

Europe *for* women



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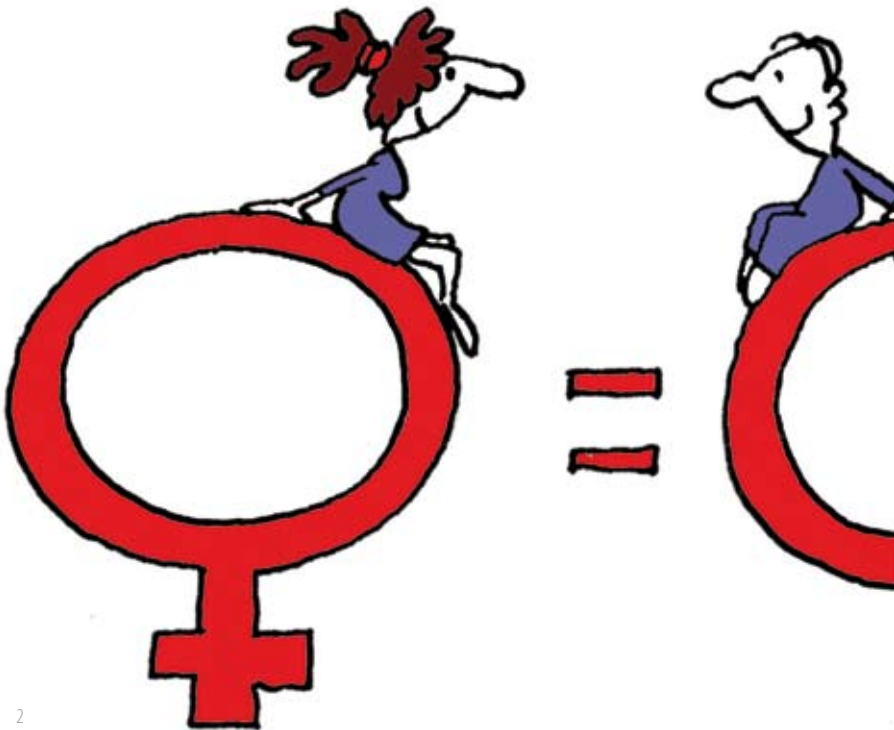
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A strong commitment to gender equality

*EU laws are key to securing equal opportunities
for women*

Equal treatment for women and men was a founding principle of the EU in 1957, when the Treaty of Rome laid down the principle of equal pay. Since the 1970s, European and national laws have expanded women's choices and improved their lives. The proportion of



women in work has risen steadily and, since 2000, female workers have taken three quarters of the millions of new jobs generated in Europe. Girls now do better than boys at school, and make up 59% of university graduates in the EU.

Nonetheless, women still earn 15% less than men, and remain a minority in political decision-making and senior management positions.

So the EU is stepping up action to eliminate discrimination and achieve gender equality. Key objectives from now until 2010 include breaking down stereotypes, and achieving economic independence for women so that they can work, earn their own incomes, and have equal rights to benefits.

EU programmes back up these goals with financial support. The EU has also set up a network of women in decision-making to accelerate women's access to power, and is establishing an Institute for Gender Equality.



A green future for the green planet

Europe is taking a lead in the global effort to halt climate change

What kind of a world will we pass on to our children? It's a worrying question. Each generation has a responsibility to make life a little better for the next, but accelerating climate change means there is a real risk our descendants will have to cope with rising sea levels, food and water shortages, higher levels of disease and serious social unrest.

But it is not too late to stop it. The EU woke up early to the threat of climate change. It has pioneered action at a worldwide level, and agreed on concrete measures to cut its own greenhouse gas emissions by at least 20% by 2020.

