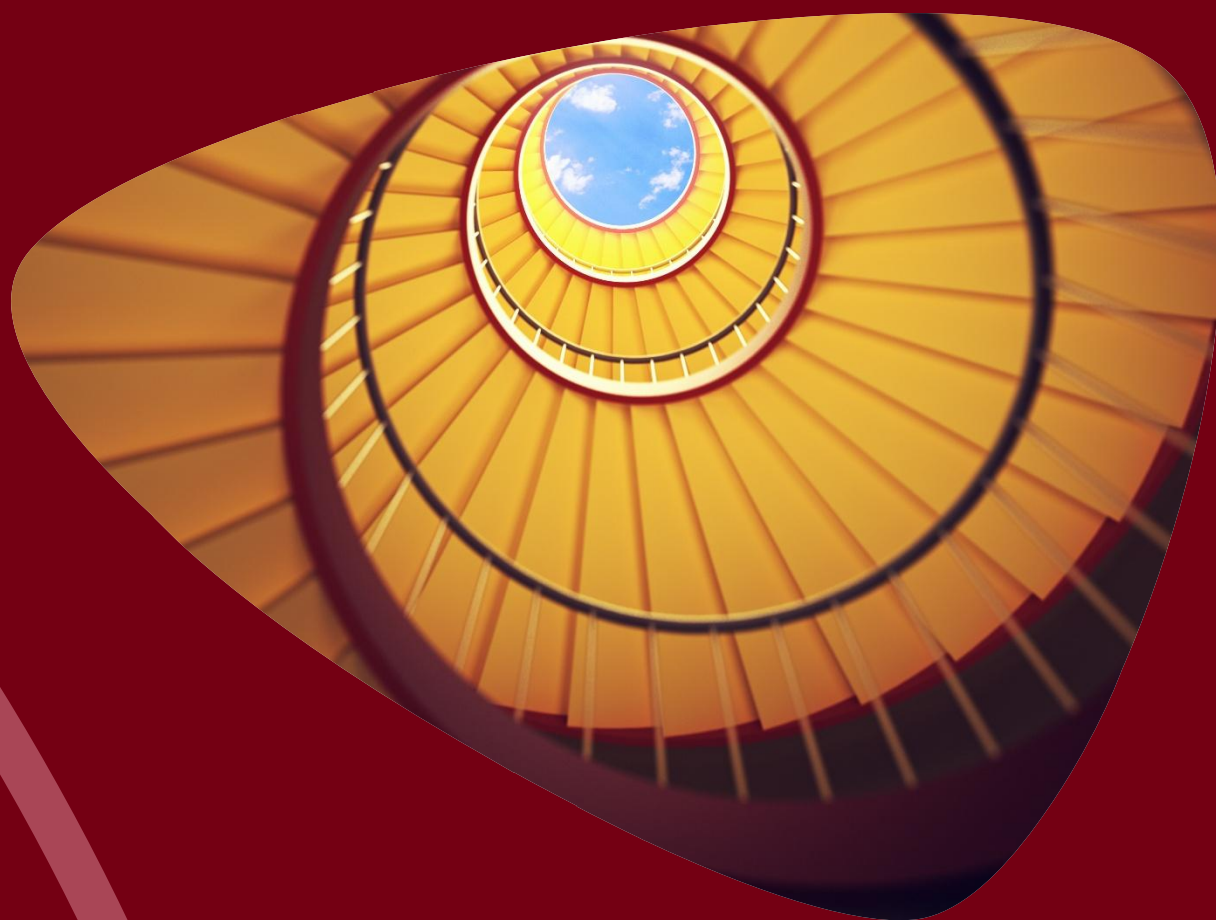




GENDER EQUALITY: QUO VADIS?

