

Beijing Platform for Action

25-year review and future priorities

SUMMARY

Governments across the world, including the European Union (EU) Member States and the EU itself, committed to working towards gender equality and empowering all women and girls at the 1995 fourth United Nations (UN) World Conference on Women in Beijing. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) adopted at the conference is considered the international 'Bill of Rights' for women, defining women's rights as human rights and setting goals and concrete measures across a range of issues affecting women and girls. In-depth national, regional and global reviews of its implementation and a set of priorities for future action will mark this 25th anniversary.

The review concerning the EU and its Member States shows that efforts to improve gender equality have had some results, but persistent inequalities and gender gaps remain across all the areas of action covered in the BPfA. The collection and use of gender equality data has improved, but it is still uneven, making it difficult to measure the impacts of action and to identify the most disadvantaged groups of women. Gender mainstreaming is not yet applied systematically across all policy areas and funding programmes. Already present in 1995, political and cultural tensions around some areas of women's rights, such as bodily autonomy and control of fertility, have been exacerbated in recent years. In addition, emerging challenges such as climate change have gender dimensions that need to be taken into account.

Looking forward, the EU and its Member States have the potential structures, actors and tools to advance gender equality. The European Parliament and women's organisations are urging the EU and national governments to demonstrate a high-level of political commitment in this area, defend the vision and commitments set out in the BPfA, and deliver an ambitious new agenda for the coming years.

A more detailed statistical picture of the current situation in the EU and its Member States, in selected fields, is available in a separately published [infographic](#).



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Background

It is now 25 years since 189 governments across the world, including the EU Member States and the EU itself, committed to working towards gender equality and empowering all women and girls at the 1995 fourth United Nations (UN) [World Conference on Women](#) in Beijing. The conference is considered a landmark in international efforts to achieve gender equality, both because of the number and range of [participants](#) that attended (an estimated 50 000 policy-makers, representatives from international organisations, NGOs and the media) and because of the strong commitments that were made across a range of issues affecting the lives of women and girls.

The [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#) (BPfA) adopted at the conference explicitly recognises women's rights as human rights and sets out an ambitious and comprehensive roadmap for achieving equality between women and men, with concrete goals and measurable targets in [12 interrelated critical areas](#) where a need for urgent action was identified: poverty; unequal access to education and training; inequalities in health care; violence against women and girls; effects of armed conflict; economic empowerment; power and decision-making; mechanisms to promote women's advancement; women's human rights; the media; the environment; and persistent discrimination and violation of the rights of the girl child. The UN [Commission on the Status of Women](#) has taken stock of progress on the BPfA every five years and is to conduct an in-depth review at its [sixty-fourth session](#) in March 2020, which will also focus on emerging issues and priorities for future action.

Measuring progress

The global appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action will draw on [national](#) and [regional](#) reviews conducted in 2019. For the Europe and Central Asia region, the UN has prepared a [report](#), based on [submissions](#) from national governments, including EU Member States, assessing achievements, setbacks and challenges in implementing the BPfA.

Equality between women and men is one of the [core values and objectives](#) of the European Union, which [committed](#) to review progress on the BPfA on an annual basis in 1995. By 2013, following work by successive presidencies, the Council had agreed its own [quantitative and qualitative indicators](#). The EU Member State data for these indicators are collected by the [European Institute for Gender Equality](#) (EIGE).

For the 25-year review, EIGE has drawn up a comprehensive [report](#) focusing on developments and trends and recommendations for future action.¹ The [key message](#) is that although efforts have had an impact, substantial gender inequalities persist across all twelve areas of concern. Many of the long-standing issues identified in 1995, such as higher levels of poverty, lower levels of employment and pay, under-representation in decision-making, and exposure to gender-based violence, remain highly relevant today, whilst new challenges stemming from digitalisation, climate change, migration and a growing backlash against gender equality require assessment and action. Measures need to be matched by scaled-up and effective financing at EU level in the new post-2020 funding programmes, and at national level.

Availability of data

The existence of solid sex-disaggregated data and comparable [gender statistics](#) is crucial for effective monitoring of progress towards the objectives in the BPfA. Since 1995, significant steps have been taken to improve the collection, analysis and dissemination of gender equality data for the BPfA objectives and the related goals in the [UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) adopted in 2015.² However, a [lack of good data](#) remains a problem, even in regions considered to be at the forefront of the fight for gender equality, such as the EU:³

Indicators: The EU currently has indicators for eleven of the twelve BPfA areas (indicators for the human rights of women are yet to be developed). In a number of areas there is a need for more indicators to fully capture gender inequalities and show whether measures are having any impact. In 2019, the EU approved four new indicators to measure outcomes for girls.⁴

Sex-disaggregated data: For some objectives, relevant data is not yet disaggregated by sex. Gaps in the data hinder assessment of how gender interacts with other characteristics such as age, ethnicity or sexual orientation, to shape outcomes for different groups of women.

