

# Women and European Parliamentary Elections

## Highlights

Fieldwork: February 2009

Publication: March 2009

This survey was requested and coordinated by Directorate General Communication of the Commission and the European Parliament.

This document does not represent the point of view of the European Commission or the European Parliament.

The interpretations and opinions contained in it are solely those of the authors.

Flash EB Series #266

# Women and European Parliamentary Elections

Conducted by  
The Gallup Organisation, Hungary  
upon the request of Directorate General  
Communication of the Commission and the  
European Parliament



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THE GALLUP ORGANISATION

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## Background

Ahead of the European elections in June 2009, the European Commission and the European Parliament commissioned a Flash Eurobarometer poll (*Women and European Parliamentary Elections* (N°266) to examine women's attitudes and behaviour towards elections in general and their opinions about the European elections and activities of the European Parliament in particular.

In detail, the survey examined:

- the impact of the European Parliament's actions on society and family life
- EU citizen's views as to whether women are well represented in the European Parliament
- how gender equality might be improved by the European Parliament's actions
- how women and men differ in the way they judge candidates
- the extent to which women wish to increase their representation in the European Parliament
- women's views as to whether they currently feel fairly represented by the EU
- how both sexes feel about politics being a male-dominated environment, whether women could bring something new to the political scene and the preferred methods of boosting women's representation in the European Parliament.

The fieldwork for this Flash Eurobarometer *Women and European Parliamentary Elections* (N°266) was conducted between 9 and 13 February 2009. So as to facilitate comparisons of electoral behaviour in a general sense and towards the European Parliament elections in particular, and also in order to allow a greater emphasis on women's views, the following sampling approach was adopted in each of the EU27 Member States: (1) a random sample of 1,000 women aged 18 years and over, and (2) a random sample of 500 citizens, both men and women, aged 18 years and over. In total, over 35,000 women and over 5,500 men aged 18 years and over were interviewed in the different Member States.

Although interviews were predominantly carried out by telephone via fixed-lines, interviews were also conducted via mobile telephones and by face-to-face interviews as appropriate. This methodology ensures that results are representative of the EU27 Member State population. In most of the countries where mobile telephone users could not or could not easily be contacted by fixed-line telephones, a mixed-mode methodology was employed to ensure that these individuals were questioned and this was done either through face-to-face (F2F) interviews or by including mobile telephones in our sampling frame. For this survey, there were mobile telephone interviews conducted in Austria, Finland, Italy, Portugal and Spain, and some F2F interviews in the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Hungary, Slovakia, Latvia, Romania, Estonia, Bulgaria and Poland.

To correct for sampling disparities, a post-stratification weighting of the results was implemented, based on key socio-demographic variables. More details on the survey methodology will be included in the Annex of the more detailed Analytical Report.

## Summary of main results

### Behaviour at elections in general

Looking at voting patterns, the survey shows that both women and men primarily base their decisions on campaign issues followed by party loyalty and candidates' personalities. Men, however, give more prominence than women to campaign issues at the expense of voting based on personalities. Across the EU, similar proportion of women and men tend to consistently vote for the same party. As for when a decision on whom to vote for is actually made, women tend to postpone this choice somewhat later than men; 55% of women only decide in the month prior to an election.

### Perceptions of the current political scene as being male dominated

A large majority of the electorate (71% of men and 77% of women) agree that men dominate the political scene and that more women in politics could lead to a different style of political decision-making. In 18 Member States, three-quarters or more women agree that men dominate politics.

### Women in society

In today's climate, the majority (70%) of women who are employed say they are able to manage the demands of both their work and family lives.

As for why many women are not part of the workforce, "family reasons" are cited the most frequently. Age is a major factor: 18-24 year-olds most frequently say they are actively seeking employment (52%), the 25-39 year-olds most often mention family responsibilities (41%) and respondents over 40 tend to say it is their personal choice to stay at home.

The survey shows that a third of all European women report they have been discriminated against on the grounds of gender (primarily at work and in society in general).

## **The European Parliamentary elections**

When voting in European elections, women give more importance to a candidate's experience on European issues rather than to any political orientation (62% vs. 51%). Men, however, tend to give almost equal weight to both of these factors (57% and 55%). The age and gender of a candidate hardly appear to figure in the decision-making process for either women or men.

## **The European Parliament's priorities**

In order for the European Parliament to improve gender equality in family life, women would like the European Parliament to prioritise policies that allow the time spent child-minding to be counted as pensionable years and policies to emphasise the importance of childcare. Not unexpectedly, younger women more frequently select the provision of sufficient day-care facilities and older women more often request the time spent child-minding to be allowed as pensionable years.

In regard to improving gender equality in society, women want the European Parliament to assign priority to policies that promote equal pay and others that would reduce violence and trafficking against women. Men support equal pay less than women, but give more support than women to the suggestion that the next European Parliament prioritises the area of equal employment opportunities.

Women agree more than men that equal pay could be effectively achieved by providing more information about existing rights. Other options are to enforce existing legislation or to introduce new laws; however, whatever the solution, both women and men prefer action to be taken at the EU level rather than on a national basis.

## **Towards equal representation in the European Parliament**

Just under half of European women feel they are not well represented by the EU. Age is a factor: while just over a third of women aged 18-24 feel they are not well represented, this figure rises to almost half for all the other age groups.

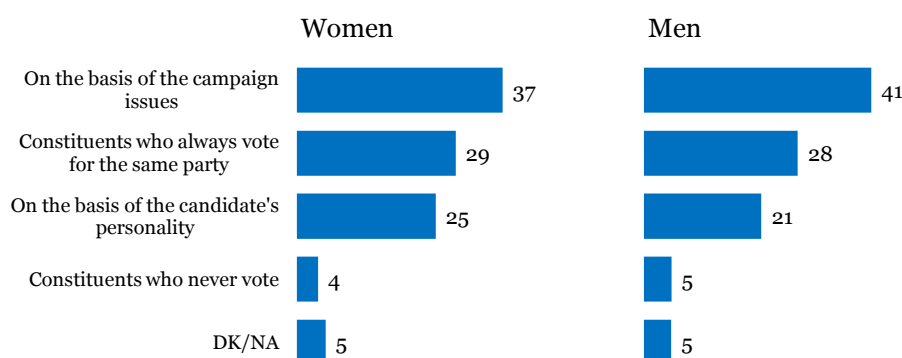
Furthermore, half of European women want 50% or more of the European Parliament members to be women (and 70% want at least 40% of parliamentarians to be women). However, once again, women are less likely to support institutionalised methods (such as mandatory quotas or voluntary commitments by parties) to boost their representation in the European Parliament. Much more than men, they support a solution whereby, for example, more women are encouraged to enter politics. In terms of the relevance of the European Parliament's activities on their lives, women see the biggest impact in the areas of education and women's rights.

