

European gender equality strategy and binding pay transparency measures

Pre-legislative synthesis of national, regional and local positions on the European Commission's initiatives



This briefing forms part of an EPRS series offering syntheses of the pre-legislative state of play and consultation on key European Commission priorities during the current five-year term. It summarises the state of affairs in the relevant policy field, examines how existing policy is working on the ground, and, where possible, identifies best practice and ideas for the future on the part of governmental organisations at all levels of European system of multi-level governance.

Summary of findings

EPRS analysis of the positions of partner organisations at European, national, regional and local levels suggests that they would like the following main considerations to be reflected in discussion of gender equality and the forthcoming Commission proposal on binding pay transparency measures:

- Input obtained from all levels of governance indicates that both gender equality and pay transparency measures require an effective combination of long- and short-term measures and legislative and non-legislative initiatives. There is a need expressed by the EU level for EU legislation covering certain aspects of **violence against women**. If the EU's accession to the Istanbul Convention remains blocked, an EU initiative could aim to achieve convention's main objectives. According to the European Parliament, an EU legislative initiative should also address cross-border aspects, including human trafficking and cyber-violence. Local, regional and national governmental organisations show good practice in non-legislative measures, such as helplines, counselling services and shelters for women.
- When it comes to **gender equality at work**, a long-term perspective focused on changing harmful gender stereotypes could usefully be combined with short-term measures to ensure a good work-life balance, according to obtained input. Governmental organisations at local and regional levels show good practice in both of these areas. When it comes to **binding pay transparency measures**, there is broad support for an EU initiative from national governmental organisations.
- All levels of government are in agreement on the importance of **gender mainstreaming**, for example in the budgetary processes, in order to take account of the different needs of men and women. The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) has produced a useful [toolkit](#) for applying gender perspective to EU funds.
- There are also calls from various parts of the EU system of multi-level governance to improve the **availability of gender-disaggregated data** in the EU.

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Linking the Levels Unit and Ex-ante Impact Assessment Unit

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1. Current state of play

Background

Article 8 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) states: 'In all its activities, the Union shall aim to eliminate inequalities, and to promote equality, between men and women'. [EU public opinion surveys](#) show that a growing proportion of citizens would like the EU to be more active in promoting gender equality. On 5 March 2020, ahead of International Women's Day on 8 March, the Commission adopted the [European gender equality strategy for 2020 to 2025](#).¹ The strategy presents policy objectives and actions aimed at making significant progress by 2025 towards a gender-equal EU. It includes the following targeted policy areas for improvement: violence against women and challenging gender stereotypes; pay transparency and the gender pay gap, gender balance on company boards, work-life balance, gender issues related to [climate change](#) and artificial intelligence, and gender equality on the global stage.

During its 2014-2019 term, Parliament adopted clear [positions](#) on individual issues covered in the Commission's strategic engagement for gender equality for 2016 to 2019, and called on [many occasions](#) for a stronger EU framework for promoting women's rights and gender equality. The current Parliament renewed the call for a robust EU gender equality strategy in its [resolution](#) of 15 January 2020 on human rights and democracy in the world (2019/2125(INI)). Parliament is currently working on an own-initiative report on the gender equality strategy ([2019/2169\(INI\)](#)).

This briefing focuses on three aspects of the gender equality strategy, due to their particular relevance from a multi-level governance perspective: a) ending gender-based violence, where Parliament has called for binding legal measures at EU level; b) achieving gender equality within the labour market; and c) the forthcoming European Commission proposal on [binding pay transparency measures](#).

Ending gender-based violence

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) and domestic violence remain a reality for many women both in the EU and globally. VAWG is a widespread violation of human rights and takes various forms, such as: domestic violence, sexual harassment (including at work), rape, economic violence, honour killings, female genital mutilation, prostitution, forced prostitution and trafficking in women and children, stalking (including cyberstalking and online violence), and also obstetric violence. According to global governmental organisation [UN Women](#), harmful gender stereotypes, wrongful gender stereotyping,² and the use of power to dominate and control women are the root causes of discrimination, abuse and violence against women. Gender equality is not a women-only issue – these are matters that affect society as a whole and future generations.³

The Council of Europe convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence – the '[Istanbul Convention](#)' – is the benchmark for international standards in this field. The EU signed the Convention in 2017, and concluding the EU's accession is a key priority for the Commission. To accelerate the conclusion of the EU's accession, in 2019, the [European Parliament](#) requested an opinion from the European Court of Justice on this issue, which is pending following the [hearing](#) on 6 October 2020.

