



19<sup>th</sup> February 2007

**Position of the European Women's Lobby in relation to the girl-child  
EWL Contribution to the 51<sup>st</sup> session of the Commission on the Status  
of Women in relation to:**

**“The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against  
the girl child”**

The European Women's Lobby (EWL) welcomes the fact that the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in its 51<sup>st</sup> session will review implementation of policies and actions taken to address the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child. It also welcomes the revision of the agreed conclusions reached at the 48<sup>th</sup> session<sup>1</sup> on the “Role of boys and men in achieving gender equality”, as this is very relevant to the issue of achieving equality in the early stages of women's life cycle, namely in girlhood.

EWL is submitting this contribution to the German Presidency acting on behalf of the European Union in negotiating the outcome document/agreed conclusions of the 51<sup>st</sup> session. This contribution has been drafted in consultation with member organisations and reflects the expectations of European women's NGOs in relation to the EU in order to address issues relating to the girl child. Therefore, the purpose of this document is to provide recommendations on issues relating to the girl child that have been identified by EWL as priorities both in terms of the CSW outcome document and within the context of the EU itself. The EWL delegation attending the CSW is also prepared to work with the EU Presidency on the text of the outcome document during the 51<sup>st</sup> session in New York.

This contribution is divided into two sections. The first part provides a general overview and the second part considers the particular issues relating to the girl child and recommendations for action.

**1) Gender equality in girlhood – a prerequisite for equality throughout the life cycle of women.**

EWL firmly believes that equality between women and men begins with the girl child and the recognition that the gender relations between girls and boys in the early stages of life is a precursor to gender equality in other phases of the life cycle. Girls and women of all ages are part of the same continuum; the difference for many girls and young women is their additional limited power to resist the constraints of gender inequality and correspondingly to negotiate the terms and conditions of gender equality in all areas of life.

EWL affirms that a proactive and systematic approach to gender equality in early childhood for both girls and boys, including the integration of a gender perspective in all

---

<sup>1</sup> Commission on the Status of Women, Forty-eighth session, 1-12 March 2004, “The role of men and boys in achieving gender equality, Agreed conclusions”, 12 March 2004, as adopted

policies related to children, is a prerequisite to eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child.

EWL also points to use of language and in particular the use of the word “children” in policies and strategies addressing both girls and boys. The generic term “children” hides the reality of the life experiences of girls and boys respectively and therefore prevents specific targets and measures to address issues from a gender perspective in childhood.

## **2) Areas of particular concern to the European Women’s Lobby in relation to the girl child and recommendations for action**

EWL has identified the following issues as critical in relation to the girl child in the European Union (EU), while recognising that they are also relevant and critical, some more so than others, in other areas of the world. Specific issues require urgent attention, namely, a strong condemnation of all forms of male violence against the girl child in situations of conflict and war, and sanctions against those who in the role of the peacekeeper as part of the United Nations (UN) and EU peacekeeping mandates, engage in acts of violence against the girl child and women. EWL also stresses that reducing poverty, which can be considered as one of the root causes of violence and illiteracy, is crucial for empowerment of the girl child.

### **Education**

EWL stresses that access to formal primary, secondary and third level education and the content of the curriculum as taught to girls and boys is a major influencing factor on gender differences and correspondingly on choices and access to rights. EWL points out that in the EU, while both girls and boys access to education in general may appear to be less problematic in comparison to other parts of the world, it should nevertheless be pointed out that girls and boys are not equal in accessing and fully availing of education systems and opportunities. In particular, access to girls from minorities, such as girls from the Roma community, migrant girls, asylum seekers, refugees and girls with disabilities remains highly problematic in some countries. An own-initiative report<sup>2</sup> from the European Parliament underlines that many Roma girls fail to complete primary education. According to a study<sup>3</sup> carried out in 2002 by the Research Institute for the Quality of Life, difficulties linked to transition, which resulted in increased unemployment, has had an impact on parents view of education and therefore, find it difficult to see the connection between schooling and getting a job. This dual discrimination faced by Roma women in the field of education means that it is particularly difficult to escape poverty.

