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Gender equality is one of the EU's core values. The Union has committed to 'gender mainstreaming', meaning that, in principle, all EU policies must take both women's and men's perspectives into consideration. In December 2024, the European Parliament is holding its 'European Gender Equality Week', giving all committees and delegations an opportunity to explore issues relevant to gender equality in their particular areas of competence. This topical digest gives an overview of relevant EPRS research publications in various areas related to gender equality.

## Gender equality: State of play

### Accelerating progress on Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5): Achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls

Briefing by Rosamund Shreeves, September 2024

Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) aims to 'achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls' and is at risk of being missed by the 2030 target, undermining other goals. The inclusion of a standalone gender equality goal was intended to mobilize action against barriers to women's rights, which are crucial for sustainable development. SDG 5 targets include removing discriminatory laws, eliminating gender-based violence, ensuring bodily autonomy, valuing unpaid care work, and closing gender gaps in resources and decision-making. However, no country has fully achieved these targets, and global progress has stalled, prompting a reassessment of effective policies and action gaps. The EU supports SDG 5 and has frameworks in place to assist non-EU countries while making uneven progress within its Member States. The European Parliament has called for concrete actions to accelerate progress toward SDG 5.

### Beyond the pandemic: The potential of ambitious gender equality policy

'At a glance' note by Rosamund Shreeves, February 2022

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, gender equality was advancing in most of the areas measured by the EU's gender equality index, and the less gender-equal Member States were catching up with the most gender-equal ones. The pandemic has put these advances at risk, bringing into sharp focus issues such as the gender dimensions of the increase in unpaid care work, the accelerated shift to remote working and the impacts of these developments on wellbeing and mental health.

### Enhancing EU gender equality policy

Chapter by Rosamund Shreeves in the study *Towards a more resilient Europe post-coronavirus: Options to enhance the EU's resilience to structural risks* coordinated by Étienne Bassot, Franck Debié, Stanislas de Finance and Astrid Worum, April 2021

The COVID-19 pandemic hit at a time when the EU committing to refocus on combating gender inequalities. Evidence shows that the lockdowns led to an increase in violence against women, a widening of the gender divide in unpaid care work, and potentially long-term impacts on women's paid work and incomes. These are all areas where the EU and the Member States have developed—, or could further develop, their capacities, and where consistent application of gender mainstreaming tools could significantly affect outcomes.

### Women's rights: 25-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action

'At a glance' note by Rosamund Shreeves, February 2021

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) adopted in 1995 at the United Nations' fourth World Conference on Women is considered the international 'Bill of Rights' for women. It defined women's rights as human rights and set goals across a range of issues affecting women and girls. Under the BPfA, the EU and its Member States committed to achieving concrete targets in twelve critical areas. See also the longer briefing [Beijing Platform for Action: 25-year review and future priorities](#) and the related [infographic](#).



# Gender mainstreaming

## Gender mainstreaming in the EU Trade agreements

*Study by Rosamund Shreeves, March 2024*

International trade is not gender neutral, with trade liberalization affecting women and men differently due to unequal access to resources and varying labour market positions. EU policymakers face the challenge of ensuring that both genders benefit from trade agreements while promoting gender equality, a core EU value. The EU has committed to integrating gender equality into its trade policies, exemplified by recent agreements that include specific provisions on trade and gender. Sustainable impact assessments and evaluations are being utilized to consider gendered effects in trade negotiations. However, experts highlight challenges, particularly the need for improved data. Parliament has advocated for stronger gender mainstreaming in trade agreements, calling for dedicated chapters on gender equality, binding provisions, comprehensive gender analyses, and gender-balanced representation in negotiation teams and oversight bodies.

## Gender responsive budgeting: Implications for the budget of the European Parliament

*Study by Magdalena Sapala and Rosamund Shreeves, October 2023*

The European Parliament is one of the key advocates of gender mainstreaming – including gender responsive budgeting (GRB) – in the EU and its Member States. It has made significant efforts to implement gender mainstreaming in its own political, administrative and procedural processes. However, despite the commitments made at both political and administrative level, the principles of gender responsive budgeting are not yet fully reflected in the European Parliament's budget. Moreover, none of the EU institutions currently apply GRB tools to their own administrative budget. This study offers an overview of gender responsive budgeting, its rationale, relevant tools and the progress made implementing it in the budget of the European Union, and looks at how the approach could be designed and implemented with specific reference to the internal budget of the European Parliament. The study is intended to feed into the ongoing reflection on promoting GRB in the other EU institutions and more broadly.

## Exploring gender equality across policy areas

*'At a glance' note by Rosamund Shreeves, October 2021*

The European Union has adopted gender mainstreaming as an official approach to gender equality, alongside targeted action to eliminate discrimination and advance women's empowerment. In October 2021, Parliament held its second Gender Equality Week, which featured a series of events highlighting the importance of gender equality and gender mainstreaming across different policy domains.

