

EU Quality Jobs Roadmap

EIGE's Contribution to the Call for Evidence

The European Institute for Gender Equality (hereafter referred to as 'EIGE') is a decentralised agency of the European Union, established to contribute to and strengthen the promotion of gender equality, including gender mainstreaming in EU policies and the resulting national policies by providing technical assistance to EU institutions, in particular the Commission, and the authorities of the Member Statesⁱⁱ. The Agency also aims to raise EU citizens' awareness of gender equality. EIGE has become the knowledge centre and the primary source for information on gender equality in the European Union.

EIGE contributes to making the European Union become a Union of Equality, where women and men, girls and boys in all their diversity are free to pursue their chosen path in life, have equal opportunities to thrive, and can equally participate in and lead our societies.

As the EU agency for gender equality, we welcome the European Commission's initiative to establish a Quality Jobs Roadmap and provide evidence to feed into that process based on EIGE's research.

Tackling the challenges

Towards quality jobs for a just and green transition

To ensure a just and inclusive green transition, **the Quality Jobs Roadmap must recognise and address the gender imbalance across key sectors of the labour market – not only as a barrier, but as a source of untapped potential.**

Most of the job growth expected to result from the green transition is in sectors that are currently dominated by men. Indeed, the sectors expected to see the largest employment gains are utilities (through increased recycling activities), electricity supply (through increased demand for renewable energy), manufacturing of appliances/electrical equipment (e.g. for the renewable electricity generation sector, or more-energy efficient appliances), construction, and the sectors that link to these via supply chains (CEDEFOP, 2021). These jobs are often associated with challenges in gender-biased recruitment, namely in engineering and other technology-based study programmes (Chavatzia, 2017; OECD, 2017; Beghini and Cattaneo, 2019). As a result, women remain significantly underrepresented in the Information and



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Communication Technologies (ICT) sector, especially in leadership roles, and continue to face gender pay gaps and systemic barriers to entry and progression (EIGE, 2023). Despite earning degrees in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), only 23% of women transition into technology roles, compared to 44% of their male counterparts (McKinsey, 2022).

Beyond entry into the sector, the retention of women in STEM remains a significant challenge. While digital jobs often offer flexibility with many being suitable for remote working and seemingly more adaptable to family and personal needs but in practice, this flexibility is not always equitably accessed or supported. For instance, although more men than women in the EU (37% compared to 34%) report having the option to take short periods off work for family or personal matters (EIGE, 2024), many men do not use this flexibility to engage in informal care responsibilities. This reflects broader workplace cultures that often do not support or encourage work-life balance, particularly for men. Moreover, STEM jobs are frequently characterised by long working hours and a family-unfriendly culture, which can discourage or even push women out of the sector. The burden of unpaid care work also limits women's access to upskilling and retraining opportunities necessary to adapt to automation and emerging job markets. These perspectives need to be addressed in the Quality Jobs Roadmap when discussing a fair and socially sustainable green transition. The Roadmap should actively promote gender-responsive policies that tackle occupational segregation, support inclusive access to STEM and ICT training and remove structural barriers to women's participation and progression in green sectors. Without such targeted measures, the green transition risks reinforcing existing gender gaps in the labour market.

In addition, the overall growing reliance on digital technologies, including Artificial Intelligence (AI), is also transforming recruitment and workplace management. Indeed, gender and racial bias are often embedded in AI by design, reflecting and amplifying broader societal norms and the views and personal biases of those who design these systems. The use of AI-driven systems in recruitment therefore raises concerns over gender bias, limited worker autonomy and impacts on well-being (Nguyen and Mateescu, 2019). Without careful monitoring, these tools risk reinforcing gender biases in hiring and surveillance practices, further entrenching inequality. It is essential that the Roadmap explicitly tackles these emerging challenges.

The Quality Jobs Roadmap should build on existing EU instruments to address these challenges. The **work-life balance directive** (Directive (EU) 2019/1158, 2019) promotes shared care responsibilities and an improved work-life balance. These are both essential for enabling women to participate in sectors such as STEM and green technologies. Full implementation of the directive can help to shift workplace cultures and address the unequal burden of care. Similarly, the **pay transparency directive** (Directive (EU) 2023/970, 2023) provides a valuable framework for uncovering and reducing gender pay gaps by ensuring greater clarity on pay structures and career progression. Building on these two directives into the Roadmap will help to create fairer and more transparent workplaces and address structural inequalities, particularly in male-dominated and digitally evolving sectors.

Quality care jobs are key to a strong economy and to achieving gender equality

The COVID-19 pandemic showed the importance of both paid and unpaid care work for a well-functioning society and economy. While care workers were applauded and acknowledged as 'essential', their work remains among the most underpaid and undervalued professions in the EU (EIGE, 2021). Women make up 90 % of the care workforce, often in precarious jobs (European Commission, 2022).

