



EUROPEAN WOMEN'S
LOBBY
EUROPEEN DES FEMMES

European Women's Lobby recommendations on the European Commission strategy on equality between women and men 2020-2025

Together with its 2000 women's organisation across Europe, the European Women's Lobby recognises the reality of women and girls' lives in Europe today and brings together the perspectives of women and girls and its membership across Europe. EWL's priorities reflect the unfinished business of implementing international human rights instruments to advance women's rights over the past three decades and ensure we are driving for further transformational progress.

Ensuring equality between women and men and integrating the dimension of equality between women and men in all policy and financial frameworks is an obligation of the European Union as per the EU Treaties. To promote equality between women and men as one of its core values, the EU must take concrete and tangible actions and adopt an ambitious and actionable strategy, which, in accordance with the Treaties, should specifically focus on putting an end to inequality between women and men. Women's lived experience and life circumstances should be put at the centre of this strategy to allow for specifically tailored actions to improve their lives. This should send a clear signal to women in all their diversity that the EU is ready to work for them.

Indeed, women - even though they represent more than half of the European population - are still facing many different types of inequalities solely based on the fact they are women. **Gender stereotypes** play a key role in perpetuating unequal power relations between women and men, in keeping women in subordinated positions in the labour market, in decision-making and in the public and private spheres, and in legitimising violence against women. All the actions of the Strategy on Equality between Women and Men, as well as all the initiatives of the European Commission, should aim at challenging gender stereotypes and achieving real equality between women and men. Indeed, fighting gender stereotypes, eliminating discriminations and the inequalities that particularly affect women and girls, and implementing gender mainstreaming are preconditions to achieve real equality between women and men. In doing so, this Strategy will contribute to implementing the vision of the future of Europe we want: **a Europe that leaves no woman or girl behind.**

Now is the right time to put women's rights in Europe at the core of EU policies and actions. The new European Commission led by a woman represents a critical opportunity to advance women's rights. The new Commissioner for equality should be empowered to lead the change: a bold new **European political strategy on equality between women and men** needs to reflect the level of ambition this new Commission is promising. This strategy is a unique opportunity to break barriers and stereotypes

faced by all women in Europe throughout their life, including in their older age: in their families, at school, at work, in the public sphere.

The European Commission should ensure its strategy is **consistent on internal and external actions** and reflects the continuum of inequality faced by women within and outside the EU, as per the universality principles of the Sustainable Development Goals and other commitments assumed by EU Member States at international level (like the CEDAW).

Policies aren't gender neutral, they might impact differently on men and women. Therefore, the European institutions and the Member States must incorporate a **gender equality perspective** and dimension at all levels and at all stages of all their policies - when defining, implementing, following-up and monitoring policies and measures, and when affecting means and resources.

Also, women are not a homogeneous group and thus it is essential to look at the great diversity of their experiences, backgrounds and the issues they face. When tackling discrimination on the grounds of sex, it is crucial to keep in mind that the discrimination of women is often combined with other factors that affect women, such as race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation (art. 21 Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU). These other factors may affect women belonging to such groups to a different degree or in different ways to men, and aggravate their negative impact. Therefore, this strategy and all EU policies and programmes should adopt an **intersectional perspective** aiming at tackling different forms of discrimination faced by women.

The European Commission's strategy will be adopted in **an important year for women's rights** with the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action. The EWL is calling on the EU to play a **strong leadership role in shaping a better world for women and girls** and to include in its strategy on equality between women and men the following recommendations. These recommendations should be **endorsed by all EU institutions** and strong **accountability mechanisms should be put in place to ensure the European Commission and all EU Member States** take concrete steps to achieve real equality between women and men in the whole EU.

The strategy should aim to:

Ensure institutional mechanisms for equality between women and men

Objectives:

- To ensure the dimension of equality between women and men is adopted in all actions taken by the European Commission and all European institutions (i.e. gender mainstreaming).
- To ground the European Commission's work on sound women's rights expertise and allow stronger response to inequalities.
- To strengthen collaboration between all EU institutions, key stakeholders, in particular women's rights organisations, and Member States to improve women's lives in Europe.

