

NEWSLETTER

March 2026

SD4EU: Project overview

A European project to strengthen social dialogue and promote gender equality

SD4EU – Social Dialogue for a Union of Equality is a European project co-funded by the European Union under the Support for Social Dialogue programme (SOCPL-2023-SOC-DIALOG). It addresses persistent gender gaps in the EU labour market by strengthening the role of employers' organisations and trade unions in promoting fairer, more inclusive workplaces. Despite significant progress, inequalities related to pay, access to social protection, and work-life balance still affect millions of workers across the EU.

SD4EU responds to these challenges by providing social partners with practical tools, evidence, and opportunities for transnational exchange, so that gender equality becomes an integral part of social dialogue and collective bargaining. The project starts with an in-depth research phase to analyse EU policies and legislation on gender equality and to map existing gaps and good practices. This knowledge will feed into training seminars and the development of gender-sensitive

practices that can be adapted and applied in different national contexts. SD4EU is fully aligned with the European Pillar of Social Rights and the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025. By supporting capacity building, sharing knowledge, and fostering cooperation, the project aims to translate commitments into practical change — so that social dialogue can become a real driver of equality in workplaces across Europe.

A strong and diverse partnership

Coordinated by **Confprofessioni** (Italy), SD4EU brings together employers' organisations, trade unions, research bodies and European associations:

- **CEPLIS** – European Council of the Liberal Professions (Belgium)
- **MFPA** – Malta Federation of Professional Associations (Malta)
- **UNPLIB** – Union Nationale des Professions Libérales et Intellectuelles de Belgique (Belgium)
- **EQUAL Ireland** – Education, Research and Related Services Co. Ltd (Ireland)
- **UILTuCS** – Unione Italiana Lavoratori Turismo Commercio e Servizi (Italy)

Several associated partners, including **UNAPL** (France), the **University of Rome Tor Vergata**, and **Eurocadres** – Council of European Professional and Managerial Staff, contribute additional expertise and broaden the project's reach.

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*Social dialogue leaves
no one behind:
equality, inclusion,
and progress for all.*



Inclusive Welfare & Social Dialogue at the Rome seminar

26 September 2025

Gender equality as a driver of social and economic innovation was at the heart of the transnational seminar “Social Protection and Gender Equality: Tools and Recommendations for a New European Social Dialogue”, organised by Confprofessioni at Spazio Europa in Rome, within the framework of the European project SD4EU – Social Dialogue for a Union of Equality, co-funded by the European Union. The event brought together representatives of social partners and professional associations from several EU Member States, with the aim of strengthening their capacity to integrate a gender perspective into welfare systems and collective bargaining.

Natali: “Equality is a driver of growth and competitiveness”

Opening the seminar, Marco Natali, President of Confprofessioni, stressed that gender equality “is not only a legal principle, but an essential condition for building fairer societies, stronger economies and more innovative professional communities.”

Natali highlighted that raising female employment rates to the European average could increase Italy's GDP by between 7% and 9%, corresponding to €150-190 billion per year. “The SD4EU project,” he added, “was designed to address these challenges with concrete tools, making social dialogue a vehicle for equality and shared development.”

Profeta: “Disaggregated data are essential for effective policies”

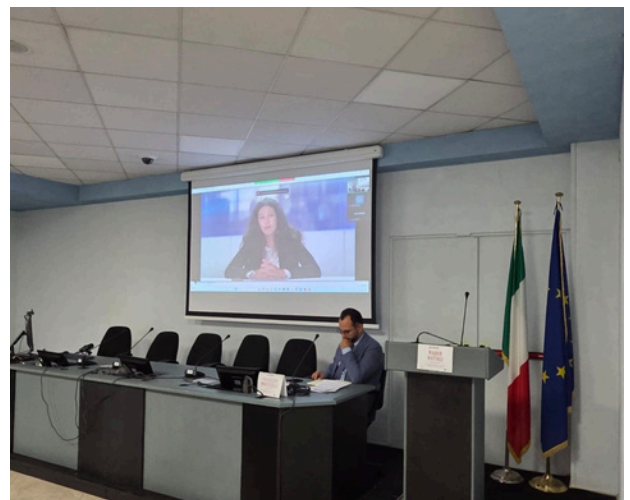
Professor Paola Profeta (Bocconi University) provided a detailed analysis of gender inequalities in the labour market and welfare systems across Europe, underlining the crucial importance of gender-disaggregated data for designing effective public policies.

In Italy, she noted, only one in two women is employed, despite higher levels of education compared to men. The gender pay gap remains in double digits, and the “child penalty” continues to significantly affect women's careers, with long-term consequences extending to pensions.

Profeta also emphasised the lack of systematic ex ante and ex post gender impact assessments of policies. Without accurate data, it is impossible to address inequalities in a structural way.