The development of girl friendly school environments, education on gender awareness and encouraging girls to become leaders are essential to ensuring that the girl-child is central to formal education systems. Awareness raising and education of the girl child in

---

<sup>2</sup> Report on the situation of Roma women in the European Union (2005/2164(INI))

Report on website:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=//EP//NONSGML+REPORT+A6-2006-0148+0+DOC+WORD+V0//EN&language=EN>

<sup>3</sup> Website:

<http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/scuk/jsp/resources/details.jsp?id=366&group=resources&section=publication&subsection=details>

relation to human rights instruments and capacity building to ensure full use of these are equally crucial.

- While young women in the EU have caught up with men in terms of their educational qualifications and account for a very large proportion of those graduating from third level education, they are still not equal in terms of opportunities in higher education and in employment. Figures from EURYDICE<sup>4</sup> show that:
- Women are more likely to be unemployed than men with the same level of qualification<sup>5</sup>.
- Gender segregation in different fields of study are still dominating (which directly prevent girls from achieving equality (the different value attached to male versus female dominated disciplines)

A Eurostat report from 2001 (EU-15)<sup>6</sup> equally shows that women are highly under-represented in public research and higher education in Europe.

- Women are seriously under-represented in higher education's senior teaching grades – the EU average is 27%, with variation ranging from 9 (Germany) to 35 (Finland).
- The majority of public researchers in Europe are men. More than 2/3 of the researchers in the Government institutions and just less than 3/4 in the higher education sector were males.
- The more senior the academic post, the lower the representation of women. At the top level of full professorship the proportion of women is relatively low (11%)
- As a result of the gender segregation in different fields of study mentioned above, the proportion of female researchers appears to vary according to scientific discipline.

### Recommendations:

- Pursue active policies to ensure that **girls from minority groups and girls from migrant communities have access to education** and educational systems..
- Ensure that **teacher training programmes** and training for professionals dealing with career orientation are aware and given tools to **challenge the gender segregation** in the choice and options of girls and boys.
- **Assess syllabus and the content of school textbooks** with the view to a reform, which would lead to the integration of gender issues as part of the training of teachers.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> The information network on education in Europe. Key Data on Education in Europe 2005 on website: <http://www.eurydice.org/portal/page/portal/Eurydice/showPresentation?pubid=052EN> or

Key Data on Education in Europe 2005 / European Commission, Eurydice, Eurostat Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2005 332 p. ; 21x27 cm (Key Data) - ISBN 92-894-9422-0 - ISSN 1725-1621 - NC-AF-05-001-EN-C On sale at the Office for Official Publications of the European Communities in Luxembourg or in its national sales points ([http://publications.eu.int/index\\_en.html](http://publications.eu.int/index_en.html)), 30 EUR.

<sup>5</sup> Examination of the situation country by country may reveal different trends.

<sup>6</sup> ISSN 1609-5995. Catalogue number: KS-NS-03-005-EN-N

Website:

[http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page?\\_pageid=1073,46587259&\\_dad=portal&\\_schema=PORTAL&p\\_product\\_code=KS-NK-01-018](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page?_pageid=1073,46587259&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL&p_product_code=KS-NK-01-018)

<sup>7</sup> See European Parliament resolution on educational discrimination against young women and girls (2006/2135(INI), Brussels, 1 February 2007

- **On the basis of** positive active measures, grants and specific programmes, rectify the under representation of women in research and high education including in “masculine” fields.

### **Poverty and social exclusion**

EWL draws attention to the impact of poverty and social exclusion on the girl child and young women, including in the European Union. The persistent trend of the feminisation of poverty in the EU is a worrying phenomenon. The cause are of a structural nature and include, the absence of real measures for single parent households most of which are headed by women, the lack of political will to ensure the payment of maintenance for girls – and boys – in situations of separation and divorce, the weakening of public services and the impact on care, demographic perspectives and access to education, training and employment. There is at present a lack of data in the EU concerning potential differences in poverty and social exclusion (for) girls and boys and the statistical data only refer to ‘children’. Eurostat estimates that in 2005<sup>8</sup>, 20% of children under 16 in the EU were living in poverty, compared to 16% of adults, bearing in mind that living below the relative poverty line<sup>9</sup> in less affluent Member States can mean living much closer to absolute poverty without even being able to meet the basic needs.

### **Recommendations:**

- EWL calls for systematic **assessments on the impact of poverty/social exclusion on the girl child** and to develop specific measures to address this in the context of European<sup>10</sup> and United Nations policies, instruments and funding mechanisms on the rights of the child.