# Main findings

## Elections in general and decision taking in European elections

- **When voting, European women put campaign issues first but tend to pay more attention than men to candidates' personalities**

### Reasons that make people decide who to vote for in elections

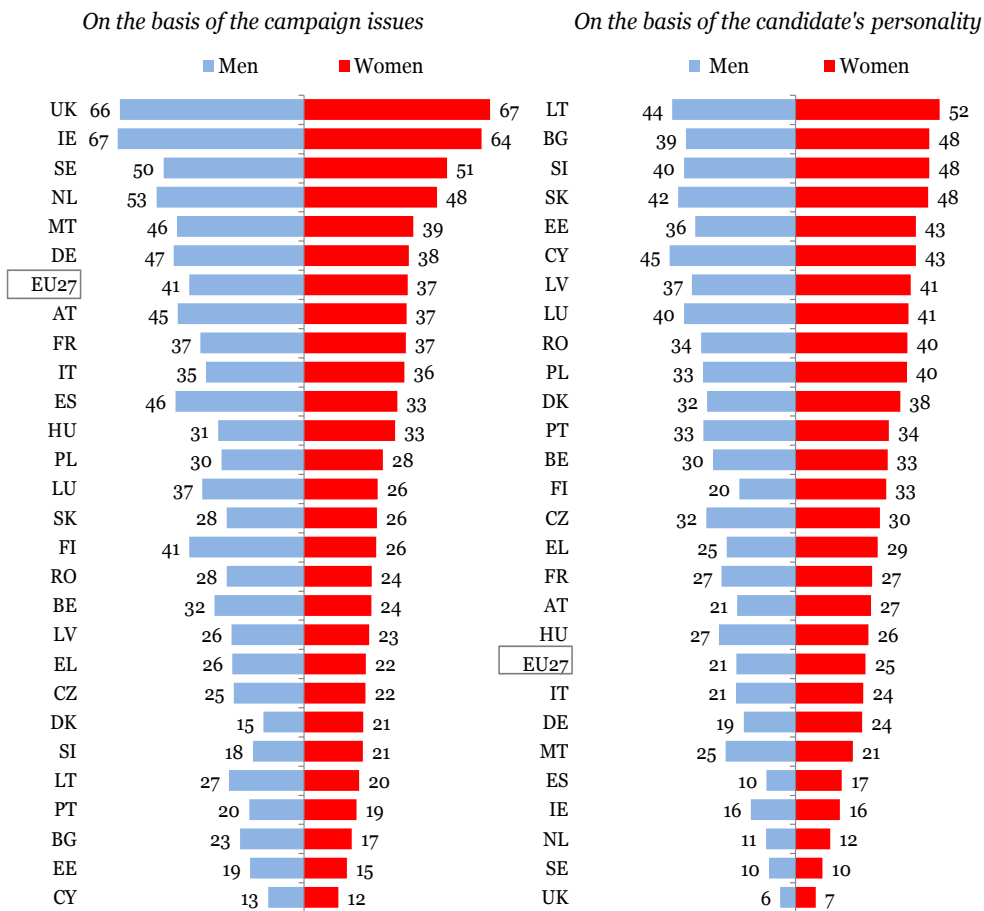


**Q3. In general when you participate in elections, how do you decide whom to vote for?**

%, Base: all respondents, EU27

- During an election, women feel that campaign issues are the most important factor in deciding whom to vote for (37%); a considerable number also vote consistently for the “same” party (29%) and others give weight to candidates’ personalities (25%). In this regard, women tend to pay slightly more attention to the latter factor (25% vs. 21% of men) at the expense of campaign issues (37% vs. 41% men).
- When voting, the importance given by women to campaign issues differs widely by Member State: from 12% in Cyprus, 15% in Greece and 17% in Bulgaria to 51% in Sweden, 64% in Ireland and 67% in the UK.
- The Member States where the candidates’ personalities are given the most prominence are Lithuania (52%), Bulgaria, Slovenia and Slovakia (all 48%). Conversely, personalities have the least importance in the UK (7%), Sweden (10%) and the Netherlands (12%).
- There are no differences between men and women in terms of party loyalty – 28% and 29% respectively always vote for the same party. The countries with the highest proportions of women who claim that they always vote for the same parties are Greece, Spain and Cyprus (41%-42%, all).

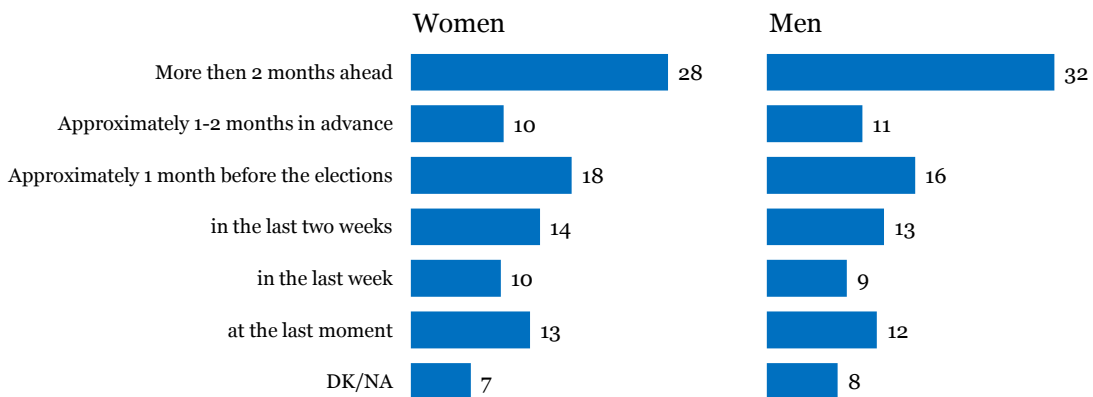
### Reasons that make people decide who to vote for in elections



Q3. In general when you participate in elections, how do you decide whom to vote for?  
%, base: all respondents, by country

- **Women are more likely than men to postpone their voting decision until the last few weeks of an election campaign.**
- More women than men (55% vs. 50%) make their decision on who to vote for in the month prior to an election. Fewer women than men, however, tend to make their mind up more than two months ahead of an election (28% and 32%, respectively).

