



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

Brussels, 6 March 2018

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

[STATEMENT/18/1601](#)

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The Commission's work on gender equality policy is based on the "Strategic [engagement](#) for gender equality 2016-2019", which focuses on 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.

In 2017 the European Commission concentrated its efforts on three main areas:

- **Reducing the gender pay gap:** the Commission presented a concrete [Action plan](#) to reduce the gender pay gap by 2019. The Action plan includes, amongst others, a call by the Commission to the European Parliament and the Member States to swiftly adopt the work-life balance [proposal](#) of April 2017. It also calls on governments and social partners to adopt concrete measures to improve gender balance in decision-making.
- **Violence against women:** 2017 was dedicated as to Ending Violence against Women with the [No Non Nein campaign](#). The Commission dedicated €15 million funding to NGO working in this field. The Commission extended the funding to 2018. The 2017 Annual Fundamental Rights Colloquium was dedicated to Women's Rights in Turbulent Times, addressed violence and harassment against women in our societies as well as the economic and political inequality between women and men, particularly focusing on the gender pay gap and on work-life balance.
- The European Commission has also initiated a [strategy that will focus on women's participation specifically in the digital sector](#) to address the new challenges that the digital future brings. The strategy will look into three main areas: breaking negative stereotypes, skills and education as well as women's participation in the entrepreneurial scene of the digital sector. These focus areas are based on the upcoming study (to be published on 08/03), whose findings reiterate the issue that not only are there less women participating in the digital sector but also that this number is decreasing.

What are the key findings of the upcoming 2018 Commission's Report on equality between women and men?

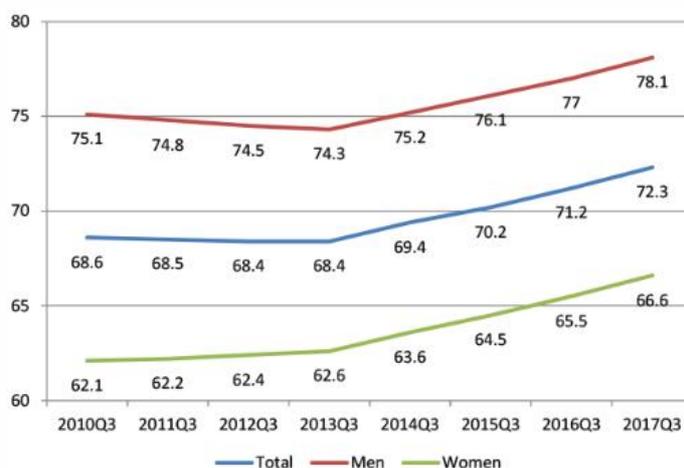
- **Employment of women:** it continued to increase slowly but steadily and reached **66.6 %** in the third quarter of 2017 (78.1% for men). Despite this progress, women are not achieving full economic independence. According to a recent [survey](#), in comparison to men, women still tend to be employed less, are employed in lower-paid sectors, work on average 6 hours longer per week than men, but have fewer paid hours, take more career breaks, and face fewer and slower promotions.
- **Gender pay gap:** women still earn on average **16 % less** per hour than men **in the EU**. The gap varies greatly from one Member State to another. .
- **Women on boards:** women account for just **a quarter of board members** in the largest publicly listed companies registered in EU Member States. France is the only Member State in which there was over 40 % of women on boards.

- **Women in politics:** the situation varies greatly. National parliaments in Sweden, Finland and Spain had at least 40 % of women each gender, while in six countries (Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Latvia, Malta and Hungary) women accounted for less than 20 % of members. Similarly, governments had as many women as men in France, Germany, Slovenia and Sweden; while women were completely absent from the Hungarian government.
- **Violence against women:** remains a problem. According to the EIGE '[Gender Equality Index 2017](#)', when it comes to the measurement of violence against women', on a scale of 1 to 100, **the EU's score is 27.5 out of 100**. The score varies between countries, ranging from 22.1 in Poland to 44.2 in Bulgaria.

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

The gender gap in employment has stagnated for the last few years at around 11 percentage points and has reached more than 18 percentage points in terms of full-time equivalent. No considerable catch-up has been observed between low and high performing Member States. Greece, Italy, Malta and Romania have the lowest employment rate for women, compared to Lithuania, Latvia and Sweden which have the highest (see Figure 2).

