



Diversity, Inclusion & Equal Rights in the EU



Introduction

The European Union is founded on the values of **human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights**. Promoting these values and promoting inclusive EU policies for equal rights is essential for ensuring that **all individuals, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, origin, religion or ability, can fully participate in society**.

Diversity, inclusion, and equal rights are essential components of a functioning democratic system. Active citizenship flourishes when people **feel recognised, protected and empowered**, and able to express their identities and **engage in education, employment, politics and civic life without fear of discrimination**.

In an increasingly diverse society, **equipping young people with the tools to understand human rights and to value differences** is vital. Education, policy, and youth initiatives that promote diversity, inclusion, and equal rights can enhance **empathy, critical thinking, and civic responsibility**.



Key concepts and definitions

- ◆ **Diversity** refers to the presence of differences within a given setting, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, disability, religion, and socio-economic background.
- ◆ **Inclusion** is about creating environments where every individual feels respected, accepted, supported, and able to participate fully.
- ◆ **Equity** recognises that different people have different needs and barriers, and thus, fairness requires tailored approaches and access to opportunities rather than treating everyone identically.
- ◆ **Equal rights** ensure that all individuals are entitled to the same legal protections and opportunities, regardless of personal characteristics.



The EU systematically defends these principles through a variety of policies:

- ◆ The **Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU** brings together the fundamental rights and freedoms recognised by the EU, including dignity, equality, and citizens' rights, and is legally binding in all member states.
- ◆ The **European Pillar of Social Rights** outlines 20 key principles to support fair and inclusive societies, with a strong focus on equal opportunities, access to education, gender equality, and inclusion of people with disabilities.
- ◆ The **Fundamental Rights Agency** (FRA) conducts regular surveys and studies in EU countries and provides comprehensive reports to identify and tackle various types of discrimination and their impacts.
- ◆ **EU Anti-Discrimination Directives**, such as the **Racial Equality Directive** and the **Employment Equality Directive**, prohibit discrimination on the grounds of gender, sexual orientation, racial or ethnic origin, religion, disability or age in areas like employment, education, and access to services.



Real-world examples

- ◆ The European Commission has launched various strategies:
 - ✓ The **Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025** aims to close gender gaps and combat gender-based violence by promoting equal pay, leadership, and work-life balance across the EU.
 - ✓ The **LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2026–2030** advances LGBTQ+ rights across Europe by addressing discrimination, improving legal recognition and protections, and supporting inclusive public policies.
 - ✓ The **EU Anti-racism Action Plan 2020–2025** presents concrete measures to tackle ethnic discrimination in the EU through improved legislation, inclusive education, and stronger national and EU-level coordination.
 - ✓ The **EU Disability Strategy 2021–2030** promotes equal participation of people with disabilities across all aspects of life through initiatives like the European Disability Card.



- ◆ **National Diversity Charters** encourage public and private organisations to commit to inclusive recruitment and anti-discrimination work practices.
- ◆ The **Erasmus+ Inclusion and Diversity Strategy** encourages participation of young people with fewer opportunities, including those with disabilities or learning difficulties, migrants, or from marginalised communities.
- ◆ The **EU Youth Strategy** ensures access to opportunities like Erasmus+ for all young people, including those with disabilities or fewer resources. Other organisations, such as the **European Youth Forum** and **ILGA-Europe** support youth activism through campaigns that advocate for inclusive education, anti-discrimination laws, and gender-neutral language.



Data and statistics

- ◆ **Women make up approximately 51% of the total population** of the EU.
- ◆ Global estimates show that **17% of Generation Z individuals identify within the LGBT+ community**, compared to **11% of Millennials** and 6% of Gen Xers (Ipsos Global Advisor, 2024). Approximately **4% of Gen Z identify as transgender, non-binary, gender-nonconforming, or gender-fluid**, with around 1% among older generations (Ipsos LGBT+ Global Survey, 2021).
- ◆ Around **101 million people in the EU have some form of disability**, and **26.8% of EU adults report long-standing limitations**, including 7.2% with severe limitations (Eurostat, 2023).
- ◆ As of 2022, **24 million non-EU nationals**, including immigrants and refugees, reside in the EU (European Parliament, 2022). There are approximately **6 million Roma residents in the EU** (EPRS, 2025).
- ◆ **Non-Christian religions** (such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and others) account for **6–7% of the European population** (Religion Monitor, 2023).



