

# EU policy recommendations – Empowering women in energy sector





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# INTRODUCTION

The energy sector across Europe presents a significant gender disparity, with women still greatly underrepresented. In the EU, the energy sector workforce is predominantly male, comprising 77.9%, while women represent only **22.1%**. This gender gap extends to the renewable energies sector, where women are similarly in the vast minority.<sup>1</sup> Women and girls, in all their diversity, are often on the frontlines of the climate crisis and face greater adversities from climate change across the world, largely due to their economic disadvantages. The correlation between underrepresentation on one hand and bearing the brunt of the adverse outcomes of current energy systems on the other hand is evident.

Moreover, reports show women and women-led households are disproportionately affected by energy and transport poverty. This vulnerability is intensified by factors such as age, disability, and ethnic background<sup>2</sup>. Women are also less likely to make decisions on energy in their households even though they are often more responsible for household labour and energy usage. The participation of women in the unpaid domestic sphere is also on the rise. Reports indicate that women were more affected by the loss of jobs and income during the COVID pandemic.<sup>3</sup>

This EUWES (Empowering Underrepresented Women in the Energy Sector) project seeks to identify the current obstacles hindering women's representation and to promote gender equality through the recommendation of inclusive policies and practices. The project's primary goal is to empower women and foster opportunities for them to actively participate in and contribute to decision-making processes within the energy sector.

To contribute towards the goal of the project, EUWES partners offer a comprehensive set of policy recommendations for EU institutions to remedy this issue. These recommendations are organized into three categories, each tailored to improve gender equality, representation and feminist principles in EU decision making as well as the educational sector and private sector. We also offer definitions and good practice examples at the end of the document.

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<sup>1</sup> *Gender and energy*. 2016. European Institute for Gender Equality. Available at: [https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/policy-areas/energy?language\\_content\\_entity=en#:~:text=In%20Europe%2C%20the%20energy%20sector,w here%20women%20are%20also%20underrepresented](https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/policy-areas/energy?language_content_entity=en#:~:text=In%20Europe%2C%20the%20energy%20sector,w here%20women%20are%20also%20underrepresented)

<sup>2</sup> Birgi, Olgu Gizemi, Marta Ferdebar, Antonia Fuhrmann, Katharina Habersbrunner, Anke Stock. 2021. *Gender and energy poverty Facts and arguments*. Available at: <https://www.empowered.eu/resource/energy-poverty-and-gender-facts-and-arguments/>

<sup>3</sup> *The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women, employment and health inequalities*. 2023. Public Health Wales NHS Trust: <https://phwwhocc.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Impacts-of-COVID-on-Women-Explanatory-Note-Eng-FINAL.pdf>





# 1 Recommendations for EU policy/decision makers

In the EU, the landscape of energy decision-making and energy consumption reveals a complex role for women. As of November 2022, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) reported that women hold **43%** of the senior ministerial roles related to energy in EU member states. Yet, women's representation falls to **29%** within national parliamentary committees dedicated to energy issues, as recorded in September 2022. <sup>4</sup>

**To improve gender justice in EU policy making, we recommend the European Union should:**

- Adopt **Gender Equality Action Plans (GEAPs)** across all EU institutions. These plans have been proven to identify strategic areas for improvement, set ambitious objectives and outline concrete measures for achieving gender equality.
- **Incorporate a feminist perspective into all upcoming and existing policies designed to drive the green transition..** Viewing the energy transition through a feminist lens is crucial as shifting to decarbonized energy sources offers an opportunity to cultivate more equitable ways of living, centering the concerns of those who are most marginalized in energy transition strategies. A feminist approach transcends mere gender mainstreaming; it calls for a profound restructuring of our energy systems and indicators of success. An authentic feminist energy system would be democratic, decentralized, and ideally publicly owned. It would prioritize human well-being and the environment over profit, striving to offset the pollutants it generates and employing technologies that empower communities. Even though this is not in line with the realities of the current energy systems, policy and decision makers should benefit from integrating feminist principles and taking into account the inherent injustices of current energy systems and possible solutions that include socially and environmentally just indicators of value. A good example on how to apply feminist principles to policies is CAN Europe's policy briefing [Towards a Feminist Foreign Climate Policy: considerations for the EU](#).
- **Require and support member states to include gender mainstreaming in the implementation of policies, particularly in National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs) and the mandatory Social Climate Plans due by June 2025.** These strategic documents are crucial as they lay out significant measures and investments in energy efficiency, renewable energy, and zero-emission mobility solutions. Mitigating gender justice is already encouraged in both plans, however it should be required. Incorporating a gender perspective is essential to ensure that these initiatives are equitable and address the diverse needs of all citizens, thereby

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<sup>4</sup> *Gender and energy*. 2016. European Institute for Gender Equality. Available at: [https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/policy-areas/energy?language\\_content\\_entity=en#:~:text=In%20Europe%2C%20the%20energy%20sector,w here%20women%20are%20also%20underrepresented](https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/policy-areas/energy?language_content_entity=en#:~:text=In%20Europe%2C%20the%20energy%20sector,w here%20women%20are%20also%20underrepresented)



enhancing the effectiveness and inclusivity of environmental and social policies.