Key actions:

- Create a **Task force of women's rights' experts** which would gather representatives from different Directorate Generals in the Commission, as for example experts on digital issues, employment, social affairs and inclusion, the economy, budgets, education, trafficking and migration and the future Coordinator on male violence against women.

- **Reinforce expertise on women’s rights in the European Commission**, in particular within the existing Gender Unit (DG Justice) but also in other Directorates as for example to promote a pilot project on gender budgeting led by a team of gender budgeting experts.
- Put in place **an Interinstitutional Task force** composed of representatives of each European institution and of key stakeholders such as NGOs, in particular women’s rights organisations, trade unions, etc. This task force should be consulted on the definition and the implementation of the present strategy.
- Reinstating **yearly Dialogue on Equality between Women and Men** (previously called “Gender Equality Dialogue”) chaired by the President of the European Commission with all Commissioners, representatives of the European Parliament, Member States, the European Council and key stakeholders as the civil society, including women’s rights organisations. This should be coupled with a **compulsory training** on gender equality and gender mainstreaming for all European Commissioners, tackling in particular the harmful effects of gender stereotypes on equality between women and men.
- Maintain and foster activities of the **Advisory Committee on equal opportunities between women and men** (hosted by the Commission with representatives of Member States and external observers). The Committee should be consulted on the strategy and keep an advisory role throughout its implementation.
- Integrate the **High-level group on gender mainstreaming** within these different aforementioned mechanisms.
- Continue to publish **annual reports** with sex-disaggregated data on the progress made in the implementation of the strategy and put them up for debate and opinion to the Interinstitutional Task force.
- Better use of data in the **gender equality index** published by the EIGE and have them integrated across the board in all the EC’s activities. EIGE’s efforts should be coordinated with those of other relevant EU Institutions and agencies (FRA, EUROJUST, EASO, EUROSTAT, etc.) in order to enhance data collection and facilitate the exchange of good practices in implementing equality measures at the national level.
- Adopt and apply **gender-budgeting** methods to the EU budget and to all decisions taken on the basis of the overall budget.
- Adopt a **Zero tolerance policy** towards discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. This could be done through the adoption of a code of conduct. This policy shall ensure this protects and supports not only those women in the employment of the Institutions and agencies but also ensuring the standard of behaviour expected by all staff will not coerce, exploit or infringe on the equality of any woman or girl.

Fight gender stereotypes and sexism, and implement gender mainstreaming to achieve real equality between women and men

Objectives

- To fight gender stereotypes, as a precondition to eliminate discrimination against women and girls and to ending inequalities between women and men.
- To implement gender mainstreaming into all EU policies, projects and programs in order to enshrine women’s and girls’ perspective into designing, decision-making and implementation processes.

Key actions

- The EU should ensure the **application of gender mainstreaming** in all EU policies, funded projects and programs, with a special focus on gender budgeting and gender impact assessment.
- For example, a gender lens must be applied when designing the **European Green Deal**, the **Digital Single Market Strategy**, the Common European Asylum System and **Migration and Asylum Pact** in order to address the specific impact these measures will have on women, to make sure their perspective is represented and to ensure their participation in decision making and implementation.
- Measures to fight gender stereotypes and gender mainstreaming should be specifically applied to EU policies pertaining to **media, education and training**:
 - Control on sexism and stereotypes in media, advertising and education should be enhanced through the adoption of an **EU directive**, in line with the equal treatment directive and filling the gaps of the 2004 Gender Equality Directive.
 - This legislation must follow-up on the **2015 Resolution of the European Parliament on empowering girls through education in the EU**, with specific attention to the provisions tackling gender stereotypes in education and training.
 - It should provide **funding for the creation, development and support of feminist studies and research** and the development of **training programmes** on women's rights, anti-discrimination and gender stereotypes for media and advertising professionals as well as for formal and non-formal education professionals.
 - It must ensure the **collection of comparable data concerning women and the media**, including on the portrayal of women from specific groups such as women with disabilities or ethnic minority women.
- A criteria for granting EU funds to Member States for **awareness-raising campaigns on gender equality and violence against women** should be to actively challenge gender stereotypes. The EC should also ensure that civil society organisations and women's organisations are systematically involved in all the stages of these funded initiatives. As a criteria, these organisations should be partners acting as multipliers and content advisors for media companies. Sufficient resources should be provided to them for their valuable input and contribution.

