Understanding the gender pay gap: definition and causes

Working women in the EU earn on average 16% less per hour than men. Find out how this gender pay gap is calculated and the reasons behind it.

Although the equal pay for equal work principle was already introduced in the Treaty of Rome in 1957, the so-called gender pay gap stubbornly persists with only marginal improvements being achieved over the last ten years.

The European Parliament has consistently called for more action to narrow the gap and adopted a resolution on 30 January (following a debate on the issue held earlier in the month).
In its resolution, Parliament urges the European Commission to propose binding measures on the gender pay gap and pay transparency, applicable to both the public and private sectors.

The resolution calls for:

- Clear targets for EU countries to reduce the gender pay gap over the next five years.
- Investment in early childhood education and care services.
- Investment in family-friendly working arrangements to ensure women’s equal participation in the labour market.
- Adequate provisions for older women such as credits for care periods, adequate minimum pensions and survivor’s benefits.
- Promoting vocational training and lifelong learning for women, in particular greater promotion of entrepreneurship and STEM subjects and digital education for girls from an early age.

The European Commission is expected to propose the new EU gender equality strategy in March.