Good working conditions in the care sector are vital to the resilience and attractiveness of the sector. Inadequate care systems not only carry significant economic costs and limit the sector's job creation potential, but they also have a profound impact on gender equality (EIGE, 2025). When care services are inadequate, the burden of informal care continues to fall mainly on women. EIGE's survey of Gender Gaps in Unpaid Care, Individual and Social Activities ([CARE Survey](#)) shows that women continue to shoulder the main burden of unpaid care and housework. In 2024, 90 % of women and 78 % of men provided daily childcare for their children under 12 years old. This is worsened by many unmet needs for childcare services of parents. As the CARE survey shows, 64 % of mothers and of fathers report unmet needs for early childhood education and care.

The inadequacy of care systems and the unequal burden of unpaid care work that so many women take on at home is one of the major factors contributing to the **gender pay gap**. Care responsibilities are holding back women's job prospects and influencing the choices they make in their professional lives.

The **European Care Strategy** recognises the need for fair working conditions in the care sector. It promotes collective bargaining and social dialogue to improve wages and working conditions, ensuring the highest occupational health and safety standards, designing continuous education and training for care workers and tackling gender stereotypes surrounding care (European Commission, 2022).

Addressing the care sector in the Quality Jobs Roadmap is essential. Improving job quality in care is not only a matter of fairness but also vital for Europe's economic resilience and demographic sustainability. As the demand for care services rises with an ageing population, investing in better working conditions, fair pay and accessible care services will support gender equality, reduce the gender pay gap and strengthen social cohesion across Member States.

Building quality workplaces by eliminating harassment and ensuring safety

To ensure that the future of work is safe, the Quality Jobs Roadmap must proactively address both traditional and emerging forms of workplace harassment.

Women remain disproportionately vulnerable to sexual harassment in the workplace. Data reveals that around one in three women (31 %) who have ever worked have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace in their adulthood in the EU. In the youngest age group (18–29 years), two in five women (42 %) have experienced sexual harassment at work (EIGE, 2024a).

The digital workplace also creates new avenues for violence and harassment, as technology blurs the lines between personal and professional communication, allowing misconduct to go unnoticed (York, 2022). Among teleworkers, women experience harassment or bullying at twice the rate of men (6 % versus 3 %, respectively) and face violence or verbal abuse more frequently (9 % versus 6 %, respectively) (EU-OSHA, 2024).

Recommendations

Strengthening job quality and career opportunities in particular in the digital, green and care sectors

- **Improve working conditions and pay in the care sector:** Ensure fair wages, safe working environments and secure contracts for care workers to enhance job quality and attract a more diverse workforce.
- **Promote flexible work arrangements:** Facilitate flexible and predictable working hours to improve work-life balance and support gender equality.
- **Ensure access to upskilling and reskilling for all:** Provide flexible, accessible upskilling and retraining opportunities that consider women's disproportionate burden of unpaid care work and enable their participation in emerging green and digital job markets.
- **Ensure fair and inclusive telework arrangements:** Propose EU legislation to ensure equal access to telework, lay down conditions for teleworking and ensure the right to disconnect.
- **Foster gender-balanced career pathways:** Implement initiatives to counter unconscious biases and encourage men's involvement in caregiving roles and men's access to the education, health and welfare sectors, while strengthening the retention of women in fields traditionally dominated by men.
- **Break gender barriers in the labour market:** Promote women's entry into and retention in the labour market by requiring employers to address horizontal and vertical segregation, eliminate biases in recruitment and promotion practices, and the gender pay gap.

Empowering workers through collective bargaining and representation

- **Enhance collective bargaining:** Support social dialogue and increase collective bargaining coverage to give care workers a stronger voice in shaping their working conditions.
- **Ensure inclusive social dialogue:** Guarantee women's representation in social dialogue processes, including those in non-standard and informal work, to address gender pay gaps, work–life balance, equal parental leave, and workplace harassment.

Promoting safety, respect and accountability in all workplaces

- **Establish zero tolerance for workplace harassment:** Integrate clear, enforceable anti-harassment measures in the Quality Jobs Roadmap to ensure all workers—especially women—are protected from violence, abuse, and intimidation at work.
- **Address digital and remote workplace risks:** Develop specific safeguards against harassment in digital and teleworking environments, including protocols for reporting and responding to online abuse and bullying.
- **Promote data collection and monitoring:** Support regular data collection on workplace harassment and violence, disaggregated by gender and work setting, to inform policy responses and track progress.

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ⁱ Established by the European Parliament and of the Council Regulation (EC) No 1922/2006 of 20 December 2006 (OJ L 403/9 of 30.12.2006)

ⁱⁱ Article 2, Idem 2