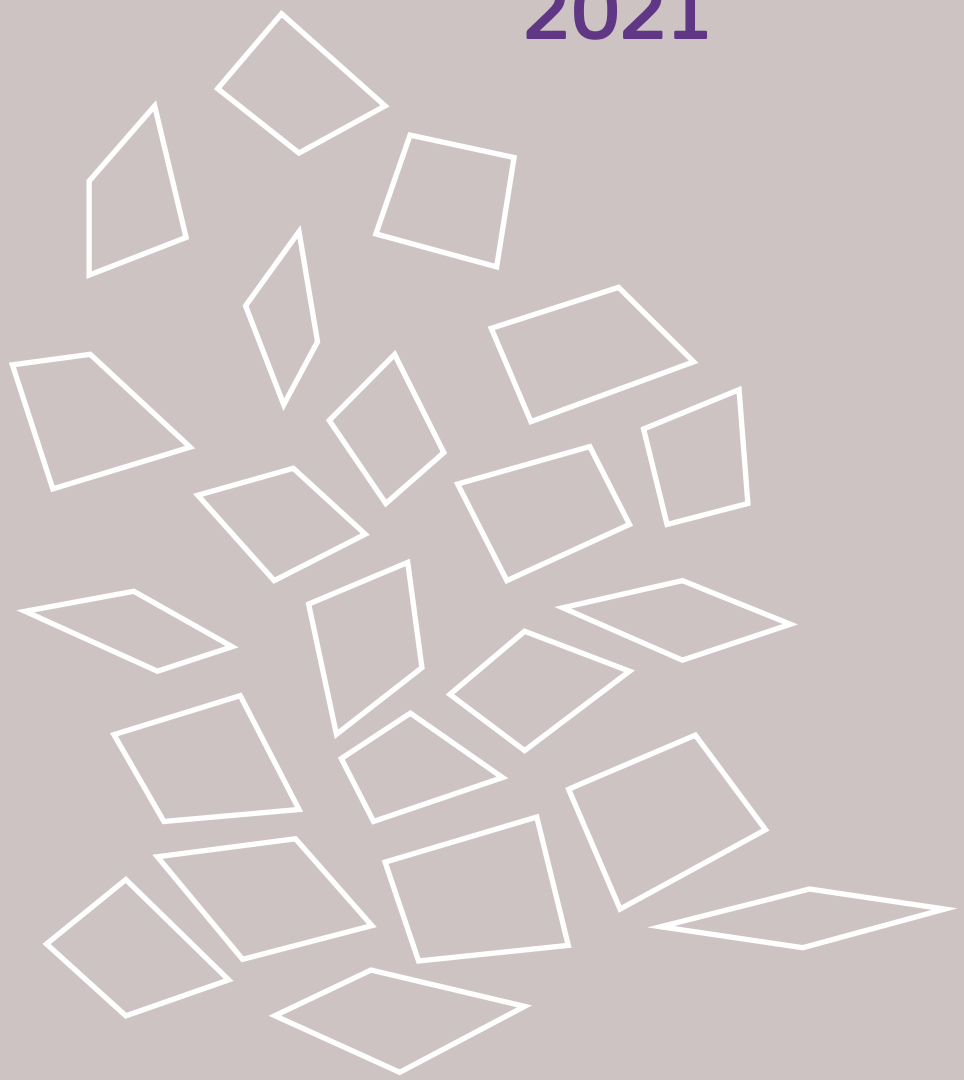
European Commission

European network of legal experts in gender equality and non-discrimination

A comparative analysis of gender equality law in Europe

2021



Justice and Consumers

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers
Directorate D — Equality and Union citizenship
Unit D.1 Non-discrimination and Roma coordination
Unit D.2 Gender Equality

European Commission
B-1049 Brussels

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

A comparative analysis of gender equality law in Europe 2021

The 27 EU Member States, Albania, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, Turkey and the United Kingdom compared

Prepared by
Birte Böök, Susanne Burri, Linda Senden and Alexandra Timmer
for the European network of legal experts in gender equality and non-discrimination

February 2022

Based on information current on 1 January 2021

Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers

2022

Europe Direct is a service to help you find answers to your questions about the European Union.

Freephone number (*):

00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11

(*)The information given is free, as are most calls (though some operators, phone boxes or hotels may charge you).

Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2022

ISBN 978-92-76-45878-4
ISSN 2599-9184
doi:10.2838/63140
Catalogue number DS-BC-22-001-EN-N

Contents

Members of the European network of legal experts in gender equality and non-discrimination

Management team

General coordinator	Jos Kösters	Human European Consultancy
Specialist coordinator gender equality law	Linda Senden	Utrecht University
Content coordinator gender equality law	Alexandra Timmer	Utrecht University
Specialist coordinator non-discrimination law	Isabelle Chopin	Migration Policy Group
Project manager	Yvonne van Leeuwen-Lohde	Human European Consultancy
Content managers gender equality law	Franka van Hoof Birte Böök	Utrecht University
Content manager non-discrimination law	Catharina Germaine	Migration Policy Group

Senior experts

Senior expert on gender equality law	Susanne Burri
Senior expert on age	Elaine Dewhurst
Senior expert on sexual orientation/trans/intersex people	Peter Dunne
Senior expert on racial or ethnic origin	Lilla Farkas
Senior expert on EU and human rights law	Christopher McCrudden
Senior expert on social security	Frans Pennings
Senior expert on religion or belief	Isabelle Rorive
Senior expert on EU law, CJEU case law, sex, gender identity and gender expression in relation to trans and intersex people	Christa Tobler
Senior expert on disability	Lisa Waddington

National experts

	Non-discrimination	Gender
Albania	Irma Baraku	Entela Baci
Austria	Dieter Schindlauer	Marion Guerrero***
Belgium	Sébastien Van Drooghenbroeck*	Nathalie Wuiame
Bulgaria	Margarita S. Ilieva	Genoveva Tisheva
Croatia	Ines Bojić	Adrijana Martinović
Cyprus	Corina Demetriou	Vera Pavlou
Czechia	Jakub Tomšej	Kristina Koldinská
Denmark	Pia Justesen	Natalie Videbaek Munkholm
Estonia	Mari-Liis Sepper**	Anu Laas
Finland	Rainer Hiltunen	Kevät Nousiainen
France	Sophie Latraverse	Marie Mercat-Bruns
Germany	Matthias Mahlmann	Jule Mulder****
Greece	Athanasios Theodoridis	Panagiota Petroglou
Hungary	András Kádár	Lídia Hermina Balogh
Iceland	Gudrun D. Gudmundsdottir	Herdís Thorgeirsdóttir
Ireland	Judy Walsh	Frances Meenan
Italy	Chiara Favilli	Simonetta Renga
Latvia	Anhelita Kamenska	Kristīne Dupate
Liechtenstein	Patricia Hornich	Nicole Mathé
Lithuania	Gediminas Andriukaitis and Monika Guliakaitė	Tomas Davulis
Luxembourg	Tania Hoffmann	Nicole Kerschen
Malta	Tonio Ellul	Romina Bartolo
Montenegro	Maja Kostić-Mandić	Vesna Simovic-Zvicer
Netherlands	Karin de Vries	Marlies Vegter
North Macedonia	Biljana Kotevska	Biljana Kotevska
Norway	Lene Løvdal	Marte Bauge
Poland	Łukasz Bojarski	Anna Cybulko
Portugal	Dulce Lopes and Joana Vicente	Maria do Rosário Palma Ramalho
Romania	Romanița Iordache	lustina Ionescu
Serbia	Ivana Krstić Davinic	Ivana Krstić Davinic
Slovakia	Vanda Durbáková	Zuzana Magurová
Slovenia	Neža Kogovšek Šalamon	Tanja Koderman Sever
Spain	Fernando Camas Roda	Dolores Morondo Taramundi
Sweden	Paul Lappalainen	Jenny Julén Votinius
Turkey	Ulaş Karan	Kadriye Bakirci
United Kingdom	Lucy Vickers	Rachel Horton

* Emmanuelle Bribosia was the expert during the reporting period for this report.
** Vadim Poleshchuk was the expert during the reporting period for this report.
*** Martina Thomasberger was the expert during the first report period of this report.
**** Ulrike Lembke was the expert during the reporting period for this report.

Introduction

This report provides a general overview of the ways in which EU gender equality law has been implemented in the domestic laws of the 27 Member States of the European Union, as well as Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway (the EEA countries), the United Kingdom and five candidate countries (Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey).[1] The analysis is based on the country reports written by the gender equality law experts of the European equality law network (EELN).[2] At the same time, the report explains the most important elements of the EU gender equality *acquis*. The term 'EU gender equality *acquis*' refers to all the relevant EU Treaty and EU Charter of Fundamental Rights provisions, legislation and case law of the CJEU in relation to gender equality.

The development of EU gender equality law has been a step-by-step process. In 1957, the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community (EEC), the origin of the current EU, contained only one single provision (Article 119 EEC Treaty, nowadays Article 157 Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union 'TFEU') on gender equality, namely the principle of equal pay between men and women for equal work.

Since then many directives have been adopted which prohibit discrimination on the grounds of sex. In chronological order these are the Directive on equal pay for men and women (75/117/EEC), the Directive on equal treatment of men and women in employment (76/207/EEC, amended by Directive 2002/73/EC), both now repealed and replaced by Recast Directive 2006/54/EC, the Directive on equal treatment of men and women in statutory schemes of social security (79/7/EEC), the Directive on equal treatment of men and women in occupational social security schemes (86/378/EEC, amended by Directive 96/97/EC and now repealed and replaced by Recast Directive 2006/54/EC), the Directive on equal treatment of men and women engaged in an activity, including agriculture, in a self-employed capacity (86/613/EEC, repealed and replaced by Directive 2010/41/EU), the Pregnant Workers' Directive (92/85/EEC), the Parental Leave Directive (96/34/EEC, repealed and replaced by Directive 2010/18/EU), the Directive on equal treatment of men and women in the access to and the supply of goods and services (2004/113/EC) and the aforementioned so-called Recast Directive on sex equality in employment and occupation (2006/54/EC). The latest addition is the Work-Life Balance Directive (2019/1158/EU), which will repeal Directive 2010/18/EU with effect from 2 August 2022. For your convenience, the weblinks to the six EU gender equality law directives currently in force (plus Directive EU 2019/1158) are attached to this report as Annex 1.

With the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty on 1 December 2009, the European Community and the EU merged into one single legal order, the European Union. However, we continue to work with two treaties: the Treaty on European Union (TEU) that lays down the basic structures and provisions, and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), which is more detailed and elaborates the TEU.[3] In addition, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU entered into force in 2009 and has the same legal value as the two Treaties (the TEU and the TFEU).[4] The TEU, the TFEU and the Charter all contain provisions that are relevant to the field of gender equality.

1 The report builds on Böök, B., Burri, S., Senden, L., Timmer, A. (2020), *A comparative analysis of gender equality law in Europe*, European Commission, available at: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/5400-a-comparative-analysis-of-gender-equality-law-in-europe-2020-1-81-mb. The report also considers Burri, S. (2018), *EU gender equality law – update 2018*, European Commission, available at: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/4767-eu-gender-equality-law-update-2018-pdf-444-kb.

2 All gender equality country reports are available on the EELN website: http://www.equalitylaw.eu/country.

3 See Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union [2008] OJ C115/13 (TEU), Article 1, which provides '(…) The Union shall be founded on the present Treaty and on the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (hereinafter referred to as 'the Treaties'). Those two Treaties shall have the same legal value. The Union shall replace and succeed the European Community.'

4 See Article 6(1) TEU.

The TEU declares that one of the values on which the EU is based is equality between women and men (Article 2 TEU). The promotion of equality between men and women throughout the European Union is one of the essential tasks of the EU (Article 3(3) TEU). Since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, Article 8 TFEU specifies that:

> 'In all its activities, the Union shall aim to eliminate inequalities, and to promote equality, between men and women.'

Article 10 TFEU contains a similar obligation for all the discrimination grounds mentioned in Article 19 TFEU, including sex:

> 'In defining and implementing its policies and activities, the Union shall aim to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation'.

These provisions lay down the obligation of gender mainstreaming. It means that both the EU and the Member States shall actively take into account the objective of gender equality when formulating and implementing laws, regulations, administrative provisions, policies and activities.[5] Although these provisions do not create enforceable rights for individuals as such, they are important for the interpretation of EU law and they impose obligations on both the EU and the Member States.

In addition, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU prohibits discrimination on any ground, including sex (Article 21);[6] it recognises the right to gender equality in all areas, and is thus not limited only to employment, and it also recognises the possibility of positive action for its promotion (Article 23). Furthermore, it also defines rights related to family protection and gender equality. The reconciliation of family/private life with work is an important aspect of the Charter; the Charter guarantees, *inter alia*, the 'right to paid maternity leave and to parental leave' (Article 33). Since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the Charter has become a binding catalogue of EU fundamental rights (see Article 6(1) TEU). The Charter applies to the EU institutions, bodies, offices and agencies, and to the Member States when they are implementing Union law (Article 51(1) of the Charter),[7] i.e. when they are acting '*within the scope*' of Union law.[8]

Another source of EU gender equality law is the case law of the Court of Justice of the EU (CJEU).[9] This Court has played a very important role in the field of equal treatment between men and women, by ensuring that individuals can effectively invoke and enforce their right to gender equality. Similarly, it has delivered important judgments interpreting EU equality legislation and relevant Treaty provisions.

This report will discuss how the above-mentioned Treaty provisions and the directives are implemented at the national level. As this report will show, transposition has been carried out in various ways: by amending relevant national legislation (such as Labour Codes), by adopting legislation relating to employment and social security legislation, and/or by adopting specific acts on gender equality and/or non-discrimination. The weblinks to the EU directives which are discussed in this report are annexed to the report. This comparative analysis provides a state-of-the art overview of the implementation of EU

5 See also Article 29 of the Council Directive 2006/54/EC of 5 July 2006 on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation (recast) (*Recast Directive*), OJ L 204, 26.07.2006, pp. 23-36.

6 However, the scope of the prohibition of sex discrimination is limited, according to the accompanying explanations to the Charter, see Explanations relating to the Charter of Fundamental Rights, 2007/C 303/02.

7 See Koukoulis-Spiliotopoulos, S. (2008) 'The Lisbon Treaty and the Charter of Fundamental Rights: maintaining and developing the *acquis* in gender equality', *European gender equality law review* No. 1/2008, pp. 15-24; available at: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/2790-european-gender-equality-law-review-1-2008 and Ellis, E. (2010), 'The impact of the Lisbon Treaty on gender equality', *European gender equality law review* No. 1/2010, pp. 7-13; available at: https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/28979eb1-b8a4-48b5-8786-83960b483554/language-en/format-PDF/source-search.

8 Judgment of 26 February 2013, Åkerberg *Fransson*, C-617/10, EU:C:2013:105.

9 Until the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty: the European Court of Justice (ECJ). In this report, reference is made to the Court of Justice of the EU (CJEU or Court), including in cases pre-dating the Lisbon Treaty.

gender equality law and the most recent developments in this area. It discusses the most important topics of EU gender equality law, namely core concepts such as direct and indirect discrimination and (sexual) harassment; equal pay and equal treatment at work; maternity, paternity, parental and other types of care leave; occupational pension schemes; statutory schemes of social security; self-employed workers; equal treatment in relation to goods and services; violence against women in relation to the Istanbul Convention; and enforcement and compliance issues.

It would also be remiss not to mention that two major developments relevant to EU gender equality occurred during 2020. One of these is the adoption of the European Commission's Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025,[10] which provides a roadmap for the Commission's plans to tackle gender inequalities and touches on emerging threats to gender equality such as the climate and the digital sphere. The other development is, of course, the outbreak of the global COVID-19 pandemic, which is already proving to have an impact on gender equality in the EU.[11] This report also discusses the legal responses that have been made at the national level to mitigate the damaging effects of the pandemic on gender equality.

10 European Commission (2020), A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0152&from=EN.

11 For a first mapping of the gendered impact of the COVID-19 crisis, see Böök, B., Van Hoof, F., Senden, L., Timmer, A., (2020) 'Gendering the COVID-19 crisis: a mapping of its impact and call for action in light of EU gender equality law and policy', *European equality law review* No. 2/2020, pp. 20-44, available at: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/5300-european-equality-law-review-2-2020-pdf-1-446-kb.

1 General legal framework

1.1 Constitution

Sex discrimination is explicitly prohibited in the Constitutions of **all countries** under review, apart from **Denmark**, **Liechtenstein** and the **United Kingdom**.

In the case of the **United Kingdom**, this is explained by the fact that the constitution is unwritten and so by definition contains no articles dealing with non-discrimination. The Human Rights Act 1998, however, partially incorporates the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) into domestic law, and by so doing gives Article 14 ECHR – which includes a prohibition of sex discrimination – *quasi*-constitutional force. This appears still to be the case now that the United Kingdom has left the EU.

In addition, a large number of countries (**Albania**, **Austria**, **Belgium**, **Croatia**, **Estonia**, **Finland**, **France**, **Germany**, **Greece**, **Hungary**, **Italy**, **Liechtenstein**, **Lithuania**, **Luxembourg**, **Malta**, **Montenegro**, **Poland**, **Portugal**, **Romania**, **Serbia**, **Slovenia**, **Spain**, **Turkey**) have also adopted provisions pertaining to equality between men and women in their Constitutions.

In most countries these constitutional provisions on equality between men and women and the prohibition of sex discrimination can be invoked horizontally, meaning between private parties. The exceptions are, **Ireland**, **Italy**, **Latvia**, **Liechtenstein**, **Montenegro**, the **Netherlands**, **Slovakia** and **Sweden**, where this is not possible. In a few countries (**Belgium**, **Germany**, **Lithuania**) horizontal application is a subject of debate. Moreover, in **Austria**, the relevant national constitutional provision does not have horizontal effect according to prevailing doctrine. However, the state has an obligation to protect individuals from discrimination by adopting adequate legislation; if it fails to do so, the courts may rely on general principles, drawn mostly from private law, to interpret norms or contracts in ways that are compatible with good morals (*gute Sitten*), especially in cases of economic or factual imbalance between the parties. This, in effect, can lead to an indirect horizontal application of fundamental rights.

1.2 Equal treatment legislation

All countries apart from **Latvia** have enacted specific equal treatment legislation. Until recently **Turkey** was another exception, but with the adoption in 2016 of the Act on the Human Rights and Equality Institution, Turkey now has specific equal treatment legislation. In some countries, equal treatment between men and women is part of a broader Anti-discrimination Act that also relates to other grounds (e.g. **Czechia**, **Hungary**, **Ireland**, **Poland**, **Romania**, **Slovakia**, **Slovenia**, **Sweden**, **United Kingdom**). Other countries have both an Anti-discrimination Act (which sometimes also includes a prohibition of sex discrimination) and a Gender Equality Act (e.g. **Albania**, **Belgium**, **Bulgaria**, **Croatia**, **Denmark**, **Finland**, **Greece**, **Lithuania**, **Montenegro**, **Netherlands North Macedonia**, **Romania**, **Serbia**). The **Bulgarian** Gender Equality Law was promulgated in 2016, however by the end of 2017 only minor steps had been taken to implement the law. **Norway** adopted a new act relating to equality and the prohibition of discrimination in 2017, which entered into force on 1 January 2018. It unites all four previously existing laws on equality and non-discrimination in one law. **Iceland** adopted a new Gender Equality Act in 2020, which entered into force on 6 January 2021.

2 Implementation of central concepts

This chapter discusses how central concepts of EU gender equality law have been transposed in the countries under review. Some of the concepts discussed in this chapter are defined in the EU gender equality law directives, namely direct and indirect sex discrimination; and harassment and sexual harassment. Other concepts have not been explicitly defined in the Directives, yet they are crucial elements of EU gender equality law, such as the concepts of sex, gender and transgender, as well as the concept of positive action. Overall, the countries under review have faithfully and often literally transposed the EU concepts into national legislation. Yet, as the analysis below will show, some difficulties remain at the level of transposition. Most of the difficulties relate to the level of enforcement.

2.1 Sex/gender/transgender

2.1.1 Definition of 'gender' and 'sex'

EU law does not provide definitions of the concepts of 'sex', 'gender' and 'transgender', and does not distinguish clearly between sex and gender.[12] Likewise, very few countries define the concepts of 'sex', 'gender' or 'transgender' in their legislation. **Albania**, **Finland**, **Hungary**,[13] **Iceland**, **Montenegro**, **Romania**, **Serbia** and **Sweden** are exceptions.

In the **Albanian** Law on Gender Equality, '"Gender" refers to the opportunities and the social attributes related with being a woman or man, as well as the relations between them' (Article 4(2)). In the **Finnish** Act on Equality between Women and Men, a new subsection (Section 3(5)) defines what is meant by gender identity and expression of gender. In the new **Icelandic** Gender Equality Act, Article 1 states that 'sex' refers to women, men and people who are officially registered as gender neutral. Article 10 of the **Serbian** Gender Equality Act defines both sex and gender: 'sex' relates to the biological features of a person, while 'gender' means the socially established roles, position and status of women and men in public and private life from which, due to social, cultural and historic differences, discrimination ensues on the basis of biological membership of a sex. **Romania** recently (2015) introduced definitions of sex and gender, as well as 'gender stereotypes' in its Gender Equality Law, whereby gender is understood to mean the combination of roles, behaviours, features and activities that society considers to be appropriate for women and for men. In **Sweden**, Chapter 1 Section 5.1 of the Discrimination Act defines sex as the fact 'that someone is a woman or a man'. In the **United Kingdom**, more specifically in Great Britain, there is a partial definition of 'sex' in Section 11 of the Equality Act 2010, which provides that, 'In relation to the protected characteristic of sex— (a) a reference to a person who has a particular protected characteristic is a reference to a man or to a woman'.

Hungary recently amended its Registry Act to include the concept of 'birth sex' defined as 'biological sex assigned on the basis of primary sexual characteristics and chromosomes'. The reasoning behind the amendment states that 'Sex[14] is not conceptualised in the current legislation, given that the determination of sex is based on biological facts. It can be determined based on primary sex characteristics and chromosomes'.[15]

12 For discussion see Lembke, U. (2016) 'Tackling sex discrimination to achieve gender equality? Conceptions of sex and gender in EU non-discrimination law and policies', *European equality law review* No, 2/2016, pp. 46-55; available at: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/3938-european-equality-law-review-2-2016.

13 The Hungarian legislation includes only one relevant definition, the one on 'birth sex' in the Act on Civil Registration Procedure from 2020.

14 It should be noted that the Hungarian language does not differentiate between the concepts of 'sex' and 'gender', the same noun used to refer to both. In Hungarian social science literature, the adjective 'social' is attached to this noun to refer to gender, and the adjective 'biological' is attached to the same noun to refer to sex.

15 Hungary, Balogh L.H. (2021) *Hungary – Country report gender equality*, European Commission, available at: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/5451-hungary-country-report-gender-equality-2021-1-62-mb, p. 14.

A few experts note that since the entry into force of the Istanbul Convention in their country, the Convention's definition of gender has entered the domestic legal order (e.g. **Croatia**, **Turkey**).[16]

2.1.2 Protection of transgender, intersex and non-binary persons[17]

Legal gender recognition, giving trans and intersex people the possibility to obtain official acknowledgment of their preferred gender, is often the gateway to obtaining equality rights.[18] In several countries, however, there is no specific legal framework in place to regulate gender recognition (e.g. **Cyprus** (though legislation is pending), **Latvia**, **Liechtenstein**), or recognition is incomplete (**Bulgaria**).

It is well-established in the case law of the Court of Justice,[19] and subsequently also in Recital 3 of Recast Directive 2006/54/EC, that discrimination arising from the gender reassignment of a person falls within the prohibition of sex discrimination. In line with this, several countries have explicitly codified the prohibition of discrimination due to gender reassignment, namely **Belgium** and **Malta** (where gender identity or expression are considered separately as grounds for sex discrimination), **Bulgaria**, **Finland**, **Greece**, **Luxembourg**, **Montenegro**, **Portugal**, **Slovakia** and the **United Kingdom**. In most of these countries this is part of a broader prohibition of gender identity and gender expression discrimination.

Many countries have a broad prohibition of discrimination on the ground of gender identity (and often also gender expression) in their legislation (e.g. **Albania**, **Belgium**, **Croatia**, **Czechia** (where the term 'gender identification' is used, which according to the expert means the same as gender identity), **Denmark** (where the term gender is used in the legislation, but where the preparatory works state that gender includes gender identity), **Finland**, **France**, **Greece** (through Acts 4604/2019 and Act 4443/2016, the latter transposing Directives 2000/43/EC and 2000/78/EC), **Hungary**, **Luxembourg**, **Malta**, **Montenegro**, **Netherlands**, **North Macedonia** (where the new Anti-Discrimination Act of 2020 for the first time explicitly includes gender identity as a prohibited ground of discrimination), **Norway**, **Portugal**, **Serbia**, **Slovenia**, **Sweden**). In **Finland**, Section 3 of the Act on Equality of 2014, defines gender identity as 'the person's own experience of (his or her) gender', and expression of gender as 'articulating one's gender by clothing, behaviour or in some other similar manner'. **Maltese** law includes definitions of 'gender expression' and 'gender identity'. Act LXI of 2016 furthermore introduced the notion of 'lived gender', which is defined as referring to each person's gender identity and its public expression over a sustained period of time. In the **Netherlands**, an amendment to the General Equal Treatment Law was adopted in 2018, specifying that the term 'gender' also includes sex characteristics, gender identity and gender expression.

A few experts are of the opinion that their national legislatures should amend the legislative framework regarding transgender and gender identity discrimination or create such a framework (e.g. **Estonia**, **Poland**).

In several countries important legislative or judicial developments have recently taken place and/or are noteworthy:

16 Gender is defined in Article 3(c) of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) CETS No. 210, to mean 'the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for women and men'. It should be noted that in **Bulgaria**, a Constitutional Court judgment from October 2021 has built on its previous ruling on the Istanbul Convention to interpret 'sex' as having to be understood only in its biological sense. https://www.constcourt.bg/bg/Acts/GetHtmlContent/5aca41e4-659e-42dc-80a5-c3f31746898b.

17 See Van den Brink, M., Dunne, P. (2018) *Trans and intersex equality rights in Europe – a comparative analysis,* European Commission, available at: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/4739-trans-and-intersex-equality-rights-in-europe-a-comparative-analysis-pdf-732-kb.

18 Van den Brink, M., Dunne, P., (2018) *Trans and intersex equality rights in Europe – a comparative analysis,* European Commission, p. 55.

19 Judgment of 30 April 1996, *P v S and Cornwall County Council*, C-13/94, EU:C:1996:170.

- In 2017, the Federal Constitutional Court of **Germany** issued a landmark judgment that clarified that the prohibition of sex discrimination covers gender identity, and that this also protects people who identify as neither male nor female. The court decided that the birth register must allow for a 'third gender'. Subsequently, on 13 December 2018, the federal parliament passed the Law on Amending the Information to be Recorded in the Birth Register with amendments to the Civil Status Act.[20]
- In **Albania**, the first instance administrative court of Durrës delivered an important judgment in the case of an intersex child.[21] Although Albanian legislation protects intersex people from discrimination, it does not recognise the right to gender reassignment. In this case, reasoning on the basis of the principle of the best interests of the child, the court decided that the birth certificate of the claimant had to be amended, and that the sex of the child had to be changed from male to female.
- In **Spain**, there is no State law (applicable to the whole of Spain) that specifically states the principle of non-discrimination against transgender, intersex and non-binary people, though there are draft bills pending which contain specific prohibitions of discrimination on the ground of gender identity[22] and on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sexual characteristics.[23] Several Autonomous Communities have already enacted such legislation.
- In **Iceland**, the explanatory report to the new Gender Equality Act No 150/2020 states that the terms 'men' and 'women' in the law also refer to trans people.
- In **Hungary**, important developments have also taken place, but they have lessened rather than improved the protection of transgender, intersex and non-binary people. The Fundamental Law (Hungary's Constitution) was amended in 2020. According to one of the relevant new provisions, 'Hungary shall protect the right of children to a self-identity corresponding to their sex at birth.'[24] The reasoning of the amending bill claims that there are 'new, modern ideological tendencies in the Western world' questioning the nature of sex, and concludes that 'birth sex is given and cannot be changed'.[25] Moreover, the Fundamental Law now includes the notion that: 'The mother shall be a woman, the father shall be a man'[26] (i.e. the category of 'mother' is available only for females, and the category of 'father' is available only for males).
- In **Turkey**, the Human Rights and Equality Institution Act of 2016 does not cover transgender, intersex and non-binary people and cannot be extended by the equality body. The expert deems that the Human Rights and Equality Institution Act is therefore not in compliance with the Turkish Constitution, EU law, or indeed human rights law, on this point.

2.2 Direct sex discrimination

2.2.1 Explicit prohibition

The Gender Recast Directive 2006/54/EC defines direct discrimination as occurring 'where one person is treated less favourably on grounds of sex than another is, has been or would be treated in a comparable situation' (Article 2(1)a). As a rule, direct discrimination is prohibited and cannot be justified, unless a specific written exception applies, such as that the sex of the person concerned is a determining factor for the job ('a genuine and determining occupational requirement', Article 14(2) Gender Recast Directive).

20 Germany, Law on Amending the Information to be Recorded in the Birth Register (Amendments to the Civil Status Act) *(Gesetz zur* Änderung *der in das Geburtenregister einzutragenden Angaben)* 18 December 2018.
21 Albania, First Instance Administrative Court of Durrës, Decision No. 1159, 29.12.2017.
22 Spain, Draft bill on full and effective equality for trans people, https://www.newtral.es/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/2021-02-02_Borrador-Ley-Trans.pdf?x62341.
23 Spain, Draft bill for an Organic Law on LGTBI rights, https://www.newtral.es/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/2021-02-02_BORRADOR-LEY-IGUALDAD-LGTBI-.pdf?x62341.
24 Hungary, Fundamental Law of Hungary (*Magyarország Alaptörvénye*), 25 April 2011, Article XVI(1). An unofficial English translation of the current version, as in force on 23 December 2020, published by the Constitutional Court of Hungary, is available at: https://hunconcourt.hu/uploads/sites/3/2021/01/thefundamentallawofhungary_20201223_fin.pdf.
25 Hungary, Fundamental Law of Hungary (*Magyarország Alaptörvénye*), 25 April 2011, Article L(1).
26 Bill No. T/13647, available (in Hungarian) at: https://www.parlament.hu/irom41/13647/13647.pdf.

Direct sex discrimination is prohibited in **all countries** under review. The definition of direct sex discrimination appears unproblematic in almost all countries. In **Hungary**, however, the definition of direct discrimination offers less protection in sex discrimination cases than the EU definition, because it allows the possibility of exemption in cases in which a difference in treatment is unavoidable because the fundamental right of another person has to be protected, if it is suitable for the designated purpose and proportionate, or otherwise has a reasonable and objective explanation directly related to the relevant relationship.[27] This means that the Hungarian definition allows for justifications of direct sex discrimination that are not allowed under EU law.

Something similar occurs in **Croatia**; the Croatian Constitutional Court allows for objective justifications of direct sex discrimination, in line with the case law of the European Court of Human Rights. According to the Constitutional Court, the legislator enjoys a certain margin of appreciation, and there would have to exist strong constitutionally acceptable reasons for the Constitutional Court to find a regulation that differentiates between men and women in compliance with the Constitution.

In **Greece** Act 4604/2019 rephrased the definition of direct discrimination as follows: '"direct discrimination": any act or omission that excludes or places in an evidently inferior position persons because of sex, sexual orientation and gender identity; moreover, any instruction, instigation or systematic encouragement of persons to discriminate in an unfavourable or unequal way against other persons on the grounds of sex'. The Greek expert considers that 'evidently inferior position' seems to be a stronger requirement than 'less favourable treatment', whereas the requirement of 'evidently' less favourable treatment is restrictive in comparison to the wording of Directive 2006/54/EC, which does not use such a word. The Greek expert therefore deems this development 'a serious regression with respect to the gender equality and anti-discrimination *acquis* in Greece'.[28]

From the law-making point of view, Act 4604/2019 by amending the above-mentioned definition of the Directive 2006/54 without any reference to it, violates Article 33 of the Directive, which provides that when Member States adopt measures implementing the Directive, they shall contain a reference to the Directive or be accompanied by such reference on the occasion of their official publication.

2.2.2 Prohibition of pregnancy and maternity discrimination

Referring to case law of the Court of Justice, the Gender Recast Directive also states that 'unfavourable treatment of a woman related to pregnancy or maternity constitutes direct discrimination on grounds of sex' (Recital 23). Such treatment is therefore also covered by the directive. In line with this, most countries under review explicitly prohibit pregnancy and maternity discrimination as a form of discrimination (**Albania**, **Austria**, **Belgium**, **Croatia**, **Cyprus**, **Czechia**, **Denmark**, **Estonia**, **Finland**, **France**, **Germany**, **Greece**, **Hungary**, **Iceland**, **Ireland**, **Italy**, **Latvia**,, **Liechtenstein**, **Luxembourg**, **Malta**, **Montenegro**, **Netherlands**, **North Macedonia**, **Norway**, **Romania**, **Slovakia**, **Slovenia**, **Spain**, **Turkey**, **United Kingdom**).

In some of the countries where this type of prohibition is not explicitly codified, it is nevertheless established in case law or other documents that unfavourable treatment related to pregnancy or maternity constitutes sex discrimination (e.g. **Serbia**). In **Sweden** pregnancy and maternity discrimination is only indirectly – and tacitly – covered by the Discrimination Act's ban on direct sex discrimination. According to the national expert, the Swedish implementation can – and has been[29] – criticised on this point as not transparent. In **Portugal** discrimination on the ground of pregnancy and maternity is prohibited.[30]

27 Hungary, Equality Act, Article 7(2) and (3).
28 Greece, Panagiota, P. (2020) *Greece – Country report gender equality*, European Commission, available at: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/country/greece, p. 19.
29 Compare Votinius, J. (2011) 'Troublesome transformation. EU law on pregnancy and maternity turned into Swedish law on parental leave', in: Rönnmar, M. (ed.), *Fundamental Rights and Social Europe*, Hart Publishing, Oxford.
30 Poland, Labour Code, Articles 24(1) and 25(6).

However, there is no explicit mention in the law that pregnancy and maternity discrimination is to be qualified as direct sex discrimination. In **Poland** neither the Anti-discrimination Law nor any provision of the Labour Code explicitly states that discrimination includes any less favourable treatment of a woman because of her pregnancy or childbirth-related leave. However, Article 12 of the Anti-discrimination Law stipulates that, in case of a breach of the equal treatment rule with regard to pregnancy or childbirth-related leave, the person concerned has the right to damages, according to Article 13 (which refers to discrimination-related damages).[31] In addition, in the case law based on the Labour Code, discrimination with regard to pregnancy is considered to be sex-based discrimination.[32]

2.2.3 Specific difficulties

Most experts report that there are no difficulties with applying the concept of direct sex discrimination at national level. Nevertheless, there do appear to be some difficulties, although not as many as with indirect discrimination. Several experts report a scarcity of case law (e.g. **Estonia**, **Slovakia**) or indeed an absence of case law (**Liechtenstein**).

In **Hungary**, the Equality Act refers to 19 explicit grounds, such as sex, racial origin, etc., and a general term: 'any other status, characteristic feature or attribute'.[33] This has created the impression that it is enough to refer to discrimination in general without indicating the protected ground on the basis of which legal redress is claimed. There are still many cases adjudicated by the *Kuria* (the Supreme Court) where the claimant did not indicate the protected ground of their claim during the first instance procedure.[34]

In **Belgium**, according to settled case law, direct discrimination is potentially justifiable. This does not accord with EU law and to resolve this problem the Belgian legislature has introduced a difference between 'distinction' and 'discrimination'. Direct discrimination is defined as a direct distinction that may not be justified when the object of such direct distinction falls within the scope of EU law (Article 13 of the Gender Act). In **Croatia**, direct sex discrimination is also potentially justifiable, because the Constitutional Court follows the approach of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in this respect.[35]

The **Spanish** expert observes that, in theory, Spanish legislation allows for the use of a hypothetical comparator, but to date no case law has dealt with this. It is therefore not known whether the judiciary is prepared to accept this concept.

The expert from **Germany** observes that the German General Equal Treatment Act does not contain a prohibition of discrimination in cases without an identifiable victim (cf. CJEU in *Feryn*).[36] This likely holds true for most countries.

The **French** expert has highlighted cases which might signal new ways employers use collective bargaining agreements on worker mobility to circumvent protection against pregnancy discrimination. French courts are resisting these prohibited, but more subtle, collective practices.

31 The Draft Law amending the Antidiscrimination Law proposes to add the following provision: 'The violation of equal treatment rule … in relation to pregnancy or maternity constitutes direct sex discrimination'.

32 Poland, The Supreme Court (SC) in its judgment of 8 January 2008, II PK 116/07; and the ruling of the SC of 8 July 2008, IPK 294/07.

33 Article 8 of the Equality Act defines discrimination as follows: 'Direct discrimination occurs if a person or a group is treated less favourably on the ground of his/her/its protected characteristic than any other person or group in comparable situation.'

34 For example, *Kúria* Pfv. 20351/2014/6.

35 In the case law of the ECtHR on Article 14 ECHR (the prohibition of discrimination) sex discrimination can be justified, provided it meets a stringent proportionality test (the 'very weighty reasons' doctrine).

36 CJEU, Judgment of 10 July 2008, *Centrum voor gelijkheid van kansen en voor racismebestrijding v Firma Feryn NV,* C-54/07, EU:C:2008:397.

2.3 Indirect sex discrimination

2.3.1 Explicit prohibition

The Gender Recast Directive 2006/54/EC defines indirect discrimination as occurring 'where an apparently neutral provision, criterion or practice would put persons of one sex at a particular disadvantage compared with persons of the other sex, unless that provision, criterion or practice is objectively justified by a legitimate aim, and the means of achieving that aim are appropriate and necessary' (Article 2(1)b).[37] Indirect discrimination concerns measures that appear neutral, but which have a disadvantageous effect on particular people. For instance, less favourable treatment of part-time workers will often amount to indirect sex discrimination, as long as mainly women are employed on a part-time basis (e.g. C-170/84 *Bilka*). Another example is the case of *Kalliri*, in 2017, where the CJEU ruled that requiring a minimum height (1.70 meters for both men and women) to enter the Police Academy in **Greece** must be considered indirect sex discrimination, as far fewer women than men fulfil this criterion.[38]

As with direct discrimination, indirect sex discrimination is explicitly prohibited in **all countries** discussed in this report. Not all national definitions are fully in line with the EU concept of indirect discrimination, however. In **Poland**, the legislator thus translated the Directive's notion 'particular disadvantage' as the 'particularly disadvantaged situation'. Both **Hungary** and **Cyprus** apply a more stringent test. In **Hungary**, the concept of indirect discrimination is narrower than the EU definition, as it stipulates a 'considerably larger disadvantage' compared to a 'particular disadvantage' as mentioned in Article 2(1)(b) of the Recast Directive. Something similar is at issue in **Cyprus**, where the Greek translation of 'particular disadvantage' is 'notably disadvantageous position'. The **Serbian** expert reports that the definition of indirect discrimination does not contain any 'would' language (i.e. anything in the conditional tense), and can be interpreted as being limited to an actual occurrence of disadvantage, making it impossible to challenge neutral provisions before they in fact cause actual disadvantage to anyone. In **Greece**, the amended definition of indirect discrimination in Act 4604/2019 has created legal uncertainty. The new definition is more restrictive than the EU definition, as it refers to an 'evidently inferior position' instead of 'less favourable treatment'. Moreover, it uses only the present tense ('excludes or places in an inferior position'), which falls short of the wording of the Directive ('would put [...] at a particular disadvantage'), which also covers the possibility of creating a particular disadvantage. From the law-making point of view, Act 4604/2019 by amending the above-mentioned definition of the Directive 2006/54 without any reference to it, violates Article 33 of the Directive, which provides that when Member States adopt measures implementing the Directive, they shall contain a reference to the Directive or be accompanied by such reference on the occasion of their official publication.

2.3.2 Statistical evidence

Indirect discrimination is difficult to prove.[39] In order to establish a presumption of indirect sex discrimination – in other words to establish the presumption that a neutral provision, criterion or practice has a particular disadvantageous effect on people of a particular sex – some countries allow statistical evidence. Statistical evidence is allowed (though not required) in **Belgium**, **Cyprus**, **Czechia**, **Denmark**, **Estonia**, **Finland**, **France**, **Germany**, **Greece**, **Hungary**, **Ireland**, **Lithuania**, **Malta**, the **Netherlands**, **North Macedonia**, **Norway**, **Poland**, **Romania**, **Serbia**, **Spain**, **Sweden** and the **United Kingdom**. In several countries there is no case law available (including **Albania**, **Croatia**, **Iceland**, **Luxembourg** and **Slovakia**).

37 See also Article 2(b) of Council Directive 2004/113/EC of 13 December 2004 implementing the principle of equal treatment between men and women in the access to and supply of goods and services, OJ L 373, pp. 37-43 (Directive 2004/113/EC).
38 CJEU, Judgment of 18 October 2017, *Kalliri,* C-409/16, EU:C:2017:767.
39 General issues related to the burden of proof are discussed further below in Section 10.2.

2.3.3 Application of the objective justification test

The possibilities for justification are much broader than with direct discrimination,[40] as the definition of indirect discrimination includes an objective justification test, which states: *'...unless that provision, criterion or practice is objectively justified by a legitimate aim and the means of achieving that aim are appropriate and necessary'* (Article 2(1)b Gender Recast Directive). The CJEU has repeatedly ruled that the objective justification test is to be interpreted strictly.[41]

Several experts report that case law that applies the objective justification test is lacking (e.g. **Montenegro**, **Poland**).

Contrary to the strict interpretation of the objective justification test by the CJEU, **Hungarian** courts have applied the test liberally. The **German** expert notes that the objective justification test was applied in a problematic manner in a case concerning a height requirement from Saarland, and in a case from Berlin concerning a boys' choir.

The **Danish** expert reports that, in a 2019 case before the District Court of Copenhagen, the question arose of whether the use of the neutral criterion *flexibility* could place women at a particular disadvantage. As there is an overrepresentation of women among the group of sole providers with children, the Court ruled that the criterion of flexibility was indirectly discriminatory as the employer did not provide an objective justification.

The reasoning of the **Spanish** courts does not generally follow a detailed structure for the justification test, in line with the CJEU doctrine (legitimate aim, necessity and suitability). Nevertheless, in the Spanish expert's view, the objective justification test is correctly applied by national courts.

2.3.4 Specific difficulties

The concept of indirect discrimination is complex and has caused difficulties for national courts. In many countries there is scant case law on indirect sex discrimination (including **Belgium**, **Cyprus**, **Latvia**, **Norway**) In several countries (**Estonia**, **Liechtenstein**, **Luxembourg**, **Montenegro**, **North Macedonia**, **Portugal**, **Slovakia**, **Slovenia**, **Turkey**) there appears to be no case law at all yet on indirect sex discrimination. On the positive side, in some countries indirect sex discrimination cases are emerging more frequently than in the past (e.g. **Croatia**).

Specific difficulties that the experts have reported include:

- The distinction between direct and indirect discrimination (and therefore the question of whether there can be an objective justification) is not always clear (**Netherlands**, **Slovakia**).
- There is a tendency among some judges to require an intention to discriminate on the part of the perpetrator, though intent is not a criterion to prove indirect discrimination (**Belgium**, **Greece**, **Romania**).
- Job classifications and collective agreements: the **German** expert reports that many German courts face difficulties when indirect discrimination is linked to the gender-related division of labour and care work, and when discrimination is rooted in the job classification systems of collective agreements, due to a specific understanding of the autonomy of collective bargaining (freedom of coalition)

40 See the report produced by the European network of legal experts in the field of gender equality, McCrudden, C., Prechal, S. (2009) *The concepts of equality and non-discrimination in Europe: A practical approach*, European Commission, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=4553&langId=en.

41 CJEU, Judgment of 20 October 2011, *Waltraud Brachner v Pensionsversicherungsanstalt*, C-123/10, EU:C:2011:675; Judgment of 9 February 1999, *Regina v Secretary of State for Employment, ex parte Nicole Seymour-Smith and Laura Perez,* C-167/97, EU:C:1999:60; Judgment of 20 March 2003, *Helga Kutz-Bauer v Freie und Hansestadt Hamburg*, C-187/00, EU:C:2003:168.

under the German Constitution. The **Spanish** expert, too, notes problematic aspects of cases on indirect discrimination in relation to incorrect job evaluations in collective agreements.
- Courts are still reluctant to rely on statistical data as evidence (**Serbia**).
- In **Romania**, a finding of indirect discrimination instead of direct discrimination is more likely to lead to a lesser sanction (a warning instead of an administrative fine), because the National Council for Combating Discrimination (CNCD) sees indirect discrimination as a less serious offence due to the assumption that it is unintended behaviour. This is problematic from the point of view of implementing effective, disproportionate and dissuasive remedies at the national level.

2.4 Multiple discrimination and intersectional discrimination

Multiple discrimination refers to discrimination based on two or more grounds simultaneously. The closely related yet distinct concept of intersectional discrimination refers to discrimination resulting from an interaction of grounds of discrimination which produces a new and different type of discrimination. The European Equality Law Network produced a thematic report on intersectional discrimination in 2016, written by Sandra Fredman.[42]

Multiple discrimination and/or intersectional discrimination is explicitly covered in the national legislation of **Albania** (since 2020), **Austria**, **Bulgaria**, **Croatia**, **Germany**, **Greece** (Act 4604/2019), **Iceland**, **Ireland**, **Italy**, **Malta** (currently still in Bill format), **Montenegro**, **North Macedonia**, **Norway**, **Poland**, **Romania**, **Serbia** (where multiple discrimination is explicitly covered, but only as a more severe form of discrimination, **Slovenia** and **Turkey**. In several, but by no means all, countries there is case law that addresses these types of discrimination: **Albania**, **Austria**, **Belgium**, **Croatia**, **Estonia**, **France**, **Germany**, **Greece** (Ombudsman's Mediation Report), **Ireland**, **Italy**, the **Netherlands**, **Norway**, **Poland**, **Romania**, **Serbia**, **Slovakia**, **Sweden** and the **United Kingdom**.

The experts from **Cyprus**, **Czechia**, **Estonia**, **Finland**, **Latvia**, **Liechtenstein**, **Luxembourg** and **Spain** note that in their countries there is neither legislation explicitly covering multiple and/or intersectional discrimination nor explicit case law.

2.5 Positive action[43]

2.5.1 Definition and approach

Several provisions of EU law allow for positive action in the field of gender equality.[44] Article 157(4) TFEU states: 'With a view to ensuring full equality in practice between men and women in working life, the principle of equal treatment shall not prevent any Member State from maintaining or adopting measures

42 Fredman, S. (2016) *Intersectional discrimination in EU gender equality and non-discrimination law*, European Commission, available at: http://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/3850-intersectional-discrimination-in-eu-gender-equality-and-non-discrimination-law-pdf-731-kb.

43 See the reports produced by the European network of legal experts in the field of gender equality, McCrudden, C. (2019) *Gender-based positive action in employment in Europe,* European Commission, available at: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/5008-gender-based-positive-action-in-employment-in-europe-pdf-1-9-mb; Fredman, S. (2009) *Making equality effective: The role of proactive measures*, European Commission, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=4551&langId=en; Selanec, G., Senden, L. (2011) *Positive action measures to ensure full equality in practice between men and women, including on company boards*, European Commission, available at: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/3864-positive-action-measures-to-ensure-full-equality-in-practice-between-men-and-women-including-on-company-boards-pdf-2-639-kb; Xenidis, R. and Masse-Dessen, H. (2018) 'Positive action in practice: some dos and don'ts in the field of EU gender equality law', *European equality law review* No. 2/2018, pp. 36-62, available at: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/4759-european-equality-law-review-2-2018-pdf-1-206-kb; Krstic, I. (2016) 'Implementation of positive action measures for achieving gender equality in North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia', *European equality law review* No. 2/2016, pp. 22-33, available at: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/3938-european-equality-law-review-2-2016.

44 See Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, OJ C 326, 26.10.2012, pp. 47-390 (TFEU), Article 157(4); Article 23 Charter of Fundamental Rights; Article 3 Gender Recast Directive 2006/54/EC; Article 6 Goods and Services Directive 2004/113/EC.

providing for specific advantages in order to make it easier for the underrepresented sex to pursue a vocational activity or to prevent or compensate for disadvantages in professional careers.'

As a rule, positive action may be taken in the various areas covered by EU law, including employment, occupational pension schemes and access to and provision of goods and services. The most important area for positive action has, until now, been access to employment and working conditions. Whenever positive action measures exist, they appear to be more common in the public sector. Where no obligations are laid down, the public sector is at least encouraged to take positive action measures. In the private sector such measures are, on the whole, voluntary. Only in a few countries do obligations exist for the private sector, for instance in the form of equality plans (e.g. **Finland**).

All countries under review have enacted legislative provisions allowing positive action. The exception is **Latvia**: Latvian law neither allows nor provides for any kind of positive action, except one soft-quota provision concerning the election of judges in self-governing bodies. In **Lithuania**, the act is essentially a dead letter law: positive action is defined in the act as being specific temporary measures laid down by specific laws, but there are no such laws in force that would allow positive action to be taken.

In a recent report by the European Equality Law Network on gender-based positive action in employment, it has become clear that there are significant differences between countries as to what is actually meant by 'positive action', and what types of measures this concept covers.[45] There is also significant terminological confusion, as besides 'positive action' several other terms are in use such as 'affirmative action', 'parité', and 'special measures'.[46] Christopher McCrudden, the author of the report, has found that the underlying problem is conceptual confusion.[47] EU law construes positive action as an exception to the non-discrimination principle,[48] thus following a formal rather than a substantive equality approach. Many Member States, EEA countries and candidate countries follow this approach.

Several countries take a more pro-active approach on positive action (including **Finland**, **Greece** and **Sweden**). In **Greece**, positive action is not merely allowed, it is required by the Constitution in all areas (Article 116(2)). In addition to provisions on positive action, **Swedish** law includes the concept of 'active measures' in the areas of working life and education. The employer or education-provider must continuously and actively seek information on needs that may arise in relation to different grounds for discrimination. The information gathered must then be transposed into active measures to create an inclusive and accessible workplace or educational institution.

2.5.2 Specific difficulties

Many national experts report difficulties in relation to positive action, both at the conceptual level and at the level of implementation.

- Positive action is seen as the exception to the (formal) equality principle, rather than as an essential aspect of achieving substantive equality (e.g. **Bulgaria**, **Cyprus**, **Turkey**).
- In many countries, positive action measures are not very widespread and are hardly seen as a priority by the legislature, social partners, or individual employers (e.g. **Bulgaria**, **Czechia**, **Estonia**, **Montenegro**). The expert from **Cyprus** reports that, though such measures are allowed, no positive action measures have been taken at all. The **Serbian** expert states that while positive

45 McCrudden, C. (2019) *Gender-based positive action in employment in Europe,* European Commission, pp. 80-84, available at: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/5008-gender-based-positive-action-in-employment-in-europe-pdf-1-9-mb.
46 McCrudden, C. (2019) *Gender-based positive action in employment in Europe,* European Commission, pp. 80-84, available at: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/5008-gender-based-positive-action-in-employment-in-europe-pdf-1-9-mb.
47 McCrudden, C. (2019) *Gender-based positive action in employment in Europe,* European Commission, p. 84, available at: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/5008-gender-based-positive-action-in-employment-in-europe-pdf-1-9-mb.
48 McCrudden, C. (2019) *Gender-based positive action in employment in Europe,* European Commission, pp. 52-55, available at: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/5008-gender-based-positive-action-in-employment-in-europe-pdf-1-9-mb.

action measures are allowed by the Serbian constitution and legislature, they are not a priority for individual employers.

- In line with this, the **Hungarian** expert notes that strong political objections exist against taking certain types of positive action measures – especially against quotas.
- The case law of the CJEU, particularly the cases *Kalanke, Marschall, Badeck* and *Abrahamsson*,[49] has prevented the **Netherlands** from developing affirmative action policies to hire women at universities.[50] In **Germany** this case law has also proved problematic. Similarly, the expert from **Norway** reports that EU law has to some extent formed a brake on the development of positive action measures in Norway in the context of academic education.[51]
- Weak monitoring (e.g. **Bulgaria**, **Finland**).
- Positive action measures are costly (e.g. **Iceland**).
- In **Belgium** an ancillary royal decree concerning positive action was adopted relating to employment in the private sector (2019), but decrees covering employment in the public sector as well as access and provision of goods and services are still lacking.

However, there are also some experts who have noted that positive action is well-established in the non-discrimination legislation of their country (e.g. **Greece**, **Portugal**).

2.5.3 Measures to improve the gender balance on company boards

Of particular interest is the issue of gender balance on company boards.[52] A proposal from the Commission on this topic is pending.[53] An increasing number of countries have adopted measures that aim to improve the gender balance on company boards. The countries which have adopted such measures are **Albania**,[54] **Austria**,[55] **Belgium**, **Denmark**, **Finland**, **France**, **Germany**, **Greece**, **Iceland**, **Ireland**, **Italy**, **Luxembourg**, the **Netherlands**, **Norway**, **Portugal**, **Romania**, **Serbia**, **Slovenia**, **Spain** and **Turkey**.

2.5.4 Positive action measures to improve the gender balance in other areas

In a number of countries there are also other positive action measures, often in the form of 'soft' measures, to improve the gender balance in specific fields, such as positive action regarding political candidates' lists (e.g. in **Albania** and **Austria**), workers' representatives lists (e.g. in **France**), or regarding the composition of political bodies. The experts from the following countries report that such measures exist in their countries: **Albania** (where there is a legal requirement that each sex must make up at least 30 % of candidates in parliamentary elections and at least 50 % in local elections), **Austria**, **Belgium**, **Croatia**, **Finland**, **France**, **Germany**, **Greece** (where there is a legal requirement that each sex must make up at least one third of the members of the service councils and at least 40 % of candidates in local

49 Judgment of 17 October 1995, *Kalanke v Freie Hansestadt Bremen*, C-450/93, EU:C:1995:322; Judgment of 11 November 1997, *Marschall,* C-409/95, EU:C:1997:533; Judgment of 28 March 2000, *Badeck,* C-158/97, EU:C:2000:163; Judgment of 6 July 2000, *Abrahamsson,* C-407/98, EU:C:2000:367.

50 Netherlands Institute for Human Rights *(College voor de rechten van de mens)*, Opinions 2011-198; 2012-195 and Opinion 2020-53 available at: www.mensenrechten.nl.

51 Cf. EFTA Court, Judgment of 22 April 2002, *Surveillance Authority v the Kingdom of Norway,* E-1/02.

52 Selanec, G., Senden, L. (2011) *Positive action measures to ensure full equality in practice between men and women including on company boards*, European Commission, available at: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/3864-positive-action-measures-to-ensure-full-equality-in-practice-between-men-and-women-including-on-company-boards-pdf-2-639-kb; and Senden, L., Visser, M. (2013) 'Balancing a Tightrope: The EU Directive on improving the gender balance among non-executive directors of boards of listed companies', *European gender equality law review* No. 1/2013, pp. 17-33, available at: https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/47bf7a78-e399-41a5-bd77-bc95281ee6be/language-en/format-PDF; Senden, L., Kruisinga, S. (2018) *Gender-balanced company boards in Europe A comparative analysis of the regulatory, policy and enforcement approaches in the EU and EEA Member States*, European Commission, available at: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/4537-gender-balanced-company-boards-in-europe-pdf-1-68-mb.

53 The Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on improving the gender balance among non-executive directors of companies listed on stock exchanges and related measures of 14 November 2012, COM (2012) 614 final, as amended by the Malta Presidency 2012/0299 (COD) 31 May 2017.

54 In Albania, this concerns only public company boards.

55 However, in Austria, the quota only applies to supervisory boards; a quota for managing boards has been demanded, *inter alia,* by the Chamber of Labour, but has to date not been adopted.

and parliamentary elections and the European elections), **Iceland** (Article 28 of the Gender Equality Act 150/2020 includes the obligation to ensure gender-balanced appointments in government and municipal committees, councils and boards), **Ireland**, **Italy**, **Liechtenstein**, **Luxembourg**, **Malta**, **Montenegro**, **North Macedonia**, **Norway**, **Poland** (where there is a legal requirement that each sex must make up at least 35 % of the candidates), **Portugal**, **Serbia**, **Slovenia**, **Spain** and the **United Kingdom**. In **Greece** such measures are compulsory and their implementation is subject to judicial review. In **Hungary** political parties can adopt positive action measures;[56] this regulation, however, is rarely applied in practice. The **Swedish** expert reports that the representation of women in Parliament and Government is close to 50 % and this number was achieved without using quotas.

Some countries also have research funding programmes which in specific circumstances might prefer female over male applicants (e.g. **Denmark**) and other programmes to increase diversity and gender equality in higher education (e.g. **Netherlands)**.

2.6 Harassment and sexual harassment[57]

2.6.1 Definition and explicit prohibition of harassment and sexual harassment

EU law prohibits harassment on the ground of a person's sex and sexual harassment and equates both with sex discrimination. Neither harassment on the ground of sex nor sexual harassment can be justified. Gender Recast Directive 2006/54/EC Article 2(1)(c) defines *harassment* as 'where unwanted conduct related to the sex of a person occurs with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, and of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.'[58] Article 1(d) defines *sexual harassment* as 'where 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'.[59] Both definitions include the violation of a person's dignity and the creation of an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. These conditions are cumulative, i.e. both need to have been met in order to comply with the definition. The main difference is that in the case of harassment on the ground of a person's sex, the person is ill-treated because he or she is a man or a woman (or, presumably, because they identify as non-binary). In the case of sexual harassment, it instead involves a person being subject to unwelcome sexual advances or, for instance, the aim of the perpetrator's behaviour is to obtain sexual favours. In concrete situations the distinction between the two may be unclear.[60]

All countries covered by this report have prohibited both harassment and sexual harassment in national legislation.

French law takes a step further and also prohibits sexist behaviour at work. This is defined as behaviour based on gender, with the purpose or effect of harming dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive work environment (see Article L.1142-2-1 of the French Labour Code).

56 Hungary, Act CXXV of 2003 on Equal Treatment and the Promotion of the Equality of Opportunities (*2003. évi CXXV. törvény az egyenlő bánásmódról és az esélyegyenlőség előmozdításáról*), 28 December 2003, Article 11(1)b.

57 De Vido, S., Sosa, L. (2021) *Criminalisation of gender-based violence against women in European States, including ICT-facilitated violence*, European Commission, available at: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/5535-criminalisation-of-gender-based-violence-against-women-in-european-states-including-ict-facilitated-violence-1-97-mb, Chapter 4; see also Petroglou, P. (2019) 'Sexual harassment and harassment related to sex at work: time for a new directive building on the EU gender equality acquis', *European equality law review* No. 2/2019, pp. 16-34, available at: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/5005-european-equality-law-review-2-2019-pdf-3-201-kb.

58 See also Article 2(c) Directive 2004/113/EC and Article 3(c) Directive 2010/41/EU.

59 See also Article 2(d) Directive 2004/113/EC and Article 3(d) Directive 2010/41/EU.

60 See the report of the European network of legal experts in the field of gender equality, Numhauser-Henning, A., Laulom, S. (2011) *Harassment related to sex and sexual harassment law in 33 European countries. Discrimination versus dignity*, European Commission, available at: https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/e06dcc86-b7bf-459e-8241-47502ef379c4/language-en/format-PDF/source-86560771.

2.6.2 Scope of the prohibition of harassment and sexual harassment

The Gender Recast Directive prohibits harassment and sexual harassment in the context of employment, including access to employment, vocational training and promotion. Similar obligations and definitions apply to the access to and supply of goods and services according to Directive 2004/113/EC. In most countries the scope of the prohibition on harassment and sexual harassment is wider than in EU law (**Albania**, **Austria**, **Belgium**, **Bulgaria**, **Croatia**, **Denmark**, **Estonia**, **Finland**, **Germany**, **Greece**, **Hungary**, **Iceland**, **Latvia**, **Montenegro**, **North Macedonia**, **Norway**, **Poland**, **Romania**, **Slovakia**, **Slovenia**, **Spain**, **Sweden**, **United Kingdom**). In some of these countries harassment and sexual harassment are prohibited in all spheres of life.

As regards sexual harassment, **Germany** only prohibits it in the employment context, thereby falling short of fully implementing EU law, as Directive 2004/113/EC Article 4(3) also prohibits harassment based on sex and sexual harassment in the access to and supply of goods and services.

2.6.3 Understanding of (sexual) harassment as discrimination

As mentioned above, EU law has explicitly opted to consider harassment on the grounds of a person's sex and sexual harassment as a form of sex discrimination.[61] In practice at the national level, however, this is not always the case. The **Belgian** and **Greek** experts, for example, report that harassment and sexual harassment are hardly ever perceived or analysed as forms of gender discrimination in case law. In **Turkey** an explicit prohibition of sexual harassment as a form of sex discrimination is lacking from employment legislation.

Not all countries have enacted legislation that specifies that harassment and sexual harassment amount to discrimination (see Article 2(2)(a) of Directive 2006/54/EC). In **Montenegro** such legislation does not exist.

2.6.4 Specific difficulties

Many national experts have reported that the number of cases that concern harassment on the basis of sex and sexual harassment is low (including **Cyprus**, **Germany**, **Greece**, **Iceland**, **Latvia**, **Montenegro**, **Slovakia**, **Spain**, **Turkey**), or that there is no case law at all (**Liechtenstein**). More broadly, several experts note that there is a general lack of measures addressing harassment and sexual harassment in employment (e.g. **Germany**, **Serbia**).

Reasons why victims are hesitant to go or are dissuaded from going to court include:

- They are deterred by the length and costs of judicial proceedings (**Cyprus**, **Norway**).
- The sanctions that are imposed in practice are too low to have a deterrent effect (**Croatia**).
- Fragmented legislative framework and different types of proceedings available (**Croatia**).
- In cases of sexual harassment at work, it is the victim who is moved to another work location, if possible, and not the perpetrator (**Croatia**).
- It is difficult to provide proof of harassment (e.g. **Austria**, **Bulgaria**, **Finland**, **Greece**, **Romania**), especially as there are often no witnesses.
- They fear victimisation and/or do not want to risk acquiring a 'bad reputation' in the labour market (e.g. **Bulgaria**, **Estonia**, **Greece**, **Portuga**l, **Turkey**). This can be worsened by a general precariousness in the labour market and high unemployment (**Spain**); or the small size of the labour

61 For a discussion of difficulties with this concept see the report by the European network of legal experts in the field of gender equality, Numhauser-Henning, A., Laulom, S. (2011) *Harassment related to sex and sexual harassment law in 33 European countries. Discrimination versus dignity*, European Commission, available at: https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/e06dcc86-b7bf-459e-8241-47502ef379c4/language-en/format-PDF/source-86560802.

market (**Luxembourg**). In relation to victimisation, the expert from **Greece** adds that victims often fear that the perpetrator might bring criminal charges against them for slander (which is quite common in practice) and/or civil claims for moral damages.
– The existence of non-disclosure agreements (**United Kingdom**).

Several experts have also reported other types of legal difficulties:

– In **Romania** the fact that sexual harassment is prohibited both in the Criminal Code and in the Gender Equality Law raises difficulties. On several occasions, when alleged acts of harassment took place within labour relations, the National Council for Combating Discrimination (*Consiliul Național pentru Combaterea Discriminării*, CNCD) decided to declare the case inadmissible *rationae materiae*, without actually referring the case to the prosecutor's office.[62] This is problematic because a criminal investigation into sexual harassment starts with a complaint from the alleged victim within three months from the time of the act, a period that is usually lost through CNCD procedures, leaving the victim without effective remedy.
– In **Norway** it is uncertain what degree of liability employers have when their representatives harass someone.
– In **Croatia** the protection against sexual harassment is fragmented and regulated in various legislative instruments, and it can be subject to several types of proceedings.
– In **Turkey**, civil servants cannot be prosecuted for crimes (including harassment or sexual harassment) unless their superior consents to prosecution.
– In **Belgium**, if the victim of harassment or sexual harassment is an employee, he or she must rely on the Welfare at Work Act to the exclusion of the Gender Act of 10 May 2007. This makes for faulty compliance with Directive 2006/54/EC, for various reasons but in particular because a woman who is the victim of sexual harassment at work is forbidden to complain about gender discrimination.

In recent years, thanks to #MeToo and related movements, the existence of sexual harassment and sex-based harassment has received more societal attention. This has had various effects. The experts from **Bulgaria** and **Czechia** note that there is widespread resistance to the concept of sexual harassment in society, which manifested in resistance to the #MeToo movement. Some other experts have reported positive effects, however, in the sense that the number of cases has increased.

2.7 Instruction to discriminate

In EU law, instruction to discriminate on the ground of a person's sex is equated with discrimination (Article 2(2)(b) of the Gender Recast Directive 2006/54/EC).[63] Thus, for example, where an agency is requested by an employer to supply workers of one sex only, both the employer and the agency would be liable and would have to justify such sex discrimination. EU law does not clearly define an instruction to discriminate.

All countries have prohibited instruction to discriminate. In most countries, the prohibition concerning the instruction to discriminate is similar in formulation to that in EU law and is not further defined. Some countries have adopted a legal definition, however. In **Bulgaria**, it means direct and intentional encouragement, giving an instruction, exerting pressure or persuading someone to engage in discrimination.

Few experts report difficulties with the concept of instruction to discriminate. In **Croatia**, because of diverging definitions in legislation, there was confusion about whether intent is required or not, a

62 E.g. CNCD (2014, 2008), Decision No. 589 of 22.10.2014, available at: http://nediscriminare.ro/uploads_ro/docManager/727/hotarare_589-14_V.O.pdf; Decision No. 648 of 20.11.2008, available at: http://nediscriminare.ro/uploads_ro/docManager/896/hot._648-2008.pdf.

63 See also Asscher-Vonk, I. (2012) 'Instruction to discriminate', *European gender equality law review* No. 1/2012, pp. 4-12, available at: https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/dea2021f-0be4-476f-bd8f-86829326380a/language-en/format-PDF/source-86561026.

requirement which is not mentioned in Article 2(2)(b) of the Recast Directive. In **North Macedonia**, it is in practice very difficult to prove instruction to discriminate. The courts rejected several cases where the claimant asserted that hate speech constituted an instruction to discriminate. In many countries there has not yet been any case law regarding instruction to discriminate (**Belgium**, **Cyprus**, **Estonia**, **Germany**, **Greece** (where the legislation transposing Directives 2004/113/EC and 2010/41/EU also prohibits 'encouragement' to discriminate), **Luxembourg**, **Malta**, **Romania**).

2.8 Other forms of discrimination

Several countries also prohibit other forms of discrimination in their national law, such as discrimination by association or discrimination based on assumed characteristics (**Albania**, **Bulgaria**, **Croatia**, **Cyprus**, **Czechia**, **Denmark**, **Finland**, **Germany**, **Greece** (which prohibits discrimination by association, but only in respect of grounds of discrimination other than sex), **Hungary** (which prohibits assumed discrimination, segregation and retaliation), **Ireland**, **Montenegro** (which prohibits segregation), **Norway**, **Serbia**, **Turkey**, **United Kingdom** (**Great Britain**)). Discrimination by association was developed in EU law in relation to disability discrimination in the *Coleman* case.[64] It refers to a situation when someone is discriminated against by virtue of their association with someone who possesses a protected characteristic. Assumed discrimination occurs when someone is treated differently based on assumptions related to a personal characteristic. For example, an employer could treat an employee disadvantageously because they assume the employee is pregnant.

In **Ireland**, the Employment Equality Act has a particularly broad definition of discrimination as it refers to any of the discrimination grounds which (i) exists, (ii) existed but no longer exists, (iii) may exist in the future, or (iv) is imputed to the person concerned. Discrimination is also taken to occur where 'a person who is associated with another person is treated, by virtue of that association, less favourably than a person who is not so associated is, has been or would be treated in a comparable situation'.[65]

In a 2020 amendment to the **Albanian** Law on Protection from Discrimination (LPD) a prohibition of structural discrimination has been included. 'Structural discrimination' is defined as follows: 'a form of discrimination that refers to the rules, provisions, practices, patterns of attitudes and behaviours in institutions and other social structures, that consciously or unconsciously present obstacles to groups or individuals to have the same rights and possibilities as others, and that contribute to less favourable results for them compared to others'.

Most experts note that there are no specific legislative provisions on algorithmic discrimination, but that algorithmic discrimination could presumably be covered under the general provisions of anti-discrimination and gender equality law. In some countries there is burgeoning case law on this topic (e.g. **Austria**, **Finland**, **Italy**), and in other countries policies and action plans concerning algorithmic discrimination have been adopted (e.g. **Serbia**). The European network of legal experts in gender equality and non-discrimination has recently published a report on algorithmic discrimination, authored by Janneke Gerards and Raphaele Xenidis.[66]

64 CJEU, Judgment of 17 July 2008, *Coleman*, C-303/06, EU:C:2008:415; see also Karagiorgi, C. (2014) 'The concept of discrimination by association and its application in the EU Member States', *European Anti-discrimination Law Review 18,* pp. 25-36, available at: https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/d172d22d-30f5-44ab-afa2-4768e7a68689/language-en/format-PDF.

65 Ireland, Section 6 of the Employment Equality Act 1998 (as amended).

66 European network of legal experts in gender equality and non-discrimination, Gerards, J. and Xenidis, R. (2020) *Algorithmic discrimination in Europe: Challenges and opportunities for gender equality and non-discrimination law*, European Commission, available at: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/5361-algorithmic-discrimination-in-europe-pdf-1-975.

2.9 Evaluation of implementation

On the whole, with some specific difficulties mentioned in the paragraphs above, the national experts are of the opinion that the key concepts of EU gender equality law have correctly transposed into national law. Several experts (e.g. **Albania**, **Belgium**) do, nevertheless, report difficulties related to (the recognition of) gender identity or note that the protection against discrimination for intersex, transgender and non-binary persons is not satisfactory (e.g. **Cyprus**). However, many of these difficulties do not strictly speaking concern the implementation of EU law on equality based on sex.

Most of the difficulties relate to the level of implementation and enforcement, rather than the legal framework itself. The lack of case law that virtually all experts mention has various root causes, amongst which experts indicate lack of knowledge about the law on the part of all actors (victims, employers, judges etc).

3 Equal pay and equal treatment at work (Article 157 on the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) and Recast Directive 2006/54)

3.1 Equal pay[67]

The principle of equal pay for men and women for equal work or work of equal value, now contained in Article 157 TFEU, has been entrenched ever since the beginning in the EEC Treaty. In order to facilitate the implementation of the principle, Directive 75/117/EEC was adopted in 1975 and has since been repealed by Recast Directive 2006/54/EC. Indeed, both direct and indirect discrimination in pay are prohibited and the CJEU has answered many preliminary questions from national courts on this issue. These have included the scope of the notion of 'pay', which the CJEU has interpreted broadly;[68] pay includes not only basic pay, but also, for example, overtime supplements,[69] special bonuses paid by the employer,[70] travel allowances,[71] compensation for attending training courses and training facilities,[72] termination payments in case of dismissal and occupational pensions.[73] In particular, the extension of pay in the sense of Article 157 TFEU to occupational pensions has been very important (see Section 5).

Significantly, the Recast Directive requires that the Member States ensure that provisions in collective agreements, wage scales, wage agreements and individual employment contracts which are contrary to the principle of equal pay should be null and void or be amended (Article 23). Moreover, it provides that, where job classification schemes are used in order to determine pay, these must be based on the same criteria for both men and women and should be drawn up to exclude discrimination on the grounds of sex (Article 4).

Unfortunately, despite this legal framework, the difference between the remuneration of male and female employees remains one of the great concerns in the area of gender equality: on average, the average gross hourly wage difference between men and women (= gender pay gap) in the EU is 14.1 %[74] and progress has been slow in closing the gender pay gap.[75] The differences can partly be explained by factors other than discrimination: e.g. traditions in the career choices of men and women; the fact that men, more often than women, are given overtime duties, with corresponding higher rates of pay; the gender imbalance in the sharing of family responsibilities; 'glass ceilings'; part-time work, which is often highly

67 See the reports produced by the European network of legal experts in the field of gender equality on this topic: Burri, S. (2019) *National cases and good practices on equal pay*, European Commission, available at: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/5002-national-cases-and-good-practices-on-equal-pay; Foubert, P. (2017) *The enforcement of the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value*, European Commission, available at: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/4466-the-enforcement-of-the-principle-of-equal-pay-for-equal-work-or-work-of-equal-value-pdf-840-kb.

68 See for example Case C-381/99, *Brunnhofer*, judgment of 26 June 2001, ECLI:EU:C:2001:358; Case C-167/97, *R v Secretary of State for Employment, ex parte Seymour-Smith and Perez,* judgment of 9 February 1999, ECLI:EU:C:1999:60, paras 24-25. Case 12/81, *Garland v British Rail Engineering,* judgment of 9 February 1982, ECLI:EU:C:1982:44, para 5; Case C-262/88, *Barber*, judgment of 17 May 1990, ECLI:EU:C:1990:209, para 12.

69 Joined Cases C-399/92, C-409/92, C-425/92, C-34/93, C-50/93 and C-78/93, *Helmig and Others* judgment of 15 December 1995, ECLI:EU:C:1994:415.

70 See for example C-58/81, *Commission v Luxembourg*, judgment of 9 June 1982, ECLI:EU:C:1982:215.

71 Case 12/81, *Garland v British Rail Engineering,* judgment of 9 February 1982, ECLI:EU:C:1982:44.

72 Case C-360/90, *Arbeiterwohlfahrt der Stadt Berlin e.V. v Monika Bötel*, judgment of 4 June 1992, ECLI:EU:C:1992:246.

73 For example Case C-249/97, *Gruber v Silhouette International Schmied GmbH & Co KG*, judgment of 14 September 1999, ECLI:EU:C:1999:405.

74 European Commission (2021), 'Pay Transparency: Equal pay for women and men for equal work', Factsheet, see: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/aid_development_cooperation_fundamental_rights/pay_transparency_factsheet_en.pdf.

75 European Commission (2018), 'The gender pay gap in the European Union', Factsheet, see: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/aid_development_cooperation_fundamental_rights/equalpayday-eu-factsheets-2018_en.pdf.

feminised; job segregation etc. However, another part of the discrepancies cannot be explained except by the fact that there is pay discrimination, which the principle of equal pay aims to eradicate.[76]

The COVID-19 pandemic is considered to have highlighted and exacerbated the gender pay gap, due to the fact that many sectors with predominantly female employees were hit particularly hard by the pandemic.[77] This was, for example, reported by the **Croatian** expert. Moreover, many studies suggest that women tended to take on most of the childcare at home.[78]

3.1.1 Implementation in national law

The principle of equal pay under EU law is, in general, reflected in the legislation of the Member States and the EEA countries, both at the constitutional and the legislative level, either as part of general labour law or as provided for in specific anti-discrimination legislation. Furthermore, in some states equal pay is also guaranteed (partly) by collective agreement (**Belgium**).

Meanwhile, the **Hungarian** expert has expressed concern about the fact that the equal pay principle as such, which was included in the former constitution, has not been adopted in Hungary's new constitution (the Fundamental Law of Hungary, 2011), despite opposition members asking to keep it in place and although the new constitution does contain the wider provision that 'Women and men shall have equal rights'. The **Romanian** Constitution lays down the principle of equal pay but it does not cover work of equal value, only equal work, and it only applies to salaries, not to other types of remuneration or benefits for work.[79] There is no case law from the Constitutional Court explaining how these limitations should be interpreted. Yet the Labour Code,[80] the Anti-discrimination Law[81] and the Gender Equality Law[82] fully transpose the principle of equal pay, covering all these aspects. By contrast, in **Greece** the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value is enshrined in the Constitution and this principle covers any ground whatsoever and is not limited to sex. However, the scope given to the principle still varies in a number of respects, as the following section will show.

In **Germany**, the Pay Transparency Act entered into force on 6 July 2017.[83] The Act contains an explicit prohibition of direct and indirect pay discrimination on the grounds of sex/gender (including pregnancy and motherhood). It tries to provide a definition of 'same work' and 'work of equal value', covering the kind of work, training requirements, working conditions and the key requirements of the actual work in question. The prohibition of pay discrimination is repeated under the heading 'pay equality' (although there is still no obligation to pay the same remuneration for the same work under German law, but rather there is a prohibition of pay discrimination on the grounds of sex, which is different). Agreements violating the prohibition of pay discrimination on the grounds of sex/gender are invalid. The Act explicitly prohibits victimisation connected to the exercising of rights under this law. Nevertheless, first evaluations of the Act carried out in 2019[84] suggest that the success of the law is limited, largely due to the way

76 On legal aspects of the gender pay gap, see the report produced by the European network of legal experts in the field of gender equality, Foubert, P., Burri, S., Numhauser-Henning, A. (2010) *The gender pay gap from a legal perspective (including 33 country reports)*, European Commission, available at: https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/8745534d-d450-4ae1-bfe2-0f7389d361ef/language-en/format-PDF/source-86561461.

77 Böök, B., van Hoof, F., Senden, L., Timmer, A. (2020) 'Gendering the COVID-19 crisis: a mapping of its impact and call for action in light of EU gender equality law and policy', European equality law review 2020/2, pp. 32-33, available at: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/5300-european-equality-law-review-2-2020-pdf-1-446-kb.

78 Farré, L., Fawaz, Y., González, L. and Graves, J. (2020), *How the Covid-19 lockdown affected gender inequality in paid and unpaid work in Spain*, p. 5.

79 Romania, Constitution, Article 41(4).

80 Romania, Labour Code (*Codul Muncii*), Article 6(3).

81 Romania, Anti-discrimination Law, Article 6(b), (c).

82 Romania, Gender Equality Law, Article 7(c).

83 Germany, Pay Transparency Act of 30 June 2017, Official Journal 2017, p. 2152, https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/entgtranspg/BJNR215210017.html.

84 German Federal Government (2019), Report on the implementation of the Pay Transparency Act with Comments by the Social Partners), https://www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj/service/publikationen/bericht-der-bundesregierung-zur-wirksamkeit-des-gesetzes-zur-foerderung-der-entgelttransparenz-zwischen-frauen-und-maennern/137226.

employers and managers engage with the law and the fact that only 2 % of employees used their right to information. It is suggested that as earlier drafts of the Act were discussed and amended on many occasions, the means for the effective enforcement of equal pay was watered down. In **France**, there seems to be an explicit effort since 2017 to enrich the meaning of substantive equality by means of a more quantitative evaluation of corrective measures in the private sector, including a new decree on the gender pay gap of 2019, which was adopted to implement the law of 5 September 2018.[85] Companies[86] must publish indicators each year relating to the pay gap between women and men. When the results obtained are under 75 points, the collective bargaining negotiations on equality will focus on adequate and relevant measures to correct the gender pay gap and programme annual or pluri-annual financial measures to close it.[87]

In **Iceland**, the new Gender Equality Act No. 150/2020 was approved in December 2020 and was to take effect on 6 January 2021. Unlike the previous pay clause in Act No. 10/2008, the new act does not require that the employees work for the same employer and the words 'working for the same employer' in Article 19 of the previous GEA have been removed. Article 6 of the new Act contains a general provision on pay equality for women, men and people who are officially registered as gender neutral for the same jobs or jobs of equal value. Equal pay is pay determined in the same way for people independent of their sex and shall not involve any sex discrimination.

3.1.2 Definition in national law

While many countries have implemented the concept of pay as contained in the Recast Directive and as it ensues from the interpretation of the CJEU of Article 157 TFEU, there are also still quite a number of countries in which the concept is not clearly defined as such in law (**Austria**, **Bulgaria**, **Estonia**, **Finland**, **Italy**, **Latvia**, **Norway**, **Sweden**, **United Kingdom**) or where there is no single and exhaustive definition of pay provided for, such as in **Belgium**. While in some countries this has not caused problems, because of the way that legislation has developed (**United Kingdom**), in others some uncertainty persists as to whether it is understood in the same way as it is contained in EU law. In some of these countries, compliance with EU law can be deduced mainly from the case law (**Latvia**, **Norway**, **Sweden**) or from a web of different laws (**Estonia**, **Malta**) and in combination with collective agreements and case law (**Austria**, **Italy**). Collective agreements may also provide for definitions (**Belgium**). The definition contained in national law may also be less elaborate than in EU legislation, yet with the meaning being the same (**Netherlands**). In **Portugal**, the new legislation on pay transparency (Law No. 60/2018, of 21 August 2018), has clarified the notion of remuneration and has been brought in line with Article 157(2) TFEU. This notion now explicitly includes other financial advantages apart from salary, including the payment of travel expenses and expenses relating to the performance of the work, bonuses, or premiums linked to productivity, seniority or good attendance. In **Germany**, the new Pay Transparency Act explicitly defines 'pay', in line with the EU concept.

