




# WOMEN AND THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT

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## Introduction

The present report explores the role of women in the working environment, focusing on academia and research, the role of women in leading positions, gender pay-gaps, and on maternity rights. Women play a role in the world economy and in the geopolitical system primarily as undervalued labourers — domestic workers, diplomats’ and politicians’ wives, and agricultural workers. It is important to underline that women represent half of the world population, and it is a lost opportunity to not fully draw upon the talents and capacities of half of humanity.

The present report is divided into four different sections. The first section explores the gender gap in academia and research, emphasising how, despite the increased presence of women in the academia over the years, women still face significant levels of discrimination. The section continues exploring the gap between men and women in higher positions in academia, initiatives by the European Union (EU) to eliminate this disparity, and the discrimination that women face in higher education institutions.

Next, the report proceeds with the second section, where the realities of gender pay gaps are discussed alongside the factors contributing to the gender pay gap in Europe, its impact on women, and the actions taken to address this issue. Research shows that the gender pay gap is influenced by a number of factors, including occupational segregation, discrimination, and women’s disproportionate responsibility for caregiving. In fact, this “duty” is very important when it comes to maternity rights, which is the focus of the third section. While some countries in Europe regulate parental leave without distinguishing entitlements allocated to mothers or fathers, most states offer different regimes based on the parent’s gender, with paternity leave schemes only having been introduced in recent years, sometimes still considered as a taboo. This is resulting in the choice of part-time —and therefore lower-paying— jobs for women. Finally, the fourth section sheds light on media discrimination against women and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women’s opportunities to advance in their professional careers. In its final part, this unit discusses key events and initiatives adopted on the European stage aimed at boosting women’s access to leadership roles and their empowerment.

### 1.1 Gender Gap in Academia and Research

In the European Union over the last few years, the participation and involvement of women in research and innovation, and academia has increased, and the gender gap has shrunk. Despite these improved numbers, women remain underrepresented in those employed in research and innovation careers, and there remains a gendered bias in the various fields in academia. According to the European Commission’s 2021 SheFigures, the number of female students in all levels of education, including graduates in bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral programmes have increased. In Europe, on average, women in bachelor’s and master’s programmes outnumber men in attendance and graduation. There remains, however, a disparity between the various fields that are being studied (European Commission, 2021). Whilst the attendance of women in academia has increased, they do still face levels of discrimination at each level, whether they study at a tertiary education level or work at a research institute. This section of the report will discuss the gender biases in different fields, the gap between men and women in higher positions in academia, initiatives by the European Union, and the violence that women face in tertiary educational environments.

According to the European Commission’s 2021 SheFigures, on average, at bachelor’s and master’s levels of education, women outnumber men in those currently attending an educational institution at 54 percent, also making up 59 percent of graduates. Women who are doctoral candidates make up around

48 percent. For doctoral candidates, in the majority of European countries, it ranged from 40 to 60 percent (European Commission, 2021). It was reported that in 2018 less than one third (32.8 percent) of all researchers in European institutions were women. Alongside this, in 2018, only 40 percent of the academic staff were women and that job positions that were equal to full professorship, only 26.2 percent were held by women. Less than 25 percent of heads of institutions in higher education were held by women. It was also reported that women who held research positions in higher education were more likely than men to be working part-time or with precarious contracts, which leave them in vulnerable or insecure positions (European Commission, 2021).

Other gender gaps in research and academia come from the output between men and women. As women in research positions get older, they publish less frequently than their male counterparts; between the years 2015-2018, it was shown that only around ten percent of patent applications were submitted by women in 27 EU countries (European Commission, 2021).

## 1.2 Gendered biases in research fields and employment

While women enjoy a larger participation in studying, academia suffers from a gendered bias in various studies and research fields. This means that there is an inequality and gender gap between men and women in the fields in which they are engaged in. According to the World Economic Forum (2022), women are more likely to study subjects related to education, health and welfare, while they are less represented in fields related to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Between the years 2013 and 2019, the gender gap between information and communications technology (ICT) and engineering remained constant. While the gap still exists in the educational fields of health and welfare, in those seven years this bias between men and women decreased. Studies related to education also continued to reflect these gendered biases (World Economic Forum, 2022).

At a doctoral level of education, these biases were also reflected in the European Commission's findings. In terms of ICT doctoral graduates in 2018, women are underrepresented at 22 percent of graduates, and only 29 percent of doctoral graduates in engineering, manufacturing, and construction. At the same level of education, in health and welfare, they comprised 60 percent of graduates, and 67 percent in education (Rosa et al., 2020). When combining all available fields of study, when it comes to ICT, women make up 1.7 percent of graduates whilst men make up 8.2 percent. In engineering, men make up 24.6 percent, whilst women make up only 6.6 percent of the proportion of graduates (World Economic Forum, 2022). It is important to note that the findings of the World Economic Forum account for the entire world.

