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Social partners and gender equality in Europe



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Eurofound (2014), *Social partners and gender equality in Europe*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

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Research project: Industrial relations and gender in Europe

Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2014

doi:10.2806/90975

ISBN 978-92-897-1307-8

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Executive summary

Introduction

The growing participation of women in the labour market has prompted changes in the way European social partner organisations tackle gender issues. Their organisational and collective bargaining structures – historically dominated by men – have had to adapt to include gender equality issues. This report examines the extent to which gender equality is incorporated by the social partners in their organisations and in their policymaking at European and national level. It explores the differences between the priority given to gender issues between the social partners in different countries and the possible factors behind such differences. Finally, it examines the main challenges faced by the social partners when attempting to promote gender equality within their organisations and in the wider labour market. The findings are based on the contributions of Eurofound's network of European correspondents, covering all EU Member States and Norway.

Policy context

Despite the implementation of gender equality principles both in the treaties and in policy objectives at EU level, gender differences are still evident in terms of access to the labour market, employment patterns and working conditions. The gender gap is visible in terms of horizontal and vertical occupational segregation, pay gaps, participation in decision-making and the unequal division of domestic tasks and care responsibilities.

In this context, the European social partners have an important role to play in the shaping of the European labour and anti-discrimination legislation and – in some cases – in implementing relevant policy initiatives. In 2005, the European cross-industry social partners BUSINESSEUROPE, UEAPME, CEEP and ETUC adopted the Framework of Actions on Gender Equality for implementation by their member organisations at national level. The Framework included four priorities for action:

- addressing gender roles;
- promoting women in decision-making;
- supporting work–life balance;
- tackling the gender pay gap.

Social partners at national level are able to exert influence in these and other policy areas that impact on gender equality by shaping legislation through tripartite consultation and through their role in bipartite collective bargaining at national, sectoral and company level – where they can work towards improving pay, working conditions and the ability of men and women to balance work and family life.

Key findings

The study shows that there are significant differences between countries in the level of priority accorded to internal and external gender equality actions by the social partners. In 17 Member States, social partner organisations reported relatively well developed internal and/or external policies, while in seven countries, gender equality activities were mainly limited to measures taken by trade unions. In four countries, neither employers nor trade unions had defined policies or priorities to address gender equality related issues.

The relationship between the level of commitment to the issue by social partners and the gender equality performance by countries (or, indeed, their industrial relations system) is not clear. While in some countries there is a strong association, in others, such as Greece and Italy, a high level of commitment by social partners to gender equality is not reflected in a positive performance on the Gender Equality Index. Similarly, no specific pattern emerges in terms of industrial relation systems: well-developed gender equality activities are reported among social partner organisations in different types of social dialogue systems, both in the level of involvement in tripartite decision-making and in the centralisation of collective bargaining systems.

The study also shows that the social partners' external strategies for gender equality are significantly better developed than their internal measures: for instance, promoting women in decision-making or mainstreaming gender equality in all social partner policies and processes. The research found that national peak-level organisations had carried out quite limited initiatives in the last five years to improve their internal equality performance and the representation of women in decision-making positions.

In general, internal action plans and strategies are usually more developed among trade union organisations than employer organisations: 13 Member States reported that their trade unions have such plans and strategies, while only five reported that employer organisations have them. The main tools developed by social partner organisations to support gender equality within their organisations are quota systems (both to increase the number of women in decision-making positions, and in collective bargaining), training, and awareness-raising activities, typically resulting in the production of handbooks and guidelines.

External actions tend to focus on campaigning and educational activities and the integration of gender equality and, in particular, work–life balance measures in national policies or collective agreements.

While in general the global economic crisis did not affect the social partners' attitude to gender equality, progress on the issue was hindered in some countries. In other countries, the gender gap in employment has narrowed, mainly however as a result of worsening employment prospects for men, due to job losses in sectors traditionally dominated by men. The research shows that commitments to gender equality have been adversely affected in those Member States that have been worst hit by the economic downturn, due to a combined effect of fewer resources and competing priorities with other emerging issues.

Policy pointers

- As demonstrated by the social partners' evaluation report on the implementation of the Framework of Actions on Gender Equality, and the publication of a *Toolkit for Gender Equality in Practice*, significant actions are being taken by European and national social partner organisations and companies in support of gender equality. However, the research highlights that more needs to be done to promote gender equality within social partner organisations and to ensure that internal and external gender equality actions remain a priority in addressing persistent gender gaps.
- It is clear that the social partners have great influence in areas linked directly to working life, and where the nature of the industrial relations system (and therefore the level of involvement of social partners in decision-making at different levels) can influence the impact their commitment can have at grassroots level.
- Social partner activities in the area of gender equality often revolve around campaigns and education and are mainly focused on issues such as work–life balance rather than being 'transformative' in terms of addressing some of the root causes of gender inequality. While addressing the root causes of gender equality may lie partly outside the remit of social partner organisations, they can certainly have an extremely important role within their remit of responsibility and action.

- Although there are efforts to tackle the gender pay gap, these are limited to relatively few countries and tend to be general campaigns rather than, for instance, efforts to reclassify occupations that are dominated by women – the latter are clearly more challenging to achieve and can have a significant impact on costs for some employers.
- The lack of strong internal strategies to support gender equality in the social partners' organisations can have an impact on their ability to recruit and retain the best and brightest among their member organisations. For trade unions, an increasing representativeness gap may emerge with the potential increase of women's membership if there is no corresponding increase in the numbers of women participating in the relevant governing and representative bodies.

Introduction

This report explores the various ways the social partners are contributing to the achievement of gender equality in the European Union – both through measures within their own organisations and through activities underpinning the achievement of greater gender equality within the labour market and society.

Equality between women and men is a fundamental right, a common EU value and a necessary condition for achieving the EU objectives of growth, employment and social cohesion. As recognised in EU legal and policy instruments, social dialogue is an important means of achieving greater equality between women and men. Hence the social partners are positioned at the heart of the implementation of this objective in several ways.

The European social partners contribute to shaping European labour legislation and measures to promote equality and anti-discrimination and are, in some cases, responsible for implementing relevant policy initiatives. At national level, while the social partners can influence legislation through tripartite consultation, they primarily play a role in collective bargaining at national, sectoral and company level – and therefore can influence not only the working conditions of men and women, but also the ability to reconcile work and family life.

Women's growing participation in the labour market has brought changes to the way in which European social partner organisations tackle gender issues. The organisational and collective bargaining structures of the social partners – historically dominated by men – have had to adapt to these issues to make progress in this area. This report discusses the extent to which gender equality is embraced by social partner organisations and to what extent it influences their policymaking at European and national level.

This report set out to collect and compare information from the EU Member States and Norway both on the internal actions of social partner organisations to promote gender equality within their organisations and on the external actions and activities implemented by social partners across a range of fields of activity. These include activities aimed at:

- addressing gender roles;
- promoting women's role in decision-making;
- supporting a good work–life balance;
- tackling gender pay gaps.

This report builds on earlier Eurofound reports on gender and equal opportunities (Eurofound, 1999; Eurofound, 2006; Eurofound, 2007; Eurofound, 2013a and 2013b;) as well as on other literature on the role and contribution of social partner organisations to gender equality (including the recently updated *Toolkit for gender equality in practice* by the European social partners (ETUC et al, 2014).

The report explores the differences between the priority given to gender issues among social partners in different countries and the potential factors behind such differences. It also examines the main challenges faced by the social partners when attempting to disseminate and promote gender equality within their organisations. The information collected was mainly from 2009 onwards.

The report was compiled on the basis of individual national reports submitted by national experts covering all 28 EU Member States and Norway (see Annex 3). These reports are based mainly on desk research as well as, where possible, direct consultation with social partner organisations. The situation in each Member State was drafted on the basis of a questionnaire, which covered the following areas:

- policy commitments to promoting equality in social partner organisations and strategic priorities to eliminate inequalities in the labour market;
- actions to promote gender equality and the balanced participation of women;
- processes in place to ensure that gender is considered in social dialogue;
- women's participation in social partner cross-industry, sectoral and company organisations;
- challenges faced in implementing actions;
- impacts of actions and future direction.

Main challenges for gender equality 1

European approaches to gender equality

The Treaty on the European Union, the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union provide the legal basis for action on gender equality. Under current EU laws, gender discrimination is prohibited in employment and vocational training, in social security and pensions, and in access to goods and services. Gender equality in the labour market is at the top of the European social and employment agenda, as demonstrated by recent policy commitments.

- The European Commission's 2010 document, *Strategy for equality between women and men*, has five priority areas for EU action on gender equality between 2010 and 2015, including equal economic independence, equal pay for equal work and work of equal value, and equality in decision-making (European Commission, 2011b).
- In the *European Pact for Gender Equality* (2011), the Council of Europe reaffirms its commitment to close gender gaps and combat gender segregation in the labour market; to promote a better work–life balance for women and men; and to implement a gender mainstreaming strategy in all policy areas (Council of the European Union, 2011).
- Increasing women's labour market participation is one of the main goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy, and gender equality is considered as an integral part of the 'inclusive growth'.

'Gender mainstreaming', in the sense of integrating gender concerns in all policy decisions, legal frameworks, activities and programmes, is widely recognised as an EU strategic priority. As such, many policy papers take a dual approach to the promotion of gender equality: separate thematic actions combined with cross-cutting interventions in the agenda of European organisations. For instance, the above-mentioned documents – the European Commission's *Strategy for equality between women and men* and the Council of Europe's *European pact for gender equality* – recognise the need to pursue gender equality with both women-specific and gender mainstreaming actions. Gender mainstreaming is also regarded as a tool to promote and reinforce good governance, as its principles require decision-makers to understand the gendered power relationships that underpin decision-making (and their impact) in society and, indeed, in social partner organisations.

Tackling persistent gender gaps in society and the labour market

Despite the implementation of gender equality principles both in the treaties and in policy objectives at European level, gender differences are still evident in terms of access to the labour market, employment patterns and working conditions. Women and men are still:

- working in different occupations, workplaces and industries;
- employed on different employment contracts;
- rewarded differently, even after adjusting for skills, experience and education.

A study carried out by Eurofound in 2013 highlighted that there are gender gaps not only in employment and pay, but also in working conditions (Eurofound, 2013a). Many women have precarious contracts and – sometimes because of this – fewer women than men have access to work-related benefits. Women are also more likely to be exposed to certain health and safety risks. This is mainly due to the fact that women and men still perform different tasks and have different occupations (a phenomenon known as **horizontal segregation**). For example, the majority of healthcare workers are women: consequently, they are more exposed to infection, musculoskeletal injuries and to other physical risks, such as highly repetitive movements and awkward postures.

Participation in employment

Despite the existing equality legislation and the significant increase in the number of women workers, the way women and men participate in the labour market is still very different. Even with the considerable progress made over the past few decades, women's participation in the labour market remains significantly lower than that of men. While the financial crisis may have reduced the gender gap in several Member States, in 2013 men's employment rates were still approximately 12 percentage points higher than women's employment rates across the EU. The crisis had a greater impact on men's employment rates, which declined to 74% (from 78% in 2007) – the rates for women remained stable at 63% (62% in 2007).

Differences among countries are significant: the level of participation is lower in southern European countries (Italy, Malta and Greece) compared with northern European countries (Sweden, Denmark and Finland). Lower rates of women's participation in southern Europe are linked to structural barriers and cultural factors that are still limiting women's career opportunities. Some of these relate to the gendered division of labour and social division of roles. Women still are expected to (and, in fact, do) assume the main caring and domestic roles, while men as the main breadwinners devote more time to paid employment. In such conditions, women's full participation in the labour market can be curbed by such factors as inflexible leave schemes and work arrangements, tax disincentives for two-earner families, and, in general, a broader assumption that a woman's reproductive and carer role cannot be combined with a career, especially at a senior level (European Commission, 2011). Another crucial issue is the lack of affordable and good quality care services.

Labour market segregation

These structural obstacles to equality for women workers have repercussions on women's working-time arrangements (in paid work), which affect not only pay, training and career opportunities, but also lead to persistent poverty gaps in old age. Part-time work remains a more common feature of women's employment, with 33% of women working part time in 2013 compared with 9.8% of men.