### Timing as to when people make up their mind on who to vote for



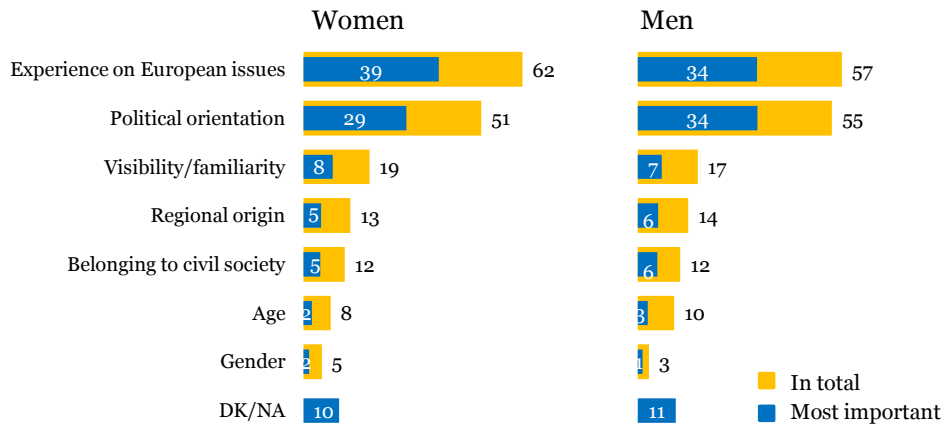
Q4. When do you usually make up your mind on who to vote for?  
%, Base: all respondents, EU27

- Almost two-thirds of Finnish women (62%) and half of Irish and Dutch women only decide whom to vote for in the last few weeks of an election campaign.
- Almost half of women in Spain and Greece (47% and 48%, respectively) and 38% of Maltese women make their voting decision more than two months ahead of an election; this is opposed to only 8% of Finnish, 13% of Irish and 19% of Polish and Latvian women.

➤ **In European Parliamentary elections, women attribute more importance than men to a candidates' experience on European issues**

- For European elections, women primarily base their voting decisions on a candidates' experience on European issues (62%) and on political orientation (51%). Compared to men, women give more importance to European experience and less to political orientation. The gender and age of candidates are not major factors for either women or men when they decide how to cast their vote in European elections.

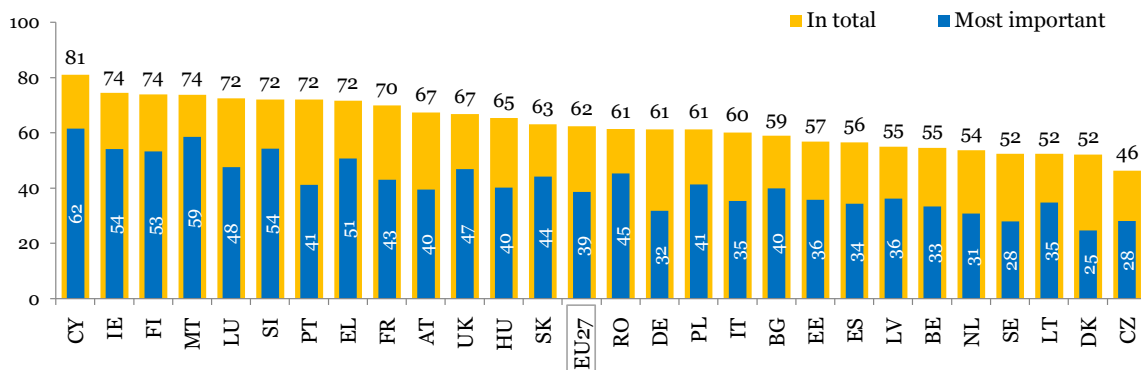
**Reasons why people vote for candidates in the European Parliamentary elections**



Q5. When you vote for the European elections, which of the following aspects relating to the candidates is the most important? And then?  
%, Base: all respondents, EU27

- In nine Member States, 70% or more of women give preference to candidates with European experience; these are led by Cyprus (81%), Ireland, Finland and Malta (all 74%). In the Czech Republic, less than half of women (46%) give prominence to this factor, with 52% acting in the same manner in Denmark, Lithuania and Sweden.

**Experience on European issues as the most important reason why people vote for a candidate**

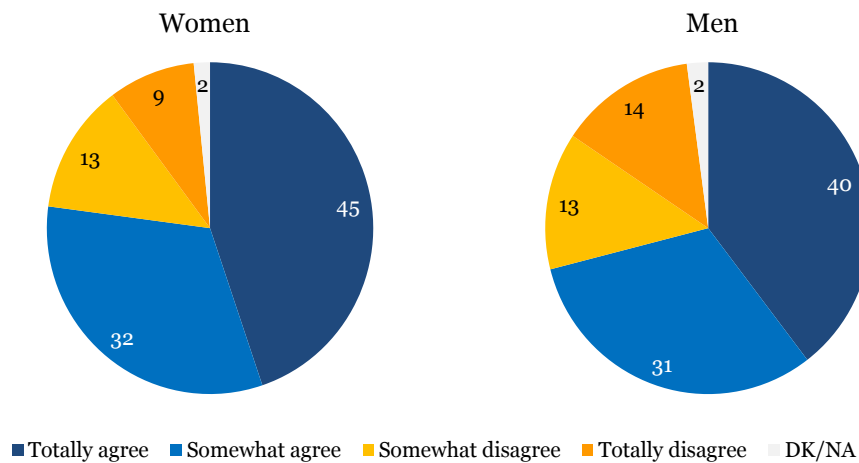


Q5. When you vote for the European elections, which of the following aspects relating to the candidates is the most important? And then?  
%, Base: all women, by country

## Perceptions of the current political scene

- **A large majority of women and men agree with the statement that men dominate the political scene. Even more feel that if there were more women in politics, there could be a different style of decision-making.**
  - Both women and men agree that politics is dominated by men; a large majority (77% of women and 71% of men) are of this opinion; 45% of women totally agree with the proposition, as do 40% of men.

