



Gender equality and industrial relations in the EU: an analytical framework

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This Working Paper is a deliverable of the project **Visualising and Measuring the Role of Industrial Relations in Addressing Gender Equality (VIRAGE)**, grant agreement no. VS/2020/01115.



This project is funded by the European Union under
the Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) programme.

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List of Acronyms

ALMP: Active Labour Market Policies

CEEP: European Centre of Employers and Enterprises Providing Public Services (now SGI Europe)

EC: European Commission

EIGE: European Institute for Gender Equality

EPSR: European Pillar of Social Rights

EQLS: European Quality of Life Surveys

ETUC: European Trade Union Confederation

EU: European Union

EU-OSHA: European Agency for Safety and Health at Work

EWCS: European Working Conditions Surveys

GEI: Gender Equality Index

ICT: Information and Communications Technology

ILO: International Labour Organization

ISCO: International Standard Classification of Occupations

LFS: Labour Force Survey

NACE: Statistical Classification of Economic Activities in the European Community

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

ÖGB: Österreichischer Gewerkschaftsbund (Austrian Trade Union Federation)

OSH: Occupational Safety and Health

STEM: Science, technology, engineering and mathematics

TEU: Treaty of the European Union

TFEU: Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union

UEAPME: European Union of Crafts and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (now SMEUnited)

UGT: Unión General de Trabajadores (Spanish General Union of Workers)

UN SDGs: United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

UNICE: Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe (now BusinessEurope)

Introduction

Over the years, gender equality has moved up the political agendas of the EU and of many other countries around the world. It is prioritised as Goal 5 of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs). In the EU, progress has been made¹ in terms of gender balance in decision making, although improvements have been slower in areas related to the labour market.

Gender equality is often considered as a standalone policy area. However, to tackle gender inequality in its multifaceted nature, a cross-cutting approach over several policy domains is required. In the EU, the European Institute of Gender Equality (EIGE) developed the Gender Equality Index (GEI)² to record these different facets and monitor progress. The GEI is a useful tool for tracking how the EU and its member states are performing as regards gender equality. It also makes an important contribution by raising policymakers' awareness of the complexities of the issue. The GEI includes six core domains, namely work, money, knowledge, time, power, and health, which are collected according to 30 indicators. It also includes the two additional domains of violence and intersecting inequalities, which present a breakdown of the main indicators by socioeconomic characteristics. The latest report shows that, at the current pace of progress, full gender equality would take another sixty years to achieve in the EU. The report also reveals how the Covid-19 pandemic is exacerbating this already slow progress towards gender equality by undermining women's participation and position in the labour market (EIGE, 2020a).

This awareness of the complexities is reflected in how EU policy on gender inequality has evolved. The legal basis for the EU to act for gender equality lies, first and foremost, in the Treaties. Since 1957, the European Treaties have stated that men and women should receive equal pay for equal work, a principle reflected today in Art. 157 of the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). Other articles of the TFEU have reinforced this principle with further provisions for equal opportunities and equal treatment: Art. 8 gives the Union the task of eliminating inequalities and promoting equality between men and women in all of its activities, Art. 19 provides for the adoption of legislation to combat all forms of discrimination, including on the basis of sex, and Art. 153 allows the EU to act in the wider area of equal opportunities and equal treatment in employment matters. The Treaty of the European Union (TEU) and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (Art. 21) include gender equality in its broader meaning among the set of core values of the EU. In 2017, the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) established the right of all EU citizens to equal treatment and opportunities in all areas, especially in relation to the labour market.

Within this framework, the EU has adopted several directives, among which Directive 2006/54/EC stands out as explicitly related to gender equality in the labour market.³ In

¹ [Eurostat Sustainable Development Indicators - SDG 5 Gender Equality](#)

² The [Gender Equality Index](#) measures how far (or close) the EU and its member states are from achieving a gender-equal society. It ranges between 1 and 100, where 1 stands for complete gender inequality and 100 defines an ideal situation of complete gender equality.

³ [Directive 2006/54/EC on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation \(recast\)](#)

addition, the European Commission (EC) has developed strategies that set objectives and outline actions on gender equality (European Commission, 2016; 2020a). The Gender Equality Strategy for 2020-2025 marks an evolution in the EU's approach to the issue, as it openly recognises the interrelation between the different dimensions in which gender inequality is manifested in society, within and beyond the labour market. The strategy addresses gender inequality in a holistic way, by acknowledging its intersectional character and involving several policy areas. It calls for gender equality to be mainstreamed in all policies and for the collaboration of several actors, including social partners. Therefore, the *continuum* of gender inequalities within and beyond the labour market is now recognised.

Social partners are key actors as part of the social dialogue process at both national and EU level, with contributions to make in policy development, labour market functioning and working conditions (European Commission, 2020b; Eurofound, 2014). As such, they appear to have a threefold role in the field of gender equality at EU level (Elomaki and Kantola, 2020). First, they can influence the political agenda by helping to define policy goals and choosing policy instruments that promote gender equality. Second, their views can shape the meaning of gender equality, that is to say, how gender (in)equality should be understood in EU policy-making. And third, they help determine the relationship between the economic and the social dimension of the EU's agenda, which is at the heart of any debate about the future of gender equality in the EU (ibid).

EU-level social partners have been involved in negotiations on gender equality policies through the European social dialogue structures recognised in the Agreement on Social Policy⁴ annexed to the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992. In 2005, social partners agreed on a Framework of Actions on Gender Equality, with the four priorities of addressing gender roles, promoting women in decision making, supporting work-life balance, and tackling the gender pay gap (ETUC, UNICE/UEAPME and CEEP, 2005; Eurofound, 2014). Although employers' organisations and trade unions have joint commitments for promoting gender equality (ETUC, UNICE/UEAPME and CEEP, 2005), their respective positions on how to address the issue can differ. Trade unions generally assign higher priority to the implementation of gender equality actions and call for a stronger role of the state and binding regulations for companies (Eurofound, 2014). Employers' organisations often prefer to negotiate gender equality policy at the company level rather than through centralised regulations (Eurofound, 2014; Elomaki and Kantola, 2020).

Social partners were also involved in the elaboration of several key policies aimed to address, including the EPSR (Elomaki & Kantola, 2020; European Commission, 2018a) and the Gender Equality Strategy for 2020-2025. These policy objectives are coherent with social dialogue agendas: to achieve equal pay for work of equal value; to address the gender pay and pension gaps; and to eliminate other gender gaps in the labour market, including aiming for equal participation across different sectors of the economy (European Commission, 2020a; European Commission, 2018a).

⁴ The Agreement on Social Policy, annexed to the Social Policy Protocol of the Maastricht Treaty, enshrined a constitutionally recognised role for the social partners in the community legislative process.

At national level, how successful social partners are in contributing to gender equality depends on the national social dialogue traditions and industrial relation regimes, as well as the priority given by a national government to gender equality. At first glance, it is hard to identify clear correlation patterns between the GEI scores and the level of commitment of social partners towards gender equality.⁵ Neither has the literature established clear links between country performance in the GEI and industrial relation regimes. Yet the ‘best’ performing countries in the GEI seem to have more actions at the social partner level. Gender equality initiatives tend to be more common in highly unionised sectors (Eurofound, 2014) and unionisation shows positive results in some dimensions of gender equality (European Commission, 2020b). These findings hint at a positive relationship between social dialogue and gender equality that could potentially be strengthened.

The Visualising and Measuring the Role of Industrial Relations in Addressing Gender Equality (VIRAGE) project aims to contribute to the literature on social dialogue/industrial relations and gender equality by exploring the role of social partners. VIRAGE acknowledges the multidimensional nature of gender inequality and the need for immediate joint actions in the economy and society to address the issue. VIRAGE seeks to improve expertise and provide a comparative analysis on the role of social partners in addressing gender equality in the EU and across countries with different social dialogue models and industrial relations’ structures.

This report presents the analytical framework of VIRAGE. It describes the key concepts and dimensions of gender (in)equality adopted throughout the research. Section 1 defines the concepts and terminology of gender. Section 2 sets out the theoretical background and an analytical framework to account for the multidimensionality of gender inequality when examining the role of social partners in addressing the issue. Sections 3 to 7 then present those dimensions of gender inequality, their definitions, the theories that underline them and the relevant indicators and trends for measuring their evolution. These sections also discuss the policy approaches and the role of social partners in addressing each issue. Finally, Section 8 summarises the main points of the analytical approach, outlines the impact of Covid-19 on gender equality, and sets out the main conclusions for the remainder of the VIRAGE research.

1. A glossary for gender analysis

1.1 Sex and gender

The literature distinguishes between biological sex and socially constructed gender (Shaver, 2018). The notion of sex refers to biological differences between women and men and is used as a means of categorising people (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Sex is used when quantifying the relationship between men and women, for example the number of men and women in employment.

Gender is a more complex notion (Shaver, 2018). Even if gender is associated with physical bodies, it is not reducible to them (Connell, 2012). The concept helps analyse binary social

⁵ This level of commitment relates to whether social partners have relatively well-developed activities, unilateral activities or no specific policy on gender equality issues.

constructions of femininity and masculinity, practices, processes, and structures that arrange, organise and govern relationships between women and men (Jule, 2014). Sümer (2009: 6) states that “[G]ender refers to socioculturally constructed components attached to each sex and [...] these social definitions of biological sex have an important part in organizing social activity”. De Beauvoir (1949) had already emphasised that femininity and masculinity are culturally determined, internalised and embodied. In their article on ‘doing gender’, West and Zimmerman (1987) also stressed that gender is a practice, as it concerns the adoption of normatively approved ways of acting following one’s biological sex: “Gender is not a set of traits, nor a variable, nor a role, but the product of social doings of some sort” (p. 129). Risman (2004) defined gender as a structure and suggested a multidimensional model to capture how gender plays out on different levels: individual, interactional and institutional, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Gender as a structure

	Individual	Interactional	Institutional
Mechanisms	Socialisation	Cultural expressions	Organisational practices
	Internalisation	Status expectations	Legal regulations
	Identity work	Cognitive bias	Distribution of resources
	Constructions of selves	Othering	Ideology
		Trading power for patronage	
		Altercating	

Source: authors’ formulation from Risman (2004).

1.2 Intersectionality

The concepts of sex and gender are interlinked, with gender understood as both a category (female/male) and a process (‘doing gender’) (Lykke, 2010; Connel, 2012). When acknowledging gender as a process, intersectionality is a suitable concept for drawing attention to the fact that gender is also influenced and affected by other social categories. Lykke (2010: 50) suggested a broad definition to recognise the variety in feminist approaches, where intersectionality is “a theoretical and methodological tool to analyse how historically specific kinds of power differentials and/or constraining normativities based on discursively, institutionally and/or structurally constructed sociocultural categorizations such as gender, ethnicity, race, class, sexuality, age/generation, dis/ability, nationality, mother tongue and so on, interact and [...] produce different kinds of societal inequalities and unjust social relations”. Adopting an intersectional approach to a gender thus allows us to analyse how different categorisations are interwoven and interact. What is considered proper female or male behaviour varies depending on other positionalities as well, since sex and gender *intersect* with other characteristics that build up identity and position in society.

1.3 Gender roles, stereotypes, and norms

Gender is associated with images of how women and men ought to be and behave and is filled with normative expectations (Edwards, 1983). The concept of gender roles emphasises the cultural determinants of femininity and masculinity. It relates to functionalist theories that

stress socially assigned positions and categories for men and women (Parsons, 1936). These roles are binary categories, often constructed as opposites, which exert pressure on women and men to behave according to their biological sex (Connell, 2012).

The concept of gender stereotyping is closely related to gender roles and captures the normative beliefs and expectations for women and men (Heilman, 2012). Stereotypes in general concern simplified assumptions about groups or individuals within a certain group. Gender stereotypes are thus generalisations of how women and men, as belonging to a certain sex, are or ought to be. Descriptive gender stereotypes are shortcuts and often function as a basis for decisions. As such, they have consequences for practices and activities in the labour market and workplaces. A presumed lack of fit based on gender stereotypes may hinder recruitment of individuals belonging to the under-represented sex in a sector or occupation, or influence evaluations through gender bias (Heilman, 2012). Gender stereotypes may also be prescriptive and lean on normative expectations about women and men (Heilman, 2012), namely, defining gender norms that prescribe appropriate ways of being and acting for women and men.

1.4 Discrimination

Discrimination, in a sociological sense, means the mistreatment of persons based on sex, race, age, disability, skin colour or religion, or any other individual characteristics. Article 21 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights⁶ establishes the right to non-discrimination. Accordingly, gender discrimination concerns the mistreatment of women and men owing to their sex and/or gender. The EIGE stresses that discrimination entails social interactions that result in “hierarchical and unequal relations and roles between and among women and men, and a disadvantaged social positioning of women”.⁷

More specifically, statistical discrimination is a concept developed to describe how inequality grows because actors (e.g. employers) lack information and tend to make decisions about an individual based on some common characteristics of the representative group to which they belong. For example, they rely on the presumption that men are strong and women are kind (Fang and Moro, 2011), using previous experiences of a group as a proxy for individuals and relating to stereotypes.

1.5 Gender equality

The EIGE defines gender equality as the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Following the EIGE’s definition, equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women’s and men’s rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female.⁸ This definition also recognises the diversity of different groups of women and men and relies on an intersectional approach to gender.

⁶ *Official Journal of the European Union* C 303/17 - 14.12.2007.

⁷ See also the [EIGE’s website](#) for the definition of sex- and gender-based discrimination.

⁸ See also the [EIGE website](#) for the definition of mainstreaming.

Gender equality is a challenging concept (Verloof and Lombardo, 2007), as it varies in meaning depending on the geographical, historical, and theoretical context. It is also a highly political notion (Poulsen, 2006; Calvo, 2013; cf. Biswas et al., 2017). Rees (2005) summarised three approaches to gender equality that have been used in EU policy documents in different periods (cf. Calvo, 2013). Between 1957 and 1980, the focus was placed on equal treatment of women and men. But one problem with this equal treatment approach was that it focused on individual inequalities and did not problematise the contextual causes of inequality, group-based discrimination and the reproduction of unequal social structures. The positive (or affirmative) action paradigm that followed (1981-90) recognised differences between women and men and aimed to overcome the disadvantages caused by biological sex. Such affirmative action, however, was criticised for its failure to challenge the reproduction of gendered social structures (Rees, 2002). Instead, gender mainstreaming (see below), introduced in 1991, “aims at transforming the gender hierarchy by identifying the hidden and unrecognized ways in which all systems and structures are ‘male-dominated’” (Calvo, 2013: 29).

The EPSR definition of gender equality used within EU policy documents focuses on individual- and group-level equalities and pays less attention to the structural, and more hidden, aspects of gender equality. It mostly refers to equality of treatment and opportunities between women and men in the labour market⁹ and to the right to equal pay for work of equal value. Moreover, as also problematised by Connell (2012: 1676) “categorical thinking persistently underplays diversity within the gender categories” and does not “grasp the gender differences within the gender categories: for instance, between hegemonic and subordinated masculinities, or between lesbian and heterosexual women’s sexuality”.

Still, the EC’s Gender Equality Strategy for 2020-2025 states that “the goal is a Union 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 European society”.¹⁰ The gender equality discourse refers more and more often to equal opportunities. These are defined as the absence of barriers to economic, political, and social participation on grounds of sex and gender, and could be considered an objective for gender equality (Biswas et al., 2017).

The literature makes a distinction between quantitative and qualitative gender equality. Quantitative gender equality concerns numerical or statistical information, such as the number of women and men in an occupation, an organisation, in leadership functions, or wage or income gaps (SCB, 2018). Qualitative gender equality concerns the recognition and equal value of experiences and knowledge, regardless of sex/gender, to enable equal opportunity for all to contribute and influence society (SCB, 2018). The feminist criticism in the 1960s was that social science treated sex and gender only as a variable in quantitative research (Oakley, 1998). To complement this dimension, therefore, qualitative analysis of gender focuses on such issues as

⁹ “Equality of treatment and opportunities between women and men must be ensured and fostered in all areas, including regarding participation in the labour market, terms and conditions of employment and career progression” (EPRS, European Commission, 2017).

¹⁰ See the webpage dedicated to the [Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025](#).

the meaning of gender, experiences of gendered representations and stereotypes, and norms, values and expectations of femininity and masculinity (Connell, 2012).

1.6 Gender empowerment

Gender relates to power (Connell, 2012), and the overall goal of gender equality is to ensure that women and men have equal opportunities in society. In the gender equality discourse, empowerment is primarily discussed *vis-à-vis* women's situation, since women as a group are most likely disadvantaged in terms of different kinds of resources in society. Empowerment is defined as a practice to strengthen people "whenever power is experienced being unevenly distributed or downright abused" (Weidenstedt, 2017: 1). Rappaport (1984: 2) suggests that empowerment is "powerful as a model for policy in the field of social and community intervention" as it helps people gain agency over their life. The results may differ; for some empowerment is 'a sense of control', whereas for others it is 'actual control' (1984: 3). Hence, the EIGE¹¹ defines empowerment as a "process by which women gain power and control over their own lives and acquire the ability to make strategic choices".

1.7 Gender mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming was introduced to deal with gender inequalities across different domains of the economy and society, and to develop policies in different areas that took both women's and men's interest into account (Walby, 2005). The Council of Europe adopted the concept of gender mainstreaming at the beginning of the 1990s and defines it as: "the (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making" (Verloo, 1999). Gender mainstreaming develops gender equality by aiming to make visible hidden institutions that reproduce inequality in different domains. It may entail a loss of focus that can limit effectiveness in addressing gender inequality (Walby, 2004). Context-specific features related to gender and beyond (Walby, 2005) mean that the implementation of gender mainstreaming varies across policy domains (employment, development and so on) and countries. Indeed, "gender mainstreaming is always situated in the context of other diverse and intersecting inequalities" (Walby, 2005: 466).

