodies is not treated in the same way (Are, 2021; Gillespie, 2018). In turn, anti-feminist activists take advantage of the opaque nature of platform algorithms and their specific technical functions, such as hyperlinking and anonymity, to challenge feminist politics (Ging, 2019). This lack of transparency makes it difficult to identify and address discriminatory practices (K. Park et al., 2023).

AI-driven moderation practices also tend to reinforce intersectional biases, disproportionately affecting not only LGBTIQ persons and persons of colour – specifically, Black women – but also obese persons or abortion activists. This reflects broader societal oppressions replicated on and by such platforms (Appelman, 2023). The mere presence of certain terms, such as 'Muslim', can trigger algorithms to predict text as offensive, leading to its flagging for moderation, with more negative consequences for Muslim women than men. For example, the feminine version of 'Muslim' in Italian ('Musulmana') is rated more negatively by these models than its masculine counterpart ('Musulmano') (FRA, 2022a). This discrepancy reflects intersectional bias, combining gender with ethnicity or religion, and underlines the challenges of applying natural language processing to gendered languages. Thus, it is challenging to hold platforms accountable for the ways in which their algorithms reflect and perpetuate stereotypes and prejudices (Scatiggio, 2021).

The **AI Act** adopted in 2024 in the EU provides a prospect to the development of trustworthy AI, fundamental rights and human-centric AI as well as prevent AI discrimination. To address some of

[51] The offence committed against a person because that person was a public representative, a journalist or a human rights defender is established as an aggravating circumstance in the Directive on combatting violence against women and domestic violence (Article 11).
[52] 'Shadowbanning' is a subtle and covert form of censorship that reduces the visibility of a user's content, effectively curtailing the user's reach without their awareness (Are, 2021).

these challenges nationally, initiatives such as the Netherlands' Algorithm Register, outlined in Box 40, offer a step towards greater transparency.

Box 40. The Algorithm Register of the Dutch Government

The Netherlands' Algorithm Register is a transparency initiative whereby government algorithms are publicly listed and evaluated for biases, including gender bias. The register aims to build public trust by making algorithmic processes accessible and understandable, allowing for public scrutiny and feedback. Government agencies must submit their algorithms for inclusion, provide detailed documentation and undergo rigorous evaluations to detect and mitigate biases. The register is continuously updated to reflect new algorithms and improvements, ensuring ongoing accountability and fairness in governmental AI systems (The Algorithm Register, n.d.).

2.10.2.6 In the evolving media landscape, gender inequality persists, yet our understanding remains limited due to a lack of comprehensive data and research

Growing awareness of gender-related issues in the media and the increased involvement of women in the industry have marked significant steps towards addressing gender disparities. Nevertheless, significant gaps in the comprehensiveness of data and research hinder a complete understanding of challenges such as gender discrimination, bias and stigmatisation in the digital realm – especially from an intersectional perspective (Gouma and Dorer, 2019) (see Box 42).

Box 41. Intersectionality on Screen: GLAAD's Annual TV Representation Report

GLAAD's 'Where We Are on TV' report analyses LGBTIQ representation across TV networks and eight streaming platforms in the United States (Amazon, Hulu, Netflix, Apple TV+, Disney+, HBO Max, Peacock and Paramount+). Intersectional data on the media are collected and analysed, considering factors such as gender, race, sexual orientation and disability status. The report highlights progress and gaps, encouraging the media industry to enhance LGBTIQ representation and storytelling (GLAAD, 2023). Although it focuses on US shows, the report's relevance extends to the EU, as American TV heavily influences global media trends and European viewers frequently consume content on these platforms. The report also serves as a benchmark for European media to evaluate and enhance LGBTIQ representation.

This is especially evident on newer digital media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, where representations of women often revolve around the objectification and commodification of their bodies, as well as traditional gender stereotypes (Yin and Binti Abdullah, 2024). For instance, the 'tradwife' social media trend champions traditional gender roles by portraying men as sole providers and women as caretakers of the home and children (Proctor, 2023; Sykes and Hopner, 2024). The tradwife movement often intersects with far-right ideologies, including white supremacy, by integrating extremist views into content about domestic life and family values (Sitler-Elbel, 2021; Zahay, 2022). Similarly, the rise of 'crypto influencers' directs young men towards stereotypically masculine careers such as (cryptocurrency) trading, while overlooking young women in discussions about financial opportunities (Henshaw, 2023; Jagolinzer, 2024).

While these platforms reflect ongoing issues, especially with regard to the rise of digital media and AI technologies, advances in data collection and accessibility offer some solutions. Examples of these are highlighted in Box 42. A focus on enhancing inclusive representation, tackling gender stereotypes and improving women's working conditions is essential to ensure that women and men in all their diversity benefit fully from technological advances and continue to shape media narratives.

Box 42. Enhancing the accessibility of gender data in the media

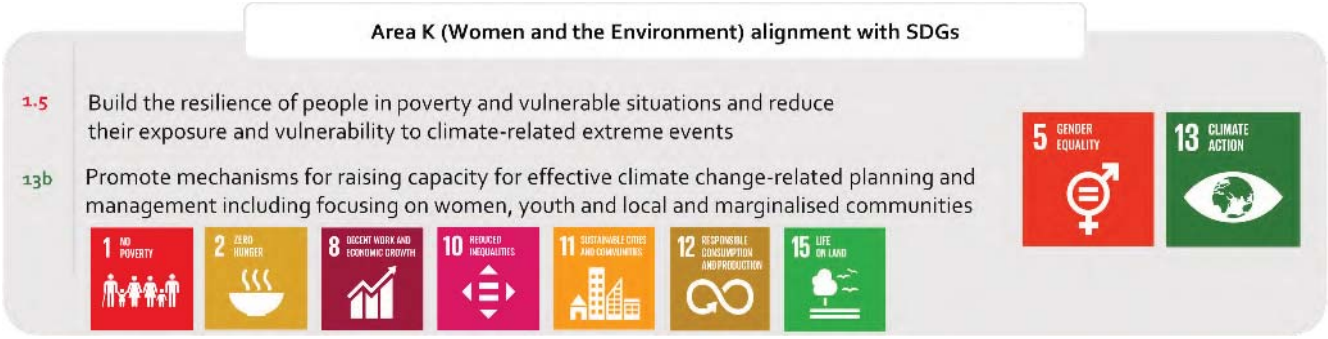
The Comparing Gender and Media Equity (GEM) dataset, prepared by the Department of Journalism, Media and Communication from the University of Gothenburg, contains three pooled datasets – Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP), the Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media (IWMF) and the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). These include hundreds of indicators to make comparable data on gender and media

more accessible and to measure the level of gender equality in news media content in different countries (Färdigh et al., 2022).

2.11 Women and the Environment (Area K)

Under the BPfA, Member States have committed to supporting women's contributions to environmental protection and sustainable development. Key goals include ensuring women's active involvement in all levels of environmental decision-making, integrating a gender perspective into sustainability policies and programmes, and creating mechanisms to assess the gender-specific impacts of development and environmental policies.

The EU's official indicators for monitoring progress in this area primarily focus on tracking women's representation in climate-related decision-making and the proportion of women and men graduating in science and technology. The lack of monitoring of the integration of a gender perspective into policymaking or the gendered impacts of environmental policies creates a notable gap between the comprehensive goals of the BPfA and the existing monitoring framework, leaving essential aspects of gender equality in environmental policy untracked.



For the BPfA +30 review, the thematic focus and priority topics of Area K include:

Assessing the gender impacts of climate change

Promoting women's roles and leadership in environmental decision-making at all levels

Adopting a gender perspective in policies for sustainable development

Achieving gender balance in studies and professions for the green transition

In the context of the European Green Deal and global environmental challenges such as climate change and the degradation of our ecosystems, these priority topics explore the contributions of women and men in all their diversity, to a socially fair green transition within our communities and households. The topics aim to shed light on the importance of gender equality in environmental leadership, recognising that it is critical to achieve balanced representation in policymaking institutions and professions aimed at environmental sustainability. Addressing the current underrepresentation of women in these spaces is essential to developing inclusive environmental policies that address gender impacts and ensure no one is left behind. However, evaluating the current state and evolving dynamics of environmental and gender-related concerns is often challenging, due to the absence of standardised national and EU-wide data.

2.11.1 EU policy developments

In 2019, the European Parliament declared a climate and environmental emergency, recognising that climate action must include strong social and inclusive measures to ensure a fair and equitable

transition (European Parliament, 2019a). Since then, in the wake of growing environmental challenges, the EU has adopted significant policy developments and legislation. Notably, the **European Green Deal** was launched as the EU's growth strategy to transform the EU into a competitive and resource-efficient economy on the path to climate neutrality by 2050 (European Commission, 2019a). This ambition is reinforced by the European Climate Law, which legally commits the EU to this climate neutrality goal (Regulation (EU) 2021/1119, 2021). However, as discussed in Section 1.4.1.1, the European Green Deal has faced criticism for failing to adopt a gender perspective and a gender mainstreaming approach (Allwood, 2020; European Parliament, 2020b).

One crucial component of the European Green Deal is the energy transition, which focuses on boosting the use of renewable energy sources, improving energy efficiency and ensuring reliable, cost-effective energy for all. Key legislative packages, such as the **Clean Energy for All Europeans (CEP) package** and the **Fit for 55 package**, aim to facilitate the energy transition while addressing social inequalities, including gender disparities. Nevertheless, these initiatives often fail to adequately address gender and intersectional inequalities. For example, the CEP package refers to 'vulnerable citizens' without explicitly addressing gender issues.

In parallel, the **EU's Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF)**, a central component of the NextGenerationEU fund, prioritises climate-related reforms, requiring Member States to allocate at least 37 % of their national RRPs to green transition measures. This emphasis on climate action contrasts starkly with its insufficient focus on gender equality. Furthermore, a gender perspective is largely missing from RRPs' measures proposed under the digital and green pillars, thus running the risk that the EU-funded twin transitions are non-gender responsive (EIGE, 2023f) (for more on this, see Section 1.4.2.4). The RRF is also crucial to the implementation of the **REPowerEU Plan**, aimed at reducing the EU's reliance on Russian fossil fuels and advancing clean energy (European Commission, 2022e). Yet the gender equality focus of the Plan is minimal, as it overlooks the specific challenges women face during the energy transition, particularly in vulnerable households (Lonergan, Gabrielli, and Sansavini, 2022) (for more on this, see Women and Poverty (Area A).

The EU's commitment to disaster resilience and preparedness is equally vital amid increasing climate and geopolitical risks. The announced **European Civil Defence Mechanism**, combined with the **European Climate Adaptation Plan**, will play a key role in supporting Member States through comprehensive planning and preparedness initiatives (von der Leyen, 2024b). These efforts will build on the **EU Climate Change Adaptation Strategy**, adopted in 2021, with the aim of creating a climate-resilient society by 2050 (European Commission, 2021i). Although the Strategy acknowledges different adaptive capacities among women and men, older persons, persons with disabilities or displaced, critics highlight gaps in addressing gender and intersectional disparities (Goldsmith et al., 2021; Nenning, 2022). In addition, the Strategy fails to incorporate a care perspective, despite increasing recognition of the climate-care nexus. This further marginalises care work, which is predominantly carried out by women (MacGregor et al., 2022; WECF, 2022).

In the field of disaster risk reduction (DRR), the **European Roadmap for the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction**[53] calls for national DRR coordinating mechanisms to include gender-sensitive representation. The **EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement**, to which several Member States are signatories (BG, HR, CY, EL, LU, MT, PO, RO and SI), includes a high-level commitment to gender equality, including the incorporation of a gender perspective into DRR projects and activities (EUR-OPA, 2018). Lastly, the EU and its Member States

[53] The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 outlines seven targets and four priorities for action to prevent new disaster risks and reduce existing ones: (i) Understanding disaster risk; (ii) Strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk; (iii) Investing in disaster reduction for resilience and; (iv) Enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and to 'Build Back Better' in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction (UNISDR, 2015).

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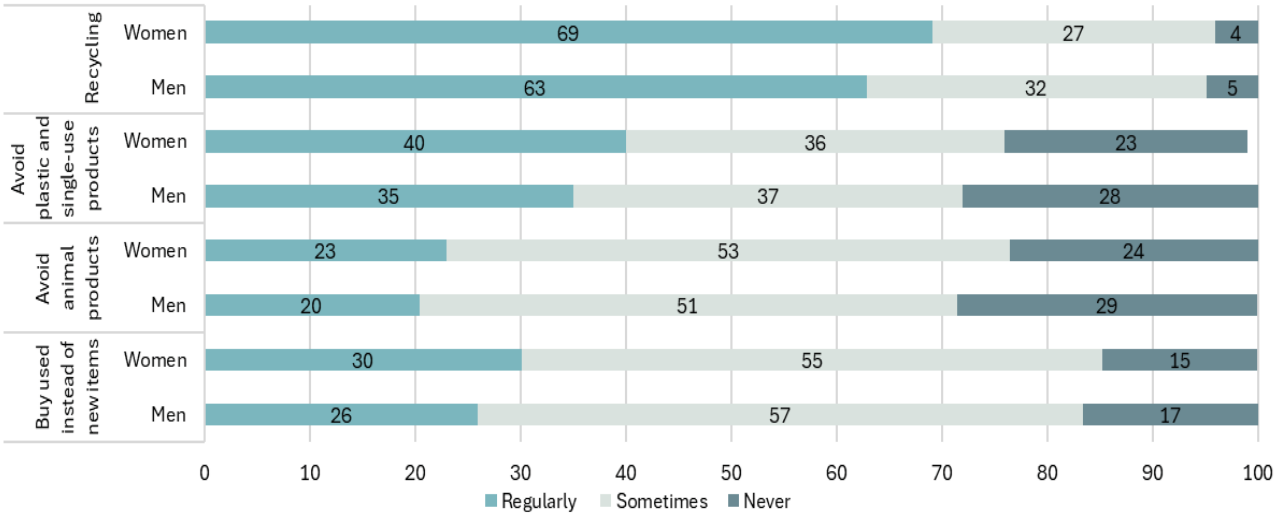
are also committed to key environmental agreements at international level, namely the **three Rio conventions**[54] and respective gender action plans (UN Environment Programme, 2022; UNCCD, 2018; UNFCCC Secretariat, 2023). The parties to COP 25 adopted a five-year enhanced **Lima work programme on gender and its gender action plan** that outlines objectives to promote gender-responsive climate action (COP25 UNFCCC, 2020).

2.11.2 Key challenges and trends

2.11.2.1 Women play a crucial role in promoting environmental sustainability at home, but environmental discourses and efforts risk reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes

EIGE's CARE survey suggests that women are more environmentally aware and consistent than men in their eco-friendly behaviour and consumption patterns (see Figure 38). Gender stereotypes shape the ways in which women and men think and act differently in terms of consumption patterns and sustainability (Bloodhart and Swim, 2020). Such stereotypes portray women as agents of care and keepers of the natural world (Wilde and Parry, 2022). At the same time, they tend to discourage men from engaging in sustainable behaviours, which are viewed as threatening traditional notions of masculinity (Brough et al., 2016; Wilson, 2023). Movements such as the 'zero waste lifestyle' often frame public environmental issues and household sustainability as feminised concerns, reinforcing traditional gender roles in cooking, cleaning and grocery shopping (Wilde and Parry, 2022). Advocates of these movements frequently invoke traditional gender roles, similar to those seen in the 'tradwife' movement (for more on this, see Section 2.10.2.6 of Women and the Media (Area J)).

