



LAYING THE GROUND FOR CHANGE

Women's economic empowerment
and ending economic violence



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GENDER EQUALITY AT CROSSROADS – A RETHINK TO RESET

Is a gender equal and inclusive European Union, underpinned by rights, justice, and economic prosperity for all a pipedream? Growing anti-democratic movements and shrinking civil society space have pushed back against women's rights and equality. These and new crises – COVID-19, the war in Ukraine, and energy and cost of living crises – have made delivering on a common goal crucial to values and identity a far sterner challenge. And an urgent necessity.

The recognition that women's participation in socio-economic development is critical to Europe's prosperity and crisis resilience has steered progress against gender inequality and discrimination in life and work. As has the fundamental principle of equal rights and opportunities for all.

Gender equality advanced, not delivered

Global and EU strategies, policies and laws have set goals, devised roadmaps, and framed action on issues impeding gender equality in different spheres. From the Beijing Platform for Action, the global legal framework to eliminate discrimination against women (CEDAW) and the European Pillar of Social Rights to the ground-breaking Istanbul Convention and the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 amongst others, these commitments have advanced equality. But not delivered it – so far. COVID-19 entrenched and exacerbated ine-

qualities. It exposed how vulnerable piecemeal and incremental equality gains are. Women were at the sharp end of the economic fallout from lockdowns: their financial independence battered by job losses, reduced income, and intensified care demands imposed by engrained gendered roles.

Top priorities for the EU

Existing socio-economic models and their power dynamics fuelled by gender norms were failing women pre-pandemic and still are. Gender-based violence at work and home, including economic violence, remains pervasive and intractable. Its extension into the digital world has heightened socio-economic impacts of gendered violence, highlighting new gaps in research, policy, and responses to address cause not effect.

The pandemic has forced a rethink to reset. An ageing Europe, a shrinking workforce, skills shortages and digital transformation make a compelling economic case for gender equality in the workforce. Women would also be empowered economically. Yet, barriers to such a win-win are also powerful, including violence against women. Economic violence in particular leaves women dependent on abusers - unable to leave or forces them to return by depriving them of all means for self-sufficiency.

Thus, women's economic empowerment and gender-based violence are top priorities



for the EU Trio Presidency of France, the Czech Republic and Sweden. Addressing the nexus between these issues means tackling workplace gender discrimination and inherent and deterrent issues, e.g. gender pay gaps, work-life imbalance, unaffordable care services and economic consequences of gendered violence. That means dismantling norms perpetuating gender inequality.

This paper aims to inform policy discussions on possible pathways for change at the

Swedish conference on gender equality in February, 2023.

The following pages look at how entrenched gender norms and roles affect the gender power balance, the world of work, and their correlation with economic violence and women's economic disempowerment. Key areas to advance women's economic empowerment and tackle economic violence are explored and summarised.

THE POWER OF GENDER NORMS

“Stereotypical expectations based on fixed norms for women and men, girls and boys, limit their aspirations, choices and freedom, and therefore need to be dismantled.”

EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025

By adolescence, when gender identity is formed, stereotypes have swayed boys' and girls' educational pathways with career repercussions. It ensures heavily segregated labour markets: women dominate the 'nurturing' teaching, health and care sectors; men, the valued science, technology and leadership roles. Masculinity is not given, however. It must be earned and repeatedly proven through life and different situations. Boys learn young that masculinity justifies violence to establish dominance, resolve conflict, or gain status. As men, that same justification is used both at home and work – with power, dominance and status tied to control over economic resources. A control stifling women's independence.

Yet, research shows men and women break gender norms when not penalized by those around them. Men's positive attitude to gender equality is also a protection against violence. Challenging masculinities, therefore, is an imperative for men and boys. And for women and girls.



WOMEN'S ECONOMIC (DIS)EMPOWERMENT

A strong, social Europe built on equal rights and opportunities to deliver shared prosperity and sustainable economic growth is a founding vision and promise of the European Union. Success demands breaking the cycle of socio-economic violence against women. Despite progress, structural, cultural, and practical barriers to gender equality and a life without violence remain deep-rooted, with consequences for women's economic independence – and the European vision.



Socio-economic violence

Socio-economic violence in the public sphere is both a cause and an effect of dominant gender power relations in societies. It may include denial of access to education or (equally) paid work (mainly to women), denial of access to services, exclusion from certain jobs, denial of pleasure and the enjoyment of civil, cultural, social and political rights. In the case of LGBT+ people, they may even be subject to criminalisation.