Figure 1 – Gender equality is stronger than violence



Simon Vouet, Portrait of Artemisia Lomi Gentileschi; public domain, Wikimedia Commons. Gentileschi, then aged 17, was raped in 1611 by a painter and colleague of her father, in Rome. She later became an accomplished painter.

Commissioner Helena Dalli stressed the need for the Member States to ratify the Istanbul Convention, and in its [work programme](#) for 2021 the European Commission announced a new legislative initiative to prevent and combat specific forms of gender-based violence to achieve the same objectives as the convention.

In its resolution [2019/2855\(RSP\)](#) of 28 November 2019 on the EU's accession to the Istanbul Convention and other measures to combat gender-based violence, Parliament condemned the attacks and campaigns against the convention based on deliberate [misinterpretation](#) and false presentation of its contents to the public. On 9 November 2020, Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality adopted by a broad majority a report on the EU Gender equality strategy (26 for, 6 against, 1 abstention). It notably called for preparatory actions for the launch of additional legally binding measures to eliminate violence against women and to combat cyber-violence.⁴

Gender stereotypes: cause of violence and gender inequality within the labour market

Harmful gender stereotypes are one of the root causes of violence. The international human rights law [framework](#) addresses gender stereotyping, but it is not binding. Gender stereotypes, together with other causes, such as the informal, unpaid care work burden on women, are also root causes for gender inequality within the labour market.

Achieving gender equality within the labour market

Today, women are still under-represented in the labour market: the [EU employment rate](#) (of people aged 20 to 64) is 67 % for women and 79 % for men.

Each partner in the couple should have the possibility to combine private and working responsibilities in an equal way. This was at the core of the [EU's directive](#) on a work-life balance for working parents and carers, adopted on 20 June 2019. The Commission aims to ensure that Member States transpose and implement this directive correctly by 2 August 2022, and calls upon the Member States to go beyond these minimum standards when reviewing their policies.

Beyond gender equality at work, the main elements assessed in the European Gender Equality Index are power, knowledge, time, money and health. The average EU score in [2020](#) is 67.9 out of 100 points. It was 67.7 in 2019. Assuming the current slow increase is maintained, it would take decades to achieve gender equality in the EU.

Binding pay transparency measures

Effective enforcement of the right to equal pay for the same work and work of equal value for women and men remains a major challenge, partly because of a lack of transparent data on men and women's pay. In 2006, Parliament and Council adopted a directive on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation ([2006/54/EC](#)). In order to raise awareness about the perennial gender bias in pay and to incentivise companies to take initiatives to analyse and possibly revise their pay structures, the [2014 Pay Transparency Recommendation \(2014/124/EU\)](#) suggested four core measures to improve pay transparency and encouraged Member States to implement at least one:

- the right to request information on pay levels;
- gender pay reports;
- gender pay audits; and
- discussion of the issue of equal pay during collective bargaining.

However, the [2017 implementation report](#) on the recommendation revealed uneven follow-up: in a significant number of Member States, transparency-enhancing measures are still entirely absent. Therefore, the Commission has announced that it will propose [binding pay transparency measures](#)

by the end of 2020, in order to reveal potential gender bias or discrimination in pay structures and, consequently, help address unjustified or discriminatory wage gaps.

Parliament adopted resolution [2019/2870\(RSP\)](#) of 30 January 2020 on the gender pay gap, calling for protection of maternity, paternity and parenthood in labour legislation, and for action to combat precarious female work and the feminisation of poverty, while paying particular attention to groups that experience multiple forms of discrimination, and adequate investment in the provision, accessibility, affordability and quality of formal early childhood education and care services.

Methodology

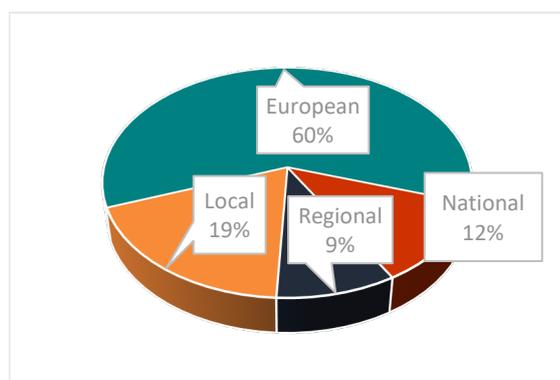
The data sources for this briefing were obtained through:

- 1 **general requests** for input on key European Commission priorities, aiming to reach out to governmental organisations at all levels of government;
- 2 **targeted requests** for input, seeking to obtain specific input from partner organisations; and
- 3 **pro-active desk research**, aiming to obtain additional relevant input online.

