

European Unequal Pay Day® 2021

A European wide campaign to raise awareness about equal pay/the gender pay gap

Equal pay for women and men is still not a reality in Europe. This is why the women's organization of the Party of European Socialists, PES Women, every year teams up with their Flemish member organization **ZIJKant to organize** European Equal Pay Day and Unequal Pay Day, symbolic days to advocate for equal pay for women and men.

The [European Unequal Pay Day](#) is a symbolic day to raise awareness on the fact that female workers in Europe still earn on average 14.1% less than men. The day marks the date from which women effectively start working for free until the end of the year. Equal Pay Day is the day until which women in Europe must work longer in order to earn as much as men did the year before. To mark this day, PES Women and **ZIJKant** conduct a unique public campaign with their fellow member organizations and partners.

European Unequal Pay Day takes place in November. This date is not chosen randomly: it symbolises the size of the difference in pay between women and men on the labour market. If this pay gap diminishes, European Unequal Pay Day shifts to an later date in the year. The opposite happens when the gap widens. While the European pay gap of 14.1% translates into 51,5 Days of unpaid labour and thus leads to the European Unequal Pay Day on the 10 November. On national level this day can fall earlier or later in the year, depending on the respective pay gap in each Member State.

Campaign 2021

In short:

- European Unequal Pay Day: 10 November 2021
- Monthly pay gap: 14,1% [=51,465 = 51,5]
- Slogan: Share tasks equally at home, for equal opportunities at work
- #unequalpayday #UEPD2021 - [View the clip](#)

Narrative:

One of the main causes of the gender pay gap is the unequal share of household work and care responsibilities. This was already the case before the pandemic. In these times of lockdown, we might think that homeworking fathers would participate more in the organisation of their households. In some cases this is true, but women have taken on most of the extra domestic work during lockdown. While men tend to isolate themselves in separate home offices to handle their videocalls and meetings, women juggle and struggle with their computers on the kitchen table, trying to keep the children busy during their meetings and emptying washing machines.

This unequal share of unpaid work has a big impact on women's careers. Even before COVID, a noticeable shift occurs around the age of 30. When people choose to have children, women work part-time much more frequently than men do and rely much more on parental leaves, putting their careers on hold. Even in the year 2021, gender stereotypes still push women towards care responsibilities while men are busy building their careers. The COVID crisis throws us back in time and widens the gender pay gap. Even in generally progressive and feminist countries such as Sweden, with the right to share parental leave equally, men only take 30% and women tend to take around 70% of leave. Assuming the parents earned the same before the child was born, it takes on average 6-7 years for women to catch up with the salary of their partners after having a child.

For this year's European Unequal Pay Day campaign, Belgian photographer Jef Boes created portraits of real young families in their houses, coping with the COVID situation. A time-lapse shows a moving mother, trying to get her work done in a chaotic setting. In opposition to this "mother in motion", a father is working steadily on his career.

In addition to these portraits, a funny clip created by communication agency Mortierbrigade and production company Caviar shows how children interfere with the video calls of their parents. While the reactions are positive when a father is being interrupted, the tone of voice changes when this happens to women. The baseline: being interrupted at work once is cute, being interrupted every day sucks. See the clip again [here](#).

Our demands:

- All teleworking, "right to disconnect" and other post-pandemic labour policies must take the gendered division of care work into account and evaluate how flexible working arrangements affect women's employment and the gender pay gap.
- Implement the provisions on equal pay of the European Gender Equality Strategy and the European Pillar of Social Rights.
- Immediate and full implementation of the EU Work-Life Balance Directive to encourage more men to take up unpaid care responsibilities in the home. All Member States must transpose the minimum standards of the Directive into national legislation as part of their national recovery plans. States are encouraged to go beyond the Directive and extend the scope of well-paid parental leave, including the rights of self-employed and adoptive parents. The Commission should consider taking additional measures to address different care-giving needs throughout the life cycle and evaluate the gendered impact of COVID-19 on work-life balance.
- New and ambitious EU legislation to improve working conditions will benefit everyone, and, if gender mainstreamed, can address particular challenges for women workers, such as the double burden of work and unpaid care responsibilities which negatively affects women's mental health. Such legislation could include directives for decent working conditions and mental wellbeing in the workplace, legislation on the right to disconnect, and EU measures to evaluate and address the impact of teleworking (and the lack of teleworking in some occupations) during the pandemic on women's careers, mental and physical health. The right to disconnect is of particular importance to women, who often face bigger work-life balance demands than men, especially during the pandemic.
- Strong collective bargaining and social dialogues to ensure collective rather than individual solutions to achieve equal pay.
- Following up and implementing the EU Pay Transparency Initiative with binding measures, effective monitoring and sanctions, as well as ambitious national targets for closing the gender pay and pension gaps are needed without delay. It should also include standardised rules for data collection and guidelines for determining what counts as 'work of equal value'. Closing gender pay and pension gaps should be given top priority in the European Semester procedure and national recovery plans. An updated EU Gender Pay Gap Action Plan is recommended.
- Since women make up 58% of European minimum wage workers, decent minimum wages are essential to combat in-work poverty and improve women's economic independence. A

