

# **Sexism at work: how can we stop it?**

**Handbook for the EU institutions and agencies**

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The personal stories were collected in person or in writing during the drafting of the handbook. They include experiences from the EU institutions and agencies, as well as from bodies that work closely with these organisations. Stories were collected by the External Expert during workshops and coaching sessions, as well as through conversations. All stories are real, though some names have been changed to protect identities. EIGE would like to thank the Directorate-General (DG) for Justice and Consumers and DG Human Resources and Security of the European Commission for their valuable input, as well as Dr Sonja Robnik, member of EIGE's Expert Forum.

## The European Institute for Gender Equality

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) is an autonomous body of the European Union established to strengthen gender equality across the EU. Equality between women and men is a fundamental value of the EU and EIGE's task is to make this a reality in Europe and beyond. This includes becoming a European knowledge centre on gender equality issues, supporting gender mainstreaming in all EU and Member State policies, and fighting discrimination based on sex.

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\* JUMP, *Libérez votre entreprise du sexisme*, 2019 ([http://jump.eu.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Guide\\_Sexisme\\_BE\\_FR.pdf](http://jump.eu.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Guide_Sexisme_BE_FR.pdf)).



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# Background

## Who is this handbook for?

This handbook will be relevant for every organisation and for all work contexts, both in the public and private sector. However, the content has been tailored to the context of the **EU institutions and agencies** <sup>(1)</sup>.

## What is the aim of this handbook?

The focus of this handbook is to help organisations understand the nature of sexism in work contexts and to provide leadership, management and staff with the tools to tackle it. The focus is on informal mechanisms to foster cultural change.

The handbook also touches on ways to deal with sexual harassment, which is illegal, constitutes discrimination and is a form of violence. EU-wide legal obligations necessitate formal responses to such behaviour. While informal mechanisms can accompany formal responses to sexual harassment, they cannot replace them.

## What is the scope of this handbook?

The focus is on policies which cover all staff employed directly by the EU (such as the Staff Regulations of Officials and Conditions of Employment of Other Servants of the European Union), highlighting specific good practices and pinpointing gaps. This handbook cannot present all internal policies and informal measures within all EU institutions and agencies.

<sup>(1)</sup> This handbook is designed to inform and does not constitute a legal text.



# Part 1.

Understand

# What is sexism?

Sexism is linked to beliefs around the fundamental nature of women and men and the roles they should play in society. Sexist assumptions about women and men, which manifest themselves as **gender stereotypes**, can rank one gender as superior to another. Such hierarchical thinking can be conscious and hostile, or it can be unconscious, manifesting itself as **unconscious bias**. Sexism can touch everyone, but women are particularly affected.

Despite legal frameworks set up across the EU to prevent discrimination and promote equality, women are still under-represented in decision-making roles, left out of certain sectors of the economy, primarily responsible for unpaid care work, paid less than men and disproportionately subject to gender-based violence <sup>(2)</sup>. Sexist attitudes, practices and behaviour contribute to these inequalities.

Within the European institutions there is no specific definition of sexism. Sexist behaviour is partly covered under Article 12a of the Staff Regulations on psychological and sexual harassment, where sexual harassment is defined as:

*... conduct relating to sex which is unwanted by the person to whom it is directed and which has the purpose or effect of offending that person or creating an intimidating, hostile, offensive or disturbing environment <sup>(3)</sup>.*

Sexist practices are prohibited under Article 1(d) of the Staff Regulations, which prohibits discrimination based on sex (among other forms of discrimination), as well as under Article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU.

However, **while some sexist behaviour may breach these anti-harassment and anti-discrimination rules, some does not reach that threshold**. Additionally, the European Court of Auditors has found that while the ethical frameworks of the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission are largely adequate and staff rate their own ethical knowledge highly, **less than a quarter believe their colleagues would not hesitate to report unethical behaviour <sup>(4)</sup>**.

## Definition: sexism

*Sexism is linked to power in that those with power are typically treated with favour and those without power are typically discriminated against. Sexism is also related to stereotypes since discriminatory actions or attitudes are frequently based on false beliefs or generalisations about gender, and on considering gender as relevant where it is not.*

*Source: EIGE <sup>(5)</sup>.*

<sup>(2)</sup> Directive 2006/54/EC on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation outlines provisions Member States are obligated to take to stop sexual harassment in the workplace, as well as direct and indirect discrimination

<sup>(3)</sup> Regulation No 31 (EEC), 11 (EAEC), laying down the Staff Regulations of Officials and the Conditions of Employment of Other Servants of the European Economic Community and the European Atomic Energy Community (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A01962R0031-20140501>).

<sup>(4)</sup> European Court of Auditors, *Special Report – The ethical frameworks of the audited EU institutions: scope for improvement*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2019 ([https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR19\\_13/SR\\_ethical\\_frameworks\\_EN.pdf](https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR19_13/SR_ethical_frameworks_EN.pdf)).

<sup>(5)</sup> <https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1367>



# What is the impact of sexism at work?

## Sexism is inefficient

Sexist assumptions and practices can hold employees back and channel them into the wrong roles. Women may be shut out of senior positions or diverted into roles seen to require stereotypically 'feminine' skills. Men have been found to rapidly leave jobs dominated by women due to social stigma, with some preferring unemployment <sup>(6)</sup>. This is a waste of human resources.

## Sexism harms employees

Sexist expectations and behaviour have been shown to negatively affect employees' performance, sense of belonging, mental health and job satisfaction <sup>(8)</sup>. Sexist behaviour and practices, when frequent and normalised, have been shown to be as detrimental to employees' occupational well-being as sexual harassment <sup>(9)</sup>.

**Less than half** of EU citizens believe gender equality has been achieved at work.

Source: Eurobarometer <sup>(7)</sup>.

## Sexism damages an organisation's image

When employees feel that sexist behaviour and practices persist in spite of efforts to build an inclusive workplace, organisations can be accused of '**gender washing**', i.e. only making cosmetic changes.

**94 %** of EU citizens believe gender equality is a fundamental right

Source: Eurobarometer <sup>(10)</sup>.

<sup>(6)</sup> Torre, M., 'The flip side of segregation: men in typically female jobs', *London School of Economics and Political Science Business Review*, 2019 (<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/businessreview/2019/01/29/the-flip-side-of-segregation-men-in-typically-female-jobs/>).

<sup>(7)</sup> EU Open Data Portal, 'Special Eurobarometer 465: Gender equality 2017' ([https://data.europa.eu/euodp/en/data/dataset/S2154\\_87\\_4\\_465\\_ENG](https://data.europa.eu/euodp/en/data/dataset/S2154_87_4_465_ENG)).

<sup>(8)</sup> Rippon, G., *The Gendered Brain*, Bodley Head, London, 2019; Bollier, T., Dardenne, B. and Dumont, M., 'Insidious dangers of benevolent sexism: consequences for women's performance', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 93, No 5, 2007, pp. 764–779 ([https://orbi.uliege.be/bitstream/2268/6525/1/Dardenne%20et%20al\\_jpsp\\_07.pdf](https://orbi.uliege.be/bitstream/2268/6525/1/Dardenne%20et%20al_jpsp_07.pdf)); Rubin, M., Paolini, S., Subašić, E. and Giacomini, A., 'A confirmatory study of the relations between workplace sexism, sense of belonging, mental health, and job satisfaction among women in male-dominated industries', *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, Vol. 49, 2019, pp. 267–282 ([https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330381680\\_A\\_confirmatory\\_study\\_of\\_the\\_relations\\_between\\_workplace\\_sexism\\_sense\\_of\\_belonging\\_mental\\_health\\_and\\_job\\_satisfaction\\_among\\_women\\_in\\_male-dominated\\_industries](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330381680_A_confirmatory_study_of_the_relations_between_workplace_sexism_sense_of_belonging_mental_health_and_job_satisfaction_among_women_in_male-dominated_industries)).

<sup>(9)</sup> Sojo, V. E., Wood, R. E. and Genat, A. E., 'Harmful workplace experiences and women's occupational well-being: a meta-analysis', *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No 1, 2016, pp. 10–40 (<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0361684315599346>).

<sup>(10)</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_428\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/archives/ebs/ebs_428_en.pdf)

Many organisations have made a commitment to **diversity and inclusion** to increase the number of employees from under-represented groups and improve their experience in the organisation. The European Commission adopted a diversity and inclusion strategy in 2017 and the nine EU justice and home affairs agencies published a diversity and inclusion statement in 2019 <sup>(1)</sup>. Yet without organisational change to combat deeply entrenched gender stereotypes and unconscious bias, these efforts can be undermined.

The Council of Europe recommendation on combating sexism states that sexism in the workplace includes:

*... derogatory comments, objectification, sexist humour or jokes, overfamiliar remarks, silencing or ignoring people, gratuitous comments about dress and physical appearance, sexist body language, lack of respect and masculine practices which intimidate or exclude women and favour fellow men <sup>(12)</sup>.*

In practice, **it can be difficult to agree on what constitutes sexism and to create an environment where everybody feels free to voice concerns**. This can be a particular challenge in multicultural and hierarchical environments.