In a first drive, general requests for input were sent to all the governmental organisations in the EPRS' Linking the Levels Unit network. These are active in a broad range of policy areas. This was done by means of the monthly newsletter *The Link*,⁵ with calls sent each month between March and July 2020 to an expanding network, which had reached over 470 contacts by the end of that period.

Secondly, targeted emails were sent to experts within the partner organisations with specific expertise on gender issues. At this stage, more details were provided on the topics to be addressed, which were chosen because of their potential relevance from a multi-level governance perspective (see 'Background').

Figure 2 – Documents analysed, by level of governmental organisation



Source: EPRS.

Finally, pro-active desk research was carried out to gather further information from other governmental organisations online as well as in the relevant literature, using European Parliament Library knowledge resources. This process took place from April to October 2020 with a view to closing the analytical gaps identified.

This outreach strategy garnered 43 documents, which are analysed in this briefing. Figure 1 presents all the input obtained according to the level of governance from which the documents originated. A large share of EU-level documents originated from the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), including a synthesis and analysis of governmental organisations at national, regional and local level.

Respondents notably included the following two partner umbrella organisations:

- **Eurocities**, the network bringing together [over 140 of Europe's largest cities](#); and
- the **Council of European Municipalities and Regions**, which brings together [60 national associations of regional and local governments](#) from across Europe, including all EU Member States.

2. Positions of governmental organisations to date

Ending gender-based violence

This section analyses the many forms gender-based violence takes, focusing on: domestic violence; online harassment and cyber-violence; sexual exploitation and prostitution; obstetric and gynaecological violence; and honour killings and female mutilation. It further details the positions that governmental organisations take with a view to ending these societal problems.

Domestic violence

Domestic violence includes physical, [psychological](#), sexual and economic violence, and 95 % of victims are women. The EIGE has collected the latest available data on intimate partner violence in the EU and published it in the [Gender Statistics Database](#). For example, the EIGE's [data](#) on intimate partner violence includes an analysis of the incidence of intimate partner femicide across 11 countries between 2014 and 2018. On average almost 500 women were killed each year by their male partners in 11 EU Member States (those for which figures are available) between 2014 and 2018. Of all the women killed, approximately half were killed by their male partners in most of those Member States.⁶

The **European Economic and Social Committee** (EESC) shared with the authors of this briefing several recommendations taken from its opinion [Eradicating domestic violence against women](#). These include, for example, providing support for the civil society organisations that work with women who have been victims of domestic violence and that promote awareness-raising campaigns and training to combat gender-based violence.

Cities are setting up centres to support victims of gender-based violence, as evidenced by the following examples taken from the **Eurocities** network. For example, the city of [Nantes](#) invested €1 million to open such a centre in autumn 2019. The city of [Bologna](#) has developed a comprehensive system to provide for the reception, counselling and support of victims of gender violence, also offering men free counselling on how to prevent and manage their violent behaviour. The city of [Gijon](#), Spain, has committed to combat gender violence by offering support to victims by means of an integrated care centre for women victims of gender violence and an advice centre for women. The city of [Vienna](#) has committed to continue and step up its work for gender equality by investing in safe shelters for women and children who have experienced domestic violence and by opening advice centres and a 24-hour emergency helpline for women.

Finally, from May to August 2020, the **European Parliament** offered one of its buildings in Brussels to be used as a women's refuge by the [Samusocial](#), a Belgian public body. The shelter provided accommodation for [279 homeless women](#)⁷ who were victims of violence or had a traumatic past and were particularly impacted by the coronavirus confinement.

As part of the action programme 'Together against violence against women', the **German Federal ministry for family affairs, senior citizens, women and youth** launched the nationwide initiative [Stärker als gewalt](#) (stronger than violence) in November 2019. The website is the first platform to combine access to a great variety of nationwide support and counselling services, at national, regional and local levels. Another central feature of this platform is the link to the nationwide 'Violence against Women' support hotline. This service is available day and night, 365 days a year, is free of charge and confidential, and it is available in 17 different languages.

