

NEWSLETTER

July 2025

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.*



Social Dialogue for Gender Equity. Official Launch of the European Project SD4EU

The European project SD4EU (Social Dialogue for a Union of Equality) was officially launched with the inaugural meeting held in Rome on 6 and 7 May. Representatives from various European countries convened at the headquarters of Confprofessioni to mark the beginning of this important initiative.

Co-funded by the European Union, SD4EU is dedicated to promoting gender equity through a more inclusive and effective model of social dialogue. This marks the fourth project coordinated by Confprofessioni in this domain and reaffirms its commitment to supporting the role of social partners in addressing pressing issues related to labour relations and equality.

The project's primary objective is to strengthen the capacity of social partners and provide new perspectives on how social dialogue can effectively tackle gender-related challenges. Particular emphasis will be placed on three key areas that remain critical for the European labour market: the gender pay gap, social protection, and work-life balance. The Rome meetings served to align participants on the project's overarching goals, strengthen mutual understanding, and define a clear operational roadmap.

Through detailed presentations, Confprofessioni clarified the tasks to be carried out, the responsibilities assigned to each participant, and the envisaged timeline for implementation.

A central point of discussion concerned the focus on "gender equity" rather than solely "gender equality." This distinction underscores the need to recognise existing structural imbalances and to adopt targeted measures to address them, moving beyond a one-size-fits-all approach.

The agenda also included planning for forthcoming activities, both immediate and long-term. These range from an initial research phase—supported by the recruitment of dedicated researchers—to the organisation of transnational seminars and the development of a roadmap for a Union committed to equity, culminating in a final conference to be held in Brussels in 2026.

Through SD4EU, the partners aspire to transform commitments into concrete actions, ensuring that social dialogue serves as a genuine driver of progress towards a more equitable and inclusive Europe.



SD4EU Working Groups' recommendations for a stronger gender-sensitive social dialogue

The SD4EU – Social Dialogue for the European Union project contributes to strengthening the capacity of European and national social partners to address persistent gender inequalities in the labour market and in social protection systems. In line with the European Pillar of Social Rights and the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025, the project aims to translate legislative principles into concrete measures that can be implemented through collective bargaining, sectoral agreements and coordinated policy frameworks.

Despite notable progress in EU legislation and national policy reforms, structural and cultural barriers continue to hinder full equality between women and men. Career fragmentation, unequal distribution of unpaid care responsibilities, wage gaps and limited access to social protection for non-standard workers remain key challenges across Member States.

Through a collaborative approach, the SD4EU committee have produced targeted recommendations that address these critical aspects.

These recommendations are addressed to social partners, policy makers and institutions at both national and European level. They provide concrete tools and policy directions to align collective bargaining and welfare frameworks with the EU's overarching equality objectives.

The following sections summarise the main findings and proposals developed by the three committee.

The committees are:

- **Social Protection Committee**
- **Equal Pay and Gender Pay Gap Committee**
- **Work-Life Balance Committee**

Social Protection Committee

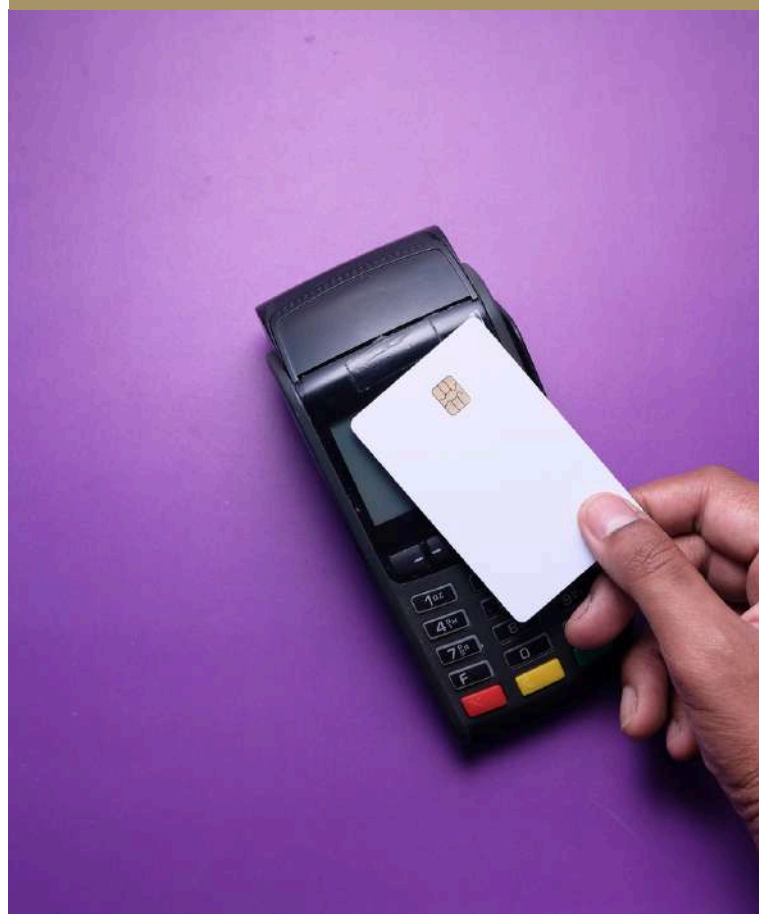
Bridging Structural Gaps in Social Protection

