



EUROPEAN WOMEN'S
LOBBY
EUROPEEN DES FEMMES

From words to action: EWL's recommendations to the European Parliament on the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025

Introduction:

The European Women's Lobby (EWL) welcomes the [Strategy on Gender Equality](#) presented by the European Commission as its key political framework for promoting equality between women and men in the EU. EWL shares the European Commission's conclusions on the serious threats to the human rights of women and girls in Europe: women and girls make up more than half the population of the EU but still face systemic discrimination, stereotypes, and barriers in all spheres of life in Europe and beyond. Women's rights are human rights and therefore need the commitment of all European institutions towards their full realisation.

The ongoing public health crisis of COVID-19 further places these inequalities at risk of further aggravation and will have **significant and long-term impacts on many women and girls** who face increased risks of violence, poverty and threats to their economic independence. Especially worrying is the situation of women and girls who are made vulnerable by our system, such as sole carers, those facing male violence, those in precarious work or economic uncertainty, all those who do not have safe accommodation, those requiring care - especially elderly women in caring homes or at home alone, or who already face social exclusion. This is despite the fact that women are overwhelmingly stepping in to lead in providing care and support for all in this moment, allowing ongoing health care services and society to continue functioning.

In this difficult time, EWL recalls and supports the **political leadership and commitment of the European Commission in setting out this Strategy to put equality between women and men back at the heart of the EU project as it becomes the driving engine in the post COVID-19 period and beyond.** It is now more than ever crucial to ensure its full implementation and that it is supplemented by urgent measures to advance equality between women and men. After 5 years without a political framework at EU level and in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, the time for action is now. Indeed, six decades of



EU action have most certainly advanced equality between women and men. However, that progress has slowed down dramatically for the last decade: economic austerity measures combined with a backlash on women's rights has stalled progress to equality, and threatened the rights of all women and girls.

The current public health crisis reminds us that **care is the backbone of our society** and that we need to refocus on what should be our essential. After decades of austerity cuts to social services and health systems, we are reminded once again that our society and economy has been heading in the wrong direction. Now is the time to become humbler and focus on what really matters: **our values of care and solidarity, which are at the core of the European project.**

We are pleased to see that the Strategy has the potential to set the path towards transformational change and **reflects some of EWL's long-term core advocacy recommendations.** The prioritisation of tackling violence against women in the European Union, a move towards a care economy and ensuring gender mainstreaming is implemented in all EU key policies and actions (including through gender budgeting) shows the impact of years of work of women's organisation across the EU. In these immensely difficult and challenging times for all people and societies in Europe and globally, the EU and its Member States must show political leadership and **urgently ensure that gender-sensitive responses are implemented so that the price of these current crises and their future impacts is not paid by women, especially the most marginalised. The Strategy provides a first step to achieving this.**

Only the full implementation of the Strategy and its necessary complementary measures can ensure the EU meets its obligations as per the Treaties to promote equality between women and men as one of its core values and to integrate the dimension of equality between women and men in all policy and financial frameworks. Indeed, in accordance with the Treaties, implementation of the Strategy should **specifically focus on and contribute to putting an end to inequality between women and men,** as EWL would have wished to see reflected in the title of the Strategy. This should send a clear signal to all women and girls that the EU is working for them.

It is essential that the implementation of the Strategy is grounded in existing European and international laws, policies and frameworks on women's human rights, in particular the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention), the 2019 Council of Europe Recommendation on Preventing and Combating Sexism and, existing European law on equality between women and men, such as the employment directives and the Directive 2004/113/EC implementing the principle of equal treatment between men and women in the access to and supply of goods and services.

Central to a successful Strategy that empowers women and advances equality between women and men, we must recognise and directly address the fact that **discrimination on the basis of sex** is often combined with other factors such as race or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, sexual orientation, class and/or migration status. These other factors may affect women and girls belonging to such groups to a different degree or in different ways to men and boys and aggravate their negative impact. The implementation of the Strategy must also recognise and adjust to the regional differences



existing within the EU, which may further prevent women and girls from fully enjoying and exercising their human rights.