### **The impact of religious and customary practices on the girl child**

EWL observes that a more conservative political climate over the past decade in Europe and globally has led to a growth in the influence of religion – **all** religions – in Europe. EWL recognises the threat religions play in refusing to question patriarchal cultures and in refusing to adopt positive measures in favour of the girl child and women.<sup>11</sup> As part of its mission to name, expose and condemn practices that violate women’s rights and silence women’s voices wherever they may be, particularly in situations where cultural and religious practices discriminate against women and the girl child either directly or indirectly, EWL stresses that the girl child is particularly vulnerable given that, on the basis of her young age and external influence, she is not in a position to negotiate and subsequently, access to and enjoyment of her human rights are being curtailed in absence of support and legal action.

### **Recommendations:**

- Prohibit and punish **practices for which justification is claimed on religious, traditional and/or cultural grounds** and which damage a woman’s physical

---

<sup>8</sup> Council of the European Union: Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2006.

<sup>9</sup> The at-risk-of-poverty line is set at 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income (after social transfers). In comparison UNICEF uses a threshold of 50%)

<sup>10</sup> notably in the context of the Commission of the European Communities, “Communication from the Commission, Towards an EU strategy on the Rights of the Child”, Brussels 4.7.2006, COM(2006)367 final

<sup>11</sup> Religion and Women’s Human Rights – EWL Position paper, May 2006

and mental integrity and basic human rights, whether this practice takes place within the borders of the EU or in third countries.<sup>12</sup>

- Condemn and punish **genital mutilation, honour crimes, forced marriages, forced early marriages** and any form of violence, in particular **domestic violence**, carried out in the name of religion and enact legislation to prohibit and criminalize these practices.<sup>13</sup>
- Where **religious education** is permitted in schools, ensure that this teaching is in conformity with gender equality principles.<sup>14</sup>
- Take a stand against any **religious doctrine which is antidemocratic** or disrespectful of human rights, especially women's rights, and refuse to allow such doctrines to influence political decision making;<sup>15</sup>
- Put into place and enforce specific and effective policies to **fight all violations of women's right to life, to bodily integrity, freedom of movement and free choice of partner**, including so-called "honour" crimes, forced marriage, forced early marriage and female genital mutilation, wherever and by whomever they are committed, however they are justified, and regardless of the nominal consent of the victim; this means that freedom of religion is limited by human rights.<sup>16</sup>

### **Sexual and reproductive health and rights**

EWL is concerned that young women are facing the highest risk of HIV infection through heterosexual contact.<sup>17</sup> It is also concerned that practices that affect girls and young women's bodily integrity – such as FGM and forced sterilisation continue to persist. EWL calls for sexuality education, as opposed to simply sex education, as a means of accompanying girls and young women to guide them to decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, particularly as they approach and reach adolescence. EWL also calls for unconditional free access to all girls and women, irrespective of their legal status, to information, counselling, health care, and methods of contraception and abortion services<sup>18</sup>.

EWL also highlights the issue of **cervical cancer**, the silent killer and the second cause of death for women between the ages of 15 and 44, after breast cancer<sup>19</sup>. Worldwide, more than 250 000 women died from cervical cancer in 2005, the vast majority in developing countries<sup>20</sup>. In light of new scientific developments in relation to the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) - the major cause of cervical cancer –, a vaccine has been approved. The vaccine, which, in order for it to be most effective, is recommended to be taken before the first sexual relations, therefore, targeting young girls and women between the ages of 9 and 15 years<sup>21</sup>. But obstacles persist, notably in relation to the cost notwithstanding the fact that it needs to be taken in three doses over a period of six

---

<sup>12</sup> EWL Position Paper Religion and Women's Human Rights, May 2006

<sup>13</sup> idem

<sup>14</sup> Council of Europe, Resolution, October 2005

<sup>15</sup> idem

<sup>16</sup> idem

<sup>17</sup> see EuroHIV HIV/AIDS surveillance in Europe, End-year report 2005 No. 73

<sup>18</sup> CEDAW General Recommendation art.12 1999 – as cited in EWL's position paper on Women's sexual rights in Europe, January 2005

<sup>19</sup> En Marche, Bimensuel No 1355, 21 décembre 2006. see also : <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2006/pr73/en/index.html>

<sup>20</sup> World Health Organisation: New vaccines against cervical cancer major opportunity for developing world", news releases 2006

<sup>21</sup> En Marche, Bimensuel No 1355, 21 décembre 2006

months. Under no circumstances should the vaccine replace ongoing and continuous screening to ensure early treatment and prevention. Ongoing gynaecological tests should be part of sexual and reproductive programmes for adolescent girls.

