

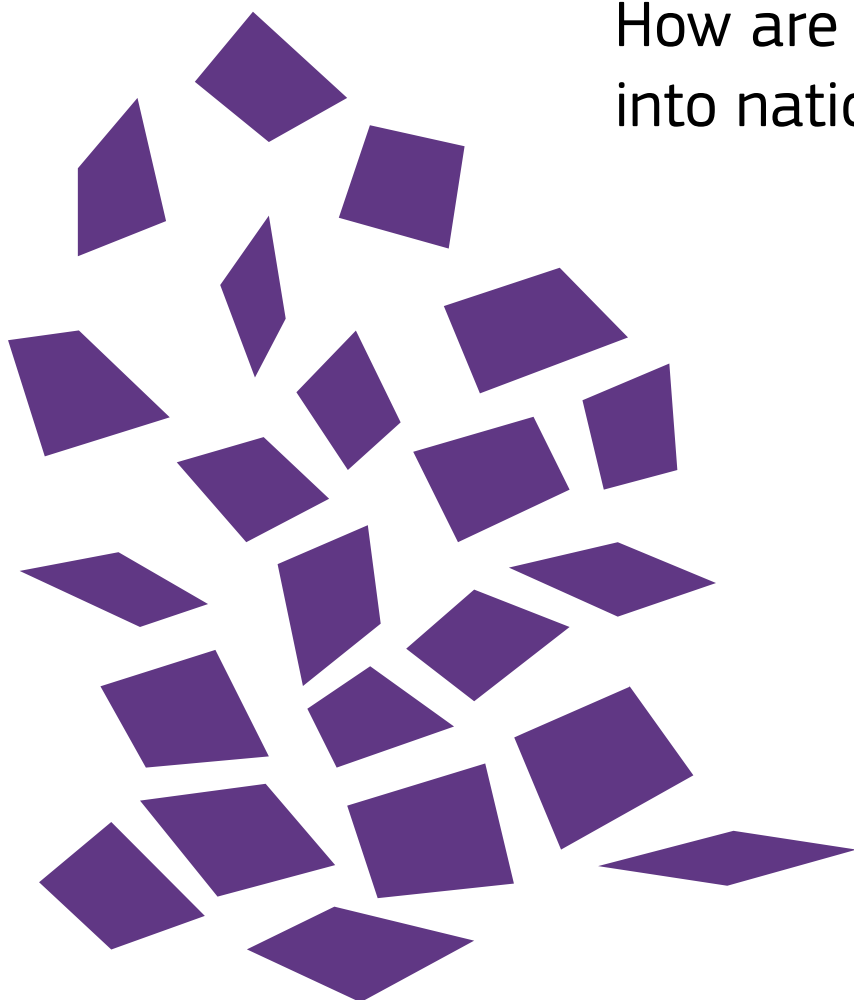


European  
Commission

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

# Gender equality law in Europe

How are EU rules transposed  
into national law in 2015?



**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers  
Directorate D — Equality  
Unit JUST/D1

*European Commission  
B-1049 Brussels*

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## **How are EU rules transposed into national law in 2015?**

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

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Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2016

ISBN 978-92-79-58037-6

ISSN 2315-3849

Doi:10.2838/721932

Catalogue number DS-AD-16-001-EN-N

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# 1 Introduction

This report provides a general overview of the transposition of EU gender equality law in the 28 Member States of the European Union, as well as Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway (the EEA countries) and four candidate countries (the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey).<sup>1</sup> The overview is based on the country reports written by the gender equality law experts of the European equality law network (EELN).<sup>2</sup> This report explains the most important elements of the EU gender equality *acquis* and its implementation at the national level. The term ‘EU gender equality *acquis*’ refers to all the relevant Treaty and Charter provisions, legislation and the case law of the CJEU in relation to gender equality.

The development of EU gender equality law has been a step-by-step process, starting, at least for the ‘oldest’ EU Member States, in the early sixties. 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, ex Article 141 EC Treaty, now Article 157 TFEU) on gender discrimination: the principle of equal pay between men and women for equal work. Since then, however, many directives have been adopted which prohibit discrimination on the grounds of sex: 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 and now repealed 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 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 by Directive 2010/41/EU), the Pregnant Workers’ Directive (92/85/EEC), the Parental Leave Directive (96/34/EEC, repealed 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, finally, the aforementioned so-called Recast Directive (2006/54/EC). The recasting of existing directives on equal pay (including occupational social security schemes), equal treatment at work and the burden of proof, was aimed at clarifying and bringing together in a single text the main provisions of the directives subject to this recasting process.<sup>3</sup> Some case law of the CJEU was also partly incorporated.<sup>4</sup> 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.

Since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty on 1 December 2009, the European Community and the EU have 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 EU (TFEU), which is more detailed and elaborates the TEU.<sup>5</sup> 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).<sup>6</sup> The TEU, the TFEU and the Charter all contain provisions that are relevant to the field of gender equality.

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1 In part, this report builds on Burri, S., Van Eijken, H. *Gender Equality Law in 33 Countries. Update 2014*, European Commission 2015, available at <http://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/2789-general-report-gender-2014>.

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

3 The following directives were subjected to this recasting exercise: 75/117/EEC, 76/207/EEC, 86/378/EEC and 97/80/EEC: see Article 34 of Recast Directive 2006/54/EC.

4 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), also in cases pre-dating the Lisbon Treaty.

5 See Article 1 TEU 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.’

6 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'.

This provision lays down the obligation of gender mainstreaming. It means that both the EU and the Member States shall actively take into account the objective of equality between men and women when formulating and implementing laws, regulations, administrative provisions, policies and activities.<sup>7</sup> 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),<sup>8</sup> it recognises the right to gender equality in all areas, and is thus not limited only to employment, and it also recognizes 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), addressed 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),<sup>9</sup> i.e. when they are acting '*within the scope*' of Union law.<sup>10</sup>

The Treaty provisions and the directives must be implemented at the national level. This means that in so far as national law does not yet fully comply with the EU provisions, the legal provisions must be transposed into national law. As this report will show, this was done in various ways: by amending relevant national legislation, such as Labour Codes, legislation relating to employment and social security legislation, and/or the adoption of specific Acts on gender equality and/or non-discrimination.

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7 See also Article 29 of the Recast Directive (2006/54/EC).

8 The scope of the prohibition of sex discrimination is limited however by the explanations for the Charter, see 2007/C 303/02.

9 See Koukoulis-Spiliotopoulos, S. '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 and Ellis, E., 'The Impact of the Lisbon Treaty on Gender Equality', *European Gender Equality Law Review* No. 1/2010, pp. 7-13; available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/document/index\\_en.htm#h2-9](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/document/index_en.htm#h2-9), accessed 16 September 2014.

10 CJEU C-617/10 Åkerberg Fransson, EU:C:2013:105.

## 2 General legal framework

### 2.1 Constitutional provisions

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.

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

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 **Austria, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Slovakia** and **Sweden**, where this is not possible. In a few countries (**Belgium, Germany** and **Lithuania**) horizontal application is a subject of debate.

### 2.2 Equal treatment legislation

All countries apart from **Turkey** and **Latvia** have enacted specific equal treatment legislation. In some countries equal treatment between men and women is part of a broader Anti-Discrimination Act which also relates to other grounds (e.g. **Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Ireland, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden** and the **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. **Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, Greece, Lithuania, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Romania** and **Serbia**).

### 3 Implementation of central concepts

This chapter discusses how central concepts of EU gender equality law have been transposed in the countries under review. Most of the concepts discussed in this chapter – but not all of them – are defined in the EU gender equality law directives. Overall, the countries under review have faithfully and often literally transposed these concepts into national legislation.

#### 3.1 Sex/gender/transgender

Very few countries define the concepts of ‘sex’, ‘gender’ and/or ‘transgender’ in their legislation. **Finland, Montenegro and Serbia** are exceptions. 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. Article 10 of the **Serbian** Gender Equality Act defines both sex and gender: ‘sex’ relates to biological features of a person, while ‘gender’ means socially established roles, position and status of women and men in public and private lives from which, due to social, cultural and historic differences, discrimination ensues on the basis of biologically belonging to a sex. The other exception is **Sweden**. Chapter 1 Section 5.1 of the Swedish 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’.

It is well-established in the case law of the Court of Justice,<sup>11</sup> and subsequently also in Recital 3 of Recast Directive 2006/54, 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** (where gender identity or expression are considered separately as grounds for sex discrimination), **Bulgaria**, the **Czech Republic, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Malta, Montenegro, Portugal, Slovakia, Sweden** and the **United Kingdom**. In most of these countries this is part of a broader prohibition of gender identity discrimination (e.g. **Belgium**, the **Czech Republic**, where the term ‘gender identification’ is used, **Finland, Hungary, Malta, Portugal** and **Sweden**). Gender identity is perceived in different ways, but is not limited to cases where gender reassignment surgery took place. In **Finland**, for example, 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’.

In several of the countries where the prohibition of gender reassignment discrimination is not codified as such, there nevertheless exists a broader prohibition on gender identity discrimination (e.g. **Croatia, Greece**), or sexual identity discrimination (e.g. **France**).

#### 3.2 Direct sex discrimination

The Gender Recast Directive 2006/54 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.

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

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11 *P v. S and Cornwall County Council, C-13/94 ECR I-2143.*

the fundamental right of another person has to be protected, if it is suitable for the designated purpose and proportional, or otherwise has a reasonable and objective explanation directly related to the relevant relationship.<sup>12</sup>

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 (**Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, the FYR of Macedonia, Malta, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Turkey and the United Kingdom**). In some of the countries where this type of prohibition is not explicitly codified, it is nevertheless established in case law that unfavourable treatment related to pregnancy or maternity constitutes sex discrimination (e.g. **Austria**). 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<sup>13</sup> – criticised on this point as not transparent. In **Portugal** discrimination on the ground of pregnancy and maternity is prohibited.<sup>14</sup> 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 Antidiscrimination 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 leaves. However, Article 12 of the Antidiscrimination Law stipulates that, in case of a breach of the equal treatment rule with regard to pregnancy or childbirth-related leaves, such person has the right to damages, according to Article 13 (which refers to discrimination-related damages).<sup>15</sup> Also in the case law based on the Labour Code, discrimination with regard to pregnancy is considered to be sex based.<sup>16</sup>

There appear to be few difficulties with applying the concept of direct sex discrimination. In **Hungary**, however, the Equality Act refers to 19 explicit grounds, like sex, racial origin, etc. and a general term: ‘any other status, characteristic feature or attribute’.<sup>17</sup> This has created the impression that it is enough to refer to discrimination in general without indicating the protected ground on which basis 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 his/her claim during the procedure of first instance.<sup>18</sup>

### 3.3 Indirect sex discrimination

The Gender Recast Directive 2006/54 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). 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

12 Article 7(2) of the Equality Act.

13 Compare Julén Votinius, J., ‘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 2011.

14 Articles 24(1) and 25(6) of the Labour Code.

15 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.’

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

17 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.’

18 For example *Kúria* Pfv.20351/2014/6.

indirect sex discrimination, as long as mainly women are employed on a part-time basis. The possibilities for justification are much broader than with direct discrimination.<sup>19</sup>

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 **Hungary**, the concept of indirect discrimination is narrower than the EU definition by stipulating a 'considerably larger disadvantage' compared to a 'particular disadvantage' as mentioned in Article 2(1)(b) of the Recast Directive.

Indirect discrimination is difficult to prove.<sup>20</sup> 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 persons of one sex – some countries allow statistical evidence. Statistical evidence is allowed (though not required) in **Belgium, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, Malta**, the **Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Serbia, Spain, Sweden** and the **United Kingdom**. In several countries there is no case law available (including **Croatia, Iceland, Luxembourg** and **Slovakia**).

The concept of indirect discrimination is complex and has caused difficulties for national courts. For example, 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 job classification systems of collective agreements due to a specific understanding of the autonomy of collective bargaining (freedom of coalition) 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.

In several countries (**Croatia, Latvia**, the **FYR of Macedonia** and **Liechtenstein**) there is no case law at all yet on indirect sex discrimination.

### 3.4 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 produces a new and different type of discrimination. The European Equality Law Network produced a thematic report on intersectional discrimination in 2015, written by Sandra Fredman.<sup>21</sup>

Multiple discrimination and/or intersectional discrimination is explicitly covered in the national legislation of **Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy**, the **FYR of Macedonia, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia** and **Turkey**. In several, but by no means all, countries there is case law available that addresses these types of discrimination: **Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy**, the **Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Serbia, Slovakia, Sweden** and the **United Kingdom**.

### 3.5 Positive action

Article 157(4) TFEU allows positive action, which is described as follows: '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 providing for specific advantages

19 See the report produced by the European Network of Legal Experts in the Field of Gender Equality, McCrudden, C, Prechal, S. *The Concepts of Equality and Non-Discrimination in Europe: A practical approach*, European Commission 2009, available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/document/index\\_en.htm#h2-9](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/document/index_en.htm#h2-9), accessed 28 March 2016.

20 General issues related to the burden of proof are discussed further below in Section 11.2.

21 The report will become available at: <http://www.equalitylaw.eu/publications/thematic-reports>.

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.<sup>22</sup>

Positive action aims at eliminating or counteracting the detrimental effects of stereotypes concerning the traditional division of roles in society between men and women. As an example of positive action can be mentioned female quotas in recruitment and promotion.<sup>23</sup> As a rule, positive action may be taken in the various areas covered by EU law, such as 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.

**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 provision concerning the election of judges. In **Greece**, positive action is not merely allowed, it is required by the Constitution in all areas (Article 116(2)). That said, 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. Whenever positive action measures exist, they appear to be more frequent 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** and **Sweden**).

Many national experts report difficulties in relation to positive action. For instance, the **German** expert reports that the concept of quotas within the civil service to hire or promote women instead of equally qualified men generally fail in practice due to the sophisticated systems of qualification assessment leading to the result that there are hardly ever two persons with equal qualifications, let alone a man and a woman.<sup>24</sup> The case law of the CJEU, particularly the cases *Kalanke*, *Marschall*, *Badeck* and *Abrahamsson*,<sup>25</sup> has prevented the **Netherlands** from developing affirmative action policies to hire women at universities.<sup>26</sup>

Of particular interest is the issue of gender balance in company boards.<sup>27</sup> A proposal of the Commission on this topic is pending.<sup>28</sup> An increasing number of countries has adopted measures that aim to improve the gender balance in company boards. The countries which have adopted such measures are **Austria**

22 See also Article 3 of the Gender Recast Directive 2006/54: 'Member States may maintain or adopt measures within the meaning of Article 141(4) of the Treaty [now Article 157(4) TFEU] with a view to ensuring full equality in practice between men and women in working life.'

23 See the reports produced by the European Network of Legal Experts in the Field of Gender Equality, Fredman, S. *Making Equality Effective: The role of proactive measures*, European Commission 2009, <http://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=4551&langId=en> and Selanec, G., Senden, L. *Positive Action Measures to Ensure Full Equality in Practice between Men and Women, including on Company Boards*, European Commission 2011, available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/gender\\_balance\\_decision\\_making/report\\_gender-balance\\_2012\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/gender_balance_decision_making/report_gender-balance_2012_en.pdf).

24 This is the finding of a recent legal expertise study: Papier, H.-J., Heidebach, M. (2014), *Rechtsgutachten zur Frage der Zulässigkeit von Zielquoten für Frauen in Führungspositionen im öffentlichen Dienst sowie zur Verankerung von Sanktionen bei Nichteinhaltung* (Legal expertise on the legitimacy of fixed-target women quotas for leading positions in the civil service and the implementation of sanctions in the case of non-compliance), [https://www.mik.nrw.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Redakteure/Dokumente/Themen\\_und\\_Aufgaben/Moderne\\_Verwaltung/1407ga\\_zielquoteoedie.pdf](https://www.mik.nrw.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Redakteure/Dokumente/Themen_und_Aufgaben/Moderne_Verwaltung/1407ga_zielquoteoedie.pdf).

25 *Case C-450/93 Kalanke v. Freie Hansestadt Bremen* [1995] ECR I-3051; *C-409/95 Marschall* [1997] ECR I-6363; *Case C-158/97 Badeck* [2000] ECR I-1875; *Case C-407/98 Abrahamsson* [2000] ECR I-5539.