In a few countries, the concept still does not (seem to) fully comply with the definition and scope of Article 157(2) TFEU. In **Lithuania**, the Labour Code of 2016 contains a special provision (Section 26(4)) that is in line with the definition of pay under EU law, which states that, for the purposes of discrimination, pay shall also encompass all indirect payments related to the performance of work under the employment contract (Article 140(6) of the Labour Code).

85 Act No. 2018-771 5 September 2018 on the individual's freedom to choose their future professional life (*Loi n° 2018-771 du 5 septembre 2018 pour la liberté de choisir son avenir professionnel*), available at: https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000037367660&categorieLien=id.

86 More than 50 employees.

87 Article D.1142-6; Decree No. 2019-15 of 8 January 2019; Guidelines No. 2019/03, Ministry of Labour on gender gap measures 25 January 2019 – Instruction, Ministère du Travail available at http://grand-est.direccte.gouv.fr/sites/grand-est.direccte.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/instr_egalite_professionnelle_25_janv_2019.pdf.

In **Slovakia**, the definition does not apply to all remuneration for work and all benefits that are paid in relation to employment allowances, discharge benefits, non-mandatory travel reimbursements, contributions from a social fund, supplementary payments to sickness insurance benefits, and contributions to supplementary pension saving funds are thus excluded from the notion of pay. Somewhat odd omissions may also be found in other domestic laws, such as the **Belgian** Gender Act, which does not expressly stipulate that it also covers work of equal value, and the **Serbian** law, which does not refer explicitly to remuneration 'in kind'. Moreover, pay is understood to mean the earnings including tax and dues payable on earnings and all employment-related income, while the following are excluded: travel costs to and from work; time spent on business trips; and costs for accommodation and food for working in the field, if the employer failed to provide the employee with accommodation and food without compensation; a retirement gratuity, of the minimum amount of three average monthly earnings; a refund of funeral expenses in the event of death of a member of immediate family, and to members of the immediate family in the event of death of the employee; and the compensation of damage sustained due to an injury at work or a professional illness; and employment anniversary bonus and solidarity assistance.

The definition in **Polish** law is considered deficient to the extent that, when speaking of work-related benefits, it omits the clarification included in the directive according to which the benefit may be both directly and indirectly related to employment and that it has to originate from the employer. Secondly, it also does not indicate a specific understanding of the principle of equal pay with regard to remuneration for work carried out in a piece-rate system[88] as well as in a time-rate system.[89] While the **Romanian** Labour Code fully transposes the equal pay principle and concept of pay, the Romanian Constitution uses a more limited formulation and the relevance of this has not been clarified so far by the Constitutional Court. As for the law of **Montenegro**, while the definition is mostly in compliance with the definition of Article 157(2) TFEU, it does not explicitly include cash and benefits in kind, although it can be considered that it does include both.

3.1.3 Explicit implementation of Article 4 of Recast Directive 2006/54

Article 4 of the Recast Directive requires national law to prohibit explicitly direct and indirect discrimination on grounds of sex with regard to all aspects and conditions of remuneration, but not all national legal systems provide for such an explicit stipulation (**Latvia**, **Montenegro**, **Netherlands**, **Poland**, **Slovenia**, **Sweden**, **United Kingdom**) or only partly (**Czechia**, **Serbia**). In **Czechia** equal pay for men and women is not explicitly mentioned, but the principle of equal pay for all employees apparently also includes equal pay for men and women.

In **Germany**, gender discrimination concerning pay is covered by statutory law, applying to the labour market in general. German courts have generally stated that there is no legal rule providing for the same pay for the same work, but that there is a general prohibition of pay discrimination based on gender. Furthermore, while most wages and job classification systems in Germany are determined by collective agreements under the Act on Collective Bargaining, this act does not contain any provisions on equal pay. Even collective agreements with public services and social institutions still contain gender-discriminatory job classification systems.

Although the new Pay Transparency Act 2017 contains an explicit prohibition of direct and indirect pay discrimination on the ground of sex/gender (including pregnancy and motherhood) and employers are required to develop a non-discriminatory payment system, it still does not tackle discriminatory structures in collective bargaining and job classifications. On the contrary, when a collective agreement applies, the employer is not obliged to explain the criteria and procedures used in wage-setting, but can

88 In this scheme, the level of an employee's remuneration depends on the quantitative results of their work (the degree to which the standard was achieved, e.g. the number of shoes produced).

89 In the case of a time-based system, the amount of remuneration depends on the amount of time worked in a given settlement period. In this system, the remuneration rates are set in relation to the number of time units (an hour, a day, a week or a month) and work efficiency has no influence on the rate.

simply refer to the agreement for explanation and justification, despite the fact that there are still gender-discriminatory job classifications established by collective agreements and that they remain one of the obstacles to equal pay. Furthermore, although the prohibition of pay discrimination is repeated under the heading 'pay equality', under German law there is still no obligation to pay the same remuneration for the same work, but rather just the prohibition of pay discrimination on the grounds of sex.

Swedish legislation does not explicitly mention pay discrimination. This 'tacit' way of regulating pay discrimination can be criticised for not being sufficiently clear. The **French** Labour Code also states that a job classification system (grading system) must be based on rules allowing for the implementation of the equal pay principle. Section 7 of the **Finnish** Act on Equality defines direct and indirect discrimination and Section 8 prohibits pay discrimination, in principle using the definitions under Section 7. However, it may still be difficult to distinguish direct and indirect pay discrimination in practice. The preparatory works to the Act on Equality refer to the possibility that the general prohibition of discrimination under Section 7 may be applied to pay discrimination in some cases that fall outside the scope of Section 8, for instance when employees do not do equal work or work of equal value, if an employee is placed at a disadvantage on the basis of sex. Section 7 does not provide a victim of discrimination with the right to obtain compensation under the Act on Equality, but compensation under tort law or the Employment Contract Act is possible.[90]

3.1.4 Permissibility of pay differences

Some countries do not provide for such a possibility in the (case) law (**Austria**, **Cyprus**, **Czechia**, **Denmark**, **Latvia**, **Liechtenstein**, **Luxembourg**, **Malta**, **Poland**, **Romania**, **Serbia**, **Slovakia**, **Slovenia**, **Spain**, **Sweden**) or it is ultimately left to the courts to decide on this (**Latvia**, **Liechtenstein**, **Lithuania**, **United Kingdom**). In **Hungary**, exemptions are not possible in direct wage discrimination cases.[91] A resolution of the Equal Treatment Authority's Advisory Body (from 2008) provided that the general rules of exemption provided by the Equal Treatment Act cannot be applied in sex-based discrimination cases where the principle of 'equal pay for work of equal value' is violated.[92] In **Sweden**, pay differences are permitted if they are motivated by objective reasons. There is no exhaustive list of such reasons. For instance, they can relate to educational level, professional experience, to some extent age (youth wages), performance differences, supply and demand in the labour market, and collective bargain outcome (since wages in Sweden are not regulated in law, but set by collective agreements). Sex can never be an objective reason. In other countries, accepted justifications for pay differences in the law in the case of equal work or work of equal value include the following ones, ranging from job-related grounds to personal qualifications in relation to the job and to certain external factors that may induce a pay differential:

- salary classification systems prescribed by law (**Croatia**, **Turkey**) or job classification systems in collective agreements (**Austria**, **Germany**);
- quantity and quality of the work (**Albania**, **Montenegro**, **Turkey**) or productivity (**Portugal**);
- being employed at different times (**Malta**, **Netherlands**);
- responsibility (**Albania**, **Finland**);
- working conditions, unpleasant or abnormal working hours (**Albania**, **Finland**, **Montenegro**);
- being a manager (**North Macedonia**, **Turkey**);
- performance of extra duties, 'red circling' or maintaining a personal rate of pay because of particular circumstances that are not based on sex (**Finland**, **Ireland**);
- seniority (**Belgium**, **Bulgaria**, **Poland**, **Portugal**, **Turkey**);

90 Finland, Government Bill 57/1985 vp, p. 16.

91 Hungary, Act CXXV of 2003 on Equal Treatment and the Promotion of the Equality of Opportunities (*2003. évi CXXV. törvény az egyenlő bánásmódról és az esélyegyenlőség előmozdításáról*), 28 December 2003, Article 22(2).

92 Resolution No. 384/4/2008. (III.28.) TT. of the Advisory Body of the Equal Treatment Authority relating to the share of the burden of proof (*Az Egyenlő Bánásmód Tanácsadó Testület 384/4/2008. (III.28.) TT. sz.* állásfoglalása *a bizonyítási kötelezettség megosztásával kapcsolatban*), available at: https://www.egyenlobanasmod.hu/sites/default/files/content/torveny/bizonyitasi_kotelezettseg.pdf.

- differences in formal qualifications (educational level) for the job (**Albania**, **Croatia**, **Finland**, **Iceland**, **Netherlands**, **Turkey**) or demand for higher qualifications for the performance of a wider range of tasks (**Ireland**);
- relevant work experience from previous jobs with the same or other employers (**Netherlands**) or work experience and professional skills in general (**Albania**, **Bulgaria**, **Finland**, **Iceland**);
- productivity (**Portugal**), personal performance/work results (**Finland**, **Montenegro**, **North Macedonia**), economic performance (**Estonia**);
- the lack of periods of absence, excluding the exercise of maternity and paternity rights (**Portugal**);
- lack of periods of absence for workers (**Portugal**);
- alignment with the last salary earned (**Netherlands**);
- guarantees to receive a specific salary or supplement granted in the past;
- competitiveness (**Hungary**);
- labour shortages (in some circumstances) (**Finland**, **Netherlands**) and demand and supply in the labour market (**Estonia**);
- the merging of two organisations or some other form of reorganisation (**Netherlands**), introduction of a new pay system, or changes in the tasks or market-based factors (**Finland**, but only on a temporary basis);
- being a specialist from abroad (**Estonia**);
- pay negotiations (**Netherlands**).

In the **Netherlands**, justifications ensue from case law and have been reported to be offering too broad a scope. While the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights (NIHR) considers, for example, an alignment with the last salary earned to be a non-neutral criterion, the courts do not always follow this and consider it in principle a valid justification. An employer is also entitled to introduce new regulations for new employees, even though these may lead to pay differences between the new and the old personnel.[93]

In **Greece**, differences in the legal nature of the employment relationship (e.g. one worker is employed under a private-law contract, while another is a civil servant) or the wage-fixing instrument (e.g. one worker is covered by a collective agreement (CA), another is not, or they are covered by different CAs) are often used as justifications, even within the same company or service where the workers are employed by the same employer and perform the same work.[94] This also occurs in **Turkey**, especially in the public sector.

In **France**, pay differentials can only be justified if the work is not of the same value. Therefore, courts concentrate on the value of jobs and not on the justification argument. Seniority, if it is not already included in a separate bonus, can be a justification for a disparity in pay.[95] A recent case decided by the Court of Cassation provides an interesting illustration. The Court decided that the pay rise of a female employee who had started at the same time and in the same pay grade as the male claimant, was justified as it constituted compensation for the extra diplomas and additional experience that the female colleague had acquired before being hired for the job and that had in fact not been taken into account. In other words, for the Court of Cassation, the corrective (preferential) measure to compensate the wage disparity was justified and in conformity with the principle of equal pay for work of equal value.

Latvian courts are also more concerned with the establishment of the similarity of the cases than with the justification of differences. **Spanish** legislation does not make any express reference to justifications for pay differences, thus leaving a lot of leeway for courts to allow these or not to consider all the circumstances of the case. For instance, the Constitutional Court has considered that justification is possible for pay differences when jobs occupied mostly by men require more responsibility and a higher degree of concentration than jobs occupied mostly by women.

93 Netherlands, The Hague Court of Appeal, *JAR* 2005/113, 4 February 2005.
94 Greece, SCPC (Civil Section) Nos 3/1997 (Plen.), 288/2003, 453/2002 (these are not gender cases).
95 France, Judgment of the Court of Cassation Soc., 19 December 2007, No. 06-44.795.

Romanian law does not address the issue of justifications at all, but leaves full discretion to individual negotiation of salaries. In **North Macedonia**, in the private sector there is also such discretion for the negotiation of salaries for managers. In **Hungarian** case law, employers may justify the wage difference by referring to their freedom of contract and/or the differences in the bargaining power of different employees.

While **Greek** law does not allow for justification of pay differentials, differences in the legal nature of the employment relationship (e.g. being under a private-law contract or being a civil servant) or the wage-fixing instrument (e.g. being covered by a collective agreement or not) are often used as justifications, even in the same firm or service and for the same work. There is also a tendency to justify pay differences on budgetary grounds, by mere generalisations and by referring to the lack of assessment criteria for the work compared.

The **Polish** Supreme Court considers that the actual performance of the worker determines whether work is equal, and not the description of the obligations of the employee deriving from the employment contract. The **Portuguese** expert has noted that the permissibility of pay differences related to a worker's periods of absence is liable to be indirect discrimination; the law in this regard explicitly indicates that the exercise of maternity and paternity rights ('parenthood rights') cannot justify different remuneration, because other leave situations are included, including time off for reasons relating to care for other relatives, which is more common among women than among men. In addition, indirect discrimination can arise here, even in situations relating to a worker's periods of absence to take care of children, apart from maternity, paternity and parental leave, because the notion of 'parenthood rights' is not clear in the law and therefore tends to be interpreted in a strict sense, e.g. only in relation to specific rights attached to maternity, paternity and parental leave.

According to Section 9 of the **Norwegian** GEADA, differential treatment may be allowed in cases where that provision, criterion or practice is objectively justified by a legitimate aim and the means of achieving that aim are appropriate and proportionate. This provision applies to all areas of society, including pay, but it is also required that the characteristic in question is of decisive significance for the performance of the work or the pursuit of the occupation. In **Iceland**, equal pay certification does not prevent a company from implementing a pay policy that is performance based if the different wages are based on relevant considerations and not gender.

3.1.5 Requirements for comparators

In many states a comparator is not required. The **French** Court of Cassation, for instance, holds that 'the existence of discrimination does not necessarily imply a comparison with other workers'. A judge may thus find that a decision amounts to sex discrimination even when there are no men in the company who can be used as comparators. **Spanish** courts resolve equal pay cases by analysing the identity of functions or their equal value, without considering the possibility of introducing the concept of (a hypothetical) comparator, even if the law does not seem to exclude this possibility. The **Hungarian** expert has noted that while the law does not require a comparator, the review of the published cases reveals that taking, elaborating and contrasting the actual pay of the claimant with another concrete employee significantly improves the claimant's chances of winning the case. But also referring to a hypothetical comparator is not excluded. In **Denmark** as well there is no legal requirement to this effect but in practice a comparator is often used to assert or prove discrimination, both within the same employer as well as across different sectors. It is not necessary that an employer employs both men and women for a comparator to be applied.

However, in other countries an actual comparator still needs to be identified on the basis of the law (**Austria**, **Croatia**, **Cyprus**, **Czechia**, **Estonia**, **Finland**, **Germany**, **Ireland**, **Malta**, **Northern Ireland**, **Netherlands**, **Portugal**, **Romania**, **Slovakia**, **Sweden**, **United Kingdom**). In **Poland**, it is only required

in cases of direct discrimination. Some countries also allow for a hypothetical comparator[96] (**Albania**, **Austria**, **Germany**, **Norway**, **Poland**, **Romania**, **Sweden**), while in others this is unclear, although not considered to be excluded (**Iceland**, **Spain**) and is left to the courts to be decided (**Italy**, **Malta**, **Serbia**). In **Cyprus**, the definition of direct discrimination with respect to equal pay for men and women for equal work or work of equal value allows a hypothetical comparator, however, it has not been tested in practice. In the **United Kingdom**, a hypothetical comparator may be relied upon but only where direct discrimination is concerned. In the recent *Asda v Brierley and others* case, the UK Supreme Court held that the *North* hypothetical shall be applied in cases where no employees of the comparator's group work at the claimant's establishment. This means that the Court considers whether, hypothetically speaking, 'the comparator's group would have been employed on broadly similar terms to those which they have at their own establishment if employed on the same site as the claimants.'[97] In yet other countries, the situation is somewhat more diverse as the law itself may not be explicit as such (**Bulgaria**, **Greece**, **Latvia**), although case law does show a comparator being required. Thus, in **Latvia**, the Supreme Court, in a recent judgment in an unequal pay case, held that a court must assess the real level of the professional qualifications of an employee (for example, their education or skills for the performance of a job, etc.), the character of the work in question and the employment conditions, and then compare these indicators with those of other workers in order to establish whether the claimant has performed equal work or work of equal value and whether they have been paid according to their qualifications and the character of the job in question.[98] In **Austria**, it is both possible to refer to a hypothetical comparator, as well as to a comparable situation that lies in the past.[99]

In **Greece**, the definition of discrimination may be considered as implicitly requiring a comparator. In **Iceland**, the prevailing comparator is the equal pay certification, which is now required for all employers with 25 or more employees on an annual basis, confirming that they meet the equal pay standards. In **Germany**, in practice, equal pay cases are not decided with regard to the sex and income of comparable employees[100] but with regard to the most sophisticated job classifications set up by collective agreements which are not challenged by the courts. Furthermore, under the new Statute on Pay Transparency, employees (and civil servants, judges and the military) are entitled to obtain information on the gross remuneration of their fellow employees doing the same work or work of equal value and up to two remuneration components. The employee exercising this right must identify the comparable same work or work of equal value and the comparison group of employees of the opposite sex must contain at least six people. However, this does not work out well in practice. The first evaluation of the Pay Transparency Act in 2019 reveals that so far the right to information has hardly been used.[101]

In **Ireland**, there was a case of 14 claimants, clerical officers employed by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, who were assigned to clerical duties in the police force. They brought a claim for equal pay and the comparators were members of the force who were assigned to perform certain clerical

96 The term 'hypothetical comparator' is not defined in national laws, but is rather implied by the wording of the provision in question. For example, in many cases, the national legislation will refer to discrimination occurring when a person is treated less favourably than another is, has been or would be treated in a comparable situation. See for example Austria, Equal Treatment Act for the Private Sector (Gleichbehandlungsgesetz, GlBG) BGBl I 66/2004, Section 5(1); Germany, General Equal Treatment Act of 14 August 2006 (Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz), Official Journal 2006, p. 1897, Section 3(1); Poland, Labour Code Act (*Ustawa: Kodeks Pracy*) of 26 June 1974, consolidated text JoL 2018 Item 108, with amendments, Article 18^{3a}(3).

97 *Asda Stores Ltd v Brierley*, Supreme Court [2021] UKSC 10, 26 march 2021, available at: https://www.supremecourt.uk/cases/docs/uksc-2019-0039-judgment.pdf.

98 Latvia, decision of the Supreme Court on 27 April 2017 in case No. SKC-792/2017, point 10.3.

99 Rebhahn, R. (2005) in Rebhahn, R. (ed.), Kommentar zum Gleichbehandlungsgesetz und GBK-GAW-Gesetz, § 5 GlBG Rz 3.

100 For an exceptional case of direct pay discrimination up to the end of 2012, see State Labour Court of Rhineland-Palatinate, Judgment of 13 January 2016, 4 Sa 616/14.

101 German Federal Government (2019), Report on the implementation of the Pay Transparency Act with Comments by the Social Partners), https://www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj/service/publikationen/bericht-der-bundesregierung-zur-wirksamkeit-des-gesetzes-zur-foerderung-der-entgelttransparenz-zwischen-frauen-und-maennern/137226.

and administrative duties. Following on the judgment from the CJEU in this case,[102] the matter was remitted to the High Court,[103] which in turn remitted it to the Labour Court, stating that the Labour Court should adopt the following approach. Namely that the Labour Court should choose comparators drawn from the generality of all those engaged in clerical work for or as members of the police force; then the Labour Court should address the issue of whether or not the work performed by the claimants is like work; then if the work is like work, the Labour Court should address the issue as to whether or not the difference in pay is objectively justified. This will not involve consideration of the reasons for the assignment of members of the police force to certain posts. Industrial relations issues cannot of themselves be the sole basis justifying a difference in pay, but regard may be had to industrial issues as one of a number of factors. In addition, consideration must be given to the context of the generality of those engaged in clerical work; this will extend to taking into account the nature of not only the clerical work but all police work, including all incidents of service in the police force. The matter is presently before the Labour Court which is to hear submissions as to how it should proceed in the selection of comparators. The most recent decision by the Labour Court was in November 2015.[104]

In other countries, a comparator may not be required in all situations (**Estonia**, **Netherlands**, **North Macedonia**), may be applied more leniently in some cases (**Finland**) or may not be explicitly required by law but sometimes in practice (**Bulgaria**). In the **Netherlands**, a comparator is not required in situations of possible indirect discrimination in which the effects of a certain rule or practice, e.g. the granting of extra pay to workers who are prepared to work overtime, is that substantially more men than women receive an advantage. In these situations, it must be examined whether there is an objective justification for the difference in pay. The normal (stringent) objective justification test is applicable here. In this approach no specific comparator is needed, as different pay systems can be compared with one another. In most cases these systems or practices will be used within one company or group of companies, but theoretically it is possible that a comparison could be made between systems or practices that appear in a collective agreement or a statutory arrangement.

In **Finland**, the use of a hypothetical comparator is not allowed, but in pay discrimination concerning pregnancy the comparison may be made with the person herself (if she had not become pregnant). In practice, the comparator requirement may be more flexible. For example, if a neutral norm has a differential impact on a group of people defined by having the same protected characteristic, this establishes the assumption that the norm itself is discriminatory. Such collective considerations are not necessary in cases that address whether or not a norm that is per se neutral has been applied in a discriminatory manner. If the application of certain criteria cannot be objectively justified, then it can be assumed that pay differentials are caused by gender. There are also cases where the main issue has been whether a comparison may be made if there are both women and men among those receiving lower pay.

The Labour Court has held that the burden of proof may be shifted onto the respondent employer if the claimant can present at least one comparator of the opposite sex who has better pay for equal work, irrespective of the fact that there are both women and men in lower and higher pay brackets doing equal work.[105] However, the Supreme Court and the Supreme Administrative Court have previously decided that in cases concerning the new pay system for judges, since both men and women were placed in lower bracket offices, pay discrimination could not exist. In these cases the claimants had not even managed to establish an assumption of discrimination, which would reverse the burden of proof onto the respondent

102 CJEU, Judgment of 28 February 2013, *Kenny v Minister for Justice and Law Reform,* C-427/11, EU:C:2013:122. For a complete commentary on this case, see Meenan, F., *Enforcement of the principle of equal pay*, European Equality Law Network (November 2016), available at: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/3950-paper-frances-meenan-workshop-equal-pay-pdf-385-kb.

103 Ireland, [2014] IEHC 11, Judgment of Mr. Justice McCarthy of 13 January 2014. For clarification, this case originated in an appeal on a point of law from a determination of the Labour Court of 27 July 2007 (EDA 13/2007). Certain questions were referred to the CJEU. The judgment was delivered on 28 February 2013.

104 Ireland, *Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform v CPSU* EDA1518. This decision was essentially a case management conference.

105 Finland, Labour Court TT:2002-7-10.

employer.[106] It seems that neither the Supreme Court nor the Supreme Administrative Court proceeded to consider whether indirect discrimination could have been occurring. Evidence of indirect discrimination would have required a comparison of how female and male judges were positioned in different pay brackets.

In **North Macedonia** and **Romania**, the comparator requirement relates only to cases of direct discrimination. In the latter country, the National Council for Combating Discrimination has also required parties to provide evidence regarding a real comparator, even if the law allows for a hypothetical one. This is explained by the fact that in practice salaries are established in direct negotiations between employer and employee, and by the lack of norms establishing salary schemes that would in fact allow for a hypothetical comparator. **Polish** law is comparable in this regard, in that the written law also allows for a hypothetical comparator but case law indicates that it must be an actual comparator, and the prevalent view is also that a comparator may not be a person employed by another employer. Furthermore, Polish law stipulates the comparator requirement only explicitly for direct discrimination, yet such a requirement also seems to be implied in the law for indirect discrimination cases. In the **United Kingdom**, a hypothetical comparator may be relied upon only in direct discrimination cases, but case law on this is lacking so far.

In the **Netherlands** a complex two-way approach is used, the first one requiring a concrete comparison of the salary of a person of one sex with that of a person of another sex. The comparator should be an actual person within the same company, so no hypothetical comparator is allowed. The second approach is not specific for equal pay, but is an application of the concept of indirect discrimination. In this approach a certain practice, e.g. the granting of extra pay to workers who are prepared to work overtime, may be contested if the result of this practice is that substantially more men than women receive the extra pay. It then has to be examined whether there is an objective justification for the difference in pay. In this approach no specific comparator is needed, as different pay systems can be compared with one another. In most cases these systems or practices will be used within one company or group of companies, but theoretically it is possible that a comparison is made between systems or practices that appear in a collective agreement or a statutory arrangement.

In **Greece**, the provisions transposing the definition of direct discrimination from the directives allow a hypothetical comparator. However, according to **Greek** case law, applying the broader equal pay principle requires a comparator in the same enterprise or service or in the framework of the same wage-fixing instrument (e.g. collective agreement, statutory or administrative provision) and when there is no such comparator, the claimant can allege that they fulfil the conditions for the higher pay provided by an instrument for workers performing or having performed the same work, and claim the pay difference. In **Estonia**, a comparable employee means an employee working for the same employer, engaged in the same or similar work, but by default the comparison is made on the basis of the collective agreement and in the absence thereof a comparable employee in the same region is taken. In **Malta**, employees are to be compared with others in 'the same class of employment', with the same employer. Whether comparison of the position of employees with different employers is possible has not been tested as yet.

The above already reveals quite some difficulties that the requirement of a comparator may present in practice. A clear hurdle concerns the requirement that a comparator has to be employed by the same employer (**Croatia**, **Estonia**, **Greece**, **Malta**, **Netherlands**). In **Croatia**, as an exception, a comparator may be a person employed by different employers in the event of temporary agency work (where the agency and user are employers). Article 46(5) of the Labour Act (on employment contracts for temporary work) provides that the amount of the agreed salary of the assigned employee should not be '…lower and less favourable, respectively, than the salary (…) of an employee who is employed with the user in the same job, to which the assigned employee would have been entitled if he or she had entered into a contract of employment with the user.' This provision is broad because it prohibits different salaries for the assigned employee and the employee working with the user irrespective of gender, i.e. it also applies

106 Finland, cases from the Supreme Court KKO 2009:78 and the Supreme Administrative Court KHO 2005:51.

to employees of the same gender. In **Greece**, it is also considered problematic that, according to case law, the hypothetical comparator must perform or have performed the same work. Another hurdle concerns the point of reference that is to be taken for the comparison: formal requirements as entailed e.g. in a job classification system or the performance of actual tasks; whenever there is a legally prescribed salary classification system the performance of actual tasks will be irrelevant (**Croatia**).

Case law related to comparators, proof and evidence

National case law reveals the problems that may present themselves in practice in relation to the requirement of a comparator. In **Czechia**, such a case was at the interface of the issue of determining 'equal value' and proof. A woman working as a head physician at a hospital was earning considerably less than her male colleagues. The Public Defender of Rights came to the conclusion that if a female employee proves a difference in remuneration compared to her male colleagues performing work of equal value, it is up to the employer to provide evidence that the difference is not connected to gender. If the employer remunerates its employees according to a system which lacks transparency, it must prove that the system is set up to be neutral and does not lead to discrimination in remuneration.

The court had to decide whether the position of the head physician was different because different departments at the hospital differ from each other (i.e. it was not the same job for which the same remuneration would be required) or whether it was, indeed, work of the same value within the meaning of Section 110 of the Labour Code. The court concluded that work of the same value must be defined carefully, taking into account e.g. number of medical procedures performed, whether it is a surgical field or not, the ability of the head physician to ensure the functioning of the department by attracting a large number of patients (with financial resources), length of practice, expertise and the reputation of the primary practitioner in the field.[107] The court also concluded that an assumption that the work was of the same value could not be derived just from the fact that the labour contracts of the two employees in question were very similar.

A recent case before the **Estonian** Supreme Court,[108] concerned the cancellation of the employment contract of a female lawyer in a regional office of the Tax and Customs Board in December 2015, for which economic reasons were given. The lower level courts briefly discussed possible discrimination in relation to issues around the extraordinary cancellation of the employment contract and possible compensation to be paid to the claimant. The claimant stated that she was discriminated against when she was paid a lower wage compared to male colleagues and lawyers at the Tallinn office for the same work. She had worked for the Tax and Customs Board since 2004 and, due to the new law on the civil service,[109] had been given a new employment contract in March 2013, just before new salary guides were adopted on 8 April 2013. The claimant noted that her salary level had stayed at the lowest level, but that given her long career and high competence, she should be paid at the higher pay level for lawyers. The claimant asked for compensation for the unpaid part of her pay between April 2013 and December 2015.

The claimant was asked to provide the names of all comparators, e.g. names of male employees doing the same work. The claimant rejected the request and stated that names are not necessary as proof in discrimination cases. The Circuit Court had ruled that the claimant had not fulfilled the requirement to provide exact evidence and so it ignored the discrimination claim.[110] The court decided that the claimant had discontinued the discrimination claim and so did not discuss the issue. The civil chamber of the Supreme Court found several procedural mistakes and determined that the cancellation of the

107 Czechia, Judgment No. 78 EC 1342/2011 of the District Court in Blansko, of 30 June 2015. No ECLI available.
108 Estonia, Supreme Court, Judgment of the Civil Chamber, *Insler v Tax and Customs Board*, No. 2-16-708 of 21 November 2018.
109 The Civil Service Act entered into force on 1 April 2013, the number of civil servants was reduced and specialists were given the position of employees. The civil service is made up of officials and employees. An official is a person who is in the public administration service and is appointed to a post and an employee is someone recruited for a job in an authority.
110 Estonia, Supreme Court, Judgment of the Civil Chamber, No. 2-16-708 / 54 of 21 November 2018, available at: https://www.riigiteataja.ee/kohtulahendid/detailid.html?id=238029596.

employment contract was void, due to the absence of a legal basis or the non-conformity with the law, or nullified, due to a conflict with the principle of good faith. The Court ruled that the former employer should pay the employee compensation. Unfortunately, the Supreme Court did not explore possible discrimination against the employee.

In another case, the Supreme Court of **Estonia** also ruled that two different types of legal measures applied to two employees cannot be deemed to constitute discrimination, if these two employees cannot be considered to be comparable individuals.[111] Further, there is no discrimination if two employees are indeed treated differently from one another, but that difference is due to objective reasons that are not related to the gender of the employees. The Supreme Court also set aside the required compensation for non-proprietary damage caused by the dismissal, because the claimant referred to economic harm (the lack of a job, the lack of income) and was unable to prove non-proprietary damage. This decision makes it extremely complicated, if not even impossible, to apply for non-proprietary damage in the future. The major arguments of the Supreme Court were that the claimant was in a higher position, had damaged the reputation of the employer and had shown no remorse for what had happened. The decisive factor was the fact that, unlike his colleague, the assistant manager had greater responsibility and his violation of the rules was more serious. Consequently, the difference in the employees' treatment by the employer was considered justified.

The **Dutch** Court of Appeal of 's-Hertogenbosch ruled that an employer had not clarified why the work experience of the male comparator was of more value than the work experience of the female employee.[112] The employer also failed to explain why a reduction in the hours of the male employee justified a higher hourly wage. The fact that the employer was not transparent about his motives for paying the male worker a higher salary than his female colleague therefore led the court to rule that the employer had discriminated against the woman and had to pay to her the same salary as that paid to the man. The Netherlands Institute for Human Rights (NIHR) has published several opinions on equal pay. The NIHR examines – or asks a job classification and evaluation specialist to examine – whether a comparator does work of equal value. The outcome differs depending on the situation. Sometimes employees can indeed be compared,[113] but sometimes the conclusion is that the comparator chosen by the claimant does not perform the same work or work of equal value.[114]

In **Finland** as well the choice of comparator and the burden of proof have been central in several cases. There is legal uncertainty as to when the employee has been able to provide facts from which it may be presumed that there has been direct or indirect discrimination. Finnish courts have come to different conclusions in the so-called 'judge cases' that were brought to the courts when the pay system for judges was changed, and judges were redistributed among different pay categories. The definition of pay discrimination under Section 8 of the Act on Equality requires that the employer implements conditions on pay so that one or several employees are disadvantaged on the ground of sex. The Labour Court (in case TT:2002-7-10) accepted that the burden of proof shifted to the employer, when an employee had shown that their pay was lower than the comparators, who were of the opposite sex. The employee was not required to show that the disadvantage was caused by their sex in order to shift the burden of proof. The Labour Court required that the employer must justify pay differentials in each case.

Later, Supreme Court case KKO 2009:79 and Supreme Administrative Court case 2005:51 were based on a different interpretation. These courts held that the employees had not been able to establish a presumption of discrimination to shift the burden of proof onto the respondent, as the courts assumed

111 Estonia, Supreme Court, Judgment of the Civil Chamber, No. 3-2-1-135-11 of 4 January 2012.
112 Netherlands, Court of Appeal 's-Hertogenbosch, *JAR* 2013/13, 13 November 2012 and *JAR* 2013/106, 5 March 2013.
113 Netherlands, College voor de Rechten van de Mens, Opinion 2012-142, 15 August 2012: unequal pay because male colleague was graded three steps higher, because of shortages on the labour market, negotiations and previous work experience.
114 Netherlands, College voor de Rechten van de Mens, Opinion 2018-30, 30 March 2018: no unequal pay because the comparators have a higher position.

that sex was not the ground of the disadvantage, as both women and men were placed in lower pay categories.

In **Hungary**, in 2018, the Equal Treatment Authority established direct discrimination in a case in which a civil servant working in a public health institution on labour, fire security and safeguarding complained that her salary was lower than men who worked in the same field.[115] In another case, in 2017, the Equal Treatment Authority skilfully used statistical evidence to establish a case of indirect wage discrimination.[116] In this case, female workers claimed that they were victims of indirect discrimination when they had not received their extra '13th month payment' (an in-cash benefit) due to being on sick leave with their children. The preconditions for this benefit had been set by the applicable collective agreement. Only employees who were absent from work for fewer than 25 days per year were eligible to receive the benefit. The calculation of the workers' days of absence did not include annual paid holiday, work-related illness, or illness which needed inpatient hospital care. The mothers of young children claimed that, even though the regulations were seemingly impartial, they were disproportionately detrimental and discriminatory towards mothers with children under the age of 12, which is the age limit for eligibility for sickness payments based on children's rights under the social security scheme. The Equal Treatment Authority conducted a statistical investigation comparing the number of workers who were and were not eligible for the benefit and the total number of workers, and the number of female workers who had and did not have children under the age of 12. The statistical investigation showed that the rule determined by the collective agreement was disproportionately disadvantageous to female workers with young children compared to male or female workers who had no children. On the basis of the statistical evidence, the Equal Treatment Authority established indirect discrimination and ordered the employer to eliminate it.[117] This case is a very important stepping-stone in Hungarian anti-discrimination case law, because it sets a good example of how to investigate indirect wage discrimination cases and how to collect, examine and evaluate statistical evidence.

3.1.6 Existence of parameters for establishing the equal value of the work performed

Interestingly, it appears that national law specifies (to some extent) how and by what criteria the equal value of work performed should be established in only about one third of the countries covered by this report (**Bulgaria**, **Croatia**, **Czechia**, **Finland**, **France**, **Germany**, **Hungary**, **Ireland**, **Luxembourg**, **Montenegro**, **Norway**, **Poland**, **Portugal**, **Serbia**, **Spain**, **Sweden**, **United Kingdom**). The applicable law in **Cyprus** contains an open-ended list of parameters to be considered when establishing equal value. In **Norway** as well the parties can in principle raise all aspects/parameters that they consider relevant. Criteria are of a personal, job-related and labour-market nature:

- knowledge (**Luxembourg**, **Norway**, **Sweden**);
- professional qualifications (including titles and diplomas) and vocational training (**Albania**, **Cyprus**, **France**, **Germany**, **Hungary**, **Luxembourg**, **Malta**, **Montenegro**, **North Macedonia**, **Norway**, **Poland**, **Portugal**, **Serbia**, **Spain**);
- professional (work) experience (**Albania**, **Bulgaria**, **France**, **Hungary**, **Luxembourg**, **North Macedonia**, **Poland**, **Portugal**, **Spain**);
- seniority (**Bulgaria**, **Cyprus**, **Malta**) or experience (**Luxembourg**);
- skills (**Croatia**, **Ireland**, **Malta**, **Montenegro**, **Poland**, **Serbia**, **Sweden**, **United Kingdom**);
- performance (**Montenegro**, **Spain**);
- work results (**Czechia**);
- nature of the job (**Albania**, **Croatia**, **Cyprus**, **Finland**, **Germany**, **Spain**), plus quantity and quality (**Albania**, **Finland**, **Hungary**, **Portugal**);

115 Hungary, Equal Treatment Authority (*Egyenlő Bánásmód Hatóság*) Decision No. EBH/152/2018.
116 Hungary, Equal Treatment Authority (*Egyenlő Bánásmód Hatóság*) Decision No. EBH/130/2017.
117 Hungary, Equal Treatment Authority (*Egyenlő Bánásmód Hatóság*) Decision No. EBH/130/2017.

- responsibilities/strenuousness/decision-making/significance (**Albania**, **Croatia**, **Cyprus**, **Czechia**, **France**, **Hungary**, **Luxembourg**, **Ireland**, **Lithuania**, **Montenegro**, **Norway**, **Poland**, **Portugal**, **Serbia**, **Sweden**, **United Kingdom**);
- complexity (**Czechia**);
- physical efforts, manual work (**Albania**, **Croatia**, **Cyprus**, **France**, **Hungary**, **Luxembourg**, **Ireland**, **Norway**, **Poland**, **Portugal**, **Serbia**, **Sweden**, **United Kingdom**); according to the ECJ, payment based on physical effort may be indirectly discriminatory against women.[118]
- mental effort, stress (**France**, **Hungary**, **Luxembourg**, **Ireland**, **Norway**, **Poland**, **Portugal**, **Serbia**, **Sweden**, **United Kingdom**);
- working conditions (**Albania**, **Croatia**, **Cyprus**, **Czechia**, **Hungary**, **Finland**, **Germany**, **Ireland**, **Montenegro**, **Norway**, **Portugal**, **Spain**, **Sweden**);
- whether substitution for one another is possible (**Croatia**);
- labour-market conditions (**Hungary**) and market value; in **Norway** a recurring point of discussion is to what extent this can justify unequal pay.

In **Spain**, the Council of Ministers adopted Royal Decree 902/2020 in October 2020, on equal pay for women and men, which was to enter into force in April 2021.[119] It develops the definition of work of equal value, with clarifications of the terms of the definition. It also enumerates examples of parameters which might constitute relevant factors in determining equal value. Finally, it requires that three criteria are applied for the correct evaluation of jobs: relevant factors are those related to the activity and that are actually present in its performance (adequacy), all the conditions of the position must be taken into account, without neglecting any (completeness), and there must be clear mechanisms to identify the factors that have actually been taken into account in the determination of pay and they cannot be factors or social assessments that reflect gender stereotypes (objectivity).

For **France**, the list of criteria contained in the law is not exhaustive and this is also the case for the **United Kingdom**. The **Hungarian** expert has noted that the criterion of labour-market conditions in the relevant provision of the Labour Code opens up the possibility for nationwide employers to provide different wages in different parts of the country. This criterion is considered to be an odd fit with the law at issue, as it does not deal with the individual (as all the other criteria do) and it also provides too much leeway for employers. In **Slovakia**, the definition of work of equal value is not sufficiently clear. The Labour Inspectorate (and likely also other actors) has problems in its application when assessing comparable work complexity, responsibility and strenuousness, especially when carrying out labour inspections focusing on this area. The legislation of Slovakia does not regulate objective criteria (such as educational, professional and training requirements, skills, effort and responsibility, work undertaken and the nature of the tasks involved).[120] In **Finland**, very dissimilar jobs can be considered to be of equal value, if they are equally demanding. Given the deeply gender-segregated labour market, this is of particular importance. In deciding whether equal work can be established, attention shall also be paid to the differences used in job classifications. However, the preparatory works also state that if the system of classification used in a collective agreement *de facto* discriminates on the basis of gender, the social partners shall modify the agreement in question.[121] The Equality Board has adopted a similar approach in a case on pay discrimination.[122] More generally, in **Turkey**, there is a tendency to justify pay differences by mere generalisations.

In other countries, it is left largely to the social partners to deal with this in collective agreements (**Austria**, **Bulgaria**, **Finland**, **Turkey**). In **Austria**, work evaluation systems are contained either in collective agreements or in obligatory agreements between works councils and employers and in some

118 Judgment of 1 July 1986, *Gisela Rummier v Dato – Druck GmbH*, Case 237/85, EU:C:1986:277, para. 24.
119 Royal Decree 902/2020 on equal pay for women and men *(Real Decreto-ley 902/2020 de igualdad retributiva entre mujeres y hombres),* 13 October 2020, https://www.boe.es/diario_boe/txt.php?id=BOE-A-2020-12215.
120 As recommended in point 10 of the Recommendation 2014/124/EU.
121 Finland, Government Bill HE 57/1985, 19.
122 Finland, Equality Board opinion No. L 2/2005.

cases in individual agreements between employers and employees. Equal treatment law, however, obliges all parties at every level of collective bargaining to apply the equal pay principle and to ensure that no discriminatory criteria for work evaluation processes are implemented.

In yet other countries, it is mainly equality bodies that provide for guidance in this respect (**Belgium**, **Estonia**). The **Belgian** Institute for the Equality of Women and Men thus issued a methodological instrument, the 'Gender neutral checklist for job assessment and classification', which was given legal recognition in the sense that when a joint sector committee adopts a job classification system, the latter must now be submitted to a department of the federal Ministry of Employment for an assessment of its gender neutrality, with the checklist being one element to be taken into consideration for this purpose. Although there are no provisions in **Estonian** law regarding criteria for work of equal value, requirements can be derived indirectly from other provisions, such as for example employers' obligation to protect employees against discrimination and to keep pay regulations and job descriptions and specifications gender neutral. While there has not been any case law on this issue as of yet, there are a few opinions from the Estonian Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner, held that sex discrimination had occurred in cases where a job evaluation had been carried out. In **North Macedonia**, the Ministry of Information Society and Administration publishes a job classification system without determining pay, but based on the same criteria for both men and women. It is applicable to all public administration employees, not just those of this Ministry, but not to other employers in the public sector or those outside the public sector.

In **Croatia**, the employer is obliged to pay the salary stipulated by regulations, collective agreements, employment rules or employment contracts. If the basis and parameters for the determination of salary are not stipulated in a collective agreement, any employer employing more than 20 employees shall stipulate them in employment rules. In the absence of such agreement and rules, and if the employment contract does not provide sufficient information to determine the salary, the employer is obliged to pay the employee an 'adequate salary'. An adequate salary is considered as the salary usually paid for equal work, and if this cannot be determined, the court will decide on it in accordance with the given circumstances.

Dutch equality law stipulates that work must be valued on the basis of a sound system of job evaluation. The idea behind this rule is that employers should make their reward systems transparent. **Greek** law refers to 'professional' instead of 'job' classification and also refers to the use of 'personnel evaluation', which is considered misleading, as it may imply that the classification and evaluation concern the worker rather than the job content, as required by the CJEU. In **Iceland**, job classification systems are used at the municipal level and these systems base the evaluation not on the performance of the employee but entail analysis of the basic requirements that apply to those carrying out the job. In **Luxembourg**, Article L225-3(2) of the Labour Code incorporates the obligation for classification systems to have common criteria for women and men. In **Croatia**, many collective agreements include a general provision on equal pay for equal work, but without further explanations or parameters.

In **Iceland**, the Equal Pay Standard is also intended to make pay, and any differences in pay for similar work, more transparent but it does not demand the same uniform pay system for all companies and institutions. One of the biggest challenges enterprises face in the implementation of the Standard is classifying which jobs are of the same or equal value. The Standard requires each workplace to introduce the same four to five key criteria with sub-criteria under each one. The Standard highlights four main criteria (IST 85: 2012, Annex B): expertise /competence, responsibility, strain and working conditions. These must be elaborated with specific content. Companies may have different (sub)criteria that make sense for each business, but the Standard obliges them to work out a more formalised system for their pay decisions, e.g. by carrying out wage analysis. This requires that jobs are classified by evaluating them against each other and assigning them weight. These are then used as a uniform measure to classify all jobs, so that the jobs within each workplace are comparable to each other on the basis of the uniform classification and salary system. In July 2019, a new pay-analysis tool called Embla was designed for

public institutions. A special department within the Ministry of Finance dealing with terms and human resources developed Embla in co-operation with Advania (a Nordic information technology corporation). Embla is directly connected with human resources and is based on a mathematical model in the toolbox on the government website. It was due to be launched for the general labour market in 2020.[123]

Case law approaches

In some countries, specific parameters for the determination of 'equal work' and 'work of equal value' ensue from case law. The **Greek** expert has noted that in 'equal value' cases under the broader equal pay principle, the typical major premise is that the equal pay principle applies to 'workers employed by the same employer, who belong to the same category, have the same formal qualifications and provide the same services aimed at serving the same category of needs, under the same conditions'. So, workers with different qualifications or performing different duties are not compared, even where they perform the same work under the same conditions. Some judgments require that the content of the work be specified, but the criteria are unclear.

Swedish case law contains a few old but really instructive cases as regards the comparison of work claimed to be of equal value.[124] Two of them concern Örebro County and the health sector. The issue at stake was whether the pay of a midwife was discriminatory as compared to that of a hospital technician. The Labour Court did not exclude the possibility that the work of a midwife and a hospital technician could be compared and found this to be of equal value, but in this case did not find the method used by the Equality Ombudsman (*Diskrimineringsombudsmannen* – DO) to be sufficient to prove it. No discrimination was thus found. The second case also concerned alleged pay discrimination against a midwife as compared to a hospital technician. In this case, the midwife and the technician were indeed found to perform work of equal value following an assessment in terms of knowledge and skills, responsibility, effort and working conditions (now part of the definition of work of equal value according to the 2008 Discrimination Act). A prima facie case of pay discrimination was thus found. The Labour Court, however, accepted the employer's objection that the higher wages of the technician were due to market forces – there was an alternative labour market for technicians with significantly higher wages, an acceptable motive to adjust the wages of technicians to a somewhat higher level. There was thus no discrimination. This can be compared with the 'parallel' Labour Court Case 2001 No. 76, in which a nurse and a hospital technician were compared and their work was found to be of equal value, but the wage difference could be explained by market reasons. Thus, in this case too the wage discrimination claim was dismissed.

The **Italian** Tribunal of Aosta of 13 April 2016 ascertained gender discrimination in pay where a female manager, in the head office of the accounts department of the local casino, had been paid about EUR 92 000 a year whereas her male colleagues had been paid about EUR 140 000 a year on average and some other male employees at a lower level received higher remuneration than she did. This case has to be recorded as gender discrimination in pay, which is taken to court very rarely in Italy. Moreover, the judgment shows a rigorous interpretation of Article 28 of Decree No 198/2006, which provides the principle of equal pay for equal work. In fact it states that the intention to discriminate as well as the possible fairness of the remuneration considering the job and the minimum wages provided by collective agreements are useless: the discrimination is proved by the mere fact that the female worker received a lower wage compared to male colleagues while she, as a manager, had higher responsibilities and weaker protection against dismissal. The judgment awarded the worker damages of about 41 % of her remuneration, considering that a fair remuneration could amount to EUR 130 000 a year (this was a little higher than that of the better paid employees).

123 https://www.stjornarradid.is/verkefni/mannrettindi-og-jafnretti/jafnretti/jafnrettisthing-2020/; https://www.stjornarradid.is/verkefni/mannrettindi-og-jafnretti/jafnretti/jafnrettisthing-2020/; https://www.fjs.is/utgefid-efni/radstefnur-fjs/; https://www.stjornarradid.is/lisalib/getfile.aspx?itemid=7f13c41c-5323-11ea-9455-005056bc530c.

124 Sweden, Labour Court Case 1996 No. 41 as compared to Labour Court Case 2001 No. 13.

Before the Spanish law was amended in March 2019, Spanish legislation did not lay down parameters for establishing the equal value of work performed. Thus the concept was addressed through decisions of the Constitutional Court and Supreme Court. For example, the **Spanish** Constitutional Court has issued several rulings,[125] pointing out that systems of professional classification and promotion must rely on criteria which should be neutral and not result in indirect discrimination, e.g. using 'physical effort' or 'arduous work' as a reason to give higher value to men's activities.[126] The Supreme Court also established that workers at the same company doing different work deserve the same payment if the difference is based on the fact that the kind of jobs done mostly by women are undervalued in relation to the jobs occupied mostly by men.[127] The Supreme Court considered, in relation to a hotel, that the chambermaids (predominantly women) were performing work of equal value to that of the bartenders (mostly men), on the basis of which they deserved equal pay.[128] The jobs were considered to be of equal value because both were on Level IV of the wage structure set out in the applicable collective agreement.[129]

In **Norway**, a landmark case before the Labour Court[130] concerned an equal pay claim by female bioengineers as compared to other types of engineers who were all male, the bioengineers being paid lower hourly wages than the other engineers. The court found, after a thorough and specific evaluation of the various elements of the job tasks, that it was indeed work of equal value and that the equal pay rule had been violated. The Court found that the clause collectively negotiated was invalid, while the remaining part of the collective agreement remained valid. Another landmark case is Tribunal Case 42/2009 where a municipality was ordered to remedy the error of not paying equal pay to women working in afterschool care compared to men in equivalent positions as 'work leaders'.[131] The Equality Tribunal undertook a specific evaluation of the job tasks at the two workplaces.

In a case before the **Icelandic** Supreme Court the issue concerned whether jobs at the same level in the hierarchy were of equal value; the job of an equality officer in the municipality whose wages were based on a job evaluation linked to collective agreements, as opposed to the job of an employment officer with higher wages as the post was held by an engineer and the evaluation was linked to the collective agreements for engineers. The Supreme Court held that, in order for jobs to be considered of equal value, an all-inclusive evaluation was needed; although aspects of the jobs were different, the Court considered that the aim of the Gender Equality Act would not be achieved if wage equality was only to reach people within the same class of work, as freedom of contract on the labour market was subject to the wage equality provided for in the GEA. In this case the claimant had shown that she had been discriminated against as the jobs were comparable in substance and form.[132]

In **Belgium**, a furniture factory had classified its blue-collar workers in four categories, but all female workers belonged to the third one. One of them took legal action, claiming that she was performing the same tasks as the men in the first category, who were entitled to higher remuneration. After hearing a number of workers as witnesses, the labour court in Bruges concluded that the claim was valid and that the employer had been discriminating against women. Fixed damages equal to six months' pay were

125 For instance, Spain, Judgment of the Constitutional Court 58/1994 of 28 February 1994, ECLI:ES:TC:1994:58: http://hj.tribunalconstitucional.es/es/Resolucion/Show/2575.
126 For instance, Spain, Judgment of the Constitutional Court 145/1991, of 1 July 1991, ECLI:ES:TC:1991:145: http://hj.tribunalconstitucional.es/es/Resolucion/Show/1784.
127 Spain, Judgment of the Supreme Court of 14 May 2014, appeal number 2328/2013, ECLI:ES:TS:2014:1908 https://www.poderjudicial.es/search/contenidos.action?action=contentpdf&databasematch=TS&reference=7084867&links=&optimize=20140602&publicinterface=true.
128 Spain, Judgment of the Supreme Court of 14 May 2014, appeal No. 2328/2013.
129 Spain, Judgment of the Supreme Court of 14 May 2014, appeal number 2328/2013, ECLI:ES:TS:2014:1908 https://www.poderjudicial.es/search/contenidos.action?action=contentpdf&databasematch=TS&reference=7084867&links=&optimize=20140602&publicinterface=true.
130 Norway, ARD-1990-148.
131 Norway, http://www.diskrimineringsnemnda.no/nb/innhold/side/vedtak.
132 Iceland, Supreme Court case No. 11/2000, judgment of 31 May 2000.

allowed to the claimant.[133] When the employer appealed, the Labour Court of Appeal in Ghent (division of Bruges) completely upheld the ruling.[134]

The **French** expert has also reported three relevant cases from the Court of Cassation, dating from 1997, 2010 and 2014, which concentrated on the issue of equal work and work of equal value.[135] In **Malta**, a case[136] investigated by the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) in 2015 addressed the issue of pay and this was the subject of an article published by the *Times of Malta*.[137] The NCPE concluded an investigation[138] following a complaint from a female employee that she was receiving a lower wage than male employees who were at a similar or same level and had similar responsibilities. The NCPE's commissioner deemed that the company's arguments that there is no set salary scale for managers should not be detrimental to the company's employees and that the company should strive for more transparency in the manner in which wages are set.

According to the **German** expert, German courts have supported the deficiencies of statutory law by establishing sophisticated differences between the principle of equal pay and the prohibition of pay discrimination, giving broad leeway to collective bargaining[139] and refusing to review complicated work assessment procedures due to lack of criteria or displaying gender stereotypes to found their decisions. Legal action against pay discrimination has only been successful in some cases concerning pensions. Before the 2017 Pay Transparency Act entered into force, courts decided time and again that neither Article 157 TFEU nor Sections 1 or 7 of the General Equal Treatment Act provide for the general principle of 'the same pay for the same work' but only apply in cases of sex/gender discrimination which, unfortunately, could almost never be found or proven.[140]

In **Poland**, a number of cases have related to situations where employees claimed to be unequally paid for equal work, but not on the grounds of sex. However, the findings as to what should be taken into account when determining pay for equal work and what should be understood as work of equal value are also relevant in cases of gender discrimination. In the judgment of 9 May 2014,[141] the Supreme Court generally stated that equality is not the same thing as equal treatment, as it may require differential treatment in order to equalise opportunities or ensure equal results, or to reward and motivate the best employees financially. Different treatment of workers in terms of employment, including pay, is possible. However, it must be based on a legitimate need for which such differentiation is allowed. In a ruling of 11 October 2013,[142] the Supreme Court clarified what permissible reasons are for wage differentiation, stating that equal work is work of the same nature, the same with regard to the qualifications required to perform it, the conditions under which it is performed and the quantity and quality of the work. However,

133 Belgium, Labour Court Bruges, Judgment of 25 June 2013, *Algemene Rol* No. 07/127676/A, unreported. The fact that the expert only heard about this case with a four-year delay is due to the haphazard way in which case law is made available (with the sole exceptions of decisions of the Constitutional Court, the *Conseil d'État/Raad van State* – higher administrative court – and, not exhaustively, the Court of Cassation).

134 Belgium, Labour Court of Appeal Ghent, Judgment of 5 December 2014, *Algemene Rol* No. 2013/AR/197, unreported.

135 France, Judgment of the Court of Cassation of 12 February 1997, No. 95-41694. Judgment of the Court of Cassation of 6 July 2010, No. 09-40021, Judgment of the Court of Cassation of 22 October 2014, No. 13-18362.

136 NCPE (2016) *Annual report 2015*, p. 38. https://ncpe.gov.mt/en/Documents/Our_Publications_and_Resources/Annual_Reports/NCPE%20AR%202015.pdf.

137 *Times of Malta* (2018), 'Woman finds male colleagues are paid € 500 more per month - investigation proves her right', 24 January 2018, available at: https://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20180124/local/woman-finds-male-colleagues-are-paid-500-more-per-month-investigation.668732.

138 NCPE (2016) *Annual report 2015* https://ncpe.gov.mt/en/Documents/Our_Publications_and_Resources/Annual_Reports/NCPE%20AR%202015.pdf.

139 There is only one judgment (Federal Labour Court, judgment of 20 August 2002, 9 AZR 353/01) in favour of a female applicant and declaring regulations of a collective agreement to be unconstitutional, but as the applicant lost her vacation benefits due to her maternity leave taken before birth, this might rather be seen as a decision upon maternity protection although involving equal pay.

140 E.g. Germany, Federal Administrative Court, Judgment of 9 April 2013, 2 C 5/12; Federal Labour Court, Judgment of 25 January 2012, 4 AZR 147/10; State Labour Court of Rhineland-Palatinate, Judgment of 11 October 2018, 5 Sa 455/15; State Labour Court of Baden-Württemberg, Judgment of 21 October 2013, 1 Sa 7/13; Labour Court of Berlin, Judgment of 1 February 2017, 56 Ca 5356/15.

141 Poland, Supreme Court, Judgment of 9 May 2014, *S.W. v Polish Railways*, I PK 276/13.

142 Poland, Supreme Court, Judgment of 27 June 2013, III PK 28/13.

it also considered that the quantity and quality of work performed constitute acceptable premises for wage differentiation.[143]

Another example of work in the same position (equal work) was dealt with in the jurisprudence of courts of appeal. The Court of Appeal in Szczecin in its judgment of 6 March 2018[144] thus stated that: 'There is no rational argument in support of the thesis that an employee currently employed in a given position should receive the same remuneration as an employee previously employed in the same or a similar position, or a few years back. The essence of the right guaranteed in Article 18^{3c} of the Labour Code is the equality of employees in the process of providing work, and not the guarantee of obtaining remuneration at a specified level of value'. In its judgment of 7 February 2018,[145] the Supreme Court held that length of service may constitute a justified reason for a pay differentiation when the employer does not provide for a length of service allowance, and when professional experience translates into the quality of the employee's length of service. However, it is not permissible to differentiate remuneration twice on the basis of the same criteria: length of service, by taking it into account when determining the basic remuneration rate, and then by also granting the length-of-service allowance.

In a judgment of 8 December 2015,[146] the Supreme Court noted that the criterion of length of service is not, in itself, a sufficient parameter for determining whether the work of compared employees is equal or of equal value, as provided for in Article $18^{3c}(1)$ of the Labour Code, as it does not refer to the objective characteristics of the work performed. At the same time, length of service may justify differentiation of remuneration components other than the length-of-service allowance for employees performing the same or equal work or work of equal value only if the practice and greater professional experience gained during a longer period of service at a comparable workplace objectively justifies a higher remuneration for employees with higher qualifications and higher professional efficiency resulting from a longer period of service at the same workplace.

Subsequent cases concerned the situation of alleged unequal pay for work of equal value. In a judgment of 14 March 2018,[147] the Supreme Court ruled that the same description of the position held by the claimant at work, as compared to other employees, namely 'chief (main) specialist' does not determine *ipso jure* that such employees provide work of equal value. When dismissing the claimant's cassation appeal (for a technical reason) the Supreme Court indicated 'for the record' that in the employer's organisational structure there was only one human resources position, which was occupied by the claimant. The comparison of her work with the work of other people occupying the position of 'main specialists' in the company, such as an accountant, manager or PR specialist, in terms of the scope of described duties, required professional qualifications and rules of liability, which were 'diametrically' different from the scope of duties performed by the applicant. This was the reason why there was no violation of the principle of equal treatment in this case. This judgment raises doubts as to whether the Supreme Court in the circumstances of this case was entitled to make such a categorical statement without focusing on detailed, separate examination of each of these positions.

The issue of the right to remuneration was also raised in a situation where the position occupied by the applicant was unique in the organisational structure of a given employer. In its decision of 25 April 2018,[148] the Supreme Court held that: 'In the case of performance of employee duties in a position which is not repeated in the organisational structure of the employer, there is no reasonable possibility to indicate and verify objective criteria for comparability of equal work for which there is the right to equal remuneration.' Admittedly, this ruling was made in the context of dismissing the cassation appeal due

143 Similar argumentation can be found in Poland, Supreme Court, Judgment of 14 December 2017, II PK 322/16.
144 Poland, Court of Appeal in Szczecin, Judgment of 6 March 2018, III Apa 20/17.
145 Poland, Supreme Court, Judgment of 7 February 2018, II PK 22/17. Cf also the Polish Supreme Court, Judgment of 15 March 2016, II PK 17/15.
146 Poland, Supreme Court, Judgment of 8 December 2015, I PK 339/14.
147 Poland, Supreme Court, Judgment of 14 March 2018, II PK 125/17.
148 Poland, Supreme Court, Judgment of 25 April 2018, I UK 499/17.

to it being manifestly ill-founded. Maybe this is the reason why the Supreme Court did not consider in this case the possibility of comparing the claimant's remuneration with the remuneration of employees performing work of equal value and also excluded from the outset the possibility of comparing the remuneration of employees for equal work but performed in other comparable enterprises.

In **Croatia** as well very few equal pay cases are actually based on claims of sex discrimination;[149] most case law concerns equal pay cases in public services and administration and involving complaints on the formal salary classification system and the actual tasks performed by the worker. Although the same guarantee of equal pay applies in public services as in private employment relationships, the formalistic approach of courts to the rigid system of job classification in public services renders almost impossible any unequal pay claim. This can be concluded indirectly from a series of cases involving claims of public servants that they should be paid more because they actually perform the tasks of higher skilled workers or work classified in another job category. Any formal difference in professional classifications will overturn comparability, as well as the fact that the public servant performs tasks of a higher paid job category without any formal decision of the public body, even where their superiors have given informal orders to perform those tasks.[150]

In **Austria**, the Supreme Court (*Oberster Gerichtshof, OGH*) held that in jobs that allow for salary negotiations, negotiating skills (or lack thereof) were not an admissible justification for lower pay for female workers.[151]

3.1.7 Job evaluation and classification systems

No job evaluation or classification system exists in **Bulgaria** (although initial discussions on this have started) and there are no examples of good practice guidance for job evaluation and classification systems in a number of other countries (**Cyprus**, **Czechia**, **Denmark**, **Estonia**, **Greece**, **Italy**, **Luxembourg**, **North Macedonia**, **Romania** and **Slovenia**).

Methods for job evaluation and classification exist in **Austria**, **Belgium**, **Finland**, **France**, **Germany**, **Iceland**, **Lithuania**, the **Netherlands**, **Poland**, **Portugal**, **Slovakia**, **Spain** and **Sweden**. In **Iceland**, **Portugal** and **Slovakia**, it is specifically stated that the same criteria must be applied for men and women, while in **France**, its Labour Code states that a job classification system (grading system) must be based on rules allowing for the implementation of the equal pay principle.

Job evaluation and classification systems are central to the approach to equal pay in **Belgium**.[152] Companies and joint sector committees have to assess whether their job evaluation systems and pay classification schemes are gender neutral and amend them where necessary.[153] Moreover, the Institute for the Equality of Women and Men developed a checklist on gender neutrality in job evaluation and job classification in 2010, to be used by both private and public employers.

149 See, for example, an unsuccessful equal pay claim alleging discrimination based on sex and age: Municipal Labour Court in Zagreb, Pr-1433/12, County Court in Zagreb, Gžr-2213/14 and Constitutional Court of the Republic of Croatia, U-III-1711/2015.

150 See, for example, Supreme Court of the Republic of Croatia, Revr-1952/09; Revr-196/10; Revr-201/11).

151 Austria, Supreme Court, Judgment of 20 May 1998, 9 ObA 350/97d.

152 The federal Ministry of Employment developed the EVA (*EValuation Analytique/Analytische EVAluatie*) project, aimed at providing the social partners with technical tools for job evaluation and a training module. After it was created in 2003, the Institute for the Equality of Women and Men drew up a 'gender-neutral check-list for job evaluation and classification'. IEWM (2010) *Checklist, gender neutrality in job evaluation and classification*, available in English at: http://uniequalpay.org/descargas/tools/checklist-neutrality-in-job-evaluation-and-classification.pdf. *Classification des fonctions sexuellement neutre – mode d'emploi*, 2006, available in French and Dutch at https://igvm-iefh.belgium.be/fr/publications/sekseneutrale_functieclassificatie. A training programme and training manual were also prepared in 2000 and made available for a few years.

153 Collective Agreement No. 25 of 15 October 1975, modified by Collective Agreement No. 25bis of 19 December 2001 and finally, Collective Agreement No. 25ter of 9 July 2008.

In the **Netherlands**, an instrument was developed in 2001 in order to create gender-neutral job evaluation and classification systems: 'de weegschaal gewogen' ('the weighted scale').[154] Subsequently, all systems that were acknowledged by the trade unions were tested for gender neutrality and have been found to be neutral. At present the debate mainly focuses on the incorrect use of job classification systems and on the granting of extra benefits outside of the systems.

In **Sweden**, there is no statutory requirement for the employer to apply a systematic or factor-based job evaluation system when deciding work that is to be regarded as of equal value to other work. Nevertheless, such systems are frequently applied. Normally, job classification is dealt with in collective agreements. In the public sector, social partners have jointly developed a job classification system called BESTA. It is used as a tool in the wage formation process at the sectoral and local level and forms the foundation for the jointly collected wage statistics. On the basis of BESTA, the partners have created a methodological support system to be used in pay audits, called BESTA *vägen* (best way).[155] Outside the state sector, the IPE (internal position evaluation) and BAS (*Befattnings- och arbetsvärderingssystem* – position and work evaluation system) are two frequently used systems, but there are also many other systems in place.[156]

In other countries, job and evaluation systems exist, but only in the public sector (**Albania**, **Croatia**, **Hungary**, **Latvia**, **Serbia**, **Turkey**). In **Croatia**, an elaborate and complex system of job classification exists in the public sector, including numerous bylaws, such as regulations on job names and coefficients of job complexity, as well as regulations on job classification in the civil service in general or within particular bodies in the public sector.[157] In the civil service, for example, the standard parameters for job classification in all state bodies include the required professional knowledge, job complexity, degree of independence, level of cooperation with other bodies and relations with citizens, level of accountability and influence on decision-making in the organisation.[158] The **Hungarian** Ministry of Interior, within the framework of a project funded by the EU Structural Funds in 2015, implemented a comprehensive job evaluation initiative in the public administration sphere and developed and implemented job evaluation and classification training courses.[159] In **Latvia**, there are no company-level job evaluation and classification systems, except for the state officials and employees employed in state and municipal institutions. The State and Municipal Institutions' Remuneration Law[160] provides a table qualifying the posts according to grades and defining salary groups according to the grades. In **Turkey**, a job classification exists to determine the pay of civil servants. It is based on the same criteria for both men and women. Civil servants are classified according to the requirements of the job and relevant qualifications.

In **Austria**, job evaluation or classification systems are bindingly regulated by collective agreements. Collective agreements contain pay grids that are structured by qualification levels and by seniority and which lay out the minimum pay levels required for jobs belonging to the respective category. The employers are required to evaluate the classification of jobs against the requirements of applicable collective agreements and indicate which career bracket is connected to an individual job. This decision

154 Letter by the Secretary of State to Parliament (2011), No. 27099, No. 3 with annexes. Available at: https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/kst-27099-3.html.

155 Available (in Swedish only) at: https://www.arbetsgivarverket.se/besta/om-besta2/.

156 Kumlin, J. (2016) *Sakligt motiverad eller koppling till kön? En analys av arbetsgivares arbete med att motverka osakliga löneskillnader mellan kvinnor och män*. Report 2016:1, Equality Ombudsman (DO), Stockholm, p. 52. Available at: https://www.do.se/download/18.277ff225178022473141e34/1618941270910/rapport-sakligt-motiverad-eller-koppling-till-kon.pdf. English summary available at: https://www.do.se/choose-language/english/reports/justified-pay-difference-or-related-to-gender.

157 See, e.g. Regulation on job classification in the civil service (*Uredba o klasifikaciji radnih mjesta u državnoj službi*), NN Nos. 77/2007, 13/2008 and 81/2008. For an overview of the Croatian public administration characteristics and performance see Koprić, I. (2018) '*Public administration characteristics and performance EU28:* Croatia', *Croatia* (country chapter), Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union.

158 Regulation on job classification in the civil service, Article 2.

159 See: Ministry of Interior: Új közszolgálati életpálya (ÁROP-2.2.17-2012-2013-000), https://bmprojektek.kormany.hu/uj-kozszolgalati-eletpalya.

160 Valsts un pašvaldību institūciju amatpersonu un darbinieku atlīdzības likums, Official Gazette No. 199, 18 December 2009, available in Latvian at: https://likumi.lv/ta/id/202273-valsts-un-pasvaldibu-instituciju-amatpersonu-un-darbinieku-atlidzibas-likums.

can be challenged and corrected in individual court cases. The collective agreements, and the pay grids as one of their most important elements, are re-negotiated annually by the social partners and consequently are under regular observation and adaptation.

Even in those countries where job evaluation systems have been introduced, this does not always have the desired effect. For example, the **Lithuanian** expert reported that the job evaluation methodology adopted as a recommendation by the Tripartite Council of the Republic of Lithuania has had little or no impact on wage setting practices in the private and public sectors. In **Poland**, many theoretical and more or less general and sophisticated manuals are available, with instructions on how to undertake job evaluations using different methods and written by different experts. However, no examples of job classification systems being used in concrete situations can be identified as good practices.

In **Malta**, the National Commission for the Protection of Equality (NCPE) implemented a project named 'Prepare the Ground for Economic Independence' (PGEI) which is co-funded by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme 2014-2020, through which an Equal Pay Tool will be developed. The project was launched in 2018 and ran until August 2020.[161]

In **Norway**, the Socialist Party proposed the adoption of an 'Icelandic model', an explicit mandatory certification process for companies and institutions with more than 25 employees,[162] to provide evidence that they pay men and women equally for the same job. However, it did not have enough support in Parliament.

3.1.8 Wage transparency

There can only be awareness of pay discrimination when wage and job evaluation systems are public and transparent. The European network of legal experts in gender equality and non-discrimination published a comprehensive report on pay transparency in the EU,[163] following the European Commission's Recommendation of 7 March 2014 on strengthening the principle of equal pay between men and women through transparency,[164] which sought to contribute to raising awareness regarding this issue.

Remaining problems

Many problems persist regarding pay transparency. There is still a considerable number of states that do not provide for any legal measures whatsoever to ensure wage transparency and where this issue has not been addressed in case law either (**Bulgaria**, **Croatia**, **Czechia**, **Greece**, **Hungary**, **Ireland**, **Liechtenstein**, **Luxembourg**, **Macedonia**, **Malta**, **Montenegro**, **Romania**, **Serbia**).

In **Latvia**, workers' representatives or trade unions formally have the right to require information on pay levels according to Article 11(1) of the Labour Law, however, there is no information on any case where such a right would have been used for the purpose of ensuring the equal pay principle. The **Slovene** expert has noted that both the lack of information on comparable jobs (as the concept of equal work and the term comparator are not defined) and on the salaries of co-workers makes it extremely difficult for potential victims of discrimination to start judicial proceedings. In **Cyprus**, the legislation does not provide for a wage transparency requirement in the sense of obliging employers to disclose pay rates

161 https://ncpe.gov.mt/en/Pages/Projects_and_Specific_Initiatives/Prepare-the-Ground-for-Economic-Independence%E2%80%8B.aspx.

162 See report 2018:10, '*Sertifisert likestilling, likelønnsstandarden på Island*' (Certified equity. Equal pay in Iceland) from the Institutt for samfunnsforskning (Institute for Social Research), available at: https://samfunnsforskning.brage.unit.no/samfunnsforskning-xmlui/handle/11250/2503028.

163 Veldman, A. (2017) *Pay transparency in the EU*, European Commission, available at: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/4073-pay-transparency-in-the-eu-pdf-693-kb.

164 Commission Recommendation of 7 March 2014 on strengthening the principle of equal pay between men and women through transparency, OJ L 69, 8.03.2014, pp. 112-116, available at: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32014H0124.

and the gender pay gap generally or to the interested party. In **Slovakia**, a mandatory indication of the minimum wage offered in job advertisements was introduced in May 2018. Importantly, in 2019, Slovakia introduced a change to employment law, which lowers the level of protection in relation to non-disclosure and maintaining confidentiality in employment relationships. As of 1 January 2019, employers may not oblige employees to keep their working conditions confidential – this includes their salary conditions. Any provisions requiring employees to keep their working conditions confidential are now invalid.

In **Serbia**, the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategy for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination for the period 2014-2018 requires further elaboration of the principle of equal pay for men and women and the introduction of sanctions for acting contrary to this principle,[165] but does not require pay transparency. However, this Action Plan expired at the end of 2018. In **Turkish** law, rules on wage transparency are also lacking. Payments to employees and public officials are confidential. Therefore, it is difficult to detect any differences in wages. However, in a recent case, the Court of Cassation decided that sharing the amount of a pay rise with a colleague did not constitute a valid ground for the termination of the employment contract.[166]

In **Hungary**, the possibility of excessive wage adjustment in the public sector is linked to the result of the unspecified evaluation of performance or quality of work done in the previous year. It is considered that the possibility of severe wage adjustment reduces the transparency of wages, and may also contribute to the statistically proven gender-based wage gap in the public sector, the more so given the fact that it is quite frequent in both the private and the public sector that the employer arbitrarily provides better wage conditions for some individuals or some groups of workers. For example, in one case, some groups of nurses working in different departments of the same hospital were entitled to receive hazard bonuses, while other groups of nurses were not, despite working under identical or very similar conditions.[167] During the litigation, the employer stopped paying the hazard bonus to all its nurses, meaning that the claimants' reference point ceased to exist, and their claim was dismissed.

In the **Netherlands**, the requirement of wage transparency ensues primarily from case law. In case law, reference is sometimes made to one of the standard considerations of the CJEU, i.e. that real transparency, which makes effective verification possible, is ensured only when the principle of equal pay is applied to every element of the salaries of men and women. In this respect, the Supreme Court ruled on 12 April 2002 that a reversal of the burden of proof that work is of equal value is appropriate if a company applies a reward system that is characterised by a complete lack of transparency.[168] According to the Supreme Court this was not the case in this particular matter. Employers must thus make clear in what way and on the basis of which standards they evaluate the work of their employees. The NIHR follows the same approach. An example is the opinion in which the NIHR ruled that the employer had not made clear which part of the extra pay a male worker received was related to labour shortage. The NIHR explicitly observed that the lack of a transparent salary system is the employer's own risk.[169]

A number of experts have referred to trade secrets and protection of privacy/confidentiality as factors hampering transparency, such as in **Austria**, **Belgium**, **Czechia**, **Estonia**, **Lithuania**, **North Macedonia**, **Poland**, **Romania** and **Slovenia**. In **Belgium** there is no transparency as to the remuneration of managers who are hired by public economic enterprises under employment contracts, although the High Administrative Court in a judgment of 2 May 2016 found that the protection of privacy and of the company's economic interests could not serve as a blanket justification for refusing to make the managers' wages transparent at the Vlaamse Radio- en Televisieomroeporganisatie (VRT), the Flemish

165 Serbia, Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategy for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination, Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 107/2014, 62.
166 Turkey, Court of Cassation 9th Division, 5 October 2017, 2016/24041, 2017/15069.
167 Hungary, Supreme Court (*Legfelsőbb Bíróság*) Judgment No. Mfv.II.10.514/2011; adopted as Decision in Principle No. as 2424/2011. in Labour Law.
168 Netherlands, Supreme Court, *JAR* 2002/101, 12 April 2002.
169 Netherlands, College voor de Rechten van de Mens, Opinion 2012-142, 15 August 2012. See also Opinion 2009-76, 6 August 2009.

public radio and television broadcasting organisation.[170] In another case which involved the European Trade Union Institute a female researcher complained of pay discrimination in comparison with male colleagues. The Labour Court of Appeal in Brussels[171] found that the employer's pay system was opaque and simply referred to the CJEU's decision in Case 109/88 *Danfoss*[172] to conclude that there was gender discrimination.

In **Estonia**, the Employment Contracts Act stipulates that the employer has no right to disclose information about wages calculated, paid or payable to the employee without the employee's consent or without a legal basis. Pay secrecy could be a workplace policy that prohibits employees from discussing how much money they make. The Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner has a right to ask for all documents about working conditions and wage policy. Also pursuant to a Supreme Court ruling, it is considered impossible to analyse gender pay differences because of the level of privacy protection. And even though public sector wages are public and are published on the Ministry of Finance homepage, in some spheres of economic activity, wage data are classified (defence, Security Police Board and the Foreign Intelligence Agency).

Similarly, in **North Macedonia** employers use the protection of privacy argument to treat wage levels as confidential data and as a ground for including confidentiality clauses on wages in employment contracts. In **Czechia**, there are still many employment contracts which require employees to keep silent about their salary. This tool aims to help private and public entities to deal with the gender pay gap in their organisation, to establish transparent rules for remuneration, and to provide assistance in fixing the pay gap.

In **Poland** as well there is an ongoing discussion between employers emphasising that remuneration data are part of trade secrets and therefore subject to confidentiality clauses in employment contracts, with some courts following this reasoning. But such information is also considered protected under the personal data protection act and, if considered as a personal good, employees should be entitled to disclose their salaries if they so wish; the obligation to preserve secrecy would then only apply to the employer. Yet there is general consensus that the prohibition to disclose information cannot extend to general remuneration tables, which may determine the range of remuneration, depending on the position, rank or qualifications. There are, nevertheless, legal provisions stipulating directly that information about the remuneration of certain people is public.[173] In the first case the Constitutional Court found the provisions of the Act of 3 March 2000 on remuneration of people in charge of legal entities owned at least 50 % by the State Treasury to be compliant with the Constitution with regard to the regulations stipulating the obligation to disclose the remuneration of these people, explaining that this information is not subject to protection in the same way as personal details or trade secrets.[174] In the other ruling, the Supreme Court found that the fact that an employee disclosed to other employees information covered by the so-called salaries confidentiality clause, in order to prevent unfair treatment and wage-related forms of discrimination, cannot in any way serve as grounds for dissolution of his contract of employment.[175]

The **Romanian** Labour Code stipulates that salaries are confidential and must be determined by individual direct negotiations between employer and employee. The law stipulates only one exception – trade unions or employees' representatives may access information regarding salaries in order to promote the employees' interests and defend their rights,[176] provided two cumulative conditions are met: the request for information is strictly in connection with the employees' interests and the request is

170 Belgium, Council of State, Dumortier, n°234.609 at www.raadvst-consetat.be.
171 Belgium, Labour Court of Appeal Brussels, Judgment of 19 October 2014, *Chroniques de droit social/Sociaalrechtelijke Kronieken*, 2005, p. 16 with J. Jacqmain's case note.
172 CJEU, Judgment of 17 October 1989, *Danfoss*, Case 109/88, EU:C:1989:383.
173 As examples, certain groups of public servants or people in decision-making positions, as provided for, e.g. in the Law of 3 March 2000 on remuneration of persons in charge of some legal entities (unified text JoL 2018 Item 1252).
174 Poland, Constitutional Court Judgment of 7 May 2001 (K 18/00).
175 Poland, Supreme Court, Judgment of 25 May 2011, II PK 304/10.
176 Romania, Labour Code, Article 163.

made in the framework of the direct relationship between the trade union or employees' representative and the employer.[177] But this does not constitute a right of employees. In **Lithuania** as well individual wages belong to the sensitive data protected by statutory or contractual confidentiality clauses. A wage is usually set by individual agreement and not collectively by a collective agreement. Even in the public sector, with rigid regulation of wage policies, employers are given wider discretion (pay-rate brackets, e.g. from EUR 1 000 to EUR 1 400 or non-transparent system of performance reward) to decide individually on the exact level of remuneration for an individual employee.

There also remain considerable differences between the states covered in this report regarding the extent to which wage transparency is considered a problem that needs to be addressed at all with a view to effectively combating pay discrimination. The **Turkish** expert has thus noted that pay differentials are not a serious problem in the public sector and are mostly problematic in the private, informal sector, as well as among public officials with an administrative law employment contract. In the formal sector, collective agreements are deemed transparent.

The **German** expert has expressed serious doubt about whether pay transparency can actually bring about any change in court decisions. In a 2017 case of (alleged) pay discrimination, the Labour Court of Berlin and Brandenburg emphasised that Article 157 TFEU does not require equal pay for equal work but prohibits sex discrimination.[178] The court could not identify any discrimination on the grounds of sex, but instead justified differentiations due to seniority and the different contract arrangements for freelancers and permanent employees. Unequal pay for the same or equivalent work could not in itself indicate discrimination. As there was no discrimination, the court rejected the claimant's request for information about the pay structure and the salaries of other male colleagues performing equivalent work. The defendant employer had confirmed that male colleagues doing equivalent work were paid a higher salary than the claimant but denied discrimination. The pay difference was explained by different collective agreements for freelancers and permanent employees, on the one hand, and differences in seniority (the period of employment with the same employer) between the claimant and other (male) freelancers, on the other. During the public hearing, the judge explained that higher remuneration would mainly depend on negotiating skills, supposedly more pronounced in men, and contractual freedom, and that maternity and childcare periods would often lead to shorter periods of employment for women, less seniority and, thus, lower wages without any discrimination being involved. The State Labour Court of Berlin and Brandenburg confirmed the ruling of the first instance court and denied the applicant the shift of the burden of proof because she could not offer further evidence that the lower remuneration for the work of equal value was based upon sex/gender discrimination.[179] The case reached the Federal Labour Court in June 2020. The Federal Labour Court clarified various aspects of the Pay Transparency Act, for example highlighting the need for a European-conform interpretation of the Act and its necessity for the proper implementation of Article 4 Recast Directive 2006/54/EC regarding equal pay for equal work and work of equal value. As such, the court considered the General Equal Treatment Act as insufficient. Accordingly, the meaning of 'employee' had to be interpreted widely and had to correspond to the personal scope of the General Equal Treatment Act and the EU equality directives and include workers in employment-like circumstances. The claimant was thus entitled to receive information regarding the average gross income as well as specific components and criteria for the determination of pay.[180] The issue has been returned to the higher labour court for further deliberation.