Figure 38. Frequency of sustainable behaviour, by sex and type of activity (% of 18-74 respondents, EU,2024)



Source: EIGE's CARE survey 2nd wave (2024).

At the same time, ecological degradation can be linked to patriarchal structures, as power is maintained through dominance over and the oppression of both women and nature, with the view that the natural world exists to be controlled (Pease, 2019). This explains a tendency among men to consider solutions based on 'fixing' (e.g. water desalinisation), which reinforce a sense of domination, as opposed to breaking unsustainable patterns of consumption and finding a more

[54] The three Rio Conventions, adopted at the 1992 Earth Summit, include the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). The UNFCCC focuses on mitigating climate change impacts and fostering adaptation, the CBD targets the conservation of biodiversity and equitable benefit-sharing, while the UNCCD emphasises sustainable land management and combating desertification (United Nations, 1992c, 1992a, 1992b).

balanced fit with the environment (Bloodhart and Swim, 2020). It is therefore critical to recognise how gender roles are constructed within environmental discourses and public policies.

2.11.2.2 Young women climate activists are leading the push for climate action

The EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 recognises the pivotal role young women play in leading the movement for climate action (European Commission, 2020f). Research shows that young climate activists are influential in raising awareness, influencing public opinion and pressuring national governments and international bodies to adopt and strengthen climate policies (Heidrich and Nakonieczna-Bartosiewicz, 2021).

The Fridays for Future movement (FFF), which has a notably high participation of women, has become a key force in global and EU climate activism (D.R. Fisher, 2019), reflecting the broader engagement of women in environmental activism (de Moor et al., 2020; Wahlström et al., 2019). This movement not only influences climate policy but fosters active democratic engagement, with young women at the forefront. Similarly, women's environmental organisations further emphasise the links between gender equality, social justice and environmental sustainability. Nevertheless, the scarcity of data and the complexity of tracking civic engagement make it challenging to assess women's leadership at grassroots level, despite the critical role that such leadership plays in shaping effective environmental policies and initiatives (OECD, 2022b).

Women's environmental organisations contribute to the fight against climate change and make sure that women's voices and needs are taken into account in creating a more sustainable future. Their work is key in pushing for more inclusive environmental policies. Recognising, supporting and funding the work of CSOs that focus on equality issues in the EU is vital. This includes financial support, capacity building and giving them a platform. Examples of key non-governmental organisations in the EU are GenderCC and Women Engage for a Common Future (WECF).

The active participation of young women in climate activism highlights the necessity for gender-sensitive environmental policies and the potential to shape a more sustainable and equitable future (Piispa and Kiilakoski, 2022). Activism also reveals gaps and delays in environmental policy, creating political tension and pressure for urgent action, which can be difficult within the EU's political and economic constraints. The 'green backlash' from fossil fuel-dependent industries and climate-sceptical groups view environmental initiatives as threats to established economic structures and often align with the rise of authoritarian movements that embrace a blend of climate denial, racism and misogyny (Daggett, 2018; Hultman, 2017).

2.11.2.3 Women continue to be underrepresented in the workforce of the transport and energy sectors in the EU, and could be further disadvantaged by digitalisation and automation

The EU Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy, part of the European Green Deal, prioritises increasing female and youth participation in the transport sector. In 2023, women made up just 17% of the transport workforce in the EU, with the highest share noted in Malta (31%) and the lowest share – in Romania (10%) (Eurostat, 2025). Gender distribution varied sharply across EU transport sub-sectors: women accounted for 41% of the air transport workforce, compared to 21% in water transport and just 15% in land transport (Ibid). Despite some progress and initiatives (see Box 43), this figure has barely changed since 2018[55], highlighting stagnation in achieving gender balance (for more on this, see EIGE, 2023j).

[55] Calculations based on Employment by sex, age and detailed economic activity (from 2008 onwards, NACE Rev. 2 two-digit level) (LFSA_EGAN22D), EU LFS, 2014-2023.

Box 43. Strengthening women's employment in the transport sector

The Women in Transport – Platform for Change, launched by the European Commission in 2017, aims to strengthen women's employment and equal opportunities in the transport sector (European Commission, n.d.-m). It includes a declaration on equal opportunities, emphasising the importance of gender-disaggregated data to inform policy planning, monitor progress and evaluate measures. To boost women's employment in the sector, it advocates for company-based measures and broader societal efforts to combat stereotypes through early education.

In 2022, the share of women in the energy sector was around 25%, up from around 20% in 2010 (European Commission: Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, 2024a). This fragile improvement saw a slight decline in 2022 from 26% in 2021. Most growth came from rising female shares in the 25-54 and 55-64 age groups, while the under-25 group declined, signalling a possibly concerning trend. Furthermore, in 2021, women represented 68% of the part-time contracts in the EU energy sector and women were 6.3 times more likely than men to be on part-time contracts (15.2% vs. 2.4% respectively) (Ibid.)

Available data at international level indicate that, in the renewable energy sector, the percentage of female employees may be higher, around 32 %, and reaching 40 % in the solar photovoltaic industry (IRENA, 2019). Nonetheless, the latter higher figures were a result of a higher women's share in in administrative jobs (45%) than technical positions, suggesting that the share of women in renewables is not higher than in the conventional energy sector (28%) (European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, 2024). While these figures reflect somewhat positive though fragile trend towards gender balance, achieving gender balance in the energy sector is a major challenge, including due to specific nature of energy-related roles, gender stereotypes, and the limited impact of corporate gender equality measures. Addressing this gap requires diverse stakeholders' targeted efforts (Ibid). Innovative approaches, such as the gender and social inclusion example in Box 44, can help.

Digitalisation and automation are set to significantly impact the transport and the energy sectors. About 80% of transport employers surveyed by the European Commission mentioned expecting up to 20% of jobs in the transport sector to be lost in the next decade (European Commission: Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport, 2021). Preliminary research suggests that women will be disproportionately affected in the short term (European Transport Workers Federation, 2021), as automation threatens to displace roles traditionally held by women, such as clerical and administrative positions. Conversely, men may face greater long-term risks in manual labour roles, such as driving and factory work (European Transport Workers Federation, 2021). As the green transition unfolds, reducing gender inequalities in these sectors requires broader social barriers to be addressed, such as those that limit women's educational choices, skills development and employment opportunities (Baruah and Gaudet, 2022). In addition, specific obstacles to entry and retention in the energy and transport workforce need to be tackled (Clancy and Feenstra, 2019) – for more on this, see Section 2.6.2.2 of Women and the Economy (Area F)).

Box 44. Empowerment of women entrepreneurs in the energy sector and support for lone-mother households

WenCoop, **Greece's** first women-centred social energy cooperative, was founded in 2020 to empower women through energy-related projects. Backed by the Greek Association of Women Entrepreneurs, it is run by 60 women from diverse business backgrounds, offering flexible share distribution for greater accessibility. Along with generating income, WenCoop fully covers members' energy consumption and, when possible, provides free energy to vulnerable groups and single-mother families (REScoop, Electra Energy, and Mileukontakt Albania, 2024; WenCoop, n.d.).

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2.11.2.4 Over time, the presence of women in environmental decision-making roles has increased, but some Member States are lagging behind

Women's participation in environmental decision-making is critical to advancing gender equality and effective climate action (OECD, 2022b). Research shows that countries with high levels of gender equality tend to have lower CO2 emissions, suggesting that advancing gender equality supports both climate action and strengthens democratic governance (McGee et al., 2020) (for examples, see Box 45). However, although women are often over-represented in environmental grassroots movements and activism, their representation diminishes in more formal and institutionalised settings (OECD, 2022b).

Box 45. Leading the digital transformation and creating sustainable and gender-responsive industrial policies

— IndustriALL, a global trade union federation established in **Denmark**, formed a gender equality task force in 2022. This focuses on incorporating gender equality into discussions on sustainable industrial policy. IndustriALL's Action Plan for 2021-2025 aims to enhance women's rights and address inequalities, ensuring that strategies, policies and measures for developing a sustainable industrial policy and a just transition are responsive to gender considerations (IndustriALL Global Union, 2021).

— EU funded project GRASS Ceiling, led South East Technological University (SETU-Ireland) aims to boost women-led innovation in farmign and rural areas. The project aims to establish nine 'living labs' in Ireland, Croatia, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Scotland, Spain and Sweden. Each lab trains six to eight women in innovative practices such as smart farming and ecotourism.

Progress is also evident at the level of EU institutions. In 2023, women constituted 52 % of members in the cabinets of Directorates-General (DGs) dealing with environmental issues[56], indicating a positive shift towards gender balance compared with 35 % in 2018 (EIGE, 2024b). Notably, women made up 71 % of cabinet members in DG Environment. However, representation varies between DGs, with women making up 29 % of DG Energy in 2023 (EIGE, 2024b). Moreover, in the 2019-2024 Commission, two out of the four Commissioners overseeing these DGs were women, indicating a gradual shift towards gender parity at the top levels of EU environmental policymaking.

There has also been an upward trend in women's participation in climate negotiations at an international level, which is now approaching gender balance. Historically, women have been underrepresented in these global forums, such as at the Conference of the Parties (COP) meetings under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). At COP28 in December 2023, women accounted for 53 % of the EU delegation, compared with 42 % in 2018 (WEDO, 2024b)[57]. Among the Member States at COP28, Estonia, Finland and Spain had the highest representation of women, while Luxembourg and Poland had the lowest. Only Estonia, Hungary, Italy, Slovakia and Slovenia appointed a woman as their head of delegation. Despite increased representation, however, women speak less than men during negotiations and are often excluded from finance and technology discussions, focusing instead on gender, education and empowerment issues (WEDO, 2024a).

The varying level of representation of women as national ministers dealing with environment and climate change remains a challenge across the EU's Member States. On average, in 2023, women constituted 31 % of national ministers in the EU responsible for portfolios such as the environment, climate change, transport and energy, marking a notable increase of 20 percentage points since 2018 (EIGE, 2023l). However, women's representation varies widely between Member States.

In 2023, women comprised 45 % of the highest-ranking civil servants in ministries with competences in environment, transport and energy (EIGE, 2024l). Bulgaria and Slovenia lead the way, with women

[56] The DGs considered are DG Climate Action, DG Energy, DG Mobility and Transport and DG Environment.

[57] These percentages are calculated and presented on the basis of the Gender Climate Tracker by WEDO, which has collected data on women's participation in their national party delegations at every UNFCCC meeting since 2008.

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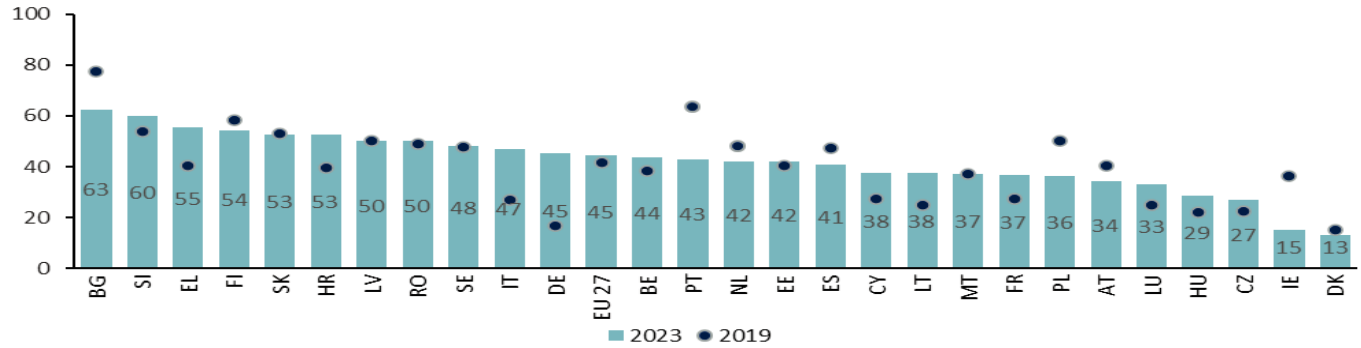
in these countries representing 63 % and 60 % of positions, respectively. In contrast, the representation in Ireland and Denmark is lower, with women making up only 15 % and 13 % of these roles (Figure 39**Error! Reference source not found.**) (EIGE, 2024l). While the upward trend in women's representation at the level of national ministries indicates significant progress, these percentages reveal that gender balance is yet to be achieved.

Figure 39. Proportion of women among the highest-ranking civil servants in ministries with competences in environment, transport and energy, by country (%, EU, 2019 and 2023)



Source: EIGE, Gender Statistics Database, bpfa_k_offic_k1__wmid_env_natmin_admin

2.11.2.5 Women are disproportionately affected by disasters and climate-induced migration, both across the EU and globally

Climate change is causing more extreme weather events, a rise in sea levels, shifts in the geographical distribution of agricultural zones and infectious diseases. These factors increase the EU's vulnerability to disasters (European Commission, 2021n). Environmental disasters are increasingly driving migration within and beyond the EU (European Parliament, 2022f; Mawby and Applebaum, 2020), particularly affecting women, who constitute the majority of people displaced by climate change and extreme weather events (Sidun and Gibbons, 2023; United Nations, 2022).

Climate and other environmental crises, coupled with gender inequality, are the greatest challenges to sustainable development of our time (UN, 2022). Due to a combination of social, economic and cultural factors that shape gender dynamics, crises and disasters affect women and men differently, even if they live in the same household (Erman et al., 2021). Social expectations and roles often place women in caregiving positions within families and communities, intensifying their responsibilities during and after disasters and limiting their ability to engage in broader resilience and recovery activities (Wernhart et al., 2021). Economically, women are more likely to have lower incomes, less stable jobs and fewer assets than men, making them more vulnerable to the financial impacts of disasters (Erman et al., 2021).

Gender-based violence is also exacerbated during emergencies, with rates of domestic violence rising in slow-onset disasters such as droughts (UN Women, 2022). For instance, studies conducted in Spain have linked heatwaves to a rise in intimate partner violence (Sanz-Barbero et al., 2018). According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the widespread and increasing impacts of climate change are also amplifying the vulnerability of individuals to human trafficking (UNODC, 2022). More research is needed to thoroughly examine the gendered impacts of extreme weather events and climate change, especially on the prevalence of gender-based violence in the EU.

In terms of climate justice, the emissions and consumption patterns of the Global North, including the EU, have far-reaching impacts that extend well beyond Europe. These disproportionately affect vulnerable communities in developing and least-developed countries. Indigenous communities, which have historically contributed little to global emissions, bear a disproportionate share of the consequences of the climate crisis (Giacomini, 2020; ILO, 2017; Turquet et al., 2023). Indigenous

women, in particular, face heightened risks of discrimination, exclusion, exploitation and gender-based violence as climate change exacerbates their economic and social vulnerabilities (Csevár, 2021). These include precarious working conditions, lack of social protections and increased poverty (Birkmann et al., 2022; ILO, 2017).