26 Opinion 2011-198, [www.mensenrechten.nl](http://www.mensenrechten.nl), accessed 5 October 2015. See also JAR 2012/78 with a comment by Cremers-Hartman, E.; Opinion 2012-195, [www.mensenrechten.nl](http://www.mensenrechten.nl), accessed 5 October 2015. See also JAR 2013/41 with a comment by Cremers-Hartman, E.

27 Selanec, G., Senden, L. *Positive Action Measures to Ensure Full Equality in Practice between Men and Women, including on Company Boards*, European Commission 2011, available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/gender\\_balance\\_decision\\_making/report\\_gender-balance\\_2012\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/gender_balance_decision_making/report_gender-balance_2012_en.pdf) and at EU Bookshop; and Senden, L., Visser, M. '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* 1/2013, pp. 17-33, available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/document/index\\_en.htm#h2-9](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/document/index_en.htm#h2-9).

28 For more information see: [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/gender\\_balance\\_decision\\_making/boardroom\\_factsheet\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/gender_balance_decision_making/boardroom_factsheet_en.pdf) and the pending proposal on gender balance in company boards: COM (2012) 614.

(entirely on a soft-law basis), **Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain** and **Turkey**.

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 or regarding the composition of political bodies. The experts from **Belgium, Croatia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, the FYR of Macedonia, Malta, Montenegro, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey** and the **United Kingdom** report that such measures exist in their countries. In **Greece** such measures are compulsory and their implementation is subject to judicial review.

### 3.6 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 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.' 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.' Both concepts include the violation of a person's dignity and the creation of an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. The main difference is that in 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. In the case of sexual harassment it rather involves a person being subject to unwelcome sexual advances or, for instance, that the behaviour of the perpetrator aims at obtaining sexual favours. In concrete situations the distinction between the two may be unclear.<sup>29</sup>

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.

**All countries** covered by this report have prohibited both harassment and sexual harassment in national legislation. The exception is **Turkey**, where harassment is not covered explicitly in legislation, but can nevertheless be deemed to fall under the Criminal Law prohibition of sexual harassment.

In **Cyprus, Denmark** and **Greece**, the prohibition of harassment only covers employment. As regards sexual harassment: **Cyprus, Germany, Italy** and **Slovenia** only prohibit this in the employment context.

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.<sup>30</sup> In practice at the national level, however, this is not always the case. The **Belgian** expert, for example, reports that harassment and sexual harassment are hardly ever perceived or analysed as forms of gender discrimination in case law. In fact, this is unavoidable as when the victim is a worker, she/he is forbidden to rely on gender equality legislation.

29 See the report of the European Network of Legal Experts in the Field of Gender Equality, Numhauser-Henning, A., Laulom, S. *Harassment related to Sex and Sexual Harassment Law in 33 European Countries. Discrimination versus Dignity*, European Commission, 2011, available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/document/index\\_en.htm#h2-9](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/document/index_en.htm#h2-9) and EU Bookshop.

30 For a discussion of difficulties with this concept see the report of the European Network of Legal Experts in the Field of Gender Equality, Numhauser-Henning, A., Laulom, S. *Harassment related to Sex and Sexual Harassment Law in 33 European Countries. Discrimination versus Dignity*, European Commission, 2011, available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/document/index\\_en.htm#h2-9](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/document/index_en.htm#h2-9) and EU Bookshop.



Not all countries have enacted legislation that specifies that harassment and sexual harassment as well as any less favourable treatment based on the person's rejection of or submission to such conduct amounts to discrimination (see Article 2(2)(a) of Directive 2006/54). Countries where such legislation does not exist are **Poland, Portugal, Turkey** and the **United Kingdom**.

### 3.7 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).<sup>31</sup> Thus, 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**, there was confusion whether intent is required or not, a requirement which is not mentioned in Article 2(2)(b) of the Recast Directive. In the **FYR of 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 (e.g. **Belgium, Croatia, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Luxembourg, Malta** and **Romania**).

### 3.8 Other forms of discrimination

Several countries also prohibit other forms of discrimination in their national law, such as discrimination by association or assumed discrimination (**Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Montenegro** (which prohibits segregation), **Norway, Serbia, Turkey** and the **United Kingdom (Great Britain)**). Discrimination by association was developed in EU law in relation to disability discrimination in the *Coleman* case.<sup>32</sup> It refers to a situation when someone is discriminated against by virtue of her 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 she assumes 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'.<sup>33</sup>

31 See also Asscher-Vonk, I. 'Instruction to discriminate' European Gender Equality Law Review No. 1/2012, pp. 4-12, available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/document/index\\_en.htm#h2-9](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/document/index_en.htm#h2-9).

32 ECJ 17 July 2008, see also *The concept of discrimination by association and its application in the EU Member States* Karagiorgi, C., <http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/adlr-18-2014-final.pdf>.

33 Section 6 of the Employment Equality Act 1998 (as amended).

## 4 Equal pay and equal treatment at work

### 4.1 The EU principle of equal pay

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 of national courts on this issue. These have included the scope of the notion of 'pay', which the CJEU has interpreted broadly; pay includes not only basic pay, but also, for example, overtime supplements, special bonuses paid by the employer, travel allowances, compensation for attending training courses and training facilities, termination payments in case of dismissal and occupational pensions. In particular, the extension of Article 157 TFEU to occupational pensions has been very important (see Section 10).

Importantly, 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 shall be or may be declared null and void or may 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, women in the EU earn 16.3 %<sup>34</sup> less than men, and progress has been slow in closing the gender pay gap.<sup>35</sup> The differences can be partly 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 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.<sup>36</sup>

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 a 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**). In **Greece** the constitutional equal pay principle covers any ground whatsoever and is not limited to sex. Yet, the scope given to the principle still varies in a number of respects, as the following section will show.

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34 Eurostat 2013; see [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/gender\\_pay\\_gap/gpg\\_eu\\_factsheet\\_2015\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/gender_pay_gap/gpg_eu_factsheet_2015_en.pdf), accessed 26 February 2016.

35 See for information on the gender pay gap for example the website of DG Justice at: [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/gender-pay-gap/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/gender-pay-gap/index_en.htm), accessed 26 February 2016.

36 On legal aspects of the gender pay gap see: European Network of Legal Experts in the Field of Gender Equality, Foubert, P., Burri, S., Numhauser-Henning, A. *The Gender Pay Gap from a Legal Perspective* (including 33 country reports) European Commission, 2010, available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/document/index\\_en.htm#h2-9](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/document/index_en.htm#h2-9) and EU Bookshop <https://bookshop.europa.eu/en/home/>, accessed 16 September 2014.

## 4.2 The scope given to the equal pay principle in national law

Differences in scope of the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value relate in particular to:

### (i) the extent to and way in which the concept of pay has been defined

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 some countries in which the concept is not defined as such in law (**Austria, Finland, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom**). While in some this has not caused problems, because of the way that legislation has developed (the **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 (**Germany, 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 (the **Netherlands**, to some extent also **Portugal**).

In a few countries, the concept does not (seem to) fully comply with the definition and scope of Article 157(2) TFEU. In **Lithuania**, indirect payments are thus not mentioned in the law, and therefore various benefits or services provided by third parties (including insurance or pension benefits) do not fall under the domestic notion of pay. Also in other domestic laws, there may be somewhat odd omissions, like the **Belgian** Gender Act not expressly stipulating that it also covers work of equal value and **Serbian** law not referring explicitly to remuneration 'in kind'. 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. 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**, it is not clear whether it fully conforms to the EU concept of pay.

### (ii) the extent to which national law explicitly prohibits direct and indirect discrimination on grounds of sex with regard to all aspects and conditions of remuneration

Article 4 of the Recast Directive requires such a prohibition, but not all national legal systems provide for such an explicit stipulation (**Latvia, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Sweden**) or only partly (**Czech Republic, Serbia**). In the **Czech Republic** 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. **German** courts have generally stated that there is no legal rule providing for the same pay for the same work; the prohibition of gender discrimination, concerning pay as well, is part of the constitutional equality principle, but only applies to civil services. 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. The Swedish expert has criticised the 'tacit' way of regulating pay discrimination in **Sweden** as being far from transparent.

### (iii) the extent to which a comparator is required in national law as regards equal pay claims

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.' **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.

But in other countries an actual comparator still needs to be identified on the basis of the law (**Austria, Croatia, Finland, Ireland, Malta, Northern-Ireland, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Sweden**). Some countries also allow for a hypothetical comparator (**Austria, Great Britain, Norway, Poland, Romania, Sweden**), while in others this is unclear yet not considered excluded (**Iceland, Portugal, Spain**) and left to the courts to be decided (**Italy, Malta, Serbia**). In yet other countries, the situation is somewhat more diverse as the law may not as such require a comparator while case law does (**Greece**, where the definition of discrimination may be considered as implicitly requiring a comparator); or the law is not explicit on this (**Bulgaria, Latvia**); or it may not be required in all situations (**Estonia, the FYR of Macedonia, the Netherlands**).

In the **FYR of 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 also being 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 **Great Britain**, 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 **Greek** case law, applying the broader equal pay principle requires a comparator in the same undertaking or service or in the framework of the same wage-fixing instrument (e.g. collective agreement, statutory or administrative provision), but when there is no such comparator, the claimant can allege that he/she fulfils the conditions for the higher pay provided by an instrument for workers performing the same work or work of the same value, and claim the pay difference, without even naming a comparator. 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 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, the Netherlands**). 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 (**Croatia**).

**(iv) the extent to which national law lays down parameters for establishing the equal value of the work performed**

Interestingly, it appears that only in about one third of the countries covered by this report, national law specifies (to some extent) how and by what criteria the equal value of work performed should be established (**Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Ireland, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Sweden, the United Kingdom**). These include criteria of a personal, job-related and labour-market nature:

- knowledge (**Norway, Sweden**);
- professional qualifications (including titles and diplomas) (**France, Hungary, the FYR of Macedonia, Montenegro, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Serbia**);
- professional (working) experience (**Bulgaria, France, Hungary, the FYR of Macedonia, Montenegro, Poland, Portugal**);
- seniority (**Bulgaria**);
- skills (**Croatia, Ireland, Montenegro, Poland, Serbia, Sweden, the United Kingdom**);
- performance (**Montenegro**);
- work results (**Czech Republic**);
- nature of the job (**Croatia**), plus quantity and quality (**Finland, Hungary, Portugal**);
- responsibilities/strenuousness/decision-making (**Croatia, Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Ireland, Montenegro, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Sweden, the United Kingdom**);
- complexity (**Czech Republic**);
- physical efforts, stress, manual work (**Croatia, France, Hungary, Ireland, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Sweden, the United Kingdom**);
- mental efforts, stress (**France, Hungary, Ireland, Norway, Portugal, Serbia, Sweden, the United Kingdom**);
- working conditions (**Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Finland, Ireland, Montenegro, Norway, Portugal, 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.

For **France**, the list contained in the law is not exhaustive and this also seems to be the case for the **United Kingdom**. The **Hungarian** expert has noted that the newly introduced criterion of labour-market conditions, according to the intentions of drafters, opens up the possibility for nationwide employers to provide different wages in different parts of the country. This criterion is considered to oddly fit into the law at issue, as all other criteria deal with the individual and it also provides some leeway for employers. In **Finland**, very dissimilar jobs can be considered to be of equal value, when they are equally demanding. Given the deeply gender-segregated labour market, this is of particular importance. The **Greek** law refers to `professional` instead of `job` classification and also refers to the use of `personnel evaluation`, which is considered misleading, as they 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, these 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 some countries, specific parameters ensue from case law. The **Spanish** Constitutional Court has thus pointed 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. The Supreme Court has also established that workers at the same company doing different work deserve the same payment when the difference relies on the fact that the kind of jobs done mostly by women are undervalued in relation to the jobs occupied mostly by men. The **German** Federal Labour Court has deplored the fundamental lack of objective criteria, and has itself focused on the requirements for work performance such as the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities, the variety of professional duties and educational qualifications. The **Polish** Supreme Court has held that if the employer takes into account such criteria as length of service and qualifications for establishing the level of pay, it must prove that the particular skills and professional experience have special significance for fulfilment of the obligations conferred upon the employee. 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 having 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.

In yet other countries, it is left foremost 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. 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. The **Estonian** Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner found sex discrimination after job evaluation in some opinions, deducing requirements from the law in a more indirect way. In the **FYR of Macedonia**, the Ministry of Informatics' Society and Administration publishes a job classification system without determining pay, but based on the same criteria for both men and women. In **Croatia**, the employer is obliged to pay the salary stipulated by regulations, collective agreement, employment rules or employment contract. 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 shall pay the employee 'adequate salary'. Adequate salary is salary usually paid for equal work, and if it cannot be determined, the court will decide on it in accordance with the given circumstances.

#### (v) the extent to which national (case) law addresses wage transparency

There can only be awareness of pay discrimination when wage and job evaluation systems are public and transparent. Yet, many problems persist in this respect, for instance, in **Belgium** there is no transparency as to the remuneration of managers who are hired by public economic enterprises under employment contracts. 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. 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.

A number of states have referred to trade secret and protection of privacy as factors hampering transparency. In **Estonia**, pursuant to a Supreme Court ruling, it is thus considered impossible to analyse gender pay differences because of the level of privacy protection. Similarly, in the **FYR of Macedonia** employers use the protection of privacy argument to treat wage levels as confidential data and as a ground for including confidentiality clauses on wage into the employment contract. 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, some courts following this. But such information is also considered protected under the personal data protection act and if considered as a personal good, the employee should be entitled to disclose his salary if he so wishes, the obligation to preserve secrecy then only applying to the employer. Yet, there is general consensus that the prohibition to disclose information cannot extend to general remuneration tables. The **Romanian** Labour Code stipulates that salaries are confidential and to be determined by individual direct negotiations between employer and employee.

There is still a considerable number of states that do not provide for any legal measures whatsoever to ensure wage transparency and in which this issue has not been addressed in case law either (**Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey**). The European Commission's Recommendation of 7 March 2014 on strengthening the principle of equal pay between men and women through transparency sought to contribute to raising awareness regarding this issue. Considerable differences in-between the researched states also seem to persist as to the extent to which wage transparency is a problem that needs to be addressed at all with a view to effectively combatting pay discrimination. The Turkish expert has noted that pay differentials are not a problem in the public sector and foremost problematic in the private, informal sector. In the formal sector, collective agreements are deemed transparent.

Yet, in other countries, some duties of transparency do exist, including:

- *reporting duties*: equal pay audits (**Great Britain**, companies with 250+ employees, **Ireland**); 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 report comparing the situation of men and women in the company (**France**, companies with 50+ employees); 'pay mapping' duty (**Finland**, companies with 30+ employees); duty of gender-segregated wage statistics (**Denmark**, companies with 10+ full-time employees, including at least 3 men and 3 women);
- *recording duty*: In **Portugal**, companies must keep sex-segregated records of recruitment forms and procedures for a minimum period of 5 years. These records must also include information that allows for the research of wage discrimination;
- *publicness of salaries of certain persons* (**Poland, Turkey**, of civil servants), also pursuant to staff regulations (**Belgium**);
- *duty for employers to establish a remuneration system*. In **Lithuania**, draft legislation was submitted to Parliament in June 2015 with a view to introducing such an obligation for companies with more than 50 employees;
- *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.
- *duty to establish a sound job evaluation system* (the **Netherlands, Portugal**);
- *investigation powers of specific inspectors*. In **Italy**, the local Labour Inspectorate may obtain gender-differentiated data at the workplace as regards hiring, vocational training and career opportunities; in **Cyprus**, a specific Inspector is appointed to also ensure the full and effective application of gender equality law, and to whom all kinds of information has to be disclosed upon his request;

- *monitoring duty of wage developments in the labour market* (**Swedish** Mediation Office);
- *unenforceability of confidentiality clauses in labour contracts* (**Northern Ireland**);
- *duty of the employer to provide information on pay* (**Norway, Greece, Slovenia**). In the latter country, the Authority for the Protection of Personal Data 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. In **Slovenia**, the employer can refuse to give such information on the ground of an employee refusing to give consent.
- *duty to produce salary guides in the public sector* (**Slovenia**).

In **Iceland**, the law stipulates a right for employees to disclose their wage upon their choice, which is not deemed very effective given the unlikelihood that men will disclose their higher wages to female colleagues.

