

# European Union

## European Commission

The coordination of gender mainstreaming across the European Commission's Directorates-General is currently under the central responsibility of the [Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers](#), led by Commissioner for Equality Helena Dalli.

Within DG JUST is a dedicated **Gender Equality Unit** (Unit D.2) to coordinate the Commission's work, as well as an Inter-Service Group on Gender Equality (ISG), with members from all Commission DGs and services. The ISG coordinates the implementation of actions for equality between women and men in the policies and annual work programmes for their respective policy areas.

The Gender Equality Unit deals with:

- 1 | legal aspects (monitoring the gender equality acquis and the new legislation) and
- 2 | policy issues, such as exchange of good practices between the Member States, awareness-raising and funding.

It is also consulted, both formally and informally, when new legislation is proposed. In the context of the inter-service consultation, the Gender Unit can make suggestions to reflect gender equality issues in proposals. The Unit has a contact person for each DG, supporting them to include a gender perspective in their activities and processes, and it also supports civil society organisations (CSOs), as experts during consultations and public dialogue.

It gives the EU CSOs a particularly important role in decision-making processes, through both formal and informal procedures. In the context of the preparation of policies, DG JUST and the Gender Equality Unit organise public consultations and seminars with social partners on specific topics to gather input from a broad range of stakeholders.

On 5 March 2020, the Commission presented its [Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025](#). The strategy establishes policy objectives and actions to address gender equality challenges in Europe and 'seeks to include the gender perspective across all policy areas, at all levels and in all stages of policy-making'.

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## **Structures with cross-sectorial (horizontal) responsibility for gender**

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### **Inter-Service Group on Gender Equality**

Established in 1995 to support the gender mainstreaming approach of the Commission, the ISG brings together representatives from each of the Commission's Directorates-General. It is chaired by the structure with central responsibility for gender equality – currently DG JUST - and coordinates the activities of Commission departments with respect to planning and implementation of actions for equality between women and men in their respective policies and work programmes. It is also the platform for monitoring and reporting the Commission's activities regarding gender equality, and contributes to policy follow-up.

The group meets four times a year to monitor implementation of specific actions. The Gender Equality Unit serves as its secretariat. ISG members liaise with the Gender Equality Unit within the framework of the annual report on equality between women and men, published every year ahead of International Women's Day on 8 March.

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### **Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men**

Established in 1991, the Advisory Committee involves representatives of the European Union (EU) Member States, the European Women's Lobby and social partner organisations. It assists the Commission in formulating and implementing EU activities to promote equality between women and men by delivering opinions on relevant issues.

Since 2012, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) attends the Committee sessions as an observer organisation, while two representatives of the European Women's Lobby may attend meetings as observers. Representatives of other organisations may be given observer status upon duly substantiated requests. The Committee normally meets twice per year.

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### **High-Level Group on Gender Mainstreaming**

The High-Level Group on Gender Mainstreaming is an informal group created in 2001. It is composed of high-level civil servants from the Member State ministries responsible for gender mainstreaming at national level, selected at the discretion of each Member State. It is chaired by the European Commission presidency and meets twice a year, at the beginning of each new presidency of the Council of the European Union.

The Group is responsible for supporting the Trio-presidencies in identifying relevant policy areas and topics of gender equality to be addressed. The group is also the main forum for planning the strategic follow-up to the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the development of new indicators. Since 2003, it assists the Commission in the preparation of its annual report on equality between women and men.

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### **Scientific Analysis and Advice on Gender Equality in the EU**

Taking over from the previous European Network of Experts on Gender Equality (ENEGE), the Scientific Analysis and Advice on Gender Equality in the EU (SAAGE) began its work in May 2016. SAAGE provides external expertise to the Commission in the field of gender equality policy and is composed of experts in statistics, econometrics, social protection, social inclusion and labour market economics.

It covers all Member States, European Economic Area/European Free Trade Association (EEA-EFTA) countries, and acceding, candidate and pre-candidate countries. SAAGE develops thematic reports, periodical reports and seminars, as well as thematic seminars on specific gender equality themes. It is managed by the Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini and coordinated by the Gender Equality Unit of DG JUST.