2. The analytical framework

As defined in the previous section, gender is understood as an institution that produces structural differences between women and men (Acker, 1992). As such, gender permeates the functioning of welfare systems, labour markets, the social dialogue, and industrial relations. To analyse the extent to which social partners influence gender equality in European labour markets, it is necessary to understand how social dialogue and industrial relations systems interact with the other elements of a given institutional and socioeconomic context, and to outline the dimensions of gender inequality on which social partners can act.

¹¹ See also the [EIGE's website](#) for the definition of empowerment of women.

2.1 Gender regimes: culture, welfare, and economy

To identify how industrial relations' actors and structures address gender inequality, it is crucial to understand the determinants of this inequality. Gender inequality in the labour market is entrenched in context-specific features such as cultural norms, the welfare state, the production regime, and the sectoral composition of the economy. Industrial relations contribute to the shaping of labour markets while also interacting with all these context-specific characteristics, as they are part of the institutional environment of a country.

The notion of **gender regime** captures the systematic relations between the different elements that 'produce' gender in a given context (Walby, 2004), within and beyond the labour market. A gender regime refers to rules and norms about gender relations, which materialise in the allocation of different tasks and rights to men and women across several domains of social life (Sainsbury, 1999). It entails the way paid work is connected to unpaid work. It encompasses how state services and benefits are provided to individuals or households, and how costs are allocated in society. It comprises both familial and non-familial gender relations in that it considers how time is shared between men and women in households as well as between households and employment. As such, gender regimes embed the feminist theory of social reproduction as composed by market and non-market exchanges and productions (Caffentzis, 2013). Moreover, gender regimes are intersectional, cutting as they do across other dimensions such as socioeconomic or racial inequalities. Within gender regimes, women and men's experiences vary according to their socioeconomic status or ethnic origin.

A key determinant of gender regimes is the country-specific culture that defines the **gender roles** revolving around ideals of care (Bettio and Plantenga, 2004). As stated by Pfau-Effinger (1998), the social practices of women are heavily influenced by predominant **gender norms** about the 'adequate' gender division of labour in a given culture. **Attitudes, behaviours and choices** are to some extent influenced by these norms and, together with individual will, are crucial in shaping the gender division of labour in the labour market and private sphere (Crompton, 1999; Geist, 2005).

Moreover, gender regimes interact with the **welfare state**. Ideals of care, gender roles and gender norms are embedded in the design of welfare states, which in turn influence individual behaviours and labour market choices (Kremer, 2006; Lewis, 2002). The intertwining of gender and the welfare state is highlighted by the feminist critique of Esping-Andersen's (1990) categorisation of welfare state regimes. Feminist scholars argue that "at the heart of the modern welfare state was the settlement between capital and labour [...] but equally important is the settlement between men and women and the changing nature of family and gender relations. [...] Every welfare system has made assumptions about what 'the family' looks like and how earning and caring are organized" (Lewis, 2006: 40).

Gender regimes do not have a clear classification *per se*, but Lewis and Ostner (1994) argue for an alternative categorisation of welfare state regimes based on the gender division of labour, or '**care regimes**' (Lewis, 1997). In such a categorisation, the male breadwinner model stands out, implying a role for men to perform paid work and provide the family with material means, and an unpaid caring role for women. Orloff (1993) suggests that the familialism-

defamilialisation axis should be considered as an additional dimension of welfare state arrangements next to the decommodification axis defined by Esping-Andersen (1990). Saraceno (2016) distinguishes between defamilialising and familialist welfare policies. Defamilialising policies liberate families, and primarily women, from a share of the caring work, while familialist policies help families, whether only women or women and men, by providing care through offering time, services, and money for it. Through these mechanisms and policy choices, the welfare state influences the organisation of private (i.e. care) and public (i.e. work) life (Daly, 2020; Daly and Rake, 2003). It shapes women's and men's employment rates, the average length of unemployment, the proportion of skilled to unskilled work, and possible pathways into and out of work (Ebbinghaus and Manow, 2004).

To make evident the link between welfare and gender regimes and to outline the implications for gender (in)equality inside and outside the labour market, it is helpful to identify **typologies of family policy** (Thevenon, 2011). The liberal family policy regime (e.g. the UK) tends towards lower levels of state intervention in care, leaving it to market forces, with means-tested cash transfers going only to low-income or single-parent households. In this regime, employment regulations are looser and benefits are not closely tied to occupational contributions. Women tend to have higher employment rates and engage more in part-time work, while wage inequalities are high and care provisions are outsourced via market mechanisms (Van der Lippe et al., 2011). Conservative or 'conservative-corporatist' regimes (e.g. Belgium) provide relatively generous benefits based on insurance contributions. Yet family support policies are favoured mainly through cash transfers and paid leaves, while public childcare services tend to be underdeveloped (Scharpf, 2004; Thevenon, 2011). As a result, women in these countries tend to engage less in paid employment.

Social-democratic regimes (e.g. Sweden) guarantee generous universal benefits. Women tend to have acquired a more equal status in the labour market, following a dual-earner family model, as public childcare services are widespread (Ferragina, 2015). Thevenon's (2011) Southern European type of family policy (e.g. Italy) broadly corresponds to Ferrera's (1996) Southern European welfare model. Family policy in these countries is characterised by long leave for parents but low cash benefits and early childcare services. As a result, women are more likely to work full time and interrupt their career once they have children. Central and Eastern European countries' type of family policy (e.g. Poland) is moving towards means-tested support and tend to favour long leaves rather than public childcare services, which makes it hard to combine paid work with care responsibilities (Thevenon, 2011; Szelewa and Polakowski, 2020).

These typologies change alongside welfare state reforms, which often promote an individualised adult worker model and are criticised for being blind to the gendered division of unpaid care work or workplace-based discrimination (Lewis, 2002). In parallel, reconciliation of work and family has driven recent efforts to reform welfare states taking gender into account (Daly, 2020; Daly and Rake, 2003).

Finally, because of the gender regimes in place, **the sectoral composition of the economy and the production regime** (i.e. the way the economic activity is organised and coordinated), as well as their transformation, also play a role in shaping gender inequality in the labour market

(Iversen and Wren, 1998). The way women position themselves in specific sectors of the economy and the labour market is rooted in the gender and welfare regimes described above. It determines their position in the wage structure, which in turn reinforces gender norms and inequalities (Blau and Kahn, 1992; Rubery and Grimshaw, 2015). Given occupational gender segregation, an economy reliant on the service sector tends to be more conducive to women's labour-market integration, compared with economies dominated by manufacturing. However, the production regime that characterises the private service economy is associated with a more inegalitarian wage structure, which feeds gender pay gaps (Iversen and Wren, 1998).

The Netherlands illustrates how the transition to a service economy and the facilitation of part-time work has contributed to the increase in female employment rates and the changed division of labour in the household. Conversely, countries belonging to continental welfare models generated well-paid jobs but created problems of labour-market exclusion, especially among women and other labour-market outsiders (Iversen and Wren, 1998).

2.2 Industrial relations and gender inequality

Along with cultural norms on gender, the welfare state, and economic structure, industrial relations are part of a country's institutional environment. Industrial relations relate to the governance structures of the employment-welfare relationship (Hassel, 2004), and thus contribute to gender (in)equality. Social partners can address gender inequality by shaping labour markets and other social processes that (re)produce it, leading to positive or negative effects. For example, trade unions have been criticised for historically supporting and shaping the male breadwinner model that excluded women from standard employment (Barrett and McIntosh, 1980; Wajcman, 2000; Fraser, 2009). Yet their role in wage setting has been seen as a positive step towards closing the gender pay gap (Blau and Kahn, 1992).

The role of social partners in addressing gender inequality changes according to its different dimensions (see sections 3 to 7) and depends on the industrial relation regimes in the country. Industrial relations regimes refer to the power relations between employers' organisations and trade unions, as classified by Visser (2009) (Table 2). Differences lie in the power balance between labour and capital, arrangements for collective bargaining, influence on public policy and representation mechanisms. Industrial relations regimes intertwine with welfare and production regimes. They arise from this setting and at the same time contribute to its shape.

Table 2. Types of industrial relations regimes and how they relate to welfare and production regimes

	North	Centre-West	South	West	Centre-East
Country	Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Norway	Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Austria, Slovenia	Greece, France, Portugal	Spain, Italy, Malta, Cyprus, UK	Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia
IR regime	Organised corporatism	Social partnership	Polarised/state-centred	Liberal pluralism	Fragmented/state-centred

Power balance	Labour-oriented	Balanced	Alternating	Employer-oriented		
Bargaining level	Sector		Variable/unstable	Company		
Bargaining style	Integrating		Conflict-oriented	Acquiescent		
Influence on public policy	Institutionalised		Irregular/politicised	Rare/event-driven	Irregular/politicised	
Employee Representation	Union-based/high coverage	Dual system/high coverage	Variable	Union-based/small coverage		
Welfare regime	Scandinavian social-democratic	Continental conservative	Southern	Anglo-Saxon liberal	Hybrid/liberal	
Production regime	Coordinated market economy		Statist economy	market	Liberal market economy	Dependent market economy/ Embedded neoliberal economy

Source: authors' formulation based on Visser (2009).

How social partners address the different dimensions of gender inequality will depend on their influence on labour market and welfare policies. Different instruments may be employed in different industrial relations regimes. Gender policies can be embedded in collective agreements by social partners or governed through national legislation. For instance, pay transparency can be a matter of industrial relations and information rights at the company level, or it can be assessed and accredited by external auditors based on a legal requirement provided by national gender policy.

However, the competences of social dialogue vary widely across the EU, and so does social partners' say in gender policy. For instance, in liberal regimes with decentralised bargaining, many small trade unions are mainly active at firm level, with limited weight in national policy. In social-democratic regimes, larger unions take part in sectoral or peak-level social dialogue, and social partners have a stronger involvement in policies, including on gender.

Industrial relations regimes also implicitly delineate the margins for gender gaps. Collective bargaining can take place at the national, sectoral, or company level. For example, wages in Belgium are predominantly regulated through national and sectoral collective agreements for which social partners have full discretion; agreements automatically cover companies and workers even when not affiliated to the signatory parties. As a result, social partners have considerable control over the gender pay gap. By contrast, social partners in the UK have only limited bargaining power regarding wages because collective bargaining is highly decentralised and takes place mostly at company or workplace level (Broughton, 2009). Decentralisation and a greater degree of individual wage bargaining increases the margin for inequalities to occur, in comparison with fixed pay rates by occupation and sector. Social partners' participation in the wage-setting mechanism can be seen as an indirect effect of industrial relations on the structural characteristics of the labour market (i.e. its inclusiveness). By affecting the overall wage equality, centralised and coordinated collective bargaining structures may reduce gender differentials by eliminating differences both within and across sectors and firms, depending on the extent of collective bargaining coverage (Blau and Kahn, 2003; Elvira and Saporta, 2001).

Similarly, social partners' participation in setting minimum wages can also indirectly impact on gender inequality. Women tend to be concentrated in the lower segments of the wage distribution, so policies that reduce the level of wage dispersion also affect the gender pay gap (Dolado et al., 1996; Mumford and Smith, 2007; Plasman and Sissoko, 2004). Social partners can also undertake actions explicitly targeting gender inequality. For example, gender equality bargaining (Williamson and Baird, 2014) concerns specific gender wage policies, such as the revaluation of female-dominated occupations/sectors, gender-sensitive job evaluation, gender pay audits (Rubery and Johnson, 2019), or policies for work-family reconciliation, protection against sexual harassment or reduction of gender segregation.

As well as the differences in industrial regimes, social partners also have a diverse array of instruments to address gender inequality dimensions. Issues such as gender pay gaps, unpaid care work and women in leadership roles can be legislated using hard law, with a direct labour market impact (e.g. quota systems). By contrast, other dimensions, such as gender segregation across occupations and sectors, ask for a change in social and cultural norms and values. In this regard, social partners are limited to advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns, which have an indirect and longer-term but profound impact, within and beyond the labour market. The strategies of social partners often concentrate on the hard law that aims for tangible results on rights acquisition, such as caregivers' leave, or pension rights derived from care work.

A final analysis of how industrial relations can tackle gender inequality is the crucial consideration of whether women have gained a voice in social partners' organisations and politics. To what degree have social partners pursued women's interests in collective bargaining and social policy lobbying? For example, the presence and organisational strength of unions in female-dominated sectors play a role in addressing gender inequality. More generally, trade union strategy towards "new social risks groups" (Shin and Ylä-Anttila, 2018) matters. In certain cases, trade unions may be less likely to represent the interests of their female electorate because they may be perceived as having less attachment to the labour market. Trade unions may also be less sensitive to the interests of members at the low end of the wage distribution (McGuinness et al., 2011).

2.3 The multidimensionality of gender inequality in the labour market

As a result of its roots in country-specific institutional and socioeconomic environments, gender inequality is a multidimensional phenomenon, which manifests itself in various forms in the labour market and at the workplace (Walby, 2004). To explore how industrial relations can address gender inequality, it is important to outline its several dimensions and their interrelations.

The **male-breadwinner model**, mentioned above as a key constituent of gender regimes, has characterised most European labour markets and welfare states in the first half of the twentieth century. This model assumed regular and full male employment and stable families in which women were provided for through their husbands' earnings and social contributions (Lewis, 2006). In turn, women performed most of the unpaid care or reproductive work (Reskin and Padavic, 1994). Cultural norms about gender and economic and welfare institutions have

been shaped around this predominant model. However, social reality has never fully matched this model, as women in many working-class families also engaged in paid employment. With the increasing participation of women in the labour market during the second half of the twentieth century, the male-breadwinner model became increasingly outdated. Nevertheless, the change in the distribution of care responsibilities happened at a much slower pace than the labour market trends for women and men (Hochschild and Maschung, 2012) and welfare states did not fully adapt to the transformation of family models that have accompanied these labour market trends.

Despite women increasingly participating in the formal labour market, gender roles for **care responsibilities** have been resistant to change. Women experience **segregated integration** (Kreimer, 2004) and different **employment patterns** than men. Labour market integration has followed traditional gender roles and stereotypes in assigning women to occupations. At the same time, the integration has aligned with women's roles outside the labour market, where limited working hours and occupations that fit care responsibilities are allocated to women.

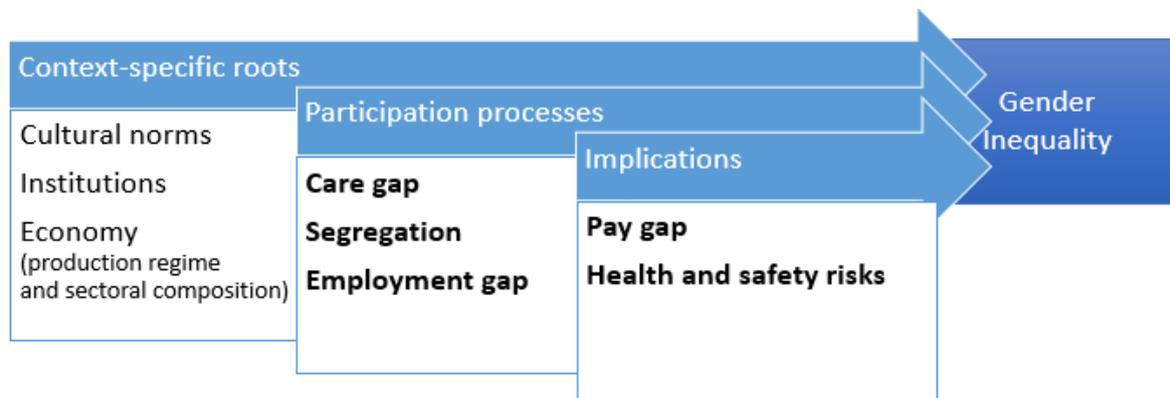
Workforce demographics changed, but workplace practices have not undergone a similar transformation to adapt to the new needs of workers, and this feeds labour market discrimination against women, especially mothers (Ravenswood and Markey, 2011). Notions such as hierarchy, job, and worker still entail a male-type relationship to procreation and paid work, built on the assumption of full commitment to paid employment regardless of family commitments (Acker, 1990). Mary Blair-Loy (2003), for instance, highlights the conflicting demands of being a mother and having a professional activity, as both types of work require undivided allegiance. As a consequence, flexible or reduced hours, more often required by women, tend to be associated with lower pay and less opportunities for promotion.

These processes may not be fully exposed, but they lead to visible gender inequality outcomes. The **gender pay gap**, which has been subject to legislation for a long time, is more than an expression of gender discrimination in the labour market. Pay gaps largely reflect the inequalities in women's participation in the labour market as described above: the difficulties of combining unpaid care and professional activities; gender segregation in occupations and sectors with lower remuneration; lower employment rates and fewer working hours; and the higher incidence of atypical, flexible employment contracts with lower remuneration (Kreimer, 2004; England, 2005; Hook and Pettit, 2016).

Similarly, **gender-specific occupational health and safety risks**, including adverse behaviours towards women, stem from gender discrimination and are at the same time the result of the way women participate in the labour market. Segregation in male-dominated *versus* female-dominated sectors, in undervalued occupations and precarious employment, reinforce adverse social behaviours at the workplace. These behaviours are harmful for women and hamper their wellbeing, their participation in the labour market and their work performance. The types of occupation, flexible contracts, care responsibilities outside work, as well as adverse social behaviours to which they are exposed, put women at higher health and safety risk, including psychosocial hazards (Eurofound, 2015; Eurofound 2020).

