



Equal Pay Day[®] in Belgium

An international source of inspiration

Equal pay for women and men is still not a reality in Belgium. This is why the progressive women's rights movement **zij-kant** organises Equal Pay Day, a day advocating equal pay for men and women.

Equal Pay Day is the day until which women must work longer in order to earn as much as men earn in a single year. To raise awareness concerning this pay gap between women and men, on this day **zij-kant** conducts a unique public campaign with activities run by volunteers throughout the country.

Equal Pay Day takes place in March. This date is not chosen randomly: it symbolises the size of the difference in pay between women and men on the Belgian labour market. If this pay gap diminishes, Equal Pay Day shifts to an earlier date in the year. The opposite happens when the gap widens.

Campaign 2020



- Equal Pay Day: 27 March 2020
- Monthly pay gap before tax: 24%
- Slogan: Wait until you retire before having children

On 27 March, it is Equal Pay Day. As a result of the gender pay gap of 24% (gross annual income, 2017), women have to work until this day to close their wage gap of the preceding year.

One of the main causes of the gender pay gap is the impact of children on women's careers. While female starters are paid equally or better than their male colleagues, a noticeable shift occurs around the age of 30. When they start having children, women work part-time much more frequently than men do.

Despite the fact that we find ourselves in the year 2020, gender stereotypes still push women towards care responsibilities while men are busy building their careers.

In a funny and provoking clip, communication agency Mortierbrigade and production company CZAR Brussels advise women to wait until their retirement before having children.

#equalpayday #EPD2020 - [View the clip.](#)

European facts on the gender pay gap

In Europe, women earn 16% less than men (on average gross hourly income of full and part-time workers, Eurostat, 2018).

The differences between European member states are big. In Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Italy and Luxemburg, the pay gap is under 10%, while in the UK, Czech Republic and Germany, the gap reaches over 20%. Estonia falls to the bottom of the list with 26%. Neighbouring countries are doing worse than Belgium (6%), with 15% (the Netherlands and France).

What is Equal Pay Day?

The history of Equal Pay Day

In 2020, Equal Pay Day will celebrate its sixteenth edition. At the initiative of the progressive women's rights movement **zij-kant**, and in collaboration with the socialist labour union ABVV, the first Equal Pay Day was held in Belgium in 2005. The campaign focused the attention of the public and of policymakers on the pay gap between women and men.

Equal Pay Day in the meantime has developed into a strong brand: a social and controversial campaign that yields results. The campaign put the debate about the pay gap on the map, and has resulted in recent years in a number of Belgian organisations taking a closer look at this pay gap via studies and days of action.

Other countries have also joined the cause: Equal Pay Day campaigns were organised among others in Switzerland, Austria, Germany, Luxemburg, Estonia and the Czech Republic. In 2005, then MEP and former president of **zij-kant** Anne Van Lancker launched a proposal in the European Parliament to hold an annual European 'equal pay for equal job' Day on March 31st. The European Commission recently breathed new life into this idea with the first annual European Equal Pay Day on 5 March 2011. Although attention on the part of Europe for the problem is welcome, it has proven difficult in practice to establish an unambiguous European definition and calculation of the pay gap. For this reason, **zij-kant** advocates that Europe offers Member States more support and financial resources for organising a national day for equal pay for men and women, with a local interpretation given in function of the local situation and needs, rather than placing the emphasis on developing an overarching and generalised European initiative.

Why an Equal Pay Day?

Equal pay for women and men is still not a reality in Belgium. The average pay gap today amounts to 24% (2017), based on the annual gross salaries of women and men.

This can be seen in the most recent edition of the '[Pay Gap Report](#)' of the [Belgian Institute for the Equality of Women and Men](#), which is drafted annually based on the official statistics of the Federal Public Service Economy. The Pay Gap Report makes it possible to precisely monitor the evolution of the pay gap.

Since 2020, zij-kant has access to new and more accurate data on the gender pay gap. These numbers show that the pay gap is even bigger than expected.

In order to compare with previous years, the new data take into account the evolution of the pay gap since 2014. At that moment, the pay gap was 25%. At this rate, we still have to campaign for another 72 years before equal pay is a reality. And that is way too long.