EWL calls on the European Parliament to **endorse the commitments in the Strategy** and to ensure they are backed by all EU Member States and the necessary funds. While endorsing the Strategy, the European Parliament should seek further commitments from the European Commission to ensure that the Strategy is implemented and that responses to the current public health crisis fast track its implementation. **EWL counts on the European Parliament to take the commitments in the Strategy forward** and to make the following recommendations.

Endorsing the commitments in the Strategy and establishing strong institutional mechanisms

EWL joins the European Commission in calling on the European Parliament and the Council to take forward the Commission's proposals. Indeed, to make sure the Gender Equality Strategy is turned into actions for all women and girls in the EU; the European Parliament and all EU Member States must establish strong institutional mechanisms to ensure monitoring of progress on women's rights, and to lead the way on EU policies advancing equality between women and men. This includes that the European institutions need to hire more women's rights' experts and carry out mandatory training of all officials, ensuring a strong and sound expertise in the design and implementation of the Strategy and subsequent measures.

EWL is urging the European Parliament and Member States to endorse the European Commission Strategy through the adoption of an **EP report and to call all EU Member States to do the same through strong Council Conclusions.**

Support to the Strategy should also go through the full allocation of the funding necessary for its implementation. We would like to emphasise that all the commitments listed in the Strategy will remain simply as words if they are not backed by the necessary resources. As European leaders are discussing the next EU Multiannual Financial Framework, they should ensure that **increased funds** go to the European Commission's programmes in support of equality between women and men, and apply gender budgeting throughout so that all EU funds, policies and programmes contribute to realising equality between women and men.

EWL would like to stress the need for **increased resources to women's rights organisations** inside and outside the EU and, while totally endorsing the need for EU institutions and the Member States to deepen their relationships with women's rights organisations, EWL would like to underline that without increased resources (financial and human resources as well as infrastructures) to allow for meaningful consultation, such engagement with EU institutions and the Member States would be compromised.

Monitoring and accountability mechanisms should be created to ensure the commitments are met with actions. One of them would be the long-overdue creation of a formal Council meeting of Ministers in charge of equality between women and men, be it as an inclusion to the current Employment, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Policy Council (EPSCO) or as a stand-alone Council formation. EWL urges



the European Parliament to support the creation of this formal meeting of Ministers in charge of equality between women and men.

In addition to endorsing the commitments in the Strategy, the European Parliament must call on the European Commission for further actions: the development of a truly comprehensive, intersectional framework for the benefit of all women and girls, in particular those made most vulnerable; actions leading to the adoption of a Directive on all forms of violence against women and girls; a shift to an economic model placing care and a women's perspective at its heart; strong measures to increase women's participation in leadership and decision-making in the whole EU and; concretely implementing gender mainstreaming in all EU policies, including climate, digital and migration policies.

Need for a stronger feminist intersectional transformative analysis

In order to achieve this, it is vital the Strategy adopts a fully transformative, holistic perspective in its implementation and monitoring. As it stands, the Strategy does not fully adopt a systemic approach to the continuum of inequalities experienced by all women and girls in Europe and beyond, given the additional impacts other forms of oppression may have. Without addressing diverse social, cultural and geographical contexts and the systemic issue of discrimination of women and girls with tailored responses, the Strategy will not be able to reach its full potential. The limited transformative analysis of the Strategy calls for further commitments to tailor our responses to the needs and rights of all women and girls.

In stating the Strategy aims for a "Europe where women and men, girls and boys, in all their diversity, are equal", we must be clear that resources **should recognise the significantly higher impact of sex-based discrimination** and violence that women and girls face. For this, the European Institutions must ensure that within and across Member States, we have data tracking these phenomenon, disaggregated as appropriate according to sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation as per the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. This should be monitored through the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), in collaboration with the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA). To conduct its mission, EIGE must be given more resources and a robust budget. It should also be possible for EIGE to access areas under the remit of the Fundamental Rights Agency to assess them from a sex-discrimination perspective.

In addition, while there have been commitments to ensuring an intersectional feminist framework in the Strategy, these **lack depth and it is unclear as to how the implementation of the Strategy will deliver a comprehensive intersectional framework to the benefit of all women and girls, particularly those subjected to multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination**. Central to a successful strategy that empowers women and advances equality between women and men, we must recognise and directly address the fact that discrimination on the basis of sex is often combined with other factors such as race or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, sexual orientation, class, and/or migration status. These other factors may affect women and girls belonging to such groups to a different degree or in different ways to men and boys and aggravate their negative impact. It is also important to recognise the significant regional differences in the EU, the range of societal prejudices and thus the difference of women's experiences.