2.11.2.6 Disaster risk reduction policies at national level are falling behind in integrating a gender perspective

The frequency and severity of climate and weather extremes necessitates stronger EU Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) policies to manage various climate risks (EEA, 2024). Although the importance of integrating a gender perspective is recognised at EU level, at national level there are still notable gaps in integrating a gender perspective in DRR (Wernhart et al., 2021). Some Member States, such as Austria, Spain and Sweden, stand out for their efforts to incorporate gender considerations into the context of DRR, climate change adaptation and mitigation, showcasing the potential for more comprehensive and inclusive approaches (see Box 46). These successes can be attributed to their implementation of gender mainstreaming strategies that include gender impact assessments, gender equality training and the collection of sex-disaggregated data. These measures ensure that gender-specific needs and vulnerabilities are addressed in decision-making processes (Breil et al., 2021).

Box 46. Supporting gender mainstreaming in disaster risk reduction

An example of how to support gender mainstreaming in disaster risk reduction is **Women Exchange 4 Disaster Risk Reduction (We4DRR),** an international network coordinated by the **Austrian** Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management. We4DRR is a Europe-wide network for the exchange of women in science, administration, policy and practice working in the fields of natural hazard management and disaster risk reduction. The aim of this network of female experts is not only to discuss issues regarding gender and natural hazards, but also to strengthen the expertise and increase the visibility of female professionals by enabling the transnational exchange of knowledge and experiences (Die Wildbach- und Lawinenverbauung, n.d.).

However, there are notable gaps and limitations in data on gender equality and the environment (Grantham, 2023). Most research on the gender impacts of climate change, including adaptation and mitigation efforts, focuses on countries outside Europe. This lack of region-specific data limits the understanding of how climate change uniquely affects women and men in the EU in their respective social and political systems. Furthermore, climate change goes beyond environmental problems. It is also a social crisis that encompasses interactions between multiple oppressions (Mikulewicz et al., 2023). Research shows that age, class and education can all have an impact on vulnerability and the strategies used to face environmental crises (Kuran et al., 2020; Ravera, Martín-López et al., 2016). Pregnant women, for instance, are particularly vulnerable during weather events, as these can induce obstetric complications (Perkins, 2018; Samuels et al., 2022). Older women also face higher mortality risks during heatwaves compared with men, due to physiological differences in heat response (Leach et al., 2024). Comprehensive data are needed that consider age, ethnicity, socio-economic status and disability along with gender and climate change (Kronsell and Magnusdottir, 2021).

2.12 The Girl Child (Area L)

Under the BPfA, Area L focuses on the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child, developing girls' skills and promoting their awareness of and participation in social, economic and political life. The official EU indicators used to monitor progress in this area include the difference in academic performance between girls and boys aged 15 in mathematics and science, the proportion of girls and boys aged 15 who expect to be working in science-related fields at the age of 30, the parameters of sexuality education in schools, and the level of dissatisfaction

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among girls and boys with their bodies. However, these indicators might not fully reflect the complexity of how attitudes towards gender roles are formed or the impact that these biases have on young persons' lives and career choices.

Area L (The Girl Child) alignment with SDGs

5.1	End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere
5.3	Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation
4.7	Ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, human rights, gender equality, culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity

For the BPfA +30 review, some of the priority topics of Area L are:

Assessing the educational accomplishments and career aspirations of

Understanding the body self-image and mental health of girls and boys

Tackling discrimination and violence against girls

Fostering enhanced sex and relationship education

While some issues in this chapter overlap with other BPfA areas, this chapter offers a deeper analysis from the perspective of the girl child. It builds on the definition of a 'child' in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and defines a 'girl child' as a girl or young woman up to the age of 18. The priority topics chosen for this chapter highlight policy-level efforts in the EU to establish legal support mechanisms to safeguard children's social rights, combat child sexual abuse and gender-based violence, and address gender stereotypes within and beyond the education sector. This underlines evolving concerns resulting from the expansion of cyberspace, the green transition, increasing mental health issues and various forms of violence affecting girls.

2.12.1 EU policy developments

Besides the **EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child 2021-2024** (see Section 1.4.5), a key milestone in improving the situation of girls and boys in the EU is the **European Child Guarantee** (Figure 40). Adopted in June 2021, it recommends to the Member States to address poverty and social exclusion among children, including by the provision of accessible, affordable and high quality early childhood education and care (ECEC), encouraged by the Barcelona targets for 2030 and the quality frameworks for ECEC. It also recognises the importance of gender perspective when designing social inclusion measures. It is the first EU-level policy instrument that aims to address exclusion in childhood and to break the poverty cycle across generations.

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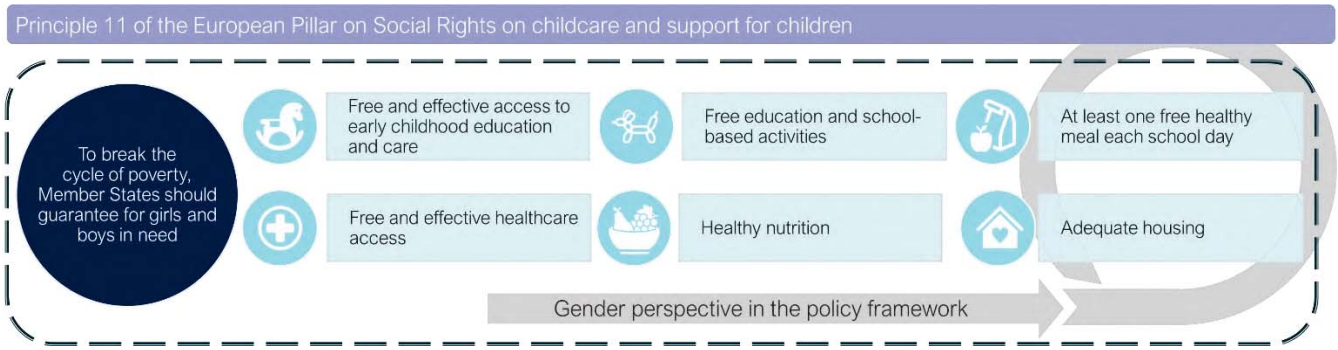
Figure 40. European Child Guarantee



Source: the authors, based on Council Recommendation (EU) 2021/1004, 2021.

All 27 EU Member States have published their **Child Guarantee action plans** (European Commission, 2024c). However, the level of ambitions varies (Eurochild, 2023; European Parliament, 2022a). To track the European Child Guarantee, the Commission and the Social Protection Committee prepared a common monitoring framework that prioritises child-specific indicators over those at a household level, but only selected indicators are disaggregated by sex (European Commission, 2024f).

The protection of girls in general falls within the scope of child protection legislation, with recent EU strategies focusing on enhancing safeguards against various forms of abuse and promoting online safety. In 2020, the Commission adopted an **EU strategy for a more effective fight against child sexual abuse**. Published at the height of the pandemic, the strategy points to how COVID-19 has made child sexual abuse more difficult to detect. It highlights the heightened vulnerability of girls, including those with intersecting backgrounds, and issues such as child trafficking (European Commission, 2020h). In line with rising risks in cyberspace, the **European Strategy for a Better Internet for Kids (BIK+)**, launched in May 2022, tackles issues such as exposure to harmful content and promotes gender diversity in ICT roles (European Commission, 2022c).

One noteworthy development has been the increased acknowledgement of the importance of comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) and the establishment of standards for its implementation. The **Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025** asserts that the effective prevention of gender-based violence requires young people to be educated about gender equality and non-violent relationships. Building on this, the 2021 **Resolution on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)** saw the European Parliament recognise CSE as a key contributor to gender equality (European Parliament, 2021e). It called on the Member States to ensure universal access to evidence-based and age-appropriate CSE.

Harmful practices against girls have also received more legislative and policy responses, addressing the previous lack of binding instruments to protect victims. The EU accession to the **Istanbul Convention** and the adoption of the **Directive on violence against women and domestic violence** will support greater protection for girls, specifically through the EU-wide criminalisation of FGM, forced marriage and certain forms of online violence (see also Section 2.4.2.6 in Violence Against Women (Area D)).

These initiatives (see also Box 47) represent a comprehensive effort to combat violence against girls, both online and offline, ensuring equitable education for girls and boys. However, disparities remain. Key challenges include tackling sexist and racist content online, removing barriers to girls in STEM, addressing youth mental health needs and engaging in ongoing collaboration between educators, health professionals and law enforcement to ensure robust protections.

Box 47. European Week of Action for Girls

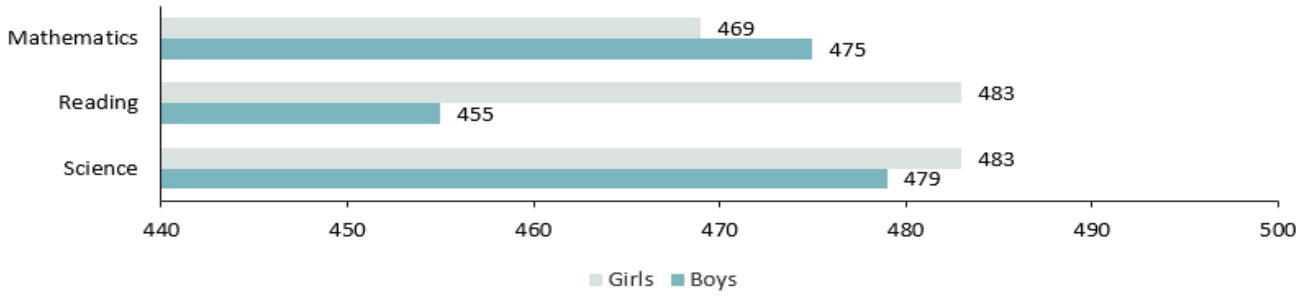
Held during the week of the International Day of the Girl (11 October), the European Week of Action for Girls (EWAG) is organised by a coalition of eight civil society organisations to ensure girls' voices and aspirations are heard by the EU institutions, and that girls' rights are at the core of the EU's external action. The coalition aims to co-create a space with and for young people. With the theme 'EU for Girls', the 2023 and 2024 editions of EWAG focused on holding EU leaders accountable for better progress on girls' rights in the context of the 2024 European Parliamentary elections.

2.12.2 Key challenges and trends

2.12.2.1 Girls continue to perform better than boys in reading and science, but gender stereotypes are holding girls back from thriving in a technology-driven future

According to PISA scores for 2022 across the Member States[58], girls surpassed boys in reading by 29 points and in science by four points. In contrast, boys outperformed girls by six points in mathematics[59] (see Figure 41). Boys are more frequently top performers in maths than girls, and the gender gap is noteworthy across all countries (OECD, 2023b).

Figure 41. Girls' and boys' educational performance in basic skills (Mean score, EU-26, 2022)



Source: PISA 2022 Volume I.
Note: missing data for LU.

Importantly, girls show decreasing interest in STEM as they age, from secondary education onwards (Lyons et al., 2022). This indicates that gender differences in achievements in STEM are not due to innate abilities, but instead to gender stereotypes formed since early childhood by family, culture and institutional dynamics (Evagorou et al., 2024). Gender stereotypes may strengthen girls' beliefs that they will not enjoy science and maths. Equally, as STEM subjects are associated with talent and brilliance, girls are more likely to be less confident in their maths and science abilities than boys (Napp and Breda, 2022; OECD, 2023b).

The gender stereotypes that affect girls and boys perpetuate inequalities. They are shaped and reinforced by community perceptions, societal norms, institutional practices (Stewart et al., 2021) and online interactions (Horvát and González-Bailón, 2024). In educational settings, conscious and unconscious biases from teachers, gender bias in textbooks and learning materials, as well as societal factors, prevent girls from pursuing careers in STEM (also discussed in Sections 2.2.2.2 and 2.2.2.5 in Education and Training of Women (Area B)). Equipping teachers to challenge these stereotypes and build girls' confidence in STEM subjects is essential in addressing these disparities (see an example of an EU initiative in Box 48).

[58] PISA 2022 data on this topic do not include Luxembourg.

[59] PISA scores do not have a theoretical minimum or maximum score. They are set in relation to the variations in results observed across all test participants.

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Box 48. Educational toolkits to help address gender stereotypes

The European Commission produced a **toolkit for primary and secondary school teachers to tackle gender stereotypes** focusing on the transport sector (European Commission, 2021l). Available in all EU languages, the toolkits aim to support teachers in facilitating discussions about gender stereotypes, using the transport sector as an example. It can also be used by school leaders, school counsellors and parents. The goal is to help young learners understand that occupations are not reserved for a particular gender, promoting a more inclusive perspective on career opportunities.

Amidst strong gender stereotypes for occupational choices, there is a growing number of initiatives that support girls to identify career tracks in the fields where women's participation is still rather low, such as STEM (Box 49 summarises a few such initiatives at national and EU level). At the same time, gender stereotypes continue to restrict boys' entry into women-dominated fields such as education and health, and significantly fewer efforts are dedicated to encouraging boys' participation in these areas (Meeussen, Van Laar, and Van Grootel, 2019).

Box 49. Initiatives to improve the participation of girls in STEM

STEM:

— Girls Go Circular is a free online training programme that aims to train 40,000 girls in digital and entrepreneurial skills across all Member States by 2027[60].

— E-STEAM festivals (Entrepreneurship, Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics), organised by the European Commission and the European Innovation and SMEs Executive Agency (EISMEA), offer hybrid workshops for girls to build their entrepreneurial and digital competences (European Commission, 2022l).

— The **German** government is actively promoting women in STEM fields through initiatives such as 'Girls' Day', 'Klischeefrei' and 'Komm, mach MINT'. These projects aim to increase interest among girls in STEM careers by providing internships and events. 'Girls' Day', the most well-known initiative, offers girls one-day internships in STEM companies, with around 1.9 million girls participating since its inception in 2001.

Children and young people are often exposed to gender stereotypes at home, where parental role models play a key role in reinforcing gendered expectations with regard to housework responsibilities. This contributes to gender roles being passed from generation to generation (Giménez-Nadal et al., 2019; Giménez-Nadal et al., 2019) . As a result, girls and boys may already adopt gender roles at home from an early age. For example, EIGE's CARE survey shows girls aged 16-18 more frequently perform housework than boys in the same age group. In contrast, boys are more often responsible for traditionally male-associated tasks, such as repairs, gardening or other maintenance-related activities (see Figure 42 and Figure 43).

