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# Mini Manual

**Mind the GAP! Joint actions of  
workers' organizations for bridging  
the gender pay gap**



## Introduction

The gender pay gap (GPG) is one of the most enduring social injustices, with women earning less than men on average for comparable work. Structural factors such as employment disparities, sectoral segregation, and unequal career progression contribute to this gap. Despite legislative advancements, women still face systemic barriers that exacerbate income inequalities over time. The European Union has long recognized equal pay as a fundamental principle enshrined in its treaties, yet implementation challenges persist. This mini manual emphasizes the **role of workers' organizations** in addressing these inequalities through collective bargaining, legal advocacy, and workplace policies that promote transparency and fairness.

## Causes of the Gender Pay Gap

The vast majority of GPG in the EU remains unexplained and cannot be connected to worker or workplace factors such as education, employment, working hours, or the economic activity for which the individual works. However key contributing factors include:

1. **Sectoral Segregation** – Women are overrepresented in lower-wage sectors such as education, healthcare, and care work, which account for around 24% of the GPG.
2. **Unequal Share of Paid and Unpaid Work** – Women work more hours overall when unpaid labor is considered, yet they often experience career stagnation due to caregiving responsibilities.
3. **The Glass Ceiling** – Women remain underrepresented in top managerial positions, earning, on average, 23% less than their male counterparts in leadership roles.
4. **Lack of Pay Transparency** – Opaque salary structures hinder women's ability to negotiate equitable wages and identify wage discrimination.
5. **Education and Negotiation Skills** – Women are less likely to negotiate their salaries, contributing to lower lifetime earnings than men.

## The Role of Workers' Organizations

Trade unions and labor organizations play a crucial role in addressing gender-based pay disparities. Their efforts are centered around several key areas. First, through **collective bargaining**, unions negotiate wage agreements that ensure equal pay for equal work, helping to close the gender pay gap. Additionally, unions support workers in filing wage discrimination claims and hold employers accountable for pay inequities through **legal advocacy**. They also advocate for **pay transparency** by pushing for the open disclosure of wages, which helps identify and address systemic discrimination in the workplace. Furthermore, unions promote **workplace flexibility policies** such as paid parental leave, affordable childcare, and flexible work schedules, which help reduce barriers for women in the labor force. Finally, trade unions empower workers by promoting their rights to equal pay through **training programs**, workshops, and awareness campaigns.

## The EU Pay Transparency Directive

The 2023 EU Pay Transparency Directive addresses wage inequalities by mandating **pay transparency** across all member states. It includes several key provisions, such as requiring employers to disclose salary ranges for job postings. Workers are granted the right to request salary comparisons by gender within their workplace, ensuring greater transparency. Additionally, companies with 250 or more employees are mandated to report **gender pay disparities**. Employers are also prohibited from





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inquiring about candidates' salary history, helping to reduce the perpetuation of existing wage gaps. The directive further strengthens legal recourse for victims of pay discrimination, including **the right to compensation**.

While this directive represents a significant step forward, its effective enforcement will require substantial institutional support. Small and medium-sized enterprises may face challenges in complying with these new requirements, highlighting the need for state-backed assistance to facilitate implementation.

## Challenges and Country-Specific Recommendations

There are country-specific challenges and strategies to combat gender-based pay disparities. Key insights, when it comes to countries, which are partners in the Mind the GAP! project, include:

1. **Bulgaria:** Weak enforcement of labor laws and gender-role stereotypes remain obstacles. Strengthening compliance mechanisms and awareness campaigns is crucial.
2. **Italy:** Low female workforce participation and occupational segregation persist. Policies promoting paternity leave and gender-neutral job classifications are recommended.
3. **North Macedonia:** Lack of pay transparency and entrenched patriarchal norms hinder progress. Mandatory wage reporting and union engagement are necessary.
4. **Montenegro:** Women are underrepresented in high-paying roles. Implementing gender-sensitive policies and improving access to leadership positions are essential.
5. **Malta:** High part-time employment among women exacerbates wage disparities. Strengthening social protection and incentivizing gender-neutral hiring is advised.
6. **Romania:** Gender imbalances in managerial roles necessitate cultural shifts towards inclusive leadership and equitable workplace policies.
7. **Serbia:** Gender wage gaps remain significant in healthcare and education. Integrating pay transparency requirements into labor laws is recommended.
8. **Slovakia:** Unpaid care work disproportionately affects women's career progression. Expanding childcare infrastructure and family-friendly work policies are necessary.
9. **Poland:** Private sector pay gaps persist due to weak wage transparency. Strengthening legal frameworks and employer accountability mechanisms is essential.

## Conclusion

The GPG has a deeply entrenched nature and there is the necessity of implementing a multi-pronged set of interventions to address this persistent issue. **Workers' organizations** play a **pivotal role** in achieving pay equity through their advocacy efforts, collective bargaining processes, and provision of legal support to workers. While the EU Pay Transparency Directive offers a legislative framework to drive progress, its success will depend on rigorous enforcement and close collaboration among trade unions, employers, and policymakers. Bridging the gender pay gap requires systematic reforms, profound cultural shifts, and sustained labor activism to ensure that wage equality becomes a tangible reality rather than merely an aspirational goal.





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