Fragmented careers and “standard” welfare: common challenges across Europe

Contributions from national partners highlighted a shared reality: career paths are becoming increasingly fragmented and discontinuous, while social protection systems remain anchored to a traditional model based on standard employment. In Italy, by 2025 only half of workers have uninterrupted career paths, with women being over 55% more likely to interrupt their careers for family reasons.





In Ireland, extremely high childcare costs (up to €1,400 per month in Dublin) represent a structural barrier to returning to work, while in Belgium the gender pension gap remains above 25%, reflecting shorter and more frequent part-time careers among women.

Women are also overrepresented in non-standard forms of work and digital platform jobs, often lacking adequate protection, with cumulative effects on income, social security rights and economic security.

Good practices and recommendations for inclusive welfare

Despite these challenges, the panels highlighted several positive experiences and operational recommendations:

- the spread of regulated smart working and collective bargaining on leave and company welfare in Italy;
- the expansion of flexible work in Ireland, which has led to record levels of female participation (+306% of women in remote working between 2016 and 2022);
- the Belgian pension reform facilitating access to minimum pensions for part-time workers, 80% of whom are women.

The final recommendations of the SD4EU working group committee focus on key priorities:

- recognising care as a structural element of social protection systems;
- ensuring fair, accessible and non-transferable leave;
- extending collective bargaining to self-employed and non-standard workers;
- strengthening the portability of social rights at European level;
- promoting flexible work models that do not penalise women's careers.

A shared European agenda

The seminar took place within the framework of the new European Pact for Social Dialogue, which aims to strengthen the structured involvement of social partners in shaping EU policies on employment, skills and welfare. SD4EU contributes to this agenda by promoting an innovative and inclusive European approach, capable of addressing the challenges posed by transformations in the labour market, the green and digital transitions, and the growing diversity of employment models.

In summary, the SD4EU seminar in Rome showed that gender equality is a common European challenge, but also a fertile ground for innovating social dialogue and building more equitable, universal and sustainable social protection systems.





Tackling the Gender Pay Gap at the Malta seminar

30 October 2025

The second transnational seminar of the SD4EU – Social Dialogue for a Union of Equality project took place in Malta on 30 October 2025, focusing on the gender pay gap and equal pay. The event brought together around 60 participants from Malta, Italy, Ireland and Belgium, including social partners, liberal professionals, experts and key stakeholders.

The seminar opened with institutional remarks by Julianne Marie Neeindam, Vice-President of Group III and of the Equality Group of the European Economic and Social Committee, as well as Norma Camilleri and James Licari, respectively CEO and President of MFPA, and the Honourable Andy Ellul, Parliamentary Secretary for Social Dialogue. The Honourable Ryan Callus, Shadow Minister for Social Dialogue, also addressed the participants.

Martina Gherlenda, SD4EU Project Manager for Confprofessioni, presented the project's objectives and results, highlighting the key role of social partners in promoting fairer and more gender-sensitive labour markets, particularly in light of new EU tools on pay transparency. Diana Larenza then outlined the project's recommendations, including improved collection and publication of gender-disaggregated data, greater attention to self-employment and new forms of digital work, and the strengthening of collective bargaining to tackle the gender pay gap.

Particular interest was generated by data presented by the National Statistics Office, showing that Malta's gender pay gap stood at 5.1% in 2023, among the lowest in Europe. However, significant disparities persist across sectors and age groups, peaking between 45 and 54 years old, reflecting the impact of care responsibilities on women's career progression. The gap is also wider in the private sector than in the public sector, where pay systems are more transparent.





Professor JosAnn Cutajar, Director of the Department of Gender and Sexualities at the University of Malta, analysed the social and cultural factors behind the pay gap, including occupational segregation, barriers to leadership positions, gender stereotypes and the higher incidence of part-time work among women. She also highlighted the long-term effects on pensions, with a higher risk of poverty among older women, and stressed that the issue goes beyond hourly wages to the broader recognition of women's work, including unpaid care work.

Two discussion panels brought together representatives of trade unions, employers' organisations and equality bodies, fostering exchange on national experiences, implementation of pay transparency measures and recognition of work in female-dominated sectors. The need for greater male involvement in care responsibilities and parental leave also emerged as a key point to address the "motherhood penalty" and promote more balanced roles both at home and at work.

The seminar concluded with closing remarks by Norma Camilleri and a networking lunch, offering further opportunities for discussion among participants.

Overall, the event represented an important moment of transnational cooperation, reaffirming the role of social partners and liberal professionals in translating EU equal pay legislation into concrete practices for a more inclusive and fair labour market across the European Union.





Work-Life Balance and Social Dialogue at the Ireland Seminar

19 November 2025

The seminar “Social Dialogue for Work-Life Balance” took place at the Technological University of the Shannon (TUS), organised by EQUAL Ireland within the framework of the European project SD4EU – Social Dialogue for a Union of Equality, coordinated by Confprofessioni. The event brought together social partners, professionals, academics, students and stakeholders to reflect on the role of work-life balance policies in promoting gender equality in European labour markets.