Background Paper



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Gender equality is a fundamental principle enshrined in international frameworks and national constitutions around the world. Article 1 of the **United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights** proclaims: *"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights."* Similarly, Article 8 of the Swiss Constitution affirms: *"Men and women have equal rights."*

Over the past decades, there has been considerable progress in promoting gender equality. The **World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report** evaluates gender disparities across four key dimensions: Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment. According to the 2024 edition, **68.5% of the global gender gap has been closed—an improvement of 4 percentage points since 2006**. Notably, the Political Empowerment dimension has seen the most significant gains, narrowing by 8.3 percentage points over the same period.

Yet 2024 also marks a year of **renewed concerns about stagnation—and even regression—in gender equality**. The **World Economic Forum** notes: *"In 2024, gender parity inches slowly forward – the pace of travel is such, however, that full parity remains beyond the reach of another five generations."* At the current rate, projections suggest it will take an estimated 134 years to achieve full gender parity.

Equileap's 2024 Gender Equality Report underscores **persistent challenges**. Despite a rise in pay gap transparency from 33% in 2024 to 44% in 2025, only 1% of companies surveyed reported having actually closed the gender pay gap. Representation at the top remains limited: just 7% of CEOs in the dataset are women.

In the United States, **the rise of anti-DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) sentiment** has prompted several major corporations to scale back their diversity and gender equality initiatives. This retreat **threatens progress**, as fewer resources are directed towards programs that support women's advancement in the workplace. The 2024 **Women in the Workplace** report by **LeanIn.Org** and **McKinsey** reveals **declining support for mentorship, career development, and sponsorship programs targeting women**, with fewer companies tracking outcomes or offering women-focused recruitment and internship opportunities. Similarly, the Q3 2024 **Gender Diversity Index** by **Equilar**, which examines gender diversity on corporate boards within the Russell 3000 Index, finds that **anti-DEI backlash has stalled progress**: its Gender Diversity Index remained flat at 0.60 for the third straight quarter in Q4 2024, with female board appointments declining for the second consecutive quarter.

Despite these setbacks, there are **glimmers of progress**—particularly in **Europe and Asia-Pacific**. **Equileap** notes that new legislative frameworks around pay transparency offer hope. The

European Union, for example, continues to lead globally: seven of the top ten countries in the **World Economic Forum's 2024 Gender Gap Index** are European.

According to the **European Commission's 2025 Report on Gender Equality in the EU**, public support remains strong: *"The Eurobarometer on gender stereotypes shows that people in the EU agree that gender equality is beneficial for society."* However, the same report reveals **growing polarization also in the EU**, particularly among younger generations—where young men are increasingly likely to endorse stereotypical views, in contrast to young women. In March 2025, the **European Commission** adopted **a Roadmap for Women's Rights**, anchored in a *Declaration of Principles for a Gender-Equal Society*. The Commission has invited other European institutions, including the Parliament and Council, to endorse this declaration during 2025.

Beyond its **intrinsic value as a human right**, gender equality is a **cornerstone of inclusive development and social stability**. Reducing inequality is essential not only for **social cohesion** but also for **long-term economic resilience**. Current data suggest we are approaching a turning point. Increased attention—from policymakers, civil society, and the private sector—is vital to **ensure that progress is not only preserved but accelerated**.

SOURCES:

- **Equilar: Gender Diversity Index (GDI)**, available at: [Q3 2024 Equilar Gender Diversity Index](#); last accessed on 9 April 2025.
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- **European Commission: 2025 report on gender equality in the EU**, available at: [2025 report on gender equality in the EU | European Commission](#); last accessed on 9 April 2025.
- **European Commission: A Roadmap for women's rights – Commission Communication**; available at: [A Roadmap for women's rights – Commission Communication | European Commission](#), last accessed on 9 April 2025.
- **LeanIn, McKinsey & Company: Women in the Workplace 2024**, available at: [Women in the Workplace 2024 report | McKinsey](#); last accessed on 9 April 2025.
- **World Economic Forum: Global Gender Gap Report 2024**; available at: [Global Gender Gap Report 2024 | World Economic Forum](#); last accessed on 9 April 2025.

 **Contact**

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