## Gender mainstreaming in the European Parliament – State of play

*Study by Rosamund Shreeves and Nora Hahnkamper-Vandenbulcke, October 2021*

The European Parliament's gender mainstreaming policy has evolved considerably since its formal launch in 2003. This study, supporting a report by the FEMM committee, explores the concept of gender mainstreaming and the tools that can be used to implement it, provides an overview of Parliament's current gender mainstreaming policy and contextualises Parliament's efforts through analysis of gender mainstreaming practices in other EU institutions, national parliaments and international institutions.

# COVID-19 and the recovery

## Social expenditure in the Recovery and Resilience Facility

*Briefing by Velina Lilyanova, February 2024*

Prompted by the pandemic and the resulting economic and social crisis, the EU set up a recovery instrument – Next Generation EU (NGEU) – to help Member States recover. NGEU's main funding tool, the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), has made available €723 billion in grants and loans to Member States for reform and investment that promote the EU's economic, social and territorial cohesion. This briefing focuses on the RRF's social dimension, looking at how the facility is helping not only to address the direct impact of the pandemic, but also to build long-term social resilience. The RRF aims to mitigate the social and economic impacts of the crisis (particularly on women), contribute to upward economic and social convergence, to the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and to high quality employment creation.



## Gender equality in the Recovery and Resilience Facility

Briefing by Magdalena Sapala, October 2022

The creation of the EU's biggest financial instrument supporting recovery in the Member States is an opportunity to put into practice the long-standing commitment to mainstream gender across different policies and EU spending, and to channel the extraordinary resources towards measures that promote gender equality. This briefing provides an overview of how gender equality is built into the RRF Regulation, and concrete examples of how Member States have taken it into account in their national recovery and resilience plans.

## COVID-19: The need for a gendered response

Briefing by Rosamund Shreeves, EPRS, February 2021

During a pandemic, adopting a gender perspective may be seen as a secondary concern. However, evidence shows that pandemics affect women and men differently. It is essential to recognise these differences in order to understand the impacts on individuals and communities and to respond effectively and equitably.

## The coronavirus crisis: An emerging gender divide?

Infographic by Marie Lecerf and Giulio Sabbati, February 2021

The EU was severely hit by the COVID-19 crisis, with effects extending far beyond public health. This infographic, produced in the height of the pandemic, sheds light on the socioeconomic and psychological impacts of the pandemic on women, addressing work-life balance, well-being and the transformation of the labour market.

# War on Ukraine

## Russia's war on Ukraine: The risk of trafficking of human beings

'At a glance' note by Maria-Margarita Mentzelopoulou, May 2022

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has forced millions to flee the country or move to safety within Ukraine's borders, resulting in one of the largest European humanitarian crises in recent times. The chaos generated by the conflict has exponentially increased the risk of human trafficking and exploitation, especially for the most vulnerable.

## Russia's war on Ukraine: The situation of LGBTI people

'At a glance' note by David de Groot and Micaela del Monte, May 2022

With each passing day, the chaos engendered by the war in Ukraine exponentially increases the risk of violence and exploitation, in particular for the most vulnerable, including women, children, Roma people and members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) community.

## Russia's war on Ukraine: A gender-sensitive humanitarian response

'At a glance' note by Rosamund Shreeves, March 2022

Even – or especially – in complex, emergency situations, it is vital to adopt a gender perspective to address individuals' needs and identify the risks to which they may be exposed. Humanitarian actors are calling for a gender-sensitive response to the Ukraine crisis, to help tackle barriers to accessing services, address increased risks of gender-based violence and facilitate the reception and integration of refugees.

# Foreign affairs, security and defence

## Women's rights in Afghanistan: An ongoing battle

Briefing by Gabija Leclerc and Rosamund Shreeves, September 2024

Since the Taliban regime overtook the country in August 2021, Afghanistan's record on women's rights has been one of, if not the, worst worldwide. Despite promises to 'uphold women's rights in line with Sharia law', from the first weeks of its rule the Taliban started suppressing citizens' rights, with women the main target. This briefing analyses the state of women's rights in Afghanistan, taking a long view. Women's rights have been an intense battleground for over a century, with periods of promising reforms followed by resistance and reversals of progress. A long view helps explain



how a country where women won voting rights earlier than most in the West has come to treat its female population in a manner possibly amounting to a crime against humanity.

### **Women's rights and gender equality: EU-US explainer**

*'At a glance' note by Rosamund Shreeves, March 2023*

Ongoing global crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the cost of living crisis, climate change and war are spotlighting perennial obstacles to gender equality, as well as the importance and potential of gender-sensitive policies. As part of their commitment to human rights, sustainable development and democracy, the European Parliament and the US Congress have committed to advance women's rights and gender equality in their internal and external policy-making in an array of sectors.

