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GENDER INEQUALITIES IN THE LIGHT OF EU GENDER MAINSTREAMING ACTIVITIES

This article aims to analyze the scope of equal access to various spheres of socio-economic life among men and women in the 27 EU member states. The theoretical part of this paper is based on a literature review; the empirical part is based on the data collected from secondary data analysis. Secondary data were gathered mainly from related research articles and websites, and Global Gender Gap Reports for 2018–2022. The research shows that both gender equality and women's rights are fundamental principles in the European Union, and many initiatives have been implemented to reduce gender inequalities. Nevertheless, it has been demonstrated that gender inequality is still present in many aspects of life in EU countries: in the labor market, education, health, and political empowerment.

Keywords: The European Union, gender equality.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Oxford Dictionary of Sports Science and Medicine (Kent, 2007) gender inequality is defined as “Social process by which people are treated differently and disadvantageously, under similar circumstances, on the basis of gender”. Therefore, gender inequality affects all areas of life, both public and private, and causes imbalance in access to the labour market, political career, education and training or decision-making processes. Undoubtedly, the issue is important as for example, worldwide, nearly 1 in 4 girls between the ages of 15 and 19 are neither employed nor in education or training – compared to 1 in 10 boys (UNICEF, 2022). Hence this article aims to analyze the scope of equal access to various spheres of the socio-economic life among men and women in the 27 European Union (EU) member states.

The question for the purpose of the research is as follows: What is the present state of gender equality in the access to various spheres of socio-economic life within the EU member states?

The main hypothesis of the paper is: Despite the various gender mainstreaming activities implemented in the EU, gender inequalities in the access to various spheres of the socio-economic life still exist in all of the EU member states.

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The theoretical part of this paper is based on literature review (the Web of Science Core Collection, EBESCO and SpringerLink databases were used as the main sources of data). The aim of the topic search (that the author carried out in the period of July-September 2022) was to identify publications for the phrases “gender diversity”, “gender equality” and “gender inequalities”. The empirical part is based on the data collected from the secondary data analysis. The sources of the data were mainly: Global Gender Gap Reports from the years 2018-2022, Eurobarometer surveys, EU legal acts and regulations, EU gender equality strategies, EU publications, studies and reports on gender equality, other documents and reports on gender equality issue available on-line, and web sites of the EU institutions. The data was used to overview actions undertaken in the EU member states to reduce gender inequalities in the access to various spheres of socio-economic lives. It also was used to overview the socio-economic situation of women in the EU member states and to analyze gender gap across EU member states by comparing Global Gender Gap Index of countries that are the most and the least advanced in reducing gender inequalities.

2. GENDER INEQUALITIES IN SOCIO-ECONOMIC SPHERES OF LIFE

Gender inequality in the labour is widely discussed in literature. C.T. Begeny, M.K. Ryan, C.A. Moss-Racusin and G. Ravetz (2020) state that women are becoming more present in the labour market but at the same time they prove that women who work inside men’s dominant professions are more likely to experience discrimination. What is more, Frankiewicz (2020) observed that women fall behind in promotions from the very first step on promotion ladder. In consequence, in Western Europe only 17 percent of executive-committee members are women, and women comprise just 32 percent of members of corporate boards for companies listed in Western Europe’s major market indexes (exhibit) (Devillard, Sancier-Sultan, de Zelicourt, Kossoff, 2016). Also in the political sphere, women less frequently than men occupy the highest positions (Uwa, John, Dauda, Oyindamola, 2018). According to the United Nations, “women in every part of the world continue to be largely marginalized from the political sphere, often as a result of discriminatory laws, practices, attitudes and gender stereotypes, low levels of education, lack of access to healthcare and the disproportionate effect of poverty on women” (United Nations, 2011). Hence, national, local and public service organizations have much responsibility in encouraging the empowerment of women in their social, political, and economic progress and towards the achievement of gender equality (Narayan-Parker [sic. ed.] 2005). Another significant problem is the wage gap, as across the globe women earn less than men (International Trade Union Confederation 2018). Eurostat publishes regularly updated information on the gender pay gap (GPG) situation in the EU and recent findings by J.M. Landmesser, A.J. Orłowski and M.A. Rusek (2020) show that the gender income gap in each EU country is present. Furthermore, women’s situation in the labour market is closely related to inequality in the education sphere. One of the biggest problems is that the inequality, especially in primary education, has a significant impact on the future income and is transferred to the next education levels (Kara, Coskun, 2020). Additionally, gender inequality can be caused by specific educational orientation of women, as they often present gender-stereotypical preferences when choosing fields of study. In consequence, women graduate from fields of study with lower economic returns (Gokulsing, Tandrayen-Ragoobur, 2014; Barone, Schizzerotto, Assirelli, Abbiati, 2019). Therefore, the literature shows that gender inequality still exists and women are still underrepresented worldwide