Figure 1. EU-28 trends in employment rates, 20-64, by gender



Source: Eurostat, Labour Force Survey

The share of women **working part-time** remains stable at around 30 %, as compared to 8 % for men, though significant country differences can be observed. Part-time work is one of the key factors contributing to the gender pay gap, pension gap and the risk of poverty of older women - limiting women's economic independence.

What is the EU doing to help women remain in the labour market?

The European Pillar of Social Rights establishes that equality of treatment and opportunities between women and men must be ensured in fostered in all areas, including regarding participation in the labour market, terms and conditions of employment and career progression. To put these words into action, the European Commission adopted a [comprehensive package](#) of policy and legal measures to improve the **Work-life balance for working parents and careers** in April 2017. The proposed directive aims at establishing an EU-wide right to paternity leave and strengthens the existing right to parental leave. Fathers would be able to take at least 10 working days of paternity leave around the time of birth of the child, compensated at least at the level of sick pay. Also, 4 months of parental leave would be compensated at least at sick pay level and be non-transferable from one parent to the other. Parents would have the right to request to take leave in a flexible way (part-time or in a piecemeal way) and the age of the child up to which parents can take leave would be increased from 8 to 12 years.

The Commission's proposal further introduces leave for workers caring for seriously ill or dependent relatives, who would be able to take 5 days off per year, compensated at least at sick pay level.

Finally, the proposal sets rights to request more flexible working arrangements for all working parents

of children up to 12 and carers with dependent relatives, not only in terms of time (flexible and/or reduced working hours) but also in terms of place of work (teleworking).

The initiative also **includes 10 non-legislative measures, which** will support Member States in the enforcement of existing discrimination and dismissal protection legislation, encourage a gender-balanced use of family-related leaves and flexible working arrangements, ensure better use of European funds to improve long-term and childcare services and remove economic disincentives for second earners which prevent women from accessing the labour market or working full-time.

How is the gender pay gap evolving? What is the Commission doing about it?

For every hour worked women earn on average 16.3% less than men in 2015. The gender pay gap varies from 5.5 % in Italy to 26.9 % in Estonia.

The main reasons behind the pay gap are rather similar across the EU countries:

- the lack of pay transparency;
- the over-representation of women in industries with low pay levels and their under-representation in well paid industries;
- the unequal distribution of caring responsibilities between women and men.

On 20 November 2017, the Commission adopted an [Action Plan to tackle the gender pay gap 2017-2019](#), which addresses all the root causes of the gender pay gap (sectoral segregation, glass-ceiling, stereotypes, work-life balance issues, and proper enforcement of the equal pay principle). It comprises 20 concrete actions to be delivered before 2019.

Every year, the Commission draws attention to the gender pay gap issue by marking the **European Equal Pay Day**. In 2017, it was [3 November](#), which is – according to our calculations- the day when EU women symbolically stopped earning for the rest of the year in comparison to men.

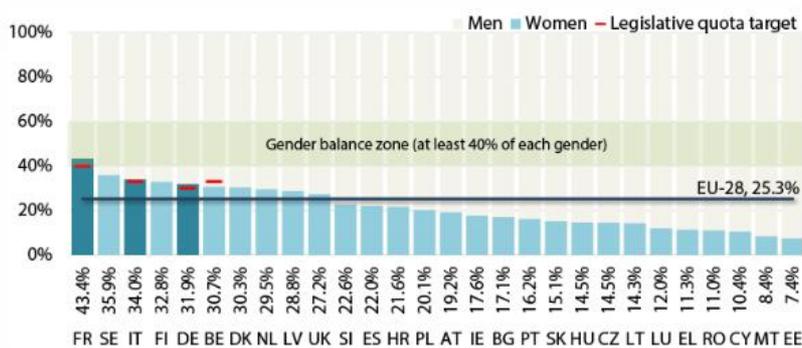
The principle of equal pay is included in the EU Treaties and in the [Directive](#) on gender equality in the area of employment and occupation, which prohibits direct and indirect discrimination on grounds of sex concerning all aspects of remuneration. It also prohibits sex discrimination in job classification 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.

What is the EU doing to help women break the glass-ceiling?

In October 2017, women accounted for just a quarter (25.3 %) of **board members in the largest publicly listed companies** registered in EU Member States, according to the European Institute for Gender Equality. With 43.4%, France was the only Member State in which there was above 40 % of women at board level, a figure that has been achieved following the introduction of a legislative quota in 2011 requiring companies to meet a 40 % target by January 2017. A further nine countries had at least 25 % women on boards (Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy, Latvia Netherlands, Sweden and the UK).