This needs to be strongly addressed by the Strategy, especially in the European responses and plans for systems' redesign and renewal during and after the COVID-19 public health crisis. Unless further commitments are made to tailor responses to the needs of all women and girls, **there is a serious risk that the impact will mainly remain with the most privileged groups of women without meeting the needs of the most marginalised and excluded.** This should include an analysis within each topic of the ways in which the issues (violence against women, economics, etc) impact different groups of women differently, and targeted actions to meet these additional needs. Furthermore, these analyses will critically contribute towards identifying gaps in data, and will improve processes of designing, collecting and evaluating sex-disaggregated data across the region. Confinement measures imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic brought to light the issue of older women, in residential and/or in their own homes, isolated to the extent that, in some countries, older persons of which older women are a majority, died of loneliness. An intersectional approach would have identified such specific issues allowing for intervention before it is too late.

EWL calls on the European Parliament to seek further engagement from the European Commission on how the commitment to ensuring an intersectional framework will be realised in practice and to call for tailored responses to the needs of all women and girls. The European Parliament must also monitor whether gender mainstreaming is fully implemented in other forthcoming strategies as the ones on disability, Roma inclusion and children's rights, etc.

[Introducing a directive on combatting all forms of male violence against women and girls](#)

EWL highly welcomes the emphasis put in the Strategy on tackling violence against women. We acknowledge that this document is the strongest the Commission has released on the topic to date. We welcome the recognition of prevention of violence as a key element to disrupting the full continuum of violence against women, including recognising the need to challenge gender stereotypes as a priority to create a Europe free from male violence.

The current public health crisis shows again, how urgent it is to act to end all forms of male violence against women and girls. EWL members across Europe testify of an increase in such violence in the context of the lockdown and isolation measures. While many EU Member States have taken specific actions, it is clear that this is a European issue that requires concerted EU action against this widespread phenomenon and breach to women's rights.

The continued commitment to overcoming hurdles to **ratify the Istanbul Convention** at EU level is crucial in our collective work to end all forms of violence against women and girls. **We also welcome the consideration given to present an initiative to extend the list of Eurocrimes in article 83.1 TFEU.** In relation to trafficking and child exploitation, it is encouraging to see specific recommendations regarding further implementation through new Strategies, which must be in line with agreed positioning and existing recommendations from within the European Institutions. EWL also welcomes



the European Commission's proposal to table a recommendation on the prevention of harmful practices¹.

However, the European Commission does not provide details on what their strategy will be to accelerate the conclusion of the EU's accession to the Istanbul Convention nor the strategy towards the implementation of the standards of the Convention into its legal framework and policies. The Commission also limits its strategy to consider proposing additional measures to prevent and combat only specific forms of violence - those that are considered to be already apprehended by existing Eurocrimes, including sexual harassment, abuse of women and female genital mutilation (FGM).

The European Parliament must call for the inclusion of all forms of violence against women and girls in the EU treaties to be given a priority and not be conditioned to the failure in EU's accession to the Istanbul Convention. It must also remind President Von der Leyen that, if we are to truly disrupt the full continuum of violence as she has set out, we cannot limit ourselves to some 'specific forms' of violence. Only the **inclusion of "all forms of violence against women" among the list of Eurocrimes** under the Treaties would allow bringing real action and pave the way for an EU Directive on preventing and combating all forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG).

Furthermore, the European Parliament must underline **that sexual exploitation of women is already recognised among Eurocrimes** (art. 83 TFEU) and yet there is still no comprehensive legislation to tackle this highly gendered and traumatic form of violence. It must make clear that, until the sex trade and sexual exploitation is treated holistically, the global system of exploitation will not be effectively disrupted. A Directive on all forms of violence against women and girls, including sexual exploitation, will send a strong message that sexual exploitation is a form of violence against women and is a crucial part of ensuring its prevention. Alternatively, alongside the Directive on Combating Trafficking, the European Parliament must call for a European legislation to combat sexual exploitation to complete the required legal responses to this Eurocrime.