## 1.3 Gaps in higher positions of power

In academia, there also exists a gap in the employment of women in higher positions of power in comparison to their male counterparts. In European academic institutions, on average, only 40 percent of the academic staff were women in 2018. Alongside this, only 26.2 percent had a position equal to a full professorship. The year after, in 2019, women in higher education made up less than 25 percent of heads of academic institutions, with one in four women being board members on the European average (European Commission, 2021). From 2010 to 2019, there has been a slow increase in the number of rectors who are women, going from 9.5 percent in 2010, to 13 percent in 2013, and finally to 14.3 percent in 2019 (Rosa et al., 2020). Dominguez and Diez (2022) conducted surveys on gender equality in academia in Spain, which included the perception of barriers to attaining higher positions by women in academia. These barriers that hindered progress included sexist behaviour by their colleagues, such

as comments or other forms of harassment, fewer opportunities to develop their careers and the lack of policies that allow for balancing work and life outside. Goastellec and Pekari (2013) found that women in research were often left out of networks that then impeded their ability to progress in their careers.

Another gender gap issue comes from the success rates for funding projects if the leader of the project is a woman compared to a man. The European Commission found that the gender gap in successful funding ranged from 0.6 to 12.9 percent across 28 member states, and in 2019 it was reported that women were three percent less likely to receive funding on average in Europe (Rosa et al., 2020).

#### **1.4 Gender-based violence in academia**

Women in academic settings, including students and staff members face violence based on their gender. This includes psychological violence, harassment, sexual violence, online violence, and other forms of discrimination. UniSafe surveyed 42,000 responses from universities around Europe in which they found that around two thirds (62 percent) of those who answered had experienced one or more forms of gender-based violence at university and that those who belonged to an ethnic minority group or were part of the LGBTQIA+ community were more susceptible to facing these forms of discrimination based on gender (Gender-based violence, 2022).

They found that of both students and staff members, 31 percent have experienced sexual harassment, 57 percent have experienced psychological violence, six percent have experienced physical violence and three percent sexual violence (Gender-based violence, 2022). It is important to note that these numbers account for violence against both men and women. In the 13 percent of cases, these incidents were not reported. The reasons ranged from that no one would take action (26 percent), it would impact their work or studies negatively (eight percent), they would not be believed (seven percent) and in some cases, they were actively discouraged from not reporting these incidents (three percent). Consequences included having to take time off work and studies, impacting productivity negatively, feeling the need to change supervisor, team, or department, or even being afraid of going to work (Gender-based violence, 2022). A Swedish study found that almost 38 percent of women either working or studying at a university had experienced sexual harassment, and that half of all female doctoral students have experienced similar situations. In the past 12 months since the survey began, around five percent of women have been faced with some form of sexual harassment (Aukland, 2022).

What has been done to combat discrimination and promote equality within these institutions? Horizon Europe is the European Union's programme to fund research and innovation, also funding and promoting gender equality through institutional changes. This also includes implementing Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) within research and academic institutions to promote equality, with a budget of 72 million euros. These are not only meant to guide policies to reduce inequality between men and women, but also to be more inclusive for everyone to create a diverse environment.

In 2013, around 36 percent of research organisations within the EU had introduced GEPs. By 2016, the number of institutions that had implemented a GEP ranged from over 90 percent in countries such as Sweden, Germany and the United Kingdom, whilst it could range from 20 percent to 60 (Rosa et al., 2020).

## Gender pay-gap in Europe

The gender pay gap is a pressing issue in Europe that has garnered significant attention in recent years. Despite significant progress towards gender equality in the workplace, women continue to earn less than men; in 2018, the gender pay gap in the EU was 14.1 percent, meaning that women earned on average 86 cents for every euro earned by men (European Commission, 2019). As of 2021, the gender pay gap in the EU stands at 13 percent, with considerable differences between EU countries: the gender pay gap ranges from less than 5 percent in countries such as Luxembourg, Romania, Slovenia, Italy, and Poland, to more than 18 percent in Germany, Austria, Estonia and Latvia. Despite this, the EU is trending towards equality in pay, with the gender pay gap decreasing in most EU countries over the last ten years. This section will explore the factors contributing to the gender pay gap in Europe, its impact on women, and the measures taken to address this issue. Research suggests that the gender pay gap is influenced by several factors, including occupational segregation, discrimination, and women's disproportionate responsibility for caregiving.

### 2.1 Occupational segregation

Occupational segregation is a key factor contributing to the gender pay gap in Europe. Women are overrepresented in lower-paying occupations such as education and healthcare, while men dominate higher-paying professions such as finance and technology (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2019). According to the European Commission (2019), this concentration of women in certain industries is one of the main reasons for the gender pay gap. Research shows that women working in male-dominated professions, such as engineering and IT, earn significantly less than their male counterparts (European Parliament, 2019). Furthermore, women are often steered towards certain occupations and discouraged from pursuing careers in traditionally male-dominated fields (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2019). This can be due to a variety of factors, including gender stereotypes and bias. For instance, women in STEM fields may face discrimination and harassment, which can make it more difficult for them to succeed and advance in their careers (European Parliament, 2019).

Addressing occupational segregation is critical to closing the gender pay gap. This can be achieved through a variety of measures, including promoting gender diversity in recruitment and hiring processes, providing training and education to women to help them enter non-traditional fields, and implementing policies to reduce gender bias in the workplace (European Commission, 2019). By breaking down occupational barriers and promoting gender balance across industries, we can create a more equal and fair labour market for all workers.