This handbook will show you how gender stereotypes and unconscious bias manifest themselves in sexist organisational practices and individual behaviour; how this affects employees, organisations and wider society; and what action you can take to rid your organisation of sexism.

*“Unconscious bias is not about ‘bad people’ who have it and ‘good ones’ who don’t – it’s about being aware, learning how to deal with it and creating structures and processes that are less prone to biases.”*

**Rebekka Wiemann, Equal Opportunities Officer, Council of the European Union**

<sup>(1)</sup> European Commission communication – A better workplace for all: from equal opportunities towards diversity and inclusion, COM(2017) 5300 final, 2017 (<https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication-equal-opportunities-diversity-inclusion-2017.pdf>); EIGE, ‘EU agencies focus on diversity and inclusion’, 2019 (<https://eige.europa.eu/news/eu-agencies-focus-diversity-and-inclusion>). The nine agencies are: the European Asylum Support Office, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, EIGE, the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation, the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training and the European Union Agency for the Operational Management of Large-Scale IT Systems in the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice.

<sup>(12)</sup> Council of Europe, *Preventing and Combating Sexism – Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1*, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 2019, p. 21 (<https://rm.coe.int/prems-055519-gbr-2573-cmrec-2019-1-web-a5/168093e08c>).

# Where does sexism come from?

## Definition: gender stereotypes

*Preconceived ideas whereby females and males are arbitrarily assigned characteristics and roles determined and limited by their gender.*

Source: EIGE <sup>(13)</sup>.

Gender stereotypes underpin sexist behaviour and practices. Gender stereotypes do not need to be hostile to be harmful. Many workplace realities have been shaped by the belief that women and men have **complementary characteristics**, for example that men are individualistic and dominant, while women are caring and collaborative.

However, **stereotypically masculine characteristics are frequently valued more highly than stereotypically feminine characteristics** (examples given below), although there is evidence this is changing <sup>(14)</sup>. This is also true in the work context, where professional development books and programmes frequently urge women to stop displaying stereotypically feminine behaviour if they want to advance in their careers.

*"I think the problem, to a very large degree, is that women are expected to be men. When you find toughness in female leaders, it's because there are too few of them and they really have to work for it, in a very stereotypical male way <sup>(15)</sup>."*

**Margrethe Vestager, European Commissioner**

We create predictions about what people will do based on what we have encountered in the world. These predictions can be based on direct experience, as well as on representations in society and culture. Our minds work like 'predictive texters' to create stereotypes. These are the **past truths, half-truths and untruths that we have picked up to help us get on with life quickly** <sup>(16)</sup>.

<sup>(13)</sup> <https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1222>

<sup>(14)</sup> Rippon, 2019. Read more on gender stereotypes in Ellemers, N., 'Gender stereotypes', *Annual Review of Psychology*, Vol. 69, 2018, pp. 275–298 (<https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/10.1146/annurev-psych-122216-011719>).

<sup>(15)</sup> Hutchinson, L., 'Margrethe Vestager: a woman of substance', *The Parliament Magazine*, 2019 (<https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/articles/interviews/margrethe-vestager-woman-substance>).

<sup>(16)</sup> Rippon, 2019.



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Image: Our minds act like 'predictive texters' to create stereotypes.

**We are 'rule scavengers'**, seeking out laws in society to determine what characteristics we should display to fit in <sup>(17)</sup>. The determination to create rules results in **confirmation bias**, where information that fits in with preconceived ideas is readily accepted, but information that challenges our beliefs is ignored <sup>(18)</sup>.

We all create stereotypes, which manifest themselves as unconscious bias. In fact, studies have shown that **people who believe they are objective, or that they are not sexist, are less objective and more likely to behave in a sexist way** <sup>(19)</sup>.

Gender stereotypes were first catalogued in the United States in the 1970s. They were based on the characteristics reported as being the most socially desirable in women and men. Stereotypically feminine attributes included **gullibility, shyness and compassion**, while stereotypically masculine attributes included **aggressiveness, independence and leadership ability**.

<sup>(17)</sup> Rippon, 2019.

<sup>(18)</sup> Heilman, M. E., Manzi, F. and Braun, S., 'Presumed incompetent: perceived lack of fit and gender bias in recruitment and selection', *Handbook of gendered careers in management: getting in, getting on, getting out*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, 2015, pp. 90-104 (<http://dro.dur.ac.uk/16470/>).

<sup>(19)</sup> Criado Perez, C., *Invisible Women – Exposing data bias in a world designed for men*, Chatto & Windus, London, 2019.

Although societal expectations around how women and men should behave have evolved since the 1970s, our perceptions of stereotypically feminine and stereotypically masculine behaviours continue to inform our societies and work contexts. Yet **no evidence has been found that the brains of women and men are wired differently** <sup>(20)</sup>.

Unconscious biases around gender can **intersect with biases around other social variables such as: age, ethnicity, migration status, sexual orientation and disability**. This can serve to further limit employees belonging to multiple stigmatised identity groups. Indeed, research has found that **multiple intersecting stigmatised identities are a risk factor for greater job insecurity** <sup>(21)</sup>.

**Masculine/Feminine Score Sheet**

Name: [REDACTED]

Score: Low = 1, Medium = 3, High = 5

Feminine	Score at Work	Score Not at Work	Masculine	Score At Work	Score Not at Work
Affectionate	4	4	Acts as a Leader	4	4
Cheerful	4	4	Aggressive	4	4
Childlike	4	4	Ambitious	4	4
Compassionate	4	4	Analytical	4	4
Does Not Use Harsh Language	4	4	Assertive	4	4
Eager to Soothe Hurt Feelings	4	4	Athletic	4	4
Femininity	4	4	Competitive	4	4
Flatterable	4	4	Defends One's Beliefs	4	4
Gentle	4	4	Dominant	4	4
Gullible	4	4	Forceful	4	4
Loves Children	4	4	Has Leadership Abilities	4	4
Loyal	4	4	Independent	4	4
Sensitive to the Needs of Others	4	4	Individualistic	4	4
Shy	4	4	Makes Decisions Easily	4	4
Soft-Spoken	4	4	Masculinity	4	4
Sympathetic	4	4	Self-Reliant	4	4
Tender	4	4	Self-Sufficient	4	4
Understanding	4	4	Strong Personality	4	4
Warm	4	4	Willing to Take a Stand	4	4
Yielding	4	4	Willing to Take Risks	4	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>

**Source: Adapted by Marsha Clark & Associates from Sandra Bem**

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Image: You can see the full list of gendered characteristics in the scoresheet above, which was received by women employees at a 2018 UK training event of a professional services firm.

<sup>(20)</sup> Ellemers, 2018.

<sup>(21)</sup> Lavaysse, L. M., Probst, T. M. and Arena Jr., D. F., 'Is more always merrier? Intersectionality as an antecedent of job insecurity', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, Vol. 15, No 11, 2018 (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6267039/>).

# Sexism at work

## Professions and pay

The perception that women and men have different skills is part of the reason they are concentrated in **different professional fields**. While women are over-represented in care and pre-primary education, men dominate politics and fields related to science, technology, engineering and mathematics <sup>(22)</sup>.

**Women earn 16 % less per hour** than men.

Source: EIGE Gender Equality Index 2020 <sup>(23)</sup>.

Such **horizontal gender segregation** is partly responsible for the **gender pay gap**, as fields dominated by men tend to be more highly paid than those dominated by women. Even when women are concentrated in a certain field, men will have more opportunities for promotion, take more senior posts and earn higher salaries <sup>(24)</sup>.

**Gender stereotypes linked to the value of work** are partly to blame, with **salaries in a profession going down when women enter and rising with the entry of men**: computer programming was once the preserve of modestly paid women, but started to gain prestige and become lucrative once men entered the profession <sup>(25)</sup>.

The five occupations across the EU with the largest **skills shortages**, such as information and communications technology (ICT) and nursing, are dominated by one gender and are projected to require increasing numbers of workers over the coming years <sup>(26)</sup>.



© fizkes/Shutterstock.com

Image: Computer programming used to be dominated by modestly paid women

<sup>(22)</sup> EIGE, *Study in the EU: set apart by gender*, 2018 (<https://eige.europa.eu/publications/study-eu-set-apart-gender>).

<sup>(23)</sup> EIGE, Gender Equality Index 2020, 'Money' (<https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2020/domain/money>).

<sup>(24)</sup> EIGE, *Study in the EU: set apart by gender*, 2018, p. 69 (<https://eige.europa.eu/publications/study-eu-set-apart-gender>).

<sup>(25)</sup> Criado Perez, 2019.

<sup>(26)</sup> EIGE, *Study in the EU: set apart by gender*, 2018, pp. 21–23 (<https://eige.europa.eu/publications/study-eu-set-apart-gender>).

## The application process

People do not need to believe in gender stereotypes for them to have an impact. At work, the effects of sexist expectations can already be detected during the application process.