Challenges and controversies

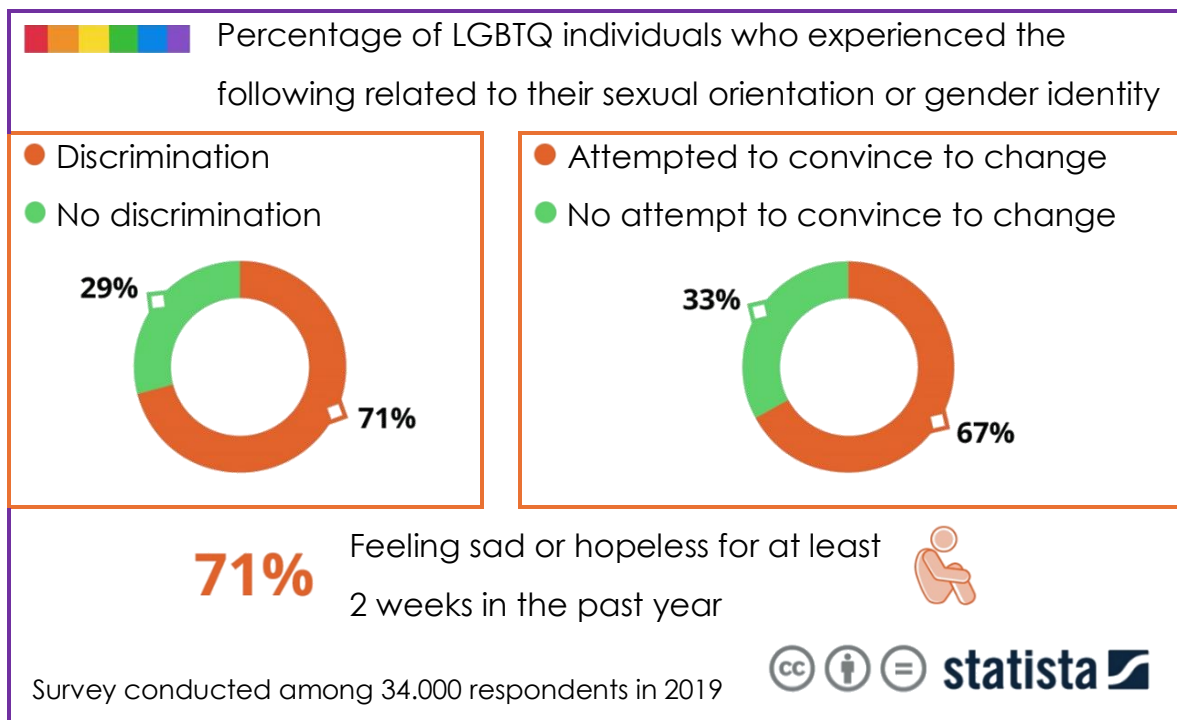
Despite the variety of policies and strategies across the EU, minority groups often still face discrimination and misrepresentation:

◆ Gender:

- ✦ Across the EU, the **gender pay gap stands at 12%** and the **gender employment gap at 10%** (European Commission, 2025), meaning that women earn less and have fewer job opportunities than men.
- ✦ **6.1% of employed women report feeling discriminated against at work**, compared to 3.6% of men (Eurostat Labour Force Survey, 2021).

◆ LGBTQ+:

- ✦ **36% of LGBTQ+ individuals** across Europe report experiencing **discrimination in their daily life**, and **14% report having experienced physical or sexual attacks** in the previous five years, with the highest rates among transgender and intersex individuals (FRA, 2023).
- ✦ The Trevor Project provides much higher numbers:



◆ Disability:

- ✦ Only **50% of persons with disabilities are employed**, highlighting a **24% gap in employment** compared to able-bodied people (Eurostat, 2022).
- ✦ Many EU countries still maintain **voting restrictions** for persons with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities (FRA, 2024).



