

Towards a new EU gender equality strategy

The European Union (EU) is in the process of shaping a new strategy for equality between women and men that will determine its policy and action in this area from 2016 to 2020. On-going assessments of the current strategy show that although some of its goals have been reached, progress has been slow and uneven and many challenges remain. Full gender equality is far from being achieved and this has implications for the lives and life chances of individual women, girls, boys and men, the communities they live in and the EU as a whole.

Context

The EU has recognised [equality between women and men](#) as a fundamental value (Article 2, Treaty on European Union – [TEU](#)) and objective (Article 3 TEU). It has a remit to introduce legislation to combat gender-based discrimination (Article 19, Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union – [TFEU](#)) and is committed to promoting the principle of gender equality, through a [dual approach](#) of integrating equal opportunities for women and men into all its policies and activities ([gender mainstreaming](#) – Article 8 TFEU) and specific targeted measures to tackle persistent or emerging gender inequalities (Article 157 TFEU).

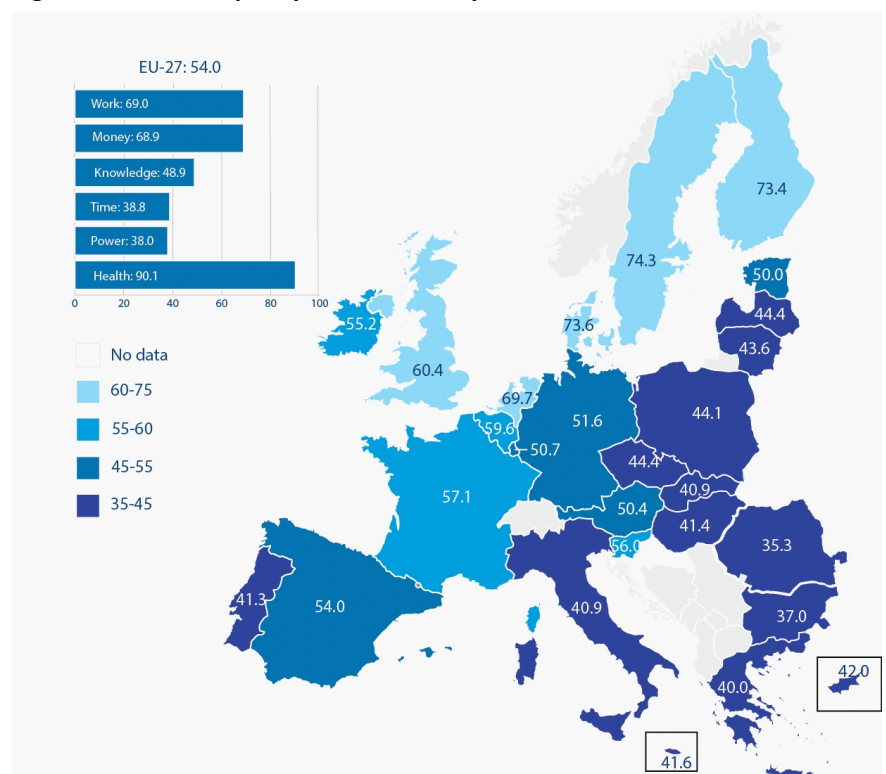
The EU's [substantial](#) legislation and case law in this area have brought significant progress. Yet as the [EU gender equality index](#) (GEI) illustrates (figure 1), albeit with significant variations between the Member States, gender gaps remain widespread across core areas and the EU as a whole is still only 'halfway towards gender equality'. This matters both because the [current gender inequalities](#) have a negative impact on individuals, particularly girls and women, preventing them from reaching their full potential, and because the evidence shows that investing in gender equality is also [smart economics](#) and positive for social cohesion.

The 2010-15 gender equality strategy

The current policy framework setting out the EU's priorities and objectives on gender equality and descriptions of the gender gaps to be addressed is the [Strategy for Equality between Women and Men](#) (2010-15), which focuses on [five priority areas](#), as well as horizontal issues:

- equal economic independence;
- equal pay;
- equality in decision-making;
- ending gender-based violence;
- gender equality in external actions.

Figure 1 – Gender Equality Index Scores by core area and EU27 Member State



Source: [European Institute for Gender Equality](#), 2013 (based on data from 2010).

Assessments of the strategy include the [mid-term review](#), [annual progress reports](#), and a [study and compilation of analyses](#) commissioned by the European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM). These have identified strengths that can be built on and crucial areas where the strategy could be improved.

Strengths

The strategy identified relevant issues and priorities, and many of the actions had the potential to contribute to gender equality. Achievements have included the development of tools for gathering sex-disaggregated and gender-sensitive data as a basis for [gender analysis](#) and [gender-impact assessment](#). There have also been moves to address the [role of men and boys](#) in promoting gender equality and the gender-related inequalities that affect them.

Weaknesses

Implementation has been hampered by a lack of resources and limited capacity. Actions were not linked with explicit targets, timelines and responsibilities, which could have improved monitoring and evaluation of outcomes. Gender mainstreaming did not take place at all stages of the EU policy cycle and across all policy areas. In particular, a gender perspective was rarely integrated in areas not seen as immediately related to women and gender equality, including transport, environment, competition, trade and macroeconomic policies, which may affect men and women differently.

Crucially, despite the [European Pact for Gender Equality](#) (2011-20), which was intended to ensure coordination with wider EU policies, there was little gender sensitivity in the EU's main growth and jobs strategy, [Europe 2020](#) or gendered analysis in recovery plans and fiscal consolidation strategies. Analysis [shows](#) that this [gender-blindness](#) has contributed to highly gendered outcomes. More systematic use of [gender budgeting](#) by the EU and Member States could help to reveal and address the disproportionate effect of such policies on women.

The future strategy beyond 2015

This year marks the 20th anniversary and review of the [Beijing Platform for Action](#), the [renewal](#) of the international development framework and goals, a major [climate change conference](#) and the [mid-term review](#) of the Europe 2020 Strategy. It is therefore considered a particularly crucial one for evaluating the progress that has been made towards gender equality, and ensuring that the EU's future gender equality strategy is more closely integrated with other EU policies and international frameworks. [Analysts](#) and stakeholders have called for more consistency between the EU's internal and external policies on equality between women and men.

The European Women's Lobby [urges](#) that the new strategy be more closely aligned with the 12 critical areas identified in the Beijing Platform for Action and that it be accompanied by specific, binding indicators and targets. The European Women Lawyers Association has [called](#) for the 2016-20 strategy for equality between women and men to be fully integrated into the [European Semester](#) and the Europe 2020 Strategy. Its suggestions for concrete goals include making gender-sensitive growth a fourth priority in Europe 2020, introducing a target of at least 40% of members of each sex in parliaments and at all levels in decision-making positions, and creating a flagship initiative on gender equality, underpinned by a proposal for a directive on the gender pay gap.

Following the recent [Forum on the future of gender equality in the EU](#), which took place on 20-21 April, the European Commission has now launched a formal [public consultation](#) on equality between women and men in the EU to provide inputs for the new strategy. The deadline for contributions is 21 July 2015.

The European Parliament's contribution

In January 2015, the European Parliament adopted a [Resolution on Progress on equality between women and men in the European Union in 2013](#). The FEMM Committee is now contributing to the development of the EU's new gender equality strategy through an [own-initiative report](#) (rapporteur Maria Noichl, S&D, Germany) which is due to be debated in the June plenary. The report advocates that the strategy take the form of an action plan, and sets out specific recommendations in areas including the situation of women in the labour market and decision-making structures, poverty, violence, health issues and multiple discrimination.