**Women are more likely to deselect themselves if they do not fulfil 100 % of the required criteria, while men need to meet only 60 % of criteria before applying** for a position <sup>(27)</sup>. While this has frequently been interpreted as evidence of women's lower levels of confidence, follow-up research suggests it is more likely tied to the fact that **women are socialised to follow rules** and understand the selection criteria to be final <sup>(28)</sup>.

**Women also apply in lower numbers to jobs advertised using adjectives associated with masculine stereotypes** <sup>(29)</sup>. In one design company, when a job advert for the same role was changed from focusing on 'aggressiveness and competitiveness' to focusing on 'enthusiasm and innovation', applications from women jumped from 5 % to 40 % <sup>(30)</sup>.



© Jacob Lund/Shutterstock.com

Image: Women apply in lower numbers to jobs advertised using adjectives such as 'aggressive' and 'competitive'.

<sup>(27)</sup> Mohr, T. S., 'Why women don't apply for jobs unless they're 100 % qualified', *Harvard Business Review*, 2014 (<https://hbr.org/2014/08/why-women-dont-apply-for-jobs-unless-theyre-100-qualified>).

<sup>(28)</sup> Mohr, 2014.

<sup>(29)</sup> Gaucher, D., Friesen, J. P and Kay, A. C., 'Evidence that gendered wording in job advertisements exists and sustains gender equality', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 101, No 1, 2011, pp. 109–128 ([https://www.researchgate.net/publication/50303045\\_Evidence\\_That\\_Gendered\\_Wording\\_in\\_Job\\_Advertisements\\_Exists\\_and\\_Sustains\\_Gender\\_Inequality](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/50303045_Evidence_That_Gendered_Wording_in_Job_Advertisements_Exists_and_Sustains_Gender_Inequality)).

<sup>(30)</sup> Criado Perez, 2019.

## Recruitment

One study found that when selecting candidates for stereotypically masculine positions, such as that of police chief, evaluators **tailored their criteria to favour whatever qualities the applicant of the preferred gender happened to have** <sup>(31)</sup>. Being family-oriented, for example, only gained importance when a male candidate possessed this attribute.

The impact of evaluators' unconscious bias in this study was **lower selection ratings and compensation offers for women than for men** <sup>(32)</sup>.



© Kinga/Shutterstock.com

Image: Evaluators can tailor selection criteria to favour the qualities of the applicant of the preferred gender.

<sup>(31)</sup> Uhlmann, E. L. and Cohen, G. L., 'Constructed criteria: redefining merit to justify discrimination', *Psychological Science*, Vol. 16, No 6, 2005, pp. 474-480 (<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.0956-7976.2005.01559.x>).

<sup>(32)</sup> Uhlmann et al., 2005.



## Performance assessment

**Women** have been found to **receive less feedback than men** (even though they ask for it in equal measures). The feedback they do receive is **less likely to be constructive** and more likely to be **critical and vague** <sup>(33)</sup>.

One study found evaluators more frequently described **men** using **task-orientated adjectives**, such as **analytical and competent**, and **women** using **relationship-focused adjectives**, such as **compassionate and enthusiastic** <sup>(34)</sup>.

### Personal story

*"My manager never feels comfortable during my performance review. He told me that team members found me 'emotional' but without any specific way I could improve."*

**Bettina, Legal Translator, European institution**

Such disparities in evaluators' assessments are the result of biases forged throughout various workplace interactions. For example, when men are present in a team, **women are evaluated as less competent, less influential and less likely to have played a leadership role** <sup>(35)</sup>. In addition, while men might receive a status boost when voicing ideas in the workplace, women might not <sup>(36)</sup>.

<sup>(33)</sup> Luxton, E., 'Why managers give women less feedback', *World Economic Forum*, 2016 (<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/10/managers-give-women-less-feedback/>).

<sup>(34)</sup> Smith, D. G., Rosenstein, J. E., Nikolov, M. C. and Chaney, D. A., 'The power of language: gender, status, and agency in performance evaluations', *Sex Roles*, Vol. 80, 2019, pp. 159–171 (<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11199-018-0923-7>).

<sup>(35)</sup> Heilman, M. E. and Haynes, M. C., 'No credit where credit is due: attributional rationalization of women's success in male-female teams', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 90, No 5, 2005, pp. 905–916 (<https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.90.5.905>).

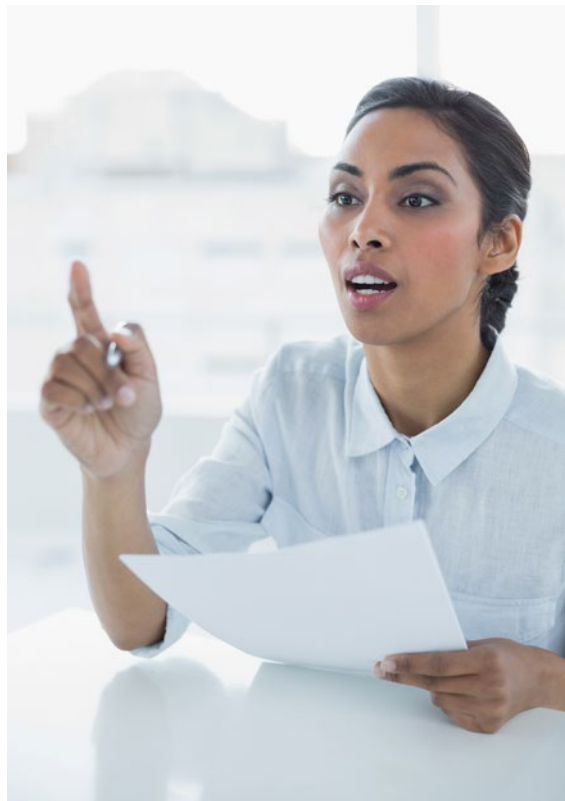
<sup>(36)</sup> Martin, S. R., 'Research: men get credit for voicing ideas, but not problems. Women don't get credit for either', *Harvard Business Review*, 2017 (<https://hbr.org/2017/11/research-men-get-credit-for-voicing-ideas-but-not-problems-women-dont-get-credit-for-either>).

## Task allocation

**Women** have been shown to more frequently volunteer for and be **allocated tasks that do not contribute to promotion**, such as serving on a committee or planning a party <sup>(37)</sup>. Women from minority backgrounds are particularly affected <sup>(38)</sup>.

## Meetings

**Women speak less in meetings** – in particular when they are in the minority – taking up only 25 % of the time <sup>(39)</sup>. Both women and men more frequently interrupt women than they do other men <sup>(40)</sup>.



© lightwavemedia/Shutterstock.com

Image: Both women and men interrupt women more frequently than they do men.

<sup>(37)</sup> Babcock, L., Recalde, M. P., Vesterlund, L. and Weingart, L., 'Gender differences in accepting and receiving requests for tasks with low promotability', *American Economic Review*, Vol. 107, No 3, 2017, pp. 714–747 (<https://pubs.aeaweb.org/doi/pdfplus/10.1257/aer.20141734>).

<sup>(38)</sup> Williams, J. C. and Multhaup, M., 'For women and minorities to get ahead, managers must assign work fairly', *Harvard Business Review*, 2018 (<https://hbr.org/2018/03/for-women-and-minorities-to-get-ahead-managers-must-assign-work-fairly>).

<sup>(39)</sup> Karpowitz, C., Mendelberg, T. and Shaker, L., 'Gender inequality in deliberative participation', *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 106, No 3, 2012, pp. 533–547 (<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055412000329>).

<sup>(40)</sup> Hancock, A. B. and Rubin, B. A., 'Influence of communication partner's gender on language', *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, Vol. 34, No 1, 2015, pp. 46–64 (<https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X14533197>).

## Caring responsibilities

Once employed, stereotypes continue to impact workplace norms and practices, as well as employee behaviour. This can be seen in formal and informal expectations around **who is responsible for unpaid care work**.

Although around 77 % of men aged 20–49 are eligible for parental leave in the EU (actually a higher share than women), only about 10 % of men take advantage of this right<sup>(41)</sup>. Care responsibilities keep **7.7 million women in the EU out of the labour market**<sup>(42)</sup>.

**Women still take on the lion's share of caring responsibilities** and tend to **use flexible working arrangements to achieve work-life balance**, while men frequently use such arrangements to increase their work commitment<sup>(43)</sup>.

44 % of people in the EU believe the most important role of a woman is to take care of her home and 43 % believe the most important role of a man is to earn money<sup>(44)</sup>.

**Once women become mothers, they are perceived as less competent than women without children**, as well as less competent than they were before becoming a mother<sup>(45)</sup>. **Any kind of family formation**, be it getting married or having a child, involves a **financial penalty for women and an earnings boost for men**<sup>(46)</sup>.

79 % of women cook and/or do housework each day, compared to 34 % of men<sup>(47)</sup>.

Women's disproportionate responsibility for care work and the real and perceived effect this has on their work commitment is **another contributor to the gender pay gap**.