This Committee highlights how career fragmentation, unpaid care, and unequal income trajectories continue to disadvantage women across Europe's social protection systems. The group's recommendations focus on:

- Compensating career interruptions: through collective agreements, bilateral funds, and schemes that recognise unpaid care work's impact on income and pensions.
- Ensuring equal parental leave: individual, non-transferable rights for mothers and fathers, with adequate income replacement, also extended to the self-employed.
- Investing in childcare services: accessible, quality childcare is essential to guarantee women's stable labour market participation.
- Adapting working time frameworks: flexible work arrangements and reintegration measures help protect income continuity for parents and caregivers.
- Securing adequate income: aligning minimum wages and pensions with real living costs, especially for women in part-time or freelance work.
- Empowering social partners: reinforcing collective bargaining to expand protection for non-standard workers and ensure that gender equality principles shape national frameworks.



Focuses on measures to compensate career interruptions due to unpaid care, improve access to contributory benefits, adapt pension schemes, and strengthen the role of social partners in ensuring income continuity and adequate protection.



Equal Pay and Gender Pay Gap Committee

Closing the Gender Pay Gap through Transparency and Valuation

This Committee underlines the urgent need for structural and cultural action to close the gender pay gap. Key proposals include:

- Going beyond hourly wages: ensuring pay transparency addresses total earnings over a lifetime, taking into account career breaks and unpaid care.
- Revaluing gendered work: assessing and raising the value of professions with high female participation, such as care and education.
- Ensuring fair wage progression: supporting wage structures that reward skills and results, not only uninterrupted tenure, and compensating for career interruptions.
- Improving gender-disaggregated data: to design targeted, evidence-based policies and track emerging forms of work like platform labour.
- Strengthening social partners' role: empowering trade unions and professional organisations to negotiate gender-sensitive pay practices and monitor compliance with the Pay Transparency Directive.
- Challenging cultural biases: investing in education and awareness campaigns to tackle stereotypes and support a truly equal workplace culture.



Addresses the structural causes of the gender pay gap through pay transparency measures, improved wage-setting criteria, fair career progression and revaluation of sectors with high female employment.

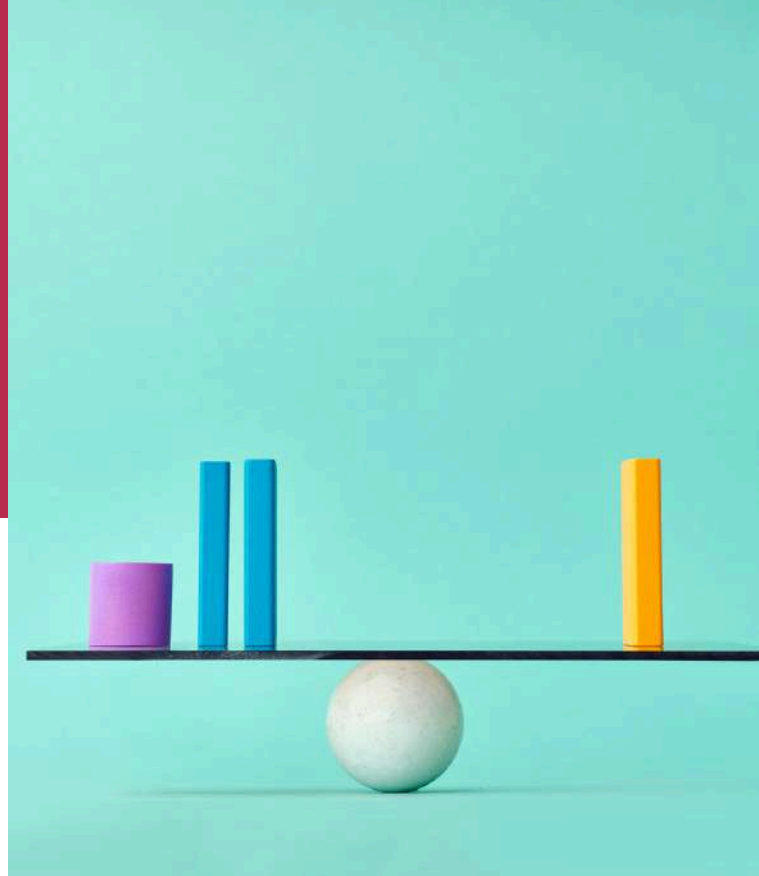


Work-Life Balance Committee

Towards a New Culture of Work and Care

This Committee stresses that reconciling work and family life is central to gender equality. Its recommendations promote:

- Equal and well-paid parental leave: encouraging fathers' active involvement in caregiving to balance responsibilities.
- Flexible work arrangements: remote work, adaptable schedules, and tailored return-to-work pathways, especially for parents and carers.
- Extending eligibility: ensuring freelancers, non-standard and self-employed workers can access leave and care-related rights.
- Recognising unpaid care: valuing caregiving as a social and economic contribution, and designing leave and support schemes accordingly.
- Investing in local care services: expanding accessible childcare and eldercare, especially in rural areas.
- Engaging social partners: ensuring that collective bargaining and EU funding streams align to deliver gender-sensitive work-life balance solutions.



Works on policies to extend parental and care leave rights, promote flexible working arrangements, recognise unpaid care as a social contribution, and strengthen access to quality childcare and eldercare services.





EIGE Gender Equality Forum 2024.

Towards a Fairer Future

The 2024 Gender Equality Forum, organized by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), brought together policymakers, activists, researchers, civil society representatives, and youth from across Europe to discuss urgent gender equality challenges, with a focus on younger generations.

Over two days, participants addressed issues such as gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive rights, online discrimination, gender bias in artificial intelligence, and the gendered effects of climate change. The Forum also tackled the rise of far-right anti-gender narratives and emphasized the importance of involving men and boys in promoting gender equality. Special attention was given to the leadership and experiences of young migrant women.

On the first day, the focus was on gender-based violence, highlighting ongoing cases and the need for stronger protective policies. The persistent gender gaps in political and economic participation were discussed, alongside concerns about women's roles in digital and ecological transitions.

The impact of the Ukraine war on women, especially displaced women and girls, was also examined. The second day concentrated on women's roles in conflict and peacebuilding, showcasing Ukrainian women as active peacebuilders supported by training and psychological services. Discussions included sexual violence in conflict zones, disinformation campaigns threatening healthcare rights, and the underrepresentation of women—particularly minorities—in security sectors. Intersectionality and compounded discrimination, such as that faced by Palestinian women in Gaza, were highlighted. Throughout the Forum, participants stressed the crucial role of women in crisis leadership and the need to dismantle systemic inequalities in education, political representation, and pay. In closing, EIGE leaders called for data-driven strategies and collective action at European and global levels to eliminate gender-based violence, secure full rights for all women, and advance genuine gender equality.



Women in Liberal Professions on the Rise, but the Gender Pay Gap Persists

Over the last 15 years, the presence of women in Italy's liberal professions has grown substantially, increasing by 49% and now representing 35.3% of the sector. This positive trend has contributed to an overall 18.4% growth in liberal professionals between 2009 and 2023.

Despite these advances, significant gender disparities persist, particularly regarding income. On average, women earn 46% less than their male counterparts. The income gap is especially pronounced among those enrolled in private pension funds, with differences reaching up to €25,000. The disparity peaks in the 51–60 age group, where women earn approximately €37,400 compared to €67,000 for men. Under the INPS Gestione Separata scheme, women earn about 71% of men's average income.

Geographically, female representation is stronger in Central and Northern Italy (around 39%) than in the South (just above 30%). Sectoral differences are also evident: women dominate in health and social care (51.9%) and legal professions (43.1%), but remain underrepresented in engineering, finance, real estate, and commerce, where they account for only 22–24%. The number of women registered under the INPS Gestione Separata scheme increased from 259,000 in 2014 to 415,000 in 2023, nearly 48% of total members, yet wage gaps persist.

Structural challenges contribute to these inequalities. Gender pay gaps in liberal professions are wider than in salaried employment. Additionally, from 2018 to 2023, many young female graduates have preferred salaried jobs over freelance careers, attracted by greater job security and benefits. Parenthood presents another significant barrier: 80% of self-employed women view motherhood as an obstacle to career advancement, mainly due to the lack of maternity protections and work-life balance policies. This situation has led many women to delay childbirth beyond age 30, reflecting broader national birth rate trends. These findings echo the priorities of Italy's National Gender Equality Strategy 2021–2026, which targets five key areas—Work, Income, Skills, Time, and Power—with the aim to close gender gaps through concrete measures by 2026.

