



Q&A - Commission contribution to promote gender equality

Brussels, 8 March 2016

On the occasion of International Women's Day, here are the priorities of the Commission in terms of gender equality.

What are the priorities of the Commission in terms of gender equality?

In December 2015 the Commission published the "[Strategic engagement for gender equality 2016-2019](#)". It represents the work programme for gender equality policy during this Commission's mandate.

The Strategic engagement focuses on the following five priority areas:

- Increasing female labour market participation and equal economic independence;
- Reducing the gender pay, earnings and pension gaps and thus fighting poverty among women;
- Promoting equality between women and men in decision-making;
- Combating gender-based violence; protecting and supporting victims;
- Promoting gender equality and women's rights across the world.

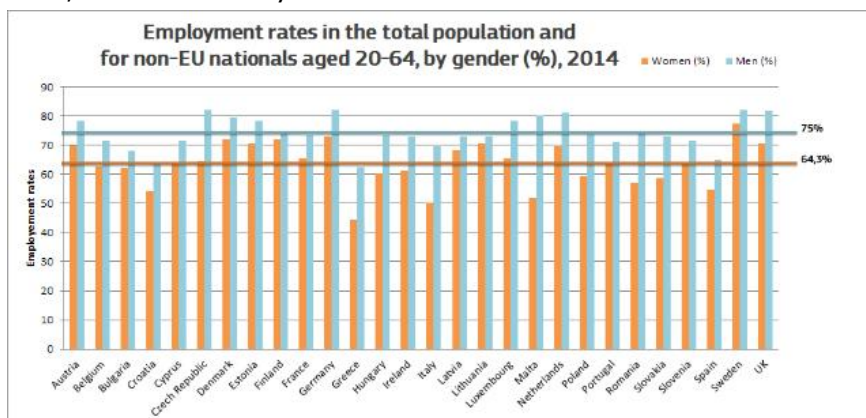
The Strategic engagement sets out objectives in each of these areas and identifies more than 30 concrete actions.

As far as the Commission itself is concerned, there is progress towards meeting the 40% target for female senior and middle managers, set by President Jean-Claude Juncker at the beginning of the mandate.

Also last year, a new [Gender Action plan](#) for the EU's activities on gender equality and women's empowerment in the EU's external relations for the 2016-2020 period was endorsed. Its aim is to support partner countries, especially developing, enlargement and neighbouring countries, to achieve tangible results towards gender equality which is at the core of European values, as well as the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted at the UN Summit (see more details below).

What is the current situation of women in the workforce? Which countries have created jobs for women over the last five years?

In 2015, women's employment reached an all-time high of 64.5 %. Although this represents some progress, the labour market participation of women in the EU is still significantly lower than that of men, which currently stands at 76.5%.



There has been some progress: 97.8 million women were in paid work in June 2015, with 3.5 million more than in January 2010, of whom 1.8 million are in fulltime and 1.7 million in part-time employment. These trends are largely driven by Germany (mainly through the creation of part-time jobs), the UK, Poland and France (with a majority in full-time work). For men, meanwhile, full-time employment has declined and part-time employment has grown strongly (+1.6 million).

There are considerable differences between Member States when it comes to women in employment. The female employment rate is lower than 60% in Croatia, Greece, Italy, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Spain while it is above 75% in Sweden.

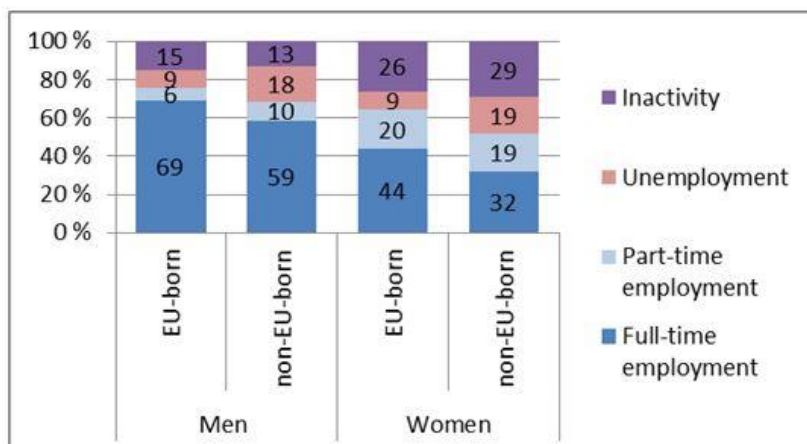
Employment rates in the total population and for non-EU nationals aged 20-64, by gender (%) and gender gap (percentage points), 2014