Figure 3 – Gender-based violence can start early on in life and have lasting consequences



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One of the latest worrying trends has been the rise of domestic violence during the lock down made necessary by the coronavirus pandemic. Victims of abuse are confined to the same home as the perpetrators of that abuse with no or limited access to support services. In **Germany**, during the pandemic as part of the *Stärker als Gewalt* initiative, the *Zuhause nicht sicher?* (not safe at home?) campaign was started in order to combat the increased risk of violence at home owing to the quarantine and tele-work measures. This campaign was supported by Germany's largest food retailers, which put up awareness-raising posters and advertised the website on products and shopping receipts.

Online harassment and cyber-violence

Online harassment and [cyber-violence](#) is a public health and safety issue, as it affects women's participation in public life and is typically used to silence women, especially women with a public voice, such as journalists or politicians. Cyber violence is a transfer of real life violence to the online environment and includes: cyber stalking, rape and death threats, bullying, trolling, defamation and hate speech, public shaming, identity theft and hacking, non-consensual pornography, revenge porn, and rapes streamed live on social media. According to academics [Lewis, Rowe and Wiper](#), the possibilities for reporting misogynist speech on popular social media platforms are very limited⁸. The [EIGE](#) estimates that one in ten women have already experienced some form of cyber violence since the age of 15. Typically, victims are young women between 15 and 35 years of age and perpetrators are men.⁹ The EIGE warns that data on cyber-violence against women and girls in the EU is limited, and the actual percentage of victims of this type of violence remains largely unknown. In 2014, the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) conducted a [European survey](#) on Violence Against Women and 20 % of [young women](#) responding stated that they had experienced cyber violence. It is considered the best source of data on the issue at present.

The European Parliament's Committees on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) and on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) are currently working on a [legislative initiative report](#) on combating cyber violence.

Sexual exploitation and prostitution

The European Parliament's [resolution](#) on sexual exploitation and prostitution (Honeyball report) of 4 February 2014 recognised 'that prostitution and forced prostitution have an impact on violence against women in general, as research on sex buyers shows that men who buy sex have a degrading image of women'; and suggested 'that the ban on the purchase of sexual services should be accompanied by a campaign to raise awareness among men'.¹⁰ Forced prostitution – the trafficking of women for sexual exploitation – is firmly established as a form of violence against women under international and European Union law ([EIGE Report](#), 2018, p. 19). Both legalised prostitution and sexual exploitation are based on the abuse of women's systemic vulnerabilities, such as poverty, and lack of job opportunities and support systems to exit prostitution or escape trafficking, etc.

EU institutions do not collect data on trafficking in human beings systematically, nor is this data publicly shared on a regular basis.¹¹ As shown by the [European External Action Service](#), the overwhelming majority of persons trafficked for sexual exploitation are women and girls (95 to 98 %), some as young as 13. Seventy per cent of the identified victims and suspects of trafficking in human beings in the European Union are EU nationals. Migrants such as asylum seekers, including children, are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation. The number of the registered victims of trafficking in the EU is on the increase: 14 145 registered victims during the

Figure 4 – International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women



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2017-2018 period compared to 13 461 victims of the 2015-2015 period¹² (Commission 2020 [report](#) on progress made in the fight against trafficking in human beings, p. 3).

According to [country data](#) on the [European Commission](#) website on how each EU Member State tackles, prevents and identifies instances of trafficking, the best and most effective anti-trafficking approach is considered to be the [Italian model](#), based on a victims' rights-centred approach. However, victims in many EU countries still face further harm from the law-enforcement authorities, which fail to recognise sexual exploitation victims, either not believing them or stigmatising them as prostitutes and blaming the victims. There is a clear need for those providing trafficked women with services (such as information, referral, medical assistance, counselling and legal representation) to also possess the necessary gender expertise. 'It has been recognised that specialist non-governmental services with such expertise are best suited for service provision to the victims in focus and should be funded for this purpose' ([EIGE Report](#), 2018, p. 37). Training of professionals is of paramount importance, as shown by the example of Ms Lāsma Stabiņa, National anti-trafficking coordinator at **Latvia's** Ministry of the Interior since 2014. Stabiņa led the development and implementation of two major international anti-trafficking projects, through which Latvia helped increase EU scrutiny of human trafficking in the form of sham marriages (an overlooked but widespread issue). Stabiņa organised training programmes to help local officials recognise sham marriages, bringing together consular staff and law enforcement officials, including judges, prosecutors, and police. Stabiņa also secured the Latvian government's support for national and regional public awareness campaigns, improving both the government's and the public's understanding of human trafficking crimes.¹³

Last but not least, the provision of shelter, especially shelter for families, is mandatory under both the Anti-trafficking and Victims' Rights Directives, as trafficked women have children, and children are also born in contexts of sexual exploitation ([EIGE Report](#), 2018, p. 38).