No specific action was taken to follow up on the Commission's recommendation, except in **Croatia, Finland, Germany, Italy, Poland**. 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 new Act on Salaries in the Public Sector in September 2015. Wage transparency is 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 wage and productivity. In **Germany**, at the beginning of 2015 the Government has announced a draft law on equal pay and wage transparency, which was presented in December 2015 but which is not yet publicly accessible. It is to contain an individual right to information but no right for associations to initiate proceedings. Reporting obligations will be restricted to companies exceeding 500 employees. In **Finland** as well, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health is preparing an instruction on how to implement the recommendation, and in **Italy**, a draft delegation act was presented to Parliament in March 2015 and is now also under examination by the Commission for Labour. 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. **France** did not consider amendments to the law necessary, as most of the recommendations were already applied and, similarly, in **Portugal** some of the issues covered by the Recommendation are already provided for in legislation, such as information on wages in the companies separated 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 if 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.

Not connected immediately to the implementation of the Recommendation, but still noteworthy are the following other initiatives. In the **Netherlands**, there is a website [www.gelijkloon.nl](http://www.gelijkloon.nl) (part of [www.wageindicator.org](http://www.wageindicator.org)), subsidized by the Dutch Government, giving 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](http://www.wervingenselectiegids.nl)). The **Luxembourg** Ministry of Equal Opportunities also proposes an online tool to companies who want to analyse their situation regarding equal pay. 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.

**(vi) the extent to which justifications for pay differences are allowed in legislation and/or case law, as well as collective agreements**

Some countries do not provide for such a possibility in the law (**Czech Republic, Cyprus, Liechtenstein, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia**) or it is left to the courts to decide on this in the end (**Latvia, Sweden**,



the **United Kingdom**). 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**) or job classification systems in collective agreements (**Germany**);
- quantity and quality of the work (**Lithuania, Montenegro, Turkey**);
- being employed at different times (**Malta**);
- responsibility (**Finland**);
- working conditions, unpleasant or deviant working hours (**Finland, Montenegro**);
- being a manager (the **FYR of Macedonia**);
- 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**);
- differences in formal qualifications (educational degree) for the job (**Croatia, Iceland**) or demand of higher qualifications for the performance of a wider range of tasks (**Ireland**);
- relevant work experience from previous jobs with the same or other employers (the **Netherlands**) or work experience in general (**Bulgaria, Finland, Iceland**);
- productivity (**Portugal**), personal performance/work results (**Finland, the FYR of Macedonia, Montenegro**), economic performance (**Estonia**);
- the lack of periods of absence, excluding the exercise of maternity and paternity rights (**Portugal**);
- age (**Sweden**);
- capabilities (**Sweden**);
- alignment with the last salary earned (the **Netherlands**);
- guarantees to receive a specific salary or supplement granted in the past;
- competitiveness (**Hungary**);
- labour shortages (in some circumstances) (the **Netherlands**) and demand and supply in the labour market (**Lithuania, Sweden**);
- results of the activities of the company or organization (**Lithuania**);
- the merging of two organisations, 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**);
- collective bargaining outcomes (**Sweden**) and pay negotiations (the **Netherlands**).

The **Swedish** justifications ensue from case law and have been reported to be offering too broad a scope and the same goes for the **Netherlands**. While the 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. 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. **Latvian** courts as well are 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 the justifications for pay differences, this leaving a lot of leeway for courts to allow these or to not consider all circumstances of the case. For instance, the Constitutional Court has considered that justification is possible for pay differences when the jobs occupied mostly by men require more responsibility and a higher degree of concentration than the jobs occupied mostly by women. **Romanian** law does not address the issue of justifications at all, but leaves full discretion to individual negotiation of salaries. **Hungarian** law does not comply with Article 14 of the Recast Directive by allowing exemptions in indirect wage discrimination cases based on ‘proportional discrimination, justified by the characteristics or nature of the work, and is based on all relevant and legitimate terms and conditions of employment’.<sup>37</sup> In case law, employers frequently refer to their freedom of contract, and/or the differences in the bargaining

37 Article 22(1) of the Equality Act.

power of different employees. This argument usually does not save them from being liable for wage discrimination, as it happened in a case in which female storekeepers earned 70-100 % less than their male colleagues. If, however, the employer invests some effort into fabricating an argument about the necessity of the challenged policy because of competitiveness, or applying preferential treatment regarding the comparator, the employer has a good chance to win the case. 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 takes it 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.

#### (vii) specific difficulties

Many experts have reported specific difficulties in relation to the application of the principle of equal pay for equal work and work of equal value in practice (**Belgium, Croatia, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the FYR of Macedonia, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom**).

Some of these reported difficulties are of a rather general and/or persistent nature and have already been seen to relate to the lack of transparency. In **Belgium**, the landmark case worth mentioning here involved the European Trade Union Institute where a female researcher complained of pay discrimination in comparison with male colleagues. The Labour Court of Appeal in Brussels found that the employer's pay system was opaque and simply referred to the CJEU's decision in *Danfoss* to conclude that gender discrimination had taken place. In **Spain** as well, employers are not obliged to disclose to employees the data on salaries or promotions disaggregated by sex and the Supreme Court established that a promotion system that lacked even minimal transparency led to women stagnating in lower ranks, according to statistical analysis, and that this constituted indirect discrimination. In **Serbia**, while the Statistical Office has data on women in the labour market which are gender-sensitively systematized, these are only available to state institutions. In **Austria**, the income reporting duty does not cover smaller enterprises and the rules for using the income reports involve confidentiality rules that may deter works councils and employees from pursuing wage negotiations with their employers and from submitting court cases. In **Lithuania** as well, rules on confidentiality contribute to the reluctance of employees to challenge discriminatory practices in the area of pay, this also being an explanation for the lack of case law. Pay differences are also considered a problem of equality law governed by public law instruments and not of individual labour law. The **Macedonian** expert emphasises statistical and budgetary invisibility of pay differences between men and women in practice as being problematic. In **Malta** as well as **Montenegro**, pay structures are also obscure and there is a lack of information and access to data on pay.

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 awaited whether the statute on general minimum wages which entered into force on 1 January 2015 might influence the gender pay gap.

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 courts is deemed problematic. 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 organization to which his job has been contracted out (this as a result of the CJEU ruling in the *Lawrence* case). She has also underscored the uncertainty of claimants in advance

of bringing a claim whether work is of equal value, and that in addition there are high tribunal fees, the requirement for (expensive) specialist legal assistance and victimization concerns. The **Polish** expert has referred to the lack in many enterprises 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 causing 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 in 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 excluding school teachers therefrom. Since most of these are women, this constitutes indirect discrimination.

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 employer's 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. The **Polish** and **Hungarian** experts have noted similar problems in proving discrimination. Hungarian courts are also excessively strict when judging on the amount of compensation to be paid to victims of sex discrimination. In one case, when the directly discriminated female bus driver was not employed because of her sex, only the lost wages were paid until the day she found employment somewhere else, despite the Supreme Court noting that CJEU case law requires persuasive sanctions. **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, being incompatible with EU law. It is also a justification in case of different employers, being compatible with EU law.

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. In **Lithuania** as well, there is an overwhelming dominance of individual agreements in the setting of wages and an absence of collective agreements. In the **Romanian** private sector there is also complete discretion to negotiate salaries.

Some experts have also referred to general aspects of their labour markets, the **Macedonian** expert mentioning the problem of the gender segregation of the workforce as one of the main problems for the gender pay gap and the **Montenegrin** expert the factual situation of illegal employment.

### 4.3 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.

#### 4.3.1 *The personal and material scope*

The 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, the Czech Republic, Latvia, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway and Portugal**. But this does not seem to be necessarily problematic. While the **Belgian** Gender Act has no proper personal scope, its material scope is broader than all 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. Whether **Montenegro** 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, in the alternative, of an employment agreement or contract (the **Netherlands, Portugal**), which is generally considered to be in compliance with the case law of the CJEU or to be even broader (**Sweden**). Yet, there are also still some deficiencies to be signalled (**Austria, Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Turkey, the United Kingdom**). The personal scope of the equal pay principle in **Lithuanian** law is rather confusing and does not encompass all persons falling with the EU notion of worker, e.g. excluding 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', entailing some characteristics of self-employment, are not fully covered by gender equality law, even if in reality they share more characteristics with regular employees. Likewise, **Turkish** law also seems narrower, the concept of worker not covering self-employed persons and civil servants. In **Cyprus** and the **United Kingdom** as well, self-employed persons are excluded from the definition of worker, deemed to be inconsistent with EU law. **Latvian** anti-discrimination law protects judges and prosecutors only with regard to access to employment and members of the boards of directors of capital companies are not protected by anti-discrimination law at all.

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 contained in the Directive as has been noted above in relation to **Belgium**. In **Croatia**, it also includes discrimination in relation to the work-life balance, as well as pregnancy, giving birth, parenting and any form of custody. **French** law rather 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 in trade unions and social services.

In other countries, the material scope appears more limited in certain respects, the **Czech** Anti-Discrimination Act not including, for example, vocational training and access thereto, promotion, and recruitment conditions. In **Portugal**, the material scope does not cover self-employment and occupation, since self-employment is out of the scope of the Labour Code. In **Iceland**, the scope is a bit more limited as it does not cover membership of, and involvement in, an organisation of workers or employers. **Lithuanian** law is found to be in contravention of EU law as regards non-discriminatory access to employment and promotion for the self-employed. In **Turkey**, the material scope is more limited, not

covering vocational training, promotion and working conditions. 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 persons whose work is comparable with employment, but some self-employed persons may fall outside the definition. A separate provision covers discrimination in relation to access to education.

#### 4.3.2 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** and **Norway**. 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, the Netherlands, Northern Ireland**);
- fashion models (**Italy**) as well as photographic models (**Belgium, France**);
- prison wards (**Belgium**) or work in male prisons and (public and private) security forces (**Cyprus**);
- work for the Marine Corps and the submarine service (the **Netherlands**) and for the military depending on the type of military force (**Romania**), such exceptions having been repealed in other countries (**France**);
- equal opportunity commissioners and official guardians (**Germany**);
- church Ministers (the **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, the FYR of Macedonia, the 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 his work, or living, in a private home (**Northern Ireland**);
- personal service, care and nursing (**Cyprus, the 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 (**Northern Ireland, Cyprus**);
- 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 resistance; **Cyprus**);
- working underground in mines (**Cyprus**).

In other states, there has been no identification of 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 (**Sweden, Portugal**). In **Finland**, exceptions can be made for 'weighty and acceptable reason' but it is unclear what this covers and whether it aligns with EU law. The exceptions provided by **Polish** and **Hungarian** 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. Furthermore, the need to differentiate between the sexes should only be 'substantial' instead of 'genuine and determining' as the Directive stipulates. 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, it also being considered a rational choice of the legislator to identify these jobs in collective bargaining rather than to cast 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 **Finland, Germany** and **Latvia**. In **Greece**, the protection of paternity and family life is added. 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 women to perform work that is particularly arduous or harmful to their health, a list of such work being laid down in a ministerial act. Such a general provision to exclude women from particular work, irrespective of their health and physical condition, raises substantial doubts on its lawfulness. 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 also declaring 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.

#### 4.3.3 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 (the **Netherlands**) or the discriminatory termination of self-employment contracts by employers/clients not being explicitly covered (the **Netherlands**);
- national equality law providing weaker protection to women by making the differentiation between workers justifiable by the employer with a much wider scope than is provided by the Recast Directive (**Hungary**);
- problems related to non-discriminatory hiring and promotion, women still often being refused on grounds of pregnancy and family obligations (**Estonia, Montenegro**) or on the basis of the argument that it's a 'man's job' (**Serbia**). A concrete, recent example regarded recruitment in the Supreme Court of **Iceland** where 10 out of 11 judges are men and the evaluation committee was composed of only men. It suggested that out of the 3 qualified applicants (2 men, 1 woman) a man should be appointed;
- discriminatory dismissal after pregnancy leave or reassignment to a lower or less-paid position when returning from parental leave (**Serbia**);
- 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.

## 5 Maternity, paternity, parental and other types of leaves

### 5.1 Pregnancy and maternity protection

Discrimination for reasons of pregnancy is considered as *direct discrimination* under EU law 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*, 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). While in the past such rights 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. It is submitted that a very long maternity leave might hamper a balanced division of family responsibilities and possibilities on the labour market. A combination of a maternity leave that is not excessively long, paternity leave, parental leave, and childcare leave might prevent such drawbacks.

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.

Article 10(2) of Directive 92/85 stipulates that, if an employer dismisses an employee during the period of her pregnancy or during maternity leave, he or she must substantiate the grounds for dismissal in writing. The following table gives an overview of how this provision is implemented in the 35 countries under review.

**Table 1: Protection against dismissal during pregnancy and maternity leave**

<b>Austria</b>	Yes. Employers have to apply for prior consent for dismissal in writing to the Labour and Social Law Courts who have to issue a written verdict.
<b>Belgium</b>	Yes, on request.
<b>Bulgaria</b>	Yes. Article 333 paragraph 6 and 335 of the Labour Code.
<b>Croatia</b>	Dismissal is prohibited during maternity leave. Exceptionally, dismissal due to business reasons in the procedure of winding-up of a company is allowed even during maternity leave (Article 34(4) Labour Act). The employer is always required to substantiate the grounds and reasons for dismissal in writing (Article 120(1) and (2) Labour Act). However, application of this exception is practically impossible, because the notice period cannot begin and is suspended during pregnancy and use of any maternity or parental related right (Article 121(2) Labour Act).
<b>Cyprus</b>	Yes
<b>Czech Republic</b>	Yes
<b>Denmark</b>	Yes
<b>Estonia</b>	Yes
<b>Finland</b>	Yes
<b>France</b>	Yes
<b>Germany</b>	Yes
<b>Greece</b>	Yes, for the whole protected period.
<b>Hungary</b>	Yes, it is a general rule for all dismissals. However, dismissal is prohibited until the end of maternity and parental leave.
<b>Iceland</b>	Yes
<b>Ireland</b>	Yes (if requested by the employee)
<b>Italy</b>	No
<b>Latvia</b>	A written form of the notification and obligation to state the grounds of dismissal are mandatory in all dismissal cases (Article 103 of the Labour Law). The law does not cover, however, the board members of capital companies (the CJEU decision in case C-232/09 <i>Danosa</i> has not been implemented)
<b>Liechtenstein</b>	Yes
<b>Lithuania</b>	Yes
<b>Luxembourg</b>	Yes
<b>FYR of Macedonia</b>	Yes
<b>Malta</b>	Yes. By Regulation 12(3) of the Protection of Maternity (Employment) Regulations.
<b>Montenegro</b>	Yes
<b>the Netherlands</b>	Yes
<b>Norway</b>	Yes
<b>Poland</b>	Yes. Dismissal is prohibited during pregnancy and maternity/parental leave except in case of the employer's bankruptcy or liquidation. The employer is always required to substantiate the grounds and reasons for dismissal in writing.
<b>Portugal</b>	This specific question does not apply because in Portugal, whatever the ground, all forms of dismissal must follow a strict and written procedure, described in the Labour Code, and the indication and justification of the ground of the dismissal in that procedure is mandatory. This procedure 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) (Article 63 of the Labour Code).
<b>Romania</b>	Yes.
<b>Serbia</b>	Yes



<b>Slovakia</b>	According to Article 61 of the Labour Code, the employer may only give notice to an employee for reasons expressly stipulated in the Labour Code and the notice must be given in writing and delivered to the employee, or otherwise it shall be invalid. According to Article 72 of the Labour Code, the employer may terminate the employment within the probationary period of a pregnant woman, a mother who has given birth within the last nine months or a breastfeeding woman only in writing, in exceptional cases not relating to her pregnancy or maternal function, giving appropriate reasons in writing, otherwise the termination shall be invalid. (Effective since 1 September 2011)
<b>Slovenia</b>	Yes, according to Article 115/5 of the ERA.
<b>Spain</b>	Spanish legislation does not specifically require the substantiation of the grounds for dismissal in writing until the end of the maternity leave (although there is a general obligation in labour law).
<b>Sweden</b>	No special rule. This right – upon request – follows from general labour law.
<b>Turkey</b>	Yes
<b>United Kingdom</b>	Yes. An employee is entitled to a written statement of reasons for dismissal, without having to request it, where she is dismissed when pregnant or during her ordinary or additional maternity leave. Employees in these circumstances do not have to have two years' continuous service in order to be eligible for this right. (Employment Rights Act 1996 Section 92)