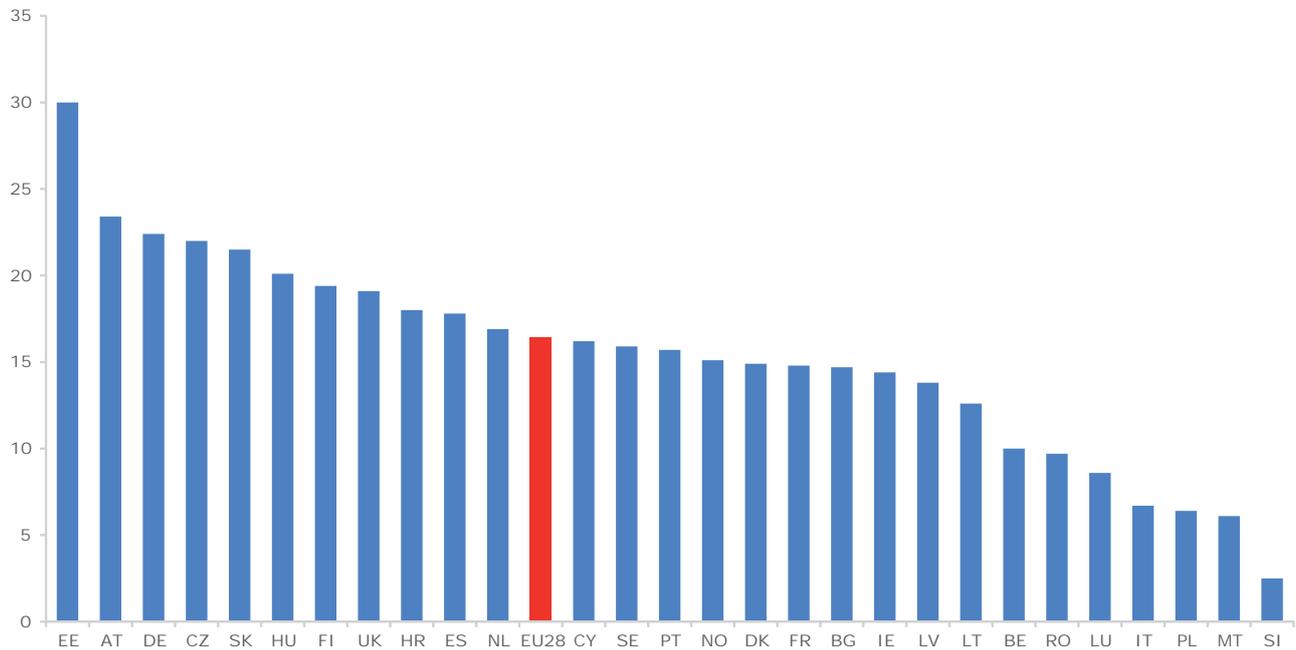
This can be seen in occupations such as personal care, cleaning and personal services, where part-time work, and women workers, prevail. However, part-time workers are often excluded from benefits and are disadvantaged in terms of access to promotion. Part-time work can also be involuntary, particularly where there is a lack of access to affordable, good quality care facilities, or – particularly in the years following the financial crisis – where full-time contracts are unavailable (Eurofound, 2004). Conversely, men often experience difficulty in finding part-time work (particularly in order to combine work and childcare responsibilities) (Eurofound, 2013a).

Similarly, patterns of vertical and horizontal gender segregation in the labour market remain. Women continue to be significantly under-represented in leadership positions and are over-represented in sectors characterised by lower quality and lower paid employment. The latter has partly been attributed to women's work being under-valued.

Gender pay gap

Inevitably, the inequalities faced by women in the labour market are also reflected in the different levels of earnings between women and men. In 2012, the gender pay gap stood at 16.4% in the EU as a whole and it is above 20% in six Member States (Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Estonia, Hungary and Slovakia). This gap has not narrowed over the last 10 years and in several countries has even shown a tendency to increase.

Figure 1: Gender pay gap in unadjusted form in 2012 (%)



Data for Greece is not available

Source: Eurostat data

Women in decision-making positions

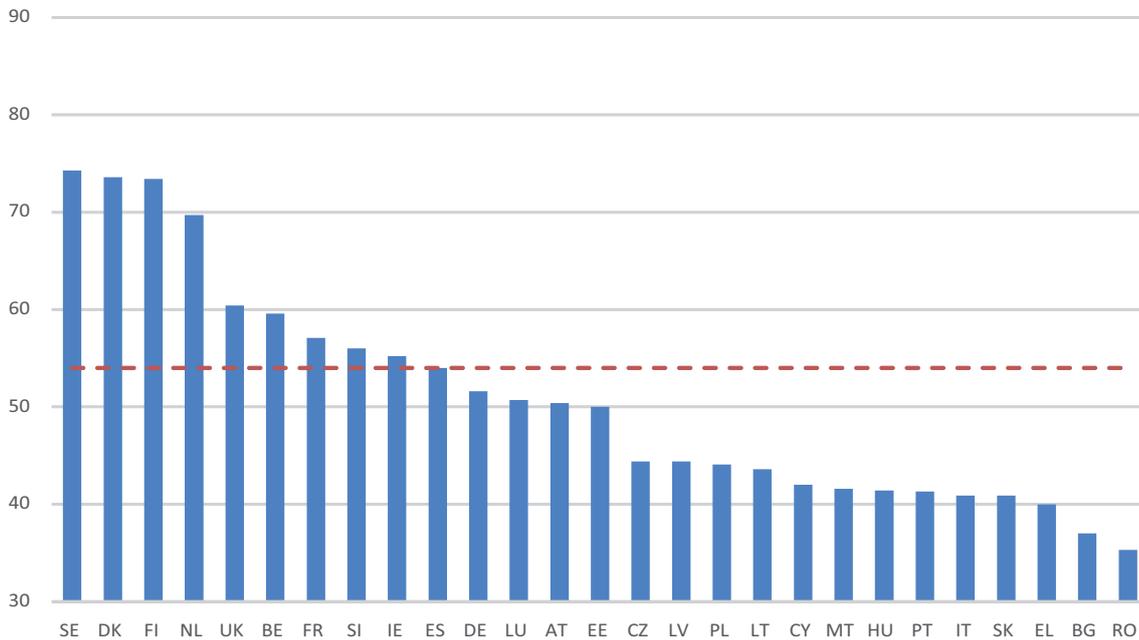
Despite women's growing participation in the labour market and their success in higher education, they remain under-represented in positions of power. The proportion of women in management and board-level positions stood at just 15.8% in the EU and they are barely visible among the top business leaders of companies: only 3% of company presidents in 2013 were women.

The reasons for this under-representation of women in positions of power and decision-making are structural and multiple. They include gender stereotypes, discrimination, and persistent segregation in education and on the labour market.

Other gaps highlighted in indicators such as the Gender Equality Index (see below) demonstrate the continuing need for action by policymakers and social partners.

In order to visualise the main issues related to such a multidimensional topic, the European Institute of Gender Equality has developed an indicator that takes six core domains into account: work, money, knowledge, time, power and health. The Gender Equality Index assigns a score ranging from 1 (total inequality) to 100 (full equality). The scores are made up of two elements: gender gaps and levels of achievement (such as high participation in the labour force). The total scores are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Gender Equality Index 2010



Source: EIGE

As expected, according to the literature on the subject, the Gender Equality Index indicates that gender equality actions and performance tend to be more developed in northern European countries (for example, in Sweden, Denmark and Finland).

This report will assess to what extent a Gender Equality Index score might be linked to the level of activity of social partner organisations in this area – although it is acknowledged that this kind of activity is only one factor that might influence outcomes measured for these scores.

Gender equality in 2 social partner organisations

Through their role in policymaking, collective bargaining and in shaping working conditions at workplace level, social partners are in a unique position to foster and promote gender equality. The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of the role played by social partners in promoting gender equality at EU and national level.

Commitment to integrating gender equality concerns at EU level

The European cross-industry social partners have made a number of policy commitments to tackling gender inequality in the labour market. In 2005, BUSINESSEUROPE, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), the Centre of Employers and Enterprises providing Public Services (CEEP) and the European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (UEAPME) agreed the Framework of Actions on Gender Equality, which recognised the role of trade unions and employers' organisations in influencing the employment-related European policy process (BUSINESSEUROPE et al, 2005). An internal evaluation of the impact of this Framework, completed in 2009, concluded that positive steps have been taken by social partners since the adoption of the Framework (BUSINESSEUROPE et al, 2009). The Framework's four priorities for action – addressing gender roles, promoting women in decision-making, supporting work–life balance and tackling the gender pay gap – have often been tackled in an interconnected way, in joint social partner initiatives.

As part of the European social partners' work programme 2012–2014, employers' federations and trade unions agreed on joint activities to address gender equality in employment, including the gender pay gap. In May 2014, the European cross-industry social partners launched *A toolkit for gender equality in practice*, which highlights 100 initiatives by social partners across Europe (ETUC et al, 2014).

The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) has developed policy commitments to gender equality and, since 2007, has collected sex-disaggregated data on affiliates' membership and decision-making positions. Its Executive Committee adopted a *Resolution on Recommendations for improving the representation gap between men and women in leadership positions and decision-making structures in trade unions* in March 2011 (ETUC, 2011). At the Athens Congress (2011), ETUC committed itself to achieving gender balance in trade unions' decision-making bodies as 'a basis for union democracy and for realising gender equality at societal, economic and political levels'. By the 2015 Congress, ETUC is expected to have set quantifiable targets, such as anti-discrimination provision and to have achieved a 40:60 ratio of representation of women and men in statutory bodies.

In March 2012, ETUC's Executive Committee adopted an **Action Programme on Gender Equality** (ETUC, 2012). Several objectives were listed in this, including:

- implementing gender mainstreaming into all ETUC policies;
- achieving equal pay between women and men;
- eliminating gender representation gap in decision-making bodies;
- promoting the combination of work, family and private life;
- addressing the link between domestic violence and workplace rights.

UEAPME, CEEP and BUSINESSEUROPE promoted gender equality issues in the wider context of diversity. UEAPME and CEEP focused on diversity and non-discrimination by publishing good practice guides on diversity policy (including gender equality) (European Commission and UEAPME, 2009; CEEP, 2007). BUSINESSEUROPE similarly promoted

gender equality by publishing a position paper, ‘Promoting diversity in employment and workplaces’ in 2013 (BUSINESSEUROPE, 2013a).

National social partner actions to promote gender equality

At national level, most peak-level social partner organisations have been involved in promoting gender equality. As can be seen below, this has primarily focused on external actions affecting the labour market and wider society, with less emphasis placed on internal structures, particularly within employers’ organisations.

Priority level and content

There are clear differences between countries regarding the priority given to achieving gender equality. In the eastern European and Baltic states, the social partners are mainly involved in trying to achieve gender equality through formulating laws, strategies and policies through tripartite dialogue with national governments. Collective bargaining at different levels is used to promote gender equality primarily in the Nordic and Benelux countries and to some extent in France, Germany and Italy.

It is important to point out that while social partners throughout Europe have been working on gender issues, there are different definitions of gender equality, which are not always necessarily clear-cut or comparable. Some are enshrined in laws, while others have been adopted in social partners’ policy documents.

Social partners also provide different definitions depending on their historical, cultural and political context. In some cases, gender equality is focused on the concept of ‘equality of opportunity’ while others focus on ‘equality of outcomes’. The first category usually sees gender equality as part of broader diversity and inclusion strategies. Social partners using this definition usually implement a set of measures to give both women and men an equal chance to compete and participate within an established framework of goals and rules. The primary objective of this approach is to ensure that equal rights and opportunities are provided to all, and based on merit, irrespective of gender. In other cases, the definition is focused more on the concept of equality of outcome, where gender equality depends on the comparability of results achieved by women and men (for example, in terms of representation or pay).

This has led to divergent policy commitments among the social partners. Those concerned with equality of opportunity tend to focus on ensuring that women have access to the labour market, for example, through ensuring appropriate skills when leaving education or training, and the implementation of effective family-friendly legislation. Social partners concerned with equality of outcomes between women and men tend to be more focused on supporting special balancing measures to bring women up to the level that men have already reached on issues such as pay.

The different definitions, therefore, have different consequences for gender equality. The equality of opportunity approach attributes differences between women and men to their gender identity, which is inscribed in the process of a lifetime and learning experiences. Consequently, this approach often places women at a disadvantageous position as opposed to men and has the unintended outcome that the male norm remains the standard (EIGE, 2013; Walby, 2005). Conversely, the equality of outcomes approach is based on acknowledging the different contributions of men and women in a gender-segregated society (Walby, 2005) – hence this approach results in the implementation of special programmes and projects for the advancement of women.

However, these general distinctions are not always clear-cut and some organisations pursue a combination of goals. It must be noted that the research was not able to classify all social partners due to limited information on the gender equality definitions provided by correspondents in the Member States. In several cases, no definition was provided.

Patterns of activity among social partner organisations

As has already been mentioned, there are varying commitments and actions taken by individual trade unions and employer organisations in promoting gender equality. Indeed, information from the Member States showed that the level of attention given to gender issues by social partners can vary substantially, both in terms of whether they have identified specific strategic/policy level commitments and in terms of the types of actions undertaken. In order to illustrate the differences in the level of importance accorded to gender issues, Figure 3 illustrates the pattern across different Member States according to the following categories.

Group 1: Countries where the social partners have relatively well-developed activities on gender equality issues

In these countries, trade unions and employer organisations were found to have introduced internal or external policies. Some 18 countries (Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom) reported that equality issues feature in the strategic objectives of at least one of each side of industry within the Member State. In five countries included in this group, the importance given to gender issues extends across all partners (Austria, Finland, Ireland, Sweden and the United Kingdom). In the other countries, the priority given to gender equality is not extended across all the social partners. For example, in Croatia, the Croatian Employers' Organisation (CEA) and the Union of Autonomous Trade Unions of Croatia (UATUC) reported the implementation of several gender equality initiatives, while the attention paid by the country's other social partners is lower. In Denmark, it is difficult to make a clear-cut distinction between internal and external strategies and action plans. In principle, the strategies and action plans are directed externally, such as towards the sector, and the single confederation concerned decides how to implement it. Overall, the confederations support a gender mainstreaming strategy focusing on the labour market as a whole.