European framework for decent minimum wages should be adopted to prevent in-work poverty, with the aim of achieving gradual upward convergence of national minimum wages, either by law or collective bargaining in line with existing national systems.

- Targeted measures at EU and national level to combat horizontal labour market segregation. The fact that more women than men tend to work in low-paid sectors is a major factor behind the gender pay gap. Improving pay and working conditions in women-dominated sectors, ensuring access to upskilling and life-long learning, while combatting stereotypes to encourage more men to work in care, education, hospitality etc. and more women to work in in STEM, should be a priority.
- A Care Deal for Europe, including increased investments in raising wages for care workers and improving access to affordable and quality healthcare, child care and long-term care.
- Gender mainstreamed national recovery and resilience plans with adequate investments in female-dominated sectors to protect women's jobs and economic independence during and after the pandemic.
- Investment in projects which challenge gender stereotypes in all areas of public and private life, with a special focus on combatting gender-based violence, toxic masculinity and sexism must be adequately funded
- The EU should explore and define a new model for European companies, which implements genuine democracy in the management of an enterprise. Rules should imply due diligence, the respect, promotion and enforcement of human rights, gender equality and anti-discrimination infrastructures, and responsible business conduct should be introduced on the EU level, possibly with a dedicated directive.
- Foster quotas to promote female leadership in the private and public sectors. Unblock the EU Women on Boards Directive and extend its scope to the executive level. Alternative proposals, such as rewards for gender-balanced companies, should be put forward, should the Directive remain blocked in the Council.
- Combatting gender stereotypes, horizontal and vertical labour market segregation is a key step towards closing the gender pay gap. Investment in educational and life-long learning programmes, especially to encourage more women to work in ICT and STEM, is needed to fully include women in the digital and green transitions, combat stereotypes and horizontal labour market segregation.

For more inspiration go and see PES Women [Feminist Economy brochure](#)

European facts on the gender pay gap

In Europe, women earn 14.1% 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 2021, Equal Pay Day will celebrate its seventeenth edition. At the initiative of the progressive Flemish women's rights movement **ZIJKant**, 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 **ZIJKant** 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, **ZIJKant** 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. To mark equal pay day in Germany, the Berlin public transport operator provided 21% reduced transportation tickets for women to flag the 21% difference between men and women's average earnings, one of the biggest gender pay gaps in [Europe](#)¹.

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 progressives refuses to accept.

Some causes of the pay gap:

- **Horizontal segregation**

Men in construction, women in the care 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**

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2019/mar/14/mind-the-gender-pay-gap-berlin-women-to-get-public-transport-discount>

Part-time work continues to be primarily a women's thing. In 2019, 44% of Belgian working women in the private sector work part-time, versus 12% 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.

- **Gender discrimination**

In some workplaces, women are simply seen as less valuable than men doing the same job, with the same qualifications. Discrimination already occurs in hiring and salary negotiations. Companies with higher proportions of women also tend to pay lower wages than those with a more equal number of women and men employees, even in the same economic sector. Because of a lack of pay transparency, many women do not know or cannot prove that they are being underpaid, making it difficult to fight for equality.

- **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 like time credit, parental leave, palliative leave, etc. may be 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.

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 and Unequal Pay Day not only highlight 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. PES Women and **zij-kant** not only aim to discuss pay differences, but also the salary itself. The taboo around discussing pay must be broken.

2. Gathering facts and figures: Numbers tell the tale

Progressives demand 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.

Thanks to many allies and pressure from progressive forces, awareness about and actions against the gender pay gap have increased in recent years and resulted recently in publishing the European Commission Pay Transparency Initiative that aims at combatting pay discrimination and to hold employers as well as government accountable.

3. Restoring confidence in social control and change

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, such as through binding pay transparency measures, 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.** data on important sectors is still lacking. EIGE etc.
- ✓ **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.