### **2023 Sakharov Prize laureate: Jina Mahsa Amini and the Woman, Life, Freedom Movement in Iran**

*'At a glance' note by Beatrix Immenkamp, November 2023*

Respect for fundamental freedoms and human rights is a core value of the EU, which it promotes through its policies. The European Parliament's Sakharov Prize honours the work of those who stand up for these freedoms and rights. With peace and human rights under increased attack today, the prize remains as relevant as ever. In 2023 it was awarded to the late Jina Mahsa Amini and the Woman, Life, Freedom Movement in Iran.

### **Growing transatlantic divide on abortion rights**

*Briefing by Gisela Grieger, October 2022*

Once at the forefront of liberalising abortion rights, the United States has rolled back women's reproductive rights. On 24 June 2022, the US Supreme Court overturned its landmark 1973 ruling in *Roe v Wade*, which had established a constitutional right to abortion under certain circumstances. For almost half a century, *Roe v Wade* made it unconstitutional to enact or enforce abortion 'bans' at state level. The 2022 ruling devolves the highly polarised US abortion rights debate to the state level, where a patchwork of abortion laws has since emerged.

### **Protests in Iran over the death of Mahsa Amini**

*'At a glance' note by Beatrix Immenkamp, September 2022*

Iran has seen massive protests over the death in police custody of 22 year-old Mahsa Amini, a Kurdish woman arrested for allegedly violating Iran's compulsory veiling laws. Protests spread to more than 150 cities across Iran. The government reacted violently to the protests, leading to at least 75 deaths and over a thousand arrests. Iranians were protesting not just against Amini's death, but also against an increasingly repressive regime that targets women, journalists and minorities. During its current mandate, the European Parliament has adopted eight resolutions condemning human rights violations in Iran.

### **SHEcurity Index and 2021 report**

*October 2021*

Data from EPRS were used as a basis for this resource, authored by Hannah Neumann MEP and Leonie Hopgood. It contains data on gender balance in the EU, its Member States and the G20 in six categories: politics, diplomacy, the military, the police, civil and military missions, and business.

### **Women in foreign affairs and international security: Still far from gender equality**

*Briefing by Ionel Zamfir, March 2021*

While gaps persist, in recent decades women's representation at management and ministerial levels in the areas of foreign affairs and security has increased in the EU, the US and the UN. Women's role in peacekeeping receives particular attention, as research has consistently shown that gender equality contributes to peace, and that peace negotiations involving women have a better chance of being sustainable and effective.



# Climate change, energy and environment

## Gender aspects of energy poverty

*'At a glance' note by Ionel Zamfir, February 2023*

In 2023, International Women's Day was celebrated in the context of Russia's war in Ukraine. The war has created a threat of potential energy shortages, driving up energy costs, which, combined with post-pandemic inflation has led to a cost-of-living crisis in Europe. Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) marked the day with a meeting with national parliaments on 1 March 2023. On the agenda: the impact of rising energy prices on women and potential measures to mitigate it.

## Women and the environment

*In the briefing [Beijing Platform for Action: 25-year review and future priorities](#) by Rosamund Shreeves and Martina Prpic, February 2020, pp. 8-9*

The signatories to the Beijing Platform for Action committed to involve women actively in environmental decision-making at all levels, integrate gender perspectives in sustainable development policies, and strengthen or establish mechanisms to assess the impact of development and environmental policies on women. Twenty-five years on, women and girls in developing countries have been particularly affected by environmental stress and crises triggered by increasing temperatures, rising sea levels and loss of biodiversity. In the EU, analysis shows gender gaps in data, access to energy, employment and decision-making. The European Parliament has stressed the need for equal participation of women in decision-making and called for the adoption of a more gender-sensitive approach in climate change policy.

# Cohesion policy

## The gender dimension in cohesion policy

*'At a glance' note by Enrico D'Ambrogio, March 2023*

The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened existing inequalities between women and men. Data reveal significant gaps among EU regions in terms of access to the labour market, pay and working conditions, and leadership in decision-making. The European Parliament sees cohesion policy as key to achieving gender equality, but calls to go beyond the policy domains of the European Social Fund.

## Women in fisheries

*Topical digest, September 2021*

Women play a key role in the fisheries sector, although their work is often unrecognised and underpaid, with many working in low-valued positions in the processing and aquaculture sectors. Many women play a significant role in supporting fishing activities in small-scale, family-run businesses. This work – often unpaid and less visible – can include vital tasks such as maintaining equipment and processing and marketing fish. The publications in this topical digest offer information on and analysis of women's role in fishing communities.