Figure 1 illustrates three layers of gender inequality and the interrelations between its five key dimensions in the labour market. The five dimensions of gender inequality in the labour market build on context-specific characteristics, such as elements of the cultural, institutional, and economic environment discussed in the previous section. Context-specific characteristics constitute the first layer of gender inequality roots and shape labour markets to reproduce this inequality. In a second layer, gender inequality manifests itself in three dimensions related to the way women participate in the labour market: the gender care gap, the segregation across occupations and sectors, and the employment gap. In a third layer, sources of gender inequality and gender-unequal participation processes pile up and lead to two further dimensions of gender inequality: the gender pay gap and gendered health and safety risks. These two, especially the pay gap, are more visible dimensions than the others, and have also been more explicitly addressed by legislation.¹²

Figure 1. Multidimensionality of gender inequality



Source: authors' composition.

Although it is not reflected in Figure 1, it is important to note that the relationship between different gender inequality dimensions is not unidirectional. On the contrary, labour market outcomes (e.g. the pay gap) continue to influence several of the processes through which women participate in the labour market (e.g. the care and employment gap), and through these processes they reinforce cultural norms on gender, institutions and economic structures that are at the basis of gender inequality. Yet acknowledging sources, processes and visible implications allows us to recognise how different dimensions of gender inequality are embedded in a given context, and how they relate to each other in layers that accumulate from the most hidden to the most visible.

Social partners have a role to play in all three layers and all five dimensions of gender inequality in the labour market, though to a different extent and with different instruments. Differences in industrial relations systems between countries, as well as differences in welfare and gender regimes, make it difficult to establish a uniform European social dialogue agenda for gender equality. Moreover, depending on different dimensions of gender equality, EU competences are limited, and progress has to go through the industrial relations structures of the member

¹² The combination of these dimensions also leads to important gaps in terms of pension benefits. However, the gender pension gap is beyond the scope of the VIRAGE analysis.

states. The next sections detail the dimensions of gender inequality in the labour market and how social partners deal with each one.

3. The gender care gap and work-life balance

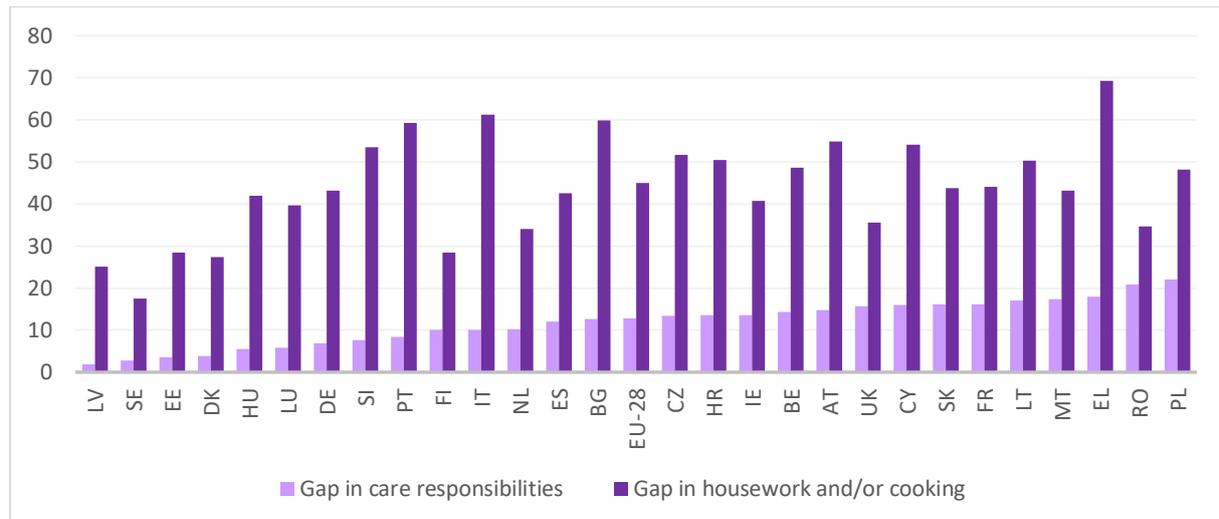
A consequence of gender and welfare regimes is that care responsibilities are unevenly distributed between men and women. This hampers the full integration of women with care responsibilities into the labour market and highlights tensions between work and family life. Work-life balance has increasingly been a part of the policy debate since the 1990s, as the female employment rate soared and working conditions evolved. This section discusses the gender care gap and its ramifications for other dimensions of gender inequality, such as employment and pay gaps, gender-occupational segregation and women's occupational health and safety risks (EIGE, 2021a). Indeed, the uneven allocation of unpaid care is often depicted as the 'missing link' (Ferrant et al., 2014) in analyses of gender gaps in labour market participation, quality of employment and, particularly, pay (EIGE, 2021a).

3.1 Understanding the gender care gap

The gender care gap can be defined as the difference between the amount of time that women and men spend on unpaid care work. These activities include housework, the care and supervision of children and the elderly, as well as voluntary work and unpaid help for other households. Care work entails "the provision of personal services to meet those basic physical and mental needs that allow a person to function at a socially determined acceptable level of capability, comfort and safety" (Himmelweit, 2007, p. 581). The distribution of unpaid work in a household is measured by the **allocation of time** spent on care activities and domestic work *per day* or week.

The results from the GEI demonstrate the unequal involvement of women and men in the care and education of their children or grandchildren, care of older or disabled people, and cooking and housework. To measure the gender care gap, the GEI includes two indicators estimated with data from the EQLS conducted by Eurofound. The first is the percentage of people involved in at least one of the following caring activities outside of paid work every day: care for children, grandchildren, the elderly, and people with disabilities. Around 38% of women and 25% of men were engaged in such care responsibilities in the EU-28 in 2016 (Figure 2). The largest gender care gaps are found in Poland, Romania, and Greece and the smallest are in Latvia, Sweden, and Estonia (Figure 2). The GEI includes a second indicator that measures the percentage of people involved in cooking and/or housework outside of paid work every day. This gap is wider, with 78.7% of women and 33.7% of men engaged in cooking and/or doing housework every day on average in the EU-28. The largest gaps are in Italy, Greece, and Bulgaria, and the smallest in Sweden, Latvia, and Denmark (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Gaps in percentages of women and men with caring responsibilities and doing cooking/housework per day (EU-28)



Source: European Institute for Gender Equality, Gender Equality Index 2020 based on Eurofound, EQLS 2016 data. Note: gaps are calculated as the percentage of women minus the percentage of men. Namely, positive values indicate a higher percentage of women with caring responsibilities or doing housework/cooking, while negative values would indicate a higher percentage of men. Gaps are expressed in percentage points.

The gender care gap relates to the concepts of work-family reconciliation and work-life balance. Work-family reconciliation means the efforts made to reconcile paid employment and unpaid work such as childbearing, child rearing and housework (Lewis, 2009). Work-life balance is a broader concept, covering not only domestic and caring tasks but also extra work responsibilities and personal life priorities. It acknowledges workers' potential inter-role conflict and entails the right to suitable leave, flexible working arrangements, and access to care services for parents and people with caring responsibilities (Gregory and Milner, 2009). Work-life balance is dependent on the interaction between household characteristics (age, gender, marital status, care responsibilities, or partner's situation), workplace characteristics, and public policies such as welfare policies and working-time norms (Gregory et al., 2013). This definition of work-life balance implies that it is measured at the individual level, where the ability to balance work and family commitments, or the stress and overload caused by imbalances, is self-reported.

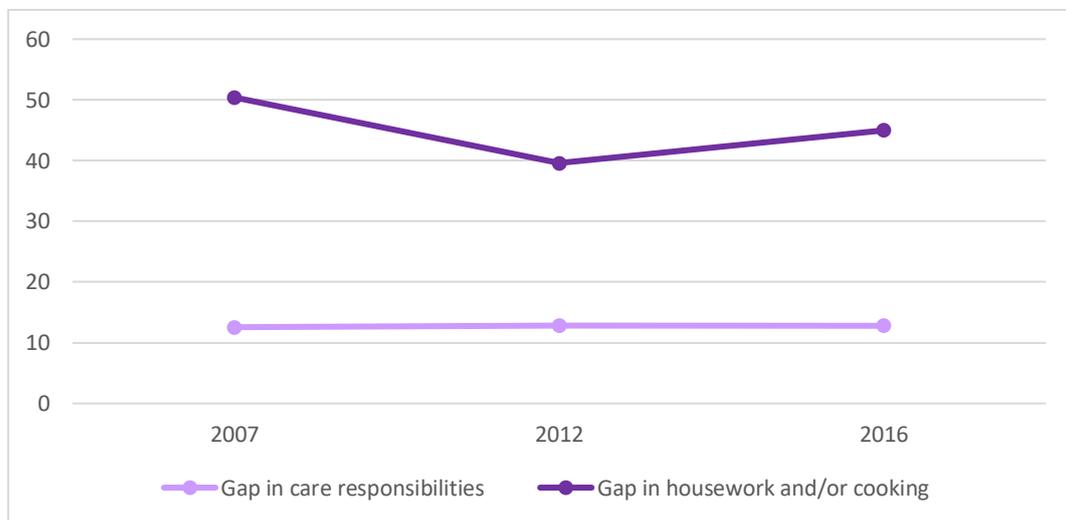
Several theories seek to unpack the gender care gap. The modern household or new home economics applies microeconomic and rational choice theory to explain household behaviour and gender division of labour, by using concepts of economies of scale and specialisation. According to Becker (1981), in a household of two parents, the parent with the highest earning potential specialises in paid work and the other in housework. However, the gender division of labour is not only a specialisation in adequately valued activities, but also a hierarchical allocation of genders to different types of work (Lewis, 2002).

An alternative explanation, linked to constructivism and sociological institutionalism, argues that the gender care gap cannot be understood without considering women's and men's experiences of the historical gendered division of labour that assigned men to the market area and women to the reproduction and care area (Blair-Loy, 2003; Kreimer, 2004). Family roles

impact time use and the sharing of caring responsibilities in the household, often at the expense of women: 606 million working-age women (or 21.7%) perform unpaid care work, including housework, on a full-time basis, compared with 41 million men (or 1.5%) (ILO, 2018). According to the gender production theory, household and paid work are a means to ‘produce’, ‘display,’ and ‘confirm’ gender identities, especially for women and men in long-term cohabiting relationships with a partner and children (West and Zimmermann, 1987; Van der Lippe et al., 2011).

As mentioned in the previous section, the growth in men’s involvement in care and domestic work has occurred at a much slower pace than women’s involvement in the labour market (Goldscheider et al., 2015). Figure 3 illustrates that, according to EQLS data, the gender care gap has barely narrowed in the past ten years in the EU-28, especially in terms of the percentage of women and men involved in daily caring activities outside of paid work. This results in the ‘**second shift**’ (Hochschild and Maschung, 2012) experienced by women with caring responsibilities. This is defined as the labour performed at home on top of the paid work performed in the formal sector and which can put a significant strain on life quality. An ILO estimation shows that when the number of hours spent in paid and unpaid work are combined, women’s working days (i.e. 7 hours and 28 minutes) are longer than men’s (i.e. 6 hours and 44 minutes) (ILO, 2019a). Family and domestic responsibilities can therefore be understood as a constraint under which women have to negotiate their work spheres and that can lead to invisible costs such as time poverty, emotional strain and lost opportunities (Chung et al, 2018).

Figure 3. Evolution of gaps in percentages of women and men with caring responsibilities and doing cooking/housework per day (EU-28)



Source: European Institute for Gender Equality, Gender Equality Index based on Eurofound, EQLS data. Note: gaps are calculated as the percentage of women minus the percentage of men. Namely, positive values indicate a higher percentage of women with caring responsibilities or doing housework/cooking, while negative values would indicate a higher percentage of men. Gaps are expressed in percentage points.

Related to this, motherhood proves to be a significant ‘axis of stratification’ for gender inequality. Women’s employment patterns are not driven so much by gender as by motherhood. The triple **motherhood penalty** (Boeckmann et al., 2015; Hook and Pettit, 2016) refers to the impact of family responsibilities on the employment and earning levels of

mothers, and their access to leadership positions. The measured residual penalty for being a mother tends to be explained as either an effect of motherhood on productivity or of statistical discrimination, as motherhood may be interpreted by employers as a predictor for potential lack of productivity (England, 2005). Conversely, evidence of a **fatherhood bonus** is revealed by fathers having not only better employment, pay and career progression prospects than mothers, but also than men without children (ILO, 2019a; Hodges and Budig 2010).

Context-specific factors also influence the time spent by men and women on paid work and housework (Boeckmann et al., 2015, p.27). Van der Lippe et al. (2011) distinguish micro and macro determinants of the division of tasks in a household: individual characteristics (marital and parental status, within-household arrangements), cultural norms (more or less egalitarian values about gender-roles), economic development, and the institutional context shaped by the welfare regime of the country (especially social, family and tax policies, and the ensuing availability of affordable and quality care options). These factors help understand the considerable cross-national variations in terms of women's care responsibilities and labour market outcomes in the EU.

3.2 Policies tackling the gender care gap

As highlighted previously, welfare systems can have a substantial impact on the gender care gap. Work-life balance policies aim to help the employee combine work and family commitments and adapt the rhythm and timing of work to life outside of work (England, 2005). Policies have been reconfigured to adjust to the participation of women in the labour market and the associated changes in care provision. As described by the EIGE (2015a), European policy and the legislative framework have addressed three main areas of intervention: care services (for children, and those in early childhood education in particular, for disabled and for older family members); leave entitlements for care purposes (including policies promoting men's involvement in parental leave schemes); and flexible working arrangements to enable parents to balance work, family and private life (including flexible working-time schedules, teleworking or part-time work). These policies can be provided by state legislation that fixes minimum standards and legal rights, by private organisations and the market (Ravenswood and Markey, 2011) or via negotiated collective agreements.

Despite some convergence in trends (Daly & Ferragina, 2018), EU member states support workers to manage work and family responsibilities in different ways. There is a rich literature on the relationship between this cross-national variation in work-family reconciliation policies and women's and mothers' employment outcomes (Brady et al., 2020). In general, authors find that well-paid leave, publicly supported childcare services for very young children, and awareness campaigns for maternal employment lead to smaller differences in employment participation and working hours between mothers and childless women, hinting at lower gender care gaps (Ferragina, 2020).

Indeed, generous **childcare policies** can have spillover effects on other dimensions of gender equality, such as the gender employment and pay gap, and women's career progression and their occupation (Brady et al. 2020). For example, universal and publicly subsidised sector childcare provision, particularly for children under two years' old, is strongly associated with

higher employment rates, longer working hours and lower motherhood wage penalties for women, as found in Scandinavian countries. Conversely, the cost of private childcare can negatively impact mothers' participation in the labour market (Boeckmann et al., 2015). Socioeconomic status mediates this relationship, and exemplifies the concept of intersectionality: poor, unskilled, single mothers rely much more on public childcare services to attain better employment outcomes (Ferragina, 2020).

The varying generosity and length of **leave entitlement** has differentiated effects. There is a consensus that long childcare leave with low benefit levels has a negative effect on maternal employment and thus on the gender care gap (Korpi, Ferrarini, and Englund 2013; Lewis 2006; Ferragina, 2020; Boeckmann et al., 2015). This type of scheme often assumes that mothers have access to another source of income, namely that of a male breadwinner. Moreover, leave policies may affect employers' assumptions that mothers are more likely to retreat from the labour market after having a child. This matters particularly in occupations where training or replacement costs are high (Boeckmann et al., 2015).

Policies for **flexible working** time tend to allow mothers to maintain their working hours after childbirth (Chung and Van der Horst 2018), and to remain in human capital-intensive jobs when the demands of the family are also high (Fuller and Hirsh 2018). Van der Lippe et al. (2018) showed that workplaces with flexible working arrangements are associated with smaller gender wage gaps, more so than parental leave or childcare support. However, depending on the type of flexible working and on stereotypes, there can also be negative effects such as traditionalising gender roles in the labour market and the household (Chung et al., 2018). Hence, the beneficial effects of flexible working on work-life balance depends on several factors: the organisational culture of the company; the prevalence of traditional gender roles and ideal worker culture; the household structure; and occupation and class, as less privileged, lower-class female workers tend to have more unreliable work schedules (Lott, 2018).

3.3 Industrial relations actions addressing the gender care gap

At EU level, work-life balance is included in multiple social partners' joint agreements and is one of the action points in the 2015-2017 Work Programme of the European Social Partners (ETUC et al., 2015). It is also a key priority in the Framework of Actions on Gender Equality and the ETUC's Action Programme on Gender Equality (ETUC et al., 2005; ETUC, 2016). According to Eurofound (2016), one of the main drivers of the effectiveness of actions concerning flexible working and work-family reconciliation measures is consensus among social partners that flexibility is valuable. However, trade unions and employers' organisations approach this goal in different ways.

The EU work-life balance Directive¹³ asks member states to introduce measures such as paternity and carers' leave, to revise parental leave and its payment and extend the right to flexible working (European commission, 2019a). The European social partners were consulted and involved in shaping this Directive, although they had different views on its content (Elomaki & Kantola, 2020). While trade unions were in favour of introducing and extending these

¹³ See [Directive](#) (EU) 2019/1158 of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers.

measures, employers' organisations stated that work-life balance could best be supported through existing facilities and exchange of good practices, for example by improving child and elderly care and challenging gender stereotypes (Elomaki & Kantola, 2020). Employers also added that extending family leave arrangements would be too costly for firms (BusinessEurope, 2017). Furthermore, while trade unions called for stronger European regulations on flexible working, BusinessEurope argued that working arrangements should be defined at company level (BusinessEurope, 2017).