### **Recommendations:**

EWL calls for:

- **Free access** to all girls, young women and women of the recently licensed vaccine to protect against cervical cancer, approved by medical authorities in several European countries in 2006.
- **Uniform access to complete and neutral information and sexuality education** is provided from before and throughout adolescence.
- Advice, **confidential** health care, **without value judgments** is provided on reproductive and sexual health including sexual orientation and abortion.
- Free access to information, counselling and health care is guaranteed for **all women** including women who do not have a valid residence permit<sup>22</sup>.
- Access to all of the above services is provided **free of charge**, i.e. the system of social security should cover all methods of contraception as well as abortion for **all women** living in the European Union.
- A legislative framework for the right to a **safe abortion** for all women in the Union is introduced<sup>23</sup>.
- Free access to **all forms of safe contraception** is ensured.<sup>24</sup>
- Policies and legal documents are developed to eliminate practices affecting women's bodily integrity and their self-determination in relation to reproduction, such as **forced sterilisation** and **female genital mutilation** on all women and girls living in the EU but also EU\_citizens living overseas.

### **Male violence against girls**

EWL is very concerned about **violence against the girl child in the family**, particularly in situations of child custody in relation to separation and/or divorce and where there is a history of partner violence/domestic violence. This is particularly worrisome in countries where automatic shared child custody is becoming a standard practice. EWL calls for strong legal protection of the girl child in these situations.

Violence against the girl child can also occur in **institutional settings**, such as orphanages<sup>25</sup> and other residential places of alternative family care. EWL calls for measures to protect the girl child in these settings.

EWL also stresses that the way in which the image of girls is constructed in **public space** lowers her social value and promotes violence towards girls. EWL calls for strict and precise legislative norms to regulate the use of girl-child images in public space, the media, advertising and commercials including the consequences of breaking the norms.

In relation to **pornography**, EWL stresses the changes that have taken place in pornography's cultural status and needs to be addressed. The changes also referred to as

---

<sup>22</sup> CEDAW General Recommendation art.12 1999

<sup>23</sup> See the 2002 EWL's motion on abortion

<sup>24</sup> Recommendations from EWL Position Paper "Women's Sexual Rights in Europe", January 2005

<sup>25</sup> While the number of orphanages in Europe has declined over the years, in the two new Member States, namely Romania and Bulgaria, these still exist. It is estimated that 2% of girls and boys in Bulgaria currently live in orphanages ((Mission without Borders – Bulgarian orphan crisis: <http://www.mwb-sa.org/saweb.nsf/d825e7f4149283d4882566ce0061afd4/b72345da638dd7f942256a92002d03e5!OpenDocument>)

the ‘mainstreaming of pornography’ can be described as the current cultural process in which pornography slips into our everyday lives as an evermore universally accepted, often idealised, cultural element. This development is of great concern because power and gender are central elements in pornography, which are in total contradiction with the values of gender equality.

Mainstreaming of pornography manifests itself particularly clearly within youth culture: from teenage television and lifestyle magazines to music videos and commercials targeted at the young. Young women and men are mostly affected by pornography’s new cultural status. But the major problem is that this exposure is not always voluntary. Little research has been conducted concerning the way in which the spread of pornography is affecting the perception of gender by young people. Findings from a major Nordic research project<sup>26</sup>, which have just recently been published, show that the general picture is complex and offers no easy answers, though an undeniable characteristic does feature: pornography is produced by men for men.

EWL is particularly concerned with **trafficking** in girls and young women for the purpose of sexual exploitation, prostitution and all other activities run by the commercial sex industry and/or by traffickers and pimps. Prostitution and the growth in the sex industry are symptoms of the unequal power relations between women and men. In a flourishing market-driven economy, men are taking the absolute right to buy the bodies of girls and young women – and boys – as commodities. While measures have been taken in the EU<sup>27</sup> to curb child sexual exploitation, failure to recognise the gendered dimension of trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation will undermine further measures to address and eradicate this extreme form of girls and women’s human rights violation.

Trafficking of the girl child can also be for the purpose of **overseas adoption**. Given the low value accorded to the girl child/women in some countries, coupled with factors of poverty can lead economically impoverished women (often unmarried) to be forced, bribed and/or tricked into selling their girl child for overseas adoption, situations which some adoption agencies take advantage.