The seminar forms part of SD4EU’s capacity-building activities, aimed at strengthening the role of social dialogue in three key areas: equal pay, social protection and work-life balance, contributing to the development of more inclusive and gender-sensitive labour and welfare policies.

Why work-life balance matters for gender equality

Speakers highlighted that work-life balance is not a marginal issue, but a structural factor affecting women’s participation in the labour market and their career opportunities. Persistent inequalities in the distribution of unpaid care work continue to limit access to full-time employment, leadership positions and long-term economic security, making work-life balance a key pillar of gender equality policies. The seminar also addressed key challenges identified by the SD4EU Work-Life Balance Committee, including the low uptake of paternity leave, inadequate compensation for care leave, limited availability of childcare and eldercare services, and the exclusion of self-employed and non-standard workers from many support measures.

Evidence and lived experiences

A key contribution came from research presented by Ruta Graham, focusing on the impact of care responsibilities on parents’ employment, particularly those with children with disabilities. The findings showed that limited workplace flexibility, insufficient access to services and rigid eligibility criteria for public support often push parents—especially women—to reduce working hours or leave the labour market altogether. The research highlighted the importance of inclusive workplaces and stronger coordination between employers and public institutions.





From experiences to shared priorities

The seminar featured thematic discussion groups addressing topics such as flexible working, community care, leadership, inclusion and social partnership in enterprises. Despite different perspectives, participants converged on a common message: work-life balance policies cannot follow a “one size fits all” approach. There is a clear need for flexible solutions that reflect diverse care responsibilities across the life course, from parenting to eldercare. Participants also stressed the difference between equality and equity, noting that treating everyone the same does not lead to fair outcomes when care responsibilities are unevenly distributed. Leadership, trust, empathy and transparent communication were identified as key factors for effective implementation.

The role of social dialogue

The seminar underlined that social dialogue is essential to translate individual experiences and concrete needs into policy recommendations. Structured cooperation between social partners, institutions and communities is crucial to designing inclusive and gender-sensitive work-life balance policies. This includes extending protections to self-employed and non-standard workers, investing in accessible care services and recognising unpaid care work in policy frameworks.

Contributing to SD4EU objectives

The seminar confirmed the added value of the SD4EU approach, which combines research, stakeholder dialogue and capacity building to support social partners in developing concrete recommendations. By placing work-life balance at the intersection of gender equality, social protection and job quality, SD4EU contributes to strengthening social dialogue as a pillar of a Union of Equality, in line with current and future EU policy priorities.



WP4: Strengthening Social Dialogue for Equality

Work Package 4 (WP4) of the SD4EU project focuses on strengthening the role of social dialogue in promoting gender equality in the labour market. WP4 is organised around two main components: Task 4.1, which focuses on developing practical guidance, and Task 4.2, which builds on these results to define a roadmap for implementation.

Building on the analytical work carried out in earlier phases of the project and on the outcomes of transnational seminars and thematic committees, WP4 translates research findings into practical approaches for social partners.

While previous activities of the project have supported the transition from research to practice, WP4 focuses on consolidating these results and ensuring their long-term sustainability and impact.

At the core of WP4 is the integration of a gender perspective into social dialogue practices. This means moving beyond a formal understanding of equality and addressing structural inequalities affecting pay, access to social protection, and work-life balance, including challenges linked to telework and the right to disconnect.

The activities carried out under Task 4.1 concentrate on gender mainstreaming as a systematic method to identify and address these structural imbalances. By analysing risks embedded in labour market structures and social dialogue processes, the project provides a framework that supports social partners in incorporating gender equality into their negotiation practices and policy actions.

Building on these results, Task 4.2 contributes to the development of a roadmap towards a “Union of Equality.” The roadmap builds on the results achieved throughout the project and offers a shared strategic direction for strengthening social dialogue from a gender equality perspective.

Overall, WP4 represents a key step in the SD4EU project, as it bridges the gap between analysis and implementation. By promoting a more inclusive and gender-sensitive approach, it supports social partners in addressing labour market inequalities in a structural and sustainable way.



Objectives:

- *Integrating a gender perspective into social dialogue practices to address structural labour market inequalities*
- *Translating project results into practical guidance and a shared framework for long-term implementation*



TASK 4.1: Advancing Gender Mainstreaming in Social Dialogue



Task 4.1 plays a central role in the SD4EU project by focusing on the practical application of gender mainstreaming within social dialogue. This task brings together the key findings emerging from the project and focuses on identifying gender-specific risks and structural vulnerabilities affecting the labour market.

In particular, it highlights how inequalities in pay, access to social protection, and work-life balance are interconnected and require a comprehensive approach.