Put an end to male violence against women and girls; provide peace, human security and dignity for all women and girls

Objectives:

- Preventing and combating all forms of male violence against women and girls including sexual exploitation; protecting and supporting victims; prosecuting the perpetrators; and addressing all the structural issues that fuel this violence will be a top priority of the EU.
- We must promote a society of peace and safety: all women and girls have the right to a life free from violence and free from the fear of violence. The strategy should seek to disrupt the continuum of violence and protect every woman in Europe from all forms of violence.

Key actions:

- Under the leadership of the European Commission, the EU should ratify the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, the **Istanbul Convention**.
- In addition, the EU should adopt **a comprehensive EU-wide strategy and an Action plan** on preventing and combating all forms of male violence against women in Europe, including specific legislation. This plan must include:

- A European Commission's proposal to add violence against women to the list of **EU crimes** and recognise the need to combat violence against women and girls as a common goal of the EU.
- An **assessment of the legal framework** existing and needed to ensure all women in Europe are protected from all forms of violence, including sexual exploitation. By analysing the existing responses, mapping remaining gaps and creating a follow-up action plan, the assessment should seek to create a comprehensive legal framework to tackle the continuum of violence against women.
- A **Directive** on all forms of violence against women and girls including definitions of different forms of violence, encompassing intimate partner violence as per the Declaration 19 on Article 8 of the TFEU, and sexual exploitation as per Article 83 of the TFEU.
- A **review of existing legislation** touching upon women's and girls' right to be protected against violence, as for example the EU Victims' Rights directive 2012/29/EU, the Recast Directive and EU migration policies, to ensure compliance with the standards of the Istanbul Convention.
- The **appointment of an EU Coordinator** on ending male violence against women and girls. The EU Coordinator will have a strong political mandate, resources and responsibility to coordinate the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, the EU Strategy and the implementation of the Directive on VAWG.
- Mandatory and standardized rules in all the EU countries of **common standards for data collection** to ensure a coherent system for collecting statistical data on violence against women and girls in the EU.
- The enhancement of EU-wide awareness raising **campaigns** to end violence against women and girls in systematic consultation and cooperation with women organisations, including the Say No stop VAW campaign and the EU/UN Spotlight Initiative.

Ensure respect of and access to women and girls sexual and reproductive health and rights

Objectives

- The EU must ensure full recognition and protection of women's Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). Those rights encompass the right of all individuals to enjoy physical, mental and social wellbeing in relation to sexuality and reproduction. They include the right for all women to choose whether or not to marry and to found and plan a family; the right to reliable, safe and affordable contraception; the right to sexual education and information in relation to sexual and reproductive health, free choice and consent; the right to legal and safe abortion, and the right to health care and health protection at all ages.
- SRHR are crucial in order to ensure freedom from all forms of male violence and coercion and contributes to achieving equality and to realise women's human rights.

Key actions

- The right to a **free-of-charge sexual and reproductive health**, safe and reliable methods of contraception and safe abortion, should be adopted as a fundamental right articulated as part of the human right to health, as an addition to the Charter of Fundamental Rights.
- The European Commission should closely **monitor** proposals by member states that would undermine, restrict or remove existing entitlements and protections for women's sexual and reproductive health and rights.