In that same spirit, the European Parliament should call for the EU policies on harmful practices, including the proposed Recommendation on the prevention of harmful practices, to be part of a **comprehensive legal and policy framework addressing the full continuum of all forms of violence against women**. Without this larger approach to VAWG, a particular piece focused on the prevention of several forms of violence that disproportionately affect certain groups of women -the most marginalised and at risk- can lead to their further re-stigmatisation. On this note, the European Parliament must note that other risk factors have not been considered in the Strategy, such as **the risk of violence that comes through 'border protection' policies of the EU on migration**. The EU must ensure a human rights-based approach is embedded in the asylum process.

The European Parliament must call the European Commission to go beyond encouraging Member States to ratify the ILO Convention on combating violence and harassment in the world of work and implement EU existing rules. While the Strategy acknowledges that sexual harassment is a specific form of violence recognised by the existing Eurocrimes, and therefore an area of EU Competence, the European Commission proposals in the Strategy are limited. Instead, **EU legislation to prevent sexual**

¹ Female genital mutilation, forced abortion and forced sterilisation, early and forced marriage, so-called "honour-related violence" and other harmful practices.

harassment should be enhanced in light of the provisions of the ILO Convention and the Istanbul Convention.

In this same sense, the European Parliament will surely welcome the fact that the new Victims' Rights Strategy will address the specific needs of victims of gender-based violence but will stress that, in order to do so in an adequate way, the Strategy should **address current gaps in EU legislation with regards to international standards** on violence against women, specially the Istanbul Convention, with a view of enhancing the legislation on victims' rights, protection and compensation of victims.

Under data collection on VAWG, the EWL highly welcomes the EU-wide survey that will be coordinated by Eurostat. The European Parliament should request Eurostat to ensure this survey is focused on the prevalence and dynamics of all forms of violence against women, as per the work initiated by the Fundamental Rights Agency, and should call on all EU Member States to carry-out this survey in their countries focusing on women as a target.

In order to improve data collection on VAWG in the EU, including from administrative sources, the European Parliament will not fail to note that the Strategy recognises the need for comprehensive, updated and comparable data but that it does not have a specific reference to ensure **harmonisation of data collection systems among Member States**, as requested by the European Parliament and EIGE in prior occasions. The EP must call again on Member States to ensure such harmonisation and to collect data on VAWG disaggregated by racial discrimination as a factor. Racialised and sex discrimination significantly and regularly overlap for women's and girls' as they are subjected to harassment, abuse, exploitation and violence by men - it is crucial this be acted upon. The call for disaggregation of data based on 'migration status' does not fit this need; it may be an indicator as to a potential motivation for abuse but a person's migration status is not visible. It also does not encompass discrimination based on race or ethnicity.

EWL invites Members of the European Parliament to welcome the creation of the **EU network on the prevention of gender based violence and domestic violence** but to call on the Commission to ensure the inclusion of specialist women's rights organisations as the pan-European experts of the EWL's Observatory on violence against women². In the same way, the EU wide communication campaigns planned to combat gender stereotypes should be **built with the expertise of women's rights organisations**, ensuring their contribution is adequately recognised and compensated. The Commission must also be invited by all to acknowledge the importance of **feminist education** which recognises the role that patriarchy plays in driving discrimination and objectification of women and girls, in order to promote non-violent relationships and ensure all women and girls, boys and men are free to live their lives with pleasure, without fear of discrimination, stereotyping or violence.

The European Parliament must request the Commission to clarify the coordination and the pacing of the different pieces of work to address violence against women outlined in the Strategy, to ensure continuity of the **EU anti-trafficking coordinator** role and the Civil Society Platform on THB, and to set

² The EWL Observatory on Violence against Women is a unique structure in Europe running since 1997, which brings together a dynamic group of women from 32 countries in Europe (professionals, women's rights defenders, front-line NGOs activists, etc.) and 8 of our European wide members, with outstanding experience and expertise in different forms of male violence against women.

up an **EU coordinator on violence against women and girls** with a strong political mandate, resources and responsibility to coordinate the implementation of the Istanbul Convention at EU level, with those of other relevant EU Institutions and agencies (specially EIGE but also FRA, EUROJUST, EASO, EUROSTAT, etc.).