# Employment and social affairs

## Standards for equality bodies: Equal treatment between women and men in employment

*Briefing by Ionel Zamfir, September 2023*

Several EU directives dealing with equality require EU Member States to establish equality bodies that assist victims of discrimination and prevent and fight discrimination on the grounds addressed in the directive. However, these rules are general and do not precisely define the bodies' duties or manner of operation, leading to disparities among the Member States' bodies. Additionally, the work of some Member States' bodies has been hampered by lack of resources, insufficient independence or a narrow remit. In December 2022, the Commission published a proposal for a directive setting standards for equality bodies involved in fighting gender discrimination in the area of employment. The proposal reinforces the bodies' independence, resources and mandate. While generally welcoming the proposal, stakeholders have suggested certain changes.





## Migrant women and the EU labour market: Overcoming double discrimination

Briefing by Anita Orav, May 2023

Migrant women play an increasingly important socioeconomic role in the European Union. Once seen primarily as partners joining migrant men, foreign-born women increasingly migrate alone in search of work. Globally, although around half of migrants today are women, they often face particular difficulties integrating into host societies. This is partly due to obstacles resulting from the institutional framework of host countries. A migrant woman's status – i.e. whether she is legally or irregularly resident – is likely to shape her migration experience. Those who migrate for work are expected to 'fill the gaps' in the labour market. Often this means working in low-paid and unregulated sectors of the economy, where they are likely to be overqualified.

## Women in the digital sector

'At a glance' note by Stefano De Luca, March 2023

International Women's Day on 8 March provides an opportunity both to celebrate women's achievements and to take stock of progress towards gender equality. The gender gap in the digital sector, in areas ranging from education to salaries, persists. As the EU's digital sector currently faces a shortage of information and communications technology professionals, women's increased participation could help the sector to grow. It could also yield economic benefits in terms of gross domestic product per capita.

## Maternity and paternity leave in the EU

Infographic by Marie Leckerf, Verena Kern and Samy Chahri, March 2023

This infographic aims to present the current maternity and paternity leave situation in EU Member States. Maternity rights are set out in the 1992 Pregnant Workers Directive, which sets the minimum period for maternity leave at 14 weeks, with 2 weeks' compulsory leave before and/or after childbirth and an adequate allowance subject to national legislation. A right to two weeks' paternity leave was introduced in a new Directive on Work-life Balance for Parents and Carers, which entered into force in August 2019. The right to paternity leave may not be made subject to a period of work qualification or a length of service qualification. Member States had until August 2022 to adopt the laws and administrative provisions necessary for compliance.

## Equal pay for equal work between men and women: Pay transparency and enforcement mechanisms

'EU Legislation in progress' briefing by Marie Leckerf, March 2023

Equal pay for equal work is one of the EU's founding principles, enshrined in Article 157 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. However, implementation and enforcement of this principle remain a challenge. One concern is that, owing to a lack of pay transparency, pay discrimination often goes undetected and victims are prevented from bringing claims.

## International Equal Pay Day

'At a glance' note by Marie Leckerf, September 2022

The gender pay gap persists globally – including in the EU – and progress in reducing it is slow. The COVID-19 pandemic was a further brake on gender equality. To accelerate the realisation of the principle of 'equal pay for work of equal value', the United Nations marked the first International Day for Equal Pay on 18 September 2020. The third annual International Equal Pay Day, in 2022, focused on pay transparency measures.

## What if care work were recognised as a driver of sustainable growth?

Briefing by Meenakshi Fernandes and Cecilia Navarra, September 2022

Care work provided in homes and institutions is a public good that is undervalued by society. Care workers are more likely to have low earnings and precarious working conditions than others. About 9 in 10 care workers are women, and most unpaid care work within households is done by women. In the EU, the 'unpaid care penalty' for women – equivalent to the earnings they lost because of this unbalanced distribution of care responsibilities – is estimated at €242 billion per year. EU action in the care sector could reap high returns for society. Fostering the 'equal earner-equal carer model' could generate benefits of between €24 billion and €48 billion a year. EU action to promote affordable, high-quality care could produce an additional €90 billion to €160 billion in benefits each year. See also the related video [Care work in the EU: The care penalty](#)



## Women working in transport

*'At a glance' note by Karin Smit-Jacobs, March 2022*

On average, women represent only 16 % of total employees in the different transport sectors and modes (land, water and air). In view of growing labour shortages in this important economic sector – which was worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic – this share needs to increase, according to experts.

## European gender equality strategy and binding pay transparency measures – Pre-legislative synthesis of national, regional and local positions on the European Commission's initiatives

*Briefing by Claudio Collovà and Laura Zandersone with Elise Habib, November 2020*

This briefing provides an analysis of the positions of organisations at European, national, regional and local levels on the Commission's gender equality strategy and proposal on binding pay transparency measures.