[60] More about the initiative: https://eit-girlsgocircular.eu/

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Figure 42. Frequency of girls and boys (aged 16-18) performing general house maintenance tasks (e.g., repairs, gardening, service arrangement) (%, EU, 2024)

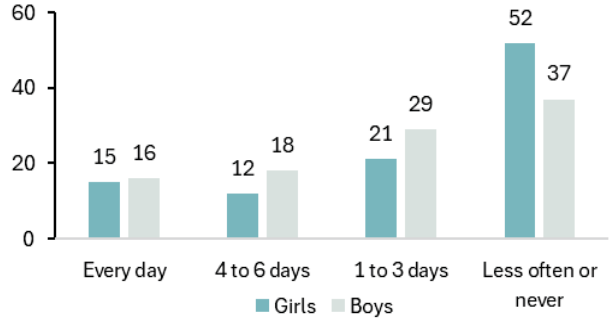
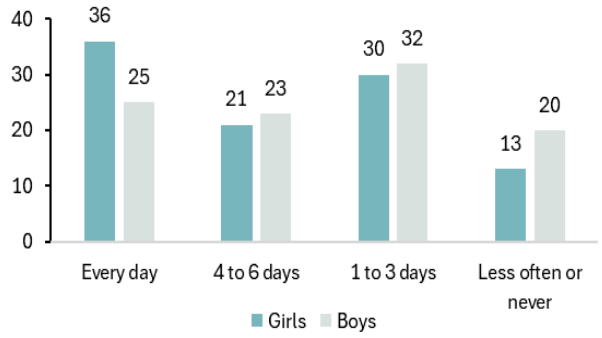


Figure 43. Frequency of girls and boys (aged 16-18) performing household chores (e.g., cooking, laundry, cleaning) (%, EU, 2022)

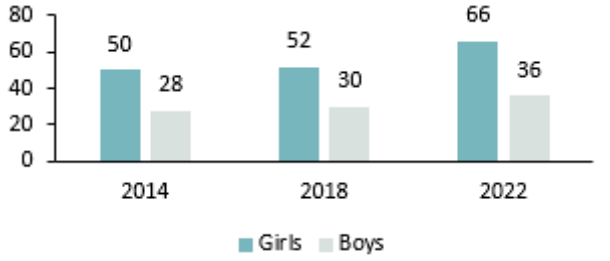


Source: EIGE's CARE survey 2nd wave (2024).

2.12.2.2 Girls in the EU report worse mental health than boys, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic

Since 2014, girls in the EU have reported more health complaints (see Figure 44 encompassing both physical (headache, stomach ache, backache) and psychological symptoms (feeling low, irritability or bad mood, feeling nervous and having difficulty in sleeping). In addition, anxiety, depression and eating disorders are more prevalent among young women than among young men in Europe[61] (Castelpietra et al., 2022).

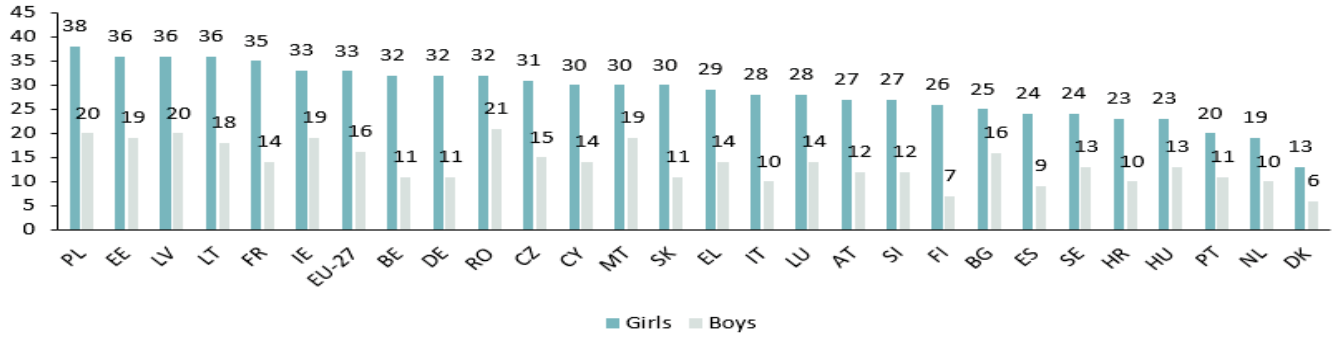
Figure 1. 15-year-olds reporting multiple health complaints more than once a week (%, EU, 2014-2022)



Source: International HBSC survey 2021/2022, 2017/2018 and 2013/2014
Note: the data for BE are averaged on the basis of the scores for Belgium (French) and Belgium (Flemish) from the original dataset.

Prolonged periods of physical isolation for children away from their friends, teachers, extended families and community due to the COVID-19 pandemic worsened feelings of loneliness among girls and boys (Mental Health Foundation, 2021). In 2021-2022, girls aged 15 consistently reported higher levels of loneliness than boys in all Member States (see Figure 45).

Figure 45. 15-year-olds who reported feeling lonely 'most of the time' or 'always', by sex and country (%, EU, 2021-2022)



Source: International HBSC survey 2021/2022.
Note: the data for BE are averaged on the basis of the scores for Belgium (French) and Belgium (Flemish) from the original dataset.

[61] Encompassing the EU-28, plus Iceland, Norway and Switzerland.

Gender stereotypes also impact the attitudes of girls and boys towards their bodies. Objectifying and sexualised portrayals of women and girls can contribute to high, internalised levels of body surveillance, and a drive for thinness and body shame among girls (Leonidas and Santos, 2020; Santoniccolo et al., 2023). In 2022, 41 % of 15-year-old girls in the EU reported feeling too fat, compared with 25 % of boys (Health Behaviour in School-aged Children study, 2023a). Similarly, dominant masculinities and traditional gender norms drive boys and young men to present as strong and in control – which can prevent them from seeking help. See also discussions on stereotypes in Women and the Media (Area J) and Women and Health (Area C).

2.12.2.3 Girls and boys in the EU face barriers to accessing sexuality education

Comprehensive sexuality education remains a challenge across the Member States. While the provision of sexuality and health education is already mandatory in most Member States, practical implementation varies. In many Member States, only biological and anatomical aspects of sex are covered, together with risk prevention – leaving out essential elements such as sexual orientation and gender-based violence (Michielsen and Ivanova, 2022; Picken, 2020). Topics such as love, marriage, partnerships and family are also frequently covered, but typically with a focus on traditional values. Few Member States cover issues such as gender stereotypes, mutual consent, LGBTIQ and topics related to online media (Michielsen and Ivanova, 2022; Picken, 2020).

Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) is a curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the emotional, physical and social aspects of sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills and values that will empower them to develop respectful social and sexual relationships. CSE supports gender equality and prevents gender-based violence by examining gender norms and roles, fostering respect for sexual diversity and gender differences, and promoting relationships that are characterised by mutual understanding and respect for individual needs and boundaries.

Source: UNESCO, UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women and WHO (2018). International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education: An Evidence-Informed Approach. Image: generated with ChatGPT.

Young people in the EU also face barriers to accessing contraceptives. Only 12 Member States (44 %) cover contraceptives in their national health system or have special contraceptive coverage for young people aged 19 and under (EPF for Sexual and Reproductive Rights, 2024). Among 15-year-old girls and boys in the EU, 28 % report using neither a condom nor a contraceptive pill during sexual intercourse (Health Behaviour in School-aged Children study, 2023c).

These topics are still sensitive in some Member States and tend to be left out, especially when the content and scope of sexuality education classes are decided at school level or community groups are involved (Michielsen and Ivanova, 2022; Picken, 2020). The anti-gender movement, often based on faith-based grounds, opposes gender equality and LGBTIQ rights while framing itself as 'pro-life' and 'pro-family' (McEwen and Narayanaswamy, 2023). Such conservative activists oppose CSE, women's rights and bodily autonomy (Ipas, 2023). This poses challenges in introducing CSE in schools, indicating a need for holistic approaches (like that adopted in Austria and summarised in Box 50), as well as careful consideration from policymakers.

Box 50. Austria's approach to comprehensive sexuality education

Austria adopts the comprehensive approach to sexuality education promoted by international standards. In Austria, sexuality is regarded as an integral part of a child's development, and sexuality education focuses on supporting children's sexual health physically, cognitively and emotionally. The curriculum focuses on biological aspects and the prevention of early pregnancy and STIs/HIV, as well as sexual identity, consent, online media and gender-based violence (Picken, 2020).

2.12.2.4 Girls may be at higher risk of gender-based violence and discrimination when gender intersects with disability, certain ethnic, racial and religious background

Perpetrators of gender-based violence often target girls from vulnerable groups due to disability, race, ethnic origin, age, religion or language (OAS et al., 2022). In Europe, around one in five children are victims of some form of sexual violence (Council of Europe, 2023a). Girls and boys are especially vulnerable, with 70 % to 85 % knowing their abuser – often someone they trust (European Parliament, 2024b). Around one-third of children who have been abused never disclose it (Thulin et al., 2020). Girls and boys with disabilities face a particularly high risk of violence due to their dependence on caregivers (Koistinen et al., 2019). It is thus essential that both girls and boys facing bullying have access to strong institutional support systems, with schools and teachers playing a central role in providing such help (as exemplified in Box 51 and Box 52).

Box 51. Enhanced protection and support for child victims of domestic violence in Portugal

In 2021, the **Portuguese** government launched funding for the creation of nationwide psychological support services for children and young victims of domestic violence. A pool of specialised psychologists with the expertise necessary to support these victims was set up (Government of the Portuguese Republic, 2021). Law No. 57/2021 extended protections for victims of domestic violence, in particular safeguarding children by recognising as victims persons up to 18 years old who are exposed to domestic violence (CIG, 2021a).

In online spaces, while both girls and boys in the EU are similarly exposed to cyberbullying (Health Behaviour in School-aged Children study, 2023b), girls are increasingly exposed to gender-based cyberviolence (EIGE, 2022c). Young women face disproportionately gendered forms of cyber harassment, such as online sexual harassment, image-based abuse, cyberstalking and the non-consensual sharing of intimate images (EIGE, 2022c). Meanwhile, across the EU, 15-year-old boys (16 %) are twice as likely to report committing cyberbullying compared with girls (8 %) (Health Behaviour in School-aged Children study, 2023d).

Box 52. Supporting teachers in addressing bullying and discrimination towards girls and boys

In **Romania**, a collaboration between the National Agency for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men and the Ministry of Education engaged 10,000 teachers in promoting non-discrimination and equal opportunities. As part of this initiative, teachers are encouraged to tackle bullying, including cyberbullying. (European Commission, 2023a).

In the EU, girls and young women from immigrant, refugee or asylum-seeking backgrounds also face increased risks of violence. Those from regions such as North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, Eastern Europe and Central Asia are most at risk of harmful practices such as forced and child marriage, as well as FGM. Roma women and girls also face heightened risks of these practices (UNFPA, 2014; Villacampa and Torres, 2020) (see also Section 2.4.2.6 in Violence Against Women (Area D)). Girls and young women in forced marriages face a higher risk of sexual assault, rape, domestic violence and abuse (Psaila et al., 2016). It is thus crucial to address this issue using an intersectional perspective to ensure that girls seeking refuge are not married off in or on the way to the EU.

2.12.2.5 A new ideological gender divide is growing between young women and men

Teenage boys and young men are becoming more conservative, especially regarding gender equality and women's rights. A study across 27 Member States found that young men (aged 18-29) are the group that struggles most with accepting advances in women's rights. Many young men believe that promoting women's rights threatens men's opportunities (Off et al., 2022). Polls for the European Parliament elections in June 2024 reveal that young men in countries such as Spain and Germany are more inclined to vote for right-wing parties, while young women lean left (Schnetzer et al., 2024; Velázquez, 2024). Women's voting patterns became a crucial barrier against the far-right

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surge in several countries (Calvo and Ferrín, 2023). While this is still a new phenomenon, similar trends are emerging in other parts of the world. For instance, in the UK, young men (aged 16-29) are less optimistic about the impact of feminism, and one in three young men think it will be harder to be a man than a woman in 20 years[62] (Campbell et al., 2024). A study across G7 countries also found that young men show higher levels of prejudice against women in leadership roles (Verian Group, 2024). Engaging young people in discussions about equality, gender stereotypes and discrimination is crucial to shift these attitudes and foster support for gender equality (for an example, see Box 53).

Box 53. Engaging young people in discussions about women's rights and gender equality

The 'Rock de Rack' festival, organised by **Luxembourg's** Ministry of Equality between Women and Men in 2019, marked the centennial of women's suffrage and centred on youth, democracy, and equality. It included educational workshops on gender equality, organised with partners including the University of Luxembourg and BEE SECURE. An interactive debate encouraged young people to share their views on gender equality and democracy in schools.

One driver of the gender divide among young generations is the growing digital exposure to 'online misogyny influencers' who offer advice on relationships, mental health, well-being and achieving material success and status (Botto and Gottzén, 2022; Haslop et al., 2024). The content shared by these influencers often steers young men towards more conservative and misogynistic ideologies. Growth in these attitudes among young men could significantly challenge the progress made and further efforts to achieve gender equality, as they may resist policies and cultural shifts aimed at promoting women's rights and reducing gender disparities.

[62] The study is based on a representative sample of 3,716 adults aged 16+ across the UK between 17 and 23 August 2023.

Beyond BPfA +30: recommendations for action

The BPfA +30 review highlights notable progress in gender equality within the EU, including greater representation of women in decision-making, more robust policies against gender-based violence and more attempts to consider gender inequalities in policymaking. Despite these advances, persistent gaps remain across all 12 areas of the BPfA, including in economic empowerment, unpaid care responsibilities and women's access to strategic sectors crucial for the green and digital transitions. Moreover, emerging challenges such as digital transformation, climate change, the effects of COVID-19 and new security threats have exacerbated existing gender inequalities and created new ones.

The following recommendations are structured around seven themes, outlining actions for EU institutions and Member States within the remit of their competence while emphasising the importance of collaboration with other stakeholders, such as civil society organisations or social partners. Where relevant, specific institutions or stakeholders are mentioned to support the targeted guidance.

1) Thriving in a gender-equal and inclusive economy

Invest in care work as the backbone of the European economy

— Invest in gender responsive social protection for informal and formal caregivers and in the formal recognition of informal care. Promote collective bargaining to improve the attractiveness of the care sector, tackle staff shortages, and increase funding for training programmes and support services for care workers. Encourage the greater participation of men in both paid and unpaid care work. Ratify and implement ILO Convention 189 to promote decent work for domestic workers.

— Exceed the minimum standards laid down in the Work-Life Balance Directive. Introduce higher levels of compensation for paternity, parental and carers' leave, extend non-transferable leave, and enhance quality flexible working arrangements. Provide access to benefits that are not linked to a minimum duration of work and expand the definition of care to encompass roles beyond the family.

— Propose EU legislation to ensure equal access to telework, lay down conditions for teleworking and ensure the right to disconnect.

— Address gender gaps and disparities within the framework of the European Semester. Embed gender mainstreaming into the European Semester. Prioritise tackling gender gaps in the labour market, as well as enhancing caregiving support, work-life balance and access to digital skills.

Address gender inequalities in multiple dimensions of poverty and financial independence

— Address women's poverty as part of the post-2025 Gender Equality Strategy. Develop a 2030 European Anti-Poverty Strategy with targets disaggregated by sex and incorporate a gender perspective into the European Platform on Combating Homelessness. At national level, exempt women's sanitary products from VAT, and take measures to ensure lower prices to combat period poverty.