<sup>(41)</sup> EIGE, *Eligibility for parental leave in EU Member States*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2020, p. 17 (<https://eige.europa.eu/publications/eligibility-parental-leave-eu-member-states>); European Commission, *Paternity and parental leave policies across the European Union*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2018, p. 4 (<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/a8464ad8-9abf-11e8-a408-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>).

<sup>(42)</sup> EIGE, *Beijing + 25: the fifth review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the EU Member States*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2020 (<https://eige.europa.eu/publications/beijing-25-fifth-review-implementation-beijing-platform-action-eu-member-states>).

<sup>(43)</sup> EIGE, *Gender Equality Index 2019 – Work-life balance*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2019, p. 108 (<https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-equality-index-2019-work-life-balance>).

<sup>(44)</sup> EU Open Data Portal, 'Special Eurobarometer 465: Gender equality 2017' (<https://ec.europa.eu/comfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Survey/getSurveyDetail/instruments/SPECIAL/surveyKy/2154>).

<sup>(45)</sup> Cikara, M., Lee, T., Fiske, S. and Glick, P., 'Ambivalent sexism at home and at work: how attitudes toward women in relationships foster exclusion in the public sphere', *Social and Psychological Bases of Ideology and System Justification*, pp. 444–462 ([https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265106821\\_Ambivalent\\_Sexism\\_at\\_Home\\_and\\_at\\_Work\\_How\\_Attitudes\\_Toward\\_Women\\_in\\_Relationships\\_Foster\\_Exclusion\\_in\\_the\\_Public\\_Sphere](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265106821_Ambivalent_Sexism_at_Home_and_at_Work_How_Attitudes_Toward_Women_in_Relationships_Foster_Exclusion_in_the_Public_Sphere)).

<sup>(46)</sup> EIGE, *Gender Equality Index 2019 – Work-life balance*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2019, p. 95 (<https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-equality-index-2019-work-life-balance>).

<sup>(47)</sup> <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2019/domain/time>

# What happens when you violate sexist expectations?

## Women

As stereotypically feminine behaviour is associated with low status and the domestic sphere, **women can benefit from adopting stereotypically masculine behaviour at work**, showing they 'have what it takes' to succeed <sup>(48)</sup>.

However, women who are seen as trying to assert power can face significant penalties <sup>(49)</sup>. For example, women who behave in a dominant way are less likely to be hired, even when considered competent <sup>(50)</sup>. This can result in a **paradox** whereby women have to **eschew stereotypically feminine behaviour to be viewed as competent**, but subsequently **face a backlash for violating gender norms** <sup>(51)</sup>.

**Resistance to women in positions of power can be seen in the violence faced by women politicians**, with those working on gender equality issues often singled out for attack.

One study of women members of parliaments in 45 European countries found the following <sup>(52)</sup>:

<sup>(48)</sup> Berdahl, J. L., Cooper, M., Glick, P., Livingston, R. W. and Williams, J. C., 'Work as a masculinity contest', *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 74, No 3, 2018, p. 428 (<https://spssi.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/josi.12289>).

<sup>(49)</sup> EIGE's Gender Equality Index shows that gender inequality is most severe in the domain of power, with the equality score only passing the halfway mark in 2019.

<sup>(50)</sup> Koenig A. M., 'Comparing prescriptive and descriptive gender stereotypes about children, adults, and the elderly', *Frontiers in Psychology*, Vol. 9, 2018 (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6028777/>).

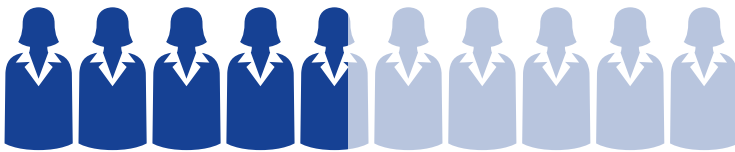
<sup>(51)</sup> Cikara et al., 2009.

<sup>(52)</sup> Council of Europe, *Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe*, 2018 (<http://www.assembly.coe.int/LifeRay/EGA/WomenFFViolence/2018/20181016-WomenParliamentIssues-EN.pdf>).

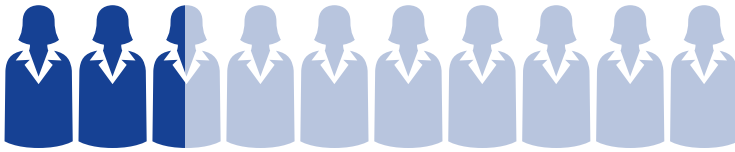
## Violence faced by women MPs in Europe



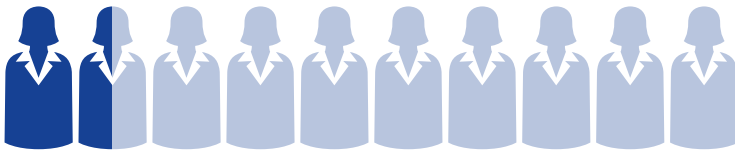
**58%**  
had been the target  
of online sexist attacks



**47%**  
had received death threats  
or threats of rape or beating



**25%**  
had faced sexual violence



**15%**  
had faced physical violence

## Men

Traditional masculinity norms require men to avoid and devalue characteristics culturally coded as feminine – with **acting like a ‘woman’ being one of the worst things a man can do** <sup>(53)</sup>.

Men who display stereotypically feminine characteristics can subsequently face negative consequences in the workplace. Men who ask for help, show empathy, express sadness or display modesty frequently receive lower status and pay, and can be less likely to be hired or promoted <sup>(54)</sup>. Fathers who apply for part-time jobs or wish to reduce their hours to provide care have also been found to face discrimination <sup>(55)</sup>.

### Personal story

*“When my organisation introduced a maternity leave policy, they said they had no budget for paternity leave. I had to take unpaid leave.”*

**Dimitry, Diplomatic organisation**



© Zivica Kerkez/Shutterstock.com

Image: Fathers who want to work part-time can face discrimination.

<sup>(53)</sup> Berdahl et al., 2018.

<sup>(54)</sup> Mayer, D. M., ‘How men get penalized for straying from masculine norms’, *Harvard Business Review*, 2018 (<https://hbr.org/2018/10/how-men-get-penalized-for-straying-from-masculine-norms>).

<sup>(55)</sup> Kelland, J., “Fatherhood forfeits” and “motherhood penalties”: an exploration of UK management selection decision-making on parent applicants’, *CIPD Applied Research Conference 2016: The shifting landscape of work and working lives*, 2016 ([https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/fatherhood-forfeits-and-motherhood-penalties\\_2016-an-exploration-of-uk-management-selection-decision-making-on-parent-applicants\\_tcm18-20005.pdf](https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/fatherhood-forfeits-and-motherhood-penalties_2016-an-exploration-of-uk-management-selection-decision-making-on-parent-applicants_tcm18-20005.pdf)).

# What is sexual harassment?

Some of the sexist behaviour listed in the Council of Europe recommendation on combating sexism, such as 'derogatory comments, objectification, sexist humour' can be categorised as sexual harassment as defined under Article 12a of the Staff Regulations.

About a **third of women** who faced sexual harassment in the EU experienced it in the workplace <sup>(56)</sup>.

Additionally, any ongoing pattern of sexist behaviour can **create an environment** that is 'intimidating, hostile, offensive or disturbing,' as defined under Article 12a of the Staff Regulations.

Such behaviour is also illegal under several EU directives and prohibited under the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention) <sup>(57)</sup>. EU law distinguishes between sex-based harassment, which is any unwanted behaviour directed to someone because they are a woman or a man, and sexual harassment, which involves unwanted conduct of a sexual nature. Sex-based harassment includes sexual harassment and some sexist behaviour.

Sexual harassment is an extreme form of sexism and has been shown to result in:

- fear, anxiety, shame, anger;
- reduced productivity;
- high absenteeism;
- reduced performance;
- high staff turnover <sup>(58)</sup>.

<sup>(56)</sup> FRA, *Violence against women: an EU-wide survey – Main results*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2014 ([https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2014-vaw-survey-main-results-apr14\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2014-vaw-survey-main-results-apr14_en.pdf)).

<sup>(57)</sup> See Directive 2006/54/EC on equal treatment of men and women in employment, Directive 2004/113/EC on the principle of equal treatment between men and women in the access to and supply of goods and services, and Directive 2010/41/EU on the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity in a self-employed capacity. The Istanbul Convention has been ratified by: Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Ireland, Greece, Spain, France, Croatia, Italy, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Finland and Sweden.

<sup>(58)</sup> European Parliament, *Bullying and sexual harassment at the workplace, in public spaces, and in political life in the EU – Study for the FEMM Committee*, research paper by the Directorate-General for Internal Policies, Publications Office of the European Union, 2018, p. 30 ([https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/604949/IPOL\\_STU\(2018\)604949\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/604949/IPOL_STU(2018)604949_EN.pdf)).