Implementation of the transparency measures set out by the European Commission's Recommendation of 7 March 2014 on strengthening the principle of equal pay between men and women.

Only a few states took specific action to follow up on the Commission's Recommendation on transparency, including **Croatia**, **Finland**, **Germany**, **Italy**, **Lithuania**, **Luxembourg**, **Poland** and **Spain**, although in

177 Romania, Labour Code, Article 163.
178 Germany, Labour Court of Berlin, Judgment of 1 February 2017, 56 Ca 5356/15.
179 Germany, State Labour Court of Berlin and Brandenburg, judgment of 5 February 2019, 16 Sa 983/18.
180 Federal Labour Court (BAG), judgment of 25 June 2020, 8 AZR 145/19.

a number of these this action has not yet been turned into law. In July 2015, the **Croatian** Government thus adopted the Action Plan for the determination and regulation of the salary system, with the overarching aim of establishing equal pay for equal work and transparency in the salary systems in the public and the private sector, to be laid down in the Act on Salaries in the Public Sector in September 2015. Wage transparency was to be enhanced through the introduction of wage categories, which should enable differentiation of work according to quality and increase work productivity, i.e. improve the relation between wages and productivity. Unfortunately, however, this initiative came to an end with the entry into office of the new Government in January 2016 and no other legislative steps have been announced since then.

In **Italy** also, a draft delegated act was presented to Parliament in March 2015 and is under examination by the Commission for Labour, although it has still not become law. In **Poland**, an initiative to impose an obligation on companies to report on wage differences between men and women was announced in 2012, but no concrete legislative steps have been taken so far.

In **Estonia**, some measures for pay transparency were planned by national strategies[181] and the draft of the Act on Amendments to the Gender Equality Act and Associated Acts was prepared but not passed in parliament due to opposition from some women's organisations, the equality body, and trade union and employers' representatives.[182] The draft act aimed to tackle the gender pay gap: it was intended to give more responsibilities and rights to the Labour Inspectorate and was targeted at public sector employers with 10 or more employees. However, a lack of common understanding and opposition to the draft law enabling effective monitoring of the implementation of equal pay for women and men led to lengthy parliamentary debates (lasting six months) and ultimately to the failure of the draft act. Arguments against it related to the selection of the sector (why only the public sector), an increased administrative burden and the poor use of pre-existing capacities, such as gender equality bodies and agencies (questioning the necessity of establishing yet another institution). Meanwhile, the Ministry of Finance has issued a promise to reduce the gender pay gap during the period of 2021 to 2024 by encouraging the introduction of transparent and objective evaluation of work and pay systems, *inter alia* by providing a digital tool to facilitate and support gender equality planning.[183] The project InWeGe (Income, Wealth and Gender, 2019-2020) studied the wage and pension differences in Estonia and developed a web application for gender differences in income and wealth (wages and pensions) available on the website of the Statistics Estonia.[184] In **Malta**, the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality in its input to the Equality Bill proposed strengthening protection in relation to pay and referred to the provisions of the Commission's Recommendation.[185]

In **Finland**, pay audits had already been required by the Act on Equality since 2005 but the provision was amended in 2014. Pay audits are required for employers with a minimum of 30 employees as part of equality planning, the aim being to clarify that there are no unfounded pay differentials between women and men. The equality plan must involve an analysis of job classifications, pay and pay differentials by gender, and if there are clear differences the employer must analyse their reasons and grounds. The main pay components are to be taken into consideration and employers must conduct the audit in cooperation with the employees' representative.

181 Estonia, the Welfare Development Plan 2016-2023; National Action Plan 2016-2019, State Budget Strategy 2019-2022; Action plan of Estonia 2020 for 2018–2020 (Adopted by the Government of the Republic of Estonia on 26 April 2018), https://www.opengovpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Estonia_Action-Plan_2018-2020_EST.pdf.

182 Estonia, Act on Amendments to the Gender Equality Act and Associated Acts, available at: https://www.riigikogu.ee/tegevus/eelnoud/eelnou/920bb10b-1e71-48fa-896d-c8f2c473867a/Soolise%20võrdõiguslikkuse%20seaduse%20muutmise%20ja%20sellega%20seonduvalt%20teiste%20seaduste%20muutmise%20seadus.

183 Ministry of Finance (2020), State Budget Strategy 2021–2024, p. 20, https://www.rahandusministeerium.ee/en/state-budget-and-economy.

184 https://palgad.stat.ee/en. The project InWeGe is carried out by the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioners office (EB) in a collaboration with Tartu University and Tallinn Technical University. For more information, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GkHs9FKrVzY.

185 NCPE (2015) 'NCPE's Input to the HREC and Equality Bills', p. 6. https://meae.gov.mt/en/Public_Consultations/MSDC/Documents/2015%20HREC%20Final/NCPE.pdf.

In the **United Kingdom**, the provisions referred to above in the Equality Act 2010 (Gender Pay Gap Information) Regulations 2017 and the EqA (Equal Pay Audits) Regulations 2014 implement the Recommendation to some extent. In respect of gender pay gap reporting the provisions fall short of the Recommendation in that they currently apply only to employers with at least 250 employees. In respect of pay audits, the provisions referred to above fall short of the Recommendation in that they will only apply to employers found liable for breaches of equal pay law at employment tribunal. The Recommendation has not been implemented in relation to pay information rights for employees or collective bargaining.

More recently, the Commission's Recommendation provided the incentive for the Equality Ombudsman to report on pay transparency in 2018.[186] Its report contains an analysis of the legal prerequisites of pay transparency and balancing requirements of the equal pay principle, particularly the right to privacy and data protection.[187] The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health nominated a tripartite working group (the Pay Transparency Working Group) to consider the proposals made by the Equality Ombudsman for amending the legal provision concerned (Section 6(b) of the Equality Act). Meanwhile it has become clear that the employees' representatives in the Working Group[188] support an amendment of the provision on pay transparency along the lines proposed by the Equality Ombudsman, whereas the employers' representatives reject it. As the Government resigned before the final report was published, no political conclusions were drawn. The current Government's programme notes that pay differentials and pay discrimination are to be combated by increasing pay transparency by means of legislation. Provisions will be introduced on the right of staff, staff representatives and individual employees to access pay information and to address pay discrimination more effectively.

In **Spain**, to implement the Commission's Recommendation, the 2019 legislation on work of equal value introduced a mechanism for wage transparency and established the right of employees to have access to the wage records of their firm through workers' representatives. The Workers' Statute now contains parameters that guide gender-neutral job evaluation and classification systems. Moreover, pay audits have been introduced, to be carried out before an equality plan is drawn up, and a Registry of Enterprise Equality Plans has been set up. Royal Decree 902/2020, which was due to come into force in April 2021, defines the principle of wage transparency and establishes that firms and collective agreements must include and apply this principle. According to Article 3 of Royal Decree 902/2020, the principle of wage transparency will be applied at least through three mechanisms thereby regulated: wage registers, pay audits, and job evaluation and classification systems.

Some countries, such as **France**, did not consider it necessary to take specific action following the Recommendation, arguing that most of the recommendations have already been adopted (see next section). Similarly, in **Portugal** some of the issues covered by the Commission Recommendation are already provided for in legislation, such as information on company wages disaggregated by sex being already available to employees. Furthermore, gender equality (including equal pay) is a mandatory topic of collective agreements and the Gender Equality Agency in the Field of Employment has a duty to check all collective agreements just after their publication in order to see whether they include discriminatory clauses. If this is the case, the Agency can present the case to the public attorney, who can take it to court in order to have these clauses declared null and void. This rule, introduced by the Labour Code of 2009, is in line with point 5 of the Recommendation.

186 Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and Maarianvaara, J. (2018) *Selvitys palkka-avoimudesta* (Report on pay transparency), Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, available at: http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/161103/R_41_18_Selvitys_palkka-avoimuudesta.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y, Nousiainen, K., *Palkka-avoimuuden oikeudelliset edellytykset* (Legal Prerequisites of Pay Transparency), in Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and Maarianvaara, Jukka, 2018, pp. 17-38.

187 Nousiainen, K. 'Palkka-avoimuuden oikeudelliset edellytykset' ('Legal prerequisites of pay transparency') in Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and Maarianvaara, J. (2018) *Selvitys palkka-avoimuudesta* (Report on pay transparency), pp. 17-39.

188 Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (2019) *Palkka-avoimuustyöryhmän loppuraportti* (The Final report of the pay transparency working group), Reports of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2019:32, available at: http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/161495/STM_rap_2019_32_Palkka-avoimuustyoryhman_loppuraportti.pdf.

Introduced wage transparency rules and enforcement mechanisms

However, in an increasing number of countries, some form of rule or duty seeking to enhance wage transparency has been introduced, including:

– *Reporting duties*: The Equality Act 2010 (Gender Pay Gap Information) Regulations 2017[189] in the **United Kingdom** requires employers in the private, public and voluntary sectors with 250 or more employees to publish, annually, information on their mean and median gender pay gaps, as well as the number of men and women in each pay quartile. The 2017 **German** Pay Transparency Act restricts the reporting duty to businesses with more than 500 employees and there are no effective sanctions provided in the case of non-compliance. Following upon the **Irish** National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017 to 2020,[190] on 26 June 2018, the Government approved the General Scheme of the Gender Pay Gap Information Bill,[191] requiring employers to publish annually information related to the pay of men and women so as to reveal any difference and the scale of that difference. It is proposed that for the first two years of the legislation, it shall apply to employers with over 250 employees and then within three years the upper limit will become 150 employees. The new Minister for Equality has announced that he intends to amend the proposed legislation with stronger enforcement mechanisms. Income reports (**Austria**, companies with 150+ employees); bi-annual m/w report relating to appointments, training, promotion, pay, etc. (**Italy**, companies with 100+ employees); annual reports comparing the situation of men and women in the company (**France**, different duties for companies with 50+ and 250+ employees; see below for detailed explanation); 'pay mapping' duty (**Finland**, companies with 30+ employees); duty of gender-segregated wage statistics (**Denmark**, but in 2016 the law was changed so as to no longer impose a duty on smaller companies with 10+ full-time employees, but only on companies with 35+ full-time employees and with at least 10 men and 10 women with comparable jobs); duty for employers to provide wage statistics each semester, disaggregated by sex, to the staff delegation (**Luxembourg**); duty to provide work councils and trade unions with anonymised data on the average wages of employees (except those in managerial positions) according to gender and professional groups, for companies with more than 20 employees (**Lithuania**). In **Montenegro**, Article 55 of the General Collective Agreement requires that, once a year, the employer informs the trade union at an appropriate level of the total calculated gross and net salaries paid out, including contributions for mandatory social insurance and the amount of the average salary paid by the employer. This information applies to all employees, so there is no specified obligation in respect of diverse functions. **Albanian** Law sets an obligation on wage transparency for public institutions only, requiring every public institution to publish on its webpage in an easily understandable and accessible format information related to: '(…) salaries of officials having the obligation to declare property and assets according to the law, salary structures for other employers, (…).'[192] According to the **Belgian** Gender Pay Gap Act (as amended in 2014), differences in pay and labour costs between men and women should be stated in companies' annual reports and every two years, 50+ companies should carry out a comparative analysis of their wage structure, showing the rates for their female and male employees. If this shows that women earn less than men, the company must draw up an action plan. An employer may also appoint a works mediator, to which women can turn if they suspect discrimination. If there is a pay differential, the works mediator will try to find a compromise with the employer. In the **Netherlands**, companies are obliged, on the basis of Article 31d of the Works Councils Act, to submit data to works councils once a year about equal treatment of men and women and about the levels and the content of employee benefits (pay etc.) in the company. These data should be broken down by gender. The **Croatian** Bureau of Statistics publishes an annual publication 'Men and women in Croatia' (from 2006 onwards), which contains a separate chapter with gender-disaggregated data on employment

189 United Kingdom, Equality Act 2010 (Gender Pay Gap Information) Regulations 2017, 6 April 2017. https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2017/172/contents/made.
190 http://www.genderequality.ie/en/GE/Pages/Conferences.
191 The Government published the Gender Pay Gap Bill 2019 in April 2019. https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2019/30/.
192 Albania, Law No. 119/2014.

and earnings. The publication is easily accessible online, on the Bureau's website, and is published in Croatian and English. However, only employers who are legal entities are required to report annually to the Croatian Bureau of Statistics the average remuneration by category of employee or position, broken down by gender. In **Norway**, the duty of employers to report on matters of equal pay was significantly strengthened in January 2020. Public enterprises and private-sector enterprises with more than 50 employees are required to adopt a concrete methodology ('activity duty'). The same applies to private undertakings with between 20 and 50 employees, if demanded by a social partner such as a union representative. Employers specified for activity duty as mentioned in Section 6, must report on both the current state of gender equality in the business and on the work they have done to fulfil the activity obligation. As of 1 January 2020, it is also an obligation for employers to develop wage surveys. The wage surveys are to be reported on for the first time in 2021.[193]

– *Pay information right*: In **Finland** the employer is required to provide the victim of alleged pay discrimination with 'information on the grounds of his/her pay and other information that is necessary for assessing whether there has been discrimination', under Section 10.3 of the Act on Equality. However, the employer is not obliged to disclose the information about a comparator who refuses to disclose their pay details. The comparator's pay information may in such cases be required to be revealed through an intervention by the Equality Ombudsman. The new **German** law restricts the right to information to businesses with more than 200 employees, although the majority of women work in smaller enterprises. In **Norway** as well a similar right is provided under Section 32 of the GEADA, but is coupled with a duty of secrecy for the person receiving the information. In **Greece**, the Authority for the Protection of Personal Data (APPD) imposed a EUR 70 000 fine on a private firm for refusing to provide data to an employee on the comparative evaluation of its employees, which he had requested in order to be able to exercise his employment rights. Moreover, in a decision concerning the application process for a work post for disabled people, the APPD allowed sensitive data about the successful candidate (disability and unemployment status) to be provided to the unsuccessful candidate, on the basis that the latter was considered to have a legitimate interest. It is likely that the APPD would take a similar position in an equal pay case. In **Slovenia**, the employer can refuse to give such information on the ground of an employee refusing to give consent. In **Iceland**, the law stipulates a right for employees to disclose their wages if they choose to do so, which is not deemed to be very effective, given the unlikelihood that men will disclose their higher wages to female colleagues.

– *Recording duty*: In **Portugal**, companies must keep sex-segregated records of recruitment forms and procedures for a minimum period of five years. These records must also include information that allows for the investigation of wage discrimination. **Spanish** Royal Decree 6/2019, of 1 March 2019, which came into force immediately after it was passed[194] establishes an obligation for employers to keep a record of the average remuneration in the company, in relation to professional groups or jobs of equal value. Workers' representatives have the right to receive annual reports of this record. It also establishes the presumption that there is a prima facie case of discrimination when, in companies with more than 50 workers, the average remuneration of workers of one sex is at least 25 % higher than the average remuneration of workers of the other sex. According to Royal Decree 902/2020, remuneration records are mandatory for all companies and the Royal Decree establishes precise instructions on the information they must contain and how to compute them. The remuneration record should include salaries, salary supplements and extra-salary benefits.

– *Publication of salaries of certain persons* (**Poland**) also pursuant to staff regulations (**Belgium**).

193 If the company already had the numbers ready in 2020, the numbers could also be reported on in 2020. See the Equality Ombud's website: https://ldo.no/en/jobbe-for-likestilling/i-arbeidslivet/Aktivitets-og-redegjorelsesplikten/ (only in Norwegian).

194 Spain, Royal Decree 6/2019, of 1 March 2019, www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2019-3244.

– *Duty for employers to establish a remuneration system*: In **Lithuania**, legislation entered into force in 2017 which established such a duty for companies with more than 50 employees and a requirement to make it available to employees. The system must specify categories of employees according to their position and qualification, the remuneration for each of them and the level of the base rate wage, the grounds and procedure for granting additional payments, and the procedure of wage indexing.

– *Duty for employers to establish an equal pay action plan:* In **Sweden**, this duty includes a survey of provisions and practices regarding pay and other terms of employment that are used at the employer's establishment and pay differences between men and women. In **Lithuania**, companies with more than 50 employees have to adopt an internal policy on equal opportunities, which must be discussed in their works council. If the **Portuguese** Gender Equality Agency in the Field of Employment (CITE) detects wage inequalities in a company, it notifies the employer to present an 'evaluation plan of the wage differences in the company' that is intended either to justify those differences or to eliminate those with no objective justification, and that will be put in place for a period of 12 months.

– *Duty to establish a sound job evaluation system* (**Netherlands**, **Portugal**). In **Austria**, sectoral collective agreements in the private sector are required to contain gender-neutral pay schemes that structure minimum pay levels according to material and temporal qualification levels. Collective agreements are accessible to the public in a database maintained by the Trade Union Federation, which is regularly updated as soon as pay rises come into effect.[195] In rare cases, where a job falls into an area not regulated by a collective agreement, adequate pay levels can be inferred by looking at the best comparable sectoral pay schemes. However, a higher rate of pay can be negotiated at any time. The **Belgian** Collective Labour Agreement No. 25 on equal pay for male and female employees obliges all sectors and individual enterprises to assess and, if necessary, correct their job evaluation and classification systems to ensure gender neutrality as a condition of equal pay. The Collective Agreement modified on 9 July 2008 provides that discrimination between men and women must be excluded from all conditions of remuneration. The communication and control of revised job evaluation and classification systems by the federal service in charge of collective agreements is one positive outcome of the law (between 1 July 2013 and 30 November 2014, more than 150 collective agreements were checked and subsequently some of them were corrected or completely modified).[196] The Institute for the Equality of Women and Men also issued a methodological instrument, the gender neutral checklist for job assessment and classification, which subsequently gained legal recognition.[197] The checklist is one of the elements taken into consideration in the check by the federal service. In two **Dutch** collective agreements the employer committed itself to carrying out an investigation into equal pay in its company. The results of one of these investigations have already been published.[198] The outcome is that pay differences do indeed exist within the company and that the main cause appears to be the under-representation of women in higher positions. The company has announced that it will discuss with the works council and the trade unions how to redress this situation.

– *Investigation powers of specific inspectors or equality bodies and possibility of sanctions*: In **Italy**, the local Labour Inspectorate may obtain gender-differentiated data at the workplace as regards hiring, vocational training and career opportunities. In **Portugal**, the workers and union representatives also have the right to ask the CITE for advice on alleged gender pay discriminatory practices inside the company; if the CITE concludes that there is wage discrimination on the ground of sex, the employer is compelled to eradicate it and may be subjected to a fine. In **Cyprus**, a specific inspector

195 https://www.kollektivvertrag.at/cms/KV/KV_0/home.
196 Deloose, S. (2018) *La loi sur l'écart salarial, effectivité et conformité au droit européen* (The law on the pay gap – effectiveness and conformity with EU law), Final essay for the L.L.M. at the *Université libre de Bruxelles*, p. 18.
197 Available in French and Dutch at: www.igvm-iefh.belgium.be.
198 Aegon (2019), *Vrouwen bij Aegon gelijk beloond* (Equal pay for women and men at Aegon), 11 February 2019, available at: https://nieuws.aegon.nl/gelijke-beloning/.

is appointed to also ensure the full and effective application of gender equality law, and to whom all kinds of information must be disclosed upon request.

– *Monitoring duty*: The **Swedish** Mediation Office – a public authority – monitors wage developments in the Swedish labour market including equal pay developments, but it must be stressed that in Sweden, pay – and pay structures – is for the social partners to decide through collective bargaining. Every year, the **Portuguese** Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs publishes detailed statistical data on the salary gap between men and women, at general and sectoral levels, and statistical data by company, profession and qualification level, based upon the annual balance sheet provided by companies. In **Belgium**, monitoring annual reports and comparative analysis is part of the tasks of company auditors within their role of annual accounts monitoring. Despite instructions given by the Institute of Company Auditors,[199] currently, this obligation is not really effective as auditors are not systematically checking the accuracy of figures provided. Moreover, the reports are only accessible internally to the works councils, limiting their use in legal cases, for example. The labour inspectors also have a role in checking information provided by enterprises, but due to their limited human resources, this is barely carried out. What is more, all data mentioned in the reports are confidential. Finally, the fact that no mediator has been appointed so far is a signal that although the law provides a number of mechanisms to ensure that equal pay in companies is real, it is not really effective. According to the **Danish** Equal Pay Act, the Government is obliged to present a national statement on the status and development of the gender pay gap every three years. This monitoring report is based on an extensive review as well as a large dataset and is made public.

– *Unenforceability of confidentiality clauses in labour contracts* (**Northern Ireland**).

– *Duty to produce salary guides in the public sector* (**Estonia**, **Slovenia**). The **Estonian** Civil Service Act stipulates that the salary guide of the authority must be disclosed on the web page of the authority. A salary guide is a procedure for the determination and payment of salaries and prescribes the basic salary or the basic salary range for the position, the conditions and procedure for payment of the variable salary, additional remuneration and benefits provided by law and the time and manner of the payment of the salary. A list of institutions and authorities (heads of authorities, ministers and high-level representatives) is provided which should establish salary guides. The procedure for drafting the salary guide and determination of the salary components for other public bodies should be specified by a Government regulation.[200]

– *Protection against retaliation*: In **Portugal**, the dismissal or the application of disciplinary measures against a worker up to one year after they ask the CITE for the advice indicated above is presumed unlawful.

– *Pay audit requirements*: Under Section 6(b) of the **Finnish** Act on Equality, employers of more than 30 employees are under a positive obligation to conduct regular pay audits (pay mapping). If pay differentials are found, the employer must enquire into the causes and reasons for these differentials. Pay audits in **Germany** are not mandatory. In the **United Kingdom**, the Equality Act allows the adoption of regulations requiring large employers (250+) to carry out and publish equal pay audits. To some extent **Sweden** can be said to have implemented the Commission's Recommendation by requiring the employer to carry out yearly pay audits. The audit must comprise a survey and analysis of wages and wage differences, referring in particular to the comparison between: women and men performing work that is to be regarded as equal; groups of employees performing work considered to be dominated by women and groups not dominated by women performing work of equal value; employees performing work considered to be dominated by women and a group of

199 *Institut des réviseurs d'entreprise*, Communication 2014/10, 29 October 2014.

200 Estonia, Regulation of the Government of the Republic No. 76 of 16 March 2013 on administration of the state personnel and payroll database remuneration levels (*Riigi personali- ja palgaarvestuse andmekogusse andmete esitamise ja arvestuse toimingute teostamise kord. Vabariigi Valitsuse määrus nr 76*), 16 May 2015.

employees performing work not considered to be female-dominated but better paid despite the work requirements being deemed to be lower. This information is not to be sent or reported anywhere, but it must be sent to the Equality Ombudsman upon request. A trade union to whom the employer is bound by collective agreement also has the right to obtain the information needed to collaborate on the monitoring of wage statistics for equality, and the survey and yearly analysis of pay levels. To the extent that this information is related to an individual employee, it is subject to rules on professional secrecy. So far, **Iceland** has introduced the most developed pay audit system, which is explained in more detail below. In **Spain**, pay audits were introduced in the Law on Effective Equality by Royal Decree 6/2019. Royal Decree 902/2020 establishes that companies that are obliged to prepare an equality plan[201] must conduct an equal pay audit before the equality plan is drawn up. The Royal Decree regulates the content of the pay audit (diagnosis with job evaluations and action plan for the correction of possible pay inequalities).

– *Penalties*: In **Great Britain**, no civil penalties for non-compliance with the reporting duty are currently proposed, although this is to remain under review,[202] but failure to report is 'an unlawful act' and the Equality and Human Rights Commission can take enforcement action It may open an investigation if it suspects a considerable pay gap is being hidden by employers. Reputational risks are also a consideration if employers fail to comply with the regulations: information is publicly available online[203] and often attracts media attention. Furthermore, any term of a contract which prohibits or restricts a person from making a 'relevant pay disclosure' to anyone is unenforceable. A tribunal must (subject to certain exceptions) require an employer who loses an equal pay claim to carry out an equal pay audit. Regarding the Gender Pay Gap Information Bill 2019 introduced in **Ireland**, the Human Rights and Equality Commission may make application to court if there is an alleged breach of the proposed legislation. There will also be additional enforcement powers and access to the Workplace Relations Commission if an employee considers that there has been a breach of the legislation.

On 1 June 2017, the **Icelandic** Parliament passed, by a vast majority, a law (Law No. 56/2017, which came into force on 1 January 2018) requiring companies and institutions employing 25 or more workers to obtain annual equal pay certification of their equal pay systems and the implementation thereof, on the basis of the requirements of a management requirement standard[204] to prove that they offer equal pay for work of equal value, regardless of gender.[205] The Equal Pay Standard ÍST 85 (the Standard) is the first to be deliberately developed according to international ISO standards, allowing it to be translated and adopted in other countries. The Standard is applicable to all companies regardless of their size, field of activity and the gender composition of their staff. It describes the process that companies and public institutions can follow in order to ensure equal pay within their organisation and is aimed at implementing effective and professional methods for making pay decisions, their effective review and improvement. The Standard ensures professional working methods in order to prevent direct or indirect discrimination and can be purchased at Icelandic Standards.[206]

In order to obtain qualification, companies and institutions need to implement an equal pay management system following guidelines in the Equal Pay Standard. An accredited auditor will conduct an audit, and if the company or institution fulfils the requirements, it will receive a certification that must be renewed every three years. Equal pay certification under the standard is designed to confirm that decisions on pay are based only on relevant considerations. The Standard does not entail a requirement that individuals receive exactly the same wages for the same work or comparable work, as employers have discretion to

201 All firms with more than 150 employees since March 2020, firms with 100-150 employees from March 2021 and firms with 50-100 employees as of March 2022.
202 Government Equalities Office (2016), *Mandatory Gender Pay Gap Reporting: Government Consultation on Draft Regulations*, at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/504398/GPG_consultation_v8.pdf.
203 See https://gender-pay-gap.service.gov.uk/Viewing/search-results.
204 The Standard ÍST 85 Equal Pay Management System – requirements and guidance.
205 https://www.government.is/news/article/2018/01/30/Questions-and-Answers-on-equal-pay-certification/.
206 http://stadlarad.is.

take into consideration individual factors applying to groups and particular personal skills when deciding wages. Nevertheless, it does make the inflexible demand that decisions on wages are based on relevant considerations, such as individuals' qualifications, experience, responsibilities or job performance, criteria which do not involve gender discrimination of any type, direct or indirect. The Standard states that the normal procedure is that information on employees' wages is presented in the form of statistics in such a way that they cannot be traced to the individuals involved.

The organisations of the social partners are commissioned to monitor compliance to ensure that workplaces acquire equal pay certification and that it is renewed every three years. In cases where a workplace either has not acquired equal pay certification or has failed to renew it by the deadline, the organisations of the social partners will be able to report it to the Centre for Gender Equality. The Centre will maintain a register of companies and institutions that have acquired certification or confirmation and will display it in an accessible manner on the Centre's website. The Centre can also impose on the workplace a formal demand to rectify the situation by a certain deadline. Rectification measures can involve, for example, the provision of information and release of materials or the drawing up of a scheduled plan of action on how the workplace intends to meet the requirements of the Equal Pay Standard. If the workplace fails to act on instructions of this type, the Centre for Gender Equality is authorised to impose *per diem* fines. Appeals can be referred to the Minister of Social Affairs and Equality against a decision to impose *per diem* fines. The minister will also order assessments every two years of the results of certification and confirmation of the equal pay systems of companies and institutions under the act and will issue regulations on the execution and structure of these assessments.

In **Germany**, a first evaluation of the Pay Transparency Act was published in 2019, showing that some issues remain. For instance, many employers seem not to have applied the rules, evaluated their systems or changed structures. Reporting duties are restricted to companies with more than 500 employees and there are no effective sanctions in the case of non-compliance, while pay audits remain non-compulsory.[207] Employees mostly do not exercise or are unaware of their rights to pay transparency. Moreover, the German expert identified the fact that there are no sanctions for infringements or enforcement mechanisms, such as an effective shift of the burden of proof and the ability to bring a class action, as a major problem.

In **France**, the new general labour legislation[208] and the Law of 29 March 2018 now detail new obligations for private companies[209] with regard to collecting the statistics necessary to monitor the participation of women and men in employment. However, a historical view shows that, in practice, in the private sector, these more recent legislative developments seem to limit the scope of these obligations in three ways.

Firstly, there is less visibility of the data presenting for each job category the situation of women and men in hiring, training, promotion, in terms of qualifications, grade, working conditions and pay, as these are now contained in a more general database, and also the scope of the negotiations on equality at work is no longer separate from other issues relating to working conditions. Secondly, the Macron executive order on the Labour Law reform of 2017[210] also concerns the general obligation of employers to negotiate on equality between women and men, which is still mandatory at least every four years when there is a group of union representatives.[211] However, the frequency of this negotiation can be set at a minimum of every four years by an agreement at company level. It is only if there is no agreement on the timetable

207 Pay audits are voluntary operational audit procedures for companies with at least 500 employees, through which they may regularly review their remuneration regulations and the various remuneration components paid as well as their application for compliance with the equal pay requirement within the meaning of the Pay Transparency Act.

208 France, Article L 2323-17 abolished by the new labour law reform, Executive Order (Ordonnance) n°2017-1386 du 22 September 2017, Article 1.

209 See *Travail, genre et sociétés* 2017/1 No. 37 pp. 129-171. Des lois à la négociation, quoi de neuf pour l'égalité professionnelles, https://www.cairn.info/revue-travail-genre-et-societes-2017-1.html.

210 France, Executive Order No. 2017-1385 of 22 September 2017 on strengthening collective negotiations (*Ordonnance n° 2017-1385 du 22 septembre 2017 relative au renforcement de la négociation collective*).

211 A '*Section syndicale*', Article L 2242-1, Labour Code, Executive order No. 2017-1385 of 22 September 2017, Article 7, available at: https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/article_lc/LEGIARTI000035608867/2999-01-01/#LEGIARTI000035608867.

that the negotiation is held every year. The scope of the negotiation must include the gender pay gap.[212] The financial penalty in the absence of negotiation on equality reflects its binding nature.[213] Thirdly, the recent decree on indicators to close the gender pay gap and monitor the promotion of women and men with specific actions might not be sufficiently effective to detect disparities and correct them.[214] The decree was adopted to implement Law No. 2018-771 of 5 September 2018[215] which provides that, in companies with more than 50 employees, the employer must publish indicators each year relating to the pay gap between women and men and the actions implemented to eliminate it. The decree also defines the methodology used to establish the indicators (L.1142-8 of the Labour Code).

According to the decree, the following indicators for companies with more than 250 employees (Article D. 1142-2 Labour Code) must be published:

1) The gender pay gap between women and men, calculated in reference to the average pay of women compared to the average pay of men, by age cohorts and categories of equivalent jobs.
2) The rate of disparities in individual pay rises that do not reflect promotions between women and men.
3) The rate of disparities in promotions between women and men.
4) The percentage of employees who benefited from a pay rise during the year of their return from maternity leave if there were increases in pay during their leave period.
5) The number of workers of the under-represented sex among the ten employees who earn the highest wages in the firm.

For companies of between 50 and 250 employees, the same indicators are to be published except one: there is no obligation to publish the rate of disparities in promotion between women and men. It is problematic to think that the differences in the number of promotions for women and men should not be monitored in these medium-sized companies.[216] The French expert considers it also regrettable that no indicators are required for smaller companies (under 50 employees), since the majority of the job pool is within these companies. Under the new decree, the results of the company in view of the indicators are published each year on the company's website, or in the absence of such a website, the indicators are circulated to employees by other means. In the public sector, similar pay gap indicators will soon be required with the new reform of the civil service adopted in the summer of 2019.[217]

In **France**, there are new measures to correct the gender pay gap detected by the new indicators (Article L 1142-9 Labour code). First, there is a duty to inform the works councils and engage in negotiations on professional equality. In companies where the results in points obtained with regard to the indicators are lower than 75, the collective bargaining negotiations on equality will focus on adequate and relevant measures to correct and, eventually, programme annual or pluri-annual financial measures to close the gender pay gap (Article D. 1142-6). These indicators can be made available to works councils. The results are presented by socio-professional categories, levels or hierarchical pay grades or other rankings according to jobs. If the indicators cannot be calculated, the employer must explain these challenges. In the event that no agreement is found on measures with employee representatives, the employer takes its own measures after consultation with the works council. This decision is monitored by the public authorities. There are also financial sanctions if the indicators reflect a certain level of disparity (L. 1142-10). In companies of at least 50 employees, if the total number of points linked to the indicators is under 75, the

212 France, Article L2242-1, Labour Code.
213 France, Article L2242-8, Labour Code.
214 France, Decree No. 2019-15, 8 January 2019 on closing the gender pay gap and combating sexual violence and sexism (*Décret n° 2019-15 du 8 janvier 2019*), available at: https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000037964765&categorieLien=id.
215 France, Chapter IV, Article 104-107, available at: https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/eli/loi/2018/9/5/MTRX1808061L/jo/texte.
216 See European Equality Law Network, Flash Report (2019), 'New decree on gender pay gap in France', available at: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/4859-france-new-decree-on-gender-pay-gap-in-france-pdf-106-kb.
217 France, Act No. 2019-828 of 6 August 2019 on the transformation of the civil service (*Loi n° 2019-828 du 6 août 2019 de transformation de la fonction publique*).

company has three years to comply and limit the pay disparities. If the company achieves a result of 75 points before the three years have elapsed then a new time limit of three years is awarded to correct the disparities which starts the year the 75 points result is published (Article D. 1142-8).[218]

The **Irish** Government approved the General Scheme of the Gender Pay Gap Information Bill on 26 June 2018.[219] The proposed legislation will be cited as the Gender Pay Gap Information Act 2018. The Employment Equality Act 1998 will be amended by the insertion of a number of sections to include: '*Gender Pay Gap Information*'. There is a legislative proposal on equal pay for women and men in the **Netherlands**, which was submitted to Parliament on 7 March 2019[220] The main elements of this are the following:

- Reversal of the burden of proof. Employers with 50 or more employees should apply for a certificate which shows that they apply the standard for equal pay. If they do not have such a certificate and a person states that he or she is not paid equally, the assumption is that this is indeed the case. The employer may refute this assumption.
- Obligation to provide information in the annual report by employers with 50 or more employees about differences in pay between employees who carry out work of (almost) equal value. If unequal pay exists, this must be reported in the annual report together with information on the way in which these differences will be eliminated.
- The Labour Inspectorate will be given the tasks of monitoring the application of the law and of imposing fines in cases of non-compliance.
- Employees of employers with 50 or more employees will get the right to ask for information about the salary of colleagues who do the same work or work of (almost) equal value.

The proposal was debated in Parliament for the first time on 2 February 2021. The conservative party CDA and (neo)-liberal party VVD oppose the proposal, because in their view it creates too heavy an administrative burden for employers. More left-wing political parties are in favour, as they believe there is no other way to reduce the gender pay gap. As there will be parliamentary elections in March 2021, it is hard to predict whether or not the proposal will be adopted in the end.

3.1.9 Other initiatives to enhance transparency and to close the gender pay gap

In a number of countries, some more practical, supporting tools have been developed to assist employers in addressing the gender pay gap within their organisation. In the **Netherlands**, a website, www.gelijkloon.nl (part of www.wageindicator.org), subsidised by the Dutch Government, provides substantive information about (equal) pay and enabling the comparison of wages. In addition, the NIHR has developed the equal pay Quickscan (see www.wervingenselectiegids.nl). If pay discrimination is suspected, a worker can turn to the NIHR, who can actively investigate and obtain necessary pay data from the employer. Furthermore, in September 2020, the Foundation for Labour (*Stichting van de Arbeid*) published an update of its checklist for equal pay, which dates from 2001. This checklist contains various tools which are targeted at four

218 This encourages companies to introduce measures to comply, postponing the sanction if the pay disparity is reduced within the three years. However, it can result in companies reducing their pay disparity once every three years to postpone any possible sanction. The decree describes the procedure to sanction the company if the three-year time limit is not respected: an agent from the labour inspectorate sends a report to the regional director (Article D. 1142-9.). The director informs the company it is considering a financial sanction within the next two months after the report and the director can take into account justifications for the non-compliance and correction of the pay disparity (economic hardship, company restructuring or merger or bankruptcy (Article D. 1142-11). The director has two choices: impose a sanction of the equivalent of 1 % of the earnings and company profits from the past calendar year based on revenues from activities (social security contribution base Article D. 1142-13) or award extra time to comply within a maximum of one year. Public authorities enforce the rules, which avoids the constraints of judicial adjudication. However, in view of the possible exemptions to enforcement in case of economic hardship in the company, the sanctions might be less rigorously enforced and this would undercut the binding and dissuasive nature of the publication of the indicators and their effect.

219 The Government published the Gender Pay Gap Bill 2019 in April 2019: https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2019/30/.

220 Summary of a legislative proposal on equal pay for men and women: https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/wetsvoorstellen/detail?cfg=wetsvoorsteldetails&qry=wetsvoorstel%3A35157.

different groups: (1) large and medium-sized companies with a human resources department, (2) small companies, (3) works councils and employee representatives and (4) individual employees. These tools can help to ensure equal pay for men and women within companies.[221]

In **Poland**, in May 2017, a free software application to measure the pay gap was made available on the website of what is now called the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy (MRPiPS).[222] The ministry encourages employers to use the tool, explaining that providing equal pay for equal jobs or jobs of equal value is not only an obligation on employers, but also brings many advantages. The MRPiPS proposes estimating the so-called 'corrected pay gap', where employees' wages are compared considering features such as sex, age, education, the position occupied, working time or the length of service. Although the **Polish** expert considers the introduction of this tool, which is free of charge, to be a positive step, its voluntary nature is criticised. It is also considered that it should be mandatory to publish monitoring results and to make those available to a wide audience.

The **Luxembourg** Ministry for Gender Equality offers an online tool to companies which want to analyse their situation regarding equal pay. The *Logib-Lux*[223] is a calculating instrument based on Excel, which allows identification of the causes of disparities regarding remuneration between men and women in a company. After submitting the relevant data, the company receives a report on the remuneration structures within the company in which the causes of any pay gap are identified. The report establishes if the gender pay gap is justified by objective factors or if it indicates indirect discrimination based on sex. It also indicates methods for improving pay equality. It must be noted that companies are not obliged to communicate the results of the report to MEGA. If they used *Logib-Lux* in the procedure on positive action, they must only document that they used it to check equal pay.

The **German** government has also offered Logib-D as a management tool to help employers identify if there is a pay gap between their male and female employees.[224] There were strong indications that another tool (eg-check)[225] was better suited to detect pay discrimination on the grounds of sex/gender and to design pay structures and evaluation systems free of sex/gender discrimination. The tool Logib-D was designed to detect only the 'adjusted' wage gap, ignoring structural and indirect discrimination of women in working life. In 2019, the Federal Ministry for Family, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth is presenting a newly developed tool, the *Evaluierung von Arbeitsbewertungsverfahren* (EVA) list for the evaluation of job assessment procedures and sample analyses.[226]

In **Czechia**, *Logib* has been implemented by the Ministry of Social Affairs as a pilot project in 2020.[227] Moreover, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs provides for a publicly accessible pay calculator.[228]

In **Austria**, a 'wage calculator' (Gehaltsrechner) is being used since 2017 upon an initiative by the Ministry for Women. This online tool lets users calculate average wages and salaries according to profession, sector or region and can thus provide an instrument for works councils, unions and individuals in their campaigns for pay equality.

221 Netherlands, Stichting van de Arbeid (Foundation for Labour) (2020), 'Je verdiende loon! Handreiking gelijke beloning mannen en vrouwen' (The salary you deserve! Guidance on equal pay for men and women), 21 September 2020, available at: https://www.stvda.nl/nl/thema/arbeid-zorg/gelijke-beloning.
222 https://www.gov.pl/web/rodzina/aplikacja-do-mierzenia-nierownosci-plac See also: https://www.infor.pl/prawo/nowosci-prawne/757047,Ministerstwo-Rodziny-Pracy-i-Polityki-Spolecznej-stworzylo-mobilne-narzedzie-do-mierzenia-luk-placowych.html.
223 http://mega.public.lu/fr/travail/genre-ecart-salaire/mesures/logib/index.html.
224 See https://www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj/service/publikationen/logib-d/82318.
225 See https://www.eg-check.de/eg-check/DE/Weichenseite/weiche_node.html.
226 See https://www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj/service/publikationen/der-entgeltgleichheit-einen-schritt-naeher/80406.
227 Czechia, *To je rovnost* (This is equality) (2020), *Logib* – webpage, available at: https://www.rovnaodmena.cz/rovne-odmenovani/logib.
228 See https://rovnaodmena.cz/rovne-odmenovani/kalkulacka/.

In **Estonia**, employers have expressed concern about the increasing administrative burden of carrying out pay analyses from a gender perspective. The Estonian e-governance project, Reporting 3.0, is aimed at developing an automated data transmission channel for various bodies, such as the Tax and Custom Board and Statistics Estonia.[229] There is a pilot project that involves transmitting accounting data directly from the institutions' IT systems, which would enable employers to make pay analyses without creating additional datasets. Such initiatives could contribute to reducing the resources that are required to carry out pay audits. From the first half of 2019 onwards, employers are obliged to enter job titles, workplace location and working hours of employees into the Employment Register. The data from the Register will be used in a wages and salaries application that visualises median wages for the 110 most common occupations, beginning in spring 2020.

In **Bulgaria**, a priority issue for the Ministry of Education and Science in 2017 was to increase remuneration for pedagogical experts in the pre-school and school sectors and to attract young specialists to the profession, as well as keeping them in this important sector, where possible.[230] As the sector is highly feminised, all improvements are pertinent to the issue of equal pay. Since 1 September 2017, remuneration for pedagogical staff was increased by 15 %, the aim of the government being to double remuneration in the sector by the end of its mandate. Other incentives and additional payments were provided for those working in small towns, such as transport costs, payments for clothing, etc. There is a special EU-funded project in which the NGO, Gender Project Foundation (GPF) is a partner, entitled 'Zero GPG – Gender equality: Innovative tool and awareness raising on GPG'. The project is about creating an enabling environment for tackling the gender pay gap (GPG) by working with government, trade unions, employers' associations, academics and NGOs. A manual for trainers on countering GPG was created, as well as an innovative web-based instrument for calculating the GPG.[231] Similarly, the **Irish** National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020 also sets out to develop practical tools to assist employers in calculating the gender pay gap within their organisations and to consider its aspects and causes, mindful of obligations regarding privacy and data protection.

Other states have adopted measures and tools that aim to enhance not just equal pay but gender equality more generally. In December 2017, the **Swedish** Government thus launched the Action Plan for Gender Equal Life Incomes, addressing a number of areas connected to life income, such as education, gender segregation in the labour market, gender pay gap, leave of absence and working hours, work environment and sick leave, and parental leave. This action plan describes the current situation and a number of issues that affect life income, and presents the measures that the government has implemented, or plans to implement, in order to reduce income differences between women and men.[232] In 2019, the Swedish National Audit Office (Swedish NAO) scrutinised the system for pay audits to combat pay differences between men and women. The investigation showed that whereas it is unproblematic for employers to compare wages of employees who perform the same work, both the employers' organisations and (to a somewhat lesser extent) the trade unions state that it is very difficult for employers to compare the wages of employees who perform work of equal value. One reason is that, to make a comparison, it is necessary to establish that some work is female-dominated and that other work is male-dominated. If

229 https://e-estonia.com/statistics-estonia-reinvents-data-mining/. On 17 October 2019, Statistics Estonia and the Government Office presented a new web application called the Tree of Truth. It is a gauge of important national indicators, giving a simple, honest and objective picture of how the country is doing, https://tamm.stat.ee/?lang=en.

230 The Report on the implementation of the National Plan on Gender Equality for 2017, adopted by the Council of Ministers in July 2018, is available here: https://www.mlsp.government.bg/uploads/1/blgarsko-zakonodatelstvo/report-equality-2017-final.pdf.

231 The project 'Innovative tool and awareness raising on GPG' https://www.tbmagazine.net/statia/razlika-v-zaplashchaneto-po-pol-mit-ili-realnost-chast-prva.html.

232 See https://www.regeringen.se/4b0b1f/contentassets/f26c798733cd41258ec06ff8bd8186d5/handlingsplan-jamstallda-livsinkomster.

the majority of the employees are of the same sex, it will not be possible to define two separate groups to compare. The same applies if the groups of employees are fairly gender balanced.[233]

In 2014, the **Cypriot** Government established a two-tier certification system. According to this system companies may receive certification for a specific good practice they implement in the field of gender equality, or an equal employer certification if they have established and implemented a detailed equality plan. In **Malta** as well an audit system devised by the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) for organisations applying to be certified with the Equality Mark is one measure that is used in order to study the wage patterns of such organisations and ensure that there is no discrimination. However, the Equality Mark certification is optional and so is only taken up by organisations that take gender equality to heart.

In **France**, companies with fewer than 300 employees can conclude an agreement with the state to receive financial assistance to carry out a study of their employment equality situation and of the measures they would need to take to ensure equal opportunities between men and women. The **Albanian** Law on local government finance, No. 68/2017, provides for gender budgeting in Article 2(8): to ensure that the creation and distribution of local financial resources accelerates and realises gender equality.

3.1.10 Remaining specific difficulties

Beyond the general problem of wage transparency, many experts have reported specific difficulties in their country which obstruct the effective application and enforcement of the principle of equal pay for equal work and work of equal value in practice (**Austria**, **Belgium**, **Bulgaria**, **Croatia**, **Cyprus**, **Estonia**, **Finland**, **France**, **Germany**, **Greece**, **Hungary**, **Ireland**, **Italy**, **Latvia**, **Lithuania**, **Montenegro**, **Netherlands**, **North Macedonia**, **Norway**, **Poland**, **Romania**, **Serbia**, **Slovakia**, **Spain**, **Sweden**, **Turkey**, **United Kingdom**).

Some of these reported difficulties are of a rather general and/or persistent nature. In **Germany**, indirectly discriminatory provisions in collective agreements are considered a root cause for the persisting gender pay gap. This is reinforced by labour court decisions stating that the evaluation of work and the establishment of pay systems are a crucial part of the autonomy of collective bargaining and that the state may not interfere with this autonomy even if the pay systems seem to be arbitrary or unjust. It is still to be seen whether the statute on general minimum wages, which entered into force on 1 January 2015, might influence the gender pay gap.

A recent case decided by the Labour Court of Berlin, concerning a female freelancer working for a public service broadcaster in the position of a senior editor on a full-time basis, with defined duties and receiving a fixed monthly remuneration, confirms this. The complainant took legal action upon realising that her male colleagues doing the same or equivalent work were being paid significantly more than herself. However, the court decided that she had not been discriminated against on the ground of sex, but rather that there were justified differentiations due to seniority and the different contract arrangements for freelancers and permanent employees, which followed from the collective agreement. The court explained that higher remuneration would mainly depend upon negotiating skills, supposedly more pronounced in men, and contractual freedom and that maternity and childcare periods would often lead to shorter periods of employment for women, less seniority and, thus, lower wages, without any discrimination being involved.

Another problem concerns the restriction of cases to individual claims, when tackling structural problems (such as discriminatory classifications and pay structures). The fact that there is no possibility of collective

233 Swedish National Audit Office (2019), *Diskrimineringslagen krav på lönekartläggning – ett trubbigt verktyg för att minska löneskillnaderna mellan könen* (The requirement for pay audits in the Discrimination Act. A blunt tool for decreasing the pay gap between men and women), Stockholm, p. 52 f, available (in Swedish only) at: https://www.riksrevisionen.se/rapporter/granskningsrapporter/2019/diskrimineringslagens-krav-pa-lonekartlaggning---ett-trubbigt-verktyg-for-att-minska-loneskillnader-mellan-konen.html.

or class actions regarding equal pay has been identified, time and again, as one of the main obstacles to achieving gender equality.

While in **Italy** job classification is required by legislation to be gender neutral, no formal job evaluation and job analysis systems are available in Italy's legal and industrial relationships systems. Moreover, local and enterprise contracts are not easily available and seldom published either on the websites and in paper form. Collective agreements and job evaluation schemes are not normally monitored.

The implementation of equal pay has received quite a lot of attention in **Belgium**, but the legal arsenal is only concentrated on one factor in the gender gap – job evaluation and classification – and not on the whole range. While a number of sound mechanisms are in place, such as the works mediator and the Special Commission, which can provide advice on equal pay disputes in response to a labour court's request and which are well equipped to examine claims of work of equal value, no works mediators have been appointed since the act came into force four years ago and the Special Commission has been consulted only twice, with the last case being 30 years ago.

In **Estonia**, it is considered problematic that individual pay agreements between employers and employees are dominant and it is often claimed that women agree to work for lower pay. Employers' pay systems and practice are not monitored and the majority of employers do not carry out wage analyses from a gender perspective. It is hoped that the administrative burden of carrying out such analyses will reduce with the introduction of innovative digital solutions. However, there is a workforce shortage in the ICT sector, outsourcing is widely used and gender equality promotion is dependent on the human resources policies of the company. The Estonian state provides foreign recruitment support, as part of the 'Work in Estonia' project, but gender equality is not a priority issue in this context. In **Lithuania** as well there is an overwhelming dominance of individual agreements in the setting of wages and an absence of collective agreements. The rules on confidentiality are also considered to contribute to the reluctance of employees to challenge discriminatory practices in the area of pay. In practice, a difference in pay for women and men is considered to be a problem of equality law, which is governed by public law instruments, and not a problem related to individual labour law.

In the **Romanian** private sector there is also complete discretion to negotiate salaries. In **Latvia**, the major problem is that neither political, nor executive power recognises gender equality as a problem. This is due to the fact that indicators on women's participation in the labour market (Latvia – 72.7 %; EU-28 – 66.5 %);[234] gender pay gap (Latvia – 15.7 %; EU-28 – 16 %);[235] and women in decision-making bodies are relatively high in the average EU-28 context. However, such favourable statistics cannot be explained by actual gender equality but rather by the considerably higher level of education of women and the fact that women in Latvia are used to bearing a double burden of obligations – the majority still work on a full-time basis, while spending considerably more hours on family and household work.

Some experts have also referred to general aspects of their labour markets, in particular the problem of gender segregation in the workforce. The expert on **North Macedonia** mentioned this as one of the main problems for the gender pay gap. While many government documents attribute the lack of women's participation in the labour market to traditional attitudes, this claim is not supported by evidence. Research has shown that, actually, discrimination in the labour market, the lack of policies to reconcile work and family life, the lack (and the cost) of care and childcare facilities all contribute to the high economic inactivity rates among women. In **Slovakia** as well horizontal and vertical segregation is a big problem. The fields of healthcare, social services and education tend to be dominated by women: over four fifths of the workforce in these sectors are women and the figure is three fifths for the public policy sector. Horizontal segregation of the labour market in Slovakia is very pronounced and 'female' jobs are less

234 Eurostat 2018, 'Employment rate by sex', available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/tesem010.
235 Eurostat (2017), 'Gender Pay Gap Statistics', available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Gender_pay_gap_statistics.

valued. The gender pay gap occurs not only between sectors, but also within sectors. A higher educational level does not automatically mean that women obtain better positions and better pay.[236]

In 2015, the Defender of Rights produced a comprehensive study of the multiple factors that interact to produce the gender pay gap in **France**.[237] First, ingrained stereotypes about male and female work lead to gendered orientation by schools of girls into certain types of jobs. This explains the segregation of the workplace, with some jobs being predominantly male and other positions predominantly female. In these predominantly female jobs, career advancement is not always possible and in predominantly male jobs there is no critical mass of women in the highest ranks, producing a glass ceiling for women. The impact of maternity enhances the risk that employers limit female promotions. As a result of these barriers and child rearing, more women end up in part-time work. They suffer from discrimination, stereotypical images of women and biased representations of their contribution to the workplace which perpetuate the recurring systemic sex discrimination in employment, affecting their pay. Hence this report explains how all these factors correlate in a vicious circle and can prevent the effective application of equal pay for work of equal value.

The **German** expert also observed that deep-rooted cultural and structural gender inequalities still seem to exist, as evidenced by the worsening gender-based segregation in the labour market.[238] Gender-specific career choices are increasing, not decreasing. The unequal distribution of care work is persistent. Although significantly more women are now employed, the total working time volume of women has not increased – more women share the same total working time, meaning that they work in ever smaller part-time jobs. The massive expansion of childcare has not yet had a significant impact. Gender stereotypes, which are internalised at an early age (not least due to an aggressive marketing policy for everything that children might need, with one version for girls and one for boys), play an important role in entrenching gender segregation. The rise of right-wing populist parties and movements furthers anti-feminism and traditional gender roles.[239] Moreover, left-wing policies often claim that 'identity politics' (meaning anti-discrimination politics and the protection of minorities) have caused the rise of right-wing populism and draw the hardly helpful conclusion that they have to focus on the 'normal citizen' (meaning the *white* blue-collar worker).[240] Instead of this kind of backlash against gender and other equality policies, new strategies to deal with the transformation of working life are necessary. The **Bulgarian** expert also noted that the political environment, and the backlash in interpretation of core principles, especially in the last two years, may represent a threat even to the understanding of concepts largely accepted to date, such as equal pay and equal working conditions. In **Austria**, intrinsic societal stereotypes result in a lower valuing of care work and other work typically performed by women, and this became especially evident during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The **Montenegrin** expert has pointed to illegal employment as a significant problem. In **Bulgaria**, there is no substantial development of case law concerning equal pay and the lack of a clear gender approach in cases of pay discrimination to the detriment of women is considered a main problem. This is due, in the first place, to the fact that in the anti-discrimination law equal pay is regulated as equal pay for all, based on all grounds. Secondly, Section 3 of Chapter II of this law is called 'Protection in the exercise of the right to work' which is interpreted in practice as a separate ground of discrimination – discrimination

236 See Porubänová, S. (2016) *The gender pay gap in Slovakia*, European Parliament, p. 2, available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/583140/IPOL_STU(2017)583140_EN.pdf, in English.

237 https://www.defenseurdesdroits.fr/sites/default/files/atoms/files/ddd_fic_20150629_salaire_egal_fh.pdf.

238 See Federal Government (2017), Second Gender Equality Report, Berlin, with further references. Documents are available at: https://www.gleichstellungsbericht.de/. The committee of experts consisted of Eva Kocher (chair), Thomas Beyer, Eva Blome, Holger Bonin, Ute Klammer, Uta Meier-Gräwe, Helmut Rainer, Stephan Rixen, Christina Schildmann, Carsten Wippermann, Anne Wizorek and, Aysel Yollu-Tok.

239 E.g. AK Fe.In (2019), *Frauen*Rechte und Frauen*Hass. Antifeminismus und die Ethnisierung von Gewalt* (Women's rights and misogyny. Anti-feminism and the ethnicisation of violence); Schutzbach, F. (2019), *Antifeminismus macht rechte Positionen gesellschaftsfähig* (Anti-feminism makes right-wing positions socially acceptable), available at: https://www.gwi-boell.de/de/2019/05/03/antifeminismus-macht-rechte-positionen-gesellschaftsfaehig.

240 E.g. Heisterhagen, N. (2018), *Die liberale Illusion: warum wir einen linken Realismus brauchen* (The liberal illusion: why we need a left-wing realism).

in employment. Thus claims for equal pay are considered without regard to any grounds of discrimination, especially not the ground of sex. The fact that women shoulder most (or more) of the unpaid domestic and care work within the household, might hinder their participation in the labour market. This is specifically mentioned by the Cypriot expert.

In other countries it is the comparison of work that poses particular problems. In **Croatia** and the **Netherlands**, the actual comparator requirement and its application by the courts is deemed problematic. Similarly, in **Austria**, the lack of transparent, plausible and binding methods for comparing different kinds of work and evaluating its worth is problematic for pursuing equal pay claims. The Supreme Court has held that an 'objective consideration' of the work in question is necessary in order to establish comparability, particularly regarding its requirements and specific chores.[241] However, it is up to the courts to carry out this examination on a case-by-case basis; a more general classification scheme or method is not yet in place. In the **Irish** expert's opinion, one of the key issues in respect of the gender pay gap is in segregated employment, as a complainant must have a comparator of the opposite sex in order to pursue an equal pay claim. The **United Kingdom** expert has also noted that in the case of outsourcing, there is the difficulty that the outsourced worker cannot generally use as a comparator a (male) worker who is working for the outsourcer, or for an organisation to which his job has been contracted out (this is as a result of the CJEU ruling in the *Lawrence* case).[242] In contracted-out cases the pay is generally determined by the organisation to which the work is contracted and not the organisation for which it is (ultimately) done. There are examples of cases in which contracted-out workers did successfully claim equal pay with male comparators who had remained in the employment of the original employer.[243] The British expert also noted that there are many difficulties in practice in relation to equal pay, because the question of whether work is of equal value is not one about which workers can be certain in advance of bringing a claim (this being a matter for the employment tribunal to determine). This problem is additional to the issues associated with all equal pay (and, indeed, discrimination) claims: complex laws to navigate; the requirement in practice for (expensive) specialist legal assistance; and the concerns workers have about being victimised for bringing discrimination/equal pay complaints.

The **Polish** expert has referred to the lack in many companies of a system of occupational classification as well as the lack of a universal system for valuing work and establishing criteria, allowing for the comparison of various kinds of work. This also causes difficulties in claiming damages resulting from wage discrimination. In **Cyprus** as well most employers in the private sector do not have an evaluation and job classification system or job description scheme put into place nor have they proceeded to evaluating posts or professions with a view to defining same work or work of equal value. Earlier research on the gender pay gap has also revealed that posts mainly occupied by women are placed on lower salary scales. The **Latvian** expert has criticised the lack of definition of the equal pay for equal value principle, the lack of criteria for assessing the equal value of work, and also the legislator's failure to take adequate account of EU gender equality law. The Latvian Parliament adopted a law on remuneration of state officials and employees with a view to establishing a uniform remuneration system, but excluded school teachers from it. Since most of these are women, this constitutes indirect discrimination. In **Greece**, the lack of transparency, together with the lack of revision of traditional, felt-fair (i.e. classifications that have been traditionally considered fair due to stereotypes, without any justification), non-transparent job classifications to the detriment of formerly 'female' (and still female-dominated) categories, render the legal provisions on equal pay to a great extent ineffective.

241 Austria, Supreme Court, judgment of 14 September 1994, 9 ObA 801/94; Austria, Supreme Court, judgment of 20 May 1998, 9 ObA 350/97d; Austria, Supreme Court, judgment of 8 May 2002, 9 ObA 108/02a.

242 CJEU, C-320/00, *A. G. Lawrence and Others v Regent Office Care Ltd*, 17 September 2002.

243 United Kingdom, *Glasgow City Council v Unison Claimants*, Court of Session, [2017] CSIH 34, 30 May 2017, available at: https://www.scotcourts.gov.uk/search-judgments/judgment?id=669034a7-8980-69d2-b500-ff0000d74aa7; *Asda Stores Ltd v Brierley*, Court of Appeal (Civil Division), [2019] EWCA Civ 44, 10-12 October 2018, available at: https://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWCA/Civ/2019/44.html.

The **Swedish** expert has noted that the main problem does not reside in proving that work is of equal value but in proving that actual discrimination took place, the Labour Court being too ready to accept employers' justifications for pay differentials. Likewise, the **Italian** expert has observed that many gender-neutral criteria can easily be explained by the employer as being objectively necessary and proportionate, responding to a real need of the business. Likewise, the **Italian** expert has observed that it might be difficult to detect the gender pay gap, which can be concealed in an apparently neutral definition of wages (and be a form of indirect discrimination) stated by collective agreements or in additional wages bargained at local or enterprise level and in personal bonuses; most of the time, such criteria can easily be explained by the employer as objective, necessary and proportionate criteria, which are essential requirements of the job.

The **Polish** and **Hungarian** experts have noted similar problems in proving discrimination. An important case in this regard occurred in 2017, when the Equal Treatment Agency used statistical evidence and concluded that a human resources measure that is still widespread, which links a portion of pay to an employee's presence in the workplace constitutes indirect pay discrimination as it is disproportionately detrimental to female workers with young children, who take more leave to care for their sick children than men do.[244]

Outsourcing, subcontracting and (other) exclusions from the scope of the law constitute a problem in a number of countries. In **Macedonia**, the Law on Agencies for Temporary Employment[245] thus declares that temporary employees (employees hired via the agency; subcontractors) cannot be paid less than non-agency employees for the same or similar work, but this is not the case for seasonal and part-time workers and for those working from home.[246] There are no clauses on their protection except for part-time workers, where the word 'proportionally' is used concerning pay. For all these categories, the issue of remuneration should be regulated exclusively by the employment contract between the employer and the employee.

In **Turkey**, subcontracting is a justification for pay differentials where there are different employers. In practice, primary employers do establish a primary employer-subcontractor relationship by engaging the primary employer's employees through the subcontractor[247] in order to keep employee payments low, avoid obligations related to social insurance, and prevent employees from using their trade union rights or collective labour agreements.

Greek case law considers out-sourcing a justification for pay differentials between workers covered by different wage-fixing instruments. This applies to workers employed by different employers, but also to those employed by the same employer who are covered by different wage-fixing instruments, which is incompatible with EU law. It is also a justification in the case of different employers, which is compatible with EU law. Equal pay cases are scarce in Greece and usually do not concern gender discrimination, even though in practice discrimination against women is quite common and has been growing since the onset of the financial crisis.

However, it is notable that, in 2017, the Supreme Civil Court dealt with a few cases and actually adopted two contradictory approaches towards levelling up as an effective way of eliminating gender discrimination in pay. In the first case, a company's statutes provided that the employment relationship had to end after 30 years of actual service for male employees and after 25 years of service for female employees. The court found that this constituted gender discrimination to the detriment of male employees and extended

244 Hungary, Equal Treatment Authority (*Egyenlő Bánásmód Hatóság*) Decision No. EBH/130/2017.
245 Republic of North Macedonia, Law on Agencies for Temporary Employment, 2006. Full title: Republic of North Macedonia, Law on Agencies for Temporary Employment (Закон за агенции за привремено вработување), Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia, Nos. 49/2006, 102/2008, 145/2010, 136/2011, 13/2013, 38/2014, 98/2015, 147/2015, 27/2016.
246 Republic of North Macedonia, Labour Law, 2005.
247 See e.g. Turkey, Court of Cassation 7th Division, 19.10.2015, 16920/19734; Bakirci, K (2017), 'The concept of employee: The position in Turkey' in, *Restatement of labour law in Europe: Vol I: The concept of employee,* 1st Edn (B. Waas/ G.H. van Voss eds.), Hart Publishing, United Kingdom, pp. 721-747.

to them the more favourable treatment provided to female employees, so that they could benefit from the legal compensation and from even higher compensation within the framework of a voluntary exit scheme. In contrast, in two other rulings, the Supreme Civil Court did not apply the equality principle in the same way. These cases concerned the distribution of the capital of a group insurance scheme following the transfer of a bank and the refusal of its successor to continue this voluntary practice. The court found the liquidation that took into account different ages for men (65 years) and for women (60 years) to be lawful and rejected the male applicants' claim that this constituted discrimination based on sex, with the reasoning that the more favourable age provision that was valid for women must be deemed invalid and could not be extended to male employees (levelling down). Apart from this, the Ombudsman found that cuts in pay and allowances during pregnancy, maternity and parental leave have increased the gender pay gap.

Some experts have also underscored the impact of the financial crises and austerity measures on securing equal pay. In **Greece**, there is thus a common belief that austerity measures in the years of the crisis have had an adverse impact on wages exceeding those stipulated in collective agreements (in some cases even shrinking to the minimum wage); this has resulted in a significant decrease in the gender pay gap while structural inequalities still persist. In the private sector, the rapid growth of flexible forms of employment as well as the replacement of contracts of indefinite duration by fixed-term contracts has led to a significant reduction in wages. The International Labour Organization Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (ILO CEACR) stresses, referring to the Ombudsman, that flexible forms of employment, mainly part-time and rotation work, are more often offered to women, especially during pregnancy and upon return from maternity leave, reducing their levels of pay, while lay-offs due to pregnancy, maternity and sexual harassment are increasing. 'Flexibility had been introduced without sufficient safeguards for the most vulnerable, or safeguards which had been introduced by law were not effectively enforced.'[248] In its 2016 Observations on the implementation of ILO Convention No. 100 (equal remuneration), the ILO CEACR again deplores the absence of impact assessment of austerity measures on women's pay, while 'the rapid growth of flexible forms of employment has led to a widening of the gender pay gap and to obstacles in women's career development'.[249]

In **Germany**, the government took several far-reaching decisions as a result of the financial crisis. On the one hand, it has reduced social security or made access much more difficult, a decision from which women in particular are suffering as a result. It has also focused on export industries, thereby promoting industries in which men predominate, albeit without taking into account the fact that they are undergoing fundamental transformation processes. Such export industries continue to be the focus of attention, and at the same time no concept has been developed as to how to deal with the rapidly growing services sector, in which men and women work under mostly unacceptable conditions and with wages that do not secure their livelihoods. With the privatisation of essential areas of previously public tasks, the state has released significant fields of work from its control, and the Minimum Wage Act is proving to be fairly ineffective.

3.2 Equal treatment at work; access to work and working conditions

EU gender equality law also covers employment, in particular access to employment, promotion, access to vocational training and working conditions, including conditions governing dismissal (see Chapter 3 of Recast Directive 2006/54/EC). Here we discuss the extent to which domestic law aligns with both the personal and material scope of the Recast Directive in this respect, possible exceptions to the equal treatment principle and particular difficulties that emerge in relation to equal treatment at work.

248 ILO Greece: Observation (CEACR), adopted 2011, published 101st ILC session (2012), Equal Remuneration Convention 1951 (No. 100), available at: www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:13201:0::NO:13201:P13201_COUNTRY_ID:102658.

249 ILO Greece, Observation (CEACR), adopted 2016, published 106th ILC session (2017), available at: www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:13100:0::NO::P13100_COMMENT_ID:3297841.

3.2.1 The personal and material scope

Transposition in this area has generally taken the form of a general gender equality act and, very often, amendments to labour law or to legislation concerning civil servants. Most of these national laws provide for a definition of the personal scope in relation to access to employment, vocational training and working conditions (see Article 14 of Directive 2006/54), except for **Belgium**, **Czechia**, **Latvia**, **Luxembourg**, the **Netherlands** and **Norway**. But this does not necessarily seem to be problematic. While the **Belgian** Gender Act has no proper personal scope, its material scope is broader than all the EU gender equality directives, and as a result it applies to anyone involved in any situation falling within the material scope. In the **Netherlands** as well the personal scope derives from the material scope of the law. **Czech** law provides that parties to a legal relationship are obliged to guarantee the equal treatment of all physical persons who make use of their right to employment and the Anti-discrimination Act specifically provides for equal treatment in access to employment, vocation, entrepreneurship, self-employment etc. In **Greece**, the legislative definition of the personal scope is broader than in EU law, but the concept of 'worker' ensues from case law. In **Luxembourg**, the law reproduces Article 14 of the Directive in this regard, but does not define the concept of 'worker'. The application of the link of subordination ensues from case law. **Norwegian** law does not define the personal scope nor the concept of 'worker', but the law in combination with the case law shows compliance with EU (case) law. There is also no definition of a 'worker' or 'employee', an 'employment contract' or an 'agreement' in statutory law in **Sweden**, but the Swedish concept of an employee is known to be relatively broad from an international perspective. Whether **Montenegrin** law contains a concept of 'worker' or 'employee' in conformity with EU law is unclear.

Most legal systems provide for a definition of a 'worker' or, alternatively, of an employment agreement or contract (**Netherlands**, **Portugal**), which is generally considered to be in compliance with the case law of the CJEU. Yet there are also still some deficiencies to be signalled (**Austria**, **Czechia**, **Latvia**, **Lithuania**, **Turkey**, **United Kingdom**). The personal scope of the equal pay principle in **Lithuanian** law is rather confusing and does not encompass everyone falling with the EU notion of worker, e.g. it excludes public servants. By way of legal analogy, however, they may still enjoy the same protection as workers. The **Austrian** expert has noted that 'free contract workers' (people working under contractual conditions that cannot be wholly subsumed under labour law, entailing some characteristics of self-employment), are not fully covered by labour law protections for workers and employees, even if in reality they share more characteristics with regular employees. This can especially put female free contract workers in precarious positions, particularly in cases of pregnancy and when child-care obligations exist, since maternity and income-related childcare benefits are often lower and more complicated to apply for than for employees. In **Turkish** law the concept of 'worker' covers dependent workers (employees with a private law employment contract, civil servants, public officials with an administrative law employment contract) and self-employed persons. However, the concept of 'worker' is not in compliance with EU law because employees with a private law employment contract, civil servants, public officials with an administrative law employment contract and self-employed are regulated by different legislation, they have different rights and they are under different obligations. In **Cyprus** and the **United Kingdom**, (certain types of) self-employed persons are excluded from the definition of worker, which is deemed to be inconsistent with EU law. **Latvian** law only protects judges and prosecutors against discrimination with regard to access to employment, and members of the boards of directors of capital companies are not protected against discrimination by law at all. **Slovene** law provides a relatively narrow definition of 'worker', which is sufficiently in conformity with the Directive but has not been further developed in case law. In **Iceland**, the new GEA No. 150/2020 also applies to people who are publicly registered as gender neutral.

The material scope in relation to (access to) employment has also been defined in the national law of most states, in accordance with Article 14(1) of Recast Directive 2006/54, except for **Norway** and **Sweden** where the ban on any form of discrimination covers any decision-making by the employer in working life with no further specification whatsoever. The Swedish expert considers this problematic from

the perspective of transparency for those concerned. Norwegian law applies to all areas of society and can as such be seen as broader than the scope of the Directive.

In other states as well the scope is wider than that contained in the Directive, as has been noted above in relation to **Belgium**. In **Croatia**, it also includes discrimination in relation to work-life balance, as well as pregnancy, giving birth, parenting and any form of custody. **French** law simply states that it applies to the public and private sector and covers all aspects of working life. **Spanish** law also applies, for instance, to staff recruitment and evaluation bodies.

In **Greece**, the scope is wider, also prohibiting discriminatory publications and advertisements and mentioning 'family status' as a prohibited ground of discrimination. **Romanian** law is also considered to be wider in scope. The law mentions 'family status' and 'marital status' as forbidden grounds. It also lists various aspects related to employment that are protected, from choosing a profession or activity to membership of trade unions and social services. **Irish** law comprises an extensive, detailed overview of the material scope and, most recently, the publication, display or causing to be published or displayed, of a discriminatory advertisement in so far as this relates to access to employment has been included in this as well. An 'advertisement' is defined as '[including] every form of statement to the public and every form of advertisement, whether to the public or not'.

In other countries, the material scope appears more limited in certain respects. The **Czech** Anti-discrimination Act does not include, for example, vocational training and access thereto, promotion or recruitment conditions. In **Portugal**, the material scope does not cover self-employment and occupation, since self-employment is outside the scope of the Labour Code. **Lithuanian** law is found to be in contravention of EU law as regards non-discriminatory access to employment and promotion for the self-employed, which are not stipulated in the relevant laws. In **Latvia** the material scope is only defined by the Labour Law, which is limited with regard to personal application. Moreover, there is no complete protection against discrimination with regard to access to membership of workers', employers' or professional organisations, including trade unions. In **Finland**, the material scope of the provision on (access to) employment is formulated as a form of 'discrimination in working life' by an employer, and refers to situations of access to work, and thus depends on the definitions of 'employer' and 'employee'. The term 'employee' even covers people whose work is comparable with employment, but some self-employed people may fall outside the definition. A separate provision covers discrimination in relation to access to education.

3.2.2 Exceptions

The possibility of exceptions for occupational activities, as provided for in Article 14(2) of the Recast Directive, has been implemented in the national laws of all states, except for **Greece**. Exceptions, or grounds for exceptions, provided for in many such laws (or ensuing from case law) include:

- singers, dancers, actors and artists (**Belgium**, **Bulgaria**, **Cyprus**, **France**, **Italy**, **Netherlands**, **Northern Ireland**);
- fashion models (**Belgium**, **Italy**) and photographic models (**Belgium**, **France**);
- prison warders (**Belgium**) or work in male prisons and (public and private) security forces (**Cyprus**);
- work for the Marine Corps and the submarine service (**Netherlands**) and for the military depending on the type of military force (**Romania**), such exceptions having been repealed in other countries (**France**); in **Estonia** compulsory military service still exists for men only;
- equal opportunities commissioners and official guardians (**Germany**);
- church ministers (**Netherlands**) and other positions in which religious, ideological conviction or national/ethnic origin fundamentally determine the nature of the organisation (**Hungary**) or religious grounds as such (**Bulgaria**, **United Kingdom**);
- preservation of decency or privacy (**Northern Ireland**) or moral reasons (**Cyprus**);

- where the job is likely to involve the holder of the job doing their work, or living, in a private home (**Northern Ireland**);
- personal service, care and nursing (**Cyprus**, **Netherlands**, **Northern Ireland**);
- biological characteristics being determinant for the job (**Austria**);
- positions in foreign countries that do not apply the principle of gender equality in employment (**Belgium**) or in countries whose laws or customs are such that the duties could not, or could not effectively, be performed by a woman (**Cyprus**, **Northern Ireland**);
- where the essential nature of the job calls for a man for reasons of physiology (excluding physical strength or stamina; **Northern Ireland**) (excluding natural health or strength; **Cyprus**);
- working underground in mines (**Cyprus**, **Turkey**) or working underground or underwater work such as cable-laying and the construction of sewers and tunnels (**Turkey**).

In other states, there has been no identification of the possible jobs concerned (**Latvia**, **Liechtenstein**) or the exception is formulated in a general way referring to the nature of the work or the context in which the work is carried out, without further specification (**Czechia**, **Denmark**, **Lithuania**, **North Macedonia**, **Norway**, **Poland**, **Portugal**, **Slovakia**, **Slovenia**, **Sweden**). In **Iceland**, Article 19(3) of the GEA allows the advertisement of a vacant position that prefers one sex over the other, if the aim of the advertiser is to promote a more equal representation of women and men in an occupational sector. The same applies if there are 'valid reasons' for advertising for a man or a woman only. In **Finland**, exceptions can be made for a 'weighty and acceptable reason' but it is unclear what this covers and whether it aligns with EU law.

The exceptions provided by **Polish** law offer the employer some leeway not only in the cases listed in Article 14 (access to employment, including the training leading to it) but also regarding any other terms and conditions of employment. In **Hungary**, for employment discrimination cases, the Equal Treatment Act used to establish an additional, somewhat broad and vaguely worded exemption,[250] which was modified in 2017 and entered into force on 1 January 2018. Most importantly, the amendment[251] has reduced the scope of the exemption from any kind of employment situation to only the hiring process, and the wording of the provision is clearer. By now repeating the wording of Article 14(1) of Directive 2006/54, the transposition of the EU acquis into Hungarian legislation has been improved. Yet, the exception provision in the Equal Treatment Act[252] does allow employers to prove that, 'by objective consideration', there is 'a reasonable explanation' for discrimination, 'directly related to the relevant [employment] relationship'. This exception can cover situations where, for example, sex discrimination is justified by deeply rooted socio-cultural norms (e.g. that bath attendants should be females in a women's public bath). However, sometimes the (alleged) financial interest of the employer is also seen as a 'reasonable explanation' for sex discrimination, thus the phrasing of this provision may be problematic from the aspect of gender equality. In **Italy**, derogation is possible regarding 'particularly strenuous' jobs, tasks and duties as provided for by collective agreements. This exception has always been deemed to be in compliance with EU law, since it is also considered a rational choice of the legislator to identify these jobs in collective bargaining rather than to set them in stone in legislation.

Most national laws also provide for the exception on the protection for women, in particular as regards pregnancy and maternity (Article 28(1) of the Recast Directive), except for **Germany**, **Latvia** and **North Macedonia**. In **Greece**, the protection of paternity and family life is added. In **Hungary**, the exception on the protection for women in relation to pregnancy and maternity has not been implemented explicitly into national law, but the Equal Treatment Act covers 'motherhood (pregnancy)' as a protected ground against any form of discrimination, including in the area of employment (access to employment, advertising,

250 Hungary, Act CXXV of 2003 on Equal Treatment and the Promotion of the Equality of Opportunities (*2003. évi CXXV. törvény az egyenlő bánásmódról és az esélyegyenlőség előmozdításáról*), 28 December 2003, Article 22(1) Point (a).

251 Hungary, Act L of 2017 amending certain Acts in respect of the entry into force of the Act on the Code of General Administrative Procedure and the Act on the Code of Administrative Court Procedure (*2017. évi L. törvény az általános közigazgatási rendtartásról szóló törvény és a közigazgatási perrendtartásról szóló törvény hatálybalépésével összefüggő egyes törvények módosításáról*), 16 May 2017, Article 226(2).

252 Hungary, Act CXXV of 2003 on Equal Treatment and the Promotion of the Equality of Opportunities (*2003. évi CXXV. törvény az egyenlő bánásmódról és az esélyegyenlőség előmozdításáról*), 28 December 2003, Article 7(2) Point (b).

hiring and working conditions).[253] In **France** and **Italy**, the law does not explicitly provide for this either, but it does not impede as such the definition of some specific rules for women. **Polish** law does not permit pregnant and breastfeeding women to perform work that is particularly arduous or harmful to their health, a list of such work being laid down in the Ministerial Act of 3 April 2017. In **Spain**, notwithstanding the applicability of the pregnancy and maternity protection rules, it is impossible to prohibit women from performing certain professional activities. The Constitutional Court has declared some cases to be non-constitutional where women had been denied access to certain jobs based on the risks that there could be to their health, if those working conditions could be equally hazardous to men.

3.2.3 Particular difficulties

A number of national experts have also reported particular difficulties related to the personal and/or material scope of national law in relation to access to work, vocational training, employment, working conditions etc., concerning a broad range of issues:

- Certain categories of workers being excluded from the personal/material scope of the national law, such as certain types of self-employed workers (**Germany**), domestic workers who work four days a week or less in a private household (**Netherlands**) or the discriminatory termination of self-employment contracts by employers/clients not being explicitly covered (**Netherlands**).
- Problems related to non-discriminatory hiring and promotion (**Czechia**), women still often being rejected on grounds of pregnancy, motherhood and family obligations (**Estonia**, **Montenegro**) or on the basis of the argument that it's a 'man's job' (**Serbia**) or that a man is more suitable for the position (**Montenegro**). In **Montenegro** these problems occur notably in the private sector.
- Discriminatory dismissal after maternity leave or reassignment to a lower or less well-paid position when returning from parental leave (**Montenegro**, **Serbia**).
- Difficulties for women in making use of their right to return to work or to an equivalent job after pregnancy and maternity leave, especially if a reorganisation of work has led to the termination of certain jobs (**Croatia**).
- Exceptions regarding access to certain jobs on religious grounds (**Bulgaria**); it is considered that these cannot be a priori justified and there is a potential problem of non-compliance with EU law in this regard.
- Wrongful use of terminology; in **Latvian** law, it is not clearly stated that non-compliance with special protection measures leads to discrimination based on sex. It also uses the formulation 'prohibition of differential treatment' instead of 'prohibition of discrimination', this being problematic from the perspective that equal treatment in different situations may amount to discrimination as well.
- In **Estonia** it is common practice that job applicants are asked about their personal life in job interviews. These cases do not reach the court, but there are complaints to the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner and discussed in the Labour Dispute Committee. In 2019 the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner received 116 (out of 304) complaints regarding labour relations.[254] In **Austria** and **Croatia**, this is also a frequent occurrence, despite being prohibited by law.
- The **Serbian** expert has also reported that traditional gender stereotypes influence the fact that women dedicate significant time to unpaid jobs and childcare. The majority of citizens believe that successful women neglect their family duties and that a higher salary unavoidably causes family problems. This is reflected in the gender gap in employment (11 %) and women only occupying 30 % of leadership positions.
- In **Montenegro**, although there are cases of women being dismissed when they become pregnant or immediately after they start or have used their pregnancy leave, no such judicial cases have been reported. Such cases often (almost always) occur in the private sector and particularly in undeclared

253 Hungary, Act CXXV of 2003 on Equal Treatment and the Promotion of the Equality of Opportunities (*2003. évi CXXV. törvény az egyenlő bánásmódról és az esélyegyenlőség előmozdításáról*), 28 December 2003, Article 8(l) and Article 21(a)-(e).

