

EUROPEAN UNION

Including Norway & Switzerland

Lead

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Structural barriers and negative trends

Efforts to achieve gender equality in the EU is progressing at a snail's pace. The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) (1) has developed a Gender Equality Index (since 2013), which measures equality between women and men in six main domains (work, money, knowledge, time, power, health) and, due to the lack of reliable and comparable data, two 'satellite' domains: violence against women and more recently is integrating intersecting inequalities in each domain. The Index provides reliable and comparable data from national statistical bodies and as well as national fact sheets and provides a composite Index for the European Union (EU). On a scale of 100 (full equality between women and men), in 2019, the EU scores 67.4, an increase of only 1.2 percentage points since 2015.

Unpaid care burden, unemployment and female face of poverty

- Women and girls continue to face inequalities within the formal employment sector throughout their life cycle. The gender pay-gap, pension- and poverty-gaps remain significant and unpaid care and domestic work remains largely unrecognised in an entrenched male breadwinner model. Stringent austerity measures have disproportionately impacted women who already face multiple forms of discrimination: women in poverty, women from ethnic minorities, women of colour, women with disabilities and older women. In addition, there is a consistent lack of gender sensitivity in welfare and tax systems in EU member states.
- Women in the European Union (EU) do on average 13 hours MORE UNPAID CARE work than men per day. As a result of this unpaid care burden 7,7 million women in the

EU are not in official employment (compared to 500.000 men) and 9 million women can only take on part-time employment.

- The employment rate has risen, but the gender employment gap remains at 11.5 percent. The gap is wider for women with disabilities: 4 out of 5 are unemployed, leading to a lifetime in poverty. Disabled women are at risk of lifelong poverty and disability benefits rarely cover extra costs related to disability.
- Women in traditionally male-dominated fields, face disproportionate rates of sexual harassment and less opportunities from leading in executive, managerial or high-level decision-making roles.
- Poverty rates are particularly high among single mothers, poor women, Roma women, migrant women, women with disabilities and older women. Evidence shows that 33% of all households in the EU face financial difficulties because they can hardly afford childcare.

Migrant and refugee women are not sufficiently protected and supported

Migrant women are more at risk of poverty, unemployment and to not have access to education or training. EIGE data show that 50% of migrant women are at risk of poverty, 50% of migrant women are not in employment and 20% of young migrant women are not in education, employment or training.

Women and girls seeking asylum face challenges, including lack of gender-sensitive processes in reception centres and higher risk of gender-based violence. The EU's migration program under the Dublin III Regulation (No. 604/2013) and its externalisation policies are not enforced. Lack of due diligence under international and EU law including the 1954 Refugee Convention lead to cumulative harm on vulnerable women and girls, including those who are asylum seekers, unaccompanied minors, undocumented and stateless. Women and asylum-seeking girls face multiple forms of discrimination, lack single-sex facilities and services in camps and reception centres (as per GREVIO recommendations).

Many EU countries exclude undocumented migrant women from access to affordable and quality maternal health care due to a range of legal and policy, administrative and financial barriers, making them more prone to violence and trafficking. The lack of sex-disaggregated data collection in migration flows at state and international level makes it especially difficult to monitor and prevent violence against asylum seeking women. Deportation of asylum seeking women seen as "economic migrants" is not acceptable as countries considered "safe" are mostly not safe for women.

Gender based violence (GBV) against women and girls

GBV is far too high everywhere in Europe and spread through social media. The situation of women in Europe is very alarming:

- 50 women are murdered every week by a partner or ex-partner, making femicide a wide-spread phenomenon.
- 50% of women in the EU have experienced sexual harassment and 80% of women parliamentarians experienced psychological violence. The #MeToo movement demonstrated the widespread nature of sexual harassment in the workplace, where 75% of women in top management positions in the EU [OB1] declared having experienced sexual harassment at work.
- One in two women in the EU have experienced sexual harassment since the age of 15 and 20 % of them have experienced online harassment.
- Women with disabilities are many times more likely to be victims of violence than non-disabled women. There are 46 million women and girls with disabilities in Europe, representing 60% of the overall population of persons with disabilities. 28% of older women had experienced some kind of violence and abuse at home in the 12 months prior to a survey.
- Women from marginalized groups face a greater risk of violence, fuelled by sexism as well as racism, xenophobia and other forms of discrimination. E.g. Roma women are more likely to face early marriages and attacks on their physical integrity.
- 8 EU Member States have not yet ratified the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence the Istanbul Convention. In many EU countries where the Istanbul Convention has been ratified there is no full enforcement and no adequate funding in place. Despite EU's signature to the Istanbul Convention in 2017, its ratification remains blocked by the EU Member States.
- Lack of systemic change across societies that are still grounded in harmful patriarchal values contribute to restrictions of government funding from providing much needed support services to female victims of violence. Only 50% of the needed number of beds in women's shelters is available, victim support often is not accessible and women's access to justice is impeded by stereotypes, high costs of legal proceedings and judiciary gender-bias.
- This also flows into the digital space, where online violence of women and girls is heightened, and used as an unregulated platform for trafficking and sexual exploitation.
- In many parts of Europe women's sexual and reproductive health, autonomy, integrity and decision-making remains threatened and violations of women's sexual and reproductive rights continue. In some countries, laws and policies still violate, restrict or undermine women's sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). For example, a number of countries maintain highly restrictive abortion laws.

Women remain structurally under-represented in decision-making

Women's representation in economy, sports and diplomacy decision-making posts is 20% or less than men. Only a few countries in the EU have implemented legally binding quotas, but it is not widely spread and there is no legally binding measures at the European level. The European Commission's 2012 legislative proposal on 'Women on Boards' to increase 'women's presence on boards to 30% by 2015 and 40% by 2020', has failed to be adopted. (**Note:** based on input from EIGE, European Institute for Gender Equality received with thanks.)