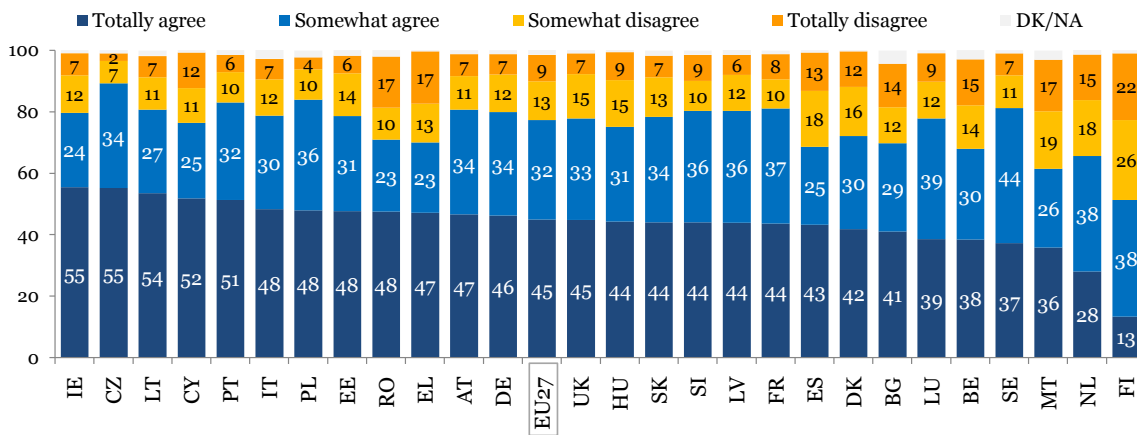
### Agreement as to whether politics is dominated by men



**Q10. Some people believe that politics is dominated by men. Do you agree with this statement?**  
 %, Base: all respondents, EU27

- In 18 Member States, three-quarters or more women agree that men dominate politics. The most support for this proposition is seen in the Czech Republic (89%), Poland (84%) and Portugal (83%). Finland has the lowest figure, with just over half agreeing (51%), followed by Malta (62%) and the Netherlands (66%). In almost all Member States, men are less likely to agree that politics is dominated by men.

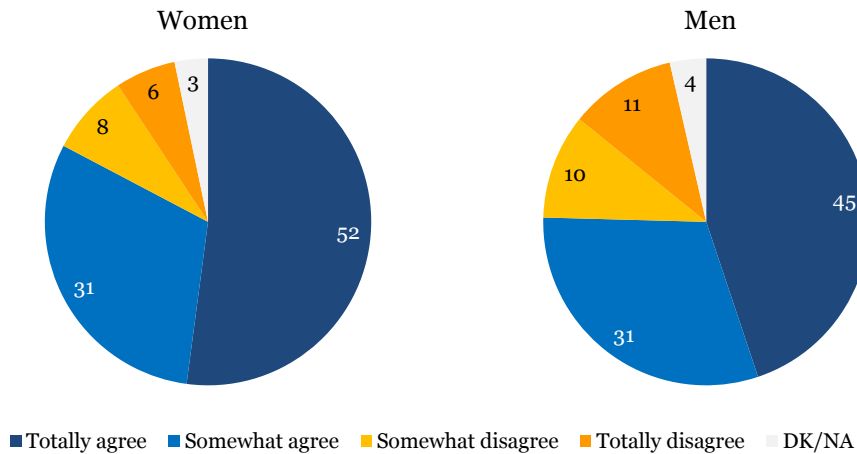
### Agreement as to whether politics is dominated by men



Q10. Some people believe that politics is dominated by men. Do you agree with this statement?  
%, Base: all women, by country

- A slim majority of European women (52%) and almost half of men (45%) also totally agreed that women in politics could bring something to politics that could lead to different decision-making. A further 31% of both men and women agreed that involving (more) women could enrich political decision-making. Despite the relatively larger amount of disagreement among men (11% completely and 10% somewhat disagreed, the respective proportions among women being 6% and 8%), the view that women could improve political decision-making was approved generally across Europe

### Views as to whether (more) women in politics could lead to different decision-making



Q11. Some people believe that women in politics add a viewpoint which could lead to different decision making in general. Do you agree with this statement?  
%, Base: all respondents, EU27

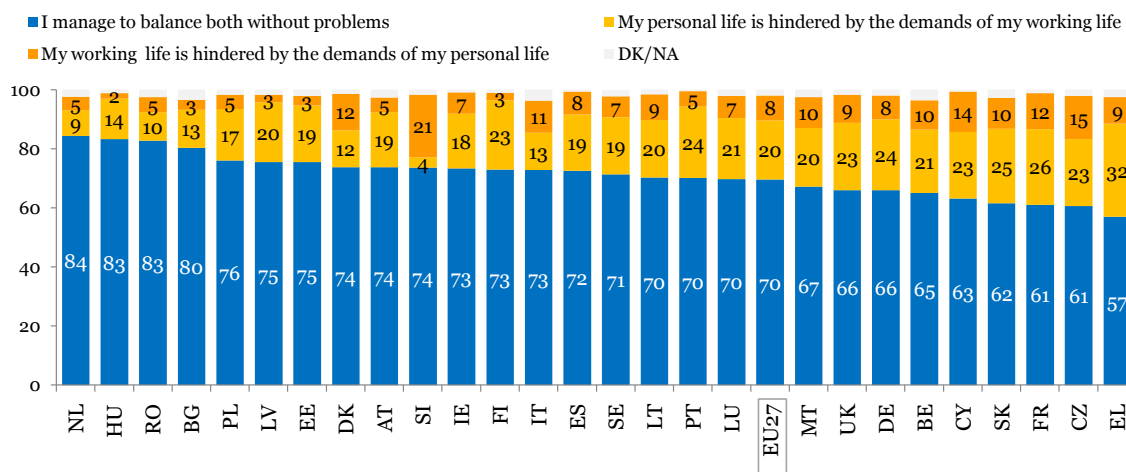
- Nine out of 10 women in Portugal (91%), France (89%), and Germany (88%) believe that women can bring fresh ideas to politics. This view has the least support in Poland (70%), Hungary and Romania (both 73%).
- The 11 Member States where women are the most sceptical about the proposition that women bring new ideas to the political process all belong to the group of countries that joined the EU in 2004 or later.

## Women in society

➤ **At the moment, almost three-quarters of European women feel they can manage the demands of both work and family**

- Seven out of 10 women in the EU say they are able to manage all the demands placed on them by both family and workplace; this ranges from 57% of women in Greece and 61% in France and the Czech Republic to 83% of women in Hungary and Romania and 84% in the Netherlands.