Addressing these persistent inequalities will require comprehensive policy action and structural reforms to support female professionals, particularly those who are self-employed, ensuring fair income distribution and equal opportunities across Italy's liberal professions.



SD4EU Report “Meaning and Dimensions of Gender Equality in EU Policies and Law” is available online.

The report offers a rigorous, multidisciplinary examination of the concept of gender equality within the European Union’s legal and policy framework, tracing its evolution from the Treaty of Rome in 1957 to the present day. It combines legal analysis, political history, and feminist theory to provide a comprehensive understanding of how gender equality has been defined, constructed, and implemented across EU institutions.

Beginning with a historical overview, the report highlights the initial focus on equal pay between men and women and shows how gender equality has developed into a broad, cross-cutting objective enshrined in key documents such as the Lisbon Treaty, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, and the Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025. Key legislative milestones—including the Defrenne case law, the Treaty of Amsterdam’s introduction of gender mainstreaming, and subsequent anti-discrimination legislation—are analysed in detail to demonstrate the gradual deepening of EU commitments to gender equality.

A central focus is given to the EU’s two main strategic approaches: gender mainstreaming and positive action. Gender mainstreaming is portrayed not merely as a policy tool, but as a structural method aimed at embedding gender equality across all EU actions.

The report traces its origins from international forums such as the 1995 Beijing Conference and explains how it has been formalised and operationalised within the EU legal framework.

Positive actions are examined as necessary but sometimes controversial interventions designed to support underrepresented groups. The report reviews important Court of Justice of the EU rulings that have shaped the legal boundaries of these measures, balancing the promotion of equality with the prevention of reverse discrimination. This analysis is particularly relevant for social partners like trade unions and employers’ organisations, who are increasingly responsible for applying gender equality principles through collective bargaining and workplace governance.

Beyond legal and policy frameworks, the report delves into conceptual debates on gender, equality, and difference. It traces the evolution of EU policies from an initial focus on formal equality and anti-discrimination towards embracing the politics of difference and intersectionality. The latter, formally integrated into EU policy through the 2020–2025 Gender Equality Strategy, links gender with other identity factors such as race, disability, age, and sexual orientation, offering a more nuanced and inclusive framework.



This approach has the potential to enhance social dialogue by making it more responsive to the diverse realities of the workforce.

The report also addresses tensions between traditional, binary legal definitions of gender and broader social understandings of gender identity. This remains an area of ongoing negotiation among EU institutions, national governments, and civil society actors, reflecting wider societal debates.

Importantly, the report is designed not just as an academic resource but as a practical tool for stakeholders involved in social dialogue processes. Within the framework of the SD4EU project, it supports social partners in developing evidence-based, inclusive, and effective gender equality strategies tailored to the needs of different Member States and sectors. By clarifying legal obligations, outlining policy developments, and providing conceptual clarity, the report aims to strengthen the capacity of social partners to advance gender equality across the EU.

Key contents include:

- **Legal-historical analysis:** Traces gender equality in EU law from the Treaty of Rome's equal pay principle to key CJEU rulings (Defrenne) and expanded provisions in the Amsterdam and Lisbon Treaties and the EU Charter.
- **Policy strategies:** Summarises gender mainstreaming as a cross-cutting EU commitment (inspired by the 1995 Beijing Conference) and explains positive actions as targeted measures to address structural imbalances (with cases like Kalanke, Marschall, Abrahamsson).
- **Conceptual reflection:** Highlights how EU discourse has shifted from formal equality to intersectionality, recognising how gender overlaps with other factors like race or disability (as seen in the Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025).
- **Strengths and limitations:** Notes gaps between legal frameworks and practice, the uneven application of gender mainstreaming, and challenges in legal definitions keeping pace with diverse gender identities.



SD4EU Report “The role of European social dialogue to reduce gender inequalities, for a Union of equality” is available online.

As Europe marks the 40th anniversary of the Val Duchesse Summit — the historic 1985 meeting that gave birth to structured European social dialogue — questions are mounting about whether this once-pioneering tool can deliver on its promise for a new generation: true gender equality at work.

The SD4EU – Social Dialogue for a Union of Equality project, funded by the European Union, places this question at centre stage. In a draft report circulating among policymakers and social partners this month, researchers warn that Europe’s social dialogue, long hailed as a pillar of the EU’s unique social model, risks drifting into irrelevance — just when it is needed most.

Back in the 1980s, then-European Commission President Jacques Delors believed that economic integration must be balanced by robust social protections. The “Val Duchesse meetings” brought unions and employers together under the EU umbrella, leading to landmark agreements on parental leave and part-time work that were later enshrined in EU directives.