Why a pay gap?

The pay gap is due among other things to stereotypic (pre)judgements and the traditional gender roles assigned to men and women in society and on the labour market: principles that Equal Pay Day refuses to accept.

Some causes of the pay gap:

- **Horizontal segregation**

Men in construction, women in the cleaning sector. A cliché for sure, but one that rings true. Today there are still many professions and sectors that are 'typically male' or 'typically female'. Perhaps it is a coincidence, but precisely these professions and sectors in which mostly women work have lower average pay. And these lower women's salaries increase the pay gap.

- **Vertical segregation**

Women at the top: (still) doesn't happen that often. Women are underrepresented in leadership positions, among managers and higher executives. They are blocked by the so-called 'glass ceiling', an invisible barrier created by habits and stereotypes concerning who, how or what a boss should be. The lower the position on the ladder, the less pay for women, and the wider the pay gap.

- **Part-time work**

Part-time work continues to be primarily a women's thing. In 2016, 45% of Belgian working women in the private sector work part-time, versus 11% for men. Care for the children is the most important reason given by women for working part-time. Part-time work is successful in Belgium thanks to allowances for the interruption of one's career, time credits and service checks. This is often presented as a win-win situation, but it has a negative impact on one's further career and salary development; on social security rights in the case of illness, unemployment and invalidity; and in particular, on one's pension.

- **Composition of the family**

The family situation affects the pay gap. It is probably the breadwinner model and the classic gender roles that work to the advantage of men: men are seen as breadwinners and are given more freedom to focus on their careers.

- **Professional training**

Research shows that men enjoy more additional training during their career. In general, men also enjoy longer and more expensive training. This training then is an excellent basis for promotion and thus an increase in pay.

- **Extras**

Popular employee benefits such as luncheon vouchers, mobile phone, laptop, company car, hospital insurance, etc. are given more often to men than to women.

- **Career breaks**

Time-outs for yourself or for someone in need of care are taken more by women than men. Possibilities in Belgium like time credit, parental leave, palliative leave, etc. are partially reimbursed, but have a clear impact on further career development and also result in a reduction in pay now and in the pension granted later.

Despite of all these possible causes, according to the 'Pay Gap Report', 53% of the pay gap in Belgium remains unexplained. Does pure discrimination also play a role? Think about individual pay negotiations and the extent to which professional experience and seniority are recognised, or the way in which positions or job responsibilities are valued and remunerated.

What does Equal Pay Day aim to achieve?

Equal Pay Day aims to eliminate pay inequality between women and men by:

1. Raising awareness

The pay gap between women and men exists, but not everyone knows about it. Equal Pay Day not only highlights the pay difference, but also its social causes, consequences and solutions. The debate on the pay gap must be kept alive in order to make progress possible and prevent resignation with respect to the status quo. **zij-kant** and ABVV not only aim to discuss pay differences, but also the salary itself. The taboo around discussing pay must be broken. Which is why the training package 'S.O.S. Griet' was developed in the context of Equal Pay Day: the information leaflet and the website www.sosgriet.be contain various tips on how to strengthen your position as woman during individual pay negotiations.

2. Gathering facts and figures: Numbers tell the tale

Equal Pay Day demands official and reliable figures and research to increase knowledge on the (causes and consequences of the) pay gap. Official figures and their analysis reinforce the message and give more clout during negotiations or when enforcing policy measures. At the time of the first Belgian Equal Pay Day in 2005, few figures were available to substantiate the demands of our campaign.

Thanks to our campaign and the continuing awareness raising around the theme, the first annual pay gap report of the Institute for the Equality of Women and Men appeared in 2007 with objective and reliable statistics on the pay gap that exists on the Belgian labour market. Moreover, under the Belgian presidency of the European Union the report '[How to close the gender pay gap: Strategies and good practices of States and social Partners in Europe](#)' and the European pay gap report 'The gender pay gap in the Member States of the European Union: Quantitative and qualitative indicators' were drafted.