Council of Europe



WHAT'S HOLDING WOMEN BACK?

More people in work in the EU is pivotal to European economic competitiveness and resilience, especially post-COVID-19. A new goal of 78% of the population in work by 2030 is a headline action point of the European Pillar of Social Rights. While the EU average employment rate is just under 75%, the figure masks a major cause and consequence of gender inequality. Only 69.5% women are in paid work compared to 80.2% men – an enduring gender gap.

Care and the motherhood penalty

In 2021, nearly 1 in 3 women in the EU were not in paid work due to unpaid care duties.

It was less than 1 in 10 for men. Although more women are in work today, men have not reciprocated as much on work at home. Stereotyping means women still do the bulk of unpaid care – 40% women look after children for at least four hours a day in contrast to 21% men. It's the same share among employed women with unemployed partners. As gendered pay and labour markets generally ensure women earn less than men, families use this financial logic in deciding the woman leaves a job or works part-time to provide unpaid care. With the earnings gap greater among couples with children than other groups, the

92%

In the EU 92% woman are regular carers.

68%

In the EU 68% men are regular carers.

81%

In the EU 81% woman are daily carers.

48%

In the EU 48% men are daily carers.

Gender inequalities in care and consequences for the labour market, EIGE, 2021

“Empowering women in the labour market also means giving them the possibility to thrive as investors and entrepreneurs”.

Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025

- ▶ pay difference is especially relevant for families with several children and in countries with high living costs. Even where subsidized childcare exists, women's lower salaries is a deciding factor in reducing work hours. With nearly 1 in 3 women in Europe working part-time, almost four times more than men, the decision has lifelong repercussions. It curtails opportunities for professional and individual growth, and lifetime earnings. Care breaks thus contribute to women getting an average of 29% less pension than men at 65 years.

Difficult choices

A lack of accessible and affordable care services ensures women continue to make difficult choices on employment. Nearly half of European households in need of formal long-term care services cannot afford it, and although an EU-average goal of a third of children under 3 years in early childhood education and care was met in 2019, many Member States have yet to reach it. Gender role expectations as well as women's fewer economic resources are at play in women using less external care support than men. The cycle is completed with care outsourced to largely migrant women in low-paid, precarious, and often informal work domestically or institutionally – reinforcing care as lowly qualified and therefore, of little social and economic value.

Gendered labour – low income and status for working women

A numerical gender balance in the labour market will not be a panacea for women's economic empowerment without equal pay for equal work and work of equal value. Despite EU commitments on equal opportunities, the average gender pay gap was 13% in 2020, impacting lifelong earnings and pensions.

Taxation further affects women's incomes.

60%

of minimum wage earners in the EU are women



Statistical brief: gender balance in business and finance, EIGE, 2021

Most EU countries have moved away from joint taxation systems supporting single breadwinner family models that disincentivise women from working. However, individual taxation policies still largely feature joint tax and benefit measures. The result is high taxes for secondary earners – mostly lower paid women – effectively discouraging uptake of work or longer working hours. Currently, only two EU countries – Finland and Sweden – have truly individual income tax systems.

Working women are also left financially exposed by gender norms shaping the world of work: A labour force highly segregated by gender and value, and workplace discrimination exacerbated by a hierarchy where only 1 in 3 managers are female. Women dominate sectors with low pay, status and limited career opportunities. Their overrepresentation in the informal economy and precarious work in sectors such as domestic work, care and hospitality, meant their jobs and already low incomes were badly hit by COVID-19.

Women informal workers in Europe and Central Asia were estimated to have lost 70% of their income in the pandemic. Businesswomen were not exempt either. In Sweden for example, public support initiatives during the pandemic largely benefited male-dominated sectors, while men's approval rates for grants were about double those for women.



370 billion EUR

- estimated annual cost to the EU from loss of women in work due to care.

Beijing +25 policy brief: Area F - Women and the economy: care responsibilities and insecure jobs limit women's empowerment, EIGE, 2020

7.8 million women

prevented from joining workforce in 2018 due to care compared to 460,000 men.