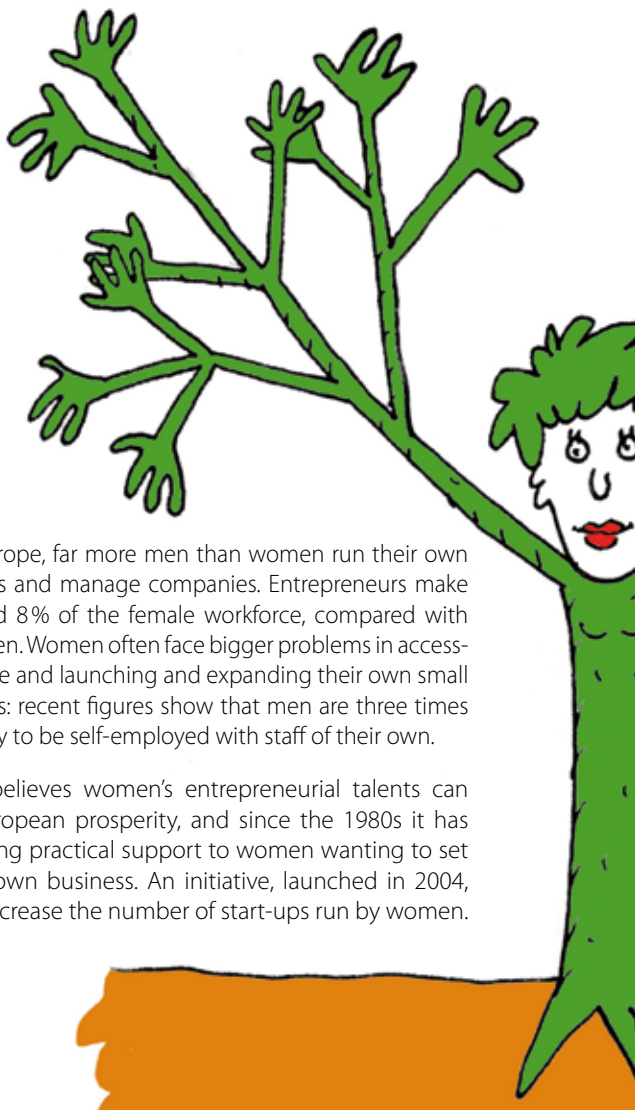
European research is helping to develop new ways of generating renewable energy from wind, water, sun and bio-fuels, and creating jobs at the same time. Much of it can be sourced from small-scale local initiatives, and successful new technologies can be shared across Europe.