### 2.2 Discrimination

Discrimination against women also contributes to the pay gap. Research shows that women are often paid less than men for doing the same job (European Parliament, 2019). Furthermore, women's disproportionate responsibility for caregiving also contributes to the pay gap: women are more likely than men to take time off work or work part-time to care for children or elderly relatives. This can result in gaps in their work history and lower earnings over time (European Parliament, 2019).

Research shows that women earn 16 percent less on average than men in the EU due to discrimination alone. Discrimination can occur at all stages of the employment process, from recruitment to promotions. For example, studies have shown that identical CVs with a male name are often preferred over those with a female name, highlighting gender bias during the initial selection stage, similar biases can occur

in promotion processes, including challenges related to work-life balance, which disproportionately affect women. Limited access to affordable childcare, flexible working arrangements, and parental leave policies can hinder women's career progression and contribute to the gender pay gap. Implicit biases and stereotypes can influence decisions made by employers, resulting in women being undervalued and underpaid. Addressing gender discrimination in the workplace is critical to closing the gender pay gap. This can be achieved through a variety of measures, including strengthening laws and regulations to protect workers from discrimination and harassment, promoting gender diversity and inclusion in the workplace, and providing training and education to employers and employees on gender equality and unconscious bias (European Parliament, 2019). In addition, organisations can take steps to promote gender equality in the workplace, such as implementing pay transparency measures, establishing quotas for women in leadership positions, and providing flexible work arrangements to help women balance work and caregiving responsibilities (European Commission, 2019).

### **2.3 Disproportionate responsibility for caregiving**

Women's disproportionate responsibility for caregiving is a significant factor contributing to the gender pay gap in Europe. Women are more likely than men to take time off work or work part-time to care for children or elderly relatives, which can result in gaps in their work history and lower earnings over time (European Parliament, 2019). According to the European Institute for Gender Equality (2019), women in the EU spend on average 26 hours per week on unpaid care work, compared to nine hours for men. This can have a significant impact on women's earnings and career prospects, as they may have to take time off work or work reduced hours to care for family members.

Furthermore, women's caregiving responsibilities can affect their ability to advance in their careers. Research suggests that women who take time off work to care for family members are often penalised in the workplace, facing reduced pay and fewer opportunities for professional development (European Commission, 2019). Women may also face discrimination in hiring and promotion decisions, as employers may assume that they will prioritise their caregiving responsibilities over their work. This phenomenon also often results in the lack of women in senior leadership positions. According to a report by the European Commission, women make up only 17 percent of board members in the largest publicly listed companies in the EU (European Commission, 2019).

Addressing women's disproportionate responsibility for caregiving is critical to closing the gender pay gap. This can be achieved through a variety of measures, including providing affordable and accessible childcare, promoting flexible work arrangements, and providing paid family leave for both parents (European Parliament, 2019). In addition, organisations can take steps to address the impact of caregiving on women's careers, such as offering career breaks, providing mentorship and support for working parents, and implementing policies to reduce discrimination against caregivers in the workplace (European Commission, 2019).

### **2.4 Impact of the gender gap and how to address it**

The gender pay gap has significant consequences for women. Women's lower earnings can result in a lifetime of lower income, affecting their economic security and overall enjoyment of their liberties and quality of life. The pay gap also contributes to gender inequality, as it perpetuates the idea that women's work is less valuable than men's, leading to women being undervalued and underrepresented in the labour market. The gender pay gap also has a broader impact on society. It affects the economy, as it reduces the purchasing power of women and limits their ability to invest in the economy. It also



perpetuates gender inequality and reinforces harmful stereotypes, which can have a negative impact on women’s mental health and well-being. Governments and organisations have implemented various measures to close the gender pay gap. For instance, some countries have introduced pay transparency measures, which require companies to disclose their gender pay gap. This can help to identify any pay disparities and encourage companies to act (European Parliament, 2019).

Others have implemented affirmative action policies to promote gender equality in the workplace. This includes measures such as quotas for women in leadership positions and training programs to promote women’s career advancement (European Commission, 2019). The EU has also taken steps to address the gender pay gap. In March 2019, the European Parliament approved new legislation to improve work-life balance and promote gender equality. The legislation includes measures such as paternity leave, flexible working arrangements, and improved parental leave for both parents (European Parliament, 2019).

## 2.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the gender pay gap is a significant issue in Europe that requires attention. Occupational segregation, discrimination, and women’s disproportionate responsibility for caregiving are some of the primary factors contributing to the pay gap. Governments and organisations must continue to work towards closing the gap and promoting gender equality in the labour market. By doing so, we can create a more equal and just society, where men and women are valued equally for their contributions to the economy and society.



