



Questions and Answers: What is the EU doing for women's rights and gender equality?

Brussels, 8 March 2017

Equality between women and men is a fundamental value of the European Union and one that has been enshrined in the Treaty from the very beginning, as the Rome Treaty included a provision on equal pay.

The 2016-19 Strategic engagement for gender equality aims at pursuing the improvements in key policy areas.

What are the priorities of the Commission in terms of gender equality?

In December 2015, the Commission presented the "Strategic engagement for gender equality 2016-2019". It represents the work programme for gender equality policy during this Commission's mandate

The Strategic engagement outlined five priority areas:

- increasing female labour-market participation and the equal economic independence of women and men;
- reducing the gender pay, earnings and pension gaps and thus fighting poverty among women;
- promoting equality between women and men in decision-making;
- combating gender-based violence and protecting and supporting victims; and
- promoting gender equality and women's rights across the world.

As far as the Commission itself is concerned, there is progress towards meeting the 40% target for female senior and middle managers, set by President Jean-Claude Juncker at the beginning of the mandate.

Also in 2015, a new Gender Action plan for the EU's activities on gender equality and women's empowerment in the EU's external relations for the 2016-2020 period was endorsed. Its aim is to support partner countries, especially developing, enlargement and neighbouring countries, to achieve tangible results towards gender equality which is at the core of European values, as well as the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted at the UN Summit (see more details below).

What are the key findings of the 2017 Commission's [Report](#) on equality between women and men?

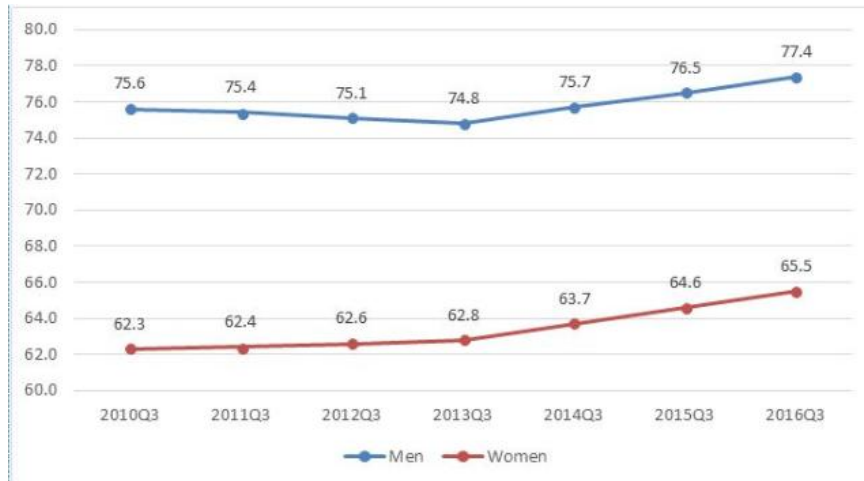
- **Progress in Member States is unequal:** Although EU legislation, guidelines, actions and funding possibilities have contributed to a certain degree of convergence, progress has been uneven in many respects. In some countries, gender equality is still far from being achieved. **Women's employment rate has reached an all-time high level and unemployment has significantly decreased for both sexes.** However, **women's unemployment rate remains very high in Southern countries** in particular (it reached 27.2% versus 18.9% for men in Greece, 20.7% versus 17.4% in Spain, for instance). In all countries, women are more likely than men to work-part-time, to be paid less, and to interrupt their career.
- **The gender gap in pensions is stable at 38%.** The gap varies greatly from one Member State to another, depending on past progress on gender equality in the labour market.
- As regards decision-making, **only four countries — France, Italy, Finland and Sweden, — have at least 30 % women in the boards of large companies.**
- **The situation is equally diverse in politics:** parliaments in Finland and Sweden have at least 40 % of women, while in eight countries (Bulgaria, Greece, Croatia, Cyprus, Latvia, Hungary, Malta and Romania) women accounted for less than 20 % of members. Similarly, the governments of Bulgaria, France, Slovenia and Sweden had as many women as men, while those in Greece and Hungary included no women at all.
- A recent survey shows that there is widespread agreement that **domestic violence, sexual**

harassment and other acts of gender-based violence are unacceptable or wrong. The same survey shows the continued existence of **victim-blaming views**. For example, more than one in five respondents (22 %) agree that women often make up or exaggerate claims of abuse or rape. This figure varies greatly between countries: victim-blaming attitudes seem more common in Eastern Europe.