	Total		
	Women (%)	Men (%)	Gender gap (pp)
EU-28	63.4	75	11.6
Austria	70.1	78.3	8.2
Belgium	62.9	71.6	8.7
Bulgaria	62.0	68.1	6.1
Croatia	54.2	64.2	10.0
Cyprus	63.9	71.6	7.7
Czech Republic	64.7	82.2	17.5
Denmark	72.2	79.5	7.3
Estonia	70.6	78.3	7.7
Finland	72.1	74.0	1.9
France	65.7	73.3	7.6
Germany	73.1	82.2	9.1
Greece	44.3	62.6	18.3
Hungary	60.2	73.5	13.3
Ireland	61.2	73.0	11.8
Italy	50.3	69.7	19.4
Latvia	68.5	73.1	4.6
Lithuania	70.6	73.1	2.5
Luxembourg	65.5	78.4	12.9
Malta	51.9	80.3	28.4
Netherlands	69.7	81.1	11.4
Poland	59.4	73.6	14.2
Portugal	64.2	71.3	7.1
Romania	57.3	74.0	16.7
Slovakia	58.6	73.2	14.6
Slovenia	63.6	71.6	8.0
Spain	54.8	65.0	10.2
Sweden	77.6	82.2	4.6
UK	70.6	81.9	11.3

Source: Eurostat, Labour Force Survey

Both male and female immigrants are twice as likely to be unemployed as those born in the EU. Immigrant women have even fewer opportunities and resources than male migrants.

Employment, unemployment and inactivity by sex and place of birth (% of population aged 20-64), 2014



Source: Eurostat, Labour Force Survey

Is the Commission leading by example?

Women make up for 54.9% of the European Commission workforce.

In November 2014, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker said that 40% of the Commission's senior and middle management should be made of women by 2019. Today the European Commission has announced that the share of women at its top management level - Directors-General and their deputies - has increased to 24% from 13% in November 2014. Female Directors make up 31% of all, and Heads of Units women, 33% of all - up from 31% 16 months ago.

To make further progress towards the 40% female management target, the European Commission is preparing a new diversity and inclusion strategy, where gender will be a priority issue

How is work-life balance promoted across the EU?

Women still carry out most of the household and caring work, which is unpaid. In 2015, working women took on three quarters of household chores and two thirds of parental care.

Work-life balance measures - such as leaves, childcare, long-term care, and flexible working arrangements - help women better reconcile professional and personal responsibilities. Too few men use the work-life balance measures, when available. However, limited progress has been made in recent years on improving the provision of measures. In 2002, the EU set targets in the field of childcare. More than one decade after the adoption, only six Member States reached these targets: Belgium, Denmark, Spain, France, Sweden and Slovenia.

A more positive development is the introduction of paid leave for fathers in some countries. For instance, parental leave for fathers was extended in Portugal or Sweden and a paid paternity leave was introduced in Croatia and Ireland in 2015. However, in most Member States very few men actually take paternity/parental leave and periods of paid leave are usually short.

Average time spent by workers on paid and unpaid work per week in 2015

Source: Eurofound, European Working Conditions Survey.

What is the EU doing to address outstanding challenges to female employment?

As part of its economic strategy, Europe 2020, all EU Member States have committed to raising the overall employment rate to 75% by 2020. Estimates from the [Commission](#) show that women are the group with the highest potential to contribute to achieving the target. The EU is monitoring the achievement of the target, and in the framework of the European Semester, it has proposed [country-specific recommendations](#) to the Member States with the greatest female employment challenges.