By introducing paternity leave and revising regulations to ensure an extent of non-transferability of parental leave between parents, the EU work-life balance Directive aims to encourage fathers to take on more family responsibilities (European Commission, 2013). An overview of national practices by the ETUC (2019c) found that paid paternity leave has been expanded in several European countries. Some national collective bargaining agreements deal with care responsibilities and with flexibility of working-time arrangements (European Commission, 2020b). However, while these provisions are important, the initiatives by social partners supporting work-life balance remain women-centred, with little emphasis on stimulating men to take up care responsibilities. Root causes of gender inequality such as gender stereotypes and gender norms are rarely addressed (Eurofound, 2014). In some countries there are cultural barriers against paternity leave and awareness-raising about care responsibilities among men is limited (ETUC, 2019c).

Social partners in some countries fare better in awareness-raising of men as carers. In Finland, for example, the 'Daddy's home' campaign ran from 2016 to 2018. Its main objectives were to encourage fathers to take parental leave and share childcare responsibilities with mothers, to increase awareness of men's parental leave options and to promote positive attitudes and practices for fathers taking family-related leave¹⁴ (ETUC, 2019c). In Germany, new schemes aiming to foster long-term paternal involvement in family life (Parental Allowance, Parental Allowance Plus and the Partnership Bonus) have also contributed to greater understanding of these issues among social partners, and have resulted in a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). There is also greater awareness within firms, with 77% of German companies now saying that being family friendly is important for business, up from 14% in 2006 (European Commission, 2018b).

4. Gender occupational segregation

The assumption that women take on the role of primary caregivers has shaped the functioning of labour markets (Acker, 1990). Gender segregation – defined as the systematic separation of women and men into different spheres of life – leads women and men to work in different sectors, branches, and occupations (Charles and Grusky, 2004; Steinmetz, 2012) and to tend towards different levels of responsibility and leadership. This results from gender segregation in education, which mirrors the underlying perceptions of gendered skills and competences. Gender segregation has implications for other dimensions of inequality, such as the

¹⁴ See FIOH, [Daddy's home – parental leave can increase work motivation \(2016–2018\)](#).

employment and pay gap, health and safety and adverse social behaviours. These dimensions are discussed in the following sections.

4.1 Understanding gender occupational segregation

Gender occupational segregation refers to the “actual dominance of one sex in a particular occupation or the higher share of one sex relative to the expected share” (EIGE, 2017). An occupation holding more than 60% of one sex is described as gendered, or dominated by one sex, while a 60-40% distribution between men and women is considered balanced (Burchell et al., 2014). Neramo (1999: 18) described it as “the unequal distribution of women and men in the occupational structure” and argued that the gender division of labour “has played and continues to play an important role for the overall level of gender inequality” (Neramo, 1999: 1). The EIGE (2017; Burchell et al., 2014) stated that occupational segregation leads to inequalities *beyond* the labour market, since the narrowing of the educational and occupational choices according to gender maintains and reinforces stereotypes, undervalues women’s work, delimits female careers and the ability for both genders to achieve work-life balance.

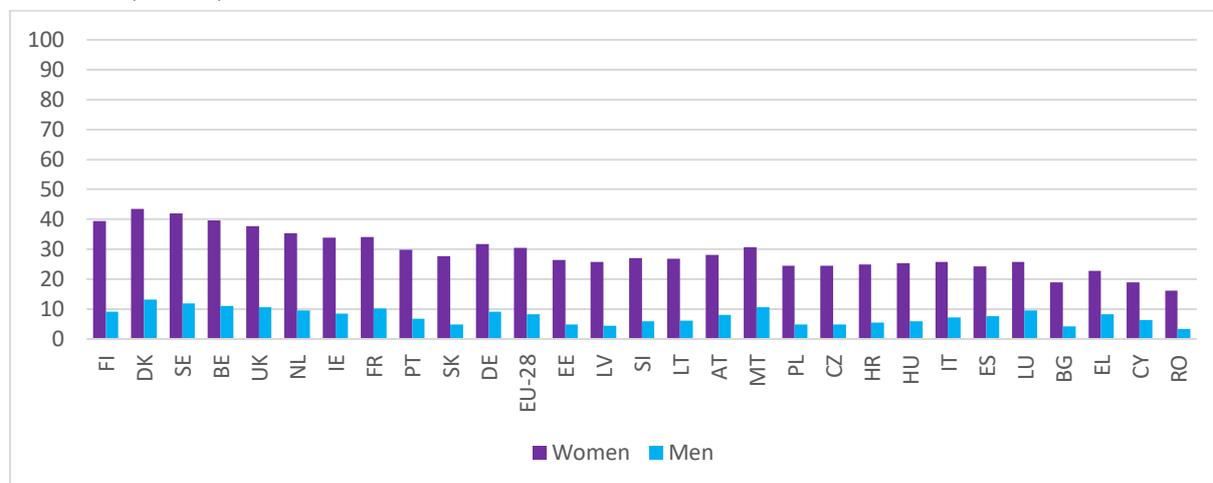
The index of dissimilarity (D) measures the gender division of labour by the share of women and men in occupations. The index describes the distribution of groups in an area (Duncan and Duncan, 1955; cf. Sakoda, 1981; Neramo, 1999; Charles and Grusky, 2005; Bettio et al., 2009), and shows how many of one group must change occupation to make it equal, in a range of 0-100%. Segregation has been stable over time in the EU, with a dissimilarity index of 50-51% (Bettio et al., 2009).

Burchell et al. (2014) suggest a more nuanced approach to occupational segregation. They looked at the proportion of women and men in twenty occupations in Europe, taking job quality, workforce characteristics, working conditions, sectoral segregation, and pay into account. In 2010, 95% of all employees in the EU were employed in these occupations (93% of the men and 97% of the women). Women were almost fully absent from some of the male-dominated occupations (e.g. mechanics, metalworking, building work and driving), whereas men were not excluded from any of the female-dominated occupations, even though their number was low in some, such as associated nurses, teaching assistants and service clerks. About 18% of the women and 15% of the men were employed in balanced or mixed occupations. Some 69% of the women and 59% of the men work in occupations dominated by their sex, whereas only 13% of the women, but 26% of the men, work in an occupation dominated by the opposite sex.

The gender segregation pattern differs across countries. In 2010, the proportion of women in male-dominated occupations varied between 6% in Lithuania to about 17% in the UK. In female-dominated occupations, France had the largest share of men (31%) and Italy the lowest (14%). As a way of measuring gender segregation, the GEI accounts for the percentage of women and men employed in the female-dominated sectors (NACE Rev. 2) of education, human health and social work. Yet similar calculations to assess gender segregation can be made for all sectors based on Eurostat statistics on employment by sector and gender. Figure 4 shows differences between EU member states regarding gender segregation in education,

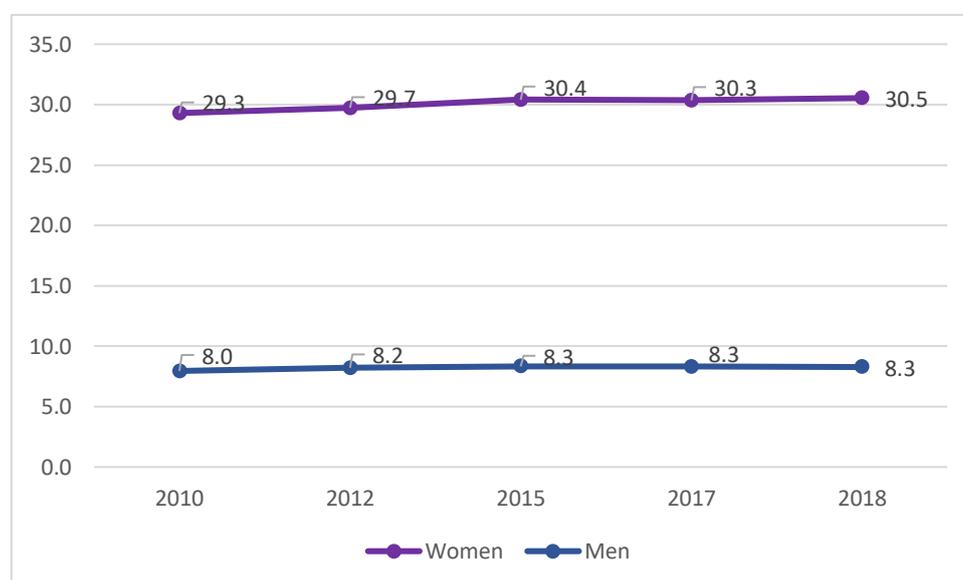
human health and social work activities. The gap in the percentage of women and men employed in these sectors has remained stable over the past 10 years in the EU-28 (Figure 5).

Figure 4. Percentage of women and men employed in education, human health and social work activities (EU-28)



Source: European Institute for Gender Equality, Gender Equality Index 2020 based on: Eurostat, EU LFS, 2018. *lfsa_egan2, lfsa_egana.*

Figure 5. Evolution of the percentage of women and men employed in education, human health and social work activities (EU-28)



Source: European Institute for Gender Equality, Gender Equality Index based on Eurostat, EU LFS. *lfsa_egan2, lfsa_egana.*

The gender division of labour is closely related to **educational segregation** and gendered skills and knowledge. Women are in the majority in higher education (EIGE, 2017), but educational segregation across subjects follows the same patterns as occupational segregation. In tertiary education, women predominate in education (82%), health and welfare (76%), social sciences

(68%) and arts and humanities (68%). Business, administration, and law (60%), and services (50%), are gender-balanced fields. Men dominate in information and communication technologies (79%), and in engineering, manufacturing, and construction (72%) (EIGE, 2017). Education, health and welfare (EHW) and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) are the two most gendered educational fields in the EU, although with variation across member states (EIGE, 2017). Educational segregation, reinforced by occupational segregation, can also lead to gender gaps in financial literacy, which in turn affects the way women make decisions regarding financial resources or career plans (Lusardi and Mitchell, 2011).

As noted by England (2010), desegregation is faster in highly skilled middle-class occupations than in lower-skilled working-class jobs. Women enter previously male-dominated tertiary occupations to a much higher degree but are still absent from traditional blue-collar male-dominated jobs. Neither are men inclined to enter female-dominated, lower-skilled jobs, presumably because the skills and competencies associated with women are less valued than those associated with men (England et al., 2005; Charles and Grusky, 2005). Stereotypes of gendered skills and competences explain differences in career choices and the persistence of educational and occupational segregation (cf. Gottfredson, 1981), as well as pay gaps within and between occupations (England et al., 2005). The devaluation of skills in female-dominated occupations such as education and health not only leads to lower wages but is also assumed to prevent men from choosing them.

This gendered occupational and educational segregation, where women and men tend to work in different occupations and industries in the labour market, is commonly referred to as **horizontal segregation** (Charles & Grusky, 2004). The phenomenon of **vertical segregation** also exists. Charles and Grusky (2004: 21; EIGE, 2017) highlight the more evaluative aspects, stating that “men are disproportionately allocated to the best-paid and most desirable occupations”, thereby describing the unequal distribution of prestige, status, recognition and pay.

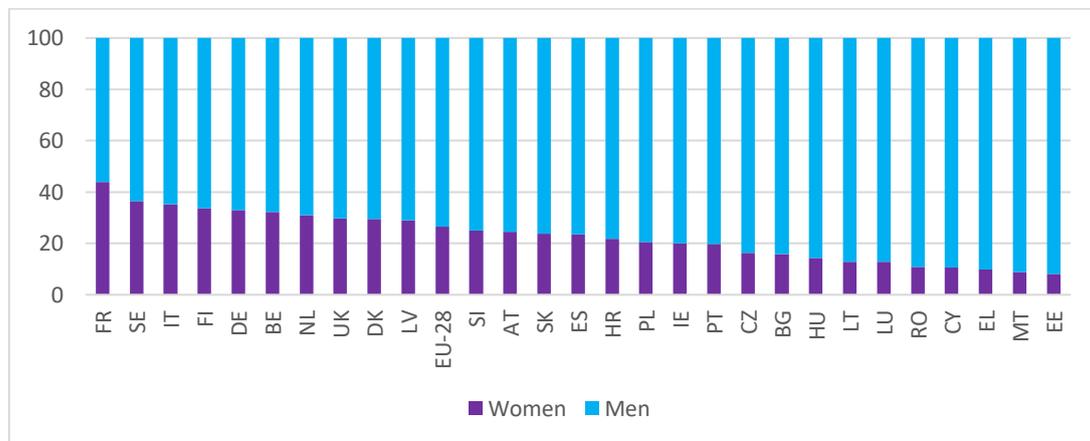
The more commonly discussed – and measured – dimension of vertical segregation focuses on women and men that work “in different hierarchical levels” (Steinmetz, 2012: 18), where men are in leadership positions more often than women (Kanter, 1977). Leadership is associated with masculinity, and “barriers to women in management exist globally and the higher the organisational level, the more glaring the gender gap” (Schein, 2007: 7). The ‘glass ceiling’ is the invisible barrier that hinders women’s advancement (Cotter et al., 2001; EIGE, 2017), while the ‘sticky floor’ illustrates how women are kept in place in low-wage positions (Harlan and Berheide, 1994). There is also the ‘glass cliff’ phenomenon, which is the tendency to appoint women to higher positions in times of crisis “associated with an increased risk of negative consequences” (Ryan and Haslam, 2007: 83). The ‘leaky pipeline’ refers to how women can drop out along the way (Pell, 1996). The ‘glass escalator’, however, suggests the advantages men have – especially in making careers in female-dominated occupations (Williams, 1992).

The incidence of women in decision-making roles is related to vertical segregation. This concerns women’s leadership positions in the economic sphere, often addressed as women in management (Fagenson, 1990), and the representation of women in political and representative institutions (Profeta, 2017; EIGE, 2020b).

Research on gender equality and political representativeness distinguishes between descriptive and substantive representation (Raaum, 2003; Celis and Lovenduski, 2018). Descriptive representation is defined as “representation by representatives who belong to the same societal group” (Celis and Lovenduski, 2018: 150), that is, whether women and men or other social groups are represented fairly in relation to their share of the population. An important aspect is therefore “mapping the proportion of women in elected bodies” (Raaum, 2003: 872). According to Celis and Lovenduski (2018: 150) the under-representation of women, as well as the homogeneity among those with a representative role, “is a considerable obstacle to achieving equality in substantive terms”. Substantive representation concerns whether women’s representation in decision-making affects the outcomes (Raaum 2003).

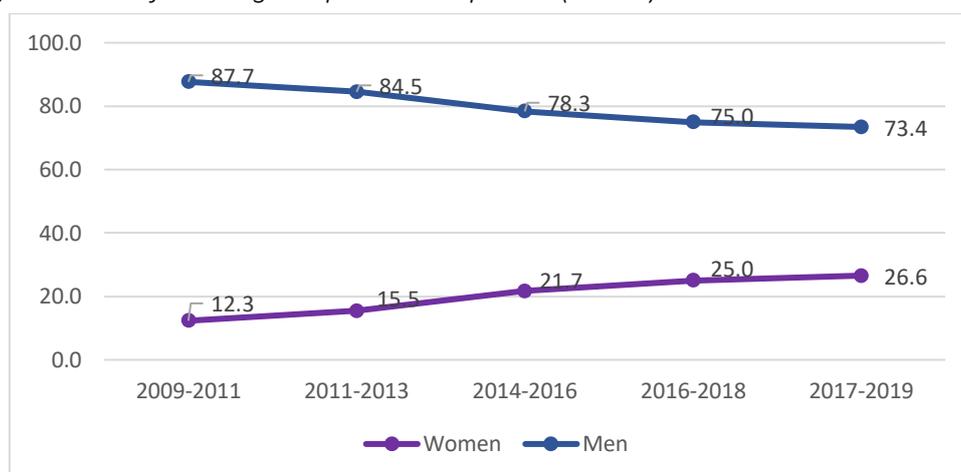
Figure 6 gives an example of how gender vertical segregation in the labour market can be measured, based on the Women and Men in Decision-making database developed by the EIGE (2021b). It shows the cross-country variation in the EU-28 in terms of women’s access to leadership roles in the economic sphere. This is measured in terms of the percentage of women and men that are board members of the largest-quoted companies, on supervisory boards, or on boards of directors. The share of women in these positions in the EU-28 has increased from 12.3% to 26.6% in the past ten years (Figure 7).

Figure 6. Percentage of women and men on boards, supervisory boards, or boards of directors of the largest-quoted companies (EU-28)



Source: European Institute for Gender Equality, Gender Equality Index 2020 based Gender Statistics Database, WMID (2017-2018-2019 average).

Figure 7. Evolution of the percentage of women and men on boards, supervisory boards, or boards of directors of the largest-quoted companies (EU-28)



Source: European Institute for Gender Equality, Gender Equality Index based Gender Statistics Database, WMID.

Gender segregation also occurs within occupations, a phenomenon referred to as **internal segregation** (Ulfsdotter Eriksson, 2006), intra-occupational segregation, or female- or male-dominated *segments* or *ghettoisation*. According to Reskin and Roos (1990), this occurs when women and men in the same occupation are allocated to different jobs or segments of tasks. Internal segregation is difficult to study through standardised classifications of occupations (e.g. ISCO) since the data are at an aggregated level (cf. Burschell et al., 2014). Such analysis thus demands case studies of single occupations.