Today, the context is more precarious. As the SD4EU analysis recounts, European social dialogue has suffered setbacks in recent decades, squeezed by waves of deregulation, the 2008 financial crisis, and mounting institutional inertia.

“What was once an engine for binding agreements now struggles to set minimum standards, let alone advance transformative gender policies,” the report notes.

Gender equality is a case in point. While the EU has been a global leader in recognising equal pay and equal treatment on paper since the 1957 Treaty of Rome, the reality for millions of women in Europe remains stubbornly unequal. The gender pay gap persists at nearly 13% on average, and structural barriers — from unpaid care work to occupational segregation — remain deeply entrenched.

Attempts by Europe’s social partners to address this imbalance are not new. From the pioneering framework agreements on parental leave in the 1990s to more recent joint actions on remote work and pay transparency, unions and employers have shown that consensus is possible. The SD4EU paper highlights how joint programmes, like the Audiovisual Sector’s updated Framework of Actions on Gender Equality, are pushing boundaries — but such best practices are too often the exception, not the rule.

The SD4EU project does not shy away from uncomfortable truths. It argues that today’s labour market realities — including the surge in self-employment, platform work and hybrid models — demand a radical rethink of the wage-centric logic that has shaped



European social rights for decades.

It calls for a “new European pact” that broadens protections to all forms of work and puts intersectional gender equality at its heart. Crucially, it insists that social dialogue must break out of its silos: involving not just traditional employers and unions, but also newer forms of worker representation, civil society, and feminist movements.

The next two years will test whether Europe’s leaders and social partners can step up. By June 2026, Member States must implement the EU Pay Transparency Directive, giving unions a key role in collective bargaining and monitoring equal pay. Meanwhile, the digital transition and remote work pose fresh challenges to gender equality — as many women bear a double burden of professional and unpaid domestic responsibilities.

The legacy of Val Duchesse is clear: social dialogue can shape laws, shift cultures, and close gaps. But as the SD4EU researchers put it, the question for 2025 and beyond is whether Europe’s institutions and social partners have the political will to revive this tool for a new generation.

After all, as Delors famously said in 1989, “You cannot fall in love with the single market.” For millions of European women — and all those left behind by outdated labour protections — a Union of Equality will require far more than economic integration.

It will require voices at the table — and binding action to match the promises.

Key Milestones of EU Social Dialogue:

- **1957 – Treaty of Rome: Equal pay principle.**
- **1985 – Val Duchesse: Delors launches EU-level social dialogue.**
- **1986 – Single European Act: Legal basis for dialogue.**
- **1989 – Charter of Social Rights: Fundamental workers’ rights.**
- **1991–1997 – Maastricht & Amsterdam Treaties: Social dialogue formalised in EU law.**
- **1995–1999 – First framework agreements (parental leave, part-time, fixed-term work).**
- **1998 – Sectoral Social Dialogue Committees created.**
- **2003 – Tripartite Social Summit established.**
- **2017 – European Pillar of Social Rights adopted.**
- **2023 – Pay Transparency Directive strengthens role of social partners.**



SD4EU Report “The Application of the Principle of Gender Equality in the Workplace” is available online.

As Europe navigates unprecedented labour market transformations, employers' organisations are facing mounting expectations to deliver on an old promise: equal treatment for all workers, regardless of gender — and fair pay for work of equal value.

A new report from the SD4EU – Social Dialogue for a Union of Equality project offers timely insight into how Europe's regulatory landscape is shifting — and what it means for employers aiming to stay compliant, competitive, and credible.

At the heart of this new push is the Pay Transparency Directive (2023/970/EU), which enters into force by 2026. For employers, this means practical obligations to disclose salary ranges, adopt clear pay structures, and monitor pay gaps across all levels — from recruitment adverts to company-wide reporting.

Social partners are recognised as “key players” in shaping how pay transparency is put into practice. The Directive explicitly invites employers and unions to develop gender-neutral job evaluation tools, design training for HR teams, and negotiate how new rules will be enforced.

For many companies, this is not just an administrative update — it is a culture shift. More transparent pay structures will require open dialogue with employee

representatives and may affect collective bargaining dynamics in sectors that have historically struggled with gender pay gaps.

The report highlights that the EU is not pushing employers alone towards this goal: social partners — employers' associations and trade unions alike — are central to ensuring that pay equity works in practice.

By actively engaging in collective bargaining, employers can shape frameworks that match their operational needs while meeting new standards for equality. For sectors where collective bargaining coverage is low, the Directive encourages Member States to promote stronger social dialogue or, where necessary, mandate action plans to boost it.