What are the latest trends on the economic independence of women?

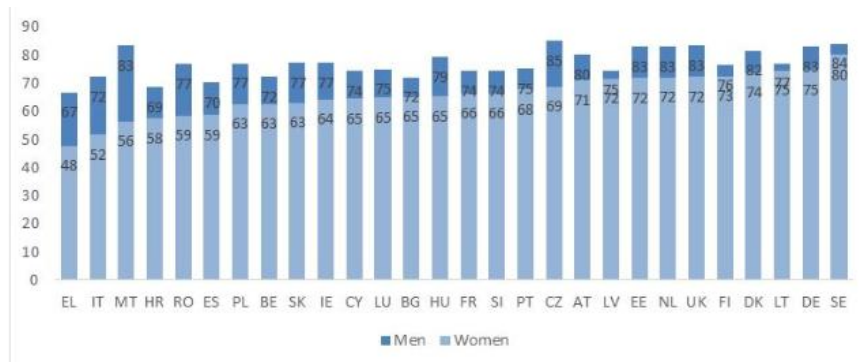
The employment rate for women reached an all-time high level of 65.5% in the third quarter of 2016, compared to 55% in 1997. Although this represents good progress, the labour market participation of women in the EU is still significantly lower than that of men, which currently stands at 77.4%. Moreover the gender gap in employment has been blocked at around 12 percentage points since 2013 (Figure 1). Nordic and Baltic countries display the lowest gap, while Southern countries face a wide gender gap (Figure 2).

Figure 1: EU-28 trends in employment rate by gender, people aged 20-64, 2010-2016 Q3



Source: Eurostat, Labour Force Survey

Figure 2: Women's and men's employment rate, per Member States, people aged 20-64, 2016 Q3



Source: Eurostat, Labour Force Survey

The nature of the jobs that women are undertaking is just as important for addressing inequality as the overall level of employment. **32% of women work part time compared to only 9% of men.** This can lead to diminished career opportunities, lower prospective pensions, underutilisation of human capital and thus lower economic growth and prosperity. Member States with an above EU average of female part-time employment are the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Belgium, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Luxembourg, Denmark and Ireland.

A [study](#) published by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) shows that higher gender equality would lead to a large **increase in the number of jobs** that would benefit both women and men. There would be up to 10.5 million additional jobs in 2050 due to improvements in gender equality, and many of those would be taken by women. **If gender equality is substantially improved by 2050, the EU employment rate will reach almost 80%** compared to 76% in the absence of substantial improvements. The study also shows that improving gender equality has **strong, positive GDP per capita impacts**. Improving gender equality would contribute to an

increase in GDP per capita of up to 10% in 2050.

What is the EU doing to address outstanding challenges to female employment in the Member States?

The EU has promoted women's employment and work-life balance by adopting legislation, setting targets, issuing recommendations, co-funding and mutual learning activities.

In the framework of the [European Semester](#) of economic coordination, a country-specific recommendation on female labour market participation was addressed to 10 Member States in 2016: the Czech Republic, Germany, Estonia, Ireland, Spain, Italy, Austria, Romania, Slovakia and the UK. They were notably encouraged to improve the provision of quality, affordable full-time childcare, access to long-term care and to remove obstacles and disincentives to economic independence. In addition to this, the European Structural and Investment Funds, notably the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund, continued to have a leverage effect, encouraging Member States to invest in the improvement of the quality and access to care facilities and labour integration of women. Moreover, the Commission continues to monitor the implementation of Directives in this area, notably on [pregnant workers](#) and maternity leave and on [parental leave](#).

