

International Equal Pay Day

As things stand, the gender pay gap persists globally and in the European Union, and progress in reducing it is slow. The coronavirus pandemic is a further brake on gender equality. To accelerate the realisation of the principle of 'Equal pay for work of equal value', the United Nations marked the first International Day for Equal Pay on 18 September 2020. This year, for its second edition, the debate will focus on ensuring that equal pay remains at the centre of the response to the pandemic and recognition of women's major contribution to economic recovery.

A persisting gender pay gap

The 'gender pay gap' is a measurable indicator of inequality between women and men. It generally refers to the average difference between the remuneration of employed women and male workers.

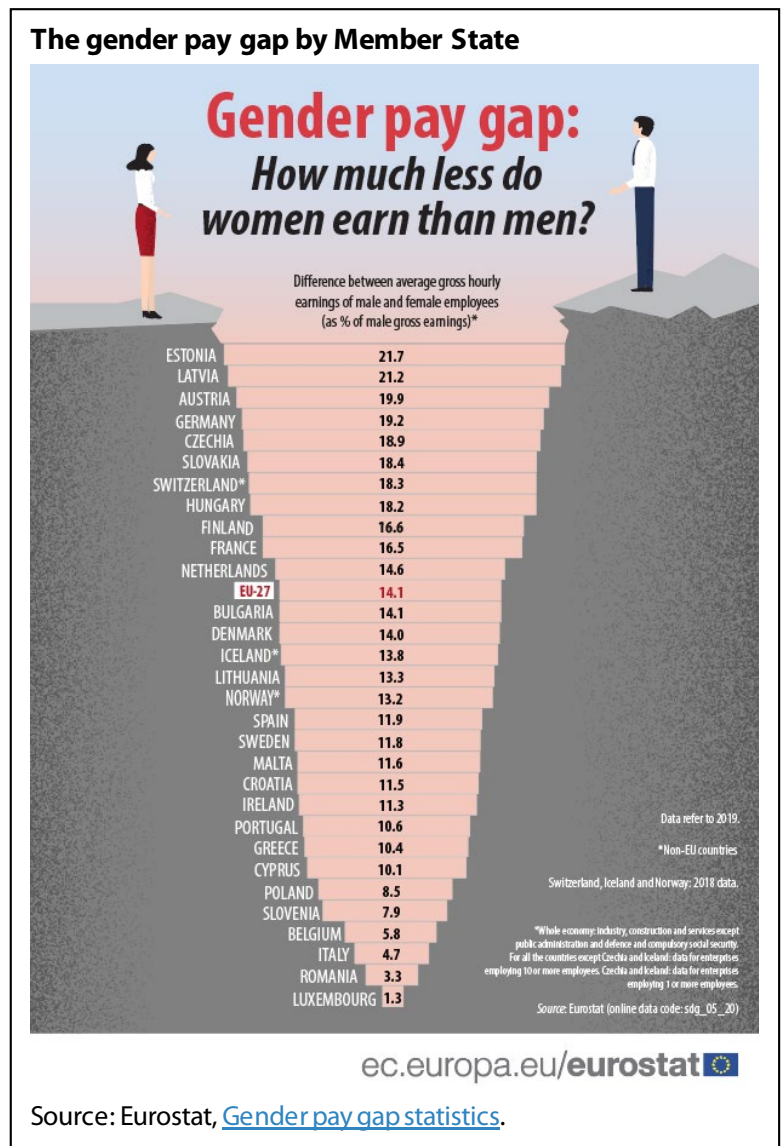
Although the gender pay gap is measured by [different methods and indicators](#), data clearly show that women around the world still earn less when compared to men. According to the [Global Wage Report 2018/2019 - What lies behind gender pay gaps](#), produced by the International Labour Organization (ILO), on average, women earn around 20% less than men. Despite the increase in women's educational attainment and participation in the labour market over the years, the gender pay gap remains a persistent and multi-dimensional issue in all countries and across all economic sectors. For women with [children](#), women of [colour](#), [migrant](#) women, and women with [disabilities](#), the discrepancy is even larger. In 2019, women's gross hourly earnings were on average 14.1% below those of men in the European Union (Eurostat, EU-27). Across Member States, the gender pay gap varied widely, ranging from 1.3% in Luxembourg to 21.7% in Estonia.