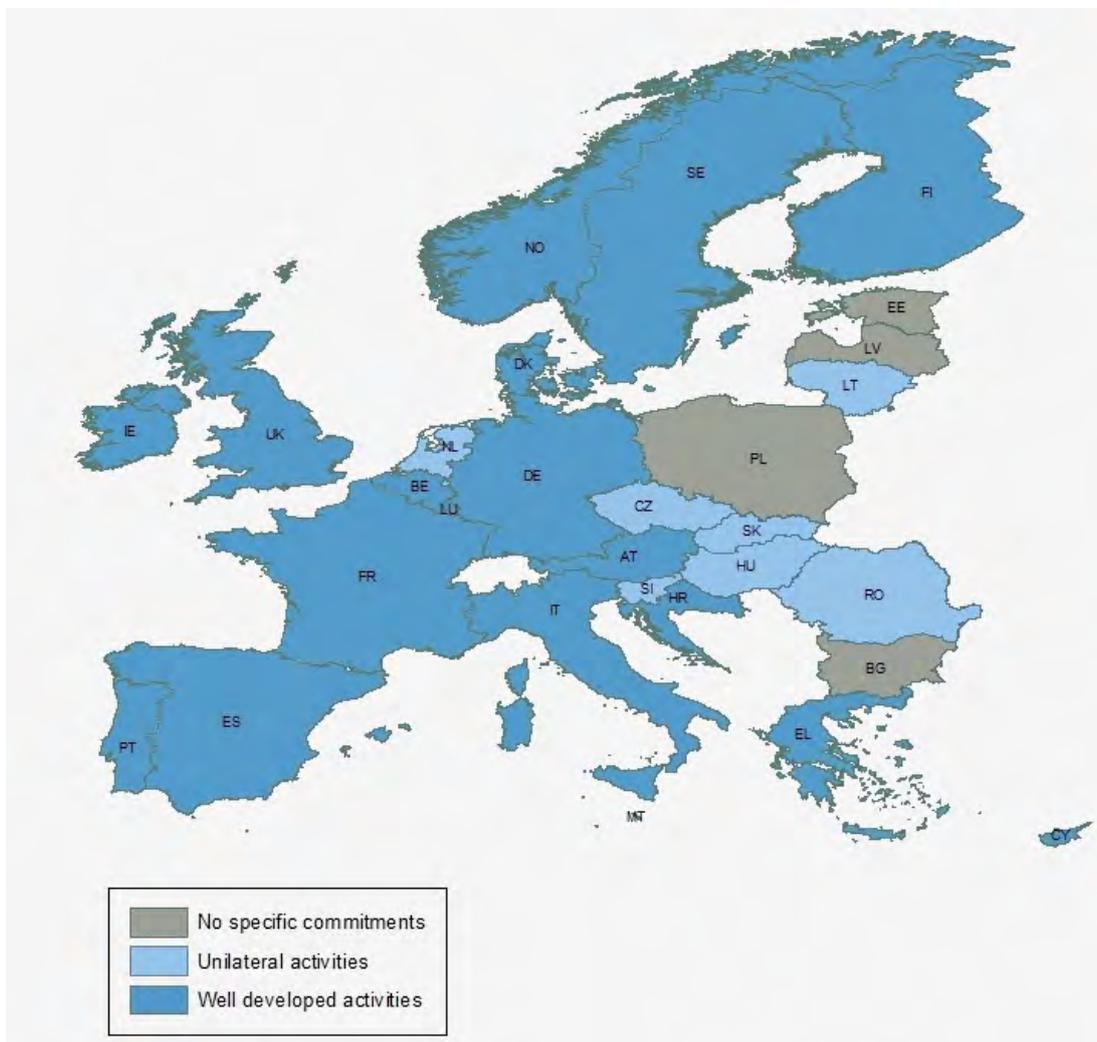
Group 2: Countries where the social partners have unilateral activities on gender equality issues

In these Member States, one type of social partner organisation (mainly trade unions) has made commitments on gender equality, while the other has addressed gender issues more marginally. In the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia), trade unions have specified policy commitments to equality issues. For example, in the Czech Republic, the only social partner regularly dealing with gender issues is the Czech-Moravian Confederation of the Czech Republic (ČMKOS), which promotes campaigns and monitors developments in this policy area. Similarly, in the Netherlands, gender equality is mainly addressed by the Federation of Dutch Trade Unions (FNV) and its members. Their policies are focused on reducing the gender pay gap and improving work-life balance. In Slovakia, the Confederation of Trade Unions and the Independent Christian Trade Unions of Slovakia (NKOS) have established committees to support activities on these issues. In Romania, too, it is the trade unions that include policy commitments on gender issues within their general strategies. In Lithuania, while trade union organisations have not developed strategies to address gender issues, each peak-level organisation has a centre or officer responsible for women's issues, promoting gender equality externally, mainly through educational activities.

Group 3: Countries where gender equality is not a stated priority by social partners and no specific policy commitments have been developed by social partner organisations

In Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia and Poland, none of the social partners has developed policies to address gender equality. In Bulgaria, although the social partners acknowledge that the issue is important, no specific measures have been implemented – what activity there is takes place mainly within the context of national policies. Similarly, in Latvia, social partners are trying to make sure the importance of the issue is grasped by their organisations as a whole, although there are no specific policies or concrete action.

Figure 3: Social partner commitment on gender-related issues



Source: Author's calculations, based on national contributions prepared by EIRO correspondents

Factors shaping commitment of the social partners to gender equality

In analysing the level of commitment by the social partners in the EU Member States and Norway, it is interesting to assess how great a link can be made with a country's performance overall on gender equality. Similarly, the overall industrial relations framework could also be considered to have a role to play in shaping the level and types of activities carried out by social partners.

Comparing the mapped level of commitment above with the position of countries on the Gender Equality Index, the following features emerge: countries reporting a relatively low level of engagement on gender equality are also ranked below the EU27 average on the index (Bulgaria 37.0, Poland 44.1, Latvia 44.4, Estonia 50), while countries included in the top 10 positions of the Gender Equality Index report a strong commitment towards gender equality among the social partners (with the exception of the Netherlands and Slovenia where the level of commitment is medium). However, the performance in the index ranking is not always reflected in the level of reported social partner activity. In this respect, it is interesting to see how social partner organisations perceive their own strategies and actions: for example, social partners in Greece and Italy display a relatively higher level of gender equality actions than would be expected given the scores of these countries on the index.

It is more difficult to establish links between patterns of industrial relations systems and the above mapping. In this respect, the analysis is based on a Eurofound study on pay carried out in 2014 (Eurofound, 2014). The study distinguishes the Member States according to the predominant level of bargaining and the degree of coordination in the wage-bargaining process. At first glance, these two variables do not seem to explain the links with social partner commitment on gender-related issues. Well-developed gender equality activities are reported among social partner organisations operating in very different types of social dialogue systems: the decentralised collective bargaining system (such as in Cyprus, Malta and the UK) and the more centralised one (such as in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden). Similarly, the degree of coordination of the wage mechanism is not likely to explain the level of commitment at country level: well-developed gender equality activities are reported both in countries with highly coordinated wage mechanisms (Austria, Norway and Sweden), and with a low level of coordination (Greece, Ireland, Malta and the UK). At the same time, countries reporting a low level of commitment are likely to be part of industrial regimes where the bargaining is usually decentralised and there is a low degree of coordination of wage mechanisms (Estonia, Latvia and Poland). The only exception is Bulgaria, where a low degree of coordination is coupled with an intermediate level of bargaining. These countries are usually characterised by weak and politicised social partners and no formal links between sectoral and company-level bargaining.

However, according to the information collected in this study, lower levels of activity on gender equality issues can also be linked to current problems facing the wider labour market and economy at national level. The most relevant reason is the declining level of importance accorded to gender issues since the beginning of the crisis. In particular, countries most affected by the crisis say they need to address other, ‘more pressing’ issues such as the risk of redundancy and policy changes affecting working conditions as a result of austerity measures.

Since the crisis, there has been a reported increase in gender discrimination and inequality in Greece. The Greek social partners identify women, particularly young women, as one of the most vulnerable groups: they are considered a burden by employers because of maternity issues and the multiple roles they are called on to play due to inadequate social support structures.

Information on the patterns across the countries for each type of action is presented below. Most of the social partners’ policy commitments on gender equality in the last decade are related to the external sphere. In particular, they tend to deal with women’s participation in the labour market, and, in general, external actions are more developed than internal ones. However, action plans and strategies that cover both an internal and external focus are fairly common among social partner organisations in countries where the commitment towards gender equality is shared between the social partners (such as Finland, Germany, Ireland and the UK). Internal plans are not present in all partner organisations in any given country, while the commitment to gender equality of social partner organisations in Croatia, Cyprus, France and Malta is reflected only in activities focused on the general labour market but not in the implementation of internal activities and plans.

Representation of women and men in social partner organisations

Information was collected at national level to try to generate a picture of the level of representation of men and women in social partner organisations, both within general membership, as well as in leadership roles. However, this is complicated by the fact that several social partner organisations report that no specific sex-disaggregated data are compiled and made available. This is more likely to be the case among employers’ organisations than among trade unions.

Trade unions

As individuals form the core of a union’s membership, breaking down the numbers by sex should give an accurate picture of the share of women.

Globally, the number of women union members has increased while at the same time total trade union membership has fallen. Nevertheless, in each country, the percentage of women remains below that of men as a general rule, with some exceptions. The Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria (CITUB) has a slight majority of women members (51%), as does the Confederations of Unions for Academic Professionals in Finland (AKAVA) (52%). Women are in the majority within the two Slovakian trade union organisations: the Confederation of Trade Unions (KOZ SR) and the Independent Christian Trade Unions of Slovakia (NKOS) (65% of members are women respectively). Women are also in the majority in the Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees (TCO) (61%), while in Slovenia there is an equal number of women and men in both the Association of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia (ZSSS) and the Confederation of Public Sector Trade Unions (KSJS). With regard to representation in different sectors, the increased representation of women could be linked to shifts in economic structures (away from manufacturing towards more women-dominated services sector), as well as reflecting the increasing labour force participation of women overall. Furthermore, trade union organisations with a higher share of women members tend to represent individuals in the professional sectors dominated by women. However, it must also be noted that many women are active in sectors (or occupations) in which there are fewer social partner organisations or have fixed term contracts, which makes them less likely to be organised as well. However, the comprehensive information that might allow for an estimate of the potential for women, not currently union members, to be organised is currently lacking.

Employers' organisations

When considering employers' organisations, it is important to keep in mind that the notion of membership is totally different to that of trade unions. Individuals are not, as such, members of the peak employers' organisations and membership is usually calculated on the basis of the number of member companies.

Gender distribution of leadership roles in social partner organisations

While the number of women in social partner organisations is increasing in line with the increased number of women entering into the labour market, women are still underrepresented in the decision-making bodies of these organisations. Again, data available from the trade unions in this regard are more extensive than those for employers' organisations, partly as a result of initiatives from the European level. The most comprehensive survey on women in trade unions is the Annual ETUC 8 March survey, which focuses on the gender situation within the trade unions (ETUC, 2010; ETUC, 2012).

A quick glance at the make-up of leadership teams in peak social partner organisations demonstrates that here, as in the wider economy, greater gender equality in decision-making has not yet been achieved.

Trade unions

The number of women in leadership roles in unions remains disappointing and lags behind the targets set by ETUC (ETUC, 2010b). The results of its survey are in line with the findings of the study entitled *The second sex of European trade unionism* (ETUC, 1999) and the ILO-ICFTU study (ILO, 2001): both studies highlight the fact that the number of women in trade union decision-making bodies is not proportional to the number of women members.

At first glance, data show that the situation has not substantially changed from the era of the two studies mentioned above. The number of women presidents is considerably lower than that of men presidents and, as shown in Table 2, according to national-level information, only eight countries have a woman president or secretary-general in their peak-level trade union organisations (Croatia, Denmark, France, Hungary, Italy, Slovakia, Sweden and the UK). The pattern is slightly more encouraging with regard to the number of women vice-presidents in trade unions, with at least one woman a vice-president or deputy secretary-general in 15 countries (Austria, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden and the UK). However, in most organisations, there are more men in the role of vice-president than women.

No particular patterns are visible in the distribution of women in leadership roles, for example in relation to the performance of different countries on the Gender Equality Index. Conversely, the presence of a woman as president or secretary-general of an organisation seems to have affected the importance given to gender equality issues. All the countries reporting a woman as president or secretary-general in at least one of their trade unions have also implemented action plans and strategies to promote gender equality issues. The only exception is Croatia, where no formal strategies or action plan have been developed.

In many countries (for example, in Austria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Sweden and the UK) some leadership roles are taken by women in some of the most important trade union organisations or confederations in terms of membership.