3. Restoring confidence in social control and change

zij-kant is not resigned to accepting this pay gap. Lower wages for women cannot simply be seen as the result of individual and free choices. Our choices and decisions are not as free as we might think; hence pay inequality can best be dealt with in a collective and social way.

4. Empowering and motivating social actors to act

To tackle the pay gap, politicians, governments, employers and labour unions must be held

responsible. They are the ones who must take initiatives to combat the pay gap and eliminate it over time, among others via the following initiatives:

- **Measures for greater pay equality.** The pay gap must be tackled in a structural and permanent way. Laws, especially their effective enforcement, are important instruments in eliminating the wage difference between women and men.
- **Attention for gender in education.** Attention for gender needs to start early, also in education. Your choice of studies after all influences your further career, and thus also your future pay and pension as well as your opportunities for promotion and career advancement.
- **Collective care facilities.** Care for children and people in need of assistance is often a barrier to (full-time) work. This affects primarily women because they still handle a majority of the care tasks. And those who (temporarily) interrupt their career not only receive a lower income, but also have less opportunities for promotion or a pay increase, and later receive a lower pension.
- **More and better figures.** In 2007, at the explicit request of the initiators of Equal Pay Day, the Institute for the Equality of Women and Men published the first official Belgian pay gap report. The report is a major step in the availability of pay gap statistics, but data on important sectors is still lacking.
- **Valuing 'women's work' more and rewarding it (financially) more fairly.** Women are overrepresented in sectors where wages are lower, such as the care and non-profit sectors. These so-called 'women's jobs' and 'women's sectors' usually pay less. In a number of cases, this is due to the lack of a gender-neutral job evaluation system.

The Equal Pay Day campaigns

Campaign 2019

- Equal Pay Day: 14 March 2019



MANLY MEN AREN'T AFRAID OF SHITTY JOBS
LIKE THE SHITTY JOBS AT HOME
SHARE THE WORK AND CLOSE THE GENDER PAY GAP

MARCH 14, 2019

equal-payday
www.equal-payday.be



- Monthly pay gap before tax: 20%
- Slogan: Share the work, close the pension gap

This year's focus is on the unequal share of unpaid household jobs and paid work. The video by communication agency Mortierbrigade and production company CZAR, showcases men and their work in a quirky manner to encourage them to reduce the pay gap. The clip won a Bronze Lion at the International Festival of Creativity in Cannes in the category Craft.

[View the clip.](#)

Campaign 2018



- Equal Pay Day: 14 March 2018
- Monthly pay gap before tax: 20%
- Slogan: Close the gender pay, gap, close the pension gap

zij-kant launches its 14th campaign in collaboration with PES Women. This year's focus is on the pension gap. The gap between the amounts women and men receive when they retire is 39% in Europe and 25% in Belgium.

The campaign is launched in Brussels on European Equal Pay Day (28 February). An event gathers representatives from women's rights organisations, trade unions and members of national parliaments and MEPs.

The campaign video highlights the problem of the pension pay gap in a funny and thought-provoking way. The creative directors of the campaign this year are Jens Mortier, Joost Berends and Philippe De Ceuster from mortierbrigade. The movie is directed by Joe Vanhoutteghem, the director of photography is Grimm Vandekerckhove and the production company is Czar Brussels.

[View the clip.](#)

Campaign 2017



- Equal Pay Day: 14 March 2017
- Monthly pay gap before tax: 20%
- Slogan: Start sooner for an equal pay later

On 22 February 2017, **zij-kant**, together with PES Women and ABVV launched a European Equal Pay Day campaign.

On the initiative of **zij-kant**, creative agency mortierbrigade has created a playful short film to depict an unorthodox way to close the gender pay gap – asking girls to start their working careers ten years earlier than men, so they can earn the same as men in their lifetime.

[View the clip.](#)

Campaign 2016



- Equal Pay Day: 13 March 2016
- Monthly pay gap before tax: 20%
- Slogan: #InherShoes

Women are still earning 20% less than men. The gender pay gap is largely due to part-time work: almost half of employed women does not have a full-time job, compared to only one in ten men. Indeed, women account for four out of every five part-time workers.