Urgency to act is now more than ever visible: women and girls are even more at risk of male violence since the outbreak of the Covid-19 crisis, as evidenced through nationally available data and attested to by EWL members. Now is time for the EU to collectively rise to the challenge and act together to put an end to this widespread breach of women's rights.

Moving to a macro-economic model that works for women and subsequently for all

EWL welcomes the proposals made in the Strategy that boosts the implementation of women's economic rights, and recognises their invaluable contributions to the economy through their unpaid, under-valued and invisible **care work**.

These proposals resonate particularly loudly in this time of the COVID-19 crisis. It is now striking how women are at the frontlines of care and essential services, which are traditionally poorly valued. This public health crisis shows how urgent it is to change our paradigm and invest in care. A recent study of the European Institute for Gender Equality shows that women represent a majority of frontline workers in the current crisis with 82% of cashiers, 93% of childcare workers and teachers, 95% of domestic cleaners and helpers, and 86% of personal care workers³.

On this note, EWL welcomes the proposals made in the Strategy as to how to close the **gender pay, pension and care gap**. In light of the Commission's intention to table legally binding measures on pay transparency by the end of 2020, we call on the European Parliament to continue pushing for robust enforcement and accountability mechanisms, including the **introduction of mandatory pay audits** across all sectors regardless of the size of the workforce. Any work on pay transparency must form part of a bigger framework to ensure a deeper assessment of the value of different forms of work in our society, to truly deliver on the commitment to 'equal pay for work of *equal value*'. The European Parliament should seek from the Commission a legal definition on 'equal value' in accordance with existing case law, and propose this as part of the implementation regarding equal pay. EWL looks forward to the publication of the 2021 Pension Adequacy Report to assess the correlations between women's part-time and care responsibilities with their pensions and invite the European Parliament to hold a public hearing on women and pension rights, as soon as the Pension Adequacy Report is published. We also call on the European Parliament to monitor this process between the Commission and the Social Protection Committee to ensure that links between the gender pension and care gaps **address women's poverty gaps across the life-cycle**.

We believe all of these proposals should form the basis for an urgent **Care Deal for Europe** and count on members of the European Parliament to push for responses to the public health crisis and upcoming economic and social policies that place the wellbeing of all at the centre. A **Care Deal for Europe** takes a holistic life-cycle approach to caring needs, public services, as well as quality care

³ <https://eige.europa.eu/covid-19-and-gender-equality/frontline-workers>

standards for community type care and independent living measures, recognising that some members of society, for example, older women, require additional caring support, as witnessed during confinement measures of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In ensuring the Strategy's effective implementation and responses to the COVID-19 crisis, and similar to the Commission's proposal to introduce a "blue economy" within the next European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, the European Parliament must call on the Commission to introduce a "**purple economy**"⁴ as a sustainable macro-economic model that equally benefits women and men. This includes shifting proposals away from the current bread-winner model towards a closer alignment with the Commission's firm commitment to implement the **Work-Life-Balance Directive** that aims to strive for an '**equal-earner-equal-carer**' model to ensure that both women and men have equal employment and care options throughout their lives. In this light, we call on the European Parliament to engage with the Commission as to how this framework can be implemented, further bringing back the focus onto women's individual rights, particularly with regards to social protection and taxation systems, rather than being penalised as assumed 'secondary earners', embedded in the male-breadwinner-model.

Alongside the **Updated Skills Agenda**, there is an absence in the Strategy to address obstacles that perpetuate women's precarious, part-time and atypical work, particularly for **asylum seeking and undocumented migrants and third country nationals, women with disabilities and other limitations to their work access**. We call on the European Parliament to enquire as to how the Commission intends to address the referenced statistic relating to lower rates of employment in the EU for third country national women, and to further call for a framework that outlines **clear routes to access entrepreneurial and training opportunities**.

While children's Early Childhood Care and Education support is recognised as highly beneficial for parents through the Child Guarantee, it must also be ensured that **all early years initiatives have specific provisions set to support girls' needs**, including early preventative actions relating to promoting equality, understanding and consent. Members of the European Parliament must also ensure that the Commission recognises the **gendered dimension of children's poverty**, which goes hand-in-hand with obstacles leading to women's poverty, and puts forward concrete measures and funds to address both issues.