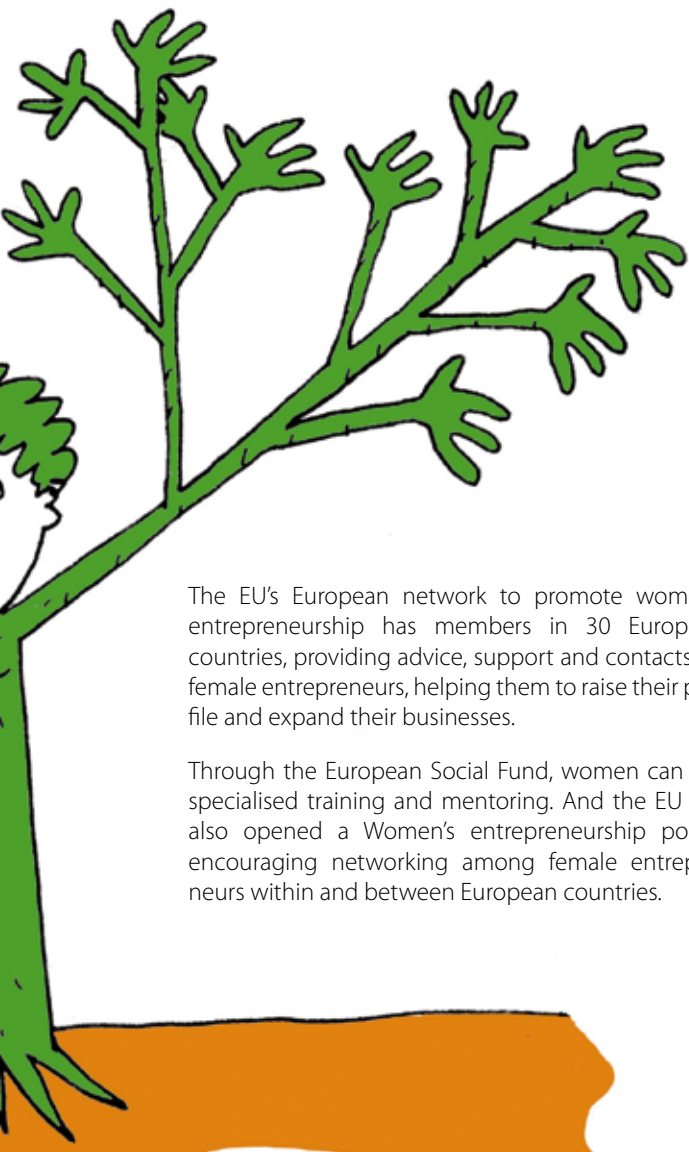
When the woman is boss

The EU backs women setting up their own businesses



Across Europe, far more men than women run their own businesses and manage companies. Entrepreneurs make up around 8% of the female workforce, compared with 16% of men. Women often face bigger problems in accessing finance and launching and expanding their own small businesses: recent figures show that men are three times more likely to be self-employed with staff of their own.

The EU believes women's entrepreneurial talents can boost European prosperity, and since the 1980s it has been giving practical support to women wanting to set up their own business. An initiative, launched in 2004, aims to increase the number of start-ups run by women.



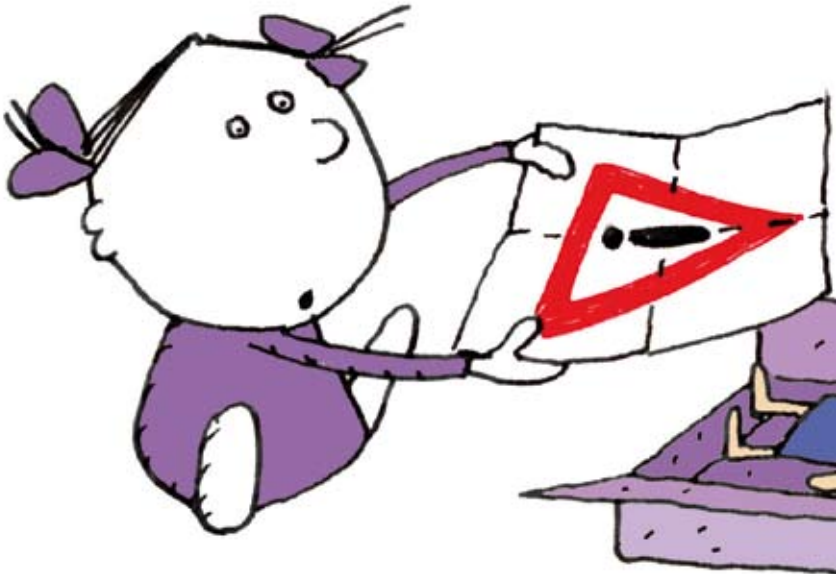
The EU's European network to promote women's entrepreneurship has members in 30 European countries, providing advice, support and contacts for female entrepreneurs, helping them to raise their profile and expand their businesses.

Through the European Social Fund, women can get specialised training and mentoring. And the EU has also opened a Women's entrepreneurship portal, encouraging networking among female entrepreneurs within and between European countries.

The EU's toy story

Priority to protecting children through toy safety rules

All parents know how quickly kids seize on new games and crazes. Setting high standards for the manufacture and sale of toys is one of the ways the EU looks after consumers' interests and keeps children safe.



EU rules oblige producers and distributors to ensure the products they place on the market are safe, and criteria for toys are especially strict. National authorities check to ensure these requirements are met. If a faulty item is found in one country, a rapid alert system ensures that it is immediately withdrawn from shops across the EU.

Concern about some foreign imports has led the EU to toughen up its approach. Toys containing magnets must now carry appropriate warnings about the dangers they pose, for example. Potential risks need to be identified early. In particular, the EU is taking measures to ensure that manufacturers and exporters — such as the United States and China — adopt high safety standards. The well-being of children must be a priority throughout the entire supply chain.