Level of data collection: The level at which data is collected or aggregated can affect interpretation. For example, data gathered at household level is [not enough](#) to capture the situation and welfare of all individuals in that household and, in particular, does not break down the differences between men and women living in the same home. EIGE's review notes that at EU level, poverty measurement is based on incomes at household and not individual level, potentially leading to the underestimation of the gender gap in poverty.

Longitudinal data: Serious gaps in consistent collection of gender statistics make it difficult to measure progress over time. Of the data available in the UN's global '[Women Count](#)' database, only 23 % is from 2010 or later and only 16 % is available for two or more points in time. In the EU, key data for some areas, such as effective measures for closing the gender pay gap, women and media, violence against women and mechanisms for women's advancement, comes from ad hoc studies or surveys, which have not been repeated. In the area of violence against women, issues also persist with quality and comparability of data, at [EU](#) and [global](#) levels.

In addition, as [expert discussions](#) at the [2018 United Nations World Data Forum](#) highlight, in order to meet gender equality objectives, it is not enough to close the data gaps; it is also vital to ensure that data is disseminated and used in policy-making and that sufficient resources are available.

Findings from the monitoring in selected areas

Women and poverty

[Eradicating poverty](#) is the first critical area identified in the Beijing Platform for Action and analysis of the progress made in this domain is indicative of the outstanding challenges in tackling the micro- and macro-level causes of gender inequality across the other domains. The BPfA highlighted that:

- Women were more likely than men to be living in poverty due to gender disparities in access to resources, economic opportunities, and economic decision-making and gender blind macro-economic policies.

Aligning the Beijing Platform for Action with the Sustainable Development Goals

UN Women has [called for](#) the 25-year review of the BPfA to align with the ongoing monitoring of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), each of which have associated [targets and indicators](#). Gender equality is a standalone objective ([Goal 5](#)) and also [applies](#) across all the goals. The EU has developed its own [indicators](#) for monitoring [progress](#) towards the gender equality goals in the 2030 Agenda, focusing on violence, education, employment and leadership issues. At Member State level, gender-related targets are being addressed by the countries that have established their own frameworks of SDG indicators, but some countries (including Croatia, Hungary, Romania and Slovenia) are [still developing](#) their frameworks.

The UN's 2019 global [assessment](#) of gender equality across the SDGs finds that no country has fully achieved gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. The [Equal Measures SDG Gender Equality Index 2019](#) shows that the world is furthest behind on gender equality issues related to public finance and better gender data (SDG 17), climate change (SDG 13), gender equality in industry and innovation (SDG 9) – and the standalone 'gender equality' goal itself (SDG 5).

- For individual women and girls poverty could lead to food insecurity, homelessness or inadequate housing, unsafe living conditions, higher risks of illness and barriers to participation in education, decision-making and civil, social and cultural life.
- Developed countries had pockets of poverty linked with precarious, low wage work and decreased support from public services and social safety nets.

Signatories committed to take steps to address the needs of women and girls living in poverty, particularly the most marginalised, and to review and modify their macro-economic and social policies to take account of the gender dimension of poverty.

Twenty five years on, [worldwide](#) gender disparities in poverty levels persist. Women and girls are 4 % more likely than men and boys to live in extreme poverty. The widest gender gap is for 25 to 34 year olds and the risk of poverty increases for women with children below the age of 5.

In the [EU](#), gender remains a significant factor in patterns of poverty. Poverty and social exclusion rates ([AROPE](#)) and gender poverty gaps vary considerably between [countries](#), but overall, significantly more women are at risk (59.9 million women, compared to 53.1 million men). Young people aged 16-24 are the age group most affected by poverty, with women and men in this group facing a similar level of risk. However, for women, the risk of poverty increases significantly with age. Although the risk of poverty is much lower for pensioners than for the rest of the population, women aged over 65 face a much higher risk than men. Gender also [intersects](#) with household composition, ethnicity, disability, and employment status. Being a single mother, coming from a [migrant](#) or [Roma](#) background, or having a [disability](#), still put women at higher risk of poverty, partly because of the challenges they present to employment.