- **Acknowledge and address the feminization of energy poverty and foster a fair European energy market.** Pervasive gender inequality in society, gendered care responsibilities and household labor, lower incomes and the higher likelihood of being a single parent are identified as key drivers of energy poverty amongst women across Europe. However, **EU energy policy continues to be designed for a “gender-neutral” energy consumer.** The **EU should foster gender-sensitive approaches to energy access**, considering unique needs of women such as for example implementing policies promoting energy-efficient renovations, ensuring affordable access to energy, and prohibiting disconnections. This should be a prominent consideration of relevant EU platforms and committees, including the Just Transition Platform and the Energy Poverty Advisory Hub.
- **Integrate specific targets on women-led initiatives and broader gender equality measures into its policy framework including budgeting.** The underrepresentation of women in key economic sectors not only undermines social justice but also hampers innovation and growth. To ensure a robust and equitable economic future, it is essential for the EU to set explicit targets. The EU can then drive investment in women-led businesses, support initiatives that promote gender equality in the workplace, and ensure more inclusive policy development.
- **Require and resource intersectional gender training for policy makers to enhance their understanding of the gender nexus and ensure effective policymaking.** These trainings should focus on gender sensitivity, the impact of policies on different genders, and methods for promoting gender equality. Tailored sessions led by experts will provide necessary insights and tools for policy makers to use in their day-to-day work which would improve their capacity to critically evaluate their inputs into the policy processes and adjust it accordingly.
- **Mandate the collection and analysis of gender-disaggregated data in the energy sector.** This data will help identify existing gender disparities and track progress toward gender equality. Mechanisms should also be established to monitor and evaluate the implementation of gender mainstreaming in the energy sector. Collecting and disseminating gender-disaggregated data on energy can help policymakers and practitioners better understand the specific challenges faced by different gender groups in relation to energy access, usage, and participation. By collecting gender disaggregated data on energy, the EU can support evidence-based decision-making and advocacy efforts aimed at promoting gender equality in the energy sector.
- **Prioritize the integration of gender experts and civil society organizations into dialogue meetings.** By creating dedicated funding and platforms for such interactions, these institutions can ensure a diverse range of perspectives are considered. This inclusive approach fosters more comprehensive understanding and addresses a wider array of concerns. It also promotes gender-sensitive policies and initiatives, ultimately leading to more equitable outcomes across various sectors and policies. A good starting point would be to resource and expand the



competencies of the EU Equality Platform for the energy sector and the advisory committee on equal opportunities.

- **Provide further training and collaboration between existing EU platforms on Gender equality and energy and climate** to build further technical knowledge. Resourcing and including the expertise of the gender justice stakeholders in energy and climate legislation has been shown to have great impact. This encourages more resilient and socially-just policy making with programmes having a higher uptake and success rate for marginalized communities. By implementing these strategies, the EU can foster a more inclusive energy sector that contributes to broader gender equality goals while ensuring a diverse and innovative workforce.
- **Require further consultation and collaboration between social and environmental committees in the European Parliament.** Committees in the European Parliament should require advice and input to avoid silos and improve the successful implementation of relevant legislation. For instance, the Women's Rights for Gender Equality Committee could then offer useful insight into energy legislation and vice versa.
- **Ensure further budget allocation towards specific gender and energy programmes.** Funding for energy projects should be allocated in a way that considers gender impact and fosters inclusive outcomes. For instance, further EU funding for tailored renovation and renewable programmes for female-led households. This would help to eradicate energy poverty and ensure decent, safe homes for female-led households.
- **Launch public awareness campaigns across the EU to highlight the importance of gender mainstreaming in the energy sector and promote gender equality.** Work with media and communication platforms to change stereotypes and promote positive images of women in energy-related roles.