Table 1: *Women in leadership roles in trade unions (2013–2014)*

Country	Reporting a woman as president or secretary-general	Reporting a woman as vice-president or deputy secretary-general
Austria		Austrian Trade Union Federation (ÖGB)
Croatia	Independent Trade Unions of Croatia (NHS)	
Czech Republic		Czech-Moravian Confederation of the Czech Republic (ČMKOS)
Denmark	Confederation of Professionals in Denmark (FTF)	Danish Confederation of Trade Unions (LO); Danish Confederation Professional Associations (AC)
Finland		The Finnish Confederation of Professionals (STTK)
France	French Christian Workers' Confederation's (CFTC); French Confederation of Professional and Managerial Staff – General Confederation of Professional and Managerial Staff (CFE-CGC)	French Democratic Confederation of Labour (CFDT)
Germany		German Federation of Career Public Servants (dbb)
Hungary	Confederation of Unions of Professionals (ÉSZT) Forum for the Cooperation of Trade Unions (SZEF) National Confederation of Hungarian Trade Unions (MSZOSZ)	Autonomous Trade Unions Confederation (ASZSZ) ÉSZT SZEF National Federation of Workers' Councils (Munkástanácsok) MSZOSZ
Ireland		Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)
Italy	General Italian Confederation of Labour (CGIL)	CGIL
Latvia		Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia (LBAS)
Poland		All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions (OPZZ); Trade Unions Forum (FZZ)
Spain		
Slovakia	Independent Christian Trade Unions of Slovakia (NKOS)	Independent Christian Trade Unions of Slovakia (NKOS)
Slovenia		Independence, Confederation of New Trade Unions of Slovenia (KNSS)
Sweden	The Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees (TCO)	Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations (Saco); The Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO)
UK	Trade Union Congress (TUC)	Trade Union Congress (TUC)

Authors' data based on national contributions prepared by EIRO correspondents

With regard to the gender breakdown in national confederations' policy departments, comparison has been possible only for those departments indicating that they deal with similar issues. On this basis, the situation reflects the gender segregation of women in the labour market. Indeed, gender stereotypes are also reflected in departments where women are in charge in trade union organisations. Examples of departments with women in top positions included economic and social affairs, training and education and equal opportunities. Men were in charge in departments dealing with economic issues and legal or industrial affairs. At the same time, there seems to be a balance between women and men managing policy departments for health and safety, family and social policy, employment, communication and administration.

Employers' organisations

The data regarding women in leadership roles in employer organisations are patchy and difficult to draw conclusions from. In general, national-level information suggests that, as with trade unions, most presidents and secretaries-general in peak employer organisations are men. Only six countries report a woman president/secretary-general among one of their employers' organisations (Austria, Bulgaria, Finland, Hungary, Poland and the UK) in the period of time considered. Women were to be found in the role of vice-president or deputy secretary-general in 12 countries (Bulgaria, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden). Only a few organisations had more women than men vice-presidents. Again, no patterns can be observed that might link these findings to the wider gender equality performance of different Member States (largely because the numbers involved are very small).

Women presidents and secretaries-general are less likely to be found among the national employers' confederations or employers' organisations representing large private sector employers. Exceptions here are Germany, Italy, Latvia, Poland and the UK. Women in leadership positions in employers' organisations are more likely to be found in the public sector and among the chambers.

Table 2: *Women in leadership roles in employers' organisations (2013–2014)*

Country	Employers' organisations reporting a woman as president or secretary-general	Employers' organisations reporting a woman as vice-president or deputy secretary-general
Austria	Federal Economic Chamber (WKO)	
Bulgaria	Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry; Bulgarian Industrial Capital Association	Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Finland	The Church Employers (KiT)	The Church Employers (KiT)
France		General Confederation of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (CGPME)
Germany		German Confederation of Employers' Associations (BDA)
Hungary	National Association of Entrepreneurs and Employers (VOSZ) Hungarian Association of Craftsmen's Corporations (IPOSZ) National Association of Strategic and Public Utility Companies (Stratosz)	Confederation of Hungarian Employers and Industrialists (MGYOSZ) IPOSZ
Italy		Confindustria; Handicraft Confederation (Confartigianato); Retailers Confederation (Confesercenti); Trade Confederation (Confcommercio); Handicraft Confederation (CNA); Small and Medium Enterprises Confederation (Confapi)
Latvia		Latvian Employers' Confederation (LDDK)
Poland	Confederation Lewiatan	Employers of Poland; Confederation Lewiatan
Slovenia		Slovenian Employers' Association (ZDS); Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia (GZS); Slovenian Employers' Association of Crafts (ZDOPS)
Spain		Spanish Confederation of Employers' Organisations (CEOE);
Sweden		The Swedish Agency for Government Employers (SAGE); The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, (SALAR); Confederation of Swedish Enterprise (Svenskt Näringsliv)
UK	Confederation of British Industry (CBI)	

Source: *Authors' data based on national contributions prepared by EIRO correspondents*

A comparison of policy departments has been possible only for those dealing with similar issues. As a result, the picture seems to be similar to the trade union departments and broadly reproduces segregation in the labour market: women are usually in charge of human resource departments and external relations while men seem to head departments dealing with economic issues and industrial affairs.

Gender distribution among negotiators

The presence of women at the bargaining table and the articulation of women's concerns within an organisation were found to have a positive influence on equality bargaining. This is because collective bargaining and social dialogue are regarded as important tools to mainstream equal opportunities in labour relations and the labour market.

According to the data collected in this study, only a small number of national experts were able to provide data on the number of senior negotiators by sex. However, the available data show that the presence of women in collective bargaining is usually lower than the representation of women in the labour market, their membership of trade unions or their representation in social partner organisations. There are some exceptions: the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise (Svenskt Näringsliv) report an equal share of women and men among negotiators while Finnish trade union Confederations of Unions for Academic Professionals in Finland (AKAVA) report a higher number of women negotiators.

Internal actions: Promoting gender equality in social partner organisations 3

In recent years, there is a growing awareness that internal actions to promote gender equality at the organisational level can positively affect the shaping of external policies and can set an example for the wider labour market.

Internal gender equality strategies

Table 3 provides an overview of the pattern across the Member States for which information was available. It should be noted that in some countries information was not available from all the organisations and therefore they are not included in the table.

Internal plans and strategies are more developed among trade unions than employer organisations. Some 13 Member States reported the existence of action plans and strategies among trade unions, while only seven reported that (all or some) employer organisations had developed similar action plans and strategies.

Table 3: *Internal strategies and action plans developed by social partners (2013–2014)*

All national trade unions and all employers' organisations have internal action plans/strategies	Belgium, Finland, Ireland, Sweden, UK
Some but not all trade unions and/or employers' organisations have internal action plans/strategies	Austria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Slovenia
All national trade unions have internal action plans/ strategies but none of the employers' organisations	Netherlands, Portugal, Spain
Neither trade unions nor employers' organisations have internal action plans/strategies	Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland

Information not available for Bulgaria, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Luxembourg, Romania and Slovakia.

Source: *Authors' data based on national contributions prepared by EIRO correspondents*

In the first group, action plans and strategies are implemented by all the peak social partner organisations reported in this research. This is the case in five Member States (Belgium, Finland, Ireland, Sweden and United Kingdom). Conversely, in the second group (Austria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, France, Italy, Norway and Slovenia), internal plans are also well developed, but not in all the analysed peak-level organisations.

In the third group, action plans and strategies are more developed among trade union organisations compared to employer organisations.

Table 3 shows that Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland and Slovakia do not report any systematic way of dealing with equality issues within their social partner organisations. However, significant differences can be found among this group regarding the overall position on gender issues. While both the social partners in Croatia have been actively involved in tackling external gender issues, in Poland, gender equality is perceived only as a side issue within the social partner organisations.

In this respect, a particular link with the Gender Equality Index emerges and is observable in other domains. Countries where more internal strategies and action plans in favour of gender equality have been identified generally score high in the Gender Equality Index, while those lacking specific actions score quite low. Countries reporting the development of internal strategies to address gender issues in all trade union and employer organisations are all ranked above the EU27 average, while countries where no action plans have been developed usually rank below the EU27 average. In the rest of the countries (where internal action plans are more or less developed), no specific patterns are discernible.

There is no specific pattern with regard to the relationship between the development of internal strategies and action plans, and the industrial relation systems in the country. This lack of pattern could be explained by the fact that internal policies tend to be very much driven by the initiative of individuals, which could be unaffected by wider societal and institutional structures.

Social partners have used various means to transform structures and processes within their organisations and to tackle the under-representation of women in decision-making positions. The first part of this chapter describes the current position in relation to the gender balance in social partner organisations and structures, providing a general overview of the number of women members, and their representation in decision-making bodies and in collective bargaining. This section is followed by a description of the main strategies adopted by social partners to address these issues, such as having women's committees and departments within social partner organisations, establishment of quotas and implementation of more gender-neutral approaches in conducting trade union affairs.

Measures to improve internal gender equality in social partner organisations

Since 2008, social partner organisations have introduced some measures to address the problem of under-representation of women in their organisation and to promote gender equality through their working methods. One of the factors that can help to determine the level of internal (and external) commitment on gender equality is the role of gender equality units and bodies.

Role of gender equality units and bodies

The presence of specific bodies devoted to gender equality within social partner organisations could play an important role in facilitating gender mainstreaming activities and initiatives, both within the organisation and during collective bargaining. More trade unions than employer organisations have units, committees or departments focused on gender issues. Table 4 indicates the organisations identified as having a specific body dealing with gender equality.

Table 4: *Social partners with a specific body for gender issues (2013–2014)*

Country	Trade union(s)	Employers' organisation(s)
Austria	Austrian Trade Union Federation (ÖGB); Chamber of Labour (AK)	Federation of Austrian Industry (IV)
Belgium	Confederation of Christian Trade Unions (CSC/ACV); Belgian General Federation of Labour (FGTB/ABVV)	
Bulgaria	Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria (CITUB); Confederation of Labour 'Podkrepa'	
Croatia	Independent Trade Unions of Croatia; Union of Autonomous Trade Unions of Croatia; Worker's Trade Unions Association of Croatia (CTUWA)	
Cyprus	Democratic Labour Federation of Cyprus (DEOK); Pancyprian Federation of Labour (PEO); Cyprus Workers' Confederation (SEK)	Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI) Cyprus Employers and Industrialists Federation (OEB)
Czech Republic	Czech-Moravian Confederation of the Czech Republic (ČMKOS)	
Finland	The Finnish Confederation of Professionals (STTK); The Confederations of Unions for Academic Professionals in Finland (AKAVA)	Confederation of Finnish Industry
France	French Democratic Confederation of Labour (CFDT); General Confederation of Labour-Force Ouvrière (FO)	General Confederation of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (CGPME)
Germany	Confederation of German Trade Unions (DGB); German Federation of Career Public Servants (dbb)	

Country	Trade union(s)	Employers' organisation(s)
Greece	General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE)	
Hungary	National Confederation of Hungarian Trade Unions (MSZOSZ); Metalworkers Union (VASAS); Federation of Trade Unions of the Chemical, Energy and Allied Workers (VDSZ); National Confederation of Workers' Councils (Munkástanácsok Országos Szövetsége)	
Ireland	Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)	Irish Business and Employers' Confederation (Ibec)
Italy	General Italian Confederation of Labour (CGIL); Italian Workers Trade Union (CISL); Italian Union of Labour (UIL); General Union of Labour (UGL)	Handicraft Confederation (Confartigianato); Retailers Confederation (Confesercenti); Trade Confederation (Confcommercio); Agriculture Confederation (Confagricoltura); Handicraft Confederation (CNA); Small and Medium Enterprises Confederation (Confapi)
Latvia	Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia (LBAS)	
Malta	Malta Workers' Union (UHM)	
Poland	Trade Union Solidarność (NSZZ); Alliance of Trade Unions (OPZZ)	
Portugal	General Confederation of Portuguese Workers (CGTP); General Workers' Union (UGT)	
Slovakia	Confederation of Trade Unions (KOZ SR); Independent Christian Trade Unions of Slovakia (NKOS)	
Slovenia	Workers organisation (ZSSS)	
Sweden	The Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO); The Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees (Saco)	The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, SALAR (SKL)
UK	Trades Union Congress (TUC)	

Source: Author, based on national contributions prepared by EIRO correspondents

To expand on the data given in Table 4:

- in Germany, the Confederation of German Trade Unions (DGB) and the German Federation of Career Public Servants (dbb) have policy departments focusing on gender issues;
- in Slovakia, the Confederation of Trade Unions (KOZ SR) and the Independent Christian Trade Unions of Slovakia NKOS have committees and coordination bodies dealing with gender equality;
- Polish unions Solidarność and the Alliance of Trade Unions (OPZZ) have established advisory bodies to support the empowerment of women workers at different levels of decision-making;
- in Finland, the Confederation of Professionals (STTK) and the Confederations of Unions for Academic Professionals in Finland (AKAVA) have specific experts to deal with gender issues.

As can be seen in Table 4, employers' organisations do not generally have this kind of department: these are in fact present only in France's General Confederation of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (CGPME), and the Irish Business and Employers' Confederation (IBEC). In some countries, gender equality is dealt with by other departments (such as in the Cypriot Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Cyprus Employers and Industrialists Federation and in the Confederation of Finnish Industries). In other countries, such as Austria and Sweden, employer organisations have posts specifically dealing with gender equality. The Federation of Austrian Industry (IV) has a person responsible for the agenda 'Women-Work-Family' within the education and society department, while the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) has full-time employees within its health and equality department to promote gender equality. They work with other departments within the association, as well as helping to promote gender mainstreaming, both internally and externally in municipalities.