The nature of women's engagement in paid work and the [unequal share](#) of unpaid domestic and care work they still assume compared to men remain key contributing factors to their risk of poverty and social exclusion over their [lifetime](#). Many more women than men are inactive on the labour market and many more women than men are not seeking work because they are looking after children, or disabled or ageing adults (14 % compared to 1 % of men). Single mothers are nearly twice as likely as single fathers not to work (29 % compared to 15 %) and two thirds of those who do work are employed part-time. Overall, women are more likely than men to experience in-work poverty because they are engaged in part-time, low paid or precarious work. The impacts of these gendered patterns of employment accumulate over time, contributing to a [gender pay gap](#), lower pension entitlements and a [gender pension gap](#) in old age. In addition, women are [more likely to live alone](#) in very old age and to have to meet all household costs on lower pension income. Living in or at risk of poverty continues to be associated with a range of negative gendered outcomes, including poor health and impacts on education. The [WHO](#) and [survey research](#) find that 'period poverty' (the inability to afford sanitary products) is affecting girls in Europe, causing them to miss school. Inability to access or afford [basic services](#) such as childcare and transport can limit women's participation in the labour market, and in turn increase poverty risk. Single-parent families are particularly affected by [rising household costs](#), with one in five (21 %) spending more than 40 % of their income on housing, compared to 9 % of all families with children. In several countries, [damp housing](#) affects single mothers at a higher rate than single fathers, and the rest of the population. Against a background of [rising homelessness](#) in all EU countries except Finland,⁵ it is likely that current methods of data collection [underestimate](#) the number of women affected, since women's homelessness is typically 'hidden'. [Poor health](#) and [domestic violence](#) are both a cause and consequence of women's homelessness.

Women's risk of ending up in poverty and experiencing these associated risks, [can be lessened](#) through a combination of targeted policies and the kind of gender-sensitive approaches to labour-market, welfare and macro-economic policies called for in the BPfA. However, whilst austerity policies had a disproportionate impact on women, [only four countries](#) (Denmark, Finland, Italy and Slovenia) carried out gender assessments before implementing them. EIGE notes that austerity

measures and cuts in welfare benefits had a particularly negative impact on the number of women taken out of poverty between 2013 and 2017.⁶

EU action: The EU's main [strategy for 'inclusive' economic growth](#) set a target for reducing the number of people at risk of poverty, and its framework for social policy, the [Pillar of Social Rights](#), recognises that women and men must have equal opportunities to acquire pension rights.⁷ One of the [priorities](#) in the EU's 2016-2019 gender equality policy was to lift women out of poverty.

EIGE recommendations: EIGE [concludes](#) that the EU could have done more to include the gender dimension of poverty in its economic growth and social policy frameworks, but welcomes the sex-disaggregated indicators in the [mechanism](#) for monitoring the implementation of the Social Pillar. It calls for coordination between the Social Pillar and the [European Semester](#), the EU framework for coordinating Member States' socio-economic policies. At national level, governments could boost women's economic independence and tackle the forms of poverty that particularly affect them by investing in public services such as childcare and transport and reforming taxation and social protection systems. Measures could include extending social security systems to cover non-standard forms of work and introducing pension credits for time spent in caring roles.

The European Parliament has drawn attention to the [gender dimension](#) of poverty, calling for macroeconomic, social and labour market policies to be aligned with gender equality policies. In January 2020, Parliament [called](#) on the Commission to take urgent action to tackle homelessness, including a complete social package to address the needs of the most vulnerable groups (migrants, women, LGBTQI people, and people with disabilities).

Women and the economy

Regarding [women's contribution to the economy](#), the BPfA highlighted that paid employment is one of the key means of lifting women out of poverty and ensuring women's economic independence and wellbeing. However noticeable progress co-existed with continuing inequalities. Globally, women's share in the labour force was continuing to rise, but their participation was made stressful and their opportunities restricted by discrimination in education, pay, and promotion; inflexible working hours; inadequate sharing of unpaid labour and family responsibilities; and insufficient provision of public services. The signatories committed to promote women's economic rights and independence, including access to employment, appropriate working conditions and control over economic resources. They also undertook to eliminate occupational segregation and all forms of employment discrimination; and to harmonise work and family responsibilities for women and men.

Twenty five years on, [globally](#), women aged 25 to 54 are still less likely than men in the same age group to participate in the labour force (55 % compared to 94 %) and young women are more than twice as likely as young men to be unemployed or inactive and not in school or vocational training. Women's engagement in paid work is still shaped and constrained by [responsibilities in the private sphere](#). [Data](#) from Oxfam shows that 42 % of women of working age are inactive because of their responsibility for caregiving, compared to just 6 % of men, worldwide. There is also [evidence](#) that women's earnings are negatively affected when they have children, in comparison to fathers and mothers without dependent children, leading to a 'motherhood pay gap' that increases in line with the number of children, or periods of leave. [Jobs in research and innovation](#), which are driving the transformation towards the 'knowledge economy', continue to be male-dominated. On average, women comprise 28.8 % of the world's researchers for example, with large variations across regions.