From a labour supply perspective, micro-level explanations of gender segregation focus on neoclassical economic theories of human capital and rational choice, and sociological explanations of socialisation. The human capital theory assumes that women and men invest differently in education and career in a rational calculation of the best outcome. Accordingly, women are more likely to invest in work with flexible hours to enable them to also engage in family life and childcare, whereas men are more oriented towards occupations and careers that lead to financial rewards and high prestige (Becker, 1985; cf. Reskin, 1993; Neramo, 1999; Steinmetz, 2012). Human capital and rational choice theories are criticised for not being able to explain occupational segregation and why the gender division of labour persists despite the increase in “women’s educational attainment and labour force commitment” (Steinmetz, 2012: 41; Reskin, 1993). Such theories neglect the social norms that influence men and women in career choices, a factor discussed instead in sociological approaches.

Sociological theories explain segregation by referring to gender norms and “inquire into the origin of gender-specific occupational preferences considering social and cultural constraints” (Steinmetz, 2012: 42). Girls and boys are gendered, that is, socialised into preferences and choices appropriate to their sex, including for skills (Gottfredson, 1981). Girls and boys are led into different (and gendered) educational and occupational paths in line with gender stereotypes, guided not only by preferences but also by perceptions of what kind of occupations are open to them (Reskin, 1993).

Occupations are also *sex-labelled*, or gender-typed, when one sex dominates them (Oppenheimer, 1968), and this is linked to gender-stereotyping. 'Female occupations' are associated with social skills commonly thought of as feminine. Men are oriented towards occupations associated with traditionally masculine characteristics, such as physical strength or analytical thinking (cf. Ulfsdotter Eriksson and Backman, 2014). Sex-labelled occupations create boundaries or barriers that cause young women and men to adjust their aspirations towards "gender-appropriate choices" (Reskin, 1993; Gottfredson, 1981). Research shows that men make women feel unwelcome in male-dominated occupations (Kanter, 1977), while women tend to welcome men in female-dominated occupations (Acker, 1990).

From the labour-demand side, employers offer jobs that contribute to gender segregation at work (Reskin, 1993). The literature discusses the employer's role mainly in terms of discrimination, that is, whether preferences are shown for either sex for a job, or the effects of statistical discrimination. As such, statistical discrimination relates to gender stereotyping of tasks, jobs, and occupations, as well as gender-stereotyped expectations of skills (Reskin, 1993).

However, gender segregation is not only reproduced by the individual choices of employees or employers but also in the way organisations function, something only implicit in the above-mentioned explanations. As argued by Acker (1990:140), organisations' practices and processes reproduce inequalities between women and men and gender segregation since "organizations are one arena in which widely disseminated cultural images of gender is invented and reproduced". Job evaluation, as a way to define and evaluate jobs, is an example of gendered practice in organisations (Acker, 1990). Even when depicted as a seemingly neutral process, it is often blind to responsibilities such as caring duties that the worker might have outside of work. It therefore risks reproducing not only the gender wage gap but also the allocation of women and men in the organisation (Ulfsdotter Eriksson, 2014).

4.2 Policies tackling gender occupational segregation

The multifaceted and interwoven nature of gender segregation makes addressing it by policies particularly challenging, consisting as it does of individual choices, gender norms, including ideas of gendered skills and obligations in family life, and discrimination of various kinds. As argued by Rubery and Fagan (2019: 59), besides taking both working life and family life into account, "a policy programme to combat segregation needs to be multifaceted and aimed at changing behaviour of men and of employers, not just women. It needs legal measures, collective actions through social partners, voluntary action by employers and community campaigns. These need to build on and extend the policies and regulations already implemented or planned at EU level, including the work-life balance package and the recommendation on pay transparency".

The problems associated with gender segregation in the labour market, relating to both horizontal and vertical segregation, are addressed in different policy approaches. The EC's Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 stresses, as the strategy for 2016-2020 did, the key objectives of challenging gender stereotypes, closing gender gaps in the labour market, and

achieving equal participation across different sectors of the economy (European Commission, 2020a).

Investing in women's skills in fields where they are under-represented is a policy option. The EC developed several initiatives under the heading Women in Digital to meet the labour shortage in the ICT sector, and to increase the share of women in the industry (European Commission, 2018c). Women in Digital challenges ICT stereotypes in skills and competences and encourages women's education in the sector. This contributes to greater equality in how (gendered) skills and competencies are evaluated and valued and how the gender beliefs around them are challenged (EIGE, 2017).

The Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 (European Commission, 2020a) also addresses vertical segregation, especially regarding women in decision-making in "politics or government agencies, at the highest courts or on companies' boards". Quota systems for women in politics or management are one of the policy approaches to this issue. They are used to level the unequal distribution of women in higher leadership and management positions (Mölders et al., 2018) and have been described as a form of affirmative action, that is, a tool aiming to include and increase the number of minorities or discriminated groups (Unzueta et al., 2010). It is a disputed means for gender equality, however. Some argue that it is a justified means of spurring equal opportunities and even challenging male dominance in top-management positions, whereas others argue that quotas are illegitimate and undermine liberal principles (Mölders et al., 2017). A directive proposal at EU level on quotas in corporate boards is currently being debated.

4.3 Industrial relations actions addressing gender occupational segregation

Addressing gender roles in society and in the labour market and promoting women in decision-making positions are key priorities in the Framework of Actions on Gender Equality and in the ETUC action programme on gender equality (ETUC, 2016; Eurofound, 2014; ETUC et al., 2005). However, gender segregation is possibly the area in which social partners have the least direct influence through workplace relations and collective bargaining. Social partners mainly challenge horizontal and vertical segregation through awareness-raising campaigns.

Vertical segregation is often classed as a priority by both employee and employers' organisations' (ETUC, 2016; BusinessEurope, 2019). Examples of vertical segregation awareness-raising campaigns by social partners include annual awards for the best woman entrepreneur, national debates, mentoring of women for leadership roles (ETUC, 2011a), and general campaigns addressing the small share of women in decision-making positions (Eurofound, 2014).

Vertical segregation can also be regulated by quantified objectives (such as quota systems) (Eurofound, 2014) and social partners have developed actions to tackle the problem in the labour market as well as internally, i.e. within their own structures. Indeed, to improve the share of women in decision-making positions in the general labour market, it is essential to first ensure a balance at the top of the social partners' organisations.

The small number of women in decision-making positions concerns not only the labour market in general but also poses a challenge within social partner organisations themselves (Eurofound, 2014). Despite the general growth of women in social partner organisations, they are still under-represented in these organisations' decision-making bodies (Eurofound, 2014). Data from the European Commission's database 'Women and Men in Decision-making' illustrate the representation gap of women in the highest decision-making bodies of European social partner organisations in 2020. Data for the European employee organisations show that 30.7% of the members of the highest decision-making bodies are women, versus 69.3% men. This is, however, an increase on 2015, when these bodies included only 23.9% women. Only 4 out of 20 presidents of these bodies are women.

Data for the European national confederations show a similar pattern, with 28.4% female members of the highest decision-making bodies (EIGE, 2020c). In horizontal segregation, the gender breakdown in national confederations' policy departments reveals that gender stereotypes are reflected in departments where women are in charge in trade union organisations. Women tend to take leadership roles in departments such as social affairs, training and education, and equal opportunities, while men are in charge in departments dealing with economic issues and legal or industrial affairs (Eurofound, 2014). Women also tend to have a smaller presence at the bargaining table than men, while female negotiators tend to have a positive influence on (gender) equality issues (Eurofound, 2014).

A wider gap can be observed in European employers' organisations. In 2020, 19.9% of the members of the highest decision-making bodies were women, and 80.1% were men. This figure shows an improvement on 2015, when there were only 15.7% women. Similar data were found for the national employers' organisations, which had 16.4% female members of the highest decision-making bodies. In the European employers' organisations only 5 of the 69 presidents are women (EIGE, 2020c). Similar patterns of gender-horizontal segregation in employers' organisations emerge as in trade unions; women are usually in charge of human resource and external relations departments while men head up departments dealing with economic issues and industrial affairs (Eurofound, 2014).

To gain an overview of gender structures, the ETUC organises the '8th March Survey' or the Annual Gender Equality Survey, where gender-disaggregated data on affiliates' membership and decision-making positions are collected (Fulton & Sechi, 2019). The survey provides not only a detailed overview of the proportion of female union members and women in decision-making bodies in the national confederations, but also an evaluation of national implementations of the 2011 ETUC recommendations for improving gender balance in trade unions (ETUC, 2011a). In these recommendations, the ETUC committed to ensure balanced participation of women and men in ETUC decision-making bodies and encouraged national confederations to adopt quota systems.

The Annual Gender Equality Survey Report of 2019 shows that various national confederations followed these recommendations (Fulton & Sechi, 2019). In Austria, the ÖGB adopted a resolution to ensure that at least a third of all ÖGB functions or positions are filled by women. The Spanish UGT included in its statutes a quota system where the proportion of either sex in

decision-making bodies cannot be lower than 40%. Several national confederations also introduced quota systems for their negotiators (Eurofound, 2014).

Besides quantified measures, social partners use soft methods to achieve gender balance in their organisations, such as gender equality units and other bodies devoted to gender equality and facilitating gender mainstreaming activities and initiatives. These units are more common among trade unions than in employers' organisations. Other examples are gender-awareness training and activities on how to work actively with gender equality (Eurofound, 2014).

Horizontal segregation also seems to be a problem in sectoral representation. The share of female participants at plenary meetings of sectoral social dialogue committees in industrial sectors stands at 10% or less. In hospitals and healthcare sectors this figure is higher than 70% (Weiler, 2013). Horizontal segregation and gender stereotypes are mostly challenged through awareness-raising campaigns or educational initiatives. In several countries, social partners participated in projects to attract more women into sectors where they are under-represented or organised 'girls' days', where technical and other traditionally non-female occupations can be experienced. In Germany, for instance, social partners are now also supporting 'boys' days', in which boys can get a feel for jobs that are traditionally dominated by women (Eurofound, 2014).

As part of an incoming EU-wide communication campaign to combat gender stereotypes, BusinessEurope suggests social media and new forms of communication to reach out to the younger generation (BusinessEurope, 2019). Despite the efforts, however, trade unions still face challenges and barriers to real achievements in this respect. Initiatives are mainly limited to campaigns and rarely involve collective bargaining. Some barriers have been acknowledged by trade unions, including lack of senior commitment, persistence of gender stereotypes, lack of resources for gender equality actions, and lack of knowledge about how to mainstream gender (Eurofound, 2014).

5. The gender employment gap

As well as women and men working in different sectors and occupations, their participation in the labour market also differs in terms of the amount of paid employment. Because of the gender norms that assign most household responsibilities to women, the employment rate has historically been lower for women than for men. Yet female employment rates have been increasing since the Industrial Revolution in the late 18th century and have increased sharply since the post-Fordism era, from the 1970s onwards (Goldscheider et al., 2015; Hochschild and Maschung, 2012).

Nonetheless, employment rates are still systematically lower for women than for men across the EU, resulting in a gender employment gap. Importantly, higher participation of women in the labour market has not solved the problem of gender inequality or shed light on other dimensions of gender inequality that might help explain women's lasting disadvantages in the labour market. These other crucial dimensions include the gender care gap and occupational segregation. Moreover, the gender employment gap is intrinsically linked to the gender pay gap, as analysed in the following section.

5.1 Understanding the gender employment gap

The gender employment gap refers to the difference between the employment rates of men and women in a given working-age group (Eurostat, 2019). The indicator developed by Eurostat (2019) to measure the gender employment gap considers the 20-64 age group. The employment rates for men and women respectively are calculated by dividing the number of persons aged 20 to 64 in employment by the total male and female population of the same age group. The difference in these rates gives the gender employment gap in percentage points. However, some estimations in the literature use different age groups (see for example Bisello and Mascherini, 2017; EIGE, 2020a).

This indicator has improved in almost all countries and at EU level in the past decade. Following an overall positive historical trend, female employment rates have constantly increased. Yet the gender employment gap has not always closed at the same speed. For example, a significant improvement was registered in the 2000s, when the employment gap reduced, from 19.3 percentage points in 2000 to 13.3 percentage points in 2010, in the EU-27. It then remained relatively stable at around 11.7 percentage points between 2013 and 2019 in the EU-27.¹⁵ Indeed, for the gap to close, it is also necessary to consider how the employment rate for men has evolved. The male employment rate could decrease in certain periods because of shrinking employment in male-dominated sectors, whereas at other times it rises faster than that of women's (Bisello and Mascherini, 2017).

The employment gap remains an issue, especially in certain EU countries. According to Eurostat (2019), Southern and Central Eastern European countries showed the highest employment gap in 2017, above the EU average (e.g. Malta, Italy, Greece, Romania, Poland, and Spain). The pace of improvement also varies, as some countries catch up rapidly (e.g. Malta, Luxembourg, Germany, and Slovakia), while others see an increase in their gender employment gap (e.g. Hungary, Ireland, and Bulgaria). Within countries, the gender employment gap varies across age groups, socioeconomic status and levels of education, emphasising the intersectionality of gender inequality (EIGE, 2020a).

The gender employment gap is the result of higher rates of both unemployment and inactivity among women in comparison with men. For the 20-64 age group, the female unemployment rate in the EU-27 has registered a constant improvement since 2012, but in 2019 it was still 6.9%, compared with 6.3% for men. The difference between female and male unemployment is even larger in certain member states (e.g. Spain).¹⁶ There is a wider gap, however, for activity. In 2018, for the same age group in the EU-27, 71.8% of women were active, compared with 84% of men. The lowest activity rates for women are registered for Italy and Greece (60% and 65% respectively).¹⁷ This shows that a large part of the gender employment gap is driven by women who are not participating in the labour market at all.

¹⁵ Source: Eurostat table [lfsi_emp_a]

¹⁶ Source: Eurostat table [une_rt_a]

¹⁷ Source: Eurostat table [lfsa_argan].

As the female employment rate improves, additional differences in the type of employment have to be taken into account to assess the position of women and men in the labour market. Thus, the concept of the gender employment gap has evolved. In measuring the gender employment gap, the EIGE (2020a) also accounts for the share of women that work part-time in comparison to men, and the social scoreboards monitoring the implementation of the EPRS contain an indicator for the gender gap in part-time employment. In fact, about 30% of employed women in the 20-64 age group work part-time, versus approximately 8% of employed men, leading to a gender part-time employment gap of 21.7 percentage points.¹⁸

The higher rate of women in part-time employment results in a much higher gender employment gap when considering full-time equivalents,¹⁹ as it does in the GEI (EIGE, 2020a). The employment gap in full-time equivalents amounted to 16 percentage points in the EU-28 in 2018. Figure 8 gives an overview of cross-country variation in full-time equivalent employment rates for women and men aged 15 or older in the EU-28. The gap between women and men has decreased over the past ten years, albeit at a rather slow rate (Figure 9).

Figure 8. Percentage gap between the employment (or full-time equivalent) rates for women and men (EU-28)

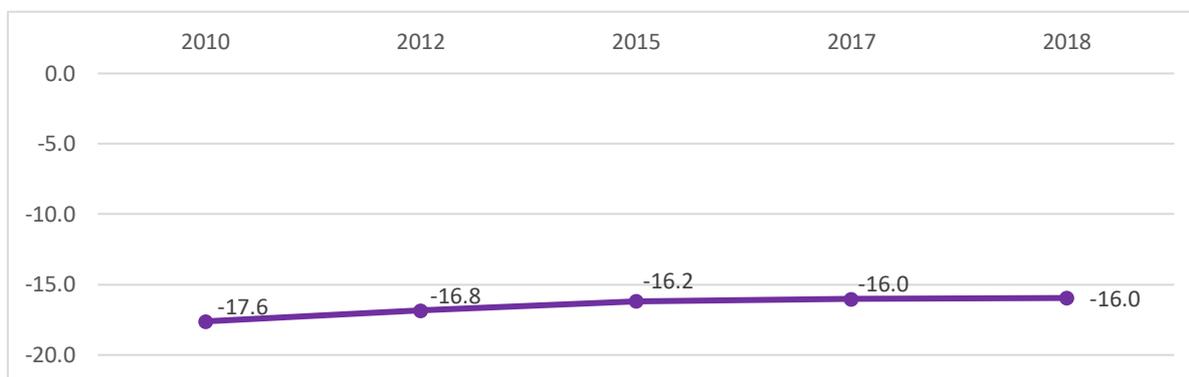


Source: European Institute for Gender Equality, Gender Equality Index 2020 based on: Eurostat, EU LFS, 2018. Note: The gaps are calculated as percentage of women minus percentage of men. Namely, negative values indicate lower percentage of women in employment (FTE), while positive values would indicate higher percentage of men. Gaps are expressed in percentage points.

¹⁸ See the [EPRS Social Scoreboard of Indicators](#).

¹⁹ According to the [Eurostat definition](#), a full-time person is counted as one unit of full-time equivalent, while a part-time worker gets a score in proportion to the hours he or she works. For example, a part-time worker employed for twenty hours a week, where full-time work consists of forty hours, is counted as 0.5 unit of full-time equivalent.

Figure 9. Evolution of the percentage gap between the employment (or full-time equivalent) rates for women and men (EU-28)



Source: European Institute for Gender Equality, Gender Equality Index based on Eurostat, EU LFS. Note: The gaps are calculated as the percentage of women minus the percentage of men. Namely, positive values indicate a higher percentage of women with caring responsibilities or doing housework/cooking, while negative values would indicate a higher percentage of men. As the gap is always negative, the upward trend indicates an improvement in the employment gap. Gaps are expressed in percentage points.