254 https://volinik.ee/voliniku-2019-aasta-tegevuste-ulevaade/.

employment. There is a clear need for education and awareness-raising, especially in the context of work in the private sector.

– In **Croatia**, national law and case law do not provide adequate protection against the non-renewal of a fixed-term contract and non-continuation of a contract for women who are pregnant and/or have given birth. Statistics show that women are more likely to be hired under fixed-term contracts, and this fact is almost common knowledge in Croatia.[255] Nevertheless, it would be difficult to prove that a fixed-term instead of an open-ended contract was concluded solely because of a person's sex (predominantly women) or that a new fixed-term or open-ended contract after the expiry of the existing contract was not offered because of discrimination.
– In **Sweden**, according to the Employment Protection Act, an employer is free to interrupt a probationary employment at any time and the decision does not have to be justified. In relation to pregnant employees in probationary employment, this means that the obligation in Article 10 of Directive 92/85/EEC to cite duly substantiated grounds for dismissal in writing is not upheld in Swedish law.

The COVID-19 crisis has also had an effect on equal access to work in many Member States. For example, the expert for **Czechia** reports that the number of women in Czechia who are able to execute their job duties remotely is approximately 5 percentage points lower than the number of men (21 % of women in comparison with 26 % of men).[256] This means a larger risk of job loss for women. Job loss was greater for women than men during the crisis in **Serbia**. In **Spain**, general statistical series[257] that have gathered 2020 data show that the crisis following the measures taken to control the COVID-19 pandemic have hit female employment harder. For example, the female unemployment rate grew from 15.55 % in the last quarter of 2019 to 18.33 % in the last quarter of 2020, whereas unemployment for men rose from 12.23 % to 14.17 %.

In **Lithuania**, during the COVID-19-related quarantine in 2020, women accounted for about 60 % of those in employment with reduced working hours. About 25 % of them did not work or worked fewer hours due to quarantine. In **Romania**, data from NGOs shows that the number of women who are unemployed increased by 50 % during the COVID-19 pandemic, compared to a 16 % increase for men. As a result, two thirds of people who became unemployed in 2020 were women.[258] In **Turkey**, around 42 % of employed women work in the informal (unregistered) sector as carers, domestic workers, seasonal workers and unpaid family workers, without any social protection.[259] Women working in the informal sector were the first to be hit by the crisis, losing their jobs and income. Since they are not registered, they cannot benefit from any of the measures taken by the Government to protect workers.

The **Portuguese** expert commented that Government information[260] regarding the payment of a special assistance allowance paid during the first months of the pandemic indicates that this allowance was paid mostly to women (82 %). This might be due to the gender pay gap – as women earn less than men, the

255 See Croatian Employment Service (2019) *Annual Report 2018* and monthly reports, available at: https://www.hzz.hr/usluge-poslodavci-posloprimci/publikacije-hzz/.
256 Idea (2020), 'Rozdílné ekonomické dopady krize covid-19 na muže a ženy v Česku' (Different economic consequences of covid-19 on women and men) – research paper, available at: https://idea.cerge-ei.cz/images/COVID/IDEA_Gender_dopady_covid-19_cerven_21.pdf.
257 Spain, National Statistics Institute, Labour Force Survey 2020 (*Encuesta de Población Activa*), https://www.ine.es/jaxiT3/Datos.htm?t=3996.
258 Romania, FILIA Centre, National Agency for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men (2021), 'Experiențele femeilor în timpul pandemiei. Starea de fapt și recomandări pentru măsuri post-criză sensibile la gen' ('Women's experiences during the pandemic. Statement of the facts and recommendations for gender-sensitive post-crisis measures') January 2021, p. 21.
259 Turkey, Bakirci, K. (2020) 'Flash Report: Impact of COVID-19 measures on women in Turkey', European network of legal experts in gender equality and non-discrimination, 3 July 2020. https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/5171-turkey-impacts-of-covid-19-measures-on-women-in-turkey-118-kb; UN Women Turkey Office (2020), *The economic and social impact of COVID-19 on women and men: Rapid Gender Assessment of COVID-19 implications in Turkey* https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/73989_rapidgenderassessmentreportturkey.pdf.
260 This information was disclosed in a meeting of the CIG – Commission for Equality and Citizenship – by the Minister in charge of equality issues.

financial family loss is lower if the woman stops working than the man – but it also demonstrates that even during this crisis, women tend to take the lead in caring for children.

In the **Netherlands**, the government has created various income support arrangements for entrepreneurs, self-employed people and flexible workers. These arrangements operate on the basis of reference requirements, i.e. whether one is entitled to income support depends on the loss of income in reference to an earlier period, in particular 2019. This might be to the disadvantage of women who were pregnant or gave birth during the reference period and therefore had less income. They do not qualify, or only to a lesser extent, for the income support. For practising lawyers, the Dutch Bar Association extended the reference period in these situations. Women's organisations have asked the government to extend the reference period in these situations for the more general COVID-related income support schemes. However, the government has so far refused to allow this request, stating that the income support schemes are very broad and general in nature and do not allow for specific arrangements for specific groups.[261]

The **Finnish** expert also commented that, due to the gender segregation of the Finnish labour market, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Finnish labour market is also gendered. The Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare has ordered a comprehensive study of the impact of COVID-19 on gender equality.[262] One of the issues investigated will be the gendered impact on employment, the labour market and working conditions. The expert for **North Macedonia** also mentioned that women's particularly vulnerable position and potential loss of income was also confirmed by the European Policy Institute's assessment of the COVID-19 impact on Roma Women.[263]

However, it should also be mentioned that the full effects of the crisis on gender equality in relation to equal pay, equal treatment at work and access to work cannot yet be fully appreciated. A more complete picture of this should emerge in the coming years.

261 The NGO Bureau Clara Wichmann drew attention to the reference period and its possible consequences for women. See: https://clara-wichmann.nl/nieuws/vrouwelijke-ondernemers-worden-benadeeld-door-de-corona-steunmaatregelen-dit-is-hoe-wij-in-actie-komen (Female entrepreneurs put at a disadvantage by the corona support schemes: this is how we take action).

262 Finland, *Koronakriisin vaikutukset sukupuolten tasa-arvoon Suomessa* (Impact of the corona crisis on gender equality in Finland), https://thl.fi/fi/tutkimus-ja-kehittaminen/tutkimukset-ja-hankkeet/koronakriisin-vaikutukset-sukupuolten-tasa-arvoon-suomessa.

263 Kamberi, I. (2020), *Challenges facing Roma during the crisis caused by COVID-19*, https://epi.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/roma_kovid-19_eng.pdf.

4 Pregnancy, maternity, paternity, parental and other types of leave related to work-life balance

In addition to the general prohibitions of direct and indirect discrimination,[264] EU legislation (and CJEU case law) explicitly prohibit any less favourable treatment of women in relation to pregnancy and maternity leave in the Recast Directive 2006/54/EC.[265] However, provisions concerning the protection of women, particularly as regards pregnancy or maternity are allowed[266] or even required. Currently, two directives provide specific protection and rights in relation not only to pregnancy and maternity, but also to parental leave. The Pregnant Workers Directive 92/85/EEC had to be transposed by November 1994 into the national law of the EU Member States, while this was required for the Parental Leave Directive 96/34/EC by June 1998.[267] Directive 2010/18/EU repealed Directive 96/34/EEC by 8 March 2012 and implemented the revised agreement on parental leave that the European social partners reached in June 2009, which lays down minimum requirements on parental leave and time off for *force majeure*.[268]

Article 33 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU on the reconciliation of private/family life and work is also relevant when Member States implement EU law.[269] As regards self-employed workers, Directive 2010/41/EU applies to maternity benefits (see Section 7).[270] In April 2017, the Commission's initiative for the European Social Pillar recognised once again the importance of work-life balance for workers, as the Pillar not only includes the principle of gender equality and equal opportunities, but also work-life balance.[271] The European Commission simultaneously published a proposal for a directive on work-life balance.[272] This proposal was adopted two years later and the Directive 2019/1158 on work-life balance for parents and carers – which will repeal the Parental Leave Directive 2010/18/EU[273] – entered into force on 12 July 2019 and has to be implemented into national law by 2 August 2022.[274] This Chapter provides a comparative analysis of the implementation into national law of Directives 92/85/EEC and 2010/18/EU, as well as relevant national law.

A specific difficulty concerning leave is that the names of some forms of leave in a few countries do not correspond to the qualification of the different forms of leave in EU law. For example, in **Portugal**,

264 Mulder, J. (2020) *Indirect sex discrimination in employment*, European Commission, available at: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/5362-indirect-discrimination-in-employment-pdf-1-434-kb.

265 See Article 2(2)(c) of Directive 2006/54/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation (recast), OJ L 204, 26.7.2006, pp. 23–36, available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32006L0054.

266 See Article 28(1) of the Recast Directive 2006/54/EC.

267 Council Directive 92/85/EEC of 19 October 1992 on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding (tenth individual Directive within the meaning of Article 16(1) of Directive 89/391/EEC), OJ 1992, L 348/1 available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A31992L0085; A proposal aimed at amending this directive (COM 2008(637) final) was withdrawn on 6 August 2015 due to the lack of agreement after years of negotiations, see https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:52008PC0637.

268 Council Directive 2010/18/EU of 8 March 2010 implementing the revised Framework Agreement on parental leave concluded by BUSINESSEUROPE, UEAPME, CEEP and ETUC and repealing Directive 96/34/EC, OJ 2010, L 68/13 available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32010L0018.

269 See, for example: McColgan, A. (2015), *Measures to address challenges of work-life balance in the EU Member States, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway*, European Union, available at: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/3631-reconciliation.

270 See in particular Article 8.

271 See *The European Pillar of Social Rights in 20 Principles*, in particular principles 2, 3 and 9: https://ec.europa.eu/info/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_en.

272 Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU, COM (2017) 253, available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52017PC0253.

273 Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU, OJ L 188, 12.7.2019, pp. 79-93, available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32019L1158&qid=1644579159781&from=EN.

274 Article 20(1). For more information see Chieregato, E. (2020), 'A work-life balance for all? Assessing the inclusiveness of EU Directive 2019/1158' *International Journal of Comparative Labour Law and Industrial Relations*, 36(1) and Oliveira, Á., De la Corte-Rodríguez, M., Lütz, F. (2020) 'The new Directive on Work-Life Balance: towards a new paradigm of family care and equality?' 45 (3) *European Law Review*, 295.

maternity leave is part of (the initial) parental leave. One could say that both parents are entitled to parental leave, but that there is a 'mother's quota', which forms the maternity leave ('initial parental leave just for the mother'). Similarly, there is an 'initial parental leave just for the father'. How to define the different types of leave also plays a role for example in **Albania** and **Slovakia** as regards paternity and parental leave. In **Turkey**, childcare leave would correspond to parental leave. The information provided within the national context by the national experts is therefore crucial to understand how the different forms of leave correspond to each other. However, given the aim of this comparative analysis, the framework of the following sections follows the relevant EU legislation. After an introduction to the general context (Section 4.1), pregnancy and maternity protection, as well as maternity leave, are considered (Sections 4.2 and 4.3), followed by adoption, parental leave, paternity leave, time off/care and surrogacy leave (Sections 4.4-4.8). In Section 4.9 flexible working-time arrangements are discussed, and the chapter ends with a short evaluation.

4.1 General (legal) context

The country reports show that in some countries, many surveys and specific research relating to work-life balance issues have been carried out (as for example in **Czechia**, in particular on the gender impact of the tax system or in **Poland** on the use of flexible working time). A significant amount of research mentioned by the national experts shows to what extent household and care responsibilities are unequally divided between men and women – the so-called 'gender care gap'.

The negative impact of parenthood is (much) greater on the labour market participation, careers, pay and pensions of women than men. This aspect was explicitly mentioned by the national experts of **Albania**, **Austria**, **Bulgaria**, **Czechia**, **Denmark**, **Finland**, **Germany**, **Hungary**, **Italy**, **Liechtenstein**, **Latvia**, **Lithuania**, the **Netherlands**, **Poland**, **Portugal**, **Serbia**,[275] **Spain**, **Sweden**[276] and **Turkey**.

This tendency is particularly marked in **Croatia**, according to a 2017 study.[277] More recent research shows that out of 34 case studies in which employees experienced discrimination, the majority (70 %) encountered discrimination or negative experiences on one ground associated with parenting responsibilities, and the remaining on two or three grounds. Almost an equal share of discrimination or negative experiences relate to pregnancy/planning/complications; using maternity or parental leave; or in relation to taking sick leave to look after a sick child. What is worrying is that 60 % of employees did not take any action to challenge the discrimination they experienced, and those who did so were not satisfied with their employer's reaction.[278]

275 The data shows that men work at paid jobs, both on weekdays and at weekends, for almost twice as long as women. On the other hand, women work in unpaid jobs longer than men, both on weekdays and at weekends: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (2020), *Women and men in the Republic of Serbia 2020,* Belgrade, 70.

276 See Swedish Government Report (2017), *Jämställt föräldraskap och goda uppväxtvillkor för barn – en ny modell för föräldraförsäkringen* (Equal parenting and good conditions for children growing up – a new model for parental insurance), SOU 2017:101, available (in Swedish with English summary) at: https://www.regeringen.se/4afa97/contentassets/01a6fba2043a4e58aeac32cf52bd3449/sou-2017_101_jamstallt-foraldraskap-och-goda-uppvaxtvillkor-for-barn.pdf. The gradual introduction, since 1955, of non-transferable days in the parental leave regulation has led to a more equal sharing of parental leave by couples, in addition to other factors such as education and higher earnings for mothers: see, among many others, Ma, L., Andersson, G., Duvander, A-Z., Evertsson, M. (2018), *Forerunners and laggards in Sweden's family change fathers' uptake of parental leave, 1993-2010*. Working Paper 2018:01, Stockholm University Linnaeus Center on Social Policy and Family Dynamics in Europe, SPaDE., available at: https://www.su.se/polopoly_fs/1.371819.1518171269!/menu/standard/file/WP_2018_01.pdf.

277 The research was conducted within the framework of the EU-funded project managed by the Croatian Ombudsperson for Gender Equality 'In pursuit of full equality between men and women: reconciliation between professional and family life'. See Klasnić, K. (2017), *Utjecaj rodne podjele obiteljskih obveza i kućanskih poslova na profesionalni život zaposlenih žena* (Impact of gender division of family and household obligations on professional life of employed women), Ombudsperson for Gender Equality, available at: http://rec.prs.hr/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Brosura_prijelom_finalno_web.pdf.

278 Tkalčec, A., Kučer, L. (2020) *Iskustva roditelja – diskriminacija na radnom mjestu* (Parents' experience – discrimination in the workplace), Zagreb, available at https://parentsatwork.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/HR_Report-Case-Studies-Parents@work_April2020-1.pdf.

On the other hand, a study conducted among employers (using a small sample of 28 employers of all sizes (with 5 to 4 000 employees)) reveals that around two thirds of employers acknowledge that their employees who are parents have different needs compared to other employees. About half of all employers find that parenting can improve certain professional skills of employees (multi-tasking, problem-solving, etc). However, around 10 % of employers believe that employees who are parents cost the company more than other employees, and around 16 % believe that parenting negatively affects commitment to work. Almost half of employers find that employees who are parents are less flexible. Almost two thirds of the employers state that they either fully or mostly agree with the statement that managerial positions cannot be performed with flexible working hours or half of full working hours. Given the above findings, the author of the Croatian report remarks that it is surprising that 96 % of employers believe that mothers and fathers can balance full-time work with parenting responsibilities.[279]

In **Estonia**, the Family Law Act now stipulates that family members are obliged to provide maintenance for other family members who are unable to cope by themselves (children, disabled or elderly people).[280] The national expert explains that this legal obligation to the two generations above and below is difficult to implement in practice, due for example to changed family structures, the high employment rate and precarious work. The problems are serious in particular for middle-aged people (the so-called sandwich generation) who have to take care of their children and thus do not have enough resources to take on the additional burden of caring for old and sick relatives at the same time. Some publications highlight specifically the problems informal carers encounter when they care for people other than their children (e.g. older relatives). Women make up the majority of informal carers for older family members (parents and parents-in-law).[281] In 2020, an average old age pension was EUR 507,[282] which does not cover monthly costs in residential care. There are also studies on the high financial costs private persons are faced with in relation to home care services, compared to public welfare expenditures, which are much lower.[283]

In **Greece**, qualitative research showed that the relationship between work and family life has been significantly influenced by the new conditions imposed by the recent economic crisis.[284] Seven years after the advent of the crisis (2009-2016), Greek society had undergone a variety of changes which are reflected in income, employment, state care services and benefits and allowances affecting those working in both the public and the private sectors. In these circumstances, the relationship between work and family life, as shown by the project's case studies, has suffered from the successive shocks of social transformations that took place during the crisis. This is especially true for female professionals. In addition, key dimensions of gender inequality which existed even before the recent economic crisis have also been prevalent. Reconciling work and family life has become extremely difficult, for women in particular, due to poor incomes and the lack of services offered by the state. The traditional role of women as mothers and housewives is thus reinforced.

In **Turkey**, the Directorate of Women's Status in the Ministry of Family, Employment and Social Services states in its strategic plan that the lack of sufficient preschool education and care services impedes

279 Kučer, L., Tkalčec, A. (2020) *Stavovi poslodavaca o zaposlenim roditeljima* (Employers' views on employed parents), Zagreb, available at https://parentsatwork.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Izvještaj-stavovi-poslodavaca-studeni-2020.pdf.

280 Article 96 of the Family Law Act stipulates that adult ascendants and descendants related in the first and second degree are required to provide maintenance (hereinafter *person required to provide maintenance*). *Perekonnaseadus* (Family Law Act), https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/507022018005/consolide.

281 Tarum, H., Kutsar, D. (2017), 'Compulsory intergenerational family solidarity shaping choices between work and care: perceptions of informal female carers and local policymakers in Estonia'. In *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 27 (1), 40–51.; Tarum, H., Kutsar, D. (2015), 'The impact of the policy framework on the integration of informal carers into the labour market in Tartu, Estonia'. In: D. Kutsar & M. Kuronen (Eds.), *Local welfare policy making in European cities* (pp. 195-208). Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.

282 Source: http://andmebaas.stat.ee/Index.aspx?lang=et&DataSetCode=SK153.

283 Pall, K. (2019), 'Kas on õige panna vanemate hoolduskulud laste kanda?' ('Is it OK to let children pay all long-term care costs for their parents?'), *Eesti Ekspress*, 02.10.2020,: https://ekspress.delfi.ee/arvamus/kas-on-oige-panna-vanemate-hoolduskulud-laste-kanda?id=87490743.

284 Thanopoulou, M., Tsiganou, J. (2016), *Gender in science without numbers – From academia to work-life balance, Main results of case studies*, Εθνικό Κέντρο Κοινωνικών Ερευνών (National Centre for Social Research), Athens.

the labour market participation of women. According to the national expert, Turkey must develop such services in the light of Article 12(2)(c) of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and Article 27 of the European Social Charter (ESC).

Surveys and figures on the complaints equality bodies receive on pregnancy and maternity discrimination show that such discrimination occurs. This aspect was highlighted specifically in the country reports for **Belgium**,[285] **Croatia**, **Cyprus**,[286] **Denmark**,[287] **Germany**,[288] **Hungary**, the **Netherlands** and the **United Kingdom**. In the **United Kingdom**, new and expectant mothers who are casual, zero-hours or agency workers were 'less likely to feel confident about challenging discriminatory behaviour', according to the Women and Equalities Committee.[289]

Some experts report unfavourable treatment of pregnant women who, at the end of a fixed-term contract, are not offered a new contract, probably due to their pregnancy and/or maternity leave (e.g. **Croatia**, **Netherlands**, **North Macedonia** and **Norway**). In **Finland**, young women are more often employed on fixed-term contracts than other groups. The availability of home care leave – a parental right to remain at home and take care of a child until the child is three on a flat-rate benefit – is often seen as a factor that has a negative impact on participation in the labour market by young women. In **Serbia**, women are sometimes questioned about their family plans during job interviews or are constantly on short-term contracts.[290] In addition, case law shows that women returning to work after maternity leave are facing unfavourable treatment.

Some surveys show that reconciling work and family life is difficult for many parents, for example in **Belgium**.[291] In **Denmark**, the Danish Association of Masters and PhDs conducted an analysis[292] of the work-life balance of 4 870 of its members. The conclusion was that poor job satisfaction and stress are experienced by those who have poorer work-life balance opportunities. This is not the case in **Iceland** where the main conclusions of one survey were that employees did not find it difficult to balance work and family life, however many of them would like to reduce their number of working hours per week.[293] In **Luxembourg**, 57 % of the participants in the 2019 'Quality of Work Index Luxembourg' stated that they never or rarely had problems with work-life balance (3 % less than in 2018) and 35 % of the participants

285 A study commissioned by the Belgian Institute for the Equality of Women and Men reported in 2017 that three out of four women workers have faced at least one form of discrimination, prejudice, unequal treatment and unpleasant treatment because of their pregnancy or maternity; 22 % of pregnant workers faced direct discrimination and 69 % suffered indirect discrimination: Institute for the Equality of Women and Men (2017), *Grossesse au travail. Experience de candidates, d'employées et de travailleuses indépendantes en Belgique,* (*Pregnancy at work – Experiences of candidates, employees and self-employed women in Belgium*).

286 The equality body in Cyprus reported that 25 % of the complaints received between 2011 and 2016 concerned discrimination at work, including dismissal, due to pregnancy or maternity. The Committee on Gender Equality in Employment and Vocational Training (Ministry of Labour) reported that 50 % of the complaints received concerned unlawful dismissals of pregnant workers.

287 https://menneskeret.dk/sites/menneskeret.dk/files/06_juni_19/discrimination_against_parents.pdf.

288 However, nearly no cases are reported on the website of the Agency. See https://www.antidiskriminierungsstelle.de/DE/ThemenUndForschung/Geschlecht/Gleichbehandlung_der_Geschlechter_im_Arbeitsleben_neu/Gleichbehandlung_Geschlechter_Arbeitsleben_node.html.

289 House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee (2016), *Pregnancy and maternity discrimination*, available at: https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmwomeq/90/90.pdf p. 20, para. 56.

290 Human Rights and Business Country Guide for Serbia, Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, the Danish Institute for Human Rights, 26, available at: http://www.bgcentar.org.rs/bgcentar/eng-lat/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Country-Guide-Serbia-FINAL-English-August-2016.pdf.

291 A survey, from the Belgian Family League (*Ligue des familles*), found that eight out of ten parents have difficulty reconciling work and family life and one in four workers say they are on the verge of exhaustion. The most frequently expressed demand by parents is a collective reduction in working time. The Family League also proposes 'conciliation leave,' which could be taken in hours rather than in days: Family League (Ligue des familles) (2018), *Comment adapter le monde du travail à la vie des parents?* (How can the world of work be adapted to the lives of parents?), available in French at: https://www.laligue.be/Files/media/495000/495841/fre/2018-10-25-enquete-travail-et-parentalite.pdf.

292 The report is available here: https://dm.dk/media/35344/derfor-er-work-life-balance-saa-vigtigt.pdf.

293 MSc Paper on Reconciliation of work and family life by Ragnheiður G. Eyjólfsdóttir; 'Reconciliation of work and family life', MSc thesis, Reykjavík University Course in Organisational Behaviour and Talent Management, 30 May 2013, https://skemman.is/bitstream/1946/16358/1/Ragnheidure-Lokaritgerð.pdf.

working full-time wanted a reduction in weekly working hours (53 % of women, 32 % of men). Telework was considered to be a way to reduce stress.

In the **Netherlands**, a large number of women work part-time. According to recent research, the Dutch system is characterised by three aspects that appear to uphold and strengthen one another: 1) the fact that women predominantly work in sectors with many part-time jobs and relatively low salaries; 2) the unequal distribution of work and care, with women carrying out most caring tasks and an infrastructure that puts women at a disadvantage in this respect; and 3) explicit ideas and social norms that influence the choices men and women make in regard to education, careers and care.[294] A report published in 2018[295] mentions that most women still work part-time, but in recent years an increase can be seen in the number of hours women do paid work. For four out of ten women working part-time, the main reason is caring for children or grandchildren. Most fathers and mothers indicate that they would like to share the care for their children equally, but in practice this only happens in one out of eight families. If care tasks are divided unequally, the mother/woman almost always has a greater share of the tasks. There is a positive trend though in the sense that the number of men who do their share of housework and care tasks is slowly increasing. According to the *Emancipation Monitor* 2020 published by Statistics Netherlands (*CBS*) and the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (*SCP*) the labour market participation of women increased more than that of men. In 2019 75.8 % of women not in education had paid work, compared to 86.3 % of men. However, women still carried out most care tasks: in one out of 6 families with children under 18 the care tasks were equally divided between men and women.[296]

In **Austria**, the incidence of part-time work is high as well and this contributes to the high gender pay gap and gender pension gap.[297] In **Luxembourg**, women represent 46 % of the labour force, whereas they are 81.6 % of the labour force who are working part time (Eurostat 2020).[298] In **Liechtenstein** and **Norway** many more women than men also work part-time if they have family responsibilities. In contrast, in Czechia, **Montenegro** and **Poland** for example, not many workers work part-time; if they do, they mostly have family responsibilities. In **Portugal**, most men and women work full-time: in 2018, part-time contracts represented only 10.5 % of the total number of employment contracts, and 87.7 % of the women worked full-time compared with 91.2 % of the men.[299] Involuntary part-time work is frequent in **Spain** and is often not related to caregiving or family responsibilities, but rather due to precariousness in the labour market, according to the national expert.

Some national experts also report that family-friendly measures such as leave are used much more by women than men (e.g. **Croatia**, **Finland**, **Germany**, **Spain** and the **United Kingdom**). For example, in **Spain**, from 2007 to 2017, parental leave was used consistently at a rate of over 92 % by women.[300] In the case of leave for care of other relatives, the rate of use by women was over 83 % for the same period.[301] Flexible working time is more common among fathers than mothers in **Finland**.[302] In this country, after the long period of home care leave, which is mostly taken by mothers, there is a right for

294 McKinsey & Company (2018), *Het potentieel pakken* (Address the potential), available at: https://www.mckinsey.com/~/media/McKinsey/Featured%20Insights/Europe/The%20power%20of%20parity%20Advancing%20gender%20equality%20in%20the%20Dutch%20labor%20market/MGI-Power-of-Parity-Nederland-September-2018-DUTCH.ashx.

295 SCP (2018), *Emancipatiemonitor 2018*, December 2018. Available at: https://digitaal.scp.nl/emancipatiemonitor2018/emancipatie-weer-in-de-lift/.

296 CBS and SCP (2020), *Emancipatiemonitor 2020,* December 2020. Available at: https://digitaal.scp.nl/emancipatiemonitor2020/.

297 The rate of part-time female workers between the ages of 15 and 64 was 68.3% in 2020. This is especially prevalent in rural areas: Statistik Austria (Statistics Austria), https://www.statistik.at/web_de/statistiken/menschen_und_gesellschaft/soziales/gender-statistik/erwerbstaetigkeit/index.html.

298 Eurostat (2020) 'Full-time and part-time employment by sex, age and occupation (1000)' (fourth quarter of 2019). Available at: https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do.

299 *CITE 2018 Report*, p. 79.

300 Excedencia por cuidado de hijas/os (parental leave), http://www.inmujer.es/estadisticasweb/6_Conciliacion/6_2_ExcedenciasPermisosyReduccionesdeJornada/w121.xls; Excedencia por cuidado.

301 Excedencia por cuidado de familiares (leave for taking care of relatives), http://www.inmujer.es/estadisticasweb/6_Conciliacion/6_2_ExcedenciasPermisosyReduccionesdeJornada/w120.xls.

302 Salmi, M. and Lammi-Taskula, J., Joustoa, J. (2011), 'Joustoa työn vai perheen hyväksi?' In Pietikäinen, P. (ed.) *Työstä, jousta, jaksa: Työn ja hyvinvoinnin tulevaisuus* (Grind, be flexible, endure: The future of work and welfare), Gaudeamus, Helsinki, 2011, pp. 155-183.

the individual to return to their own job. The national expert signals that this might be an incentive for discrimination as it may cause problems for the employer.

In **Germany**, the complexity of the care system has been criticised.[303] A recent study shows that mothers who take parental leave for more than 12 months see their wages drop by 10 % and, if they make use of flexible working times, their wages decrease by 16 % after their parental leave.[304] In **Czechia** and **Slovakia**, research shows that the parental leave for three years with a parental allowance has negative consequences for the women who take such a long period of leave. In **Lithuania**, the 'children's money' allowance granted upon request to parents without any precondition tends to reduce the willingness of women to return to work. Some experts also point at the role of traditional stereotypes in hampering a more equal sharing of work and care between men and women (e.g. **Germany**, **Italy**, **Lithuania** and **Poland**).

In some countries, the policies and legislation aim to boost birth rates (for example, in **Croatia**, **France** and **Serbia**). In **Latvia**, there are also political discussions about the need to raise birth rates, but these are not linked to work-life balance issues.

The lack of services and costs related to (childcare) services also impedes a more gender balanced division of work and care, in particular for lower or medium income groups (e.g. **Italy**). In southern and western **German** states, there is still a lack of tens of thousands of kindergarten places. Research showed that in **Austria** employees with small children consider that the conditions, effects and availability of childcare at their workplace is an important factor in their employment decisions. This survey also revealed that employees with children under 12 years of age prefer flexible working time arrangements.[305]

There are also more positive trends. After the introduction of a parental allowance, the take-up of parental leave by fathers in **Germany** increased from 3 % to 37 %.[306] In **Luxembourg**, the number of fathers who took parental leave after an income-related parental leave pay[307] was introduced in 2016 increased dramatically by 190 %. Between 2016 and 2017, the number of beneficiaries increased significantly as well, especially regarding fathers (+ 28.8 % for women, + 215.9 % for men). In 2016, mothers represented 75.3 % and fathers 24.7 % of the beneficiaries. The number of parents who benefited from parental leave increased again by 16.3 % between 2017 and 2018. Fathers, in particular, have shown an interest in the new parental leave. In 2018, they represented 49 % of the beneficiaries versus 25 % in 2016. They opted as much for the full-time leave as for the half-time parental leave. However, the flexible leave is less favoured by men, representing 43 % of all the parental leave taken by fathers.[308] In 2018, the number of beneficiaries is close to equality between women (4 875) and men (4 721).

In **Poland**, currently a quarter of the workers taking all kinds of childcare-related leave are fathers, but still only about 1 % of parental leave is taken by men.[309] In **Portugal**, a survey published in 2017 shows a growing use of paternity leave and parental leave by fathers and the extensive use of childcare facilities

303 German Federal Government (2017), *Second gender equality report*, Berlin, p. 113.

304 Lott, Y. & Eulgem, L. (2019), 'Lohnnachteile durch Mutterschaft. Helfen flexible Arbeitszeiten?' (Wage disadvantages due to motherhood. Do flexible working times help?) in *WSI Report* No. 49, https://www.boeckler.de/pdf/p_wsi_report_49_2019.pdf.

305 L&R Social Research (2014), *Vereinbarkeit von Beruf und Kinderbetreuung – betriebliche Rahmenbedingungen aus Sicht berufstätiger Eltern* (Reconciliation of work and childcare – operational framework from the perspective of working parents) available at: https://www.femtech.at/sites/default/files/Studie_Vereinbarkeit_Beruf_Familie_2014.pdf.

306 Samtleben, C., Schäper, C. & Wrohlich, K. (2019), 'Elterngeld und Elterngeld Plus: Nutzung durch Väter gestiegen, Aufteilung zwischen Müttern und Vätern aber noch sehr ungleich', in *DIW Wochenbericht* No. 35, https://www.diw.de/documents/publikationen/73/diw_01.c.673396.de/19-35-1.pdf. However, the length of the parental leave taken by mothers is usually much longer (10 to 12 months) than the leave fathers take (72 % take parental leave for two months).

307 The lower limit is EUR 1 922.96 per month, equal to the social minimum wage for non-qualified workers, and the upper limit is EUR 3 204.93 per month, equal to the social minimum wage increased by two thirds.

308 Luxembourg, General Inspectorate of Social Security (IGSS) (2020) *Rapport Général sur la Sécurité Sociale 2019* (General Report on Social Security 2019), p. 180.

309 https://www.gov.pl/web/rodzina/wiadomosci-polityka-rodzinna; https://www.gov.pl/web/rodzina/rosnie-liczba-urlopow-rodzicielskich; https://www.gov.pl/web/rodzina/ojcowie-coraz-chetniej-korzystaja-z-urlopow-rodzicielskich\; https://www.gov.pl/web/rodzina/urlopy-dla-rodzicow-2; https://www.gov.pl/web/rodzina/urlopy-dla-rodzicow-w-2019-najnowsze-dane.

for children prior to school age.[310] In **Finland**, legislation on a reform of the family leave regulations was passed in December 2021.[311] The Government's aim was a gender-neutral family leave system, in which the benefits during leave would no longer be different for mothers and fathers, and suited to all forms of family. It would introduce an equal quota of non-transferable family leave to mothers and fathers, by increasing the time allocated to fathers but without reducing the time allotted to mothers. Part of the leave would remain non-transferable.[312] The new family leaves consist of pregnancy leave and benefits of circa 1.6 months, which is shorter than the former maternity leave, and of parental leave of circa 6.4 months for each parent, or in case of single parent families, 12.8 months. The non-transferable part of the parental leave is longer than under present law. The amendment is expected to come into force on 1 August 2022. In **Iceland**, the new maternity/paternity and parental leave Act prolongs the combined leave for both parents from 10 months to 12 months. Each parent is entitled to six months' leave and can assign six weeks of their leave to the other parent. The new act also provides that each parent is entitled to two months' leave in the event of a stillbirth or miscarriage after 18 weeks of pregnancy. Both parents who are active on the labour market and those who are not receive grants. In addition, one of the aims of the new Gender Equality Act[313] is to enable parents to coordinate their job obligations with their duties towards their family. Employers have the duty to make the necessary arrangements to enable their employees to reconcile their working obligations with family life, independent of their sex. These measures entail increased flexibility in organising work and working hours and to take into account the circumstances of the family, the needs of the employer/workplace, including enabling employees to return to their work after maternity/paternity leave or leave due to pressing and unavoidable family circumstances.

A Royal Decree in **Spain** introduced a 'birth-related' leave in 2019 as an individual, non-transferable right, as well as increased possibilities for flexible working time in order to facilitate work-life balance. This legislation also seeks to combat sex discrimination in the labour market.

A study in Czechia highlighted to what extent public funding for pre-school places pays off. In **Montenegro**, there is a large network of public pre-school facilities with a high coverage. In **Italy**, the Ministry of Economy and Finance offers free childcare to workers. In **Sweden**, in addition to the right to work shorter hours for employees with small children, subsidised day-care facilities for children are available for working parents.

While in some countries the legislation on work-life balance complies with the EU requirements, the effectiveness of national law is hampered by a fear of exercising rights to leave, in particular when workers have precarious jobs, which is the case for many young workers. The gender pay gap and the fact that men/fathers are the main breadwinners also play a role in this respect (e.g. in **Italy**).

As regards legislation, in most countries, the Labour Code contains legal provisions relevant for work-life balance issues, in addition to other Acts. The **Belgian** system is particularly complex, as new measures have been added to old ones without harmonising the regulations with different objectives (redistribution of work or reconciliation of work and private life).

The right to an adequate reconciliation between work and family life is granted in the **Portuguese** Constitution as a fundamental right for workers.[314]

310 CITE *(Comissão para a Igualdade no Trabalho e no Emprego) Report 2017,* pp. 63-66.
311 Government Bill HE 129/2021 on an amendment of Sickness Insurance Act, Employment Contracts Act and Act on Early education.
312 Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (2020) *Perhevapaauudistus tähtää perheiden hyvinvointiin ja tasa-arvon lisäämiseen* (The family leave reform aims at family welfare and enhanced equality), press release, 5 February 2020, available at: https://valtioneuvosto.fi/artikkeli/-/asset_publisher/1271139/perhevapaauudistus-tahtaa-perheiden-hyvinvointiin-ja-tasa-arvon-lisaamiseen.
313 Iceland, No. 150/2020.
314 See Articles 59(1)(b) and 67(h).

Sometimes, specific Acts apply to for example the protection of motherhood and paternity, as is the case in **Cyprus**; or entitlements to parental leave, childcare leave and benefits (e.g. **Croatia**, **Denmark** and **Ireland**); or on remote working (e.g. **France**).

The **Lithuanian** Labour Code explicitly requires that employees' conduct and their actions at work shall be assessed by their employers with a view to practically and effectively implementing the principle of work-life balance.

In 2018, the European network of legal experts in gender equality and non-discrimination published a thematic report on *Family leave: enforcement of the protection against dismissal and unfavourable treatment*.[315] This report addresses the protection against discrimination and unfavourable treatment as well as dismissal due to the take-up of family-related leave – pregnancy and maternity leave, parental and adoption leave, paternity leave and carers' leave – at national level in the 28 Member States and three EEA countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway). It also provides detailed information on access to justice and enforcement issues.

4.2 Pregnancy and maternity protection[316]

Discrimination for reasons of pregnancy is considered as *direct discrimination* under EU law[317] and therefore also in the Member States. Any less favourable treatment of a woman related to pregnancy or maternity leave is included in the prohibition of discrimination (Article 2(2)(c) of Recast Directive 2006/54/EC).

At the same time, protection for reasons of pregnancy and maternity justifies different treatment for the women concerned. Thus, *special rights* and specific protection related to pregnancy and maternity, such as maternity leave, do not amount to discrimination against men (Directive 92/85/EEC and Article 28 of the Recast Directive 2006/54/EC). In CJEU case law, when specific protection does not apply, the principle of equal treatment between men and women can be applied[318] or the general principle of equal treatment.[319] While in the past rights protecting women in relation to pregnancy and maternity have been seen as an exception to the principle of equal treatment, nowadays they are considered as a means to ensure the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women regarding both access to employment and working conditions. However, it might be questioned how far protective measures should go, in particular in view of a more balanced division of work and family life between men and women when a very long maternity leave and/or many protective measures exist for women for a long period of time. If women are entitled to an additional period of maternity leave followed by parental leave or a home care leave, a long period of leave might hamper their careers as, for example, the **Irish**, **Finnish** and **Lithuanian** experts pointed out. The unequal uptake of leave might be reinforced when men are lacking or entitled only to a very short paternity leave and/or leave is unpaid. It is submitted that a very long maternity leave might hamper a gender-balanced division of family responsibilities and opportunities on the labour market. A combination of a maternity leave that is not excessively long, paternity leave, an individual right to parental leave, care leave and childcare leave might prevent such drawbacks.[320]

315 Masselot, A. (2018), *Family leave: enforcement of the protection against dismissal and unfavourable treatment*, European Commission, available at: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/publications/thematic-reports.

316 Mulder, J. (2018) 'Promoting substantive gender equality through the law on pregnancy discrimination, maternity and parental leave', *European equality law review* 2018/1, pp. 39-49, available at: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/4639-european-equality-law-review-1-2018-pdf-1-086-kb.

317 See, for example, Cases C-438/99 *Jiménez Melgar* and C-109/00 *Tele Danmark*.

318 See the case of an IVF treatment when Directive 92/85/EEC did not apply: CJEU, Judgment of 26 February 2008, *Sabine Mayr v Bäckerei und Konditorei Gerhard FlöcknerOHG*, C-506/06, ECLI:EU:C:2008:119.

319 See, for example, CJEU, Judgment of 16 September 2010, *Zoi Chatzi v Ipourgos Ikonomikon*, C-149/10, ECLI:EU:C:2010:407.

320 See on this issue: De la Corte-Rodriguez, M. (2019) *EU Law on maternity and other child-related leaves. Impact on gender equality*. Kluwer Law International, the Netherlands.

In order to strengthen the protection of pregnant women and women who have recently given birth, the Pregnant Workers Directive 92/85/EEC was adopted in 1992. The most important provisions concern a period of maternity leave of at least 14 weeks (Article 8). Women are entitled to the payment of an adequate allowance during pregnancy and maternity leave (Article 11). This allowance is deemed to be adequate if it guarantees an income at least equivalent to that which the worker concerned would receive in case of illness (Article 11(3)). Another important provision relates to protection against dismissal from the beginning of the pregnancy until the end of the maternity leave (Article 10). Apart from leave and employment protection, the Directive also provides for health and safety protection for pregnant women or women who are breastfeeding. If there is a risk to health and safety or an effect on the pregnancy or breastfeeding, as established on the basis of detailed guidelines, the employer must take the necessary steps, like temporarily adjusting the working conditions, moving the worker to another job or, if there is no other solution, granting the worker temporary leave. At national level, the minimum requirements of the Directives are generally met and national (case) law offers more protection and extensive rights.

4.2.1 Definitions in national law and obligation to inform employer

According to Article 1(1) of the Pregnant Workers Directive 92/85/EEC, the directive applies to pregnant workers, workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding. These three groups are defined in Article 2:

> '(a) pregnant worker shall mean a pregnant worker who informs her employer of her condition, in accordance with national legislation and/or national practice;
> (b) worker who has recently given birth shall mean a worker who has recently given birth within the meaning of national legislation and/or national practice and who informs her employer of her condition, in accordance with that legislation and/or practice;
> (c) worker who is breastfeeding shall mean a worker who is breastfeeding within the meaning of national legislation and/or national practice and who informs her employer of her condition, in accordance with that legislation and/or practice.'

In some countries, the concepts of pregnant worker, worker who has recently given birth and a worker who is breastfeeding are defined, sometimes in the same, and sometimes in different Acts (**Albania**, **Bulgaria**, **Croatia**, **Germany**,[321] **Greece**,[322] **Ireland**, **Lithuania**, **Luxembourg**,[323] **Malta**, **Montenegro**, **Portugal**, **Slovakia**, **Slovenia**, **Turkey**). In **Bulgarian** legislation, equal protection is granted to female workers and employees who are at an advanced stage of in-vitro fertilisation treatment. Their rights were made consistent with those of pregnant female workers and employees and with those who are breastfeeding.

In many countries, no definitions of a pregnant worker, a worker who has recently given birth or a breastfeeding worker exist in national law (**Austria**, **Cyprus**,[324] **Czechia**, **Denmark**, **Finland**, **France**, **Iceland**, **Italy**, **Latvia**,[325] **Liechtenstein**, **Montenegro**, **Netherlands**, **Poland**, **Serbia**, **Spain**, **Sweden**, **United Kingdom**).

A legal obligation to inform the employer (often in order to benefit from pregnancy protection and/or before maternity leave) is frequently found (**Albania**, **Bulgaria**, **Cyprus**, **Denmark**, **Estonia**, **Finland**, **France**,

321 As transgender people can claim legal recognition of their new gender status without surgery, 'pregnant men' may occur (although there are going to be fierce discussions about the question of whether they, after giving birth, can be recognised as the mother or the father on the birth certificate). Moreover, since intersex* children are no longer to be assigned one of two genders at birth, people without a female or male gender status or with a 'diverse' status may become pregnant in the future. The law itself speaks of pregnant and breastfeeding 'persons'.
322 The definitions specify: '*provided that this is required for taking a positive measure in her favour*', i.e. for example maternity leave.
323 A woman who has recently given birth is not defined, but a premature birth is.
324 The equality body took a more restricted approach than required under EU law in case number 27/2017.
325 However, the period relevant for pregnancy and maternity protection is defined in Article 37(7) of the Labour Law.

Germany, **Hungary**,[326] **Iceland**, **Ireland**, **Italy**, **Lithuania**, **Luxembourg**,[327] **Malta**, **Montenegro**, **Netherlands**, **North Macedonia**, **Portugal**,[328] **Slovenia**, **Turkey**, **United Kingdom**). However, there is no such (formal) obligation in **Austria**,[329] **Belgium**,[330] **Czechia**, **Greece**,[331] (except in case of positive measures), **Latvia**,[332] **Liechtenstein**, **Poland**, **Serbia**, **Slovakia**, **Spain** or **Sweden**. In order to benefit from protective measures, pregnancy has most often to be proved, for example by a medical certificate. However, in **Norway**, the protection of pregnant employees applies to any employee who is pregnant or is breastfeeding, not only to employees who have informed their employer about their condition.

4.2.2 Protective measures

The aim of the Pregnant Workers Directive 92/85/EEC is to encourage improvements in the health and safety at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or who are breastfeeding (Article 1). Articles 4-6 of this Directive require specific measures from employers in order to prevent the workers to which the directive applies from being exposed to dangerous substances, processes or working conditions, which are specified in non-exhaustive lists in Annexes to the directive.[333] Employers must assess the risks and decide what measures should be taken. These may include temporarily adjusting the working conditions and/or the working hours of the worker concerned. If this is not possible, the worker should be moved to another job. Pregnant workers, workers who have recently given birth and workers who are breastfeeding cannot be obliged to perform night work during a certain period to be determined at national level. These workers must then be able to work during daytime or – if such a transfer is not possible – have a longer period of leave (Article 7). Employment rights and maintenance of a payment to, and/or entitlement to an adequate allowance must be ensured (Article 11(1)).

These provisions are implemented in **Albania**, **Austria**, **Belgium**, **Bulgaria**,[334] **Croatia**, **Cyprus**, **Czechia**, **Denmark**, **Estonia**, **Finland**, **France**, **Germany**, **Greece**, **Hungary**, **Iceland**, **Ireland**, **Italy**, **Latvia**, **Liechtenstein**, **Lithuania**, **Luxembourg**,[335] **Malta**, the **Netherlands**, **North Macedonia**, **Poland**, **Portugal**, **Serbia**, **Slovenia**, **Spain**,[336] **Sweden**, **Turkey** and the **United Kingdom**. The ban on

326 If the notification of pregnancy is given following the delivery of a letter of dismissal, the dismissal may be withdrawn by the employer within 15 days following the notification.

327 This obligation also applies to a worker who is breastfeeding. In a ruling of 19 December 2019, the Court of Appeal stated that 'in the event that a pregnant employee is fired before she informed the employer of the pregnancy, she must produce a medical certificate to her employer within 8 days to annul the dismissal', Court of Appeal, 19 December 2019, No. 127/19. Comments on this judgment were made in *InfosJuridiques* No. 1-2020 p. 6, available at: https://www.csl.lu/fr/publications-newsletters/newsletters/infosjuridiques/2020.

328 In order to have access to the relevant protection rules. However, these rules are applicable not only if the worker has formally informed the employer of her condition but also, regardless of that formal communication, whenever the employer has direct knowledge of the worker's condition (Article 36(2) of the Labour Code).

329 However, maternity protections (such as protection against dismissal) depend upon notification of the employer. Nonetheless, negative consequences of a failure to inform the employer can be reversed by informing the employer as soon as possible after the fact (e.g., after a dismissal).

330 However, in the event of a dispute, it will be up to the worker to prove that the employer was informed. Thus, the visible nature of the pregnancy is sufficient to provide the employer with information.

331 If an employer dismisses a pregnant worker without being aware of her condition, once informed of the pregnancy the employer must adopt measures in order to deal with the nullity of the dismissal of the pregnant worker (i.e. reinstatement): SCPC (Civil Section) No. 954/2018.

332 There is formal obligation to inform the employer provided by the law, however, according to the case-law in case of discrimination the main issue is if the employer knew about the pregnancy in fact.

333 Annex 1 of Directive 92/85/EEC was amended by Directive 2014/27/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 February 2014 amending Council Directives 92/58/EEC, 92/85/EEC, 94/33/EC, 98/24/EC and Directive 2004/37/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council, in order to align them to Regulation (EC) No 1272/2008 on classification, labelling and packaging of substances and mixtures, *OJ* 2014, L 65/1.

334 These provisions also apply to a woman at an advanced state of in-vitro fertilisation.

335 The prohibition of night work applies from 10 pm until 6 am.

336 The Spanish Supreme Court transferred to the employer the burden of proof that the work undertaken by the worker was compatible with breastfeeding after the CJEU C-531/15 *Otero Ramos* and C-41/17 *Gonzalez Castro* cases: Judgment of the Supreme Court of 26 June 2018, appeal number 1398/16, ECLI: ES:TS:2018:2651: www.poderjudicial.es/search/contenidos.action?action=contentpdf&databasematch=TS&reference=8454467&statsQueryId=106305728&calledfrom=searchresults&links=&optimize=20180719&publicinterface=true.

employing pregnant women and women who are breastfeeding for prohibited work is absolute in **Poland**, even if the woman concerned does agree to the work.

In **Norway**, the protective measures mentioned in Articles 4-7 of Directive 92/85/EEC are not explicitly implemented in national law, but the legislation provides broad protection against health hazards for all employees in relation to the rules on the general working environment, working hours, the information and consultation obligation and the entitlement to leave. Pregnant workers are protected under the general provisions. The same is true in **Montenegro**, where protective measures have to be taken by the employer to protect the health of a pregnant worker and her child. The scope of the specific protection of pregnant and breastfeeding women and mothers until the completion of nine months after confinement is broad in **Slovakia**.

Interestingly, in **Germany**, in a paradigm shift, Section 13 of the new Maternity Protection Act provides for a hierarchical range of employers' duties to guarantee protection and safety for pregnant or breastfeeding employees. The first and primary task is the substantial reshaping of the work environment.[337] Only when the required level of safety cannot be reached by such a reshaping or when the reshaping would require a disproportionate effort can the employer require a change of the specific workplace. If safety can neither be guaranteed by reshaping the work environment nor by a change of workplace, the employer is not allowed to employ the pregnant or breastfeeding employee during the period of pregnancy or breastfeeding (generally covering the first year after the birth of the child).[338] The national expert considers that by qualifying the reshaping of the work environment as a priority and the prohibition of work as a last resort, pregnancy and breastfeeding might cease to have the status of special obstacles to a successful working life and may become part of a comprehensive concept of occupational safety (influenced by EU law requirements). A newly established Commission for Maternity Protection will further develop guidelines concerning risk assessment, technical safety, occupational medicine and hygiene.

The situation in the countries under review is diverse as regards the prohibition of night work for pregnant workers, workers who have recently given birth and breastfeeding workers. Article 7 of Directive 92/85/EEC requires the Member States to take the necessary measures to ensure that these workers are not obliged to perform night work during their pregnancy and for a period following childbirth, to be determined at national level. This period can be quite long. For example, in **Bulgaria**, night work is forbidden for pregnant workers and workers in an advanced stage of in-vitro fertilisation treatment; this also applies to mothers with children up to six years old, and mothers who care for children with disabilities, notwithstanding their age, unless their explicit written consent is given. Fathers are not protected under this provision, even if they are lone parents, which could be regarded as direct sex discrimination. In contrast, in **Italy** the prohibition of night work applies not only to mothers, but also to fathers.[339] In **Hungary**, night work is prohibited for women during pregnancy until their child(ren) reaches three years old, also for single parents (fathers) until their child(ren) reaches three year old – even in cases where the employee would consent to perform night work.[340] Such a long period can be detrimental for employees who are not offered daytime work during the prohibited period of night work. The option of daytime work or leave from work must be offered to workers according to Article 7(2) of Directive 92/85/EEC.

In **Montenegro**, it is not only women during pregnancy and women who have children under three years of age who may not work longer than the full-time hours or overnight. Exceptionally, an employed woman who has a child older than two years of age may work at night, but only if she consents to such work in writing. In addition, parents with a child with severe disabilities and single parents who have a child

337 Although not discussed in the legislative process, there are some considerable links to the concept of reasonable accommodation.

338 Most of the regulations entered into force on 1 January 2018.

339 Until the child is three years old. The dismissal of a working mother of children aged under three years who refused to be employed in night work was considered null and void by the Italian Court of Cassation, as the employer had not proved that there was no day job where she could have been employed: case No. 23807 of 14 November 2011.

340 Hungary, Act I of 2012 on the Labour Code (*2012. évi I. törvény a munka törvénykönyvéről*), 6 January 2012, Article 113(1) Points (a)-(b), (3).

under seven years of age may not work longer than the full-time hours or at night, unless they give their written consent.

In **Denmark**, **Finland**, **Norway**, **Sweden**[341] and the **United Kingdom** there is no specific legal prohibition of night work for pregnant (and/or breastfeeding) women. However, if health risks exist, the employer must provide daytime work and/or take other measures. In **Albania**, there is a prohibition of night work for pregnant women and women who have recently given birth until their child reaches the age of one year, if this would be harmful to the health and safety of the woman and/or the child. A similar provision applies to breastfeeding women for a period of 63 days after birth. In **Estonia**, a pregnant and/or breastfeeding women can refuse night work and underground mining work. In **Iceland**, it is prohibited to oblige an employee who is pregnant to work at night. This also applies for the six months after she gives birth, if it is necessary for her health and safety and is confirmed with a medical certificate.

The situation is slightly different in Czechia, where night work is not generally prohibited for pregnant women, but there is an obligation for the employer to transfer a pregnant or breastfeeding woman, or a mother until nine months after delivery, from night work to day work, if she requests this.[342] A similar situation exists in **Slovakia**. On the contrary in **Poland**, the prohibition of night work has an absolute character, which means that a pregnant woman cannot perform night work regardless of whether such work poses any risk to her health or not, or whether there is any objective reason why she should not perform night work. The consent of the pregnant employee is irrelevant.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, additional measures to protect pregnant women in the workplace have to be observed in **Austria**, including enhanced hygiene and distancing measures.[343] Under certain conditions, pregnant women can take protective leave due to the COVID-19 pandemic (especially if they are not able to work from home).[344]

4.2.3 Prohibition of dismissal

Article 10(1) prohibits dismissal of workers from the beginning of their pregnancy until the end of their maternity leave (as stipulated in Article 8, thus 14 weeks), save in exceptional cases not connected to pregnancy or maternity. If an employer dismisses an employee during the period of her pregnancy or during maternity leave, they must substantiate the grounds for dismissal in writing (Article 10(2)). The following table gives an overview of how Article 10 is implemented in the 36 countries under review.

Table 1 Protection against dismissal during pregnancy and maternity leave

Albania	Yes, except in exceptional cases not linked to pregnancy or childbirth.
Austria	Yes. Employers can only terminate a contract of a pregnant worker for a number of special reasons[345] after having informed the works council and having obtained subsequent consent from the labour courts.
Belgium	Yes.
Bulgaria	Yes, except on certain grounds (Article 333 paragraph 5 & 6 and 338 of the Labour Code).

341 There is no prohibition against night work for pregnant women. However, a pregnant employee or an employee who has recently given birth may not perform night work if she provides medical certificates stating that such work would be detrimental to her health or safety: Swedish Work Environment Statute AFS 2007: 5, Section 9A.
342 Czechia, Section 41 of the Labour Code.
343 Arbeitsinspektion (Austrian Labour inspectorate), https://www.arbeitsinspektion.gv.at/Gesundheit_im_Betrieb/Gesundheit_im_Betrieb_1/Schwangere_Arbeitnehmerinnen.html.
344 Paragraph 3a of the Maternity Protection Act.
345 For example, a failure to attend work without any justification for a significant period, physical or severe verbal assaults against the employer or their family, theft, fraud, or breaches of trust that would also qualify as a criminal offence (such as fraud or serious theft): Paragraph 12 of the Maternity Protection Act.

Croatia	Yes. The protection extends for 15 days after the end of maternity leave. Exceptionally, dismissal due to business reasons in the procedure of winding up (liquidation) of a company is allowed even during maternity leave (Article 34(4) Labour Act). However, application of this exception is practically impossible, because the notice period cannot begin and is suspended during pregnancy and the exercise of any right related to maternity or parenthood (Article 121(2) Labour Act). The same applies in case of employer's insolvency (Article 191(3) Insolvency Act), although in practice, dismissal due to an employer's insolvency may have an immediate effect, where the insolvency procedure is opened and closed on the same day (when the employer/insolvency debtor has no assets).
Cyprus	Yes. The protection extends for five months after the end of the maternity leave.
Czechia	Yes.
Denmark	Yes.
Estonia	Yes.
Finland	Yes.
France	Yes. The protection extends for ten weeks after birth.[346]
Germany	Yes (except under exceptional circumstances not related to pregnancy). The protection extends for four months after childbirth.
Greece	Yes, for the whole protected period (i.e. during pregnancy and 18 months after childbirth or during a longer absence due to illness related to pregnancy or childbirth).[347]
Hungary	Yes, a dismissal with notice is prohibited during pregnancy, maternity leave, parental leave and IVF treatment (for six months), with a few exceptions. Fathers are only protected from dismissal during parental leave if they are the sole carers of their child(ren) and the mother is not available.
Iceland	Yes.
Ireland	Yes.
Italy	Yes. Protection is granted for a period of 12 months following the date of confinement.
Latvia	Yes.[348] An employee on maternity leave may only be dismissed in the case of the liquidation of the employer's company.
Liechtenstein	Yes.
Lithuania	Yes.
Luxembourg	Yes.[349]
Malta	Yes. By Regulation 12 of the Protection of Maternity (Employment) Regulations.
Montenegro	Yes.[350]
Netherlands	Yes, from the beginning of the pregnancy, during maternity leave and for six weeks after resuming work after maternity leave or after a period of illness caused by pregnancy or childbirth.
North Macedonia	Yes.
Norway	Yes.

346 Article 81 of the new Act No. 2019-828 of 6 August 2019 on the transformation of the civil service, amending Article 6 of Act No. 83-634 of 13 July 1983 on the rights and obligations of civil servants, adds pregnancy as a specific ground of discrimination for public sector employees.

347 After the cut-off date (01.01.2021), the protection was extended to fathers as well for the first six months after childbirth by Art. 48(4) Act 4808/2021.

348 The employer has the right to give notice of dismissal in case of temporary incapacity to work for more than six months (Article 101, para. 1, Clause 11) and repeated periods of incapacity. According to the national expert, this provision is contrary to the CJEU Judgment of 30 June 1998, *Mary Brown and Rentokil Limited,* C-394/96, ECLI:EU:C:1998:331.

349 The protection also applies also to a pregnant woman working under a traineeship contract, according to the Constitutional Court: Case Law No. 00142 of 14 December 2018, Memorial A No. 1149 of 19 December 2018. Available at: http://legilux.public.lu/eli/etat/leg/memorial/2018/a1149; *Infos Juridiques* No. 1/2019 of 30 January 2019. Available at: https://www.csl.lu/single_newsletter/63ffd96c4a. However, on the dismissal at the end of the maternity leave of a worker with a fixed-term contract in relation to a probationary period, see: Court of Appeal, 19 December 2019, No. 127/19. Comments on this judgment were made in *Infos Juridiques* No. 1-2020 p. 6, available at: https://www.csl.lu/fr/publications-newsletters/newsletters/infosjuridiques/2020.

350 The protection also applies during maternity and parental leave, as well as some other (care) leave: Article 123 Labour Law.

Poland	Yes. Dismissal is prohibited during pregnancy and maternity/parental leave except in specific situations, such as the employer's bankruptcy or liquidation.
Portugal	Yes. The procedure applying to all forms of dismissals is stricter regarding dismissals of women during pregnancy, maternity leave, parental leave and breastfeeding of a child, since it involves the intervention of a (public) Agency for Equality in Employment (CITE), which has to approve the dismissal in advance (Article 63 of the Labour Code).
Romania	Yes.[351]
Serbia	Yes.
Slovakia	An employer cannot give notice[352] to an employee within the protected period, also meaning within the period of a female employee's pregnancy, when a female employee is on maternity leave or a male employee caring for a new-born child is on parental leave (during the same period as maternity leave). An employer cannot immediately (without notice) terminate the employment relationship with a pregnant employee, a female employee on maternity leave, or a male employee caring for a new-born child on parental leave.[353]
Slovenia	Yes, according to Article 115/5 of the ERA.
Spain	Yes. The dismissal of a pregnant worker during the probationary period shall be null and void, unless it is due to reasons unrelated to pregnancy and maternity (Article 14.2, Workers' Statute).[354]
Sweden	Yes. During pregnancy and maternity leave, the employee is protected by the non-discrimination rules and the ban on less favourable treatment in the parental leave regulation. General labour law provides a strong employment protection, and reasons connected with pregnancy or maternity can never constitute a permitted ground for dismissal. In addition, the employer may not terminate an employment for an employee on maternity or parental leave. The notice period starts on the day when the employee returns from the leave.
Turkey	Yes. However, there is no obligation to reinstate employees who are employed for a definite period or employees who are employed in an establishment with less than thirty employees, or employees who do not meet a minimum seniority of six months in case of discriminatory or invalid or unjustified dismissal.
United Kingdom	No. Dismissal from the beginning of the pregnancy until the end of the maternity leave is not prohibited in national law, but if the dismissal is related to the pregnancy or maternity leave then it will automatically be deemed unfair (under the Employment Rights Act 1996 Section 99) and will be discriminatory under the Equality Act 2010.

4.2.4 Redundancy and payment during maternity leave

Payment during maternity leave (in some case by the public social security system) does not cease when the employee is made redundant (for reasons not connected to pregnancy or maternity) in **Albania**, **Austria**, **Belgium**, **Bulgaria**, **Cyprus**, **Denmark**, **Estonia**, **France**, **Germany**, **Hungary**, **Iceland**, **Italy**, **Latvia**, **Liechtenstein**, **Lithuania**, **Luxembourg**, **Malta**, **Montenegro** (in case of collective dismissals), the **Netherlands**, **North Macedonia**, **Norway**, **Portugal**, **Serbia**, **Slovakia**, **Slovenia**, **Spain** and **Sweden**.

351 However, during the probation period (the first 90 days of the work contract), the employer does not have to give any reasons for dismissal: Labour Code, Article 31(3).

352 An employment relationship may be terminated by agreement, by notice, by immediate termination and by termination during the probation period (Article 59, Section 1 of the Labour Code).

353 Slovakia, Act No. 311/2001 Coll. Labour Code, Article 68, Section 3.

354 Spain, Royal Decree 6/2019 of 1 March 2019. The doctrine of the Constitutional Court exempted the dismissal of a pregnant woman during the probationary period, which was not automatically considered null and void, if the employer argued that they were not aware of the pregnancy: Judgment of the Constitutional Court 173/2013 of 10 October 2013, ECLI:ES:TC:2013:173: http://hj.tribunalconstitucional.es/HJ/es/Resolucion/Show/23619.

In **Greece**, the payment for maternity leave ceases, but a monthly flat rate unemployment allowance is paid. There is no legal regulation on this issue in **Finland**; payment in case of redundancy would depend on the collective agreement.

In case of the employer becoming insolvent, the status as an insured person in the mandatory health insurance in **Croatia**, which is a prerequisite for the payment of maternity (and parental) benefits, is automatically terminated. Sometimes employees are not aware of this and are confronted with an obligation to reimburse payments retroactively. Measures have now been taken in order to ensure that insolvency proceedings are not closed if there is no proof that all workers have been formally deregistered from the mandatory insurance registers.[355]

In **Ireland**, dismissal by reason of redundancy can only come into effect on the completion of maternity leave (or additional maternity leave).

4.2.5 Employer's obligation to substantiate a dismissal

In most countries the employer has the obligation to substantiate a dismissal, often in writing (**Austria**, **Bulgaria**, **Croatia**, **Cyprus**, **Czechia**, **Denmark**, **Estonia**, **Finland**,[356] **France**, **Germany**, **Greece**,[357] **Hungary**, **Iceland**, **Ireland**, **Italy**, **Latvia**, **Liechtenstein**, **Lithuania**, **Malta**, **Montenegro**, **Netherlands**, **North Macedonia**, **Norway**, **Poland**,[358] **Portugal**, **Slovakia**, **Slovenia**, **Spain**,[359] **Sweden**, **Turkey**,[360] **United Kingdom**) and in some countries only on request by the worker (e.g. **Belgium** and **Luxembourg**) or implicitly, when the employer has to prove that the reason for dismissal was not pregnancy or childbirth, as is the case in **Albania**.

In **Italy**, legislation has been adopted in order to combat so-called blank resignation of working mothers.[361] 'Blank resignation' refers to an undated resignation letter signed by a worker at the time of recruitment which can be used by the employer to make the worker resign when needed (i.e. when pregnant). Often the employer makes recruitment conditional on the prospective employee signing such a letter.

355 Croatia, Decision on termination, non-commencement of damages recovery procedures and on writing-off of claims for damages based on undue maternity and parental benefits and on settlement of damages from mandatory health insurance (*Odluka o obustavi, nepokretanju postupaka naknade štete i o otpisu tražbina na ime naknade štete po osnovi nepripadno ostvarenih prava na rodiljne i roditeljske potpore te o podmirenju naknade štete iz obveznog zdravstvenog osiguranja*), NN No. 16/2019.

356 If an employer dismisses a pregnant employee or an employee on family-related leave, the dismissal is assumed to be caused by pregnancy or use of family-related leave unless the employer can provide a different credible reason (Chapter 7, Section 9(2)). An employer may dismiss a pregnant employee or an employee on family-related leave using normal grounds of dismissal only if the employer ceases all operations.

357 The employer must also submit the dismissal to the Labour Inspectorate: Article 10 of Decree 176/97. In the absence of a justification in writing at the time of the termination, the termination will be null and void: Dodecanes CA No 43/2014.

358 In every case of dismissal (with the exception of employment contracts for a defined period of time), the employer has the obligation to substantiate the decision: Article 30(4) Labour Code.

359 In the case of dismissals for redundancy, the Supreme Court has ruled that the employer must justify the specific reason for including a pregnant woman in the group of people dismissed. If the employer fails to do so, the dismissal of the claimant must be declared null and void: Judgment of the Supreme Court of 14 January 2015, appeal number 104/2014, ECLI:ES:TS:2015:711: available at: https://www.poderjudicial.es/search/doAction?action=contentpdf&databasematch=TS&reference=7324092&links=&optimize=20150313&publicinterface=true Judgment of the Supreme Court of 20 July 2018, appeal number 2708/16, ECLI:ES:TS:2018:3248: available at: https://www.poderjudicial.es/search/ contenidos.action?action=contentpdf&databasematch=TS&reference=8515525&statsQueryId=106519600&calledfrom=searchresults& links=&optimize=20181001&publicinterface=true; see on this issue CJEU Judgment of 22 February 2018, *Jessica Porras Guisado v Bankia SA and Others*, C-103/16, ECLI:EU:C:2018:99. Royal Decree 6/2019 of 1 March 2019 introduced this requirement to Article 53.4 of the Workers' Statute.

360 However, this is not always the case (Turkey).

361 Act No. 92/2012 changed Article 55, para. 4 of Decree No. 151/2012 and extended the period during which mutual termination of the employment contract or resignation letters of working mothers must be signed in front of an inspector of the Minister of Labour. This period now starts at the beginning of the pregnancy and ends when the child reaches the age of three.

4.3 Maternity leave

4.3.1 Duration, payment and share of maternity leave

Article 8 of the Pregnant Workers Directive requires a continuous period of maternity leave of at least 14 weeks allocated before or after confinement, of which two weeks at least allocated before or after confinement are compulsory. According to Article 11(2) and (3), during this maternity leave the rights connected with the employment contract must be ensured and workers on maternity leave are entitled to maintenance of a payment, and/or an adequate allowance which has to be at least equivalent to sick pay (which might be subject to a ceiling). Eligibility requirements for benefits laid down under national legislation are allowed (Article 11(4)).

All countries provide for at least the minimum period of maternity leave of 14 weeks, as set out in the Pregnant Workers Directive. Many countries provide for longer periods. The following table gives an overview of the length of maternity leave, as well as the length of any potential obligatory period of maternity leave, the possibility to share maternity leave with the father, and the amount of payment mothers receive during maternity leave.

Table 2 Maternity leave

Country	Duration	Obligatory period	Possibility to share ML with the father?	Payment
Albania	365 days (390 for multiple birth)	35 (or 60) days before the expected confinement and 63 days after birth	Yes, after 63 days' obligatory maternity leave	80 % allowance until 150 days after birth
Austria	16 weeks	8 weeks before birth – longer individual maternity leave before birth in cases of medically attested health risks for mother or foetus; 8 weeks after birth, 12 weeks in cases of premature births, multiple births or delivery by Caesarean section; no more than 20 weeks in full	No	100 % of average earnings (without ceiling, including regular bonuses) if earning for at least 3 months prior to the maternity leave more than the mandatory social security threshold, in 2020: EUR 460.66 per month. Unemployed pregnant women are entitled to a maternity benefit that amounts to 180 % of their regular monthly unemployment benefit or unemployment benefit per diem.

Country	Duration	Obligatory period	Possibility to share ML with the father?	Payment
Belgium	15 weeks	1 week compulsory antenatal leave, can only be taken before birth, 5 weeks of optional antenatal leave and 9 weeks compulsory postnatal leave	No, but if the mother dies after giving birth the remaining leave is transferred to the mother's spouse/life partner[362]	82 % for the first 30 days (approx. 4 weeks), 75 % (daily maximum EUR 106.90) remainder
Bulgaria	410 days (58.5 weeks)	45 days (6.5 weeks) before birth	Since 2009, fathers can replace the mother with her consent after the child is 6 months old	410 days (58.5 weeks) are paid at 90 % of the average income, no ceiling
Croatia	98 days: 28 days before and 70 days after confinement Additional voluntary leave from the 71st day after confinement until child reaches the age of 6 months[363]	98 days: 28 days before and 70 days after confinement	The time from 71st day after birth until child reaches age of 6 months is entirely transferable to the father	Compulsory and additional (voluntary) maternity leave are both paid at the rate of 100 % of the base for calculation of salary compensation, in accordance with the provisions on mandatory health insurance (no ceiling). If no prior length of service is satisfied (12 months uninterrupted length of service / 18 months interrupted length of service): 70 % of budgetary calculation base (currently EUR 312 (HRK 2 328))
Cyprus	18 weeks (at least 2 weeks before and 9 weeks after confinement)	11 weeks fully compulsory, starting at least two weeks before the expected due date.	No	72 % of the weekly average of the basic insurable earnings of the beneficiary in the previous contribution year. Maternity benefit cannot be more than the person's normal income. This situation might arise if the mother receives part of her salary from her employer during maternity leave.

362 Or if the worker has to remain in hospital after giving birth while the child can be taken home.

363 The employee can use additional maternity leave in the form of the right to work half of the full working time, in which case its duration can be prolonged even after the child is six months old (for the time spent on this form of leave before the child turned six months of age), but at the latest until the child is nine months old (Article 15(1) to (3), Act on Maternity and Parental Benefits).

Country	Duration	Obligatory period	Possibility to share ML with the father?	Payment
Czechia	28 weeks, 37 weeks in case of multiple births	There is a 12-week obligatory period of maternity leave before (6, max. 8 weeks) and after the birth; this period should not end less than six weeks after the birth	Possible to transfer the maternity leave to the father after the child reaches the age of six weeks	70 % of average income of the last 12 months, with a ceiling of EUR 1 640
Denmark[364]	4 weeks before the expected birth and 14 weeks after the birth	2 weeks after the birth	Not the 14 weeks of maternity leave. The father or co-mother may choose to take some of the 32 weeks of parental leave at the same time as the mother is taking maternity leave.	100 % salary according to some collective agreements. Benefit for 14 weeks at the level of sick leave benefits: EUR 592 per week.
Estonia	20 weeks (140 calendar days: 70 days pregnancy leave and 70 days maternity leave)	None, but pregnancy leave should start between 30 and 70 days before the expected birth in order to receive 70 days of benefit	No	100 % of average earnings of the insured person in the preceding calendar year, no ceiling
Finland	105 weekdays (between and including Monday to Saturday) – approximately 16.5 weeks	2 weeks before estimated birth and 2 weeks after	No	Payment is dependent on previous earnings: 90 % for the first 56 weekdays after birth up to EUR 50 606, and for salaries higher than this, 32.5 % of salary above that. for the rest of the leave, 70 % up EUR 32 892. and above that sum up to EUR 50 606 40 %, above that 25 %. Women with no previous earnings are entitled to a minimum benefit.
France	16 weeks (six weeks before estimated birth date and 10 weeks after)	2 weeks before and 6 weeks after	No	100 % of average earnings with ceiling of EUR 82.32 per day.

364 Amendment to the Act on Maternity and Parental Leave has been submitted in December 2021, proposal 104 of 22 December 2021, expected to come into force 1 July 2022. The amendment redistributes the weeks of maternity, paternity and parental weeks with a view to implement Articles 5 and 8 in the Work life balance directive.

Country	Duration	Obligatory period	Possibility to share ML with the father?	Payment
Germany	14 weeks, up to 18 weeks in cases of premature or multiple births	6 weeks before and 8 weeks after birth; 12 weeks after birth in cases of premature or multiple births. During the 6 weeks antenatal protection period the employee is allowed to work voluntarily, but the employer is prohibited from requiring her to work.	No	100 % of last average income of the last 13 weeks or 3 months for dependent employees, no ceiling
Greece[365]	Public sector: 5 months (approx. 22 weeks); private sector: 17 weeks[366] (in addition, six months special leave granted to women only after the end of the maternity leave)	All. Public sector: 2 months (approx. 9 weeks) before birth and 3 months (approx. 13 weeks) after; private sector: 8 weeks before birth and 9 weeks after	No	Public sector: 100 %, paid by employer, without upper limit. Private sector: part is paid by employer, with a social security allowance for the remaining period, which covers wages for the majority of women.
Hungary	24 weeks	2 weeks obligatory; in the absence of agreement: 4 weeks before birth	No	70 % of the average daily salary – no ceilings on payments
Iceland	6 months after birth[367] Each parent has a right to 6 months maternity/paternity leave until the child is 2 years old	Two weeks after birth is obligatory for the parent who has given birth	6 weeks of each parent's independent leave	80 % of average total wages of the last 12 months (finishing 6 months before birth). The ceiling is EUR 4 000 per month.
Ireland	26 weeks	2 weeks	Fathers cannot share the leave, but if the mother dies the father takes over the remaining leave	First 26 weeks are paid at a level of EUR 245 gross per week, following 16 weeks are unpaid. The employer can choose to 'top up' the payment if agreed between employer and employee.

365 After the cut-off date (1.1.2021) by Act 4808/2021 the 9-weeks post-natal part of maternity leave was extended to adoptive mothers; moreover, the 'special' maternity protection allowance was extended to adoptive mothers and employees in the public sector employed under labour law. See EELN flash report of 12 July 2021 https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/5447-greece-innovative-provisions-on-family-related-leaves-act-4808-2021-104-kb.

366 Female salaried lawyers are not entitled to an adequate maternity allowance: EELN flash report (Greece) of 8 May 2020, 'Female salaried lawyers not entitled to adequate maternity allowance', available at: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/5133-greece-female-salaried-lawyers-not-entitled-to-adequate-maternity-allowance-126-kb.

367 Iceland, Maternity/Paternity and Parental Leave Act No. 140/2020, Article 8, which came into effect 1 January 2021 and has replaced the Act on Maternity, Paternity Leave and Parental Leave No. 95/2000.

Country	Duration	Obligatory period	Possibility to share ML with the father?	Payment
Italy	22 weeks (5 months)	All: 2 (or 1 or 0) months before birth, 3 (or 4 or 5) months after	Fathers may obtain maternity leave after the birth for the whole length of maternity leave or for the remaining period in special cases (e.g. death or serious illness of the mother). And optional right to take one day of leave within five months after the birth.	80 % of average daily remuneration paid throughout the entire maternity leave period, no ceiling.
Latvia	56 days before and 56 days after the expected date of confinement. Plus extra 14 days if woman has visited a doctor and registered her condition before 12th week of pregnancy (18 weeks in total)	None, it is the right of the pregnant worker, but an employer must not employ a pregnant woman 2 weeks before and 2 weeks after she gives birth	The right to maternity leave is not accessible to fathers, unless exceptional circumstances occur – the death of the mother or the mother waives her parental rights	80 % of gross salary for entire maternity leave period, no ceiling.[368]
Liechtenstein	20 weeks	8 weeks after birth are compulsory, following 12 weeks are voluntary. 4 weeks before birth	No	80 % of salary for full 20 weeks, 16 of which must follow childbirth. No explicit ceiling; the payment is based on the maximum income for the obligatory insurance for illness and old age, which varies according to the general development of salaries
Lithuania	70 calendar days before expected childbirth and 56 days after childbirth.	Fully voluntary, but if not taken, the employer must grant 14 days leave immediately after childbirth	No	If the woman has been insured for more than 12 months over the previous 24 months, 77.58 % of reimbursed remuneration. The minimum benefit is EUR 234 per month.
Luxembourg	20 weeks (8 weeks antenatal leave and 12 weeks post-natal leave), but can be extended if birth takes place after expected date of delivery	All the maternity leave is compulsory	No	100 %, granted on the basis of a medical certificate and treated as period of sick leave, no ceiling to payment.

368 The fact is that, in reality, maternity allowance exceeds the normal salary, because people in active employment after deduction of taxes are entitled to approximately 68 % of their gross salary.

Country	Duration	Obligatory period	Possibility to share ML with the father?	Payment
Malta	18 weeks	4 weeks before and six weeks after the expected date of confinement.	No	100 % for first 14 weeks paid by the employer, then 4 weeks maternity benefit. The rate is in accordance with the Social Security Act. The rate may be subject to an increase. Ceiling of EUR 181.08 per week.
Montenegro	Parental Leave (including maternity leave) can last up to 365 days counting from the birth of the child. Mandatory maternity leave of 98 days.	Compulsory maternity leave of 28 days, before giving birth and 70 days after the birth of the child. As a rule, part of the maternity leave for 70 days after childbirth is used by the mother of the child, but this right can also be exercised by the father in two specific cases.[369]	Yes, after the obligatory period of 70 days after the birth of the child the parental leave may be used by the father, if the mother has ceased to exercise the right to maternity/parental leave	100 % of the basic wage if the mother was employed continuously for 12 months by the employer concerned. If an employee has continuously worked between 6 and 12 months before the leave, the compensation of the employer is calculated as 70 % of the average monthly salary. If an employee has worked continuously between 3 and 6 months the compensation is 50 % of the average monthly salary. If an employee has worked continuously up to 3 months, the compensation is 30 % of the average monthly salary
Netherlands	16 weeks	Between 4 and 6 weeks are compulsory before birth and at least 10 weeks after birth[370]	No, except in case of the mother dying during the birth or maternity leave.	100 % of salary paid, up to maximum daily wage of EUR 214.28 per day.

369 1. If two or more children are born, this right can be used by both parents at the same time; 2. In a case where the mother dies at childbirth, is seriously ill, has left the child, has been deprived of her parental right or is serving a sentence of imprisonment, the child's father has the right to use the maternity leave from the day of the child's birth.

370 If the child has to remain in hospital for longer than eight days after the birth, the maternity leave may be extended. The maximum extension is ten weeks: Article 3:1(5) Work and Care Act, 2001.

Country	Duration	Obligatory period	Possibility to share ML with the father?	Payment
North Macedonia	9 months (38 weeks), 15 months for multiple births	73 days (approx. 10 weeks): 28 days (4 weeks) before birth and 45 days (approx. 6 weeks) after birth	The leave cannot be shared, but can be taken over by the father after 9 months (38 weeks), or 15 months (52 weeks) for multiple births, provided that the mother is incapacitated or she does not use the leave	100 % of the average individual salary for the last 12 months (52 weeks) (or minimum 6 months (approx. 25 weeks)), but not higher than the value of four average salaries at national level (EUR 1 400 approximately). If the mother uses the obligatory part, the rest of the leave is paid 50 % on top of her regular salary
Norway	Nine weeks of parental leave are reserved for the mother.[371] The parents can choose 100 % or 80 % payment during the parental leave period. 15 weeks of the parental leave are reserved for each of the parents (termed the 'mother's quota') if you choose 100 % payment. If the mother chooses 80 %, the mother's (and father's) quota is 19 weeks.	3 weeks before birth and 6 weeks after	Depends if you choose 100 % or 80 % payment in parental leave. 15 (or 19) weeks reserved for each of the parents. The remaining period of parental leave can be shared.	Level of sick pay, 100 % of normal full pay with a maximum of EUR 58 807.28 per year
Poland	20 weeks and from 31 to 37 weeks in cases of multiple birth, depending on the number of children	14 weeks after birth[372]	The remaining weeks can be taken by the father, with consent of the mother	100 % of average earnings, no ceiling
Portugal	'Initial parental leave just for the mother' 6 weeks after birth. 'Initial parental leave' for the remaining time until 120 or 150 days, according to the choice of parents	6 weeks for the mother after birth (the 'initial parental leave')	The period remaining after the confinement period of 6 weeks after giving birth can be divided between both parents	No payment by the employer, but a social security allowance paid on the basis of 100 % of the average salary of the worker if 120 days are taken or 80 % if 150 days are taken. No ceiling to payment

371 Maternity leave is specifically defined as being included in and a part of the parental leave. The Norwegian solution thus blurs the two different types of leave.