## 5.2 Maternity leave

**All countries** provide for at least the minimum period of maternity leave of 14 weeks, as set 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**

Member State	Duration	Obligatory period	Possibility to share ML with the father?	Payment
<b>Austria</b>	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, except for federal public servants and contractual public servants, who are entitled to 4 weeks of unpaid leave (no federal transfer for this period)	100 % of average earnings if earning for at least 3 months prior to the maternity leave more than the mandatory social security threshold (2016: EUR 415,72 per month), without ceiling
<b>Belgium</b>	15 weeks	1 week before birth, 9 after birth	No, but if the mother dies after giving birth the remaining leave is transferred to the mother's spouse/life partner	82 % for the first 30 days (approx. 4 weeks), 75 % (daily maximum EUR 98.70) remainder

Member State	Duration	Obligatory period	Possibility to share ML with the father?	Payment
<b>Bulgaria</b>	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
<b>Croatia</b>	14 weeks + until child reaches age of 6 months	4 weeks before birth, 10 weeks after  71st day (first day after 10 weeks) after birth until child reaches age of 6 months: voluntary maternity leave	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 leaves 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): 50 % of budgetary calculation base (currently EUR 222 (HRK 1 663))
<b>Cyprus</b>	18 weeks	Fully compulsory	No	72 % of the weekly average of the basic insurable earnings of the beneficiary in the previous contribution year. Weekly supplementary benefits amount to 72 % of the weekly average of the claimant's basic insurable earnings. Maximum insurable earnings EUR 4 533.
<b>Czech Republic</b>	28 weeks	none	Possible to transfer the leave to the father	70 % of average income of the last 12 months, with a ceiling of EUR 1 178 (CZK 31 800)
<b>Denmark</b>	18 weeks (4 before birth and 14 after birth)	2 weeks after birth	No	Benefit for 18 weeks. Mothers are only entitled to wages during absences related to pregnancy and childbirth if such a right follows from a collective agreement or an individual employment contract. If the mother is only entitled to benefit and not to wages she will get 90 % of the wages, max EUR 547.48 (DKK 4 075) per week. According to many collective agreements: 100 % of salary
<b>Estonia</b>	20 weeks (140 calendar days)	None, but maternity benefit decreases if maternity leave starts less than 30 days (approx. 4 weeks) before expected date of birth	No	100 % of average earnings of the insured person in the preceding calendar year, no ceiling

Member State	Duration	Obligatory period	Possibility to share ML with the father?	Payment
Finland	105 week days (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 working days after birth up to EUR 50 606, and for salaries higher than this, 32.5 % of salary. After that, 70 % of salary up to EUR 32 892; or 40 % of salary up to EUR 50 606; and for salaries higher than these amounts, 25 % of salary (calculated as annual income divided by 300). Or a flat-rate benefit if there are no previous earnings.
France	16 weeks	2 weeks before and 6 weeks after	No	100 % of average earnings from the last 3 months, with ceiling of EUR 3 129. Some collective agreements provide the worker with full pay
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 prenatal 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	Public Sector: 5 months (approx. 22 weeks) Private Sector: 17 weeks	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. Private Sector: half to one month paid by employer; a social security allowance for the remaining period, which covers the wages for the majority of women, but is subject to 200 working days during the two years preceding maternity leave, while sickness allowance is subject to 100 working days in the year preceding sickness
Hungary	24 weeks	2 weeks obligatory As a recommendation: 4 weeks before birth	No	70 % of the average daily salary – no ceilings on payments

Member State	Duration	Obligatory period	Possibility to share ML with the father?	Payment
Iceland	3 months after birth	First 2 weeks after birth	The 3 months are not transferable	80 % of average total wages of the last 12 months which ended 6 months before birth. Maximum amount per month in 2014 for a parent working full time is EUR 2 392. Maximum amount for a parent working a part-time 50-100 % job is EUR 876. Maximum amount for parent working a part-time 25-49 % job is EUR 633. Maximum amount for a parent in a 25 % or less job is EUR 382 per month. Maximum grant amount for parent working/ studying 75-100 % is EUR 876 per month.
Ireland	44 weeks	First 26 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 230 gross per week, following 16 weeks are unpaid. The employer can choose to 'top-up' the payment – this is a different contract between employer and employee
Italy	22 weeks (5 months)	All: 2 (or 1) months before birth, 3 (or 4) months after	Fathers are entitled to three days of paternity leave in the first five months following the child's birth, of which two days can be an alternative to the maternity leave	80 % of average daily remuneration paid throughout the entire maternity leave period, no ceiling
Latvia	16 weeks, plus extra 2 weeks if woman has visited a doctor and registered her condition before 12th week of pregnancy (18 weeks)	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 birth	The right to maternity leave is not accessible to fathers, unless the exceptional circumstances occur – the death of a mother or a mother waives her parental rights	80 % of gross salary for entire maternity leave period, no ceiling
Liechtenstein	20 weeks	8 weeks after birth are compulsory, following 12 weeks are voluntary. 4 weeks before birth are optional	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

Member State	Duration	Obligatory period	Possibility to share ML with the father?	Payment
Lithuania	18 weeks	Fully voluntary	No	If the woman has been insured for 12 months preceding birth, 100 % of reimbursed remuneration, subject to ceilings that are linked to national average insured income: EUR 430. Upper limit is 3.2 times the average national insured income (EUR 1 379), and the minimum benefit is 0.33 times the average national insured (EUR 129)
Luxembourg	16 weeks, but can be extended if birth takes place after expected date of delivery	All 16 weeks	No	100 %, granted on the basis of a medical certificate and treated as period of sick leave, no ceiling to payment
FYR of Macedonia	9 months (38 weeks), 12 months (52 weeks) for multiple births	73 days (approx. 10 weeks): 28 days (4 weeks) before birth and 45 days (approx. 6 weeks) after	The leave cannot be shared, but can be taken over by the father (9 months (38 weeks), or 12 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 two average salaries at national level. If the mother uses the obligatory part, the rest of the leave is paid 50 % on top of her regular salary
Malta	18 weeks	4 weeks before, 6 weeks after birth	No	100 % for first 14 weeks, then flat rate of EUR 160 per week for remaining 4 weeks
Montenegro	Parental leave (including maternity leave) can last up to 365 days counting from the birth of a child	An employed woman may start maternity leave 45 days, and compulsorily 28 days, before giving birth. The mother of the child cannot cancel maternity leave before the expiry of 45 days from the day of birth	X	If an employee has continuously worked between 6 and 12 months before the leave, the compensation 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.
the Netherlands	16 weeks	Between 4 and 6 weeks are compulsory before birth	No	100 % of salary paid, up to maximum daily wage of EUR 196

Member State	Duration	Obligatory period	Possibility to share ML with the father?	Payment
Norway	10 weeks of maternity leave, termed 'mother's quota'	3 weeks before birth and 6 weeks after	No	100 % of average salary for 46 weeks, or 80 % of average salary for 56 weeks. The 100 % is limited to 6 'G' (1 G is the base calculation amount as provided by the National Insurance Act, and is annually regulated). From 1 May 2014 1 G amounts to EUR 10 792 (NOK 88 370; exchange rate 8.78). The maximum parental leave salary amounts to EUR 64 752 (NOK 530 220)
Poland	20 weeks and from 31 to 37 weeks in cases of multiple birth, depending on the number of children	14 weeks after birth	The remaining weeks can be taken by the father, with consent of the mother	100 % of average earnings, no ceiling
Portugal	17 weeks or 21 weeks	6 weeks for the mother after birth	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 (17 weeks) are taken or 80% if 150 days (21 weeks) are taken. No ceiling to 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 day of childbirth	Must commence maternity leave 28 days before the expected date of delivery and cannot be on maternity leave shorter than 3 full months	No. The father has a right to maternity leave only if the mother abandons the child, dies, or is prevented due to other justified reasons to exercise that right (serving a prison term, serious illness and the like), or is not employed	The amount of maternity pay is equal to the average basic salary paid in the past 12 months prior to the month in which maternity leave was taken. If an employee has worked for less than 12 months, for the months that are missing the salary is calculated as 50 % of the average monthly salary.
Slovakia	34 weeks	6-8 weeks before birth and 6 weeks after birth	Yes, but not at the same time	Maternity benefit for 34 weeks amounting to 65 % of the mother's daily income, minimum EUR 226 and maximum EUR 766 per month

Member State	Duration	Obligatory period	Possibility to share ML with the father?	Payment
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	16 weeks, 10 of which are transferable to the father	6 weeks after birth for the mother	Yes	100 % of monthly salary, dependent on minimum period of working time, no ceiling
Sweden	14 weeks before or after giving birth	2 weeks before or after birth	No	Maternity benefits are paid at sick-leave level (80 % of the income up to an income-level of 10 'basic amounts' (EUR 49 000) per year). If not income based, benefits are paid at the basic level (grundnivå) of EUR 20 (SEK 225) 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 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 workers are paid via the Social Security Institution, which amounts to sickness payments (two thirds of regular wages)
United Kingdom	52 weeks	2 weeks after birth	Yes, between 2 and 26 weeks may be transferred to the father	Entitled to 39 weeks of maternity pay; 90 % of salary in the first 6, and a fixed rate of EUR 166.93 (GBP 138.18) per week during the remaining 33 weeks

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. 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 a similar job. However, a few countries do not provide such a guarantee (e.g. the **Netherlands**)<sup>38</sup> or they do not do so explicitly (e.g. **Belgium, Germany**). 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

38 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: Case C-252/13 *Commission v. the Netherlands* [2014], ECR n.y.r..

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.<sup>39</sup> In **Hungary**, the new Labour Code 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 his/her original job.

### 5.3 Adoption leave

**All countries** provide for adoption leave. In **Romania** this is not done explicitly, but the law stipulates that parents who adopt a child have a right to parental leave.<sup>40</sup> In **Slovakia** something similar applies: so-called substitute parents (i.e. adoption, foster care or care in case of death of the child's mother) can apply for maternity and parental leave. In **Turkey**, adoption leave used to exist only for civil servants (leaving adoption leave for workers up to individual/collective labour contracts), but this changed in 2015. With Law No. 6645<sup>41</sup> amending the Labour Law, three days' paid leave are to be granted to workers upon adoption.

### 5.4 Parental leave

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.<sup>42</sup>

Many countries have not formally implemented the Directive because they believed that their national legislation already complied with EU law (**Austria, Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal, Spain, Sweden**). In addition, the experts for the EEA countries of **Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway** indicate that national law is in accordance with EU law. The candidate countries (the **FYR of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Turkey**) have not implemented the Directive. In the other countries, formal transposition of the Directive has occurred, or minor amendments to national law were made.

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

Apart from **Turkey**, all countries have created a right to parental leave. The length of this leave varies considerably per country, however. The table below provides an overview.<sup>43</sup>

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39 Labour Court of Wiesbaden, judgment of 18 December 2008, 5 Ca 46/08.

40 Article 8.(2) of the Government Emergency Ordinance No.111/2010.

41 Official Gazette 23 April 2015, No. 29335.

42 Do Rosário Palma Ramalho, M., Foubert, P., Burri, S. *The Implementation of Parental Leave Directive 2010/18 in 33 European Countries*, available at: [http://www.equalitylaw.eu/index.php?option=com\\_edocman&task=document\\_viewdoc&id=2723&Itemid=295](http://www.equalitylaw.eu/index.php?option=com_edocman&task=document_viewdoc&id=2723&Itemid=295).

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



Table 3: Parental leave

Country	Parental leave		
	Length	Payment	Transferable?
Austria	Until the child is 2 <sup>1</sup>	flat rate	No <sup>2</sup>
Belgium	4 months per parent	flat rate	No
Bulgaria	6 months per parent	unpaid	In part
Croatia	6-8 months (30 for third and consecutive children & twins)	100 % of the monthly earnings but cannot exceed 80 % of the budget calculation base (capped)	In part
Cyprus	18 weeks per parent/23 weeks for widow(er)s	unpaid	In part
Czech Republic	Until the child is 3	flat rate	Yes
Denmark	32 weeks per child	100 %	Yes
Estonia	3 years minus 70 days	100 % paid for 435 days, then unpaid	Yes
Finland	26 weeks per child	70-75 %, capped	In part
France	Until child is 3	flat rate	Yes
Germany	3 years per parent	67 % for 14 months (when 2 months are taken by the other parent), then unpaid	No, but the parental allowances depend upon the sharing of parental leave between the parents.
Greece	4 months per parent (9 in the public sector)	unpaid (private sector)	Yes in public, no in private sector
Hungary	Until the child is 3 (general rule) <sup>3</sup>	70 % (capped) for 104 weeks, then very low flat rate	Yes
Iceland	4 months per parent	80 % (capped) for 13 weeks	In part
Ireland	18 weeks per parent	unpaid	In part (if both parents work for the same employer)
Italy	10/11 months per child	30 %	In part
Latvia	18 months per parent	70 %	No
Liechtenstein	4 months per parent	unpaid	No
Lithuania	Until the child is 3	100 % for 52 weeks or 70 % for 104 weeks	Yes
Luxembourg	6 months per parent	flat rate	No
FYR of Macedonia	52 weeks (78 weeks for multiple childbirth) – father is entitled to parental leave if the mother does not take maternity leave	Paid	Yes, the father can use the leave only if the mother does not use it
Malta	4 months per parent (12 months per child in the public sector)	Unpaid	Yes in public sector, no in private sector

<sup>1</sup> Each parent being able to reserve 3 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.

<sup>2</sup> Both parents have the same right to parental leave; there is no provision for proper transferability. Under the legal provisions parents have the right to divide the duration of parental leave between them; an agreement on how to do this must be reached. Only one parent can take the leave at a time, except for one month where one parent takes over from the other.

<sup>3</sup> Longer in cases of twins or disabled children.

Country	Parental leave		
	Length	Payment	Transferable?
<b>Montenegro</b>	45 days after the birth of the baby until the expiry of 365 days from the day of commencement of maternity leave	100 % (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, if one parent stops parental leave, the other parent is entitled to use the unused part
<b>The Netherlands</b>	26 weeks per parent	unpaid but tax relief	No
<b>Norway</b>	Until the child is 2	100 % for 49 weeks or 80 % for 59 weeks, capped	In part
<b>Poland</b>	6 +26 weeks/36 months	60 % or 80 % for 32 weeks	Yes
<b>Portugal</b>	3 months per parent	25 %	No
<b>Romania</b>	2 years per child	85 %, capped differently depending on the length of the parental leave	Transferable, except for one month that is mandatory for the parent who did not take the parental leave
<b>Serbia</b>	3 months after the birth until 365 days after commencement of maternity leave (2 years for every third and subsequent child)	100 % (if parent has worked at least 6 continuous months) 60 % (if parent has worked between 3 and 6 months) 30 % (less than 3 months)	No
<b>Slovakia</b>	Until the child is 3 <sup>4</sup>	flat rate	No
<b>Slovenia</b>	260 days per child	100 %, capped	In part
<b>Spain</b>	Until the child is 3	Unpaid	Yes
<b>Sweden</b>	480 days (includes maternity leave)	80 %, capped for 65 weeks then flat rate	In part
<b>United Kingdom</b>	18 weeks per parent	unpaid	No

<sup>4</sup> Six if disabled.

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. There are however family-related leaves or leaves that may be used for family/parental issues, which are quite generous and exceed Directive 2010/18.

