

The Conference on the Future of Europe: A significant opportunity to advance women's rights in the EU

Advocacy paper

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The European Women's Lobby (EWL), the largest platform of women's organisations in Europe, sees the **Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE)** as a crucial moment for citizens' engagement and the European Union (EU) **to make concrete commitments to frame a feminist Europe.**

As per Articles 2, 3, and 8 of the Lisbon Treaty, **equality between women and men is a legally binding goal of the EU.** Moreover, Article 8 of the **Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (2012)** establishes the **promotion of gender equality through all the European Union's activities**, hereby entrenching the **principle of gender mainstreaming.** The **EU must reiterate these strong and unconditional commitments to women's rights through the CoFoE's outcomes and follow-up actions.**

As they make up half of the population, **women's experiences, needs and interests should be fully addressed when deciding on the future of the EU**, if this future is to be equal. Advancing gender equality requires having women's rights as a priority on the agenda, and the CoFoE must be one of the channels to advance this goal.

Gender Mainstreaming has been extensively mentioned by the European Parliament in the past years, in particular, the need to put it into practice; the CoFoE is a great opportunity to ensure it is. That is why we **must push for the inclusion of more ambitious recommendations on women's rights in the Conference's conclusions to the Executive Board.** This is a defining moment.

Key areas of action to ensure an equal future for women in the EU:

As a Member of the European Parliament, **you have the power to influence the process.** In particular, MEPs from the European Parliament's Delegation to the Conference. In December 2021, a potential resolution on the CoFoE was discussed by MEPs from the AFCO Committee to express concerns and come up with concrete proposals and demands.

We call on all MEPs to promptly proceed with **drafting a resolution that ensures the CoFoE properly addresses women's interests and needs and demands concrete follow-up actions to truly advance women's rights in the EU.**

We believe the conclusions and recommendations for follow-up actions to the CoFoE Executive Board should:

- Ensure that EU instruments and legislation on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) do not work in silos:
 - **making the fight against VAWG a priority** in the Future of Europe through the inclusion of **concrete measures on all forms of VAWG;**
 - **ratifying and implementing the Istanbul Convention** including its four pillars on prevention, protection, prosecution, and co-ordinated policies;
 - highlighting the importance of the future **EU directive on Violence Against Women and Girls to address all forms of violence, including online violence and sexual exploitation;**



- **including actions on VAWG in each Panel's recommendations as the continuum of VAWG permeates all areas of life** and hereby must be tackled from all the panels' standpoints including the economy, social justice, education, digitalisation, democracy, security perspective, health, climate change, and migration.
- Lay the foundation **for a feminist economy of wellbeing through the adoption of a Care Deal for Europe:**
 - recognising care as essential to our economy;
 - grounded in human rights;
 - fostering investment in **quality, accessible and affordable public care infrastructures and services;**
 - including work-life balance policies.
 - ensuring adequate payment and paid leave for care work at home for family members (children, sick family members, elders).
- Stress the importance of **women's equal political representation and participation in decision-making** by:
 - ensuring gender equality is recognised and applied as a horizontal principle of the European elections and a minimal democratic standard;
 - ensuring the **equal representation of women and men in EU decision-making bodies**, including the EU "top jobs";
 - calling for the adoption of concrete measures to **ensure candidate lists have an equal number of male and female candidates, such as the use of alternation or zipped lists**, especially in the context of the reform of the EU Electoral Law and the upcoming 2024 European Elections;
 - putting in place positive measures granting gender parity of elected and appointed officials;
 - ensuring the equal representation of women and men in the area of common foreign and security policy and the work of EEAS including at the highest level;
- **Effectively establish gender mainstreaming** in all the activities of the European Union, including in the recommendations on climate change and the environment by:
 - applying **gender budgeting to the whole EU budget, including climate and sustainable finance** mechanisms;
 - collecting sex-disaggregated data on all policy areas, exploring among others the differential impact of climate change and climate measures on all women and girls;
 - seizing the green and digital transition to tackle the gender pay, employment, and long-term earnings and pension gaps, and to guarantee women's economic independence;
 - proactively preventing the escalation of energy poverty;
 - using binding measures like quotas and other positive measures to increase women's representation in digital, energy and climate-related ministries and European bodies and negotiations;
- Ensure **support for women's rights organisations**, including financial, as they provide essential services and have been severely impacted by Covid-19.

Women in Europe count on you as their representative to frame a European future where their rights are respected, protected and implemented by concrete mechanisms. Your influence on the CoFoE is the opportunity to ensure that the different European legislations, tools and measures do not operate in silos. **We call on you to address the CoFoE's critical gaps on women's rights and to give substance to the previous commitments taken by the European Parliament.**