Despite women's rising educational levels and their progressive entry into the labour market, the EU still has a [significant gender gap in employment](#). Between 2013 and 2017, the employment rate for women rose by around four percentage points to 66.5 %, but this is still 11.5 percentage points below that of men. The gender employment gap is higher for women with disabilities and migrant women, especially those from [outside the EU](#). It also tends to be higher for less educated and older women and some ethnic minorities.

Based on Eurostat data, EIGE estimates that [care](#) responsibilities are keeping 7.7 million women out of the labour market compared to 450 000 men. This unpaid care work [contributes](#) to the economy but continues to be largely invisible, since it is not included in key indicators such as GDP. The labour market continues to be characterised by high levels of horizontal and vertical gender segregation. Women are more likely than men to be in part-time, temporary or precarious employment and to work in sectors where pay is lower. On the other hand, they are less likely to be in higher paid sectors and management positions. These trajectories contribute to significant and persistent income inequalities between women and men. Since 2010, progress in reducing the [gender pay gap](#) has been slow. The gap even increased slightly between 2011 and 2012 (by 0.3 percentage points), following which there has been a slow and steady narrowing. In 2018, the gap stood at 15.7 %, but varied significantly between countries, from an estimated 3 % in Romania to 22.7 % in Estonia. If the UK data is taken out of the EU average, the pay gap in 2018 drops from 15.7 % to 14.8 %. The gender pay gap has an impact on women's lifetime earnings, contributing to an even more significant [gender pension gap](#) (35.7 % in 2017). European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS) [research](#) estimates that the aggregate annual earnings that women lose in the EU due to the gender pay gap is between €241 and 379 billion. When it comes to the jobs of the future, women are currently under-represented in better paid, expanding sectors such as science, technology, engineering and maths occupations ([STEM](#)), whilst their current jobs may be more [vulnerable to automation](#).

EU action: Increasing [women's employment and economic independence](#) was one of the priorities of the EU's 2016-2019 gender equality policy. The European Commission introduced two major new initiatives under the new [European Pillar of Social Rights](#). The [Gender pay gap action plan](#) sets out 20 concrete actions to address the root causes, including support for projects to tackle stereotypes and segregation in education, training and the labour market and improve gender balance in management and decision-making in companies. The [Work-life Balance Directive](#), adopted in 2019, replaced a 2008 [proposal](#) on maternity leave that was withdrawn in 2015, and is broader in scope. Its [legislative measures](#) include modernising existing EU law on parental leave and establishing EU-wide rights to carer and paternity leave, pay during leave, and flexible working arrangements for parents and carers. Non-legislative measures include support for affordable childcare across the EU. The EU has also set [targets](#) for childcare provision for children aged under three years.

EIGE notes that better data is needed to assess the underlying causes of gender inequalities in the labour market. It recommends that the EU and national governments take further steps to ensure pay transparency, regulate and increase the availability of childcare and other care services, reform tax laws and systems that deter women from participating in the labour market, and promote an economy of wellbeing that supports social rights.

The **European Parliament** has consistently [called](#) for more action to close the gender pay gap. In January 2020, it adopted a [resolution](#) urging the European Commission to propose binding measures on pay transparency and EU countries to set targets to reduce their gender pay gap and invest in family-friendly working arrangements and childcare to ensure women's equal participation in the labour market. The same resolution calls for specific provisions for girls, notably measures to promote digital and STEM education, and for older women. Parliament has highlighted the cumulative impact of gender imbalances in pay, overall earnings, family and caring responsibilities and career patterns on [women's pensions](#). It has also flagged the precarious situation of [care and domestic workers](#), who enable others to balance work and family life. The new EU [work-life balance legislation](#) covers several longstanding EP demands e.g. for paid paternity leave. Parliament has also made proposals to improve women's representation and participation in the [media](#), [digital](#) and [STEM](#) sectors.

Women in power and decision-making

Increasing women's participation in decision-making is especially important because it has the potential to reduce gender gaps in other areas as well. The BPfA highlighted that women's [equal participation in decision-making](#) is a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into

account, but that various barriers stand in the way, including discriminatory attitudes and practices, unequal power relations within the family, and the unequal division of labour. In 1995, women continued to be under-represented in formal power structures, but the BPfA also flagged women's involvement in grassroots and other informal forms of decision-making. Signatory countries committed to take [measures](#) to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making, and [increase](#) women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership.