372 The compulsory period of maternity leave is only eight weeks if the female worker has a certificate of incapacity for self-support (Article 180(6) of the Labour Code) or is in hospital because of a medical condition that prevents her from personally taking care of her child (Article 180(10) of the Labour Code).

Country	Duration	Obligatory period	Possibility to share ML with the father?	Payment
Romania	18 weeks	6 weeks after birth	No	85 % of average monthly income of the last 6 months, not more than 12 minimum salaries
Serbia	45 days at the earliest, and 28 days in any case, prior to the time of the expected delivery and three full months from the date of birth	Must commence maternity leave 28 days before the expected date of delivery and cannot be on maternity leave shorter than 3 full months		The amount of maternity pay is equal to the average basic salary paid in the past 18 months prior to the month in which maternity leave was taken, up to a maximum of 3 average salaries in Serbia.
Slovakia	34 weeks (37 weeks for single mothers; 43 for multiple births)	6-8 weeks before birth and 6 weeks after birth	No, but men can receive maternity allowance if the mother agrees to it and not at the same time	Maternity benefit for 34 weeks amounting to 75 % of the mother's daily income, maximum EUR 1 548.70 per month
Slovenia	15 weeks, which commence 4 weeks before the expected date of birth	15 days (approx. 2 weeks), before or after birth or both	No. The father has the right to maternity leave only if the mother: 1. has died, 2. has left the child, 3. is permanently or temporarily unable to live and work independently	100 % of the average salary of the last 12 months immediately prior to the date on which benefits were claimed; no ceiling
Spain[373]	Birth-related leave with similar features for both parents. 16 weeks, for the biological mother One week more for each parent if the child has a disability[374]	6 weeks after birth for the mother	No, the father also has the right to birth-related leave[375]	100 % of monthly salary, dependent on minimum period of working time, no ceiling (however, maximum monthly amount of social security contributions and thus maternity benefits of EUR 4 070.10[376]

373 Following the reform introduced by Royal Decree 6/2019 of 1 March 2019. Transition period until 2021.
374 Also extendable in case of multiple births or hospitalisation of the child.
375 However, there are some possibilities to share the leave during the transition period.
376 For the contributory maternity leave. There is also a non-contributory maternity leave if a working mother does not meet the requirements of the contributory maternity leave. The allowance is then EUR 753.06.

Country	Duration	Obligatory period	Possibility to share ML with the father?	Payment
Sweden	14 weeks (7 weeks before estimated birth and 7 weeks after birth)	2 weeks before or after birth	Maternity leave is included in the parental leave out of which the father is entitled to half. Only the mother may take out part of the leave before the birth of the child.	Maternity benefits are paid at sick-leave level (80 % of income up to a level of approximately EUR 47 000 per year). If not, income based, benefits are paid at the basic level (*grundnivå*) of EUR 25 (SEK 250) a day.
Turkey	16 weeks	All: 8 weeks before birth and 8 weeks after – 8 weeks before birth can be reduced to 3 weeks (with approval of doctor), with the remaining 5 weeks added to the 8 weeks after birth. Multiple births: 2 additional weeks added to antenatal leave	No, but if a civil servant or employee dies after giving birth, the remaining leave is transferred to the spouse	For civil servants, regular salaries are paid throughout the leave by public bodies. Female employees are paid via the Social Security Institution, which amounts to sickness payments (two thirds of regular wages).[377]
United Kingdom	52 weeks	2 weeks after birth	Yes, between 2 and 26 weeks may be transferred to the father (shared parental leave)	Entitled to 39 weeks of maternity pay; 90 % of salary in the first 6, and a fixed rate of GBP 151.20 (EUR 174.10) per week during the remaining 33 weeks

4.3.2 Conditions for eligibility

In **Italy**, **Montenegro**, **Serbia** and **Sweden**, no specific conditions apply for entitlement to maternity benefits. In **Malta**, the applicant must be a citizen of Malta, married/cohabiting with a citizen of Malta, a citizen of a European Union Member State, a citizen of a member country of the European Social Charter, or have refugee status and ordinarily reside in Malta or Gozo. Moreover, she must have availed herself of more than 14 weeks of maternity leave.

The following countries have specific eligibility conditions for entitlement to (full) maternity benefits, most often required periods of employment or (statutory social) insurance: **Albania**, **Austria**, **Belgium**, **Bulgaria**, **Croatia**, **Cyprus**, **Czechia**, **Denmark**,[378] **Estonia**, **Finland**, **France**, **Hungary**, **Iceland**, **Ireland**, **Liechtenstein**, **Lithuania**, **Luxembourg**, the **Netherlands**, **North Macedonia**, **Norway**, **Poland**, **Portugal**, **Serbia**, **Slovakia**, **Slovenia**, **Spain**,[379] **Turkey** and the **United Kingdom**.

In **Germany**, quasi-subordinate workers are covered by the new Maternity Protection Act. However, they are explicitly not entitled to maternity allowances except when they are insured under a statutory health

377 For outpatient (not hospitalised) treatment. For inpatient treatment, the maternity allowance is set at half the daily earnings.
378 The right to maternity benefit depends on the mother's legal residence in Denmark.
379 For the contributory maternity leave a previous period of working time is required, but this does not apply to the non-contributory maternity leave.

insurance scheme and even then the allowance is no more than EUR 13 per day and EUR 210 in total.[380] The national expert considers that, with regard to the criteria for a comparable need for social protection, these mothers (to be) should be equally covered.

In **Greece**, social security legislation makes the payment of the maternity allowance conditional on the completion of 200 working days during the two years preceding the commencement of maternity leave.[381] According to the national expert, this constitutes a violation of Article 11(4) of Directive 92/85/EEC. Moreover, the granting of maternity allowance is subject to stricter conditions than the granting of sickness allowance (the granting of the latter is subject to 120 working days in the year preceding the notification of the sickness whereas conditions for sickness benefits in kind were lowered in 2020 to 75 and further to 50 working days in the year preceding the notification of the sickness to facilitate entitlement thereto due to the pandemic crisis).[382] The national expert considers this a violation of Article 11(3) of Directive 92/85/EEC, which requires that the maternity allowance guarantee income at least equivalent to that which the worker concerned would receive in the event of a break in her activities on grounds connected with her state of health.[383] In addition, fixed-term state employees are not entitled to the same rights and protection as their colleagues with permanent contracts. The national expert points at diverse forms of direct sex discrimination of, in particular, substitute state school teachers with fixed-term contracts. Adopted following an intervention by the Greek Ombudsman, the new provision of Article 26 Act 4599/2019 provides the right of female substitute teachers to reduced working hours or alternatively to a paid leave for the upbringing of the child up to three months and 15 days, which is to be taken exclusively after the end of the maternity leave, which covers adoptive and foster mothers as well. The time period of the above leave constitutes teaching service and is recognised as insurable time by the competent social security insurance schemes.

In **Latvia**, official employment is required, but a calculation on presumed income is possible in order to be entitled to an allowance.

4.3.3 Right to return to the same or an equivalent job

The right to return to the same or an equivalent job on terms and conditions which are no less favourable and to benefit from any improvement in working conditions is provided for in Article 15 of Recast Directive 2006/54/EC. In most states a worker returning to work after her maternity leave is protected against unfavourable treatment. Workers are generally guaranteed by law to be able to return to the same job or, if this is not possible, to an equivalent or similar job. In **Austria**, parental leave periods have to be factored into time-related pay scheme advancements, so that the salary of every employee returning to the workplace after the leave period starts at the same level as they would be eligible for if they had been working.[384] In **Finland**, the criteria that determine an equivalent job are the nature of the employee's previous work and their education and work experience. The **Irish** Maternity Protection Act contains very detailed rules on return to work.[385] In **Italy**, workers have the right to return to the same workplace or to another workplace in the same municipality and to work there until the child is one year old. In the **United Kingdom**, women have the right to return to the same job if returning from a period

380 The Federal Social Court, judgment of 26 September 2017, B 1 KR 31/16 R, decided that public broadcasters are obliged to contribute to the funding of maternity allowances for anyone for whom they pay social security contributions, even if they classify these people as 'freelancers' under labour law.

381 Greece, Article 39 of Act 1846/1951 on IKA, OJ A 179/21.06.1951.

382 Greece, Article 23 Act 4529/2018, OJ A 56/23.3.2018; Article 37(8) Act 4670/2020, OJ A 43/28.2.2020 reduced the minimum of 75 days to 50 days as of 28.02.2020.

383 The national expert highlights that the fact that Greek law foresees a maternity leave that exceeds the minimum EU law requirements in length and pay is irrelevant. The CJEU has also condemned adverse treatment related to forms of leave granted by national legislation which exceeded minimum EU law requirements: See e.g. CJEU, C-284/02, *Land Brandenburg v Ursula Sass*, 18 November 2004; ECLI:EU:C:2004:722, concerning maternity leave longer than 14 weeks.

384 Para. 15f Maternity Protection Act, in force from 1 August 2019, https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokumente/Bundesnormen/NOR40215892/NOR40215892.pdf, para. 7c Fathers' Parental Leave Act, https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokumente/Bundesnormen/NOR40022232/NOR40022232.pdf.

385 In Section 26.

of no more than 26 weeks' leave. If the employee takes a longer period of maternity leave, the right to return to the same job is qualified: if return to the same job is not reasonably practicable, the right is to return to another job which is suitable for the worker, appropriate for her to do in the circumstances, and which is on terms and conditions not less favourable than those which would have applied had she not been absent.[386]

However, a few countries do not provide such a guarantee (e.g. the **Netherlands**)[387] or they do not do so explicitly (e.g. **Belgium**, **Estonia**, **Germany** and **Turkey**). In **Germany**, such a provision is not necessary. Due to the German concept of maternity leave, the issue of 'returning to the same job' does not arise because the employment relationship remains totally unaffected. However, a transfer to a non-equivalent post after maternity leave would be direct discrimination under the General Equal Treatment Act and the worker concerned would be awarded compensation.[388] In **Estonia**, equivalent job and improved working conditions are mentioned if returning from maternity leave, but not explicitly stressed after parental leave. While there is prohibition of dismissal, it happens that women/men cannot enjoy their rights after parental leave. In **Croatia**, if an employer could not provide an equivalent job, this would be considered a regular dismissal, for which the employer would have to have a justifiable reason. The employer must stipulate the reasons in writing and provide a statement of the reasons.

In **Hungary**, the current Labour Code (adopted in 2012) does not expressly guarantee the right to return to the original job or an equivalent job at the end of maternity/parental leave. Due to the cumulative interpretation of various sections of this Code, however, the employee has the right to return to work with the same employer and, in the absence of a mutually agreed modification of the employment contract, the employee has the right to return to their original job.

In **Greece**, this requirement often seems to be disregarded in practice in the private sector, as evidenced by the complaints submitted by women to the Ombudsman.

4.4 Adoption leave

EU law does not require the Member States to introduce a specific adoption leave. However, Member States which recognise such a right must ensure that men and women exercising the right to adoption leave are protected against dismissal and are entitled at the end of this leave to return to their jobs or to equivalent posts on conditions which are no less favourable to them, and to benefit from any improvement in working conditions to which they would have been entitled during their absence (Article 16 of Directive 2006/54/EC).

In addition, adoptive parents are entitled to parental leave according to Clause 2 of the Parental Leave Directive 2010/18/EU. Clause 4 of this Directive stipulates that the Member States and/or social partners shall assess the need for additional measures to address the specific needs of adoptive parents.

All countries provide for adoption leave, but in some countries age limits of the adopted child apply and the length of adoption leave differs between countries. For example, in **Austria**, adoption leave of at least six months can be taken when children below the age of seven years are adopted. For younger children, adoption leave can be taken up to the child's second birthday. In **Bulgaria**, an adoptive mother of a child up to five years old has right to leave of 365 days from taking the child but no later than the child reaching the age of five years. When the adoptive parents are married and the mother works under

386 United Kingdom, Regulation 18(2), 18A.

387 The Commission started an infringement procedure on this issue on 24 January 2013, infringement No. 2013/45. On 22 October 2014 the CJEU handed down its judgment on this issue, and dismissed the action as inadmissible because not all of the Article 258 TFEU formalities had been complied with. Specifically, the Commission did not identify any rule of Dutch law that in its content or application was contrary to the wording or the objective of the relevant provisions of Directive 2006/54. See Judgment of 22 October 2014, *Commission v the Netherlands*, C-252/13, ECLI:EU:C:2014:2312.

388 Germany, Labour Court of Wiesbaden, Judgment of 18 December 2008, 5 Ca 46/08.

a labour contract, she can agree for the adoptive father to take the leave after the first six months. In **Czechia**, adoption leave can last until the child reaches three years of age; if a child is older than three, but younger than seven, when adopted, the leave can be taken for 22 weeks. The adoptive parents are entitled to maternity benefit and also to a parental allowance paid from the state's social support system, under the same conditions as biological parents. In **Ireland**, the length of adoption leave is 24 weeks for a qualified adopter (who can also be a self-employed parent and this is also available for male same-sex couples). The benefit is paid on the same terms as maternity benefit and there is an additional unpaid leave of 16 weeks.[389]

In **Estonia**, adoption leave is 70 days following the date of entry into force of the court judgment approving the adoption (if a child is under 10), paid entirely by the state. An adoptive parent has the same rights as biological parents. In the **United Kingdom**, specific eligibility conditions apply, such as 26 weeks' qualifying service. In **Belgium**, **Croatia** and **Spain** the period of leave is extended for adoption of a disabled child.

In **Albania**, **Austria**, **Bulgaria**, **Denmark**, **Estonia**, **Hungary**, **Iceland**, **Ireland**, **Italy**, **Luxembourg**, **North Macedonia**, **Norway**, **Poland**, **Portugal**,[390] **Slovakia**, and **Spain**,[391] most if not all protections and rights available under statutory maternity leave are also available under statutory adoption leave. The same is true in **Greece**, although in the public sector the protection does not apply to workers with a fixed-term contract and the national expert points out a breach of Directives 2010/18/EU and 1999/70/EC. In **Hungary**, an 'adoption fee' was introduced in 2020 for (insured) parents who adopt an older child (without age limit). The benefit is provided for six months (EUR 625 per month, reduced by taxes to EUR 470 per month).

In **Slovakia** so-called substitute parents (i.e. adoptive parents, foster carers or carers in the event of the death of the child's mother) can apply for maternity and parental leave. In **Romania** there is no specific adoption leave, but the law stipulates that parents who adopt a child have a right to parental leave.[392] In Lithuania, there is a similar approach[393] as well as in **Serbia** and **Sweden**.

4.5 Parental leave

Directive 2010/18/EU repealed Directive 96/34/EC by 8 March 2012 and implements the revised Framework Agreement on parental leave that the European social partners reached in June 2009.[394] This Agreement lays down minimum requirements designed to facilitate the reconciliation of parental and professional responsibilities for working parents (Clause 1(1)). Member States may adopt more favourable measures. The Framework Agreement applies to all workers, men and women, who have an employment contract or employment relationship as defined by the law, collective agreements and/or practice in force in each Member State. The Agreement thus also applies to part-time workers, fixed-term contract workers and temporary agency workers (Clauses 1(1) and 1(2)). They are entitled to an individual right to parental leave on the grounds of the birth or adoption of a child so as to take care of that child until a given age (up to eight years). The parental leave shall be granted for at least a period of four months and should, in principle, be provided on a non-transferable basis. To encourage both parents to take leave on a more equal basis, at least one of the four months has to be provided on a non-transferable basis (Clause 2). In practice, up until now parental leave is still much more often taken by mothers than fathers.[395] Member States are not yet obliged to introduce (partially) paid parental leave.

389 Self-employed people are also entitled to adoption leave benefit provided they have the requisite social insurance contributions, which is the same as under the maternity legislation.
390 Compared to the 'initial parental leave'.
391 In cases of adoption or fostering of a child younger than 6 years or between 6 and 18 if a child is disabled.
392 Romania, Article 8(2) of the Government Emergency Ordinance No.111/2010.
393 There is a right to three months parental leave for adoptive parents: Article 134(2) of the Labour Code.
394 Council Directive 2010/18/EU of 8 March 2010 implementing the revised Framework Agreement on parental leave concluded by BUSINESSEUROPE, UEAPME, CEEP and ETUC and repealing Directive 96/34/EC, OJ 2010, L 68/13.
395 See Eurostat: http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=lfso_10lparlea&lang=en.

In 2015, the former European network of legal experts in the field of gender equality, published a comprehensive report on the implementation of the Parental Leave Directive 2010/18/EU.[396]

In July 2019, a new Directive on Work-life Balance 2019/1158 entered into force which also addresses parental leave.[397] The main changes are notably that the non-transferable period is increased from one month to two months of parental leave which cannot be transferred from one parent to the other (Article 5(2)). Workers will be entitled to an adequate payment or allowance during the two non-transferable months of the parental leave. The amount of the allowance has to be determined by the Member States (Article 8(1) and (2)). In addition, specific provisions apply regarding employment rights, protection against unfavourable treatment and dismissal, as well as the burden of proof, victimisation and penalties (Articles 10-14). Finally, equality bodies will be competent with regard to issues of discrimination within the scope of the Directive (Article 15). The Directive must be transposed into national law by 2 August 2022 (Article 20(1)).[398]

As of 1 July 2020, fathers, same-sex partners and partners of the mother in the **Netherlands** are entitled to a benefit of 70 % of the daily salary during five weeks of additional birth leave/parental leave, with a cap of 70 % of the maximum daily wage as defined in social security legislation. The mother's partner is also entitled to 'normal' birth leave, which consists of one week of paid leave. This leave must be paid by the employer and must be taken within four weeks of the birth of the child. The additional birth leave can be taken within six months after the birth. Apart from this form of parental leave, which is actually birth leave, the social security system in the Netherlands does not provide for an allowance during parental leave.

In **Spain**, birth-related leave as introduced by Royal Decree 6/2019 combines features of paternity leave and parental leave as defined and regulated in Articles 3 to 5 of Directive 2019/1158. In the case of the other parent, birth-related leave is intended for the provision of care to the child,[399] as defined in Article 3.1.b. of Directive 2019/1158. When fully implemented in 2021, it will be for a period of 16 weeks, the first six of which are compulsory and must be used immediately after the birth of the child, full-time and without interruption.

Many countries did not formally implement the Parental Leave Directive 2010/18/EU because they believed that their national legislation already complied with EU law (**Austria**, **Czechia**, **Finland**, **Germany**, **Hungary**, **Iceland**, **Latvia**, **Lithuania**, **Portugal**, **Spain**, **Sweden**). In addition, the experts for the EEA countries of **Iceland**, **Liechtenstein** and **Norway** indicate that national law is in accordance with EU law. **Albania** has partially implemented Directive 2010/18/EU. Part-time workers, fixed-term contract workers or people with a contract of employment or employment relationship with a temporary agency are excluded from the right to parental leave. In **Turkey**, there is no legislation and/or national collective agreement, or case law specifically mentioning parental leave within the understanding of Directive 2010/18/EU. However, there are provisions for family-related leave or leave related to childcare for civil servants that may be used for family/parental issues, which are quite generous and exceed the requirements of Directive 2010/18/EU. Three candidate countries (**Montenegro**, **North Macedonia** and

396 Do Rosário Palma Ramalho, M., Foubert, P., Burri, S. (2015), *The implementation of Parental Leave Directive 2010/18 in 33 European Countries*, European Commission, and Masselot, A. (2018), *Family leave: enforcement of the protection against dismissal and unfavourable treatment*, European Commission, both available at: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/publications.

397 Directive (EU) 2019/ 1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU, OJ L 188, 12.7.2019, pp. 79–93, available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2019.188.01.0079.01.ENG.

398 The implementation period is two years longer as regards the payment of the last two weeks of the non-transferable period of parental leave (Article 20(2)). See for an overview of the impact of the Work-Life Balance Directive 2019/1158 on the national level: Oliveira, Á., De la Corte-Rodríguez, M. and Lütz, F. (2020) 'The new Directive on Work-Life Balance: towards a new paradigm of family care and equality?' 45(3) *European Law Review, 295* and Revue de Droit Comparé du Travail et de la Sécurité Sociale, Dossier thématique, 'La Directive 2019/1158 du 20 juin 2019 concernant l'équilibre entre vie professionnelle et privée des parents et des aidants', 2020/3.

399 In the case of birth-related leave for biological mothers, the aim of the legislator is also to guarantee time to recover after giving birth, to ensure the health of women and to prevent undue pressure to return to work too soon.

Serbia) have not implemented the Directive. In the other countries, formal transposition of the Directive has occurred or minor amendments to national law have been made.

Conditions on access to parental leave in **Luxembourg's** legislation regarding the status of the worker at the time of the birth were considered contrary to EU law by the CJEU. However, this was not the case for the condition that the parent concerned must be employed without interruption for a period of at least 12 months immediately preceding the start of the parental leave.[400]

Directive 2010/18/EU contains minimum requirements. The entitlements to parental leave differ greatly, in particular as regards length and/or income during leave, and in some countries much more favourable provisions apply. For example, in **Norway**, parents are entitled to 12 months of leave, of which 46 weeks are paid (parental benefit) at the full daily rate, respectively 56 weeks at a reduced rate in connection with the birth of the child. In addition, parents are entitled to two more years of (unpaid) parental leave until the child is three years old or until the workers have another child. In **Portugal**, there are several types of 'parental leave', including a 'grandparent's leave', a right to leave to assist a daughter younger than 16 who has given birth, for a maximum of 30 days.[401] Taken together, different forms of leave to be able to take care of children are more generous than the parental leave provided for in Directive 2010/18/EU.

In **Estonia** parental leave is also quite generous, as it can last until the child is three years old. But it is also very inflexible, given the fact that it must immediately follow maternity leave (of 70 days) and can only be taken by one person at a time.[402] It is assumed that the mother continues with the leave and is entitled to the monthly parental benefit. If the initial recipient of the parental benefit is the father, it must be requested in advance and the mother must prove that she is not on parental leave. As this requirement only applies to the mother, this amounts to direct sex discrimination.

More favourable rules also apply in some countries to parents of a disabled child or a child with a long-term illness (e.g. **Belgium**, **Croatia**, **Cyprus**, **Czechia**, **Denmark**, **Finland**, **France**, **Greece**, **Hungary**, **Ireland**, **Montenegro**, **Portugal**, **Serbia**, **Slovenia**, **Sweden**). For example, in **Belgium**, if the child is disabled, parental leave can be taken until the child is 21 years old and parents of twins are entitled to parental leave for each child. In **Denmark**, parents have a right to leave and a right to compensation for loss of income if they look after their mentally impaired child or a child who suffers from long-term illness at home. Diverse forms of paid and unpaid leave exist in **Greece**, including for adoptive parents, foster parents and guardians. In **Slovenia**, parental leave can be extended by 90 days; in **Poland** an additional childcare leave of 36 months can be taken until the child is 18 years old (thus in total 72 months).

In **France**, the possibility of eight days of paid bereavement leave has been available since 2020 for families who have lost a child under 25 years old or a person under their care of the same age,[403] which is in addition to the paid leave[404] for the death of a child.[405] This must be taken within a year of the child's death.

If the period specified in a fixed-term contract ends during parental leave, there is no obligation for the employer to prolong the employment relationship in **Czechia**, but the parental allowance from the state social support system continues to be paid without any change.

400 CJEU, 25 February 2021, C-129/20 (*XI*), ECLI:EU:C:2021/140.
401 Portugal, Article 50 of the Labour Code.
402 The state is changing the system of parental leave and benefits in 2018-2022. The aim is to make it easier to reconcile work and family life and to make the system of parental leave and benefits more flexible.
403 France, Act No. 2020-692 of 8 June 2020 on the improvement of rights of workers and the support of families after the loss of a child. From 1 July 2020, after the death of their child, employees and civil servants will be awarded bereavement leave of seven days, rather than five days, which was previously the case. A supplemental paid leave of eight days will be added to the first leave. https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT000041975976.
404 France, Article L.331-9 of Social Security Code.
405 France, Article L.3142-1 Labour Code and new Article L.3142-4 Labour Code which extends to five (death of a child) or seven days minimum (child under 25) and if the child regardless of his/her age was a parent, amended by Law No 2020-692 of 8 June 2020.

4.5.1 Duration, payment and transferability of parental leave

In **all countries**, national legislation regarding parental leave is applicable to both the public and the private sectors (although not always in the same way).

The length of this leave varies considerably by country, however. The table below provides an overview.[406]

Table 3 Parental leave

Country	Parental leave		
	Length	Payment	Transferable?
Albania	Minimum 4 months until the child is 6	Unpaid	No[407]
Austria	Individual right until the child is 2[408]	Childcare Allowance paid by Healthcare Provider available (income related or lump sum depending on length of reception)[409]	No[410]
Belgium	4 months per parent	Flat rate	No
Bulgaria	6 months per parent	Unpaid	In part (up to five months).[411]
Croatia	6 months if only one parent uses the parental leave or for single parents. 8 months combined[412] (for the first and second child), (30 months combined for third and consecutive children or twins)	Yes, paid by state budget at 100 % of the salary, but capped at 170 % of the budget calculation base (currently EUR 757).[413]	Two months non- transferable
Cyprus	18 weeks per child (individual right for each parent/23 weeks for widow(er)s	Unpaid	Non-transferable, exceptionally only if two weeks leave at least have been taken, two weeks of the remaining leave are transferable.

406 This table has been adapted from McColgan, A. (2015), *Measures to address the challenges of work-life balance in the EU Member States, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway*, European Commission, pp. 68-69, available at: http://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/3631-reconciliation.

407 Unless one of the parents dies.

408 Each parent is able to reserve three months of leave to take later. Parents are also entitled to share one month of parental leave. In this case, the overall period is shortened for this 'double month' and parental leave is only granted for 23, rather than 24 months.

409 The duration for receiving child care benefits does not necessarily overlap with parental leave periods!

410 Both parents have the same right to parental leave; they can divide the duration of parental leave between them. An agreement on how to do this must be reached. In principle, only one parent at a time can take the leave (with few excptions). Fathers can take one month of parental leave parallel to the mother's maternity leave, which shortens the overall duration of the parental leave by one month.

411 Directive 2010/18/EU requires that one of the four minimum months should be non-transferable. In Bulgaria, a longer leave is provided and the one-month non-transferable period is respected.

412 Usually 4 months for one parent and 4 months for the other parent, of which two months are non-transferable.

413 Croatia, Article 24b of the Act on Maternity and Parental Benefits.

Country	Parental leave		
	Length	Payment	Transferable?
Czechia[414]	Until the child is 4	Flat rate social security allowance (EUR 11 000, CZK 300 000 for the whole period)[415]	Yes
Denmark[416]	32 weeks per parent. The father or co-mother may begin their 32 weeks of leave during the first 14 weeks of maternity leave. Both parents may choose to take part-time leave Both parents may choose to save 8-13 weeks of the leave to be taken at a later stage before the child is 9 years old.	100 % salary according to some collective agreements for 1-32 of the weeks. Benefit for 32 weeks per child: EUR 592 per week. The benefits can be taken at a lower rate, so the benefits are extended to last up to 46 weeks. The weeks of benefits can be shared between the parents.	The parents can agree to share the 32 weeks of benefits between them. The parents can take leave with benefits on a part-time basis – so one parent is on leave e.g. Monday-Tuesday, and the other parent is on leave Wednesday-Friday.
Estonia	3 years minus 70 days	100 % paid (ceiling exists) for 435 days within the period, until the child turns three years old, the rest is unpaid	Yes, the parents can agree the timing, but only one parent at time.
Finland	26 weeks per child (158 weekdays)[417]	70 %, capped	Yes[418]
France	One year, and can be renewed twice until child is 3 years old	Flat rate, period depends on the first child (six months, one year if the parents share the leave), second child (additional six months), subsequent children.	Yes. Possibility to extend the parental leave if the other parent takes six months.
Germany	3 years per parent	67 % up to 100 % for 14 months (when 2 months are taken by the other parent), then unpaid, 4 additional months paid when both parents are working part-time	No, but the parental allowances depend on the sharing of parental leave between the parents.

414 In the Czech Republic parental leave should be distinguished from parental allowance.

415 The parental allowance has been significantly increased (Act No. 363/2019, amending Act No. 117/1995, on state social support, the amendment enters into force as of 1 January 2020), but only for those who will have children in the future, or who are still taking care of at least one child. It is not possible to increase the allowance for parents who have already claimed the parental allowance and returned to work, even if their child is, for example, only 2.5 years old. Parents who had claimed EUR 8 500 (CZK 220 000) could not claim the remaining EUR 2 500 (CZK 80 000), as they are no longer getting the allowance.

416 Amendment to the Act on Maternity and Parental Leave has been submitted in December 2021, proposal 104 of 22 December 2021, expected to come into force 1 July 2022. The amendment redistributes the weeks of maternity, paternity and parental weeks with a view to implement Articles 5 and 8 in the Work life balance directive.

417 The planned family leave reform would introduce a leave period of about 14 months for both parents (or, the only parent in case of single parent families), of which about 6.6 months would be non-transferable for each parent, and 69 weekdays would be transferable: Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (2020) *Perhevapaauudistus tähtää perheiden hyvinvointiin ja tasa-arvon lisäämiseen* (Reform of family leave aims at family welfare and increased equality), press release 2 February 2020; https://valtioneuvosto.fi/artikkeli/-/asset_publisher/1271139/perhevapaauudistus-tahtaa-perheiden-hyvinvointiin-ja-tasa-arvon-lisaamiseen.

418 According to parental agreement (Chapter 9, Section 8 of the Sickness Insurance Act).

Country	Parental leave		
	Length	Payment	Transferable?
Greece[419]	4 months per parent (9 in the public sector)	Unpaid (private sector); fully paid (public sector)	Yes, fully transferable in public sector (no minimum period which is not transferable). Not transferable in the private sector.
Hungary	3 years until the child is 10 years old (10 years under certain circumstances, e.g. chronically ill or severely disabled children)	Unpaid leave (but state benefits may be available) Both parents of children under 16 years are entitled to additional 2-7 days of paid leave annually, depending on the number of children. 'Childcare fee' 70 % of pay (capped) until the child is 2, then very low flat rate	Yes, it is a joint right for the parents. Under certain circumstances, insured (working / not retired) grandparents may be eligible for parental leave as well, provided that the child is being raised in his/her parents' household
Iceland	4 months per parent	Unpaid	An independent entitlement by each parent. Non-transferable.
Ireland	26 weeks per parent (since 1 September 2020); In addition, each parent is entitled to five weeks parents' leave	26 unpaid leave Parents' benefits.[420]	No, except up to 14 weeks of parental leave if both parents are employed by the same employer. The five weeks parent's leave is non-transferable.
Italy	10/11 months for both parents per child. Single parents: 10 months	30 % (social security allowance) for a total of six months for both parents for the first six years of the child's life	In part (two months)
Latvia	18 months per parent (under the Labour Law)	60 % for one of the parents who stopped working (under social security law, until child attains 12 months of age)[421]	No
Liechtenstein	4 months per parent	Unpaid	No

419 After the cut-off date (01.01.2021), parental leave of four-months to be taken up to the age of eight years of the child was provided by Article 28 Act 4808/2021, implementing Articles 5 and 8 of Directive 2019/1158. See EELN flash report of 09.07.2021, https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/5444-greece-greece-transposes-directive-2019-1158-on-work-life-balance-141-kb.

420 Ireland, Parent's Leave and Benefit Act 2019. The provisions apply to a parent who fulfils eligibility requirements as the parent of a child adopted or born on or after 1 November 2019. The two weeks' leave can be extended to a maximum of nine weeks by ministerial order.

421 Alternatively, if a parent would like to receive parental allowance until a child is 18 months old, then the amount of allowance will be 43.75 % of the gross salary. Article 10^{6}(4) of the Law on Maternity and Sickness Insurance, stipulates since the 1 January 2020 that if a woman gives birth to another child within a period of three years while still caring for a previously born child, she is entitled to parental allowance for the second child, which is not lower than that for the previous child: *Grozījumi likumā 'Par maternitātes un slimības apdrošināšanu'*, Official Gazette No. 255A, 19 December 2019. Such provision is obviously directly discriminatory against fathers, since they might well be in a similar situation.

Country	Parental leave		
	Length	Payment	Transferable?
Lithuania	Until the child is 3	Allowance up to two years 77.58 % until the child is one year old. Or 54.31 % after the end of the maternity leave until the child reaches one year and 31.03 % until the child is two years old, subject to minimum and maximum ceilings.	Yes
Luxembourg	4 or 6 months per parent full-time; 8 or 12 months half-time; or flexible leave over a period of 20 months	Social security benefit, proportion of the wage, min EUR 1 922, max EUR 3 200 (for full-time leave)	No
Malta	4 months per parent (12 months per child in the public sector)	Unpaid	No
Montenegro	70 days after the birth of the baby until the expiry of 365 days	100 % paid (when having worked continuously for 12 months and more, before the leave) 70 % (when having worked continuously between 6 and 12 months before the leave) 50 % (between 3 and 6 months) 30 % (3 months or less)	Yes, both parents have the right to equal parts of the parental leave. If one parent stops parental leave, the other parent is entitled to use the unused part after the expiry of 30 days from the date that the parent started to use the parental leave.
Netherlands	26 weeks per parent	Unpaid, but collective agreements may impose a (partially) paid leave (public sector)	No
North Macedonia	52 weeks (78 weeks for multiple childbirth) – father is entitled to parental leave if the mother does not take maternity leave	Paid by the state	Yes, the father can use the leave only if the mother does not use it
Norway	12 months fully paid, 12 months each of the parents unpaid[422]	100 % for 46 weeks or 80 % for 56 weeks, capped	In part. A minimum of 15 weeks is reserved for the mother (6 weeks after birth and 9 weeks as the mother wants = mother's quota) and 15 weeks for the father (father's quota).[423]
Poland	32 weeks (34 in case of multiple birth) In addition: 36 months childcare leave	6 (or 8) weeks, 100 % allowance, then 60 % for the remaining weeks Unpaid	Yes

422 The legislation does not apply to matters concerning the Parliament.
423 If the parents chose the 100 % remuneration rate, If they choose the reduced rate with 80 % payment, 19 weeks are reserved for each of the parents. The remaining part of the leave may be shared between the parents as they deem fit.

Country	Parental leave		
	Length	Payment	Transferable?
Portugal	3 months (full-time) per parent, 12 months (part-time) (parental leave in strict sense)	25 % (allowance during the first three months, if parental leave is taken immediately after maternity leave)	No
Romania	2 years per child	85 %, cannot be lower than 85 % of the national minimum wage	Transferable, except for one month that is mandatory for the parent who did not take the parental leave
Serbia	3 months after the birth until 365 days after commencement of maternity leave (2 years for every third and subsequent child)	EUR 850 for the first child; EUR 2 000 for the second child; EUR 12 200 for the third child; EUR 18 300 for the fourth child (all in 24 instalments)	No
Slovakia	Until the child is 3[424]	Flat rate (EUR 220.70 for one child, EUR 337.50 for twins and EUR 405 for triplets) or EUR 370, if previously a maternity allowance or similar benefit for care of this child was received (EUR 462.50 for twins and EUR 555 for triplets)[425]	No
Slovenia	260 days per child	100 % social benefits, capped (minimum and maximum)	In part
Spain[426]	Until the child is 3[427] Leave can take different forms	Unpaid	No
Sweden	480 days (includes maternity leave) per child. Divided equally between the parents.	80 %, capped for 390 days, then flat rate at EUR 17 (SEK 180)	In part. A minimum of 90 days is reserved for the mother (mother quota) and 90 days for the father (father quota).
Turkey	No regulation on parental leave. (forms of unpaid leave related to children for women employees; family-related leave or leave related to childcare for civil servants)		
United Kingdom	18 weeks per parent	Unpaid	No

4.5.2 Right to return to the same or an equivalent job

According to Clause 5(1) of Directive 2010/18/EU, at the end of the parental leave workers have the right to return to the same or equivalent job.[428] Workers are entitled to rights acquired (or in the process

424 Six if disabled.
425 Parental allowance increases by 25 % per child in the case of multiple births and is reduced by 50 % if older children do not regularly attend compulsory school.
426 From 2021, see the information on maternity (Table 2) and paternity leave (Table 4). At the end of the transition period in 2021, birth-related leave (16 weeks) will be fully equalised between both parents. Birth-related leave as introduced by Royal Decree 6/2019 combines features of paternity leave and parental leave as defined and regulated in Articles 3 to 5 of Directive 2019/1158.
427 In addition, workers with children younger than nine months (on request up to 12 months if both parents exercise the right simultaneously), including adoptive and foster parents, and civil servants with children younger than 12 months, have the right to paid leave of one hour per day.
428 See, for example, CJEU 7 September 2017, C-174/16 (*H.*), ECLI:EU:C:2017:637.

of being acquired) on the date on which parental leave starts. These rights must be maintained as they stand until the end of parental leave (Clause 5(2)).[429]

In most countries where parental leave exists, Clause 5(1) and (2) has been implemented explicitly. However, there is no such legal right in **Albania**. In the **Netherlands**, there is no explicit legal right to return to the same or a comparable job after taking parental leave. The specific protection against unfavourable treatment related to parental leave is considered sufficient by the Dutch government. It is submitted that a specific legal provision would be a better way to implement Clause 5(1) and (2). This clause has not been explicitly implemented in **Belgium** either, but this seems not to be problematic in practice in the public sector. In the private sector, collective agreements might not take into account the period of parental leave for example for Christmas bonuses.

In **Hungary**, the Labour Code does not expressly guarantee the right of a parent to return to their original job or an equivalent job at the end of parental leave. A cumulative interpretation of the relevant regulations, however, leads to the conclusion that such a right is provided. The **German** Federal Parental Leave and Parental Allowances Act does not explicitly cover the right to return to one's former job or to an equivalent post.[430] The German Women Lawyers' Association points out that the lack of a right to return to work after parental leave violates Directive 2010/18/EU.[431]

In **Spain**, a worker has the right to return to the same job within one year of unpaid leave and to a similar job after one year of unpaid leave. In the **United Kingdom**, the right to return to the same job exists for employees from a period of no more than four weeks' leave.

In **France**, workers returning from parental leave are entitled to training if working techniques and methods have changed. In the public sector, parents who take parental leave keep their right to career advancement for the subsequent five years. This five-year period will be assimilated to effective work.[432] In 2019, the Court of Cassation qualified the refusal to return an employee to the equivalent job after maternity leave followed by parental leave as indirect sex discrimination.[433] **Irish** law explicitly addresses specific situations, such as a transfer of undertaking. In **Latvia**, the obligation to provide the same or/and equivalent job is absolute, there are no exceptions even if the post is abolished on account of structural, organisational or other objective reasons.

4.5.3 Protection against less favourable treatment or dismissal.[434]

Workers who take parental leave must be protected against less favourable treatment and dismissal (Clause 5(4)). If a worker is dismissed unlawfully, the calculation of fixed damages and of indemnity must be based on the full-time remuneration prior to the start of the (part-time) parental leave.[435]

In most countries, employees are specifically protected against unfavourable treatment and dismissal related to applying for and/or taking parental leave. However, there is no such right in **Albania**. In

429 See on social security entitlements Clause 5(5) of Directive 2010/18/EU and CJEU Judgment of 16 July 2009, *Gómez-Limón*, C-537/07, ECLI:EU:C:2009:462.

430 See Nassibi, G. et al. (2012), 'Geschlechtergleichstellung durch Arbeitszeitsouveränität' (Gender Equality and Working Time Sovereignty), *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Juristinnenbundes*, pp. 111-116.

431 See German Women Lawyers' Association (2014), 'Stellungnahme vom 26.06.2014 zum Entwurf eines Gesetzes zur Einführung des Elterngeld Plus mit Partnerschaftsbonus und einer flexibleren Elternzeit im BEEG', https://www.djb.de/verein/Kom-u-AS/K4/st14-10/.

432 France, Act No. 2019-828 6 August 2019 on the transformation of the civil service and Decree No. 2020-529 of 5 May 2020.

433 France, Court of Cassation, Social chamber 14 November 2019 No. 18-15682, https://www.courdecassation.fr/jurisprudence_2/arrets_publies_2986/chambre_sociale_3168/2019_9139/novembre_9548/1567_14_43913.html.

434 See the report produced by the European network of legal experts in the field of gender equality, Masselot, A. (2018) *Family leave: enforcement of the protection against dismissal and unfavourable treatment*, European Commission, available at: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/4808-family-leave-enforcement-of-the-protection-against-dismissal-and-unfavourable-treatment-pdf-962-kb.

435 See the CJEU Judgment of 22 October 2009, *Christel Meerts v Proost NV*, C-116/08, ECLI:EU:C:2009:645 and Judgment of 27 February 2014, *Lyreco Belgium NV v Sophie Rogiers*, C-588/12, ECLI:EU:C:2014:99.

Bulgaria, the anti-discrimination provisions apply, which prohibit discrimination on the ground of family status. In Czechia, **Latvia**, **Liechtenstein**, **Slovakia** and **Turkey**, the Employment Act protects against any kind of adverse treatment because of the use of rights, thus including the right to parental leave.[436] This includes, in Czechia, a prohibition on giving notice during the protected period, thus also during parental leave. In **Hungary**, taking different forms of parental leave (including maternity leave, parental leave and parent's leave to take care of a sick child) does not terminate the employment relationship, therefore the employment contract remains in force during the leave.[437] Dismissal is prohibited during parental leave. The protection is broad in **Montenegro**, as during periods of absence from work in order to care for a child, maintain a healthy pregnancy or use maternity, parental, adoptive or foster parental leave, the employer may not dismiss the employee. In the case of an employee whose fixed-term labour contract ends during the period when they are using their right to maternity, i.e. parental leave, the period of validity of the fixed-term labour contract shall be extended until the end of the use of the right to such leave.

In **Belgium** the protection starts from the date when the employer has received notice until three months after the end of the leave. In **Finland**, the employer may dismiss a person on maternity, paternity, parental, adoption or care leave only if the employer's activities cease completely. The situation is different in the **Netherlands**, where dismissal of an employee during parental leave for reasons not connected to the leave is not explicitly prohibited.

4.6 Paternity leave

Most countries provide fathers with the right to paternity leave, though in many countries this leave is very short. The Work-life Balance Directive 2019/1158 adopted in 2019 requires that fathers be entitled to a paid paternity leave of at least 10 working days to be taken on the occasion of the birth of the child (Article 4).[438] The payment or allowance must at least be equivalent to sick pay and may be subject to a ceiling. The right to a payment or allowance can be subject to periods of previous employment, but not more than six months before the expected date of birth (Article 8(1) and (2)).

In **Portugal**, the compulsory part of the paid 'initial part of the parental leave just for the father' is now 20 days, and the non compulsory part is 5 days. In 2018, 77.2 % of working fathers enjoyed the compulsory period of their paternity leave, but only 39.9 % also enjoyed the non-compulsory period of the leave.[439] In **Spain**, Royal Decree 6/2019 of 1 March 2019 modified the regulation of paternity leave. As of April 2019, maternity and paternity leave no longer exist, but have been replaced by a single birth-related leave (*permiso por nacimiento*) with similar features for each parent.[440]

The table below provides an overview of the current length and level of payment of paternity leave in 36 countries.[441]

436 In **Lithuania**, the approach is similar.
437 Hungary, Act I of 2012 on the Labour Code (*2012. évi I. törvény a munka törvénykönyvéről*), 6 January 2012, Articles 127-128, 130.
438 Such leave is intended for fathers, or where and insofar as recognised by national law, equivalent second parents and irrespective of the marital or family status, as defined by national law. Such leave shall not be subject to a period of work or length of service qualification.
439 *CITE Report 2018*, pp. 76-79.
440 There is a transition period until 2021, when both parents' leave periods will be fully equalised.
441 This table has been adapted from McColgan, A. (2015), *Measures to address the challenges of work-life balance in the EU Member States, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway*, European Commission, p. 65, available at: http://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/3631-reconciliation.

Table 4 Paternity leave

Country	Paternity leave	
	Length	Payment
Albania	3 days[442]	Paid[443] (100 % for 3 days, then 80 % for the days 64-150, and 50 % for the remaining days of paternity leave)
Austria	0-31 days[444]	EUR 700 – deducted from the father's Child Care Benefit at a later stage, if he decides to take it.
Belgium	15 days (birth leave)	100 % for 3 days, then 82 % (this is equal to 100 % net as no contributions are deducted from social security benefits)
Bulgaria	15 days	90 %
Croatia	0	N/A
Cyprus	2 weeks	72 % (paternity benefit)
Czechia	5 days[445]	70 % (benefit paid from sickness insurance)
Denmark[446]	2 weeks	100 % salary according to some collective agreements. or Benefit for 2 weeks at the level of sick leave benefits: EUR 592 per week.
Estonia	30 calendar days until the child is three years old	100 % (same calculation as for the parental benefit, ceiling exists), could be taken at the same time when mother is on maternity leave or on parental leave
Finland	54 days	70 % (capped)
France	25 days[447] 4 calendar days that have to be taken right after the birth of the child and a period of 21 calendar days	100 % (capped)
Germany	0	N/A
Greece[448]	2 days[449]	100 %
Hungary	5 days[450]	100 %
Iceland	6 months[451]	80 % (capped)
Ireland	2 weeks	EUR 245 gross per week

442 The insured father or adoptive father has the right to take care of the child after the 63-day post-partum period, if this right is not exercised by the mother or there are no conditions for the mother to benefit. This leave can last for 267 days.
443 Labour Code, Article 96(3) and point 9(c) of the Recast DCM No. 511/2002 on the duration of work and leave in state institutions.
444 Civil servants are entitled to four weeks' leave; certain groups of employees in the private sector are entitled to leave periods of varying lengths according to some collective agreements or to 28 to 31 days of 'family time', according to a written agreement with the employer. The 'paternity' leave is an early parental leave, which fathers can take immediately after the birth of the child.
445 Paternity leave was introduced in Law 148/2017, which entered into force on 1 February 2018.
446 Amendment to the Act on Maternity and Parental Leave has been submitted in December 2021, proposal 104 of 22 December 2021, expected to come into force 1 July 2022. The amendment redistributes the weeks of maternity, paternity and parental weeks with a view to implement Articles 5 and 8 in the Work life balance directive.
447 32 in the case of multiple births. Article L.1225-35 of the Labour Code, amended in 2020.
448 After the cut-off date (01.01.2021), Directive 2019/1158 on work-life balance was transposed by Chapters A and C, Part III, of Act 4808/2021 and paternity leave was fixed at 14 working days fully paid by the employer. See EELN flash report of 09.07.2021, https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/5444-greece-greece-transposes-directive-2019-1158-on-work-life-balance-141-kb.
449 Five days for the military.
450 Seven in the case of twins.
451 Act 140/2020, Article 8, came into effect on 1 January 2021, replacing the Act on Maternity, Paternity Leave and Parental Leave No. 95/2000. In addition, parents have a joint entitlement to an additional two months, which either parent may take in its entirety or the parents may divide between them. Only six weeks of this period are transferable between the parents. If fathers do not use the rest of their full leave, it is lost.

Country	Paternity leave	
	Length	Payment
Italy	10 days compulsory leave, plus one day optional[452]	100 %
Latvia	10 calendar days	80 %
Liechtenstein	0	N/A
Lithuania	30 calendar days, taken before child reaches 1 year of age.	Capped (EUR 2 240 monthly), minimum payment is EUR 234.
Luxembourg	10 mandatory leave days	100 % (capped)
Malta	1 day in private sector and 5 days in public sector	100 %
Montenegro	By collective agreement. Usually 5 working days.	100 %
Netherlands	5 days	100 %
North Macedonia	7 days	100 %
Norway	2 weeks[453]	Unpaid, but some employers offer pay on a voluntary basis or pay is required by collective agreement. Fathers can also take the 'father's quota' of the parental leave, which is paid (see previous section)
Poland	2 weeks	100 %
Portugal[454]	20 days compulsory, to be taken in the child's first 6 weeks (5 days of which to be taken when the mother gives birth); and 5 optional additional days	100 %
Romania	5/15 days[455]	100 %
Serbia	7 days	100 %
Slovakia	0	N/A
Slovenia	30 days	100 %
Spain[456]	16 weeks birth leave[457]	100 %

452 This leave was originally conceived as an experimental measure for 2013-2015 and was then extended by Article 1, Paragraph 354 of Law 232/2016 for the period 2017-2020 and by Article 1, Paragraph 363 of Law 178/2020 to 2021.
453 In addition to the father's quota of parental leave (15 weeks of benefit period if parents choose the 100% rate; 19 weeks if they choose the 80% rate).
454 Called 'initial parental leave just for the father': Article 43 of the Labour Code.
455 Fifteen days if the father has completed a course in infant care.
456 Following the reform introduced by Royal Decree 6/2019 of 1 March 2019. Transition period until 2021.
457 The new birth-related leave is granted to the biological mother and to the 'other parent', in order to include same-sex couples. Extendable in case of a child with disabilities, multiple births or hospitalisation of the child.

Country	Paternity leave	
	Length	Payment
Sweden	10 days (in addition to the 90 non-transferable days of parental leave)	80 % capped (in addition to 90 days of benefits at income-replacement level of parental leave). The eligible person is the other parent (father or other)
Turkey	Employees: 5 days Civil servants: 10 days (plus optional 24 months)	100 % Civil servants: 100 % (optional 24 months unpaid)
United Kingdom	2 weeks	Flat rate[458]

4.7 Time off and care leave

The Parental Leave Directive 2010/18/EU requires that workers are entitled to time off on grounds of force majeure for urgent family reasons in cases of sickness or accident making the immediate presence of the worker indispensable (Clause 8). The Work-life Balance Directive 2019/1158, which has to be implemented by 2 August 2022, has a similar provision (Article 7) and in addition introduces an unpaid carers' leave of five working days per year (Article 6). This new carers' leave enables carers to provide care or support to a relative or to a person who lives in the same household as the worker and who is in need of significant care or support for a serious medical reason (Article 3(1)(c)). The protection of workers taking this carers' leave is broader than in case of time off for *force majeure* as required by Directive 2010/18. With the Work-life Balance Directive 2019/1158, the employment rights of workers taking carers' leave will have to be maintained (Article 10), these workers have to be protected against discrimination (Article 11) and enjoy protection against dismissal (Article 12). Articles 10 and 11 also apply to time off in case of *force majeure* as defined in Article 7 of Directive 2019/1158. The same is true for provisions which apply to the whole Directive 2019/1158 such as the role of the Equality bodies (Article 15).[459]

In national law, the distinction between the right to take time off for different (often specified) reasons and the new carers' leave in Article 6 of Directive 2019/1158 is not always clear. In some countries, time off in case of *force majeure* can be taken for a longer period as is the case for example in **Portugal**. What is defined then as time off in case of force majeure might be (very similar to) a carers' leave as defined in Article 6 of Directive 2019/1158 (see table 6).

Time off in case of *force majeure* as defined in Clause 8 of the Parental Leave Directive 2018/10 is not available in all Member States, for example in **Italy** and in **Montenegro**, there is no such provision in the legal system. In **Greece** and in **Lithuania**, there is no general provision on time off for urgent family reasons in case of sickness or accident, although there are several provisions of special forms of leave and time off on specific grounds. Similarly, in the **United Kingdom**, different kinds of situations of unexpected emergencies are mentioned in which employees are entitled to time off as is 'reasonable' in order to take action that is 'necessary'. In **Turkish** law, the term '*force majeure*' is not legally defined. It is understood to mean external obstacles that are not anticipated as of the date of the contract, are beyond the party's control, are not caused directly or indirectly by the fault or negligence of the party seeking relief, and that prevent or delay the affected party from performing their contractual/legal obligation(s).

458 At the same rate as statutory maternity pay.
459 These provisions have to be implemented by 2 August 2020 (Article 20(1)).

In **Iceland**, no right to time off for *force majeure* exists and there is no care leave. However, there is a right of parents to financial assistance when they are not able to pursue employment or studies due to the special care required by their children who have been diagnosed as suffering from chronic illnesses or severe disabilities. The amount is 80 % of the employee's average aggregate wages, based on a 12-month period ending two months prior to the diagnosis of the child.

Table 5 below provides an overview of time off for force majeure that corresponds most closely to the provisions as defined in Directives 2010/18 and 2019/1158 on time off on grounds of force majeure for urgent family reasons in cases of sickness or accident which make the immediate presence of the worker indispensable. Such time off is in many countries rather short, often paid and can in many countries be taken for more reasons than for urgent family reasons due to only accident or sickness. Table 6 provides an overview of leave that corresponds most closely to carers' leave as defined in Directive 2019/1158.

Table 5 Availability of time off for force majeure

Country	Purpose(s) of time off	Maximum period of time off	Compensation?	Other relevant information
Albania	Time off for different specific reasons	5 days paid leave in case of loss of spouse/ husband or some family members	100 % wage	Additional period of 30 days per year unpaid
Austria	Short-term leave in case of sudden illness of a child or relative	Two weeks for a sick child; one week for a relative living in the same household	100 % paid	*Force majeure* leave is extended to parents who are admitted into in-patient care together with their sick children. This leave may also be taken on a day-to-day basis.
Belgium	In the private sector: 10 days per year (not necessarily related to childcare). In the public sector, in case of illness or accident of a close relative (e.g. spouse, child).	10 days a year 4 days a year	Unpaid 100 % paid	Entitlement to social security cover is maintained
Bulgaria	Time off for urgent family reasons in the event of the death of a parent, child, spouse, sibling, or parent of the other spouse or other direct-line relatives.[460] Unpaid leave which can be used as time off for *force majeure*[461]	Up to two working days Up to 30 days a year	Paid (collective agreement or by agreement between the employer and the employee) Unpaid	No requirements or conditions for granting these leaves for *force majeure* Subject to consent of the employer

460 Bulgaria, Article 157 para. 1, p. 3 of the Labour Code.
461 Bulgaria, Article 160 of the Labour Code.

Country	Purpose(s) of time off	Maximum period of time off	Compensation?	Other relevant information
Croatia	Time off for important personal reasons (e.g. wedding, birth of a child, severe illness or death of an immediate family member)	Up to 7 days per year, unless stated otherwise in a collective agreement	100 % paid	In addition, carers' leave for urgent family reasons in case of accident or illness making the immediate attendance of the worker indispensable (with social benefits)
Cyprus	Reasons of force majeure; urgent family matters related to sickness or accident of a dependent family member	7 days per year	No	
Czechia	Care for ill family member or child younger than 10 years	No limit per year for care of ill child younger than 10 years[462]	Caring benefit (60 % of daily salary) paid from sickness insurance	
Denmark	Time off on grounds of *force majeure* if it is family-related for urgent reasons in case of sickness or accident. Time off for the child's first one or two days of sickness is provided in some collective agreements.	Statutory act on force majeure situations for children or spouse – not specified, but as long as it is 'urgent'. No annual maximum. Collective agreements may provide a right to take 1 or 2 days off in case of sick children. No annual maximum.	If provided in collective agreement: For childrens' first one or two days of sickness, 100 % salaries. Some collective agreements provide a legal basis for 100% salaries in other urgent family matters. The Act on leave in force majeure situations does not address salaries. This has not been addressed in the case law under the act. Depending on the type of employment and the contract provisions, the employer would be allowed to withhold salaries for the time off for urgent family matters. If the situation of leave becomes more permanent, the parent can apply for official leave for family matters, as described in Table 6 below.	

462 Provided that the employee provides a medical certificate verifying the illness of the child, there are no maximum limits per year.

Country	Purpose(s) of time off	Maximum period of time off	Compensation?	Other relevant information
Estonia	Time off for urgent family reasons, unintentional reason arising from the employee	A reasonable period (case by case)	100 % paid	An employee should inform employer and presume a duration. Should be agreed with the employer
Finland	Care for compelling unexpected family reasons related to illness or accident	Short temporary leave	Unpaid, but some collective agreements provide pay	Based on agreement, but involves protection against dismissal
France	*Force majeure* bereavement leave for families who have lost a child Paid bereavement leave for families who have lost a child under 25 years old or a person under their care in addition to the bereavement leave for families who have lost a child	7 days 8 days	7+8 =15 days fully paid by Social Security and employer art. L3142-2 Labour Code[463] 5 days paid	
Germany	Emergency childcare leave Care for a close relative[464]	Up to 10 working days per year for each child (single parents 20 days). Maximum for more children 25 days (single parents 50 days) Up to 10 days	70 % of income (statutory health insurance scheme) 70 % of the income (statutory health insurance scheme)	 The employee has to inform the employer immediately and present a medical report
Greece[465]	No general provision on time off for *force majeure*, but specific provisions exist			

463 Act No. 2020-692 of 8 June 2020 on the improvement of rights of workers and the support of families after the loss of a child. From 1 July 2020, after the death of their child, employees and civil servants are awarded bereavement leave of seven days, rather than five days, which was previously the case. A supplemental paid leave of eight days is be added to the first leave.

464 According to the latest change within the relevant period in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the entitlements for the year 2020 included 15 working days for each child (30 days for single parents) with an absolute maximum of 35 working days (70 for single parents): Act on the future of hospitals (Krankenhauszukunftsgesetz) Act of 23 October 2020, Official Journal 2020 (BGBl. I no 45), p. 2208.

465 After the cut-off date (01.01.2021), a force majeure leave was provided by Article 30 Act 4808/2021, implementing Article 7 of Directive 2019/1158, https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/5444-greece-greece-transposes-directive-2019-1158-on-work-life-balance-141-kb.

Country	Purpose(s) of time off	Maximum period of time off	Compensation?	Other relevant information
Hungary	Time off for *force majeure* for the duration of personal or family circumstances of special concern, or justified by unavertable causes In the event of death of a relative	Not specified 2 days	Unpaid 100 %	
Iceland	None available			
Ireland	Time off for *force majeure* where for urgent family reasons owing to injury or illness, the immediate presence of the employee is indispensable	3 days in any period of 12 consecutive months or 5 days in a period of 36 months	100 %	
Italy	No provisions on time off for *force majeure*			
Latvia	In case of force majeure	Not limited, however, this should be 'short period of time'	Yes (100 %)	Only condition is that the employee informs the employer
Liechtenstein	In case of force majeure for urgent family reasons	1 to 3 days, several times a year	Yes (80 %), but eligibility requirement	Evidenced by medical certificate
Lithuania	No provisions on time off for *force majeure*, but time off for specific reasons		Unpaid	
Luxembourg	Care for family reasons if a child is sick is applicable in case of *force majeure*	Maximum 12 days for a child younger than 4; 18 days for a child between 5 and 13; 5 days for a child between 14 and 18	Yes, 100 %	
Malta	No carers' leave in national law. But in public service: responsibility leave to take care of dependent elderly parents, sons and daughters, or the spouse/partner in a civil union and leave for a special reason including work-life balance reasons.	In case of responsibility leave, for 12 months, can be renewed on yearly basis; in case of leave for a special reason 3 months.	Unpaid	Has to be approved. Medical certificate is required in case of care of elderly parent/spouse or partner.
Montenegro	No provisions on time off for *force majeure*			
Netherlands	Time off for *force majeure* for urgent family reasons in case of sickness or accident	Short period, length of the leave must be reasonable	Yes, 100 %	

Country	Purpose(s) of time off	Maximum period of time off	Compensation?	Other relevant information
North Macedonia	Provision that 'if a worker cannot do his work due to *force majeure*, he has the right to half of the salary to which he would be entitled if he was working'.	Not specified	Yes, 50 %	
Norway	Time off for *force majeure* for urgent family reasons in case of sickness or accident	Paid leave in the case of sickness of a child below the age of 12 year 10 days per calendar year and a maximum of 15 days if the employee has more than two children. Single parents are entitled to double the amount of leave.	Yes, 100 %	
Poland	Care of at least one child younger than 14	2 days per year	100 %	May be taken part-time
Portugal[466]	Time off on grounds of force majeure for different family reasons	Different time limits 30 days per year	No	
Romania	Public service: days off for certain reasons (marriage, birth of a child etc.)	Different time limits (up to 5 days)	Yes, 100 %	
Serbia	Time off for different reasons (marriage, childbirth, serious illness of a family member etc.)	Up to 5 days per year	100 %	
Slovakia	Time off (force majeure) for urgent family reasons in case of sickness or accident. When accompanying the mother of the employee's newborn child to and from the maternity hospital When accompanying: – a family member to a medical facility for examinations or treatment upon sudden disease or accident, and also for planned examinations and treatment – a disabled child to a social care facility or special school	No limit on number of times per year (i) Maximum 7 days per calendar year (ii) Maximum 10 days per calendar year	Allowance under Social Insurance Act Yes Yes	

466 These are short leave of absence related to pregnancy, childbirth and to the care of children.

Country	Purpose(s) of time off	Maximum period of time off	Compensation?	Other relevant information
Slovenia	Time off (*force majeure*) for urgent family reasons in case of sickness or accident Absence from work due to personal circumstances (such as: – marriage, – the death of a spouse or cohabitant partner or the death of a child, an adopted child or a child of the spouse or the cohabitant partner; – the death of parents; – a serious accident suffered by the worker or accompanying child to school on his first day of primary school etc.)	 Up to 7 days per year	100 % 100 % of average monthly full-time salary from the last three months	
Spain	Time off in some situations (e.g. death of a relative): up to 4 days	2 days. 4 days if the worker has to travel outside the province		Notice and justification required
Sweden	Time off due to urgent family reasons that require the presence of the employee	No explicit time limit, but not for a long time	No, but most collective agreements include a certain number of paid days, usually 10 days	Collective agreements on compensation, usually require a qualification period
Turkey	Family/parental related reasons are not considered as *force* majeure under Turkish law. However sabbatical leave for civil servants and public employees and unpaid leave for civil servants for valid reasons may be used for family/parental related reasons.			
United Kingdom	Time off for unexpected emergencies	No cap	No	

Table 6 Availability of care leave

Country	Purpose(s) of leave	Maximum period of leave	Compensation?	Other relevant information
Albania	Care leave	12 days per year (15 days if child is younger than 3 and ill)	Paid (70 % if less than 10 years of insurance; 80 % if more than 10 years)	Extended period of no more than 30 days
Austria	Care for terminally ill relatives Care for seriously sick children or relatives with heightened increased care requirements, severely ill relatives or severely ill children	Up to three months with an extension period of another three months Three months	Unpaid	Employees need an agreement with their employer. They can claim a benefit (*Pflegekarenzgeld*) if the relative/child has the right to level 3 Care benefit (*Pflegegeld Stufe 3*)
Belgium	Special schemes in the private and public sectors related to career breaks (public sector) or time credits (private sector) – Care for a child younger than 12 years – Care for a disabled child younger than 21 or a seriously ill relative or a terminally ill member of the family	51 months over a career	State benefits	Full-time or part-time leave. The special career break/time credits scheme aimed at caring for a seriously ill relative[467] include several restrictions: the employee must give seven days' notice, the employer may object to the leave (in small businesses) or postpone it on organisational grounds (in any business), and the minimum duration of the leave must be one month.
Bulgaria	Care for sick child, spouse or relative	Up to 60 days per year for a child, 10 for an adult	70 % pay by the employer for the first 3 days and 80 % after that from social insurance for insured persons	In addition to the time off for force majeure leave and to the possibility for unpaid leave.
Croatia	Care for sick family member (child or spouse)	60 days per illness for children up to seven, 40 days per illness for children from seven to 18, 20 days per illness for children over 18 and spouse	70 % of salary capped, 100 % of salary for children under 3. All payments subject to a ceiling of EUR 561 (HRK 4 257) per month	

467 RD of 10 August 1998 and, in the public sector, various sets of regulations.

Country	Purpose(s) of leave	Maximum period of leave	Compensation?	Other relevant information
Cyprus	No care leave beyond the leave on grounds of force majeure			
Czechia	Care for a sick family member or ill child younger than 10 years Long-term care for family member	No limit per year for care of ill child younger than 10 years[468] 90 days	Caring benefit (60 % of daily salary) paid from sickness insurance Long-term care allowance (60 % of daily salary)	
Denmark	Care for disabled/ long-term illness/ terminally ill relative	Maximum 6 months, can be extended with an additional 3 months	The level minimum salaries for care personnel employed by the local municipality, as set out in collective agreements for care personnel.	The leave can be divided into smaller parts, and the leave can be divided between several persons who are 'close relatives'
Estonia	Time off to take care of sick adult or disabled person Care leave for child up to 14 years or a disabled child up to 18 years	5 days per year 10 working days per year	Paid at the level of minimum wage Unpaid	
Finland	Care for sick relative Care leave for child, partial care leave for child	Fixed term Up until the child is 3 years old	Unpaid Flat rate benefit	
France	Care for ill child Care for a terminally ill child, parent or spouse	3 to 5 days per year 6 months	Unpaid (but collective bargaining agreement of company or sector can provide pay) State benefits available	 May be taken part-time
Germany	Part-time or full-time home care leave to care for a close relative under the age of 18 End-of-life care for a close relative	Up to six months Up to three months	'Home care support benefit' as a means of earnings replacement benefits 'Home care support benefit' as a means of earnings replacement benefits	Reduction of working time possible but no less than 15 hours per week, in agreement with the employer for up to two years to care for a close relative in need of care

468 Provided that the employee provides a medical certificate verifying the illness of the child, there are no maximum limits per year.

Country	Purpose(s) of leave	Maximum period of leave	Compensation?	Other relevant information
Greece[469]	Care for a child in hospital due to disease or accident, available to natural, adoptive or foster parent	Public sector: 30 days per year[470]	Public sector: fully paid leave.	
	Care for a child or spouse requiring transfusions or periodic hospitalisation or a disabled child	Public sector: from 22 days per year.	Public sector: fully paid leave	
	Care for sick dependents	Private sector: 6-10 days per year.	No	
		Public sector: 4-10 days per year.	Yes	
	School visits	Private sector: 4 days per year	Yes	The relevant law is silent on whether this leave should be paid or unpaid, but the SCPC (Civil Section – Full Court), by construing this provision under Article 21(1) of the Greek Constitution (protection of the family and the children), found that the time off for school visits has to be paid.
		Public sector: 4-5 days per year	Yes	
Hungary	Care for a relative	Between 30 days and two years	Unpaid leave, State benefits may be available ranging EUR 98-177/month 50-60 % of the average salary	Need for care is certified by a physician
	Sick leave for parents to take care of their children	Unlimited until child is 12 months, then number of days depends on the age of the child		Need for care is certified by a physician
	Home care leave to care for disabled or permanently ill children	Unlimited (until the 18th birthday of the child)	State benefits available (EUR 344/month)	Need for care is certified by a physician
Iceland	None available			
Ireland	Care for a person who needs full-time care and attention.	104 weeks (208 weeks if an employee has to look after more than one person)	State benefits	Subject to one year of continuous service

469 After the cut-off date (01.01.2021) the provisions on family-related leaves were amended by Act 4808/2021.
470 These types of leave presuppose the exhaustion of other paid leave including parental leave, except annual leave; according to the national expert this condition conflicts with Directive 2010/18/EU.

Country	Purpose(s) of leave	Maximum period of leave	Compensation?	Other relevant information
Italy	Illness of child younger than three	For period of illness	Unpaid	
	Care for seriously disabled relatives who is not hospitalised	Three days per month	Yes (100 %)	Details of the nature of such leave to be determined between employer and worker
	Care for seriously disabled spouse if not hospitalised	Two years in the whole career	Yes (capped)	
	Death or serious illness of a close relative	Three days per year	Yes	
	For serious family reasons	Two years over a career	No	
Latvia	No care leave except for: – Care leave for a sick child up to the age of 14; – Care leave up to the age of 18 in case of severe and serious illness when personal care by the parents at home or at hospital is needed, or for the care of child with disabilities	Until the age of 14: – up to 14 days; – in hospital up to 21 days; – in case of broken bones up to 30 days. Until the age of 18: – up to 26 weeks – in specific cases where personal care in hospital is required, up to 3 years within a 5 year period	80% of average social insurance salary	
Liechtenstein	No care leave except for *force majeure*			
Lithuania	Full-time care leave for a sick child, relative or spouse – up to 120 days	120 days per year for a seriously ill child, 7 for an adult	State benefits for up to 7 days (at once) and up to 120 days per year for a seriously ill child	
Luxembourg	Care for family reasons if child is sick	Maximum 12 days for child younger than 4; 18 days for child between 5 and 13; 5 days for child between 14 and 18	Yes, 100 %	

Country	Purpose(s) of leave	Maximum period of leave	Compensation?	Other relevant information
Malta	No carers' leave in national law. But in public service: responsibility leave to take care of dependent elderly parents, sons and daughters, or the spouse/partner in a civil union	 For 12 months, can be renewed on a yearly basis	 Unpaid	 Has to be approved. Medical certificate is required
Montenegro	Serious illness of a close family member Death of an immediate family member Special care for a child with special needs	Determined by collective agreement 7 days Until the child turns 3	Yes Yes Yes	
Netherlands	Short-term care leave to care for a sick relative or family member or another close contact Long-term care for a close relative or dependent with life-threatening illness or serious illness	Up to 10 days per year Up to 6 weeks per year	Yes, at 70 % No	May be taken part-time May be taken part-time
North Macedonia	Care leave for a sick child under the age of three	Up to 30 days a year	Paid (100 %)	
Norway	Care for close relatives and/or other close persons during terminal stage of life. Care for parents, spouse, cohabitant or registered partner and disabled or chronically sick child	60 days 10 days per year	Yes, equal to sick leave pay (100 % salary) Unpaid leave. salary during the leave are often agreed upon between the parties, for example in collective agreements	
Poland	Care for a child Care for family member	Up to 60 days per year Up to 14 days per year	80 % 80 %	 Maximum is 60 days per year, irrespective of the number of family members

Country	Purpose(s) of leave	Maximum period of leave	Compensation?	Other relevant information
Portugal	Care for a child (under or over 12 years) Care for a disabled child or chronically ill child Care for a grandchild when the mother is under 16 at the time of birth	15 days per year 30 days per year 30 days after birth	No No No	
Romania	No care leave			
Serbia	Time off (in case of serious illness of a family member Special care of a child or another person: absence from work or work half-time	7 working days per year Until the child turns 5	Yes Yes, compensation of earnings	 Also for other groups (e.g. adoptive parents, foster parents) until the child turns 3
Slovakia	The employer is obliged to accept the absence of an employee from work for periods when they are attending to a sick family member and during periods relating to care for a child under ten who for significant reasons cannot be placed in an educational centre or school that otherwise cares for the child; or if the person caring for the child falls ill or is placed in quarantine.	No	In case of personal and full-time nursing, a nursing benefit is available: 55 % of the daily salary is paid for a maximum of 10 days	
Slovenia	Care for close relatives	Up to 7 days for children under 7; up to 15 days for older disabled children, possibility of extension to 30 days	80 % salary	Leave on full-time basis only; number of days depends on situation

Country	Purpose(s) of leave	Maximum period of leave	Compensation?	Other relevant information
Spain[471]	Time off in some situations (e.g. death of a relative)	2 days. 4 days if the worker has to travel to another town	100 %	Civil servants 3 to 6 days
	Civil servants have a right to be paid at a reduced rate of up to half of their working time to take care of a first-degree relative who is seriously ill for up to one month.			
	Daily reduction of working time to take care of a person with a disability, illness etc.		Proportional reduction of the salary from a minimum of one eighth and a maximum of one half of their working day.[472] Civil servants have the same right but without minimum or maximum limits to the rate of pay.	
	Care leave taken to care of for relatives up to the second degree who cannot take care of themselves because of age, accident, illness or disability, and they do not have a remunerated activity.	Up to 2 years (workers) or 3 years (civil servants)	Unpaid	
Sweden	Care for sick child under the age of 12	60 days yearly per child	80 % salary capped	
	Care for seriously ill relatives	100 days (240 if the relative has AIDS)	State benefits	
Turkey	For employees and civil servants who care for a child who is at least 70 % disabled or a child with a chronic illness	Up to 10 days	Yes	No age limit for the child, can be used wholly or partially within 1-year period
	Death of a child/ spouse/parent/sibling	7 days for civil servants; 3 days for employees	Yes	
	For civil servants: Sickness and patient companionship leave	3 months	Yes	Upon medical report, may be extended, no age limit for child
United Kingdom	None available			

471 Following the reform introduced by Royal Decree 6/2019 of 1 March 2019. Transition period until 2021.
472 Spain, Article 37.6 of the Workers' Statute.

4.8 Leave in relation to surrogacy

In just a few countries parental leave is available in cases of surrogacy. Countries that have provided for this right are **Greece**[473] and the **United Kingdom**. In the public sector of **Greece**, public servants who are the commissioning parents in a surrogacy are entitled to three months fully paid leave after the birth of the child in addition to reduced working hours, or alternatively, in addition to the nine months leave granted to parents under the public sector parental leave scheme. In **Spain**, surrogacy is not legal.[474] However, in 2010 the General Directorate of Registries and Notaries issued a resolution that enabled the registration in the Spanish Civil Registry of children as a result of this practice in other countries, as long as there was a court ruling or resolution proving the affiliation of the minor, as well as the fulfillment of the rights of the pregnant woman. The Spanish Supreme Court has focused on the fact that, despite the invalidity of this type of contract, the protection of the minor cannot be impaired by this circumstance, and this is how rights have been recognised by case-law, among others through benefits or leaves granted to surrogate fathers.

In **Ireland**, there is no legislative right to leave in relation to surrogacy, but a parent *in loco parentis* might be entitled to parental leave. In **Portugal** surrogacy has been allowed under very strict conditions since 2016. Since 2019, parenthood rights have been recognised for individuals 'entitled to parenthood rights'. In the **Netherlands**, intended parents will have a right to parental leave if they become the legal parents of the child, e.g. through adoption, or if they take permanent care of the child and live at the same address. The surrogate mother might also be entitled to parental leave if she is still the legal mother of the child. In **North Macedonia**, the surrogate mother is entitled to 45 days of birth leave and the commissioning mother is entitled to maternity and parental leave. In **Iceland**, a draft on altruistic surrogacy is still pending.[475] According to the draft, the surrogate mother, while pregnant, would have all the same rights as any pregnant woman with regard to health services. According to Article 23 of the draft law, the surrogate mother and her spouse would be entitled to maternity/paternity leave and parental leave. In **Croatia**, adoption leave would be possible.

In a few countries, surrogacy is not legally regulated (e.g. **Albania**, **Belgium**, **Croatia**, **Hungary**, **Italy**, **Latvia**, **Montenegro**, **Poland**, **Turkey**). Surrogacy is illegal in **Austria**,[476] **Bulgaria**, **Estonia**, **Finland**, **France**, **Germany**, **Liechtenstein**, **Luxembourg**, **Norway and Slovenia**. In **Denmark**, **Norway** and **Slovakia** any agreement on surrogacy is invalid and surrogacy is not recognised in **Sweden**.

In **Serbia**, surrogacy is still not allowed. However, there is a very restrictive right to surrogate motherhood in the draft of the Civil Code.[477] In **Malta**, surrogacy is not legal and there is no surrogacy leave. However, leave is granted in cases of treatments or procedures that include the in vitro handling of human oocytes, spermatozoa or embryos for establishing a pregnancy. This includes but is not limited to, intra-uterine insemination, in vitro fertilisation, intracytoplasmic sperm injection, embryo transfer, gamete, germinal tissue and embryo cryo-preservation and oocyte and embryo donation. A single prospective parent shall be entitled to 60 hours of leave with full pay. In the case of two prospective parents where one is a human oocyte donor and the other the receiving person, both prospective parents shall be entitled to 60 hours of

473 In the private sector, the commissioning parents are assimilated with natural parents concerning all forms of leave for the care and raising of the child. Both the commissioning and the surrogate mother are entitled to reduced working days. In the public sector, public servants who are the commiwssioning parents in a surrogacy are entitled to three-months fully paid leave after the birth of the child in addition to the reduced working hours or alternatively to the nine-months leave (to be taken instead of the reduced working hours).

474 Article 10 of Law 14/2006, of May 26, on Assisted Human Reproduction Techniques, establishes that all contracts for which pregnancy is agreed – with or without a price – by a woman who waives her maternal affiliation in favour of the contractor are invalid.

475 First proposed in 2015 by the Minister of Health the draft went through one discussion in the Althing (Parliament) and the procedure then stopped before going to a parliamentary committee.

476 Parents may, however, enter into a surrogacy contract in a country where this is legal. If the biological parents are Austrian citizens, the children must be recognised legally as citizens, granted residency rights on entering the country, and included in all provisions of Austrian law, such as social security participation, as legal offspring of the surrogate parents. This would also have to be extended to the right to parental leave and parental part-time arrangements for the parents.

477 Text available in Serbian at http://www.mpravde.gov.rs/files/NACRT.pdf.

leave with full pay provided that 120 hours of leave for medically assisted procreation with full pay shall be granted one time for the human oocyte process.[478]

4.9 Flexible working-time arrangements

According to Clause 6(1) of the Parental Leave Directive 2010/18/EU, parents returning from parental leave may request changes to their working hours and/or working patterns for a set period of time. The employer has to consider and respond to such requests, taking into account both the employer's and the worker's needs. Even if this is a rather weak provision, it might offer possibilities in practice to adjust working time and working hours while remaining employed (see also Article 21(2) of the Recast Directive 2006/54/EC). In should be noted that EU law does not guarantee a right to part-time work.[479]

The Work-life Balance Directive 2019/1158 introduces more rights to request flexible working arrangements for workers with children up to a specified age (at least eight years) and carers (Article 9). These arrangements include the right to request adjustment of working patterns, including through the use of remote working arrangements, flexible working schedules or reduced working hours (Article 3(1)(f)).

The reform introduced by Royal Decree 6/2019 of 1 March 2019 in **Spain** has resolved a key aspect of compliance with Directive 2010/18/EU. Under the current regulation, employers must now consider and respond to requests from workers to have their working day adapted to their needs, and not only when they come back to work after parental leave, but more widely. This right is also guaranteed by giving access to an urgent and priority procedure before the Labour Courts. The right to have their working day adapted to their needs is recognised for workers, but not for civil servants.[480]

The three tables below offer an overview of the possibilities for workers to access reduced – hours (for example from full-time to part-time work) or extend working time (Table 7), have an individual right to adjust weekly working time patterns (Table 8) and the possibility to work from home or remotely (Table 9).

Table 7 Right to reduce or extend working time[481]

Country	Access to adjustment of working time		
	If so, tied to care purposes?	Right or right to request?	Compensation?
Albania	For breastfeeding women to breastfeed the child. Two hours.	Right for the period of 63rd day following childbirth until the child is one year old	Yes, salary is paid
Austria	Yes (parents of children up to the age of 7 (or upon entering school).[482]	Right to reduce working time	No

478 Laws of Malta, Chapter 452, Employment and Industrial Relations Act, Leave for Medically Assisted Procreation National Standard (Amendment) Order, 2020, LN 263 of 2020: https://legislation.mt/eli/ln/2020/263/eng.

479 See CJEU Judgment of 15 October 2014, *Teresa Mascellani v Ministero della Giustizia*, C-221/13, ECLI:EU:C:2014:2286. The case concerned a female worker whose employer ordered the conversion of a part-time employment relationship into full-time employment without the consent of the employee concerned. The national provision was not contrary to the Part-time Work Directive 97/81/EC.

480 The Royal Decree 6/2019 modified the Worker's Statute on this point, but not the Public Servants' Statute. There is some controversy (and a few judgements still by lower courts) on this point, because since there is no specific regulation for civil servants, the Worker Statute could be used as subsidiary norm, particularly for contract workers in the Public Administration. Article 8.4 of the Resolution of 28 February 2019 of the State Secretary for Public Function has established that 'exceptionally, adaptations of the working day could be authorised with personal and temporal character, with a maximum of two hours, for motives directly linked to conciliation of family life and in cases of single-parent families'.

481 The table has been adapted from: McColgan, A. (2015), *Measures to address the challenges of work-life balance in the EU Member States, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway*, European Commission, p. 36, available at: http://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/3631-reconciliation.

482 When caring for dying relatives or severely ill children, workers can apply for a temporary reduction in working hours. Similarly, workers can reduce working hours for a period of three months in cases where a severely sick or disabled relative needs help with their care.

