

## Area H — Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women: reduced efforts from Member States

### Introduction

Gender equality is one of the fundamental values of the EU. Since 1996, the EU Commission has committed itself to a dual approach, which involves ‘mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies, while also implementing specific measures to eliminate, prevent or remedy gender inequalities’ (1). More recently, the 2013 Council conclusions on institutional mechanisms highlighted the mainstreaming principle within all of its activities as a specific goal. Gender mainstreaming (i.e. the ‘systematic consideration of the differences between the conditions, situations and needs of women and men in all policies and actions’ (2)) is also a focus area within the strategic engagement for gender equality 2016-2019.

Despite these commitments, EU’s approach towards realising gender equality across different policy areas remains fragmented and suggests insufficient continuity and progress. The publishing of the *Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016-2019* as a staff working document shows the declining importance of gender equality within EU policy in comparison with the previous strategy, which was published as a communication, having the status of soft law. In addition, gender mainstreaming is absent from some flagship

EU strategies (the Europe 2020 strategy) and gender perspective is weak in a number of policy areas of high importance (such as climate change or migration). The use of gender-mainstreaming tools, such as gender impact assessment and gender budgeting, also remains fragmented. Notably, the EU budget is still largely gender blind.

Besides mainstreaming gender equality within its own activities, the EU also works with Member States to strengthen their institutional mechanisms and support gender mainstreaming, through recommendations, guidelines and mutual learning events. Under the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), national governments have committed to promoting institutional mechanisms that support gender equality. This includes ensuring a high level of governmental responsibility for gender equality and mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programmes. EU and its Member States have also committed to strengthening policies and legislation by 2030 to promote gender equality and empower women and girls under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5. Progress in Area H underpins progress in other areas of the BPfA, making it vital to achieving gender equality.



(1) Quoted from <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/what-is-gender-mainstreaming>

(2) Quoted from <https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1185>

## Governments are less committed to promoting gender equality

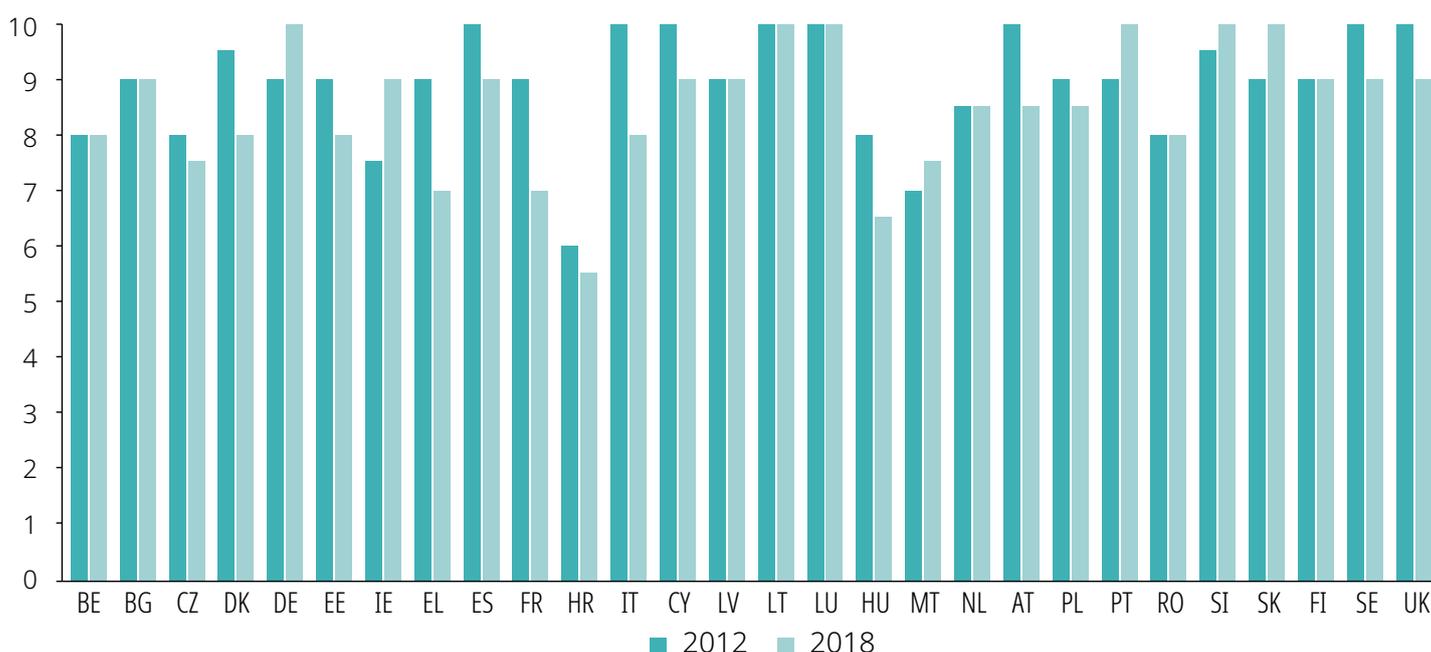
In 2018, the status of governmental responsibility in promoting gender equality was somewhat weaker than in 2012. This assessment is based on an indicator that examines the level of seniority of the person with ultimate responsibility for gender equality within the government; the existence of a dedicated government body for gender equality; its location within the government hierarchy and its functions; and existence of a national action plan on gender equality. The score on the indicator ranges from 0 to 10, with 10 standing for the highest status of governmental responsibility.