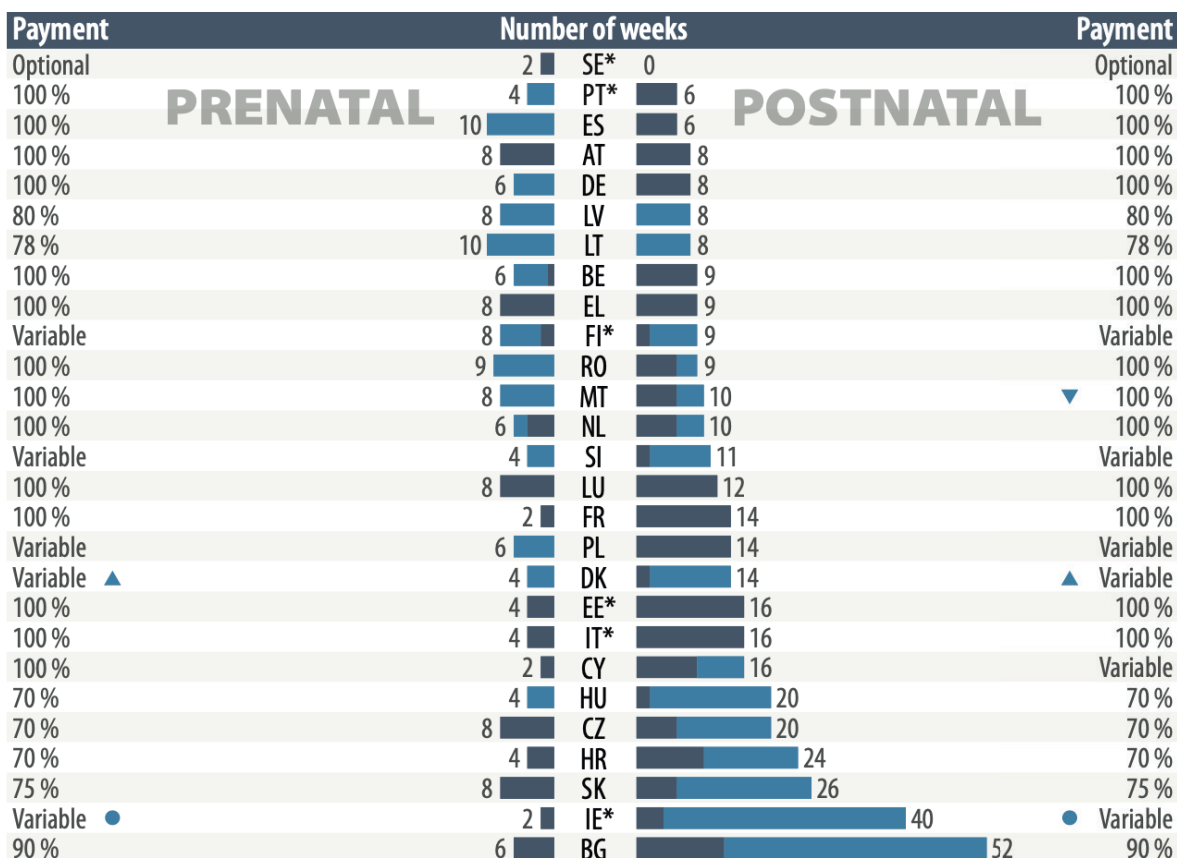
## Maternity rights in the European working environment

When discussing maternity rights, one usually ought to look at a country's policy regarding maternity leave. While some countries in Europe only regulate parental leave generally, without different entitlements allocated to mothers or fathers, most states offer different regimes based on the parent's gender, with paternity leave schemes only having been introduced in recent years.

Maternity rights in the European Union are set out in the 1992 Pregnant Workers Directive (Council Directive 92/85/EEC). According to this EU statute, the minimum period for maternity leave is 14 weeks, allocated before and/or after confinement, of which two weeks are compulsory leave. Maternity leave policies can be disaggregated into two dimensions: payment and protection (). Within the sphere of payment, according to the directive, workers are entitled to adequate allowance subject to national legislation. According to Article 11(3) of the directive, an allowance is deemed "adequate" if it guarantees income at least equivalent to that received by the worker in the event of a health-motivated break in her activities. Within these minimum thresholds, member states have discretion in setting national rules governing maternity leave policies.

In terms of pregnant workers' protection, the Directive lays down a few rules regarding safeguarding the health of the pregnant employee as well as the guarantee of their employment rights. In the sense of the former, Article 6 stipulates that pregnant workers and workers who are breastfeeding may not be obliged to perform "duties for which assessment has revealed a risk of exposure that would jeopardise their health or safety". Furthermore, Article 7 lays down rules regarding night work: member states (MS) should take measures to ensure that pregnant workers, workers who have recently given birth, and breastfeeding workers are not obliged to perform night work. In the sense of guaranteeing employment, MS shall ensure prohibition of mothers' dismissal adjacent to their pregnancy. Pursuant to Article 10(2) of the Directive, if a worker is dismissed during the period from the beginning of their pregnancy to the end of the maternity leave, the employer must cite duly substantiated reasons for such action in writing. Furthermore, Directive 2006/54 on equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment stipulates that a woman on maternity leave is entitled to return to her job or equivalent post on terms and conditions which are not less favourable to her (Article 15).

EU member states had two years after the adoption of the Directive to implement the laws, regulations and administrative provisions necessary to comply with this Directive. The graph below, developed by the European Parliament in March 2022, showcases a comparison of the Member States' laws regarding maternity leave and compensation (dark blue represents mandatory maternity leave).