- The European Commission should **monitor the access of women to public health services** and in particular sexual and reproductive health services, and collect disaggregated data on sex, ethnicity, nationality, age, disability, social status, sexual orientation and migration status. The European Commission should **assist** member states in ensuring that sexual and reproductive health services are available to all women, regardless of their legal status.
- The European Commission should include sexual and reproductive health and guarantee gender budgeting in the **EU health programme**. Moreover, the European Commission should maximise the participation of all women in health policy development, programme planning and service delivery, and support health research focused on women's health.
- The European Commission should support the adoption of **mandatory comprehensive education about feminist relationship and sexuality** across the continent. European institutions can pressure states on the basis of CEDAW and European laws and conventions concerning non-discrimination to challenge patriarchal norms in sex and relationships through state curricula and textbooks.
- The European Commission should introduce **sexuality education as a funding priority**, and **support** projects in countries where access to it is scarce and/or mainly provided by NGOs, in absence of state efforts. The European Commission should also **promote research and data collection** on sexuality education, especially in relation to assessment of violence prevention and health provision.
- The European Commission should conduct research into **gender-based violence in institutional and health care settings**, especially obstetric violence. The European Commission should pay more attention to psychological trauma related to childbirth and **promote good models** of integration of maternity care and mental health services.
- The European Commission should take a **firm stance against forced sterilisation of women**, especially Roma women, women and girls with disabilities and women from other minorities, and assist member states in preventing, banning and prosecuting it. The Strategy should guarantee **effective remedies and reparations** to all survivors of forced sterilisation and provide guidance and support to member states in adopting comprehensive inquiry and reparation schemes.

Ensure all women's equal economic independence

Objectives:

- Ensure that all women in Europe have equal economic rights, decision-making power in their lives and equal economic independence.
- Strive towards an equal-earner-equal-carer model as opposed to a male-breadwinner model.
- Recognise and address multiple and intersecting discrimination faced by women with disabilities, from different ethnic minorities, of different socio-economic and educational backgrounds and younger or elderly women, whose access to services, decent work and funding is especially limited, and whose contributions are all too often overlooked, and whose right to independence and dignity is often not enforced.

Key actions:

- Build a care economy for the well-being of all and shift towards an **equal-earner-equal-carer model** through:
 - Expanding the child guarantee to a **'care guarantee' or a 'Care Deal for Europe'** to address care needs throughout the life-cycle (going beyond the Barcelona targets), and investing in the care economy by directing investments in the EU budget in this area.

- Monitoring and reporting (annually) on the implementation of the **Work-Life-Balance Directive**, with particular attention to the situation of women in invisible and un-paid care roles, and their non-discrimination, their rights and their status.
 - Presenting new legislation to **improve maternity leave provisions** for women in Europe by extending their entitled period of leave from at least 14 weeks to 18 weeks as per the International Labour Organisation's Maternity Protection Recommendation (2000).
 - **Accede to the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Domestic Workers Convention** (2011) which recognises undervalued, informal domestic work traditionally often done by women domestic workers filling unmet care needs due to lack of public investments in care services, to guarantee labour protections, decent working conditions and social protections on par with other categories of workers.
- Introduce EU binding legislation to address the persistent **gender gap** in pay, life-long earning and pensions through:
 - Introducing a **5-10% annual target to reduce the gender pay gap** and address the current **gender pension gap**.
 - Guaranteeing **pay transparency** and introducing mandatory pay audits in all companies and sectors of the economy to guarantee equal pay.
 - Ensuring **wages** for part-time workers are in line with the full-time equivalent hourly wage; and introduce legislation on a **minimum wage**.
 - Putting forward amendments to the **Recast Directive** (Directive 2006/54/EC) that contain an explicit and binding definition of 'work of equal value' across occupational sectors.
 - Ensuring that equal pay between women and men is part of **all public procurement contracts** in the EU.
- Implement **gender mainstreaming** and adopt **gender responsive policies**:
 - Ensure that the **macro-economic framework**, including the post-Europe 2020 Strategy and European Semester architecture applies gender mainstreaming throughout the whole Strategy, and has a gender equality pillar that specifically seeks to progress equality between women and men and in particular women's economic independence. This will allow for **gender impact assessments of macro-economic policies** to be carried out prior to issuing country-specific recommendations.
 - Follow-up with **legislation to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights**, from a gender perspective, to ensure that all of the (current) principles are translated into gender sensitive rights, policies and practices.
 - Within the framework of EU legal obligations under Article 153 TFEU on equal opportunities and equal treatment in matters of employment and occupation, and within this framework of Article 157 TFEU that authorises positive action to empower women, the EU commits to gender mainstreaming within the **EU Digital Single Market strategy and within all initiatives related to Europe fit for a Digital Age portfolio**, specifically on closing the digital gender employment and training gap.
 - Ensure the **equal representation of women across all sectors** through positive action and binding measures, including women in economic decision-making, women in the green job sector, women's engagement in the ICT sector, and the inclusion of women in the digital skills agenda and annual index for inclusivity, by supporting for example the European Code of Best Practices for Women and ICT.
- Strengthen **gender-sensitive social protection policies**

