



## STUDY PROGRAMME

POL

## ACADEMIC YEAR

2025-2026

## SEMESTER

Second

## COURSE TITLE

“A Union of Equality: Theory & Practice”

## COURSE PROFESSORS

Zoe LEFKOFRIDI & Lesia RADELICKI

## COURSE ASSISTANT

Luís MATOS

## NATURE OF COURSE (COMPULSORY, OPTIONAL)

Optional course

## LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

English

## ECTS CREDITS

4

### 1. COURSE OBJECTIVES

The central questions addressed in this course are:

- **What is gender equality? Why is it important for the EU?**
- **How much equality has thus far been achieved in the EU? What kind of EU laws and policies are seeking to achieve it?**
- **What are the challenges ahead for equality policies; gender equality in particular and diversity issues in general?**

The aim of this course is to familiarize students with current debates on equality in the European Union (EU). While the focus is on gender equality, the course adopts an intersectional approach to equality and discusses also connections to other grounds of discrimination (e.g. race, disability). Gender equality is a fundamental value of the Union, which has been acting as a positive force in generating norms that promote gender equality and setting standards in this policy domain. Though gender equality promotion at the EU level has always been tied to economic integration (Kantola 2010), the Treaty of Amsterdam codified a formal commitment to gender mainstreaming in all EU actions. Today, according to the Gender Equality Index, the EU scores 71.0 out of 100, with particular high scores when it comes to work and money indicators.



However, decades of progress towards gender equality are currently endangered by democratic backsliding in some member states (Hungary and Poland); achievements in the area of gender equality were also undermined by policy responses to Covid-19 pandemic: lockdown policies had gendered impacts on employment and the division of labor within the family (childcare and household), with varied implications (ranging from shift in attitudes to gender roles to decreased mental health). At the same time, the Ukraine conflict exposed more and more women and girls to heightened gender-based violence and health risks.

What do these challenges imply for the EU and its future? Given that gender equality is a fundamental value of the Union, **attacks on gender equality constitute attacks to the European integration** itself – as a Union founded on equality, diversity, democracy and the rule of law. To enhance understanding of equality and diversity in the EU and its importance for the future of the EU polity, its policies and politics, the course will highlight **legal, economic and political** aspects of gender equality. It will introduce students to the **'thin'** and **'thick'** conceptualizations of gender (Gwiazda 2023), which result in different understandings of equality ranging from the binary concept (between men and women) to broader concept of equality that includes diversity (e.g., LGBTQI+ rights). Using this lens, we will review **legal and policy developments in gender equality** on the EU level and discuss how discrimination because of gender may intersect with other categories of discrimination (e.g., sexual orientation, disability); we will also debate why policies should consider potential **intersections** and how. We will also examine the EU's internal variation with regard to **economic aspects of gender equality**, e.g., women's participation in the labor market across EU; the gender pay and pension gaps, and the related rates of female poverty in the EU. Data collected by the [European Institute for Gender Equality](#) (EIGE) will help us understand differences between EU member states with regard to economic and political aspects of gender equality and their interplay: by considering the **political aspects of gender equality**, namely women's political participation in politics at different levels of government (EU institutions and Member States) we will be able to appreciate the (potential) impact of women's representation on substantive EU policies.

The course adopts an intersectional approach to equality, examining how gender intersects with other grounds of discrimination (age, disability, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, etc.) and explores the implementation of gender mainstreaming policies. While firmly anchored in politics (as both professors are mainly trained in political science), this course addresses interdisciplinary aspects thus connecting to history, law, psychology, sociology and economics. The course advances participants' understanding of gender equality both theoretically and empirically, preparing future policy makers to address these complex challenges. Research findings from two Horizon Europe Projects: [Push\\*Back\\*Lash](#) and [ActEU](#) will enrich our understanding of the political dimension of gender equality in the EU and of the commitment of citizens and elites to support for women's and LGBTQI+ rights, which have recently been among the Union's highest priorities.