Even in 2016 women are essentially still taking care of most family and household tasks. Claiming that this is their own choice is not always true : studies show that only 8,5% of women working part-time would turn down the opportunity of full-time employment.

More equality and an even distribution of family and household tasks are essential for women to gain access to full-time jobs (and full-time pay). That is why we are asking everyone to put themselves in a woman's shoes and to devote their full attention not to her generous cleavage but to her scanty pay check.

[View the clip.](#)

Pay me like a man

On International Women's Day, **zij-kant**, PES Women and the Dutch PvdA-women launch a European Equal Pay Day campaign video clip, created by mortierbrigade and the production company Czar. In the high-profile clip, Erika Ervin, American actress and transgender model, tells how happy she is to now be a woman, but also the severe sacrifices she made to become one. She refers to the gender pay gap she has experienced since she is a woman. Her motto: "Treat me like a woman, pay me like a man"...

[View the clip.](#)

2015 Campaign



- Equal Pay Day on 14 March 2015
- Pay gap in gross monthly wage: 20%
- Slogan: #SpeakUpEPD

In 2015 Belgian women still earn one fifth less than men. But, there is also good news: thanks to our Equal Pay Day action days and as a result of frequent social concertation, the gender disparity in average gross hourly wages of full-time workers partly decreased. In 2001, the wage gap for men and women working full time still amounted to 15%; in 2012, this wage gap decreased to 6%. **zij-kant** and ABVV want this positive and faster evolution in hourly wages also reflected in the gross monthly wages. One of the major reasons for the pay gap is part-time work. More than 4 out of 5 people who work part time are women. 46% of all female employees work part-time, compared to only 10% of men.

For the creation of the Equal Pay Day campaign spot, **zij-kant** and ABVV once again relied on the agency *mortierbrigade*, this year in co-operation with Caviar (production) and MediaMonks (interactive marketing). The result is a real interactive cliché killer, a technical masterpiece telling a double story. In a rather stereotypical commercial British actress Rachel Donovan glorifies a new detergent. But one sees clearly that she speaks in voice-over, and in the repeat of the scene you can hear the undubbed truth about what women really want. The video can be seen on TV and on www.equalpayday.be

Like Rachel Donovan, **zij-kant** and ABVV invite all women and men to use #SpeakUpEPD in order to express what women really want. And that is an undeniable signal: equal pay. Women are fed up to work as hard as men for a smaller salary and they urge all women and men to help close the gender pay gap. The Equal Pay Day messages 2015 are distributed on posters, postcards, stickers, Facebook and Twitter. On Friday 13th and Saturday 14th March, volunteers of **zij-kant** and ABVV occupy public places in Flanders and Brussels to run their Equal Pay Day campaign.

[View the clip.](#)

2014 Campaign



- Equal Pay Day on 18 March 2014
- Pay gap in gross monthly wage: 21%
- Slogan: 'It's a disgrace ...'

In 2014 **zij-kant** and ABVV 'celebrate' the tenth anniversary of Equal Pay Day, but it is not a very festive occasion. The gender pay gap in the average gross monthly wages still amounts to 21% (2011). It decreased with 7 percentage points compared to the 28% in 1999. At this speed, it will take us 37 more years of campaigning to finally close the wage gap.

zij-kant and ABVV believe it's a disgrace that women are still paid less than men. To share their outrage with the general public, employers and policymakers, they developed a disgraceful campaign in collaboration with the communication agency *mortierbrigade*: "You think it's a

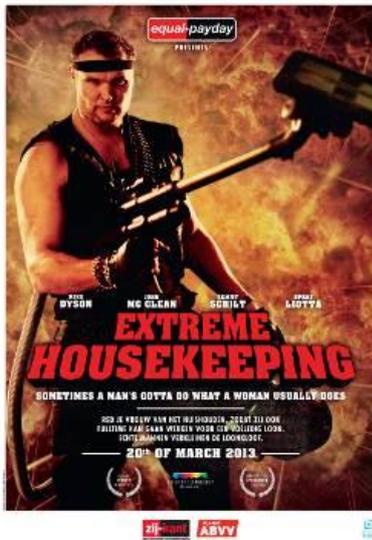
disgrace that ginger, bold, black or big people earn less. Why don't you think the same about women ...?" The campaign is launched on 7 March 2014 with a large article on the gender pay gap in the national newspaper *De Standaard*. The website www.equalpayday.be is renewed and offers a face swap. By changing gender female Facebook users can finally earn 21% more. Men will have to make do with 21% less.