Other forms of gender-based violence include **obstetric and gynaecological violence**. In Europe, Roma, migrant women and women with [disabilities](#)¹⁴ are at particular risk of violations of their sexual and reproductive rights.¹⁵ Worldwide, more than 90 organisations have signed a [WHO pledge](#) on the prevention and elimination of disrespect and abuse during childbirth. The **Council of Europe** (CoE) [Parliamentary Assembly](#), in its 2019 report on obstetrical and gynaecological violence, states that it 'is a form of violence that has long been hidden and is still too often ignored'. The CoE [Commissioner for Human Rights](#) has pointed out that women's sexual and reproductive health and rights are human rights.

Honour killings and female mutilation. According to EIGE's [report](#) on Female genital mutilation in the European Union, it has been recognised that 75 % of the victims of honour-related violence and oppression are female (at least 56 % of victims in 2019 were younger than 18 years old). However, according to [EPRS research](#), the majority of honour-related crimes go unreported. At local level, the city of **Gothenburg**, Sweden, has adopted a 2019-2023 gender equality plan, encompassing honour-related violence and oppression, and including forced marriages as an important aspect of gender equality and gender-based violence, in line with their strategic working plans.¹⁶ On 12 February 2020 the European Parliament adopted a [resolution](#) on an EU strategy to put an end to female genital mutilation around the world.

Achieving gender equality within the labour market

Gender inequality is widespread in many areas of the labour market. According to [Eurostat](#), in 2019 the female employment rate in the EU was approximately 67 %, compared with 79 % for men. The average showed wide national discrepancies: Greece, Spain and Italy had female employment rates below 55 %, while Germany, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Finland and Sweden were above 75 %.

There are many reasons for this gap. According to a 2018 exploratory [opinion](#) by the **European Economic and Social Committee**, requested by the European Parliament, these causes should be tackled with an integrated strategy, as follows:

- at all levels of governance: the EESC recommends that awareness-raising campaigns be undertaken to combat gender stereotypes and gender segregation in education, training and career choices, making use of new technologies;
- at national level: the EESC recommends that Member States adapt their tax-benefit systems to make them gender neutral and free of disincentives that could deter second earners from working or working more.

Governmental organisations highlighted a number of measures in relation to building capacity and raising public awareness. For instance, the city of **Vienna** produced a toolkit based on a gender-sensitive pedagogy for educators working with young children. The city also runs 'girl empowerment workshops' where city staff work with young women to raise awareness for instance about gender stereotypes, also in the media.¹⁷ The City of **Lyon** has developed training courses on raising awareness of gender equality among the staff of the city administration.¹⁸

An additional example in this respect is [the Women's Parliament](#), a joint initiative by the Parliament of the Spanish region of **Catalonia** and the National Women's Council of Catalonia. The event, held on 1 July 2019, consisted of an open plenary, with the participation of feminist organisations, prominent women in Catalan society and 60 members of the regional Parliament.

An important element in achieving gender equality within the labour market are policies promoting a work-life balance. The Work-Life-Balance Directive introduces minimum standards for family leave and flexible working arrangements for workers, and promotes equal sharing of caring responsibilities between parents.

EU regions and cities show some good practices in this respect. According to [Eurostat](#), **Slovenia's** female employment rate was almost 73 %, compared with approximately 67 % in the EU. The city of [Ljubljana](#) considers that work-life balance is one of the most important conditions for achieving gender equality. Slovenia's capital city pursues this objective, for instance by:

- investing extensively in subsidised childcare to make sure children get a place in kindergarten: the rate of inclusion in Slovenia's capital was over 92 % in 2019, compared with over 80 % in the country as a whole;
- offering the possibility of morning and extended care for children in lower grades of primary schools and subsidised meals in secondary schools; and
- providing holiday care and additional programmes for pre-school and school-age children.