## 2. LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate comprehensive understanding of gender equality theories and their application in EU contexts
- Evaluate the effectiveness of current EU equality policies and legislation
- Analyze the intersection of gender with other forms of discrimination and inequality
- Assess contemporary challenges to gender equality in the context of democratic backsliding and crisis responses
- Develop evidence-based policy recommendations for advancing equality in the Union



- Apply intersectional analysis to various policy domains
- Engage constructively in debates about equality policies and their implementation

This knowledge and these skills will prepare students to become effective policy makers that pursue problem-solving for the Union's common good, thinking and acting inclusively while valuing and respecting diversity.

The above course objectives link up with the following programme-specific learning outcomes:

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- Students develop a multidisciplinary understanding of the European political system.
- Students have a general knowledge of the main components of the EU political system: institutions, actors, decision-making procedures, competences and policies.
- Students comprehend the disciplinary knowledge and theories specific to EU studies.
- Students develop a concrete understanding of the logics of policy-making and negotiations within the EU political system, thanks to simulation exercises and the drafting of policy papers.
- Students can communicate in both French and English in an academic or professional context.
- Students can recognize, contextualize, explain, and interpret political, societal and economic phenomena in European integration. They can assess events, governance problems and political crises.
- Students can analyse the process and actors of EU policy-making at different levels of governance and can reflect on potential developments.
- Students can transform a complex problem into a research question, mobilize theories, develop a research design, and conduct empirical work to provide solutions in an analytical and balanced way.
- Students can flexibly apply theories and analytical frameworks from different disciplinary perspectives to the main issues of EU politics and policies.
- Students are capable of working as part of a complex project, individually or collectively, and they develop skills of planning, organisation, prioritisation and time management.
- Students can communicate clearly and effectively, through oral presentations or written documents, to different kinds of audiences.

## MATA-POL

- The graduate demonstrates advanced and critical mastery of the principal theoretical approaches and analytical concepts in their disciplinary focus (International Relations and Diplomacy Studies, Political Science, Regional Studies) or interdisciplinary focus and can apply them to the analysis of transatlantic affairs.
- The graduate can identify, interpret and critically assess the current state of academic research on transatlantic affairs and can situate them within broader scholarly debates, in line with their (inter-) disciplinary focus.
- The graduate possesses in depth and comparative knowledge of the political systems of the European Union and the United States, including their institutional structures, policy making



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processes, and core internal and external policies, and can analyse their interactions in a transatlantic context.

- The graduate can contextualise and interpret contemporary transatlantic developments by integrating historical, political, legal and economic perspectives, and can meaningfully explain how past dynamics shape current policy choices, debates and institutional frameworks.
- The graduate can synthesise and integrate insights from multiple disciplines relevant to transatlantic affairs (e.g., International Relations, Political Science, Regional Studies or an interdisciplinary focus) and can adopt and compare both European and U.S. perspectives in analysing and evaluating transatlantic issues
- The graduate can analyse developments within Europe and/or the US that impact their relative geopolitical standing, thereby influencing EU and/or US interests relevant to transatlantic affairs.
- The graduate acquires a nuanced perspective of internal political, economic, and/or social pressures and how they may impact, either directly or indirectly, the transatlantic relationship and the capacity of the transatlantic partners to act in accordance with the needs of the transatlantic partnership.
- The graduate can analyse transatlantic affairs in a broad and multidisciplinary manner, assessing challenges in this domain with intellectual openness, sensitivity to diversity of perspectives, and the ability to understand and navigate complex and ambiguous situations.
- The graduate is able to critically reflect on a wide range of issues in transatlantic affairs, to develop well informed and evidence based points of view, and to communicate these effectively, both orally and in writing, when working independently or collaboratively.
- The graduate can independently transform complex transatlantic issues into a clear and feasible research question, find and evaluate relevant sources in line with their (inter-)disciplinary focus, apply appropriate concepts and methods, and present research results in accordance with the ethical standards of the field.
- The graduate is capable of rapidly processing large volumes of information, critically analysing (inter-)discipline relevant sources, and proposing creative, feasible, and analytically grounded solutions to problems within the field of transatlantic affairs.
- The graduate has the intellectual maturity and professional skills to function autonomously and responsibly in national or international professional environments—particularly in transatlantic contexts—by planning and organising work effectively, setting priorities, meeting deadlines, cooperating across cultural and disciplinary boundaries, and building professional networks.