The protection of women and girls at risk of **social exclusion, poverty and homelessness** is strikingly absent in the Strategy. This is particularly worrying given that those mostly affected by the current public health crisis are the most vulnerable and marginalised (economically and also vulnerable due to lack of services to ensure confinement measures are adhered to) and that they will continue to be impacted by the lifting of confinement measures and ensuing likelihood of a recession. EWL calls on Members of the European Parliament to enquire as to how the Commission intends to ensure these aspects are addressed now and in the future. Whether this will be done through the Commission's forthcoming **Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion**, to prevent marginalised women from being excluded from social and economic policies and thus challenge the continuing and deepening poverty cycle. Furthermore, we count on the European Parliament to call on the Commission to develop a

⁴ See the European Women's Lobby "Purple Pact: A feminist approach to the economy", 2019 https://www.womenlobby.org/IMG/pdf/purplepact_publication_web.pdf

Human Rights Framework to combat poverty and social exclusion, and to develop a **European Housing Strategy** and a **Strategy to end homelessness in Europe** that considers the specific experiences of homeless women. We further call for the European Parliament to recommend to the Commission that a proposal for an integrated gender-sensitive **European Social Protection/Social Security Strategy** be put forward, which could lead to the establishment of an EU wide social security/poverty/pension risk fund in the future, to ensure that women have an equal right to free movement of persons, in accordance with treaty obligations.

To ensure sustainable funding for women's rights organisations, we call on the European Parliament to continue to push for **increased funds for women's rights organisations during the negotiations of the upcoming MFF**. A revised proposal by the Commission on the next MFF must be the opportunity to call upon the Commission, with the support of Member States, to match the **85% benchmark** allocated to ensuring gender equality in external policies with **internal budgets** to 'mutually reinforce each other'. This will help ensure that **gender mainstreaming is applied across all policy areas** of the MFF 2021-2027 and the EU's annual budgetary processes and that the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on women and girls is acknowledged and mitigated.

[Increasing participation of women in leadership and decision-making in the whole EU](#)

EWL welcomes the Commission's commitments to ensuring the equal participation of women in leadership and decision-making. We are glad to see the firm commitment from the European Commission to push for the adoption of the **Directive on women on boards**, which EWL has been calling for since 2012. We call on the European Parliament to join the Commission in urging Member States to go forward with its adoption.

We also welcome the emphasis put on promoting the equal political participation of women, notably through the elections, both as voters and candidates. We really appreciate the Commission highlighting the necessary steps to be taken to ensure equal participation, such as the promotion of best practices and, especially, funding.

The Commission also committed to "lead by example" by ensuring equal representation in their management staff, through implementing quantitative targets leadership development programs, as well as reaching more equality in EU agencies. This is a great step, with actual timelines set to achieve these objectives. The Commission acknowledging and committing to the overhaul and upgrading of its own sexual harassment policies is also significant.

However, we would have liked to see more concrete and ambitious commitments from the Commission. We urge the European Parliament to do the same within its own staffing and leadership while also pushing for **binding measures, like quotas, to ensure equal participation of women in politics**, for example in the next European elections.

The EP must also follow the Commission's example and adopt measures to achieve **parity in its representation and management**, as well as working on its own sexual harassment policies, reflecting the Commission's commitment.



The EP must also call on all other public institutions in the EU and all Member States to include more women on their boards and to adopt **legislation to ensure equal representation of all women in all decision-making spheres**. This should obviously also apply in the current context of the COVID-19 crisis to ensure that decisions taken to respond to it include women and a woman's perspective.

Concretely implementing gender mainstreaming

Under article 8 TFEU, the European Union must **promote equality between men and women through all its activities** (the concept also known as 'gender mainstreaming'). Therefore, the EU institutions have the obligation 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 process, with a special focus on gender budgeting and gender impact assessment.

In EU responses to the COVID-19 public health crisis:

Gender mainstreaming must be at the core of all emergency responses, both immediate and long-term, to the COVID-19 public health crisis. Many EU countries have been granted special powers to address urgent health and socioeconomic needs, and while we applaud governments' responses and the emergency measures introduced, democratic systems could become fragile in the absence of stringent democratic accountability and transparency mechanisms.