Progress on implementing the Beijing Platform for Action

At the EU level, we are beginning to see pivotal changes towards gender equality, both at the structural level and in mind-sets. The results of the European Parliament Elections in May 2019 saw an increase of elected women representing a positive shift towards parity democracy, notably through women's participation and representation in key political decision-making positions. For the first time, the European Union (EU) welcomes its first woman President of the European Commission leading a Commission with an almost balanced representation of women and men. Increased women representation in EU decision-making represents an opportunity, which needs to be translated into transformational change for women in Europe.

Another great advance is the new regulation on '**Work Life Balance**' that has been adopted by the European Union as recent as mid 2019. This provides legislative measures for statutory parental, paternity and carers' leave. It also calls for much stronger measures for public services that aim to reduce the unpaid care burden on women, amongst others. The EU Member States have three years to transpose this Directive into national law. However, the issue of payment and the level (during leave) remains controversial and will need to be monitored very carefully. This regulation ensures much stronger measures for parental leave and state services that aim to reduce the unpaid care burden on women, amongst others.

Also in the area of **international cooperation**, the **Gender Action Plan (GAP)** of the European Commission (DEVCO), which is now going into a third period with an expanded GAP being developed, has been important in ensuring that more and more of the substantial funding for international cooperation is gender-responsive, and even gender-transformative (the EU provided more than 50% of all international development cooperation funding globally).

The **Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development** is an important framework to ensure coherence between progress on **gender equality (SDG5)** in the EU and through its international cooperation, but more needs to be done to make gender-just Sustainable Development a key priority for all areas of policy making, and to address the contradictions

between unsustainable economic production and consumption patterns, and gender-just and climate-just development. The **Green New Deal**, which the new EU Commission will be developing, is an important step.

At the national level, individual EU member states have taken further measures, for example Sweden has developed its '**Feminist Foreign Policy**' and other countries have been developing similar policies, for example France. While, in other countries, women's human rights, which are guaranteed by the European Union, are being questioned by populist, conservative governments, including the right to safe and legal abortion is under pressure in for example Poland.



Recommendations beyond Beijing+25

Governments in the EU, Norway and Switzerland need to reaffirm their commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), UN Security Council Resolution 1325, and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). 2020 marks a critical moment in assessing the visionary agenda of the BPfA, a quarter of a century after its adoption. As we celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the creation of UN Women, the full implementation of the BPfA must remain a priority for the future. It is also a critical moment to assess the fifth year of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular goal 5, ensuring that no girl and woman are left behind. The implementation of the BPfA and the SDGs by both the European Union (EU) and its Member States must remain at the top of the political agenda, supported by powerful institutional mechanisms, including resources.

Priority 1 - Take effective measures to prevent and eliminate **all forms of gender-based violence**, including violence against women of all ages and girls, recognizing the continuum of violence wherever it takes place including sexual, cyber and online violence as well as harmful practices. We call for the immediate ratification and implementation of the Istanbul Convention. We also call for all measures to eliminate violence against women and girls in all their diversity to take account of all multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination and the needs of survivors of violence throughout the life course. and other human rights instruments.

Priority 2 - 25 years after Beijing gender mainstreaming efforts have yet to bring about systemic change to **guarantee full equality for all**. We call for the adoption and implementation of a robust political strategy for gender equality in line with obligations under CEDAW and commitments under the SDGs with ambitious goals, targets and benchmarks and strong institutional mechanisms and resources to subject to regular monitoring and assessment of progress against disaggregated data, including annual ministerial meetings to monitor progress. The strategy should also be consistent throughout the EU's internal and external policies, reflecting the continuum of inequalities faced by women within and outside the EU, and in the context of the universal principles of the SDGs

In addition, all EU Member States, Norway and Switzerland must:

- Ensure strong support to effective Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) that promote equality between women and men and women's rights and hold governments accountable when they threaten these, including through EU funding.
- Set an EU-wide gender-parity target for executive government as well as boards of public and private companies: balanced representation of women and men in different areas of life, as well as equal representation of women's and men's concerns and interests in decision-making is essential to be recognized as a right.
- Effectively implement existing law and, if relevant, create a specific instrument at EU level to tackle anti-gender/women's right forms of cyber violence against women and girls. Recognize, register and persecute all cases of online abuse and expand the definitions of harm on online platforms to acknowledge violence against women.
- Transpose the Council of Europe's international legal instrument to stop sexism ([link](#)) into EU and national legislation as per COE Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 on preventing and combatting sexism.
- All European funding, including European Structural and Investment Funds as well as new funds and allocation from the general budget (e.g. 20% to climate) need to ensure gender-responsiveness in design and implementation, and based on monitoring and evaluation, strengthening of their gender transformative impact
- Fully transpose the ILO convention to end violence and harassment in the workplace into EU and national legislation ([link](#))
- High quality, relevant, comparable and comprehensive sex disaggregated data collection to accurately assess progress against various gendered challenges facing the EU.
- Adopt stringent measures, including new legislation on equal pay, with particular attention to 'equal value' to move beyond the gender segregated labour-market in the sectors where women work are undervalued and underpaid.
- Deliver a feminist economic model for the wellbeing of all, putting the care of ourselves, each other and the planet at its core. Carry out gender impact assessments of economic policies, including tax policies and structural reforms prior to the adoption of policies in these areas.
- Develop and invest in the care economy; set targets to meet different care needs throughout the life course.
- Establish a European working group of feminist economists to support policies to move beyond GDP and towards long-term sustainable development.