A Systematic Approach to Equality

Task 4.1 is built on the concept of gender mainstreaming, treated not as a one-time fix but as a systematic method to identify and address structural asymmetries in the labour market. The framework focuses on risks embedded in institutional and organisational practices rather than isolated individual situations. To achieve this, the project analyses three interconnected thematic areas:

1. Closing the Gender Pay Gap

Evidence shows that pay inequality is rooted in structural risks such as occupational segregation and “career penalties” related to maternity. Vulnerabilities often stem from a lack of pay transparency and limited access to collective bargaining. Task 4.1 highlights the need for social partners to move beyond legal compliance by strengthening their role in addressing pay inequalities.

2. Strengthening Social Protection

Women often face long-term risks, including significant pension gaps, due to fragmented career paths and their overrepresentation in non-standard work. Current social protection systems, which are frequently tied to continuous full-time employment, can reproduce these inequalities. The project identifies social dialogue as a key lever to promote more inclusive protection mechanisms.

3. Balancing Work, Life, and Technology

While telework offers flexibility, it also carries the risk of blurring the boundaries between professional and private life, often increasing the unpaid care burden for women. Task 4.1 emphasizes the importance of addressing these challenges within social dialogue, including through measures such as the right to disconnect and a more balanced sharing of care responsibilities.

From Analysis to Operation

The ultimate goal of this task is to translate research findings into operational tools. These include practical tools to support social partners in applying gender mainstreaming in their activities. The findings of Task 4.1 demonstrate that risks regarding pay, social protection, and work-life balance are structurally interconnected. Therefore, they cannot be solved through isolated measures. By embedding a gender mainstreaming approach directly into social dialogue practices, social partners can transform EU equality principles into concrete, lasting workplace improvements.

*Gender equality must be integrated into
social dialogue*

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*This is how European rules turn into real
changes in the workplace*



TASK 4.2

Roadmap towards a Union of Equality



Task 4.2 conceives gender mainstreaming not as a one-off intervention, but as a continuous and structured process embedded within the very fabric of social dialogue.

The roadmap follows a progressive logic designed to guide social partners from initial awareness and the identification of structural vulnerabilities toward the systematic integration of gender considerations into negotiation and decision-making processes. While providing a common strategic direction, the framework remains flexible, allowing adaptation to different national contexts and sectoral characteristics.

The roadmap organises the project results into three interconnected operational pillars:

1. Ensuring gender pay equality

Beyond simply identifying gaps, the roadmap calls for concrete steps such as introducing pay transparency measures and integrating specific gender clauses into collective agreements. The aim is to establish joint procedures to identify and address unjustified pay disparities within wage-setting systems.

2. Strengthening gender-sensitive social protection

To address risks affecting women and non-standard workers, the roadmap supports partners in assessing coverage and access to protection schemes. It emphasises the need to promote more inclusive mechanisms that are accessible across different forms of work.

3. Balancing work, private life, and care policies

The roadmap focuses on promoting flexible and secure working arrangements and supporting a more balanced uptake of parental leave. It also highlights the importance of addressing telework and the right to disconnect within social dialogue.

From analysis to implementation

The ultimate goal of this task is to facilitate the transition from conceptual understanding to practical implementation. The tools identified to support this transition include:

- Monitoring systems and indicators to assess the outcomes of negotiated measures.
- Training programmes and methodological tools to strengthen institutional capacity.
- Advocacy actions to support the integration of gender equality into labour market policies.

Rather than introducing new recommendations, the roadmap organises the results of the project into a coherent framework to support implementation.

By structuring actions across these thematic areas, the roadmap provides a practical reference for embedding gender equality within existing social dialogue systems.

[ACCESS THE ROADMAP](#)





Deliverables D2.1 & D2.2 Now Available

SD4EU Deliverable D2.1 - Meaning and Dimensions of Gender Equality in EU Policies and Law

Following its introduction in the previous newsletter, Deliverable 2.1 is now available as a downloadable resource.

The report provides a comprehensive overview of how gender equality has evolved within the EU legal and policy framework, from early principles of equal pay to the current emphasis on gender mainstreaming and intersectionality.

It offers both a conceptual and operational reference for social partners, supporting the integration of gender equality into policy design and collective bargaining.

[ACCESS THE FULL REPORT](#)

Deliverable D2.2 - The Application of the Principle of Gender Equality in the Workplace

Also now available, Deliverable D2.2 explores how the principle of gender equality is applied in practice within the European regulatory framework, with particular attention to recent developments such as the Pay Transparency Directive and work-life balance policies.

It highlights the role of social partners in translating legal provisions into concrete workplace practices, through collective bargaining, pay setting mechanisms and organisational measures aimed at ensuring equal treatment and equal pay.

The report provides practical guidance for employers' organisations and trade unions to support the effective implementation of gender equality principles in evolving labour market contexts.

[ACCESS THE FULL REPORT](#)



New Recommendations: Strengthening Dialogue for Equality

Following their presentation in the previous newsletter, the SD4EU recommendations are now available as a consolidated project output.