Women' over-representation in non-standard employment²⁰ is due in part to their occupational segregation in mainly low-quality jobs and in part to their need to have flexible employment arrangements to undertake unpaid care work (EIGE, 2019a, EIGE, 2020a). For example, 13.5% of employed women had temporary contracts in 2018, in comparison with 11.3% of men.²¹ Temporarily employed women face substantial gender wage gaps and have limited access to job resources, such as autonomy, flexibility and access to training (OECD, 2020).

Theoretical explanations for the gender employment gap, in terms of employment, inactivity and non-standard employment, share a common ground with the theories behind the gender care gap and gender segregation. Family and care responsibilities remain tasks largely performed by women, as explained in section 3. This results in lower activity and employment levels for women, shorter working hours, over-representation in part-time work, more career breaks and temporary jobs, and thus average lower wages for women. This all links with the gender pay gap described in section 6 (European Commission, 2013).

In addition, Ferragina (2019) shows that the employment gap can be explained by family policy, notably in childcare provision, parental leave systems and the taxation systems for couples. In particular, disincentives for second earners arising from national tax and benefit systems can lead to the so-called inactivity or low-wage trap. As second earners in a family are more often women, they tend to bear a higher tax burden when they participate in the labour market.

²⁰ According to the [Eurofound definition](#), non-standard employment is an umbrella term for different employment arrangements that deviate from standard employment. They include temporary employment; part-time and on-call work; temporary agency work and other multiparty employment relationships; as well as disguised employment and dependent self-employment.

²¹ Source: Eurostat table [lfsi_pt_a].

Thus, these kinds of traps more often affect the female part of the working-age population, who may consequently decide to remain inactive or earn less.²²

5.2 Policies tackling the gender employment gap

As the concept of the employment gap has evolved to recognise within-employment differences between men and women, so have policy approaches changed. In the past, **educational policies** have tackled the issue by promoting higher educational levels for women to favour their employment. This policy approach consisted of remedying the human capital investment deficit experienced by women for historical and cultural reasons (Bertocchi and Bozzano, 2019). However, since the educational level of women has overtaken that of men in the EU, these policies have taken a narrower approach. The focus has shifted to the promotion of female enrolment in specific educational paths to overcome occupational segregation, namely STEM subjects, which are traditionally less popular among women. Since the demand for STEM graduates is expected to rise as an effect of digitalisation, the intrinsic purpose of these policies is to ensure that women increase their employability in a changing economy, thereby contributing to closing the gender employment gap (Bertocchi and Bozzano, 2019; European Commission, 2020a).

The evolution of policy approaches to the gender employment gap also reflects the increasing awareness of its causes. Since it results from structural inequality in care responsibility and work-life balance, a large part of the policy approaches to eliminating the gender employment gap has to do with **family policies and work-life balance legislation** (Bisello and Mascherini, 2017; Ferragina, 2019, 2020; Jaumotte, 2004). As such, these have been discussed in the dedicated section above (see section 3).

However, it is worth outlining the **social investment approach**, which presents women's participation in the labour market as one of its main objectives (Bisello and Mascherini, 2017, Saraceno, 2015).²³ Social investment policies aim to increase employment through **Active Labour Market Policies** (ALMPs), such as incentives to employers, the financing of start-ups and entrepreneurship, training programmes for job seekers, along with job counselling and guidance as background labour market services (Bonoli, 2007). In some cases, these measures are targeted at more vulnerable groups, including women, and the effect on employment is higher than for men (Bergemann and van den Berg, 2006). Indeed, women tend to benefit more from ALMPs in getting back to work, because of the non-linear career paths and multiple breaks owing to care responsibilities that they experience during their working life.

In addition to ALMPs, social investment policies aim to increase female labour market participation by reinforcing care services for children and the elderly (Hemerijck, 2017). This aspect coincides with the family policy mentioned above, complementing employment support in a holistic manner to tackle gender care gaps, although it is doubtful that social investment has the capacity to address the root causes of gender inequality (Saraceno, 2015).

²² See [European Semester thematic factsheet on women labour force participation](#)

²³ See also the [EU Social Investment Package](#).

Finally, a well-known stimulus for employment is public investment for direct (and indirect, through multiplier effects) job creation. In this regard, De Henau et al. (2016) argue that, through gender mainstreaming, **gender-sensitive public investment**, as in social infrastructure and in the care sector, can generate jobs to significantly improve the female employment rate, although the actual impact differs by country. The authors acknowledge, however, that this positive effect on female employment would be partly linked to occupational segregation, owing to the existing prevalence of women in these sectors.

5.3 Industrial relations actions addressing the gender employment gap

The gender employment gap, the gender care gap, and the pay gap are all linked, and in addressing gender employment gaps, social partners tend to concentrate on initiatives to reduce the gender care gap by supporting the work-life balance. Eurofound (2016) identified four categories of measures designed to promote the participation of women in the labour market (labour market, childcare support, leave and flexible working arrangements) that are closely related to the gender care gap and work-life balance initiatives (already discussed in previous sections). Social partners' actions in addressing the gender employment gap have been limited to contributing to these policies, and to improving working conditions in non-standard employment, which more often affect women.

One of the main priorities of trade unions is to monitor changes in employment conditions, reduce precarious work to a minimum, and to improve employment quality. Looking at the ETUC's European strategy for quality employment we note that besides general actions (such as good wages, work security via standard employment and access to social protection, lifelong learning opportunities, etc.) the issue of women in precarious work is addressed. Although efforts are still needed to increase participation levels of women in the labour market, women are disproportionately represented in poor-quality and low-paid jobs. For example, healthcare workers are mostly women. Caring professions, however, are among the most underpaid jobs in the EU.²⁴ Therefore, the ETUC specifies the need to pay specific attention to the quality dimension of women's employment (ETUC, 2015).

As discussed above, women are over-represented in part-time and flexible employment. In this respect, European social partners established a framework agreement in 1997, eliminating unjustified discrimination against part-time workers and improving the quality of part-time work. The agreement aims to facilitate the development of part-time work on a voluntary basis and contributes to the flexible organisation of working time in a way that takes account of employers' and workers' needs (European Commission, 2020b). This agreement, however, does not specify any gender-related actions.

Although the ETUC mentions the larger share of women than men in precarious work and part-time jobs (ETUC, 2015), the gender employment gap is still marginal in the ETUC's positions on economic and social policy issues (Elomaki & Kantola, 2020). The gender pay gap, work-life balance, and the care gap, however, are more often explicitly mentioned in social partners' programmes on gender equality. Yet gender stereotypes and cultural norms are often

²⁴ See also [EIGE's website](#) for more information on essential workers.

overlooked (ETUC, 2016), and it's unacknowledged that this pattern of more women working in part-time employment than men is reproduced because of these norms. For instance, about one third of European citizens disapproves if women with children under the age of three work full time (European Commission, 2013).

6. The gender pay gap

The gender pay gap has been long used as a measure to monitor and discuss gender inequality in the labour market. Equal payment between men and women has been one of the first areas where the EU and all its member states have adopted legislation and developed policies for gender equality (O'Reilly et al., 2015; Smith, 2012). The gender pay gap and related policies are among the most visible, investigated, and discussed gender issues in labour economics and beyond (Boll et al., 2016). Despite this longstanding interest, the gender pay gap persists (Eurostat, 2020). It represents one key aspect of gender inequality, limiting gender empowerment and resulting in women's greater vulnerability to poverty than men's (EIGE, 2017). The gender pay gap deserves further attention, especially considering it is an area in which social partners and collective bargaining can play a significant role, but as yet remains one where they have driven progress only to a limited extent (Smith, 2012).²⁵

6.1 Understanding the gender pay gap

The gender pay gap is “the gap between male and female pay, whether hourly, weekly, or monthly as just one aspect of a wider picture of gender inequities but also capturing the complex processes on the labour market that lead to women's disadvantage” (Smith, 2012: 3). This definition acknowledges the interdependence between the different dimensions of gender inequality, recognising as it does the “multifaceted character of the gender pay gap” (p. 670). It considers the gender pay gap a proxy of gender inequality in the labour market, caused by several layers of inequalities (Bergmann et al., 2019).

From a statistical point of view, more precise definitions are adopted to build indicators of the gender pay gap. Eurostat (2020) provides an overview of gender pay gap statistics, including the **unadjusted gender pay gap**, which is defined as the difference between the average gross hourly earnings of men and women expressed as a percentage of the average gross hourly earnings of men. However, this measure does not account for differences in working time, occupations, types of employment, or for the effect of the national tax system. To overcome these limitations, breakdowns of gender pay gaps across working time and occupations are made available to check variations in pay within similar types of job. Moreover, other measures have been developed in the literature. The EIGE (2019a) presented the **gender overall earnings gap**, which is a composite indicator combining the average hourly earnings, the monthly average of paid hours and the employment rate of women and men. These two indicators are those most commonly used at EU level.

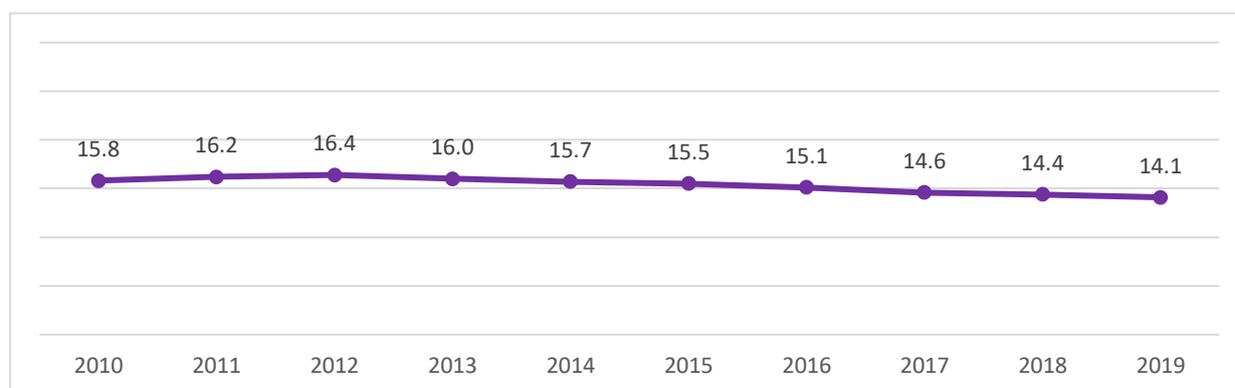
Adjusted gender pay gaps can be calculated through decomposition techniques (Oaxaca, 1973; Blinder, 1973) that attribute fractions of the gap to gender differences in certain observed

²⁵ The gender pay gap, employment gap, and indirectly with all other gaps mentioned in previous sections, result in the gender pension gap. This, however, remains outside the scope of this paper.

characteristics, measuring the ‘unexplained’ part of the gender wage differences – i.e. not attributable to differences in education, in the type of employment, of firms, etc. (Boll et al., 2016). Moreover, international organisations have developed their own, albeit similar, measures, such as the gender wage gap,²⁶ the factor-weighted gender pay gap,²⁷ or the ratio of female estimated earned income over male value (WEF, 2017). Empirical studies have sometimes developed their own measures of the gender pay gap, either on primary or existing data (e.g. Auspurg et al., 2017; Bergmann et al., 2019; Boll et al., 2016; Christofides et al., 2013; Datta Gupta and Eriksson, 2012).

Thanks to these indicators, the gender pay gap has been constantly monitored over the past decades, showing modest improvements in the EU. The unadjusted gender pay gap was 15.8% in 2010, worsened to 16.4% in 2012 and then had improved to 14.1% by 2019 for the EU-27,²⁸ meaning that women’s gross hourly earnings were on average 14.1% below those of men (Figure 10). However, the gap varies a lot across member states (Figure 11). Within countries, significant variation is also found across ages, socioeconomic groups, and sectors (Eurostat, 2020). There are also nuances to consider. A lower pay gap does not always mean more equal labour markets. It can also appear in cases of lower employment rates of women, or higher level of education of women that participate in the labour market in comparison with men (EIGE, 2019b). These kinds of critical analyses of the gender pay gap, measured as unadjusted pay gaps, highlight that this dimension of gender inequality needs to be completed by other measures. Indeed, the gender pay gap is strongly connected and often analysed in parallel with the gender employment gap and gender occupational segregation.

Figure 10. Evolution of the gender pay gap in unadjusted form (EU-27)



Source: Eurostat, EU LFS. *earn_grpgg2*.

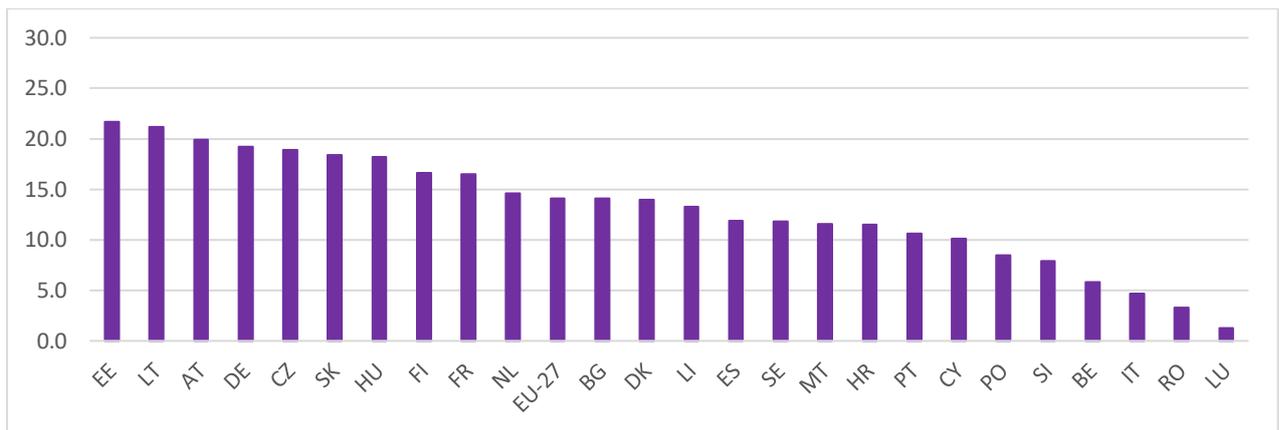
Note: the indicator includes industry, construction and services (except public administration, defence, and compulsory social security). The gap is expressed in percentage of average gross hourly earnings of men.

²⁶ See [OECD gender wage gap](#).

²⁷ See [ILO statistics on gender pay gap](#).

²⁸ The widely cited figure of 16% for the average EU gender pay gap refers to the EU28 (e.g. Boll et al., 2016; EIGE, 2019a).

Figure 11. Gender pay gap in unadjusted form (EU-27)



Source: Eurostat, EU LFS, 2019. *earn_grpgg2*.

Note: the indicator includes Industry, construction and services (except public administration, defence, compulsory social security). Gap is expressed in percentage of average gross hourly earnings of men.

Several theories, across different disciplines, seek to explain the gender pay gap. The fundamental difference between them is in whether they look for individual or social factors (Boll et al., 2016). However, considering the multidimensionality of gender inequality and the continuous interaction between social factors and individual behaviours (Hodgson, 2006), theories relying on individual explanatory factors also appear, in the end, to be linked to social factors, as exemplified below.

Auspurg et al. (2017) review different theories connecting the gender pay gap to individual expectations and choices that legitimate gender-based differentials in earnings. The **same-gender referent theory** explains how women accept being paid less because they compare their lower earnings with other underpaid women, while the opposite holds for men. The **reward expectations theory** claims that men and women associate their gender with the socially accepted status that justifies higher or lower rewards respectively for otherwise similar work. While the expectations are at individual level, they are shaped by social norms and beliefs, so that gender inequalities are constantly reproduced. The same applies to the **double standard theory**, which assumes that status characteristics such as gender are used “to interpret information about performance as suggestive of true abilities” (p. 183), causing a biased assessment and reward of such performance.

The double standard theory resembles what Boll et al. (2016) report as Arrow’s **statistical discrimination**: “If childcare induces the average woman to gather less work-related experience over her lifetime and therefore reach a lower level of productivity, statistical discrimination does deprive a female worker compared to a male worker with the same employment history” (p. 63). Boll et al. (2016) recognise the tension between individual and social determinants in theories on gender pay gap. As discussed in previous sections, some theories stress the role of social norms and perceptions in generating the pay gap and in segregating men and women in different sectors and occupations, which also reinforce pay gaps. Some other theories, for example the **compensating wage theory**, which dates back to Adam Smith, ascribe the pay gap to workers’ preferences for jobs with working conditions that are more suitable to their respective gender. Such non-pecuniary conditions are considered

during the wage negotiation and can thus explain the gender pay gap. Ultimately, however, such workers' preferences seem related to social norms and behaviours and to the gender roles that shape society.

Similarly, Boll et al. (2016) refer to the **human capital theory** to explain the gender pay gap attributable to workers' characteristics such as skills and productivity. Motherhood and care responsibilities lead to career breaks and absence from the labour market, and this can cause women's human capital to be devalued, with a loss in experience-related knowledge and thus lower productivity, in comparison with a same-age man. For the same reasons, women are more often in part-time jobs. These are perceived as less productive than full-time ones by employers facing coordination costs, thus resulting in lower hourly pay. Yet, while the characteristics that explain the gender pay gap are held by individuals, they are influenced by gender norms that assign the bulk of reproduction and care responsibilities to women and determine their commitment to work and skills' formation.