Progress was made in just a few Member States, principally as a result of **legislative or other forms of positive measures** to promote gender balance. In half of the Member States (14), men still outnumber women in the boards of large companies by at least 4 to 1 (i.e. less than 20 % women), while in Malta and Estonia women account for less than 10 % of board members (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Representation of women and men on the boards of the largest listed companies in the EU, October 2017



Source: European Institute for Gender Equality, Gender Statistics Database

The EU's [Action Plan](#) on tackling the gender pay gap reiterates the Commission's commitment to break the glass-ceiling. The Commission is determined to work towards the adoption of the 2012 proposal for a Directive, for the under-represented gender to represent at least 40 % of non-executive directors, to ensure transparent selection of board members; and to encourage governments to adopt strategies with concrete measures to ensure improved gender balance in decision making.

Moreover, **Directive 2014/95/EU on disclosure of non-financial and diversity information** requires certain large companies (above 500 employees) to describe their diversity policy on aspects such as their staff's age, gender, educational and professional backgrounds, as well as the objectives of such diversity policy, its implementation and results. If no such policy is applied, the statement must explain why this is the case.

What about women in senior positions in the European Commission?

The European Commission is steadily moving towards meeting the **target set by President Juncker** of ensuring that at least 40 % of the Commission's middle and senior managers are women by the end of the current mandate (2019). Female managers at all levels had reached a total of 38 % on 1 March 2018, up from 30 % at the beginning of the mandate of this Commission (2014). At senior management level, the share of women has increased from 27 % on 1 November 2014 to 36 %. At middle management level, 38 % of managers are women, compared to 31 % when the Juncker Commission took office. The progress comes after efforts to identify, develop and support female talent, targeted training sessions and mentoring, specific management programmes and support for existing and new female networks, and setting individual targets for all Commission departments when it comes to appointing women to middle-management functions for the first time.

What is the place of women in European politics?

Europeans support a fairer distribution of power. According to the latest [Eurobarometer Survey on Gender Equality](#), 70 % of Europeans are in favour of legal measures to ensure parity between women and men in politics (Figure 3) and 86 % think that they can be represented by female politicians (Figure 4).

Figure 3:

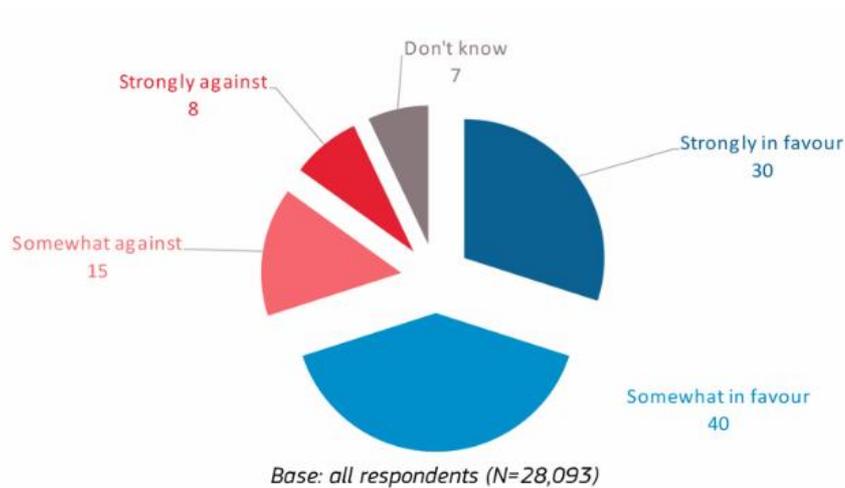
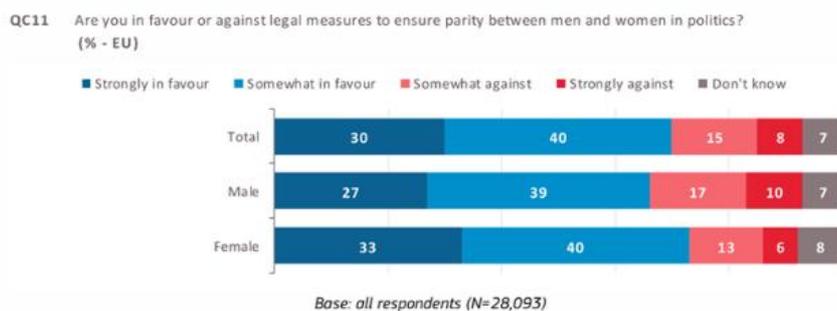