Countries like Sweden have a gender-neutral approach to parental leave and laws do not differentiate based on gender, which explains the zero weeks allocated for postpartum maternity leave. Each parent is eligible for up to 240 days of paid parental leave, which amounts to 480 in total per child. Of these 240 days, all but 90 days may be transferred to the other parent. The only exception is for single parents with sole custody, who are allowed to take all 480 days of leave (YLC Stockholm, 2020). However, parents are eligible for unpaid leave until the child is 18 months old.

In terms of payment, it varies based on one’s prior salary, immigration status, length of residence and work in Sweden, as well as other personal circumstances. Any legal resident in Sweden is entitled to a basic parental leave payment of 250 SEK a day (about 22 EUR), even if they have not been earning money in Sweden prior to the child’s birth. As the system is very flexible depending on a parent’s wishes, a carer may still work part-time and receive benefits, which can be paid for full days, half days or even quarter or one-eighth of days. Parents can also receive compensation for taking time off work to care for a sick child, until the age of 12.

Another state which practises the “parental leave” policy type is Portugal, where parents can choose between 120 days compensated at 100 percent, or 150 days compensated with 80 percent. If parents choose to share the leave period, then this may be supplemented with 30 days. The father can take any amount of this period, apart from the first six weeks emphasised in the graph, which are reserved for the mother.

The leave policy in the United Kingdom mainly regards maternity leave, which can be taken for up to 12 months postnatally. However, only 6 weeks of these are well paid (Moss-Deven, 2019), with

90 percent of one's average weekly earnings (before tax) (Gov.UK, 2023). Statutory Maternity Pays continues for another 33 weeks but is only paid at a low flat rate of GBP 156.66, or 90 percent of one's average weekly payment, if lower than the mentioned sum. The remaining weeks of the allowed leave are, however, unpaid.

### 3.1 Paternity leave

When it comes to paternity leave, certain standards are set in the EU Directive 2019/1158 on work-life balance and carers, which entered into force in August 2019 and introduced the right at the EU level. According to this statute, which lays down requirements designed to help States achieve equality between men and women within the labour market dimension, "paternity leave" refers to leave from work for fathers, or if recognised by national law, for equivalent second parents (Article 3(1)). The document mandates that fathers (or equivalent parents in same-sex families) have an individual entitlement to at least ten days of leave following the birth of their child. This time off must be compensated at least equivalently to sick pay (Article 4). Furthermore, some provisions are meant to supplement parental leave regulations set in the 1992 Directive. In order to encourage more men to take up the leave (Chierigato, 2020), a minimum period of non-transferrable leave of two months is laid down (Article 5(2)). In terms of pay, it is stipulated that at least two months of leave shall be paid, or some form of allowance shall be given. However, the Directive is silent on whether this needs to be substantive pay and does not require it to be "adequate", as in the case of maternity leave.

An important development championed by the Directive is extended regulation of one's right to request flexible working arrangements to accommodate one parental duties. According to Article 9(1) of said directive, MS shall take necessary measures to ensure that workers with children have this right until their child reaches at least eight years old. Such arrangements may take the form of remote work, flexible schedules or a reduction of working hours in order to adapt to caring responsibilities (Chierigato, 2020). However, as pointed out by Chierigato (2020, p. 8), this provision only pertains to an employee's right to request such arrangements, which in turn ought to be taken into account by the employer. Still, this does not guarantee the desired effect, as the latter may refuse such a request if they state appropriate reasons. In the United Kingdom, what is known as "parental leave" offers each parent a total of four months of leave which can be taken until their child turns 18 years old (Moss-Deven, 2019). This unpaid leave allows parents to spend time with their families or care for their sick children but cannot be used in one block of time, only in shorter periods of maximum four weeks per year. During this leave, a worker's employment rights are protected, and they cannot lose their position or entitlement to holidays or other types of leave (Gov.UK, 2023). As for paternity leave, the British state offers new fathers the possibility to take two weeks of leave, but only paid at a low flat rate, of the same amount as maternity leave pay after the initial six weeks expire (Moss-Deven, 2019).

Although the developments demonstrate important progress in the relationship between care, employment and gender, studies on public policies in the field of work-life balance) emphasise that thorough regulation of parental leave conditions is insufficient in the lack of other measures (Moss-Deven, 2019; Chierigato, 2020). The fact that until recently the primary regulatory act on the matter was a directive which only concerned the pregnant parent shows how predominant cultural attitudes and expectations permeate into law. Parental leave policy shall only be a piece within a broader framework of "care-work policies and cultural ideas over care tasks" (Mazzuchelli et al., 2019, p. 241). Implementing new parental leave rules should be built on an aligned system of cultural attitudes on the roles of both men and women in formal and informal care for families —which does not only

include children, but other dependents. Progressive policies need to be coherent with societal ideas about who is responsible for the care of children or the elderly (Moss-Deven, 2019). A compelling example is shown by the cases of Japan and South Korea, where, despite the offer of a generous leave for fathers, men show low take-up rates (Kim, 2018; Nakazato, 2019). This shows the inefficiency of policy change that runs too much ahead of local practice (Moss-Deven, 2019).