Country	Access to adjustment of working time		
	If so, tied to care purposes?	Right or right to request?	Compensation?
Belgium	Yes. Not tied to care purposes. In the private sector mostly 'time credits' In the public sector, staff regulations with possibility of career-breaks.	Right	Yes (statutory social benefit)
Bulgaria	No right[483]		
Croatia	Yes, but only reduction of working time as part of arrangements for maternity and parental rights and benefits.	Yes, in relation to maternity and parental leave	Yes
Cyprus	Yes, not tied to care purposes.	Right to request	No
Czechia	Yes. Part-time work under some conditions for some groups	Right, with exceptions	No
Denmark	Yes, not tied to care purposes.	Right to request	No
Estonia	Yes, not tied to care purposes Right for breastfeeding breaks until child is 1,5 years old	Right to request Right	No Nursing breaks are paid, included into working time
Finland	Yes	Right, with exceptions	Wage-related, flat rate or no benefit depending on type of leave[484]
France	Right to work part-time, not tied to care purposes	Right to request	No
Germany	Yes, not linked to care purposes	Right, with exceptions. Now also a bridge part-time work, thus temporary reduction of working time[485]	No[486]
Greece[487]	Private sector: reduced paid daily hours for breastfeeding and childcare or alternative, corresponding length as a childcare leave, in the latter case upon agreement with the employer Public sector: reduced paid hours provided by law or in alternative the 9 months parental leave	Right	Yes

483 Only the employer has the initiative to reduce or extend working time.
484 These arrangements are usually seen in the context of flexible working time, but the provisions are under the Employment Contracts Act Chapter on family leaves, like all absence from work for family reasons. The benefit is defined by the Sickness Insurance Act. The partial benefit may be flexible (during care leave, when the child is cared at home), or as partial (when the child is in the 1st or 2nd form at school).
485 Section 9a of the amended Part-Time and Fixed-Term Employment Act entered into force on 1 January 2019. There is still no right to extend working time on request.
486 Except where the part-time working arrangement carries entitlement to Home Care Support Benefit.
487 After the cut-off date (01.01.2021), flexible working arrangements (FWA) for care reasons, in particular, in the form of telework, flexible hours or part time work, were provided by Article 31 Act 4808/2021, implementing Article 9 of Directive 2019/1158. See EELN flash report of 09.07.2021, https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/5444-greece-greece-transposes-directive-2019-1158-on-work-life-balance-141-kb.

Country	Access to adjustment of working time		
	If so, tied to care purposes?	Right or right to request?	Compensation?
Hungary	Yes, tied to care purposes. A specific right for working time reduction is available for breastfeeding mothers.	Right	Social security benefits (childcare allowance)
Iceland	Yes, tied to care purposes	Right, with exceptions	No
Ireland	Yes, not tied to care purposes	Right to request	No
Italy	No, except right to part-time work in some situations	Right to request	No
Latvia	Yes, tied to care purposes	Right for some specific groups	Possibly (unclear as yet)
Liechtenstein	No legal right	Employer has to consider a request to shift from full-time to part-time work	No
Lithuania	Yes, tied to care purposes	Right for certain groups. Right to request part-time	No[488]
Luxembourg	No right		
Malta	No right, unless provided by collective agreement	Right to request if working in the public sector	
Montenegro	Yes. Right to work part-time until the child is 3 or when care for a child with disabilities is needed	Right	Yes. Working hours to be considered as full-time working hours for the purpose of exercising rights arising from and based on employment.
Netherlands	Yes, but not tied to care purposes	Right, unless compelling business or organisational reasons justify a refusal.	No
North Macedonia	Yes, for care of children with disabilities	Right to request	No
Norway	Yes, not only tied to care purposes[489]	Right, if no major inconvenience for the employer	No
Poland	Yes, for persons entitled to parental and childcare leave	Right to reduce working time (half-time during these types of leave).	No
Portugal	Yes, tied to care purposes	Right, with exceptions	No
Romania	Yes, only for women employees who are breastfeeding children under one year old.	A few collective agreements provide for this right	Yes
Serbia	No right		
Slovakia	Yes, only certain groups or with consent of the employer	Right, with exceptions	No
Slovenia	Yes, tied to care purposes	Right	Social security contributions paid for some parents[490] Right to return after a period

488 Where the reduced hours arrangement is for parents of children under 12 (or a disabled child under 18), who are entitled to have their weekly hours reduced by two hours (four hours for parents of three or more children under 12).
489 For example, also specific right for employees who have reached the age of 62, or for health, social or other welfare reasons.
490 Those with a child under three or a disabled child under 18, or two children, one of whom has not completed the first year of primary schooling. Additional rights for other persons caring for or nursing a child (e.g. guardians).

Country	Access to adjustment of working time		
	If so, tied to care purposes?	Right or right to request?	Compensation?
Spain[491]	Yes. Right of workers who care for children under 12, to have a reduction of their working day.	Right, sometimes criteria in collective agreements (for example the period of notice)	No, proportional reduction of salary
Sweden	Yes (parents of a child up to 8 years old)	Right	Sometimes[492]
Turkey	Yes (for pregnant workers, workers having recently given birth/ breastfeeding workers and for biological and adoptive parents who are employees or civil servants). Approval of the employer required for some groups of employees.	Right	No
United Kingdom	Yes, not tied to care purpose	Right to request a change to the hours they are required to work for all employees	No

Table 8 Individual right to adjust working time patterns

Country	Possibility to adjust working patterns?	Right or right to request?
Albania	No	
Austria	Yes	Right
Belgium	Yes	Right to request
Bulgaria	No, only on initiative of the employer	Right to request for certain groups
Croatia	No, only for certain categories of workers (if the nature of the work so requires) on employer's initiative.	No right, only employer's initiative. Employee's consent required in certain cases (Article 67(4) and (5) Labour Act)
Cyprus	No[493]	
Czechia	Yes	Right, with exceptions
Denmark	No. Collective agreements or individual shop level regulation or individual agreement may provide a framework for daily 'flexi-time'[494]	
Estonia	No	
Finland	No, except in collective agreements or agreement between employer and employee (also 'working time bank').[495]	
France	No, but collective agreements could provide some specific rights and possibility to bank hours	

491 Following the reform introduced by Royal Decree 6/2019 of 1 March 2019. Transition period until 2021.
492 If parents have not yet exhausted their right to parental benefit.
493 National legislation does not provide for a legal right to adjust working time patterns beyond the right to reduce or extend working time. The right to adjust working time patterns might be stipulated in collective agreements in certain sectors or agreed in individual contracts or though practice/custom.
494 This could be in a manner, where employees are entitled to organise their working time as flexi-time up to two hours either side of core working time. Core working time is the period of the day when the individual employee/all employees have to be present, and flexi-time would be hours around the core time, where the individual employee may organise his or her own working time. Core time could be 10.00 to 13.00, and flexi-time could be 6.00 to 19.00. Of course, this arrangement works only for the type of work that allows for flexibility.
495 Working Hours Act. Section 15 of the Working Hours Act contains in addition a provision for shorter working hours for social and health reasons other than those connected to family that may be agreed upon by request of the employee and the employer must try to arrange work so that the employee may work part time. An agreement for such shorter hours may cover a maximum of 26 weeks at a time. A denial of an employee's request for part-time work by the employer must be justified.

Country	Possibility to adjust working patterns?	Right or right to request?
Germany	No,[496] but collective and works agreements could provide specific rights	
Greece[497]	No[498]	
Hungary	No	
Iceland	Yes	Right
Ireland	Yes	Right to request
Italy	Yes, in limited situations	
Latvia	No	
Liechtenstein	No	
Lithuania	No	
Luxembourg	Yes	Limited under some conditions
Malta	No	Right to request if working in the public sector
Montenegro	Yes	Right to request
Netherlands	Yes	Right to request
North Macedonia	Yes, for workers returning from parental leave	Right to request for medical reasons, until the child is three years old
Norway	Yes In the public sector: collective agreement on 'flexi-time'	Right, unless major disadvantages for the employer
Poland	Yes, for specific groups	Right
Portugal[499]	Yes	Right, employer can justify a refusal
Romania	No	No
Serbia	No right to adjust working time patterns, except for specific groups	Right to request
Slovakia	Yes, for specific groups on employers' initiative and agreement with the employee	
Slovenia	No	
Spain[500]	Yes. Right of workers who care for children under 12 to have their working day adapted to their needs.	Right
Sweden	Yes. For parents of a child up to 8 years old and in relation to leave to take care of sick relatives.	Right
Turkey	No	
United Kingdom	Yes, right to request a change to the hours they are required to work for all employees.	Right to request

496 Under Section 7(2) of the amended Part-Time and Fixed-Term Employment Act, the employer is obliged to discuss an employee's wish to change the duration and/or situation of the existing contractual working time.

497 After the cut-off date (01.01.2021), flexible working arrangements (FWA) for care reasons, in particular, in the form of telework, flexible hours or part time work, were provided by Article 31 Act 4808/2021, implementing Article 9 of Directive 2019/1158. See EELN flash report of 09.07.2021, https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/5444-greece-greece-transposes-directive-2019-1158-on-work-life-balance-141-kb.

498 Except in the maritime sector: upon return from parental leave, a seafarer can request changes to their working time for a maximum of seven days, if the operational needs of the ship allow for this in the captain's judgment. Also, in order to facilitate a return to work, the seafarer and their employer can agree on suitable measures for returning to the workplace (Article 5(5) and (6) of Decree 80/2012).

499 No possibility for the employer to impose flexible working time arrangement on workers with children under three without specific and written consent of the working parent (Articles 206 No. 4(b) and 208-B No. 3(b) of the Labour Code).

500 Following the reform introduced by Royal Decree 6/2019 of 1 March 2019. Transition period until 2021.

Table 9 Access to remote working/homeworking[501]

Country	Right to remote working/homeworking
Albania	No. It may be possible upon agreement by contract with the employer
Austria	No. Access may be possible by agreement with employer or in case of a works council agreement.
Belgium	No
Bulgaria	No. It may be possible based on an arrangement with the employer.
Croatia	No
Cyprus	No, although some collective agreements might provide for it
Czechia	No
Denmark	No, unless agreed with employer or in collective agreement
Estonia	No, unless agreed with employer
Finland	No, unless included in collective agreement or agreed with the employer[502]
France	No. But an employer has to justify a denial of a request from a worker with disabilities.
Germany	No, although many collective agreements provide for it[503]
Greece[504]	No, unless agreed with employer
Hungary	No, unless agreed with employer. Specific right for some part-time workers
Iceland	No, although some collective agreements provide for it
Ireland	No, although some collective agreements provide for a right/right to request
Italy	No. Only right to teleworking in some situations.
Latvia	No
Liechtenstein	No
Lithuania	Yes, up to 1/5th of the time for pregnant employees, employees who have given birth or are breastfeeding and employees raising a child under 3, or raising child under 14 years of age alone or a disabled child under 18. An employer who proves that it would cause excessive costs can refuse the request.
Luxembourg	No. Telework regulated in some collective agreements.
Malta	No but available in the public sector
Montenegro	No, depending on agreement with employer
Netherlands	Yes, right to request
North Macedonia	Yes, right to request
Norway	No, although many collective agreements provide for it
Poland	Yes, for workers with a disabled child
Portugal	Yes, a worker with a child under three has a right to telework
Romania	No
Serbia	No
Slovakia	No
Slovenia	Yes, right to request. Right to return to previous working arrangements

501 This table shows the situation in 2020 before specific measure on remote working/homeworking were taken due to the COVID-19 pandemic which are described below.
502 Finland, Section 13 of the Working Hours Act.
503 Germany, under Section 12 of the Federal Equality Act, public employers are obliged to offer family-friendly working hours and general conditions.
504 After the cut-off date (01.01.2021), flexible working arrangements (FWA) for care reasons, in particular, in the form of telework, flexible hours or part time work, were provided by Article 31 Act 4808/2021, implementing Article 9 of Directive 2019/1158. See EELN flash report of 09.07.2021, https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/5444-greece-greece-transposes-directive-2019-1158-on-work-life-balance-141-kb.

Country	Right to remote working/homeworking
Spain[505]	Yes, right to propose. The rejection must be motivated and in writing, the final decisions is taken by urgent proceedings by the Labour court.
Sweden	No
Turkey	Yes, if there is mutual consent (Article 14 EA)
United Kingdom	Yes, right to request a change to 'where, as between his home and a place of business of his employer, he is required to work'

In some countries there is a possibility of 'banking' working hours, up to certain limits (e.g. **Belgium**, **Croatia**).

Teleworking and flexible working during the COVID-19 pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, teleworking became widespread in many countries (e.g. **Albania**, **Austria**, **Belgium**, **Bulgaria**, **Croatia**, **Czechia**, **Estonia**, **Finland**, **Greece**,[506] **Hungary**, **Ireland**, **Iceland**, **Latvia**, **Norway**, **Portugal**, **Serbia**, **Slovakia**, **Spain**, **Sweden** and **Turkey**). This does not mean that legal entitlements exist for workers in all these countries to request remote working/homeworking or specific rights concerning homeworking. In addition, various surveys show that workers – women in particular – face difficulties, for example regarding working time and issues of reconciling work and family life, when homeworking (e.g. **Croatia** and **Spain**).

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, legislators have adopted a number of rules on working from home (home office) in **Austria**.[507] Neither employees nor employers can unilaterally demand home working; rather, an individual agreement is necessary. The framework for home working can be arranged by individual contract or works agreement. Special rules on work accidents, liability and data protection apply, as well as worker protection rules. The employer is obliged to provide work equipment, or to compensate the employee for the costs incurred by working at home using their own digital equipment.[508]

In **Czechia**, general government measures required employers to allow their employees work remotely as much as possible. People started to use this way of working often and in many cases they got used to it: 2 % of women in comparison with 26 % of men are able to execute their work tasks while using a home office set-up.[509] However, there is still no legal entitlement to request home office arrangements. Similarly, working from home is not regulated, for example, in **Croatia**, **Iceland** and **Hungary**).

In **Croatia**, workers are not entitled to decide independently on working time arrangements when working from home. All standard rules concerning working time, overtime, adjustment of the working time patterns, night work, and daily, weekly and monthly breaks and vacations apply to work performed remotely (i.e. from home), unless otherwise prescribed by law, collective agreement, agreement between the works council and employer, or employment contract.[510] In practice, however, the boundary between working time and free time has been blurred or completely erased, especially for workers who are parents of school-age children. One study shows that employers report that workers are overloaded by the combination of homeworking and supervising their children's online schooling.[511] Workers have

505 Following the reform introduced by Royal Decree 6/2019 of 1 March 2019. Transition period until 2021.
506 After the cut-off date (01.01.2021), telework was instituted for the first time in the public sector (Act 4807/2021) and re-regulated in the private sector (Article 37 Act 4808/2021); in both sectors the right to disconnect was recognised for the first time.
507 BGBl. I Nr. 2021/61.
508 Zischka, S. (2021) Home-Office. Arbeitsrechtliche Neuerungen, die Personalisten kennen sollten. PVP 2021/233.
509 Idea (2020), 'Rozdílné ekonomické dopady krize covid-19 na muže a ženy v Česku' (Different economic consequences of covid-19 on women and men) – research paper, available at: https://idea.cerge-ei.cz/images/COVID/IDEA_Gender_dopady_covid-19_cerven_21.pdf.
510 Croatia, Labour Act, Article 17(6).
511 Kučer, L., Tkalčec, A. (2020) *Stavovi poslodavaca o zaposlenim roditeljima* (Employers' views on employed parents), Zagreb, p. 16, available at https://parentsatwork.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Izvještaj-stavovi-poslodavaca-studeni-2020.pdf.

problems with time management, stress and inadequate technical equipment for working from home,[512] as well as insufficiently clear instructions from their superiors. As far as flexible working arrangements are concerned, almost all employers (97.1 %) who participated in the survey stated that they offered their workers the option to work from home during the pandemic (and over 50 % of them think that they would use this option even after the pandemic is over), two thirds (66.7 %) have introduced flexible working time, and one third of employers have allowed their employees to take leave to look after their children during times when schools and kindergartens were closed.[513]

The **Swedish** trade union federation for white-collar workers in the private sector, TCO, reported that, among its members, the majority of women who worked from home experienced less stress, felt less disrupted, and said that they were getting more done and became more efficient than women who worked in a workplace outside the home. On the other hand, men who worked from home experienced more stress than men who continued to work in the workplace. The TCO states that reduced stress can lead to less sick leave and greater job satisfaction, and that working from home thus improves working life for women in these respects. However, from a gender equality point of view, a development where men choose to work in the workplace while women prefer to work from home is not optimal. There is a risk that women will have greater responsibility for the family because they are at home, and that men will have better opportunities for career and salary development because they are physically present at work.[514]

In some countries, specific measures were taken on homeworking during the COVID-19 crisis. In **Ireland**, a code of practice has been adopted by the Workplace Relations Commission on the right to disconnect. The key issue is to provide assurances to employees who feel obliged to routinely work longer hours than those agreed in their terms and conditions of employment. Employees essentially should work their normal working hours and not be expected to be on duty responding to emails, etc. at any hour. An employee asserting their right to disconnect should not be penalised.[515]

In **Malta**, the Head of the Civil Service issued a directive stipulating that teleworking requests by public sector employees had to be accepted in their entirety, whilst allowing for everything possible to be done so that other requests are also accepted, as long as the work carried out and service to clients remains consistent.[516]

In **Norway**, the set working time for Government employees was suspended for a period due to COVID-19.

In **Poland**, legislation aimed at combating the COVID-19 crisis allowed employers to order employees to work remotely for a specified period of time. The condition is that the employee has the skills and the technical and local capabilities to perform such work and that the type of work permits it. The tools and materials needed to carry out the remote work and the logistical support for the remote work have to be provided by the employer. At the direction of the employer, an employee performing remote work is obliged to keep records of the work performed, including, in particular, a description of the work, as well as the date and time of its performance. The employer may at any time revoke an order to work remotely.[517] There is no symmetrical entitlement for employees to request remote working.

512 Even though it is the employer's duty to ensure that workers have the necessary means to perform work tasks remotely, as well as to ensure safety at work even in the circumstances of teleworking.

513 Kučer, L., Tkalčec, A. (2020) *Stavovi poslodavaca o zaposlenim roditeljima* (Employers' views on employed parents), Zagreb, p. 16, available at https://parentsatwork.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Izvještaj-stavovi-poslodavaca-studeni-2020.pdf.

514 TCO (2021) *Livspusslet under Coronapandemin*, available (in Swedish) at: https://www.tco.se/rapporter-och-remissvar/rapporter/2021/livspusslet-under-coronapandemin/.

515 https://www.workplacerelations.ie/en/what_you_should_know/codes_practice/code-of-practice-for-employers-and-employees-on-the-right-to-disconnect.pdf.

516 COVID-19 Info Page, 'Aid Measures': https://www.gov.mt/en/Government/DOI/Press%20Releases/Documents/ISSUE03_ENG_14032020.pdf.

517 JoL of 2020, item 1842, as amended (so-called Anti-Crisis Shield).

Special legislation was approved in **Portugal** allowing for a general right to work remotely from home in all situations where work from home was possible.[518] This right is granted both to the employer and to the employee, provided the technical conditions for remote working are met, so the agreement of the parties is no longer needed. Despite the general and provisional nature of this measure (in the sense that it is intended to last only during the pandemic and it is justified for public health reasons and not linked to the right to teleworking for purposes of reconciling work and home life),[519] the practical result of this legislation is that working from home or remotely has become very common and widely accepted, unlike before. So, this development may contribute to this kind of work becoming more widespread, including for purposes of reconciling work and family life, after the end of the pandemic crisis.

In **Slovakia**, the Labour Code was amended. Before the amendment, the right to teleworking was based exclusively on a mutual agreement between the employee and the employer. Since April 2020, during an emergency period, teleworking has been granted upon the request of the employee, unless there are other operational restrictions, while employers may temporarily order teleworking without their employees' consent subject to two conditions: the employee can perform their work tasks from home and work tasks do not have to be carried out at the official workplace; or carrying out work tasks at the official workplace is risky.[520]

In **Spain**, domestic care tasks, 70 % of which are carried out by women, multiplied with the closure of schools and day centres for the elderly and people with disabilities. In order to avoid lay-offs, the government determined that teleworking was the preferred approach, over temporary cessation or the reduction of activity.[521] Despite the possibility of adapting the schedule and reducing the working day to favour the reconciliation of work and home life, teleworking proved to be a very limited reconciliation mechanism under these circumstances and a study by the University of Valencia revealed the higher levels of stress and anxiety among women who worked from home with dependent children during lockdown.[522]

In September 2020, the Government adopted Royal Decree 28/2020 on remote working,[523] which modifies Article 13 of the Workers' Statute and establishes new conditions and guarantees for remote working and teleworking, especially the right to have flexible working hours, the obligation to register the working time adequately and the right to digital disconnection. However, reconciliation measures requested by the trade unions, such as special care leave when children have to isolate at home because of being in close contact with someone who tests positive for COVID-19 but without being positive themselves, were not agreed upon.

4.10 Evaluation and implementation

The previous sections of this chapter show that in general the implementation of the EU directives in the EU Member States is satisfactory. In many countries, workers are entitled to more leave rights than the minimum required under EU law. However, there are still some problematic issues in the legislation of some countries which have been highlighted by the national experts of the network and which should be remedied. For example, in **Albania**, part-time workers, fixed-term contract workers or people with a

518 Decree-Law No. 10-A/2020, of 13 March 2020, Article 29.
519 A legal right to telework for purposes of reconciling work and home life was introduced by Law No. 120/2015, of 1 September 2015.
520 Slovakia, Act No. 66/2020 Coll amending Act No. 311/2001 Coll. Labour Code (Zákon č. 66/2020 Z.z. ktorým sa dopĺňa zákon č. 311/2001 Z. z. Zákonník práce v znení neskorších predpisov a ktorým sa dopĺňajú niektoré zákony), Article 250b, 2 April 2020, effective from 4 April 2020.
521 Spain, Royal Decree 8/2020, of 17 March 2020, on extraordinary urgent measures to face the social and economic impact of COVID-19 (*Real Decreto-ley 8/2020, de 17 de marzo, de medidas urgentes extraordinarias para hacer frente al impacto económico y social del COVID-19*), https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2020-3824.
522 https://www.womennow.es/es/noticia/estudio-conciliacion-teletrabajo-mujeres-durante-el-confinamiento/.
523 Spain, Royal Decree 28/2020, of 22 September 2020, on remote working (*Real Decreto-ley 28/2020, de trabajo a distancia*), https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2020-11043.

contract of employment or employment relationship with a temporary employment agency are excluded from the right to parental leave. In **Ireland**, politicians are not entitled to maternity leave and legislation on paternity leave, adoption leave and parental leave does not yet apply to politicians.

In addition, many surveys reveal the gender imbalance of work and care. This has a negative impact – due for example to the taking up of long unpaid leave – , mainly on women, as regards career possibilities and related income, pensions etc. For example, the fact that in **Austria** childcare benefits can be received for longer (851 days) than the maximum period of legal parental leave (up to the child's second birthday) can be an incentive especially for low-earning women to stay at home for longer than the protections tied to parental leave last.

Another problematic aspect is that enforcement in practice is often lacking. There is not much case law on work-life balance issues (see also Sections 2.2 on direct sex discrimination and 2.3 on indirect sex discrimination). Most cases described in the country reports concern discrimination and dismissals in relation to pregnancy and/or maternity (e.g. **Albania**, **Denmark**, **Estonia**, **France**, **Greece**, **Hungary**, **Ireland**, **Lithuania**[524] and **Norway**) and unfavourable treatment upon returning from maternity leave (e.g. **France**, **Greece**, **Hungary**, **Ireland** and **Norway**). However, claimants in **Albania**, for example, are seldom successful in proving pregnancy or maternity discrimination, while pregnancy and maternity discrimination as well as unfavourable treatment due to the taking up of leave seem to be widespread. This is also the case according to various surveys in **Belgium**.

As for the general trends in the field of work-life balance in **Hungary**, a study from 2018, commissioned by the European Parliament's Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs at the request of the FEMM Committee, highlighted that, since 2011, the Government has committed itself to promoting family mainstreaming instead of gender mainstreaming.[525] An Amnesty International study on gender-based discrimination in Hungarian workplaces (from 2020) concludes that the state 'urgently needs to take steps to change the widespread negative perception concerning pregnant employees and employees with young children among employers and the wider society, as well as the need for men to play a more significant role in family life'.[526]

In some countries, protection against discrimination in relation to parenting and family responsibilities is limited (for example in **Albania**). This is worrying, as the gap between law on the statute books and law in action does not seem to be becoming narrower. However, the expert for **Denmark** reports some successful cases for claimants in relation to parental, paternity and care leave as well as time off for *force majeure*, addressing not only dismissal, but also unfavourable treatment in relation to such leave. In **France**, the Court of Cassation decided a few cases on indirect discrimination in relation to parental leave, applying CJEU case law to these national cases.[527]

The country reports show the huge diversity of measures at national level aimed at the reconciliation of work, private and family life. In some countries, the complexity of the national legislation has been criticised (for example, in **Germany**). Different forms of leave for different reasons are available to specific groups under specific conditions with different allowances, for example in **Greece** and in **Hungary**.

The EU directives and provisions reflect a slow, step-by-step process towards more specific rights, in particular with the recently adopted Work-life Balance Directive 2019/1158 which is the first piece of legislation in the area of gender equality law in a decade. In some countries, new leave and/or rights

524 However, there have only been a few cases.

525 Hungler, S., Kende, Á. (2019) 'Nők a család- és foglalkoztatáspolitika keresztútján' ('Women at the crossroads of family policies and employment policies'), *Pro Futuro*, vol. 9, no. 2., available at: https://doi.org/10.26521/Profuturo/1/2019/3881.

526 Amnesty International (2020): No Working Around It: Gender-based Discrimination in Hungarian Workplaces, p. 51, https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/EUR2723782020ENGLISH.PDF.

527 See Court of Cassation, Social chamber 14 November 2019 No. 18-15682, https://www.courdecassation.fr/jurisprudence_2/arrets_publies_2986/chambre_sociale_3168/2019_9139/novembre_9548/1567_14_43913.html and Court of Cassation, No. 16-27825, 18 March 2020 (applying the CJEU, judgment of 8 May 2019, *Praxair*, C-486/18, ECLI:EU:C:2019:379).

as well as payment will have to be introduced (paternity leave, parental leave, carers' leave and flexible working time arrangements). The required changes will range between quite significant and minor and their effects in practice will have to be awaited. However, with the adoption of the Work-Life Balance Directive and the accompanying communication on Work-Life Balance, it is clear that work-life balance issues are firmly on the EU agenda, providing an impetus for further developments at national level. However, in terms of work-life balance issues, the gender effects of the COVID-19 pandemic since 2020 are worrying.

4.11 Remaining issues

4.11.1 COVID-19 and work-life balance issues

The COVID-19 pandemic has consequences for gender (in)equality as many surveys and data show. For example, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) published recent findings on unpaid care and housework.[528] EIGE reports that the lockdowns leading to the closing of schools and some workplaces increased women's share of unpaid work despite men sharing the workload more than before. During lockdowns, European women spent 18.4 hours per week on cooking and housework, compared to 12.1 hours for men. Before the pandemic, women spent 15.8 hours and men 6.8 hours on these tasks. The situation is particularly difficult for parents who had to help their children during online schooling and for single parents, most of whom are women. Mothers working from home had to deal with interruptions by children more often than fathers. Many national experts describe similar problems. In addition, in **Albania**, for example, a considerable proportion of women faced psychological and mental health issues as a result of the uncertainty created by the pandemic.

The double load of providing for children while working (often from home) has hit women especially hard, as a recent **Austrian** research project found.[529] The Austrian Chamber of Labour commissioned a study on the compatibility of family and career during the COVID-19 pandemic, finding that parents experienced high amounts of pressure in their jobs and private lives, due to demands by their employers, the absence of child-care and schooling options and political developments. Women were hit especially hard in this regard.[530]

In **Bulgaria**, measures undertaken by the Government, including restrictions on attending school also for younger students and quarantine periods in cases of COVID-19 being identified in schools, compelled parents of younger children (minors up to 14 years old), to stay at home and take care of them, in addition to organising online home-schooling for them. Very often these responsibilities came in addition to remote working for the parents concerned. In many cases it was the mother who had to perform these functions, but it was observed that the pandemic created opportunities for more equal participation by both parents, for contributions to a better work-life balance and for gender equality.

Similarly, UN Women's rapid-assessment survey on the situation in **North Macedonia** showed that both women and men spent more time on household tasks (such as cleaning and grocery shopping). It also

528 See Unpaid care and housework: https://eige.europa.eu/covid-19-and-gender-equality/unpaid-care-and-housework.

529 Mader, K., Derndorfer, J., Disslbacher, F., Lechinger, V. and Six, E. (2020) 'Genderspezifische Effekte von COVID-19' (Gender-specific effects of COVID-19), research project; summary available at: https://www.wu.ac.at/vw3/forschung/laufende-projekte/genderspezifscheeffektevoncovid-19.

530 Froissner, F., Glassner, V. and Theurl, S. (2021) 'Krisengewinner Patriarchat? Wie die COVID-Arbeitsmarktkrise Frauen trifft' (Is patriarchy the winner in this crisis? How the COVID labour market crisis affects women), in Filipič, U. and Schönauer, A. (eds), *Ein Jahr Corona: Ausblick Zukunft der Arbeit* (A year of coronavirus: prospects for the future of work), Vienna, ÖGB-Verlag, pp. 56-68, available at: https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/bitstream/handle/document/72645/ssoar-2021-foissner_et_al-Krisengewinner_Patriarchat_Wie_die_COVID-Arbeitsmarktkrise.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y&lnkname=ssoar-2021-foissner_et_al-Krisengewinner_Patriarchat_Wie_die_COVID-Arbeitsmarktkrise.pdf.

showed that women spent much more time than men doing domestic and care work. A positive change identified by the survey was the increased involvement of young men in domestic work.[531]

The **German** expert notes that more generally, it is without a doubt that women carried most of the additional burden related to child and other care within the context of the closure of schools, nurseries, and other care facilities. Indeed, there is significant evidence that women took up most of the additional care work, whether employed or not and irrespective of fathers' presence at home during working hours.[532]

In **Greece**, a survey on the impact of the pandemic on daily life and work during the first lockdown showed that almost one in two women engaged more with housework during the pandemic and lockdown whereas this was the case with 2 out of 10 men.[533] According to another survey, the lockdown has added a very big or big burden of family responsibilities to female researchers; the latter also experienced a high level to a very high level of personal psychological strain due to the lockdown and social-distancing measures at a significantly higher percentage than their male colleagues.[534]

The authors of a study on the impact of COVID-19 on the gender division of childcare tasks in **Hungary** conclude that, during the pandemic (especially during lockdown), gender inequality increased regarding the amount of time dedicated to childcare, especially among college-educated parents, urban parents and parents working from home. According to the authors, this suggests that 'even when men are physically present in the household, even if the burden of reproductive work increases suddenly and significantly, women are expected to shoulder a larger share'.[535]

The coronavirus crisis also brought considerable changes to work-life balance in the **Netherlands**. According to annual research by recruitment bureau Hay, work-life balance deteriorated due to the lockdowns.[536] By the end of 2020 only half of Dutch workers were positive about their work-life balance. Overall, 39 % indicated that things had become worse since the start of the pandemic. This was especially the case for working parents during the periods when schools were closed. In addition, research bureau TNO reported that working parents, in particular, indicated that it was hard for them to combine work and care.[537] The coronavirus crisis appears not to have influenced the division of work and care tasks between men and women. After the first months of the lockdown in 2020, 31 % of fathers indicated in a survey that, since the beginning of the pandemic, they had spent more time with their children than before. However, women still perform the largest proportion of care tasks. In a survey from June 2020 mothers indicated that they spent 14.3 hours a week more on care tasks because of the lockdown, whereas for

531 Bashevska, M. (2020), *Rapid gender assessment: The impact of COVID-19 on women and men in North Macedonia*, UN Women, https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20eca/attachments/publications/2020/09/rga_the%20impact%20of%20covid-19_nm_eng_final_2020_09_29-min.pdf?la=en&vs=2420, pp. 31-33, 39.

532 Gundula Zoch, Ann-Christin Bächmann, B. Vicari, 'Who cares when care closes? Care-arrangements and parental working conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic in Germany' [2021] 23(1) *European Societies* 576-588; Jonas Jessen, C. Katharina Spiess Sevrin Waights Katharina Wrohlich, 'Sharing the Caring? The Gender Division of Care Work during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Germany' IZA DP No. 14457 available at: http://ftp.iza.org/dp14457.pdf; Alison Andrew, Sarah Cattan, Monica Costa Dias, Christine Farquharson, Lucy Kraftman, Sonya Krutikova, Angus Phimister, Almudena Sevilla, 'The Gendered Division of Paid and Domestic Work under Lockdown' IZA DP No. 13500 available at: http://ftp.iza.org/dp13500.pdf.

533 A survey on 'The Impact of the Pandemic on Daily Life and Work' conducted by the Hellenic-American Chamber of Commerce in the period 23 April-1 May 2020, https://www.amcham.gr/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/GenderImpactOfPandemic2020.ENGLISH.pdf.

534 A survey 'COVID-19 and young Greek researchers – The influence of the pandemic on their research activity' published in May 2020 by the National Documentation Centre (EKT). See the Research (in Greek) available at: https://metrics.ekt.gr/sites/metrics-ekt/files/ekdoseis-pdf/2020/EKT_COVID19_GreekResearchers.pdf and a research note (in English), available at: https://metrics.ekt.gr/sites/metrics-ekt/files/ekdoseis-pdf/2020/ResearchNote_EKT_COVID19_GreekResearchers.pdf.

535 Fodor, É., Gregor, A., Koltai, J., Kováts, E. (2021) 'The impact of COVID-19 on the gender division of childcare work in Hungary', European Societies, vol. 23, issue sup1, pp. S107, https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2020.1817522.

536 Hays (2020), *What workers want*, 2020. Available at: https://www.hays.nl/what-workers-want/2020.

537 TNO (2020), *Zorgtaken maken verschil tussen ontspannen of gestreste coronatijd* (Caring responsibilities mean the difference between a relaxed or a stressful coronavirus period). Available at: https://www.monitorarbeid.tno.nl/nl-nl/blog-splitsen-zorgtaken/.

fathers the figure was 10.5 hours a week.[538] In other research from September 2020, it was mentioned that the coronavirus crisis had hardly had any effect on gender roles.[539]

The crisis caused domestic problems in **Serbia**, due to childcare and home-schooling, having to do grocery shopping during working hours, as well as general psychological pressures due to confinement and lack of exercise.[540] Civil servants often used the working part of the day for telephone conversations and meetings, doing household chores and taking care of responsibilities around children, and then devoting the evening hours to work obligations that require greater concentration, such as preparing opinions, drafting solutions or resolving cases.[541] This had a significant effect on work-life balance.

The closure of schools and kindergartens, and the cessation of contact with elderly family members made it more difficult to organise childcare and care for elderly and chronically ill household or family members.[542] The burden of this care most often fell on women. All-day childcare became an additional burden for parents who had to go out to work during the epidemic, but also for those who worked from home and cared for preschool children or younger primary school children, helping them with school tasks and online classes. This work was also done mainly by women, and it posed a particular challenge for single parents.

Surveys show that self-isolation measures taken by the **Turkish** Government to slow the spread of COVID-19 overburdened women with unpaid housework and care work as more family members spent time at home. As schools switched to distance learning, most parents' caring responsibilities increased and this responsibility often fell on women. When childcare facilities closed and parents needed to work, the responsibility fell on grandmothers, who were in the risk group for COVID-19. For women who also needed to work from home, this also meant increased working hours.[543]

Some surveys provide not only information on the still existing gender care gap and work-life balance difficulties during the COVID-19 pandemic, but also the gendered economic and employment impacts of the pandemic on specific groups.

In **Germany**, specific difficulties arise regarding pregnancy and maternity related entitlements. The entitlements to maternity pay caused some uncertainty within the context of the pandemic-related furlough scheme during (temporary) business closures (*Kurzarbeit*). Specifically, there is some uncertainty whether pregnant workers who are not working because they are on maternity leave (6 weeks before due date and 8 weeks after birth) or are unable to work during their pregnancy because the employer cannot ensure a safe working environment, are entitled to the maternity or related pay, even if the business is closed and they would have been subjected to the furlough scheme if at work. While the scope of entitlements is controversial within academic circles, a guiding paper drafted by several ministries indicates that due to the structure of the *Mutterschutzgesetz* (*MuSchG*) and the furlough scheme, pregnant workers will still be entitled to maternity and related pay. Specifically, the report indicates that

538 Yerkes, M. and Remery, C. (Cogis-NL) (2020), *COVID gender (in)equality survey Netherlands. Tweede policy brief over de periode juni 2020* (COVID gender (in)equality survey Netherlands. Second policy brief for the period of June 2020), Utrecht. Available at: https://www.uu.nl/sites/default/files/Policyletter%20COGIS%20juni%202020%20def.pdf.

539 Intermediair (2020), *Vrouwen de was, man aan het werk. Coronacrisis nauwelijks effect op rolpatronen* (Women do the washing, men work. Coronavirus crisis hardly affects gender roles). Available at: https://www.intermediair.nl/werk-privebalans/rolverdeling/vrouwen-de-was-man-aan-het-werk-coronacrisis-nauwelijks-effect-op-rolpatronen.

540 Serbia social briefing: Working at home during pandemic, 15 October 2020, https://china-cee.eu/2020/10/15/serbia-social-briefing-working-at-home-during-pandemic/.

541 Pajvančić, M., Petrušić, N., Nikolin, S., Vladisavljević, A., Baćanović, V., *Rodna analiza odgovora na COVID-19 u Republici Srbiji* (Gender perspective to the response to COVID-19 in the Republic of Serbia), OSCE, Belgrade, March-May 2020, 137.

542 Pajvančić, M., Petrušić, N., Nikolin, S., Vladisavljević, A., Baćanović, V., *Rodna analiza odgovora na COVID-19 u Republici Srbiji* (Gender perspective to the response to COVID-19 in the Republic of Serbia), OSCE, Belgrade, March-May 2020, 118.

543 See Bakirci, K. (2020), 'Flash Report: Impact of COVID-19 measures on women in Turkey', European network of legal experts in gender equality and non-discrimination, 3 July 2020, https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/5171-turkey-impacts-of-covid-19-measures-on-women-in-turkey-118-kb; UN Women Turkey Office (2020), *The economic and social impact of COVID-19 on women and men: Rapid gender assessment of COVID-19 implications in Turkey* https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/73989_rapidgenderassessmentreportturkey.pdf.

the furlough scheme covers workers that are available to work only, which does not include workers who are on maternity leave or cannot work due to their pregnancy.[544] Various states limited the possibility for pregnant workers to work, within the context of lockdowns and isolation measures as more workplaces were considered to be high risk areas.

The latest UNDP **Montenegro** report, *Women's contribution to the economy of Montenegro – Utilisation of care economy during COVID-19*, estimates that women's work in the domain of unpaid work and domestic care exceeded that done by men by 92 %. The monetary value of such work and care has been estimated at EUR 122 million during the first 3 months of the COVID-19 pandemic, that is, from April to June 2020. While 11 % of women reported that they usually do not do any domestic work, the share of men who reported the same was 42 %. The share of women among the newly unemployed reached 56 % in the same reference period, with COVID-19 leading to an overall drop in women's net earnings, which cumulatively amounted to a EUR 2.34 million reduction in earnings. The report notes that, even before the pandemic, the GDP per capita for women was only 86 % of the national average GDP, compared to 114 % for men. The report also notes that, although the virus itself does not discriminate, the effects of COVID-19 are anything but gender neutral, given that the immediate and long-term consequences of the pandemic affect women in particular. The largest increase in the number of unemployed women was recorded in the 31- to- 40-year age group, while the category of unemployed women who have been looking for work for up to one year has increased by as much as 38.7 %.[545]

Surveys in **Norway** show that the redundancies and unemployment hit hardest in the age group where most people have children. The reports also highlight the risk for the current parental benefits system to contribute to a more difficult situation for expectant parents who have lost their job or have been laid off.[546] Today, parental benefit is calculated based on the last 3 or 12 months before the leave starts. This also applies to freelancers and those laid off who only receive 64.2 % of their income. For pregnant women who have been laid off or left without work throughout or in part of 2020, this may result in a significantly lower income during the entire leave period. This will apply even if other people laid off in the businesses they work in are brought back to work. For freelancers the scheme may mean that some women will be forced to work extra hard in the last three months before their leave to make up for the lost income in the last year, which may result in health consequences for the pregnant worker. Another consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic is that the father/co-mother will have to postpone the use of the parental quota reserved for them due to economic difficulties in their family.

4.11.2 Specific COVID-19-related work-life balance measures at national level

In addition to measures on remote working/homeworking described in Section 4.9, specific legislative measures[547] were taken in countries to support parents and/or carers who had to work remotely and support their children. In many countries the measures took the form of specific leave with related allowances. In **Belgium** a 'corona parental leave' with an allowance increased by 25 %[548] was introduced, which was replaced by an extension of the benefits of the temporary unemployment scheme for *force majeure* to employees in the event of the closure of a school, childcare centre or day-care centre for people with disabilities or because a child has to quarantine. The worker receives an allowance of 70 %

544 Bewertung des Bundesministeriums für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend in cooporation with Bundesministerien für Gesundheit und für Arbeit und Soziales (2020) *Orientierungspapier „Mutterschaftsleistungen bei Kurzarbeit* https://www.bmfsfj.de/resource/blob/173850/d4bc3e12ad12e611a76062b53b74bfc4/20210226-informationsblatt-schwangere-corona-data.pdf.

545 Vukovic, M. (2020) *Women's contribution to the economy of Montenegro – Utilisation of care in the time of the Covid-19 pandemic* https://www.me.undp.org/content/montenegro/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2020/Women_Care_Work.html.

546 Kilden Gender Research 'Likestillingskonsekvenser av koronapandemien Arbeidsliv og økonomi' (Consequences for gender equality because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Working life and economy) https://kjonnsforskning.no/sites/default/files/notat_bufdir_likestillingskonsekvenser_av_koronapandemien_arbeidsliv_og_okonomi.pdf.

547 In Liechtenstein, in April 2020 an initiative of an employees' interest group (LANV) sought to obtain fair working conditions for employed parents who struggled with juggling the obligation to work and the obligation to look after their children when schools were closed: https://www.menschenrechte.li/lanvpetitionberufstaetigeeltern/.

548 The gross parental leave allowance is, for example, EUR 532 for half-time parental leave for a worker under 50.

of the average salary. In addition, a system of parental benefit was adopted to support self-employed workers who have to partially interrupt their activities during the pandemic.[549]

Similarly, in **Austria**, a special type of leave with full pay was instituted for individuals with care obligations for children under 14 years of age or other dependents in need of care (*Sonderbetreuungszeit*). This kind of leave is available for a total of four weeks, if care facilities, kindergartens or schools are closed due to the pandemic.[550]

In **Czechia** the possible length of care leave was extended from nine days to the whole period of school closures during the pandemic. Simultaneously, people working on types of contract other than a standard full-time employment contract (such as irregular, part-time and precarious jobs) could also apply for this type of support, even though they could not do so outside of the pandemic.[551] Such leave also became available for self-employed people.

In **Denmark** a tripartite agreement provided an extra period of 10 days of parental leave with a right to benefits for parents with children under 14 years in situations where children were sent home from school due to closure of classes or schools to reduce the risk of spreading infection.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the entitlements to care for a close relative in **Germany** for the year 2020 were amended and are now 15 working days[552] for each child (30 days for single parents) with an absolute maximum of 35 working days (70 for single parents).[553]

A 'special purpose' leave was available to working parents in the private and the public sector in **Greece** under certain conditions. In the private sector, for every three days of the 'special purpose' leave, the workers had to use one day of their annual leave. As a rule, two thirds of the cost of the days of said leave were covered by the employer and one third thereof was covered by the state.[554] In the public sector, for every four days of absence, three days were considered by the competent service as justified absence due to the suspension of the functioning of the above establishments and were fully paid, and one day was considered as annual leave. If the employee was absent for less than four days, these days were all considered as annual leave.[555] If the employees concerned had exhausted their annual leave (fourth day), they could use any other leave available, either paid or unpaid (e.g. leave for school visits, leave to care for a sick child and unpaid leave).[556] In addition, employees with children are entitled to reduced daily working hours up to 25 % upon agreement with the employer.[557] Fully paid leave in the public sector and specific protection measures can be requested by pregnant workers in both the public sector and private sector. Pregnant workers were thus for the first time considered as a group of workers at high risk for COVID-19.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, leave for family reasons was used in **Luxembourg** as the main tool for compensating the loss of parents' income in the event of an interruption to work due to a child

549 Belgium, Royal Decree of 4 June 2020 granting a parental allowance to self-employed people who partially interrupt their self-employment as part of the measures to combat the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus (*Arrêté Royal du 4 juin 2020 accordant une allocation parentale en faveur du travailleur indépendant qui interrompt partiellement son activité indépendante dans le cadre des mesures de lutte contre la propagation du coronavirus COVID-19*), *Moniteur belge/Belgisch Staatsblad*, 10.06.2020.

550 Law Amending the Labour Contract Law (*Arbeitsvertragrechtsanpassungsgesetz, AVRAG*), Paragraph 18b.

551 ČSSZ (2020), 'Aktuální informace k ošetřovnému z důvodu uzavření škol' (Current information regarding care leave) – information website, available at: https://www.cssz.cz/aktualni-informace-k-osetrovnemu.

552 Instead of a maximum of 10 days.

553 Act on the future of hospitals (Krankenhauszukunftsgesetz) Act of 23 October 2020, Official Journal 2020 (BGBl. I no 45), p. 2208.

554 Greece, Article 4(3) of the ALC of 11 March 2020, OJ A 55/11.03.2020, sanctioned by Article 2 Act 4682/2020, OJ A 76/03.04.2020.

555 The specific conditions of entitlement in the following cases are defined in detail in the ALC of 11 March 2020: (1) Where both parents are public servants; (2) where one parent is employed in the public sector and the other in the private sector; (3) where the employee's spouse is employed in the public sector and at the same time is on any other leave (parental leave, maternity leave, sabbatical leave); (4) where the employee's spouse is not employed; (5) in the case of divorce and (6) in the case of single-parent families.

556 Circular of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs 39683/1259/1.10.2020.

557 Article 35 Act 4690/2020.

quarantining, school closure or any other measure applicable to children in relation to the health crisis. A new form of care leave, 'leave for family support', was also created during this period. This leave was available to employees or self-employed people who had to provide care at home for a disabled adult or an elderly person whose care institution partially or totally shut down its activities in the context of the pandemic. The costs of such leave were met by of the National Health Fund.[558] Such leave could not be taken at the same time as short-time working.

In **Latvia**, the right to parental leave and allowance was extended during the COVID-19 crisis for those parents whose right to parental leave would normally have ended. This longer leave was available to parents unable to return to work, because of a lack of work (at their workplace) or because the workplace was closed, or due to a ban on the provision of services or selling of goods (for the self-employed). This means that parents with a child who attained the relevant age (12 months or 18 months) continued to be on parental leave with a parental allowance (though not exceeding EUR 700 monthly).[559]

Based on a decision by the state body responsible for education in **Montenegro**, while kindergartens and schools are closed, the right to take paid leave from work is provided for the parent, guardian, foster parent, adoptive parent or single parent of a child who is not older than 11 years of age, and of a child with special educational needs or developmental disabilities. However, the right to paid leave was not provided for employees in the healthcare and security sectors, employees of institutions providing accommodation for social and child protection reasons, and employees of the protection and rescue services, as well as in other bodies, services and legal entities whose activity is an indispensable condition of life and work (key workers), unless both parents are employed by these employers.[560] According to research by the Montenegrin Employers Federation, the most common labour relations measures taken by economic entities as a result of the COVID-19 crisis are: the introduction of working from home (32 %), introduction of part-time working (26 %) and enabling the use of annual leave (21 %). Working from home was used least in micro enterprises (28 %), and most in large enterprises (80 %), while the introduction of part-time working was used the least in micro companies (18 %), and the most in large companies (47 %).[561]

During the COVID-19 crisis, a specific paid leave was established in **Portugal**, allowing working parents to stay at home to take care of children under 12 years old who had to stay at home due to school closures or for medical reasons. These parents benefited from a public allowance granted by the social security system. Some months after this special leave was put in place, a public survey concluded that almost 90 % of these periods of leave had been taken by mothers, while fathers kept on working.[562]

The COVID-19 pandemic prompted the Government of **Romania** to adopt measures to support parents whose children had to be schooled at home. Paid days off were available to one of the parents for supervising their children during the temporary closure of schools. These days were paid up to 75 % of the salary but not more than 75 % of the average salary decided at the national level for the year 2020 (approximately EUR 1 130).[563] This financial help was provided under various conditions: the child is under 12 years old or is under 26 years old in case of people with disabilities; the child is enrolled in the school system; and the job does not allow working from home or teleworking. Some groups of 'essential' workers

558 In November 2020, a law was passed in Parliament, which approved a state grant of EUR 386 million covering the costs of the sickness benefit in cash, leave for family reasons and leave for family support in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. The funding will be spread over four budget years.

559 Amendments to the Law on Maternity and Sickness Insurance (*grozījumi likumā 'Par maternitātes un slimības apdrošināšanu'*), Official Gazette No. 67B, 4 April 2020, and No. 244, 17 December 2020.

560 *Official Gazette*, Nos 103/2020 and 5/2021.

561 Montenegrin Employers Federation (2020) 'The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Enterprises in Montenegro: Challenges and Expectations', available at: http://poslodavci.org/en/publications/report-on-the-impact-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-enterprises-in-montenegro-challenges-and-expectations.

562 This information was disclosed in a meeting of the CIG – Commission for Equality and Citizenship – by the Minister in charge of equality issues.

563 Romania, Law No. 19/2020 on paid days off granted to parents for supervising their children upon the temporary closure of schools on 2 March 2020, amended by Government Emergency Ordinance No. 30/2020 (*Legea nr. 19/2020 privind zilele libere plătite acordate părinților pentru supravegherea copiilor în situația închiderii temporare a unităților de învățământ, modificată prin Ordonanța de Urgență a Guvernului nr. 30/2020*).

could receive this benefit only with the agreement of the employer who had to ensure the continuity of the service (e.g. telecommunications, water and energy supply).

At the same time, parents who were on parental leave and whose field of work was affected by the restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic could ask for a prolonged period of leave until the end of 2020. The allowance for parents who come back from parental leave before the child is two years old will continue to be paid up until the child is three years old for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic.[564]

Italy expanded not only leave possibilities, but also introduced temporary allowances in order mitigate the negative effects on gender equality and work-life balance in both the private and public sectors during several periods in 2020.[565] This legislation included strengthening the right to parental leave and economic support for families with care duties, including the right for those assisting a disabled relative to carry out their work through smart working. It provided for special leave, to be taken, alternatively, by parents of children up to 12 years old or of seriously disabled children (in this case an allowance of 50 % of the remuneration and figurative contributions were granted).

In addition, unpaid leave could be taken for the whole period during which school activities were suspended by employees taking care of children up to 16 years old. As an alternative to the leave mentioned above, a voucher for babysitting services was provided for working parents (employed and self-employed) of children aged 12 years or younger. A further 12 days every two months of paid leave were added to the ordinary three days a month time off available to workers in both the private and the public sectors assisting a relative with a registered serious disability.[566] Housekeepers and care workers with a contract of at least 11 hours a week were entitled to a temporary monthly allowance, on the condition that they did not live with their employers. In addition, a right to 'smart working' was available to various groups of parents (provided that the job could be performed in this way) until the end of the COVID-19 emergency period.

In some countries, allowances were only made available to certain groups. Despite discussions that took place and calls from NGOs and representatives of parents in **Bulgaria** to introduce periods of special paid leave during the pandemic and the days needed for quarantine, the solution proposed by the state provided for targeted social assistance for parents instead. The scheme for this assistance encompasses the following cases: parent(s) who cannot work remotely and have no opportunity to take paid leave; unemployed parent(s) who are not entitled to unemployment or other benefits; self-employed parent(s) who cannot exercise their profession during this period; parent(s) who do not receive pregnancy and maternity benefits; families that satisfy the means tests of average income equal to a maximum of 150 % of the minimum wage for each member of the family.[567] The amount per month per family in the case of the child/children staying at home for 10 days is about EUR 325 for 1 child and EUR 490 for two children.

In **Cyprus**, a special benefit was available during the COVID-19 crisis for parents who were absent from work with children under 15 years old or disabled children regardless of age.[568] The aim was to provide economic support to parents who could not work remotely or flexibly during the pandemic. While the benefit went some way towards alleviating the impact of the pandemic on working families, the fact that

564 Romania, Government Emergency Ordinance No. 97/2020 of 11 June 2020 on the implementation of measures for administrative simplification in the field of social protection, as well as measures for granting rights and benefits of social assistance in the field of activity affected by restrictions (*Ordonanta urgenta 97/2020 pentru implementarea unor măsuri de simplificare administrativă în domeniul protecției sociale, precum și pentru acordarea unor drepturi și beneficii de asistență socială în domeniile de activitate în care se mențin restricții*).

565 Italy, Laws 27/2020, 77/2020, 126/2020 and 176/2020.

566 Italy, Article 33 of Law 104/1990.

567 https://asp.government.bg/bg/deynosti/sotsialno-podpomagane/mesechna-tseleva-pomosht-za-semeystva-s-detsa-do-14-godishna-vazrast-pri-obyaveno-izvanredno-polozhenie-ili-obyavena-izvanredna-epidemichna-obstanovka.

568 Cyprus, Special Leave for Childcare Decision 20/2020.

beneficiaries could only claim a percentage of their salary meant that many women in low-paid sectors were either discouraged from staying at home or suffered a significant loss of income.

After schools were closed in **Malta** as a measure to combat the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, parents of children under 16 who could not go to work due to taking care of children were entitled to a benefit. People who were eligible received a direct payment of EUR 166.15 per week if working full-time or EUR 103.85 per week if working part-time. Moreover, social security contributions were paid in order to safeguard future contributory pension rights.[569]

The most significant measure taken in **Poland** was the introduction of the right to an additional care allowance, amounting to 80 % of the allowance base, in the event of the closure of a nursery, children's club, kindergarten, school or other institution attended by a child, or the inability to provide care by a nanny or day-care provider, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This allowance could be received until the specified deadline, by the insured person who decided to suspend their work due to the need to personally look after a child under eight. The additional care allowance was payable despite the re-opening of the above facilities, if the insured person decided to continue to look after the child personally.[570] It may be suspected (although no research results are available yet) that the obligation to care for dependent children over the age of eight – at the expense of work – was carried out mainly by women. Also, the provision referring to the possibility of receiving the allowance even when the care institutions were re-opened, could translate into more frequent incidences of women resigning from work, in order to intensify care activities at home.

In **Slovakia**, a new benefit scheme for caregivers, known as 'pandemic nursing benefit', was established which, according to the Social Insurance Agency, was in most cases used by women.[571] This benefit was available to employees, people entitled to compulsory or voluntary sickness insurance and people whose protected period of sickness insurance had ended. The benefit has a fixed rate of 55 % of the daily assessment basis or the probable daily assessment basis. In relation to children whose attendance at school was compulsory, entitlement to 'pandemic nursing benefit' only applied to those caring for children under 11 years of age (up to 18 years of age for children with a long-term health condition), due to the fact that the pupil's school / class was closed by a decision of the competent authority (school director or public health officials). An entitled person caring for a sick child under 16 years of age, i.e. a child whose condition had suddenly deteriorated and the attending physician had therefore confirmed the need for nursing, was for this time entitled to pandemic nursing benefit. In the case of children attending a pre-school setting, their parents were only entitled to the 'pandemic nursing benefit' if the kindergarten was closed by decision of the competent authority.[572]

This measure was criticised as rather problematic because the amount was lower than the parent's normal income. This could cause problems for single-parent families, of whom more than 90 % are women. It would therefore be appropriate to reconsider the amount of the pandemic nursing benefit. Another problem is that if a parent, mostly a woman, receives this allowance for a longer period of time, it can lead to employers deciding to dismiss such workers after their return to work or not renewing

569 https://www.servizz.gov.mt/en/Pages/Inclusion_-Equality-and-Social-Welfare/COVID-19-Social-Measures/Social-Measures/WEB05171/default.aspx. https://home.kpmg/xx/en/home/insights/2020/04/malta-government-and-institution-measures-in-response-to-covid.html.

570 Poland, Article 4 of the Act of 2/03/2020 on special solutions related to the prevention and combating of COVID-19, other infectious diseases and crisis situations caused by them, JoL of 2020, item 374 as amended.

571 https://www.socpoist.sk/information-about-coronavirus/68406s.

572 During the COVID-19 crisis, the Social Insurance Agency expanded the group of parents who were entitled to pandemic nursing benefit to children in various life situations. Parents who would not otherwise be entitled to the nursing benefit thus also received it. These were parents whose period of parental leave had ended and they had been unable to place the child in a pre-school facility and parents who had removed their child from private facilities and were subsequently unable to place them in another facility or find a childminder who could take care of the child. Parents with sickness insurance could also apply for nursing benefit if their child was previously cared for by another person (childminder, grandparents, etc.): https://www.socpoist.sk/aktuality-socialna-poistovna-prizna-osetrovne--ocr--aj-rodicom-po-rodicovskej-dovolenke/48411s68517c.

their contracts (if they have been employed for a fixed-term period). It would therefore be helpful if parents were able or obliged to take turns in receiving pandemic nursing benefit – this would also help to distribute unpaid work and domestic care more evenly.[573]

According to EIGE, 'essential' workers – in sectors such as health, care, education etc. – in which women are overrepresented faced long working hours and reported difficulties reconciling work and family life.[574] National experts report similar findings in particular when childcare facilities and/or schools were closed (e.g. in **Albania** and **Cyprus**). The above description of measures taken at national level shows that some entitlements were not (always) available to workers in essential sectors (e.g. **Montenegro** and **Romania**).

Employees in the health sector worked long hours throughout the year in **Sweden**, a country in which childcare and (with few exceptions) schools for children below 16 years of age remained open during the pandemic.

In many countries research shows that it was mostly women who took the available leave and took on additional care responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, some national experts are optimistic as regards the long-term effects of flexible working in view of a more equal sharing of care responsibilities between men and women (e.g. **Bulgaria**, **Czechia** and **Portugal**). The experiences with flexible working hours and teleworking during lockdowns and closing of kindergartens and schools might contribute to changes in working patters and workplaces when possible in the future. However, the picture is complex as the **Italian** expert rightly states: 'All these urgent measures are to be appreciated as they show that the economic measures also address gender equality issues. Nevertheless, the economic crisis hit women harder because of existing gender inequalities; the pandemic is having a regressive effect on women's participation in the labour market. Most critics already highlighted the need for a really strong and long-term effort to push for greater gender equality as fast as possible. This is not just to avoid taking a step backwards with regard to gender quality, but also for the benefit of economic growth.'

4.11.3 Future prospects

The transposition of the Work-Life Balance Directive 2019/1158 into national law by 2 August 2022 will provide equal minimum rights for workers in the EU Member States when this directive is correctly implemented, as it requires a minimum level of protection for workers to be ensured.[575]

Some experts are worried that new legislation might reduce existing rights. For example in **Italy**, criteria for a new regulation have been adopted which include:

- More flexible use of parental leave will have to be provided, in a way that is compatible with the employer's organisational needs and following the provisions of collective agreements.
- Parents will be entitled to five hours remunerated time off to talk to the child's teachers during the school year.
- At least two months of parental leave will have to be given to each parent as non-transferrable leave.

According to the Italian expert, the reform of parental leave risks being a step backwards. In fact, the current Italian regulation is already very flexible (parental leave can also be taken on an hourly basis), while the new reference to the organisational needs of employers could hamper the use of this right.

573 Kuruc, A. (2021), 'Miera nezamestnanosti žien v SR sa v treťom štvrťroku 2020 zvýšila až o 25% vplyvom pandémie ochorenia COVID-19 oproti roku 2019' ('The unemployment rate of women in the Slovak Republic increased by up to 25 % in the third quarter of 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic compared to 2019'), available in Slovak at: https://www.totojerovnost.eu/index.php/2021/01/22/miera-nezamestnanosti-zien-v-sr-sa-v-tretom-stvrtroku-2020-zvysila-az-o-25-vplyvom-pandemie-ochorenia-covid-19-oproti-roku-2019/.

574 See https://eige.europa.eu/covid-19-and-gender-equality/essential-workers.

575 Article 16.

Moreover, at present, each parent is entitled to six months of parental leave covered by an allowance of 30 % of the remuneration paid by the Italian social security agency, the INPS, with a maximum of ten months for each child, which can be increased to eleven months where the father takes up at least three months of leave. The implementation of the principles provided by the bill, where only two months of leave are to be assigned as non-transferrable, could paradoxically have an impact contrary to the declared objectives of the reform. Moreover, no increase of the allowance has been provided and the latter is one of the main reasons for the scarce use of parental leave by fathers, along with cultural reasons. The effect in practice of other initiatives, such as extra funding and allowances to support family policies and the development of crèches by municipalities, is still awaited.

The country reports by the 36 national gender experts of the European network of legal experts in gender equality and non-discrimination[576] show that workers – as well as self-employed people –often have more rights under national than under EU law. For example, in **France**, the right to bereavement leave has been extended. In **Italy**, a period of leave of three months is given to female victims of gender-based violence who are under a protection programme certified by local authorities.

576 Available at: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/country.

5 Occupational pension schemes (Chapter 2 of Directive 2006/54)

The CJEU has made clear in its case law – in particular in the famous *Barber* judgment[577] – that occupational pension schemes are to be considered as pay. Therefore, the principle of equal treatment applies to these schemes as well. According to the CJEU, and in contrast to the so-called statutory schemes, to be discussed in Section 6, Article 157 TFEU applies to schemes which are:

i) the result of either an agreement between workers and employers or of a unilateral decision of the employer;
ii) wholly financed by the employer or by both the employer and the workers; and
iii) where affiliation to those schemes derives from the employment relationship with a given employer.

The most important consequence of this case law was that certain aspects of Occupational Social Security Schemes Directive 86/378/EEC, which was adopted in the meantime, were contrary to what is now Article 157 TFEU and had to be amended.[578] The most salient forms of discrimination in this Directive were maintaining the different pensionable ages for women and men and the exclusion of survivor's benefits for widowers.[579] In the light of the CJEU's case law, these forms of discrimination are no longer allowed. Similarly, in relation to the use of gender-segregated and different actuarial factors – in particular the different life expectancy of women and men (i.e. the fact that on average women live longer which also means that they need old-age pensions for a longer period of time) – the CJEU 'corrected' the Occupational Social Security Schemes Directive to a certain extent. The case law on occupational pensions had a considerable impact on equal treatment in occupational pension schemes in those Member States where it was previously believed that what is now Article 157 TFEU was not applicable and certain forms of discrimination were still allowed.

The case law on occupational social security schemes is now codified in Chapter 2 of Gender Recast Directive 2006/54/EC.

5.1 Direct and indirect sex discrimination in occupational social security schemes

Most countries have prohibited direct and indirect discrimination on the ground of sex in occupational social security schemes. This is not done explicitly in **Albania**, **Germany**, **Latvia**, **Poland**, **Sweden** and **Turkey**. In **Sweden**, for example, the payments in occupational pension schemes are – in parallel with the case law of the CJEU – regarded as pay and are thus covered by the ban on (among other grounds) gender discrimination in the Discrimination Act. This ban covers all types of employer decisions; occupational pension schemes are not mentioned explicitly. In **Turkey**, there is no specific prohibition as regards occupational schemes but the constitutional rule on gender equality applies to state schemes as well as occupational schemes. In **Serbia** there are no occupational pension schemes.

5.2 Personal scope

Article 6 of Gender Recast Directive 2006/54/EC defines the personal scope of Chapter 2 as follows: 'This Chapter shall apply to members of the working population, including self-employed persons, persons whose activity is interrupted by illness, maternity, accident or involuntary unemployment and persons seeking employment and to retired and disabled workers, and to those claiming under them, in accordance with national law and/or practice.'

577 Case C-262/88 *Douglas Harvey Barber v Guardian Royal Exchange Assurance Group* [1990] ECR I-1889.
578 Directive 86/378/EEC was amended by Directive 96/97/EC, and has now been repealed by Recast Directive 2006/54/EC.
579 Strictly speaking, there is, under CJEU case law, a difference between the retirement age in the sense of the age at which women or men have to leave their employment, which must be equal, and the age at which women and men qualify for their old-age and related pensions. In certain schemes this difference can be maintained, see Section 6 on Statutory Schemes of Social Security.

In most countries the personal scope is the same as in the Directive. However, some national experts report that the personal scope of national law relating to occupational social security schemes is more restricted than in the Directive (**Austria**, **Estonia**, **North Macedonia**, **Slovenia**, **Turkey**). In **Austria**, for example, where occupational pension schemes are not widespread, the personal scope of the two applicable laws (the Act on Occupational Pension Schemes (*Betriebspensionsgesetz)* and the Act on Private Pension Bearers (*Pensionskassengesetz*) covers every worker and employee working under a private contract whose employer has established an occupational social security scheme, including board members. The laws cannot be applied to unemployed people or people on sick leave with social security benefits or during periods of disability. In **Germany**, the personal scope is more restricted as self-employed people (and freelancers) cannot normally take part in occupational pension schemes. The expert from the **United Kingdom** expresses concern as to the extent of application of the Equality Act and the equivalent provisions in Northern Irish law to the self-employed: in *Jivraj v. Hashwani* the Supreme Court indicated that autonomous workers were not within the concept of 'worker' for the purposes of UK discrimination law provisions.[580]

5.3 Material scope

Article 7 of Gender Recast Directive 2006/54/EC defines the material scope of Chapter 2. On the basis of this provision, occupational schemes which provide protection against sickness, 'invalidity', old age including early retirement, industrial accidents and occupational diseases, unemployment, and occupational schemes which provide for other benefits in particular survivor's benefits and family allowances, all fall under the scope of the Directive.

In most countries the same material scope applies (e.g. **Cyprus**, **Czechia**, **Denmark**, **Finland**, **France**, **Greece**, **Hungary**, **Liechtenstein**, **Lithuania**, **Malta**, **Netherlands**, **Norway**, **Portugal**, **Slovakia**, **Sweden**, **Turkey**, **United Kingdom**).

A few experts report that national legislation relating to occupational social security is more restricted than in the Directive (**Croatia**, **Germany**, **North Macedonia**, **Poland**, **Slovenia**).

5.4 Exclusions from material scope

Article 8 of Gender Recast Directive 2006/54/EC provides that certain contracts and schemes can be excluded from the material scope of the Directive. Most countries did not make use of this possibility. Experts from **Cyprus**, **Czechia**, **Germany**, **Greece**, **Ireland**, **Liechtenstein**, **Malta**, **Portugal** and **Turkey** report that the national legislator has made use of this exclusion clause. **Czechia**, **Greece** and **Portugal** have adopted Article 8 verbatim in their national law. The most common exclusion appears to relate to self-employed people. In **Germany**, self-employed people (and freelancers) cannot normally take part in occupational pension schemes. Similarly, in **Turkey** there are no mandatory occupational pension plans for the self-employed.

5.5 Case law and examples of sex discrimination

Article 9 of Gender Recast Directive 2006/54/EC gives several examples of discrimination. While most countries appear to be free from the types of discrimination mentioned in this article and many experts report that there is no case law, some national experts have reported problems. Much of the case law at national level dates from some time ago. Current cases and developments are discussed below.

Article 9(1)f prohibits different retirement ages for men and women. As of 2018, the application of a different pensionable age for men and women in **Italy** has come to an end. In **North Macedonia**, on

580 United Kingdom, [2011] UKSC 40.

the basis of the main pension legislation (Article 18 of the Law on Pension and Disability Insurance), there are still different retirement ages for men and women (64 versus 62). In addition, the calculation of pension regarding disability is different for men and women (Article 52). In 2016, the Constitutional Court held that the difference in retirement age does not constitute sex discrimination. Instead, the Court characterised the difference as positive discrimination, based on the special societal protection of mothers and motherhood.

Apart from different retirement ages, other problems and developments also appear. In **Belgium**, the Court of Cassation fairly recently found that, as the Gender Act of 10 May 2007 is *d'ordre public*, a retired female worker could rely on Article 12 of the Act to reclaim occupational disability benefits which had been denied to her when she had reached the age of 60 (before the Act came into force), while they would have been allowed for a man up to the age of 65.[581] In **Finland** differential actuarial factors have been problematic. This will be discussed under statutory schemes. In **Germany**, while the law no longer permits different retirement ages for men and women, indirect sex discrimination remains a major problem. The Federal Labour Court has held that a failure to take periods of bringing up children into consideration for the purpose of occupational pensions constitutes neither direct nor indirect discrimination on the grounds of sex and does not violate European or national constitutional law.[582] The condition of a 15-year period of service for the same employer in order to be entitled to occupational pensions was not considered to constitute indirect sex discrimination either.[583] The Federal Labour Court explicitly rejects the addition of (interrupted) periods of service for the same employer.[584]

The **Icelandic** expert reported an interesting 2012 Supreme Court case. The Supreme Court held that the pension rights of a man in a divorce case did not fall under 'marriage property' under the Law in Respect of Marriage.[585] The claimant in this case, the former wife, referred to Article 102(2) of the Marriage Act which states that pension rights should not be excluded from divorce settlements if apparently unreasonable. The couple in this case had been married for 35 years and had had four children. His income had been considerably higher than hers, as she had not been working full-time, and subsequently he was expecting a higher old-age pension, albeit no concrete calculation was presented with regard to their expected pensions. The Supreme Court held that pension rights in case of divorce should only be shared in exceptional circumstances as the general principle in the law is that pension rights are not to be shared in the case of divorce. The Supreme Court in assessing whether these circumstances were exceptional, held that all circumstances must be scrutinised in context; the claimant (the wife) had acquired her own pension rights with her work outside the home and it had to be assumed that she would be able to increase her entitlement to pension rights before retiring. The Supreme Court furthermore pointed out that there was no explicit evidence regarding the value of the pension rights in question to support the claim of exceptional circumstances, hence confirming the ruling of the lower court.

In **Greece**, there continue to be issues of sex discrimination within the public servants' occupational social security scheme. Articles 36 and 40 of the Civil and Military Pensions Code[586] continue to be discriminatory, despite other amendments being made to the Code in response to the CJEU's judgment in C-559/07 *European Commission v the Hellenic Republic*: although, as a rule, both men and women with three children are entitled to a pension after 25 years of actual service, irrespective of this condition, the length of service in expedition units is recognised as double only for women with three children. The Court of Audit by its Judgment 743/2018 (Full Section) found that the above more favourable treatment of women constitutes gender discrimination and applied the more favourable conditions to a father of three children as well (levelling-up).[587] Nevertheless, Article 32(1) of the Civil and Military Pensions Code still

581 Judgment of 16 September 2013, (2014) *Chroniques de droit social/Sociaalrechtelijke Kronieken*, p. 282.
582 Germany, Federal Labour Court, judgment of 20 April 2010, 3 AZR 370/08.
583 Germany, Federal Labour Court, judgment of 12 February 2013, 3 AZR 100/11.
584 Confirmed by the Federal Labour Court, judgment of 9 October 2012, 3 AZR 477/10.
585 Iceland, Supreme Court case No. 568/2012.
586 Greece, Presidential Decree 169/2007, OJ A 210/31.08.2007.
587 The same reasoning was followed by the Court of Audit judgment No. 1268/2018 (Full Section) on the relevant legal framework before the amendment enacted by Act 3865/2010 as of 1 January 2011.

sets more favourable conditions for the granting of a pension to fathers of deceased military personnel than those applying to mothers. Although the Court of Audit[588] held that mothers were entitled to a pension subject to the same conditions as fathers, the provision remained.

While Article 56(1)(2) of the Civil and Military Pensions Code has been amended in order to ensure that both female and male civil servants with minor children will be eligible for the same retirement age, this does not apply during the transition period, meaning that male civil servants who fulfil the required conditions but reached the more advantageous retirement age previously only applied to women (50 years) before 31 December 2010 are not granted the same pension as female civil servants in the same position. The Court of Audit (Full Section) held in March 2020 that the more favourable retirement ages provided for female civil servants who are mothers of minor children (and the rest of female civil servants as well), compared to that provided for male civil servants, constituted direct discrimination in pay on the grounds of sex, in breach of Article 141(2) TEC (now Article 157(2) TFEU). In view of this, the Court found the impugned provision to be in breach of the principle of equality, as enshrined in the Greek Constitution and EU law.

5.6 Sex as an actuarial factor

One particularly difficult issue is the use of actuarial factors in occupational social security schemes when they differ depending on sex.[589] The use of gender-related actuarial factors is still allowed, within certain limits, under the Recast Directive (see Article 9(1)(h) and (j)).

Gender-related actuarial factors in occupational pension schemes can still be used in **Belgium** in contracts concluded before 20 December 2012, **Czechia**, **Germany** (partly), **Greece**, **Ireland**, **Italy**, **Liechtenstein**, **Malta**, the **Netherlands** and the **United Kingdom**. In **Germany**, lawyers are discussing the question of whether the *Test-Achats* ruling should be applied to occupational pension schemes.[590] In 2013, the Higher Regional Court of Celle decided that the state pension agency (covering around four million employees in the public sector) is obliged to employ gender-neutral actuarial factors under constitutional and European equality law.[591] The Higher Regional Court of Cologne disagreed.[592] In 2017, the Federal Court of Justice decided that the use of different gender-based actuarial factors by the state pension agency or by pension schemes organised under private law is incompatible with the prohibition of sex/gender discrimination under the German Constitution as well as with Directive 2006/54/EC and the *Test Achats* ruling.[593]

In **Austria**, the Supreme Court found in 2019 that an employer who calculated occupational pensions for female employees according to a more favourable method than those for male employees of the same age, in order to compensate for the gender pension gap, acted discriminatorily.[594] In 2021, the Supreme Court had to consider a similar case that included, among other things, the question of whether it constituted pay discrimination based on sex if an employer made, on average, higher contributions to a company pension fund for their female than for their male employees in 2021. Due to the fact that the limitation period for the claim had already expired, the Supreme Court rejected the review of the case and did not examine the substantive question at hand.[595]

588 Greece, Court of Audit 751/2000.
589 See Jacqmain, J. and Wuiame, N. (2015) *Gender based actuarial factors and EU gender equality law*, European equality law review 2015/1, available at: https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/2bc75714-7955-46e2-a500-669d41fdf9cf/language-en/format-PDF/source-86561749, pp. 14-24.
590 E.g. Beyer, A., Britz, T. (2013), 'Zur Umsetzung und zu den Folgen des Unisex-Urteils des EuGH' (Implementation and Consequences of the Test-Achats Ruling) *Versicherungsrecht* No. 28, pp. 1219-1227; Labour Court of Munich, judgment of 21 May 2013, 22 Ca 15307/12.
591 Germany, Higher Regional Court of Celle, judgment of 24 October 2013, 10 UF 195/12.
592 Germany, Higher Regional Court of Cologne, judgment of 6 January 2015, 12 UF 91/14.
593 Germany, Federal Court of Justice, judgment of 8 March 2017, XII ZB 663/13, with further references.
594 Austria, Supreme Court, judgment of 27 February 2019, 9 ObA 25/18v.
595 Austria, Supreme Court, judgment of 25 June 2021, 8 ObA 95/20h.

Latvia has no formal provision allowing gender-based actuarial factors, but in practice these can be used in cases where an employer provides an insurance product under an occupational social security scheme which does not fall under the Law on Private Pension Funds.

5.7 Difficulties

A perennial source of confusion is the distinction between occupational schemes and statutory schemes. In some countries the characteristics of the national social security system do not correspond to the concept of 'occupational pension schemes'. This led respective governments to believe that it was not necessary to transpose the EU provisions on occupational social security schemes, even after the amendments to the initial directive by Directive 96/97/EC. The distinction between statutory and occupational schemes is (and was) problematic in, for example, **Greece** (where social security legislation and case law deal with all schemes in the same way, without distinguishing between statutory and occupational ones). Another problem, signalled by the **Latvian** expert, constitutes the identification of what falls under the concept of occupational scheme, for example, does this also encompass additional health and life insurance sometimes provided by an employer? In addition, some of the 'new' Member States or candidate countries, in particular the post-communist states, had restructured their social security system in accordance with the so-called 'World Bank Model' (e.g. **Bulgaria**, **Latvia** and **North Macedonia**). This model does not follow a three-pillar structure like that used in the EU framework (i.e. statutory, occupational and private schemes). Instead, the World Bank Model follows the distinction between state schemes, mandatory savings schemes and voluntary schemes. It is less obvious how to apply the EU criteria for occupational schemes to the latter model.

6 Statutory schemes of social security (Directive 79/7/EEC)

Equal treatment of women and men in statutory schemes of social security was introduced in 1979, by Social Security Directive 79/7/EEC. Such schemes ensure certain benefits for workers. This refers to measures established by national legislation that protect workers against risks such as sickness, 'invalidity', old age, accidents at work, occupational diseases and unemployment.

In contrast to occupational pension schemes, discussed in the previous chapter, statutory social security schemes do not fall under the concept of pay. Some litigation has revolved around the question of whether a scheme is statutory or occupational.[596] This is particularly important since certain exceptions are allowed under Directive 79/7/EEC, but not under Article 157 TFEU or Recast Directive 2006/54/EC. The CJEU has often answered preliminary questions on issues of both direct and indirect sex discrimination in statutory social security schemes.[597]

6.1 Implementation of the principle of equal treatment

Most of the transposition measures taken by the 36 countries covered in this report concerned amendments to the rules governing the various schemes. In many countries, social security legislation is a complicated matter, governed by a web of legislative provisions, and this is also true for the introduction of gender equality in this domain. All the relevant legislation had to be screened. Almost all national experts report that the principle of equal treatment for men and women in matters of social security has now been implemented in national legislation.

In some countries this has not been done by specific legislation expressly transposing Directive 79/7/EEC, but rather through general equal treatment law or provisions in the Constitution (e.g. **Belgium**, **Croatia**, **Denmark**, **France**, **Hungary** and **Spain**).

Thus, in **Spain** there is no legislation or single legal provision expressly stipulating the prohibition of gender discrimination in statutory social security schemes. However, Article 14 of the Constitution, which generally prohibits gender discrimination, applies to social security as well. There have been a string of CJEU cases in respect of Spain concerning indirect sex discrimination in social security.[598] Spanish law has mostly been amended in response to these judgments. Following *Villar Laiz*, the Spanish Constitutional Court ruled that the partiality coefficients applied in the calculation of contributions of part-time workers was contrary to the Constitution because it was indirectly discriminatory on the ground of sex. However, the Court has limited the application of its decision, excluding its retroactivity. This is, in the opinion of the Spanish expert, against the doctrine of the CJEU. The Constitutional Court has also limited its decision to retirement pensions, although partiality coefficients are used for calculating the contributions of permanent disability pensions and some family pensions.

In **Greece**, the Constitutional prohibition of sex discrimination (Article 4(2)) also applies to social security in general, while there is legislation of limited scope that prohibits it in the field of Directive 79/7/EEC. In the **Netherlands** as well as **Italy**, there is no specific national legislation prohibiting discrimination in statutory social security schemes. However, nearly all forms of sex discrimination in this area have been eradicated in these countries.

596 See, for example, Judgment of 28 September 1994, *Bestuur van het Algemeen Burgerlijk Pensioenfonds v G. A. Beune,* C-7/93, EU:C:1994:350.

597 See for examples of prohibited indirect sex discrimination in Austrian law the Judgment of 20 October 2011, *Waltraud Brachner v Pensionsversicherungsanstalt,* C-123/10, EU:C:2011:675 (*Brachner*); and Judgment of 22 November 2012, *Isabel Elbal Moreno v Instituto Nacional de la Seguridad Social (INSS) and Tesorería General de la Seguridad Social (TGSS)*, C-385/11, EU:C:2012:746.

598 Judgment of 22 November 2012, C-385/11, *Isabel Elbal Moreno v Instituto Nacional de la Seguridad Social (INSS) and Tesorería General de la Seguridad Social (TGSS)*; Judgment of 9 November 2017, C-98/15, *Espadas Recio v Servicio Público de Empleo Estatal (SPEE)*; Judgment of 8 May 2019, C-161/18, *Violeta Villar Láiz v Instituto Nacional de la Seguridad Social (INSS) and Tesorería General de la Seguridad Social (TGSS).*

6.2 Personal scope

Article 2 of Directive 79/7/EEC lays down the personal scope of the Directive. On the basis of this provision, the Directive applies to 'the working population – including self-employed persons, workers and self-employed persons whose activity is interrupted by illness, accident or involuntary unemployment and persons seeking employment – and to retired or invalided workers and self-employed persons'.

While many experts report that the personal scope of national law is the same as in the Directive, several experts have reported that the national law relating to statutory social security is broader in personal scope than the Directive (**Finland**, **Iceland**, **Italy**, **Latvia**, **North Macedonia**, **Norway**, **Serbia**, **Slovenia**, **Sweden**, **Turkey**).

