

ECEG Position Paper on the Commission's Public Consultation on Gender Equality in the EU



Gender equality is a fundamental value of the European Union and, in the latest 5 years, the Juncker Commission has actively engaged in its promotion. However, despite a slight increase in the female labour force rates, the gender employment gap remains stable around 11.5 percentage points, with large gender discrepancies in terms of remuneration and working conditions.

In light of these data, the European Chemical Employers Group (ECEG) firmly believes that current gender equality priorities should continue to be applied also after 2019, paying special attention to women's economic empowerment and introducing new goals to ensure equal access to education, skills development, training, information and employment opportunities.

The ECEG considers that the current EU legislation on gender equality and work-life balance is extremely comprehensive. Instead of introducing new rules, EU gender-equality actions should rather focus on a more efficient application of existing laws and on a better coordination in the exchange of good practices among Member States and local entities.

The Commission should especially support and encourage those projects and trainings which aim at making STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) education programmes and professions more attractive to women. In this regard, social partners' EU-funded project "Equal Participation of Women in the European Chemical Industry" highlighted that women employed in the chemical sector represent a very low percentage if compared to the overall number of women in the labour market¹. In fact, generally speaking, few women opt for a technical and/or scientific education, with, subsequently, a female under-representation in those professions linked to STEM. In order to face this "leaky pipeline" phenomenon and provide different professional and career opportunities to women, career and study orientation programmes (especially in the field of STEM) should be encouraged and improved.

At the same time, formation and training sessions should be offered to employees coming back from parental leave, as well as to managerial and executive levels in order to help in innovating and introducing appropriate measures in terms of gender balance. Affordable and good-quality childcare services should also be prioritised, conforming them to "modern working hours", giving the possibility to women to come back rapidly to the labour market and maintain similar levels of salary, as well as

¹ Please, see: <http://www.demographicsinchemistry.eu/index.php?id=25&L=1>. In the chemical sector, women represent less than 1/3 of the total workforce. Moreover, only one woman every 2 men is represented in scientific and administration councils and a very low percentage occupy managerial and administrative positions.

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the impetus of career perspectives. This should go together with the promotion of more equal sharing of family responsibilities between women and men, with the main goal of relieving women of their childcare and household responsibilities and reducing, in the meantime, their proportion in part-time job positions. Right and uniform implementation of paternity leave measures should also be applied across the different Member States, ensuring that men who make use of this right do not face a drastic reduction on their salary.

In this context, national and European social dialogue represents an essential tool to promote and encourage a cultural shift where child, elderly or disabled people care do not have a sexual connotation and are not exclusive responsibility of women. Through an engaged and constructive social dialogue, trade unions and employers' organisations contribute to the exchange of good practices, the promotion of clearer guidance and the dissemination of awareness-raising activities. On the one hand, trade unions generally advocate for regulatory changes, provide education and other capacity-building services, while, on the other, employers' organisations play a pivotal role in helping entrepreneurs to access information on regulations, market opportunities and other resources and services.

In the chemical sector, European social partners are already actively committed in the promotion of gender equality, carrying out several activities in the framework of social dialogue work programmes (Chemical sector specific EU-funded project "Children - Care - Career: Equal Participation of Women in the European Chemical Industry", 2013) and cross-sectoral actions (Framework of Actions on Gender Equality, 2005; Gender Equality Toolkit, 2014; Seminar on tackling the gender pay gap and childcare, 2018; ECEG Position Paper on the Commission's Public Consultation on the Evaluation of the provisions in the Directive 2006/54/EC implementing the Treaty principle on 'equal pay'², 2019).

² Please, see: <https://www.eceg.org/eceg-position-paper-on-the-commissions-public-consultation-on-the-evaluation-of-the-equal-pay-directive/>.

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About ECEG

ECEG, the European Chemical Employers Group, founded in 2002, is a recognised European Sectoral Social Partner, representing the chemicals, pharmaceuticals, rubber and plastics industries in Europe. Our sector provides approximately 3.3 million direct jobs in more than 94.000 enterprises.