## 2 Recommendations to support the educational sector

Enhancing the involvement of women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) disciplines is imperative across Europe not only for fostering equal opportunities and social equity but also for addressing urgent societal challenges such as climate change. However, the current situation indicates that a lot of work remains to be done. In 2021, within the EU, women comprised only **32.8%** of tertiary education graduates in STEM fields. This is crucial, as a larger pool of female graduates would provide energy-related companies with a broader talent base from which to hire. **We recommend the European Union provides more funding opportunities such as Erasmus+ projects and supports initiatives for gender equality in educational institutions.**

Educational institutions should be supported by the EU to:

- **Promote gender equality by adopting Gender Equality Action Plans (GEAPs) at the school, university or faculty level as an effective way to institutionalize efforts to promote gender equality.** These plans can identify strategic areas for improvement, set ambitious objectives, and outline concrete measures for achieving gender equality.
- **Provide courses, workshops or training sessions for teachers and professors to enhance their understanding of gender issues and unconscious biases.** These sessions should be funded by the EU and include discussions on gender stereotypes, unconscious biases, and strategies for creating inclusive learning environments. By raising awareness, educators can better understand how their own biases may impact their interactions with students and work towards creating a more equitable classroom environment. This is in particular important for faculties from STEM fields or any educational institution where there is a concentration of one gender.
- **Appoint a dedicated person to oversee activities on gender equality.** Assigning a dedicated individual to oversee gender equality initiatives is essential for offering continuous support and guidance to faculty and students alike. By creating multiple positions and appointing individuals to represent each department or faculty, institutions can guarantee dedicated assistance for addressing gender equality concerns at every level. These officers are pivotal in driving the implementation of gender equality programs, offering resources and support to faculty members, and championing institutional change.
- **Increase the visibility of gender aspects in teaching materials and include a concerted effort to diversify the authors and content used in STEM courses.** By including material produced by women and diverse genders, educators can provide students with a more inclusive perspective on STEM topics. Additionally, incorporating content that reflects the socio-political



dimension of the subject matter and using gender-transformative language can help to counteract biases and stereotypes within STEM education.

- **Integrate gender perspectives into STEM curricula.** Creating interdisciplinary seminars or gender modules within STEM disciplines provides students with opportunities to explore gender issues in depth and engage in critical discussions. These seminars could cover topics such as the impact of gender stereotypes on career choices, the representation of women in STEM fields, and strategies for promoting gender diversity within the industry. By incorporating these modules into existing curricula, institutions can ensure that all students have the opportunity to learn about gender issues within their field of study.
- **Encourage research and final theses focusing on the gender-energy nexus.** This is essential for advancing our understanding of how gender intersects with energy issues. By incentivizing students to explore this topic in their academic work, institutions can generate valuable insights into the gender disparities within the energy sector and identify opportunities for promoting gender justice.
- **Establish mentorship and internship programs for female students in STEM studies** by linking them with women employed in the energy sector. Highlighting successful stories of women in the energy sector serves to inspire and motivate other women to pursue careers in the field. The European Union should actively promote and share these stories across Europe. By showcasing the achievements of women in leadership positions, educational institutions can help to challenge stereotypes and demonstrate to students the diverse career opportunities available in the energy sector. Additionally, internship programs can help to provide female students with access to career opportunities.
- **Create informal networks of women working or studying in the energy sector** can provide a valuable source of support and encouragement. By facilitating communication and collaboration among key beneficiaries, institutions can help to create a sense of community and solidarity among women in the field.
- **Carry out promotional activities aimed at high schools in order to attract female students towards STEM studies.** To attract more female students to STEM studies, faculties should collaborate with high schools by organizing interactive workshops, career fairs, and mentorship programs. These events can showcase successful female professionals in STEM, offer hands-on activities, and provide information on scholarships and opportunities. Faculties can produce targeted communication campaigns that encourage women accessing STEM studies.





### 3 Recommendations to support the private sector

In the EU, the energy sector workforce is predominantly male while women represent only **22.1%**. This gender gap extends to the renewable energies sector, where women are similarly underrepresented.<sup>5</sup> The ongoing energy transition offers new opportunities for a more inclusive workforce, however this will not happen without clear vision and strategic commitment from the EU, member states and energy companies.

#### **The European Commission should require and encourage energy companies to:**

1. **Conduct Gender Self-Assessment (GSA) and adopt Gender equality plans.** Conducting regular Gender Self-Assessments is crucial for energy companies committed to promoting gender equality. By evaluating gender diversity, leaders identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement. The GSA should cover workforce composition, policies, and culture, providing insights into challenges and opportunities. Key components include initiatives to increase women's leadership, mitigate biases in recruitment, and foster inclusivity. Addressing disparities enhances corporate reputation, attracts talent, and drives growth.
2. **Provide training and reskilling programmes for their employees.** Gender training and reskilling programs are vital for promoting gender equality and diversity in the energy sector. They equip employees to recognize and challenge gender stereotypes and biases. These initiatives foster awareness and empathy, creating an inclusive culture. Reskilling programs aid the transition to renewable energy while ensuring equal opportunities. Topics like gender-just communication and unconscious bias should be covered. Workshops, seminars, and online modules offer practical tools. Reskilling should address barriers faced by women and diverse genders.
3. **Appoint gender equality officers.** Establishing dedicated positions for gender equality officers is a proactive step towards embedding gender equality within energy companies. These officers serve as experts and advocates for gender mainstreaming, responsible for designing, implementing, and monitoring initiatives to promote diversity and inclusion. Unlike ad-hoc approaches to gender equality, dedicating resources to gender equality officers ensures sustained focus and accountability within the organization. These officers collaborate closely with human resources teams, senior leadership, and employee resource groups to drive meaningful change and address systemic barriers to gender equality.
4. **Provide mentorship and leadership programmes.** Initiating Mentorship and Leadership