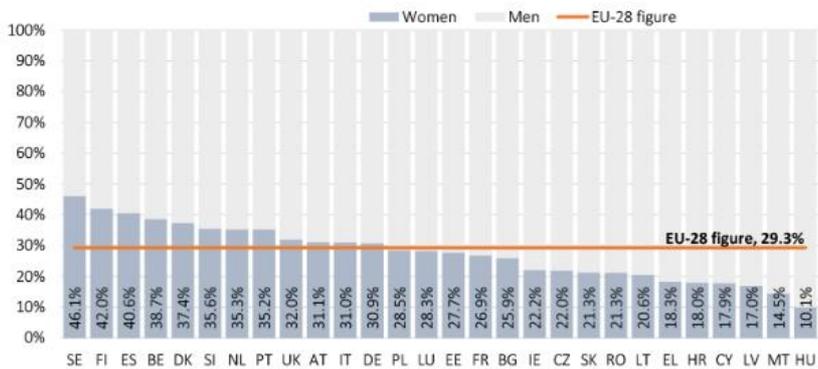
Figure 4:



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 29.3 % in November 2017, the rate of progress is far too slow. Moreover, women accounted only for 16.9 % of leaders of major political parties (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Representation of women and men in single/lower houses of parliament, November 2017



Source: EIGE Gender Statistics Database.

What is the EU doing to combat violence against women?

Throughout 2017, the Commission has engaged with different stakeholders to allow actors to share best-practices and improve support structures for victims of gender-based violence.

- The [social media campaign: NON.NO.NEIN campaign – Say NO! Stop violence against women](#) launched in 2017 raised awareness and funded concrete projects that address violence against women. 15 million euros in funding were made available for Member States, local governments, relevant professionals and civil society organisations across Europe to intensify their actions and campaigns to combat violence against women. In this context, lawyers, doctors, teachers and police, among others, were trained to improve their support for victims and to prevent gender-based violence. This campaign will continue throughout 2018.
- Under the **Mutual Learning Programme in gender equality** the Commission organised an exchange of good practices among Member States' governmental representatives. Good practices included Denmark's policy and legislation on digital sexual abuse and France's campaign addressing sexual harassment on public transport.
- The **Annual Colloquium on Fundamental Rights** held on 20-21 November in Brussels focused on '[Women's Rights in Turbulent Times](#)'. Violence against women was one of the core topics at the Colloquium, which brought together more than 400 participants including ministers from about half of the Member States, international organisations, leading academics, social partners, business representatives, civil society actors, journalists and media professionals.
- **The first step to build a global alliance to fight violence against women and girls at global level** was taken in December between the Commission, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Council of Europe and UN Women. The aim is to establish by the end of 2018 a global alliance to end violence against women and girls.

In addition to actions under the Gender Equality and Justice policies, the European Commission focuses on violence against women in a range of other policy areas, such as **trade, migration and home affairs, transport and in external cooperation**. Furthermore, the European Social Fund supports targeted actions to combat violence against women, particularly women with disabilities and the most vulnerable or deprived.

Regarding, trafficking of women and girls, the anti-trafficking directive sets forth an obligation for support measures to be gender specific. Finally, the newly adopted set of policy priorities adopted by the Commission on 4 December 2017 places gender at its core, with a set of actions dedicated on addressing the gender dimension of this grave human rights violation and heinous crime.

Internally, the European Commission has measures in place to prevent all forms of harassment inside Commission itself. A recently adopted diversity and inclusion [strategy](#) reinforces these measures and includes further preventive measures. In light of the sexual harassment cases at work that women recently made public, the Commission also decided to review its internal rules. The aim is to have a new, updated anti-harassment policy in place in 2018.

What is the Istanbul Convention?

As of November 2017, all EU Member States have signed the Council of Europe Convention on

preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence ([Istanbul Convention](#)), and 17 countries have ratified it. The Convention is the first instrument in Europe to set legally binding standards to prevent violence against women and domestic violence, protect its victims and punish perpetrators. After the Commission's proposal in March 2016, the EU signed the Istanbul Convention on 13 June 2017. Work is ongoing on the Council Decision that will enable it to be concluded in 2018. The Convention will enable Member States to develop a common framework to combat violence against women.

What is the EU doing to promote the role of women in science and innovation?