A united front in tough times

The EU fights the economic crisis through coordinated national action

The recession has left Europeans anxious about their livelihood. People across Europe have been affected by the downturn and women are particularly vulnerable.

We now know that economic and financial excesses around the world have been guilty of causing the biggest economic crisis of our lifetime, with severe implications for employment and income. The EU has reacted fast, uniting governments in their efforts to fight the crisis, injecting billions of euros into the economy to boost demand and rebuild confidence. It has moved to guarantee people's savings, while the euro has aided small countries in weathering the economic turmoil.

The Union also helps individual citizens to deal with the impact of recession. The European Social Fund supports 10 million people every year — over half of them women — in learning new skills and finding work, helping to erode inequalities in the workplace.

We need to go further, through practical steps to reinforce social solidarity and stability, improving education and allowing human skills to flourish. The crisis has provided us with an opportunity to draw important lessons and decide how we want to build our economic landscape from here on; how best to support European businesses and enable them to prosper, while keeping social issues high on the agenda.

Protecting women against violence

The EU fights trafficking, abuse and violence against women

Violence against women is unacceptable in any form. Yet in Europe, many women and girls continue to live under the shadow of aggression or exploitation. They may be victims of domestic violence or sexual abuse, of trafficking and forced prostitution, or of intimidation and oppression — breaching their fundamental right to freedom, dignity and safety.

The EU combats trafficking at its roots, tracking down the crime gangs who prey on women, through international cooperation between the police and judges and sophisticated exchange of intelligence. It works with authorities in areas like the Balkans to fight organised crime. Alleviating poverty in developing countries also makes women less vulnerable to exploitation. Women who have been trafficked can get help from EU funds to reintegrate into society through education, training and employment.

The European Commission runs a programme that protects women, children and young people from all forms of violence. It funds projects such as women's refuges and health facilities, as well as efforts to change attitudes, and to protect women within migrant and ethnic minority groups.

Juggling professional and personal life successfully

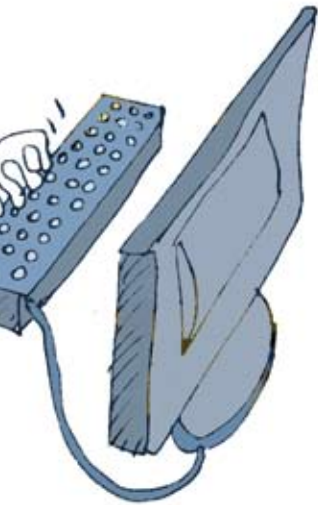
The EU helps people to balance the demands of work and home

Combining work with the care of children and other family members is a major issue for women, and increasingly for men too. Yet the division



of responsibilities at home is still very unequal, making it harder for women to develop a career. Only 65 % of women with young children in the EU are in work, compared with 91 % of men.

The EU is working to create a better balance between professional, private and family life, so that everybody can plan to have children, or care for other relatives, without suffering stress or poverty. There are laws on parental leave, part-time work, and protecting pregnant women and new mothers in the workplace.



The EU is taking steps to increase paid time off work for both parents and to introduce flexible working hours that will help them better balance their professional and family responsibilities. EU Member States have set targets for establishing high-quality care services for children across Europe. In the current economic crisis, strong policies that ensure women's interests aren't sidelined are particularly important.