## 3. COURSE CONTENTS

### I. Foundations of Equality and Discrimination

- What is Equality? What is Discrimination?
  - Defining Gender Equality within EU Values, Equal Rights, Opportunities and Responsibilities
  - Core concepts: Sex & Gender, Gender Identity, Intersectionality, gender mainstreaming
- Theoretical & Analytical frameworks for understanding equality:
  - Feminisms; Waves and Strands; Gender Roles & Stereotypes; Vertical & Horizontal Segregation of Politics & Markets

### II. The Normative Foundations - Why Equality Matters in the EU

- EU values, fundamental rights & *acquis Communautaire*
  - EU Treaty and references to Equality and Anti-Discrimination; Gender Equality as secondary EU law
  - A Union of Democracies: Democratic theory and Political Equality: Political Rights, Opportunities and Responsibilities as fundamentals of democratic regimes
- EU as global front-runner: International commitments and SDGs; Consequences of gender inequality for different policy areas: climate change, transport policies, innovation
- Gender Equality- Related EU legislation & Policies:
  - European Pillar of Social Rights
  - Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025
  - Gender Action Plan III
  - Gender Budgeting frameworks
- Expanding Equality Agenda:
  - LGBTQI+ rights
  - Rights of persons with disabilities
  - Racial equality (incl. Roma strategy, anti-racism action plan)

### III. Reality Check - Measuring Equality in the Union

- Equality in different domains of power:
  - EIGE Equality Index and measurement tools
- Political Aspects:
  - Women's political participation at different levels of government (EU institutions and MS)
  - Political participation & representation
  - Quotas and their effectiveness
  - Political parties' discourse on gender and diversity
- Legal aspects: Anti-discrimination law and intersectionality in practice
- Economic aspects:
  - Women's participation in the labor market across EU MS
  - Gender pay gap and pension gap in the EU



- Female poverty in the EU
- Women in business and on corporate boards

#### IV. Contemporary Challenges to the Union of Equality

- Crisis-induced setbacks:
  - COVID-19 policy responses (lockdowns), energy crisis, conflicts and gendered consequences
- Political challenges:
  - "Gender Wars" and cultural backlash
  - Democratic Backsliding & Backlash against Gender Equality
  - Rise of the Far Right across the EU and in the European Parliament – effects on policies
  - Pushback Strategies and resistance movements

#### V. The Future of the Union of Equality- EU Vision and Way Forward

- The post-2025 Gender Equality Strategy development
- Identifying missing legislation and policy gaps
- Addressing remaining societal gaps: strategies and solutions

Students will gain insights from ongoing research in the context of two Horizon Europe Projects: [Push\\*Back\\*Lash](#) and [ActEU](#).

### 4. TEACHING METHOD

The course combines theoretical foundations with practical policy analysis. The professors will provide input on gender-related concepts and theories, drawing on current research on politics and gender and the relationship between democracy and gender equality. Interactive elements include structured debates, poster presentations with peer feedback, and policy proposal development. Students will engage with both academic literature and policy documents, including reports from contemporary research projects.

The course will rely on student-centered, interactive pedagogy. We will begin with a reflection on students' personal experiences with privilege and inequality; we will then move from the "personal" to the "political" to critically discuss arguments against and in favor of EU equality laws and policies, and how they affect our lives. Students will be expected to do a few scholarly readings prior to our session; they are particularly expected to actively follow current policy developments, which will constitute their input to class discussions. Using a step-by-step approach and different types of activities (discussion, poster, report) students learn to think as policymakers that pursue problem-solving for the Union's common good. Peer review and exchange seek to encourage students to try to approach policy problems from different perspectives and to consider several viewpoints when drafting a proposal for an EU policy. In this course, students – and future policy makers- learn how to think and act inclusively, namely to value and respect diversity. Students will also be assessed based on a final exam.