- Gender equality is one of the key priorities in the European Research Area. The European Commission provides through the Research and Innovation Programme Horizon 2020 funds to research organisations for the implementation of gender equality plans.
- With the bi-annual dataset '[she figures](#)' the Commission keeps track of the progress women make in research and innovation throughout Europe. The statistics show that women are gaining ground but progress is still slow and uneven.

	Share out of total (year)	
Female PhD graduates	43% (in 2004)	47% (in 2014)
Female heads of research institutions	16% (in 2004)	20% (in 2014)
Women researchers	31% (in 2005)	37% (in 2015)
Female professors	15% (in 2004)	21% (in 2013)

What is the EU doing for women entrepreneurs?

- Women represent a large pool of under-exploited entrepreneurial potential. But, they represent less than 30% of entrepreneurs in Europe. They have more conservative entrepreneurial ambitions and fewer proclivities to scale up. It is hence crucial to make positive role models known or to set up business networks with a gender dimension.
- Women are disproportionately affected by the difficulties all entrepreneurs face:
 - o Digitisation: in 2015 women represented only 16% of ICT specialists and 17% of ICT students. We therefore need ICT schemes targeted to women.
 - o Access to funding: financial flows for business women need to be improved, (i.e. loans, venture-capital). Women use approaches such as crowdfunding less than men. But when they do, they are more successful.
 - The Commission generally supports SMEs and entrepreneurship with variety of programmes. Some initiatives specifically target women entrepreneurs:
 - o Online Europe-wide platform for women entrepreneurs [WEgate](#). It aims to facilitate access to learning, mentoring and business networks across Europe.
 - o New community of women business angels and women entrepreneurs to facilitate women's access to funding. This initiative covers 14 EU countries.
 - o Increase the number of women entrepreneurs that get funds through the Horizon 2020 SME instrument.

What does the EU do to include more women in the tech sector?

- The upcoming '**Women in digital age**' study (to be published on 08/03) sheds light on factors influencing women's participation in the digital sector. Once women are in the digital sector, they tend to leave it at a greater rate than men. This is particularly clear in the 30 to 44 age range, which is the key stage in a person's professional development. This age range is also the period when most Europeans have their first child and/or have to take care of small children. This 'drop-out phenomenon' of women from digital jobs has an economic cost. The annual productivity loss for the European economy due to women leaving their digital jobs is estimated at 16.1 billion euro. The study highlights some innovative approaches to address the digital gender gap, which persist despite many structured efforts.
- After 1 year, the **Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition** has over 300 members, with more than 90 organisations pledging to tackle the digital skills gap. The pledging organisations have provided online and face-to-face training, digital skills certifications, awareness raising, job placements and internships to millions of Europeans. Around a tenth of the pledges focus on actions attracting women and girls to learn digital competences for life and work.

- The **Digital Opportunity traineeship programme** offers students and recent graduates from all disciplines traineeships in digital jobs in another EU country. The aim is to give them hands-on digital experience in fields demanded by the market such as cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, big data or digital marketing. The initiative will provide cross-border traineeships for up to 6,000 students and recent graduates between 2018 and 2020. The first traineeships will start in mid-2018. Trainees will receive an allowance of around €500 per month, for an average of 5 months. The pilot project is financed by EU's Horizon 2020 and implemented through Erasmus+. Members of the Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition and other companies are encouraged to offer the traineeships on Erasmus Intern and the [Eures DropIn](#) websites.
- The [new strategy on women in the digital sector](#) initiated by Commissioner Mariya Gabriel, in charge of Digital Economy and Society, will promote actions like highlighting successful role models in order to break the stereotypes of the digital sector as being a man's world as the study pointed out that many young girls do not take up an education in ICT related fields as they had no role models and they see it as a field that is more for men. Encouraging successful women in the digital sector and drawing attention to their achievements is one of the actions through which the Commission aims to tackle stereotyping.

What is the EU doing to empower women through trade policy?

While trade policy is gender-neutral in the EU and elsewhere, it may not always be gender-sensitive. For instance, trade in services is often connected to the movement of people, with rules on qualifications and licences. Such rules must not inadvertently discriminate against women. Furthermore, we need better data and better input to be able to consider gender issues when we assess the impact of our trade deals. As a pilot project, we are including a chapter on gender in the negotiations for a free trade agreement with Chile, strengthening coordination and oversight of women's issues within trade. These negotiations were launched in December of last year.

What is the EU doing to include more women in the transport sector?