## Recent trends in female employment

*Briefing by Monika Kiss, October 2020*

The coronavirus crisis had a harsher initial impact on women than on men when it came to the labour market. Men are more likely to work in sectors that were considered essential economic activities (with the exception of healthcare). Additionally, women's work often involves contact with customers and clients, making teleworking impossible. Women also faced increased childcare obligations, reducing their ability to work, and enjoyed lower levels of social protection owing to their working arrangements.

# Migration

## The protection of vulnerable adults in cross-border situations

*Briefing by Ionel Zamfir, December 2023*

As mobility increases in the EU, so does the need to protect adults who, because of an impairment or insufficiency in their personal faculties, are unable to protect their interests and rely on support from others. While all EU Member States have established legal provisions and practices addressing vulnerable adults' needs, they are highly divergent. In cross-border situations, additional obstacles arise regarding determination of the jurisdiction and law to be applied, recognition of decisions issued by other Member States, and international cooperation among competent national authorities. The 2000 Hague Convention on the International Protection of Adults aimed to mitigate such obstacles, but has only been ratified by 12 Member States. The Commission has put forth a proposal for a regulation on the protection of vulnerable adults in cross-border situations, and a proposal for a Council decision authorising Member States to ratify the convention.

## Implementation of Directive 2011/36/EU: Migration and gender issues

*Study by Alina Ileana Dinu, September 2020*

Directive 2011/36/EU (Anti-trafficking Directive) is the benchmark legislation on the fight against human trafficking at EU level. This European implementation assessment gathers evidence on progress made and challenges in implementing the directive in the Member States, with a double focus: the migratory context and gender issues. Almost ten years after its adoption, the Anti-trafficking Directive remains a valuable tool in combating trafficking in human beings in the EU. Nevertheless, the evaluation points out the need to continue efforts to ensure application of the directive's provisions, as persisting grey areas and obstacles are significant enough to put the full achievement of the directive's objectives at risk.

# Education, culture and sport

## Gender equality in sport

*Infographic by Ionel Zamfir and Samy Chahri, March 2024*

Strongly associated with masculinity, sport is one of the most gender-unequal social institutions in modern society and has traditionally been dominated by men in both participation and governance. This infographic explores women's involvement in coaching and decision-making at both the professional and amateur level, with focus on gender inequality in pay and media coverage.



## Women in arts and culture – Artists, not muses

'At a glance' note by Magdalena Pasikowska-Schnass, March 2021

As in all other domains, women's place in arts and culture has historically not matched their ambitions or skills. Traditionally, women were amateur performing artists or the muses of male artists, with limited access to arts education. Despite good progress, there is still much to be done to ensure women in the EU can contribute their artistic visions fully and freely and hold positions of responsibility, and to recover the works of courageous women artists from dusty museum archives.

## The Bauhaus movement: Where are the women?

Briefing by Ivana Katsarova, March 2021

Bauhaus, arguably the most influential art and design movement in history, celebrated its centenary in 2019. The early years of the Bauhaus movement restricted women to areas deemed proper for their gender, such as textiles and weaving, while discouraging them from indulging in architecture, sculpture or painting.

## Teaching careers in the EU: Why boys do not want to be teachers

Briefing by Ivana Katsarova, February 2020

In the EU, only 7 % of all teachers are under 30, while 36 % are 50 or older. Of the nearly 6 million people working as schoolteachers, 72 % are women, confirming the perception that teaching is a 'woman's world'.

## Teaching: A woman's world

Infographic by Ivana Katsarova, February 2020

A report on gender segregation by the European Institute for Gender Equality shows that in all EU countries, men dominate certain professional fields, such as engineering and technology. By contrast, a number of jobs are still commonly considered to be for 'women only'. These include pre-school education, nursing, midwifery, secretarial work, and domestic and personal care-related services.

## Women in front of and behind the camera: Still struggling with inequality

'At a glance' note by Ivana Katsarova, March 2021

Although almost as many female (44 %) as male (56 %) directors graduate from film schools in Europe, the average portion of female directors in the film industry is only around 20 %, varying from 5 % in Latvia to 30 % in Sweden. These numbers reveal that gender equality in the directing profession is still far from being achieved.

## European Heritage Days – Women's contribution

'At a glance' note by Magdalena Pasikowska-Schnass, September 2020

European Heritage Days have helped raise awareness of Europe's rich and diverse heritage. But have they sufficiently promoted women's contributions to our common heritage?

## Gender equality in sports: (Slowly) changing the game

'At a glance' note by Ivana Katsarova, February 2020

Despite the steady growth of female presence and involvement in the Olympic Movement, girls and women worldwide still have fewer opportunities and receive less investment, training and corporate attention in sport. There is ample room for improvement when it comes to women's participation in sports governance structures.