The document brings together the results of the project's analytical and discussion phases, outlining key priorities to strengthen social dialogue and reduce gender inequalities across the European Union. It

The document highlights the need for a broader cultural and structural transformation in the organisation of work and care, promoting a more balanced distribution of responsibilities and equal participation in the labour market.

The recommendations address structural challenges in social protection systems, including career fragmentation and the unequal care burdens and emphasise the importance of inclusive protection mechanisms and equal access to parental leave for both parents.

They also tackle the gender pay gap, calling for measures such as pay transparency, the revaluation of female-dominated sectors, and approaches that take into account the impact of career interruptions and unpaid care work.

A central role is assigned to social partners, who are key actors in translating these priorities into concrete actions through collective bargaining and social dialogue.

Overall, the document provides a structured framework for translating gender equality from a formal principle into concrete and sustainable practices across European labour markets.





Impact and Future Outlook: Social Dialogue for Equality

One of the key challenges in the European debate on gender equality is how to translate principles into concrete workplace practices. The answer increasingly points to social dialogue—and to the role played by the SD4EU.

Rather than remaining at the level of analysis, SD4EU contributes to this process by providing tools, guidance, and operational directions to support gender mainstreaming within social dialogue.

From Discussion to Action

Traditionally, social dialogue has been a space for negotiation, but not always for implementation. SD4EU changes this dynamic by equipping social partners with concrete guidance—how to include gender clauses in collective agreements, how to introduce pay transparency measures, and how to identify structural inequalities within workplaces. In this way, the project supports social partners in integrating gender equality more systematically into negotiation and decision-making processes.

Strengthening the Actors of Change

The project also recognises that effective dialogue depends on capable actors. For this reason, it invests in strengthening the institutional capacity of trade unions and employers' organisations. By improving their expertise on gender issues, SD4EU ensures that equality is no longer treated as a secondary concern, but becomes an integral part of bargaining and decision-making processes.

A Structural and Continuous Approach

A central aspect of the project is its long-term approach to gender mainstreaming. Gender equality is not presented as a one-off reform, but as a continuous process embedded in social dialogue systems. Through monitoring tools and data-based evaluation, the project promotes a model where policies are regularly assessed and improved.

Connecting National Practices to European Goals

Finally, SD4EU plays a strategic role in aligning national social dialogue with broader EU priorities, such as the Union of Equality. By doing so, it supports greater alignment between national practices and broader EU priorities.

A New Role for Social Dialogue

In this framework, social dialogue is no longer just a forum for negotiation—it becomes a mechanism for transformation. In this perspective, social dialogue becomes a practical tool for supporting more inclusive and gender-sensitive labour market outcomes..

[**ACCESS THE FULL GUIDELINES**](#)

**Gender equality is not automatic:
it requires a structural change in work,
care, and social dialogue to become a
concrete reality in everyday working
life.**

SD4EU Final Conference: Social Dialogue as a Driver of Equality

26 March 2026

On 26 March 2026, the final conference of the SD4EU – Social Dialogue for a Union of Equality project took place at the headquarters of the European Economic and Social Committee in Brussels. The event marked the culmination of a two-year process coordinated by Confprofessioni, within a transnational partnership involving organisations from Italy, Belgium, Ireland, Malta and France.

The central objective was to strengthen the role of social partners in promoting gender equality within the European labour market. The conference was opened with a video message by the President of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola, who described social dialogue as “the engine that drives us forward”, emphasising that cooperation between institutions, social partners and civil society is essential to address inequalities. Metsola recalled key achievements at the European level—from directives on women on corporate boards and pay transparency to legislation addressing violence against women—while stressing that real change must take place in workplaces and communities.

A clear picture emerged during the conference: despite regulatory progress, inequalities persist. Fragmented careers, part-time work and occupational segregation continue to disadvantage women, affecting wages, job stability and pensions. From its early stages, the project focused on three key areas of intervention: strengthening social protection, reducing the gender pay gap, and improving work-life balance, including through accessible care services and fairly shared parental leave.

The President of Confprofessioni, Marco Natali, described SD4EU as a “political signal”, underlining that equality is not an automatic outcome of the market, but a construction that requires shared responsibility. Similarly, Martin Boehme stressed the importance of reinforcing a more inclusive social dialogue capable of responding to labour market transformations.





Significant attention was also given to future challenges, particularly the impact of digital transformation. Juliane Marie Neiendam warned that equality is not guaranteed and must be “actively built”, while Paola Profeta presented data on the underrepresentation of women in artificial intelligence and the ongoing “child penalty”, which continues to reduce women’s participation and income after motherhood. From an operational perspective, Martina Gherlenda presented the project’s outcomes, including three research reports, guidelines for gender mainstreaming and a roadmap towards a Union of Equality. Diana Larenza translated these findings into concrete recommendations, such as strengthening collective bargaining, introducing compensation mechanisms for career interruptions, and placing greater emphasis on the concept of a living wage.