## 5.5 Paternity leave

Most countries provide fathers with the right to paternity leave, though in many countries this leave is very short. The table below provides an overview.<sup>44</sup>

**Table 4: Paternity leave**

Country	Paternity leave	
	Length	Payment
Austria	0 <sup>1</sup>	N/A
Belgium	10 days	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	0	N/A
Czech Republic	0 <sup>2</sup>	N/A
Denmark	2 weeks	100 %
Estonia	10 days	100 %
Finland	54 days	70 % (capped)
France	11 days <sup>3</sup>	100 % (capped)
Germany	0	N/A
Greece	2 days	100 %
Hungary	5 days <sup>4</sup>	100 %
Iceland	3 months	80 % (capped)
Ireland	0	0
Italy	3 days	100 %
Latvia	10 calendar days	80 %
Liechtenstein	0	N/A
Lithuania	Until the child is 1 month old	100 % capped
Luxembourg	2 days	100 %
FYR of Macedonia	7 days	X
Malta	1 day	100 %
Montenegro	By Collective Agreement	100 %
The Netherlands	5 days	2 days 100 %, 3 days unpaid
Norway	2 weeks	100 %
Poland	2 weeks	100 %
Portugal	15 days compulsory, and 10 optional additional days	100 %
Romania	5/15 days <sup>5</sup>	100 %

<sup>1</sup> Except in the case of civil servants, who are entitled to four weeks' leave.  
<sup>2</sup> But the mother may transfer maternity benefit to the father six weeks after the birth.  
<sup>3</sup> Eighteen in the case of multiple births.  
<sup>4</sup> Seven in the case of twins.  
<sup>5</sup> Fifteen days if the father has completed a course in infant care.

44 This table has been adapted from McColgan, A. *Measures to address the challenges of work-life balance in the EU Member States, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway*, p. 65, available at <http://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/3631-reconciliation>.

Country	Paternity leave	
	Length	Payment
Serbia	7 days	100 %
Slovakia	0	N/A
Slovenia	30 days	100 % capped for 2 weeks then flat rate
Spain	13 days	unpaid
Sweden	2 weeks	80 % capped
Turkey	5 days [civil servants: 10 days (plus optional 24 months)]	100% [civil servants: 100 % (optional 24 months unpaid)]
United Kingdom	2 weeks	flat rate <sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Or 90 % salary if the latter is less.

## 5.6 Time off/care leave

The table below provides an overview of any other leaves that are available.<sup>45</sup>

**Table 5: Availability of Care Leaves other than Leaves Relating to Parenting**

Country	Purpose(s) of leave	Maximum period of leave	Compensation?	Other relevant information
Austria	Care for disabled or terminally ill close relatives	Six months	No	Worker may instead reduce hours of work
Belgium	Care for young or disabled children or seriously ill relative	48 months over a career	State benefits	Private sector only, <sup>1</sup> subject to 24 months' service and may be taken part time <sup>2</sup>
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	
Croatia	Care for sick relatives	20 days per illness	70 % of salary capped, 100 % of salary for children under 3	
Cyprus	Reasons of force majeure; care for sick family members and close relatives	7 days	No	

<sup>1</sup> Public-sector workers may take up to five years full-time and five years part-time leave in a career, which may be used for any reason. Such leave is unpaid but entitles the worker to a low level of social security payment; this is paid at a higher level when the leave is used to care for a sick child. There is a proposal to bring the public sector in line with the private-sector scheme, although without improving the level of social security payable to public-sector workers.

<sup>2</sup> The 48-month maximum applies regardless of whether leave is taken full time or part time.

45 This table has been adapted from McColgan, A. *Measures to address the challenges of work-life balance in the EU Member States, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway*, pp. 91-92, available at <http://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/3631-reconciliation>.

Country	Purpose(s) of leave	Maximum period of leave	Compensation?	Other relevant information
Czech Republic	Care for family member	9 days	State benefits (60 % wages)	
Denmark	Care for disabled/terminally ill relative	6+ months	Yes	
Finland	Care for sick relative	Indefinite	Unpaid	Best practice rather than justiciable right
France	Care for a terminally ill child or spouse	Six months	State benefits available	May be taken part time
Germany	Care for a close relative	Two years	State benefits available	May be taken part time
Greece	Care for a child or spouse in hospital or requiring transfusions, or a disabled child	22 days per year	Yes	Public-sector workers only <sup>3</sup>
	Care for sick dependents	6 days per year	No	
Hungary	Care for a relative	Two years	State benefits may be available	Need for care is certified by a physician
Ireland	Care for seriously ill or disabled person	104 weeks	State benefits	Subject to one year of continuous service
Italy	Care for seriously disabled relatives	Three days per month	No	Details of the nature of such leave to be determined between employer and worker
	Care for seriously disabled spouse	Two years	No	
	Death or serious illness of a close relative	Three days per year	Yes	
	For serious family reasons	Two years over a career	No	
Lithuania	Care for a sick child, relative or spouse	120 days per year for a seriously ill child, 7 for an adult	State benefits	
FYR of Macedonia	Care for a sick child under the age of 3	Unknown	Yes	
	Care for close family members	Maximum 30 days per year	Yes	
Montenegro	Serious illness of a close family member	Determined by collective agreement	Yes	
	Death of an immediate family member	7 days	Yes	
	Special care for a child with special needs	Until child turns 3	Yes	

<sup>3</sup> Such leaves are also provided for in the private sector, but they presuppose the exhaustion of other paid leaves; according to the national expert this condition conflicts with Directive 2010/18.

Country	Purpose(s) of leave	Maximum period of leave	Compensation?	Other relevant information
The Netherlands	Care for a sick parent or partner	10 days	Yes, at 70 %	May be taken part time
	Care for a close relative or dependent	12 weeks part-time work	No	Worker may reduce hours by up to 50 %
Norway	Care for terminally ill intimates	60 days	Yes, equal to sick leave pay (100 % salary)	May be taken part time
	Care for relatives	10 days per year	Yes, equal to sick leave pay (100 % salary)	May be taken part time
Portugal	Care for a grandchild where the mother is under 16 at the time of birth	30 days	No	
	Care for dependents	10 days a year	No	
Serbia	Serious illness of a member of their immediate family	7 days	Yes	
	Special care for a child or another person	Until child turns 5		Parent can be absent from work or work half of the full working hours
Slovakia	When accompanying: (i) a family member to a medical facility for examinations or treatment upon sudden disease or accident, and also for planned examinations and treatment (ii) A handicapped child to a social care facility or special school	(i) Maximum 7 days per calendar year (ii) Maximum 10 days per calendar year	Yes	
Slovenia	Care for close relatives	14 days, capable of extension	80 % salary	
Spain	Care for infirm relatives	One year	No	May be taken as reduced hours
Sweden	Care for seriously ill relatives	100 days (240 where the relative has AIDS)	State benefits	

Country	Purpose(s) of leave	Maximum period of leave	Compensation?	Other relevant information
Turkey	Care for a disabled child or a child with a permanent sickness	Up to 10 days	Yes	No age limit for the child, can be used wholly or partially within one year period
	Death of the child / spouse / parent / sibling	5 days	Yes	Upon medical report, may be extended, no age limit for child
	[for civil servants: Sickness and patient companionship leave]	3 months	Yes	No age limit for the child, can be used wholly or partially within a one-year period
	Care for a disabled child or a child with a permanent sickness	10 days	Yes	No age limit for the child, can be used wholly or partially within a one-year period

## 5.7 Leave in relation to surrogacy

In only few countries parental leave is available in cases of surrogacy. Countries that have provided for this right are: **Greece, Slovakia, Spain**, and the **United Kingdom**. 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 **Iceland**, a draft law was presented to Parliament on this topic in 2015; according to the draft, the surrogate mother while pregnant has all the same rights as pregnant women with regard to health services. According to Article 23 of the draft law the surrogate mother and her spouse are entitled to maternity/paternity leave and parental leave. In a few countries, surrogacy is prohibited (**Estonia, Liechtenstein**).

## 5.8 Leave sharing arrangements

Not all countries provide parents with a legal right to share (part) of the maternity leave. The table below provides an overview.<sup>46</sup>

Table 6: Sharing maternity leave

Country	Maternity leave transferable?
Austria	No
Belgium	Only on maternal death <sup>1</sup>
Bulgaria	Yes, after child is 6 months old
Croatia	Yes, after the first 14 weeks
Cyprus	No
Czech Republic	No
Denmark	Only on maternal illness
<sup>1</sup> Leave available to father/partner as well as to the mother where the latter is hospitalised.	

<sup>46</sup> This table has been adapted from McColgan, A. *Measures to address the challenges of work-life balance in the EU Member States, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway*, p. 60, available at <http://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/3631-reconciliation>.

Country	Maternity leave transferable?
Estonia	No
Finland	No
France	No
Germany	No
Greece	No
Hungary	No
Iceland	No
Ireland	Only on maternal death
Italy	Only on maternal death, serious illness or abandonment <sup>2</sup>
Latvia	Only on maternal death, serious illness or abandonment
Liechtenstein	No
Lithuania	No
Luxembourg	No
FYR of Macedonia	Yes, when the mother does not/cannot use maternity leave
Malta	No
Montenegro	No
The Netherlands	Only on maternal death <sup>3</sup>
Norway	Yes, apart from 9 compulsory weeks for the mother
Poland	Yes, after the first 14 weeks
Portugal	Yes, after the first 6 weeks post-birth
Romania	No
Serbia	No
Slovakia	No
Slovenia	Only on maternal illness or abandonment <sup>4</sup>
Spain	Yes, after the first 6 weeks or on maternal death
Sweden	No
Turkey	No, only on maternal death of civil servant mother for civil servant father
United Kingdom	Yes, apart for a 2-week compulsory period for the mother
<sup>2</sup> Or where the father has exclusive custody. <sup>3</sup> This is expected to change, however. <sup>4</sup> Also where she is under 18, an apprentice or a student, in which case the child's grandparent may be assigned the leave.	

## 5.9 Flexible working-time arrangements

The Network's 2015 report entitled *Measures to address the challenges of work-life balance in the EU Member States, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway*, authored by Aileen McColgan, has provided the following overview of flexible working-time arrangements:<sup>47</sup>

47 McColgan, A. *Measures to address the challenges of work-life balance in the EU Member States, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway*, p. 36, available at <http://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/3631-reconciliation>.



Table 7: Access to reduced-hours working arrangements

Country	Access to reduced hours		Compensation?
	Tied to reconciliation purposes?	Right or right to request?	
Austria	Yes	Right	No
Belgium	Yes	Right	Yes
Bulgaria	No	Right to request	No
Croatia	Yes, but only as a modality of maternity and parental rights and benefits	Yes, if both previous remarks are taken into account	Yes
Cyprus	Private sector only. Must be agreed	Right to request	No
Czech Republic	Yes	Right, with exceptions	No
Denmark	Yes	Right to request	No
Estonia	Yes	Right to request	No
Finland	Yes	Right, with exceptions	Flat-rate benefit
France	No	Right to request	No
Germany	No	Right, with exceptions	No <sup>1</sup>
Greece	Private sector only	Collective agreements only	No
Hungary	Yes	Right	Social security benefits
Iceland	No	Right, with exceptions	No
Ireland	No	Right to request	No
Italy	No	Collective agreements only	No
Latvia	Yes	Right	Possibly (unclear as yet)
Liechtenstein	No	Right to request	No
Lithuania	Yes	Right	Sometimes <sup>2</sup>
Luxembourg	Public sector only	Right	No
FYR of Macedonia	No	Right only for parents of a child with disabilities	Yes
Malta	Yes	Right to request	No
Montenegro	Yes	Right	Yes
The Netherlands	No	Right to request	No
Norway	Yes	Right	No
Poland	Yes, during (extended) period of additional maternity/parental leave	Right	No
Portugal	Yes	Right, with exceptions	No
Romania	Yes	A few collective agreements provide for this right	No
Serbia	N/A	N/A	N/A
Slovakia	Yes	Right, with exceptions	No
Slovenia	Yes	Right	Social security contributions paid for some parents <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Except where the part-time working arrangement carries entitlement to Home Care Support Benefit.

<sup>2</sup> 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 2 hours (4 hours for parents of 3 or more children under 12).

<sup>3</sup> Those with a child under 3 or a disabled child under 18, or 2 children one of whom has not completed the first year of primary schooling.

Country	Access to reduced hours		Compensation?
	Tied to reconciliation purposes?	Right or right to request?	
Spain	Yes	Right	Sometimes <sup>4</sup>
Sweden	Yes	Right	Sometimes <sup>5</sup>
Turkey	Yes	Right (only for pregnant workers / workers having recently given birth / breastfeeding workers)	Yes
United Kingdom	No	Right to request	No

<sup>4</sup> Where the reduced hours arrangement is in the form of 'breastfeeding permission' (available to either parent).  
<sup>5</sup> If parents have not yet exhausted their right to parental benefit.

The same report has also provided an overview of the right to remote working or homeworking.<sup>48</sup>

**Table 8: Access to remote working/homeworking**

Country	Right to remote working/homeworking
Austria	No
Belgium	No
Bulgaria	No. It may be possible based on an arrangement with the employer.
Croatia	No
Cyprus	No, though some collective agreements provide for it
Czech Republic	No
Denmark	No
Estonia	No
Finland	No, though many collective agreements provide for it
France	No
Germany	No, though many collective agreements provide for it
Greece	No
Hungary	No
Iceland	No, though some collective agreements provide for it
Ireland	No, though some collective agreements provide for a right / right to request
Italy	No
Latvia	No
Liechtenstein	No
Lithuania	No
Luxembourg	No
FYR of Macedonia	Yes
Malta	No
Montenegro	No, depending on agreement with employer
The Netherlands	Right to request to be introduced
Norway	No, though many collective agreements provide for it
Poland	No
Portugal	No
Romania	No

48 McColgan, A. *Measures to address the challenges of work-life balance in the EU Member States, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway*, p. 54, available at <http://www.equalitylaw.eu/downloads/3631-reconciliation>.

Country	Right to remote working/homeworking
Serbia	No
Slovakia	No
Slovenia	No
Spain	No
Sweden	No
Turkey	No
United Kingdom	Right to request

## 6 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<sup>49</sup> – 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 7, 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.<sup>50</sup> 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.<sup>51</sup> 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.

### 6.1 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 **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** and **Montenegro** there are no occupational pension schemes.

### 6.2 Personal scope

Article 6 of Gender Recast Directive 2006/54 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

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49 Case C-262/88 *Douglas Harvey Barber v. Guardian Royal Exchange Assurance Group* [1990] ECR I-1889.

50 Directive 86/378/EEC was amended by Directive 96/97/EC, and has now been repealed by Recast Directive 2006/54/EC.

51 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 7 on Statutory Schemes of Social Security.

seeking employment and to retired and disabled workers, and to those claiming under them, in accordance with national law and/or practice.’

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, the FYR of Macedonia, Slovenia and 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 persons or persons on sick leave with social security benefits or during periods of disability. In **Germany**, the personal scope is more restricted as self-employed persons (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.<sup>52</sup>

### 6.3 Material scope

Article 7 of Gender Recast Directive 2006/54 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, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Malta, Norway, Portugal, Slovakia, Sweden, Turkey** and the **United Kingdom**).

A few experts report that national legislation relating to occupational social security is more restricted than in the Directive (**Croatia, the FYR of Macedonia, Poland and Slovenia**).

### 6.4 Exclusions from material scope

Article 8 of Gender Recast Directive 2006/54 provides that certain contracts and schemes can be excluded from the material scope of Directive. Most countries did not make use of this possibility. Experts from **Cyprus, Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Portugal and Turkey** report that the national legislator has made use of this exclusion clause. The **Czech Republic** and **Portugal** have adopted Article 8 verbatim in their national law. The most common exclusion appears to relate to self-employed persons. In **Germany**, self-employed persons (and freelancers) cannot normally take part in occupational pension schemes. Similarly, in **Turkey** there are no mandatory occupational pension plans for the self-employed.

### 6.5 Case law and examples of sex discrimination

Article 9 of Gender Recast Directive 2006/54 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.

52 [2011] UKSC 40.

Article 9(1)f prohibits different retirement ages for men and women. This, however, continues to be the practice in some states. **Italy** fails to comply with Article 9(1)f as the pensionable age remains different for men and women. The occupational old-age pension is awarded on reaching the pensionable age as established in the statutory system, where, at present and until 2018, women's pensionable age is lower than that for men. Women can, however, carry on working until the pensionable age set for men: for this purpose, the protection against unfair dismissal has been extended to the extra period during which they can choose to work. In this respect, therefore, men are subjected to more disadvantageous treatment than women, as they cannot take their pension early. In the **FYR of Macedonia**, on the basis of the main pension legislation (Article 18 of the Law on Pension and Disability Insurance), there are different retirement ages for men and women (64 versus 62). Also, the calculation of pension regarding disability is different for men and women (Article 52).