### Finding the right balance between personal and working life



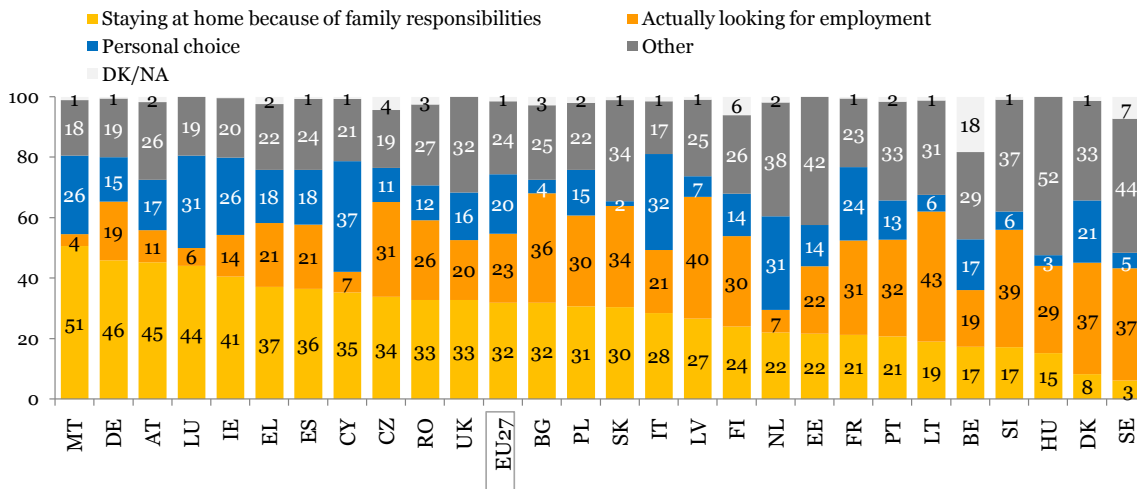
Q16. Which of the following statements applies most to you?  
 %, Base: women who are employed, by country

- In regard to perceptions about finding such a harmonised work-life balance, women in employment between the ages of 25 and 54, those with the highest levels of education and especially those who have experienced gender discrimination are the most likely to say they have difficulties in finding the correct balance.
- As for women having their personal lives hindered by the demands of their work lives, this impact is primarily seen in Greece, France and Slovakia (32%, 26% and 25%, respectively) and has the least prominence in Slovenia (4%), the Netherlands (9%) and Romania (10%).

➤ **The reasons why many women are not in the workforce are dependent on the age of the respondent.**

- Across the EU, there are a variety of reasons why many women (excluding students and retirees) are not working; the most chosen response is "because of family reasons" (32%). Other oft-mentioned reasons are "currently seeking employment" (23%) and "a personal choice" (20%).
- Looking at age as a factor, 18-24 year-olds most frequently say they are seeking employment (52%), while the 25-39 year-olds most often mention family responsibilities (41%). Respondents over 40, on the other hand, tend to say it is a personal choice to stay at home (23% of 40-54 year-olds and 26% of the over 54s compared to 8% of 18-24 year-olds).

### Women’s reasons for not working



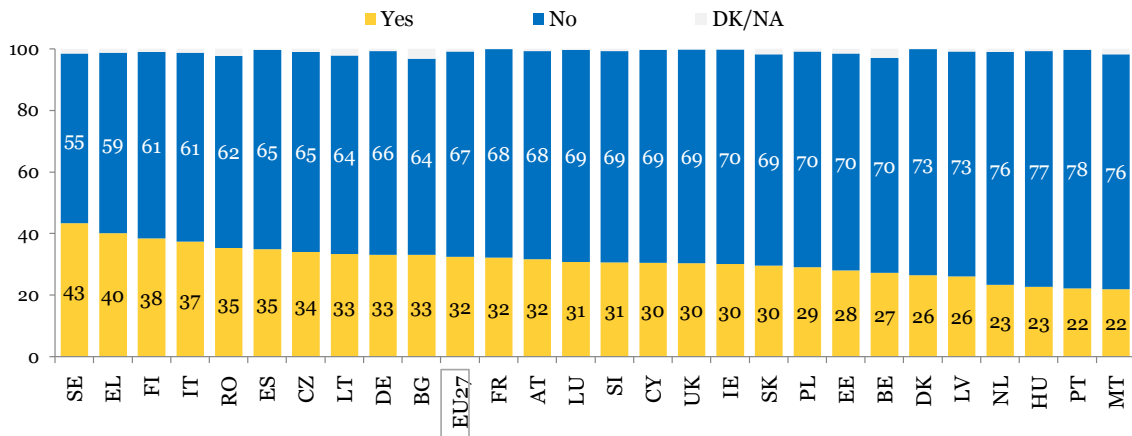
Q16b. What is the reason that you are currently not employed?  
 %, Base: women who are not employed (excluding retired women and full-time students), by country

- Maltese women are those most likely to cite family responsibilities as the reason for not being employed (51%), together with more than 4 in 10 women in Germany (46%) and Austria (45%).
- The proportion of women not working but saying they are currently seeking employment ranges from 4% in Malta, 6% in Luxembourg and 7% in Cyprus and the Netherlands, to approximately 4 out of 10 women in Lithuania, Latvia and Slovenia (43%, 40% and 39%, respectively).
- Women in Cyprus, Italy and the Netherlands (37%, 32% and 31%, respectively) are those most likely to say that they are making a personal choice not to work.

### ➤ A third of all European women report gender discrimination

- 67% of women living in the EU reported that they never felt discriminated against on the grounds of gender.

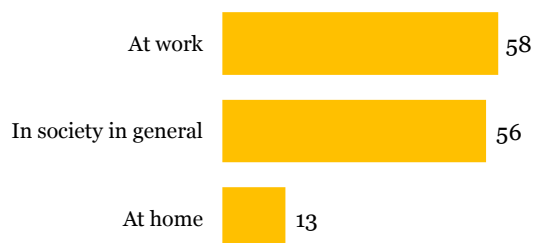
### Experiences of unfair treatment on the grounds of gender



Q17. Have you ever felt unfairly treated because you are a woman?  
 %, Base: all women, by country

- One in three women (32%) say they have been discriminated against on the basis of their gender (national figures range from 22% in Portugal and Malta, and 23% in the Netherlands and Hungary to 38% in Finland, 40% in Greece and 43% in Sweden). For those women who reported unfair treatment on the grounds of gender, this treatment generally occurred at work (58%) or in society in general (56%) as opposed to the home (13%)

### Places where women experienced unfair treatment



Q18. Where?