The debate was further enriched by contributions from project partners, which brought complementary national and sectoral perspectives. In particular, the need emerged to monitor the real impact of EU policies, strengthen social dialogue in smaller and more fragmented professional contexts, and adapt existing tools to new forms of work. At the same time, the importance of collective bargaining, fair flexibility models and the active involvement of all actors—including men—in advancing gender equality was emphasised.

The Brussels conference was not only a closing moment, but also a relaunch. The message was clear: gender equality remains an open challenge and requires concrete action, stronger social dialogue and continuous commitment. In this perspective, SD4EU leaves a lasting legacy of operational tools and a clear direction: to transform analysis into effective policies and tangible results.



Contributions from Partners

Advancing Gender Equality through Social Dialogue: Insights from Confprofessioni

SD4EU has been a participatory project involving partners and the many individuals people reached through seminars, the final conferences and dissemination activities; a project that, through the work of its thematic committees, the project has produced a rich package of policy recommendations; a project that delivers leaves behind three research reports, guidelines for gender mainstreaming and a roadmap towards a Union of Equality, aimed at guiding and simplifying supporting the work of the social partners targeted by the project.

This We are talking about is a challenging and successful project that has engaged partners such as MFPA, UNPLIB, CEPLIS, Equal EQUAL Ireland, Eurocadres, UILTuCS and UNAPL, and has received recognition appreciation from representatives of the European Economic and Social Committee and the European Commission during the Final Conference held in Brussels.

The in-depth work analysis, exchange, discussion and joint reflection work carried out within the thematic committees — on social protection, the gender pay gap and work-life balance — also made it possible to analyse examine best practices across emerging from different several European contexts. Through discussion and shared reflection, partners were able to agree it was possible to reach a common understanding on a set package of recommendations for each thematic area addressed. These discussions were then further developed during The subsequent three transnational seminars, open to discussion with which brought together a qualified audience, then and laid the foundations for the drafting of the guidelines and the roadmap.

Addressing the condition of women's work and its vulnerabilities has been a shared exercise among project partners, helping to challenge common assumptions and overcome as well as some initial scepticism. Greater awareness of what achieving gender equality in the workplace truly entails really means, — of the a still incomplete and uneven reality that remains incomplete and uneven, and of the role that social dialogue can play in maximising results supporting more effective outcomes, — has made it possible to identify concrete and effective constructive actions to that may help address the issues highlighted.

In thanking our project partners for their commitment and contribution, we conclude this experience with the awareness that the path towards gender equality is still long and full of challenges obstacles. At the same time, but also that social dialogue has proven to be an important key tool for fostering exchange and identifying for the search for shared solutions.



Susanna Pisano
European Affairs Coordinator

CONFPROFESSIONI

Confprofessioni is the leading organisation representing liberal professionals in Italy. Founded in 1966, it brings together 20 national associations and represents a system of over 1.5 million professionals, generating a productive sector with 4 million workers, contributing 13% of the national GDP.

It plays a key institutional role as the employers' signatory of the National Collective Labour Agreement for professional firms (CCNL), the most representative contract in the liberal professions sector. Around this contract, Confprofessioni has developed a unified identity promoting ethical values, competence, and the central role of liberal professions in Italy's development.

Since 2001, it has been the sole recognised social partner for the liberal professions, and in 2010 it joined the National Council for Economics and Labour (CNEL), where it currently coordinates the Council for Self-Employment and Professions.

Contributions from Partners

CEPLIS call for Action on Gender Equality in Europe

Being the sole body to represent the liberal professions at the European level, CEPLIS is glad to have participated to the SD4EU Final conference as a beneficiary partner in the project and to add the voice of liberal professions in favour of gender equality.

We at CEPLIS acknowledge and regret that still, in 2026, gender inequality remains a significant issue. Thus, the importance in bringing novel solutions, ensuring their implementation, and raising awareness of this issue among the wider public. Liberal professions must have a key role in this changing world and must be a part of the solution. Dialogue, as our project highlighted, is our best weapon to achieve those goals.

Being active at the European level, it is important to us to verify that the policies that are applied at the EU regarding gender equality are followed up and acted on. It is important to see how the people on the ground feel regarding the impact of EU policies. We are very much concerned by the general pay gap, by other inequalities women bear, like access to employment, and the numerous consequences those have on a societal level.

As mentioned during the Conference's panel discussion, the social partners must go beyond strictly legislation-oriented approaches and must engage a constant dialogue with our peers to drive sustainable reductions in gender inequality across labour markets.

The final message is clear: gender equality remains an ongoing challenge and requires concrete action, stronger social dialogue and a sustained commitment. SD4EU has provided not only practical tools but also a clear direction: to translate analysis into effective policies and tangible results.



Theodoros Koutroubas
Director General at CEPLIS

CEPLIS

The European Council of the Liberal Professions (CEPLIS) is an association dedicated to studying and promoting the policies, practices, and data related to liberal professions at both scientific and cultural levels.

Its objectives include coordinating and defending the moral, cultural, scientific, and material interests of these professions, and implementing actions or creating organisations to support these goals.