Europe's healthcare workers - 76% of which are women⁵ and a third of which are over the age of 50⁶ - face the greatest risk of infection to the virus. Women more broadly face significant risk to their health, as they are more subject to male violence, give birth alone, and experience reduced access to contraception and urgent abortion services. Older women face the highest risk to COVID-19, particularly those over 80 years of age, with pre-existing health conditions, or residing in nursing homes. Women too often left on the margins of society are at further risk of social exclusion, poverty and the long-term implications of future austerity measures: women and girls with disabilities, older women, asylum seeker women and girls, Roma women and girls, women with underlying health conditions, and women impacted by prostitution.

The European Parliament must urge the European Commission to hold Member States to account to ensure that **emergency responses and plans for the redesign and renewal of our systems post COVID-19 include gender mainstreaming** across the whole process. These measures must recognise women's sexual reproductive health and rights as essential health services, be informed in consultation with women's civil society and draw on sex-disaggregated data. Any restrictions to human rights during this crisis period must also indicate a clear end-date.

We call on the European Parliament to demand the European Commission to redirect its Cohesion Funds under the current **Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020** to enable Member States to invest in social cohesion, which is crucial as we face uncertainties and long-term socio-economic,

⁵ <https://eige.europa.eu/covid-19-and-gender-equality/frontline-workers>

⁶ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/DDN-20200409-2>

health and environmental consequences of the pandemic. The next MFF must also include increased resources to ensure women do not pay the price for the COVID-19 crisis and the ensuing likely recession.

We call on the European Parliament to enquire how the European Commission intends to ensure “regular **exchanges of good practices between Member States and stakeholders on the gender aspects of health** (...), including on sexual and reproductive health and rights”. This is especially crucial to inform emergency responses in the current context, which must leave no woman or girl behind even after the pandemic.

In EU digital policies:

The EWL also welcomes the **recognition of the impact of the digital transition on women and girls** in the European Commission's new Strategy on gender equality. This defining transformation on the European economy and society must indeed work to the benefit of all Europeans, particularly as women have been excluded from this policy-making and economic space. The European Parliament must call on the Commission to bridge together its clear commitments on ending stereotypes with **comprehensive actions** to ensure women's economic independence in the digital transition.

It will be essential that specific actions to increase women's participation in digital policy-making and the Single Market Agenda are realised and that comprehensive, transparent gender mainstreaming measures are implemented throughout the next Digital Strategy. Through this Strategy, the EU can ensure the new **SME Strategy, Digital Education Action Plan** and Updated Skills Agenda include specific measures to increase the participation of women. The European Parliament must call on the European Commission to ensure that these specific measures are implemented in recognition of existing legislative frameworks such as the Work Life Balance Directive as well as in the spirit of the Care economy. Similarly, it is vital to align these processes with European institutional measures on **preventing sexual harassment in the workplace**, which remains a critical factor in preventing women's participation in the digital economy.

We also welcome the intention to align the European Commission's Strategy on gender equality and the development of the **Digital Services Act** to better combat illegal activities online. As outlined, combating the full continuum of violence against women is essential in progressing equality, therefore recognising the digital dimension within this is a marked step forward. Updating key legislative frameworks will be transformative in ensuring the online space is neither a tool of nor facilitator of violence including trafficking and sexual exploitation. The EWL looks forward to working with the European Parliament and other EU institutions in embedding this holistic perspective in the upcoming legislative process and ensuring that these efforts are aligned to the **systematic gender mainstreaming of all digital related policies** with societal and economic impacts.

In EU climate policies

The Strategy certainly recognises both the specific **impact of climate change on women and girls across the globe** and **the potential opportunities of the green transition** in tackling unequal access to work spaces that many groups of women face. There is a recognition that strategies to reflect the needs of older persons will particularly support women. Yet there are **no clear measures or**



recommendations as to how the European Green Deal will involve a gender mainstreaming approach: we look forward to the Parliament seeking further clarifications here to ensure all EU policies meet the needs of all women and girls.

The European Parliament must call on the European Commission to adopt measures for the **inclusion of women in climate decision-making positions at all levels**, to ensure effectiveness in pursuing policies that are both socially and environmentally sustainable.