This section will highlight the **link between persistent gender stereotypes and sexual harassment**. However, sexual harassment is a legal matter and beyond the scope of this handbook, which focuses on informal mechanisms to create cultural change.

#### Definition: sexual harassment

*Any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature occurs, with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.*

Source: EIGE <sup>(59)</sup>.

Sexual harassment is a form of discrimination and violence. **Victims are predominantly women and perpetrators are predominantly men** <sup>(60)</sup>. When FRA surveyed women about experiencing sexual harassment in the employment context, men were perpetrators in 86 % of cases <sup>(61)</sup>.

Men can also be targets of sexual harassment and women can also be perpetrators, though this is less common.

However, when surveyed, people in **different European countries** have been found to have a **different understanding of what constitutes sexual harassment at work**. For example, the French are three times more likely to believe it is harassment to tell a sexual joke than the Danes <sup>(62)</sup>.

Key factors are whether the affected individual **considers the act as unwanted** and whether they can **distance themselves without fear of reprisals**.

**Complimenting someone may not necessarily amount to sexual harassment.**

Much depends on the **context and nuances of the relationship** between those involved. A good rule of thumb is that comments about people's appearance in today's workplace are best avoided.

The FRA survey on violence against women found the following <sup>(63)</sup>:

<sup>(59)</sup> <https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1376>

<sup>(60)</sup> EIGE Gender Statistics Database, 'Over the last 12 months, during the course of your work have you been subjected to harassment? (% of respondents, 15 + workers)' ([https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs/indicator/ta\\_wrklab\\_wrk\\_cond\\_wrkcultdiscr\\_ewcs\\_harassment/bar](https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs/indicator/ta_wrklab_wrk_cond_wrkcultdiscr_ewcs_harassment/bar)).

<sup>(61)</sup> FRA, 2014, p. 113.

<sup>(62)</sup> Inhoffen, L., 'Sexuelle Belästigung gegenüber Frauen: Wo fängt sie an und wo hört sie auf?', 2018 (<https://yougov.de/news/2017/11/09/sexuelle-belastigung-gegenuber-frauen-wo-fangt-sie/>).

<sup>(63)</sup> FRA, 2014, p. 96.



## Form of harassment experienced by women in the employment context in the EU-28 since the age of 15 (%)



**33%**  
Intrusive questions about private life



**21%**  
Sending or showing sexually explicit pictures, photos or gifts



**32%**  
Sexually suggestive comments or jokes



**17%**  
Inappropriate staring or leering



**28%**  
Inappropriate invitations to go out on dates



**13%**  
Forced to watch or look at pornographic material against one's will



**23%**  
Unwelcome touching, hugging or kissing



**10%**  
Unwanted sexually explicit emails or SMS messages



**4%**  
Indecent exposure



**23%**  
Intrusive comments about physical appearance



**3%**  
Inappropriate advances on social networking websites

People sometimes try to excuse sexual harassment with one of the following:

*"It was just a joke."*

*"She/he is from a different era."*

*"But she/  
he is so nice!"*

*"She/he is from  
a different culture."*

*"She/he was  
only flirting."*

*"It was just a one-off."*

*"You're being too sensitive!"*

None of these excuses are valid. Remember that:

- all staff should be aware of what behaviour constitutes sexual harassment and need to be held to account if they breach the legislation, Staff Regulations and policy;
- inappropriate jokes can constitute sexual harassment;
- one instance of sexual harassment is too much and should be reported;
- there could be other victims;
- nobody has the right to violate another person's dignity.

# Violating sexist expectations can lead to sexual harassment

## Women

Large numbers of women in positions of authority report sexual harassment. In the EU, **75 % of women in top management positions** reported experiencing **sexual harassment** since the age of 15, although this could reflect a greater awareness of sexual harassment law and policy <sup>(64)</sup>.

However, research in the United States found that even when controlling for awareness of sexual harassment laws and policies, women in authority positions faced greater harassment <sup>(65)</sup>. **Women in work contexts dominated by men also faced greater harassment**, suggesting **this behaviour is a tool to keep targets 'in their place'** <sup>(66)</sup>.

One survey found that **70 % of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in the United Kingdom had experienced sexual harassment in the workplace**, with LGBT women particularly affected <sup>(67)</sup>.

Both **women and men are more likely to face harassment in work contexts dominated by men** <sup>(68)</sup>.



© Rocketclips, Inc. / Shutterstock.com

Image: Both women and men are more likely to face harassment in work contexts dominated by men.

<sup>(64)</sup> FRA, 2014, p. 96.

<sup>(65)</sup> McLaughlin, H., Uggen, C. and Blackstone, A., 'Sexual harassment, workplace authority, and the paradox of power', *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 77, No 4, 2012, p. 640 (<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0003122412451728>).

<sup>(66)</sup> McLaughlin et al., 2012, p. 635.

<sup>(67)</sup> Trades Union Congress (TUC), *Sexual harassment of LGBT people in the workplace*, TUC, London, 2019 ([https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/LGBT\\_Sexual\\_Harassment\\_Report\\_0.pdf](https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/LGBT_Sexual_Harassment_Report_0.pdf)).

<sup>(68)</sup> TUC, 2019.

## Men

There is a paucity of research on sexual harassment against men. In the EU, men face sexual harassment at roughly a third of the rate that women do <sup>(69)</sup>.

Sexual harassment of men has been found to primarily consist of sexual comments and jokes, as well as intrusive questions about one's private life <sup>(70)</sup>. **Men are more likely to face harassment from other men**, as opposed to from women <sup>(71)</sup>.

Men who violate stereotypical gender roles are more likely to face harassment, with **men who engage in feminist activism** facing higher levels of sexual harassment in the workplace <sup>(72)</sup>.

Men who complain of sexual harassment have been found to be **believed less, liked less and punished more** than women who complain <sup>(73)</sup>.



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Image: Men who engage in feminist activism can face harassment.

<sup>(69)</sup> FRA, 2014, p. 100.

<sup>(70)</sup> McDonald, P. and Charlesworth, S., 'Workplace sexual harassment at the margins', *Work, Employment and Society*, Vol. 30, No 1, 2016, p. 8 (<https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017014564615>).

<sup>(71)</sup> McDonald et al., 2016, p. 6.

<sup>(72)</sup> Campbell Quick, J. and McFadyen, M. A., 'Sexual harassment: have we made any progress?', *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, Vol. 22, No 3, 2017, p. 291 (<https://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/features/ocp-ocp0000054.pdf>).

<sup>(73)</sup> McDonald et al., 2016, p. 121.

# Under-reporting of sexual harassment

Sexual harassment is under-reported, with one UK survey finding that **79 % of targets of sexual harassment in the workplace did not report it** <sup>(74)</sup>.

The reasons given for not reporting included:

- fear that relationships at work would be negatively affected;
- fear that the report would not be believed or taken seriously;
- embarrassment;
- fear of a negative impact on career <sup>(75)</sup>.

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) also found that a lack of public discussion on sexual harassment, as well as high societal tolerance of such violence, lead to under-reporting <sup>(76)</sup>.

*Most of the time women and girls are afraid to denounce violence. They may feel ashamed or are afraid they will be blamed or, as much sexual harassment happens in the workplace, are afraid of losing their job or being penalised.*

Source: European Parliament <sup>(77)</sup>.

<sup>(74)</sup> TUC, *Still just a bit of banter? Sexual harassment in the workplace in 2016*, TUC, London, 2016 (<https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/SexualHarassmentreport2016.pdf>).

<sup>(75)</sup> TUC, 2016, p. 21.

<sup>(76)</sup> Eurofound, *Violence and harassment in European workplaces: extent, impacts and policies*, Eurofound, Dublin, 2015, p. 52 ([https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331175890\\_Violence\\_and\\_harassment\\_in\\_European\\_workplaces\\_Extent\\_impacts\\_and\\_policies](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331175890_Violence_and_harassment_in_European_workplaces_Extent_impacts_and_policies)).

<sup>(77)</sup> European Parliament resolution of 26 October 2017 on combating sexual harassment and abuse in the EU (2017/2897(RSP)) ([https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2017-0417\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2017-0417_EN.pdf)).



# Part 2.

Test yourself

The purpose of this tool is to help you understand how sexism and sexual harassment impact your organisation and what action you can take to create cultural change. You will find advice on next steps in the 'Act' section of this handbook.

Answer **'yes'** or **'no'** to each question. The final total of 'yes' and 'no' answers will enable you to make a self-assessment.