This renewed role for social dialogue extends beyond pay. Directives on adequate minimum wages (2022/2041/EU) and work-life balance (2019/1158/EU) both stress the value of well-functioning industrial relations to secure fair conditions — especially for women, who remain overrepresented in low-paid and part-time roles.

Remote work and flexible arrangements have become the norm for many sectors, offering new opportunities but also new risks — particularly for women balancing work and care responsibilities.

Frameworks such as the European Social Partners' Telework Agreement and emerging discussions around the Right to Disconnect



show how social partners can lead on modernising workplace standards while protecting health, productivity and work-life balance.

Again, the SD4EU report makes clear: employers who shape these solutions proactively through collective dialogue are more likely to find balanced, workable models than those forced to comply reactively.

Today, fair pay and flexible conditions are more than legal requirements — they are drivers of competitiveness. Employers' organisations that help their members adopt transparent pay systems, promote balanced flexible work, and engage openly with workers' representatives are better placed to attract talent and maintain trust.

The legacy of European social dialogue — born in Val Duchesse in 1985 — shows that cooperation works. Now, as the EU strengthens its Union of Equality, employers are once again called to the table. The stakes are high: compliance, culture, and competitiveness all depend on the quality of the dialogue we build together.

KEY POINTS AT A GLANCE:

- **GENDER EQUALITY REMAINS A LEGAL AND STRATEGIC PRIORITY (ARTICLE 157 TFEU)**
- **PAY TRANSPARENCY DIRECTIVE (2023/970/EU)**
- **MINIMUM WAGE DIRECTIVE (2022/2041/EU)**
- **WORK-LIFE BALANCE DIRECTIVE (2019/1158/EU)**
- **SOCIAL SECURITY DIRECTIVES (E.G. 79/7/EEC, 2006/54/EC)**



Gender equality and social protection: European SD4EU seminar in Rome boosts social dialogue for an inclusive welfare system.

26 September 2025

Gender equality as a lever for 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 the Spazio Europa in Rome, as part 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 various EU Member States, with the aim of strengthening their capacity to integrate the gender dimension into welfare systems and collective bargaining processes.

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

Natali pointed out that raising female employment in Italy to the European average would translate into GDP growth of between 7% and 9%, equivalent to €150–190 billion per year. “The SD4EU project,” he added, “was conceived to tackle these challenges through concrete measures, making social

dialogue a vehicle for equality and shared progress.”

Professor Paola Profeta (Bocconi University) offered a detailed analysis of gender inequalities in the labour market and across European welfare systems, highlighting the crucial importance of gender-disaggregated data to design effective public policies.

In Italy, she noted, only one in two women is in employment, despite higher educational attainment than men; the gender pay gap remains in double digits; and the so-called “child penalty” continues to weigh heavily on women’s careers, with long-term effects that extend into retirement.

Profeta stressed that systematic ex-ante and ex-post gender impact assessments of policies are often lacking. Without robust data, it becomes impossible to tackle inequalities in a structural way.

Contributions from national partners painted a common picture: career paths are increasingly fragmented and discontinuous, while social protection systems remain anchored to the traditional model of standard, full-time employment.

In Italy, by 2025 only half of all workers will have uninterrupted career paths, with women being 55% more likely to take breaks for family reasons.



In Ireland, the extremely high cost of childcare (up to €1,400 per month in Dublin) represents a structural barrier to returning to work, while in Belgium the “gender pension gap” remains above 25%, reflecting shorter and part-time female careers.

Women are also over-represented in atypical and platform-based work, often without adequate protection, leading to cumulative disadvantages in income, pension rights and economic security.

Despite these challenges, the panels showcased numerous positive experiences and practical recommendations:

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

The final recommendations of the SD4EU working group focused on several key priorities:

- recognising care as a structural component of social protection systems;
- ensuring fair, accessible and non-transferable leave schemes;
- extending collective bargaining coverage to the self-employed and atypical workers;
- strengthening the portability of social rights at European level;
- promoting flexible working models that do not penalise women’s career progression.

The seminar took place within the framework of the new European Pact for Social Dialogue, which seeks to strengthen the structured participation 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 changing forms of work, the green and digital transitions, and the growing diversity of employment models. In short, the SD4EU seminar in Rome demonstrated that gender equality is both a shared European challenge and fertile ground for innovating social dialogue and building more equitable, universal and sustainable social protection systems.