Gender equality and long-term care at home, EIGE, 2020

Women in the EU are:



93%

of all childcare workers and teachers' aides

Eurostat, 2021

90%

of 9.5 million domestic workers

European Commission, 2021

78%

of health workers

Eurostat, 2021

73%

of teachers

Eurostat, 2021

► The digital transformation, with a more automated workforce likely in low-skilled sectors where women mostly work, offers gendered opportunities and risks. Less than 20% of both ICT specialists and graduates in the EU are women and although women make up 41% of scientists and engineers, they remain a significant minority in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields overall. Job creation in a green economy and the digital transformation will benefit sectors dominated by men. An analysis of the energy sector predicts new green jobs in OECD countries will mostly be in utilities, construction and manufacturing – sectors employing almost 31% of all working men, compared to 11% for women.

Segregation through education

Barriers to women's economic empowerment appear in childhood and are entrenched throughout their education. Schoolgirls can often feel they are unable to engage in certain activities or subjects because of their gender. While women university graduates in the EU now slightly outnumber men, their dominance in health, humanities, arts and education studies has repercussions for accessing well-paid jobs, lifetime earnings and pensions. It also perpetuates gender stereotyping and segregation in the labour force.

Gender-based violence - a socio-economic crisis

With traditional and stereotypical masculinity norms known to be risk factors, gender-based violence goes far beyond the physical and sexual harm of intimate partner violence receiving most policy and intervention focus. Women can suffer a diverse and complex mix of violence at home and work, underpinned by gender and social norms and their power dynamics. The use of economic, psychological and cyber violence, coercive control, and/or physical and sexual violence has long-term socio-economic impacts. Economic violence ensures women

25% fall in earnings among women experiencing intimate partner violence in Sweden,

14% for men



Can Work Be Safe, When Home Isn't? Impact of intimate partner violence on work, workers, and workplaces in Sweden, Western Education, 2021

366 billion EUR

- the cost of gender-based violence in the EU - 79% related to violence against women

EIGE, 2021

are financially dependent on abusers. No access to or control over money or other resources prohibits many women from escaping or forces their return to abusers. It also inhibits women's economic independence long after abusive relationships have ended. With economic, psychological and cyber violence not reliant on physical presence nor time limited, they can continue indefinitely.

A job can provide an element of economic independence and security, but getting work or staying in it is another matter. Abusers use diverse tactics to stop women from working, including violence and conflict before job interviews and harassment at work. Threats that force women into hiding keep them there, preventing a normal life involving work.

Frequent absences from work because of injuries, court appearances, medical or social services' appointments, and an inability to focus on the job resulting in poor performance make staying in work extremely challenging. It also pushes already vulnerable women into low-paid, part-time and precarious work.

A lack of awareness of such violence and its impacts within society and institutions such as



What is economic violence?

“...behaviours that control a person’s ability to acquire, use, or maintain economic resources, thus threatening their economic security and potential for self-sufficiency.”

Adams, Sullivan, Bybee and Greeson, 2008 cited in Understanding and responding to economic abuse, Sharp-Jeffs, N. 2022

Economic violence – what an abuser does:

Economic control – tracks and bars a woman’s access to resources and ability to use them

Employment sabotage – stops a woman from applying for or taking a job, curbs opportunities for career growth, harasses a woman at work

Economic exploitation – spends all funds, runs up debt, takes out loans in a woman’s name without her knowledge or through coercion – ‘sexually transmitted debt’ – and ruins a woman’s credit score

Compiled primarily from: Measuring abusive behaviors: Is economic abuse a unique form of abuse? Stylianou, A. M., et al. 2013 / His Money or Our Money: Financial Abuse of Women in Intimate Partner Relationships, Branigan, E., Grace, M., 2005



“Too many people still violate the principle of gender equality through sexist hate speech and by blocking action against gender-based violence and gender stereotypes.”

EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025

- ▶ social services, is a major barrier to effective prevention and support – and perpetuates dependency on social protection.

Workplace violence, gendered and prevalent

Violence is not always left at home, nor private. It can often follow into the workplace and be very public. A 2021 study on workplace violence in Sweden found at least 1 in 3 employees had been impacted by intimate partner violence as victims – mostly women – or colleagues of victims. Among victims of such violence, nearly 1 in 10 also experienced it at or near work. A fifth of women employees worked with someone using abusive behaviour, far more than men. Violence is manifest in diverse ways: stalking or harassment; derogatory emails, phone calls and posts on social media; contacting colleagues; and threats.