Equal Pay Day is most known by its controversial clips. For this campaign **zij-kant** and *mortierbrigade* created two disgraceful spots in which the narrator argues why big and black people should earn less. **zij-kant** and *mortierbrigade* ask the public "Why don't you care about this when it concerns women?"

On 18 March 2014 volunteers of **zij-kant** and ABVV distribute flyers and posters of bold, ginger, big or black men. They construct Injustice Gates to make the unfairness of the gender pay gap more tangible. Men can take the fastlane, women will have to make a detour to reach the same goal.

View the clips about [fat](#) and [black](#) people.

2013 Campaign



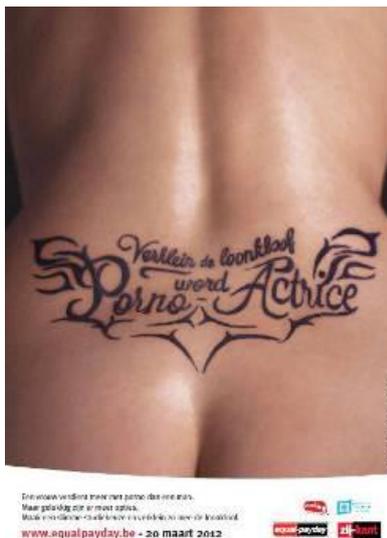
- Equal Pay Day on 20 March 2013
- Pay gap in gross monthly wage: 22%
- Slogan: 'Extreme Housekeeping. Sometimes a man gotta do what a woman usually does'

Equal Pay Day 2013 raised awareness among the public on the impact of part time work by a large number of women on their pay and career perspectives. With our campaign 'Extreme Housekeeping' we suggested men to take a larger part in household duties so that their partners can work full time for a full wage.

The advertising agency Mortierbrigade created a sensational clip. They invited four-time world champion kickboxing Semmy Schilt to demonstrate that real men break gender stereotypes in an original way. As a natural born action hero he cleans the house and prepares dinner. Mike Dyson and Spray Liotta figure as sidekicks. Fans will recognise about every cliché from the action film genre and find some very interesting suggestions to close the pay gap.

[View the clip.](#)

2012 Campaign



- Equal Pay Day on 20 March 2012
- Pay gap in gross monthly wage: 22%
- Slogan: 'Close the pay gap. Become a porn actress'

Equal Pay Day 2012 focused on the link between study, career and pay. In collaboration with the Flemish ABVV and with the support of Equal Opportunities Flanders and the Belgian Institute for the Equality of Women and Men, **zij-kant** designed the brochure 'Your studies now also determine your pay later'. This message was directed at youth and the need for well thought choices concerning study and career, a balanced combination of work and family, and the impact of family decisions on pay and one's further career.

zij-kant and advertising agency Mortierbrigade launched [a controversial Equal Pay Day clip](#) under the motto 'Close the pay gap. Become a porn actress'. In the video, former American porn icon Sasha Grey talks about her career and about the choices she made as a young

woman, while her former colleagues perform porn in the background. Or so it seems... The clip aimed to encourage girls to take the future into their own hands, and not to blindly follow traditional gender roles.

[View the clip.](#)

2011 Campaign



- Equal Pay Day on 25 March 2011
- Pay gap in gross monthly wage: 23%
- Slogan: 'To earn less is to work longer'

The 2011 campaign made the link between wages and pensions, and aimed to make people aware of the fact that their career and their pay determine their pension. The poster showed a spirited mature woman who earned less than men her entire life, and thus was forced to work longer for a decent pension.

zij-kant also made [a clip with 4 thumping grannies working with power tools to the tune of the dance hit 'Satisfaction'](#). The clip became a world hit and has already been viewed more than two million times on YouTube. And there was also professional praise, with a Golden Cub for the best Belgian commercial of 2011 and three nominations at the Cannes Advertising Festival.