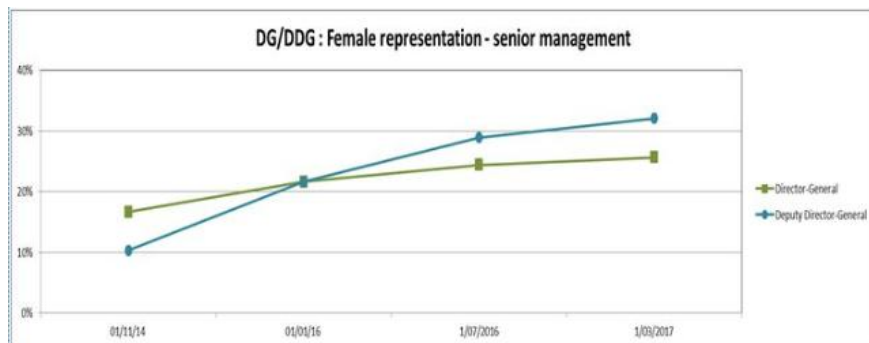
The Commission has announced the preparation of a new initiative to address the challenges of work-life balance for working parents and caregivers. This is one of the Commission's key initiatives in its work programme for 2017, and is related to the European Pillar of Social Rights. This initiative has been informed by an extensive consultation process in 2016.

What about women in senior positions in the European Commission?

President Juncker has set the target of 40% women representation in senior and middle management positions to be reached by 2019, which is also included in the Communication on "The Working Methods of the European Commission 2014 – 2019" (November 2014).

Today, almost 35% of middle managers are women. Female senior managers (Director level and above) make up for 32% of all. In particular, in the last two years, the Commission appointed several qualified women to the top management - Director-General or their deputies - thus increasing the representation of women at that level to 29% up from 13% in November 2014.

Figure 3: Increase in women in Director General and Deputy Director General roles (% of total)



The progress made so far has been possible thanks to efforts made to raise awareness of the importance of promoting equal opportunities and encouraging recruitment and appointments of a greater number of women. The Commission departments are also more proactive in identifying potential in their female population. Talented women are supported through targeted training sessions as well as mentoring and coaching schemes.

In this context, the Commission is also preparing a Strategy on Diversity and Inclusion, setting out the main actions the European Commission intends to implement to foster diversity and inclusion amongst its staff up to the year 2019.

How is the gender pay gap evolving?

Inequalities on the labour market are also reflected in the gender pay gap. For every hour worked women earn on average 16.3% less than men in 2015. This figure is above 20% in Czech Republic, Austria, Estonia, Germany and the UK.

Although the magnitude of the gap differs, a number of underlying causes are rather similar across countries. [Recent research](#) confirms that women work mainly in relatively low-paid sectors. This explains a significant proportion of the gender pay gap in all EU countries. The same research confirms that part-time and temporary contracts are associated with lower hourly wages.

The unequal distribution of caring responsibilities between women and men is one of the major drivers of the gender gaps in employment, working hours and pay.

- What is the gender gap in pension?

- The gender gap in pensions, which is defined as the gap between the average pre-tax income received as a pension by women and that received by men, is at 38.3 % (+65 age group) in 2015. The gap varies greatly from one Member State to another, depending on past progress on gender equality in the labour market. It is also affected by the design of the national pension system, and depends on the extent to which pension entitlements are linked to earnings-related pension contributions over working careers.

What is the EU doing about the gender pay gap?

The principle of equal pay is included in the EU Treaties and in [Directive](#) on gender equality in the area of employment and occupation. The Directive prohibits direct and indirect discrimination on grounds of sex concerning all aspects of remuneration. It also prohibits sex discrimination in job classification systems used for determining pay. However, the effective application of the existing legal framework on equal pay remains a challenge in all Member States. The Commission is monitoring whether EU law on equal pay is being correctly applied and supports Member States and other stakeholders in properly enforcing the existing rules.