In 2016, the German region of **Baden Württemberg** enacted a law to achieve equal opportunities for women and men in the public service. The law seeks to work towards a quota of 50 % women (especially in managerial positions) and to ensure working conditions that allow for a combination of gainful employment and family and care responsibilities. The law applies to nearly all the authorities of the *Land*: corporations, institutions and public law foundations (those under exclusive supervision of the *Land*), courts, education facilities, and municipalities.¹⁹

The contribution of capital cities and the private sector to gender equality in informatics

[RigaTechGirls](#) is a non-governmental organisation and IT technology mentoring programme where female leaders of industry, but also for instance from the President's office, mentor girls and women. Its partners and supporters appear to be mainly private companies. Today, about 25 % of all Latvian employees working in IT are female, which is above the 16.7 % average for the European Union.

Source: G. Sabbati, M. Prpic and R. Shreeves, [Gender equality in the EU's digital and media sectors](#), EPRS, March 2018.

Binding pay transparency measures

The average gender pay gap in the EU is almost 15%. Across Member States, the gender pay gap varies by almost 20 percentage points, ranging from 3% in **Romania** to almost 23% in **Estonia** (Figure 1). There are regional and local variations within Member States. For instance, the gender pay gap in **Germany** is approximately 20%. However, it is 25% in **Bavaria** and reaches almost 40% in one small Bavarian district home to 100 000 people.²⁰

Three national public authorities feature among the 43 contributors who provided [feedback](#) on the Commission's inception impact assessment regarding pay transparency for men and women.

At national level, the [French Labour ministry](#)

welcomed the forthcoming Commission initiative and proposed as an example of good practice the French Professional Equality Index, introduced by national law in 2018. It is a composite index, weighted on a 100-point scale, consisting of up to five indicators. Three of these indicators measure the gap between men and women on: actual remuneration; any increase in remuneration; and any promotion. The remaining two indicators measure: any gap in remuneration increase between female staff returning from maternity leave and other female staff; and the share of women among the company's top-10 earners. The index was first introduced for companies with over 250 employees and has been extended to companies with over 50 employees since 1 March 2020.

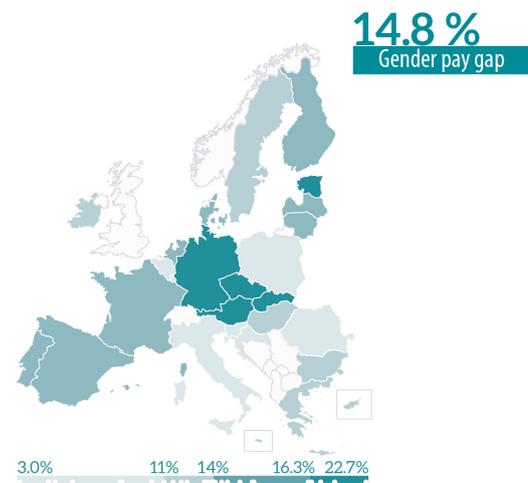
The [Netherlands Institute for Human Rights](#) also supports a Commission directive in this field, and notes that:

- the gender pay gap has been on a decreasing trend in the Netherlands, but is still at least 5% in the public sector and at least 7% in the private sector;
- one of the causes of wage discrimination is the fact that most employees do not have full access to relevant wage data i.e. the limited pay transparency the forthcoming Commission initiative aims to address; and
- a national proposal currently being debated in the [Dutch parliament](#) would introduce a requirement for companies to be issued a certificate showing that they pay men and women equally for equal work. It would apply to companies with more than 50 employees, one of the above-mentioned thresholds used in France.

Finally, and by contrast, the [Danish national agency for personnel and development](#) under the Danish Ministry of Employment is of the opinion that:

- to achieve the objective of equal pay for equal work, the current EU legislation constitutes an adequate legal framework and the Commission could usefully focus attention on its correct implementation;

Figure 5 – Gender pay gap in EU-27 in 2018



Data source: Eurostat.

Figure 6 – Pay slips conceal wage discrimination



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- in Denmark, the website www.loenoverblik.dk sets out what the Danish agency considers to be sufficient pay transparency by making available gender-disaggregated statistics; and
- there is a need to address other root causes.