### **To be completed by management and leadership**

- Do you know and understand the EU legislation, Staff Regulations and policy around sexual and psychological harassment?
- Have you ensured your team know and understand the EU legislation, Staff Regulations and policy around sexual and psychological harassment?
- Are you clear about the role of management in establishing a working environment free from sexism and sexual harassment?
- Do you understand sexism and what kind of behaviour or organisational practices could be deemed sexist?
- Have you ensured your team understand sexism and what kind of behaviour or organisational practices could be deemed sexist?
- Has your team been surveyed on their perceptions and experiences of sexism and sexual harassment in your organisation?
- Have you and your team taken unconscious bias training?
- Have you adjusted your internal and external communication to remove gender stereotypes?
- Do you try to maintain gender balance when allocating tasks and responsibilities on your team, as well as reclassification recommendations?
- Do you apply your unconscious bias training related to gender when you are involved in recruitment processes, giving feedback or in performance appraisals?
- Have you and your team received training to self-advocate (that is for employees to stand up for themselves and deal with situations constructively as they arise) if they face sexism?
- Has your team received bystander training to help them act when they witness inappropriate behaviour?
- Do you help ensure complaints of sexual harassment are handled quickly, confidentially and consistently, regardless of the hierarchical level of the people involved?
- Have confidential counsellors received proper training on how to support victims?
- Do you know how to contact your human resources representative in the event of a problem?



## To be completed by staff

- Do you know and understand the EU legislation, Staff Regulations and policy around sexual and psychological harassment?
- Do you understand sexism and what kind of behaviour or organisational practices could be deemed sexist?
- Have you been trained in how to deal with sexism, either as a target or to support someone else?
- Are you aware when jokes and behaviour are sexist in tone and content?
- Do you know how to shut down sexist jokes and behaviour?
- Have you personally experienced sexism in your organisation?
- If you experienced sexism in the workplace, did you self-advocate?
- Have you personally experienced sexual harassment in your organisation?
- Do you feel sufficient action is being taken to deal with sexism in your organisation?
- Do you feel sufficient action is being taken to deal with sexual harassment in your organisation?
- Does your manager make sure the originator of any idea receives credit?
- Does your manager make sure that staff are treated equally in meetings, for example by not being disproportionately interrupted?
- Do you know how to contact your human resources representative in the event of a problem?
- Do you know how to access a confidential counsellor in the event of a problem?
- Do you feel secure and respected in your place of work?

## If you answered 'yes' more than 12 times

Your organisation has taken action to overcome sexism and sexual harassment. Well done!

Do you want to improve even more? Browse our 'Act' files to find a benchmark of good practices in organisations.

## If you answered 'yes' between 6 and 11 times

Your organisation has started to work on the subject and can still make progress.

## If you answered 'yes' less than six times

Now is the time to act to improve the quality of your work context and take steps to avoid any risk. This can be employee well-being, legal exposure or your reputation as an employer.

Read the '**Understand**' and '**Act**' sections point by point to help you change your organisational culture.



# Part 3.

Act

# How can I combat sexism?

## An ten-step programme for managers

This section will present an ten-step programme for management and leadership to start tackling sexism in their organisation. The following section will outline what action all staff can take to implement culture change in their organisation.

### 1. Check your own awareness on sexism

How did you do in the 'Test yourself' section? Ensure your own understanding of sexism and sexual harassment to ensure your credibility.

Remember that people who believe that they are not sexist are less objective and more likely to behave in a sexist way.

You can test your own biases with the Harvard Implicit Bias Test, developed by the University of Harvard (<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>).



© SFIO CRACHO/Shutterstock.com

Image: You can test your own biases to ensure your understanding of sexism and sexual harassment.

## 2. Be vocal about your commitment

Managers should find out what training their organisation offers on sexism, harassment, bias and diversity. They should unambiguously and consistently state their commitment to eradicating sexist behaviour and practices in their organisation. Concerns about organisational inaction and repercussions can prevent those who are experiencing sexism from speaking up.

*[O]rganisations striving to uphold high ethical standards cannot rely on rules and enforcement mechanisms alone. Instead, they must support their ambitions by developing an appropriate culture of integrity.*

Source: European Court of Auditors <sup>(78)</sup>.

As the #MeToo movement and campaigns such as the Everyday Sexism Project have shown, just because **sexism is not reported or spoken about does not mean people are not experiencing it**. As you saw in the 'Understand' section, sexist behaviour and practices are prevalent across society and work contexts.

### Example

When the European Central Bank made a public commitment to diversity and took several measures to officially support gender balance, the promotion gap between women and men disappeared <sup>(79)</sup>.

## 3. Take the pulse of your organisation

Your team may feel comfortable sharing their experiences of sexism, but often they will prefer anonymity. **You can carry out an audit via an anonymous survey**. Involving an external provider can also be helpful. Check with your human resources team for further advice.

Suggest to your team that they **complete the 'Test yourself' section of this handbook**.

*"We strive for an environment where sexism has no place, where everyone can feel safe, properly respected, and treated with dignity. Such commitment must come not only from all levels of management, but from all staff, too."*

**William Shapcott, Director-General of Organisational Development and Services, Council of the European Union**

<sup>(78)</sup> European Court of Auditors, 2019.

<sup>(79)</sup> European Central Bank, *The gender promotion gap: evidence from central banking – Working paper series*, European Central Bank, Frankfurt, 2019 (<https://www.ecb.europa.eu/pub/pdf/scpwps/ecb.wp2265~ad73fb9a6b.en.pdf>).

## 4. Use bias interrupters to identify and eliminate sexism

'Bias Interrupters' disrupt the transmission of bias in work interactions such as recruitment, performance appraisals, promotions and task allocation. The focus is on changing systems as opposed to changing people.

The first step is to **gather data to identify bias**, such as the following.

- Do women or men employees receive lower performance evaluations after they have had children?
- Are women disproportionately described using relationship-focused adjectives and men using task-oriented adjectives in performance appraisals?
- Are meetings dominated by one gender? Do women who speak more receive lower performance evaluations? You can use an app to measure how much women and men talk in meetings <sup>(80)</sup>.
- Are women employees disproportionately responsible for tasks that do not help career progression, such as the organisation of informal office events?

### Example: European Court of Auditors

The European Court of Auditors carries out an annual evaluation of promotions for the year to make sure that parental leave and part-time working do not negatively impact promotion within their institution.

The second step is to **implement bias interrupters**. Here are some ways this can be done in **performance appraisal and feedback**:

- **Stick with measurable criteria.** For example: 'Cécile delivered all tasks within agreed deadlines' rather than 'Cécile is a good time manager'.
- **Back up with data.** For example: 'Isabella held three induction meetings on the work of the unit for newcomers' rather than 'Isabella has supported newcomers to the unit'.
- **Enable staff to accurately assess their performance with regular informal feedback.** The performance appraisal systems of the EU institutions and agencies require self-assessment. Research suggests women are just as likely to ask for feedback as men, but are less likely to get it <sup>(81)</sup>. When faced with self-evaluation, women have also been shown to evaluate their performance more negatively than men <sup>(82)</sup>.

<sup>(80)</sup> For example, Time to Talk (not tested by EIGE) (<http://www.lookwhostalking.se/>).

<sup>(81)</sup> McKinsey and Company, 'Women in the workplace 2016' (<https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/women-in-the-workplace-2016>).

<sup>(82)</sup> Exley, C. L, Judd, B., 'The gender gap in self-promotion – Working paper 26345', *National Bureau of Economic Research*, 2019, revised June 2020 (<https://www.nber.org/papers/w26345.pdf>).

- **Provide unconscious bias training** to ensure objective performance appraisal and informal feedback. Managers have to watch out for unconscious bias when considering employees behaving in a non-gender stereotypical way (for example women behaving assertively – see p. 18).
- **Encourage women to apply for more senior roles.** If certain selection criteria are optional, this should be made clear (see p. 13 on women considering selection criteria final).

**Personal story**

*“My experience is that line managers are promoting people who behave like them more than executing a fair decision-making process based on facts. If you work in a very ‘male’ sector like ICT, the impact on the appraisal procedure is quite significant.*

*The appraisal training makes evaluators aware of typical evaluator’s biases, but training is not sufficient. If there are no ex-ante controls, stereotyping can still happen.”*

**Rosemarie, EU agency**

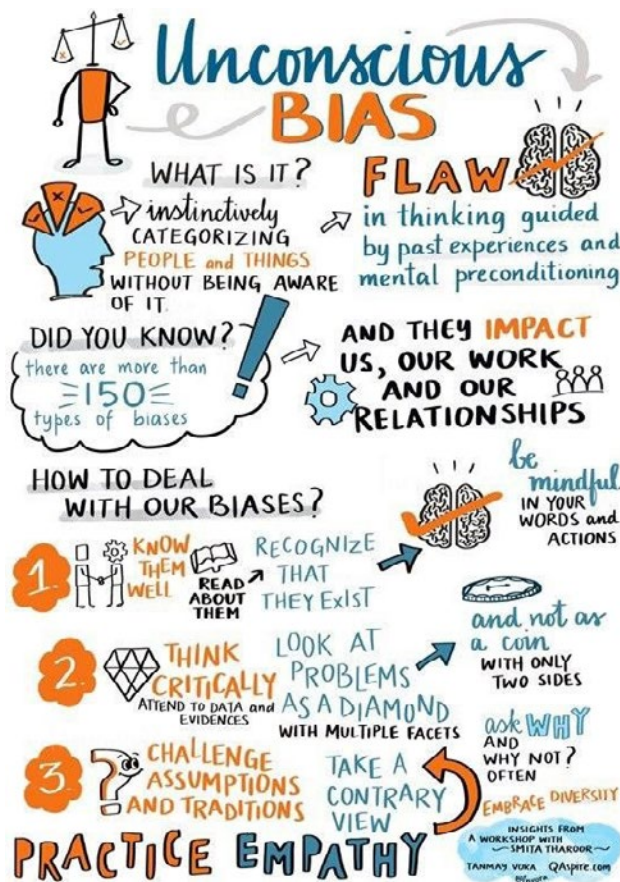


Image: Infographic included in the European Commission's recommended online training 'Unconscious bias: micro-learning for managers'.