Non-intimate partner violence against women in the workplace is as extensive: 1 in 3 women in the EU had been sexually harassed at work in the most recent data from 2014. For qualified professional women and those in top management jobs, that figure was 3 in 4.

Women in all sectors and levels affected

Migrant women, women domestic, social, health and care workers and others in low paid and precarious work are especially vulnerable to workplace harassment and violence. However, all sectors are affected, e.g. 63% of women transport workers across Europe have suffered violence on the job, while 45% of Swedish women finance employees have been harassed at work. Senior-level women are not exempt either. Prevalence of gender-based

violence and harassment on company boards in the EU grew from nearly 12% in 2010 to more than 26% in 2018.

The lives and livelihoods of women in the public domain such as women’s rights activists, cultural workers, journalists, lawyers and political leaders are threatened by violence as well. Much of it online and often involving peers. It is used to intimidate and silence.

Such violence and the aggressive nature of politics can push women parliamentarians out of politics or deter them from entering it. As a result, women’s ability to shape and drive





change in every area of life and work as political leaders and decision-makers is significantly diminished.

Generally, workplace violence is tackled only as an employment policy issue – not as the result of the unequal division of power and resources between women and men. Women who suffer violence or harassment at work are more likely to leave jobs or the labour market entirely because of it. Promotions can also be blocked. Each of these scenarios impact their financial security.

“As he stood and shouted and swore all that he could in front of my workplace where everyone could hear him, it was obviously hard to keep it together and focus on the work once he got tired and left the place.”

Can Work Be Safe, When Home Isn't?
Impact of intimate partner violence on
work, workers, and workplaces in Sweden,
Western Education, 2021

WHAT WILL IT TAKE?

“Everyone should be safe in their homes, in their close relationships, in their workplaces, in public spaces, and online.”

EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025

Women’s economic empowerment entails bold vision and profound change in every area of life. It requires a committed and equal partnership between women and men in creating new social and economic models and power dynamics. Free of existing norms, it would redefine roles, expectations, and values independent of gender. At a minimum, it needs men to step up, rethink what masculinities can mean in the 21st century – and positively engage on gender equality.

It necessitates breaking the cycle of socio-economic violence against women at home and work. That involves removing tacit and explicit permission and acceptance of gender-based violence in culture, society, economy, law and its enforcement – and understanding its long-term impacts.





CONNECTING THE DOTS

Gender-based violence is closely linked with women's economic empowerment. This link needs to be further elaborated both in theory and practice. Research shows men may support gender equality conceptually but defend the status quo in reality. Overcoming men's fear of what gender equality could mean for their masculinity and economic dominance involves men and women of all ages.

Early interventions essential

Global data shows a link between people experiencing violence as a child or seeing their parent suffering it – and carrying it out as an adult. Boys and girls exposed to more than four abusive experiences, including emotional and sexual, are 7 to 8 times more likely to commit intimate partner violence in adulthood. Understanding and intercepting this through tailored interventions when still young could help children unlearn beliefs around such behaviour. Doing so would break the circle of violent behaviour passing from one generation to the next.

Women in jobs when partners are not, or women becoming more economically independent can be more at risk of intimate partner violence, including economic violence. Research in Sweden spotlights how class and education can undercut such violence. Education opens doors to higher paid work and more opportunities later in life, and control over one's financial situation. Raising awareness of economic violence widely throughout society is important – teaching girls financial skills and about economic independence from school age would be empowering.

Strengthening responses

Women are not equally protected from gender-based violence in law or practice

Swedish law protects child witnesses to domestic violence

Since 2021, children witnessing violence within the family are legally protected as victims of crime in acknowledgement of the damage caused. A parent committing violence on a partner before a child is guilty of both assault and of violating a child's integrity.

- 9,000 incidents were reported to the police in first year
- Nearly 1,000 indictments include 'violation of a child's integrity'
- Conviction carries up to 2 years in prison, and 4 years for more serious cases

across the EU. Differences in definitions of its various forms, in national policies and legislation, including what constitutes a criminal offence and what is culturally acceptable, prevent a common understanding and response. This is compounded by low prosecution and conviction rates, lack of up-to-date comparable data to determine the true scale and scope of economic violence – and its impact. Ratification and implementation of the landmark Istanbul Convention would address many of these issues.