- Develop a **Human Rights Framework** to combat poverty and social exclusion, which affirms the right of all women, men, girls and boys in the EU to lead a dignified life, free of poverty and social exclusion.
- Propose an integrated gender-sensitive **European Social Protection/Social Security Strategy** which could lead to the establishment of an EU wide social security/poverty/pension risk fund.
- Develop a **European Housing Strategy** and a Strategy to end homelessness in Europe with a particular focus on the specific experience of homeless women.

Promote equality in decision-making and leadership

Objectives:

- Ensure the leadership and decision-making organs of the EU comprise of feminist women from all backgrounds, representing the diversity of European citizens.
- Achieve parity between women and men in all European institutions and the Member States.

Key actions:

- The European Commission and the Council of the European Union **reopen the process of adopting the Women on Boards Directive**.
- The EU to utilise the Directive on women on boards as a tool to push for **more women on the boards of public institutions and entities** such as technology giants and large companies, SME's, financial institutions, judiciary and cultural and sport bodies such as media organisations.
- Adopt binding texts to **ensure parity** at all levels within the European institutions and agencies and encourage Member States to adopt legislation ensuring equal representation of women in decision-making.

Ensure resources for women's rights

Objectives:

- Increase the share of EU funding to achieving gender equality, which has declined over the last decade.
- Apply gender mainstreaming to the MFF and the annual budget.
- Develop a long-term strategy on gender budgeting as a tool of gender mainstreaming.

Key actions:

- Implement **gender budgeting** as a tool of gender mainstreaming to ensure that all EU money is delivering on equality between women and men, including in the MFF. This could be launched through setting up a task force to initiate a pilot project led by a team of gender budgeting experts.
- When drafting their individual budgets, EU institutions and bodies should clarify the **gender equality impact** of their spending targets and define a specific gender equality objective for each budgetary item.
- When implementing national programmes under the **European Social Fund Plus (ESF+)**, a gender perspective must be incorporated and drawn from the Social Scoreboard indicators, the European Semester country reports and sex-disaggregated data.

- Ensure sufficient and earmarked **budget allocations** on ending violence against women and girls, within the Daphne and AMIF strands, and sustainable funding for specialised civil society organisations providing support to women and girls victims of violence.
- Allocating significant EU funds under Horizon 2020 to **develop feminist research on violence against women**, including sexual exploitation and pornography and their impact on women and girls, men and boys.
- Increase resources designated for **support to women’s organisations** both inside the EU and in the external actions of the EU.
- Ensure **adequate resourcing** to maintain the sustainability and resilience of the European Women’s Lobby which represents women’s organisations across the EU and is the essential civil society interlocutor of the EU institutions on Women’s Rights

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