Controlling hazardous chemicals

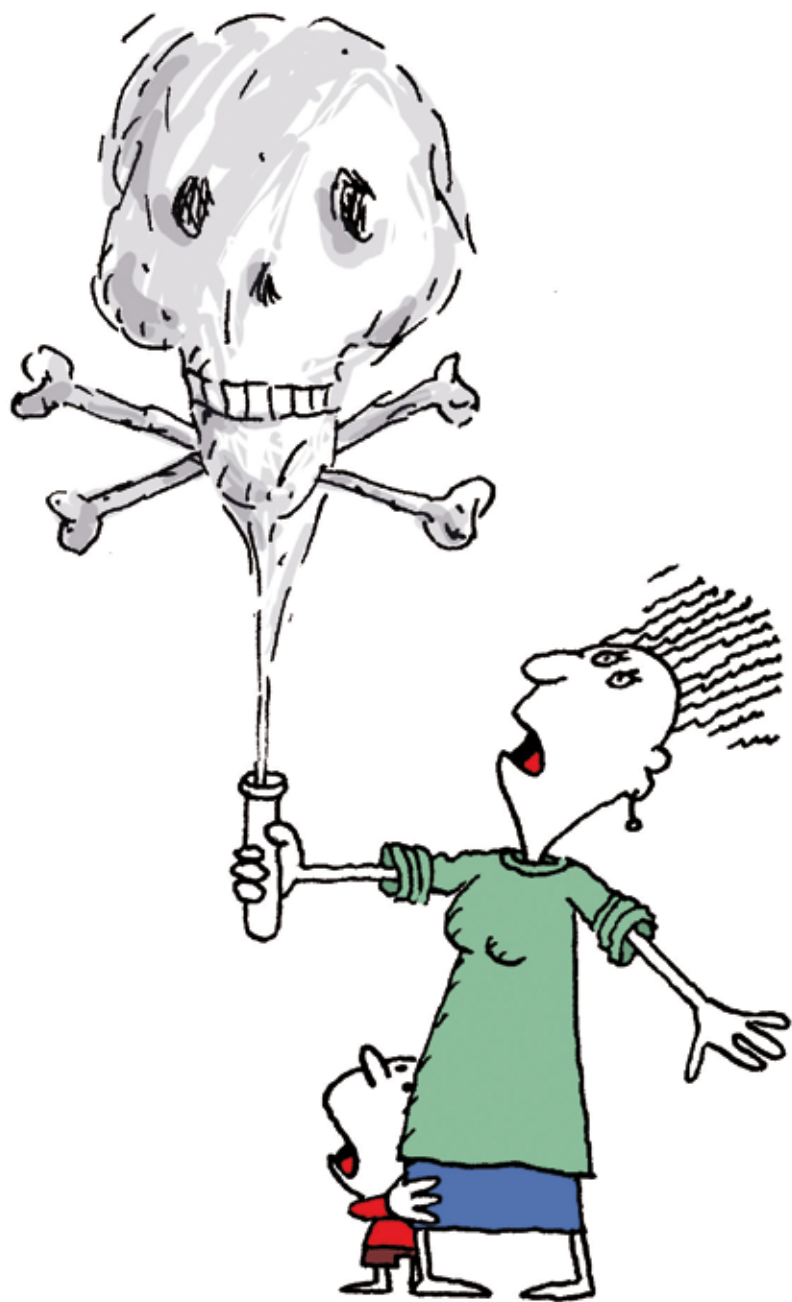
New safety rules apply to some 30 000 potentially risky substances in use in Europe

In today's world, chemicals surround us at every step: they are vital in the production of anything from clothing to TV sets. The EU has taken decisive action to protect people from the risks these substances pose, following wide public consultation.

The ambitious REACH legislation, governing the registration, evaluation, authorisation and restriction of chemical substances, came into force in 2007 and will lead to the phasing out of dangerous materials. It breaks entirely new ground in putting the onus on industry to collect data and guarantee the safety of chemical substances.

Dioxins, which are a by-product of industrial processes, have also caused a series of health scares in recent years. Even small concentrations can harm the environment and human health, damaging the immune system, nervous and hormonal systems and reproductive functions. The EU has adopted a Europe-wide strategy to combat this threat and is working at the global level to counter the release of such long-lasting, toxic substances.

Europe has also been key in encouraging industry to introduce more biodegradable types of plastic for bags, cups, food wrapping, plant pots and the hundreds of polymer-based items consumers take for granted.