Wage transparency and awareness-raising help employees and employers to reduce the gender pay gap. The 2014 Commission's [Recommendation](#) on pay transparency provides a toolbox to assist Member States in improving wage transparency, including:

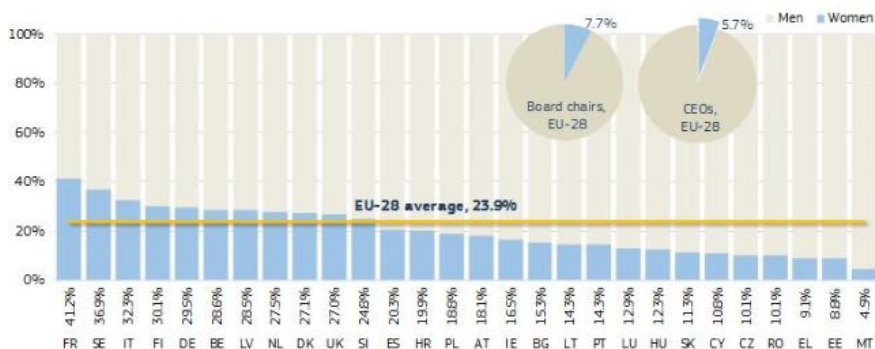
- allowing employees to request information on pay levels, broken down by gender, for categories of employees doing the same work or work of equal value;
- regular reporting by employers on wage structures by category of employee or position, broken down by gender (limited to large and medium companies);
- pay audits in large companies; and
- including equal pay issues in collective bargaining.

The Commission marks the European Equal Pay Day every year. EU funds also support [transnational projects](#), run by civil society and social partners, aiming at understanding and tackling the gender pay gap, breaking the glass-ceiling, overcoming gender segregation in the labour market and stereotypes.

Are women breaking the glass-ceiling in companies?

Data from October 2016 show that women still account for less than one in four (23.9 %) board members in the largest publicly listed companies registered in EU Member States. At the top executive level, women were even less well represented, accounting for only 5.7 % of CEOs.

Figure 4: Gender balance among board members, chairs and CEOs of large listed companies in the EU, October 2016



Source: European Commission, Database on women and men in decision-making.

Since October 2010, the proportion of women on boards in countries with binding legislative measures (Belgium, Germany, France and Italy) has risen from 9.8 % to 33.7 % compared to just from 12.7 % to 20.3 % in countries without such measures. Among Member States where there is no legislation, the strong commitment to the self-regulatory business-led approach in the UK has shown some significant results, with the proportion of women on the boards of the 50 largest companies increasing by 13.6 % since October 2010 to reach 27 %. This — after Slovenia — represents the second-largest increase in countries where there are no binding legislative measures. However, concerted efforts and continued

pressure are needed to maintain positive change in the EU.

Figure 5: Share of women among board members of the large listed companies, EU-28, 2010-2016



Source: European Commission, Database on women and men in decision-making.

What has the EU done to promote gender equality on company boards?

In November 2012, the Commission tabled a proposal for EU level legislation requiring that at least 40 % of listed companies' non-executive directors belong to the under-represented gender. While the European Parliament supported the initiative, as well as many Member States, no majority was found in the Council to back it up.

The Commission also collects and analyses data, raises awareness and promotes the exchange of good practices, and supports stakeholders in improving gender equality in economic decision making.

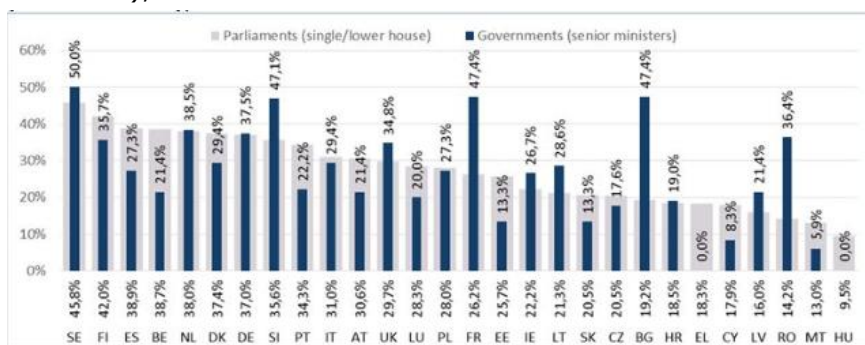
How is the situation evolving in national politics?