- Automation and digitalisation bring about new opportunities for women in transport. A [study](#) published in July 2017 on **'Making the EU transport sector attractive to future generations'** gave recommendations on how to attract more women to this sector. In 2017, a reflection was engaged with a wide range of stakeholders on possible actions that could be taken at EU and national level, as well as within companies and training institutions.
- In November 2017, the **Women in Transport-EU Platform for Change** was launched by Violeta Bulc, EU Commissioner for Transport. Its aim is to improve female employment in transport. **A declaration to ensure equal opportunities for women and men in the transport sector** was publicly signed on 27 November 2017 when launching the [Platform](#) and is now available online to gather further signatures.

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

The EU, as a global actor, promotes gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment in all its actions across the world. For this reason, it works closely with partner countries, the United Nations, other international organisations and non-governmental actors, in particular women's organisations and advocates for gender equality.

The full implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan in external relations (2016-2020) has continued and is showing positive results (as shown in the first implementation report issued in August 2017). When looking at the OECD DAC gender marker, more than 11% improvement in gender mainstreaming was achieved within a year: while in 2015 47.3% of new projects were marked as mainly or significantly aiming at promoting gender equality, in 2016 this percentage increased to 58.8%.

In 2017, the EU together with the United Nations launched the unprecedented Spotlight Initiative to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. For this, the EU made available €500 million, encouraging other partners to also participate. Over the next few years, comprehensive programmes will be implemented to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls, such as sexual and gender-based violence and harmful practices; trafficking and economic (labour) exploitation; femicide; and domestic and family violence. Core areas of intervention will include strengthening legislative frameworks, policies and institutions, preventive measures, access to services and improving data gathering in Africa, Latin America, Asia, the Pacific and the Caribbean.

The EU's action follows an all-encompassing approach to addressing gender inequalities worldwide. The EU is actively engaged with partner countries in multilateral fora to consistently contribute to advancing the gender equality agenda, notably at annual sessions of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and the sessions of the UN Human Rights Council as the key policy-making UN fora. 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 for Action, as well as

the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICDP).

During 2017 the following key initiatives were launched:

- The EU-UN Spotlight Initiative to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls, supported with €500 million from the EU.
- In close cooperation with the European External Action Service, the Commission, on behalf of the EU, has played a key role in preparing the [G7 Roadmap for a Gender Responsive Economic Environment](#) officially adopted by G7 Leaders at the May 2017 Taormina Summit. This was the first G7 ministerial meeting dedicated to the topic of gender equality. The Roadmap focuses on structural policies falling within central governments' jurisdiction and that are likely to have the greatest impact on delivering gender equality.
- The EU plays an active role in maximising progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which form part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. To that end, Eurostat published a document entitled '[Sustainable development in the European Union – 2017 monitoring report on progress towards the SDGs in an EU context](#)'. The report marks the beginning of Eurostat's regular monitoring of progress towards the SDGs in an EU context, including SDG 5.
- Contributing to the in-depth review of SDG5, last year's report on equality between women and men in the EU reported on work on SDG5, its targets and indicators. In response to the reporting request regarding the EU's contribution to the SDGs, the 2017 report on equality between women and men in the EU was presented at the 2017 United Nations High-Level Political Forum for Sustainable Development by Commissioner Mimica on 17 July.
- The Commission is [also committed to preventing gender-based violence](#) in humanitarian crises. On 21 June 2017, the EU took over from Sweden in leading the global initiative '[Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies](#)'. In humanitarian crises, gender-based violence is often widespread. The call to action brings together nearly 70 humanitarian organisations with one mission: to recognise gender-based violence as life-threatening and addressing it from the earliest onset of a crisis. During its leadership until the end of 2018, the [EU works on the following four priorities](#): (1) Increasing advocacy on the need to prevent and respond to gender-based violence, (2) Increase focus on prevention of gender-based violence in emergencies, (3) Bring the Call to Action to the field, where it can have the biggest impact., and (4) Implement commitments, following the Call to Action Roadmap 2016-2020. In rolling out the Call to Action Road Map under the Enhanced Response Capacity Programme, DG ECHO allocated 1 million euro to capacity building in 2017.
- The Commission has also been actively working with women in the digital sector in the Western Balkans and plans to setup an ICT Women & Girls network to act as role models to inspire women and girls to get more into ICT sector. The [digital for development strategy](#) also suggest concrete actions empowering women and girls by using digital technology as to fulfil sustainable development goal on gender equality/. The Commission also pursue this policy through public events, for instance by organising one of the major sessions at the European Development Days 2018 on women and ICT in the developing world.

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