For example, in **Latvia**, the Law on Social Security applies to everyone residing in Latvia legally (with some exceptions concerning citizens of third countries with temporary residence permits). In **Sweden**, generally speaking, the social security system is individual and based on either residence or gainful activities, including both employment and self-employment. Many schemes – such as that on parental leave and pensions – include a guaranteed level covering all Swedish residents, which makes the coverage broader than required by Article 2. The scope is also broader in **Serbia**, as Article 4 of the Law on Social Protection stipulates that each individual or family in need of help and support to overcome their social and subsistence difficulties, and to create conditions in order to meet their basic needs, have the right to social security.

In the **Netherlands**, however, the personal scope of national law appears more restricted than the personal scope of the Directive, as self-employed people are not always covered by statutory social security regimes. National law relating to statutory social security schemes covers employees and former employees, i.e. those who receive an invalidity pension or an unemployment benefit or a sickness benefit on the basis of one of the social security laws. In some cases, self-employed persons are included. Dutch law refers to what are termed *gelijkgestelden*, i.e. workers who do not qualify as a worker in the sense of the Civil Code (Article 7:610), but who work under similar conditions (quasi/para-subordinate workers). Examples of this are various types of flexi-workers or home workers. For some of these persons a threshold applies: their employment relationship must have lasted for at least 30 days and their income must amount to at least 40 % of the minimum income as regulated by law. In addition, for some employment relations the possibility of being covered under the social security schemes is restricted to those who work for at least two days per week.[599] Excluded from the scope of social security schemes are, among others, directors of a company who own a majority of the shares of that company and domestic staff who work on fewer than four days a week for the same employer. According to the Central Appeals Tribunal, the interpretation of 'domestic staff' includes not only domestic cleaners or child-minders and the like, but also 'professional carers' such as trained nurses providing medical care at home in the service of an individual employer.[600]

6.3 Material scope

Article 3 of Directive 79/7/EEC lays down the material scope of the Directive. It covers sickness, 'invalidity', old age, accidents at work, occupational diseases and unemployment.

While many experts report that the material scope of national law is the same as in EU law, several experts have reported that national law relating to statutory social security is broader in material scope than the Directive (e.g. **Albania**, **Austria**, **Belgium**, **Finland**, **Germany**, **Latvia**, **Liechtenstein**, **Montenegro**, **Serbia**).

599 Netherlands, Articles 1 and 5 of the Decree designating cases where employment relationship is considered to be employment (*Besluit aanwijzing gevallen waarin arbeidsverhouding als dienstbetrekking wordt beschouwd*), 2008 Stb. 2008, 574.
600 Netherlands, Central Appeals Tribunal (CRvB), *RSV* 1996/247, 29 April 1996.

Social assistance is partially excluded from the scope of Directive 79/7/EEC. Only where it intends to supplement or replace statutory schemes does the prohibition of discrimination laid down in that directive apply (Article 3(1)(b)). For example, a family benefit for low-income families that supplements an unemployment benefit would fall under the scope of the directive.

Article 3(2) stipulates that the directive does not cover family benefits and survivors' benefits. The exception is when family benefits are granted by way of increases of benefits due in respect of the risks referred to in paragraph 1(a). Nevertheless, in almost all of the Member States and EEA countries, gender discrimination in these areas has been abolished, independently of EU law requirements. **Cyprus** is an exception when it comes to survivor's benefits: a widow's pension is payable only to a widow. A widower's pension is payable only if a widower is permanently incapable of self-support. The Parliament amended the law, but the President of the Republic referred it to the Supreme Court for a legal opinion on whether the law is unconstitutional, with reference to Article 80 of the Constitution. There is currently a proposal to amend the law as regards widower's pensions.

In **Italy**, some groups of part-time workers (i.e. those working less than 24 hours a week and vertical part-timers) are excluded from family allowances. In **Greece**, the legislation implementing Directive 79/7/EEC does not cover all the schemes which must be considered statutory.

6.4 Derogations from material scope

Article 7 of Directive 79/7/EEC contains a number of derogations Member States are permitted to make from the principle of equal treatment. There has been a tendency to stop making use of these derogations. The two most important derogations relate to the treatment of periods of care and to the differences in pensionable age.

Derogations from equal treatment: differences in pensionable age (Article 7(1)(a))[601]
As far as the traditional difference in pensionable age is concerned, the overall picture of the statutory schemes in the Member States, the EEA and the candidate countries is as follows:

- In the largest group of states there is no difference (anymore) in this respect between men and women (**Belgium**, **Cyprus**, **Denmark**, **Finland**, **France**, **Germany**, **Greece** (with the exception of a more favourable pensionable age for mothers with minor children or disabled children irrespective of their age affiliated to the general pension scheme for private sector employees), **Iceland**, **Ireland**, **Italy** (as of 2018), **Latvia**, **Liechtenstein**, **Luxembourg**, **Malta**, **Montenegro**, **Netherlands**, **Norway**, **Portugal**, **Slovakia**, **Sweden**, **Spain**).
- In other states there is a process of equalising the pensionable age, sometimes with long transitional arrangements (**Albania**, **Austria**, **Bulgaria**, **Croatia**, **Czechia**, **Estonia**, **Lithuania**, **North Macedonia** (where women have the option to retire earlier than men, which is not obligatory), **Serbia**, **Slovenia**, **Turkey**, **United Kingdom**).
- In **Romania** the difference in pensionable age is maintained.
- **Hungary** and **Poland** form a category of their own: these are countries which have recently (re) introduced differences between men and women in this respect. In 2011 Hungary introduced more differences in the form of an early retirement option available only for women, and in 2016 Poland reinstated different pensionable ages: 60 for women and 65 for men.

601 One may question the retention and reintroduction of different pensionable ages in some countries in the light of the Court's ruling in Case C-9/91, in which it underscored the temporal element by holding that: 'Although the preamble to the Directive does not state the reasons for the derogations which it lays down, it can be deduced from the nature of the exceptions contained in Article 7(1) of the Directive that the Community legislature intended to allow Member States to maintain temporarily the advantages accorded to women with respect to retirement in order to enable them progressively to adapt their pension systems in this respect without disrupting the complex financial equilibrium of those systems, the importance of which could not be ignored. Those advantages include the possibility for female workers of qualifying for a pension earlier than male workers, as envisaged by Article 7(1)(a) of the Directive.' Case C-9/91, The Queen c/ Secretary of State for Social Security, ex parte the Equal Opportunities Commission, ECLI:EU:C:1992:297 para 15.

Interestingly, in countries that have maintained or reintroduced a difference in pensionable age, the difference is regarded as fair since it compensates for unequal working conditions for men and women. As we have seen in the previous chapter on occupational pension schemes, the CJEU has another opinion concerning this difference in pensionable age cases and such direct sex discrimination is prohibited. However, in the area of statutory social security, differences in pensionable age are not prohibited. Although the difference has given rise to some litigation, the (male) complainants have not been successful very often to date.

In **Czechia**, the statutory pension system applies a different pensionable age for men and women and it also allows only women to reduce their pensionable age if they have raised more than one child. This does not apply to men, even if a man has raised his children alone. The pensionable age is being gradually increased and will be equal for men and women in 2044, when people born in 1977 will reach retirement at 67. Until then, the current discrimination against men is maintained by legislation. This practice has not been changed following the ECtHR ruling in *Andrle*,[602] or even following the CJEU ruling in *Soukupova*.[603]

Derogations from equal treatment: periods of care (Article 7(1)b)

Article 7(1)(b) provides that Member States can decide to exclude from the principle of equal treatment advantages in respect of old-age pension schemes granted to people who have brought up children, and the acquisition of benefit entitlements following periods of interruption of employment due to the bringing up of children. In the states under review, there is a whole array of 'advantages' that relate to the fact that women (or more often one of the parents) have been engaged in raising their children. These advantages can take the form of qualifying periods, i.e. periods of leave that still count for the purposes of (certain types of) social security, various bonuses or notional contributions. Much depends on the national scheme in question.

In **France**, for example, legislation granting pension credits to mothers per child had to be amended.[604] However, female civil servants still enjoy an increased insurance coverage for pensions linked to maternity if there is an agreement between the father and the mother. If the parents do not agree, the advantage will be granted to the parent who can prove that they have contributed more and for a longer period to the upbringing of the child.

Another example is **Italy**, where advantages as regards old-age pensions for the purpose of child-rearing are provided for the benefit of women. More favourable coefficients of transformation (according to which pensions are calculated) are fixed for maternity. Then, again in relation to maternity, a reduction in the age of retirement of four months per child is granted, with a maximum limit of 12 months. As an alternative to this, it is also provided that women with children are able to receive a retirement pension subject to reduced conditions.

In **Albania**, an early retirement option existed until 31 December 2014 for women with six or more children.

In **Spain**, Article 60 of the General Law of Social Security stipulates a pension supplement exclusively applicable to mothers of at least two children, although a Royal Decree has recently changed this rule. The supplement also applies to the mothers of adopted children. No equivalent measure is available to fathers who were responsible for taking care of their children. The supplement is an increase of between 5 % and 15 % of the pension and may exceed the maximum pension established in the social security system. The supplement is established to compensate for the losses in their professional careers suffered by women as a result of caring for their children. The Spanish legal expert notes that the exclusion of

602 ECtHR, *Andrle v Czechia,* No. 6268/08, 17 February 2011.
603 CJEU, Judgment of 23 October 2012, *Blanka Soukupová v Ministerstvo zemědělství,* C-401/11, EU:C:2012:658.
604 See also Judgment of 13 December 2001, *Henri Mouflin v Recteur de l'académie de Reims,* C-206/00, EU:C:2001:695; and more recently Judgment of 17 July 2014, *Maurice Leone and Blandine Leone v Garde des Sceaux, ministre de la Justice and Caisse nationale de retraite des agents des collectivités locales*, C173/13, EU:C:2014:2090.

fathers from this benefit is problematic, as these losses can also occur for men who spend time caring for their children.

In **Slovakia**, while previously there was a difference between men and women, from 1 January 2021 the retirement age is adjusted so that every insured person who has raised children has their retirement age reduced by six months for each child they brought up, compared to the retirement age of a childless insured person who was born in the same calendar year.

6.5 Sex as an actuarial factor

Unlike Recast Directive 2006/54/EC dealing with occupational social security schemes (see Section 5.6), Directive 79/7/EEC does not mention the use of gender-related actuarial factors. The list of derogations under Article 7(1) is exhaustive, and the use of gender-based actuarial factors in the calculation of social security benefits is not included. The first time the CJEU ruled on the legality of the use of sex-based actuarial factors in the calculation of social benefits, was Case C-318/13 (*X*). The Court delivered a judgment following a dispute between X and the Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health concerning the grant of a lump-sum compensation paid following an accident at work.[605] The calculation of that lump sum was based on the age of the worker and his remaining average life expectancy. In order to determine this, the worker's sex was taken into account. X, a man, then complained that he received less compensation than a woman of the same age would have received in a comparable situation. The CJEU ruled that the difference in calculation constituted a form of unequal treatment, which cannot be justified.[606]

In most countries, sex is not used as an actuarial factor in the calculation of social security benefits. The exceptions are **Belgium**, **Bulgaria** and **Germany**. In **Bulgaria**, at the end of 2017, under Act No. 92/2017, the use of sex as an actuarial factor in additional life pension for old age considered as part of the statutory pension system was declared inadmissible. Implementation of the act is yet to be monitored.

In **Finland**, following the CJEU's judgment in *X*, the Supreme Administrative Court found that the use of sex-segregated life expectancy in calculating lump-sum compensation under the Employment Accidents Act breached EU law, and that X had suffered a loss due to the Act.[607] The Employment Accidents Act (608/1948) was replaced by the Act on Employment Accidents and Occupational Diseases (459/2015), which came into force on 1 January 2015. The new Act does not contain any provisions using sex as an actuarial factor.

Belgian legislation concerning accidents at work is similar to that in **Finland**, except that only one third of the total value of the life-long compensation benefit may be paid as a lump-sum amount; gender-segregated mortality tables are used in order to calculate this value. After the European Commission requested all Member States to screen their statutory security schemes in the light of case C-318/13, a Royal Decree amended a previous decree in order to impose the use of gender-neutral actuarial factors for lump sums to be paid as of 1 January 2016.

In **Bulgaria**, until almost the end of 2017, when the legislation[608] was amended, actuarial factors based on sex were still used in the calculation of social security benefits in the area of supplementary mandatory social insurance for people born after 31 December 1959. This practice implemented by private insurance companies was systematically challenged and brought before the Supreme Administrative Court between

605 CJEU, Judgment of 3 September 2014, *X*, C-318/13, EU:C:2014:2133.
606 The Court reasoned that: 'Such a generalisation is likely to lead to discriminatory treatment of male insured persons as compared to female insured persons. Among other things, when account is taken of general statistical data, according to sex, there is a lack of certainty that a female insured person always has a greater life expectancy than a male insured person of the same age placed in a comparable situation.' (Finding 38).
607 Finland, Supreme Administrative Court, KHO:2015:8.
608 Act amending the Social Security Code (ZID KSO) (published in State Gazette No 92 of 17 November 2017).

2011 and 2013 by a group of Bulgarian women born after December 1959. Their complaints were all rejected.

In **Germany**, sex-based actuarial factors are not generally used. Concerning pensions for civil servants, however, the administration uses gender-specific mortality tables to identify the average life expectancy of men and women and calculates (among other criteria) on this basis. The Federal Administrative Court doubts that this method of 'pure statistical gender equality' is compatible with the EU law principle of equal pay and has expressed its interest in a clarifying decision from the CJEU.[609]

6.6 Difficulties

As regards difficulties with the implementation of Directive 79/7/EEC, some countries face the problem mentioned in Chapter 5.7 above: that their security schemes are not comparable to either statutory social security schemes or occupational social security schemes (e.g. **Bulgaria** and **Romania**). The **Greek** expert reports that there is limited awareness of the distinction between statutory and occupational social security schemes among various stakeholders.

Structural difficulties with statutory social security persist in many countries, often due to apparently gender-neutral rules which in effect disadvantage women (indirect discrimination). The main problems are related to:

- The differences between full-time and part-time workers (e.g. **Italy** and **Spain**). Groups of part-time workers – often women – who work for just a few hours per week are especially precarious (e.g. **Germany** and the **Netherlands**).
- Childcare leave and the discontinuity in many women's working lives (e.g. **Spain**). The experts from **Italy** and **Latvia** report inequalities in the calculation of particular benefits, due to women taking childcare leave and thereby interrupting their contributions to social security schemes. In **Latvia**, during childcare leave, parents are insured by the state instead of insuring themselves, but at a minimum amount. Consequently, being on childcare leave negatively affects the amount of their old-age pensions.
- Job segregation (where women are overrepresented in low-income sectors (e.g. **Spain**)) and the salary pay gap (e.g. **Portugal**).
- Required length of contributions: the expert from **Italy** notes in this regard that the latest legislation on pensions is far from female-friendly. Act No. 214/2011 provides for an increase of the minimum contribution condition from five to 20 years: if the claimant has less than 20 years' contributions, the pension will be paid from the age of 70.
- The economic thresholds to access benefits (e.g. **Italy**) and the formulas used to calculate the amount for old-age and disability pensions (e.g. **Portugal**).
- Health insurance: in **Croatia**, there are gender equality issues with the statutory health insurance. An example of the less favourable position of women in statutory health insurance in practice includes lower salary compensation for sickness when a woman takes sick leave (e.g. to take care of a sick child) in the six months after her return from parental leave.

The **Turkish** expert also mentions many shortcomings in the Turkish laws on social security from a gender equality perspective. The social security system in Turkey is established typically on the basis of working life and premium payments and also mainly takes the male employee as the person to be protected. For women to become beneficiaries of social security, they have to work in an insured job in the formal sector; otherwise, they have to be dependent on a man. In short, when it comes to social security,

609 Germany, Federal Administrative Court, judgment of 5 September 2013, 2 C 47/11.

according to the expert, women in Turkey are defined not as individuals, but within the framework of family and matrimony.[610]

Despite these structural problems, the **Spanish** expert reports that the issue of gender is hardly included in ongoing debates about the reform of the social security system, and the same likely applies in other countries.

In **Luxembourg**, a more singular issue has been raised: the High Council of Social Security questioned the compatibility of Article 196 paragraph 2(c) of the Social Security Code with Article 10a paragraph 1 of the Constitution. The background history to Article 196 is that when it was introduced, it was considered that young women could enter into marriages with older men with the sole objective of being entitled, without paying pension contributions, to a survivor's pension rights for the remainder of their lives. In order to prevent such an excessive burden on the finances of the old-age pension scheme, a limit of 15 years in the age difference between spouses was introduced. This provision was never repealed. While the Superior Court did not find indirect discrimination on grounds of sex, it found discrimination between spouses or partners with an age difference of greater than 15 years and those with an age difference of less than 15 years. However, the Constitutional Court did not consider the provision to be contrary to the Constitution, arguing that it seemed reasonably proportionate to the aim pursued.[611]

In **Serbia**, a decision by the Constitutional Court is pending regarding the constitutionality of a difference in age for survivors' pensions – the qualifying age being 53 for widows and 58 for widowers.

610 Turkey, Bakirci, K. (2021) *Turkey – Country report gender equality*, European Commission, available at: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/5415-turkey-country-report-gender-equality-2021-2-17-mb, p. 88.

611 Luxembourg, Constitutional Court, Case Law No. 129 of 7 July 2017. Memorial A No. 638 of 14 July 2017. available at: http://data.legilux.public.lu/file/eli-etat-leg-memorial-2017-638-fr-pdf.pdf.

7 Self-employed workers (Directive 2010/41/EU and some relevant provisions of the Recast Directive)

Protection from sex discrimination against self-employed workers, their spouses, and insofar as recognised by national law, life partners, who are not employees or partners, is a complex area. The number of self-employed workers has been increasing in Europe and they experienced severe consequences as a result of the recent economic downturn. The relatively weak provisions of Directive 86/613/EEC have been modernised and replaced by the stronger provisions of Directive 2010/41/EU, which repeals the former Directive. But even so, lacunas remain in the protection of self-employed workers in EU law.

Directive 2010/41/EU requires that the Member States take the necessary measures to ensure the elimination of all provisions which are contrary to the principle of equal treatment, for instance in relation to the establishment, equipment or extension of a business or the launching or extension of any other form of self-employed activity (Article 4(1)). Direct and indirect discrimination, harassment and sexual harassment and instruction to discriminate are prohibited. The Directive does not extend the social protection of the self-employed, but where a system for social protection for self-employed workers exists in a Member State, that state must take the necessary measures to ensure that spouses and life partners can benefit from social protection in accordance with national law (Article 7). The Member States must take the necessary measures to ensure that female self-employed workers, and female spouses and life partners may, in accordance with national law, be granted a sufficient maternity allowance allowing interruptions in their occupational activity owing to pregnancy or motherhood for at least 14 weeks (on a mandatory or voluntary basis). Measures must also be taken to ensure access to temporary replacements or social services (Article 8). It is worth mentioning that equality bodies should, among other things, provide independent assistance to victims of discrimination, conduct independent surveys etc. (Article 11).

In addition, various other gender equality directives are also relevant to the equal treatment of the self-employed, but only in certain respects. Directive 2006/54/EC, for instance, prohibits discrimination in access to self-employment (Article 14(1)(a)) and to occupational social security schemes (Articles 10-11). Directive 2004/113/EC, on Goods and Services, is also relevant to the self-employed, because it requires equal treatment in relation to, for instance, the renting of accommodation and services such as banking, insurance and other financial services.

7.1 Implementation of Directive 2010/41/EU

In 2015 the European network of legal experts in the field of gender equality published a report on the implementation of Directive 2010/41/EU.[612]

In several states no specific law implementing Directive 2010/41/EU has been adopted (e.g. **Albania**, **Belgium**, **France**, **Liechtenstein**, **Spain**). In several other states existing laws were amended to include provisions related to the self-employed (**Austria**, **Bulgaria**, **Croatia**, **Cyprus**, **Estonia**, **Hungary**). In some countries general equal treatment legislation applies (**Austria**, **Denmark**, **Finland**, **Iceland**, **Italy**, **Germany**, **Netherlands**, **Norway**, **United Kingdom**). **Greece** has enacted a law to specifically implement the directive,[613] but not all of the directive's provisions were transposed.

612 Barnard, C. and Blackham, A. (2015), *Self-employed: The implementation of Directive 2010/41 on the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity in a self-employed capacity,* European Commission, available at: http://www.equalitylaw.eu/index.php?option=com_edocman&task=document.viewdoc&id=2732&Itemid=295.

613 Greece, Act 4097/2012 (OJ A 235/03.12.2012).

7.2 Personal scope

7.2.1 Scope and definitions

Article 2 of Directive 2010/41/EU lays down the personal scope of the directive. It stipulates that the directive covers self-employed workers and their spouses or life partners. Self-employed workers are defined as 'all persons pursuing a gainful activity for their own account, under the conditions laid down by national law'. This leave considerable room for national law to define who might be considered a self-employed worker. The question of who a self-employed worker is according to national law is difficult, however.[614] The definition of self-employment is often not clear at national level. Catherine Barnard and Alysia Blackham have provided a categorisation of different types of definitions.[615]

Whereas some countries have copied the definition of the Directive (e.g. **Greece**), in several states 'self-employed person' or 'self-employment' is not defined at all in national legislation (**Bulgaria**, **Denmark**, **Finland**, **France**, **Italy**, **Ireland**, **Montenegro**, **Netherlands**, **Poland**, **Sweden**). In **France**, the criteria for self-employment are developed on the basis of cases from the *Cour de Cassation* (the French Supreme Court). According to the case law, a self-employed person can be defined as a person who provides services to another party in an independent and non-subordinate manner.[616] In **Austria**, self-employed is defined by law – but not comprehensively, and slightly varying according to subject matter (tax law, employment law, trade law, etc.).

7.2.2 Different categories of self-employed

The Directive does not distinguish between different types of self-employed workers. Some countries, however, do differentiate between categories of self-employed workers (e.g. **Albania**, **Croatia** (where the differentiation exists only for tax purposes, not for social security legislation), **Germany**, **Iceland**, **North Macedonia**, **Romania**, **Spain** and **Turkey**). In some of these countries not all self-employed workers enjoy the same rights. In **Iceland**, for example, not all self-employed workers are considered to be part of the same category with regard to unemployment. There is a special unemployment fund for benefit payments to farmers, small fishing-vessel owners and lorry drivers.[617] Other self-employed individuals, just like wage earners, are entitled to apply to the Directorate of Labour for unemployment benefits when becoming unemployed.

In **Austria**, **Romania** and **Turkey**, agricultural workers also form a separate category. In **Germany**, there are hundreds of professions in the field of self-employment and many of them are organised in associations with the right of self-regulation and their own social security systems, especially professional pension funds. Thus, self-employed workers are covered by various and very different federal and state laws, as well as professional regulations. In **Spain**, there are two kinds of self-employed workers: the ordinary ones (who are called *autónomos)*, and the economically dependent self-employed workers (who are called *trabajadores autónomos económicamente dependientes* or *TRADE).*

7.2.3 Recognition of life partners

As to the recognition of spouses and life partners of self-employed people, the picture at the national level is diverse. The experts from **Bulgaria**, **Cyprus**, **Czechia**, **Denmark**, **Estonia**, **Hungary**, **Italy**, **Latvia**, **Lithuania**, **Montenegro**, **North Macedonia**, **Norway**, **Poland**, **Romania**, **Serbia**, **Slovakia**

614 Barnard, C., Blackham, A. (2015) 'Self-employment in EU Member States: the role for equality law', *European equality law review* 2015/2, pp. 7-10.
615 Barnard, C., Blackham, A. (2015) 'Self-employment in EU Member States: the role for equality law', *European equality law review* 2015/2, pp. 7-10.
616 For instance see, Court of Cassation, Social Chamber, 13 November 1996, Dr. Soc. 1996. 1067.
617 Iceland, Article 7 of the Unemployment Insurance Act No. 54/2006.

and **Turkey** report that national law does not recognise life partners or only to a minor extent. In **Greece** they are recognised: social security rights were granted in 2016, but only to life partnership agreements that were entered into after 23 December 2015. People who entered into a life partnership agreement before 23 December 2015 have the right, if they so wish, to acquire such rights by means of a notarial deed. However, life partners have not yet been granted rights related to employment.

7.3 Material scope

Article 4 of Directive 2010/41/EU lays down the material scope of the directive. It provides that, 'there shall be no discrimination whatsoever on grounds of sex in the public or private sectors, either directly or indirectly, for instance in relation to the establishment, equipment or extension of a business or the launching or extension of any other form of self-employed activity' (Article 4(1)). Harassment and sexual harassment and an instruction to discriminate are also prohibited.

Many experts report that the material scope of national law is the same as in the Directive (e.g. **Austria**, **Cyprus**, **Estonia**, **Greece**, **Slovakia**, **Spain**, **Sweden**). The expert from **Albania** reports that legislation there is broader than the directive.

7.4 Positive action

Article 5 of Directive 2010/41/EU gives Member States the possibility of taking positive action (within the meaning of Article 157(4) TFEU) with a view to ensuring full equality in practice between men and women in working life, for instance aimed at promoting entrepreneurial initiatives among women.

The majority of states have not made use of this power in the context of self-employment (**Austria**, **Belgium**, **Bulgaria**, **Cyprus**, **Czechia**, **Denmark**, **Finland**, **Greece**, **Hungary**, **Ireland**, **Latvia**, **Liechtenstein**, **Lithuania**, **Malta**, **Netherlands**, **Norway**, **Poland**, **Romania**, **Slovakia**, **Slovenia**, **Sweden**, **United Kingdom**).

Where positive action has been taken, this has been related to providing financial incentives and subsidies for female entrepreneurs (**Albania**, **Croatia**, **Spain**, **Turkey**); preferential treatment for loans for female entrepreneurs to set up or develop a business (**Estonia** (although this is solely project-based, a national support scheme does not exist), **France**, **Germany**, **Italy**, **Poland**, **Sweden**, **Turkey**); providing training (**Croatia**, **Estonia**, **Italy**, **North Macedonia**, **Turkey**) and advice services (**Spain**); tax relief or exemptions (**Poland**) and social security contribution reductions (**Spain**); support, mentoring, counselling and other activities to encourage women's self-employment (**Germany**, **North Macedonia**, **Serbia**); and financial support for independent women's networks (**Luxembourg**).[618]

Despite these actions and programmes, gender inequality persists in this sphere. The **Serbian** expert, for example, explained that women face more unfavourable conditions for the development of their enterprises than men due to their position in the labour market, the gender gap in property ownership, greater involvement of women in the home, and the still strong gender stereotypes which cause a lack of confidence among women and influence their willingness to initiate their own business venture. The main problems in Serbia are: difficulties in obtaining funds from financial institutions and lack of initial capital, disadvantageous traditional lending models and non-creditworthiness, the property usually being registered in the husband's name, the lack of microfinance institutions, and the lack of knowledge and skills for entrepreneurship.[619]

618 Barnard, C. and Blackham, A. (2015), *Self-employed: The implementation of Directive 2010/41 on the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity in a self-employed capacity*, available at: http://www.equalitylaw.eu/index.php?option=com_edocman&task=document.viewdoc&id=2732&Itemid=295, pp. 19-20.

619 The National Strategy for the Improvement of the Position of Women and Promotion of Gender Equality, Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 15/2009.

7.5 Social protection

Article 7 of Directive 2010/41/EU provides that '[w]here a system for social protection for self-employed workers exists in a Member State, that Member State shall take the necessary measures to ensure that spouses and life partners can benefit from a social protection in accordance with national law.' The Member States may decide whether the social protection is implemented on a mandatory or a voluntary basis.

All countries have a system of social protection in place for self-employed workers. These systems vary considerably, however. In some countries, self-employed workers are covered in the same way as employees (e.g. **Croatia**, **Montenegro**, **Slovenia**). Often there is a combination of mandatory (e.g. covering pensions and health insurance) and voluntary (e.g. covering sickness insurance) schemes in place. In the **Netherlands**, for example, self-employed people are covered by the national insurance schemes, which provide for basic welfare benefits, by the Surviving Dependants Act and, from pensionable age (65 years and three months in 2015), by the General Old-Age Pensions Act. They cannot, however, automatically rely on employment-related insurance schemes, such as unemployment and disability benefits. Instead, they can choose to join these insurance schemes voluntarily (but will only benefit if they meet certain criteria, such as having paid contributions for at least three years); take out (generally more costly) private insurance; or remain uninsured. Furthermore, they do not (yet) have access to a supplementary collective pension scheme.

The 2015 report on the implementation of the directive, by Barnard and Blackham, notes that social protection for spouses (and sometimes life partners) is mandatory in most countries (**Austria**, **Belgium**, **Croatia**, **Cyprus** (not life partners), **Czechia**, **Denmark**, **Finland**, **France** (not spouses and life partners in the liberal professions), **Germany**, **Iceland**, **Ireland**, **Italy**, **Liechtenstein**, **Luxembourg**, **North Macedonia** (not life partners), **Norway**, **Poland**, **Portugal**, **Spain**, **Sweden**, **Turkey** (not life partners).[620] Voluntary systems exist in **Bulgaria**, **Estonia**, **Lithuania** (not life partners), **Luxembourg** (voluntary if not in agriculture), **Romania**, **Slovakia**, **Slovenia** and the **United Kingdom** (though with some residence-based entitlements).[621]

7.6 Maternity benefits

Article 8 of Directive 2010/41/EU regards maternity benefits for female self-employed workers and female spouses and life partners of self-employed workers. Paragraph 1 states that:

> 'The Member States shall take the necessary measures to ensure that female self-employed workers and female spouses and life partners... may, in accordance with national law, be granted a sufficient maternity allowance enabling interruptions in their occupational activity owing to pregnancy or motherhood for at least 14 weeks.'

Barnard and Blackham reported that few countries have amended their law to comply with this article.[622] Several national experts have reported problems with the implementation of the provision either formally

620 See Barnard, C. and Blackham, A. (2015), *Self-employed: The implementation of Directive 2010/41 on the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity in a self-employed capacity*, European Commission, available at: http://www.equalitylaw.eu/index.php?option=com_edocman&task=document.viewdoc&id=2732&Itemid=295, p. 22.

621 See Barnard C. and Blackham, A. (2015), *Self-employed: The implementation of Directive 2010/41 on the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity in a self-employed capacity*, European Commission, available at: http://www.equalitylaw.eu/index.php?option=com_edocman&task=document.viewdoc&id=2732&Itemid=295, p. 22.

622 See Barnard, C. and Blackham, A. (2015), *Self-Employed: The implementation of Directive 2010/41 on the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity in a self-employed capacity*, European Commission, available at: http://www.equalitylaw.eu/index.php?option=com_edocman&task=document.viewdoc&id=2732&Itemid=295, p. 23.

or in practice (e.g. **Germany**, **Greece**, **Latvia**, **Lithuania**, **North Macedonia**). In 2020, **Denmark** adopted a legislative proposal to improve maternity/parental leave for self-employed workers. In **Greece**, only self-employed women – not spouses or life partners – may be granted maternity allowance. Moreover, maternity benefits for the self-employed have been fixed at a sum that is far below the poverty threshold. In **Germany**, only self-employed artists, publicists and women helping family members in the agricultural sector are entitled to maternity allowances under special regulations. In **Lithuania**, spouses of self-employed workers are not covered by the regulation on maternity allowances, while life partners are not recognised at all. The same is true for **North Macedonia**.

The expert from **Spain** provides an illustration of how maternity leave for self-employed women works in practice: as self-employed women usually declare a lower than real income, the maternity allowance hardly serves to replace the loss of their previous income. In fact, self-employed women tend to go back to work immediately after the compulsory six weeks after birth, foregoing the rest of their maternity leave. In Spain, there are no services supplying temporary replacements or other kinds of social services, other than the reductions in the social security contribution if the self-employed woman hires someone to replace her during her maternity leave or during the time devoted to the care of children.

7.7 Occupational social security

7.7.1 Implementation of provisions regarding occupational social security

Article 10 of Recast Directive 2006/54/EC stipulates that 'Member States shall take the necessary steps to ensure that the provisions of occupational social security schemes for self-employed persons contrary to the principle of equal treatment are revised with effect from 1 January 1993 at the latest'.

As regards the question of whether national law has implemented the provisions regarding occupational social security for self-employed workers, the picture is again diverse. The experts report that this is not the case in **Estonia**, **France** (although the principle of equality does apply), **Germany**, **Latvia** (not explicitly), **Lithuania**, **Montenegro** (occupational social security not recognised), **North Macedonia**, **Serbia** (occupational social security not recognised), **Spain**, **Sweden**, **Turkey** and the **United Kingdom**. In several of these countries, the view was taken that no implementation was required (e.g. the **United Kingdom**). In **Greece**, Article 10 has been reproduced in the Act transposing the Directive, but without any clarification as to which Greek schemes are occupational.

7.7.2 Exceptions for self-employed workers regarding matters of occupational social security

Article 11 of Recast Directive 2006/54/EC provides for exceptions for self-employed workers regarding matters of occupational social security. In certain circumstances, Member States may defer compulsory application of the principle of equal treatment. Such exceptions only appear to apply in **Greece**, **Ireland** and **Portugal**. In **Ireland**, single member schemes are excluded from the Pensions Acts. In **Portugal**, Article 5 of DecreeLaw No. 307/97, of 11 November 1997 (which deals with gender equality in occupational social security) uses the exceptions for self-employed workers regarding matters of occupational social security. In **Greece**, the national expert reports that the relevant article of the Act transposing the Directive is not clear.[623]

7.8 Prohibition of discrimination in the access to self-employment

Article 14(1) of Recast Directive 2006/54/EC provides that there shall be no direct or indirect sex discrimination in relation to 'conditions for access to employment, to self-employment or to occupation, including selection criteria and recruitment conditions, whatever the branch of activity and at all levels of

623 Greece, Article 8(3) of Act 3896/2010.

the professional hierarchy, including promotion'. This prohibition of discrimination has been implemented in **all countries**, albeit not everywhere explicitly specifically for self-employed workers. The exceptions are **Lithuania**, **North Macedonia** and **Serbia**.

In **Germany**, the prohibition of gender-based discrimination against self-employed workers is restricted to access to self-employed activities and promotion. It is contested whether self-employed people may invoke Section 19 of the General Equal Treatment Act (transposing requirements of Directive 2004/113/EC) against discrimination concerning working conditions or the discriminatory termination of self-employment contracts.[624] The courts have not yet confirmed this possibility. In **Sweden**, as regards the self-employed there is no prohibition applicable to discrimination as regards the choice of a business partner. Nor does legislation cover the termination of contractual relationships with a self-employed person.

624 See Thüsing, G. (2007), *Arbeitsrechtlicher Diskriminierungsschutz*, para. 94, Munich.

8 Goods and services (Directive 2004/113)

In conformity with Directive 2004/113/EC, all EU Member States have proceeded to prohibit in their laws direct and indirect discrimination on grounds of sex in the access to and supply of goods and services, also including non-EU Member States **Iceland**, **Liechtenstein**, **Montenegro**, **North Macedonia** and **Norway**. In **Turkey**, the new Article 5 of the Act on the Human Rights and Equality Institution transposes this directive as well. In **Serbia** the prohibition concerns only the provision of services and not goods.

(i) Scope of domestic laws

According to Article 3(1) of the Directive, it 'shall apply to all persons who provide goods and services, which are available to the public irrespective of the person concerned as regards both the public and private sectors, including public bodies, and which are offered outside the area of private and family life and the transactions carried out in this context'. Yet there are quite some differences between states when it comes to the material scope of their national laws, depending in particular on whether they have used the exclusion of Article 3(3):

> 'This Directive shall not apply to the content of media and advertising nor to education.'

While quite some countries have used the above exclusions (**Austria**, **Cyprus**, **Estonia**, **Finland**, **Germany**, **Greece**, **Italy**, **Liechtenstein**, **Poland**, **Portugal**, **Romania**), in yet more countries the material scope is actually broader than required by the Directive because it also applies to the content of media, advertising and education (**Belgium**, **Bulgaria**, **Croatia**, **Denmark**, **Estonia**, **Hungary** (housing and education), **Iceland**, **Latvia**, **Lithuania**, **Luxembourg**, **North Macedonia**, **Norway**, **Malta**, **Serbia**, **Slovakia**, **Slovenia**, **Spain**, **United Kingdom**). However, in **Slovene** law the terms goods and services are not defined.

In **Denmark**, the Act on Gender Equality applies to all areas of society, encompassing media content, advertising and education. The scope of **Maltese** law and also the law of **North Macedonia** are framed very widely, the latter referring to bodies of the legislative, executive and judicial authorities, local self-government bodies and other bodies in the public and private sectors, public enterprises, political parties, mass media and the civil sector, and all the entities providing goods and services available to the public, offered outside the area of private and family life. **United Kingdom** law covers 'facilities' as well as goods and services and does not require that services are of a nature which would generally be paid for. **Spanish** law contains two specific provisions that offer protection to pregnant women and women on maternity leave: costs related to pregnancy and childbirth do not justify differences in premiums and benefits for individual people and, in the access to goods and services, it is not allowed to inquire about the pregnancy of a woman, except for health protection.

Serbian law provides for a duty of social and healthcare institutions and other institutions dealing with the protection of women and children to adjust their work organisation and working hours to the requirements of their clients. Two cases were decided by the **Swedish** Equality Ombudsman, both concerning harassment of women by a taxi driver and a bus driver respectively. The two women were awarded compensation of EUR 6 300 and EUR 3 150 respectively. **Ireland** has reported a case that did not lead to a finding of discrimination: the denial of return passage by an airline to a pregnant woman was not considered to be based on the pregnancy, but on the stage of pregnancy and the risk this posed to safety.

Some countries have taken something of an in-between position in this regard. The **Netherlands**, for instance, only allows exceptions regarding education, so as to give institutions for special education some room to follow their own beliefs. Likewise, in **France** the law allows for the organisation of single-sex schools (both public and private) schools. **Ireland** has used the exceptions of both education and

advertising, whereas **Turkey** has availed itself of the exceptions of advertising and media but not education. In **Sweden** the situation is different again: media and advertising are not covered by the non-discrimination principle, whereas education is. In **Norway**, the non-discrimination principle extends to both education and advertising, and there have indeed been some instances of sex discrimination in advertisements, regulated by Article 2 of the Marketing Control Act.

In some countries, the precise material scope is unclear because the legislation simply guarantees equal access to goods and services without any further specification (**Czechia**, **Montenegro**). The **Romanian** Goods and Services Law was adopted to transpose the Directive and incorporated its scope and permitted exclusions, yet such legal limitations are inconsistent with the rest of **Romanian** legislation that was already in place and which exceeds the Directive requirements. Such legislation does not allow for any exceptions, e.g. regarding real estate contracts, bank loans and any other type of contract, and also applies to services in the field of education and media and advertising. Moreover, the 2015 amendment of the Gender Equality Law introduced the explicit obligation that advertising agencies refrain from using gender stereotypes in their productions. In practice, the National Council for Combating Discrimination applies the Anti-discrimination Law to cases where, for example, discriminatory advertising is concerned.

According to **Bulgarian** statutory law the non-discrimination principle only extends to education, but on the basis of case law also includes media and advertising. The scope of the **Lithuanian** implementing law does not clarify whether access to goods and services is fully covered, as on the one hand it defines 'different opportunities' for selecting goods and services as a violation of the equal treatment principle that can trigger an administrative penalty, but on the other it does not prohibit situations where the refusal to supply goods or provide services is based on the consumer's sex. Furthermore, the consumer is always perceived as a physical person only. The supply of goods or the provision of services can be denied to legal persons who are represented by natural persons of a certain sex.

Importantly, in some countries the material scope is more restricted. **German** law is confined to contracts concluded under civil law and also provides for certain exceptions, such as the application to so-called 'mass contracts' only. Furthermore, the prohibition of sexual harassment is confined to the area of employment. **Latvian** law does not cover goods and services which are publicly offered by natural persons outside commercial activities, for example, if a natural person publicly advertises the sale of their own apartment.[625] Non-profit associations are not covered either because they are precluded from providing any goods and services in return for payment, consequently their activities are not considered as commercial.

In **Estonia**, the law mainly refers to nationality, race and colour as grounds prohibiting discrimination in the access to goods and services and it allows for some exceptions and differences in treatment of people due to their sex. Thus, the scope of the Estonian legislation is more restricted than that of Directive 2004/113. It does not prohibit discrimination on grounds of religion or other beliefs, age, disability or sexual orientation in access to the services and supply of goods that are available to the public, including housing. Moreover, gender reassignment as a specific ground of discrimination is not protected under Estonian legislation. The applicable **Irish** Equal Status Act cannot be used to challenge legislative provisions that may be discriminatory under Directive 2004/113/EC. The best approach to resolve such an issue is to seek a judicial review of the relevant decision and to plead that the decision is in breach of the directive.

625 Note that in reaction to an infringement procedure opened by the European Commission against Latvia, in December 2021 the Latvian Parliament amended the law and now non-discrimination is applicable in transactions between private individuals in case of public offer.

(ii) Possibility of justifications

Article 4(5) of Directive 2004/113/EC stipulates that '[t]his Directive shall not preclude differences in treatment, if the provision of the goods and services exclusively or primarily to members of one sex is justified by a legitimate aim and the means of achieving that aim are appropriate and necessary'. In some countries, the law does not (explicitly) provide for any such possibility of justification of differences in treatment in the provision of goods and services (**Montenegro**, **North Macedonia**, **Portugal**, **Serbia**), but most domestic laws do (**Austria**, **Bulgaria**, **Croatia**, **Cyprus**, **Czechia**, **Denmark**, **Estonia**, **Finland**, **France**, **Germany**, **Greece**, **Hungary**, **Italy**, **Latvia**, **Liechtenstein**, **Luxembourg**, **Malta**, **Poland**, **Slovenia**, **Spain**, **Turkey**, **United Kingdom**). However, application of this rule and case law have been very scarce so far.

In the **Netherlands**, such justifications include sanitary facilities, changing rooms, dormitories and saunas, beauty and sports contests, and the protection from or fight against sexual violence and harassment, and aid for victims thereof. Such sex-segregated services aimed at protection must be necessary and proportionate. **German** law allows differential treatment if there is an objective reason for this, examples of this being the prevention of danger or harm to others or the need to protect privacy or personal security. However, the requirement of proportionality does not exist in the respective German legislation. In **Belgium**, while the federal Gender Act allows for justifications, these have not been further stipulated in an ancillary Royal Decree. But as certain aspects of the notion of 'goods and services' fall within the respective jurisdictions of the federal authorities and statutes, courts may in fact assess proposed justifications for differences in treatment, a case in point concerning the access to a fitness facility reserved for women. This was considered justified because of the morphological differences between men and women and the protection of privacy. In **Denmark**, the Equality Board has ruled that the principle of equal treatment in access to goods and services does not always require the provision of facilities for men and women on a common basis, as long as the facilities are not provided on more favourable terms to members of one sex.

The **Finnish** Equality Ombudsman has considered that offers to one sex only are justified if their monetary value is small and when special offers are made for the annual mother's or father's day celebrations. Some public baths and swimming pools offer some hours for men and women separately, and public saunas are offered for men and women separately. In **Croatia**, the Ombudsperson for Gender Equality issued a recommendation in 2019 that other more appropriate means, such as visible signs with rules of behaviour, should be used, rather than a complete ban on service to male users during certain hours. In **Norway**, the Equality Tribunal found that a fitness centre offering reduced subscriptions for women exercising during the evening amounted to sex discrimination, but concluded that this was justified as it was a necessary measure to achieve the purpose of getting more women to exercise at the centre in the evening. Moreover, men were not disadvantaged by the offer, and the offer was in any case limited to 50 memberships, thus the advantage for women was relatively small and limited. In **Northern Ireland**, limited exceptions for small dwellings are allowed, exceptions designed to protect privacy and decency in circumstances where personal and/or health care is provided or service users will be in a state of undress, as well as to protect religious freedom. In **Ireland**, a male-only golf club was not considered to be discriminatory. In **Estonia**, services specifically aimed at supporting women represent a justifiable exception to the prohibition of gender discrimination in the consumption and supply of goods and services (e.g. shelters). Estonia has a regulated women's support service and most shelters for victims of domestic violence are prepared to meet victims' needs, e.g. women can be accompanied by children.

In **Lithuania**, there is no statutory provision on the possibility of justifications of sex discrimination in the sphere of goods and services, but the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson does investigate individual complaints. For example, women on parental leave until their child reaches the age of three were refused consumer credit for financing the purchase of domestic electric appliances. The Ombudsperson dismissed this complaint on the ground that there was no evidence that the company had the intention to discriminate against the women. It also justified the equal quotas for boys and girls with regard to access

to a Jesuit grammar school for reasons of 'creditable' proportional representation of both sexes. Nor did it see a violation of equal treatment in the activities of the 'pink taxi' company, which was established to provide services for women only.

In **Bulgaria**, interesting decisions have been taken by both the Supreme Administrative Court and the Commission for the Protection from Discrimination, which show a certain amount of deference to moral arguments and persisting stereotypes as an excuse for not dealing with the issues at stake from the perspective of discrimination. Experts and women's NGOs in Bulgaria are convinced that these decisions are also due to the fact that media and advertisements are excluded from the scope of the Directive. Justifications for differences in treatment are specified in the Act on the Human Rights and Equality Institution of **Turkey** (Article 7) with regard to all types of discrimination, including the provision of goods and services.

(iii) Compliance with the Test-Achats *ruling*

Since the *Test-Achats* ruling,[626] the laws of all EU Member States have been amended so as to ensure that the use of sex as a factor in the calculation of premiums and benefits for the purposes of insurance and related financial services shall not result in differences in individuals' premiums and benefits, from the date set for this by the *Test-Achats* ruling, being 21 December 2012 (see also Article 5(1) and (2) of Directive 2004/113/EC).

The only non-EU states in which this is not the case are **Liechtenstein**, **North Macedonia**[627] and **Serbia**. In **Montenegrin** law there is no explicit prohibition on this, but it can be inferred from general equality law that it does not allow for an exception in this regard. In EEA countries, the CJEU ruling is applicable to exchanges of services between EU residents only and therefore in **Liechtenstein** differences in premiums and benefits are still allowed. In **Serbia** as well risk factors based on sex in connection with insurance premiums and benefits are still used in practice. While **Hungarian** law has been changed, it still allows exemption from the unisex rule as regards group life, accident and sickness insurance schemes.

In **Finland**, employers have started to provide pension schemes for some of their employees (typically for directors or high-level executives) that are not considered to be consumer insurance schemes, and as they are not statutory schemes, sex may then be used as an actuarial factor. **Estonian** law still allows insurance undertakings in the assessment of insured risks in sickness insurance to take into account risks which are characteristic only of people of one gender and to differentiate, if necessary and corresponding to the extent of the specified risks, the insurance premiums and insurance indemnities of women and men. This provision is considered to be in contravention of EU law. In **Slovenia**, insurance undertakings may, in relation to life assurance, accident and health insurance, take into consideration the personal circumstance of gender in the determination of premiums and benefits in general, if this does not lead to any differentiation at the individual level.

A noteworthy effect of the amendment to the **Spanish** law in order to comply with the *Test-Achats* ruling has been an increase in car insurance costs for women, since previously it was quite common for insurance companies to establish lower prices for women. Under **Romanian** law all insurance companies have the obligation to draft and apply internal norms and procedures regarding the collection, processing, publishing and updating of statistical and actuarial data used for the calculation of premiums and/or benefits.

626 CJEU, Case C-236/09.

627 Please note, however, that Article 3(4) of the Law on Equal Opportunities for Men and Women 'prohibits discrimination based on sex in access to goods and services in the public and private sector, including discrimination in premiums from insurance schemes' (North Macedonia, Kotevska, B. (2020) *North Macedonia – Country report gender equality*, European Commission, available at: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/5205-north-macedonia-country-report-gender-equality-2020-pdf-1-45-mb, p. 56).

(iv) Possibility of positive action measures

Many legal systems allow for positive action measures in relation to the access to and supply of goods and services (in accordance with Article 6 of the Directive); in some countries this was clarified only recently (**Montenegro**). However, the adoption of such measures is the exception rather than the rule, as only **Ireland**, **North Macedonia**, **Spain**, **Sweden** and the **United Kingdom** have done it thus far. Such measures include public measures in relation to access to certain goods when women are in special situations of risk; for example, **Spanish** law states that the Government will promote the access of women to housing when they are in a situation of need or at risk of exclusion, and when they have been victims of gender-based violence.

The **Irish** Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012 provides that in order to obtain state funding during the next parliamentary term, each political party must have at least 30 % female candidates running in the next general election. This legislation was enacted because of the low number of women parliamentarians, but a constitutional action against this provision has been initiated in the courts. In **Northern Ireland** as well positive action measures are allowed in relation to political parties and voluntary bodies. In **Sweden**, differential treatment of men and women with regard to services and housing is allowed, when this is for a legitimate aim and the means applied are necessary and appropriate. In **Estonia**, a child maintenance support fund primarily children and women, because the majority of single parents are women. Regulations for the fund's payments are stipulated by the Family Benefits Act (FBA) and the fund became operational on 1 January 2017.[628] In **Lithuania**, the National Payment Agency, under the Ministry of Agriculture, has started a programme in 2020 which aims at providing financial support of up to EUR 17 000 for starting a business in rural areas.[629] According to the evaluation criteria for applications, female applicants will receive an additional 5 points (out of 100 points) solely for being female. This has caused some questions, but the Ministry of Agriculture has asserted that there is no discrimination because women generally have much lower entrepreneurship skills than men.

(v) Specific problems

Several states have reported specific problems of discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy, maternity or parenthood in relation to the access to and supply of goods and services. These include:

- complaints regarding discrimination in the access to and supply of health services, mostly in connection with female reproductive health, i.e. abortion and accessibility of contraception. In **Croatia**, the Ombudsperson for Gender Equality reported several complaints during 2017 concerning the denial of abortions by certain health institutions, and the difficulties experienced by women in such cases because health workers may refuse to perform an abortion and pharmacies may refuse the morning-after pill to women for reasons of conscience. In February 2017, a decision by the Constitutional Court confirmed the constitutionality of the act regulating the right to freedom of choice regarding childbirth, stating that this is implied in the right to privacy, which includes self-determination, freedom of choice and dignity. It has therefore confirmed the existing freedom of women to decide on the termination of their pregnancy (within the legally prescribed limits).[630] Nevertheless, a 2020 survey on the accessibility of legally induced abortions in Croatian medical facilities authorised to conduct such procedures reveals that difficulties in accessing abortion, and even in receiving information about the availability of such procedures, persist in many of them;
- banks refusing to grant loans to women during periods of pregnancy and maternity and parental leave (**Croatia**), but following recommendations of the Ombudsperson for Gender Equality many banks

628 Estonia, Chapter 4 of the Family Benefits Act, RT I, 24.12.2016, 5, available at: https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/521062017011/consolide.

629 For the programme, see https://www.nma.lt/index.php/naujienos/verslo-paraiskos-nuo-rugsejo-atnaujinta/37910. For further information, see https://www.15min.lt/verslas/naujiena/finansai/moterims-parama-gauti-bus-lengviau-bet-tai-nebus-diskriminacija-662-1260950.

630 Croatia, Constitutional Court of the Republic of Croatia, Decision of 21 February 2017, U-I-60/1991.

changed their practices. Nevertheless, cases of male clients on parental leave being discriminated against have been reported, as have cases regarding compensation for new-born children arising out of life insurance policies being only available for women;
- unequal standards of care and protection for women giving birth, depending on the hospital and differences in fees for voluntary abortion (**Croatia**);
- application of a waiting period before self-employed women can insure themselves with private insurance companies against the risk of maternity leave (the **Netherlands**);
- private health insurance companies terminating the membership of pregnant women or excluding benefits for pregnancy and childbirth from the beginning (**Germany**);
- the access to health services attached to insurance contracts being restricted by the widespread practice of establishing an initial period during which the contract has no effect, this period possibly covering pregnancy time (**Portugal**);
- reported cases of refusals to rent flats to pregnant women (**Poland**);
- denial of services, e.g. in restaurants, to breastfeeding mothers (**Germany**, **Poland**). In a ruling of 14 December 2017, the Court of Appeal in Gdańsk found that preventing a woman from breastfeeding her child at a restaurant table constituted discrimination with regard to sex, ordering the restaurant owner to pay damages equivalent to EUR 500 plus interest. In addition, the restaurant owner was obliged to issue a public statement apologising to the woman for this unlawful behaviour;
- mothers (occasionally fathers, as well) not allowed to enter shops or buses with a pram (**Poland**);
- restriction of the presence of fathers (or other companions) in delivery rooms while their partners were giving birth, as a measure taken in response to the spread of COVID-19 in 2020 (**Cyprus**, **Estonia**, **Slovakia**); the equality body in **Cyprus** made an *ex officio* intervention against this practice, denouncing the practice and urging public and private hospitals to allow women to be accompanied by their partners while giving birth;
- the protection under domestic legislation is considered not sufficiently clear and precise so as to allow individuals to understand their rights and for providers of goods and services to understand their legal obligations as far as transsexual people, pregnant women and women who have recently given birth are concerned (**Lithuania**);
- in the absence of legislation stipulating what kinds of risks have to be covered by private insurance programmes, insurance companies do not provide any standard travel and health insurance programme covering risks related to pregnancy and maternity (**Latvia**).

By contrast, in **Italy**, Article 4(2) of Directive 2004/113/EC has been applied to maintain the exemption from fees for all clinical tests related to pregnancy and for certain clinical tests during the same period. Moreover, having children is regarded as a preferential ground to have access to public housing, while having more than one child is a preferential ground to gain access to a public kindergarten.

In **Norway**, the Biotechnology Act raised questions about inequality for several years, because sperm donation was allowed, but egg donation was not. Before the change to the Act in 2020, the Equality Ombud, among others, criticised this practice. In July 2020, the Parliament decided to permit egg donation by changing Section 2-11 of the Biotechnology Act.

In **North Macedonia**, access to health services for Roma women remains an issue. This was further exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In **Albania**, the burden of proof for claims of discrimination regarding access to and supply of goods and services is not shifted with respect to civil courts, but only in administrative procedures.

Another specific problem that has been highlighted by some experts concerns the impact of algorithms on gender equality, including in the area of goods and services. For example, in **Spain**, while online and digital market environments are rapidly expanding, the attention dedicated to the impact of algorithms on gender equality and the question of algorithmic discrimination is still limited. **Estonia** provides another example of a lack of engagement with the subject of algorithmic discrimination both from the public

and from representatives of civil society and the equality body. In **France**, there is a debate on the risk of algorithmic sex discrimination in goods and services outside of employment. For example, algorithms can also increase the risk of sex discrimination by raising prices for gendered products designed for menstruation (female consumers are easy targets for predatory prices). The European network of legal experts in gender equality and non-discrimination has published a report on algorithmic discrimination and the state of laws and policies on this issue across the EU.[631]

Finally, the COVID-19 crisis has also given rise to specific problems relating to equal access to goods and services, especially in relation to health. For example, the **Belgian** expert reports that access to care during the pandemic, especially to reproductive care (for example, abortion) has been problematic. In **Croatia**, a thematic report on the impact of COVID-19 on the reproductive health of women was published in 2020, looking into reproductive healthcare during the pandemic. The results show that some of the pre-existing issues, such as uneven standards of care, difficulties in accessing or the complete inaccessibility of certain healthcare services, as well as the lack of available information for patients, have continued and were aggravated during the pandemic.

In **Slovakia**, the National Centre for Human Rights reported cases where providers refused to provide preventive healthcare for women in the form of radiological examinations (mammography), which forms part of breast cancer screening. Some healthcare providers suspended abortions, referring to a government requirement to postpone non-essential operations in response to COVID-19. In **Romania**, access to abortion has been significantly hindered due to the COVID-19 crisis. NGOs reported that the large majority of hospitals stopped providing this healthcare service, especially during the few weeks of the state of emergency, as they considered it not to be essential healthcare: only 11 % of 112 hospitals reviewed and no hospital in the capital city were providing legal abortion services in April 2020, when the NGO FILIA Centre carried out telephone research.

The **Turkish** expert reports that the pandemic did not only affect access to healthcare. According to a survey carried out by the UN Women Turkey Office between 19 and 25 April 2020, women experienced greater difficulty in accessing basic supplies and services than men, especially in relation to accessing personal protective equipment, such as masks and gloves, as well as 'health services and assistance'. In addition, more than one third of the respondents indicated some or major difficulty in accessing hygiene and sanitary products, and public transport. The **German** expert also reports difficulties in access to goods and services during the crisis. The annual report of the Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency recognised that women suffered further disadvantages within the context of COVID-19 related restrictions, for example in relation to single parents not being allowed to enter stores because they were accompanied by their children who, due to lockdown related closures, were not in their usual care facilities.

631 See the report produced by the European network of legal experts in the field of gender equality, Gerards, J. and Xenidis, R. (2020) *Algorithmic discrimination in Europe: Challenges and opportunities for gender equality and non-discrimination law*, European Commission, available at: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/5361-algorithmic-discrimination-in-europe-pdf-1-975.

9 Violence against women and domestic violence

The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) establishes a set of comprehensive obligations for addressing violence against women and domestic violence within the legal framework of international human rights law.[632] The Convention recognises in its preamble the structural nature of violence against women ('a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between women and men')[633] and states the purpose of the promotion of substantive equality between women and men, including by empowering women.

The Council of Europe (CoE) adopted the Istanbul Convention on 6 April 2011, and it entered into force on 1 August 2014. In Europe, it is the first instrument to set legally binding standards specifically to prevent violence against women (including girls under the age of 18).[634] The Convention covers a broad range of measures, including data collection, awareness-raising, protection, provision of support services and measures to address migrant women and women lodging asylum claims. It also deals with legal measures on criminalising forms of violence against women and the cross-border dimension of violence against women.

In October 2015, the European Commission published a 'Roadmap: (A possible) EU Accession to the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women, and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention)', detailing an initiative that could potentially lead to a Council Decision on EU accession to the Istanbul Convention.[635] Article 216(1) TFEU gives the EU the external competence to conclude international agreements where Treaties or legally binding EU acts so provide, where the agreement is necessary to achieve one of the objectives referred to by the Treaties, or is likely to affect common rules or alter their scope.[636] Given that combating crime and promoting gender equality are clearly established as objectives in the EU acquis, the EU has the general competence to accede to the Istanbul Convention.[637] Under Article 216(2) TFEU, agreements concluded by the EU are binding on its institutions and its Member States.[638] Thus, in case of EU accession to the Istanbul Convention, the Member States will be bound by both the EU policies that implement the Convention and the duties arising from their own ratification. To date, the only international human rights treaty ratified by the EU is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD).[639] On 13 June 2017, the EU became a signatory to the Istanbul Convention. The European network of legal experts in gender equality and non-discrimination published a report on the legal implications of EU accession to the Istanbul Convention in 2016.[640]

As accession to the Istanbul Convention has so far not been approved by the Council, the European Commission published a new roadmap on 3 August 2020.[641] On 16 December 2020 the Commission published the inception impact assessment, in which it highlighted three possible legislative and non-

632 Council of Europe, CETS No. 210, adopted 11 May 2011 and entered into force 1 August 2014.
633 Preamble, Istanbul Convention.
634 See Article 3(f) of the Convention.
635 European Commission, (2015) *(A possible) EU Accession to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention),* available at: http://ec.europa.eu/smart-regulation/roadmaps/docs/2015_just_010_istanbul_convention_en.pdf. After the cut-off date of this report the European Parliament adopted its resolution of 28 November 2019 on the EU's accession to the Istanbul Convention and other measures to combat gender-based violence, available at: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2019-0080_EN.html.
636 Article 216(1) TFEU.
637 After the cut-off date of this report, on 6 October 2021, the CJEU handed down opinion A-1/19 which defines the limits of the EU and the Members States' competence in this regard.
638 Article 216(2) TFEU.
639 Council Decision of 26 November 2009 concerning the conclusion, by the European Community, of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2010/48/EC), available at: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32010D0048&rid=1.
640 Nousiainen, K., Chinkin, C. (2015) *Legal implications of EU accession to the Istanbul Convention,* European Commission, available at: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/3794-legal-implications-of-eu-accession-to-the-istanbul-convention.
641 Violence against women and domestic violence – fitness check of EU legislation, Ref. Ares (2020), available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12472-Violence-against-women-and-domestic-violence-fitness-check-of-EU-legislation?fbclid=IwAR0_XUlaiNW4-VI569U_LhY4RIDE_RundnRr9_XJigDS34ICD-DiYHfJ5G8.

legislative scenarios for future EU action.[642] In particular, Option No. 3 consists of a 'holistic legislative initiative on preventing and combatting gender-based violence and domestic violence' aimed at 'a comprehensive sectoral directive to prevent such violence, strengthen the protection of victims and witnesses and punish offenders.' A proposal for a Directive on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence is indeed being prepared. To inform the Commission's work on this legislative initiative, the European network of legal experts in gender equality and non-discrimination published a comparative analysis of the criminal law provisions that are applied to gender-based violence against women, including ICT-facilitated violence, authored by Sara De Vido and Lorena Sosa in 2021.[643]

As of the information cut-off date of this comparative analysis, the Istanbul Convention has been signed by 45 members of the Council of Europe, 34 of which have ratified the Convention.

Of the EU Member States, 21 had ratified the Convention by 1 January 2021: **Austria**, **Belgium**, **Croatia**, **Cyprus**, **Denmark**, **Estonia**, **Finland**, **France**, **Germany**, **Greece**, **Ireland**, **Italy**, **Luxembourg**, **Malta**, **Netherlands**, **Poland**, **Portugal**, **Romania**, **Slovenia**, **Spain** and **Sweden**. Of the EEA countries, **Norway** and **Iceland** have ratified. Most of the candidate countries have ratified (**Albania**, **Montenegro**, **North Macedonia**, **and Serbia**). In addition, **Liechtenstein** ratified the Convention in 2021.

Turkey withdrew from the Convention in March 2021 (after the official cut-off date for this report). In **Hungary**, the leaders of the ruling right-wing political alliance announced that there is no intention to ratify the Convention. In **Bulgaria**, the Constitutional Court ruled on the constitutionality of a draft law for the ratification of the Convention in 2018, finding by a simple majority that the Convention is not in compliance with the Bulgarian Constitution. In 2020, the **Slovak** government announced to the Council of Europe that it would not ratify the Convention.

In **Czechia** there has been no progression on ratification, and there is strong criticism of the Convention by one part of the Catholic Church and also some other churches. In **Latvia**, the Constitutional Court decided in 2021 that there is nothing in the IC contrary to the Constitution of Latvia.[644] In **Lithuania** ratification is still pending, but the political and public debate on the issue polarised in 2020.

In **Poland**, discussions about withdrawing from the Convention are ongoing. In 2020, the Prime Minister requested the Constitutional Tribunal to examine the compatibility of several of the Convention's provisions with the Constitution of Poland.

Legislative amendments that were adopted in the Member States because of ratification of the Convention sometimes took the form of modifications to national Criminal Codes. Proposals to amend the law are ongoing in several countries,[645] including those which had already ratified the Istanbul Convention a few years ago (e.g. **Cyprus**, **Iceland** and the **Netherlands**). In **Greece**, a new Penal Code entered into force in 2019. Most experts report that violence against women is an actively debated topic in politics and society.

642 Inception Impact Assessment, Ref. Ares (2020)7664101 – 16/12/2020, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12682-Combating-gender-based-violence-protecting-victims-and-punishing-offenders.

643 De Vido, S., Sosa, L. (2021) Criminalisation of gender-based violence against women in European States, including ICT-facilitated violence, European Commission, available at: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/5535-criminalisation-of-gender-based-violence-against-women-in-european-states-including-ict-facilitated-violence-1-97-mb.

644 Latvia, Case no No. 2020-39-02. Press release in English available at: https://www.satv.tiesa.gov.lv/en/press-release/a-case-initiated-with-respect-to-the-compliance-of-the-istanbul-convention-with-the-satversme/. Case No. 2020-39-02, decided on 4 June 2021. See https://www.satv.tiesa.gov.lv/en/press-release/information-regarding-the-judgment-of-the-constitutional-court-of-the-republic-of-latvia-in-case-no-2020-39-02-on-the-compliance-of-the-istanbul-convention-with-the-constitution-of-latvia/.

645 GREVIO (2021), Mid-term Horizontal Review of GREVIO baseline evaluation reports, available at: https://rm.coe.int/horizontal-review-study-2021/1680a26325.

10 Compliance and enforcement aspects (horizontal provisions of all directives)

This chapter concerns the way in which states have given effect to the horizontal provisions of all EU gender equality directives, that is to say those that have a bearing on ensuring compliance with and enforcement of the EU rights and obligations contained therein. It also considers whether and how states have incorporated the concept of gender mainstreaming at the national level.

10.1 Victimisation

As a matter of EU gender equality law, people who have made a complaint or instigated legal proceedings aimed at enforcing compliance with the principle of equal treatment have to be protected against dismissal or any adverse treatment or consequence in reaction to their action (Article 24 of Directive 2006/54/EC and Article 10 of Directive 2004/113/EC). Experts from all Member States, except for **North Macedonia** and to some extent **Sweden**, have reported that their national level is up to the EU standard, in some states the prohibition having been made more explicit recently (**Croatia**, **Italy**). In **North Macedonia**, protection is only ensured for anti-mobbing procedures. Victimisation is defined in a limited way as unfavourable treatment and exposure of a person to endure damage because of initiating a procedure or testifying in such a procedure. In **Sweden**, the prohibition as such seems to meet the requirements of the Recast Directive. What can be called into question is the fact that the ban on reprisals does not meet the requirement in Article 2.2.a of the directive that it should be included in the actual concept of discrimination. However, the Labour Court awarded compensation in damages of EUR 7 900 to a woman who was dismissed on the very day she made a complaint about sexual harassment.

In **Turkey**, the previous Article 5 of the Employment Act was the main provision for employees but was deemed inadequate. Now, a new approach to enforcement is envisaged by the Act on the Human Rights and Equality Institution (Act No. 6701). The Human Rights and Equality Institution must investigate discrimination upon a complaint and ex officio, and must impose a fine on natural persons and on public/private legal entities in case of discrimination. Furthermore, it must help and guide victims concerning administrative and legal procedures.

Yet there are certain limitations to the level of protection in some other states as well. In **Portugal**, there is no explicit reference to victimisation in relation to discrimination in the legal system, this being confined to the area of employment. The **Latvian** expert has noted that it would be desirable to implement protection against victimisation in the field of social security as well. In **Poland**, questions concerning the protection against victimisation have arisen in judicial practice, in particular in respect of the possibility of awarding compensation. Until the introduction of the new Labour Code in May 2019, the list of non-personal discrimination criteria was exhaustive, thus leading the Supreme Court to conclude that being in litigation with an employer over defending workers' rights did not fall under the prohibited grounds. The **Belgian** expert considers the effectiveness of the protection against victimisation in her country disputable, because it mostly concerns dismissal of the victim and the amount of fixed damages for unlawful dismissal is considered too limited to be a real deterrent (six months' gross remuneration), unless for very small businesses. Moreover, the compatibility of Article 22 of the Belgian Gender Act with Article 24 of Directive 2006/54/EC has been called into question by the labour tribunal of Antwerp, which referred to the CJEU for a preliminary ruling on this matter. The CJEU held that Article 24 does indeed preclude legislation such as the provision in question, which limits the protection against dismissal for witnesses only if they have reported the facts in a signed and dated document.[646]

In February 2017, a proposal to amend the definition of victimisation in the Gender Equality Act passed the first reading in the **Croatian** Parliament, this under pressure of the European Commission to bring

646 Case C-404/18, *Jamina Hakelbracht and Others v WTG Retail BVBA*, judgment of 20 June 2019, ECLI:EU:C:2019:523.

this definition more in line with that contained in the Anti-discrimination Act. In the expert's opinion this was not really necessary from a legal point of view, but it may still add to the legal certainty of those concerned. In **Estonia**, Article 5(1.1) of the Gender Equality Act, which provides protection from victimisation, is often ignored by employers and law enforcement agencies. The **Montenegrin** expert has noted that a number of law enforcement officers in her country are ignorant about the notion of victimisation.

10.2 Burden of proof

A second important issue concerns the provision made in national law for a shift of the burden of proof in sex discrimination cases. As a result of difficulties which are inherent in proving discrimination, EU gender equality law provides for a shift in the burden of proof. An alleged victim of discrimination has to establish, before a court or other competent authority, facts from which it may be presumed that there has been direct or indirect discrimination. It is, however, for the respondent to prove that there has been no breach of the principle of equal treatment. If the Member States so wish, they may introduce more favourable rules for claimants. These rules also apply in the area of goods and services, but do not apply in criminal proceedings (Article 19 of Recast Directive 2006/54/EC and Article 9 of Directive 2004/113/EC). Again, various aspects of this law of evidence in discrimination cases were initially developed by the Court of Justice[647] and only later laid down in legislation.

In all domestic legal systems covered by this report the shift of the burden of proof is ensured, in most of them by way of legislation and in some confirmed in case law (**Bulgaria**, **Ireland**, **Italy**, **Slovakia**). In **Estonia**, if the employer refuses to provide proof, such a refusal is deemed to be an acknowledgment of discrimination. However, the rules pertaining to the burden of proof establish high evidentiary thresholds that represent obstacles to victims of discrimination seeking redress. In **Slovakia**, legislation has been improved and the scope of applicability of the shift of the burden of proof is now actually wider than that contained in the directives, as it applies to all forms of discrimination.

However, in some countries the law is somewhat ambiguous, containing slightly different rules in various pieces of legislation (**Croatia**, **Montenegro**, **Serbia**). In some countries, there has not been any or only poor experience with this in practice, because of the lack of (adequate) case law (**Liechtenstein**, **Serbia**). In yet others, the case law is not very satisfactory. In **Montenegro**, while, according to the national expert, the new Labour Law is broadly in line with EU legislation, the Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination is not. An amendment of the latter to harmonise it with Directive 2006/54/EC is underway. While the **Hungarian** Supreme Court guidelines on employment cases point to the difference between the burden of proof in cases on misuse of the law (direct burden of proof) and equal treatment cases (shared and reversed burden of proof) and regardless of the ongoing discussion of the burden of proof, lower-level courts in Hungary still rather frequently request claimants to prove the occurrence of discrimination, according to available information.

In **Greece**, the rules on the statute books are fine, but they do not seem to be applied, as the Ombudsman also notes, even in spite of a relevant CJEU preliminary ruling in a **Greek** case.[648] An important reason for this is that they are contained in the legal acts transposing the directives without being incorporated into the procedural codes and are therefore hardly known. In **Romania**, the burden of proof has three different definitions in three different legislative acts, of which two fall short of the EU definition. This leads to a situation of inconsistent application of the burden of proof in practice. In **Poland**, the burden of proof provision in the law has been understood by many courts as requiring claimants not just to present basic facts, but also to make probable the existence of discrimination by indicating its ground, so in fact asking about the employer's motivation.

647 In CJEU, *Danfoss* and *Kelly and Meister.*
648 CJEU, C-196/02 *Nikoloudi* [2005] ECR I-1789.

Another problem relates to access to information. In **France**, the Court of Cassation heard a case very similar to the CJEU's *Meister* case, holding that the Court of Appeal was right in deciding that the employees had a legitimate aim in demanding the communication of information necessary for the protection of their rights, information that only the employer had access to and that he refused to communicate.

In **Germany**, the lack of information rights is also considered problematic, together with the courts' reluctance to use statistical data as prima facie evidence. The 2017 Pay Transparency Act does not entirely solve these problems. **United Kingdom** law is considered deficient in the light of EU (case) law to the extent that a potential claimant may be unable to obtain the necessary information to establish facts that are such as to shift the burden of proof.

Some countries, however, do provide for a specific right to information, such as **Ireland**. In **Italy**, as regards the use of quantitative/statistical data, national legislation goes further than EU law, as it requires companies with more than one hundred employees to draw up bi-annual reports on the workers' situation as regards recruitment, professional training, career opportunities, remuneration, dismissal and retirement. In **Latvia**, access to information is not guaranteed by law and it is up to the court to decide if there is a ground to request any information which is only at the disposal of the respondent.

A particular problem has occurred in **Finland**, where case law has centred on whether a comparison may be made if there are both women and men among those with lower pay. The Labour Court has held that the burden of proof may be shifted onto the defendant if the claimant can present at least one comparator of the opposite sex who has better pay for equal work, irrespective of there being both women and men in lower and higher pay brackets doing equal work. However, in cases concerning the new pay system for judges, the Supreme Court and the Supreme Administrative Court decided that because both men and women were placed in lower pay bracket posts, there could be no pay discrimination. The claimants had not even managed to establish an assumption of discrimination, which would reverse the burden of proof onto the defendant. The Courts did not proceed to consider whether indirect discrimination could have been at issue, which would have required a comparison of how female and male judges were positioned in different pay brackets.

10.3 Gender mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming, which at EU level is enshrined in Article 8 TFEU, is an important tool which aims to ensure that gender equality is realised in all areas of life. As such, it requires of legislators and policy makers that a gender perspective is taken in the entire process of law and policy-making, from preparation to implementation, and that evaluation and monitoring processes are applied to ensure that gender mainstreaming has been successfully implemented. Different approaches have been taken by states to incorporate this tool into the national context.

Gender mainstreaming is explicitly regulated by law in many of the 36 states reported on (**Albania**, **Austria**, **Belgium**, **Bulgaria**, **Denmark**, **Estonia**, **Finland**, **France**, **Germany**, **Greece**, **Iceland**, **Ireland**, **Lithuania**, **North Macedonia**, **Slovenia**, **Spain**, **United Kingdom**).

In **Iceland**, gender mainstreaming has been part and parcel of the gender equality legislation since Act No. 96/2000. Article 2 of Act No. 10/2008 defines the concept of gender mainstreaming as 'Organising, improving, developing and evaluating the policy-making process in such a way that gender equality perspectives are incorporated in all spheres in the policy-making and decisions of those who are generally involved in policy-making in society.'

In **Germany**, several provisions require the active fostering of gender equality at the Federal level. Article 3(2) of the Basic Law imposes an explicit duty on the state to promote gender equality. Moreover, Section 2 of the Federal Gender Equality Act (Bundesgleichstellungsgesetz, BgleiG) imposes a similar

duty on all employees of the Federal administration, while Section 2 of the Joint Rules of Procedure of the Federal Government (Gemeinsame Geschäftsordnung der Bundesregierung, GGO) explicitly refers to the term gender mainstreaming and indicates that the equality of women and men is a leading principle (Leitprinzip) and should be promoted within the context of all political, legislative and administrative activities. There are a number of other legal provisions that explicitly recognise the need to promote gender equality. However, it is difficult to measure how effective these measures are in practice.

In **Belgium**, the current gender mainstreaming approach implemented at federal level is based on the adoption of the federal law of 12 January 2007, on the structural integration of the gender dimension in all federal policies. A key institutional arrangement for implementing the law is the interdepartmental coordination group (CIG), which was established by royal decree in 2010. It is composed of representatives of ministers' private offices, nominated by the relevant minister, civil servants from each administration and representatives from the Gender Institute. The law also provides for data collection, gender impact assessments and gender budgeting instruments. Gender mainstreaming acts with similar features as found in the federal law have been adopted in all regions and communities except for Flanders and the German-speaking community.

In **Greece**, gender mainstreaming has been regulated for the first time by Act 4604/2019, defining it as 'the strategy for the realisation of substantive gender equality, which includes gender mainstreaming in the preparation, the planning, the application, the follow-up and the evaluation of policies, regulatory measures and expense programmes for the achievement of equality between women and men and the fight against discrimination'. Article 3(1) Act 4604/2019 provides that the gender dimension has to be integrated into all areas of private and public life and, in particular, into the country's political, social, economic and cultural reality. Gender mainstreaming should be applied in public policy, in the budgeting processes of ministries, the drafting of public documents, the collection of statistical data, and in education, public health policy and research.

In **Spain**, the framework reference for gender mainstreaming is Law 3/2007 on Effective Equality, which applies at national, regional and local level. Article 15 of the Law on Effective Equality establishes that 'the principle of equal treatment and opportunities between women and men will inform, in a transversal manner, the actions of all public powers' and that 'the public administration will actively integrate it into the adoption and execution of its regulatory provisions, into the definition and budgeting of public policies in all areas and into the development of all its activities'. The Equality Law also prescribes the creation of gender units within all ministries to reinforce gender mainstreaming, as well as an Inter-Ministerial Commission for Equality that coordinates and monitors equality policy. Equality Plans are the main tool to implement gender mainstreaming. However, these are non-mandatory policy instruments adopted in the respective fields of competence of the different public administrations, and they can be found at different levels (national, regional and local), in addition to sectoral equality plans. The main national policy reference for gender mainstreaming is the National Equal Opportunities Strategic Plan, which must be periodically approved according to Law 3/2007 and guides public policy on equality. The renewal of the Strategic Plan, however, has been pending since 2016.

Among those states that regulate gender mainstreaming through legislation, an explicit duty related to gender mainstreaming is found in **Denmark**, **Finland**, **France**, **Ireland**, **Lithuania**, **North Macedonia**, **Slovenia** and the **United Kingdom**.

Finnish law imposes an explicit duty on the authorities to promote gender equality in all their activities in a targeted and systematic manner, as well as to provide such administrative proceedings that ensure that gender equality is promoted in decision-making. The Ministry of Justice provides guidelines for law drafting which list many types of impacts that should be considered in the context of preparing laws. One of the categories covers societal impacts (Chapter 5), among them the impact on non-discrimination, children and gender equality. The guideline stresses the impacts on values and attitudes, the rule of law, legal relations and civil society.

French law imposes on the state and its institutions an integrated approach to enforcing its policy on equality. For the Government, it consists of 'systematically taking into consideration the differences in situations between women and men in all policies and public programmes and providing, if necessary, targeted actions to correct inequalities'.[649]

In **Ireland**, the law does not mention gender specifically but requires that the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of law and practice in the state relating to the protection of human rights and equality; either of its own volition or on being so requested by a Minister of the Government, to examine any legislative proposal and report its views on any implications for human rights or equality; and either of its own volition or on being so requested by the Government, to make such recommendations to the Government as it deems appropriate in relation to the measures which the Commission considers should be taken to strengthen, protect and uphold human rights and equality in the state. This is similar to how gender mainstreaming is regulated in the **United Kingdom** as well.

In **Slovenia**, gender mainstreaming is legislated through the Act on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men. According to Article 11, the Government and all ministries are obliged to take gender equality into consideration when planning, designing and implementing policy measures. All ministers must appoint coordinators for equal opportunities for women and men, who are then responsible for the implementation of duties within the competence of the ministry. Furthermore, the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities has adopted several methods and tools for gender mainstreaming, such as gender awareness-raising, gender budgeting, gender impact assessment, gender indicators, gender planning, gender statistics and sex-disaggregated data.

Some states have incorporated gender mainstreaming strategies in some form through policies but do not have any law regulating this (**Croatia**, **Estonia**, **Liechtenstein**, **Luxembourg**, **Malta**, **Netherlands**, **Norway**, **Serbia** and **Sweden**). Among these, some include gender mainstreaming in their national gender strategy or action plans (**Luxembourg**, **Norway**, **Serbia** and **Sweden**) or other policy papers (**Liechtenstein**). For example, in **Sweden**, gender mainstreaming has been the official strategy for gender equality policy since 1994 and, since 2002, gender mainstreaming has been included in the budgetary work of the Government. This strategy is implemented through a number of action plans that are continuously revised and evaluated. Currently, there are action plans on prostitution and trafficking, female genital mutilation, gender equal pensions, gender equal life income, and feminist foreign policy.

Gender mainstreaming is also at the heart of **Luxembourg's** new National Action Plan on Gender Equality, which considers gender equality as a cross-cutting priority for all policies. The **Norwegian** government has included gender mainstreaming in its overall strategy for gender equality, but keeps gender-specific action as an equally important approach. The gender mainstreaming approach calls for the integration of gender perspectives into all stages of policy processes – design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation – to promote equality between women and men. The strategy recognises gender as a cross-cutting issue which has relevance in most areas of society.

In **Malta**, a Gender Mainstreaming Unit was set up in January 2019. This Unit forms part of the Human Rights Directorate and is responsible for the development of the first national framework on Gender Equality and Gender Mainstreaming. It serves as a coordinating body between entities and assists the government in policy-making. It strives to raise awareness and provide training. The Unit is in the process of publishing an equality and mainstreaming strategy and action plan.

In the **Netherlands**, gender mainstreaming is also not legally mandated. The Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) is responsible for the national emancipation policy. It enters into cooperation

649 Secrétariat d'Etat chargé de l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes (2017), *Vers l'égalité réelle entre les femmes et les hommes: Chiffres clés 2017* (Towards real equality between women and men: key figures 2017), p. 4.

agreements with other ministries about gender topics which fall within their domain. These agreements specify what and how those ministries must contribute to the emancipation objectives set out in national policy. This means that ministries other than the OCW are held accountable by Parliament for the implementation of gender equality policy.