Most national parliaments do not reflect the diversity of the electorate

Women continue to be under-represented in decision-making positions at all levels. Indeed, in most EU Member States, parliaments and governments at all levels fail to reflect the composition of the societies they represent.

Although the proportion of women members in the single/lower houses of national parliaments in the EU has increased from 22.1 % in October 2004 to 28.7 % in November 2016, the rate of progress is slow at just over half a percentage point per year. There is, in addition, considerable variation between Member States.

Figure 6: Share of women in national parliaments (single/lower house) and governments (senior ministers), October-November 2016



Source: European Commission, Database on women and men in decision-making.

What do Europeans think about violence against women?

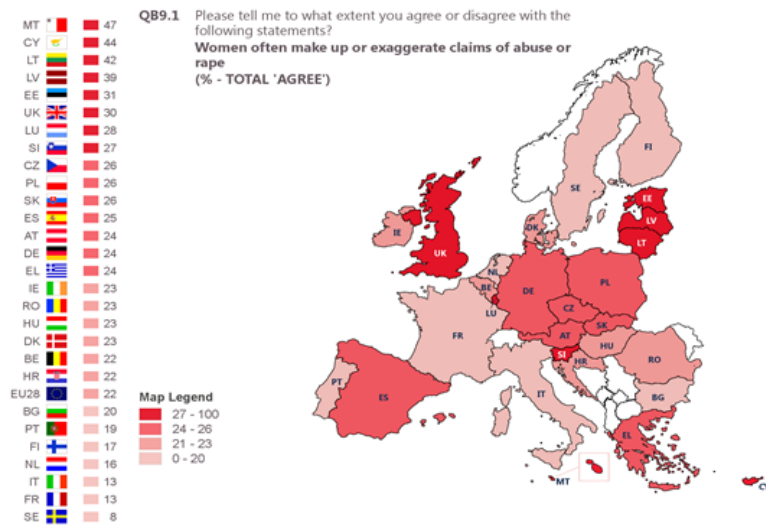
The Commission carried out a Eurobarometer on gender-based violence in 2016. This EU public opinion survey showed that almost all Europeans (96 %) think that domestic violence against women is unacceptable.

While there is widespread agreement that domestic violence, sexual harassment and other acts of gender-based violence are unacceptable or wrong, the survey nevertheless indicates the continued prevalence of this problem, with almost one quarter of respondents (24 %) claiming to know of a friend or family member who has been a victim of domestic violence.

Find more information in the [Q&A](#) published on the International Day for the elimination of Violence

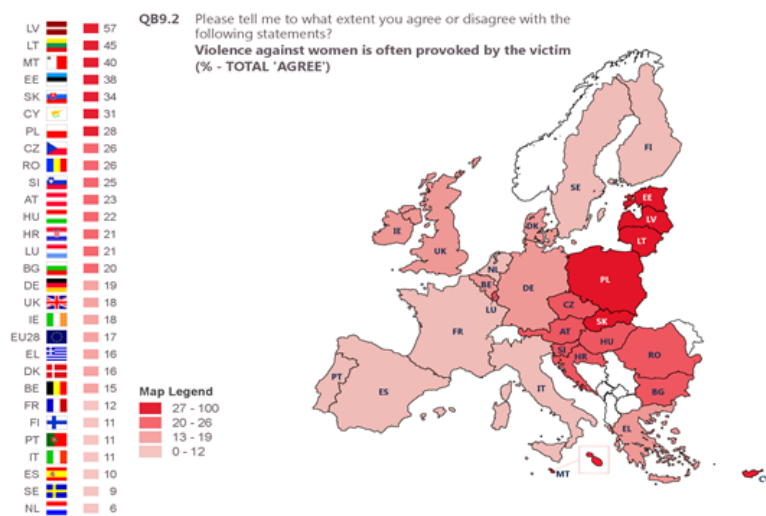
against women.

