

## The European Parliament's fight for gender equality in the EU



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Find out how the EU and the European Parliament work to protect women's rights and to improve gender equality at work, in politics and other areas.

### EU measures to tackle gender inequalities

From the beginning the European Union has promoted [gender equality](#) and [a more social Europe](#). The EU has adopted important [legislation](#) and EU funding supports action by member states.

The European Parliament has passed, together with the Council, key legislative acts that

advance women's rights. In addition, Parliament regularly adopts own initiative reports, calling for more efforts to improve gender equality.

The concepts of EU gender equality policy were also shaped by European Court of Justice rulings.

The European Parliament has a [standing committee dedicated to women's rights and gender equality](#). Every year, Parliament marks [International Women's Day](#) on 8 March and raises awareness by organising events.

Reflecting on the [progress made in defending women's rights in recent years](#) and the challenges ahead, MEPs have expressed concern with the backlash in some EU countries and the risk that gender equality could slip down their agenda.

Parliament has also called on the European Commission to ensure that women's rights are taken into account in all its proposals, to develop concrete plans to improve women's poverty rates and to strengthen efforts to close the gender pay gap.

## Gender equality week at the Parliament

The European Parliament introduced an annual [European Gender Equality Week](#) in 2020. It provides an opportunity for Parliament's committees to consider the issues they deal with from the perspective of gender.

### Further information

[Check out our timeline of the EU's fight for women's rights](#)

## Adopted legislation

The EU aims to ensure gender equality at work, in politics and other areas. Adopted legislation covers a vast variety of issues: helping ending unequal pay, eliminating gender-based discrimination, boosting women's presence on corporate boards and combatting violence against women.

## Combatting violence against women

In April 2024, Parliament adopted the first ever EU rules on combatting violence against women. The goal is to prevent gender-based violence and protect victims, especially women and victims of domestic violence. The directive calls for stronger laws against cyberviolence, better

assistance for victims, steps to prevent rape and define sexual consent better.

The rules provide that the safety and well-being of victims should be prioritised, including by offering access to sheltered accommodation.

## Further information

[Read more on how the EU is fighting gender-based violence](#)

[Find out what cyberviolence against women is and how the EU seeks to prevent it](#)



 **Advancing women's rights in the EU: meet Stella and Linda**  
[https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/video/v\\_N01\\_AFPS\\_240304\\_FOEW\\_INTER](https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/video/v_N01_AFPS_240304_FOEW_INTER)

## New rules to reduce gender pay gap

Parliament has been pushing for concrete measures to narrow the [gender pay gap](#) - the difference in earnings between men and women - which in the EU was an average of [12.7% in 2022](#) and the pension gap - the difference in pension income that men and women get - which stood at [29% in 2019](#). It also called for measures to tackle female poverty, as women are more likely to live in poverty than men.

In March 2023, Parliament adopted new rules that require companies to disclose information on salaries, making it easier to compare remuneration and expose gender pay gaps. If pay reporting shows a gender pay gap of at least 5%, employers will have to conduct a joint pay assessment in cooperation with workers' representatives. EU countries will have to impose penalties, such as fines for employers that infringe the rules. Vacancy notices and job titles will have to be gender neutral.

## Further information

[Read more on EU measures to close the gender pay gap](#)

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*"Each member state shall ensure that the principle of equal pay for male and female workers for equal work or work of equal value is applied."*

Article 157, Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU)

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## Women on company boards

In November 2022, [Parliament approved rules to boost gender equality on corporate boards](#). The directive aims to introduce transparent recruitment procedures in companies, so that at least 40% of non-executive director posts or 33% of all director posts are occupied by the under-represented sex by the end of June 2026.

The legislation applies to the boards of publicly listed companies in the EU. Small and medium-sized enterprises with fewer than 250 employees are excluded from the rules.

## Maternity, paternity and parental leave

In 2019, the EU approved [new rules on family and care-related leave](#) and more adaptable working conditions, to create more incentives for fathers to take family-related leave and to increase women's employment rate.

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## *EU legislation on gender equality in the workplace:*

- rules on employment (incl. equal pay, social security, working conditions and harassment)
  - rules on self-employment
  - rights to maternity, paternity and parental leave
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## Other initiatives supported by the European Parliament

### Women's sexual and reproductive rights

In a [resolution adopted in April 2024](#), MEPs urged the Council to add sexual and reproductive healthcare and the right to a safe and legal abortion to the [EU Charter of Fundamental Rights](#) - a [demand they had made several times](#). The text invited EU countries to fully decriminalise abortion in line with the [2022 guidelines of the World Health Organization](#). MEPs called on the European Commission to ensure that organisations working against gender equality and women's rights, including reproductive rights, do not receive EU funding.

In March 2022, Parliament adopted the EU Gender Action Plan III aimed at promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights outside the EU and ensuring universal access in [EU countries](#).

### Women in politics

The Parliament has repeatedly highlighted the importance of gender equality in politics, promoting women's equal participation in decision-making processes at all levels.

The share of women elected as MEPs at the European elections in June 2024 was 38.5%, a slight decrease compared to 39.8% just before the elections.

In a [report](#) adopted in January 2019, Parliament called on European political parties to ensure both women and men were put forward for the bodies governing the European Parliament in the ninth parliamentary term.

## Further information

[Check out our infographics on women in the European Parliament](#)

## More women in ICT and sciences

Women are underrepresented in Europe's digital sector as they are less likely to take up studies or apply for a job in this field. In a [resolution](#) adopted in 2018, MEPs called on EU countries to put in place measures to ensure the full integration of women into ICT sectors, as well as foster education and training in ICT, science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

## Find out more about what the EU does on social policies:

- [How the EU improves workers' rights and working conditions](#)
- [Reducing unemployment: EU policies explained](#)
- [Youth employment: the EU measures to make it work](#)
- [Improving public health: EU measures explained](#)

## Find out more about the EU's actions on gender equality

[European Institute for Gender Equality  
2023 report on gender equality in the EU](#)