Deeper research would reinforce slowly growing understanding on links between violence against women, working life and economic empowerment. It would inform more effective legal and practical answers to get buy-in from enforcers, institutions, employers, and society to work – particularly as strong social norms are challenged. For example, the lack of long-term safe and affordable housing for survivors often reliant on social welfare is a key factor in many women returning to, or remaining in, abusive relationships.

Homelessness undermines a survivor’s ability to work and long-term economic security. In Italy, during COVID-19, prosecutors ruled the perpetrator of domestic violence had to leave the family home, not the survivor.

Sexually transmitted debt

Systems and services can inadvertently facilitate and perpetuate economic violence by not knowing of or understanding its manifestation. Banks and financial institutions can ensure women are not impoverished, forever in debt, and



- ▶ penalized from partners emptying or blocking joint accounts, running up overdrafts or taking out loans in a woman's name without consent. By understanding what economic violence is, they can hold the abuser to account for debts – not the victim.

Supportive work policies

ILO's Convention 190 – an international treaty on everyone's right to work free from violence and harassment in the world of work, including gender-based violence – is a global first. It defines work-related violence and harassment, its settings, and the roles of States, employers and workers' organizations in preventing and eliminating it. Though it provides an opportunity for concerted action to stamp it out, only five European countries have ratified it so far.

States and employers can go further. Policies such as flexible work hours and paid leave for women affected by all types of violence can be a deciding factor in keeping them in jobs. Vodafone set a precedent among employers in 2019 with a global policy on domestic violence. It provides up to 10 days of paid leave and specialist support, and training for managers.

Desegregated education – catalyst for change



Education and its impact on earning power and economic independence in adulthood affects equality in household decision-making later in life. First base for women's full participation in the workforce, however, is a desegregated education system unbound by stereotypes.

For that, education needs overhauling and educators investing in as catalysts for change. They are pivotal to changing gender norms, girls' aspirations to ensure economic autonomy, and to securing women's equal benefit from the green economy and digital transformation.

Efforts in the EU to change the status quo primarily focus on getting girls and women into STEM subjects and fields. The digital upskilling of teachers, students and adults is a key education action point in post-COVID

Laws on right to paid leave

Italy:

In 2015, Italy was the first EU Member State to enact law to provide paid leave for domestic violence survivors. It allows for up to 3 months.

Ireland:

Ireland will be the latest when it passes a Bill to give 5 days of paid leave a year.

Domestic violence leave, Report and Recommendation/Five days leave promised for domestic violence victims, Businessplus, Ireland

1.2 million jobs could be created in EU resulting in an



820 billion EUR

increase in GDP by 2050 – if women's under-representation in STEM jobs is tackled.

Beijing +25 policy brief: Area F – Women and the economy: care responsibilities and insecure jobs limit women's empowerment, EIGE, 2020

national resilience and recovery plans but does not intersect with other areas or mainstream gender in resourcing economic recovery. Few initiatives currently focus on training teachers to mainstream gender equality in learning and school culture, and on getting more men into teaching or boys and men into education, health, care and social studies.

An open workforce

Desegregating the labour market is equally essential but represents an even greater challenge. Despite many initiatives on labour desegregation focusing on women and STEM, many STEM women graduates still go into teaching, not careers they are qualified for. Approaches to get women into well-paid jobs or leadership roles – building their skills and confidence, addressing implicit bias in recruitment and pro-





Sweden's job search assistance for migrants

A pilot initiative tailored for migrants to speed up their entry into the labour market helped women and men equally. Its effectiveness was measured against generic support from the Public Employment Services (PES).

- Programme designed to work for all new arrivals, regardless of qualifications, experience and care responsibilities
- Informal skills and traits are matched to jobs, not just formal qualifications
- Gender equal outcome goals, evaluated through active management
- 37% women and 43% men in work or studies 15 months into project - 10 percentage points above those receiving standard support

Arbetsförmedlingen, 2020

► motion, and valuing the feminine – have also not yielded hoped-for gender dividends.

Few efforts aim to attract men into education, health, care and social work. Men's deterrence from these female dominated sectors seen as of little value and low-skilled, is compounded by low pay, job insecurity, poor working conditions and few opportunities for career progress. The social and financial revaluing of roles and sectors dominated by women would transform the landscape, beginning with rapid progress on closing gender pay, earnings and pension gaps and action on minimum wages.