— Include individual-based assessments in the measurement of poverty. Regularly collect and analyse data disaggregated by sex on the multidimensional nature of poverty. Complement data on incomes and poverty at household level with assessments of individuals in order to better identify women's poverty and financial dependence (e.g. in cases of violence against women or family dissolution).

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— Establish a multidimensional concept of financial independence that includes income, consumption, wealth and power/control, together with standardised indicators for EU-wide tracking.

Secure equitable wages and reduce precarious employment for all women and men

— Promote women's entry into and retention in the labour market, reduce the gender pay gap and support women entrepreneurs through policies aimed at strengthening the Single Market. Invest in and promote life-long learning for women and men, particularly groups such as older women, carers and those affected by the automation of jobs.
— At national level, swiftly transpose the Directives on Adequate Minimum Wages and Pay Transparency. Ensure the provisions on minimum wages cover all types of workers and adhere to the international standards of 60 % of the gross median wage and 50 % of the gross average wage. Adjust minimum wages to reflect the cost of living through national price indexes. Prioritise the implementation of the Pay Transparency Directive in response to the cost-of-living crisis.
— Implement the Council Recommendation on Minimum Income. Allow persons who are receiving income support to accumulate earnings from work during short-term or sporadic work, probation periods or traineeships. Monitor the implementation of such support within the framework of the European Semester and propose a legally binding EU Directive.
— Boost gender equality in the review of the EPSR Action Plan in 2025, taking into account intersecting inequalities. Set specific targets, disaggregated by gender and other characteristics, to tackle women's poverty. Integrate a gender equality perspective into the Quality Jobs Roadmap, the focus on digitalisation in the world of work and the new Pact for European Social Dialogue to tackle the root causes and the disproportionate effects of poverty on women and men.
— Provide direct funding from Horizon Europe and the new European Competitiveness Fund to support women entrepreneurs, women-led SMEs and women researchers and innovators. Place a focus on providing tailored guidance on debt, investments and digital financial literacy, as well as sponsoring networking and coaching initiatives. Collect comparable and sex-disaggregated data on levels of financial literacy across the EU.
— Improve data collection and metrics on gendered employment trends, especially in green and energy sectors, to track gender equality in the green transition. Collect comprehensive data on unpaid work (including care and domestic tasks). Ensure employment statistics consider parental leave uniformly, including details on duration, uptake and income replacement.

Ensure gender equality in fiscal policies and pension reforms

— Recognise and compensate unpaid care work and ensure pension schemes cover people who are self-employed or unemployed, as well as those in atypical employment. Explore individual taxation options to eliminate disincentives for secondary earners and address the pay and pension gaps associated with an unequal share of care accumulated over the life-course.

Extend policies on work-life balance and promote gender-equal workplace cultures

— Enforce equal and non-transferable parental leave and family-friendly working time arrangements, mandate the adoption of gender equality plans by companies and promote the advancement of women into senior positions and leadership. Implement initiatives to counter unconscious biases and encourage men's involvement in caregiving roles and men's access to the education, health and welfare sectors, while strengthening the retention of women in traditionally male-dominated fields.

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— Ensure women are represented in social dialogue, including those in non-standard and informal work. Promote social dialogue to address gender pay gaps, work-life balance, the equal sharing of parental leave, and zero tolerance towards workplace harassment. Incorporate gender-sensitive considerations into the Pact for European Social Dialogue.

2) Providing gender-responsive social protection and services

Strengthen gender equality considerations in social policies

— Invest in accessible, affordable and high-quality, gender-responsive early childhood education (ECEC) and long-term care services for family members in need of care. Set ambitious targets for participation in ECEC, as well as EU-level targets for home-based long-term care services, and increase investments in working conditions as well as health and safety in these areas. Support the implementation of the European Care Strategy through research and data collection.
— Create a network of family support services that are universal and easy to access and that offer general as well as specific support for families in all their diversity, including lone-parent families, families with caring needs, same-sex families and those in which grandparents or other relatives are actively involved in raising children.
— Support gender-responsive monitoring of the European Child Guarantee National action plans. Ensure that all relevant indicators, where possible, in monitoring frameworks are disaggregated by gender and age.
— Implement gender-sensitive regulations and labour reforms to ensure fair pay, social protections and equitable working conditions for workers in non-standard work. Adopt the ILO's recommendations to reduce precarious work by restricting the use of unstable contracts, limiting their duration. Implement safeguards to protect collective bargaining rights and guard against discrimination, including for non-standard workers.

Incorporate a gender perspective into policies on housing and homelessness

— Support and invest in social housing as the backbone of national housing systems. Guarantee that all women and men have access to affordable and dignified housing, particularly groups that are more vulnerable to housing poverty, such as young people, lone mothers, older women and women fleeing intimate partner violence. Integrate social housing as one element in a comprehensive housing strategy alongside other affordable housing initiatives at national level. Enforce stronger tenant protections and rent control measures to ensure housing stability. Monitor housing exclusion indicators in the European Semester.
— Adopt the principle of 'Housing First' to address homelessness in a gender-sensitive and intersectional way. This approach focuses on providing long-term housing without requiring individuals to accept support or demonstrate personal progress.

Ensure universal access to healthcare, including sexual and reproductive health and mental health

— Ensure universal access to gender-responsive healthcare for women and men in all their diversity, particularly for groups in disadvantaged situations such as women and girls with disabilities, migrant women and girls, transgender and non-binary individuals and women in rural areas. Remove barriers to access, such as language and financial constraints. Increase investment in healthcare facilities in rural areas and develop adaptable solutions such as mobile health clinics.
— Address gender inequalities in the healthcare workforce. Enhance working conditions as well as health and safety in the healthcare sector. Take steps to close the gender pay gap

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in the sector – in particular, addressing the persistent devaluation of roles predominantly held by women, such as nursing. Adopt measures to prevent and address gender-based violence within healthcare settings. Encourage the participation of men and boys in the healthcare sector through awareness campaigns that challenge traditional gender roles. Provide healthcare professionals with training to ensure healthcare services are gender-responsive, inclusive and non-stigmatising.

— Ensure equal access to sexual and reproductive health services for all women and girls, particularly those affected by intersecting forms of discrimination. Ensure men and boys also benefit from resources, services and education on sexual and reproductive health in stigma-free settings. Increase investments to support research on safe, effective, affordable and acceptable sexual and reproductive health technologies, including contraception for all genders.
— Implement and expand comprehensive breast cancer and cervical cancer screening programmes. Extend the age ranges of women eligible for free screenings.

Adopt a sex and gender approach in health research and funding

— Incorporate sex and gender considerations into EU health programmes and funding guidelines for health research.
— Promote sex and gender sensitive biomedical, clinical and public health research. Enhance research on women's health, including sex and gender specific responses to diseases. Implement policies favourable to investment in women's health, for example via the proposed initiative under the European Competitiveness Compass and through increased EU funding for women's health, including via the EU's research framework programme.
— Create an expert group on women's health in research and innovation at EU level to address the unmet health needs of women. Enhance research on women's health, focusing on sex and gender-disaggregated data collection, national health data systems and analyses, in order to improve the delivery of national health services for women.
— Adopt a standardised definition of violence in gynaecological and obstetric care. Establish minimum standards for gynaecological, antenatal, childbirth and postnatal care. Promote accountability of healthcare providers, facilitate research and data collection and raise awareness about gynaecological and obstetric violence as a form of violence against women.

3) Eradicating gender-based violence, stigma and stereotypes

Advance the EU legal framework to eliminate gender-based violence against women and the standards for women's human rights

— Implement the Istanbul Convention as a binding legal instrument in 22 Member States and the EU within the remit of its competence. Transpose the EU Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence. At EU level, urge those Member States that have not yet ratified the Istanbul Convention to expedite this process, and support Member States in implementing and monitoring the EU Directive on violence against women and domestic violence.
— Align the EU legal framework with international standards on women's rights, particularly to prevent and combat all forms of violence against women as outlined in the General Recommendations to the CEDAW Convention.
— Ratify ILO Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work to recognise the right to a world of work free from violence and harassment, including gender-based violence.

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— Accelerate revisions to the Victims' Rights Directive to address existing gaps in protection and support for victims. Integrate a gender and intersectional perspective into these revisions, acknowledging the increased vulnerability of groups of people in disadvantaged situations.

Advance the EU legal framework on anti-discrimination

— Adopt an Anti-discrimination Directive to overcome current gaps in anti-discrimination legislation at EU level. Extend the current list of EU crimes in Article 83(1) Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to include hate crimes and hate speech, as a new area of listed crimes.

Strengthen data collection to tackle violence against women

— In cooperation with EIGE, adapt national data-recording systems for intimate partner violence (IPV) to include data on the sex and age of the victim and perpetrator and the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator. Conduct regular population-based surveys on violence against women at national level using harmonised methodologies, and publish regular reports.
— Adopt common indicators for tracking objectives in relation to Women's human rights (Area I of the BPfA), focusing on the ratification of fundamental human rights laws and treaties and enforcing equality and non-discrimination laws.

Ensure residency rights for survivors of domestic violence in the EU

— Amend the Citizens' Rights Directive (Directive 2004/38/EC) to eliminate the requirement for non-EU citizens to be economically active and to possess health insurance in the host Member State in order to retain residency rights in the event of divorce, the annulment of a marriage or the termination of a registered partnership in cases of domestic violence during the relationship.

Recognise femicide as a distinct offence from homicide

— Recognise femicide as a criminal offence separate from homicide in national penal codes. Consider orphaned children and the parents and siblings of murdered women as victims.

Establish a consent-based framework for rape and ensure specialised support services

— Adopt a consent-based definition of rape to combat underreporting and the inadequate prosecution of rape. Swiftly implement the provisions of the Directive on combating violence against women with regard to education about consent. Promote awareness-raising campaigns and programmes that aim to deconstruct stereotypes which reinforce unequal gender and power dynamics, as well as promoting the role of consent in sexual relationships.
— Increase the availability and accessibility of specialised services to respond to rape and sexual violence. Strengthen referral mechanisms by training professionals, particularly those in healthcare, psychosocial services and law enforcement. Increase funding for support services that address the needs of victims in vulnerable situations. Strengthen reporting mechanisms and adopt mandatory reporting by law enforcement, healthcare and social services of incidents of violence against women.
— Address persistent gender stereotypes and bias in justice systems to improve victims' access to justice. Provide gender-sensitive training, work-life balance measures and professional development for women in professions related to the judicial system.
— Develop practical guidelines to standardise comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) curricula across the Member States. Ensure these guidelines cover topics such as gender-based violence, consent, gender stereotypes and unequal power dynamics. Adopt CSE

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training as part of teacher education programmes. Engage NGOs working on gender equality in implementing evidence-based education programmes.

Address economic violence and psychological violence as critical forms of violence

— Recognise economic violence and psychological violence as separate offences or as aggravating circumstances in cases of domestic violence or intimate partner violence. Align definitions of these offences in national frameworks with the Istanbul Convention.

Strengthen the response to and awareness of gender-based cyber violence

— Enforce the Digital Services Act (DSA) and adopt a unified approach to cyber violence by harmonising definitions and collecting comparable data. Monitor compliance with DSA and EU Directive on combatting violence against women and domestic violence and ensure that digital providers and platforms have effective mechanisms for reporting complaints and follow-up, removal of harmful content, informing on support services for victims of cyber violence. Incentisise platforms to set up and adhere to the Code of Conduct on combatting gender-based cyber violence. Strengthen digital literacy programmes and initiatives for reporting online violence. Address the psychological impacts of cyber violence on both young girls and boys.

Improve the legal framework on forced marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM)

— Criminalise forced marriage and FGM to implement the provisions of the EU Directive on violence against women and domestic violence. Recognise the risk of FGM as a ground for asylum and enact corresponding legislation to guarantee gender-sensitive asylum procedures.

Eliminate gender stereotypes and gender-based violence in education

— Set national standards to ensure educational materials promote gender equality and dismantle gender stereotypes. Promote comprehensive sexuality education, including knowledge about consent in interpersonal relationships, as a key preventive measure against violence against women and domestic violence. Review curricula and teaching content to ensure its inclusivity and provide publishers with guidelines on eliminating gender bias in educational materials. Invest in the professional development of educators to better combat gender stereotypes throughout childhood education, vocational education and training, on-the-job training and adult education, as well as formal and non-formal learning educational pathways.

— Address all forms of gender-based violence in education. Establish policies aimed at preventing, recognising and responding to gender-based violence in educational settings. Implement mandatory training programmes for all members of the education community, as well as safe infrastructure, confidential reporting mechanisms and disciplinary actions. Engage NGOs working on gender equality in implementing evidence-based prevention programmes.

— Implement gender-sensitive indicators in the monitoring of education and training. In collaboration with national education ministries, promote and rely on both quantitative and qualitative research on how social norms affect the educational performance of women, men, girls and boys. Rely on such data to inform policies on tackling gender stereotypes.

Address misogynistic attitudes among men and boys

— Counter rising anti-democratic values among boys and young men concerning gender equality and women’s rights by promoting gender equality education in schools, strengthening critical media literacy, countering misinformation and challenging gender stereotypes.

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— Cooperate with CSOs to support a bottom-up approach to awareness-raising initiatives. Engage companies, sports organisations, media organisations and other organisations in tackling misogyny across all life spheres.

4) Fostering parity democracy, accountability and gender-responsive institutions

Enhance the status of gender equality and gender mainstreaming in EU governance and policymaking processes

— Appoint a Commissioner for Equality with a well-funded and resourced administrative structure to uphold the ambitions outlined in the EU Treaties, gender equality legislation and the 'Union of Equality' strategies.
— Develop a new EU Gender Equality Strategy post-2025 with clear targets, monitoring mechanisms and dedicated resources.
— Strengthen the coordination and accountability of EU institutional mechanisms to advance gender equality and gender mainstreaming. Produce, publish and regularly monitor Gender Mainstreaming Action Plans in all DGs.
— Incorporate ex-ante gender impact assessment and gender analysis throughout the policymaking process, making these findings publicly available to inform policies. In line with the Better Regulation Agenda, adopt a gender perspective, taking into account intersectional aspects, across all policy areas. Include gender-responsive requirements in future revisions of the Public Procurement Directive[63].
— Adopt a comprehensive gender budgeting approach in the EU budget. Propose for the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2028-2035 mandatory gender mainstreaming and budgeting across all programmes, including *ex-ante* and *ex-post* gender impact assessments as well as gender equality objectives and indicators.
— Keep gender equality in the agenda of discussions on changing (geo)political context and EU's priorities, such as security and competitiveness. Ensure continuation of funding for gender equality and combatting gender-based violence and gender mainstreaming in security and competitiveness policies.
— Strengthen gender perspective in the implementation and monitoring of the Recovery and Resilience Facility national plans.
— Establish a dedicated Council formation of ministers responsible for gender equality and convene meetings regularly. Strengthen the Council's institutional mechanisms for gender mainstreaming, including by establishing an internal gender mainstreaming network at the General Secretariat of the Council.