%, Base: women who experienced unfair treatment, EU27

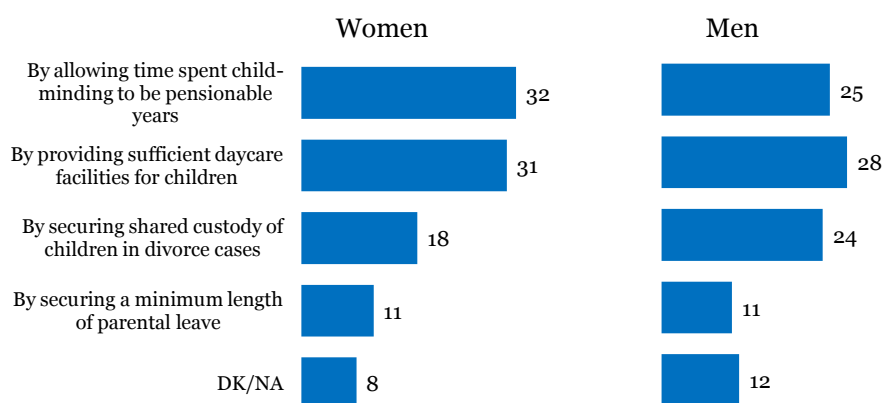
- Three-quarters of women who actually report that they have experienced gender discrimination in the Czech Republic and the UK (78% and 76%, respectively) and 68% of women in Ireland have experienced discrimination at work on the basis of gender. In Romania, Bulgaria and Latvia, such unfair treatment was less likely at work (39%-46% of all reported cases), in comparison to other Member States, but more liable to take place in society in general (65%, 61% and 61%).
- Reports of discrimination on the grounds of gender at home, although rare, were the most frequently reported in the UK and Greece (both 21%) and Ireland (17%).
- Women aged 25-54, those with a higher level of education, those from metropolitan zones (all 37%) and the self-employed (40%) are the most likely groups to have encountered discrimination based on gender. Older women (aged over 54) and the least-educated women were more likely to report having encountered discrimination at home (17% and 18%, respectively).

## The work of the European Parliament

### ➤ To improve gender equality in the family, women would like the European Parliament to allow time spent child-minding to be counted as pensionable years and to increase the recognition of the importance of childcare facilities

- Women would primarily like child-minding years to count towards their pension and to have improved day-care facilities for children (32% and 31% respectively). Men agree with these priorities (25% and 28% respectively) but also see more importance in securing shared custody decisions in divorce cases (24% vs. 18% women).

### How the European Parliament could improve gender equality in family life

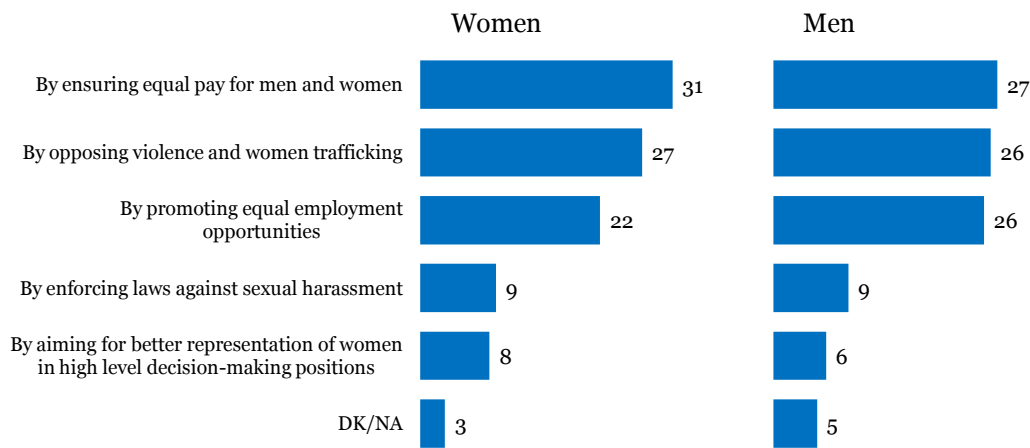


Q6. In the domain of gender equality in family life, which of the following areas should be prioritised by the next European Parliament?

%, Base: all respondents, EU27

- The principle of child-minding years counting towards a pension finds the most backing in Sweden (51%), Hungary (50%) and Austria (49%) while improved day-care receives the most support in Portugal (49%), Greece (40%) and Cyprus (39%).
  - Securing shared custody decisions in divorce cases appears to be a popular policy for women in Spain (29%), Lithuania and Denmark (both 26%).
  - Not unexpectedly, younger women more frequently select the provision of sufficient day-care facilities as the policy initiative to be prioritised (38% of 15-24 year-olds vs. 28% of the over 54 year-olds); older women more often request the time spent child-minding to be allowed as pensionable years (31% of the over 54 year-olds and 39% of 40-54 year-olds vs. 23% of 18-24 year-olds).
- **In order to improve gender equality in society in general, women wish the next European Parliament to give priority to policies that promote equal pay and others that would reduce violence and trafficking against women.**
- The priorities for European Parliament actions that gain the most support amongst women are: achieving equal pay for men and women (31%) and reducing violence and trafficking against women (27%). Men agree that these are the two priority policy areas (27% and 26%, respectively) but also show more support for equal employment opportunities (26% vs. 22% of women).

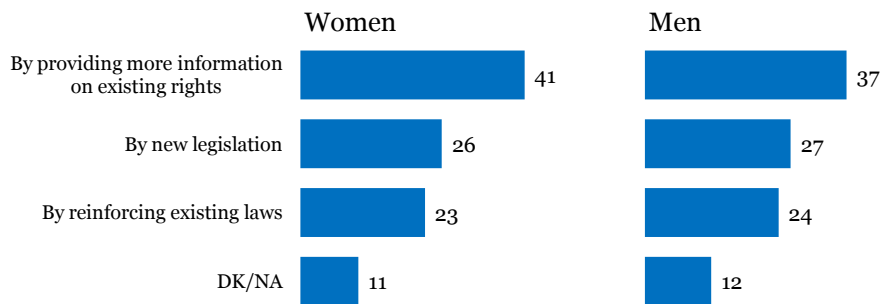
### How the European Parliament could improve gender equality in society



**Q7. In the domain of gender equality in society, in general, which of the following areas should be prioritised by the next European Parliament?**  
 %, Base: all respondents, EU27

- Achieving equal pay finds the most support amongst women in Austria, Germany, France and Sweden (42%-45%), while a reduction of violence against women and sex trafficking is mainly supported in Spain, Denmark and Portugal (48%, 43% and 38%, respectively).
  - The promotion of equal employment opportunities receives the most support of women in Hungary (35%), Lithuania and the Czech Republic (31%).
- **On the issue of equal pay, women and men prefer better information on existing rights and want the action taken at the EU level.**
- In order to achieve equal pay, slightly more women (41% vs. 37% of men) opt for the “soft” solution: i.e. the want more information about the existing rights on equal pay. This option is most favoured in Romania (53%), Latvia (51%), Greece and Malta (50%).