CEPLIS operates independently of political, linguistic, philosophical, or ethnic considerations and does not have profit-making aims. It can only take positions on issues related to a specific profession upon request from the member representing that profession, and it does not intervene in conflicts between different professions or organizations. Each member retains the right to defend the specific interests of its profession within Europe.

Contributions from Partners

From Conversation to Change: Promoting Gender Equality with MFPA

The SD4EU Project has been a rewarding and meaningful journey for the Malta Federation of Professional Associations (MFPA), and we are especially pleased to have partnered once again with Confprofessioni and the wider European consortium. Throughout the project, the collaboration among partners has demonstrated the strength of shared expertise and commitment to promoting more inclusive and sustainable professional environments across Europe.

The outcomes of the project have been highly positive, generating valuable insights and practical tools that support stakeholders in addressing equality challenges within different sectors. In particular, the development of the project's guidelines for better equality represents a significant step forward, offering concrete recommendations to help all foster fairer opportunities and reduce structural barriers in the workplace and other settings.

MFPA is proud to have contributed to this collective effort and to the dialogue that has emerged among partners and stakeholders during the project's implementation. While the achievements of the project are encouraging, they also highlight the importance of continuing research and cooperation in order to improve gender equality across EU countries.

MFPA looks forward to further collaboration with Confprofessioni and other partners to deepen this work and ensure that the progress made through the SD4EU initiative continues to support equality and sustainable development in various sectors within Europe.



Norma Camilleri
CEO of MFPA

MFPA

The Malta Federation of Professional Associations (MFPA) was set up in 1971 by seven founding organisations.

With the growth of the University of Malta, the professional population in Malta increased and more professional organisations were set up throughout the years. Today MFPA comprises 17 professional organisations as full members and other three organisations with partial membership, representing no less than 10,000 professionals in Malta.

The Malta Federation of Professional Associations is a non-profit organisation established with the aim of promoting the professions, maintaining professional standards, and protecting professional rights and privileges. It also seeks to foster inter-professional relationships and contribute to the advancement of society, taking any appropriate measures to fulfill these objectives.

Making Equality Work: UNPLIB's Commitment to Gender-Sensitive Social Dialogue

As a partner in the SD4EU – Social Dialogue for a Union of Equality project, UNPLIB actively contributed to the three transnational seminars by bringing the perspective of liberal professions and self-employed professionals into European discussions on gender equality.

Across the seminars, a shared diagnosis emerged: gender inequalities persist throughout professional careers, from access to income and social protection to long-term pension outcomes. Fragmented career paths, unequal distribution of care responsibilities and limited access to tailored social protection mechanisms continue to disproportionately affect women, particularly among the self-employed.

UNPLIB highlighted the need for inclusive social dialogue frameworks that fully integrate professionals outside standard employment relationships. Discussions on pay transparency and the gender pay gap confirmed that “equal pay for equal work” remains difficult to achieve without reliable indicators, transparency tools and recognition of the specific constraints faced by women professionals. Flexibility, while essential, too often translates into lower income, slower career progression and wider pension gaps. Another key takeaway shared across the seminars was the importance of recognising invisible work, especially care and domestic responsibilities, which remain largely unpaid and undervalued despite their central role in economic and social sustainability. UNPLIB strongly supported approaches that go beyond employer-based solutions and call for broader societal and policy responses.

Throughout the project, UNPLIB contributed by:

- giving visibility to gender inequalities affecting liberal professions and self-employed workers,
- promoting social protection systems better adapted to non-linear careers,
- supporting pay transparency and fair remuneration practices,
- reinforcing the role of professional organisations in European social dialogue.

UNPLIB was represented throughout the project by delegations composed of Bernard Jacquemin (President), Jean Ruwet (Vice-President), Michael Van Gompen (Treasurer), Jean-Yves Pirlot (Project Director), Florian Lebourdais (Project Officer), Sylvianne Wauters and Fatiha Erkha.

The SD4EU project confirmed that professional unions such as UNPLIB are essential actors in building a gender-sensitive, inclusive and forward-looking European social dialogue. Achieving real equality requires continuous cooperation, shared responsibility and policies that reflect the diversity of professional realities across Europe.

In this context, Belgium is generally well positioned within the European Union in terms of social rights and the quality of social dialogue. However, this favourable situation does not remove the need for continued efforts, particularly to reduce persistent disparities between sectors and to better address the specific challenges faced by non-standard careers, liberal professions and self-employed workers.



Bernard Jacquemin
President of UNPLIB

UNPLIB

The Union Nationale des Professions Libérales et Intellectuelles de Belgique (UNPLIB) is an interprofessional non-profit association that aims to promote, defend, and represent the moral, social, and economic interests shared by liberal professions in Belgium.

UNPLIB brings together over 56,000 members through their professional associations, including federations, professional orders, and institutes.