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### **European Network of Legal Experts in Gender Equality and Non-discrimination**

The Network has been in operation since 1983. In 2014, after a period of increasingly closer cooperation, it merged two previous existing systems: the Network of Legal Experts in the Non-discrimination field, and the European Network of Legal Experts in the field of Gender Equality. It is composed of independent experts (academics and practitioners) from EU Member States, EEA-EFTA countries and candidate countries. It monitors the implementation of EU equality and non-discrimination legal acquis on a country-by-country basis, which it then compiles into annual country reports and comparative analysis. The Network is responsible for providing the Commission with independent advice on all grounds of discrimination covered by [Directive 2000/43/EC](#) and [Directive 2000/78/EC](#).

It also assists in the dissemination of related EU and national developments in this area through its bi-annual European Equality Law Review, its website and other publications, which are presented and discussed during the annual legal seminar. Overall management of the network rests with Human European Consultancy, Utrecht University and the Migration Policy Group. It is coordinated by the unit JUST D2 on Gender Equality and by the unit JUST D1 on Non-discrimination and Roma coordination within DG JUST.

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### **European Network of Equality Bodies (Equinet)**

DG JUST founded Equinet, a permanent network supporting and assisting 49 national equality bodies from 31 European countries. It has a partnership agreement with the European Commission under the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme. Equinet works to enable peer support and capacity-building among equality bodies and extracts learnings from the work of equality bodies to inform European policy-making. It has a specific commitment to the work of equality bodies on the ground of gender, with a dedicated gender equality working group.

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### **European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)**

EIGE is a European autonomous agency established in 2006, following the European Parliament and Council's adoption of [Regulation \(EC\) No 1922/2006](#). The Institute became operational in 2010. EIGE is located in Vilnius (Lithuania) and supports EU Member States and European institutions, in particular the European Commission, in their efforts to promote gender equality, fight sex-based discrimination and raise awareness of gender issues.

EIGE is responsible for collecting and analysing comparative data on gender issues, developing methodological tools (particularly to assist the integration of the gender dimension in all policy areas - gender mainstreaming), facilitating the exchange of best practices and dialogue among interested parties, and raising awareness among EU citizens. EIGE also has an Experts' Forum. DG JUST is the parent DG of EIGE.

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## Structures with policy-specific (vertical) responsibility for gender

The DG for Development and Cooperation (DG DEVCO) is the only unit in a DG with specific responsibility for gender issues. Within its units, it has a sector working on gender.

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### Directorate-General for Research & Innovation (DG RTD)

[DG RTD](#) houses a 'Gender Sector', which belongs to Unit E.5 – Democracy and European values. It works to raise awareness and build capacity on gender equality in research and innovation (R&I), both internally and externally, and integrates the gender dimension into relevant work programmes. It also devises and monitors the EU strategy on gender equality in R&I, while taking note of new and emerging policy priorities, such as fostering the innovation dimension of gender while developing an intersectional approach to gender equality. It was recently recognised for its effectiveness in the evaluation of gender equality measures in the Horizon 2020 programme, in particular for the gender dimension in R&I.

- The **ERAC Standing Working Group on Gender Equality in Research and Innovation (ERAC SWG GRI)** is the successor to the Helsinki Group on Women and Science. It is a policy advisory committee that provides advice to the Council of the European Union, the European Commission and Member States on policies and initiatives related to gender equality in R&I. The Council manages the secretariat of the group. The Gender Sector, in coordination with Member States within the ERAC SWG GRI, ensures that gender equality is a key priority within the European Research Area (ERA).
- The Ethics and Gender Unit coordinates the **Gender Equality Matrix Group**, known as the 'Women and Science Group' until 2016, and the 'Gender in Research and Innovation Group' until November 2019. It is an informal network of correspondents for gender issues in each of the relevant departments of DG RTD (together with other DGs involved in the framework

programmes (FPs)). The goal is to co-create and steer the definition and implementation of the gender strategy in Horizon Europe and its strategic programming. It fosters synergies among the relevant Commission services, actively involving them in the co-creation process in order to deliver effective gender policy-making for R&I. It also strengthens the implementation of gender equality within the ERA and contributes to discussions on its future.