in various socio-economic spheres of life. For that reason, the author of the article has decided to join the discussion on the issue of gender equality in the EU. The novel aspect of the study is that the author collates the EU most important initiatives for the gender equality with the information about the level of Global Gender Gap Index in the EU member states. Consequently, it is possible to discuss whether the EU gender mainstreaming policy is efficient.

3. EU POLICIES FOR GENDER EQUALITY

The European Union is considered one of the most advanced with regard to the promotion of the issue of gender equality, as for many years the EU has imposed on member states various norms and values to create gender parity in socio-economic life (Jacquot, 2020). Selected diversity and inclusion initiatives of the EU are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Examples of the EU activities promoting gender equality

Type of the activity	Example of activities
Research framework	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS) – research conducted in 2018, aimed to assess the cost of gender inequalities in the EU economy (van Ballegooij, Maxom, 2018). 2. European Institute for Gender Equality – research that aims to gather the gender-disaggregated statistics and indicators like Gender Equality Index (monitors and compares gender equality progress across various groups of women and men in the EU over time) (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022). 3. Eurobarometer – a survey on citizens' perceptions and expectations regarding gender equality policies, conducted for the European Parliament in 2022 (European Parliament, 2021), a survey on women in times of COVID-19 (Ipsos European Public Affairs, 2022).
Legal framework	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. European Convention of Human Rights – adopted in 1950, protects citizens in the European states against human rights violations (European Court of Human Rights, Council of Europe, 2013). 2. The European Social Charter – is a Council of Europe treaty that guarantees a broad range of everyday human rights related to employment, housing, health, education, social protection and welfare (Council of Europe, 1961). 3. Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Council of Europe, 2011). 4. Directive 2006/54/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation (European Parliament, Council of the European Union, 2006). 5. Council Directive 2004/113/EC of 13 December 2004 implementing the principle of equal treatment between men and women in the access to and supply of goods and services (Council of the European Union, 2004).

Table 1 (cont.). Examples of the EU activities promoting gender equality

Type of the activity	Example of activities
Legal framework	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Directive 2010/41/Eu of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 July 2010 on the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity in a self-employed capacity and repealing Council Directive 86/613/EEC (European Parliament, Council of the European Union, 2010). 7. Recommendation Rec(98)14 on gender mainstreaming – calls on member states to create an enabling environment to facilitate conditions for: the implementation of gender streamlining in public sector and balanced participation of woman and men in political and public decision making (Council of Europe, 1998). 8. Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on preventing and combating sexism (Council of Europe, 2019). 9. Recommendation Rec (2003) 3 adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 12 March 2003 and Explanatory Memorandum on Balanced Participation of Women and Men in Political and Public Decision-Making - calls on the balanced participation of men and women in decision-making bodies in political and public life Council of Europe, 2003). 10. Recommendation CM/Rec (2007)17 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on gender equality standards and mechanisms – provide an extensive list of measures to achieve gender equality in practice (Council of Europe, 2007).
Policy framework	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025 – the new strategy outlines the goals and priorities of the Council of Europe on gender equality, identifying working methods and main partners, as well as measures required to increase the visibility of the results. The main strategic areas of the strategy are: prevent and combat gender stereotypes and sexism, prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence, ensure the equal access for women to justice, achieve a balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making, protect the rights of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls, achieve gender mainstreaming in all policies and measures (Council of Europe, 2020). 2. 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – launched in New York in 2015 put a strong emphasis on the empowerment of women – goal 5 of the Agenda (United Nations, 2015).
Financial framework	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. European Social Fund Plus will support the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights through supporting actions in the areas of employment, education & skills and social inclusion. The budget is 98,5 billion EUR (Regulation EU 2021/1057). 2. Horizon Europe - the goal is to improve the European research and innovation system, create gender-equal working environments where all talents can thrive and better integrate the gender dimension in projects to improve research quality. The budget is 95,5 billion EUR (Komisja Europejska, 2021). 3. European Regional Development Fund – the main goal is to contribute more, from investment and services in support of female entrepreneurship, to narrowing the gender gap in research and innovation, and improving access to physical, ICT and social infrastructure (European Union, 2022).