Even at the level of the EU, attitudes towards gender roles within the family dynamic and the care-work relationship differ greatly, despite harmonised minimum thresholds for time off. According to a study by the European Commission (2017, p. 6), when asked whether the most important role of a woman is to take care of her home and family, 81 percent of Bulgarians, 78 percent of Hungarians and 77 percent of Poles and Czechs agreed with the statement. Conversely, only 11 percent of people from Sweden and 15 percent of Dutch people agreed, which reveals a stark difference in attitudes toward gender behind a formal front of progressivism. Another major aspect of work-life balance concerns the lifelong duty of informal labour and family care that is overwhelmingly put on women's shoulders (European Commission, 2022). An attempt at filling this gap has been made with the adoption of the 2019 Directive on work-life balance for working parents and carers, which recognises the long-term responsibility of caring for dependents which was not adequately addressed by the fixed terms of leave in previous legislation. This document explicitly aims to “increase take-up of family-related leave and flexible working arrangements by men” (Proposal for Directive, 2019), encouraging a gender-balanced use of such benefits. Besides sanctioning paternity leave, the act also introduces a “carer’s leave”. This offers any worker providing personal care or support to a relative who is in significant need of care or support for a medical reason leave from work in order to provide such care, as defined by each MS, but no less than five working days per year (Article 6). States may allocate this leave on a different basis other than days per year, such as per person in need or per case. Article 12 of said directive extends the right to protection from dismissal laid down in the 1992 Directive to any worker who request flexible working arrangements or carer leave.

In order to strengthen their efforts for a gender-balanced system of care for children and dependents, the Commission adopted in September 2022 a European Care Strategy. This strategy targets two areas, which turned into recommendations from the Council. First, it proposes that MS revise their policy on access to high-quality and affordable early childhood education and care by 2030, allowings parents to balance their care responsibilities with work, even under flexible arrangements. Secondly, the Council recommends all states to increase access to affordable and high-quality long-term care for those in need, stressing a need to shift the burden of care from individuals within the family to state welfare systems.

### 3.2 Unemployed women

Within the European Union, the rate of unemployed women stands at 6.5 percent as of January 2023 (Eurostat). Since the topic of parental leave bears upon working parents, one may wonder what kind of basic benefits European states afford their new mothers. In that case, a child's needs would be covered by family benefits, granted through the social security system of each state. The country responsible for ensuring these funds depends on one's place of residence and economic status, and not on nationality, which means that host countries are responsible for allocating family benefits, under conditions subject to national laws. Several studies (inter alia, Korzeniowska, 2021) indicate that social policy within the EU is uncoordinated and challenging to understand for laypersons. Despite their numerous areas of policy harmonisation and similar levels of development, EU states still show evident differences in

terms of social expenditure. For example, the Swedish state offers child allowance (*barnbidrag*) to any insured person who lives in Sweden and has children (European Commission, 2022). If the child has two guardians, the allowance is shared between them, or is paid entirely to one person in the alternative case. This financial support is automatically paid to all parents from the first month of their child's life until the child turns 16. This allowance is SEK 1,250 per month (EUR 110.88), or SEK 625 for each parent if there are two guardians.

In Finland, the allowance received increases with every other child and single parents benefit from a single-parent supplement granted for each child (European Commission, 2022). In Bulgaria, parents may receive a monthly allowance for raising their children until they graduate from high school, if their income does not exceed BGN 410 (EUR 209.62). Moreover, pregnant women may receive a one-off benefit (EUR 76.69) if their income is equal to or lower than BGN 510 (EUR 260.75). Mothers also have a right to a one-off benefit for giving birth to a living child, irrespective of income. The amount of the benefit was EUR 127.82 for the first child, EUR 306.77 for the second, EUR 153.38 for the third and EUR 102.25 for the fourth and each subsequent child (European Commission, 2022). Each country has different rules in place and may or may not offer various special benefits according to the mother's economic and social condition.<sup>1</sup>

It is essential to note that despite the major increase in women's employment in recent decades, the burden of private care and responsibilities still rests mainly on them (European Commission, 2022). This is one of the causes why more women than men choose part-time and, thus, less paid jobs and have their freedom in choosing employment more restrictive. Governments should analyse the cultural mechanisms at play for this status quo when designing more inclusive social policy for new parents.



1 All these statistics may be further researched on the European Commission's Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion reports, at <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=858&langId=en>.

## Women in leadership positions: the European framework

One of the key indicators of gender equality in Europe is the level of equal access of men and women to leadership positions. This section aims to scrutinise the extent to which men and women hold equal opportunities in holding leadership positions throughout their professional career in Europe. Precisely, focus is placed upon examining statistics that illustrate the reality of the job market in politics and other leadership roles. Subsequently, this section addresses media discrimination against women and the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the opportunities for women to progress professionally. In its final part, this section touches upon milestone developments and initiatives taken in the European scene which aim to stimulate women's access to leadership roles and their empowerment.