The EU also supports Member States' objectives by providing funding for projects under the European Structural and Investment Fund (ESIF), notably the ESF and ERDF, including projects that:

- Promote women's access to, and participation in, all levels of the labour market;
- Promote women entrepreneurs and women's participation in science and technology, in particular in decision-making positions;
- Combat gender stereotypes in career selection and the professions, and promote lifelong learning; and
- Reconcile work and family life and offer support for childcare facilities.
- Support the integration into employment of immigrant women.

Between 2014 and 2020, Member States have programmed approximately 1.5 billion euros from the European Social Fund to the investment priority "equality between men and women in all areas, including in access to employment, career progression, reconciliation of work and private life and promotion of equal pay for equal work". The ERDF is also an important asset, with approximately 1.25 billion EUR supporting investments in childcare infrastructure, which is important for supporting women's employment.

In parallel, the Commission is monitoring Member States' implementation of the directives on [equal treatment](#), [maternity leave](#) and [parental leave](#) and, in consultation with the social partners and general public, is preparing a [new initiative](#) to further support work-life balance and female labour market participation.

What are the sources of the gender pay gap? What the EU is doing to tackle it?

The gender pay gap is the average hourly wage difference between male and female employees across the entire economy. The latest figures show an average 16.3% gender pay gap in 2013 across the

European Union.



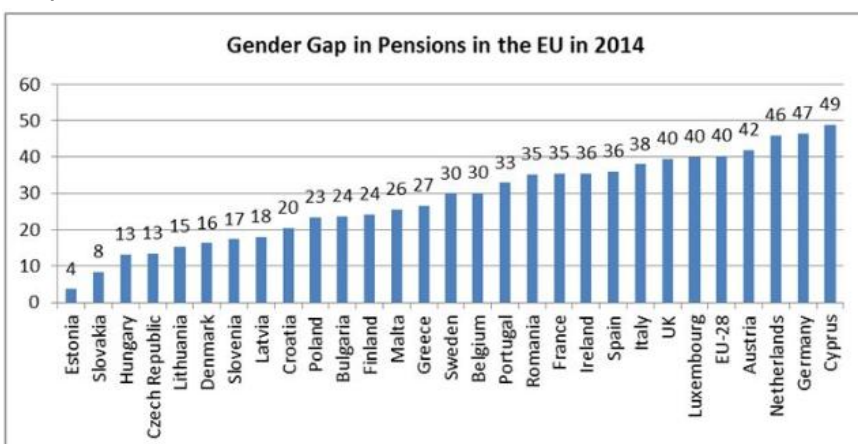
Source: Eurostat, Structure of Earnings Survey, 2013 data, with the exception of Ireland (2012) and Greece (2010).

Besides initiatives at company or sector level, the EU and its Member States have acted on a comprehensive set of policies to tackle the gender pay gap.

- [Directive 2006/54/EC](#) on equal treatment in the area of employment and occupation **prohibits direct and indirect discrimination** on grounds of gender in relation to pay. Implementation remains a challenge and the Commission calls on Member States and other stakeholders apply the rules properly.
- The Commission's [Recommendation on pay transparency](#) provides a toolkit of concrete measures to improve pay transparency, e.g. pay audits, regular reporting by employers and an employee entitlement to information on pay. In addition, the EU provides funding for **eight transnational projects** aimed at **understanding and reducing the gender pay gap**.
- To draw attention to the existence and the size of the gender pay gap, the Commission established an annual European Equal Pay Day in 2011. The fifth **Equal Pay Day** was marked on 2 November 2015, the day on which, symbolically, women 'stop earning' for the rest of the year. For this occasion, the Commission published information material, including country factsheets and an [infographic](#) dispelling common misconceptions around the gender pay gap.

What is the magnitude of the gender pension gap?