Grybaite (2006) links several theoretical explanations to the gender pay gap and argues that the human capital theory "fails to take into account the fact that all decisions are made in a normative context where there are set ideas about what women and men ought to do" (p.86). Moreover, the gender pay gap can only partially be explained by differences in education and work experience. For a long time, women had lower educational levels than men because gender roles assigned them to unpaid work, discouraging investment in education. Nowadays, female educational levels have risen and often overtaken those of men in many EU countries, so the wage gap is less and less explained by this factor (Besamusca, 2020). Other factors are increasingly important in justifying the pay gap, such as gender-occupational segregation and the lower remuneration of jobs performed by women, which is reckoned as a form of labour market discrimination and embedded in gender norms (Besamusca, 2020; Grybaite, 2006).

6.2 Policies tackling the gender pay gap

Equal pay legislation has long aimed to address the gender pay gap in the EU. The principle of equal pay is enshrined in the Treaties and reinforced in the EPSR. Directive 2006/54/EC²⁹ on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation has consolidated and replaced existing directives adopted in the field since the 1970s. However, the implementation of the Directive across member states has raised concerns, as its assessments highlighted insufficient application or enforcement.³⁰ In fact, the gender pay gap has improved more slowly than expected.

The insufficient enforcement of equal pay legislations has called for supplementary actions. **Pay transparency** provisions are a prerequisite to overcoming the informational barriers that lead to gender pay gaps. The EC adopted a Recommendation in 2014 to support member states in enforcing the equal pay principle through pay transparency. This policy approach focuses on firms. It tackles the portion of pay gap produced within firms by requiring them to submit

²⁹ [Directive 2006/54/EC](#)

³⁰ [European Parliament resolution of 8 October 2015 on the application of Directive 2006/54/EC \(2014/2160\(INI\)\)](#)

reports or plans on gender equality including on pay, as happens in France (Besamusca, 2020). The von der Leyen Commission presented a proposal on binding pay-transparent measures³¹ in March 2021.

Acting on **wage-setting mechanisms** is a general policy that can address the pay gap. There are positive effects of introducing minimum wages for female workers (Bargain et al., 2019). The pay gap is due to unequal distribution of men and women across jobs and the wage scale, where women are often concentrated in low-paid jobs and in undermined occupations, such as healthcare and personal care services. Therefore, minimum wage setting can raise those wages that contribute to the overall gender pay gap in European economies (Besamusca, 2020).

The EC adopted the EU Action Plan 2017-2019 on tackling the gender pay gap to strengthen its action on equal pay.³² This plan recognises the underlying roots of gender pay gaps and invites them to be addressed, including both horizontal and vertical occupational segregation, differences in care responsibilities, and gender stereotypes. This approach is reflected in the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, which tackles gender inequality in its complexity and links gender pay gap to other inequalities.

The evolution of the policy approach marks policymakers' acknowledgement of the underlying causes of gender pay gaps and the need to tackle these causes holistically. The EIGE (2019b) has stressed the necessity of advancing gender pay gap policies in a direction that tackles its interlinkages with other dimensions of gender inequality. Policy approaches to gender pay gaps are interlinked with family policy, because this has an impact on the pay gap (Boll et al., 2016). Policy action on work-life balance can complement equal pay legislation by tackling inequality in the reproductive and care responsibilities assigned to men and women by society. These, in turn, impact on the effort and time that women put into their jobs and ultimately on their earnings differentials with respect to men (Bergmann et al. 2019; EIGE, 2019b).

The gender pay gap is also driven by the vertical segregation of women in the labour market. A lower wage gap for women in decision-making positions seems to exist, though evidence is mixed (Huffman, 2016; Abendroth et al. 2017; Balcar and Hedija, 2016). Finally, horizontal segregation also drives the pay gap, so it needs to be tackled by actions that promote a more equal distribution of men and women across occupations and sectors (Cortis and Meagher, 2012). Therefore, a **holistic approach** to the gender pay gap means tackling all the other aspects of gender inequality described in the previous sections.

6.3 Industrial relations actions to close the gender pay gap

Social partners have a key responsibility in the shaping of employment policy, for setting wages and negotiating labour market conditions and legislation. As social partners frame gender equality mainly in relation to labour market equality, they tend to prioritise agenda items such as gender pay gaps. The gender policy focus of trade unions, though, is often broader than that of employers' organisations (Elomaki & Kantola, 2020). In 2005, social partners at European

³¹ [Political guidelines for the next European Commission 2019-2024](#)

³² [COM\(2017\) 678 final](#)

level agreed the Framework of Actions on Gender Equality with four priorities, which included the gender pay gap (ETUC, UNICE/UEAPME & CEEP, 2005; Eurofound, 2014). Equal pay was also included in the ETUC action programme on gender equality 2016-2019 (ETUC, 2016). Social partners were also involved in developing the Gender Equality Strategy for 2020-2025, where equal pay for work of equal value is a key objective (European Commission, 2020a).

The EC proposal for binding pay transparency measures can be seen mainly as the result of trade union actions which called for more pay transparency (Hofman et al., 2020; ETUC, 2019b). The EU social partners had notably contrasting positions. Whereas almost all trade unions supported the introduction of these measures (even sacrificing their right to autonomous negotiation to some extent), employers' federations spoke out against any further actions in this area (Hofman et al., 2020). BusinessEurope, for example, indicated that "the impact of binding legislations on pay transparency is negligible to addressing the root causes of the wage gap (...) proven extremely complex to put in place in practice, with no effect in reducing the overall gender pay gap" (BusinessEurope, 2019, p. 9).

When it comes to overall wage setting rooted in different industrial relations regimes, trade unions traditionally call for centralised wage setting at the national or sectoral level, objectified valorisation of occupations, and a strong state involvement in ensuring gender equality measures. Employers' organisations, however, often prefer decentralised (company level) or even individualised systems of wage setting and pay regulation (Eurofound, 2014; OECD, 2004). In contrast to company-level and individual wage bargaining, which allows higher wage dispersion, centralised wage setting relates to lower overall wage inequality (OECD, 2004).

Concerning wage policy and equality, most European countries have an intermediate or high degree of centralisation (Donado & Wälde, 2012), which remains a key priority for trade unions (ETUC, 2020a). Decentralisation and individualised wage bargaining increase the margin for inequalities to occur, compared with fixed pay rates by occupation. Furthermore, the gender wage gap is about five percentage points smaller for those women covered by a collective bargaining agreement (European Commission, 2020b).

Although collective bargaining has the potential to close gender wage gaps, certain factors hinder this potential for women in non-standard employment (part-time and temporary work). For instance, some bargaining systems in low-paid, female-dominated sectors do not permit wage rises to catch up with male pay. Social partners could also increase their efforts to reach those women in non-standard employment for whom bargaining coverage is limited (OECD, 2020).

National social partners play a crucial role in equal pay and pay transparency. Examples include setting policies to raise pay in female-dominated occupations or sectors, establishing gender-sensitive job grading, and implementing action plans to remedy gender pay gaps revealed by company-level gender pay audits (European Commission, 2020b).

The Belgian gender pay gap law and the equal pay policy in Iceland illustrate national policies in which social partners were strongly involved. The Belgian gender pay gap law, passed in 2012, is an acknowledgement by the federal parliament of earlier social partner agreements on addressing gender bias in job classification systems. At the sectoral level, new job

classification systems were agreed by the social partners. At the company level, the law requires records that include gender-disaggregated data about employees, working hours and training opportunities. Companies with more than 50 employees must also produce a biannual gender-disaggregated report on the pay structure. The law relies on the action of social partners for its implementation and effectiveness, as work councils or trade union delegations are responsible for determining whether an action plan is required for gender-neutral pay structure (European commission, 2016).

In Iceland, the equal pay law holds employers responsible for ensuring that there is no gender-based discrimination in wage setting. Here, companies must obtain an equal pay certification by accredited external auditors, while social partners are responsible for monitoring compliance, including a certification renewal every three years (European Commission, 2019b). These two cases illustrate how different industrial relations regimes can fulfil the same ambitions.

7. Occupational safety and health and adverse social behaviour

Occupational safety and health (OSH) concerns all aspects of employee welfare in the workplace. OSH has evolved to cover psychosocial as well as physical risks. The aim is to reduce or remove work-related hazards and to improve working conditions, addressing the risks depending on the sector, occupation and job tasks.³³ Women's increased employment rates, gender differences in employment conditions, and the gendered division of labour also affect safety and health at work (EU-OSHA, 2013; cf. Allli, 2008). Hence, since women and men tend to have different jobs and work in different sectors, they are exposed to different types of workplace environments. Moreover, within the same working environment, women and men may experience different health and safety risks, especially regarding adverse social behaviours such as mobbing, bullying, and sexual harassment.

7.1 Understanding gender-specific OSH risks

OSH is a broad and interdisciplinary field that has been defined as “the science of the anticipation, recognition, evaluation and control of hazards arising in or from the workplace that could impair the health and well-being of workers, taking into account the possible impact on the surrounding communities and the general environment” (Alli, 2008: vii). The basic principle in OSH concerns ‘worker’s rights’ to decent working conditions and environments (Alli, 2008: 18). OSH policies work to ensure the wellbeing of employees, because a healthy and safe work environment contributes positively to productivity for the organisation (Alli, 2008).

OSH includes aspects of work organisation and working conditions but also features beyond the working context, such as in work-family balance. A theoretical framework, suggested by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA), takes all these aspects into account (EU-OSHA, 2003: 21). OSH outcomes in terms of work organisation are affected by the organisation’s traditions, teamwork, and/or level of authority, and also the individuals’ employment relationship (part- or full-time, permanent or temporary). Working conditions

³³ See [ILO website](#) for more information.

cover, for instance, working time (long hours, flexibility, etc), and tasks. Different kinds of jobs expose employees to different hazards or risks, including physical, chemical and/or biological risks, ergonomic risks with musculoskeletal demands and or monotonous tasks, violence, bullying and sexual harassment, and other stressors.

Bauer and Hämning (2014) point to changes in the economy over the past few decades that have implications for working conditions, such as increased global competition and technological innovations. These changes have intensified the workflow, which in turn increases pressures on employees. They stress the following highly important aspects for OSH:

Pace, intensity, and complexity of jobs and organizational changes increase; Employment contracts and labour relations are less binding, resulting in increased job insecurity and precarious job situations; Social relationships at work become more unstable due to continuous restructuring in organizations and changing employers; Jobs become more emotionally and socially demanding, as employees have to increasingly assure high customer binding and satisfaction; Boundaries between the paid job, private activities, and recovery times are increasingly blurred (Bauer and Hämning, 2014: 2).

The focus in OSH, they argue, thus needs to change from physical, biological, and chemical challenges to the psychosocial aspects of work.

As explained in previous sections, work organisation and working conditions differ for women and men. As result, OSH risk differs across gender. In the literature, such aspects are mainly discussed within the **labour process theory** that critiques work and work organisation: what employees do, what skills they have, command and control, payment etc. (cf. Hall 1993). An additional approach is to focus on **job quality**, since it is fundamental to health, safety, and wellbeing (Eurofound, 2020). In studying gender differences at work, job quality is defined by the same kind of content as covered in the OSH approach: physical environment (posture related, ambient, biological and chemical); social environment (social behaviour, social support and management quality); work intensity (quantitative demands, pace, interdependency and emotional demands); skills and discretion (cognitive dimension, decisions, participation and training); working-time quality (duration, working time, flexibility); prospects (employment status, career, job security and downsizing); and earnings (Eurofound, 2020).

The study of job quality and gender equality showed gender differences that depended on occupation and sector. On a general level, Eurofound (2020: 81) found that “gender inequalities do not exclusively affect women”. Women and men share some experiences of job quality, but in general, women’s situations tend to be poorer. The findings show that men report more quantitative demands and less support from managers and colleagues but have slightly better career opportunities than women. Women report higher exposure to emotional demands, and for those in low-skilled occupations, poor opportunities for training. The study confirms that, in terms of OSH, women are more exposed to psychosocial hazards (emotional demands, adverse behaviours), whereas men suffer more from physical demands (EU-OSHA, 2003). These inequalities in OSH outcomes are explained by gender segregation in the labour market, gendered differences in employment relations and working conditions, and women’s greater responsibilities in family matters (EU-OSHA, 2013).

7.1.1 Adverse social behaviour

The OSH discourse has increasingly focused on psychosocial wellbeing at work, and especially issues of adverse social behaviour (Eurofound, 2015). Adverse social behaviour concerns violence and harassment (Eurofound 2020: 48; Eurofound 2015:7). It includes physical, psychological and/or social behaviours, such as a criminal offence, abuse, threat, humiliation, mobbing, bullying and/or disrespect, conducted by one or more individuals (colleagues, managers, or a third party). It concerns unwelcome interpersonal acts and behaviours. It is discussed as: i) violence at work, ii) bullying and mobbing, and iii) sexual harassment (EU-OSHA, 2003).

Violence at work is defined as “incidents where persons are abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances related to their work, involving an explicit or implicit challenge to their safety, well-being or health” (Milczarek et al., 2010:16). The concept includes abuse, covering “the misuse of physical or psychological strength”, which could come in the form of harassment, bullying or mobbing; threats, including “the menace of death, or the announcement of an intention to harm a person or damage their property”; and assault, as “any attempt at physical injury or attack on a person including actual physical harm” (Di Martino et al. 2003: 3). Even though there is a distinction between physical and psychosocial aspects of violence, they often occur together (Di Martino et al. 2003).

Bullying and mobbing include different kinds of aggressive behaviour that aims to undermine a group or an individual, such as cruel attacks of professional or personal conduct, from which the offended finds it difficult to defend her/himself (Di Martino et al. 2003). It has been defined as “repeated, unreasonable behaviour directed towards an employee, or group of employees, that creates a risk to safety and health” (Milczarek et al., 2010:26). That is, if a person acts in ways that aim to threaten, humiliate, or undermine someone else, their behaviour is considered “unreasonable”.

The concepts of bullying and mobbing used to be discussed separately. The former stressed abuse or aggressive behaviour that was conducted by a single individual, whereas the latter was abuse conducted by a group of individuals (Di Martino et al. 2003). However, it has become more common not to make such a distinction regarding the number of abusers, although this can differ depending on national culture. Even though some countries use the word bullying, the meaning overlaps with the more common use of the word mobbing. In some cases, the word harassment is used for bullying and mobbing, which may cause this kind of abuse to be confused with sexual harassment (Hoel and Vartia, 2018).

The difficulties of nailing down what is covered by the concepts of bullying and mobbing has resulted in a long list of behaviours. According to Hoel and Vartia (2018: 12), “European definitions have continued to converge focusing on persistent and prolonged exposure to negative and aggressive behaviours of a primarily psychological nature” (see Di Martino et al. 2003: 7 for a selection). Drawing on Rayner and Hoel (1997), Cowie et al. (2002:34) summarised different types of bullying, such as: threat to professional status (e.g. belittling opinion, public professional humiliation, and accusation regarding lack of effort); threat to personal standing (e.g. name-calling, insults, intimidation, and devaluing with reference to age); isolation (e.g.

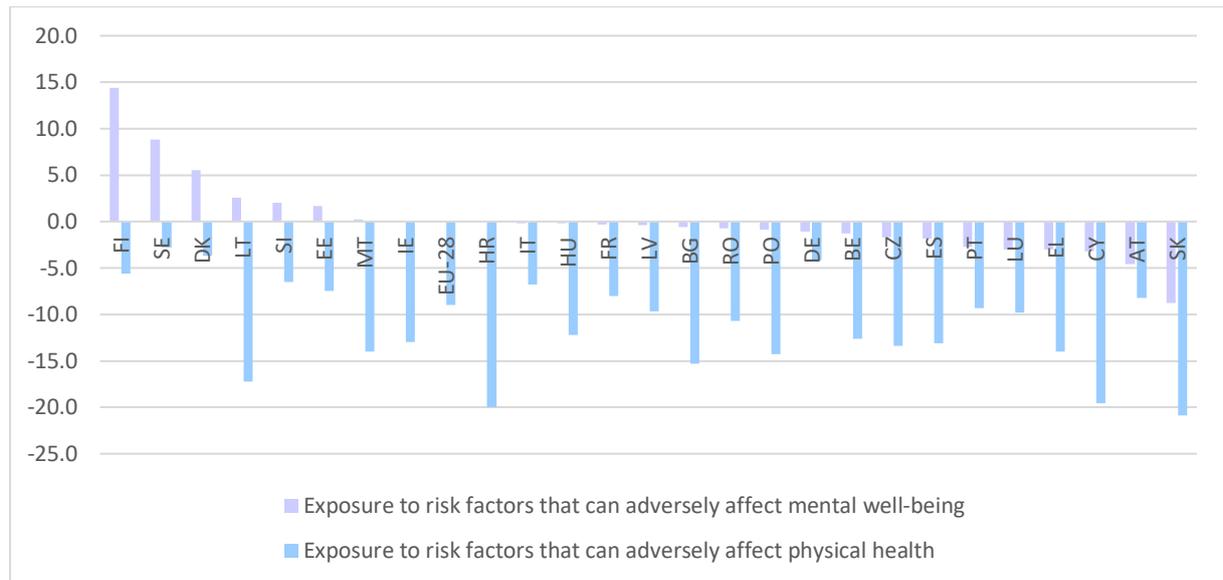
preventing access to opportunities, physical or social isolation, and withholding of information); overwork (e.g. undue pressure, impossible deadlines, and unnecessary disruptions); destabilisation (e.g. failure to give credit when due, meaningless tasks, removal of responsibility, repeated reminders of blunders, and setting someone up to fail).