Table 1 (cont.). Examples of the EU activities promoting gender equality

Type of the activity	Example of activities
Financial framework	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Creative Europe – provides EU Funding Opportunities for the Cultural and Creative Sectors in years 2021–2027. The budget is 2,44 billion EUR (European Commission, 2021). 5. The dedicated Commission funding – under the budget for the ‘Equality and Rights’ and ‘Daphne’ strands, EUR 261 million is allocated to activities that include the promotion of gender equality, and prevention and combating gender-based violence (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022). 6. The Invest EU Program - it places an emphasis on measures promoting gender equality across its all four policy windows: the Sustainable Infrastructure Window; the Research, Innovation and Digitization Window; the Small and Medium-sized Enterprises; and the Social Investment and Skills Window (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022).
Institutional framework	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. European Institute for Gender Equality – was established in 2007 and is a European Union agency that supports the member states’ governments and EU’s institutions in promoting equality between men and women (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022). 2. Gender Equality Commission (GEC) – helps to ensure the mainstreaming of gender equality into all Council of Europe policies and to reduce the gap between commitments and the reality of women in Europe. Members of the commission represent each member states and provide advice, guidance and support to other Council of Europe bodies and to member states (Council of Europe, 2022). 3. The European Court of Human Rights – was established in 1959 and the main object is to ensure the observance of the European Convention on Human Rights (The European Court of Human rights, 2022). 4. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights – advises the EU and its Member States on fundamental human rights and their implementation in national legislation (FRA, 2022).

Source: Own study.

The research shows that the EU is committed to ensuring gender impartiality in socio-economic life by implementing different types of actions that refer to: the research needed to design effective EU and national gender policies, the legislative mechanisms and policies that help to combat unfair discrimination, the funding opportunities for projects enhancing gender equality and the equality bodies that promote equal treatment of men and women. Furthermore, there are various initiatives carried out in the EU to promote diversity and inclusion. One of the well-known initiatives is the Diversity Charter, which is a written commitment (an initiative promoted by the European Commission) voluntarily signed by organizations to promote diversity and equal opportunities in workplace, regardless of age, disability, gender, race or ethnic origin, religion or sexual orientation. It was established in 2011 in France, and has been signed by over 12 000 entities in 26 European countries so far (Forum Odpowiedzialnego Biznesu). Another example is the European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Award which is opened to all local authorities in the EU who are making an effort to build fairer societies by promoting diversity and inclusion idea. The award was launched by the European Commission in February 2022 (European Commission, 2022b). Additionally, the European Commission organizes the EU Diversity

Month during which various activities and events (like conferences, mentoring projects, webinars, workshops) take places during the month of May, across the EU member countries. The main goal is to explore how organizations from different sectors can work together to build inclusive workplaces (European Commission, 2022a).

It is clear that the EU policies aim to encourage women to be more involved in socio-economic life. However, the question is whether mainstreaming activities implemented by the EU result in the equal access of men and women to the labour market, the political career, the education system and healthcare. For this reason, it is crucial to analyze gender equality across the EU countries.