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## **Directorate-General for Development and Cooperation (DEVCO)**

[DEVCO](#), established on 3 January 2011, is the result of the merger of parts of the former Directorate-General for Development and Relations with African, Caribbean and Pacific States with the former EuropeAid Co-operation Office. The mission of DG DEVCO is to design policies to reduce poverty in the world, ensure sustainable development and promote democracy, peace and security. It is also responsible for implementing the EU's external aid instruments and coordinating the actions of the EU institutions, Member States and other EU actors around the Union's core values, objectives and common priorities. DG DEVCO consists of nine Directorates. The Gender Equality, Human Rights and Democratic Governance Unit is part of Directorate B.

- **Gender Equality, Human Rights and Democratic Governance Unit (DEVCO.B.1):** This Unit focuses on those aspects that are generally considered in development and cooperation, including gender equality, human rights and democratic governance, resilience, fragility, migration, employment, culture, education, health, security and nuclear safety. It develops policies, provides guidance on quality, and implements thematic budget lines in greater detail. DEVCO B.1 also coordinates annual Member States' gender experts' meetings on the implementation of gender mainstreaming in development cooperation, including representatives from EU delegations (embassies) in third countries. The European External Action Service has appointed a Gender Adviser, who oversees the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. The (mandatory) EU Gender Action Plan 2016-2020 'includes the [gender] mainstreaming as one of the three specific approaches to be implemented in the programming of development initiatives, together with political and policy dialogue and the promotion of specific actions for gender equality and women's and girls' rights'.

- **Network of gender focal points:** This informal network of gender focal points is composed of representatives of the Commission's DGs that deal with external relations and development cooperation, as well as representatives of Commission delegations.
  - **Group of Experts on Gender Equality in Development Cooperation:** This informal group met for the first time in 1999 and is formed by Member States' gender experts. It is chaired by the Commission and meets annually. Its aim is to discuss gender policy and developments in the context of major EU and international events.
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### Structures set up in support of other policy areas

- The **Advisory Group on Women in Rural Areas** was created in 1998 and consists of representatives of socioeconomic organisations (agricultural producers, trade, consumers, the European Women's Lobby and workers). It meets once a year and is coordinated by the DG Agriculture and Rural Development (DG AGRI).
  - The **European Network to Promote Women's Entrepreneurship (WES)** has members from 31 European countries (the EU-27, Croatia, Iceland, Norway, Turkey and the United Kingdom). The delegates in the network represent central national governments and institutions and have responsibility for promoting female entrepreneurship. WES members provide advice, support, information and contacts on existing support measures for female entrepreneurs. It also helps to identify good practices. WES is coordinated by the Commission's DG Enterprise and Industry (DG ENTR). Its activities are presented in an annual report, last released in 2012 and publicly available on the Commission website.
  - The **Experts Group on Trafficking in Human Beings** was set up in 2003. It is a consultative group that consists of 20 people appointed by the Director-General of DG HOME as independent experts. Its aim is to provide the Commission with expertise, through opinions or reports relating to the prevention of and fight against trafficking in human beings.
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The European Parliament is committed to gender mainstreaming in its work and organisation, a position confirmed in several resolutions since 2003. In 2019, the European Parliament adopted a Resolution on Gender Mainstreaming. It called for the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) to be ‘accompanied by a joint declaration by Parliament, the Commission and the Council’.

The Parliament committed to ensuring that the annual budgetary procedures integrate gender-responsive elements that consider how the overall financial framework of the Union contributes to the objective of achieving equality and ensures gender mainstreaming. While recognising that most Parliamentary Committees (19 out of 23) have adopted action plans on gender mainstreaming in their work, the European Parliament called on those that had not, namely the Budgetary Control and Petitions Committee, the special temporary committee on Financial Crimes, Tax Evasion and Tax Avoidance and the Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) itself to follow suit, noting ‘heterogeneity of these plans and the lack of implementation thereof’. It also called for the adoption of a joint gender action plan for the European Parliament, to include the ‘introduction of a gender perspective in all its policy activities and its working organisation’.