At local level, the **Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)** argues: 'CEMR supports better and correct implementation of existing national legislation, supplemented by non-legislative action at European level... such as sharing of best practice, capacity-building measures, guidance for all levels of government and awareness-raising actions. Research indicates that implementation and enforcement of existing legislation is uneven across Member States. We advocate for objectives to be designed and developed in partnership with local and regional government and its partners'.²¹

3. Analysis of governmental organisations' positions

Main features of input

EPRS analysis reveals data availability to be a major issue. On gender-based violence, for instance, data availability varies across Member States, and data for the number of women victims of intimate partner violence is unavailable for the majority of Member States. Data availability and comparability has been slowly improving since 2014, and some Member States, such as Czechia, Germany and Slovenia, have made significant efforts to collect and share comparable data that adhere to the EIGE's indicators. The number of victims of [culture-based violence](#), including honour killings and [female genital mutilation](#) in Europe is uncertain, meanwhile, since there is a lack of reliable statistics. Finally, an EU-wide survey with gender-disaggregated data on the prevalence and harm caused by cyber-violence against women and girls is still lacking, and national-level research within EU Member States is limited.

Collecting comparable, sex-disaggregated data is highly important when it comes to tracing trends, evaluating progress, calculating risks and making informed policy decisions to improve the status of women. Nevertheless, gender-specific data is not always taken sufficiently seriously, even when it does exist. One of the reasons for not collecting gender-disaggregated data or not taking it seriously lies in the historical data bias that the average man represents the average human, as argued by [Caroline Criado Perez](#). According to the British feminist author,²² the gender data gap²³ can only be closed by appropriate decisions and targeted action to collect gender-specific data, as well as to actually use it in designing policies that take account of differences in women's and men's lives. For example, the gender pay gap has been common knowledge for around 40 years. However, progress has been so slow that it is still a part of the EU's 2020-2025 gender equality strategy and other policies at all levels of governance.

Roles and responsibilities of different levels of government

The evidence gathered shows that regional and local governmental organisations have wide-ranging responsibilities related to gender equality. This is coupled with a pro-active role in raising awareness and promoting gender equality (see above).

It is however worth noting that women make up a minority in the leadership roles of governmental organisations at all levels. As discussed in a [workshop](#) at the European Committee of the Regions (CoR), only 15 % of EU's mayors are women in a majority of Member States, and only 22 % or less of CoR members are female. The European Committee of the Regions is aware of this weakness and has shaped a strategy to remedy it. In contrast, women make up almost [40 %](#) of the membership of the European Parliament. Among EU Member States, only parliaments of Finland, Portugal, Spain and Sweden outperform the European Parliament in this respect.²⁴

A controversial issue in the literature is whether an increase in women's representation translates into a different policy focus. For instance, the global umbrella organisation United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) notes how 'a direct causal relationship between the presence of women in municipal councils and childcare coverage was found' in [Norway](#). However, there are [other views](#).

Financial and technical resources

Gender equality benefits society and it is, therefore, important to understand how spending decisions impact on gender equality. However, at the moment there is no systematic way to do that in the EU budget, as demonstrated by a study requested by the Budgetary Affairs Committee of the European Parliament.²⁵ The lack of indicators and specific budget lines for gender equality in the various funding programmes makes it difficult to see how much money goes towards gender equality goals and how effective policies are at achieving them. For cross-cutting issues in particular, gender objectives may not be set across a number of policy fields, and this can lead to gender issues being altogether neglected.

'[Gender budgeting](#)' is defined by the Council of Europe as the 'gender-based assessment of budgets incorporating a gender perspective at all levels of the budgetary process and restructuring revenues and expenditures in order to promote gender equality'. As demonstrated by the [OECD](#) and academic research by [O'Hagan and Klatzer](#),²⁶ gender budgeting methods and approaches have flourished at national, sub-national and local levels, also in EU countries. In two thirds of OECD countries, gender budgeting usually entails cooperation among at least two levels of governance.

Finally, the amount of money devoted to gender equality policies cannot be easily compared, in part because of differences in defining the terms. To give a simple indication, the EIGE has found that [under 1 %](#) of financing under the European structural and investment funds is earmarked for promoting gender equality. These funds account for approximately three quarters of the EU budget.

EXPERT READING ON THE TOPIC

Criado Perez C., [Invisible Women: Exposing data bias in a world designed for men](#), Chatto & Windus, 2019.

[Cyber violence and hate speech online against women](#), Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, European Parliament, September 2018.

[Equal Pay for Equal Work Binding pay-transparency measures](#), Policy Department for Economic, Scientific and Quality of Life Policies, European Parliament, February 2020.

Prpic M. and Shreeves R., [Promoting equality between women and men](#), EPRS, European Parliament, June 2019.