Intersectionality key for results

Women's access to 'men's work' and their greater economic empowerment is more likely if policies crosscut to identify holistic responses. Women with disabilities, from migrant or ethnic minorities, LGBTI, and both young and old women are not only especially vulnerable to violence, but also face specific discriminatory hurdles to get and progress in jobs.

EU Directives on Racial Equality and Employment Equality have extended discrimination grounds to cover gender intersections with age, disabilities, race etc. Ineffective national implementation of the Directives maintains structural barriers with an economic cost: an estimated 224-305 billion EUR loss in GDP and 88-110 billion EUR in lost tax revenue. Oversight for effective implementation would bring more of the most vulnerable women into jobs and society. Particularly migrant women.

Overcoming barriers to women's economic participation is vital given the EU workforce will have shrunk by 18% by 2070 and nearly 1 in 3 people will be above 65 years by 2080. With a third of households currently composed of just one person, many if not most people will rely on formal care – not family – for support in the future.

Valuing care and unpaid work

Currently, 80% of care in Europe is provided by family and friends. However, no economic

Upgrading care work

France's Ségur de la Santé consultation process launched during COVID-19 resulted in an **€8.2 billion annual budget to revalue salaries of care workers in hospitals and health system.**

French Ministry for Solidarity and Health, 2021

value is put on unpaid work – mostly done by women – as it is considered non-market work. As such, it is excluded from GDP calculations and policy-making radars.

De-gendering care by destigmatizing and rewarding unpaid and paid caregiving would help shift gender stereotypes and be a potent enabler of women's economic security. Setting standards for qualification and career growth in paid care would benefit women and potentially bring more men to the sector.

Real investment in formal care from childhood to old age would minimize informal and exploitative work in the sector, provide a critical service to all of society, and further unlock women's economic potential. By making Swedish municipalities legally responsible for publicly funded home and institutional care for any elderly person needing it, the State became the principal caregiver – not women.

Affordable childcare bears fruit

Family-friendly policies can boost women's employment rates. Affordable and subsidized childcare are the most effective ways to get more women into jobs – and more equal sharing of unpaid care responsibilities at home. Malta's introduction in 2014 of free childcare for under 3-year-olds when both parents are working or studying, saw women's employment rise by more than 11 points to 65.5% by 2019. When the Netherlands reduced childcare fees by 50% for all parents along with increased tax credits for low-income working parents, it too saw more women in jobs and working longer hours.





- ▶ Meeting revised Barcelona targets in the EU Care Strategy on childcare provision by 2030 and compliance with the EU Directive on Work-Life Balance should enable more women to work and be economically independent. Similar goals and support initiatives for unpaid long-term care of family members could do the same for even more women. With boys and girls who see fathers share care and housework and mothers in jobs outside the home having more positive gender equality attitudes and behaviour as adults, investing in care has a value far beyond the economic.

Financial security underpins economic empowerment

A job alone will not empower women economically. Reducing the EU gender pay gap, currently 13%, has generally been less about equal pay for equal work than men's wages not rising as much. Ten EU countries have laws on pay transparency, many with reporting obligations and mostly for companies with more than 50 staff. While the EU Pay Transparency Directive marks another step forward, albeit focusing on companies of at least 250 people, reporting on its own in the EU has proved insufficient.

Active measures by Sweden's Discrimination Ombudsman take a crosscutting approach. Employers are obliged to apply a series of actions in five work-related areas, including pay and other employment terms, to prevent discrimination on all grounds covered by law. These include gender, age, disability, ethnicity, religion or other beliefs, and sexual identity, orientation or expression. Annual pay surveys must also be carried out. Employers with at least 25 staff are required to document their work on all active measures, while employers with 10-24 employees report on pay surveys.

A life-cycle perspective

Resolving the gender pay gap would have significant outcomes for women's lifetime earnings and pensions, especially those not working or working part-time due to care. Some countries provide pension credits to buffer the impact of care on a woman's long-



Photo: Mostphotos

term financial security. Whereas Spain provides social security contributions for unpaid long-term carers, including those who have had to leave jobs.

Although closing the gender pay gap is a headline objective for equality, its impact on women's economic empowerment would be compromised without tackling gender discrimination in taxation.



Pay transparency

Spain:

2020 law requires companies to make public information on employee salaries. Decisions on how basic salaries and benefits are made must be explained. A fine up to €187,000 applies if companies don't comply. A 4-year strategy for gender balance in company with more than 50 staff is also needed.