The coronavirus pandemic has disproportionately affected women in the [economic sphere](#). It is likely to have long-term adverse effects on [gender equality](#). [Research](#) already suggests that the gender pay gap will widen because of the pandemic.

International Equal Pay Day

The United Nations' commitment

Mainstreaming the gender perspective is key to the implementation of the United Nations (UN) [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#). Since 2015, the 'Equal pay for work of equal value' principle has been



recognised as one of the priority areas of the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#) (UNSDGs), as mentioned in [target 8.5](#): 'By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value'. In 2017, under the leadership of the ILO, the UN entity for gender equality and the empowerment of women ([UN Women](#)) and the [Gender Initiative](#) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development ([OECD](#)), and together with governments, labour organisations (e.g. [ITUC](#)), employers' organisations (e.g. [IOE](#)) and other dedicated agencies, the Equal Pay International Coalition ([EPIC](#)) was launched for the effective and swift achievement of the principle.

On 15 November 2019, the UN General Assembly adopted a [resolution](#) proclaiming 18 September as International Equal Pay Day. The resolution was introduced by the Equal Pay International Coalition (EPIC) with the support of Australia, Canada, Germany, New Zealand, Panama, South Africa and Switzerland. The day is intended to promote further action towards the achievement of equal pay for work of equal value.

The first International Equal Pay Day – 18 September 2020

On 18 September 2020, the [first International Equal Pay Day](#), international leaders committed to taking affirmative action to narrow the gender pay gap. EPIC called on participants to put pay equity at the heart of Covid-19 recovery efforts by introducing [integrated policy responses](#) aimed at mitigating job and income losses resulting from the pandemic and ensuring that women do not end up disproportionately shouldering these job losses and reductions in incomes.

The 2021 Equal Pay Day

This year's [celebration](#) will focus on the efforts of key labour market actors to ensure that equal pay remains central to pandemic responses worldwide and to fully recognise the contributions of women to coronavirus pandemic economic recovery. The event aims to strengthen commitments to closing the gender pay gap across regions and sectors.

European Union initiatives

Equal pay for equal work is one of the EU's founding principles, enshrined in [Article 157 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union](#). However, the implementation and enforcement of this principle remain a [challenge](#). Since then, there have been initiatives to address the gender pay gap both at [EU](#) and [Member State](#) levels. Although some [reduction of the gender pay gap](#) has been recorded in most EU Member States, the challenge persists.

In her [political guidelines](#), the European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, announced that she would introduce a proposal on binding pay transparency measures in order to address the gender pay gap and ensure application of the principle of equal pay for equal work. The Commission's [legislative proposal](#) was adopted on 4 March 2021. It is one of the key priorities in the [EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025](#). The proposed directive 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 would focus on two aspects of equal pay: measures to ensure pay transparency and better access to justice for victims of pay discrimination.

European Parliament position

Parliament has been calling for stronger measures on pay transparency and equal pay for a number of years. In its resolution of 8 October 2015 on '[Equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation](#)', Parliament asked the Commission to draw up a legislative proposal on equal pay, incorporating measures on strengthening pay transparency, together with effective means of enforcement, such as mandatory pay audits for large companies. Parliament's resolution of 30 January 2020 on the '[Gender pay gap](#)' urged the Commission to ensure that the forthcoming pay transparency legislation applies to both the public and private sectors, promotes the role of the social partners and collective bargaining, and includes strong enforcement policies for those failing to comply. Parliament also asked for the proposal to incorporate a number of concrete measures.

Parliament's resolution of 21 January 2021 on the new '[EU Gender Equality Strategy](#)' stresses that binding measures are necessary to close the gender pay gap.