4. COUNTRY-LEVEL GENDER GAP

The socio-economic situation of women is well illustrated by the so-called Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI)². The index was created and first used in 2006 by the World Economic Forum. Its methodology has not changed since then, and the index itself is used to measure gender equality (women and men) in a given country. Theoretically, the index can take on values between zero and one, where 0 means a complete lack of gender equality (complete exclusion of women from socio-economic life), and value 1 means complete gender equality (complete lack of discrimination against women in socio-economic life). The Global Gender Gap Index benchmarks the current state and the evolution of gender parity across four key dimensions (World Economic Forum, 2022):

1. Economic Participation and Opportunity. This subindex examines three spheres: the participation gap (that measures the difference between women and men in labour-force participation rates), the remuneration gap (which presents the ratio of estimated female-to-male earned income and wage equality for similar work) and the advancement gap (that is captured using hard data statistics which refer to the ratio of women to men among legislators, senior officials and managers, and to the ratio of women to men among technical and professional workers).
2. Educational Attainment. This subindex is used to present the gap between women's and men's access to education, as well as the country's ability to provide an equal number of men and women in primary-, secondary- and tertiary-level education.
3. Health and Survival. This subindex provides an overview of sex ratio at birth, as well as the rate of life expectancy for both sexes in order to present the differences in health between women and men in a given country
4. Political Empowerment. This subindex measures the gender gap at the highest level of political decision-making. It presents the ratio of women to men in parliamentary positions and in terms of years in an executive office (prime minister or president).

In 2022 the "Global Gender Gap Report" covered 146 countries and benchmarked gender equality among them. The Table 2. presents the GGGI for 27 EU member states in years 2018-2021.

² Another well-known index is Gender Equality index published by the European Institute for Gender Equality. It presents the scores and ranks of all the EU member states in six domains – work, money, knowledge, time, power and health and enables the comparison of all 27 countries. Nevertheless, the author did not decide to use the mentioned index, as the latest data for all of the EU member states is from the year 2020.

Table 2. Gender gap in the EU member states

The country	2018		2019		2020		2021	
	The global rank	The score	The global rank	The score	The global rank	The score	The global rank	The score
Austria	53	0.718	34	0.744	21	0.777	21	0.781
Belgium	32	0.738	27	0.750	13	0.789	14	0.793
Bulgaria	18	0.756	49	0.727	38	0.746	42	0.740
Croatia	59	0.712	60	0.720	45	0.733	n.d.	n.d.
Cyprus	92	0.684	91	0.692	83	0.707	93	0.696
Czech Republic	82	0.693	78	0.706	78	0.711	76	0.710
Denmark	13	0.778	14	0.782	29	0.768	32	0.764
Estonia	33	0.734	26	0.751	46	0.733	52	0.733
Finland	4	0.821	3	0.832	2	0.861	2	0.860
France	12	0.779	15	0.781	16	0.784	15	0.791
Germany	14	0.776	10	0.787	11	0.798	10	0.801
Greece	78	0.696	84	0.701	98	0.689	100	0.689
Hungary	102	0.674	105	0.677	99	0.688	88	0.699
Ireland	9	0.796	7	0.798	9	0.800	9	0.804
Italy	70	0.684	76	0.707	63	0.721	63	0.720
Latvia	17	0.758	11	0.785	20	0.778	26	0.771
Lithuania	24	0.749	33	0.745	8	0.804	11	0.799
Luxemburg	61	0.712	51	0.725	55	0.726	46	0.736
Malta	91	0.686	90	0.693	84	0.703	85	0.703
Netherlands	27	0.747	38	0.736	31	0.762	28	0.767
Poland	42	0.728	40	0.736	75	0.713	77	0.709
Portugal	37	0.732	35	0.744	20	0.775	29	0.766
Romania	63	0.711	55	0.724	88	0.700	90	0.698
Slovak Republic	83	0.693	63	0.718	77	0.712	67	0.717
Slovenia	11	0.784	36	0.743	41	0.741	39	0.744
Spain	29	0.746	8	0.795	14	0.788	17	0.788
Sweden	3	0.822	4	0.830	5	0.823	5	0.822

Source: Own study based on World Economic Forum, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022.

It is interesting to observe that in the pooled sample of the 27 EU member states the gender gap is present in all of the countries. At the same time, the level of gender inequality differs across countries. In some countries, for example Finland, Sweden, Ireland and Germany, the gender gap is the lowest, as all of the four countries are ranked in top ten world economies which closed at least 80% of their gender gaps (the indicator is over 0,8 in the case of those four countries). On the other hand, Cyprus, Romania, Hungary, and Greece are ranked as countries which have not reached the level of 70% in closing the gender gap.