In 2018, women made up 39 % of the [global](#) workforce, but only 27 % of managerial positions were occupied by women, up slightly from 26 % in 2015. As of January 2019, women's representation in national parliaments worldwide ranged from 0 to 61.3 %, with an average of 24 %, an increase from 19 % in 2010, but still short of the 30 % mentioned in the BPfA. At the local level, data from 103 countries and areas show that women's representation in elected deliberative bodies varies from less than 1 % to close to parity, at 50 %, with a median of 26 %. At the most personal level – women's power to take decisions about their own bodies – data from 51 countries shows that only 57 % of women aged 15 to 49 who are married or in a partnership make their own decisions about sexual relations and the use of contraceptives and reproductive health services.

EIGE [data on decision-making](#) covers politics, public administration, the judiciary, business and finance, social partners and NGOs, [environment and climate change](#), media, science and research and sports. Its 25-year review of the BPfA finds that despite some progress, women continue to be under-represented in all these fields. In most EU Member States, women still make up less than a third of members of [national](#) and regional parliaments, although there are some exceptions, notably Belgium, Finland, Sweden, and Spain, where women now make up at least 40 %. EIGE and the [European Commission](#) conclude that legislation and other measures can accelerate progress towards gender balance. For example, the proportion of women on company boards has increased from 16.6 % in 2013 to 27.7 % in 2019. The countries that adopted binding quotas (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, and Portugal) now have an average of 35.3 % of women on boards, an increase of 18.3 percentage points since 2013. Countries that introduced soft measures have also seen progress, but it has been half as fast (up 9.7 percentage points to 27 %). On the other hand, there has been very little progress in the countries that have taken no substantial action. Here women make up an average of 15.4 % of board members. Countries that have introduced legislative electoral quotas have also made faster improvements towards gender balanced political representation. However, quotas have not had the same results across all EU Member States.

EU action: Since the 1990s, the EU has pursued the objective of promoting balanced participation of women and men in decision-making at local, regional and national levels as part of its broader commitment to gender equality. The European Commission's strategic engagement for gender equality for 2016–2019 included this as a [priority objective](#), setting out 'soft law' measures, including data-collection and funding, to support the Member States and civil society. The European Commission's proposal for binding EU legislation on [gender balance on company boards](#) has stalled but remains on the agenda.

EIGE concludes that the data on gender-based inequalities in power and decision-making is comprehensive, but there are still gaps when it comes to measuring the relative importance of the positions held by women and men, the effectiveness of tools such as quotas and mentoring programmes used to promote gender balance and women's leadership, and the degree to which policy making actually reflects women's perspectives and needs. EIGE recommends that legislative and non-legislative measures should be introduced in sectors where women are under-represented in decision-making positions. These should include targets, timelines and sanctions for non-compliance. And there should be a particular focus on the areas where women are most-under-represented, i.e. politics and public life, economic decision-making, sports and the diplomatic sector. EIGE also flags the need to ensure that women's organisations and other civil society organisations promoting women's rights and gender equality are adequately supported and resourced and involved in policy-making at EU and national levels.

In 2001, the **European Parliament** [argued](#) that women's inclusion in decision-making strengthens democracy and is a necessary condition for taking women's interests and concerns into account. It [welcomed](#) the parity systems/gender quotas introduced in some Member States and urged others to consider legislating to facilitate gender balance in political and [economic](#) decision-making. For the [2019](#) European elections, it urged Member States and political parties to support gender-balanced electoral lists. It has also [called](#) for measures to prevent and combat sexual harassment in political life and for more EU [support](#) for grassroots organisations and equality bodies. Parliament also [supports](#) steps to give women control over their bodies through access to legal sexual and reproductive health services.

Women and the environment

Gender gaps in poverty, employment and decision-making are all significant in the area of [women and the environment](#) that is growing in importance in view of the climate crisis. The BPfA stressed that women have an essential role to play in developing sustainable and ecologically sound consumption and production patterns. However, although women were often involved in grassroots campaigns to protect the environment and minimise waste, they remained largely absent at all levels of policy formulation and decision-making and at managerial level in environment related agencies. The BPfA made only one reference to global warming in connection with the threat to people living in island countries and coastal areas. The signatories committed to involve women actively in [environmental decision-making at all levels](#), integrate [gender concerns and perspectives](#) in sustainable development policies, and strengthen or establish mechanisms at national, regional and international levels to [assess the impact of development and environmental policies](#) on women.