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 disablement 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 to a man up to the age of 65.<sup>53</sup> In **Finland** differential actuarial factors have been problematic. This will be discussed in the next section. 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.<sup>54</sup> The condition of a 15-year period of service for the same employer to be entitled to occupational pensions was not considered to constitute indirect sex discrimination either.<sup>55</sup> The Federal Labour Court explicitly rejects the addition of (interrupted) periods of service for the same employer.<sup>56</sup>

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.<sup>57</sup> The claimant, the former wife, in this case 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 scrutinized 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 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**, some occupational schemes continue to be discriminatory, in spite of national case law condemning this. For example, Article 32(1) of the Civil and Military Pensions Code<sup>58</sup> sets different conditions for the granting of a pension to fathers of deceased military personnel than those applying to

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53 Judgment of 16 September 2013, (2014) *Chroniques de droit social/Sociaalrechtelijke Kronieken*, p. 282.

54 Federal Labour Court, judgment of 20 April 2010, 3 AZR 370/08.

55 Federal Labour Court, judgment of 12 February 2013, 3 AZR 100/11.

56 Confirmed by the Federal Labour Court, judgment of 9 October 2012, 3 AZR 477/10.

57 Supreme Court case No. 568/2012.

58 Presidential Decree 169/2007, OJ A 210/31.8.2007.

mothers. Although the Court of Audit<sup>59</sup> held that mothers were entitled to a pension subject to the same conditions as fathers, the provision remained.

## 6.6 Sex as an actuarial factor

One particularly difficult issue is the use of actuarial factors in occupational social security schemes when they differ according to sex.<sup>60</sup> The use of gender-related actuarial factors is, within certain limits, still allowed under the Recast Directive (see Article 9(1) (h) and (j)).

Gender-related actuarial factors in occupational pension schemes can be used in **Belgium**, the **Czech Republic**, **Germany** (partly), **Greece**, **Ireland**, **Italy**, **Liechtenstein**, **Malta**, the **Netherlands** and the **United Kingdom**. In **Germany**, lawyers are discussing the question whether the *Test-Achats* ruling should be applied to occupational pension schemes.<sup>61</sup> 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.<sup>62</sup> The Higher Regional Court of Cologne disagreed.<sup>63</sup> Proceedings are pending before the Federal Court of Justice (XII ZB 663/13).

## 6.7 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 with the concept of 'occupational pension schemes'. This led the 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** and **Latvia**. Also, 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** and **the FYR of Macedonia**). This model does not follow a three-pillar structure like the one 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.

59 Court of Audit 751/2000.

60 See Jacqmain and Wuiame, *Gender based actuarial factors and EU gender equality law*, EELR 2015/1, <http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/elr2015-1.pdf>, pp. 14-24.

61 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.

62 Higher Regional Court of Celle, judgment of 24 October 2013, 10 UF 195/12.

63 Higher Regional Court of Cologne, judgment of 6 January 2015, 12 UF 91/14.

## 7 Statutory schemes of social security (Directive 79/7)

Equal treatment of women and men in statutory schemes of social security was introduced in 1979, by Social Security Directive 79/7/EEC. Statutory schemes ensure certain benefits for workers. It 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 revolved around the question of whether a scheme is statutory or occupational. This is particularly important since certain exceptions are allowed under Statutory Social Security Directive 79/7/EEC, but not under Article 157 TFEU or Recast Directive 2006/54/EC. A 2007 report by the Network of legal experts in the fields of employment, social affairs and equality between men and women observed that ‘Generally speaking, one is better off if the scheme at issue was qualified as occupational since then certain differentiations (or discriminations) are not allowed anymore (e.g. discrimination in relation to survivors benefits and retirement age; also in relation to the use of gender segregated actuarial factors, which are not a problem in statutory schemes ...).’<sup>64</sup>

### 7.1 Implementation principle of equal treatment

Most of the transposition measures taken by the respective countries 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, but rather through general equal treatment law or provisions in the Constitution (e.g. **Belgium, France, Hungary, 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. In the **Netherlands** as well as **Italy**, there is no specific national legislation prohibiting discrimination in statutory social security schemes. Nearly all forms of sex discrimination in this area have been eradicated in these countries, however.

All social security schemes are gender neutral (with the exception that there are different pensionable ages for men and women – discussed below). However, there are no specific provisions explicitly mentioning the principle of equal treatment.

### 7.2 Personal scope

Article 2 of Directive 79/7 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 EU law, 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, the FYR of Macedonia, Montenegro, Norway, Serbia, Slovenia, Sweden and Turkey**). For example, in **Latvia**, the Law on Social Security applies to all persons

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64 Report Prechal, p. 5: [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/2007-social\\_security\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/2007-social_security_en.pdf).



residing in Latvia legally (with some exceptions concerning citizens of 3<sup>rd</sup> countries having 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 appears more restricted, as self-employed persons are not always included.

### 7.3 Material scope

Article 3 of Directive 79/7 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. **Austria, Belgium, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, Serbia**).

Social assistance is partially excluded from the scope of the Social Security Directive. 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.<sup>65</sup> **Cyprus** is an exception when it comes to survivor's benefits: in that country 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. Currently there is a proposal for amendment of 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 does not cover all the schemes which must be considered statutory.

### 7.4 Exclusions from material scope

Article 7 of Directive 79/7 contains a number of derogations Member States are permitted to make from the principle of equal treatment. In this respect a similar tendency can be observed: several countries have abolished gender discrimination on their own initiative. In other words, several States do not make use of the derogations at all or do not do so any more (**Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Slovakia, Sweden**). The two most important derogations relate to periods of care and to the pensionable age.

#### *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 persons who have brought up children, and the acquisition of benefit entitlements following periods of interruption of employment due to the

65 Report Prechal, p. 6: [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/2007-social\\_security\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/2007-social_security_en.pdf).

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 engaged in raising the children. These advantages can take the form of qualifying periods, i.e. periods on 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.<sup>66</sup> 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. In case the parents do not agree, the advantage will be granted to the parent who can prove that he/she has contributed more and for a longer period to the education 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 4 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.

*Derogations from equal treatment: differences in pensionable age (Article 7(1)a)*

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 (any more) in this respect between men and women (**Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro**, the **Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Serbia, Slovakia, Sweden, Spain**);
- In other States there is a process of equalising the pensionable age, sometimes with long transitional arrangements (**Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary** (general rule for old-age pension), **Italy, Lithuania**, the **FYR of Macedonia, Poland, Turkey** and the **United Kingdom**);
- In the remaining States the difference in pensionable age is maintained (e.g. **Bulgaria** (though the difference is regularly reviewed by the Government and new rules entered into force on 1 January 2016), **Romania** and **Slovenia**).
- **Hungary** forms a category of its own: this is the only country that recently introduced *more* differences in the form of an early retirement option available only for women.<sup>67</sup>

Interestingly, it is in particular former 'socialist' countries that have maintained a difference in pensionable age the longest. In these countries 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 up to now. In the **Czech Republic**, 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. Whereas there is one pensionable age for men, which is gradually being increased, there are differences in the pensionable age for women according to the number of children they have raised. This does not apply to men, even if a man has raised his children alone. The pensionable age 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

66 See also Case C-206/00, *Henri Mouflin v. Recteur de l'académie de Reims* [2001] ECR I-10201 (*Mouflin*) and more recently Case C173/13, *Maurice Leone, Blandine Leone v. Garde des Sceaux, ministre de la Justice, Caisse nationale de retraite des agents des collectivités locales*, n.y.r..

67 Though in **Poland**, there is currently a legislative proposal to return to differentiated retirement ages. The draft law was presented to Parliament by newly elected President A. Duda. <http://info.wyborcza.pl/temat/wyborcza/projekt+nowej+ustawy+emerytalnej>.

by legislation. This practice has not been changed following the ECtHR ruling in *Andrle*,<sup>68</sup> or even following the CJEU ruling in *Soukupova*.<sup>69</sup>

**Hungary** has introduced more inequalities, rather than moving towards equalization. As this is such a unique case, it is worth explaining the situation at some length. Article 1 of Act CLXX of 2010 which came into force on 1 January 2011, modified Article 18(2) of the Act LXXXI of 1997 on social security pensions and introduced an early retirement option which is available only to women who have gained 40 years of eligibility. The calculation of eligibility is different from the general rules on eligibility, because into the eligibility for early retirement all periods to which any kind of child-related social security payment was paid is taken into consideration. The regulation was challenged by a trade union leader as a private individual who initiated a referendum in order to allow men to retire under the same conditions as women. The referendum was refused by the National Election Committee. The issue went up to both the *Kuria* (the Supreme Court) and the Constitutional Court. Eventually the referendum was refused by a deeply divided Constitutional Court.<sup>70</sup> The majority of the Constitutional Court held that the referendum cannot be allowed because it violates Article 8(3) of the Fundamental Law (which replaced the Constitution), which prohibits holding referenda on issues which are related to the central budget and laws regulating it.

The Constitutional Court also reflected on the question what the fundamental legal grounds are of regulating differently the rights for early retirement of women and men. The last sentence of Article XIX (4) of the Fundamental Law specifically allows Parliament to enact regulation on statutory pension which provides 'stronger protection' for women. The Constitutional Court argued that the suggested referendum could not be allowed because it aims to eliminate the specific protection women enjoy in regard of early retirement. The Hungarian expert emphasizes in her report that the reasoning does not investigate the issue from the angle of equal treatment; the Court just relies on women's need for stronger protection, as it is articulated by the Fundamental Law, thereby reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes (women are weak and in need of protection; women are in charge of raising children; the role of men is to work, etc.). The judgment did not refer to any European or international sources of law on equal treatment or equal pay.

## 7.5 Sex as an actuarial factor

Unlike Recast Directive 2006/54 dealing with occupational social security schemes (see section 6.6), Directive 79/7 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.<sup>71</sup> 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.<sup>72</sup>

68 *Andrle v. the Czech Republic* [2011] n.y.r. (Application no. 6268/08).

69 Case C-401/11 *Blanka Soukupová v. Ministerstvo zemědělství* [2013] ECR n.y.r..

70 The summary of the procedure of the Constitutional Court is available online, including the decision and the link to one of the motions of the petitioners: <http://public.mkab.hu/dev/dontesek.nsf/0/9DCFF70D6D9D6B67C1257EB300585871?OpenDocument>.

71 C-318/13 (*X*).

72 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).

In most countries, sex is not used as an actuarial factor in the calculation of social security benefits. The exceptions are **Belgium, Bulgaria, Finland** and **Germany**.

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.<sup>73</sup> 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 the Finnish one, 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, it is not yet known whether other uses of gender-based actuarial factors have been detected.

In **Bulgaria** actuarial factors based on sex are still used in the calculation of social security benefits in the area of supplementary mandatory social insurance for persons born after 31 December 1959. This practice implemented by private insurance companies has been systematically challenged and brought before the Supreme Administrative Court in the last three years by a group of Bulgarian women born after December 1959. The arguments of Case C-318/13 were presented as well. All procedures are still pending at the moment. The Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation has reported the practice to the EU Commission.

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 things) on this basis. The Federal Administrative Court doubts that this method of 'pure statistical gender equality' is compatible with the Union law principle of equal pay and has expressed its interest in a clarifying decision of the CJEU.<sup>74</sup>

## 7.6 Difficulties

As regards difficulties with the implementation of Directive 79/7, some countries face the problem mentioned in Chapter 6.7 above: that their security schemes are not comparable to either statutory social security schemes or occupational social security schemes (e.g. **Romania** and **Bulgaria**).

The CJEU has often answered preliminary questions on issues of both direct and indirect sex discrimination in statutory social security schemes.<sup>75</sup> Legislative gaps persist however. In particular, several national experts have raised the precarious position of some groups of part-time workers – often women – who work only few hours per week (e.g. **Germany** and the **Netherlands**).

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 in a minimum amount. Consequently, being on childcare leave negatively affects the amount of the old-age pension. The expert from **Italy** notes that the latest legislation on pensions is far from women-friendly. Act No. 214/2011 provides for an increase of the minimum contribution condition from 5 to 20 years: if the claimant has less than 20 years' contributions, the pension will be paid from the age of 70.

73 KHO:2015:8.

74 Federal Administrative Court, judgment of 5 September 2013, 2 C 47/11.

75 See for an example of prohibited indirect sex discrimination in Austrian law the recent Case C-123/10 *Waltraud Brachner v. Pensionsversicherungsanstalt* [2011] ECR I-10003 (*Brachner*); Case 385/11 *Isabel Elbal Moreno v. Instituto Nacional de la Seguridad Social (INSS) and Tesorería General de la Seguridad Social (TGSS)* [2012] ECR n.y.r..

Furthermore, it introduced a new minimum benefit amount condition according to which pensions will be paid at 70 rather than at 66 (67 by 2021) when their amount is less than EUR 643 a month. The relevant conditions are particularly difficult to fulfil by those who do atypical work, i.e. intermittent, temporary, occasional and part-time work, which is often done by women. This means that many women may risk receiving their pension only from the age of 70.

## 8 Self-employed workers (Directive 2010/41/EU and provisions of the Recast Directive)

Protection against gender discrimination of self-employed persons, their spouses, and insofar as recognised by national law, the life partners of the self-employed, who are not employees or partners, is a complex area. The number of self-employed persons has been increasing in Europe and they experience severe consequences 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, the protection of self-employed persons in EU law still shows lacunas. 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 an 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 has to 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 have to 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 also have to be taken to ensure access to temporary replacements or social services (Article 8). Worth mentioning is that equality bodies should among other things provide independent assistance to victims of discrimination, conduct independent surveys etc. (Article 11).

To this one may add, however, that various other gender equality directives are also relevant for the equal treatment of the self-employed, but then in certain respects only. Directive 2006/54/EC, for instance, prohibits discrimination in the access to self-employment (Article 14(1)(a)) and 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.

### 8.1 Implementation of Directive 2010/41/EU

The European Network of Legal Experts in the Field of Gender Equality has recently published a report on the implementation of Directive 2010/41/EU.<sup>76</sup>

In several States no specific law implementing Directive 2010/41/EU has been adopted (e.g. **Belgium, France, Liechtenstein, Spain**). In several other States existing laws were amended to include provisions related to the self-employed (e.g. **Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary**). In some countries, general equal treatment legislation applies but this does not necessarily cover the full scope of the Directive (e.g. **Austria, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway** and the **United Kingdom**). **Greece** has enacted a law to specifically implement the Directive.<sup>77</sup>

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76 Barnard, Blackham, *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](http://www.equalitylaw.eu/index.php?option=com_edocman&task=document.viewdoc&id=2732&Itemid=295).

77 Act 4097/2012 (OJ A 235/03.12.2012).

## 8.2 Personal Scope

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 leaves considerable room for national law to define who might be considered a self-employed worker. The question of who is a self-employed worker according to national law is difficult, however.<sup>78</sup> The definition of self-employment is often not clear at national level. Barnard and Blackham have provided a categorisation of different types of definitions.<sup>79</sup>

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 (**Austria, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, France, Italy, Ireland, Montenegro, Netherlands, Poland** and **Sweden**). In **France**, the criteria for self-employment are developed on the basis of cases of 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.

## 8.3 Different categories of self-employed workers and life partners

Related to the question of personal scope, two particular issues arise: the first is whether all self-employed workers are considered part of the same category, and the second is whether national law pertaining to self-employment also recognizes and covers life partners.

As to the first issue, 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. **Croatia** (where the differentiation exists only for tax purposes, not for social security legislation), **Germany, Iceland, Italy**, the **FYR of 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.<sup>80</sup> Other self-employed individuals, just like wage earners, are entitled to apply to the Directorate of Labour for unemployment benefits when becoming unemployed. In **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 persons 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*).

As to the second issue, the recognition of spouses and life partners of self-employed persons, the picture at the national level is diverse. Experts from **Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania**, the **FYR of Macedonia, Malta, Montenegro, Norway, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia** and **Turkey** report that national law does not recognize life partners or only in a small part.

78 Barnard, C., Blackham, A, ‘Self-employment in EU Member States: the Role for Equality Law’, *European Equality Law Review* 2015/2, pp. 7-10.

79 Barnard, C., Blackham, A, ‘Self-employment in EU Member States: the Role for Equality Law’, *European Equality Law Review* 2015/2, pp. 7-10.

80 Article 7 of the Unemployment Insurance Act No. 54/2006.

## 8.4 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**).

## 8.5 Positive action

Article 5 of Directive 2010/41/EU gives Member States the possibility to take 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, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden** and the **United Kingdom**).