An interesting phenomena is that during the whole observed period only 3 EU countries have constantly improved their ranking (Austria, Czech Republic, Finland). Comparing the

year 2021 against 2018, 13 EU countries improved their ranking (Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Malta, Portugal, Spain, Slovak Republic) and 11 countries declined while one (Ireland) kept the same position in ranking. What is worth noticing, 18 EU countries improved in closing their gender gap (the level of GGGI increased) but only 13 of them improved their ranking. This means that the gender gap decreased globally, and despite better GGGI result in 2021 the country is ranked lower. Add to this, Austria and Belgium exhibited the highest improvement in the gender parity score, while Poland has declined the most over years.

Summing up, Europe presents the second-highest level of closing the gender gap with the score of the index 0.766, while North America is the most advanced region with the score of the index 0.769. Consequently, it will take at least sixty years to close the gender gap in EU countries (World Economic Forum 2022).

In order to illustrate cross-country differences in the socio-economic situation of women in the EU the author has decided to compare Finland (with an overall score of 0.860), which tops the index, with Greece, which is ranked the lowest among the EU countries. The table 3. presents detailed data about the two mentioned countries.

Table 3. Gender gap in Finland and Greece

	Finland	Greece
Rank (out of 146 countries)	2	100
Global Gender Gap Index	0.860	0.689
Economic Participation and Opportunity	0.789	0.672
Educational Attainment	1.00	0.986
Health and Survival	0.970	0.966
Political Empowerment	0.682	0.130
Year that women received the right to vote	1917	1952
Population sex ratio female/male	1.03	1.04
Labour-force participation rate %	0.882	0.745
Gender pay gap %	17.16	8.91
Estimated earned income	0.724	0.650
Legislators, senior officials and managers	0.599	0.417
Women in parliament	0.835	0.266
Women in ministerial positions	1	0.118
Unemployed adults % of labour force (15-64)	6.21F 7.26 M	19.08F 11.36 M
Workers employed part-time % of employed people	0.50F 0.38M	0.41 F 0.27M
Firms with female majority ownership % firms	9.50	16.50
Share of women's membership in boards %	35.2	19.60
Firms with female top managers % firms	12.9	17.20

Source: own study based on (World Economic Forum 2022).

With regard to the data published by World Economic forum (2022) Finland is ranked as the second best country in achieving gender parity. Thus Finland closed its gender gap in 86%, while Greece is ranked as the country with the least gender parity among all EU

member states, as it closed the gender gap in 68.9%. When it comes to the level of the subindex, both countries (Finland and Greece) report the highest parity on Educational Attainment. In the case of Finland there is a full parity in enrolment in primary, secondary and tertiary education for women and men. In turn, Greece offers equal access to primary and tertiary education both for men and women, but there is still an inequality in enrolment in secondary education, as over 5% more men than women are enrolled in secondary education. The second highest subindex for both countries is Health and Survival, where the gender gap has been closed in over 96%. As a result, in both countries women's healthy life expectancy is comparable to the global average level, as well as sex ratio at birth. Moreover, the maternal mortality is low (3 maternal deaths per 100 000 live births) and almost all of the births are attended by skilled personnel. On the contrary, political empowerment is the sphere where the gender gap remains the widest in both countries, as Finland exhibits a gap of 31.8% and Greece 87%. In practice, those numbers reflect low representation of women in political life. Consequently, in Greece only 21% of all parliamentarians are women (45.5% in the case of Finland), and there is a big disproportion in holding ministerial position, as only 10,53% are women (in comparison there is a full parity in Finland). It is also worth-noticing that women in Greece received the right to vote much later than women in Finland. The second subindex where the gender gap remains large is Economic Participation and Opportunity. Finland and Greece differ from each other according to the mentioned subindex. When it comes to the issue of economic participation, 56.46% of Finnish women are engaged actively in the labour market, either by working or looking for a job. In comparison, only 43.4% of Greek women participate in labour-force. Consequently, in both cases the gender gap is observed. What is more, the estimated earned income is lower for women than for men in both countries. Hence, the wage gap is present in Finland (where women earn 8.91% less than men for similar work), and in Greece (where women earn 17.16% less than men for similar work). In addition, women more often are employed as part-time workers, or are unemployed in both countries. The data presented in the table 3 also shows that in Finland only 37.47% of decision-making positions (legislators, senior officials and managers) are held by women, while in Greece the ratio is even lower and remains at the level of 29.41%. Unfortunately, the same inequalities can be observed in the case of the share of women's membership in boards (only 35.2% of board members are women in Finland and in Greece even less – 19.6%). However, an interesting phenomenon is that Greek women are more often top managers than Finnish ones, as well as there are more Greek firms than Finnish enterprises with female majority ownership.