Figure 7: Proportion of respondents who agree that women often make up or exaggerate claims of abuse or rape



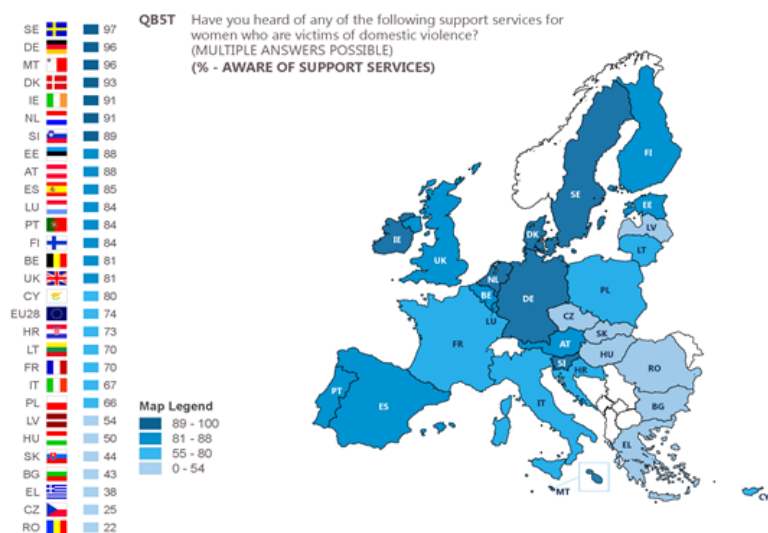
Source: Special Eurobarometer 449, 2016

Figure 8: Proportion of respondents who agree that violence against women is often provoked by the victim



Source: Special Eurobarometer 449, 2016

Figure 9: Proportion of respondents who have heard of support services for women who are victims of domestic violence



Source: Special Eurobarometer 449, 2016

What is the European Commission doing to increase awareness of gender-based violence?

Find more information in the [Q&A](#) published on the International Day for the elimination of Violence against women

What the EU does to combat Female Genital Mutilation?

You can consult a dedicated [Q&A](#) published on the International Day against Female Genital Mutilation.

What is done at EU-level to eradicate trafficking?

The large majority of victims of trafficking registered in the EU are women and girls (80%). The EU recognises that trafficking of females is a form of violence against women and has adopted comprehensive legal and policy frameworks to eradicate it. The [Anti-trafficking Directive](#) makes provisions for protecting victims and for preventing more people from becoming victims. The [EU Strategy towards the Eradication of Trafficking in Human Beings 2012-2016](#) complements this legislation with a series of actions, including actions which focus on the gender dimension of human trafficking. As part of this strategy, the Commission published the [Study on the Gender Dimension of Trafficking in Human Beings](#) in March 2016. Also in 2016, the Commission issued the [First Report on Progress Made in the Fight Against Trafficking in Human Beings](#), which included findings about women and girls.

What is the Istanbul Convention?

The Council of Europe's [Istanbul Convention](#) offers a human-rights-based approach to fighting violence against women. In March 2016 the Commission made a proposal for the EU to become party to the Convention (see [IP/16/549](#) and [factsheet](#)). This would strengthen its accountability for the promotion of fundamental rights within and beyond EU borders. The proposals made by the Commission are currently being discussed in Council. The European Parliament will then need to consent to the EU's accession.

How does the EU protect women in migration?

In the context of the ongoing reform of the Common European Asylum System the European Commission has proposed to [strengthen the provisions for vulnerable asylum applicants](#). This involves more ambitious provisions for assessing vulnerability and an obligation for Member States to take the specific needs of women applicants into account who have experienced gender-based harm. The strengthened provisions also aim to ensure that asylum applicants have access to medical care, legal support, appropriate trauma counselling and psycho-social care. The proposal for the new [Asylum Procedure Regulation](#) advocates gender-sensitive procedures for granting international protection. Women for instance should be given an effective opportunity to have a private interview, separate from their spouse or other family members. Where possible they should be assisted by female interpreters and female medical practitioners, especially if they may have been a victim of gender-based violence.

The European Asylum Support Office (EASO) has furthermore developed [several tools](#) in order to ensure an effective implementation of legal provisions for gender-related issues.

What does the EU do to promote the role of women in science and innovation?

On 8 March, the European Commission will award three outstanding women entrepreneurs the [EU Prize for Women Innovators](#). This is the fourth edition of the Prize and for the first time this year's contest includes a new Rising Innovator award, which recognises excellence in female entrepreneurs aged 30 years or under.