Where positive action has been taken, this has been related to providing financial incentives and subsidies for female entrepreneurs (**Croatia, Spain, Turkey**); preferential treatment for loans for female entrepreneurs to set up or develop a business (**Estonia, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Sweden, Turkey**); providing training (**Croatia, Estonia, Italy, the FYR of 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, the FYR of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia**).<sup>81</sup>

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.<sup>82</sup> 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, the lack of knowledge and skills for entrepreneurship, etc.<sup>83</sup>

## 8.6 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

81 Barnard, Blackham *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](http://www.equalitylaw.eu/index.php?option=com_edocman&task=document.viewdoc&id=2732&Itemid=295) at pp. 19-20.

82 See Arandjelovic, R. *Fueling the Economic Potential of Women in Serbia, Overview of the situation in female entrepreneurship in Serbia, obstacles most often encountered by women in business and proposed answers*, available at <http://www.policycafe.rs/documents/financial/research-and-publications/A2F-for-women/Women%20Entrepreneurship%20Thesis.pdf>, accessed 28 September 2015, p. 5.

83 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.



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 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. the **Czech Republic, 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 persons are covered by the national insurance schemes, which provide for basic welfare benefits, by the Surviving Dependents Act, and from the pensionable age (65 years and 3 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), to take out (generally more costly) private insurance or choose to remain uninsured. Also, they do not (yet) have access to a supplementary collective pension scheme.

The recent 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 (including **Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus** (not life partners), **Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France** (not spouses and life partners in the liberal professions), **Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg**, the **FYR of Macedonia** (not life partners), the **Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden** and **Turkey** (not life partners)).<sup>84</sup> Voluntary systems exist in **Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia** (not life partners), **Lithuania** (not life partners), **Luxembourg** (voluntary if not in agriculture), **Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia**, and the **United Kingdom** (though with some residence-based entitlements).<sup>85</sup> In **Greece**, Article 7 of the Directive has not been transposed and the persons covered by this Article are not dealt with by social security legislation.

## 8.7 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.<sup>86</sup> Several national experts have reported problems with the implementation of this provision either formally or in practice (e.g. **Germany, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania** and the **FYR of Macedonia**). In **Greece**, only self-employed women – not spouses nor life partners – may be granted a maternity allowance. In **Germany**, only self-employed artists and publicists as well as helping family members in the agricultural sector are entitled to maternity allowances under special regulations. In **Lithuania**, spouses of self-employed persons are not subject to the regulation on maternity allowances, while life partners are not recognised at all. Similarly, in the **FYR of Macedonia** female spouses or life partners cannot enjoy maternity leave either.

84 See Barnard, Blackham *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=3631&Itemid=295](http://www.equalitylaw.eu/index.php?option=com_edocman&task=document.viewdoc&id=3631&Itemid=295) at p. 22.

85 See Barnard, Blackham *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=3631&Itemid=295](http://www.equalitylaw.eu/index.php?option=com_edocman&task=document.viewdoc&id=3631&Itemid=295) at p. 22.

86 See Barnard, Blackham *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=3631&Itemid=295](http://www.equalitylaw.eu/index.php?option=com_edocman&task=document.viewdoc&id=3631&Itemid=295) at p. 23.

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 the previous income. In fact, self-employed women tend to go back to work immediately after the compulsory six weeks after birth, discarding the rest of the 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.

## 8.8 Occupational social security

Article 10 of Recast Directive 2006/54 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 whether national law has implemented the provisions regarding occupational social security for self-employed persons the picture is diverse. Experts from **Austria, Estonia, France** (though the principle of equality does apply), **Hungary, Ireland, Latvia** (not explicitly), **Lithuania**, the **FYR of Macedonia, Montenegro** (occupational social security not recognized), **Serbia** (occupational social security not recognized), **Spain, Sweden, Turkey** and the **United Kingdom** report that this is not the case. 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 schemes are occupational.

## 8.9 Exceptions related to occupational social security

Article 11 of Recast Directive 2006/54 provides for exceptions for self-employed persons 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 Decree-Law No. 307/97, of 11 November 1997 (which deals with gender equality in occupational social security) uses the exceptions for self-employed persons regarding matters of occupational social security. As regards **Greece**, the national expert reports that the relevant article of the Act transposing the Directive is not clear.<sup>87</sup>

## 8.10 Prohibition of discrimination

Article 14(1) of Recast Directive 2006/54 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 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**, the **FYR of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia** and **Turkey**. Notable about this list is that it includes all candidate countries. In **Germany**, the prohibition of gender-based discrimination against self-employed persons is restricted to access to self-employed activities and promotion. It is contested whether self-employed persons may invoke Section 19 of the General Equal Treatment Act (transposing requirements of Directive 2004/113) against discrimination concerning working conditions or the discriminatory termination of self-employment contracts.<sup>88</sup> Up until now, the courts have not 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.

<sup>87</sup> Article 8(3) of Act 3896/2010.

<sup>88</sup> See Thüsing, G. (2007), *Arbeitsrechtlicher Diskriminierungsschutz*, Paragraph 94, Munich.

## 9 Equal treatment in relation to goods and services

In conformity with Directive 2004/113, 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, the FYR of Macedonia, Montenegro and Norway**. **Turkish** law does not contain such a prohibition,<sup>89</sup> whereas 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, Norway, 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, the FYR of Macedonia, Malta, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain** and the **United Kingdom**). Yet, in **Slovene** law the terms goods and services are not defined.

The scope of **Maltese** and also **Macedonian** law are framed very widely, the latter referring to bodies of the legislative, executive and judicial authority, local self-government units and other bodies of the public and private sector, 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 of individual persons 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 organization 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 respectively a bus driver. Both women were awarded compensation of EUR 6 300 respectively 3 150. **Ireland** has reported a case which 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 for safety.

Some countries have taken somewhat of a position in the middle in this regard, the **Netherlands** for instance only allowing 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 non-mixed (both public and private) schools. **Ireland** has used the exceptions of both education and advertising. In **Sweden** this is yet different, media and advertising not covered by the non-discrimination principle, whereas education is. In **Norway**, the non-discrimination principle extends to both education and advertising. In some countries, the precise material scope is unclear because simply guaranteeing equal access to goods and services without any further specification (**Czech Republic, Montenegro**). The

<sup>89</sup> Given this lack, there is no reference to Turkey in the remainder of this chapter.

**Romanian** Goods and Services Law was adopted to transpose the Directive and took over 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. According to **Bulgarian** statutory law the non-discrimination principle only extends to education, but on the basis of case law also to media and advertising. The scope of the **Lithuanian** implementing law does not clarify whether the 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 his/her own apartment. Non-profit associations are not covered either because they are precluded from providing any goods and services against pay, 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 persons due to their sex.

## (ii) Possibility of justifications

In some countries, national law does not (explicitly) provide for any possibility of justification of differences in treatment in the provision of goods and services (**Denmark, Iceland, the FYR of Macedonia, Montenegro, Norway, Portugal, Serbia**), but most domestic laws do (**Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, the United Kingdom**). Article 4(5) of the Directive allows for this by stipulating 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.' Yet, application of this rule and case law has been very scarce so far.

In the **Netherlands**, such justifications include sanitary facilities, changing and sleeping rooms 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 proportional. **German** law also 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. 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 federate 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. The **Finnish** Equality Ombudsman has considered that offers to one sex only are justified if their value in money 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 **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 **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 the child reaches the age of three were refused the consumers' 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 in the access to the Jesuitical grammar school for reasons of 'credible' proportionate 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 operational 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 quite some 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.

### (iii) Compliance with the *Test-Achats* ruling

Since the *Test-Achats* ruling,<sup>90</sup> 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, as 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). The only non-EU states in which this is not the case are **Liechtenstein**, the **FYR of Macedonia** and **Serbia**. In **Montenegro** 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 insurances. In **Finland**, employers have started to provide pension schemes for some of their employees (typically for directors or high executives) that are not considered as consumer insurances, 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 the risks which are characteristic only of persons of one gender, and to differentiate, if necessary, to the extent of the specified risks the insurance premiums and insurance indemnities of women and men. This provision is considered in contravention of EU law. In **Slovenia**, insurance undertakings may in relation to life assurances, accident and health insurances 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 so as to comply with the *Test-Achats* ruling has been an increase of car insurance costs for women, since before it was quite common for insurance companies to establish better 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.

### (iv) Possibility of positive action measures

While 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), the adoption thereof is rather the exception than the rule, as only **Ireland**, the **FYR of Macedonia**, **Spain**, **Sweden** and the **United Kingdom** have done so thus far. Such measures include public measures in relation to the access of

<sup>90</sup> Case C-236/09.

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**, there are attempts to establish a Child Maintenance Guarantee Fund by the state to primarily support children and women, because the majority of single parents are women.

#### (v) Specific problems

There are quite some states that 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 (**Croatia**; because of appeal on conscience health institutions may refuse the performance of an abortion);
- banks refusing to grant loans to women during periods of pregnancy and maternity and parental leave (**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 insurances 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**);
- mothers (occasionally fathers, as well) not allowed to enter into the shops or buses with a pram (**Hungary**);
- the protection under the domestic act is considered not sufficiently clear and precise so as to allow individuals to understand their rights and for goods and services providers 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 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.

## 10 Violence against women and domestic violence in relation to the Istanbul Convention

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 within the legal framework of international human rights law.<sup>91</sup> The Convention recognises in its preamble, the structural nature of violence against women ('a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between women and men')<sup>92</sup> and states the purpose of 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 to specifically prevent violence against women (including girls under the age of 18).<sup>93</sup> The Convention covers a broad range of measures, including data collection, awareness-raising, protection, provision of support services and measures to address asylum and migration. It also deals with legal measures on criminalizing forms of violence against women and the cross-border dimension of violence against women.

In October 2015, the European Commission published a 'Roadmap for (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.<sup>94</sup> 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.<sup>95</sup> 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. Under Article 216(b) TFEU, agreements concluded by the EU are binding on its institutions and its Member States.<sup>96</sup> Thus, in case of EU accession to the Istanbul Convention, the Member States will be bound by both the Union 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).<sup>97</sup>

On 1 February 2016, the Istanbul Convention had been signed by 38 members of the Council of Europe, of which 20 have ratified the Convention. 25 EU Member States had signed, and 12 EU Member States had also ratified it. The EFTA states **Iceland** and **Norway** had also ratified the Convention.

The following EU Member States have ratified the Convention: **Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Italy, Malta**, the **Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain** and **Sweden**. The following Member States have signed: **Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Romania, Slovakia**, and the **United Kingdom**.

According to the report 'Legal implications of EU accession to the Istanbul Convention' several Member States that have signed the Convention have also taken steps towards ratification. The EU competence in the area of criminal law is of particular importance because the Istanbul Convention is an instrument for combating crime and legislative amendments effected in the Member States before ratification are often in the form of modifications to national Criminal Codes. In the Member States that have not signed the

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91 CETS No. 210, adopted 11 May 2011 and entered into force 1 August 2014.

92 Preamble, Istanbul Convention.

93 See Article 3(f) of the Convention.

94 [http://ec.europa.eu/smart-regulation/roadmaps/docs/2015\\_just\\_010\\_istanbul\\_convention\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/smart-regulation/roadmaps/docs/2015_just_010_istanbul_convention_en.pdf).

95 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A12012E%2FTXT>.

96 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A12012E%2FTXT>.

97 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32010D0048&rid=1>; [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-11-4\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-11-4_en.htm).

Convention - **Bulgaria**, the **Czech Republic** and **Latvia** - a political process concerning the accession is expected to start.<sup>98</sup>

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98 Nousiainen, K., Chinkin, C. *Legal implications of EU accession to the Istanbul Convention*, European network of legal experts in gender equality and non-discrimination (December 2015).



## 11 Enforcement and compliance

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.

### 11.1 Victimisation

As a matter of EU gender equality law, persons 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). All states, except for the **FYR of Macedonia**, **Sweden** and **Turkey**, have reported that their national level is up to the EU standard. In the **FYR of 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 national ban on reprisals is considered to fall short for not meeting the Directive requirement that it should be included in the very concept of discrimination. Yet, the Labour Court awarded compensation in damages of EUR 7 900 to a woman that was dismissed on the very day she made a complaint about sexual harassment. In **Turkey**, the provision against victimisation is deemed inadequate because of other deficiencies in gender equality law, relating inter alia to the definitions of direct and indirect discrimination.

Yet, there are some 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 employment area. The **Belgian** expert considers the effectiveness of the protection against victimisation in his country disputable, because it mostly concerns the victim's dismissal 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. The **Latvian** expert has noted that it would be desirable to implement protection against victimisation also in the field of social security.

### 11.2 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<sup>99</sup> 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, Norway, Slovakia**). In **Estonia**, if the employer refuses to provide proof, such refusal shall be deemed to equal acknowledgment of discrimination. 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.

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99 In *Danfoss and Kelly and Meister*.

Yet, in some countries the law is somewhat ambiguous, containing slightly different rules in various pieces of legislation (**Croatia, Serbia**). In some countries, there has not been any experience with this in practice, because of the lack of case law (**Liechtenstein, Serbia**). In yet others, the case law is not very satisfying. While the **Hungarian** Supreme Court guidelines on employment cases point out 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 constant discussion on the burden of proof, it is still rather frequent for lower-level courts in Hungary to request claimants to prove the occurrence of discrimination. In **Greece**, the rules are fine on the books, 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.<sup>100</sup> An important reason is that they are contained in the legal acts transposing the Directives without being incorporated in the procedural codes, and that they 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 so as to require claimants to not just present basic facts, but to also make probable the existence of discrimination by indicating its ground, so in fact asking about the employer's motivation.

Another problem relates to the access of information. In **France**, the Court of Cassation has 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 as well as the courts' reluctance to use statistical data as prima facie evidence. **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. The Supreme Court and the Supreme Administrative Court, however, decided in cases concerning the new pay system for judges that because both men and women were placed in lower bracket offices, 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.

### 11.3 Remedies and sanctions

The degree to which EU gender equality law will have the desired effects will depend to an important 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 by effective, proportionate and dissuasive sanctions. The CJEU

100 C-196/02 *Nikoloudi* [2005] ECR I-1789.

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.<sup>101</sup>

### (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 as to the rights of the claimant (the **United Kingdom**);
- request for annulment of unlawful provisions (**Belgium, Greece, Liechtenstein, Serbia**), nullity of discriminatory provisions and practices (**Bulgaria, France, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Spain**), prohibition or termination of the discriminatory activities (**Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Norway, Serbia, the United Kingdom**), or action for restitution (**Slovakia, Slovenia, Turkey**);
- certain right to reinstatement (**Austria, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the FYR of Macedonia, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey**) or nullity of the dismissal (**Estonia, Spain, Sweden**) and of the refusal to hire or promote (**Greece**);
- compensation (**Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Liechtenstein, the FYR of Macedonia, Malta, the Netherlands, 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, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia**) when a person's reputation or respect in society or dignity has been harmed (**Czech Republic**) or distress has been caused because of victimisation (**Ireland**);
- penalty payments and administrative fines (**Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Luxembourg, the FYR of Macedonia, Montenegro, 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 of the Equal Treatment Commission (**Hungary**);
- temporary measures in order to prevent discriminatory treatment and to avoid major irreparable damage (**Serbia**).

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 change now. A 'transitional benefit' was also been 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. 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

<sup>101</sup> See for example 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*).

allows for 'discrimination compensation', which according to its Supreme Court can be distinguished in dignity compensation and preventive compensation.

While in many states, the level of compensation is capped (see further below), this is not the case in **Finland, 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 2½ 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 in contrast with alleged victims on other discrimination grounds.

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.
- 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 the 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**, whoever 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, whoever violates the provisions on gender discrimination, in case of conviction will be punished 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, severe bodily or mental impairment, involving imprisonment for up to one year.
- in **Greece**, the 'offence to sexual dignity' can lead to imprisonment for 6 months to 3 years and a pecuniary penalty of at least EUR 1 000, if it is committed through the exploitation of the situation of a worker or candidate for employment.
- in **Turkey**, criminal sanctions can be imposed for harassment and sexual assault, and involve imprisonment of varying duration according to the gravity of the crime, ranging from 3 months to 12 years and even up.
- 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 3 months to 5 years.
- in **Malta**, a fine or imprisonment for up to 6 months or both is possible in case of victimisation, and (sexual) harassment.
- in **Poland**, imprisonment for up to 2 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 3 years of imprisonment is possible in the most serious cases of sexual harassment.
- in the **FYR of Macedonia**, where a breach of equality law constitutes a crime this can lead to a penal sanction/imprisonment.
- in **Norway** and **Portugal**, criminal-law sanctions can concern all discrimination grounds, in both private and public employment, but can only consist of penalties.