Twenty five years on, [women and girls in developing countries](#) have been particularly affected by environmental stress and crises triggered by increasing temperatures, rising sea levels and loss of biodiversity. Competition over increasingly scarce natural resources can exacerbate [gender-based violence](#). Gender roles and relations also have a significant impact on women's and men's decisions to [migrate](#) for environmental reasons and their experiences of migration. However, despite the gender differences in access to land and natural resources, vulnerability to environmental challenges and engagement in environmental management, there is still only one gender-specific indicator available for addressing the links between gender and the environment in the SDGs. For the Europe and Central Asia region, the lack of gender perspectives in environmental protection, climate change and disaster-risk management is identified as the most glaring gap in national reports. Research demonstrates that there is a significant gender dimension within the EU, which is not yet being fully assessed or incorporated into policy-making:

- **Gender gaps in data:** There is a lack of indicators to measure the extent to which gender perspectives are integrated into environmental and climate change policies, or the benefits of adopting a gender perspective. There is also a lack of comparable, sex-disaggregated national and EU-wide data to assess the current situation and trends from a gender perspective.
- **Gender gaps in energy access:** Most EU Member States have households living in or close to [energy poverty](#). Due to their lower average income, women (particularly single mothers and women living alone in older age) are disproportionately affected. With fewer resources to make investments in energy efficiency and reduce their energy consumption, women may be less able to take part in or benefit from the energy transition. Without [specific action](#) to support women and other economically disadvantaged groups, they may become (or remain) energy poor.
- **Gender gaps in the labour market:** The ongoing global energy transition could create new employment possibilities for women, but there is no sex-disaggregated employment data for the renewable energy sector at EU level. [Globally](#), it is estimated that the number of jobs available in this sector could increase from 10.3 million in 2017 to nearly 29 million in 2050. Women currently represent 32 % of the renewable energy workforce (higher than their 22 % share in the oil and gas workforce), but they are more likely to be employed in administrative

jobs than in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) posts. This imbalance is connected with the under-representation of women and girls in [STEM education](#).

- **Gender gaps in decision-making:** Women are [under-represented](#) in decision-making positions with influence over the energy transition in the corporate and public energy sectors. Women are also under-represented in [ministries](#) dealing with environment, climate change, energy and transport, but [EU delegations](#) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) have been more gender balanced.
- **Gender gaps in perceptions and action on climate change:** Women's under-representation in employment and decision making in this area does not reflect their actual level of concern about environmental issues and their likelihood of taking pro-environmental action. Research and [public opinion surveys](#) show that women are comparatively more likely than men to say they have taken personal action to fight climate change, particularly everyday action such as recycling. There is a risk that this will add still further to women's burden of unpaid work, particularly since social psychology [research](#) finds that gender stereotypes are shaping pro-environmental or 'green' behaviours. These gender gaps may be extending to legislatures. An analysis of [environmental attitudes and actions amongst Members of the European Parliament](#) found that in the 6th and 7th terms, male and female legislators expressed similar concern for the environment, but women were significantly more likely to support environmental legislation than men – even after controlling for political ideology and nationality.
- **Gender blind policy on tackling climate change:** While the EU is increasingly focusing on tackling climate change and reducing carbon emissions, gender mainstreaming is [strikingly weak](#) within EU environmental policies and gender is also rarely mentioned in the Member States' [draft national energy and climate plans](#) (NECPs) for 2012-2030.

EU action: EIGE highlights that EU climate change, energy and environment policy has so far lacked a gender-sensitive approach. The first EU climate/energy legislation to mention gender is the [Energy Governance Regulation](#) (2018), setting out EU-wide emission reduction targets and policy objectives for 2021-2030. In line with the [Paris Agreement](#), it urges Member States to integrate the dimensions of human rights and gender equality in their integrated national energy and climate plans and long-term strategies and their biennial progress reports.⁸

EIGE's policy recommendations on gender equality in relation to the environment and climate change include: promoting gender sensitive goals, targets and indicators in national energy and climate plans and EU environmental and climate change policies.

The **European Parliament** has also [called](#) for the adoption of a more gender-sensitive approach in climate change policy, including measures to prevent violence against women and girls living in reception centres for the displaced. It [stresses](#) the need to recognise and support women's and girls' roles as agents for change and the equal participation of women in decision-making bodies and national- and local-level climate policy and action.

Mechanisms for advancing gender equality

The BPfA identified adequately resourced [institutional mechanisms for women's advancement](#) as crucial preconditions for ensuring progress in all the other critical areas of concern. Signatories committed to create or strengthen [these mechanisms](#), integrate [gender perspectives](#) in legislation, public policies, programmes and projects and generate and disseminate [gender-disaggregated data and information](#) for planning and evaluation.

Twenty five years on, despite the persistent inequalities and emerging challenges, progress in using [institutional mechanisms for gender equality](#), and tools such as gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting, which are needed to make gender equality a reality, has slowed or even reversed.