### 5. FURTHER DETAILS ON THE TEACHING METHOD

The course employs interactive teaching methods including lectures, seminars, debates, poster



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presentations, and case study discussions. Students will engage in problem-solving exercises and peer review activities designed to encourage multiple perspectives when approaching EU policy challenges. Participation in class activities is paramount. Through interactive class activities students will develop important skills that will help them in their careers as EU fonctionnaires and policy makers. Students will engage in structured debates on specific gender-related issues (e.g., quotas in corporate boards) and present policy proposals through poster presentations followed by constructive peer feedback. The course emphasizes experiential learning through student presentations on the gender dimensions of various EU policies, encouraging critical analysis and policy recommendation development. Respect for diversity, inclusion and equal treatment are fundamental principles of participation in this class.

## 6. COURSE MATERIAL

The professors will provide input on gender-related concepts and theories, drawing on own work on politics and gender and the relationship between democracy and gender equality. Readings will comprise a few scholarly articles as well as policy briefs and reports, including reports by [Push\\*Back\\*Lash](#) and [ActEU](#) (open access) - ongoing research in the context of two Horizon Europe Projects funded by the EU.

## 7. EVALUATION

Students will be assessed based on (a) their engagement in debates in favor and against specific gender-related issues (e.g., quotas in corporate boards). They will also be evaluated through (2) a poster presentation and (3) a follow-up short report piece. In these two assignments students are expected to address a specific challenge to a democratic Union of equality and diversity (backed up by evidence) and propose possible ways to tackle it (policy recommendations). Each poster will pitch a policy proposal on a specific gender-related issue (of the student's choice); the proposal will critically be discussed by fellow students. The constructive feedback by the students and the professor will feed into the blog piece, which is, in essence the revised version of the policy proposal pitched in the poster presentation.

- a. 50 % = Engagement in the Course (Performance in Class & in Written & Oral Assignments); in detail:
  - 15% engagement in the class discussions
  - 20% poster presentation
  - 15% follow up report
- b. 50% = exam at the end of the semester

Assessment at second attempt: At second attempt, the course will be assessed (100%) on the basis of a written exam.

**Plagiarism:** Pursuant to Articles 39a and subsequent provisions of the College of Europe Study Regulations 2025–2026, plagiarism, self-plagiarism, collusion, and the falsification of data are expressly prohibited and shall be deemed to constitute academic misconduct. All written work submitted by a student shall be subject to assessment with regard not only to its originality but also to the scope and rigor of the research undertaken. Any instance of plagiarism, self-plagiarism, collusion, or falsification of data, as defined in the aforementioned Study Regulation, shall give rise to the imposition of penalties in accordance with Article 40 thereof.

**Artificial Intelligence:** Pursuant to Articles 38 and subsequent provisions of the College of Europe



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Study Regulations 2025–2026, the category of permitted generative AI (genAI) use for the present course is **bounded use**. Students may employ genAI tools at both foundational and advanced stages of the work process, including brainstorming, literature screening, data organisation, analysis, interpretation, argument generation, and as a feedback tool. The final text of any assignment, however, must be written by the student in their own words, without copying AI-generated text blocks, using translation tools, or similar automated assistance. The non-generative use of AI tools, such as for spell-checking, reference style management, or information searches, remains by default permitted for all course work and the Master's thesis. Any use of genAI must be transparently acknowledged in accordance with the department's referencing guidelines. Students bear full responsibility for the entirety of the content they submit, irrespective of the tools used, and must ensure compliance with College regulations on academic integrity, data protection, and intellectual property. Violations of the permitted scope of AI use, or failures to acknowledge such use, shall constitute academic misconduct and will be sanctioned in line with Articles 39a, 39b, and 40 of the Academic Regulations on plagiarism, falsification of data, and related infringements.



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