Women's lower earnings, lower employment rates, high rates of part-time work and career breaks due to care responsibilities reduce their pension contributions and, ultimately, pension entitlements. To some extent, pension systems can alleviate the impact of genderbased differences in past employment conditions. Care crediting, minimum and guaranteed pensions, and survivors' pensions give women extra pension protection. Nevertheless, the gender gap in pensions stood at 40 % in the EU in 2014 and is not narrowing. On the contrary, it has widened significantly in Austria, Cyprus, Germany, Spain, Italy and the Netherlands.



Source: Eurostat, 2014 data, with the exception of Ireland (2013)

Has there been progress regarding the number of women on boards?

Although the level of female representation in the boardroom is still low, progress has picked up since 2010 thanks to a combination of political pressure, intense public debate and legislative measures. The proportion of women on the boards of large publicly listed companies rose from 11.9 % in October 2010 to 22.7 % in October 2015. The improvement is largely attributable to important changes where

governments have intervened through legislation and thus encouraged public debate on the issue (Italy, France, Belgium, Germany) or by implementing a voluntary, business-led framework with clearly defined targets and regular monitoring (UK).

Representation of women on the boards of the largest listed companies, October 2015



Source: European Commission, *Database on women and men in decision-making*

What has the EU done to promote gender equality on company boards?

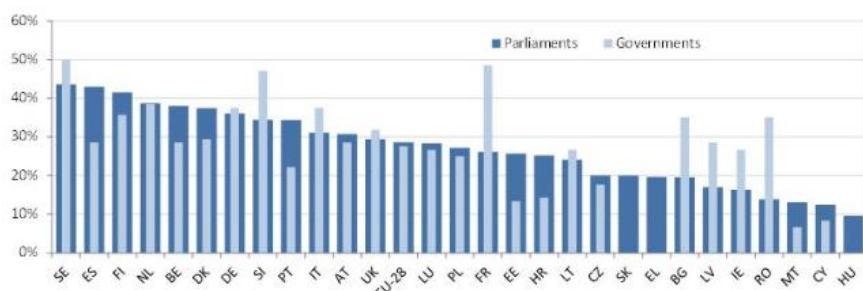
In November 2012, the Commission tabled a [proposal](#) for EU level legislation requiring that at least 40 % of listed companies' non-executive directors belong to the under-represented gender. While the European Parliament supported the initiative, as well as many Member States, no majority was found in the Council to back it up.

The Commission also collects and analyses data, raises awareness and promotes the exchange of good practices, and supports stakeholders in improving gender equality in economic decision making.

Are we progressing towards parity in national politics?

Parity in national politics is more than three decades away (on average) and it won't be reached if some countries do not take determined actions. While some EU Member States display among the best performances in the world, three countries in the EU have an all-male Government in 2016.

Women in national parliaments and governments (%), November 2015



Source: European Commission, *Database on women and men in decision-making*

How does the EU protect women in migration?

According to UNHCR, 20% of Mediterranean sea arrivals since 1 January 2016 are women [and 36% children]. The EU has international obligations to provide protection and humanitarian support to those who need it.

The correct implementation of EU asylum rules (notably the recast Qualifications Directive and the Asylum Procedures Directive) guarantee protection of women at risk, raising awareness of professionals working with asylum and encouraging Member States to resettle children and women at risk by providing support through the European Refugee Fund and the future Asylum and Migration Fund.

The European Commission makes all efforts to assure the rights and needs of women and girls who are fleeing conflicts and wars. For instance, the Commission encourages and assist Member States to ensure a dedicated assistance is paid to women and vulnerable specific needs when implementing the hotspot approach through the creation of dedicated accommodation and assistance for women and families, as well as vulnerable groups.

Women also face much stronger barriers to integration than other migrants suffering from multiple disadvantages. The provision of services has to be tailored to the needs of women, considering in particular child care responsibilities. The Commission foresees to present further steps to improve integration for third-country nationals, taking into account gender, in April 2016.

What does the EU do to promote the role of women in science and innovation?

On 10 March, the European Commission will award for the third time three outstanding women entrepreneurs the [EU Prize for Women Innovators](#). This prize was launched on International Women's Day 2015 to raise public awareness of the need for more innovation and [more women entrepreneurs](#). It is the largest prize of its kind worldwide, and it celebrates women who have combined scientific excellence with the sense of business required to set up innovative enterprises. Since 2011, more than 220 women have submitted their application to share their inspiring stories of overcoming hurdles to success.