Reinforce democratic principles to safeguard gender equality and address violence against women politicians as well as women's human rights organisations and activists

— Collaborate over the monitoring of democratic backsliding and reinforce democratic principles, ensuring that gender equality remains a priority across the EU. Counter disinformation regarding gender equality and women's rights through EU efforts to protect democracies, such as the expected European Democracy Shield.
— Ensure that electoral bodies monitor instances of violence against women. Provide gender-sensitive training to electoral stakeholders and improve access to funding for women candidates.
— Address online violence against women politicians, journalists and human rights defenders. Update national legal frameworks to define types of violence and describe investigation, punishment and reparation processes. Create synergies with platforms to promote

[63] Directive - 2014/24 - EN - EUR-Lex

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transparency and accountability in preventing and responding to online attacks against women, working together to remove opacity policies that could obstruct investigations.

— Safeguard the operating spaces of activists and CSOs. Ensure a safe environment for activists and civil society by strengthening their protection against online and physical violence and harassment. Ensure that the successor to the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme provides increased EU funding for gender equality organisations.
— Engage in meaningful and systematic consultations with civil society organisations working on gender equality, human rights, equality and women's rights to ensure the involvement of these bodies at all stages of policymaking.
— Enhance the FEMM Committee's status and influence in legislative and policy processes, particularly on economic policies. Reinforce gender-equal democracy at EU level through proposed amendments to the statutes and funding of European political parties and their governing bodies and foundations.

Promote gender balance in decision-making and leadership

— Enforce legislative gender quotas for all elections on the basis of parity. Adopt gender quotas for all elections, mandating a minimum 50/50 share of women and men among candidates. Apply sanctions on political parties for non-compliance. Expedite the proposed revisions to the European Parliament's regulations to enhance gender equality. Revise national parliaments' internal policies to ensure they are gender-sensitive and inclusive and to strengthen gender mainstreaming within parliamentary practices.
— Ensure the transposition and implementation of the Directive on improving gender balance among the directors of listed companies. At national level, apply penalties on companies for non-compliance. Involve independent equality bodies in monitoring compliance by companies and reporting annually on progress. Adopt measures aimed at gender auditing and public reporting on gender representation and pay in SMEs.
— Ensure the equal representation of women and men in national central banks, European financial institutions and other decision-making spheres.
— Collect data disaggregated by sex, age, race, ethnicity, disability status and sexual orientation within legal constraints in order to better understand how diverse groups are represented in decision-making. To overcome legal and ethical challenges to data collection, create legal exceptions that cover monitoring and public reporting while maintaining the anonymity of respondents.

Strengthen institutional mechanisms for gender equality and gender mainstreaming

— Reinforce national governmental gender equality bodies, with a sole focus on promoting gender equality and gender mainstreaming in policymaking and in line with the EU commitment to the dual approach. Make their mandate distinct from other non-discrimination grounds. Strengthen their resources and locate their powers at the highest level within the governmental structure, preferably as a ministry, to highlight its importance. Transpose the Directives on Standards for Equality Bodies. At EU level, create common indicators on the functioning of equality bodies through collaboration between the Commission, EIGE, FRA and Equinet.
— Increase the use of gender mainstreaming structures, methods and tools. Make gender mainstreaming a mandatory practice. Strengthen the use of gender analysis, *ex-ante* gender impact assessments, gender-responsive evaluations and gender budgeting across all levels of government and in all policy areas. Establish gender mainstreaming structures by, for example, creating focal points in all ministries and a cross-ministry coordination body.

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— Adopt national gender equality strategies with accompanying action plans that outline concrete measures, accountability mechanisms and adequate financial resources to support implementation.
— Collect and disseminate statistics on gender and intersecting inequalities. Regularly produce and disseminate gender equality reports, incorporating an intersectional perspective. Publish comprehensive gender statistics on the websites of national statistical offices.

5) Shaping a digital transformation that promotes gender equality

Guarantee equitable access to digital skills and employment pathways

— Ensure inclusive access to digital education at all stages of life, addressing the specific barriers faced by women and other people in disadvantaged situations, including the risks of deskilling and skills mismatch. Integrate a gender-sensitive, intersectional approach within the 'Union of Skills' to ensure all groups benefit from digital opportunities, from education to professional advancement. Create frameworks to regularly monitor and evaluate the gendered impacts of digitalisation on job structures and employment practices and their effects on different groups of people.
— Ensure employment opportunities for women in professions related to the digital transition. Promote targeted training and mentoring programmes for women who have limited experience in ICT and digital skills. Ensure access to these programmes for people with caregiving duties and those with limited internet access.
— Increase the attention paid to psychosocial risks and gender impacts in traditional and remote working environments – for example, in the context of labour inspectorates. Ensure a comprehensive approach to workplace safety and gender equality, including protections for employees and self-employed individuals.

Enhance gender equality policies and fair working conditions for women in media and digital companies

— Promote policies to improve working conditions and the health and safety of women in the media, digital, and creative industries. Extend labour protections to freelancers and those in non-traditional employment. Ensure fair and equitable working conditions in media and digital companies. Address care and gender pay gaps through comprehensive social security, and implement safeguards against discrimination, harassment and cyber violence.
— Foster partnerships between media and digital organisations and unions to strengthen national, regional and international regulatory mechanisms. Adopt quotas or targets for women's representation on media boards and leadership roles.

Promote women's leadership and entrepreneurship in high-tech sectors

— Support women in STEM career fields through initiatives such as mentoring and entrepreneurship, as well as leadership programmes, to drive innovation and foster inclusive growth. Promote the training, recruitment and retention of women in the professions of the next wave of frontier technologies and cutting-edge science, in particular AI innovation, supercomputing, semiconductors, the Internet of Things, genomics, quantum computing, space tech and biotechnology, among others.
— Establish dedicated funding mechanisms and incentives for women entrepreneurs in high-tech sectors, such as grants, low-interest loans and venture capital funds, while promoting financial literacy and investment readiness through targeted training to equip women with the skills needed to access and secure financing.

Embed gender equality into EU digital and AI strategies and initiatives

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— Integrate gender equality considerations into EU digital strategies and regulations to address gender biases in algorithms and promote the equitable representation of women on digital media platforms in terms of both content creation and decision-making roles. Establish enforceable measures and impose penalties for non-compliance instead of relying on self-regulation by stakeholders in the media.
— Introduce mandatory gender equality impact assessment as a part of Fundamental Rights Impact Assessment under the AI Act framework to identify and mitigate potential adverse effects of AI tools on women and men. Include third-party audits to detect and correct algorithmic biases in hiring, retention and advancement practices.
— Explore the potential of AI to enhance the diversity and accessibility of media content – for example, by using deep learning to detect gender-based violence and online harassment or using speech recognition and automated captioning innovations to make media more accessible to persons with disabilities. Incorporate advanced technologies and AI to improve diagnostic accuracy.

Strengthen social media regulations to protect women and girls from cyber violence

— Cooperate with social media platforms to introduce e-safety regulations to protect women and girls from cyber violence and harassment on social media, including the development of reporting mechanisms, penalties, harmful content removal and preventive measures. Promote the commitment of platforms to Code of conduct on combatting gender-based cyber violence.
— Introduce regulatory measures to promote non-stereotypical portrayals of women and men. Monitor performance at national level, enforcing compliance and imposing penalties. To support those measures, develop media literacy programmes and training for journalists and media professionals on gender-sensitive content.

Support research and data collection on gender equality and intersecting inequalities in digitalisation

— Invest in research that tracks gender equality in media and digital industries by collecting sex-disaggregated data, including with intersectional perspective. Involve national statistical agencies, academia and research centres as well as media and digital companies in measuring access to gender-sensitive digital learning programmes; monitoring women's employment in ICT, STEM and emerging digital fields; evaluating AI biases in relation to workforce management; tracking working conditions in the media and digital sectors; and assessing stereotypical portrayals in the media.

6) Advancing a socially fair green transition that leaves no woman or girl behind

Integrate gender and intersectional perspectives in EU climate strategies and initiatives

— Embed gender-specific objectives and targets, taking into account an intersectional lens, within the European Green Deal and related EU climate initiatives. Address gaps in the circular economy with regard to vital industries such as the power and utilities sector, by mandating the use of gender mainstreaming methods and tools. Facilitate the sharing of good practices among the Member States, support capacity-building initiatives, and promote gender considerations within climate finance mechanisms.
— Strengthen the gender perspective in National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs). Enhance the assessment of NECPs by adopting gender-responsive frameworks in the evaluation process.

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— Adopt gender-sensitive public health strategies, including the implementation of housing interventions that enhance energy efficiency and counteract energy poverty to better address the health impacts of climate change.
— Strengthen gender equality considerations in EU agricultural and food security policies and funding and ensure women farmers have equitable access to resources and opportunities. Include more robust requirements for Member States to tackle gender inequalities in agriculture and address discriminatory gender norms that impact food security and nutrition.
— Actively incorporate a gender perspective into climate adaptation, mitigation and disaster risk reduction (DRR) strategies, and adhere to the EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement. Involve women, especially those from groups in disadvantaged situations, in the planning and implementation of DRR and climate adaptation initiatives.

Promote gender equality in environmental decision-making and sustainability efforts

— Ensure the equal representation of women in environmental decision-making at all levels, including in national and international forums. Promote gender-responsive training programmes to ensure the equitable access of women to jobs and leadership positions in green, transport and sustainable energy sectors.
— Consult with women's organisations and invest in initiatives that recognise women's environmental efforts. Encourage women and girls, men and boys to participate equally in sustainability initiatives.

Recognise the vital role of the care sector in advancing the green transition

— Prioritise policies that explicitly include care work in green job policies and sustainable caregiving practices. This involves targeted investment and incentives for green caregiving practices, as well as research to broaden knowledge on the role of unpaid and paid care work in the green transition.

Address data gaps to inform gender-responsive environmental policies

— Establish frameworks to regularly assess the gendered impacts of environmental policies, energy poverty and transport poverty. Prioritise the collection of up-to-date, intersectional data disaggregated by sex, age, ethnicity, disability and socio-economic status. Address significant data gaps, such as the impact of climate change on women's health, gender-based violence and employment opportunities in strategic sectors of the green transition, such as the energy and transport sectors, to develop robust, gender-responsive environmental policies. Develop clear guidelines for data collection and implementation.
— Develop new indicators to track progress, in line with the BPfA, regarding the integration of a gender perspective into policies and programmes for sustainable development and the establishment of mechanisms to assess the impact on women of development and environmental policies.

7) Achieving peaceful and inclusive societies and advancing gender equality across the world

Integrate a feminist approach into security frameworks

— Integrate a feminist approach that aligns with the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, to protect women's rights in EU security policies. Conduct gender impact assessments on security policies to mitigate gender-based risks. Evaluate the implementation of the EU's WPS Action Plan and ensure that future policies incorporate gender and intersectional perspectives. Support Member States in developing national action plans and promote a feminist approach to foreign and security policy, particularly in areas such as AI, cybersecurity, climate security, and counter terrorism and radicalisation.

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— Improve data collection in order to grasp the scale and impact of security threats against women. Invest urgently in further research and in collecting data disaggregated by sex to better understand the gender-specific and intersecting vulnerabilities that emerge from new security concerns.
— Increase the representation of women in high-profile roles, including defence ministers, senior military positions and parliamentary security and defence committees. Consider gender quotas for top executive positions in security and defence agencies. Address exclusionary practices, provide regular gender equality training for the armed forces, and enforce a policy of zero tolerance towards sexual harassment and abuse.

Adopt gender-responsive approaches to increasing migratory pressures

— Revise the New Pact on Migration and Asylum to prevent increased violence against refugees and asylum seekers, especially women and children. Avoid border securitisation policies and the externalisation of asylum processes that exacerbate the vulnerability of refugee women.
— Extend the Temporary Protection Directive to protect women and girls fleeing Ukraine until the Russian war of aggression ends and provide similar protection to women and girls fleeing other conflict zones. Adopt adequate reception conditions to prevent gender-based violence, especially sexual violence, against women and girl asylum seekers.

Strengthen commitments to gender equality in External Action and EU enlargement

— Fulfil the commitments of the Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in External Action 2021-2027 (GAP III) and strengthen the adoption of a gender perspective in EU humanitarian actions. Allocate more funding to gender-related actions and programmes in which gender equality is a key component.
— Adopt a post-2027 GAP IV building on the successes of GAP III with strong support to gender-transformative approach and even more ambitious objectives, especially scaling up support to SRHR and women's rights through earmarked funding and monitoring tools.
— Support EU candidate countries in complying with the EU gender equality framework. This includes newly adopted legislation such as the EU Directive on violence against women and domestic violence. Assert the EU's leading role in multilateral negotiations to reform the international order through the protection of women's rights and gender mainstreaming.

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Directive (EU) 2023/970 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 May 2023 to Strengthen the Application of the Principle of Equal Pay for Equal Work or Work of Equal Value between Men and Women through Pay Transparency and Enforcement Mechanisms (Text with EEA Relevance), OJ L 132, 17.5.2023, p. 21–44, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2023/970/oj/eng

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Regulation (EU) 2021/522 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 March 2021 Establishing a Programme for the Union's Action in the Field of Health ('EU4Health Programme') for the Period 2021-2027 and Repealing Regulation (EU) No 282/2014 (Text with EEA Relevance), 107 Regulation (EU) 2021/522, OJ L 107, 26.3.2021, p. 1–29, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/522/oj/eng

Regulation (EU) 2021/1057 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 Establishing the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and Repealing Regulation (EU) No 1296/2013, OJ L 231, 30.6.2021, p. 21–59, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/1057/oj/eng

Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 Laying down Common Provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and Financial Rules for Those and for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy, OJ L 231, 30.6.2021, p. 159–706, ELI: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32021R1060

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. 1–17, ELI: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32021R1119

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Regulation (EU) 2022/641 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 12 April 2022 amending Regulation (EU) No 536/2014 as regards a derogation from certain obligations concerning investigational medicinal products made available in the United Kingdom in respect of Northern Ireland and in Cyprus, Ireland and Malta, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32022R0641

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Regulation (EU) 2024/1689 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 laying down harmonised rules on artificial intelligence and amending Regulations (EC) No 300/2008, (EU) No 167/2013, (EU) No 168/2013, (EU) 2018/858, (EU) 2018/1139 and (EU) 2019/2144 and Directives 2014/90/EU, (EU) 2016/797 and (EU) 2020/1828 (Artificial Intelligence Act), OJ L, 2024/1689, 12.7.2024, ELI: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1689/oj

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Annex 1. Beijing Platform objectives and targets for the Sustainable Development Goals

SDG 5 on 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls' cuts across all BPfA areas.