## 5. Eliminate sexism from your surroundings

You only need to make small changes to make progress. Here are some ideas.

- **Check your internal communication** to ensure you avoid language and images that include gender stereotypes (e.g. women serving coffee or taking notes).

### Tip!

EIGE's *Toolkit on Gender-sensitive Communication* gives concrete guidance on how to make your communication inclusive.

- **Have gender-balanced panels** at your conferences.
- **Do not accept invitations to single-gender panels** <sup>(83)</sup>. If you accept, make some noise about it once you are there.
- **Encourage men to take parental leave.**
- **Eliminate sexism from meetings** by:

### Tip!

The **Brussels Binder** is a free database of women experts based in Europe who are available to speak on panels.

- ✓ **asking all participants to contribute** – be aware of a bias relating to women 'who talk a lot' and who can be perceived more negatively than men <sup>(84)</sup>;
- ✓ **rotating housekeeping tasks** such as note taking among all participants, regardless of gender;
- ✓ **acknowledging all contributors** to any discussion or initiative, not just the most vocal.

### Good to know

You can follow Commissioner Mariya Gabriel's #NoWomanNoPanel campaign on social media.

*"We are careful regarding what visuals we use in our internal communication. The level of sexism in stock photos is high (e.g. few photos of women above 50 in a business context) and many people don't realise until it is pointed out to them."*

**Rebekka Wiemann, Equal Opportunities Officer, Council of the European Union**

<sup>(83)</sup> Single-gender panels can be acceptable, for example if survivors of sexual violence are speaking. However, more often than not it is beneficial to have representatives of both genders. A panel on women in ICT, for example, would benefit from the presence of men so they can hear first-hand the challenges faced by their women colleagues.

<sup>(84)</sup> Brescoll, V. L., 'Who takes the floor and why: gender, power, and volubility in organizations', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 56, No 4, 2011, pp. 622–641 (<https://doi.org/10.1177/0001839212439994>).



## 6. Be clear that sexist behaviour will not be tolerated

When announcing your position of zero tolerance regarding sexist behaviour and sexual harassment, be clear that **all complaints will be treated seriously**.

The EU institutions and agencies offer the services of **confidential counsellors** to oversee informal procedures aimed at mediation and conciliation. Make sure your team knows who the confidential counsellors are and how to contact them.

### Tip!

EIGE has a policy of appointing a gender-balanced team of confidential counsellors.

In order to protect the complainant, it may be deemed best to move someone to another part of the organisation. **Consider carefully before deciding to move the complainant:**

'Is this really the least harmful course of action ...?'

'... Or is it actually the easiest as they are the more junior party?'

When employees at EIGE faced allegations of sexual harassment, the Institute conducted investigations and took action against staff members, including dismissals.

EIGE subsequently led the adoption of a zero-tolerance policy towards sexual harassment in the workplace, signed by other EU agencies <sup>(85)</sup>.

<sup>(85)</sup> EIGE, *Joint statement of heads of JHA agencies: zero tolerance for sexual harassment*, 2017 (<https://eige.europa.eu/lt/news/joint-statement-jha-agencies-sexual-harassment>).

## 7. Manage passivity

It is important to make sure your team understands what types of behaviour are considered sexist and unacceptable.

Your staff should also have received appropriate **training on unconscious bias**, how to stage a **bystander intervention** and how to **self-advocate**.

This does not mean escalating all incidents, but **making people aware**. It is an opportunity to set up measures to deal with future occurrences in a productive and non-conflictual fashion.

### Good to know

The **Council of Europe** has a compilation of good practices to combat sexism in its 47 Member States <sup>(86)</sup>.

### Personal story

*“Senior leaders (both women and men) often either don’t notice or are not empowered or trained to act against sexist behaviour in their departments.”*

**Eleonora, European Commission, Brussels**

<sup>(86)</sup> Council of Europe, ‘Compilation of good practices to prevent and combat sexism in Council of Europe member states’, 2018 (<https://rm.coe.int/compilation-of-good-practices-to-prevent-and-combat-sexism-revised/16808b15a5>).

## 8. Monitor backlash

Many managers fear resistance when they propose to launch initiatives to tackle sexism. **Resistance is information and any pushback provides excellent data.** Make a note of where the resistance is coming from and why. Check how it links to any previously reported behaviour.

### Tip!

Individual coaching and group training can help tackle unconscious bias and sexism.

Some individuals have been in a post for many years and are unaware of their unconscious biases and sexist behaviour. Workplace expectations may be different to when they first joined.

Allocating a **mentor or reverse mentoring** (assigning a younger and more junior person as a mentor) can also be helpful.

### Watch out

Women and ethnic minority leaders who promote diversity can receive lower performance ratings.

It may seem logical to allocate initiatives to tackle sexism to women. However, **women may face a backlash when promoting diversity-related initiatives** as they highlight their status and trigger the associated negative stereotypes<sup>(88)</sup>.

<sup>(87)</sup> Hekman, D. R., Johnson, S. K., Foo, M. and Yang, W., 'Does diversity-valuing behavior result in diminished performance ratings for non-white and female leaders?', *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 60, No 2, 2017 ([https://www.cbs.dk/files/cbs.dk/hekman\\_et\\_al\\_2017\\_0.pdf](https://www.cbs.dk/files/cbs.dk/hekman_et_al_2017_0.pdf)).

<sup>(88)</sup> Hekman et al., 2017, pp. 771–797.

## 9. Provide training on self-advocacy

**Self-advocacy is the ability to speak up for yourself in a non-conflictual way.** Many situations involving sexism, particularly at the lower end of the spectrum, can be defused by training staff to deal with the issue themselves.

If any behaviour is part of an ongoing pattern, then that is clearly something that employees should be advised to report.

There will also be instances where self-advocacy is difficult – if the person behaving in a sexist manner is in a position of authority for example. Recommending employees make an official report could be appropriate in such cases.

### Example

The European Court of Auditors has set up a working group on 'dignity at work' to provide guidance on how to deal with sexism.



© fizkes/Shutterstock.com

Image: Many instances of sexism can be defused by training staff to deal with the issue themselves.

## 10. Provide incentives

Managers can be held accountable by clearly outlining measurable expectations around specific areas of activity such as:

- **meeting any assigned quotas** for the under-represented gender;
- ensuring **gender-balanced shortlists for open positions**;
- encouraging **equal opportunities for promotion**;
- ensuring **task allocation decisions are gender-neutral**.

### Tip!

Make sure networking events are held during core hours where all staff can build relationships for career progression.

### Example: European Commission

To achieve 40 % women in management, the European Commission assigned a target to each DG.

Measures included a career development programme to get women into management roles. This included personalised skills assessment, coaching, training, cross-DG mentorship and networking.

The European Commission also implemented **gender-balanced selection panels** and **gender-neutral vacancy notices**, as well as the possibility to **suspend the filling of management positions in case of insufficient progress** in the recruitment of women managers.

# How can all staff create cultural change?

Although our biases can never be eliminated, we can learn to manage them. Here are some ideas on how to do that.

## 1. Become more self-aware

It is easy to ignore our own biases and be mindful of bias in others ('I'm not biased, it's my colleagues who have a problem')<sup>(89)</sup>.

Complete the **'Test yourself'** section of this handbook

Make sure you engage in **unconscious bias training**. Reflect on what you might do, or do not do, to enable this behaviour. Do you stay silent when someone cracks a sexist joke?

If you find yourself with a **sharp negative reaction** to anything, check for **biases that might have triggered that response**. Discuss with a peer, mentor or coach to get feedback.



© GaudiLab/Shutterstock.com

Image: If you find yourself with a sharp negative reaction to anything, check for biases that might have triggered that response.

<sup>(89)</sup> Banaji, M. R. and Greenwald, A. G., *Blindspot: The Hidden Biases of Good People*, Delacorte Press, 2013.

## 2. Ask for feedback

Very often we share our opinions before we ask. Ask for **feedback** on how people receive the way **you address them and your opinions**.

If you have received feedback you think is sexist, incomplete or misleading, ask questions to clarify, such as the following.

'Can you clarify what you mean when you say I am too "emotional?"'

'What makes you think that?'

'What particular incident(s) brought you to that conclusion?'