In some cases, such as in Italy, gender equality issues are dealt with through special structures and committees whose main role is to support women entrepreneurs in specific sectors.

In some organisations, there is an argument for gender equality to be mainstreamed; however, it is difficult to assess whether existing commitments to gender mainstreaming are effective in practice. Knowledge and capacity gaps on gender mainstreaming can hinder its implementation. It is also difficult to establish the extent to which the adoption of a mainstreaming strategy leads to a strengthening or a watering down of gender equality commitments at an organisational level. Indeed, the adoption of the integrated approach to gender equality often contributes to the disappearance of specific actions targeting gender inequalities in specific domains or issues. If commitments to gender mainstreaming do not materialise (due to lack of political will and/or knowledge and capacity gaps), gender inequalities might not be adequately addressed.

Tools to promote gender equality within social partner organisations

Social partner organisations have developed tools to support internal gender equality, including:

- efforts to gather sex-disaggregated data;
- the introduction of quota systems;
- gender-awareness training and activities;
- measures to encourage a good work–life balance.

In some cases, these activities are part of a wider action plan encompassing both internal as well as external equality priorities. A few have been part of explicit gender mainstreaming strategies.

Quota systems to increase the number of women in decision-making functions were introduced by trade unions in Austria, Croatia, France, Germany Italy, Portugal, Spain and the UK. According to the information collected, these have been mainly introduced in order to achieve a more equal representation of women and men within their structures, especially on their executive bodies. These systems are mainly implemented through mandatory resolutions or by changes in the organisation's statutes. For example, in Austria, the ÖGB adopted a resolution in 2006 to ensure that at least a third of all ÖGB functions or positions are filled by women. Similarly, in Italy, the General Italian Confederation of Work (CGIL) and the German Federation of Career Public Servants (dbb) introduced quotas into their statutes. In Spain, the UGT included in its statutes a quota system where the presence of each sex in decision-making bodies cannot be lower than 40%. In the UK, the Trade Union Congress (TUC) introduced quotas for women's participation in union delegations to conferences and quotas for women's participation in committees, including in the General Council.

Quota systems have also been introduced to achieve a more equal representation of women and men among negotiators during collective bargaining: for example, by the ÖGB in Austria, the General Workers' Union in Portugal and the TUC in the UK. The TUC has also introduced quotas for negotiating teams.

In the Czech Republic, training and awareness-raising activities have largely been limited to the development of handbooks and guidelines (including some on collective bargaining). Training on gender equality has been provided in Slovenia. In Cyprus, social partners carry out initiatives to support guidelines on gender mainstreaming on specific topics such as collective bargaining, social dialogue and policymaking. In Sweden, training is well developed among social partners: the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) offers training on how to work actively with gender equality, in cooperation with Karlstad University, while the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO) works actively on organising seminars on gender equality.

Trade unions have implemented awareness-raising and training activities for women trade unionists. Tools to carry out internal training and awareness activities have been developed by peak trade union organisations in Belgium, the Czech Republic, Greece, the Netherlands and Slovenia. The Federation of Dutch Trade Unions (FNV) introduced a checklist on diversity and gender issues for negotiators.

For their internal staff, the Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees (Saco) has developed a checklist to be used for persons going on parental leave for a period longer than one month, as well as a gender mainstreamed strategy for the recruitment process, which ensures that only competences are in focus during the recruitment process. A number of social partner organisations, trade unions in particular, have developed enhanced policies for family-friendly working (leave and flexible working policies) for their own staff, in some cases with an emphasis on enhancing the rights of fathers to family leave.

The actions to address women's representation internally in social partner organisations link to their external commitments on women's representation in decision-making positions in general. For example, promoting the balanced participation of women and men in decision-making is one of the objectives incorporated in the support plan for implementing the principle of equality between men and women of the Czech-Moravian Confederation (ČMKOS) and individual trade unions in the Czech Republic. Within the trade union, ČMKOS has a particular goal to increase the number of women in the decision-making bodies of trade unions and to promote their greater participation in collective bargaining.

Challenges in implementing internal equality actions

According to the information collected by the national correspondents for EIRO, social partners report several challenges preventing the implementation of effective internal gender equality actions. These can be classified as challenges which have been recognised generally – and therefore can be addressed – and challenges which remain invisible due to lack of awareness or 'gender blindness' – and hence are less easy to tackle.

Recognised challenges

Overall, social partner organisations remain dominated by men. The under-representation of women in the decision-making process is problematic, because the specific barriers faced by women are not sufficiently considered by social partners in their internal structures. This usually leads to a lack of awareness and action on gender inequality issues. The removal of *de jure* barriers to women accessing decision-making positions in social partner organisations is insufficient because *de facto* barriers still exist.

Several challenges have been identified:

- There is a lack of senior-level commitment and priority to gender equality issues in social partner organisations. Lack of commitment in practice to practical actions towards gender equality in decision-making at a senior management level appears to be a common issue. The relatively small representation of women among peak positions and the relative paucity of tools to enhance a more equal representation can be regarded as signs of weak political commitment to promote gender equality internally. Only a few social partner organisations have established quotas to ensure a more equal representation of women and men in top management positions. Quotas are opposed by a number of organisations for different reasons, mostly because they say they prefer to focus on suitability for the post rather than on gender in making appointments.

- The persistence of gender stereotypes in relation to the role and function of women and men in trade unions and employers' organisations could be an underlying issue. This can be linked to working practices and resistance to certain roles being offered as part-time positions, internal discrimination as well as cultural factors. Persisting segregation of the labour market hinders the possibility for social partners' organisations to mainstream gender in social dialogue. In sectors still highly dominated by men, gender equality concerns have found it difficult to find their place on the agenda.
- The lack of resources for gender equality and gender mainstreaming actions is reported by several social partner organisations. This is partly linked to the crisis and austerity reforms. In Croatia, because of the crisis, the attention of the social partners has been directed towards preserving existing jobs rather than gender issues. Similarly, in Cyprus, most social partners report a constant decrease in the budget allocated to the Gender Equality Committee in Employment and Vocational Training and reduced funding for social partners in the National Mechanism for Women's Rights. To an extent, lack of resources could reflect the relatively low importance accorded to gender issues on the agenda of some social partners, as reported in Poland. Both in Belgium and in the Czech Republic, some social partners have faced resource problems also because of the scant interest demonstrated with regard to these issues among lower positions and at a lower level (sector, company). In the Czech Republic, this could be due to the lack of resources associated with qualified personnel to deal with these issues. Similarly, in Belgium, many initiatives undertaken by the social partners have not always been effectively implemented among their members.
- Limited knowledge of how to mainstream gender in day-to-day work activities is a factor hindering gender equality. One of the main challenges faced by social partners in the implementation of internal gender equality actions is due to their limited understanding of gender equality issues. For example, in Italy, the difficulties in applying a gender mainstreaming perspective in daily activities show the persistent gap between rules and laws enforced and the weakness of practices. Further training would be needed in some organisations to ensure that all staff understand gender issues and know how to promote gender equality within their organisation.

Hidden challenges

Overall, social partners seem to recognise the need to take into account the impact of gender relations on their internal functioning, but lack of awareness of the impact of gender on social partners' work and functioning/limited understanding of why gender considerations are relevant continues to undermine their efforts. Some social partner organisations appear to remain gender blind, assuming that a policy or programme does not have an unequal (even if unintended) outcome on women and men and, through their internal practices, underline stereotypes regarding the division of roles of women and men in the society. For example, while in some social partner organisations, the gender perspective has focused on the equal representation of both women and men at a decision-making level, there is less emphasis on the day-to-day structures that facilitate women's involvement and participation. There is a danger that social partners believe that they have fully integrated gender concerns in their organisation if they have a gender balanced representation of women and men (as is the case in Latvia or Lithuania where women are well represented at the top management of peak-level trade unions). However, as a general rule, top level decision-making positions are still held by men – and this is often seen by women within the organisation to be a reward for men's time commitment. As women are not able to commit as much time as men, they seldom get elected to decision-making positions. This difference in commitment to the organisation is often attributed to a lack of interest from women. However, this is due more to working time arrangements and to the functioning of social partner organisations themselves (Buscatto, 2009). Since meetings are often held at night, many women cannot attend due to care and family responsibilities.

Also, the socialisation among members is often based upon masculine norms and routines. Characteristics traditionally attributed to men, such as strong public speaking skills, strength and leadership are valued. Due to the gendered socialisation process whereby women are requested to be quiet and avoid confrontation with authorities, and men are expected to be bold and to speak out, men have usually more experience in public speaking than women. As a result, the specific issues related to women are only marginally addressed.

These different analyses were clearly visible in social partners' responses. In Cyprus, some representatives have observed that conditions need to be created to allow women to take up leadership roles and participate in certain functions (for example, changes to the times that meetings are held and childcare availability). In Malta, women members of the General Workers' Union (GWU) said they had difficulty in attending union activities, which often take place after office hours, due to family responsibilities, and that it was hard to participate in meetings where speaking time was often monopolised by men.

A comparison of the representation of women in social partners' decision-making structures is somewhat problematic due to different organisational structures and ways of reporting this representation. Women can be found in the very top positions in trade unions in 15 countries, although women are more likely to be in the role of vice-president/deputy secretary-general rather than being president/secretary-general. Women appear to be less well represented in top positions in the peak employers' organisations. Dedicated units on gender equality issues were found in approximately half of the peak-level trade union organisations, and in other cases gender came within the remit of other departments. Employers' organisations were found to be much less likely to have dedicated units in charge of gender equality in employment issues.

Key barriers to achieving more representation of work in social partner organisations, internal structures were identified as: lack of senior commitment; persistence of gender stereotypes; lack of resources; and lack of knowledge of how to mainstream gender. In some cases efforts are undermined by a lack of attention to how internal practices might contribute to reproducing gender stereotypes by reinforcing masculine norms and routines (such as the timing of meetings and reward structures which work against women with caring responsibilities). Measures to address the challenges were not prevalent in the national reports, although some social partners are trying to address the issues through setting targets/quotas, changing their working practices to adopt a more gender-friendly working environment (such as having meetings and work reunions during working day core hours) and undertaking awareness-raising interventions.

External actions: Promoting gender equality in the labour market and society 4

Social partners' strategies and actions

The extent to which social partners have been developing action plans and strategies on gender equality in the labour market varies significantly across organisations and Member States. Table 5 maps those countries where external action plans and strategies to promote gender equality have been developed, indicating whether these relate to all or some of the national level trade union and employer organisation partners.

Table 5: *External action plans and strategies developed by social partners (2013–2014)*

All national trade unions and all or some employers' organisations have external action plans/strategies	Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, Sweden and United Kingdom*
National trade unions have external action plans/ strategies but none of the employers' organisations	Belgium, Czech Republic, Greece, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain
Neither trade unions nor employers' organisations have external action plans/strategies	Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia

Information not available for Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Romania.

* In Cyprus, Denmark, Italy and Sweden only some employers' organisations have action plans/strategies. The exceptions in Italy and Sweden are Confindustria and Svenskt Näringsliv. In Denmark the only organisation not reporting the implementation of an action plan is the Danish Federation of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (HRV), while in Cyprus all organisations except the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI) report the existence of a plan or strategy.

Source: *Authors' data based on national contributions prepared by EIRO correspondents*

In the first group social partners implement a coordinated and comprehensive approach towards gender equality issues, with both being involved in strategies and action plans and having gender equality on their policy agenda. These action plans have been developed separately among social partner organisations; however they have been developed by all social partners in five Member States (Finland, France, Germany, Ireland and the UK).

As can be seen in the second group (Belgium, the Czech Republic, Greece, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain) gender equality issues tend to be a priority for trade unions, while employers' organisations deal with the issue only marginally (it should be noted that no information was collected as part of this research on relevant actions at the company level). Hence, employers' organisations tend to approach gender equality on the basis of one-off projects rather than on long-term action plans or coordinated strategies.

In the third group, there is a more ad-hoc approach to the promotion of activities that address a wide range of issues. These initiatives might lack continuity and may encounter obstacles in addressing complex topics such as gender mainstreaming or the gender pay gap. Sometimes activities are not defined by a specific agenda, but are mainly determined by available funding such as European funds. In this context the implementation of external action plans does not seem to be related with the GEI or the national industrial relations systems.

No direct link can be found with the Gender Equality Index (GEI). Indeed, countries reporting gender strategies implemented by both the social partners score in very different positions in the Gender Equality Index. Cyprus, Germany, Italy and Luxembourg rank below the EU27 average and the other countries above it. However, countries where no strategies have been implemented by the social partners usually score below the EU27 average.

According to the information collected, national industrial relation systems do not seem to be directly related to the development of external strategies and action plans among the social partners. As a result, no clear patterns emerge when comparing the implementation of strategies and action plans, and the extent and form of social partner involvement in industrial relations.

Social partner strategies and actions on the promotion of gender equality in the labour market and employment across Member States and Norway are closely linked to the four priority areas identified in the Framework of Actions on Gender Equality by the European social partners, namely:

- (i) addressing gender roles in society and in the labour market;
- (ii) promoting a balanced participation of women and men in decision-making;
- (iii) supporting work–life balance;
- (iv) tackling the gender gap.