The national experts report various difficulties and shortcomings with gender mainstreaming. In **Denmark**, the Danish legislature utilises a Gender Mainstreaming Assessment scheme when adopting new legislation. According to the guidelines of this scheme, the respective ministers are responsible for equality / gender mainstreaming within their own areas, including gender mainstreaming assessment of policies, legislation and activities to determine if and how it impacts gender equality. According to the guidelines, all legislative proposals must be screened by the respective ministry / government agency as part of a relevance test. However, despite the implementation of gender mainstreaming obligations being regulated by law, there are no provisions for their enforcement nor sanctions for failing to do so.

In **Lithuania**, gender mainstreaming is incorporated in the legislation in a very formal way. State and municipal institutions and agencies must, within their competence, ensure that equal rights for women and men are guaranteed in all the legal acts drafted and adopted by them; draw up and implement programmes and measures aimed at ensuring equal opportunities for women and men; and support the programmes of public establishments, associations and charitable foundations which assist in implementing equal opportunities for women and men. In reality, ex ante evaluations and impact assessments of legislation are not implemented in designing public policy in Lithuania. Moreover, according to the national expert, the ignorance of the gender dimension at every stage of the political and legislative process, not to mention the executive level, suggests that gender mainstreaming is quite generally perceived as an unnecessary formal burden with no public or private institution willing to demand its proper execution.

Gender impact assessments and gender-sensitive budgeting are still not part of standard procedure in **Croatia**. However, other tools are used to incorporate and take account of gender aspects in law and policy-making, which involves various actors. The Government has pledged to promote equality between men and women in society, the labour market and in the family in its main strategic document, the Government Programme for the mandate from 2020 to 2024. The Ombudsperson for Gender Equality actively participates in the drafting process of legislation concerning gender equality, either as a member of the working group, or by providing comments in the process of public consultations. The Office for Gender Equality serves as a technical service of the Government for the preparation of activities related to gender equality and is in charge of preparing national policy on gender equality.

Several experts reported that there is neither a law on gender mainstreaming, nor are there any policies aimed at incorporating gender mainstreaming into legislative and policy-making processes in their states (**Cyprus**, **Czechia**, **Hungary**, **Italy**, **Latvia**, **Montenegro**, **Poland**, **Portugal**, **Romania**, **Slovakia** and **Turkey)**. In **Czechia**, the government has recognised this method as a legitimate tool for the implementation of equal opportunities for men and women and marked it as a priority task in this area,[650] but unfortunately, this has remained merely a declaration of intent and the method of gender mainstreaming is not used in policy-making or evaluation in practice.

In **Estonia**, while the Gender Equality Act prescribes that gender equality must be integrated into all policies by all national agencies, a gender perspective is poorly, and often not at all, integrated into the preparation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies.[651] There is no gender equality strategy. The **Hungarian** expert observed that since 2011, the Hungarian government has committed to *family* mainstreaming rather than gender mainstreaming. The **Latvian** Ministry of Welfare has made some attempts to educate colleagues from other ministries on gender mainstreaming, but without

650 Czechia, Government Resolution No. 456 of 9 May 2001.

651 However, it is sometimes claimed that the Gender Equality Programme 2021-2024 (a rolling programme which is updated every year) constitutes a gender mainstreaming strategy. See https://www.sm.ee/sites/default/files/lisa_4_soolise_vordoiguslikkuse_programm_2.pdf (only in Estonian).

success. According to the national expert, gender mainstreaming is not considered noteworthy in the Latvian political decision-making process.

10.4 Remedies and sanctions

The degree to which EU gender equality law will have the desired effects will depend to a considerable extent on the remedies and sanctions national laws provide for. While it is up to the Member States to decide on the applicable remedies and sanctions for breaches of EU gender equality law (e.g. compensation, reinstatement, criminal sanctions, administrative fines etc.), EU law requires that infringements of the prohibition of discrimination must be met with effective, proportionate and dissuasive sanctions. The CJEU initially developed these requirements and they were only later laid down in EU discrimination legislation (see Articles 18 and 25 of Recast Directive 2006/54/EC and Articles 8 and 14 of Directive 2004/113/EC). Compensation or reparation must also be proportionate to the damage suffered. The fixing of a prior upper limit may not, in principle, restrict this. Similarly, national law may not exclude awarding interest.[652]

(i) Types of remedies and sanctions

As a consequence of the national autonomy that remains, the variety of national remedies and sanctions provided for victims is huge. These include, also depending on the type of violation of gender equality law involved:

- declaration of the rights of the claimant (**United Kingdom**);
- request for annulment of unlawful provisions (**Belgium**, **Greece**, **Liechtenstein**, **Serbia**), nullity of discriminatory provisions and practices (**Bulgaria**, **France**, **Greece**, **Italy**, **Latvia**, **Luxembourg**, **Malta**, **Spain**), prohibition or termination of the discriminatory activities (**Bulgaria**, **Estonia**, **Greece**, **Hungary**, **Latvia**, **Norway**, **Serbia**, **United Kingdom**) or action for restitution (**Slovakia**, **Slovenia**, **Turkey**);
- certain right to reinstatement (**Austria**, **Cyprus**, **Estonia**, **Finland**, **France**, **Greece**, **Hungary**, **Ireland**, **Latvia**, **Lithuania**, **Luxembourg**, **Malta**, **Netherlands**, **North Macedonia**, **Portugal**, **Romania**, **Slovenia**, **Spain**, **Turkey**) or nullity of the dismissal (**Estonia**, **Greece**, **Spain**, **Sweden**) and of the refusal to hire or promote (**Greece**);
- compensation (**Austria**, **Bulgaria**, **Croatia**, **Czechia**, **Denmark**, **Finland**, **France**, **Germany**, **Hungary**, **Italy**, **Liechtenstein**, **Malta**, **Netherlands**, **North Macedonia**, **Portugal**, **Romania**, **Serbia**, **Spain**, **Sweden**, **Turkey**, the **United Kingdom**), also explicitly including interest (**Cyprus**, **Greece**, **Ireland**, **Lithuania**) and compensation for non-material or moral damages (**Bulgaria**, **Croatia**, **Cyprus**, **Denmark**, **Estonia**, **Greece**, **Hungary**, **Iceland**, **Latvia**, **Lithuania**, **Luxembourg**, **Norway**, **Poland** (in practice), **Romania**, **Serbia**, **Slovakia**, **Slovenia**) when a person's reputation, respect in society or dignity has been harmed (**Czechia**) or distress has been caused because of victimisation (**Ireland**);
- penalty payments and administrative fines (**Austria**, **Belgium**, **Bulgaria**, **Cyprus**, **Denmark**, **Finland**, **Greece**, **Hungary**, **Iceland** (including per diem fines), **Latvia**, **Luxembourg**, **North Macedonia**, **Norway**, **Portugal**, **Romania**, **Serbia**, **Slovenia**, **Spain**, **Sweden**, **Turkey**);
- denial or revocation of certain public allowances or financial benefits (**Italy**, **Portugal**);
- automatic application of the most beneficial pay provision to employees of both sexes, provided they perform equal work/work of the same value (**Greece**, **Portugal**);
- publication of the court's decision (**Serbia**), at the respondent's costs (**Croatia**) or publication of the decision on the website of the respondent and that of the Equal Treatment Authority (**Hungary**);
- temporary measures in order to prevent discriminatory treatment and to avoid major irreparable damage (**Serbia**).

652 See, for example, CJEU, Case C-271/92 *M. Helen Marshall v Southampton and South-West Hampshire Area Health Authority* [1993] ECR I-4397 (*Marshall II*) and Case C-180/95 *Nils Draehmpaehl v Urania Immobilienservice OHG* [1997] ECR I-2195 (*Draehmpaehl*).

In the **Netherlands**, since 1 July 2015, victims of discriminatory dismissals can also request reasonable compensation instead of requesting the court to invalidate the termination. Until this date damages were hardly ever claimed (let alone awarded) in cases of discrimination and the expectation is that this will now change. A 'transitional benefit' was also introduced on 1 July 2015. All employees who have been employed for two or more years, whether on the basis of a permanent contract or a fixed-term contract, are entitled to this benefit in the event of the termination of their employment, unless the termination is the result of serious misconduct by the employee.

In **Ireland**, a claimant may be awarded up to EUR 15 000 by the Workplace Relations Commission under the Equal Status Act 2000; at the claimant's election in the case of a claim of gender discrimination, the claim may be brought to the Circuit Court where they may be awarded unlimited compensation. The Irish expert has reported a case in which the claimant (a very senior sales and marketing director) obtained a total of EUR 315 000 for discriminatory dismissal during maternity leave and for distress caused by victimisation. **Swedish** law allows for 'discrimination compensation', which according to its Supreme Court can be divided into dignity compensation and preventive compensation.

In **Turkey**, the newly introduced Act on the Human Rights and Equality Institution now provides for the possibility for the Human Rights and Equality Board to issue warnings and to impose an administrative fine, and for the gravity of the violation, the perpetrator's economic status and multiple discrimination, if any, to be considered as aggravating factors. Discriminatory acts will be punishable with fines of between TL 1 000 and TL 15 000.[653] If the Board determines that the discriminatory act constitutes a crime, it will report this crime.

In **Portugal**, a new law was introduced in 2017 specifically reinforcing the protection of harassment victims by granting them accrued rights to damage compensation and imposing upon the employer the duty to approve a Code of Conduct in relation to harassment practices in the company as well as the duty to start a disciplinary procedure against perpetrators of harassment. It also extended the protection against dismissal to witnesses of harassment who denounce such practices.

Under the **German** Victim Compensation Act, if the offender is not identified, victims of gender-based violence can make a claim for compensation. In the past, there was a restricting condition that the assault must have been of a physical nature, although the consequences compensated could include severe psychological harm or suffering. With the Social Compensation Act of 12 December 2019, the compensation law was fundamentally restructured and, among other things, the concept of the violent act giving rise to a claim was extended to include 'acts of psychological violence'. Nevertheless, the scope of application is restricted to compensation for harm suffered by 'a serious conduct directed directly against the free will and choice of a person', e.g. human trafficking, forced prostitution, stalking, abduction and extortion. With the exception of stalking, these offences are very likely to be performed with physical violence, which was already covered by the law.[654]

While in many states the level of compensation is capped (see further below), this is not the case in **Finland**, **France**, **Italy**, **Norway**, **Poland** and the **United Kingdom**. In **Lithuania** the compensation for non-material damages has no maximum amount either, but the courts are reluctant to award high compensation for non-material damages. For example, for the discriminatory refusal to employ Roma women as waitresses in a bar, the employer was obliged to pay compensation of approximately 2.5 times the minimum wage in non-material damages instead of employment. By contrast, in **Slovenia** damages are not capped in the private sector, but they are as regards the award of non-material damages. In **Romania**, alleged victims of gender discrimination first have to file a complaint with the employer or service provider before they can submit a complaint to the court or the national equality body, this is in contrast with alleged victims on other discrimination grounds.

653 Due to the high fluctuation of the Turkish Lira no conversion to Euro is given.
654 Critique by the German Women Lawyers' Association, https://www.djb.de/themen/thema/ik/st20-09/.

Criminal sanctions are also possible in a number of states, but for different categories of gender discrimination:

- Discrimination in employment and in the access to goods and services may be a ground for imprisonment in **Belgium**, for one month to one year.
- In **Denmark**, violations of the protection against discrimination in employment can be sanctioned with a (criminal) fine. This applies to gender discrimination in regards to employment, promotion and relocation, access to education, courses, upskilling and retraining, general working conditions including dismissal, access to carry out work as self-employed, membership of trade unions, employer associations, or interest associations, or advertising positions or educations, and applies also to legal entities.
- The **Finnish** Penal Code prohibits discrimination at work and an aggravated form of discrimination at work on the basis of sex and several other grounds, including family relations, in relation to access to employment and at work. The penalty for the former crime is a fine or a maximum of six months of imprisonment, and for the latter a fine or a maximum of two years of imprisonment.
- Under the **French** Labour Code the employer risks a maximum of one year of imprisonment and a fine of EUR 3 750 and under the Criminal Code any discrimination can be punished with a maximum of three years of imprisonment and a fine of EUR 45 000. But these sanctions are rarely used.
- In **Cyprus**, anyone who intentionally contravenes the provisions on the prohibition of pay discrimination shall be guilty of an offence and be punished with a fine not exceeding EUR 6 860 or by imprisonment not exceeding six months or with both such penalties. Furthermore, anyone who violates the provisions on gender discrimination, in the event of conviction with a fine not exceeding EUR 7 000, or by imprisonment not exceeding six months or with both such penalties.
- In **Croatia**, sexual harassment provides a ground for a penal sanction, if committed against a subordinate person or other person dependent on the offender, or a person who is especially vulnerable due to age, illness, disability, dependency, pregnancy, or severe physical or mental impairment, involving imprisonment for up to two years.
- In **Greece**, an 'offence to sexual dignity' can lead to imprisonment up to three years and a pecuniary penalty, if it is committed through the exploitation of the situation of a worker or candidate for employment. An 'abuse to a sexual act' committed through the same circumstances can lead to imprisonment of at least two years.
- In **Turkey**, criminal sanctions can be imposed for crimes against sexual inviolability, including harassment and sexual assault, and involve imprisonment of varying duration according to the gravity of the crime, ranging from three months to 12 years and even longer.
- In **Lithuania**, serious discrimination on the grounds of inter alia sex shall be punishable by community service order, arrest or imprisonment for up to three years, but there have been no cases so far.
- In **Serbia**, violation of equality law generally may lead to imprisonment for three months to five years.
- In **Malta**, a fine or imprisonment for up to six months or both is possible in case of victimisation and (sexual) harassment.
- In **Poland**, imprisonment for up to two years is possible in the case of very serious and notorious violations of employees' rights, as well as fines and restrictions to the convicted person's liberty and up to three years of imprisonment is possible in the most serious cases of sexual harassment.
- In **Austria** as well severe sexual harassment is seen as a criminal offence carrying the threat of punishment of up to six months of imprisonment or a criminal fine.
- In **North Macedonia**, where a breach of equality law passes the threshold to be considered a crime, it can lead to a penal sanction/imprisonment.
- In **Norway**, sexual harassment and harassment may both constitute crimes, depending on the particular harassment. Sexual harassment in the form of sexual acts and sexual conduct without consent (other than rape and attempted rape) carries up to a one-year prison sentence. However, there are large differences between the harassment, the penalties and what is actually interpreted as punishment in the courts. Bullying and harassment expressed in physical violence are crimes, as are threats. The harassment does not have to be linked to a discrimination ground and can be

punished with a fine or imprisonment of up to 2 years. Hate speech is regarded a crime when its linked to skin colour, ethnicity, religion and sexual orientation and gender identity/gender expression, but not when it comes to sex/gender. Similar provisions exist in **Sweden**.

- In **Portugal**, criminal-law sanctions can concern all discrimination grounds, in both private and public employment, but can only consist of penalties.
- The decriminalisation provided by **Italian** Decree No. 8 of 15 January 2016 involved changes in the sanctions for the infringement of the ban on gender discrimination in the working relationship: minor criminal sanctions (a fine from EUR 250 to EUR 1 500) have now been substituted by administrative monetary sanctions from EUR 5 000 to EUR 10 000. The change concerns all cases of discrimination covered by the Code of Equal Opportunities, i.e. all sectors, both public and private and all aspects of the working relationship.

(ii) Persisting problems

Importantly, quite a lot of the experts believe that their national laws do not (fully) comply with the general EU standard of effective, proportionate and dissuasive sanctions (**Bulgaria**, **Finland**, **Hungary**, **Latvia**, **Montenegro**, **Netherlands**, **North Macedonia**, **Poland**, **Romania**, **Serbia**, **Slovakia**) or observe that serious problems persist in this regard (**Czechia**, **Estonia**, **Germany**, **Spain**, **Sweden**). In **Greece**, the sanctions are effective, proportionate and dissuasive, but their use is limited as procedural and socio-economic problems deter recourse to legal proceedings (see the next section).

One significant, more common problem concerns the (fixed and/or low) level of compensation and damages and also, in some countries, the way these are applied by the courts (**Austria**, **Belgium**, **Bulgaria**, **Croatia**, **Czechia**, **Denmark**, **Estonia**, **Finland**, **Hungary**, **Latvia**, **Lithuania**, **Malta**, **Montenegro**, **Netherlands**, **Poland**, **Romania**, **Serbia**, **Spain**). These sanctions are not considered to meet the requirement of dissuasiveness and are also not considered to be appropriately balanced with the costs, length and uncertainty of judicial proceedings.

Although in **Czechia** an offence in the area of equal treatment may be sanctioned with a fine of up to EUR 37 040, labour inspectorates have never imposed such a high fine. In 2018, they imposed some 21 fines, amounting in total to a mere EUR 21 540 (approx. EUR 1000 each). The **Spanish** expert considers the remedies and sanctions to be proportionate in theory, but in practice moral damages are difficult to prove and when they are recognised by the courts, quite low sums are awarded. Furthermore, certain sanctions can only be imposed by the labour inspectorate, which does not always consider gender discrimination a priority. Similarly, in **Serbia** anti-discrimination proceedings are not treated as urgent in practice and sanctions imposed for moral damages have ranged from EUR 40 to EUR 830, which is only symbolic when compared to some other laws. Even in severe cases of discrimination courts have only imposed the smallest amounts and the execution of court decisions has been problematic as well. In **Croatia**, while the legislative framework regarding the remedies and sanctions is satisfactory overall, the courts in labour disputes do not always award any damages, even where it is established that a worker was harassed, because they find that the circumstances do not justify the award of damages.[655]

In **Hungary**, in 2015, the amount of fines applied by the Equal Treatment Authority (ETA) were extremely low: only EUR 310 in two employment discrimination cases, in which a camerawoman's and a driver's employment application were refused because of their sex. In 2016 the amount of the fines imposed increased considerably, but the figure is still far below the maximum applicable amount (EUR 1 5003 000 compared to the statutory maximum of EUR 20 000). The amount continued to increase in the following years. Higher fines were mainly imposed in cases where pregnant women were dismissed during their trial period. In a recent case, the Equal Treatment Authority established direct discrimination based on pregnancy and ordered the employer to cease the discriminatory practice, to pay a fine of EUR 4 160, and

655 See Zagreb County Court, Gž R-931/2018. Even in cases where damages are awarded, the amount is much lower than in comparable cases of, e.g., compensation for emotional pain or reduced working capacity arising from a car accident injury.

for the decision to be published on the authority's website for 30 days.[656] The Equal Treatment Authority reviewed the income of the company and imposed this (rather high) fine to deter the company from such discriminatory practice in the future.

In a recent case in the **Netherlands**, the District Court of Limburg[657] decided that an employee whose contract had not been extended because of her pregnancy was not entitled to compensation for material (income) damage, because it was likely, according to the court, that the contract would only have been extended one more time for one year and would have ended afterwards. During that year, the employee had also received a social security benefit and therefore she had suffered no loss of income. The court furthermore granted compensation for non-pecuniary damage of only EUR 1 000, which does not meet the requirement of an effective, proportionate and dissuasive sanction.

In **Lithuania**, the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson and the courts are rather reluctant to impose severe sanctions for breaches of equality legislation. In **Finland**, it is deemed problematic that the compensation may be reduced or removed altogether if considered reasonable, taking into account the economic circumstances of the violator, their attempts to prevent harmful effects caused by the act, or other circumstances. The **Swedish** expert has noted the specific restriction applying to economic compensation in relation to appointments and promotions, which rules out the possibility in these cases of indemnities in addition to 'discrimination compensation'. This restriction, which is a result of the Swedish 'hiring at will' doctrine, can possibly be questioned in the light of the principle of equal access to employment and its effective implementation.

In **Ireland**, compensation can only be awarded on the basis of one discrimination ground even if more grounds are at issue in a particular case and it is doubtful whether 'real and effective compensation' is available, given that awards are capped even where there is discrimination on more than one ground. In **Norway**, redress and compensation seem to be low in a case from 2019 concerning sexual harassment from Hålogaland Court of Appeal, with damages set at NOK 36 387 (EUR 4 000) and the redress/compensation set at NOK 20 000 (EUR 2 200). The case was later appealed to the Supreme Court, which set the compensation amount to NOK 20 000. However, not many cases of sexual harassment have yet come before the Norwegian courts.

In **Romania**, while administrative sanctions may range between EUR 680 and EUR 22 720, the national equality body stays close to the minimum level and, when awarded by the courts, moral damages are very low rendering the sanction ineffective. In **Turkey**, 'discrimination compensation' is limited to a maximum of four months' wages under Employment Act Article 5. In **Malta**, fines/compensation amount to no more than EUR 2 329.27, which is generally considered to be too low to provide a deterrent. Although the level of compensation in **Poland** is not capped, the usual awards given in practice are considered unlikely to have a dissuasive effect.

The **North Macedonian** expert has noted that, while the Labour Inspectorate is now authorised to issue administrative fines without a court procedure, the amounts of the administrative fines that can be imposed have been reduced significantly. For example, a previous EUR 400 fine now limited to EUR 70.[658] The **Italian** expert deems the decriminalisation provided by Decree No. 8 of 15 January 2016 a retrograde step in the effectiveness of sanctions, even though it aims to reduce the workload of the criminal courts. Although the new sanctions are harsher than the previous ones, they have lost both the greater deterrent effect of criminal sanctions and the enforceability of the special procedure of Article 15 of Decree No. 124/2004, which allowed the employer to avoid a criminal trial by the restoration of a lawful condition (i.e. halting the unlawful situation, if possible) and the payment of a quarter of the maximum fine.

656 Equal Treatment Authority (*Egyenlő Bánásmód Hatóság)* Decision No. EBH/HJF/209/27/2020.
657 Netherlands, District Court Limburg, 13 December 2017, ECLI:NL:RBLIM:2017:12124.
658 The change to this law was effected in a short procedure, without any discussion (in a plenary session or in a session of the Commission on Equal Opportunities of Women and Men), http://www.sobranie.mk/materialdetails.nspx?materialId=c88da9f4-f206-491a-aa81-714494a882bd.

Other problems concern, for instance, the freezing effect of the old, inflexible case law of the **Belgian** Court of Cassation which means that no court would dare to order the reinstatement of a worker under an employment contract. In **Germany**, when discrimination results from collective agreements, the employer is only responsible if they acted with gross negligence or intentionally. Furthermore, the employer as well as a person providing goods and services are obliged to pay material damages only when they can be held responsible for the discrimination by personal fault. These conditions hamper enforcement and there is also the problem that the compensation granted for personal harm is very modest.

In **North Macedonia**, the weak court system and ineffectiveness of the gender equality legal representative of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the Anti-discrimination Commission are seen as particularly problematic. In **Iceland**, despite the burden of proof lying with the employer, it is still difficult for the claimant to gather enough evidence to bring a case before the complaints committee. The clause permitting workers to disclose their wage terms is anything but a guarantee of transparency. Rather to the contrary, it may be seen as a scapegoat for not fixing the problem.

In **Norway**, as of January 2018, the Equality and Anti-discrimination Ombud no longer treat complaints; rather, the Equality and Anti-discrimination Tribunal is now in charge of this. However, the Ombud's role in promoting equality has been strengthened, with her task being to provide guidance on matters of equality and discrimination to anyone who turns to her, including individuals. Another important task of the Ombud is to follow up the duty of public and private employers to promote equality, and report on equality and non-discrimination. According to the Act on the Equality and Anti-discrimination Ombud and the Equality and Anti-discrimination Tribunal (EAOA), only the Tribunal has an albeit limited authority to award damages in employment relationships and to award compensation for economic loss in cases where the defendant has no objections to the claim for compensation, or the Tribunal finds reasons to dismiss the defendant's objections. This limited authority means that many cases concerning sex discrimination must still be taken to court to be awarded compensation and redress.

The **Montenegrin** expert has pointed to more general issues, such as slow responses from state bodies and other respondents, the complex bureaucracy and psychological barriers, as being problematic.

10.5 Access to courts

Another issue that is of prime importance for ensuring effective compliance with and enforcement of EU gender equality law concerns adequate access to courts for alleged victims of sex discrimination. Member States have the obligation to ensure that judicial procedures are available to everyone who considers that they have been wronged by a failure to apply the principle of equal treatment to them, even after the relationship in which the discrimination is alleged to have occurred has ended. According to the CJEU's case law, national courts must provide effective judicial protection and access to the judicial process must be guaranteed (e.g. Article 17(1) of Directive 2006/54/EC).[659] In this respect as well significant problems and obstacles persist in the states covered by this report, which may not always be legal barriers.

(iii) Low level of litigation and explanatory factors

While access to courts as such is ensured in all states, a widespread general problem remains that overall the level of gender equality litigation is still (very) low in many states. In addition to the low levels of compensation that may act as a deterrent to engaging in judicial proceedings (see the previous section), the most often reported difficulties and barriers encountered by victims of sex discrimination and which may explain the low level of litigation concern:

659 Well-established case law since CJEU, Case C-222/84 *Marguerite Johnston v Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary* [1986] ECR I-01651.

- the cost of legal proceedings (**Austria**, **Belgium**, **Croatia**, **Estonia**, **Finland**, **Greece**, **Iceland**, **Latvia**, **North Macedonia**, **Norway**, **Poland**, **Slovakia**, **United Kingdom**); importantly, in the latter country, the Fees Order which imposed a financial burden on potential claimants was found to be unlawful by the Supreme Court in 2017 for contravening the right to an effective remedy under EU law and imposing disproportionate limitations on the enforcement of EU employment rights); in **North Macedonia**, the new anti-discrimination law of 2019 provides that no court fees will apply to discrimination cases, which has eased, although not fully lifted, the financial burden;
- overly short time limits for initiating proceedings (**Germany**, **United Kingdom**);
- length of proceedings (**Czechia**, **Croatia**, **Estonia**, **Greece**, **Italy**, **Norway**, **Slovenia**);
- the conditions of entitlement to legal aid (**Belgium**, **Greece**, **Norway**);
- lack of a right of associations to bring proceedings (**Austria**, **Germany**; only possible for works councils, but these have not done so as yet);
- lack of trust or faith in the courts/legal system (**Estonia**, **Italy**, **Montenegro**, **North Macedonia**);
- only courts being allowed to award compensation and these not necessarily recognising the equality body's finding of discrimination as a basis for awarding compensation (**Bulgaria**, **Hungary**);
- lack of access to information, in particular other court rulings on the matter (**Croatia**);
- benefits ensuing from court action too minor (discussed extensively in the previous section);
- 'stigma' of being a 'troublemaker' associated with such cases (**Croatia**, **Czechia**, **Estonia**, **Malta**) and fear of retaliation or victimisation (**Greece**, **Latvia**, **Liechtenstein**, **North Macedonia**, **United Kingdom**), including legal retaliation in the form of a penal sue for slander, defamation or insult and/or a 'blackmail' civil action for moral damages due to slander, defamation or insult against the victim and/or their witnesses or potential witnesses (**Greece**);
- being part of a small-scale community (**Estonia**, **Liechtenstein**, **Luxembourg**, **Malta**, **Montenegro**);
- lack of confidence of claimants that they will be believed (**United Kingdom**) and difficulty of proof (**Greece**, **Italy**, **Latvia**, **Turkey**);
- lack of family support and understanding (**Montenegro**, **Serbia**);
- lack of awareness and knowledge about existing equality law (**Estonia**, **Italy**, **Montenegro**, **Serbia**);
- lack of experience and custom of defending own rights (**Estonia**);
- lack of skilled, experienced advice and assistance (**Greece**, **United Kingdom**);
- strongly rooted traditional gender stereotypes which entail a greater degree of tolerance (**Montenegro**, **Serbia**);
- the socio-economic crisis, ensuing high female unemployment and long-term unemployment, and unemployment benefits which are low and subject to strict conditions (**Greece**).

Among more specific factors that have been highlighted as being particular causes of the reluctance to take individual legal action is the currently often applied concept of 'diversity', which limits gender to being just one of the criteria amidst many others, thereby shifting the focus of policymakers and the media. In **Belgium** pay scales in the private sector are governed by collective agreement and a pay discrimination claim may therefore be considered to be quite bold.

The **Hungarian** expert has noted that while access to court is safeguarded by legislation, according to available information, gaps may be shown in the case law of lower-level courts in four areas: the broad interpretation of exemptions provided for in the law; the reluctance to award dissuasive compensation; the minimisation of the severity of violence against women; and inadequate application of the rules on the burden of proof. On the other hand, an amendment to the rules on non-material damages for pain and suffering might lead to more effective, proportionate and dissuasive sanctions in the future.

In **Norway**, like in other European countries such as Iceland or example, there are significant economic risks linked to the costs of proceedings. The general rule on costs of proceedings in discrimination cases is that the successful party is entitled to full compensation for their legal costs from the opposite party. These costs are practical barriers for most discrimination complaints. Moreover, difficulties in obtaining free legal aid in discrimination cases are another factor hindering access to court.

A ruling by the Supreme Court of **Iceland** overturning a district court judgment in a sexual harassment case is not considered to be very encouraging in persuading victims to go to court.[660] The woman in this case claimed non-pecuniary damages as well as unpaid wages from her employer for sexual harassment by her superior during a work trip. She maintained that her employer had not reacted as they should have in light of the seriousness of her allegations and that her working arrangements had been changed so that she was unable to do her job. The Supreme Court held that the behaviour of the man was 'completely inappropriate'. Inviting her to join him in a hot tub where he sat naked and knocking on her door an hour after she had bid good night had certainly been 'inappropriate' while 'more was needed' for it to constitute sexual harassment. The Court furthermore held that the woman had not been able to prove that she had been subjected to injustice in her work after submitting her complaint.

The current government has on its agenda an intention to strengthen the situation of victims of sexual violence. Under the present system, the victim is not part of the prosecutor's case against the alleged offender. The police have the duty to inform the victim about their rights and whether investigation in the case has finished or been cancelled, as well as providing substantive reasoning for such decisions so that the victim can contest the decision before the state prosecutor. However, the police are not under any obligation to inform the victim about the process of the case, to hear the testimony of the alleged offender or otherwise be involved in the case.[661]

In **France**, a new justice reform which groups together local district courts (*tribunal d'instance et de grande instance*) has been criticised as limiting vulnerable groups' access to justice, since the elimination of lower courts (*tribunal d'instance*) within communities requires travelling greater distances to get to court.

(iv) Legal – financial – aid

A particular point requiring attention concerns the legal aid that is available for alleged victims of gender discrimination. A divergent picture emerges here as well, especially when making a distinction between financial aid and legal advice or assistance (see below point (iii)).

In some countries no legal financial aid is provided (**Austria**, **Lithuania**, **Luxembourg**, **Romania**), in others this is income-dependent (**Belgium**, **Bulgaria**, **Estonia**, **Finland**, **France**, **Greece**, **Hungary**, **Iceland**, **Latvia**, **Malta**, **Montenegro**, **North Macedonia**, **Norway**, **Poland**, **Sweden**) or only available for particular types of cases (**Turkey**) or before specific courts (**Cyprus**).

In **Iceland**, financial aid may also be granted if the outcome of the case is likely to have great general significance or have a strong impact on the employment, social status or other personal status of the applicant. The Legal Aid Committee also examines factors such as whether the applicant has tried to settle the case, for example through administrative appeal, and whether there is a chance that the case would be successful in court, by looking at the case law of the courts. Hence in light of the Supreme Court's decision mentioned above, the prospects of legal aid for alleged victims of sexual harassment are considered not very promising.

In **Turkey**, no legal expenses can be imposed on victims of violence. Applications to the Human Rights and Equality Institution are free of charge and the Institution must investigate discrimination upon complaint and ex officio, must impose a fine on natural persons and public/private legal entities in case of discrimination, and must help and guide victims concerning administrative and legal procedures. The decisions of the Institution must also specify the legal means/procedures for the parties to challenge its decisions. Natural persons and legal entities can file complaints of discrimination. Applications can be made directly to the Human Rights and Equality Institution or through governors in towns and sub-

660 Iceland, Supreme Court case No. 267/2011.
661 https://kjarninn.is/frettir/2019-06-20-baeta-aetti-rettarstodu-brotathola-i-kynferdisbrotamalum/.

governors in sub-towns. In **Hungary**, legal aid providers must give recipients of legal aid legal advice or prepare submissions or other papers for them, and (if so authorised) inspect the documents relating to their case, and the State must pay or advance the legal aid providers for the relevant costs and fees. However, claimants may have to pay lawyers' fees if they lose the case. In **Montenegro**, victims of gender discrimination usually receive free legal aid from NGOs in the form of information, legal advice and representation. In **Poland**, a claimant can also request the court to assign a legal representative to defend their case. In **North Macedonia**, the new Law on Free Legal Aid (FLAL) adopted in 2019 replaced the heavily criticised FLAL from 2009, ensuring that any person, regardless of citizenship, can now apply for free legal aid, as long as they satisfy the criteria that they are not in a material position to cover the expenses of the process.

In the **Netherlands**, free legal aid for people with low incomes has been restricted in recent years as part of austerity measures. In **Portugal**, victims of discrimination have free access to the courts and in case of economic difficulties the individual has the right to a public attorney for this purpose and does not have to pay the costs of the proceedings.

In **Serbia**, the Law on Free Legal Aid adopted in 2019, which entered into force on 1 October 2019, provides for free legal aid for victims of discrimination. However, the problem is that it is still unclear how this law applies in practice. Victims can also submit a complaint to the Commissioner for Protection of Equality, which is free of charge, as is the entire procedure. In **Sweden**, victims of sex discrimination in all contexts can be represented by the Equality Ombudsman without any costs. But the Ombudsman is free to choose which cases are taken to court and the number of cases brought is very limited (25 in 2014) in relation to the number of complaints (1 949 of which 224 were more closely scrutinised). At first hand, in discrimination cases, employees are represented by their trade unions, which provide legal assistance free of charge.

In the **United Kingdom**, legal aid may be available in the county court and for judicial review applications in the high court, but the limitations on cases in which such aid is available, the very low income thresholds below which it is available and the restrictions on legal aid in public law challenges are such that it is of extremely limited assistance to prospective claimants. In **Greece**, legal aid is also subject to the condition that the remedy is admissible and not manifestly ill-founded. Victims of offences against sexual freedom or abuse of sexual life for financial benefit and victims of domestic violence who lodge penal complaints are exempted from litigation costs, without any conditions.

In **Austria**, statutory corporations for employees and the trade unions offer free legal consultations in labour and social security law and in urgent cases they provide free representation for all levels of jurisdiction for their members. However, there are no provisions that would permit NGOs to act by proxy, with few exceptions. Claimants can also file a petition to the relevant court for financial aid concerning court fees, which may also include legal representation by an attorney. This can be granted if the claimant meets certain financial criteria and the claim poses legal difficulties in its pursuit. Nonetheless, the claimant still needs to cover certain costs in case of a loss at court, which means that a financial risk remains, even if legal aid is granted. This makes court proceedings especially unappealing for people with low or no income. Moreover, the benefits of winning a case often do not compensate for such a risk, since courts traditionally have been hesitant to grant large amounts of damages.

(v) Action by proxy of interest groups, equality bodies and social partners

When it comes to access to courts for anti-discrimination/gender equality interest groups or other legal entities that can act on behalf of or represent alleged victims of sex discrimination, this is provided for in quite a number of countries (**Austria**, **Belgium**, **Bulgaria**, **Croatia**, **Cyprus**, **Czechia**, **Denmark**, **Estonia**, **France**, **Greece**, **Hungary**, **Iceland**, **Italy**, **Latvia**, **Liechtenstein**, **Lithuania**, **Luxembourg**, **Montenegro**, **Netherlands**, **Norway**, **Portugal**, **Serbia**, **Spain**, **Sweden**). However, in **Greece** the relevant provisions are incorrectly worded (regarding the pre-requisites of recourse to courts by legal

entities) and in any case not widely known and not often applied, as they have not been incorporated into the procedural codes. The ground acted upon may not always be gender discrimination, but e.g. protection of consumer rights (as was the case for *Test-Achats*) or simply trade unions providing legal assistance generally to their members (**Belgium**). This may be beneficial to the extent that they also bear the costs. However, the following brief overview reveals quite a number of limitations of the applicable national regulations for actions by proxy.

In **Austria**, such action is generally limited to the so-called 'Klagsverband', an umbrella organisation of several non-governmental organisations acting in the field of anti-discrimination. Social partners can also, under certain circumstances, represent victims of discrimination before the Labour and Social Courts. In **Portugal**, in the field of discrimination these actions are allowed in all cases where a collective interest regarding the promotion of equality is recognised to the entity that initiates the proceedings. In addition, collective representatives of a victim of discrimination (e.g. trade unions) can promote judicial actions on the victim's behalf or assist the victim in those actions. In **France**, trade unions have the right to act on behalf of an alleged victim of discrimination without being mandated as such, whereas other associations need the written consent of the claimant.

In **Spain**, in theory, there are many mechanisms for intervention by interest groups and legal entities for the defence of victims of discrimination. However, these actions are quite rare and most cases of gender discrimination submitted to the courts are pursued by individual victims. In **Serbia**, trade unions may also initiate proceedings in case of discrimination of larger groups of people or on behalf of individuals giving their consent.

In **Denmark**, **Finland** and **Italy** trade unions can bring cases as well and in **Bulgaria** and **Sweden** both trade unions and other non-profit organisations may bring discrimination cases to court, but with trade unions having a priority right to do so. The Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner in **Estonia** is calling for the right to go to court with discrimination cases, but the Ministry of Justice is opposing this proposal. In **Greece** NGOs have legal standing, but they have inadequate resources for actually bringing cases. In **Slovakia**, NGOs can represent victims only before regular courts, not the Constitutional Court.

The **Finnish** Ombudsman has a mandate to assist a victim in court, but the mandate has so far never been used. In other countries, such entities may not be entitled to bring legal action on behalf of the claimant as they must bring their own case (**Germany**) and may only be supported by counsel or financially (**Finland**, **Ireland**, **North Macedonia**, **United Kingdom**). In **Romania**, an amendment to gender equality law in 2012 limited the possibility for alleged victims to be represented by trade unions or NGOs to administrative procedures only, and not court proceedings. In **Turkey**, interest groups have no legal standing, so cannot act on behalf of a claimant, nor is there a right to start class actions. There is only legal standing for the Ministry of Family, Employment and Social Affairs.

In **Montenegro**, an organisation engaged in the protection of fundamental rights may bring proceedings, but only with the consent of the person discriminated against. Likewise, in **Malta** legal entities with a 'legitimate interest' may engage themselves on behalf or in support of a complainant in all judicial proceedings, with the complainant's approval. **Polish** law rules out the possibility of group proceedings in claims against employers, but it allows trade unions, NGOs and the Human Rights Defender to initiate a case on a claimant's behalf, provided they have the consent of the claimant.

10.6 Equality bodies

Since 2002, by virtue of Directive 2002/73/EC, the Member States and EEA countries have also been obliged to designate equality bodies. The tasks of these bodies are the promotion, analysis, monitoring and support of equal treatment of everyone without discrimination on grounds of sex. They may form part of agencies with responsibilities at the national level for defending human rights or safeguarding

individual rights. These bodies must have the competence to provide independent assistance to victims of gender discrimination, to conduct independent surveys concerning gender discrimination and to publish independent reports and make recommendations (Article 20 of Recast Directive 2006/54/EC and Article 12 of Directive 2004/113/EC).[662]

All states have put an equality body into place that seeks to implement the requirements of EU and national gender equality law, including **Turkey** as of very recently. However, these bodies differ in terms of purpose, competence and the discrimination grounds they can deal with. In some countries, there are specific bodies limited to dealing with gender equality issues (**Belgium**, **Croatia**, **Cyprus**, **Iceland**, **Italy**), whereas in most countries they can also act in defence of non-discrimination on other grounds (**Albania**, **Austria**, **Bulgaria**, **Czechia**, **Denmark**, **Estonia**, **Finland** (the Equality and Non-Discrimination Board, although the Equality Ombudsman has a mandate on the ground of gender), **France**, **Greece**, **Germany**, **Hungary**, **Ireland**, **Latvia**, **Liechtenstein**, **Lithuania**, **Luxembourg**, **Malta**, **Montenegro**, **Netherlands**, **North Macedonia**, **Norway**, **Poland**, **Serbia**, **Slovakia**, **Slovenia**, **Spain**, **Sweden**, **United Kingdom**). **Romania** has both types of bodies.

These bodies may just have an informative and/or research function (e.g. **Germany**, **Luxembourg**) or they may also investigate complaints, give legal advice and assistance, issue (non-binding) opinions, recommendations and warnings, try to obtain out-of-court settlements, bring cases to court, etc. (**Albania**, **Estonia**, **Finland**, **Greece** (no recourse to courts), **Hungary**, **Iceland**, **Ireland**, **Italy**, **Lithuania**, **Montenegro**, **Norway**, **Poland** (no recourse to courts against private actors), **Serbia**, **Slovakia**, **Sweden**). Some equality bodies may also issue fines (**Cyprus**, **Hungary**, **Iceland**, **Lithuania**) or impose sanctions (**Bulgaria**, **Denmark**).

In **Denmark**, the Board of Equal Treatment[663] is a first instance complaints mechanism that assesses individual complaints of all aspects of equal treatment and non-discrimination, both in employment and in general society. Access is free, and the format is an easy on-line complaints form. Also, the Board assesses complaints of a general nature submitted by the Institute of Human Rights. The secretariat of the Board of Equal Treatment conducts complaints-based *ex officio* investigations, the board members decide the cases on the basis of all the available statements and documentation. The Board of Equal Treatment may issue sanctions, i.e. payment of compensations in situations of violations. The rulings of the Board of Equal Treatment are publicly available.[664] The Board of Equal Treatment rules on hundreds of complaints every year. One of the parties may decide to have a ruling re-assessed in the ordinary court system.

In **Norway**, the mandate of the equality bodies was changed in 2018, with the Equality Ombud now no longer functioning as a first instance complaints mechanism, but rather providing advice to victims of discrimination and others. The Equality Tribunal, the only equality body in Norway that investigates complaints, was given power to give redress for breaches of the act (as of 1 January 2018), as well as giving the Equality Tribunal the authority to assess cases of sexual harassment. In 2019 the Equality Tribunal awarded compensation for the first time, and has done so in more cases since then.

The **Irish** Human Rights and Equality Commission can invite a company or group of companies to carry out an equality review or to prepare and implement an equality action plan. In **Hungary**, the tasks and competences of the Equal Treatment Authority, which included conducting complaint-based and *ex officio* investigations, deciding on violations of equal treatment and, if necessary, applying sanctions on the basis of the investigation, were transferred to the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights as of 1 January

662 On equality bodies in general see Holtmaat, R. *Catalyst for change: Equality bodies according to Directive 2000/43/EC* 2007, available at: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/1199-catalysts-for-change-en.
663 Statutory Act on the Board of Equal Treatment, act no 1230 of 2 October 2016.
664 Database and search form of rulings from the Board of Equal Treatment: https://ast.dk/naevn/ligebehandlingsnaevnet/afgorelser/afgorelser-fra-ligebehandlingsnaevnet.

2021.[665] This raises concerns, as while the Equal Treatment Authority had a single focus and mandate (dealing with non-discrimination issues), the Parliamentary Commissioner's Office is a large organisation, mandated with a wide range of tasks, which might lead to less attention being paid to the issue of non-discrimination.[666]

The situation in **North Macedonia** is rather opaque, as the law also provides for a special state agent to act as a gender equality body, but seemingly without having independent powers of investigation, monitoring and reporting. No information is available regarding its actual functioning. The Ombudsperson can also protect people from sex and gender discrimination, for example by representing groups of victims of discrimination in court. The Commission for Protection against Discrimination (the multi-mandate equality body) is also competent to act in cases of sex and gender discrimination in both the public and the private sector. Like the Ombudsperson, it also has monitoring and reporting competences, including on these two grounds. However, neither the Ombudsperson nor the Commission for Protection against Discrimination provide visibility for gender equality in their mandate. Moreover, a 2019 analysis of the implementation of the Gender Equality Law found that a legal representative is not recognised as a mechanism for protection. It raises doubts with regard to the position and efficiency of the representative and proposes that the position be removed.[667]

The **Croatian** expert has noted that many victims feel more confident complaining to the Ombudsperson for Gender Equality in out-of-court, less formal proceedings at no cost than when going to court. The same applies in **Greece** where the Ombudsperson investigates 300-400 individual complaints annually. Similarly, in **Portugal** the difference between the reduced number of actions brought before the courts and the intense work of the national equality body (CITE) gives grounds for concluding that the more effective action regarding practical implementation takes place outside the courts. Alleged victims of discrimination also have the right to seek advice and to report discriminatory practices to both CITE and the Labour Inspection Services.

The **Polish** expert has also observed that practice shows that often more can be achieved through direct contacts between the Labour Inspectorate and the employer than by going to court, referring to a wide investigation involving 581 companies regarding the dismissals of people returning from maternity, paternity and parental leave and the observance of other employee rights. **Turkey** has put into place the Human Rights and Equality Institution based on a new Act that entered into force in April 2016, through which two gaps in relation to gender equality were closed: the lack of a specific law on non-discrimination and the lack of an equality body. Turkey also has an Ombudsman institution, and one of the five Ombudspersons is responsible for women and children. It can try to settle complaints but also seek to obtain a judicial settlement if need be, in which case the judge will consider the (non-binding) report of the Ombudsperson.

The **French** Defender of Rights body can also help victims to make a case against agents of discrimination and, thanks to special powers, can carry out an investigation and demand explanations from defendants, by conducting hearings and collecting other evidence, including the gathering of information on site. It can issue recommendations and publish them, thus encouraging the defendant to comply. Another noteworthy development concerns the establishment of Anti-discrimination Bureaux (ADVs) in the **Netherlands**; all

665 Hungary, Act CXXVII of 2020 on the Amendment of Certain Laws with the Aim of Enhancing the Enforcement of the requirement of Equal Treatment (*2020. évi CXXVII. törvény egyes törvényeknek az egyenlő bánásmód követelménye hatékonyabb érvényesítését biztosító módosításáról*) 1 December 2020. For more about this development in English, see: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/5345-hungary-legislation-adopted-abolishing-the-equal-treatment-authority-and-transferring-its-tasks-to-the-ombudsman-126-kb.

666 For more about this development in English, see: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/5345-hungary-legislation-adopted-abolishing-the-equal-treatment-authority-and-transferring-its-tasks-to-the-ombudsman-126-kb.

667 Chalovska-Dimovska, N. (2019), Извештај за проценката на имплементацијата на Законот за еднакви можности на жените и мажите на централно ниво *(Assessment report regarding the implementation of the Law on Equal opportunities for Women and Men at the central level),* OSCE – Mission to Skopje and Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, available at: http://www.mtsp.gov.mk/rodova-ramnopravnost.nspx.

municipalities are obliged to establish and subsidise an ADV, the main task of these Bureaux being to assist victims of discrimination and to monitor the situation in this regard. While the **Estonian** Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner receives more complaints every year, its resources are scant.

In **Montenegro**, the Ombudsman was given the role of monitoring discrimination cases processed before various enforcement bodies. Apart from shortcomings in human and financial resources, the Ombudsman has reported that its work is made more difficult due to the lack of case records relating to discrimination. Although the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination is clear and imperative, the bylaws and regulations to this Act are entirely vague and ambiguous, which has also already been reported by the Ombudsman, as has the inconsistency and inaccuracy of the Rulebook on the Content and Manner of Keeping Separate Records on Cases of Reported Discrimination,[668] which is supposed to provide for the establishment of special records in the form of an electronic database, enabling immediate access to data to the Ombudsman.[669]

In **Spain**, the Institute of Women and for Equal Opportunities is not an independent body but is part of the Government and while Spanish legislation establishes a wide range of competences for the Institute in combating discrimination, it does not have a proactive role in exercising them.

In **Sweden**, after calls from the Equality Ombudsman for an increased mandate to impose sanctions against employers and educational providers who do not comply with the obligation to conduct pay audits and other active preventive measures. The matter is currently subject to a discussion regarding legislative changes, and has so far been investigated and analysed in a Governmental report delivered in December 2020. The government appointed a Committee in 2018 to investigate and analyse the need for more efficient sanctions in this area. The committee was to deliver its report in October 2021.

10.7 Social partners

Increasingly, the social partners, alongside NGOs and other stakeholders, are also called upon to play a part in the realisation of gender equality. Member States and the EEA countries have the obligation to promote social dialogue between the social partners with a view to fostering equal treatment. This dialogue may include the monitoring of gender equality practices at the workplace, promoting flexible working arrangements, with the aim of facilitating the reconciliation of work and private life, as well as the monitoring of collective agreements, codes of conduct, research or exchange of experience and good practice in the area of gender equality. Similarly, the states are required to encourage employers to promote equal treatment in a planned and systematic way and to provide, at appropriate regular intervals, employees and/or their representatives with appropriate information on equal treatment. Such information may include an overview of the proportion of men and women at different levels of the organisation, their pay and pay differentials, and possible measures to improve the situation in cooperation with employees' representatives (Articles 21 and 22 of Recast Directive 2006/54/EC and Article 11 of Directive 2004/113/EC).

However, it appears that in some countries social partners do not play any particular role of significance in this regard (**Bulgaria**, **Czechia**, **Estonia**, **Latvia**, **Lithuania**, **Luxembourg**, **Romania**, **Slovakia**, **Turkey**, **United Kingdom**) or it is unclear what the results are (**Iceland**, **Italy**, **North Macedonia**, **Malta**).

In other countries, social partners fulfil more visible roles in the development and promotion of gender equality law, by:

- giving opinions (**Austria**, **Belgium**, **Croatia**, **Sweden**), also in court cases (**Poland**, **Sweden**);
- monitoring the application by employers of labour provisions (**Poland**, **Sweden**);

668 Official Gazette of Montenegro No. 50/2014.
669 Official Gazette of Montenegro No. 50/2014, p. 135.

- initiating legal action, including assistance of trade union members in individual cases (**Belgium**, **Denmark**, **Finland**, **Greece** (however the provisions on this *locus standi*, provided by the laws transposing the Gender Equality Directives, have not yet been incorporated in the procedural codes and are not widely known and applied), **Hungary**, **Poland**, **Sweden**) or intervening in labour law disputes in favour of litigants (**Greece**);
- stimulating discussion on certain issues, such as equal pay and positive action (**Denmark**, **Greece**, **Netherlands**, **Sweden**);
- engaging with equality bodies (**Croatia**, **Liechtenstein**);
- representatives of social partners being statutory members of the national equal treatment commission or body (**Italy**) and the right to co-decide on the commission's opinion (**Austria**);
- there being a legal obligation to present and discuss new legislation with the social partners, and the breach of this stipulation making it unconstitutional and therefore not applicable (**Portugal**) or there being a tradition to involve social partners in such discussion (**Croatia**, **Denmark**, **Norway**, **Slovenia**);
- in **Estonia**, after the national parliamentary elections in spring of 2015, the Gender Equality Council, an advisory body of the Ministry of Social Affairs consisting of 22 representatives of different organisations, submitted recommendations for the Government to promote gender equality in 2015-2018, sending them to all parties represented in the new Parliament;[670]
- collective agreements (see Section 10.7).

In some other countries, the role of social partners in this area is quite strong. In **France**, there has been a long tradition of involving the social partners mainly through the obligation to negotiate annually on equality and the gender gap. Since 2012, sanctions can be imposed on companies that do not respect their obligation to negotiate and to conclude agreements on gender equality. In **Ireland**, both employers' bodies and trade unions have been considered effective in implementing equality legislation, without there being legislative provisions on this. In **Cyprus**, the social partners play an important role in the application of gender equality law through the Labour Advisory Body. In **Serbia**, the Confederation of Autonomous Trade Unions has had a specific Women's Section since 2002, which takes a variety of initiatives to combat gender discrimination and to reinforce women's rights and protection of maternity. Interestingly, Serbian law also provides that in collective negotiations, trade unions and employers' organisations should make an effort to ensure that 30 % of the representatives of the least represented sex are included in the negotiation committees.

In **Greece**, large trade unions have special Secretariats for Women/Equality; however, possibilities for the unions to bring discrimination cases to court is limited by the inadequate transposition of the relevant EU law provisions and the non-incorporation of the relevant national provisions into the procedural codes. In **Finland**, trade unions can also bring cases to the Labour Court and to the Equality and Non-Discrimination Board and the social partners are influential in proposing and drafting legislation regarding all issues of working life, including all gender equality law. The social partners traditionally also have joint discussions on gender equality issues.

In **Sweden**, the labour market is characterised by a high level of organisational involvement, both at the employers' and the employees' level, with about 75 % of workers being affiliated to a trade union. The role played by the social partners is crucial to non-discrimination law. The Discrimination Act thus requires the employer to cooperate with trade unions on active measures to bring about equal rights and opportunities and to combat discrimination in working life. The Act also states that a trade union to whom the employer is bound by collective agreement has the right to obtain necessary information to

670 The recommendations prioritised five objectives: 1) reducing the negative impact of gender stereotypes in everyday life and on the decisions of women and men and on the development of economy and society; 2) supporting equal economic independence for women and men; 3) increasing gender balance at all levels of management and decision-making; 4) increasing the quality of life for both women and men; and 5) supporting systematic and effective implementation of gender mainstreaming. In 2016, the Council also gave its comments to the draft Welfare Development Plan 2016-2023 which includes the Government's gender equality policy priorities and also reflects the Council's previous proposals.

collaborate on the monitoring of wage statistics and pay equality. Trade unions and employers are aware of the risk of wage discrimination when negotiating wages, and most trade unions have particular policies to come to terms with and prevent an augmentation of the gender pay gap. Moreover, the trade union has a priority right to bring an action on behalf of its members (in fact many discrimination cases brought before court are brought by trade unions). Social partners also play a predominant role in the **Danish** labour market. Most employment law cases brought before the ordinary courts are brought by a trade union on behalf of a member and, if a claim is based on a collective agreement, the social partners are the only parties who can enforce it. The social partners consult with government on any amendments to existing legislation in the area of equality law, as well as on new initiatives. The recent implementation agreement of changes to the Act on Maternity and Parental Leave is illustrative of this role. Members of trade unions or employer organisations are supported in disputes concerning equal treatment in all aspects of employment. Although in **Portugal** all legal provisions concerning labour law are discussed with the social partners on a regular basis, including provisions on gender equality, gender equality is not traditionally considered an important issue by the social partners.

In **Spain**, there is a general obligation for social partners to negotiate measures promoting equal treatment and opportunities for women and men in collective agreements. Royal Decree 6/2019 has introduced important changes in this respect, by establishing that companies with more than 50 workers are obliged to carry out and produce equality plans.

10.8 Collective agreements

In an extension of the previous section, when it comes specifically to the relevance of collective agreements as a means to implement EU gender equality law, the national systems also show a divergent picture. More generally, collective agreements may be binding as a contract but in most states they are not generally binding for non-signatory parties unless a specific measure to that effect has been taken.

In some states collective agreements are of considerable importance for the promotion of equality (**Austria**, **Greece**, **Sweden**). In **Sweden**, collective agreements determine working conditions in general and especially regarding pay. Such collective agreements are legally binding for employers and members of the signing trade union. As pay regulation rests entirely with the social partners they are also under a duty to address the gender pay gap, but they have to do so only on the basis of the general ban on discrimination as no other specific rules apply in this regard. However, given the social partners' autonomy and the strongly gender-segregated nature of the Swedish labour market, it is in fact difficult to assess the Swedish wage-setting system. In **Austria** as well, collective agreements are the basis for national wage policies and can also cover various workplace policies. Collective agreements have the legal status of binding general labour ordinances. Their personal scope applies to all enterprises and to all workers of the relevant sector or industry and covers the entire state territory or at least regional areas (such as one of the provinces). Collective bargaining parties have observed the equal pay principle for many years, resulting for instance in the elimination of special low wage groups for female workers. Collective agreements are also used to implement progressive provisions such as additional paid or unpaid parental leave periods, positive action measures etc. **Portugal** shows an interesting approach regarding the enforcement of the equal pay principle via collective agreements, as its Labour Code establishes that whenever a collective agreement or internal provision of company regulations restricts a certain type of remuneration to men or to women, these stipulations are automatically applicable to employees of both sexes, provided they perform equal work or work of the same value. Furthermore, the Labour Code also provides for assessment of collective agreements on possible discriminatory clauses by the national equality body, just after the publication of these agreements. This has proven to be very effective, either because the equality body convinces the social partners to change the clause in question, or, when this does not happen, because the court declares the clause null and void. In **Cyprus**, collective agreements are also used as a tool to implement gender equality law, but they have no force of law In Denmark, collective agreements are binding for parties to the agreement and for members of the employer

organisation. Coverage is very high with 84 % of employees in Denmark working in a workplace, where a collective agreement is in force. Collective agreements are the primary source for general working conditions, and are almost the exclusive source for regulating pay. Pay regulation are in the hands of the social partners who are under a duty to adhere to the Act on Equal Pay. However, equal pay remains to be a disputed issue, in part due to the largely gender-segregated labour market. This issue surfaced in 2021 as the primary reason for a long industrial conflict between nurses and their employer (the Danish Regions). Collective agreements are very detailed and complex, and in addition increasingly distribute pay negotiations above a certain minimum wage level, to shop level negotiations. This increases the lack of transparency in salary levels. Indeed gender equality in wages remains to be a complex issue in Denmark. In **Belgium** a specific collective agreement on equal pay was adopted in the past, which has been declared generally binding by a Royal Decree. In the **Netherlands**, collective agreements provide for supplementary, more beneficial rules than those contained in legislation regarding inter alia the right to childcare facilities, care leave and parental leave. Since the incorporation of the gender equality principle in the **Greek** Constitution, the social partners have often included gender equality issues in collective bargaining and have gradually eradicated direct discrimination in pay, yet this has not been the case for indirect discrimination regarding professional classification in collective agreements. They have also improved maternity and parenthood protection. In **Norway**, eight collective agreements have been made nationally applicable to secure equal pay in certain sectors and all the main agreements refer to gender equality as a specific target.

However, it has also been signalled that collective agreements are not used as a (real) means to implement EU gender equality law (**Bulgaria**, **Czechia**, **Estonia**, **Finland**, **Germany**, **Hungary**, **Iceland**, **Italy**, **Latvia**, **Lithuania**, **Luxembourg**, **Malta**, **Montenegro**, **Poland**, **Romania**, **Slovenia**, **Turkey**, the **United Kingdom**), that not all collective agreements contain clauses geared towards ensuring equality (**Liechtenstein**, **North Macedonia**), or when they do contain some innovative measures, these may be merely formal without any concrete measures having been taken (**France**). Furthermore, collective agreements may even contain provisions inciting inequalities based on sex (**Croatia**, **Germany**). In **Germany**, the still mostly male-dominated nature of social partner organisations is also considered an obstacle for using collective agreements as an effective means to implement gender equality law. In **Hungary**, collective agreements are mainly concluded at company level and since collective agreements may deviate from legislation, they are not deemed a suitable means for implementing equality law. Under the Labour Code (adopted in 2012), collective agreements are used to reduce workers' rights. In **Finland**, collective agreements are not used for implementing EU gender equality law, except possibly soft-law measures in the form of recommendations addressed to the social partners. In **Greece**, since 2010, the system of collective agreements has gradually been dismantled through repeated and extensive statutory interventions in collective bargaining. Furthermore, the collective agreement hierarchy was reversed, so that enterprise-level agreements (where women's bargaining power is weaker) prevail over sectoral agreements. To date, company-level CAs prevail over sectoral CAs only exceptionally, in the case of enterprises which face serious financial problems and are in the procedure of bankruptcy or the procedure prior to it or under consolidation measures or in an out-of-court settlement. Those enterprises are defined by a Ministerial Decision of the Minister of Employment and Social Affairs after consultation of the Supreme Council of Employment. Minimum-wage fixing has also been removed from collective bargaining for the whole country. Minimum wages are defined by statute. In the first application of this law, the minimum wage was fixed in a discriminatory way on grounds of age. This was considered to be a breach of the European Social Charter by the European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR).[671] As of 1 February 2019, this discrimination on grounds of age has been repealed. These measures are required by Memoranda of Understanding as bailout conditionalities. In **Slovakia**, equal opportunity issues included in collective agreements mostly concerned the working conditions of pregnant women and employees taking care of young children. In **Luxembourg**, there is a legal obligation for social partners to refer to the results of the negotiations, including on the application of equality plans for women and men, but

671 ECSR Decision on the merits of 23.05.2012, Complaint No. 66/2011, General Federation of Employees of the National Electric Power Corporation (GENOP-DEI) and Confederation of Greek Civil Servants' *Trade Unions (ADEDY) v Greece*.

this is not considered very effective, since social partners mostly limit themselves to observing that this matter has been discussed.

Sometimes, collective agreements may still contain rules violating equal treatment legislation as revealed by a case from the **Hungarian** Equal Treatment Authority. The collective agreement in this case contained a rule based on which the employer did not provide a voucher (a form of benefit) to the employee while she was on maternity leave. The ETA and the labour court established that this violated the regulations on equal wages and the employer was obliged by the court to pay the wage difference to the employee. No further sanctions were applied.[672]

672 Hungary, EBH/19/2016 http://egyenlobanasmod.hu/hu/jogeset/ebh192016.

11 Overall assessment: law on the books versus law in practice

The comparative analysis presented in this report of the legal state of affairs in 36 European countries in all fields covered by EU gender equality law shows that much has been achieved. However, it is also clear that many concerns remain. Despite the regulations in force in these states, it appears that in many countries specific problems of proper transposition and application of EU gender equality law remain in all areas. These concern not only substantive deficiencies of legislation and its application by national courts, but also the 'patchwork' nature of applicable national laws, which affects the clarity and consistency of the overall body of national gender equality law. Some experts also consider that transposition has remained a rather formal process, with equality laws never really being scrutinised and modified in order to support the substantial and genuine equality of women and to assess whether these laws produce the desired results.

In addition to specific problems of national equality law, the report has also revealed quite a number of more general problems that occur in many states or at least in a considerable number of them.

The gender pay gap remains one of the main concerns. On a positive note in this respect, we can see the reinforcement of legal frameworks and the development of some practical tools in various states with a view to enhancing the application of the equal pay principle and to bring about actual progress. The most telling example of this concerns the introduction of a mandatory equal pay certification system, based on an equal pay management standard in **Iceland**, but also of a free software application to measure the pay gap in **Poland**. More and more states are introducing online tools such as *Logib* which allows companies to analyse their situation regarding equal pay (e.g. **Czechia**, **Germany** and **Luxembourg**).

Nevertheless, the Pay Transparency Act introduced in 2017 in **Germany** still reveals several deficiencies that will hamper true progress and continue to act as barriers to access to justice, such as the need for comparable employees and problems concerning the burden of proof. The exception for remuneration systems under collective agreements is also an important obstacle to the analysis and removal of structural pay discrimination. Moreover, without the ability to bring collective or class actions, more rights for works councils and binding obligations, the principle of equal pay will not be strengthened by insulated transparency measures.[673] In this respect, more transparency should be considered as a condition, but not a substitute, for anti-discrimination law enforcement.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic is considered to have highlighted and exacerbated the gender pay gap, *inter alia* due to the fact that many sectors with predominantly female employees were particularly hit by the pandemic. The full effects of the crisis on gender equality in relation to equal pay, equal treatment at work and access to work cannot yet be fully appreciated. A more complete picture of this should emerge in the coming years.

Structural difficulties with statutory social security persist in many countries, often due to apparently gender-neutral rules which in effect disadvantage women (indirect discrimination). The main problems are related to differences between full-time and part-time workers, childcare leave creating gaps in women's working lives, job segregation with women being overrepresented in low-income sectors and the salary pay gap.

Another general concern relates to the enforcement of equality law, which can be seen as one of the major challenges to overcome in the future, as the lack of litigation in most states can be taken as an indicator that the practical effectiveness of the legal framework is weak. In Section 10.4, a broad range of factors explaining the low level of litigation have been identified, which are in need of more in-depth investigation and also require a more comprehensive policy strategy to overcome them. These factors

673 See German Women Lawyers' Association, https://www.djb.de/verein/Kom-u-AS/K1/st17-05/; https://www.djb.de/verein/Kom-u-AS/K1/pm18-11/.

also expose other general problems, such as the lack of transparency and access to information. It is not only wages and pay systems that fall short in terms of transparency and accessibility of data and statistics, but also, for instance, gender equality case law. In some states, this case law is not published or is very poorly accessible. This is not only a likely cause of inconsistent interpretation by courts, but it also does not add to the general awareness of gender equality law among all parties concerned. In this context, the limited or incorrect media coverage of gender discrimination cases may also be criticised. This state of affairs reinforces another commonly encountered problem: the lack of specific knowledge and expertise on the part of courts and equality bodies, as well as of lawyers and potential victims of gender discrimination.

Effective enforcement is also very much hampered by the length and costs of legal proceedings, the **United Kingdom** expert framing this very pointedly by observing that 'the real problem across the United Kingdom is that enforcement is difficult and increasingly expensive to the extent that the legal rights are in danger of becoming paper entitlements only'. The **Norwegian** situation is also telling in this regard, where most discrimination cases are brought to the Equality and Anti-discrimination Tribunal because of the low threshold and it being free of charge.

On top of this, the low levels of compensation awarded in many states by the courts also creates a disincentive for bringing cases to court at all. The fact that many national laws contain upper limits of compensation also raises serious doubts as to the compatibility with EU law requirements. Only the **French** and **Irish** reports show some optimism in this regard, demonstrating an increase in the number of court cases and more familiarity with the instruments on regulating discrimination and good accessibility of court rulings.

Another issue concerns the role taken by social partners in implementing and promoting gender equality law. The picture emerging here is that in many countries the social partners could play a more active role in this regard and that much more could be done. The autonomy of social partners in some countries, which sometimes allows them to deviate from legislation, has, in fact, not contributed much to gender equality to date. In some cases it has even had a negative effect. Social partners could give more weight and priority to gender equality in collective bargaining and agreements. More generally, several experts have observed that there is a lack of attention or sense of urgency with regard to gender equality and that more could be done, including at the levels of the legislature and executive authorities when it comes to mainstreaming gender equality into all policies, but also at the level of equality bodies. Recent political and administrative reforms in a number of countries are exacerbating this problem, as well as jeopardising the independence of the judiciary and/or equality bodies (**Estonia**, **Hungary**, **Poland**).

A very worrying issue raised in some reports concerns multiple discrimination and the current reinforcement of gender stereotypes, traditional family values and traditional gender roles limiting women's free choices, or at least pressuring women into traditional family roles, that is filtering through in national policies, legislation, case law or in political discourse. In some countries, this is clearly related to conservative governments being in place (**Hungary**, **Poland**). Recent measures of concern in **Poland** are: the establishment of a child benefit system that encourages women to leave the labour market; budget cuts regarding the activities of the Commissioner for Human Rights; and the police investigation of the financial administration of the Centre for Women's Rights, the most active women's NGO. In other countries, it may be related to the financial crisis and austerity policies (**Greece**). Media content may also still be characterised by sexism and misogyny (**Serbia**).

Another highly worrying, connected issue concerns the number of cases of (sexual) harassment, domestic and gender-based violence (e.g. **Montenegro**). Although in some countries new laws have been introduced to reinforce protection against and to prevent and punish such harassment and violence (**Estonia**, **Portugal**, **Serbia**) or such protection has been reinforced through case law (**Germany**), the level of protection offered by domestic laws in other countries is deemed insufficient. For instance, people who experience such offences may not be considered as 'vulnerable victims' (**Slovakia**) or compensation

for damage inflicted may be limited to cases of physical violence (**Germany**). It must be watched closely whether and how this tendency develops in the near future.

Last but not least, some of the effects of the COVID-19 crisis on gender equality have started to emerge. Gender equality has suffered in many countries during the pandemic.[674] States focused on developing crisis responses whilst often not taking into account the particular effect of the crisis on women and vulnerable groups. Cases of domestic violence and other types of violence against women surged during lockdowns, women were particularly burdened by increased care responsibilities and many women were exposed to a heightened risk of infection due to working in essential professions. At the same time, women's participation in the formulation of policies in response to the crisis was largely lacking.

In relation to work-life balance issues, the gender effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are worrying, with women often reported to take on larger proportions of household chores and childcare and thus being able to spend less time on their careers. The crisis has also given rise to problems relating to equal access to goods and services, especially in relation to health. Access to reproductive healthcare was particularly affected, with some experts reporting difficulties concerning access to abortions or other reproductive care in their countries (e.g. **Belgium**, **Croatia**, **Slovakia**, **Romania**).

Another worrying side effect of the COVID-19 crisis can be seen in **Hungary**, where the government used the special political situation, relating to the pandemic, to push through certain legislative initiatives without public debate, including the adoption of a political declaration, proposed by MPs from the junior coalition party, calling the Government to reject the ratification of the Istanbul Convention by Hungary and to oppose the ratification of it by the European Union.[675] The full effect of the global pandemic on gender equality in Europe more generally still remains to be seen.

674 For a first mapping of the gendered impact of the COVID-19 crisis, see Böök, B., Van Hoof, F., Senden, L., Timmer, A., (2020) 'Gendering the COVID-19 crisis: a mapping of its impact and call for action in light of EU gender equality law and policy', *European equality law review* No. 2/2020, pp. 20-44, available at: https://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/5300-european-equality-law-review-2-2020-pdf-1-446-kb.

675 Hungary, Political Declaration No. 2/2020. (V. 5.) OGY.

Annex 1 – EU gender equality Directives

Directive 79/7/EEC

http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A31979L0007

Council Directive 79/7/EEC of 19 December 1978 on the progressive implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women in matters of social security

OJ L 6, 10.1.1979, pp. 24–25 (DA, DE, EN, FR, IT, NL)
Greek special edition: Chapter 05 Volume 003 pp. 160 – 162
Spanish special edition: Chapter 05 Volume 002 pp. 174 – 175
Portuguese special edition: Chapter 05 Volume 002 pp. 174 – 175
Special edition in Finnish: Chapter 05 Volume 002 pp. 111 – 112
Special edition in Swedish: Chapter 05 Volume 002 pp. 111 – 112
Special edition in Czech: Chapter 05 Volume 001 pp. 215 – 216
Special edition in Estonian: Chapter 05 Volume 001 pp. 215 – 216
Special edition in Latvian: Chapter 05 Volume 001 pp. 215 – 216
Special edition in Lithuanian: Chapter 05 Volume 001 pp. 215 – 216
Special edition in Hungarian Chapter 05 Volume 001 pp. 215 – 216
Special edition in Maltese: Chapter 05 Volume 001 pp. 215 – 216
Special edition in Polish: Chapter 05 Volume 001 pp. 215 – 216
Special edition in Slovak: Chapter 05 Volume 001 pp. 215 – 216
Special edition in Slovene: Chapter 05 Volume 001 pp. 215 – 216
Special edition in Bulgarian: Chapter 05 Volume 001 pp. 192 – 193
Special edition in Romanian: Chapter 05 Volume 001 pp. 192 – 193
Special edition in Croatian: Chapter 05 Volume 003 pp. 7 – 8

This Directive applies to statutory social security schemes and prohibits direct and indirect discrimination based on sex, in particular with reference to family or marital status, with respect to the scope of the schemes and the conditions for accessing them. It specifies that measures taken for the protection of women in relation to maternity shall not be affected by the principle of equal treatment.

Directive 92/85/EEC

http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A31992L0085

Council Directive 92/85/EEC of 19 October 1992 on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the safety and health at work of pregnant workers and workers who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding (10 individual Directive within the meaning of Article 16(1) of Directive 89/391/EEC)

OJ L 348, 28.11.1992, pp. 1–7 (ES, DA, DE, EL, EN, FR, IT, NL, PT)
Special edition in Finnish: Chapter 05 Volume 006 pp. 3 – 10
Special edition in Swedish: Chapter 05 Volume 006 pp. 3 – 10
Special edition in Czech: Chapter 05 Volume 002 pp. 110 – 117
Special edition in Estonian: Chapter 05 Volume 002 pp. 110 – 116
Special edition in Latvian: Chapter 05 Volume 002 pp. 110 – 117
Special edition in Lithuanian: Chapter 05 Volume 002 pp. 110 – 117
Special edition in Hungarian Chapter 05 Volume 002 pp. 110 – 116
Special edition in Maltese: Chapter 05 Volume 002 pp. 110 – 116
Special edition in Polish: Chapter 05 Volume 002 pp. 110 – 117
Special edition in Slovak: Chapter 05 Volume 002 pp. 110 – 117

Special edition in Slovene: Chapter 05 Volume 002 pp. 110 – 117
Special edition in Bulgarian: Chapter 05 Volume 003 pp. 3 – 10
Special edition in Romanian: Chapter 05 Volume 003 pp. 3 – 10
Special edition in Croatian: Chapter 05 Volume 004 pp. 73 – 80

Directive 92/85/EEC regulates the basic rights of workers during pregnancy and after childbirth. It lays down protective measures in relation to hazardous or risky working conditions, nightwork, mandatory maternity leave, ante-natal examinations, protection from dismissal from employment and the maintenance of employment rights.

Directive 2004/113/EC

http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32004L0113

Council Directive 2004/113/EC of 13 December 2004 implementing the principle of equal treatment between men and women in the access to and supply of goods and services.

OJ L 373, 21.12.2004, pp. 37–43 (ES, CS, DA, DE, ET, EL, EN, FR, IT, LV, LT, HU, NL, PL, PT, SK, SL, FI, SV)
OJ L 153M, 7.6.2006, pp. 294–300 (MT)
Special edition in Bulgarian: Chapter 05 Volume 007 pp. 135 – 141
Special edition in Romanian: Chapter 05 Volume 007 pp. 135 – 141
Special edition in Croatian: Chapter 05 Volume 001 pp. 101 – 107

This Directive prohibits direct and indirect discrimination based on sex, as well as harassment and sexual harassment, in the provision of goods and services within the European Union. The Directive applies to anyone who provides goods and services that are publicly available. This includes public bodies and covers the public and private sphere in the case of any goods and services that are offered beyond transactions carried out in the context of private and family life.

Directive 2006/54/EC

http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32006L0054

Directive 2006/54/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation (recast)

OJ L 204, 26.7.2006, pp. 23–36 (ES, CS, DA, DE, ET, EL, EN, FR, IT, LV, LT, HU, MT, NL, PL, PT, SK, SL, FI, SV)
Special edition in Bulgarian: Chapter 05 Volume 008 pp. 262 – 275
Special edition in Romanian: Chapter 05 Volume 008 pp. 262 – 275
Special edition in Croatian: Chapter 05 Volume 001 pp. 246 – 259

Directive 2006/54, also known as the Recast Directive, implements the principle of equal treatment between women and men in the domain of European Union labour law. The Directive has brought together some older directives and requires the implementation of the prohibition of direct and indirect sex discrimination, harassment and sexual harassment in pay, (access to) employment and in occupational social security schemes.

Directive 2010/18/EU

http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32010L0018

Council Directive 2010/18/EU of 8 March 2010 implementing the revised Framework Agreement on parental leave concluded by BUSINESSEUROPE, UEAPME, CEEP and ETUC and repealing Directive 96/34/EC

OJ L 68, 18.3.2010, pp. 13–20 (BG, ES, CS, DA, DE, ET, EL, EN, FR, IT, LV, LT, HU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SK, SL, FI, SV)
Special edition in Croatian: Chapter 05 Volume 003 pp. 276 – 283

This Directive concerns the basic right of all parents in the European Union to parental leave. It also provides for the right to return to the original job after the leave (or a similar position) and to maintain any previously acquired employment-related rights, determines the kind of conditions employers may apply to the leave, and addresses the needs of adoptive parents. Moreover, it provides for the right to time off for urgent family reasons, sickness or accidents.

Directive 2010/41/EU

http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:32010L0041

Directive 2010/41/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 July 2010 on the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity in a self-employed capacity and repealing Council Directive 86/613/EEC

OJ L 180, 15.7.2010, pp. 1–6 (BG, ES, CS, DA, DE, ET, EL, EN, FR, IT, LV, LT, HU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SK, SL, FI, SV)
Special edition in Croatian: Chapter 05 Volume 002 pp. 245 – 250

Directive 2010/41/EU implements the principles of equal treatment and non-discrimination with respect to self-employment. It sets out provisions in relation to matters such as maternity benefits and social protection.

Directive 2019/1158/EU

https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32019L1158

Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU

PE/20/2019/REV/1
OJ L 188, 12.7.2019, pp. 79–93 (BG, ES, CS, DA, DE, ET, EL, EN, FR, GA, HR, IT, LV, LT, HU, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SK, SL, FI, SV)

The new Directive 2019/1158/EU concerns anyone who has an employment contract or is in an employment relationship defined by law, and lays down minimum requirements with respect to paternity leave, parental leave, carers leave and flexible working arrangements, to apply across all EU Member States. It also contains provisions on acquired employment rights, as well as protection from dismissal and adverse treatment or consequences.

Annex 2 – Equality bodies[676]

Albania
– Commissioner for the Protection from Discrimination

Austria
– Ombud for Equal Treatment
– Austrian Disability Ombudsman

Belgium
– Unia (Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities)
– Institute for the Equality of Women and Men
– Federal Centre for Migration (Myria)

Bulgaria
– Commission for Protection Against Discrimination

Croatia
– Office of the Ombudsman
– Ombudsperson for Gender Equality
– Ombudswoman for Persons with Disabilities

Cyprus
– Office of the Commissioner for Administration and the Protection of Human Rights (Ombudsman)

Czechia
– Public Defender of Rights

Denmark
– Board of Equal Treatment
– Danish Institute for Human Rights

Estonia
– Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner
– Chancellor of Justice

Finland
– Ombudsman for Equality
– Non-Discrimination Ombudsman

France
– Defender of Rights

Germany
– Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency – FADA

Greece
– Greek Ombudsman
– The Consumer's Ombudsman (Directive 2004/113/EC in the private sector)

676 See also https://equineteurope.org/what-are-equality-bodies/.

Hungary
– Equal Treatment Authority (until 31 December 2020)
– Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights (from 1 January 2021)

Iceland
– Centre for Gender Equality

Ireland
– Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission

Italy
– National Equality Councillor
– Local Equality Councillors
– National Office against Racial Discrimination – UNAR

Latvia
– Office of the Ombudsperson

Liechtenstein
– Office for Social Services
– Association for Human Rights

Lithuania
– Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson

Luxembourg
– Centre for Equal Treatment

Malta
– Commission for the Rights of Persons with Disability - CRPD
– National Commission for the Promotion of Equality – NCPE

Montenegro
– Protector of Human Rights and Freedoms of Montenegro (Ombudsman)

Netherlands
– Netherlands Institute for Human Rights (formerly Equal Treatment Commission)

North Macedonia
– Commission for Protection against Discrimination
– Ombudsperson

Norway
– Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud – LDO
– Equality and Anti-Discrimination Tribunal

Poland
– Commissioner for Human Rights

Portugal
– High Commission for Migration
– Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality - CIG
– Commission for Equality in Labour and Employment – CITE

Romania
– National Council for Combating Discrimination – CNCD

Serbia
– Commissioner for the Protection of Equality

Slovakia
– National Centre for Human Rights

Slovenia
– Advocate of the Principle of Equality

Spain
– Institute of Women and for Equal Opportunities
– Council for the Elimination of Racial or Ethnic Discrimination

Sweden
– Equality Ombudsman

Turkey
– Human Rights and Equality Institution

United Kingdom
– Great Britain - Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)
– Northern Ireland - Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

GETTING IN TOUCH WITH THE EU

In person

All over the European Union there are hundreds of Europe Direct information centres. You can find the address of the centre nearest you at: https://europa.eu/european-union/contact_en

On the phone or by email

Europe Direct is a service that answers your questions about the European Union. You can contact this service: – by freephone: 00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11 (certain operators may charge for these calls), – at the following standard number: +32 22999696, or – by email via: https://europa.eu/european-union/contact_en

FINDING INFORMATION ABOUT THE EU

Online

Information about the European Union in all the official languages of the EU is available on the Europa website at: https://europa.eu/european-union/index_en

EU publications

You can download or order free and priced EU publications from: https://publications.europa.eu/en/publications. Multiple copies of free publications may be obtained by contacting Europe Direct or your local information centre (see https://europa.eu/european-union/contact_en).

EU law and related documents

For access to legal information from the EU, including all EU law since 1951 in all the official language versions, go to EUR-Lex at: http://eur-lex.europa.eu

Open data from the EU

The EU Open Data Portal (http://data.europa.eu/euodp/en) provides access to datasets from the EU. Data can be downloaded and reused for free, for both commercial and non-commercial purposes.

Publications Office
of the European Union