# Decision-making and politics

## Women in politics in the EU – State of play in 2024

Briefing by Ionel Zamfir, March 2024

One hundred years after women won the vote, or were first elected to parliament in some EU countries, data show that women continue to be under-represented in politics and public life at all levels. There is now solid evidence not just of the obstacles, but also of effective strategies for increasing women's participation and representation. The arguments for gender balance in politics are numerous, benefiting not only women and female politicians, but also political parties and the rest of society. The EU has committed to achieve gender balance in political representation and participation





as a matter of justice, equality and democracy. Recommendations made for achieving this goal include specific action that could be taken by the EU institutions, national governments, political parties, civil society and the media.

### **Violence against women active in politics in the EU: A serious obstacle to political participation**

*Briefing by Ionel Zamfir, February 2024*

Women continue to be under-represented in EU countries at all levels of political decision-making as well as in political parties. The origins of this situation are complex, but one reason stands out: violence against women active in politics discourages many women from entering the political arena. Female politicians are exposed to two severe and intersecting forms of violence: political violence and gender-based violence. Violence against women in politics needs to be understood and addressed in a distinct manner. At EU level, several measures seek to combat violence against women in politics, either indirectly or specifically. The legislative proposal for combating violence against women covers crimes that also affect politicians, and the proposal to criminalise hate speech would also address the issue.

### **Towards gender balance in the European elections: Electoral quotas – What can they achieve?**

*Briefing by Ionel Zamfir, September 2023*

Gender-balanced representation among the decision-makers of the European Union is an important step towards full realisation of the principle of equality between women and men enshrined in the EU Treaties. Though there were very few women EU Commissioners and Members of the European Parliament at the institutions' creation, the Union has made steady and significant progress on this front. Today, the European Parliament is one of the world's most gender-balanced representative assemblies, but there are still significant divergences between EU countries, with several electing men and women in almost equal numbers, and others still far away from such a balance. In this context, analysing the tools that have allowed some Member States to fill the gender gap is instrumental for further progress.

### **Gender balance on corporate boards**

*'At a glance' note by Marie Lecerf, November 2022*

In 2012, the European Commission tabled a directive to improve gender balance on company boards. It set a target whereby women should make up 40 % of non-executive director positions and 33 % of all director positions for listed companies. After being blocked in the Council for a decade, the Parliament and Council reached agreement in June 2022. The proposal was put to the vote and adopted during the Parliament's November 11 2022 plenary session.

### **Women in parliaments**

*Infographic by Martina Prpic, Giulio Sabbati and Samy Chahri, February 2020*

This infographic shows the proportion of women in parliaments around the world, compares representation of women in national parliaments and the European Parliament and shows the proportion of women in each of the European Parliament's political groups. It also gives an overview of the percentage of female Members of the European Parliament by Member State and the gender quotas applicable to the 2019 elections.

### **Women in local and regional government: Still a long way from achieving parity**

*Briefing by Vasileios Margaras, March 2020*

Local and regional government ought to constitute an advantageous sphere for women: a space where they can easily participate in decision-making without having to sacrifice their family, social or career roles. Nevertheless, the data show that it is not always easy for women to participate in these structures.

## **Gender-based violence**

### **Regulation of prostitution in the European Union: Laws and policies in selected EU Member States**

*In-Depth Analysis by Piotr Bakowski and Martina Prpic, September 2024*

Considerable differences of opinion characterise the public debate on the regulation of prostitution in the EU. This results in a complex legal and policy landscape. A lack of comprehensive statistical data complicates the picture, and the choices legislators make are deeply rooted in overarching ideological approaches. At EU level, the European Parliament has long been the primary forum for debating prostitution issues.



## Combating violence against women and domestic violence

*Briefing by Ionel Zamfir, May 2024*

Violence directed against a woman because she is a woman, or that affects women disproportionately, is a violation of fundamental rights and a major obstacle to gender equality in all EU countries. Despite increased attention, national legislation does not offer equal protection for women against all forms of gender-based violence across the EU, and there are significant gaps in the measures adopted at EU level. On 8 March 2022, the Commission adopted a legislative proposal on combating violence against women and domestic violence, to create minimum standards in EU law for criminalising certain forms of gender-based violence; improve victim access to justice, protection and support; ensure coordination between services and prevent these crimes. In July 2023, based on a joint report drafted by its Committees for Gender Equality (FEMM) and Civil Liberties (LIBE), the Parliament decided to enter into interinstitutional negotiations. After difficult discussions, a compromise was reached that removed rape from the scope of the directive, owing to the Council's concerns over the absence of an EU legal basis. The final text was adopted by a large majority in Parliament during its April II 2024 plenary session and by the Council on 7 May 2024. Member States have three years to transpose it.