Table A1. Beijing Platform objectives and Sustainable Development Goals' Targets

RELEVANT THEME IN THE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	BPFA CRITICAL AREAS COVERED	SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS
1) Thriving in a gender-equal and inclusive economy	A, B, F, G, J, K	Goal 1) End poverty in all its forms everywhere. Goal 4) Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Goal 8) Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. Goal 9) Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation. Goal 10) Reduce inequality within and among countries.
2) Providing gender-responsive social protection and services	A, B, C, D, F, H, I, K, L	Goal 1) End poverty in all its forms everywhere. Goal 2) End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture. Goal 3) Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages. Goal 4) Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Goal 6) Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. Goal 7) Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all. Goal 8) Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. Goal 9) Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation. Goal 10) Reduce inequality within and among countries. Goal 11) Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. Goal 12) Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns. Goal 13) Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. Goal 15) Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss. Goal 17) Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.
3) Eradicating gender-based violence, stigma and stereotypes	B, C, D, I, J, L	Goal 2) End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture. Goal 3) Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages. Goal 4) Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Goal 6) Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

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		Goal 16) Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.
4) Fostering parity democracy, accountability and gender-responsive institutions	G, H, I, J	Goal 17) Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development.
5) Shaping a digital transformation that promotes gender equality	B, C, D, F, J	Goal 1) End poverty in all its forms everywhere. Goal 4) Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Goal 8) Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. Goal 9) Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation. Goal 10) Reduce inequality within and among countries.
6) Advancing a socially fair green transition that leaves no woman or girl behind	A, B, F, K, L	Goal 1) End poverty in all its forms everywhere. Goal 4) Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Goal 7) Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all. Goal 8) Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. Goal 10) Reduce inequality within and among countries. Goal 11) Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. Goal 13) Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.
7) Achieving peaceful and inclusive societies and advancing gender equality across the world	E, I	Goal 3) Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages. Goal 4) Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Goal 11) Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. Goal 16) Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

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Annex 2. Methodology for tracking gender equality mainstreaming in the EU budget

Table A2. Assessment criteria for the attribution of scores in the gender tracking methodology

The methodology applies one of the following scores to interventions at the most granular level possible, based on the following assessment criteria:

Stage of assessment	Score 0	Score 0*	Score 1	Score 2
***Ex-ante* assessment based on the intervention's design**	The intervention does not target gender equality.	A gender analysis has yet to be conducted. It is likely, but not yet clear that the intervention can have an impact on gender equality.	A gender analysis of the intervention has been conducted. The findings from this analysis have informed the design of the intervention, and gender equality aspects have been reflected in the adopted legal acts and/or in the performance framework of the intervention.	
***Ex-ante* assessment based on the intervention's programming**		In the programming phase, the intervention may reinforce its gender equality perspective, *inter alia*, by planning gender equality conducive actions or issuing guidance to reinforce the promotion of gender equality by managing authorities.	A firm commitment towards gender equality undertaken in the design of the intervention is now reflected in the intervention's programming: a gender equality perspective is integrated, for instance, in the annual work programme executed under direct management through provisions included in grants and procurement procedures.	The top-level ambition of the intervention is to advance gender equality, which is reflected in its programming.
***Ex-post* assessment based on the intervention's implementation**	Assess whether evidence from the implementation of the intervention confirms its non-relevance to gender equality.	In the implementation phase, the intervention is reassigned to other scores (0, 1 or 2), as soon as the gender equality perspective can be sufficiently assessed and supported by quantitative and/or qualitative analysis.	The intervention has positive effects *ex-post*, proven by quantitative and/or qualitative analysis. Commitment to monitoring and reporting on the gender equality results achieved by the intervention in the evaluation phase	

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Source: European Commission. (2022). Draft general budget of the European Union 2023 – 'Working Document Part I'. Retrieved from https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2022-06/wd_i_final_web_v2_kva022003enn.pdf

This methodology above tracks[64] contributions to gender equality at two stages: *ex-ante,* based on policy design and programming (including the legal framework) and *ex-post,* based on the ongoing assessment of the implementation of the interventions (European Commission, 2022g). Each DG performs its calculation, and DG BUDG reviews the consistency of all inputs. The Task Force on Equality also collaborates in the assessment (European Commission, 2022g; European Court of Auditors, 2022).

The methodology does not include coefficients to weigh the contribution of interventions towards gender equality. In other words, the Commission only commits to report on full financial envelopes under each score.

[64] 'Expenditure tracking' is a system to measure the contributions made by different EU spending programmes to an overarching policy priority. It requires a detailed understanding of how specific actions contribute to a given policy priority. These actions need to be identified in a way that allows the related financial resources to be counted and then aggregated at the level of the entire EU budget to monitor progress (European Commission, 2021f).

Annex 3. Gender equality and gender mainstreaming in the 'Union of Equality' strategies

Table A3. 'Union of Equality' strategies and other related strategies since 2019

EU Youth Strategy (2019-2027)	Aims to promote gender-sensitive approaches, eliminate gender stereotypes and discrimination, end gender-based violence, and ensure equality rights in education, the labour market and the media. One of the goals outlined in European Youth Goals focuses on 'Equality for all genders', addressing the unique challenges faced by young women and non-binary and LGBTIQ youth.
EU Anti-Racism Action Plan (2020-2025)	Aims to address the heightened risks faced by women, particularly with regard to the misclassifying of minority women by AI-based facial recognition. It emphasises the need for an intersectional approach to combat various forms of racism, including anti-black racism, anti-gypsyism, antisemitism, anti-Asian racism, and anti-Muslim hatred. The Plan commits to working with Member States to gather intersectional data on gender, racial or ethnic origin and religion.
Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion (2021-2027)	Emphasises gender mainstreaming in efforts by the EU and Member States, recognising that migrant women and girls face unique obstacles, including care responsibilities, which hinder their labour market and educational participation. The Plan aims to enhance the participation of migrant women in the labour market, as well as supporting entrepreneurship under the InvestEU programme, and improving awareness and anti-discrimination measures in recruitment. It also commits to addressing health challenges such as access to prenatal and post-natal care.
Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation (2020-2030)	Raises awareness about discrimination against Roma women and promotes the revision of national Roma platforms to include Roma women. Sets a target of 45 % paid employment for Roma women by 2030 and establishes a sex-disaggregated health goal to increase life expectancy for Roma women and men by five years by 2030. Also provides a framework for Member States to create national plans with gender-responsive measures for Roma women.
LGBTIQ Equality Strategy (2020-2025)	Acknowledges the various inequalities faced by LGBTIQ individuals and stresses the importance of an intersectional approach, aligning with the EU Gender Equality Strategy. It specifically addresses the challenges encountered by LGBTIQ women and girls, including gender-based violence and harmful practices such as forced abortion and sterilisation.
Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2021-2030)	Highlights challenges for women with disabilities, including a higher risk of violence and unequal access to healthcare, and encourages Member States to develop inclusive entrepreneurship policies for target groups, including women with disabilities. The Commission commits to improving access to justice and legal protection for women with disabilities.
EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child (2021-2024)	Highlights the limitations imposed by gender stereotypes on children's aspirations, in particular hindering girls' participation in STEM fields. It urges Member States to dismantle these stereotypes and commits to combating violence against children, including gender-based violence, by tackling harmful practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage and cyberbullying. The Strategy emphasises the importance of age and gender-appropriate reporting and support services.
EU Strategy on Combating Antisemitism and Fostering Jewish Life (2021-2030)	Aims to address the rising antisemitism in Europe by reinforcing efforts to prevent hate, protect Jewish communities, and promote Holocaust education and remembrance.

Source: elaborated by the authors, based on the texts of Strategies and Action Plans from the Publications Office of the European Union.

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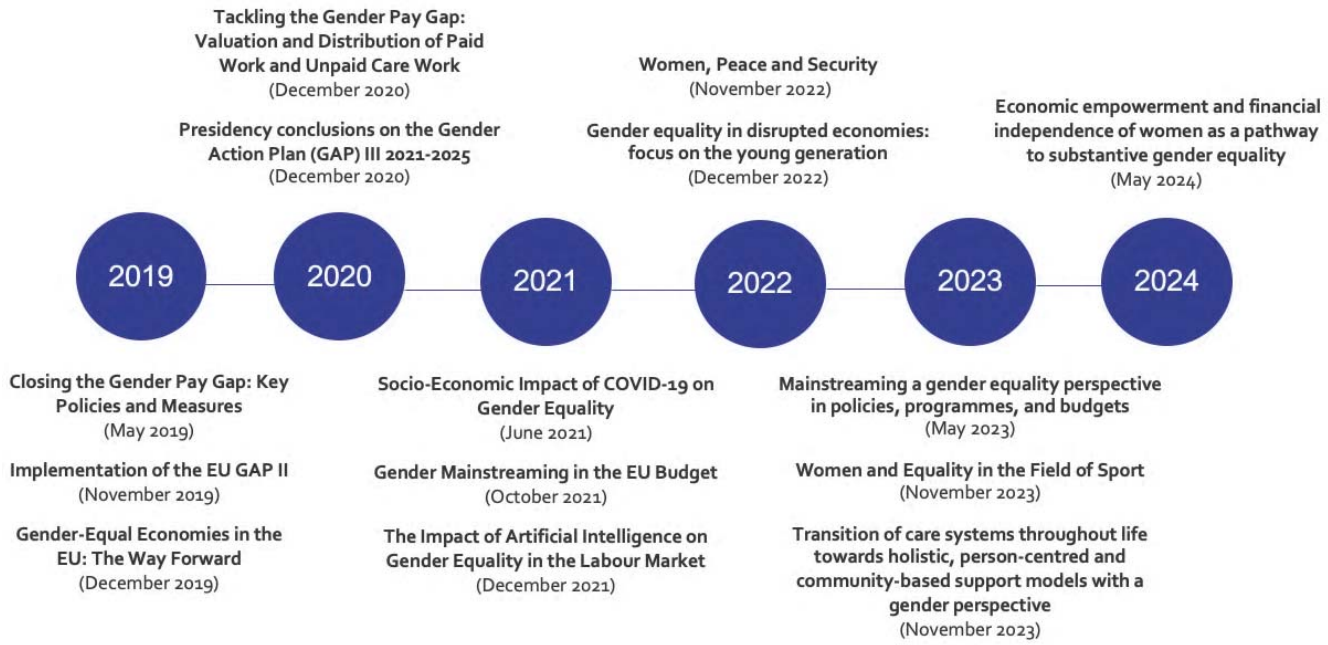
Annex 4. Additional supporting tables

Figure A1. Council conclusions in the area of gender equality (2019-2023)



Source: elaborated by the authors, based on the Council of the EU and the European Council's document register, available at https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/documents-publications/

Table A4. Legislative quotas in Member States applied to the single/lower house of parliament (2023)

Member State	Required % of under-represented gender	Provisions	First use
BE	50	On electoral lists, the difference between the number of candidates of each sex should not be more than 1. This also applies to the list of alternates. The top two candidates on an electoral list must be of different sexes.	2002
IE	40 (previously set at 30)	The minimum representation of candidates of each sex in general elections should be 40 %.	2012
EL	40 (previously set at 33)	Lists of candidates should contain at least 40 % of each sex.	2008
ES	40	Lists of candidates should contain at least 40 % of each sex.	2007
FR	50	The difference between the number of candidates of each sex that a party or group of parties presents for a single-member constituency election cannot be greater than 2 %.	2000
HR	40	When submitting lists of candidates for the election of representatives to the European Parliament, the Croatian Parliament, as well as local and regional elections, political parties and other authorised entities are obliged to establish gender-balanced election lists in cases where candidates of one gender are underrepresented.	2008
IT	40	On electoral lists for both the Parliament and the Senate, candidates must be listed alternately by gender. Neither sex can account for more than 60 % of candidates on each list.	2017

LU	40	National legislation on funding for political parties requires a 40 % quota for the under-represented sex on all electoral lists.	2023
PL	35	The share of women and men among candidates cannot be less than 35 % on electoral lists for elections to the national parliament.	2011
PT	40 (previously set at 33)	Candidate lists for elections to the National Assembly must be composed in such a way as to promote a minimum representation of 40 % of each sex. On electoral lists, candidates must be listed alternately by sex.	2006
SI	35	Neither sex can represent less than 35 % of candidate lists for parliamentary elections. Every second candidate in the first half of the candidate list must be a woman.	2006

Source: EIGE (2024). Gender balance in politics: November 2023. Luxembourg: European Union Publications Office. Retrieved from https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/publications/gender-balance-politics-november-2023

Table A5. Quotas in place in Member States to promote gender balance in corporate boardrooms (2023)

Year	Member State	Quota	Companies covered
2011	BE	33 %	State-owned and listed
	FR	40 %*	Listed and large non-listed
	IT	40 %	State-owned and listed
2015	DE	30 %*	Listed and large non-listed
2017	AT	30 %	State-owned, listed and large
	PT	33 %	Public and listed private
2020	EL	25 %	Listed
2022	NL	33 %*	Listed

Source: EIGE (2024). Gender balance in business and finance. Retrieved from https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/publications/gender-balance-business-and-finance?language_content_entity=en

Note: *Specific provisions for executive/management positions.

Table A6. Overview of support and protection services for victims of violence against women in the EU (2022)

National helplines	In 2022, 23 Member States had national women's helplines. Four Member States (BE, LV, MT and NL) had yet to provide a national helpline.
Women's shelters	In 2022, there were 1,616 women-only shelters across the EU, out of 2,232 shelters accessible to women. Although there had been an increase since 2021 (WAVE, 2021), 20 Member States were still failing to meet the Istanbul Convention standards, with an average of 39 % of beds missing.
Women's centres	In 2022, there were 2,995 women's centres across the EU, showing a significant increase since 2021 (WAVE, 2021, 2023). However, this rise should be treated with caution, as may be partially attributed to differences in data availability and the methodology used for data collection, and does not necessarily reflect an increase in levels of provision. In the Member States, on average, there is one centre per 76,257 women, which falls short of the Istanbul Convention's recommended level of one women's centre per 50,000 women. Specialist support services (e.g. for survivors of forced marriage, FGM and human trafficking) remain scarce.
Rape crisis centres	Specialised sexualised violence services are available in 18 Member States, but no Member State yet complies with the Istanbul Convention's recommended minimum standard of one centre for every 200,000 inhabitants. 82 % of the necessary services are missing in Member States.

Source: Women Against Violence Europe (WAVE, 2023), genvio_ser_avail__wave_helpl, genvio_ser_qual__wave_shelters_icstand and genvio_ser_avail__wave_beds_shelters

Annex 5. EIGE's data collection on Institutional mechanisms for gender equality and gender mainstreaming (Area H)

This annex details the approach and methodology used in EIGE's 2024 data collection on institutional mechanisms for the promotion of gender equality and gender mainstreaming. Figure 1 presents key definitions.

Key definitions

Institutional mechanisms for gender equality and gender mainstreaming are bodies and processes that serve to promote, advocate and support gender equality and the mainstreaming of gender issues across all policy areas (EIGE, 2023m). For monitoring purposes, 'bodies' refers to gender equality bodies convened at the national level only. These are split into two types (EIGE, 2023m).

- Governmental gender equality bodies are bodies within government whose purpose is to design, coordinate and implement government policies for gender equality. Such bodies are normally located within ministerial structures but can also be government agencies (EIGE, 2023m).
- Independent gender equality bodies are bodies outside government that are mandated to support the equal treatment of all persons without discrimination on the grounds of sex, sometimes as part of a wider equalities remit (EIGE, 2023m).