Regarding to the presented data, it has been demonstrated that gender inequality is still present in many aspects of life: in the labour market, education, health and political empowerment in the EU countries.

5. CONCLUSION

The aim of the study was to analyze the scope of equal access to various spheres of socio-economic life among men and women in the 27 EU member states. To discuss and conclude the most important findings the SWOT analysis can be introduced. Firstly, the most important strengths of the EU gender mainstreaming activities is that equality between women and men still remains one of the major priority in the EU. The EU is committed to eliminating gender imbalance by taking the following types of actions:

1. Conducting research to gather statistics and indicators that illustrate the gender gap,

2. Ensuring legal protection against discrimination: conventions, directives, recommendations,
3. Presenting the policies that promote equality – non-legislative acts and programs that advance equality between men and women,
4. Funding the programs and initiatives that ensure equal access to education, labour market, healthcare etc.,
5. Institutional support: institutions and agencies that monitor, promote and support diversity and inclusion policy,
6. Organizing a variety of initiatives that promote gender awareness-rising.

In consequence, that thanks to different EU initiatives, one can observe the greater participation of women in the European labour market and political life. The life expectancy is longer and European women are better educated. Finally, the strength of EU mainstreaming initiatives is that the gender gap decreases constantly.

On the other hand, empirical analysis of the data drawn from GGGI proves that there are some weaknesses of the EU gender mainstreaming activities. First of all the gender imbalance is still persistent in many aspects of life in the EU. Even though different activities have been implemented, there is no EU country with full parity. However, the EU countries differ from each other by the level of the gender gap. Finland is the most advanced in reducing gender inequalities while Greece presents the lowest level of the GGGI among all EU countries. Moreover, the gender gap has changed during the observed period of 2018–2021. In addition, while in most of the EU countries gender inequality has decreased, in others gender imbalance has widened. At the same time, it is worth noticing that the level of gender inequalities vary depending on the sphere of socio-economic life. As mentioned earlier, the lowest women's participation is observed in political empowerment, while the highest parity is on Educational attainment in all the 27 EU member states.

There are some opportunities in the socio-economic environment that favor the introduction of EU gender mainstreaming initiatives. The most important one is the great social support for gender equality in Europe. According to Eurobarometer (2017) 9 out of 10 respondents consider that promoting gender equality is important for the society, economy, and for them personally. On the other hand there are many threats that hinder the implementation of gender equality policies. The most important are as follow:

- gender stereotypes are still present in societies,
- conservative politicians and governments in some of the EU member states that promote traditional roles for women to play in the society,
- economic crisis that means less money spent on gender equality programs,
- unstable geopolitical situation which results in less attention paid on the issue of human capital development programs (while more money is spent on for example defense and armament).

The conclusion that comes from the SWOT analysis is that although there are many strengths of the EU gender mainstreaming policy it still needs to be improved. It is worth noticing the socio-political environment is difficult and unstable. For this reason EU activities for promoting gender equality need to be reinforced but also they need better implementation. Nevertheless, the situation differs across EU countries, and in recent times progress towards gender equality has slowed, stalled or even regressed in some areas (Prpic, Shreeves, Dobрева, 2019). Thus, the gender mainstreaming goal still needs to be achieved at all levels of the EU action. Moreover, it will require a political will and

cooperation at all levels (the EU level and the national level) to eliminate gender stereotyping, gender-based violence and uneven access to labour market and political career. Further research should examine how the gender gap will change in the next few years and what will be the impact of gender-oriented national activities on women's situation.

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