### 4.1 Women in politics and relationships roles

According to a briefing of the European Parliament in 2019 published by the European Parliamentary Research Service, at a European level, since the first directly elected legislature in 1979, the percentage of female members has risen from 16.6 percent to 35.8 percent after the 2014 elections (Shreeves et al., 2019). Nevertheless, large disparities remain between Member States of the European Union; for instance, in Finland the percentage of women in politics was as high as 76.9 percent and in Croatia 54.5 percent, while in Estonia and Cyprus the percentage was as low as 16.7 percent. On a national level, there are fewer women than men in the parliament in every EU Member State (Shreeves et al., 2019). Similarly, on a local and regional level, gender inequality is observed with an average of 33.3 percent of women in regional assemblies in the EU (Shreeves et al., 2019). A crucial aspect of women's participation in politics is diversity. Pursuant to the above briefing, in 2019 there was no data on an EU-wide level on political representation of diverse groups of women, such as LGBTQIA+ women, women with disabilities, or women from ethnic minorities. For instance, Roma minorities are one of the most under-represented groups in politics and the issue was particularly flagged by the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) (Shreeves et al., 2019).

One of the most dominant parameters of women's active participation in politics is the fact that women are often labelled negatively as far as their competency to engage in such matters is concerned. For example, women in politics are criticised on the basis of their physical appearance and the clothes they are wearing more often than their male colleagues (Eyes on Europe, 2021). Another pattern when it comes to the reactions to women's participation in politics is the so-called ideology of a fragile woman. This ideology dates back to the 1800s when a group of politicians, lawyers, scientists, and other men of high rank collectively agreed to label women as being "of fragile nature" (Eyes on Europe, 2021).

Two examples of the above-mentioned discrimination against women in politics are the cases of the Italian Minister of Integration in 2013 and of the Prime Minister of Finland in 2022. In the first case, Roberto Calderoli, a former minister of the government of Silvio Berlusconi and senate vice president of the Northern League, stated at a rally in the town of Treviglio that Cecile Kyenge, the then Minister of Integration with origins from the Democratic Republic of Congo, should have been preferably working as a minister at her own country (The Guardian, 2013). Also, he added that "I love animals – bears and wolves, as is known – but when I see the pictures of Kyenge I cannot but think of the features of an orangutan, even if I'm not saying she is one" (The Guardian, 2013).

The second example is the case of Sanna Marin, the Finnish Prime Minister. Marin has been serving as the Prime Minister of Finland since 2019 and is the world's youngest prime minister (Global Human Rights Defence, 2022). On August 18th, 2022, she faced massive attacks of criticism following a

video shared on social media by one of her friends where she was singing and dancing with her friends (Global Human Rights Defence, 2022). The criticism included allegations that Marin had used alcohol and drugs; precisely, a Finnish Member of the Parliament of the Centre Party shared on Twitter that she should undergo a drug test to prove that she had not used illegal substances (Global Human Rights Defence, 2022). Both examples show the general hostility against women in politics which aims at underestimating their dynamism and their leadership skills through targeting either their physical appearance or criticising their actions in a conservative manner and is fairly disproportionate when compared with the way that men in power are treated.

In terms of the general presence of women in positions of leadership, pursuant to a new release by Eurostat in 2020, only one manager out of three in the EU is a woman, while the number of women in senior management positions is even lower (Eurostat, 2020). According to data collected by Eurostat, out of the 6.7 million persons holding a managerial position in the EU, 63 percent are men and 37 percent are women (Eurostat, 2020). According to research conducted by the European Institute for Gender Equality in 2021, among the largest companies in the EU, only 20.2 percent of women held executive positions and 7.8 percent of women held CEO positions (Catalyst, 2022).

#### 4.2 Media discrimination

A fundamental aspect of the discussion corresponds to the role played by the media. Arguably, media discrimination against women has resulted in the exclusion or criticism of women, especially in regard to women's participation in politics. In fact, in Europe women follow the news media less than men; in Spain, Italy, France, Germany, and the UK, 52 percent of men read online newspapers in comparison to 37 percent of women; when women were asked to state the reasons they dislike news media, they pointed out that “news is for men” (Haraldsson, 2022). For instance, when the topics of politics and government are covered by news media, they rarely discuss women. According to findings of the Global Media Monitoring Project in 2020, only 20 percent of people discussed in this context are women. As a result, this under-representation of women leads to them being discouraged to take active part in the political scene and generates an idea of a male-only dominated political scene. This situation, among other factors, leads to the lack of political awareness among women and reduced levels of self-interest in politics (Haraldsson, 2022). According to a study conducted in 2015, the gender gap as far as political awareness is concerned is a phenomenon that starts during childhood across European countries (Haraldsson, 2022). Additionally, pursuant to a Danish survey conducted in 2020, women appeared to be considerably less confident than men in assuming political roles (Dahl, Nyrup, 2020).

Overall, it appears that gender stereotypes are present within the world of the news media and contribute to the manner in which women shape their perception of the political world as a male-dominated field. This often results in women not trusting their competencies and leaves them either insecure about their potential or entirely uninterested in the world of politics. In fact, across Europe, both men and women believe in their majority that politics is a male-dominated field (Haraldsson, 2022). Remarkably, a study conducted in 2020 showed that when men and women were asked to categorise certain issues as political or not, both men and women in Spain appeared to consider issues such as employment as political, while considered matters like the morning after pill as non-political (Haraldsson, 2022). This only shows that issues that are of a feminine nature seem to not be given equal importance in the field of politics despite their socio-political value and their relevance in the functioning of society (Haraldsson, 2022).