The Council of the European Union has endorsed a set of indicators to monitor the implementation of Area H of the BPfA in the EU Member States[65]:

- H1 Status of commitment to the promotion of gender equality;
- H2a Personnel resources of the governmental gender equality body;
- H2b Personnel resources of the designated body or bodies for the promotion of equal treatment of women and men;
- H3 Gender mainstreaming;
- H4 Production and dissemination of statistics disaggregated by sex.

EIGE's role in monitoring progress

EIGE plays a crucial role in monitoring and refining the indicators related to Area H of the BPfA. The 2024 data collection marks the fourth data collection exercise conducted by EIGE to assess the status of institutional mechanisms for gender equality and gender mainstreaming in each Member State (EIGE, 2025b).

EIGE slightly adapts the indicators used in data collections to align with key policy and legislative developments at both the EU and international levels. These adaptations are based on data validation, quality assurance processes and stakeholders' feedback from each data collection. The result is a robust framework with effective and relevant indicators for tracking and assessing progress (see Figure A2 below).

Figure A2. Indicators for monitoring institutional mechanisms for the promotion of gender equality and gender mainstreaming, 2024

[65] The first set of indicators (H1 to H3) was adopted in 2006 and supplemented with indicator H4 in 2013.

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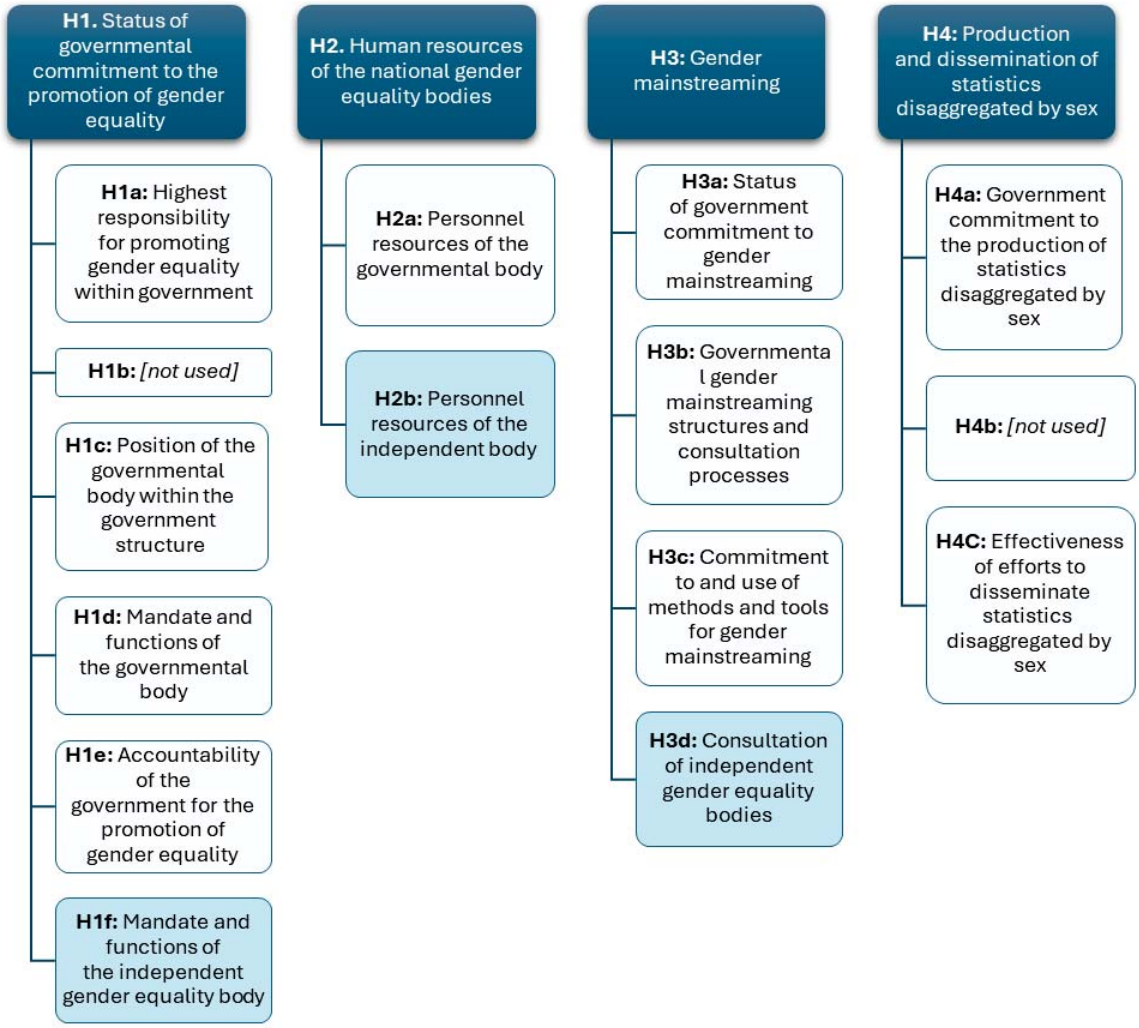

Note: Shaded boxes (H1f, H2b and H3d) represent data collected for independent equality bodies. Data are available EIGE's Gender Statistics Database.

EIGE's data collection on institutional mechanisms relies on information compiled by nominated representatives of national authorities, each supported by a national researcher with expertise in the area of gender equality. The data provided is subject to a comprehensive quality assurance process to ensure that the information for each country is relevant and reliable, and adheres to common guidelines to facilitate statistical comparison.

Measurement framework

This sub-section describes the measurement framework applied for the collection of data on institutional mechanisms in 2024 and the subsequent calculation of indicator values at indicator level, except for indicator H2 on Human resources where respective sub-indicators are also presented.

Overview

The measurement framework for monitoring institutional mechanisms comprises four main indicators (H1 to H4), each with a number of sub-indicators. Each of the four indicators is calculated as the sum of its sub-indicator scores, resulting in different maximum values for each. For overall scoring, each indicator is given equal weight. Each indicator is scored as a percentage of its maximum value, and then the average of these percentages is taken.

Indicator H1: Status of governmental commitment in promoting gender equality

The same list of sub-indicators under indicator H1 used for the 2021 data collection was used for the 2024 data collection. The sub-indicators are as follows:

- a highest responsibility for promoting gender equality at the governmental level (maximum 2);
- b permanence of the governmental body [not used]
- c position of the governmental gender equality body within the government structure (maximum 2);
- d mandate and functions of the governmental gender equality body (maximum 3);
- e accountability of the government for the promotion of gender equality (maximum 5);
- f mandate and functions of the independent gender equality body (maximum 3).

In the current measurement framework, H1 has a maximum score of 15.

Indicator H2: Human resources of the national gender equality bodies

The same list of sub-indicators under indicator H2 used for the 2021 data collection was used for the 2024 data collection. The sub-indicators are as follows:

- a Personnel resources of governmental gender equality bodies (maximum 2);
- b Personnel resources of independent equality bodies (maximum 2)

Therefore, in the current measurement framework, H2 has a maximum score of 4 points.

No changes were made to the scoring model since the 2021 data collection. Further information on the scoring for these indicators is described below.

Indicator H2a: Personnel resources of governmental gender equality bodies

Scoring of the data on personnel resources

Data on the total number of employees of governmental gender equality bodies are collected in question 5 (Q5). In the case of equality bodies with a wider remit, question 6 (Q6) also collects data on the proportion of the time that the total employees reported in Q5 work on gender equality issues. The data are collected as a broad range (0–25 %, 25–50 %, 50–75 %, 75–100 %).

To calculate the total governmental personnel resources allocated to gender equality, the total employees reported under Q5 are (separately for each body) adjusted by the proportion reported under Q6 (always using the upper limit of the range) as per this formula:

(Total staff of governmental gender equality body, Q5) × (Proportion of time spent on gender equality, Q6)

In light of these challenges, the approach taken is to score based on the absolute numbers of personnel reported (as calculated using the formula above). However, for bodies with multiple mandates, it is difficult to estimate the time spent on gender equality, especially when individuals have roles that span multiple grounds rather than separate departments for different grounds. In such cases, using the upper limit of the percentage range may sometimes overestimate the number of people working on gender equality.

Fundamentally, a team of two or three within a unit of a ministry does not have anywhere near the same capacity as a team of 25 or more in a dedicated department or separate agency. This is true irrespective of the size of the population served and the scoring reflects this (see Figure A3).

below).

Figure A3. Indicators for monitoring institutional mechanisms for the promotion of gender equality and gender mainstreaming, 2024

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Question/option		Maximum score
5 6	Combined results of: **5: What is the total number of employees in the governmental body?** **6: If the mandate of the governmental body includes gender equality combined with other non-discrimination areas. Approximately what percentage of time is spent on projects focused on gender equality?**	
	100 or more	2
	25–100	1.5
	10–25	1
	5–10	0.5
	0–5	0
	Don't know	0
Maximum score		**2**

Indicator H2b: Personnel resources of independent equality bodies

The scoring model applied to indicator H2b is the same as for indicator H2a (i.e. based on absolute numbers of personnel). Similar to the issues under sub-indicator H2a, there were instances where no evidence was provided for the data in H2b, making it difficult to verify the figures.

Indicator H3: Gender mainstreaming

The 2024 questionnaire maintains the revised measurement and conceptual framework adopted for the 2021 questionnaire. Therefore, the list of sub-indicators for H3 is as follows:

a. Status of government commitment to gender mainstreaming (maximum 2);

b. Governmental gender mainstreaming structures and consultation processes (maximum 4);

c. Commitment to and use of methods and tools for gender mainstreaming (maximum 6);

d. Consultation of independent gender equality bodies (maximum 2).

The maximum score for H3 is a total of 14 points.

Indicator H4: Production and dissemination of statistics disaggregated by sex

The currently adopted indicator H4 is compiled as the sum of scores for three 'aspects' with an overall maximum score of 6.

In 2021, previous sub-indicators H4a and H4b were merged into a broadened H4a referring to government commitment to the 'production' of statistics (i.e. covering collection and dissemination together). While sub-indicator H4c was expanded to consider not only the methods used to disseminate gender statistics but also the intensity and accessibility of the efforts made.

The revised list of sub-indicators adopted in 2021 data collection and continued in 2024 as follows:

a. Government commitment to the production of statistics disaggregated by sex (maximum 2);

b. Governmental commitment to the dissemination of statistics disaggregated by sex [Not used – incorporated under H4a];

c. Effectiveness of efforts to disseminate statistics disaggregated by sex (maximum 4).

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Annex 6. EIGE's work on harmonising the collection of administrative data at EU level on violence against women

Collecting administrative data on VAW is a requirement of Article 44 of the new Directive on violence against women and domestic violence (Directive (EU) 2024/1385, 2024). EIGE has carried out significant work in this field. Beginning in 2012, EIGE has mapped and analysed administrative data sources, systems and methodologies for data collection on violence against women across all EU Member States, focusing on the police and justice sectors (EIGE, 2016a).

Following this, EIGE has analysed the definitions and terminology used for rape, femicide and intimate partner violence at EU and Member State levels (EIGE, 2016b). Between 2017 and 2018, EIGE conducted a feasibility study and proposed a measurement framework of 13 indicators to be used by police and justice sectors to harmonise administrative data collection (EIGE, 2016b). These 13 indicators (see Table A7) were also developed to allow comparability across the EU and to support Member States in meeting the minimum requirements of the Victims' Rights Directive and the Istanbul Convention (EIGE, 2016b). Four of the indicators refer to specific types of violence against women as established in the Istanbul Convention and the Directive on violence against women (physical, psychological, sexual, economic). Two indicators measure rape and femicide.

Table A7. Overview of EIGE's 13 indicators for measuring intimate

Indicator	Unit of measurement	Sex of the victim	Sex of the perpetrator	Time coverage
Police sector				
Annual number of [female and total] victims of [intimate partner / domestic / any] violence, as recorded by the police	Victims	Female; and total	N/A	Calendar year (12 months)
Annual number of reported offences of [intimate partner / domestic / any] violence against [female and total] victims, as recorded by the police	Offences	Female; and total	N/A	Calendar year (12 months)
Annual number of male perpetrators of [intimate partner / domestic / any] violence against [female and total] victims, as recorded by the police	Perpetrators	Female; and total	Male	Calendar year (12 months)
Annual number of [female and total] victims of [intimate partner / domestic / any] physical violence, as recorded by the police	Victims (however, if victim-level data are not available, Member States can provide data on the number of offences related to physical violence. This must be clarified in the 2c_metadata_ conceptual tab).	Female; and total	N/A	Calendar year (12 months)
Annual number of [female and total] victims of [intimate partner / domestic / any] psychological violence, as recorded by the police	Victims (however, if victim-level data are not available, Member States can provide data on the number of offences related to psychological violence. This must be clarified in the 2c_metadata_ conceptual tab).	Female; and total	N/A	Calendar year (12 months)

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Annual number of [female and total] victims of [intimate partner / domestic / any] sexual violence, as recorded by the police	Victims (however, if victim-level data are not available, Member States can provide data on the number of offences related to sexual violence. This must be clarified in the 2c_metadata_ conceptual tab).	Female; and total	N/A	Calendar year (12 months)
Annual number of [female and total] victims of [intimate partner / domestic / any] economic violence, as recorded by the police	Victims (however, if victim-level data are not available, Member States can provide data on the number of offences related to economic violence. This must be clarified in the 2c_metadata_ conceptual tab).	Female; and total	N/A	Calendar year (12 months)
Annual number of [female and total] victims reporting [intimate partner / domestic / any] rape, as recorded by the police	Victims (however, if victim-level data are not available, Member States can provide data on the number of offences related to rape. This must be clarified in the 2c_metadata_conceptual tab).	Female; and total	N/A	Calendar year (12 months)
Annual number of [female and total] victims of [intimate partner / domestic / any] [femicide/homicide], as recorded by the police	Victims	Female; and total	N/A	Calendar year (12 months)
Justice system				
Annual number of protection orders [applied for and granted] in cases of [intimate partner / domestic / any] violence against [female and total] victims	Protection orders	Female; and total	Male	Calendar year (12 months)
Annual number of male perpetrators prosecuted for [intimate partner / domestic / any] violence against [female and total] victims	Perpetrators	Female; and total	Male	Calendar year (12 months)
Annual number of male perpetrators sentenced for [intimate partner / domestic / any] violence against [female and total] victims	Perpetrators	Female; and total	Male	Calendar year (12 months)
Number of male perpetrators held in prison or with a sanction involving a form of deprivation of liberty for [intimate partner / domestic / any] violence against [female and total] victims	Perpetrators	Female; and total	Male	On 31 December (of each given year (2014-2022).

Source: Adapted from EIGE. (2023). *Methodological Guidance: Administrative data collection on violence against women and domestic violence.* Retrieved from https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/publications/methodological-guidance-administrative-data-collection-violence-against-women-and-domestic-violence-0?language_content_entity=en

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