## 3. Build empathy

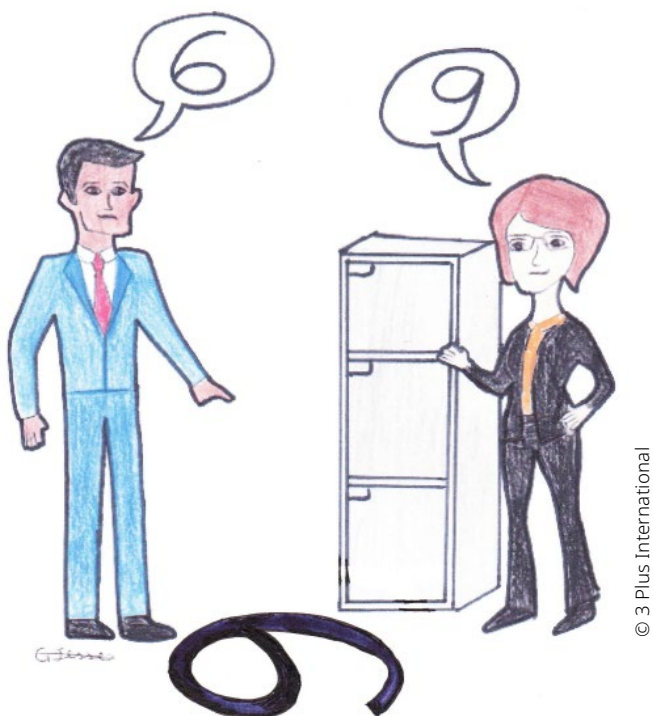
Putting yourself in other people's shoes goes a long way. How would you feel if you were constantly interrupted in meetings?

You could even ask some appropriate questions about your colleagues' experience of your workplace or certain events.

For example: rather than asking 'do you have any feedback for me?' which may produce a negative response, try asking **general open-ended questions**, such as one of the following.

'What are your thoughts on... ?'

'How did you feel about... ?'



© 3 Plus International

Image: Putting yourself in other people's shoes goes a long way.

## 4. Self-advocate

It is important that we feel able to deal with sexist behaviour when it occurs and that we have the skills to self-advocate. We all have to foster a **workplace culture where people feel comfortable to raise concerns without fear of judgement and reprisals.**

You can contribute by communicating constructively in the following way.

- **Point it out.** State your observation: 'It seems that...'
- **Check it out.** Validate your understanding and check the intent: 'Can you clarify... help me understand...?'
- **Work it out.** Find a solution: 'Would you be willing to...? Could we...?'

For instances of sexual harassment that contravene organisational policies, the Belgian social enterprise JUMP recommends the following.

1. Do not suffer in silence, speak up.
2. Refer the issue to your line manager. If the perpetrator is your line manager go to your human resources manager or other person designated to deal with such challenges, such as a confidential counsellor.
3. Find witnesses who can corroborate your experience.
4. Create a paper trail:
  - a) Keep a record of the incident noting any relevant details. State the facts such as who was involved, what happened, when and where.
  - b) Ask for written testimonial from any witnesses. If you have experienced emotional or psychological distress which others can confirm, ask for their testimony too.
  - c) Save all written communication of those involved.
  - d) Save all medical certificates <sup>(90)</sup>.

It must be noted that responsibility for violence such as sexual harassment lies solely with the perpetrator. The victim cannot be held responsible for their actions and should not be expected to self-advocate.

<sup>(90)</sup> JUMP, *Libérez votre entreprise du sexisme*, 2019 ([http://jump.eu.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Guide\\_Sexisme\\_BE\\_FR.pdf](http://jump.eu.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Guide_Sexisme_BE_FR.pdf)).



## 5. Do not be a bystander

We have to assume that not all sexist incidents take place out of sight. Bystander interventions are important to create a culture where sexist behaviour is flagged up as unacceptable. Support colleagues who you might feel are targets.

Challenge the situation and focus on **why you are uncomfortable rather than the person who is the target**.

For example: 'I feel uncomfortable when you comment on Eloïse's appearance in meetings.'

**Avoid** saying: 'Don't comment on Eloïse's appearance in meetings it makes her feel uncomfortable.' This makes Eloïse a target twice.

Remind the person who is behaving in a sexist way that **this is against the policy of your organisation**. It might be more appropriate to challenge the issue later, but the language should remain the same.



© Mangostar/Shutterstock.com

Image: Bystander interventions are important to create a culture where sexist behaviour is flagged up as unacceptable.

# How can I report a problem?

The Staff Regulations require employees to refrain from behaviour that might reflect adversely on their position and condemn psychological and sexual harassment. Sexual and sex-based harassment are also illegal under EU law.

If a staff member faces behaviour they deem to be psychological or sexual harassment, they have access to a **formal or an informal procedure**.

## Informal procedure

This procedure does not involve any formal legal qualification of the behaviour or disciplinary sanctions.

In many institutions and agencies, staff can speak to **confidential counsellors**, who are trained staff volunteers who provide support in situations of allegations of harassment in the work context. They offer confidential discussions in a safe environment and can help colleagues to reach a decision about how they wish to proceed.

You can also speak to a confidential counsellor if you have experienced sexism and want to seek their advice. Your manager and human resources representative should also be able to help.

## Formal procedure

The formal procedure seeks to assess whether harassment has occurred, and if so, take appropriate measures, including disciplinary measures. This may result in an **administrative inquiry** having to be carried out.

Information on administrative follow-up is not available in cases where individuals have sought support from a confidential counsellor and have decided to not lodge a formal complaint.

# Eradicating sexism to change the face of the EU

Sexism continues to have an impact on our workplaces and societies, with **women being under-represented in most decision-making positions**.

In September 2020, according to EIGE's Gender Statistics Database, 86 % of presidents and prime ministers and 69 % of government ministers in the EU-28 are men <sup>(91)</sup>. Across the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission, 66 % of senior administrators are men <sup>(92)</sup>. The majority of EU institutions are led by men <sup>(93)</sup>.

Only 20 years ago, the gap between women and men was even more pronounced. 100 % of EU countries and 90 % of EU institutions were led by men <sup>(94)</sup>. 86 % of senior administrators in the EU institutions were men <sup>(95)</sup>.

Women in leadership positions are still a relatively new phenomenon. This reality shapes our conscious and unconscious beliefs about who should hold what role in the work context. When asked to draw a leader, most people will draw a man <sup>(96)</sup>.

As this handbook has shown, there is still some way to go to end sexism. Being able to identify sexism and having the right tools to tackle it will help organisations bring in and retain more women. This will help them change the face of the EU to better represent the reality of its citizens.

<sup>(91)</sup> EIGE Gender Statistics Database, 'National governments: presidents and prime-ministers' ([https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs/indicator/wmidm\\_pol\\_gov\\_wmid\\_natgov\\_pres](https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs/indicator/wmidm_pol_gov_wmid_natgov_pres)); EIGE Gender Statistics Database, 'National governments: ministers by seniority and function of government' ([https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs/indicator/wmidm\\_pol\\_gov\\_wmid\\_natgov\\_minis](https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs/indicator/wmidm_pol_gov_wmid_natgov_minis)).

<sup>(92)</sup> EIGE Gender Statistics Database, 'European Union institutions: senior administrators' ([https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs/indicator/wmidm\\_admin\\_eur\\_wmid\\_euadmin\\_eurins/hbar](https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs/indicator/wmidm_admin_eur_wmid_euadmin_eurins/hbar)).

<sup>(93)</sup> In July 2020, the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the European Ombudsman were led by women. The European Parliament, the European Council, the Court of Justice of the European Union, the European Court of Auditors, the European External Action Service, the European Economic and Social Committee, the European Committee of the Regions, the European Investment Bank and the European Data Protection Supervisor were chaired or run by men.

<sup>(94)</sup> In 1999, the presidents and prime ministers of existing EU Member States (Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Austria, Portugal, Sweden and the United Kingdom) were all men. In July 1999, the European Parliament was led by a woman. The European Council, the European Commission, the Court of Justice of the European Union, the European Central Bank, the European Court of Auditors, the European Economic and Social Committee, the European Committee of the Regions, the European Investment Bank and the European Ombudsman, and were led by men. The European External Action Service and European Data Protection Supervisor had not yet been created.

<sup>(95)</sup> EIGE Gender Statistics Database, 'European Union institutions: senior administrators', 1999 ([https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs/indicator/wmidm\\_admin\\_eur\\_wmid\\_euadmin\\_eurins/hbar/year:1999/geo:EU/EGROUP:EUR\\_INST/sex:M,W/UNIT:PC/POSITION:ADMIN/ENTITY:TOT,EC,CNCL,EPARL](https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs/indicator/wmidm_admin_eur_wmid_euadmin_eurins/hbar/year:1999/geo:EU/EGROUP:EUR_INST/sex:M,W/UNIT:PC/POSITION:ADMIN/ENTITY:TOT,EC,CNCL,EPARL)).

<sup>(96)</sup> Criado Perez, 2019.

## Gender inequality in the EU leadership positions



Source: EIGE





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