## Zero tolerance for female genital mutilation

*'At a glance' note by Rosamund Shreeves, February 2024*

As part of broader efforts to combat all forms of violence against women and girls, the EU is committed to working collectively to eradicate female genital mutilation (FGM) and to supporting Member States' efforts in this field. The Commission assesses EU measures to combat FGM every year on or around 6 February – the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation. See also the related [infographic](#).

## Revision of Directive 2011/93/EU on combating the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and child pornography

*Briefing by Marie-Astrid Huemer, February 2024*

In September 2021, the Commission launched a REFIT initiative to assess the implementation of Directive 2011/93/EU on combating the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and child pornography, with a view to revising it. This appraisal takes stock of reports published by the Commission, positions adopted and analyses submitted by EU institutions and agencies, and the relevant European Court of Human Rights case law. The directive requires the EU Member States to criminalise a series of offences, including online child sexual abuse. Yet, it does not cover all of the related technological issues or provide clues on how to reconcile respect for fundamental rights with the urgent need to combat sexual abuse against children. The directive must be understood within the broader frame of applicable EU legislation, including the proposed regulation on online child sexual abuse currently under discussion. Analysis demonstrates a need to amend the directive, with a focus on stronger preventive measures, educational programmes and assistance to victims, and more efficient investigation and prosecution mechanisms including through international cooperation.

## Definitions of rape in the legislation of EU Member States

*In-Depth analysis by Ionel Zamfir, January 2024*

This comparative analysis of the national legislation on rape in European Union Member States provides an overview of legal provisions with a focus on the notion of consent. According to the proposed EU directive on violence against women and domestic violence, lack of consent from victims of rape should be made a constitutive element of the crime.

## Combating child sexual abuse

*Briefing by Claudio Collova, January 2024*

This briefing provides a pre-legislative synthesis of the positions of national, regional and local governmental organisations on the European Commission's forthcoming proposal to revise the Combating Child Sexual Abuse Directive. It is part of an EPRS series that provides summaries of the pre-legislative state of play and advance consultation on a range of Commission priorities. The briefing presents the current state of affairs, examines how existing policy is working on the ground, and identifies best practices and ideas for the future that could be taken up by governmental organisations at all levels of the European system of multilevel governance.



## Revision of the Victim's Rights Directive

Briefing by Martina Prpic, November 2023

On 12 July 2023, the Commission published its proposal for a revision of the Victims' Rights Directive, the key EU legislation on the protection of the rights of victims of crime. The Commission estimates that 15 % of Europeans fall victim to crime each year. Despite recent progress, victims still lack access to information, support and protection. Secondary victimisation during criminal proceedings is common, and victims' access to compensation is not sufficiently supported. Vulnerable victims especially lack sufficient specialised support. The Commission is proposing a set of amendments to strengthen the current rules and expand victims' rights.

## Understanding EU action against human trafficking

Briefing by Martina Prpic, June 2023

This briefing provides an overview of the phenomenon of human trafficking, covering its prevalence at global and EU levels, its main causes and forms, and the methods used by traffickers. Attention is paid to the role gender plays in human trafficking, as women and men are not trafficked in the same ways or for the same purposes. The briefing then discusses EU and international action and against trafficking, the current EU legal framework on the topic, and resolutions made by the Parliament on the fight against human trafficking.

## Preventing and combating trafficking in human beings

Briefing by Martina Prpic, June 2023

On 19 December 2022, the European Commission put forward a proposal for the targeted revision of Directive 2011/36/EU, the main EU instrument to combat trafficking in human beings and protect its victims. Despite progress in fighting this crime, the Commission reports that on average 7 000 people per year are victims of human trafficking in the EU and that this figure is likely only the tip of the iceberg. Forms of exploitation have evolved over time, adapting new environments. For instance, criminal networks are now taking advantage of new technologies to recruit victims. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has generated a massive displacement of women and children and created new opportunities for criminal organisations. While a large majority of victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation are women and girls, men are the primary victims of trafficking for labour exploitation (the share of which is increasing), and may be forced to engage in criminal activities. Against this background, the Commission has proposed a set of amendments to strengthen the current rules, further harmonise provisions across Member States, and collect robust data and statistics.

## EU accession to the Istanbul Convention

'At a glance' note by Ionel Zamfir, May 2023

On 25 January 2023, the Committees on Women's Rights and Gender Equality and Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs jointly adopted, by a substantial majority, their interim report on EU accession to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention). The report calls for swift EU ratification, noting that the 2021 opinion of the European Court of Justice enables EU accession in the absence of a common accord among Member States. As a lack of consensus in the Council had proved an obstacle to ratification, the Swedish Council Presidency made it one of its priorities.

