



## THE GIRL CHILD

*"Empowerment of and investment in girls are the key in breaking the cycle of discrimination and in promoting the full and effective enjoyment of their human rights".*  
United Nations Resolution 66/170



Achieving equality between women and men begins with the girl child: it is crucial to recognise that the gender relations between girls and boys in the early stages of life are a precursor to their full enjoyment of human rights and to the realisation of gender equality in other phases of life. Children are gendered human beings: girls have specific experiences and needs, and are more likely to suffer from sexual violence, sexist stereotypes, or sex-based discrimination.

A proactive and systematic approach to gender equality in early childhood, including the integration of a gender perspective in all policies related to children, is a prerequisite to eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child. Children's rights are considered within different European policies and programmes – combating violence, trafficking and sexual exploitation, anti-discrimination, prevention of child abduction – but with a neutral perspective. Childhood is a particular period, where children shape their personality and which has an impact on the rest of their life. Hence, the distinct needs of girls must be addressed in EU and national policy. Girls are full of ideas and energy and should be considered a driving force for a brighter, greener and more equal Europe.

### BEIJING '95 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES



- Eliminate all forms of discrimination against the girl child.
- Eliminate negative cultural attitudes and practices against girls.
- Promote and protect the rights of the girl child and increase awareness of her needs and potential.
- Eliminate discrimination against girls in education, skill development and training.
- Eliminate discriminations against girls in health and nutrition.
- Eliminate the economic exploitation of child labour and protect young girls at work.
- Eradicate violence against the girl child.
- Promote the girl child's awareness of and participation in social, economic and political life.
- Strengthen the role of the family in improving the status of the girl child.

### FACTS & FIGURES IN EUROPE

Since 2008 in Europe, the risk of poverty and social exclusion has risen more rapidly for girls than for boys; moreover, girls experience specific human rights violations arising from poverty and social exclusion: dangers of child trafficking and prostitution, and child labour and exploitation. 'Au pair' work or summer jobs abroad can attract under-18 girls into trafficking or exploiting networks. Certain groups of girls are particularly at risk of exclusion from educational opportunities, in particular those from migrant or ethnic minority backgrounds and from families with low socio-economic status.

Violence against girls is still prevalent in Europe: one in ten women have experienced some form of sexual abuse before the age of 15 and more than 27% of women have

experienced some form of abuse in their childhood. Child, early and forced marriage, as well as sexual harassment at school, affects millions of girls every year and brings risks for their reproductive and overall health; Roma girls suffer disproportionately from this practice. Female genital mutilation (FGM), an extreme and violent way in which girls are controlled and disempowered, is still present in EU countries. Girls with disabilities or in care institutions are at particular risk of abuse.

Girls are a very vulnerable category in terms of health: they are more at risk of addiction to alcohol and cigarettes, more at risk of getting eating disorders and sensitive to reproductive health.



### EUROPEAN WOMEN'S LOBBY ACTIONS

- In 2011, in **partnership with the World Association of Girls Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS)**, the EWL organised an event on the European Parliament to raise awareness on violence against women and girls, and the discrepancy between EU external and internal policies in terms of gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- During the 58th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women in 2014, the EWL co-organised a side-event entitled **"Reaching out to the last girl: Prostitution, MDGs and the most vulnerable women and girls"**: EWL partners shared their experience and views on prostitution from the perspective of the most vulnerable women and girls: girls from Indian low castes, African women and girls in Europe and women and girls from Canadian Indigenous communities.





# THE GIRL CHILD IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

The right to protection and respect and the promotion of the principle of the child's best interests are recognised by the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which has had the same legal status as the EU Treaties since the Lisbon Treaty.

However, experience shows that when girls are not specifically mentioned as a unique cohort, interventions don't reach them. Today, there is no overall EU legislation affecting the rights of girl children and the European Commission Youth Strategy doesn't have a gender perspective or a particular pillar for girl children.

In December 2011, the European Parliament and the Council

approved a directive on combating sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children, and child pornography. In 2012, the European Parliament approved also the Daphne Programme, a programme to fight against violence and to protect women and girl children.

Since the International Day of the Girl Child (11th October each year) was adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 2011, a European Week of Action for Girls is organised every year by NGOs, giving a regular opportunity to highlight the rights of girls, the challenges they face, and the initiatives they promote for a better life in Europe.

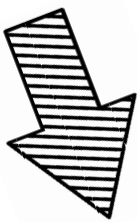


## GOOD PRACTICE

- Holistic, compulsory and continuous sexuality education is part of the primary school curriculum in several EU Member States (Sweden, Belgium, France, Germany, Denmark and Finland).
- In 2012, the French government commissioned a report on equality between girls and boys in childcare and unveiled the persisting stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes against girls from the earliest age. The report is a key tool for the government to implement systematic education schemes on gender equality at school.

## CHALLENGES

- Gender stereotypes are resilient in all spheres of society, including in formal and non-formal education. Stereotypes have an impact on girls' educational patterns of choice and path, which have consequences for their whole life in terms of professional and personal development. Girls are confronted every day with sexist stereotyping in the media, the culture and fashion industry, and advertising, which sends them damaging messages about their self-esteem and their potential.
- There is a lack of opportunities for girls to participate in programmes to promote gender awareness and empowerment for girls.
- New technologies can offer opportunities for girls to speak out, but are also used as a tool by boys and men for bullying, sexual harassment and control over girls' sexuality and freedom.
- A more conservative political climate over the past decade in Europe has led to a growth in the influence of religious and customary practices on the girl child. At the same time, the entertainment industry sends restrictive messages to girls and young women about their potential, which makes them vulnerable to sexual objectification, and impacts on their health and sexual health.
- Girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights are threatened: there is a lack of information, counselling, health care, and methods of contraception and abortion services.
- Violence against the girl child in the family persists: child marriage, pressure or control over girls' social life, prostitution...
- Non-accompanied migrant or asylum-seeking girl children are highly vulnerable and at risk of sexual exploitation.



## OUR DEMANDS

**Her future: empowering the girl child for the future of women's rights.**

- **Recognise the distinctive needs of girl children in all EU internal and external policies on children, youth and young people, and establish goals for girls in EU various actions and instruments.**
- **Systematically assess the impact of poverty and social exclusion on the girl child and develop specific measures to address these issues.**
- **Prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex in the areas of education and the media.**
- **Adopt and implement a strategy to end all forms of violence against women and girls, with concrete actions towards girl children, taking into account their multiple identities, and providing quality child protection systems.**
- **Ensure universal access to education for girls, and the disappearance of sexist stereotypes in formal and non-formal education. Ensure that teaching overall Europe is in conformity with gender equality principles and support girls' empowerment.**
- **Support, including financially, gender-sensitive comprehensive sex education for all girls and boys in Europe, including information on women's rights, gender equality, sexual orientation and sexual rights.**
- **Pursue active policies to protect girls from minority groups and girls from migrant communities and allow the non-accompanied girl child to benefit from asylum.**
- **Support programmes that actively promote the full and effective participation of young women and girls in the design, implementation, and monitoring of European and national policies and services.**