Since 2012 only six Member States have increased their score, while a further eight have stayed the same (see Figure 1). All others had lower scores than in 2012, which often resulted from small reductions across different aspects

of government efforts to promote gender equality, such as a less prominent location of the gender equality body within the government hierarchy or limiting of its functions. This trend is likely to limit progress in Area H more broadly, because government support for gender equality is considered crucial for the overall development and maintenance of institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women.

Multiple factors can help explain this trend, including a policy shift from gender equality to a broader human rights perspective (and the closely related trend of merging independent gender equality bodies with other anti-discrimination organisations), EU enlargement, the financial crisis and 'anti-gender' movements within certain Member States.

Figure 1. Status of governmental responsibility in promoting gender equality by Member State <sup>(3)</sup>



Sources: EIGE 2012 and 2018 survey data

Note: Compared to the report annexed to the Council of the EU conclusions on Gender-Equal Economies in the EU: The Way Forward (14254/19), the figure for Finland in 2018 has been revised from 7 to 9 points during final data quality checks.

## Gender mainstreaming weakened in many Member States

Member States' efforts to mainstream gender declined slightly since 2012, as measured by the status of governments' commitments to gender mainstreaming in public administration, the structures of gender mainstreaming, and the level of com-

mitment to using various methods and tools for gender mainstreaming. Of a total possible score of 16, the average score for Member States in 2012 was a disappointing 8.4. This reduced further to 7.4 in 2018. Figure 2 highlights this negative trend in

<sup>(3)</sup> In figure 1, the results for 2012 and 2018 are comparable only to a limited degree over time. This is because the methodology to collect data has changed slightly over time, putting more weight on assessment by independent experts rather than self-assessment by the government where possible. The values should be interpreted with caution, as they present the situation at different points in time, and the specific reasons for changes between these years are not reviewed in detail.

Figure 2. Change in gender-mainstreaming efforts from 2012 to 2018 (4)



Sources: EIGE 2012 and 2018 survey data

18 Member States, compared with improved scores in just nine Member States. This low — and falling — level of achievement is worrying, as gender mainstreaming represents a key strategy to support the equal consideration of women's and men's needs and interests in decision-making and in a range of key policy strategies.