It must also ask that systems be put in place to collect **sex-disaggregated data on the impact of the climate crisis and of climate policies**. The data must inform climate policy-makers when designing and implementing policies.

Furthermore, the EP must urge the European Commission to ensure **gender impact assessment and gender mainstreaming** of all the measures, funding mechanisms and policies to tackle the climate crisis. To this end, every new measure, mechanism or strategy should undergo a gender impact assessment, as well as through implementation of gender budgeting to climate-related funds, which ensures that funding choices don't exacerbate inequalities and that they integrate a women's perspective.

Actions taken should furthermore ensure that women can take advantage of the **opportunities created by the green transition**. Gender should be mainstreamed in employment policies related to sustainability and just transition. This includes delivering policies that allow for proper work-life balance, and ensuring equal pay, a decent income, personal development and adequate social protection. Similarly, projects financed under environmental programs and access to investments for climate action should incorporate a gender perspective.

In EU policies relative to "demographic challenges"

Given the current challenge that many European Member States face in tackling xenophobia and anti-migration movements, EWL is concerned that a broader reflection on migration and the **opportunities for transforming the European approach to migration through upcoming policies, negotiations and financial commitments are not adequately reflected** in this document.

We urge the European Parliament to seek clarification on the reference to 'demographic challenges' and to ask for strong language and actions on migration as a needed European priority. Overall coverage of issues relating to migration are highly weak and concerning in terms of framing and placement. In addition to 'demography' as an entry point, there is a clear lack of a **human rights basis** of considering migration as a gendered issue and there was no mention of the need for **gender mainstreaming within the CEAS (Common European Asylum System) or Migration & Asylum Pact**. It is crucial that at a minimum these policies reflect the calls relating to migration and asylum within the Istanbul Convention, but must go further to reflect a deeper understanding of the particular needs of migrant and asylum seeking women and girls in accessing health and education supports and financial security to prevent the risk of their exploitation and ensure their rights and freedoms are respected.

The European Parliament must also call on the Dublin regulations to be reviewed to ensure that all **Member States fairly share in our duty to provide an asylum** application process, that they ensure those who are awaiting their decision are treated fairly, with respect and dignity and that those in



power who commit violations of rights are prosecuted. This is particularly relevant in the current context of the COVID-19 outbreak, most deeply in relation to women and girls who are subjected to male violence, which occurs at higher-than-average rates in such contexts.⁷

The European Parliament must support commitments to maintain specific funding to support women and girls under the AMF. Under integration, it will be important that the European Parliament send to Member States a strong message that integration is not a one-way process. This is a key opportunity to ensure investments are made not only to support the needs of women and girls who are newly joining a community, but also additional investment to ensure European and national political voices promote a welcoming voice to women and girls, who are at particular risk of isolation, through community building and social structures.

Recommendations:

EWL calls on the European Parliament to:

- endorse the European Commission's Strategy through a European Parliament report,
- call on Member States to endorse commitments in the Strategy through Council Conclusions and to ensure that a formal Council meeting of Ministers of equality between women and men is set up,
- ensure the Strategy is matched with the necessary funding through increased resources in the next MFF to EU programmes dedicated to equality between women and men and to women's rights organisations and, through implementation of gender budgeting at the EU and national level.

EWL further recommends to the European Parliament to call the European Commission for:

- the development of a truly comprehensive intersectional feminist framework for the benefit of all women and girls, in particular the most vulnerable;
- strong measures to increase women's participation in leadership and decision-making in the whole EU, starting with including women and a woman's perspective in all decisions taken to respond to the COVID-19 crisis;
- actions leading to the adoption of a Directive on all forms of male violence against women and girls;
- a shift towards an economic model that places care and women's perspective at its heart and draws from the lessons of the current health crisis;
- concrete measures to address women and girls at risk of or experiencing social exclusion, poverty or homelessness, including to mitigate the impact of the current health crisis;
- concretely implementing gender mainstreaming in all EU policies, including COVID-19, climate, digital and migration policies.

⁷ For more information on our recommendations in relation to women and girls on the move, please see our [#WomensVoices report](#) and [#GirlsVoices infosheet](#).