Shreeves R. and Prpic M., [Violence against women in the EU, State of play](#), EPRS, European Parliament, November 2020.

[Violence against Women Psychological violence and coercive control](#), Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, European Parliament, April 2020.

ENDNOTES

¹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions, A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 (COM/2020/152 final).

² For example, Eurobarometer [data](#) of 2016 shows that 27 % of Europeans find rape justifiable under some conditions.

³ See also M. Nogaj: [Combating violence against women: European added value assessment](#), EPRS, European Parliament, 2013, p. 8.

⁴ For further information on the Istanbul Convention, see [Tackling violence against women and domestic violence in Europe](#). The added value of the Istanbul Convention and remaining challenges, Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, European Parliament, October 2020.

⁵ Any governmental organisations wishing to subscribe to *The Link* can do so by writing to EPRS-LinkingLevels@europarl.europa.eu.

⁶ [Data talk](#), Women victims of intimate femicide (aged 18 and over) committed by a male intimate partner (aged 18 and over), as a share of the women victims of homicide aged 18 and over, EPRS calculations.

⁷ At the time of writing, 64 of the 279 women have already been oriented towards solutions to exit their homeless status.

- ⁸ R. Lewis, M. Rowe and C. Wiper, '[Misogyny online: extending the boundaries of hate crime](#)', *Journal of Gender-Based Violence*, Vol. 2(3), October 2018, pp. 519-536.
- ⁹ [Cyber violence and hate speech online against women](#), Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, European Parliament, 2018, p. 36.
- ¹⁰ [Honeyball Report](#) on sexual exploitation and prostitution and its impact on gender equality, 2013/2103(INI), A7-0071/2014.
- ¹¹ A. Dinu, [Implementation of Directive 2011/36/EU: Migration and gender issues](#), EPRS, European Parliament, September 2020, p. 28.
- ¹² The actual number may be higher. For more findings on victims and perpetrators, see the Commission's 2018 report '[Data collection on trafficking in human beings in the EU](#)', which states that 23 % of victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation are children (p. 14).
- ¹³ [Trafficking in persons report](#), 20th edition, Department of State, USA, June 2020, p. 51.
- ¹⁴ The European Parliament condemned the forced sterilisation of women with disabilities in its resolution of 29 November 2018 on the situation of women with disabilities ([2018/2685\(RSP\)](#)).
- ¹⁵ R. Shreeves, [Stepping up Roma inclusion policies](#), EPRS, European Parliament, July 2020; and R. Korver, [Framework for national Roma integration strategies up to 2020](#), Implementation Assessment study, EPRS, April 2020.
- ¹⁶ For more information about fighting forced marriage and honour-based abuse, please see this [video](#) by British campaigner Jasvinder Sanghera.
- ¹⁷ 'Stronger than violence' website: www.staerker-als-gewalt.de.
- ¹⁸ Eurocities, [Cities are leading the way on gender equality](#), March 2020.
- ¹⁹ Law to secure equal opportunities for women and men in the public service in Baden Württemberg (see [Chancengleichheitsgesetz](#) brochure – in German).
- ²⁰ Institute for Employment Research (IAB) 3/2019 IAB Bavaria: '[Gender Pay Gap in Bavaria](#)'.
- ²¹ CEMR submission to Targeted consultation with social partners on pay transparency, shared with the authors.
- ²² For further insight, see Criado Perez's article on [gender biased algorithms](#).
- ²³ C. Criado Perez in her book [Invisible women: Exposing data bias in a world designed for men](#) includes numerous examples not only of non-existent gender-specific data, but also plenty of examples when existing data was continuously ignored, hence not only not helping to improve women's lives but even rendering them more dangerous.
- ²⁴ See also, V. Margaras, [Women in local and regional government: Still a long way from achieving parity](#), EPRS, European Parliament, March 2020.
- ²⁵ [Gender Responsive EU Budgeting](#). Update of the study 'The EU Budget for Gender Equality' and review of its conclusions and recommendations, European Parliament, 2019. A [planned audit](#) by the European Court of Auditors aims to assess whether the EU budget promotes equality between women and men through gender mainstreaming.
- ²⁶ OECD, [Gender Budgeting in OECD countries](#), 2017. A. O'Hagan and E. Klatzer (eds.), [Gender Budgeting in Europe: Developments and Challenges](#), 2018, see in particular Chapter 3.

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