The external actions taken by social partner organisations to promote gender equality in employment have either been undertaken by single organisations (unilateral activities) or jointly between employers and workers' organisations (bipartite) or between employers and workers' organisations and government (tripartite activities).

In the last decade, most of the social partners' actions on gender equality have been external activities. Their development and nature vary significantly between countries and are often linked to the extent to which equality is already enshrined in national legislation and policymaking. Actions address the fact that women continue to face specific barriers to getting jobs and progressing in the labour market, mostly due to:

- family responsibilities outside the workplace;
- the persistence of gender stereotypes hindering women's (and men's) access to non-traditional jobs and to high-level positions;
- gender-specific forms of discrimination, including sexual harassment.

It should be noted that trade unions generally assign high priority to implementing gender equality actions in the labour market and employment (although it must be borne in mind that individual employer actions are not the subject of this research). Overall, trade unions tend to call for a stronger role of the state in ensuring gender equality, often lobbying for changes in legislation, towards more binding regulations and measures for companies. It is also important to note that gender equality initiatives can be found more commonly in highly unionised sectors (particularly where women dominate the workforce). Employer organisations generally prefer company-level solutions and lobby for these – and tend to oppose additional regulations. Sector-specific initiatives have been implemented in several Member States, such as the UK and France, but gender issues are mostly addressed at cross-sectoral level.

In some countries, social partners' activities are informed by surveys and research they carry out on workers' views and on the position of women and men in the labour market. Social partners also prepare arguments to show the benefits of gender equality. In Belgium, the Czech Republic, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Slovenia and Sweden, dedicated bodies have been established for monitoring and evaluating gender equality in the labour market. In Sweden, all employers with more than 25 employees have to perform salary surveys every three years and the Confederation of Professional Employees (TCO) performs annual surveys. In Slovenia, the Association of Trade Unions of Slovenia established a monitoring and evaluation committee, while in the Czech Republic the Czech-Moravian Confederation (ČMKOS) monitors collective agreements and commitments relating to gender issues. In Greece, a regular evaluation procedure regarding gender has been established. Other social partners also conduct or supervise studies and surveys on working conditions and social issues from a gender perspective. The Croatian Employers' Organisation (CEA) conducted a survey on childcare provisions. The Cyprus Employers and Industrialists' Federation (OEB) carried out a survey on the position of women in the Cypriot labour market. The Latvian Employers' Confederation (LDDK) analysed gender equality in working conditions and risk surveys.

This chapter provides an overview of the most important actions implemented by social partner organisations since 2009 in relation to the headings of the Framework of Actions on Gender Equality.

Addressing gender roles in society and in the labour market

The first priority of the Framework of Actions – addressing gender roles in society and in the labour market – arguably relates to an issue of the greatest significance for the overall framework for action on gender equality. However, it could also be considered to be the area where social partners have the most limited direct influence through workplace relations and collective bargaining. Traditional gender roles are primarily challenged through awareness-raising activities by tripartite or bipartite organisations, or even unilaterally. These activities have mainly focused on challenging traditional patterns of labour market segregation and emphasising the importance of the role of women in the economy, in decision-making and in entrepreneurship. Social partners in most countries have some initiatives in this area.

In some countries, commitments relating to gender equality are included, as an overarching issue, in framework collective agreements. In France, regulations dating back to 2001 and 2006 require certain gender equality issues to be negotiated both at sectoral and company level. This means that an equality agreement has to be concluded in each sector. Companies with more than 50 employees are also required to negotiate on gender issues and on improving gender equality at company level each year. If the social partners conclude an agreement, negotiations on such issues may subsequently be conducted on a triennial basis. Since 2012, penalties apply for non-compliance. Agreements have to touch on access to employment and training, promotion, working conditions (in particular for part-time workers), and work–life balance. Gender issues must also be taken into account in wage bargaining.

In the Czech Republic, gender equality is required to underpin all collective bargaining negotiations.

In Austria, Cyprus, Germany, Italy and Sweden, the social partners carried out specific projects in line with the development of strategies and action plans. In several Member States, topics such as horizontal and vertical segregation in employment and education choices have recently been the subject of campaigns. In Austria and Germany, for example, the social partners, in collaboration with the government, implemented a project to attract more women to employment in non-traditional sectors. In an effort to tackle occupational stereotypes early, a number of countries are running ‘girls’ days’, which provide girls with the opportunity to experience technical and other non-traditional occupations for women. In Germany, the social partners are now also supporting ‘boys’ days’, in which boys can get a feel for jobs that are traditionally dominated by women. Resistance to men/boys entering professions traditionally dominated by women has been considerably stronger than resistance to women/girls entering professions that are traditionally dominated by men. Therefore, this initiative is a particularly good example of ensuring that gender initiatives are not seen simply as ‘women’s initiatives’ and that successfully embed men/boys into a gender equality action.

Both initiatives have been evaluated and regularly receive very positive feedback. Evaluation of the girl’s day in Germany showed that a significant number of young women subsequently applied for apprenticeships in the organisations (or sectors) they visited.

In several countries, such as in Cyprus and Spain, social partners have commissioned and published studies focusing on the role of women in the labour market. In Spain, this has included publication of a guide on eliminating gender stereotypes in society.

The Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia (LBAS) has produced several brochures and awareness-raising material for women. In 2012 and 2013, the Women's Centre of the Lithuanian Trade Union Confederation (LPSK) organised several roundtable discussions on:

- the role of women in the Lithuanian society;
- women's employment and economic growth;
- opportunities for women in business and the public sector;
- challenges faced by women seeking to have a career.

Employers' organisations often focus on raising awareness and promoting women's entrepreneurship. In Estonia, for instance, the employers' organisation EVEA has implemented an annual award for the 'best woman entrepreneur'. The Association of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia (ZSSS) awards the annual Mogota Rose (Roža mogota), which rewards achievements in promoting equal opportunities between women and men.

Other gender-related issues at the workplace, such as sexual harassment and violence against women, are also being addressed by social partner organisations. In Greece, the National General Collective Agreement 2004–2005 (implemented in subsequent years) included a commitment to address moral and sexual harassment at the workplace. This has led to efforts to align the national framework to the EU legal framework on the prohibition of sexual harassment in the workplace and tackle the issue of violence against women in the workplace.

In Italy, the trade union CISL and employer organisation Confindustria have worked together on projects to increase women's participation in the labour market. Some social partners, such as the General Italian Confederation of Labour (CGIL) have also collaborated with civil society organisations and NGOs to raise public awareness on more general issues, such as gender-based violence, by helping to organise activities connected to the international day against violence against women (25 November).

Several monitoring activities ensure that commitments to gender equality are implemented. Sometimes, it is the social partners themselves who carry out the monitoring.

- In Slovenia, the Association of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia established a monitoring and evaluation Committee for Equal Opportunities.
- In Germany, the employer organisations monitor activities in the private industry as a result of a national agreement signed in 2001 with the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth.
- In France, the effectiveness of strategies to ensure internal and external gender equality is covered through national framework agreements and gender mainstreaming in company bargaining.

In other countries, specific bodies are devised to carry out the monitoring. In Italy, for example, a national agreement covering the most important sectors of the economy provided for the creation of an observatory. A regular report on employment-related issues is also required in Italy for national agreements concluded in the major economic sectors (applying to public and private companies with more than 100 employees). In addition, at workplace level, an elected bilateral advisory board, mainly operating in the public sector and in privately run large companies, monitors and controls actions and plans related to gender issues.

Promoting a balanced participation of women and men in decision-making

Many social partners are keen to increase the proportion of women in decision-making positions. However, as this section shows, employers and trade unions have developed different approaches to address the underrepresentation of women in collective bargaining processes, policymaking and wider society.

Proposals for a European-wide regulation on quotas for women in board-level positions have led to a lot of activity in terms of gathering national data, raising awareness and lobbying. In Denmark, for instance, the Confederation of Danish Industry (DI) has conducted an analysis of women on the boards of companies in Denmark while, in Ireland, the business and employer's organisation IBEC has organised a national debate on this issue. The Danish analysis showed an increased share of women in large public limited companies from 2008 to 2013.

Quota systems to increase the number of women in decision-making functions were also introduced by trade unions in Austria, Croatia, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom. These have mainly been introduced into the social partner statutes in order to balance the representation of women and men within their structures and in particular in their executive bodies.

So far, quota systems have mainly been implemented among trade unions in order to increase the number of women in governing bodies. The implementation generally is carried out through the so-called legislative quotas (mandatory resolutions, changes in the organisation's statutes). For example, in Austria, the ÖGB adopted a resolution in 2006 to ensure that at least a third of all ÖGB functions or positions are filled with women. Similarly, in Italy, the General Italian Confederation of Work (CGIL) and the German Federation of Career Public Servants (dbb) introduced quotas into their statutes. In Spain, the UGT included in its statutes a quota system where the proportion of each sex in decision-making bodies cannot be lower than 40%. In the United Kingdom, the Trade Union Congress (TUC) introduced quotas for women's participation in union delegations to conferences and quotas for women's participation in committees including the General Council.

Quota systems have also been introduced in an effort to balance the representation of women and men among negotiators during collective bargaining. In Austria, the ÖGB introduced quotas (albeit informally) in order to ensure that women participate on negotiating teams. In Spain, the UGT introduced quotas among their negotiators. The TUC in the United Kingdom gives training to men and women on negotiation techniques that are gender-sensitive, and they also introduced quotas for negotiating teams.

Irrespective of the sides taken in this debate, many employers' organisations (sometimes with the support of government or European funding) are implementing measures to support women in obtaining leadership positions either through mentorship or networking opportunities.

The Croatian Employers' Association (CEA) and the national Ombudsperson for Gender Equality carry out a biannual project entitled 'Women in managing boards' to analyse the barriers to better representation for women on management boards.

Some social partner organisations have also been involved in more general actions to increase women's participation in decision-making bodies at a national level.

- In Bulgaria, during the 14th international trade union women's school, the Commission for Gender, Family, Women and Children of the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions of Bulgaria (CITUB) organised a discussion on the issues of women's leadership in business, politics and trade unions and the challenges they face in times of economic crisis.

- In Cyprus, the Democratic Labour Federation of Cyprus (DEOK) was involved in an awareness-raising campaign to increase the participation of women in the 2011 parliamentary elections.

Work–life balance measures

Most initiatives carried out by the social partners aim to improve work–life balance, and these are carried out through collective bargaining, tripartite action, bipartite social dialogue and unilateral activities.

In collective agreements, the focus has been on improving leave provision and flexibility about where and when people work so that it is easier for them to balance work and family life.

- In Bulgaria, the social partners signed two national agreements in 2010 aimed at facilitating work–life balance: the national agreement regulating home-based work and the national agreement for the organisation and implementation of teleworking. The Labour Code was amended accordingly in 2012.
- In Malta, social partner organisations, particularly trade unions, emphasised the importance of gender issues, mainly family-friendly measures, in collective bargaining negotiations and in social dialogue, in order to improve women’s participation in the labour market.
- In Norway, collective agreements have also given fathers the right to paid leave (two weeks when their baby is born).

As a result of tripartite dialogue, the cross-industry social partners in Germany signed a ‘Charter for family-friendly working hours’ agreeing to provide options to promote family-friendly working hours in establishments and to develop more flexible working time (including flexible working hours for executive positions). Best practice examples are the collective agreement on working life and demography concluded in the chemical industry in 2008 and the demography agreement concluded for the railways operator Deutsche Bahn.

In Greece, the social partners are finalising joint actions under the guidance of the ILO for 2014–2015. These aim to examine and map ways of measuring the impact of increased gender discrimination on conditions of work and pay. Awareness-raising actions have been developed for both employers and employees.

Many trade unions have taken unilateral action to raise awareness of the importance of a good work–life balance and to promote measures encouraging it, as well as campaigning for legislative change, particularly with regard to the provision of leave. For example, the women’s section of the Union of Autonomous Trade Unions of Croatia (UATUC) participated in drafting and amending the Gender Equality Act and Act on Parental and Paternity Benefits. Particular attention (especially in relation to the campaign for International Women’s Day in 2010) was paid to the special provisions in collective agreements for workers with family obligations. In March 2010, women’s groups from all three peak trade unions organised a common campaign and a press conference on the issue of the protection of women and workers with family obligations through collective agreements.

In order to contribute to the improvement of work–life balance, many social partners have developed awareness-raising days, training activities for their members, and guidelines and toolkits. Trade unions have mainly implemented training activities aimed at including a gender perspective in working time negotiations.

In Ireland, the social partners have carried out the following activities:

- To assist employers in proactively and positively managing their workforce during pregnancy, maternity leave and on return from maternity leave, employer organisation IBEC developed a maternity and parenting toolkit.
- The Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) has produced research on work–life balance, as well as a toolkit and training pack designed to help unions to train officials in negotiating and developing family-friendly and work–life balance initiatives at enterprise level.

Awards and labels have been developed in a number of countries to highlight companies implementing family-friendly working practices. Many companies consider such initiatives to be part of their strategy to make themselves more attractive to a high-quality workforce.