◆ **Ethnicity:**

- ✦ **45% of people of African descent** in the EU report experiencing **racial discrimination** (FRA, 2019) and up to 76% are not in work, education or training compared to 8% of the general population (FRA, 2018).
- ✦ **24% of immigrants or individuals of foreign origin report facing discrimination on at least one occasion per year** (FRA, 2017).
- ✦ **71% of individuals facing ethnic discrimination do not know where to seek help**, and **only 12% report incidents** (FRA EU-MIDIS II, 2017).

◆ **Religion**

- ✦ **47% of Muslim respondents** across 13 member states reported experiencing racism or religious discrimination in the past five years, **especially women wearing hijabs and young Muslims** (FRA, 2024).

Acknowledging these numbers, the EU still struggles to implement its inclusion agenda and policies for various reasons:

- ◆ **Varying national implementations:** EU policies often leave room for interpretation, resulting in unequal enforcement across member states.
- ◆ **Rising bigotry and anti-equality rhetoric:** Disinformation campaigns, political polarisation, and attacks on marginalised communities reduce targeted individuals' opportunities to seek or receive support.
- ◆ **Institutional representation:** Diversity management inside EU institutions remains a challenge due to an imbalance or lack of minorities within staff, leading to most decisions being made by people who do not face the same issues and may be less informed of people's situations and needs.
- ◆ **Accessibility gaps:** Despite legal frameworks, public services, educational tools, work environments, and digital spaces are not always fully accessible to persons with disabilities or neurodivergence.

Continued commitment from policymakers, educators, and civil society, including youth and future generations, is essential to overcoming these challenges and reducing discrimination rates across Europe and beyond.



Further reading and resources

Videos

- ✦ CIPD. (2024, March 25). *Equality, diversity and inclusion explained*. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UzTW4RkV-K0>
- ✦ euronews. (2024, November 22). *Inclusion of people with disabilities in the EU | Explainer - EP2*. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=682FBzPdXiY>
- ✦ SIPDC Trainer. (2021, September 28). *DEI - Overview of Diversity, equity, and Inclusion*. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kGd8seSSQH8>
- ✦ VinciWorks. (2025, March 7). *VinciWorks Webinar: Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in 2025*. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W5bGrNB9Dc>

Further readings

- ✦ ESMA. (2024). *Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Strategy*. https://www.esma.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2024-02/ESMA64-337-1805_Diversity_Equity_and_Inclusion_Strategy.pdf
- ✦ European Commission. (2025). *Persons with disabilities*. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/disability/persons-disabilities_en
- ✦ European Commission. (n.d.) *Justice and fundamental rights*. https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights_en
- ✦ European Youth Forum & Pollithy, C., Cojocari, D., Siemasz, K., Kalantaridis, K., Chatzimichail, P., Moulana, P., Farren, R., Rowies, T., Molay, V. (2018). *Diversity and Inclusion Guidelines*. <https://www.youthforum.org/files/Diversity20and20inclusion20guidelines.pdf>
- ✦ Felix, A. (2024). *Joint statement: "Building an inclusive European Union of Equality"*. European Disability Forum. <https://www.edf->



feph.org/publications/joint-statement-building-an-inclusive-european-union-of-equality/

- ✦ Manessi, Silvia. (2020). *Equality and Diversity Management Inside the Institutions of the European Union*. Journal for Foreign Languages. 12. 223-240. 10.4312/vestnik.12.223-240.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/348020160_Equality_and_Diversity_Management_Inside_the_Institutions_of_the_European_Union
- ✦ Mantu, S. (2024). *Economic or social EU citizenship – The never-ending quest for transnational social rights*. Nordisk Socialrättslig Tidskrift, 2024 38, 81–104. <https://doi.org/10.53292/3c7046b7.bbd08bfc>

All sources accessed September 15th, 2025.



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

Project code: KA220-YOU-000286883