UNPLIB is structured around four main pillars:

1. Health
2. Legal
3. Economic
4. Technical

In 2011, UNPLIB was granted the title of Royal Society, a mark of recognition for its work over more than 50 years.

Contributions from Partners

EQUAL Ireland: Work-Life Balance and Inclusive Social Dialogue

Drawing on discussions developed during the SD4EU project and the Final Conference in Brussels, one of the key reflections emerging from the Irish experience concerns the evolving meaning of work-life balance and its growing importance within social dialogue.

In Ireland, as in many other European countries, important progress has been made through the implementation of the 2019 EU Work-Life Balance Directive.

This represented a significant step forward in formally recognising the right to better reconcile work and private life. However, the experience discussed within SD4EU confirmed that legislation alone is not enough. Without concrete changes in workplace culture and active involvement from social partners, these rights risk remaining only formal protections.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this debate by demonstrating that flexible working models are both possible and, in many cases, effective.

At the same time, it also revealed new risks linked to remote work, including longer working hours, blurred boundaries between work and private life, and increased levels of stress. The discussions developed within the project highlighted that flexibility without adequate safeguards can create new inequalities rather than reduce existing ones.

Another important reflection concerns the need to move beyond a narrow understanding of work-life balance. For too long, this issue has been associated almost exclusively with parents, particularly mothers. However, the project discussions highlighted how work-life balance also affects people with disabilities or chronic illnesses, unpaid carers, self-employed workers and those working in more precarious forms of employment.

The project also reinforced the importance of addressing the unequal distribution of unpaid care work, which continues to affect women disproportionately and remains a central gender equality issue.

As highlighted throughout the SD4EU activities, achieving a fairer work-life balance requires not only legislation, but also continuous dialogue, inclusive workplace practices and stronger involvement of social partners.



EQUAL IRELAND

EQUAL Ireland is a 'not-for-profit' charitable trust formed in 2001 by a collaboration involving IBEC, SIPTU, FAS and Lionra, a higher education network. We aim to bring adult friendly 3rd level education to people who previously missed the opportunity to gain a degree or higher level of study.

Apart from our friends in Community, Trade Unions and Employers organisations our educational partners are the Technological University of the Shannon (formerly Athlone and Limerick Institutes of Technology) and the Atlantic Technological University (of which the former Letterkenny Institute of Technology is now a part).

We deliver courses online and in local communities at a time and pace that suits adult learners, taking into consideration many of the barriers and commitments that can hinder or prevent them returning to education. There are no traditional exams.

SD4EU: Towards a New European Culture of Work and Care

Led by a consortium of European professional organisations, including UNAPL under the auspices of Confprofessioni, the SD4EU project has supported social partners in advancing towards a renewed culture of care and work: recognition of care work, goal-oriented organisational models, a fairer sharing of family responsibilities, and the right to disconnect. As an employer-representative organisation, UNAPL nevertheless stresses that such progress must be accompanied by reflection on work organisation within very small liberal professional firms, where absences and business continuity often depend on fragile operational balances. In this context, the introduction in France in July 2026 of additional birth-related leave, and an equivalent scheme for self-employed workers, reflects broader European concerns.

From July 2026, each parent will be able, either simultaneously or alternately, to take one or two additional months following the arrival of a child, in addition to statutory maternity leave (16 weeks) and paternity leave (28 days). Until then, extending leave beyond statutory entitlements had mainly been possible through parental education leave, which could last up to three years but remained poorly compensated. As a result, it had primarily been taken up by women already in more precarious labour market positions, increasing risks of career penalties and long-term detachment from employment.

The new additional leave aims to address these shortcomings. Shorter than parental leave and potentially better remunerated, it could improve work-family reconciliation for both parents while encouraging greater paternal involvement, helping move beyond models of “auxiliary fatherhood” still common in workplace cultures.

This development coincides with the year in which France must transpose the European directive on pay equality, raising the broader question of whether Europe is moving towards a deeper cultural transformation.

This ambition is at the core of SD4EU, which promotes recognition of care work, organisational models focused on results rather than hours spent at work, equal sharing of family responsibilities, and the right to disconnect as essential components of well-being.

UNAPL—particularly through its Parity-Equality and European Affairs Commissions—fully supports the project orientations as a step towards more equitable, sustainable and genuinely equal working conditions across Europe.



UNAPL

The Union nationale des professions libérales (UNAPL), established in 1977, is a national employers' organisation representing liberal professions in France. It brings together 69 trade unions across four sectors: Health, Law, Living Environment, and Technical Professions. It operates regionally through local UNAPL branches and Liberal Professions Houses.

Liberal professions account for 28.6% of French businesses and employ nearly 2.8 million people, including 1.2 million salaried workers.

UNAPL has three main missions:

- To defend the moral and material interests of liberal professionals
- To promote liberal professional practice
- To represent the sector before public authorities and in social dialogue

UNAPL is a member of the U2P (Union of Local Businesses), the leading national employers' organisation.

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