France:

2018 labour law obliges companies to report annual performance on women's economic empowerment in 5 areas: ending gender pay gap, opportunities for pay increases and for promotion, no penalties upon return from maternity leave, and 4 of 10 highest paid positions in company held by women. Fines of up to 1% of wage bill impossible if performance not reported or if score is below 75/100. This builds on French companies' legal requirement to annually report on gender equality on pay, recruitment, working conditions and work-family balance.



Empowering women at work, Government laws and policies for gender equality, ILO, 2021

Gender equality policies

Some countries use certification to showcase an organization's commitment to gender equality. In **Italy**, a company with a 'pink sticker' for its gender equality friendly policies has several perks. These include reduced social security contributions and scores considered in the allocation of national or European funds and tenders.

Tax systems

Austria's tax system with defined goals to encourage a more equal sharing of paid and unpaid work, get more women into the labour force, and cut pay gaps, made the connection.

SUMMARY

“...a gender equal Europe where gender-based violence, sex discrimination and structural inequality between women and men are a thing of the past...”

EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025

Europe is in the throes of multiple and simultaneous crises that undermine gender equality gains. COVID-19 also forced a face-off with some realities.

Women bearing the brunt of job and income loss, the spike in gender-based violence, and the care crisis dovetailed to underscore that the EU's economic recovery, resilience and prosperity was intertwined with women's economic empowerment. It cannot exist without ending economic violence against women, a connection largely missing from policy discourse so far.

Women's equal participation in the work-force, a cornerstone of economic empowerment, requires profound social changes for socio-economic success in the digital transformation and green economy. Silo approaches to realize change have not been the answer. Desegregating gendered education and labour is tied to tackling gender-based violence and discrimination in its totality. It entails reshaping masculinities and gender stereotypes – starting early with boys and girls. As childhood experiences impact gender-based violence and gender equality at work and home in adulthood, pre-adult interventions could be key. With school a primary arena for learning behaviours and setting beliefs as well as deciding career paths, education and educators can catalyse change, but need investing in. The focus on gender equality in STEM could be matched with similar efforts on care, health and education.

Enabling more women to work means a medley of actions that do not channel more women into low-paid, precarious jobs in the care sector. Putting social and economic value on unpaid and care work, subsidizing childcare provision for all, and investing in the 'social economy' set to explode in the face of EU demographic realities – without putting the onus on women to be the carer – are pathways.

EU directives to realize gender equality in all spheres of life and work are steps to over-



come structural barriers to women's economic empowerment. Post-COVID recovery and resilience funds offer a unique opportunity to resource gender mainstreaming in national plans to deliver results.

Universal definitions and legal responses on economic violence backed by up-to-date comparable data would lay solid ground in combatting it. ILO's Convention 190 and the Istanbul Convention provide normative legal frameworks. However, laws need cross-the-board buy-in from employers, enforcers and

others, and resources to follow through. Supportive work policies such as flexible hours and paid leave would help women survivors and victims to stay in jobs, together with initiatives against sexually transmitted debt.

The economic case for gender equality is powerful. The prize of women's economic empowerment and a life free from violence is even more potent. It would underpin the fulfilment of a promise of a gender equal Europe built on equal rights, opportunities and shared prosperity.

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A strong, social Europe built on equal rights and opportunities to deliver shared prosperity and sustainable economic growth is a founding vision and promise of the European Union. Success demands breaking the cycle of economic violence against women. Despite progress, structural, cultural, and practical barriers to gender equality and a life without violence remain deep-rooted, with consequences for women's economic independence – and the European vision.

This publication is produced by the Swedish Gender Equality Agency as part of Sweden's presidency of the Council of the European Union, 2023. It explores the nexus of economic empowerment of women and gender-based violence, focusing on economic violence.

The Swedish Gender Equality Agency is a government agency under the Ministry of Employment, created to contribute to effective implementation of the Swedish gender equality policy.

The Agency works on policy-analysis and follow-up of progress against the gender equality goals, coordination and support to government agencies and universities on gender mainstreaming, as well as international exchange and cooperation. It provides government grants to women's mobilization, gender equality projects and prevention of men's violence against women in Sweden.

An important part of the mandate is supporting implementation and monitoring of Sweden's national ten-year strategy to prevent and combat men's violence against women, including female genital mutilation, honour-related violence and oppression, as well as prostitution and trafficking in human beings.