Keeping the doctor at bay

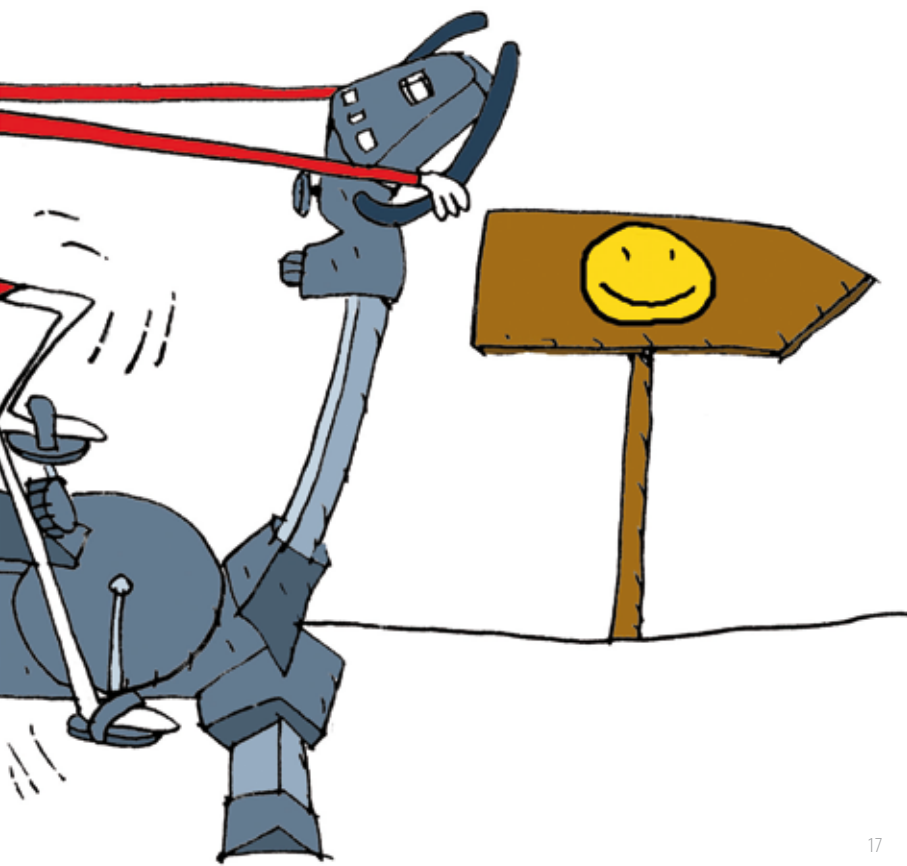
EU governments, doctors and experts work together to improve health standards across Europe

Health is an area where EU countries can work together to find solutions to common problems. Women in Europe share specific health risks.

Cancer is the second most common cause of death in the EU, and breast, cervical and colorectal cancer account for 32% of cancer deaths in women. The Union is encouraging Member States to set up large-scale quality-assured screening programmes to provide early diagnosis and improve survival rates in the EU. Approximately 51 million screenings are carried out each year, but this must be doubled to cover all at-risk groups.

Obesity is a serious problem in Europe for adults and children. The number of overweight or obese children in Europe is growing by 400 000 a year. The EU has launched initiatives to encourage a healthy lifestyle from a young age, for example through programmes that distribute milk, fresh fruit and vegetables to schoolchildren.





Taking consumers' interests to heart

EU food safety measures help Europeans to make informed choices

Food scares, whether dioxins in pork or pesticides in fruit, concern Europeans and can pose serious risks, especially for children and older people.

The EU implements a wide range of measures to ensure that food across Europe is safe to eat, and to encourage a healthy diet. They cover the whole food supply chain, setting standards and monitoring animal health and welfare, plants and crops, and food imports.

Europe sets stringent rules for organic produce, and stops the manufacturers of 'health foods' or slimming products from making inaccurate or unsubstantiated claims. EU legislation on food labelling helps consumers make informed purchasing choices.



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There are European Commission and Parliament representations and offices in all the countries of the European Union. The European Commission also has delegations in other parts of the world.

Europe for women

The European Union is involved in a number of areas that affect your daily life, from gender equality to product safety. How do you want the EU to shape these issues in the future? Use your vote at the European Parliament elections in June 2009.

