

Assessing progress towards gender equality

International Women's Day on 8 March provides an opportunity to take stock of progress towards gender equality. Three own-initiative reports by the European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM), highlighting persistent gender inequalities and emerging issues in the European Union, are on the agenda for the plenary in March 2017.

Context

Under the Treaties, the EU is committed to upholding the principle of gender equality in all its activities (Articles 2 and 3(3) [TEU](#) and 8 TFEU) and can enact legislation to combat gender-based discrimination (Article 19 [TFEU](#)). Current policy priorities are set out in the [Strategic engagement for gender equality 2016-2019](#), which identifies five priority areas for action and funding. The [index](#) developed by the EU's Gender Equality Institute (EIGE) demonstrates the need for action. Advances have been made, but overall, the EU and its Member States are still only halfway towards achieving full equality between women and men and there are significant divergences between [countries](#). Whilst most score relatively well on [health and education](#), this cannot be said of [employment](#), access to [economic and financial resources](#) or [leadership](#). Given the persistent gender gaps and slow pace of progress towards closing them, concerns are being raised about a number of issues, including whether the existing EU gender equality legislation is being properly implemented and enforced; where it needs to be modernised or new legislation introduced to fill gaps in protection or address emerging issues; whether the data, tools and funding available for advancing gender equality are sufficient or being used in the most effective way; whether the high-level political commitment to women's rights is being translated into concrete action at all levels and across all EU policy areas; and whether this commitment should be strengthened, given the [gendered impact](#) of the economic crisis and austerity policies and concerns being raised in the [EU](#) and [internationally](#) about a climate of hostility towards advances in gender equality and the concept itself. [Public support](#) for EU action on equality remains strong.

Reviewing EU gender equality law

[EU gender equality law](#) lays down the principles of direct and indirect discrimination and positive action. Key directives uphold women's rights in employment and pay ([Recast Directive 2006/54/EC](#); [Directive 2010/41/EU](#)); pregnancy and parenthood (Directives [92/85/EEC](#); [2010/18/EU](#)), social security ([Directive 79/7/EEC](#)) and access to goods and services ([Directive 2004/113/EC](#)). A 2016 [review](#) of the legislation by the EU's [network of legal experts](#) identifies a pattern of inadequate transposition, application and enforcement in many Member States. Case law may be poorly accessible, which means that there is inconsistent interpretation in the courts and low general awareness of equality law, in courts and amongst potential victims and lawyers. Bringing a case can be expensive, and there is a worrying trend of gender stereotypes that curtail women's choices filtering through to policy and case law in some countries. Regarding specific directives, there are [concerns](#) that Directive 2006/54/EC has failed to tackle the gender pay gap. An EPRS [Ex-Post Impact Assessment](#) of Directive 2004/113/EC finds that implementation is uneven. It is not clear how the gender discrimination provisions apply to new sectors, such as the sharing economy (that is, to services provided by platforms such as Airbnb and Uber). In other areas, indirect discrimination is still overlooked, most seriously in medicine and healthcare, where the exclusion of women from medical trials, or obstacles to accessing services, can have severe consequences. The assessment concludes that the directive in itself is not enough to resolve such indirect discrimination. It will only be effective if it is part of a wider push to apply the gender equality framework, extend it to all grounds of discrimination, raise awareness and strengthen [equality bodies](#). Current proposals to complete and modernise the existing framework include possible new legislation on [work-life balance](#). Other proposed legislation on [gender balance in economic decision-making](#) remains blocked in Council and there is currently no EU directive on [combating violence against women](#).



Reviewing EU funding for gender equality

There is no single budget line in the EU budget concerned with equality between women and men. Rather, gender equality is financed through an array of actions under several EU funding programmes. Just as [gender impact assessment](#) can be used to assess the contribution of a particular law or policy to advancing gender equality goals, [gender budgeting](#) can be used to assess the funding available to support equality and the gender impact of allocation and spending. In 2013, the Parliament, the Council and the Commission [agreed](#) that annual budgetary procedures for the 2014-2020 [Multi-Annual Financial Framework](#) (MFF) would incorporate a gender perspective. However EPRS [research](#) finds that there is no clear gender strategy in the MFF, and it is often not possible to determine which, if any, resources are allocated to achieving gender objectives within programmes. Studies commissioned by the FEMM Committee on the [EU budget for gender equality](#) and the use of EU funding in [selected Member States](#) also find that the high-level commitment to gender equality is not reflected in spending and that gender budgeting is not systematically applied in the EU budget and across all funding programmes. One issue is that [gender indicators](#) and [gender-disaggregated data](#) are not systematically used in monitoring and evaluating initiatives funded by the EU budget, which makes it difficult to show where it has made a positive impact or where there are failings. Another is that a gender perspective is rarely adopted in policy fields that are not seen as immediately related to gender equality, such as ICT, transport, business support and environmental policies, where a gender impact may in fact be felt.

European Parliament position

The Parliament has consistently taken a strong and proactive stance on advancing gender equality. The three reports to be put to plenary share a common emphasis on the need to deliver on EU commitments.

Equality between women and men (2014-2015)

The [report](#), adopted on 6 February 2017, [reviews](#) progress towards gender equality across the various EU policy areas and the performance of individual Member States. Highlighting the slow pace of change, and the Commission's downgrading of gender equality as a political goal, it reiterates Parliament's call for the Commission to set out a new, broader, gender equality strategy, integrated with the EU 2020 Strategy and the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#). It also asks the Commission to monitor the implementation of existing gender legislation more effectively, review Directive 2006/54/EC and enact new gender equality legislation.

Directive 2004/113/EC on gender equality in access to goods and services

The [report](#), adopted on 6 February 2017, finds that although all Member States have transposed the directive, there are problems with its implementation. The report identifies issues in the insurance, banking, transport and sharing economy sectors and proposes ways of applying the directive more effectively.

Funding for gender equality

The [report](#), adopted on 25 January 2017, finds that EU funding should be used much more proactively to achieve gender equality goals. For example, Member States should use ERDF funding to support investment in affordable childcare and care for other dependents, to help women stay in work. The drop in funds to combat violence against women should be reversed and more funding should go to grassroots organisations and equality bodies. Gender budgeting should be applied in all EU budget lines and in all future EU funding programmes, with clear targets, specified resources and systematic monitoring.

Core EU gender equality funding

[European Structural and Investment Funds](#): **€5.85 billion** (1.3 % of the overall ESI funding) is earmarked in 2014-2020 for measures promoting gender equality, of which 1.6 % to support access to employment, work-life balance and equal pay under the ESF. Around **€1.25 billion** of ERDF funding is programmed for investment in childcare infrastructure.

[Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme](#): 35 % of the overall budget is to be divided between two gender equality objectives: promoting gender equality and mainstreaming; and preventing violence (Daphne).

[Horizon 2020 Programme](#): **€43 million** is to be allocated to projects promoting gender equality in the research system and research organisations between 2014-2020.

European Commission: [Strategic engagement for gender equality 2016-2019](#).

Own-initiative reports; Committee responsible: FEMM; equality between women and men in the EU in 2014/2015 (rapporteur Ernest Urtasun, Greens/ALE, Spain, [2016/2249 \(INI\)](#)), application of Directive 2004/113/EC on equal treatment between men and women in access to goods and services (Agnieszka Kozłowska-Rajewicz, EPP, Poland, [2016/2012 \(INI\)](#)), EU funds for gender equality (Clare Moody, S&D, United Kingdom, [2016/2144 \(INI\)](#)).