During the campaign, the film 'Made in Dagenham' was shown at cinemas, a film about the wage struggle of female British workers at Ford during the sixties. In Belgium, Equal Pay Day was co-promoter of this feel-good film, a real Equal Pay Day movie.

[View the clip.](#)

2010 Campaign



- Equal Pay Day on 26 March 2010
- Pay gap in gross monthly wage: 23%
- Slogan: 'You'll have to make do as long as your wife earns 23% too little'

'Everyone will benefit if the pay gap disappears' was the core message of Equal Pay Day 2010. The campaign was explicitly directed at men: four creative posters and a [web ad](#) showed how they too suffer the consequences of the pay gap in their family. Thus, the campaign called upon men to contribute to the fight for equal pay for men and women.

[View the clip.](#)

2009 Campaign



- Equal Pay Day on 27 March 2009
- Pay gap in gross monthly wage: 24%
- Slogan: 'Women work for free from 3:05 pm'

The fifth edition was developed around the stroke of the clock at 3:05 pm. Since the pay gap is 24%, a simple calculation reveals that on a 9-to-5 working day, women work for free from 3:05 pm. The message also appeared in several media during the campaign week before Equal Pay Day.

At the stroke of 3:05 a radio commercial called on women to stop working, and via a unique Facebook application, users could 'donate' their status to Equal Pay Day, so at 3:05 the message automatically appeared: "It's 3:05. From

now on, women work for free."

2008 Campaign



- Equal Pay Day on 31 March 2008
- Pay gap in gross monthly wage: 25%
- Slogan: 'Women are still on sale'

In the fourth campaign, we not only pleaded for a closing of the pay gap, but also for improving (the predominantly low) women's wages. On the poster, a woman was advertised as a bargain, with a 25% discount. The message was clear: women's wages are on sale throughout the year.

This time the web ad was also shown via public broadcasting as a public interest message. Hundreds of thousands of TV viewers were able to view dozens of men going wild in their search for women in the office, as if it

were the first day of sales.

[View the clip.](#)

2007 Campaign



- Equal Pay Day on 30 March 2007
- Pay gap in gross monthly wage: 24%
- Slogan: 'It's not hormones, it's the difference in pay'

Thanks to previous Equal Pay Day campaigns, the first Belgian pay gap report was published in 2007. Finally, we had official figures to support our demands.

The 2007 campaign was full of humour. With a close-up of a woman in tears and the accompanying slogan: the message was clear: the woman was not menstruating, she had just seen her payslip. Filmmaker Fien Troch again contributed to the campaign with four hilarious films in which women release their pay gap frustrations on their environment. These ads were also critically acclaimed, including bronze at the CCB Awards.

View the four clips: [film 1](#), [film 2](#), [film 3](#), [film 4](#).

2006 Campaign



- Equal Pay Day on 31 March 2006
- Pay gap in gross monthly wage: 24%
- Slogan: 'Stupid cow, paying women 24% less is an insult'

This campaign shocked the public, which was our intention. The idea was to visualise the insult that women undergo constantly by earning less than men. The poster depicted a woman with 'stupid cow' on her name badge and the accompanying web ad was called 'Executive Cow'.

For this ad – in which a young woman is subjected to one insult after another at her workplace – **zij-kant**, **ABVV**, communication agency mortierbrigade and director Fien

Troch won the Bronze Lion in the category 'Public Awareness Messages' at the Cannes Advertising Festival.

[View the clip.](#)

2005 Campaign



- Equal Pay Day on 31 March 2005
- Pay gap in gross monthly wage: 24% (*correction in 2007 to 28%*)
- Slogan: 'Louise finally earns as much as a man'

The first Equal Pay Day campaign was striking and effective. Our central figure 'Louise' almost became 'Louis', with a beard and without hair, hoping to finally earn as much as a man.

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