There are 11.6 Million women enterprises in the EU representing only 29% of all entrepreneurs. Although women are increasingly active in research, there are still too few of them who create innovative enterprises. This represents an untapped potential for Europe which needs all its human resources to remain competitive and find solutions to the economic and societal challenges that we are facing.

The European Commission also keeps track of the progress women make in research and innovation: the latest '[She Figures](#)' statistics show that women are gaining ground in science but their progress is still slow and uneven. Women PhD graduates rose from 43% in 2004 to 47% in 2014.

Women are also making progress as heads of research institutions, rising from 16% to 20%. However, the proportion of women researchers in general remains stable and the share of female professors has only slightly increased to 20.9%. The 'She Figures' publication is the main source of Pan-European comparable statistics on the state of gender equality in research and innovation.

What is the EU doing to tackle violence against women?

The Lisbon Treaty states that Member States should take all necessary steps to tackle domestic violence and help protect victims. Women and girls who are victims of violence need appropriate support and protection. The European Commission has carried out concrete actions to combat violence against women, including:

- Ensuring protection and support for victims

New rules that apply as of 16 November are bringing about major changes in the way victims of crime are treated in Europe. The Victims' Rights Directive lays down a set of binding rights for victims of crime, and clear obligations for EU Member States to ensure these rights in practice (see [IP/15/6095](#)). These rules recognise the specific vulnerability of victims of gender-based violence and give victims a right to specialist support according to their needs.

As of January 2015, new rules entered into force to give victims of domestic violence and stalking reinforced protection when travelling or moving to other EU countries (see [IP/15/3045](#)). These rules are composed of a directive and regulation to cover the different types of protection orders across the Member States.

There are also rules on [compensation for crime victims](#). According to the Directive, persons who have fallen victim to intentional, violent crime in another EU Member States can receive fair compensation from the national compensation systems .

- Tacking action to eradicate trafficking

The majority of victims of trafficking registered in the EU are women and girls (80%)(more details [here](#)). The EU has recognised trafficking of women and girls as a form of violence against women and has adopted a comprehensive legal and policy framework to eradicate it. The [anti-trafficking Directive 2011/36/EU](#) harmonises Member States' criminal laws, it establishes robust provisions on victims' protection and prevention, as well as supports the principle of non-punishment and unconditional assistance of victims. The EU Strategy towards the [Eradication of Trafficking in Human Beings 2012-2016](#) complements legislation with a series of actions, including on gender dimensions of trafficking in human beings.

- Data collection and research to better understand the phenomenon

The EU has worked to gather accurate and comparable European data on gender-based violence. The [first EU-wide survey on women's experiences of various forms of violence](#), carried out by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), shows that violence takes place everywhere, in every society, whether at home, at work, at school, in the street or online. One in three women has been a victim of physical or sexual violence, or both. 65% of women have experienced sexual harassment.

In cooperation with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Eurostat collected [crime data recorded by the police and justice systems](#). The [first results](#) were published in September 2015 and showed that in many EU Member States, over half of murdered women are killed by an intimate partner, relative or family member.

The [European Working Conditions Survey](#), carried out by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound), also provides information on violence

experienced by women at work. The [survey](#) shows that in 2015, 17% of women in the EU were exposed to adverse social behaviours, including verbal abuse, unwanted sexual attention, threats, humiliating behaviours, physical violence, sexual harassment and bullying or harassment.

On the request of the European Commission, two researchers have [mapped recent surveys and studies](#) on attitudes towards violence against women in the EU. This reveals the still widespread nature of attitudes of acceptability and tolerance of violence against women, linked to victim-blaming and gender stereotypes. This research will help to better define and target awareness-raising activities in this area.