## Violence against women and domestic violence: The new Commission proposal in light of European Parliament requests

Study by Izabela Cristina Bacian and Nora Hahnkamper-Vandenbulcke, June 2022

On 8 March 2022, the European Commission presented a long-awaited proposal for a directive combating violence against women and domestic violence. Ahead of its deliberations, the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality asked the Ex-Post Evaluation Unit of DG EPRS to prepare an analysis of the proposal in light of the Parliament's past requests for a legislative framework on preventing and combating gender-based violence. Accordingly, this study examines the main requests adopted by Parliament on the topic since its first such call in 2009 and compares them with the provisions of the Commission proposal.

## Combating violence against women and domestic violence

Briefing by Laura Zandersone, June 2022

This briefing provides an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the impact assessment accompanying the March 2022 Commission proposal for a directive combating violence against women (VaW) and domestic violence. According



to the Commission, the proposal sets out targeted rules for the protection of victims of VaW and domestic violence to strengthen actions taken by Member States. The proposal aims to ensure minimum rules across the EU on protection against such violence, whether it takes place online or offline.

### **Adding gender-based violence to the list of serious crimes in Article 83(1) TFEU**

*'At a glance' note by Rosamund Shreeves, September 2021*

The EU does not currently have a specific legal instrument addressing gender-based violence. In September 2021 the Parliament adopted an own-initiative legislative report which proposed to identify gender-based violence as an area of serious crime at EU level.

### **Gender-based violence as a new area of crime listed in Article 83(1) TFEU – European added value assessment**

*Study by Cecilia Navarra, Meenakshi Fernandes and Niombo Lomba, with María García Muñoz, June 2021*

This European added value assessment supports the European Parliament's legislative-initiative report on a 'Proposal for a Council decision to identify gender-based violence as a new area of crime listed in Article 83(1) TFEU'. The assessment presents evidence supporting the classification of gender-based violence as a particularly serious crime with a cross-border dimension, estimates the significant benefits that could be generated through EU action and identifies complementary EU action that could enhance the added value of this policy option.

### **Combating gender-based cyber-violence**

*'At a glance' note by Rosamund Shreeves, December 2021*

As the world moves online, forms of violence that already affect women and girls disproportionately are following suit, with digital technologies enabling them to take on new guises. The EU does not have a legislative framework to address this gender-based violence, despite its harmful impacts on individuals, society and democracy. A legislative-initiative report calling for EU legislation to fight gender-based cyber-violence, and provide its victims with equal protection was put to the vote at Parliament's December 2021 plenary session.

### **Combating gender based violence: Cyber violence (European added value assessment)**

*Study by Niombo Lomba, Cecilia Navarra and Meenakshi Fernandes, March 2021*

With the rise of new technology and social media, gender-based cyber violence is a constantly growing threat with impacts at individual, social and economic levels, on women and girls and on society as generally. Action taken so far has been inadequate, and the cross-border nature of gender-based cyber violence has yet to be properly addressed. This European added value assessment complements the Parliament's legislative-initiative report on combating gender-based cyber-violence. It finds that the cost to individuals and society is substantial. A combination of legal and non-legal policy options would generate the greatest European added value.

## **Sexual orientation and gender identity**

### **Free movement rights of rainbow families**

*Briefing by David de Groot, June 2023*

'Rainbow families' – same-sex couples with or without children – still face many obstacles while exercising their free movement rights. In her 2020 State of the Union Speech, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen stated that 'If you are [a] parent in one country, you are [a] parent in every country'. In 2021, the European Parliament declared the EU an LGBTIQ Freedom Zone. It has expressed its deepest concern regarding the discrimination suffered by rainbow families and their children in the EU and insists that the EU take a common approach to the recognition of same-sex marriages and partnerships. In December 2022, the Commission proposed a regulation on the recognition of parenthood across Member States.

### **The rights of LGBTI people in the European Union**

*Briefing by David de Groot, May 2023*

The prohibition of discrimination and the protection of human rights are important elements of the EU legal order. Nevertheless, discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people persists throughout the EU and takes various forms. This briefing looks at the scope of EU non-discrimination law, the recognition of marital or family status in the EU Member States and implications for free movement. Combating



discrimination has become part of EU internal and external policies, and has been the subject of numerous European Parliament resolutions. However, action in this area becomes problematic when it touches on issues in areas that are traditionally the preserve of Member States, such as marital status and family law.

### **Bans on conversion 'therapies': The situation in selected EU Member States**

*Briefing by David de Groot, June 2022*

LGBTI conversion 'therapies' are practices that can be defined as 'any treatment aimed at changing a person's sexual orientation or gender identity'. The European Parliament has strongly condemned all forms of discrimination against LGBTI people, including LGBTI conversion 'therapies'. Moreover, it has repeatedly called on the Member States to ban such practices. This briefing looks at the laws on conversion 'therapies' that are already in place or have been proposed in certain Member States. It then compares them based on the definition of the practice, the scope of protection offered and the sanctions envisaged.

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