Overall, most of the work–life balance initiatives remain very women-centred, with little emphasis on men. They generally focus on adapting women’s working time to the needs of the family, whose well-being is still considered to be women’s responsibility. Very little has been done to encourage or facilitate men to take up caring responsibilities. As a result, these initiatives fail to address the status quo and existing imbalances in power relations between women and men. Ideally, they should also have a transformative dimension by tackling the way in which men balance work, family and private life.

Tackling the gender pay gap

Social partners in several Member States have been working to improve gender inequalities in the collective bargaining process.

- In Austria, a social partner agreement was reached on the production of income transparency reports as well as on the publication of expected minimum wages in job advertisements. The Trade Union Federation (ÖGB) and its negotiating member unions have also committed themselves to addressing discriminatory practices in sectors dominated by women during collective bargaining (for example, a better calculation of leave periods has been a recent priority).
- In Belgium, in 2008, social partners signed a national agreement to guarantee equal pay among employees. However, it is reported that the commitments were not reiterated in the cross-sectoral agreement 2009–2010, mainly because the economic recession led to a focus on other priorities in the country.
- Also in Belgium, the government – acting on a proposal by the social partners – revised the occupational job classifications in order to address gender differences in pay. Women have traditionally been employed in jobs with a lower job classification than jobs carried out by men.
- In France, since 2012, gender equality and the pay gap must be subject to annual negotiations in company bargaining. The Labour code envisages fines for workplaces not having such agreements.
- Similarly, in Slovakia, the Confederation of Trade Unions of the Slovak Republic (KOZ SR) focused on the gender pay gap and on national non-discrimination legislation in social dialogue and collective bargaining. However, this has had little effect on reducing the gender pay gap.
- In Sweden, during the collective bargaining campaign in 2013, the trade union LO worked explicitly to tackle the gender pay gap prevailing between sectors dominated by women and those dominated by men.

- In Finland, the social partners have agreed to promote equal pay by narrowing the gender pay gap by 15% by 2015. Among the initiatives implemented to achieve this goal has been the requirement since 2005 for collective agreements to include a number of equal pay increments specifically targeting highly trained women-dominated groups.

In some Member States, the social partners have created specific structures to facilitate conducting a gender analysis of pay and to evaluate to what extent equal pay principles are respected (for example, in Cyprus) or to assess the existence of gender bias in pay systems (for example, in Ireland). In other countries, compulsory company bargaining on this issue has been introduced, requiring trade unions and employer organisations to recognise the existence of the problem and to reflect on possible solutions (such as in France). In this area, specific committees, bodies or departments working within social partners appear to play a significant role in translating concerns about gender equality into action. In most Member States, these bodies are often the ones to design, organise and implement the initiatives. Another tool in operation is the provision of awards to companies that agree to have a policy to address the gender pay gap (such as the Confederation of Industry and Employers in the Netherlands).

Analysis of the social partners' actions on gender 5

Impact of internal and external strategies and actions

Table 6 summarises the information gathered regarding the commitment of employer and trade union organisations in internal and external strategies and actions on gender issues.

Table 6: *Social partners' actions on gender issues*

Country	Internal actions		External actions	
	Trade union	Employer organisation	Trade union	Employer organisation
AT	Mod	Lim	SA +	SA +
BE	SA	Lim	SA	Lim
BG	Lim	No info	Lim	Lim
CY	Mod +/-	No info	SA	Mod +/-
CZ	Mod +/-	No info	Mod +/-	N/A
DE	SA	No info	SA	SA
DK	Lim +/-	No info	Mod	Mod
EE	No info	No info	Mod +/-	Lim +/-
EL	SA	No info	SA	No info
ES	SA	No info	SA	Lim
FI	SA +	SA +	SA	SA
FR	Mod +/-	No info	SA +/-	SA +/-
HR	Mod +/-	Mod +/-	Mod +/-	Mod +/-
HU	Mod +/-	Mod +/-	SA +/-	Mod +/-
IE	SA	SA	SA	SA
IT	SA +/-	Mod +/-	SA +/-	SA +/-
LV	No info	No info	Lim	Lim
LT	No info	No info	Mod +/-	Mod +/-
LU	Mod +/-	Lim +/-	SA +/-	Mod +/-
MT	Lim	No info	Mod +/-	Mod +/-
NL	Mod +/-	No info	Mod +/-	Mod +/-
NO	SA +/-	Mod +/-	SA +/-	SA +/-
PL	No info	No info	Lim +/-	Lim +/-
PT	Mod +	No info	SA +/-	Mod
RO	No info	No info	Mod	Lim
SE	SA +	SA +	SA +	SA +
SI	Mod +/-	Lim +/-	Mod +/-	Mod +/-
SK	No info	No info	Lim +/-	Lim +/-
UK	SA	SA	SA	SA

Legend:

Mod: moderate activity

Lim: limited activity

SA: strong activity

+: all organisations involved

+/-: Only some organisations / not all organisations involved

No info: no information available or provided

External actions regarding equality in the labour market are quite varied and issue-based. It is clear that the social partners see their role as that of campaigning generally, as well as working with their own members. There is also evidence to suggest that approaches vary according to public/private sectors and company size.

The picture is much more patchy in terms of internal actions to address gender equality in internal social partner structures and organisations. Guidance and awareness-raising in the internal actions appear to be limited to working within the structures of collective bargaining. Some trade unions have published data and some have set targets for women's representation: this includes quotas for the number of women senior negotiators involved in collective bargaining arrangements.

Feedback from social partner organisations collected through the research for the project suggests that the actions of social partner organisations have had more impact in the following areas:

- gender pay gap;
- employment rates of women;
- combating gender stereotypes.

The responses suggest that the actions have had less impact on addressing issues to do with the distribution of caring responsibilities within households and vertical/horizontal labour market segregation. These may take longer to address because they relate to embedded structural issues, which are linked to social norms and traditions. While social partners in 10 countries consider that their activities had a positive effect on the number of women in decision-making roles, overall, however, this does not seem to be an area of the greatest impact.

The state plays a key role in implementing wider action on improving gender equality, with tripartite action more widely developed on challenging gender inequalities in society and in the labour market. In general, social partners take part in national awareness-raising campaigns aiming to address gender inequalities in society. Topics such as horizontal and vertical segregation in employment and education choices have recently been targeted by campaigns in several Member States, such as in Austria and Germany, where the social partners, in collaboration with the government, implemented a project to attract more women in non-traditional professional sectors.

Impact of the crisis

The gender gap in employment has narrowed in several Member States since the economic crisis. However, this can be misleading, as it is mainly due to the worsening employment prospects for men, given significant job losses in sectors traditionally dominated by men. It is also linked to the fall in women's employment in some countries (although with delayed effect) because of significant cuts in public funding and associated redundancies in public services.

There are differences between the European countries with regard to the importance accorded to gender-related issues since the beginning of the global economic crisis.

Based on national research, it appears that commitments to gender equality have been adversely affected in those Member States that have been worst hit by the economic downturn, due to a combined effect of fewer resources to back-up commitments and competing priorities with other emerging issues. In Ireland, priority gender issues and targets previously included in national agreements have been scaled back as a result of the crisis and the resulting austerity measures. Similarly, in Italy, it is reported that there is a risk that positive steps taken towards gender equality through

the development of public debates, collective agreements and affirmative actions could be overshadowed by new pressing priorities. In Latvia, the crisis led to wage cuts affecting the working population as a whole, and this issue has overshadowed debates on gender-specific issues. In the Netherlands, too, trade unions have given priority to maintaining employment and income in negotiations with employers, with a seeming reduction in the importance placed on gender issues. Similarly, the labour conditions memorandum for 2014, implemented by employer organisation Algemene Werkgeversvereniging VNO-NCW (AWVN), is almost solely directed at addressing the general economic crisis (AWVN, 2014).

In other countries additional barriers to action have developed: in Poland the declining importance given to gender equality is thought to be due mainly to the overall crisis in the social dialogue process. In July 2013, the national trade unions peak organisations, which are part of the social dialogue process, suspended their participation in the Tripartite Commission for Socio-Economic Affairs due to disagreements on the proposed reforms to the retirement age, the minimum wage, atypical employment and working time. The main reasons were that the government failed to appoint a new chair to the commission, and then introduced reforms without consulting the social partners through the commission in the usual way.

Funding issues have also emerged in Member States, even where the importance placed on gender equality issues has remained unchanged since the crisis. In Sweden and Finland, the resources available to tackle discrimination and support women's careers through national budgets were reduced. However, in other countries such as the Czech Republic, resources provided by the European Social Fund (ESF) could help protect gender-related activities from budget cuts. At the same time, the impact of the economic crisis on women is increasingly recognised. The Greek social partners identify women, particularly young ones, as one of the most vulnerable groups with employers considering them a burden because of maternity and the multiple roles they are called on to play due to inadequate social support structures.

The global economic crisis has thus presented some threats to progress on gender equality issues by social partner organisations. The main problem is dealing with competing priorities, and the lack of a long-term strategy regarding women's employment and working conditions in the recession, despite the fact that there is some evidence that the current economic climate is having a particularly negative impact on some groups of women. The climate of austerity has also created problems in securing resources for action on gender equality in some countries.

Conclusions 6

At European level, the cross-industry social partner organisations made a commitment to promote gender equality actions at the national level through their 2005 Framework of Actions on Gender Equality. The Framework of Actions addressed the priority themes addressing gender roles, promoting women in decision-making, supporting work–life balance and tackling the gender pay gap. Most recently, the social partners published a toolkit providing examples of good practice in each area among their member organisations.

The importance of such gender equality actions is not only vindicated by the persistent gender gaps in employment, unequal share of caring responsibilities and gender gaps in wages, pensions and working conditions among other things, but is also critical to the achievement of the Europe 2020 goals.

Social partners have a key role to play in achieving equality targets because of their critical role in shaping labour market and social conditions through their involvement in policymaking and collective bargaining at various levels, although it is clear that the specific role they play in different countries and industrial relations systems depends strongly on national traditions and organisational strength.

It is worth noting that the information gathered for this study showed no clear links between industrial relations systems and the level of social partner involvement in policymaking and the level of social partner activity on gender equality. Similarly, such links could not be established between industrial relations systems and the broader role of social partners and a country's wider performance with regard to gender equality. However, the 'best' performers in gender equality seem to have a stronger policy framework and more programmes in place at the level of social partner organisations. The lack of policy framework and/or programmes for gender equality at this level seems to be a common pattern among those countries having a low score on the Gender Equality Index. The increasing participation of women in the labour market has increased the share of women members among trade unions, but maybe not to the extent that their increasing representation might warrant because of their over-representation in non-unionised sectors and occupations and in employment relationships where trade union representation tends to be less well developed.

Despite this increased representation of women in the labour market and among trade union membership, the representation of women in leadership positions remains relatively low in social partner organisations. Overall, trade unions (including peak confederations) are more likely to have women presidents, vice-presidents or secretaries-general, but progress in this area has not been in line with the targets set by ETUC. In some cases such progress has only been achieved through the use of quota systems.

Among employers' organisations the number of women in leadership roles is even more limited and is – in many countries – limited to employers' organisations in the public sector (or among chambers).

The evidence points to the fact that organisations with women in leadership positions tend to be more likely to have developed gender equality strategies and approaches. Nevertheless, there are few examples of comprehensive internal gender equality strategies and action plans. Thus, even with the presence of women in leadership positions there is a risk that internal gender equality strategies do not permeate further than such quotas and working principles. Barriers, such as the timing of meetings and the lack of opportunity to work part time in leadership roles, are still hindering women from having a greater involvement in social partner organisations.

Other internal actions are primarily focused on training, awareness-raising or the creation of specific bodies to deal with gender issues. While such actions can be helpful (for instance to train negotiators), little is known about their impact. Specific bodies or committees dealing with gender can mean that these issues are retained on the agenda but this can also mean that gender is kept separate from other issues. Certain issues remain stereotyped, such as the higher representation of women in social affairs departments, which tend to attract fewer staff and resources in employer

organisations than departments dealing with economic or industrial affairs. Mainstreaming of gender issues is – in principle – a more effective organisational principle to ensure the integration of gender considerations in all areas of policymaking, but can also lead to a watering down of the equality agenda if not properly implemented. So far, little evidence of effective mainstreaming can be found. It is thus important to keep a dual approach: adopting a gender mainstreaming strategy while having some actions targeting specific areas of gender inequalities in place.

This can lead to both employers and unions being unable to attract and retain the best and brightest workers in their organisations. For trade unions, the widening representativeness gap could have a potentially detrimental impact on new recruitment.

Social partner actions on gender equality in the labour market (external actions) are more widespread, but these also often focus on training and advice, work–life balance policies and awards for companies with positive practices in such areas. This relates to campaigns to encourage the greater participation of women in decision-making. In the context of a European (and in some cases national) debate on quotas for women on boards, trade unions tend to be in favour while employers' organisations are more likely to be opposed. It is clear that there are some areas in which social partners have less influence over tackling stereotypes (in the private sphere). However, it should be noted that work–life balance policies often continue to be focused on allowing flexibility – primarily to women – to combine work with family responsibilities, with little emphasis on encouraging more men to take up such possibilities.

