

# INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

Institutional mechanisms are support systems that are put in place at government level to ensure that a gender-equality perspective is mainstreamed in all policies and programmes. They play a central role in ensuring that gender equality laws are upheld, that women are made aware of their rights and can seek justice before the Courts when their rights have been violated. They also are crucial to ensure that women's concerns and experiences form an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes, in all political, economic and societal spheres.

Well-functioning and adequately resourced institutional mechanisms are recognised at EU and national level as essential tools to promote women's rights: they are crucial preconditions for ensuring progress in all the other critical areas for women's rights, and therefore are central for promoting and realising de facto equality between women and men.

We want to see a strong sustainable architecture for women's rights and gender equality at EU level, as a comprehensive and effective tool for the realisation of gender equality in Europe, and a model for similar mechanisms in all Member States.



## FACTS & FIGURES IN EUROPE

EIGE has established that, while by 2012 all 28 Member States had established governmental equality bodies, there has been a tendency for gender equality, as a policy area, to decrease in importance. Fewer governments have cabinet ministers responsible for gender equality in 2012 compared to 2005; more governments placed the highest responsibility for gender equality with deputy ministers and assistant ministers. One third of Member States do not have their governmental gender equality body located at the highest level of governmental structures despite the recommendation of the Council in 2009 to do so.

Since 2005, the personnel resources of governmental

*"Institutional mechanisms play a vital role in accelerating the achievement of de facto equality between women and men within the European Union and that strong and sustainable mechanisms are needed for developing, implementing and monitoring the relevant policies, in order to ensure that gender equality remains prominent on the political agenda."*  
*EU Council Conclusions, December 2013*

#Beijing20

FROM WORDS  
TO ACTION

1995-2015



## BEIJING '95 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

- Create or strengthen national machineries and other governmental bodies.
- Integrate gender perspectives in legislation, public policies, programmes and projects.
- Generate and disseminate gender-disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation.

gender equality bodies have decreased in 14 Member States. Only five Member States have a separate designated body for the promotion of equal treatment of women and men.

In 2012, only two Member States used gender mainstreaming widely for drafting laws, policy programmes, actions plans and projects; only eight Member States had established a legal commitment for gender budgeting and only three used gender budgeting widely.

Two thirds of Member States have a national legal obligation to regularly collect and disseminate statistics disaggregated by sex.



25 YEARS  
EUROPEAN WOMEN'S LOBBY  
EUROPEEN DES FEMMES

## EUROPEAN WOMEN'S LOBBY ACTIONS

- **EWL issues regular alerts on the weakening of institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women's rights in Europe.** Its in-depth work on the impact of the crisis on women's rights and gender equality in Europe publication "The price of austerity" (2012) has shown the gradual and potential further erosion of gender specific institutional mechanisms particularly at national level; austerity policies have had a drastic impact on national gender equality bodies and the equality ministries/departments, at a time when women's rights advocates in Europe most need them.
- The EWL actively participates in European Commission advisory bodies, and collaborates with the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) and the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA).
- The key demand of the EWL in its 2014 Manifesto for the European elections was a Commissioner for women's rights and gender equality, as an instrumental political sign of the EU priority to realise gender equality, both through gender mainstreaming and specific actions for women's rights.



# INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

At the European level, each of the three main institutions has developed some form of mechanism for the promotion of equality between women and men, to varying degrees of success. In the Council of Ministers, equality between women and men falls within the competence of a body in charge of social affairs in general. In 2010, a specific Gender Equality Unit was established in the European Commission within DG Justice, which addresses different grounds of discrimination (sex, age, sexual orientation, disability, ethnic/migration background), sending the message that women's rights are mainly about discrimination. The 2014 Commission might slightly change this structure. In 2010, the European Commission adopted a five-year Strategy for equality between women and men, which should be renewed; all EU Commissioners, when starting their mandate in 2009, signed a Charter on Women's Rights and committed to integrate gender equality in their respective policy portfolios. Other mechanisms are active within the European Commission, such as the Commission Inter-service Group on Gender Mainstreaming, the Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men. The Committee on

Women's Rights and Gender Equality is the key political body of the European Parliament on women's rights, and delivers annual reports on gender equality and political resolutions on the diversity of issues related to women's rights.

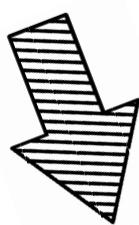
The adoption of the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme, in 2013, provides funding mechanisms for women's rights and gender equality, and the Structural Funds regulations contain an obligation for all partners to integrate a gender equality dimension in all funded projects and partnership agreements. However, there is no gender impact assessment of the EU budget. The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) started working in 2009 and developed several projects to support EU policies, including data collection. However, it has no power of coordination and policy mandate.

In this context, there is a clear lack of coordinated and sustainable EU architecture for women's rights and gender equality, which would ensure the accomplishment of de facto equality between women and men in Europe.



## GOOD PRACTICE

- In Germany, gender equality bodies at the regional level are working with universities and public institutions.
- In France, a high level Council for equality between women and men was established in 2013 and comprises experts, researchers and civil society representatives.



## CHALLENGES

- Throughout the EU, both at the national and European level, gender equality institutional mechanisms are diluted into bodies dealing with diversity and all grounds of discrimination, and in some cases into human rights bodies. This leads to an invisibility of the goal of women's rights and a decrease of human and financial resources for gender equality and women's rights.
- There is a lack of training within governmental structures on gender equality, gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting.
- More cooperation with and support for women's rights organisations is needed.
- There is an urgent need for gender disaggregated data and specific reports that reflect gender issues. When it comes to gender equality measures, the data and information have many shortcomings and the data collected (gender pay gap, gender pension gap) is not systematically used in other policy frameworks.
- The role of gender mainstreaming and institutional mechanisms can become neutral in terms of feminist analysis of power relations. Any gender equality strategy should challenge structural discrimination against women and girls and the persisting violations of their rights.

## OUR DEMANDS

### A sustainable and strong EU architecture for women's rights and gender equality.

- **A strong European Commissioner for Women's Rights and Gender Equality, supported by a Directorate on equality between women and men.**
- **An EU Strategy for women's rights and equality between women and men, based on the dual approach of gender mainstreaming and specific actions.**
- **A stronger role for the European Institute for Gender Equality: monitoring gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting in all EU policies and organs, including macroeconomic policies and EU external policies; collecting and disseminating gender statistics; training and raising awareness on gender inequality within the EU institutions and towards the general public.**
- **A budget heading for activities on gender equality in the budget of each Commission unit.**
- **A structured dialogue of the different EU institutions with the women's rights movement, including the EWL.**
- **The strengthening of the European Commission's Inter-Service Group on Gender Mainstreaming and making its work more visible inside and outside the Commission.**
- **To the Member States: Gender equality mechanisms should be at the highest political level, be part of a coordinated and comprehensive strategy for women's rights, and need to have the necessary authority, visibility, political recognition, funding and human resources. They should develop gender expertise within and as capacity builders for gender equality at different levels of government and administration.**