## (ii) Persisting problems

Importantly, quite many 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, the FYR of Macedonia, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia**) or observe that serious problems persist in this regard (**Czech Republic, Germany, Spain, Sweden**). In **Greece**, the sanctions are effective, proportionate and dissuasive, but their use is limited as procedural and socio-economic problems deter a recourse to legal proceedings (see the next section).

One important, more common problem concerns the (fixed and/or low) level of compensation and damages, and in some countries also their way of application by the courts (**Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Finland, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Spain, Sweden**). As such, these are not considered to meet the requirement of dissuasiveness and are also considered not appropriately balanced with the costs, length and uncertainty of judicial proceedings. While in the **Czech Republic** 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 this. In 2014, they imposed some 50 fines, amounting in total to a mere EUR 13 000. The **Spanish** expert considers the remedies and sanctions to be proportionate in theory, but in practice moral damages are difficult to prove and when recognized 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 830, which is only symbolic when compared to some other laws. Even in severe cases of discrimination courts have imposed the smallest amounts only and the execution of court decisions has been problematic as well. In the last few years the **Hungarian** Equal Treatment Authority became reluctant to use even the weak sanctions it could apply; while it can impose fines ranging from EUR 165 to EUR 20 000, the number of cases in which a fine was imposed at all decreased from 20 to 2 in the years 2010-2012, although the total number of cases did not decrease. In 2013 only the total amount of fines was published (EUR 10 000), which did not even reach the maximum threshold that can be imposed in one single case. The report on 2014 indicated that in 23 cases the violation of equal treatment had been established, out of which 30% led to a fine. In a recently published case, when a camerawoman's employment application was refused because of her sex, the sanction was a mere EUR 310. In **Estonia**, claims for compensation related to discrimination are rare, and in 2014, unlawfully treated employees were paid only EUR 71 000 by employers in total. In **Lithuania** as well, 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, his or her attempts to prevent harmful effects caused by the act, or other circumstances. The **Swedish** expert has noted that the specific restriction applying to economic compensation which rules out the possibility of indemnities in relation to appointments and promotions, as a result of the Swedish 'hiring at will' doctrine, can 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 'real and effective compensation' can be doubted given that awards are capped even where there is discrimination on more than one ground. While in **Norway** case law on the matter is sparse, and sanctions therefore hardly imposed, it is noteworthy that in three recent ones high non-pecuniary damages were awarded, above EUR 12 000, which is high in comparison with e.g. cases of unjustified dismissal. 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**, compensation is limited to a maximum of four months' wages. In **Malta**, fines/compensation levels range from EUR 116.47 to EUR 2329.27, depending on the type of violation of gender equality law involved, which is generally considered to be too low to provide a deterrent. While in **Poland**, the level of compensation is not capped, but the usual awards given in practice are considered unlikely to have a dissuasive effect.

Other problems concern for instance the freezing effect of old, inflexible case law of the **Belgian** Court of Cassation that no court may order the reinstatement of a worker under an employment contract. In **Germany**, when discrimination results from collective agreements, the employer is only responsible if it acted with gross negligence or intentionally. Furthermore, the employer as well as the person providing goods and services are obliged to pay material damages only when they can be held responsible for the discrimination by personal fault. In the **FYR of Macedonia**, the weak court system and ineffectiveness of the Gender Equality Body and the Antidiscrimination 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 all but a guarantee of transparency. Rather to the contrary, it may be seen as a scapegoat for not fixing the problem. In **Norway**, victims of discrimination have expressed disappointment with the fact that the Equality Ombud and Equality Tribunal are not entitled to award compensation in cases where discrimination has been established. As the Equality Ombud handles 90 % of all discrimination cases each year, this means that the sanctions Norwegian law provides for are hardly used in practice.

#### 11.4 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 all persons who consider 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).<sup>102</sup> In this respect as well, quite some problems and obstacles persist in the states covered by this report, which may not always be legal barriers.

##### (i) 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 deterrence to engaging in judicial proceedings (see the previous section), the most reported difficulties and barriers victims of sex discrimination encounter and which may explain the low level of litigation, concern:

- the cost of legal proceedings (**Belgium, Croatia, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Latvia, the FYR of Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, the United Kingdom**);
- overly short time limits for initiating proceedings (**Germany, the United Kingdom**);
- length of proceedings (**Croatia, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Slovenia**);
- the conditions of entitlement to legal aid (**Belgium, Greece**);
- lack of a right of associations to bring proceedings (**Germany**);
- lack of trust or faith in the courts/legal system (**Estonia, Italy, the FYR of Macedonia, Montenegro**);
- only courts being allowed to award compensation and these not necessarily recognising the equality body's finding of discrimination as a basis for claiming compensation (**Bulgaria, Hungary, Norway**);
- lack of access to information, in particular other court rulings on the matter (**Croatia, Latvia**);
- too small benefits ensuing from court action (discussed extensively in the previous section);
- 'stigma' of being a 'troublemaker' associated with such cases (**Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Malta**) and fear of retaliation or victimisation (**Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Liechtenstein, the FYR of Macedonia, the United Kingdom**);
- being part of a small-scale community (**Estonia, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro**);

102 Well-established case law since Case C-222/84 *Marguerite Johnston v. Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary* [1986] ECR I-01651.

- lack of confidence of claimants that they will be believed (the **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 habit to defend own rights (**Estonia**);
- lack of skilled, experienced advice and assistance (**Greece, the United Kingdom**);
- strongly rooted traditional gender stereotypes which entail a greater degree of tolerance (**Montenegro, Serbia**).

Among more specific factors that have been pointed to 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, therewith shifting the focus of policymakers and media. In **Belgium** pay scales in the private sector are governed by collective agreement and a pay discrimination claim may therefore be considered as quite bold. The **Hungarian** expert has noted that while access to court is safeguarded by legislation, the case law of lower-level courts proves the considerable gaps in the legal practice in four areas: the broad interpretation of exemptions provided for in the law; the reluctance to award dissuasive compensation; the minimization of the weight of violence against women; and inadequate application of the rules on the burden of proof. A ruling of the Supreme Court of **Iceland** in a sexual harassment case is considered not very encouraging for victims to go to court. The woman in this case claimed non-pecuniary damages from her employer for sexual harassment by her superior during a work trip. 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; knocking on her door an hour after she had bid good night), yet in the Court’s view more explicit sexual behaviour (‘other things and more’) was required for this to be considered sexual harassment.

## (ii) Legal – financial - aid

A particular point of 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 on the latter point (iii) and Section 11.4.).

In some countries no legal financial aid is provided for (**Austria, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Romania**), in others this is income-dependent (**Belgium, Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Malta, Montenegro, Norway, Poland, Sweden**) or only available for particular types of cases (the **FYR of Macedonia, Turkey**) or before specific courts (**Cyprus**). In **Iceland**, financial aid may also be granted when the outcome of the case were to have great general significance or have strong impact on the employment, social status or other personal status of the applicant. The Legal Aid Committee also looks to factors such as whether the applicant has tried to settle the case, for example by administrative appeal and whether there is a chance that the case would be successful in court, by looking at 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. 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 his case.

In the **Netherlands**, the free legal aid for persons with a low income 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 person has the right to a public attorney for this purpose and does not have to pay the costs of the proceedings. In **Serbia**, there is no free legal aid, but the claimant is released from advance payment of costs of proceedings, which are paid from court funds. 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 scrutinized). Furthermore, trade unions also 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.

### (iii) 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, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Serbia, Spain, Sweden**). 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 for legal assistance generally to their members (**Belgium**). This may be beneficial to the extent that they also bear the costs. Yet, the following sketchy overview reveals quite some limitations of the applicable national regulations for actions by proxy.

In **Austria**, such action is limited to the so-called 'Klagsverband', an umbrella organisation of several non-governmental organisations acting in the field of anti-discrimination. 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. Also 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 the 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 persons 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 pleading for a right to go to court with discrimination cases, but the Ministry of Justice is opposing this proposal. While in **Greece** NGOs have legal standing, they have inadequate resources for actually doing so. In **Slovakia**, NGOs can represent victims only before regular courts, not the Supreme Court or 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 these must bring their own case (**Germany, Ireland**) and may only be supported by counsel or financially (**Finland, the FYR of Macedonia, the United Kingdom**). In **Romania**, an amendment to gender equality law in 2012 has limited the possibility of 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 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 having a 'legitimate interest' may engage themselves on behalf or in support of a complainant in all judicial proceedings, with the complainant's approval. In **Slovenia**, NGOs and other legal entities may only act as a side intervenient but act on behalf of an alleged victim. **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, requiring the consent of the claimant.

### 11.5 Equality bodies

Since 2002, by virtue of Directive 2002/73/EC, the Member States and EEA countries are also obliged to designate equality bodies. The tasks of these bodies are the promotion, analysis, monitoring and support of equal treatment of all persons 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).<sup>103</sup>

All states, except Turkey, have put an equality body into place that seeks to implement the requirements of EU and national gender equality law. Yet, these bodies differ in terms of purpose, competence and 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 (**Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, the Netherlands, France, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the FYR of Macedonia, Malta, Montenegro, Norway, Poland, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, the United Kingdom**). Some countries have both types of bodies (**Liechtenstein, Romania**). Such bodies may have just an informative and/or research function (e.g. **Germany, Luxembourg, Slovenia**) or also investigate complaints, give legal advice and assistance, issue (non-binding) opinions, recommendations and warnings, try to get to an out-of-court settlement, bring cases to court, etc. (**Austria, Estonia, Finland, Greece** (no recourse to courts), **Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Montenegro, Norway, Poland, Serbia, Slovakia, Sweden**). Some equality bodies may also issue fines (**Cyprus, Hungary, Lithuania**) or impose sanctions (**Bulgaria**). The **Irish** Human Rights and Equality Commission can also invite – a group of – undertakings to carry out an equality review or to prepare and implement an equality action plan. The situation in the **FYR of Macedonia** is rather opaque, as the law also provides for a special state agent to act as a gender equality body, but seemingly not having an independent power of investigation, monitoring and reporting. No information is available regarding its actual functioning either. The **Norwegian** expert has noted that the main weakness of the Equality Ombud is that neither she nor anyone else has the specific task of providing independent assistance to victims of discrimination that will enable them to have access to effective, proportionate and dissuasive sanctions as required by EU law.

The **Croatian** expert has noted that many victims feel more confident complaining to the Ombudsperson for Gender Equality in out-of-court, less formalistic proceedings at no cost than when going to court. The same applies for **Greece**. The Ombudsperson annually investigates 300-400 individual complaints. 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 ground to the conclusion that the more effective action regarding practical implementation takes place outside the courts. Alleged victims of discrimination also have the right to seek counsel 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 persons returning from maternity, paternity and parental leaves and the observance of other employee rights. **Turkey** also has an Ombudsman institution, and one of the five Ombudspersons is in charge of women

103 On equality bodies in general see Holtmaat, R. *Catalyst for Change: Equality Bodies according to Directive 2000/43/EC 2007*, available at <http://www.migpolgroup.com/?s=Catalyst+for+Change%3A+Equality+Bodies+according+to+Directive+2000%2F43%2FEC+2007>, accessed 31 October 2013.

and children. It can try to settle complaints but also to get 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 so-called Anti-Discrimination Bureaus (*ADV*) in the **Netherlands**; all municipalities are obliged to establish and subsidise an *ADV*, the main task of these Bureaus being to assist victims of discrimination and to monitor the situation in this regard.

## 11.6 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).

Yet, it appears that in some countries social partners do not play any particular role of significance in this regard (**Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Romania, Slovakia, Turkey, the United Kingdom**) or it is unclear what the results are (**Iceland, Italy, the FYR of Macedonia, Malta, Norway**).

In other countries, social partners fulfil more visible roles in the development and promotion of gender equality law, by:

- giving opinions (**Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Greece**), also in court cases (**Poland**);
- monitoring the application by employers of labour provisions (**Poland**);
- initiating legal action, including assistance of trade union members in individual cases (**Belgium, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Sweden**);
- stimulating discussion on certain issues, such as equal pay and positive action (the **Netherlands, Sweden**);
- engaging with equality bodies (**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 (**Norway, Slovenia**);
- collective agreements (see Section 11.7).

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 annually negotiate 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' organizations should make an effort to ensure that 30 % of the representatives of the least represented sex is included in the negotiation committees. In **Greece**, large trade unions have special Secretariats for Women/Equality; however, the unions' possibility to bring discrimination cases to court is limited by the inadequate transposition of the relevant EU law provisions. In **Finland**, trade unions can also bring cases to court 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 other countries, this role could possibly be bigger given the strong position of trade unions. In **Sweden**, the labour market is characterised by a high organisation density, both at employers' and employees' level, with about 75 % of workers being affiliated to a trade union. They play an important role especially in relation to areas that are not covered by the law, such as wages, or that contain semi-mandatory rules leaving room to deviate by collective agreement. 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. While 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 subject by the social partners.

### 11.7 Collective agreements

In 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 the state does not influence the collective bargaining process. 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. While collective agreements are not generally applicable

in **Denmark**, they are still an important source of law as gender equality legislation is subsidiary to collective agreements, providing for similar protection as prescribed by legislation. 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, Czech Republic, 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 (the **FYR of Macedonia, Liechtenstein**), 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 partners' organisations is also considered an obstacle for using collective agreements as an effective means to implement gender equality law. In **Hungary**, collective agreements are only 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 new Labour Code, 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. Minimum-wage fixing has also been removed from collective bargaining for the whole country and minimum wages have now been reduced by statute in a way which is discriminatory on grounds of age. 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 this is not considered very effective since social partners mostly limit themselves to observing that this matter has been discussed.

## 12 Overall assessment: law on the books versus law in practice

The comparative overview presented in this report of the legal state of affairs in the EU Member States and a number of other countries in all fields covered by EU gender equality law shows that much has been achieved but also that many concerns remain, the gender pay gap just being one of them. Despite the regulations in force in these states, it has appeared that in many countries specific problems of proper transposition and application of EU gender equality law remain in all areas. These not only regard substantive deficiencies of legislation and its application by national courts, but also the 'patchworks' of applicable national laws, affecting clarity and consistency of the overall body of national gender equality law.

However, in addition to such specific problems of national equality law, the report has also revealed quite a number of more general problems that occur in many states or in a considerable number of them. Firstly, this concerns 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 11.4, a broad range of factors explaining the low level of litigation have been identified, which are in need of a more in-depth investigation and also require a more comprehensive policy strategy to overcome them. These factors also expose other general problems, such as the lack of transparency and access to information. Not only wages and pay systems 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 very poorly accessible, this not only being a likely cause of inconsistent interpretation by courts but also not adding 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 can be criticised as well. This state of affairs reinforces another commonly felt problem: the lack of specific knowledge and expertise at courts and equality bodies, but also 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 Ombud and Tribunal because of the low threshold and it being free of charge, but these bodies are not entitled to award compensation when they establish discrimination. On top of this, the low levels of compensation awarded in many states by the courts also create 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 up by social partners to implement and promote gender equality law. The picture emerging here is that in many countries they could take up a more active role in this regard and that much more could be done. The autonomy of social partners in some countries, sometimes allowing them to deviate from legislation, so far has not in fact added much to gender equality, in some cases even having a negative effect. Social partners could give more weight and priority to gender equality in collective bargaining and agreements. More generally, quite some experts have observed that there is a lack of attention and of a sense of urgency when it comes to gender equality and that more could be done, including at the levels of the legislator and executive authorities when it comes to mainstreaming gender equality into all policies, but also at the level of equality bodies.

Last but not least, a very worrying issue raised in some reports concerns the current reinforcement of gender stereotypes, traditional family values and traditional gender roles limiting women's free choices

that is filtering through in national policies, legislation and case law. This may result from conservative governments that are in place in some countries (**Hungary**, the **FYR of Macedonia**), while in others it results from the financial crisis and austerity policies (**Greece**). It is to be watched closely whether and how this tendency develops in the near future.

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