Other activities, such as efforts to address gender segregation in occupations and the labour market, are often initiated in collaboration with governments, as this also requires influencing other stakeholders (such as education providers, parents and wider society). Although there are activities to tackle the gender pay gap, these are limited to relatively few countries and tend to be general campaigns rather than, for instance, efforts to reclassify occupations that are more dominated by women – the latter are clearly more challenging to achieve and can have a significant impact on costs for some employers.

Activities in the area of gender equality can therefore largely be classified as campaigning or educational rather than 'transformative' in terms of addressing some of the root causes of gender inequality.

Social partner organisations have a fundamental role to play in the achievement of gender equality. Through their role in European social dialogue, the social partners are contributing to the transformation of gender relations and overcoming persistent gender inequalities in employment and working conditions. Social partner organisations cannot only influence policy and working conditions, but can also provide a model as well as guidance through their own organisational structures and activities. Despite ongoing challenges, social partner organisations should continue working towards achieving more equality both at internal and external levels.

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Annex 1: Key definitions

Gender division of labour	The division of labour between women and men is directly linked to socio-cultural patterns that determine the tasks that both sexes should perform in society. In European societies, the gender-based division of labour is a reflection of the division that has historically been made between public and private spheres. According to this division, a specific set of norms differentiates women's and men's responsibilities. Women's tasks are tied to their role in the household economy and in the domestic sphere, and thus, women still assume the role of main carer, inside and outside the home.
Gender-segregated labour market (horizontal and vertical)	Gender segregation in employment has two main forms: horizontal and vertical. Horizontal segregation means that men and women are concentrated in different types of work, according to a gender-based representation of the tasks that need to be undertaken in these sectors. Vertical segregation is the concentration of women and men into different hierarchical levels of occupation, according to the gender-based value of the necessary criteria required to reach the top-level and/or to remain at the lower positions (European Commission, 2009b).
Gender mainstreaming	According to the Council of Europe, 'Gender mainstreaming is the (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making' (Council of Europe, 1998, p.15). Gender mainstreaming is not a goal in itself but a political strategy, based upon the realisation that no political area or subject is 'gender neutral'. It implies that gender concerns must be integrated into all policy decisions, legal frameworks, activities and programmes.
Social partners' activities	Some commonly-used concepts when describing social partners' activities are defined here: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unilateral activities/initiatives: Actions implemented by a specific trade union or employers' federation. • Bipartite activities/initiatives: Actions negotiated and implemented jointly by employers' and trade union organisations. • Tripartite activities/initiatives: Actions agreed and implemented by social partners with governmental bodies.
Gender audit	A tool that aims to support an organisation's commitment to implementing gender equality. The International Labour Organisation (ILO), for example, promotes 'participatory gender audits', which take into account not only objective data and staff perceptions of the achievement of gender equality in an organisation but also: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Considers whether internal practices and related support systems for gender mainstreaming are effective and reinforce each other and whether they are being followed; • Monitors and assesses the relative progress made in gender mainstreaming; • Establishes a baseline; • Identifies critical gaps and challenges; • Recommends ways of addressing them and suggests new and more effective strategies; • Documents good practices towards the achievement of gender equality. (ILO, 2007)
Sex-disaggregated data	Refers to data collected and analysed separately for men and for women. For example, data collected in order to assess the presence of women and men in an organisation's decision-making bodies.
Gender budgeting	A tool that adds a gender perspective to the budgetary process (see Quinn, 2009).
Gender equality action plan	A set of measures adopted by an organisation in order to respond to shortcomings previously identified by the gender audit.

Annex 2: Peak trade unions and employer organisations included in the research

The national-level questionnaire was carried out in 28 countries (+ Norway) and covers most peak-level trade unions and employers' organisations, detailed in the table below.

	Employer organisations		Trade union organisations	
	No.		No.	
Austria	2	Federal Economic Chamber (WKO); Federation of Austrian Industry (IV)	2	Austrian Trade Union Federation (ÖGB); Chamber of Labour (AK)
Belgium	1	Belgian Federation of Employers (FEB/VBO)	3	Confederation of Christian Trade Unions (CSC/ACV); Belgian General Federation of Labour (FGTB/ABVV); Federation of Liberal Trade Unions of Belgium (CGSLB/ACLVB)
Bulgaria	4	Bulgarian Industrial Association; Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry; Bulgarian Industrial Capital Association; Confederation of Employers and Industrialists in Bulgaria	2	Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria (CITUB); Confederation of Labour 'Podkrepa'

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	Employer organisations		Trade union organisations	
	No.		No.	
Cyprus	2	Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI); Cyprus Employers and Industrialists Federation (OEB)	3	Democratic Labour Federation of Cyprus (DEOK); Pancyprian Federation of Labour (PEO); Cyprus Workers' Confederation (SEK)
Croatia	1	Croatian Employers' Association (CEA)	3	Independent Trade Unions of Croatia (NHS); Union of Autonomous Trade Unions of Croatia (UATUC); Worker's Trade Unions Association of Croatian (CTUWA)
Czech Republic	2	Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republic (SP ČR); Confederation of employers and entrepreneurial associations of the Czech Republic (KZPS ČR)	1	Czech-Moravian Confederation of the Czech Republic (ČMKOS); Association of Independent Trade Unions (ASO ČR)
Denmark	3	Confederation of Danish Employers (DA); Danish Employers' Association for the Financial Sector (FA); Danish Federation of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (HVR)	3	Danish Confederation of Trade Unions (LO); Confederation of Professionals in Denmark (FTF); Danish Confederation Professional Associations (AC)
Estonia	2	Estonian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ECCI); Estonian Association of SMEs (EVEA)	3	Estonian Employers' Confederation (ETTK); Estonian Business Association (ESEA); Estonian Service Industry Association (ESIA)
Finland	4	The Confederation of Finnish Industries (EK); Local government employers (KT); The State Employer's Office (VTML); The Church Employers (KiT)	3	The Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions (SAK); The Finnish Confederation of Professionals (STTK); The Confederations of Unions for Academic Professionals in Finland (AKAVA)
France	3	Movement of French Enterprises' (Medef); General Confederation of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (CGPME); Craftwork Employers' Association (UPA)	5	French Democratic Confederation of Labour (CFDT); General Confederation of Labour (CGT); French Confederation of Professional and Managerial Staff (CFE-CGC); General Confederation of Labour-Force Ouvrière (FO); French Christian Workers' Confederations (CFTC)
Germany	1	German Confederation of Employers' Associations (BDA)	2	Confederation of German Trade Unions (DGB); German Federation of Career Public Servants (dbb)
Greece	1	Hellenic Federation of Enterprises (SEV)	1	General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE)
Hungary	6	Confederation of Hungarian Employers and Industrialists (MGYOSZ); National Association of Entrepreneurs and Employers (VOSZ); National Federation of Consumer Cooperatives (ÁFEOSZ); National Federation of Traders and Caterers (KISOSZ); Hungarian Association of Craftsmen's Corporations (IPOSZ); National Association of Strategic and Public Utility Companies (Stratosz)	8	Democratic League of Independent Trade Unions (LIGA); Autonomous Trade Unions Confederation (ASZSZ); Confederation of Unions of Professionals (ÉSZT); Forum for the Cooperation of Trade Unions (SZEF); National Federation of Workers' Council (Munkástanácsok); National Confederation of Hungarian Trade Unions (MSZOSZ); Metalworkers Union (Vasas); Federation of Trade Unions of the Chemical, Energy and Allied Workers (VDSZ)
Ireland	1	Irish Business and Employers' Confederation (IBEC)	1	Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)
Italy	7	Confindustria; Handicraft Confederation (Confartigianato); Retailers Confederation (Confesercenti); Agriculture Confederation (Confagricoltura); Trade Confederation (Confcommercio); Handicraft Confederation (CNA); Small and Medium Enterprises Confederation (Confapi)	4	General Italian Confederation of Labour (CGIL); Italian Workers Trade Union (CISL); Italian Union of Labour (UIL); General Union of Labour (UGL)
Latvia	1	Latvian Employers' Confederation (LDDK)	1	Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia (LBAS)
Lithuania	2	Lithuanian Confederation of Industrialists (LPK); Lithuanian Business Employers' Confederation (LVDK)	3	Lithuanian Trade Union Confederation (LPSK); Lithuanian Labour Federation (LDF); Lithuanian Trade Union 'Solidarumas'(LPS 'Solidarumas')
Luxembourg	1	Union of Luxembourg Enterprises (UEL)	4	Independent Trade Union Confederation (OGB-L); Luxembourg Confederation of Christian Unions (LCGB); Trade Union of the Employees of the Financial Sector (ALEBA); Confederation of the Civil Servants (CGPF)

	Employer organisations		Trade union organisations	
	No.		No.	
Malta	3	Malta Employers Association (MEA); The Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry (Malta Chamber); Association of General Retailers and Traders (GRTU)	4	General Workers Union (GWU); Confederation of Malta Trade Unions (CMTU); Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (FORUM); Malta Workers' Union (UHM);
Netherlands	1	Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employers (VNO-NCW)	1	Federation of Dutch Trade Unions (FNV)
Norway	4	Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise (NHO); Arbeidsgiverforeningen Spekter; Federation of Norwegian Enterprises (Virke); Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS)	4	Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO); Confederation of Vocational Unions (YS); Confederation of Unions for Professionals (Unio); Federation of Norwegian Professional Associations (Akademikerne)
Poland	2	Employers of Poland; Polish Confederation Lewiatan	3	Trade Union Solidarność (NSZZ); Alliance of Trade Unions (OPZZ); Trade Unions Forum (FZZ)
Portugal	4	Confederation of Portuguese Business (CIP); Confederation of Trade and Services of Portugal (CCP); Portuguese Tourism Confederation (CTP); Confederation of Farmers of Portugal (CAP)	2	General Confederation of the Portuguese Workers (CGTP/IN); General Union of Workers (UGT)
Romania	13	General Union of Romanian Industrialists 1903 (UGIR 1903); Confederation of Romanian Employers in Industry, Agriculture, Construction and Services (CONPIROM); Romanian Employers Organisation (PR); National Union of Romanian Employers (UNPR); National Confederation of Romanian Employers (CNPR); Romanian National Council of Private Small and Medium Enterprises (CNIPMMR); General Union of Romanian Industrialists (UGIR); National Council of Romanian Employers (CoNPR); Romanian National Employers (PNR); Romanian Association of Construction Entrepreneurs (ARACO); Employers' Confederation for Industry, Services and Commerce (CPISC); National Union of Romanian Private Capital Employers (UNPCPR); CONCORDIA Employers' Confederation (CP CONCORDIA)	5	Cartel Alfa National Trade Union Confederation (CNS Cartel Alfa); National Trade Union Bloc (BNS); Frăția National Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Romania (CNSLR Frăția); Meridian National Trade Union Confederation (CSN Meridian); Confederation of the Romanian Democratic Unions (CSDR).
Slovakia	2	Federation of Employer Associations (AZZZ SR); National Union of Employers (RUZ SR)	2	Confederation of Trade Unions (KOZ SR); Independent Christian Trade Unions of Slovakia (NKOS)
Slovenia	5	Slovenian Employers' Association (ZDS); Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia (GZS); Slovenian Chamber of Commerce (TZS); Chamber of Craft and Small Businesses of Slovenia (OZS); Slovenian Employers' Association of Crafts (ZDOPS)	7	Association of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia (ZSSS); Confederation of Public Sector Trade Unions (KSJS); Confederation of Trade Unions of Slovenia Pergam (Pergam); Confederation of Trade Unions '90 of Slovenia; Independence, Confederation of New Trade Unions of Slovenia (KNSS); Union of Workers' Trade Unions of Slovenia (Solidarnost); Slovene Union of Trade Unions Alternativa (SZS Alternativa)
Spain	2	Spanish Confederation of Employers' Organisations (CEOE); Spanish Confederation of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (CEPYME)	3	General Workers Confederation (UGT); Trade Union Confederation of Workers' Commissions (CCOO); Spanish Confederation of Employers' Organisations (CEOE)
Sweden	3	The Swedish Agency for Government Employers (SAGE); The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR); Confederation of Swedish Enterprise (Svenskt Näringsliv)	1	The Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO); The Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees (TCO); The Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees (Saco)
UK	1	Confederation of British Industry (CBI)	1	Trades Union Congress (TUC)

Note: This table does not represent all the existing national peak-level social partners organisations.

Annex 3: Project team and national experts

Eurofound project team

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Acknowledgements

The project team would like to thank Jane Pillinger, Jill Rubery and the colleagues at EIGE, in particular Anne-Laure Humbert, for their very pertinent comments and input.

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This report assesses the role of the social partners in advancing gender equality in Europe. It explores the actions taken within the different national frameworks of industrial relations and against the ranking of the Member States on the Gender Equality Index. Overall, significant actions are being taken by European and national social partner organisations and companies in support of gender equality. These tend to put the emphasis on campaigning and educational activities and the integration of work–life balance measures in national policies or collective agreements. The research also shows that while national peak-level social partner organisations have implemented a limited number of initiatives aimed at improving their internal gender equality performance, the representation of women in decision-making remains relatively weak.

Eurofound, a tripartite European Union Agency, provides knowledge to assist in the development of social and work-related policies.