The aim of the Prize is to raise public awareness on the need for more innovation and more women entrepreneurs, and to promote these role models who have combined scientific excellence with the sense of entrepreneurship. This year, 47 applications were received, from which [12 finalists](#) were shortlisted in January.

Although women are increasingly active in research, there are still too few of them who create innovative enterprises. Around 31% of entrepreneurs in the EU are women. This represents an untapped potential for Europe which needs all its human resources to remain competitive and find solutions to the economic and societal challenges we are facing.

The European Commission also keeps track of the progress women make in research and innovation. [The She Figures 2015](#) showed that there are still gaps between women and men in research and innovation. PhD graduates are equally distributed on average between women and men, although there are still differences in fields such as mathematics, statistics, computing and engineering. There are fewer women in the higher echelons of scientific careers. Women represent one third of researchers, 23.5% of grade A and 20% of the Heads of institutions in the Higher Education Sector. The *She Figures* publication is the main source of Pan-European comparable statistics on the state of gender equality in research and innovation.

What is the EU doing to help promote gender equality outside the European Union?

The European Union has women's human rights and gender equality at the core of all its external policies. It makes every possible effort to strengthen the voice and empower women and girls, and to assert their rights – political, social, economic - around the world.

In this regard the [2016-2020 EU Gender Action Plan](#) in external relations serves as the main guiding framework for EU actions and cooperation with partner countries, international and civil society organisations, and the private sector. This EU commitment is complemented by EUR 100 million specifically earmarked for gender-related actions by 2020 and by other gender mainstreaming measures throughout the EU external instruments.

As gender equality cuts across the whole [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) and is vital for achieving all SDGs, [the EU will contribute to this key driver of development](#) by also focusing on concrete actions that counter and prevent any form of violence against women and girls, by shifting the institutional culture of the EU and its Member States to deliver on commitments and by supporting partner countries to create a more enabling environment for the fulfilment of all girls' and women's rights.

We will be particularly investing in women and girls whose rights are violated across the world as they are excluded from education, from equal access to health and family planning services, from the labour market, and from political life while facing discriminatory rules and laws on inheritance, citizenship or land-ownership. In 2017 we will provide specific support to victims of violence in the most remote and fragile areas.

Conflicts and natural disasters affect women, girls, boys and men differently. A key example is the EU-funded humanitarian aid projects across the world, which are adapted to the different needs of boys, men, women and girls. All projects take into account gender to ensure maximum impact so aid reaches those that need it most. In order to ensure that humanitarian responses address the specific needs of women and girls taking their perspective into account is promoted in all EU funded humanitarian projects.

The European Commission's approach to gender and gender-based violence in humanitarian aid is outlined in the policy document [Gender in Humanitarian Aid – Different Needs, Adapted Assistance](#). This approach is further developed in the document [Humanitarian Protection: Improving Protection Outcomes to Reduce Risks for People in Humanitarian Crises](#). The EU also introduced a [Gender-Age Marker](#) tool to assess how much EU-funded humanitarian actions take gender and age into consideration.

The EU responds to gender-based violence in humanitarian crises through targeted actions and capacity building. In 2016 the EU has supported 62 humanitarian projects related to gender-based violence so far. These projects are financed with a total of almost €24.5 million and will reach 3.4 million women, girls, boys and men around the world. Since 2014 the EU has spent more than €1 million per year on projects that contribute to building the capacity of the humanitarian system to deal with gender and gender-based violence. The EU is an active member of the global initiative [Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence](#).

The EU also supports the implementation of the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women \(CEDAW\)](#) and the [Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action](#). The EU is also at the forefront of the implementation of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and its follow up resolutions.

It is essential for the EU to also get non-governmental actors involved. This will help to address the root causes of gender inequality: a lack of access to financial and material resources, unequal power relations, discrimination, stigma, gender stereotypes and violence.

More information

[2017 Annual Report on Gender Equality](#)

[2016-19 Strategic engagement for gender equality](#)

[Database on women and men in decision-making](#)

*Factsheet updated to remove references to old data

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