WHAT'S NEXT & UPCOMING EVENTS

GENDER PAY GAP AND EQUAL PAY TRANSNATIONAL SEMINAR

MALTA, 30 OCTOBER 2025

On 30 October 2025, Malta will host the second transnational seminar dedicated to tackling the gender pay gap and equal pay challenges. This half-day event will bring together around 60 participants from Malta, Italy, Ireland, and Belgium, including social partners, liberal professionals, experts, and key stakeholders.

The seminar will focus on addressing minimum wage issues and pay equity, highlighting emerging trends and successful practices from different countries. Building on the findings from Task 1, the event will introduce innovative approaches to social dialogue aimed at fostering inclusive and fair labour markets.

Participants will engage in lively discussions, case studies, and networking sessions designed to share knowledge, develop practical tools, and strengthen cooperation across borders.



WORK-LIFE BALANCE AND REMOTE WORKING TRANSNATIONAL SEMINAR

DUBLIN, 19 NOVEMBER 2025

Next up is Dublin, where the third transnational seminar will delve into the pressing issues of work-life balance and teleworking. Bringing together experts, professionals, social partners, and stakeholders from across Europe, the event promises a rich exchange of ideas and insights on emerging work models and their impact on social dialogue.

Over the course of a half-day, attendees will explore the latest trends, tackle the challenges and opportunities of flexible working, and consider practical policy recommendations to support a healthier balance between professional and personal life. With interactive sessions, panel discussions, and networking opportunities, the seminar is designed to foster dialogue, share best practices, and strengthen cross-border collaboration.

As part of the wider project, the Dublin seminar represents a significant step towards innovative approaches to social dialogue, offering participants a valuable chance for learning, discussion, and collective growth. It's an unmissable occasion for anyone interested in the future of work in Europe.



Tackling Gender Gaps in the Professional Workforce: Confprofessioni's Ongoing Commitment and the SD4EU Project

Addressing gender gaps in women's employment — especially in the professional sector — is a collective effort that Confprofessioni has been pursuing for many years. Today, this commitment has been further strengthened through the launch of a dedicated confederal working group focused specifically on this issue.

Within the broader context of social dialogue experiences shared with European partners, the SD4EU project represents an important opportunity to gather data, build awareness, identify challenges and exchange best practices. These elements provide a solid basis for reflection, planning and action — all within a framework of open dialogue, free from prejudice or geographical bias.

What truly sets this experience apart is the strong personal engagement it generates when faced with the reality that women's work, even today, remains fragile, complex and in urgent need of tangible support measures. This situation, although it varies from country to country, is a common thread running through the experiences of all project partners.

By sharing best practices — which each participating country brings to the table — we can activate a virtuous cycle of positive measures aimed at narrowing or even eliminating the gender gaps identified in the three key areas under review: social protection, the gender pay gap and work-life balance.

I also expect the outcomes of the upcoming transnational seminars planned under the project to provide fresh momentum, helping us achieve concrete results. These outcomes will be essential in formulating recommendations to the European Commission on how to strengthen, expand and ensure the full and effective implementation of EU legislation within national legal frameworks.



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.

CEPLIS Reaffirms Commitment to Gender Equality through the SD4EU Project

As the sole body representing the liberal professions at the European level, CEPLIS is glad to participate as a beneficiary partner in the project SD4EU, which aims to empower social partners to rethink their approach to gender equality in the context of labour negotiations.

Our project stems from the European Pillar of Social Rights, a seminal legislative text unveiled by the European Commission in 2017, and designed to guide the actions of all European authorities in the promotion of social progress.

Principle 2 of this document clearly states the necessity to realise gender equality in all places. Despite that, ground experience and macro-level statistics continually demonstrate that women still face substantial discrimination in and out of the workplace.

CEPLIS has always been committed to supporting every initiative susceptible to advance gender equality. SD4EU is thus a project of crucial importance to us, as we believe that social partners can and should have a determinant role to play in promoting a truly equal society.

Through SD4EU, CEPLIS and the other bodies participating will provide European social partners with actionable recommendations aiming at improving the position of women in the professional world. We hope that our recommendations will contribute to motivate decision-makers not only to adopt gender equality oriented policies, but also to monitor the implementation of policies already adopted, and in general to realise that keeping discriminations going is highly detrimental to the Union's growth.



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.

From Conversation to Change: Promoting Gender Equality with MFPA

Gender equality is not just a nice idea. It is essential for a fair and thriving society. When everyone, regardless of gender, has equal access to education, jobs, and leadership roles, communities grow stronger, economies do better, and people live healthier, happier lives. It's about making sure no one is held back just because of outdated stereotypes or systemic barriers. The Malta Federation of Professional Associations, MFPA, strongly believes in breaking stereotypes, so much so that it was the theme of an exhibition it held at the Maltese Parliament and which is touring schools in Malta.