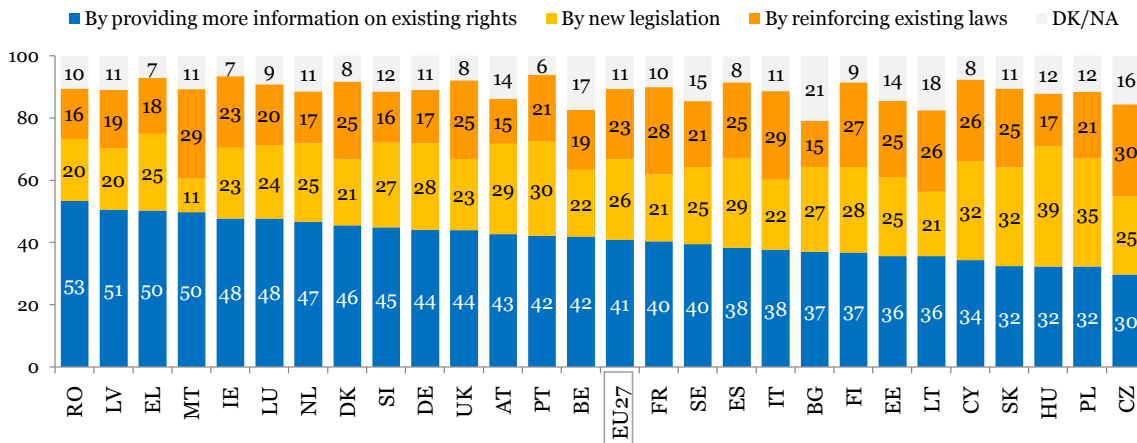
### How equal pay for men and women can be achieved



**Q8. Would you say that the equal payment for men and women would be more effectively achieved by...?**  
 %, Base: all respondents, EU27

- Concerning more direct measures, i.e. new legislation or the reinforcement of existing laws at the EU level, these are mostly favoured by women in Cyprus (58%), Slovakia (57%), Hungary and Poland (56%).

### How equal pay for men and women can be achieved



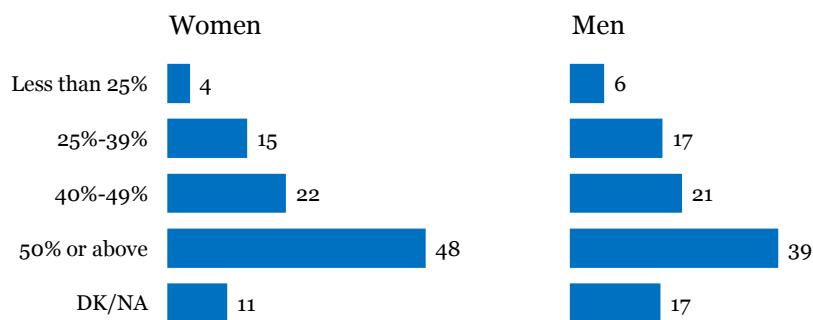
Q8. Would you say that the equal payment for men and women would be more effectively achieved by...? % Base: all women, by country

- Whatever the response, both women and men (55% and 58% respectively) prefer action to be taken at the EU level rather than on a national basis. Women in Luxembourg (80%), Spain (74%), Portugal and Belgium (70%) provide the most support for EU level action.
- Women in the UK (62%), Romania (61%) and Malta (59%) are the most likely to think that taking actions at a national level would be more effective.

➤ **Half of European women want equal representation of the sexes in the European Parliament.**

- Just under half of European women (48%) want at least an equal representation of the sexes in the elected members to the European Parliament. Only 39% of men support this proposition. Furthermore, 70% of women want between 40 and 50% of female parliamentarians (60% of men agree with this proportion).

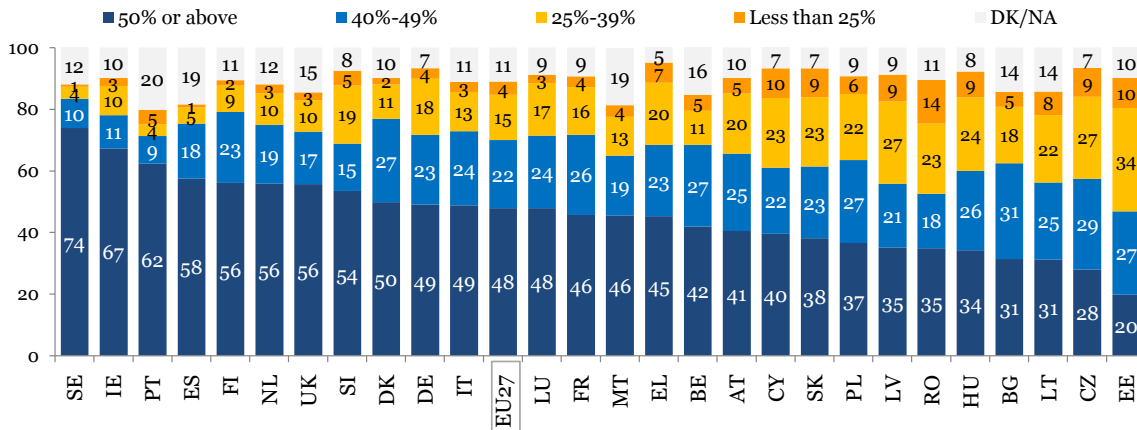
### Desired proportion of elected women in the European Parliament



Q12. In your opinion, what proportion of elected members to the European Parliament should be woman? % Base: all respondents, EU27

- Over two-thirds of women in Sweden and Ireland (74% and 67% respectively) and 62% of Portuguese women want equal representation of the sexes in the European Parliament.