[Globally](#), progress has been made towards establishing national and local bodies mandated to promote gender equality and applying gender mainstreaming, but data is uneven and only a [handful](#) of countries have introduced comprehensive gender budgeting systems to track expenditure on gender equality. In the Europe and Central Asia region, one third of countries apply some version of gender budgeting and several countries have introduced gender impact assessments. However, government support for gender equality bodies is insufficient and gender mainstreaming is patchy, particularly in economic, financial and environment policy. Only a [tiny proportion](#) (1%) of development funding for gender equality goes to grassroots women's organisations.

[Challenges](#) remain in this area at EU and national levels and there have been a number of setbacks. The post-2015 EU framework for gender equality policy was [widely considered](#) to be weaker than its predecessor. The [potential](#) of gender mainstreaming has not yet been fully utilised. Gender indicators and gender-disaggregated data are not systematically used in monitoring and evaluating EU-funded initiatives, making it difficult to show where there has been a positive impact or where there are failings. A gender perspective is rarely adopted in policy fields not seen as immediately related to gender equality, such as ICT, transport, business and environmental policies, where a gender impact may nevertheless be felt. The EU's high-level commitment to gender equality is [not reflected](#) in spending, and gender budgeting is not systematically applied in the EU budget and across all funding programmes. EIGE [finds](#) that at national level, effective use of gender mainstreaming was low in 2012 and had weakened in 18 Member States in 2018. The reasons for this include gender equality bodies being downgraded to lower positions within government and less use of methods and tools. In some EU countries, the institutional architecture for gender equality has been weakened due to restructuring and budget cuts. In some, '[anti-gender movements](#)' have had a negative impact on institutional and policy frameworks and on civil society. EIGE notes that 'some of the new Member States may not share a "progressive understanding" of gender equality with some of the older Member States' and have blocked progress on EU gender equality legislation.

EU action: The new European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, has identified gender equality as a major theme and objective of her Commission (2019–2024). In her political guidelines, she promised a new EU gender equality strategy to underpin this political commitment and support long-term work inside and outside the EU. The [new strategy](#) is due to be adopted at the beginning of March. It will [maintain](#) the existing focus on targeted actions and gender mainstreaming, address current priorities such as the gender pay gap, equality in decision-making and combating gender-based violence, and introduce new priorities such as artificial intelligence and climate change. New cross-cutting priorities will include gender stereotypes, the role of men and boys and the cumulative impacts of gender inequalities throughout the life cycle. The strategy will also address 'intersectionality', to take account of the interplay between gender and characteristics such as age, ethnicity, sexual identity and orientation, and disability.

EIGE recommends that gender should be mainstreamed in every aspect of the post-2020 strategy for implementing the SDGs and the EU multiannual financial framework and that these should be linked with a strong EU gender equality strategy. The use of gender mainstreaming tools and methods should be promoted at national level. Data collection should be further improved across all 12 areas of the BPfA to improve gender sensitive monitoring and evaluation.

During its 2014–2019 term, the **European Parliament** called on [many occasions](#) for a stronger EU framework for promoting women's rights and gender equality and it [renewed](#) this call in January 2020. At the same time, it also [called](#) for gender mainstreaming across all policy areas and systematic use of gender impact assessments. Parliament would like to see EU [funding](#) used much more proactively to achieve gender equality goals, and gender budgeting to be applied in all EU budget lines and in all future EU funding programmes, with clear targets, specified resources and systematic monitoring. Parliament has [taken](#) a strong position on the current backlash against women's rights and gender equality and called for a strong gender equality focus at EU level.

The current [backlash](#) against gender equality both globally and within the EU itself threatens to erode existing achievements, diminish protections against discrimination and block further progress. The areas in which it is materialising – key areas of the institutional and policy framework; certain policy fields, including education, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and violence against women; and the working environment of women's rights NGOs – are common across countries. [Researchers](#) have evoked the possibility that the consensus reached on gender equality and women's empowerment at the 4th World Conference of Women and set out in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action could be under threat, since the basic commitments around which it was constructed and the partnerships between national governments, international organisations and civil society that underpinned it are being undermined. Tensions already existed regarding particular areas in 1995, such as the explicit right for all women to control all aspects of their health, in particular their fertility.