As a Federation representing 17 different professional organisations, we strongly believe that social dialogue plays a huge role in making this happen. When governments, civil society, employers and employees come together to talk openly, real change can happen. We need to close pay gaps, improve workplace conditions and ensure fair policies for everyone. Dialogue gives people a voice, especially those who might otherwise be ignored.

MFPA is proud to partner once again on this project led by Confprofessioni. With social dialogue we can help create a world where opportunities are based on talent and hard work, not gender, hence benefiting not just individuals, but entire societies.



James Licari
President 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

UNPLIB is proud to be part of the SD4EU project, which represents a crucial step toward a more inclusive, fair, and forward-looking European Social Dialogue. This initiative promotes cooperation among social partners and fosters innovative, gender-sensitive approaches to professional development across Europe.

As a representative organisation for liberal professionals in Belgium, UNPLIB fully supports the project's ambition to leverage European Social Dialogue to make professional equality a reality. From our perspective, SD4EU is a powerful platform for addressing the systemic inequalities that persist in the world of work, including gender-based disparities in earnings, recognition, and career progression.

We are particularly engaged in the work of the SD4EU Work-Life Balance Committee, the Social Protection Committee, and the Equal Pay and Gender Pay Gap Committee, where we bring forward the specific needs of Belgian liberal professionals. These working groups offer valuable spaces for shaping policy recommendations and promoting a professional environment in which fairness and equality can thrive.

UNPLIB is strongly committed to advocating for:

- greater recognition of women's careers in the liberal professions,
- improved social protection schemes that consider the child penalty and career interruptions,
- and stronger legal frameworks to ensure equal pay for equal work or work of equal value.

We are confident that SD4EU will continue to empower social partners and generate meaningful, long-term impact across the European professional landscape.



Bernard Jaquemin
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.

EQUAL Ireland Helps to Shape European Conversation on Social Protection

Some of the key outcomes of the SP4SE Project for Ireland “Voices from Ireland’s Community Frontlines”, was presented in Brussels on 16 June 2025 at the European Conference on Social Dialogue and Social Protection for the Self-Employed.

The presentation shared critical findings from an innovative adult education perspective in Ireland, emphasising that effective policy must be grounded in lived experience and local insight.

Four core learnings emerged:

1. Gendered Realities – Self-employed women face unique health challenges, such as menopause, without access to sick leave or HR support. Social protection must address these gaps.
2. Community-Led Rural Solutions – Rural areas need flexible, locally-delivered services. One-size-fits-all policies often fail to meet the realities on the ground.
3. Language as Inclusion – For migrant families, language is a key barrier. Accessible, community-based education supports employment, participation, and dignity.
4. Emotional Intelligence as Survival – Skills like resilience and empathy are essential for self-employed individuals and should be valued within policy frameworks.

These insights point to a pressing need for social protection systems that are people-centred, equitable, and informed by frontline experiences. The paper received strong interest from European policymakers and NGOs, reinforcing the vital role of adult learners and community voices in shaping future-ready policy.



Nuala Keher and Eddie Higgins
Joint Executive Managers EQUAL
Ireland

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.

Leveraging European Social Dialogue to Make Professional Equality a Reality

As a representative organisation for the liberal professions, UNAPL is fully committed to achieving better recognition of women's careers, more tailored social protection, and genuine equality in professional practice. UNAPL is actively involved in the SD4EU (Social Dialogue for a Union of Equality) programme, co-financed by the European Commission, which supports a more gender-sensitive approach to the role of social partners.

In France, despite working the same hours, women still earn an average of 14.2% less than men. This disparity is largely due to the gendered distribution of professions: women are predominantly found in feminised service and office roles, as well as in the "care" sector, where salaries tend to be lower and professional classifications are less clearly defined — even though women graduate from the education system with higher qualifications on average.

Women's careers are particularly affected by childbirth and the number of children they have: mothers work fewer hours and earn less than fathers, and the gap widens with each additional child. This impacts their entire professional trajectory, often resulting in an incomplete career path and, ultimately, an average retirement pension that is 40% lower than that of men.

UNAPL advocates for a social protection system that better accounts for the child penalty and for working conditions that enhance the value of female-dominated professions.

By June 2026, France must transpose into national law Directive (EU) 2023/970, which aims to strengthen the enforcement of the principle of equal pay for equal work or work of equal value between women and men, through pay transparency and monitoring mechanisms. UNAPL will closely follow the preliminary consultations leading up to the drafting of this legislation, particularly with regard to contributions and best practice proposals developed under the SD4EU programme.



Ornella Condina
European and International
Affairs Commission

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.

GET IN TOUCH!



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