### **4.3 The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the gender gap in leadership roles**

Throughout June and July 2021, the European Institute for Gender Equality conducted an online survey in order to monitor the socio-economic impact of the pandemic. The data collected included information from all EU Member States and included the input of 42,300 participants between the ages of 20 and 64 years with 1,500 participants per EU country (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021). The goal of this survey was to show the interconnections between government policies during the pandemic, the changes in paid and unpaid work undertaken by women and men and their impact on gender equality (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021). The main aspects covered by the survey include the distribution of paid and unpaid work, work-life balance, working arrangements like time schedules and teleworking, and leisure time and well-being (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021).

The study led to three important conclusions relevant to women's access to leadership roles. Firstly, women experienced an increase in both their paid and unpaid work at a higher rate compared to men, especially those with young children. (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021). For instance, 40 percent of women and 21 percent of men spent approximately four hours a weekday on childcare (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021). The percentage difference between women and men ranges from seven points in Belgium to 30 percentage points in Portugal and Germany (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021). Secondly, in February/March 2020, men appeared to have wider access to flexible working hours and teleworking settings than women. (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021). In fact, approximately 61 percent of women stated that their work schedule was established by their employer without the possibility for flexible arrangements, compared to 57 percent of men; this situation continued in summer of 2021. (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021). Thirdly, the pre-existing levels of gender inequality in the distribution of work in households appeared to remain (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021). Precisely, women continued to claim responsibility for the majority of household tasks, with two thirds of women being responsible for most or all of the household related tasks in the summer of 2021. (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021). Such tasks include but are not limited to shopping for groceries, planning and managing the schedule of children etc. (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021).

The above survey illustrates the reality that women face in the job market. Employers often put them in a more disadvantageous position than men, and this pattern has further intensified during the pandemic. This outcome renders the access of women to leadership positions even more challenging by setting double standards for men and women and creating harsher conditions for women than men. During the pandemic, women were overburdened by household and workplace tasks, which discourages women's leadership and promotes a work culture where men are offered more benefits and flexibility, rendering in this way the possibility for women to climb the professional ladder more difficult.

### **4.4 Initiatives to promote women leadership in Europe**

Considering the current gender inequality in leadership roles across professional roles in the EU, there have been certain remarkable initiatives that have been taken to boost women's equal access to roles that include power and decision-making. For example, the European Innovation Council, in partnership with the European Institute of Innovation and Technology, has launched the Women Entrepreneurship and Leadership Program in the context of achieving equal human rights for men and women, which is also part of the Sustainable Development Agenda for 2030 (European Institute of Innovation and Technology, 2021). Starting in 2016, the Institute has taken a series of actions in [www.ghrd.org](http://www.ghrd.org)

order to fight against gender mainstreaming. In December 2022, the Institute approved the revised Gender Equality Policy for 2022-2027, which aspires to boost equality and women's participation in leadership activities. In the context of women empowerment and promotion of women in leadership positions, the European Institute for Innovation and Technology, has engaged with various projects to achieve this goal. Such projects are the Empowering Women in Agrifood (EWA) project and the ENGIE project – 'Encouraging Girls to Study Geosciences and Engineering'.

Overall, the level of women's representation in leadership roles in Europe is not equal to that of men. Women often face discrimination, underestimation of their competencies, and may not be offered the same number of opportunities for professional evolution and self-development as men. Due to discriminative and patriarchal social standards, women are often considered incapable of assuming such levels of responsibility and are marginalised by a male-dominated culture of leadership. It is of fundamental importance that the issue is raised and effectively tackled on a national, regional as well as international level in order to empower more women to engage in such roles and eliminate any gender stereotypes that discriminate against women and violate their rights. The right to not be discriminated against is a human right and must be protected under all circumstances.



## Conclusion

This report stresses the importance of women in the working environment, focusing in the first section on the field of academia and research. It found that in European academic institutions, on average, only 40 percent of the academic staff were women in 2018. Alongside this, only 26.2 percent had a position equal to a full professorship. The year after, in 2019, women in higher education made up less than 25 percent of heads of academic institutions, with one in four women being board members on the European average. The second section highlighted the gender pay gap, where occupational segregation, discrimination, and women’s disproportionate responsibility for caregiving significantly contribute to the pay gap. Governments and organisations must continue to work together towards closing the gap and promoting gender equality in the labour market.

The third section discussed how, despite major increases in women’s employment in recent decades, the burden of private care and child responsibility still lies primarily on their shoulders, pushing women to choose part-time and therefore lower-paying jobs. It is imperative that governments with the support of the public and private sector analyse the cultural mechanisms at play for this status quo in order to design more inclusive social policy for new parents, creating a more equal society where the contribution of men and women are put on the same level. Lastly, the fourth section emphasised the presence of women in leadership roles in Europe, which is still not as equal to that of men. As a consequence, women tend to face discrimination, underestimation of their competencies and may not be offered the same number of opportunities for professional evolution and self-development as men. Due to discriminative and patriarchal social standards, women are often considered incapable of assuming such levels of responsibility and are marginalised by a male-dominated culture of leadership.



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