### Desired proportion of elected women in the European Parliament

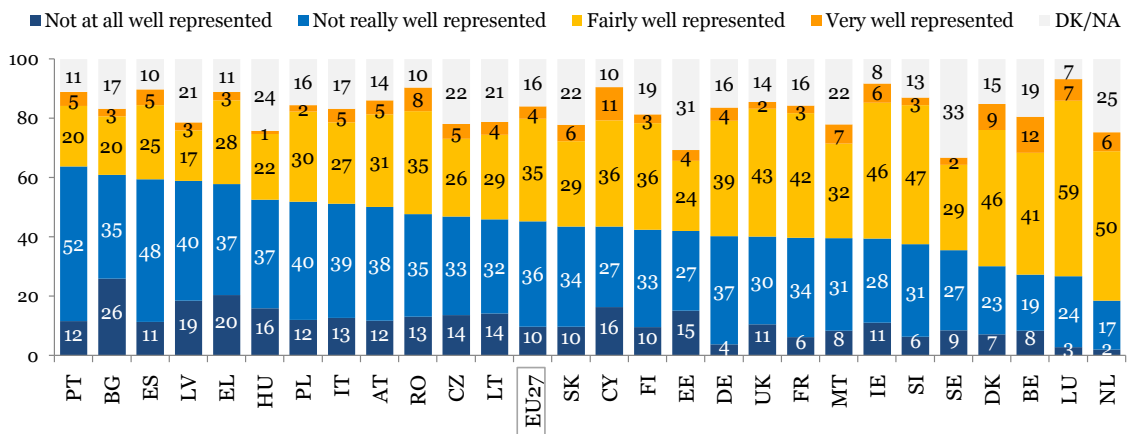


Q12. In your opinion, what proportion of elected members to the European Parliament should be women? % Base: all women, by country

➤ **Just under half of European women think they are not well represented by the EU.**

- While almost half of women (46%) feel that women’s interests are not well represented by the EU, 39% are satisfied with the situation.

### Views as to whether the EU represents women’s interests



Q14. Do you feel that as woman, your interests are well represented by the European Union? % Base: all women, by country

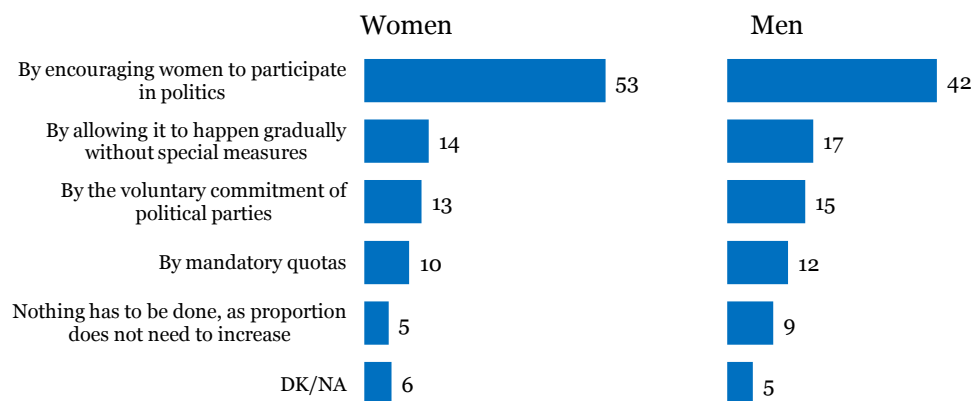
- Age is a factor: just over a third (36%) of women aged 18-24 felt they are not well represented, whereas this figure rises to 46%-47% for all other age groups.
- Women in Luxembourg (66%), the Netherlands (56%) and Denmark (55%) are the most likely to agree that women’s interests are well represented by the EU; women in Latvia (20%), Bulgaria and Hungary (both 23%) offer the least support to this proposition.

➤ **Women are less likely than men to support direct measures that could boost their representation in the European Parliament.**

- Women, more than men, prefer non-intrusive methods (i.e. by “encouraging” women to run as candidates, or by allowing the situation to improve gradually without the need for special measures) to boost women’s representation in the European Parliament (67% of women vs. 59% of men).

- Women are slightly less likely than men to back direct measures (i.e. introducing mandatory or voluntary gender quotas) to boost women’s representation in the European Parliament (23% vs. 27% of men).

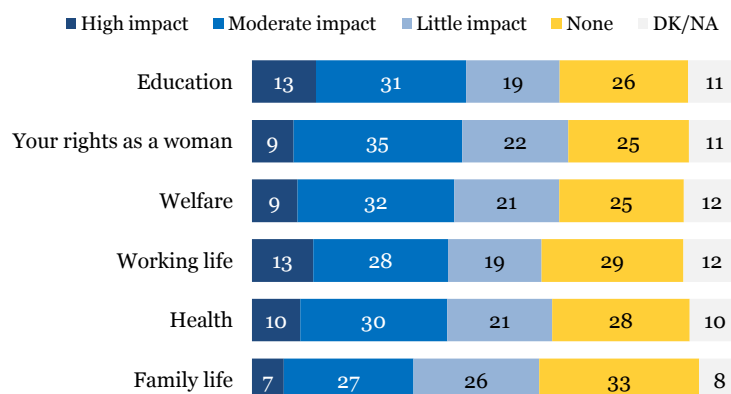
**The most effective way of increasing the proportion of women MEPs**



**Q13. If we should increase the proportion of women MEPs what would be the most effective way?**  
 %, Base: all respondents, EU27

- British and Irish (both 77%), Dutch and Portuguese (both 76%) women are those most likely to support such indirect methods; Italian women are amongst those giving the least support to such means of increasing female representation (57%), together with Danish and Latvian women (both 59%).
  - Italian women, however, are amongst those who are the most likely to support the more direct quota-based measures (30%), together with Danish and Swedish women (32% and 31%, respectively).
  - The number of women feeling that no action should be taken is relatively small (5% in the EU) but this number is higher in the three Baltic States (10%-11%).
- **Women see the activities of the European Parliament as having the most impact in the areas of education and women’s rights.**
- Approximately one in eight women say the European Parliament’s activities have had a major impact in education and on their working lives (both 13%) and in the health domain (10%).

### Impact of the European Parliament’s activities on various aspects of women’s life



Q15. To what extent do you think that the activities of European Parliament have had an impact on the following areas of your life?  
%, Base: all women, EU27

- Overall (high and moderate impact combined), the European Parliament has had the greatest impact in the areas of education and women’s rights (both 44%), in welfare and on their working lives (both 41%).
- Younger women, those with higher levels of education and those who were the most likely to vote in European elections tend to say more frequently that the European Parliament’s activities have had an impact on the various (listed) aspects of their lives.