Looking ahead: 'Generation Equality'

To mark the 25th anniversary of the BPfA, the UN is organising a campaign, '[Generation Equality: Realizing women's rights for an equal future](#)'. Against the backdrop of the global backlash against women's rights, the aim is to remobilise, create partnerships to address persisting gender gaps and emerging issues, and make real progress on achieving equality for all women and girls worldwide. There is a particular focus on involving younger generations of activists (who may not be aware of the Beijing Platform for Action and its relevance for them), civil society and other stakeholders including governments, international organisations, parliaments, cities, business, trade unions and the media. The campaign will culminate in a [Generation Equality Forum](#), hosted jointly by [Mexico](#) (7-8 May 2020) and [France](#) (7-10 July 2020).

At the Forum in France, six multi-stakeholder [action coalitions](#) will be launched in areas the UN has identified as priorities: gender-based violence; economic justice and rights; bodily autonomy and sexual and reproductive health and rights; feminist action for climate justice; technology and innovation for gender equality; and feminist movements and leadership. Each coalition will commit to concrete actions to be carried out between 2020-2025 to deliver tangible impacts on gender equality and girls' and women's human rights. They will report annually on progress, looking in particular at girls and women who are 'left behind' as a result of poverty or marginalisation. Each coalition must include one action that focuses on the rights of adolescent girls and young women and ensure that they are involved in setting priorities and monitoring. All will cover cross-cutting issues: financing; transforming gender norms (including by [engaging men and boys](#)); law and policy reform; education; data; intersectional discrimination; and addressing structural inequalities. The first results are expected to be announced at the [high-level meeting](#) of the UN General Assembly to be held in September 2020, to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the BPfA.

EU and civil society positions on the BPfA

The **European Union** will make a political statement at the 64th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW64) and be involved in shaping the political declaration. During the European Parliament's plenary session on 12 February 2020, the Council announced that the EU will make every effort to ensure that past achievements are safeguarded and will strive for a political declaration that recognises women's civil society organisations and human rights defenders. The EU will also be represented at the Generation Equality Forum and is likely to participate in one or more action coalitions. The **European Parliament** will send a delegation to the CSW64. In its [resolution](#) of 13 February 2020 on the EU priorities for CSW64, the European Parliament calls for a renewed commitment to achieve and go beyond the objectives of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA), and a unified EU position denouncing the backlash. The resolution sets out recommendations for all the areas of concern. Parliament will highlight the 25-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action during its [events](#) around International Women's Day, with a particular focus on women's economic wellbeing and empowerment and the gender impacts of climate change. In 2019, the **Council** adopted [conclusions on gender-equal economies in the EU](#) calling for more EU action in the areas covered by the BPfA. The [European Women's Lobby](#) has flagged the

gaps in implementation of BPfA commitments, and is calling for EU political leaders to take action to guarantee women's human rights, equality between women and men and full implementation of the BPfA, CEDAW and the SDGs.

MAIN REFERENCES

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[The Parliament's fight for gender equality in the EU](#), European Parliament, 2019.

ENDNOTES

¹ The analysis draws on multiple sources, including BPfA monitoring data and analysis from the European Commission, the European Parliament, EU agencies, stakeholders, international organisations and academic research. For the 25-year review, the analysis is not structured by area of concern in the BPfA, but organised around five themes that cut across multiple areas: gender inequalities in the economy; gender-responsive public infrastructure; social protection and services; freedom from gender-based violence, stereotypes and stigma; parity democracy, accountability and gender-responsive institutions; and peaceful and inclusive societies.

² See the comparative table in [Annex 0](#) of EIGE's 25-year review for the alignment of the BPfA objectives and the SDGs.

³ EIGE's [Beijing +25 report](#) analyses the issues with collection of gender-disaggregated data for each area covered by the BPfA. See the overview of strategic objectives and indicators in Annex 4 pp. 163-170. Information for the broader Europe region is set out in the [Regional Review](#), Section IV: Data and Statistics pp. 16-17.

⁴ For the full list, see Annex 1 of the [Council Conclusions on Gender-Equal Economies in the EU: The Way Forward](#), 2019.

⁵ European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA), [European Index of Housing Exclusion 2019](#): See Appendix 1: Recent Data on Homelessness in EU Countries.

⁶ A [2019 report](#) by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights draws an explicit link between austerity policies, as implemented in the United Kingdom, and increasing poverty among women in particular, noting that policies have perpetuated rather than tackled gendered aspects of poverty. A national [2020 report](#) finds that austerity has adversely affected the social determinants that impact on health and that among women, particularly, life expectancy declined in the more deprived areas of the country.

⁷ For further information see, [Employment and social aspects of the Europe 2020 strategy](#), EPRS, 2014 and [Implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights \('Social Pillar'\)](#), European Parliamentary Research Service, European Parliament, 2017.

⁸ The Paris Agreement reaffirms that the Parties should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights and gender equality.

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