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<sup>5</sup> *Gender and energy*. 2016. European Institute for Gender Equality. Available at: [https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/policy-areas/energy?language\\_content\\_entity=en#:~:text=In%20Europe%2C%20the%20energy%20sector,w here%20women%20are%20also%20underrepresented](https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/policy-areas/energy?language_content_entity=en#:~:text=In%20Europe%2C%20the%20energy%20sector,w here%20women%20are%20also%20underrepresented)



Development programs tailored for women is critical for building a pipeline of diverse talent and fostering career advancement opportunities within energy companies. Mentorship programs provide women with guidance, support, and access to networks that can help them navigate the complexities of the workplace and develop essential leadership skills. By investing in mentorship and leadership development, energy companies cultivate a culture of inclusivity and empower women to reach their full potential.

- 5. Prioritize women in recruitment.** Implementing measures to prioritize women in recruitment processes is essential for addressing gender imbalances and promoting diversity within energy companies. This may include adopting gender-neutral language in job descriptions, diversifying selection panels, and actively seeking out qualified women candidates for open positions. Apply anti-discrimination policies within the company and DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) approach to recruiting which is the process of intentionally cultivating a diverse, balanced and inclusive recruitment process. Temporary measures such as quotas can help ensure balanced representation at decision-making levels while longer-term efforts focus on removing systemic barriers to women's advancement.
- 6. Encourage female employees in the energy sector to engage actively in informal networks tailored to women in STEM.**



## PROJECT DEFINITIONS

**Gender** refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being female in all its diversity, and the relationships between women and men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are context/ time- specific and changeable.

**Gender equality** refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality between women and men is both a human rights issue and a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centered development.

**Disaggregated data** refers to breaking down data into subcategories to reveal patterns that cannot be fully reflected by larger, aggregate data which does not account for disadvantaged groups.

**Gender-energy nexus** refers to how gender intersects with energy issues, including topics on energy injustice, energy poverty, energy usage and marginalisation across sectors.

## GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLES

### In policy making:

- CAN Europe's policy briefing [Towards a Feminist Foreign Climate Policy: considerations for the EU](#).
- [Germany's Feminist foreign policy](#).
- [ENPOR](#)'s recommendations for gender responsive energy efficiency policies
- [W4RES Horizon 2020 project](#) funded by the EU to involve women to support market uptake of renewable heating and cooling.
- The [EmpowerMed](#) project is a great example of collecting gender-disaggregated data to show how summer energy poverty disproportionately affects women.
- Good practice of civil society and gender experts consultation with governments includes the signing of a general collaboration protocol between the Spanish Ministry for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge and Spanish Women's Institute.

### Educational sector:

- The Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computing of the University of Zagreb conducts [Internal gender equality assessment](#) and [Gender equality plan. Technische Universität Berlin](#)
- The role of a [Gender equality officer](#) at the University of Cologne.
- [Gendering MINT digital](#) is a useful tool for engendering STEM studies, also the Technical University Berlin offers a certificate study program "[Gender Pro MINT](#)" with 30 ECTS for



students of STEM studies.

- The North Rhine-Westphalia Technical University in Aachen (RWTH Aachen University) [organises seminars, fairs, and programmes fostering female students'](#) careers in the STEM field.
- [#NoMoreMatildas](#) is a great campaign of Association of Women Researchers and Technologists which provides very good [communications](#).
- The Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computing of the University of Zagreb launched a podcast [ŽensCast](#) offering future female students stories of women who started their professional careers at the Faculty.

**Private sector:**

- [XEnergy](#) is a good example of such a mentorship programme to strengthen the role and visibility of women in the energy industry and other sectors.
- [GWNET](#) aims to empower women in energy through interdisciplinary networking, advocacy, training, and mentoring
- [Women Energize Women](#) is a campaign and conference that spotlights the importance of women in shaping the global energy transition.

You are welcome to find out more about [the EUWES project and our partners here](#).