The European Parliament has established different bodies for implementing gender mainstreaming and promoting gender equality.

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## **Structures with a gender mainstreaming mandate**

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### **Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality**

The [Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality \(FEMM\)](#) is one of the 20 standing parliamentary committees of the European Parliament. FEMM plays a crucial role in advancing gender equality in the EU through legislating and influencing the European political agenda in the area of equality between women and men and women’s rights. About 30 pieces of legislation on gender equality have been adopted in the EU over the past 40 years. FEMM’s priorities on gender mainstreaming for the period 2011–2014 emphasised the dual approach of gender equality and gender mainstreaming, ensuring a gender balance in decision-making and also a gender perspective in the budgetary process.



It also monitors the implementation of European equal treatment directives in the area of employment, access to goods and services, and all other areas relevant for gender equality and women's rights. FEMM provides feedback to the Commission's gender equality strategy and action programmes, and closely follows the European Commission's annual progress reports on equality between women and men, while also adopting its own report.

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### **Gender Mainstreaming Network**

FEMM further promotes gender mainstreaming by coordinating and chairing the Parliament's Gender Mainstreaming Network. The Network is composed of the chair or vice-chair from each parliamentary committee, who have been appointed to implement gender mainstreaming in the work of their committee. They are supported by a gender mainstreaming administrator in each parliamentary committee secretariat.

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### **High Level Group on Gender Equality and Diversity**

One of the Parliament's vice-presidents heads the High-Level Group on Gender Equality and Diversity, which adopts a multiannual strategy enhancing equal treatment of women and men within the administration of the European Parliament.

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### **Rapporteur**

A standing rapporteur for gender mainstreaming was appointed in 2016. During the 9th legislative term (2019-2024), Irene Tolleret (RE) and Gwedoline Delbos-Corfield (Green/EFA) are the standing rapporteurs. The main responsibility of the rapporteur is to draft reports on legislative proposals, documents provided by the European Commission or any other document relevant to gender mainstreaming that will be presented at FEMM Committee. In developing these reports, the rapporteur may consult with experts and other committee members to decide the political strategy to be followed.

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There is no structural mechanism on gender equality at Council level. Working groups are embedded in the Working Party of Social Questions. In 1994, the ministers responsible for gender equality convened for the first time to promote gender equality as an issue to consider at European Community level, while supporting the preparation of the Beijing Conference.

In 2018, during the Austrian presidency, an informal configuration of ministers responsible for gender equality met for the first time since 2011. In 2019, the Romanian and the Finnish Presidency organised a formal meeting on gender equality issues, attended by Ministers for Employment and Social Policy. Earlier, informal meetings were held to support Council Presidencies of the Union to set an agenda on gender equality, informed by the High-Level Group on Gender Mainstreaming.

Member State ministers responsible for gender equality have the opportunity to meet within the framework of the [Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council \(EPSCO\)](#). Among the main outcomes of EPSCO meetings are Council Conclusions on different subjects related to gender equality and women's rights. They primarily focus on the areas of BPfA concern selected by the Presidency country. Since 2011, EIGE has provided expertise in the preparation of such biannual reports to follow-up the BPfA in the EU. Since 2015, a research note on a specific topic related to EU strategy is prepared for the presidency during the first semester of the year, with the BPfA report issued during the second semester of each year.

As a result of the economic, budgetary and institutional crises in the EU, Member State support for gender equality actions within the European Council has varied since 2013. The Council of the European Union Conclusions of 1 December 2015 highlighted the importance of acknowledging the crucial contribution of gender equality to the quality of R&I, and gender equality in decision-making. In 2016, the Council adopted conclusions on gender equality, stating its commitment to upgrading the status of the Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality to that of a Commission Communication, linking its contents closely to the Europe 2020 Strategy and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and publishing a high-level strategy for gender in the form of a Communication before the expiry of the Strategic Engagement for 2016-2019.

The Council adopted conclusions in 2017 and 2018 to strengthen gender equality and women's empowerment in EU external action. In June 2018, it reached an agreement on the level of payment of paternity and parental leave, while, in 2019, it adopted conclusions on the gender pay gap.