- A solid framework: steps toward EU ratifying the Istanbul Convention

The EU is now taking steps towards ratifying the Council of Europe's [Istanbul Convention](#), which offers a comprehensive approach to combatting violence against women, and which could strengthen the EU's efforts in promoting its fundamental values of human rights and equality between men and women. The European Commission adopted a proposal for EU accession to the Convention in March 2016.

- Improving awareness of gender-based violence

The European Commission also funds awareness-raising campaigns in EU countries and supports grassroots organisations, NGOs and networks working to prevent violence against women, under the [DAPHNE III](#), [PROGRESS](#) and [Rights, Equality and Citizenship](#) Programmes. These projects have, for example, empowered advocates for change among FGM-practising communities, supported the evaluation of existing programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence in Europe, and trained support services for victims of sexual violence in universities to better respond to incidents and young victims' needs. The Commission has also supported Member States in publicising national helplines for victims, in training relevant professionals and in raising awareness among the general public about this problem.

What the EU does to combat Female Genital Mutilation?

You can consult a dedicated [Q&A](#) published on the International Day against Female Genital Mutilation.

What is the EU doing to ensure gender equality beyond its borders?

The EU is and remains at the forefront of those advancing gender equality in its relations with non-EU countries. The EU presents political demarches, funds programmes aimed at combatting specific problems and discrimination suffered by women and girls of all ages. The EU supports women's associations advocates for their cause, and uses a rights-based approach in all its initiatives. Gender equality is further mainstreamed into programmes and measures to promote equality between women and men in all different fields of activity.

The EU monitors and supports adherence to the Copenhagen criteria for accession to the EU in the field of equal treatment of women and men, and assists candidate countries and potential candidates with the transposition and enforcement of legislation.

The eradication of gender-based violence is a specific priority of the European Union's human rights policy in third countries, as reflected in the "[EU Guidelines](#) on Violence against Women and Girls and Combating all Forms of Discrimination against Them". Along with these Guidelines, for instance, the European Union works with third countries to enhance the fight against impunity and to support the protection and reintegration of victims, in close cooperation with civil society organisations and with women human rights defenders. This includes protection against harmful traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation, child early and forced marriage, femicide.

The EU firmly supports gender equality and empowerment of women worldwide, because empowering women can significantly reduce poverty, for instance through increased production, rising household incomes, and improved child health and education levels.

The EU works hard to ensure that girls and women have full and equal access to education, healthcare, sanitation and employment possibilities and do not suffer from any forms of violence and discrimination.

Thanks to the EU's development cooperation, since 2004 around 300,000 new female students enrolled in secondary education, over 730 Civil Society Organisations working on gender equality were supported, and 7.5 million births were attended by skilled health personnel.

To continue building on the progress made so far and to tackle the remaining challenges, a new [Action Plan](#) for the EU's activities on gender equality and women's empowerment in the EU's external relations for the 2016-2020 period was adopted in 2015.

The EU's new Gender Action Plan focuses on 4 priorities:

- 1) Ensuring the physical and psychological integrity of girls and women;
- 2) Ensuring that girls and women are empowered and that their social and economic rights are

fulfilled;

3) Strengthening the voice and participation of girls and women to ensure that they have a say in decision-making at all levels;

4) Shifting the institutional culture towards one that more systematically supports, tracks and measures gender equality.

This new Action Plan emphasises the shifting of mind-sets that hinder gender equality and promotes policy coherence with internal EU policies, in full alignment with the new EU Human Rights and Democracy Action Plan (2015 – 2019). The work of the European Union on protecting women in conflict situations and in facilitating their pro-active role as peace-builders is also guided by the "[EU Comprehensive Approach for the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 on Women, Peace and Security](#)".

The EU continues to ensure that all its humanitarian assistance is systematically tailored to the different and specific needs of women and girls. This includes supporting actions that prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in humanitarian crises, both through mainstreaming targeted actions and capacity building. In 2015 the EU allocated over 15 million EUR to targeted actions aimed at preventing and responding to gender based violence, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Syria.

For more information on what the High Representative Federica Mogherini and the European External Action Service are doing to promote gender equality and to empower women, visit the [website](#).

See Statement [16/641](#)

MEMO/16/642

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