Weaker efforts to mainstream gender are largely driven by limited use of various methods and tools for gender mainstreaming, and limitations in the structures of gender mainstreaming resulting from the absence of interministerial gender-main-

streaming structures, focal points responsible for gender mainstreaming in ministries and/or consultations with the governmental gender equality body. This can be partly explained by the emergence of a family-mainstreaming approach, which some Member States have implemented in place of gender mainstreaming. This approach considers the impact of actions on families and integrates family concerns throughout the policy process. Although it is not inherently negative, some Member States have harnessed the trend towards family mainstreaming to entrench 'traditional' values and oppose women's rights.

## Recommendations for action

At Member State level, institutional mechanisms would be strengthened by placing governmental responsibility for gender equality and the location of the government gender equality body at the highest possible levels. Systematic application of gender-mainstreaming tools and methods within all policy-making stages would help ensure that sufficient accountability measures are in place, and that gender equality bodies have responsibility for drafting, reviewing and analysing policy from a gender-sensitive perspective.

The EU could further support government efforts to promote gender equality by directly funding specific programmes that support this goal or including metrics on institutional mechanisms or gender mainstreaming as prerequisites for accessing

EU funds. The EU would benefit from regular use of gender-mainstreaming tools and measures across all levels of action.

Specific actions to ensure that sufficient emphasis is placed on further development of institutional mechanisms at EU level are of vital importance for the future progress and development of the post-Europe 2020 strategy and its coordination process across Member States. Finally, integration of gender equality in the relevant EU funds would facilitate monitoring of EU achievements, especially in the context of the SDGs. Defining gender equality as a distinct policy objective within the post-2020 multiannual financial framework would help to make the EU economy smarter, more effective and more gender equal.

(4) In figure 2, the results for 2012 and 2018 are comparable only to a limited degree over time. This is because the methodology to collect data has changed slightly over time, putting more weight on assessment by independent experts rather than self-assessment by the government where possible. The values should be interpreted with caution, as they present the situation at different points in time, and the specific reasons for changes between these years are not reviewed in detail.

## Further information

Beyond the developments presented here, the Beijing + 25 review has explored some other challenges related to institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women (Area H), including differences in staffing of gender equality bodies across Member States.

Further information on EU policy developments and trends

in the area of institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women can be found in EIGE's Beijing + 25 report. Some other policy briefs based on this report also present challenges that are closely related to institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women (such as Area G, Women in power and decision-making).

EIGE regularly produces reports reviewing different areas of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) or other EU policy priorities, as requested by the presidencies of the Council of the European Union. This factsheet is based on the report *Beijing + 25: The fifth review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the EU Member States*, prepared at the request of Finland's Presidency of the Council of the EU.

Other publications include:

- [Tackling the Gender Pay Gap: Not without a better work–life balance](#) (2019)
- [Gender Equality and Youth: Opportunities and risks of digitalisation](#) (2019)
- [Women and Men in ICT: A chance for better work–life balance](#) (2018)
- [Study and Work in the EU: Set apart by gender](#) (2018)

You can explore all of EIGE's previous BPfA reports and publications at <https://eige.europa.eu/beijing-platform-for-action>

To support the EU Member States and Institutions in gender mainstreaming, EIGE has also developed the [Gender Mainstreaming Platform](#), an online resource with methods, tools and good practices in mainstreaming gender into various policy areas of the EU.

Publications placed on the Platform include:

- [Gender Impact Assessment](#)
- [Institutional transformation](#)
- [Gender Analysis](#)
- [Sex-desegregated data and Indicators](#)

### European Institute for Gender Equality

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) is the EU knowledge centre on gender equality. EIGE supports policymakers and all relevant institutions in their efforts to make equality between women and men a reality for all Europeans by providing them with specific expertise and comparable and reliable data on gender equality in Europe.  
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European Institute for Gender Equality  
Gedimino pr. 16  
LT-01103 Vilnius  
Lithuania

### Contact details

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+370 52157444 



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