Sexual harassment is distinguished from non-sexual violence at work and refers to the abuse of a sexual character taking place in the workplace (Siuta & Bergman 2019). Sexual harassment includes a range of behaviours. These behaviours can be non-verbal, such as gestures or displays; verbal, containing sexual suggestions; physical, which includes all kinds of bodily approaches; and also written – or cyber related – for instance in emails, SMS, and social media (Hoel & Vartia 2018). The formal definition given by Directive 2002/73/EC is: “any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature occurs, with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment”.³⁴ Fitzgerald et al. (1995) suggested a theoretical model of sexual harassment consisting of three interrelated dimensions. **Gender harassment**, which is sexual and sexist hostility (Siuta & Bergman 2019), refers to negative and sexist attitudes towards women, for instance, displaying pornographic objects or using sexualised epithets. Such acts are not intended to downgrade and humiliate by, for example, commenting on someone not being suitable for a certain job. **Unwanted sexual attention** concerns touching, repeatedly asking for dates, commenting on someone’s body, attempted and actual rapes. Finally, **sexual coercion** means to force someone into a sexually oriented ‘exchange’ – that is, an employment or career opportunity, or social inclusion conditioned by a sort of forced compliance.

There are difficulties in comparing country trends in adverse social behaviours, because of differences in the kinds of behaviours that are included in surveys and reports, as well as in routines of reporting incidents. Eurofound (2015) developed the index of Adverse Social Behaviours, which includes all workers reporting at least one form of violence or harassment as asked in the European Working Condition Survey (EWCS), expressed as a percentage of total workers. In a similar fashion, relying on data from the EU Labour Force Survey ad hoc module, Figure 12 displays gender-disaggregated data on exposure to risk factors that can adversely affect mental wellbeing (i.e. severe time pressure or overload of work, violence or threat of violence, harassment or bullying) or physical health (i.e. difficult work postures or work movements; handling of heavy loads; noise or strong vibration; chemicals, dust, fumes, smoke or gases; strong visual concentration; risk of accidents).

³⁴See also the [EIGE website](#) for the definition of sexual harassment.

Figure 12. Gap in percentage of women and men reporting exposure to risk factors that can adversely affect mental wellbeing and physical health (EU-27)



Source: Eurostat, EU LFS AHM, hsw_exp1, hsw_exp2, 2013 (missing values for the Netherlands).

Note: gaps are calculated as the percentage of women minus the percentage of men. Namely, positive values indicate a higher percentage of women exposed to risk factors, while negative values indicate a higher percentage of men. Gaps are expressed in percentage points.

An explanation of member state differences is whether violence and harassment are topics in the national political agenda, which increase the general awareness in the public (Eurofound, 2015; Bettio, 2019). The #MeToo movement raised global awareness for gendered violence at the workplace (O’Neil et al. 2018; Siuta & Bergmann, 2019), and awareness not only affects political debates, but also the ‘level of tolerance’ (Eurofound, 2015: 52), and thus the inclination to report incidents. In countries with high awareness, where there is information and knowledge, low tolerance and a public discussion among social partners, government and civil society, employees are more inclined to identify and report incidents.

This helps explain the ‘Nordic Paradox’, where Nordic countries, on the one hand, are known for vast and expansive gender equality policies, but on the other hand report high levels of gendered harassment and violence (Bettio 2019; O’Neil et al. 2018; cf. Hoel & Vartia 2018; Siuta & Bergman 2019). Lack of information is presumed to be the reason for low levels of awareness in Southern and Eastern European countries, as well as a lack of social sanctions, which lead to high tolerance and adverse social behaviours being considered ‘part of the job’ (Eurofound 2015: 52).

Mayhew’s (2011) rough estimation is that one out of five incidents is reported and that the most common forms of violence occur in jobs handling cash and in jobs with face-to-face interaction with a third party. Women experience more adverse social behaviours than men do, and according to Bettio (2019), about one out of five women have experienced violence or harassment at work. Non-native employees and those in temporary employment are at higher risk. Health and social work, transport and storage, accommodation and food, public administration, and education are especially exposed sectors. Adverse social behaviour is more

common in female-dominated occupations and those that are customer oriented, where it comes from colleagues and managers as well as customers and patients (Eurofound, 2020).

7.2 Policies tackling gender-specific OSH risks

The legislative ground for OSH in the EU is in Article 153 of the TFEU, which is about the role of the Union in supporting and complementing member states' actions for "a) improvement in particular of the working environment to protect workers' safety and health, and b) working conditions". The Framework Directive 89/391/EEC sets minimum requirements for OSH in member states. There are about 25 individual directives on different aspects of OSH. This policy approach consists of asking member states to set **binding rules** to which organisations have to comply to protect workers from OSH risks. Sexual harassment is more explicitly tackled in directives related to equal opportunities, such as Directive 2006/54/EC, without, however, developing specific provisions for member states to follow.

To provide **information and support practical implementation** in compliance with the regulations, the EU also provides non-binding guidelines on OSH, either dedicated to certain actors (e.g. employers) or to certain topics (e.g. chemical safety). Other important policy documents **setting priorities and line for action** are strategic frameworks. The EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2014-2020 stresses the importance of improving implementation of OSH regulations, for example through **labour inspections**, and to prevent work-related diseases and acknowledging demographic changes in the workforce and especially the ageing (European Commission, 2015).

Seven key strategic objectives are identified: consolidating national health and safety strategies; support for small and micro enterprises to better comply with health and safety rules; improving enforcement by member states, for example by evaluating the performance of national labour inspectorates; simplifying existing legislation; addressing the ageing of the European workforce; improving statistical data collection; and reinforcing coordination with international organisations (cf. Del Castillo, 2016).

General OSH policies have been criticised for being gender blind (Messing and Östlin, 2006). Standards were set around work traditionally conducted by men and using men as role models in design tools and instruments, despite physical differences within groups of men as well as between men and women. Moreover, there are gender disparities in return to work, when men are offered training and education more often than women. Therefore, the EU-OSHA (2014) suggested a gender-sensitive approach to OSH practices. Since women and men are different, OSH needs to be gender sensitive, that is, acknowledge that the sexes face different hazards at work. Gender mainstreaming is suggested as a means of fully considering the differences in conditions and needs of women's and men's working-life situations.

7.3 Industrial relations actions addressing gender-specific OSH risks

Because of horizontal gender segregation, women are generally at higher risk of exposure to psychosocial hazards that contribute to work-related stress. Men are more likely to experience fatal or non-fatal injuries at work or suffer health problems from exposure to physical agents

such as noise, because they are more in jobs that expose them to a higher risk of ‘accidents’ (EU-OSHA, 2003; Unison, 2016).

In the 1990s, national health and safety policies began to take account of psychosocial risks in the workplace. In the early 2000s the European Commission decided that the gender aspect should also be considered in OSH policies (EU-OSHA, 2003). This shift stimulated European social partners to develop further their traditional strong action on OSH, to establish a joint framework agreement on work-related stress, which aimed to increase the awareness and understanding of psychosocial risks in the workplace (ETUC et al., 2005). However, no gender perspective was included in this framework. A more recent ETUC position paper (2019d) on a new EU strategy on OSH clearly does take the gender aspect into account.

At national level, in several member states, social partners are key actors in defining national and sectoral strategies concerning OSH. For instance, in 1996, Belgium adopted the wellbeing law, which fundamentally reformed legislation on health and safety at work, paying more attention to the psychosocial aspect of OSH and allocating core tasks to the social partners (Wynne et al., 2014). In 2001 in Germany, the project Mental Health in the World of Work was launched to promote healthy working conditions. This was a combined initiative involving the federal government, Länder governments, social partners, social insurance partners, foundations, and enterprises (Wynne et al., 2014).

With the advent of the Me Too movement, policymakers, including social partners, started to prioritise workplace gender-based violence in gender-equality policies. Gender-based violence at work had not been included in the 2005 joint framework on gender equality (ETUC et al., 2005), but it is defined in more recent documents, such as the ETUC’s action programme on gender equality (ETUC, 2016) and the European gender equality strategy 2020-2025 (European Commission, 2020a).

Three documents signify crucial milestones for combating sexual harassment and violence at the workplace. The first was drafted by the European social partners (ETUC, BusinessEurope, CEEP and UEAPME) in 2007. This **framework agreement to tackle violence and harassment at work** concerns all types of harassment and violence. It acknowledges that some groups and sectors are more exposed than others though it does not have a specific gender focus (Crotti, 2019). The framework indicates preventive, protective, and supportive measures in the workplace. For prevention, social partners suggested awareness raising and training for managers and workers, workplace statements, and a trusted person for advice and assistance. Protection measures included discretion to protect the victim’s dignity and privacy, and timely investigation. Supportive measures comprise the reintegration of the victim into the workplace and sanctions for the perpetrators (Crotti, 2019). The aim of this framework was to increase awareness and information for employers and workers, providing them with an action-oriented framework to identify, prevent and manage problems (ETUC, BusinessEurope, UEAPME and CEEP, 2007). Implementation depends on national confederations. Several national trade unions have used the framework to press for measures to protect women from violent behaviour (ETUC, 2017a).

The second document is being used by social partners as leverage to improve policy in the field of sexual harassment. The **Istanbul convention** adopted by the Council of Europe in 2011 is the first instrument in Europe to propose legally binding standards to prevent gender-based violence, protect victims of violence and punish perpetrators (Jurviste and Shreeves, 2019). As of July 2020, it has been signed by all EU member states, and ratified by 21, but the accession of the EU to this convention is not yet finalised (European Parliament, 2020). The ETUC argues that the convention has the potential for a strong EU legal framework on gender-based violence and calls for a new directive to ensure its implementation (ETUC, 2017a). As for preventive measures, the convention concentrates on education. Protective measures include criminalisation of practices and cooperation between state agencies. Supportive measures focus on information for victims about available services and legal measures (Crotti, 2019).

Besides a strong EU legal framework on gender-based violence, the ETUC called for an ILO Convention on violence against women and men in the world of work (ETUC, 2017a). The **ILO Convention 190 concerning the elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work** (International Labour Organization, 2019) thus represents the third crucial document in this respect. The convention aims to set global standards, including specific ones for female workers, to ensure a safe and healthy work environment (Crotti, 2019). Concerning preventive, protective, and supportive measures, the ILO convention stresses the importance of national laws and collective bargaining (ILO, 2019c).

In addition to these three key documents, other actions have been taken. In 2017 the ETUC conducted a study, 'Safe at home – Safe at Work', which set out 10 recommendations for unions to tackle harassment and violence against women at work. These recommendations included tackling vertical segregation and encouraging male-oriented initiatives, such as ensuring women are in senior negotiating positions and encouraging male trade union leaders and negotiators to raise awareness and champion a zero-tolerance approach to violence against women (ETUC, 2017a; ETUC, 2017b).

8. Discussion and conclusion

This report aimed to build an analytical framework to study the role of social partners in addressing gender inequality in the EU. It provided a literature and data review to conceptualise and present different dimensions of gender inequality. It also sought to explore the relevance of industrial relations structures and tools to address gender inequality in European labour markets, by a broad overview of actions undertaken by social partners at EU and national level.

First, the report set out an analytical framework to study the relationship between social dialogue and gender inequality, by taking the multiple dimensions of gender inequality and their interrelatedness into account. The analytical framework is built on the acknowledgement that gender inequality manifests itself in several ways in the labour market and at the workplace. It recognises that the causes of gender inequality are embedded in national cultural, institutional, and economic contexts. The institutional environment includes the welfare state and labour market institutions, including social partners. The latter can thus

address gender inequality within the labour market, for instance through wage setting, and beyond, by influencing social policy or challenging gender norms.

Second, the report has dug into five dimensions of gender inequality in the labour market and at the workplace, with the aim to provide clear definitions and identify how social partners can address each of them. The sections dealt with the gender care gap, vertical and horizontal occupational segregation, the employment gap, the pay gap, gender-specific occupational health and safety risks, and adverse social behaviours. According to the analytical framework, these dimensions influence each other, in a way where theoretical explanations, policy responses and social partners' actions often overlap, highlighting the need for conceiving of gender inequality and related actions in a comprehensive and holistic way.

The Covid-19 pandemic has seen all these dimensions of gender inequality in the labour market regress, especially for young women, women with low qualifications and migrant women. Women's jobs are 1.8 times more vulnerable in this crisis than men's jobs, and women account for 54% of overall job losses, while they make up 39% of global employment.³⁵ Occupational segregation is key to understanding the disproportionate impact of the crisis on women. Women are over-represented in sectors negatively affected by the Covid-19 crisis, such as food and accommodation services or the wholesale and retail trade (ILO, 2020; Kulic et al., 2020).

Moreover, women often work in occupations deemed essential; for example, women make up 76% of healthcare workers in the EU.³⁶ These 'frontline workers' have faced major OSH risks by being exposed to infected patients and working long hours (Holst et al., 2020). Care workers performed other essential tasks during the pandemic, such as providing long-term care in old people's homes or cleaning services. Domestic workers, who tend to be mostly migrant women and undeclared workers, have been particularly at risk and faced significant income loss caused by lockdown measures (UN Women, 2020).

Nevertheless, the societal and cultural transformations brought about by the Covid-19 crisis might prompt a reassessment of care as an essential value in society, which could lead to a reevaluation of care professions. In addition, the gender care gap has worsened during the pandemic, but also become more evident. Early figures show that women tended to carry the additional burden of unpaid care and domestic work (Arlon et al., 2020).³⁷ While care work has taken centre stage during the pandemic, the fragility of care arrangements within contemporary European welfare states and the persistence of women's higher burden for providing care have been revealed (Daly, 2020).

However, the Covid-19 crisis could trigger welfare state reforms and might have been an opportunity for a shift in gender roles. As fathers spent more time at home, a reorganisation of the division of labour in the household in some cases matched the new circumstances (Reichelt et al., 2020). The recovery plans developed by member states will have to take gender inequality into consideration if the shortcomings of welfare systems that the crisis has laid bare

³⁵ www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/covid-19-and-gender-equality-counteracting-the-regressive-effects

³⁶ See the EIGE Gender Statistics Database, Employment in human health activities by sex and age.

³⁷ See also [Eurofound's 'Living, working and COVID-19' data](#).

are to be tackled. They also need to balance the gender asymmetric effects of the crisis and to comply with the EU principle of gender mainstreaming in EU funds. Therefore, while the current crisis seems to be making gender inequality worse, it could also offer new opportunities to address these longstanding issues. Social partners could transform their roles here if they were to seize these opportunities.

At the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis the European social partners urged governments to approve particular measures. In a joint statement, they argued for the involvement of national social partners in the design and implementation of national measures (ETUC, BusinessEurope, SMEunited and CEEP, 2020). This first joint statement did not include any gender-specific focus. In fact, EU member states first conducted gender-blind policies to respond to the economic shock, despite the higher impact of the crisis on women (Cook and Grimshaw, 2020). According to the UN COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker, few measures have been directed at supporting families to reconcile paid and unpaid work, such as paid leave for primary caregivers, reduced or flexible working arrangements or monetary compensation for parents (UN Women, 2020).

When it became clear that the Covid-19 crisis was likely to affect women and men differently, taking the gender distribution among certain sectors and family work arrangements into account, some social partners started to advocate for specific actions. For example, the IndustriAll Global Union called for a gender-responsive approach to the crisis. The proposed measures included ensuring women's representation in health and safety committees that define measures to protect workers from Covid-19. They pushed for specific protection of pregnant women workers during the crisis and urged governments to increase resources allocated to the prevention of domestic violence and protection of victims. The collecting of gender-separated data to analyse the impacts of Covid-19 in order to develop short- and long-term gender-responsive approaches was also advocated (IndustriAll Global Union, 2020). Awareness campaigns for union members on the equal distribution of housework and childcare between men and women were also included, calling for a change in social norms (IndustriAll Global Union, 2020).

The analytical framework and illustrative examples of the report highlight how gender inequality is embedded in country-specific contexts and that the role played by social partners varies according to several factors. First, their role depends on the **overall policy framework** to address gender inequality in a country. Second, the **industrial relations regime** in which social partners operate influences their role on gender inequality. Across industrial relations regimes, social partners impact labour market mechanisms in different ways, for example through centralised or decentralised bargaining, and can influence welfare, social and gender policies to a different degree and with different instruments. Third, the role of social partners varies depending on the **dimensions of gender inequality** to be tackled. They traditionally have higher interest and access to stronger instruments to influence aspects of gender inequality related to the labour market, such as collective agreements on wages. Soft actions such as awareness campaigns to overcome gender stereotypes or occupational segregation are emerging as a sign of their evolving role and commitment on gender equality matters. Fourth, because of the gender-occupational segregation and the different degree of unionisation across sectors, the

role of social partners varies at **sectoral level**. Therefore, the economic structure of a country and the relative importance of the sector influences gender equality and industrial relations, and the way they interact with each other.

Finally, the two **types of social partners** – trade unions and employers’ associations – seem to show different patterns in terms of sensitivity to the five dimensions of gender inequality, to the types of instruments used to tackle them and to the internal processes that embed gender equality in their own organisations. The remainder of the research in VIRAGE will investigate in more depth these differences in the role played by social partners in addressing gender inequality, through an EU-27 analysis and a country-case study approach. The latter considers four countries: Belgium, Italy, Poland, and Sweden. These countries differ in terms of gender inequality policy and outcomes, as well as in their industrial relations regimes. Moreover, a sectoral focus will allow social dialogue and industrial relations strategies to be explored in sectors that are prevalent in the country where female employment is high or where the role of the social partner is particularly developed. Through a comparative analysis, the final aim will be to learn, formulate and exchange lessons about the role of industrial relations structures and actors in tackling gender inequality across Europe, drawing from the empirical evidence gathered during the project.

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