Therefore, EWL calls on the UN and the EU to introduce and implement binding measures within their institutional mechanisms to ensure that violence in all its forms against the girl child, young women and women is addressed as an issue of gender (in)equality.

### **Recommendations:**

EWL calls for:

- ❑ Universal ratification of the **UN Protocol** to Prevent, Suppress and Punish **Trafficking** in Persons, Especially Women and Children.<sup>28</sup>
- ❑ Specific targets for girls and boys in all programmes, strategies, recommendations and action plans to address violence against children.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Nordisk Ministerraad: ‘Unge, kon og pornografi i Norden’ 2006

<sup>27</sup> Council Framework Decision 2004/68/JHA of 22 December 2003 on combating the sexual exploitation of children and child pornography; Council Decision 2000/375/JHA of 29 May 2000 to combat child pornography on the Internet

<sup>28</sup> As of 12 February 2007, four EU Member States have not ratified this: Czech Republic, Greece, Ireland and Luxembourg

<sup>29</sup> Including follow up to the UN’s Report of the independent expert for the United Nations study on violence against children and the UN’s In-depth study on all forms of violence against women, July 2006

- ❑ Urgent further research on the **links between child pornography and adult pornography** and the impacts on girls, women, boys and men, as well as the relationship between pornography and sexual violence.<sup>30</sup>
- ❑ Urgent further **research on national laws in the area of adoption** and identification of gaps in laws relating to the trafficking of young girls for the purpose of giving birth abroad and to sell their newborn infants.<sup>31</sup>
- ❑ **Action plans at every level to address all forms of violence against girls** and women, including a European Union action plan, containing targets, benchmarks, resources and time frames.

### **Non accompanied minors as asylum seekers – issues for girls and young women**

EWL also identifies the special needs of the **girl child and young women as a non-accompanied asylum seeking minor**. While non-accompanied minors form a special category and are named as such in European asylum policies<sup>32</sup>, the girl child/young woman is not named as such and this is a matter of grave concern. EWL believes that while both asylum seeking non-accompanied girls and boys have special needs, the non-accompanied girl child/young woman is highly vulnerable and at risk of sexual exploitation and prey to sophisticated organised criminal organisations. The experience of girls and women in refugee camps shows that minimum protection does not necessarily guarantee their security.<sup>33</sup> It is therefore vital that specific measures are taken non-accompanied girls/young women asylum seekers.

### **Recommendations:**

- ❑ EWL strongly **condemns the detention** of non-accompanied girls and boys and state that under no circumstances should they be detained for reasons of their immigration status.
- ❑ EWL calls for allowing the non-accompanied girl child to **benefit from asylum** either as a victim of or threatened with persecution based on religious and/or traditional practices in her country of origin.
- ❑ EWL calls for **specific measures to protect the non-accompanied girl-child** as soon as she arrives on the territory of third country that is not her country of origin.

Y:\POLICY\CSW\CSW 2007\2nd version girl child post board\_en.doc

---

<sup>30</sup> See The second national report of the Irish observatory on violence against women – Pornography, Monica O'Connor, October 2006

<sup>31</sup> This new form of trafficking is becoming more and more common and dangerous for the Roma women who can hardly survive in the severe economic conditions and cannot afford rearing a child. Avoiding the Dependency Trap : the UNDP Roma Human Development Report 2003 shows that in Czech Republic, Slovak, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria substantial number of Roma children face starvation on a frequent basis even in the wealthiest of these economies, which negatively affects their health status and educational prospects

Source: [http://origin-hdr.undp.org/reports/view\\_reports.cfm?year=0&country=0&region=4&type=0&theme=0](http://origin-hdr.undp.org/reports/view_reports.cfm?year=0&country=0&region=4&type=0&theme=0)

<sup>32</sup> Council Directive 2004/83/EC on *Minimum Standards for the qualification and status of third country nationals or stateless persons as refugees or as persons who otherwise need international protection and the content of the protection granted; Council Directive 2003/9/EC of 27 January 2003 laying down minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers (article 19)*

<sup>33</sup> See: UNHCR “Sexual and gender-based violence against refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons – Guidelines for prevention and response”, May 2003. Women and girls in refugee camps – in which they have presumably reached a zone of protection- remain vulnerable as they are often coerced into providing sexual “favours” in return of food and other basic necessities.