

Gender Equality Strategy

Analysis



EUROPEAN WOMEN'S
LOBBY
EUROPEEN DES FEMMES



GENDER EQUALITY STRATEGY 2026 – 2030 EWL ANALYSIS

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The **European Women's Lobby submitted detailed recommendations** across all policy areas ahead of the **new Gender Equality Strategy 2026–2030**. The resulting Strategy picks up a significant number of these calls, spanning every pillar of EWL's advocacy, from violence prevention to economic justice, from institutional reform to external action.

The Strategy delivers several advances. It establishes **health as a standalone pillar** for the first time in any EU gender equality framework. The Strategy acknowledges menstrual and menopause poverty, also as a first, launches a new WHO initiative on women's healthcare, and includes SRHR data collection. The Commission's formal acknowledgement that ESF+ funds may support access to abortion services, in response to the *My Voice, My Choice* ECI, is a historic first step. **Care cannot be separated from health.** The Strategy responds to a central EWL demand by committing to a European Care Deal by 2027, alongside implementation reports on the Work-Life Balance Directive and Council Recommendations on childcare and long-term care.

On **violence against women**, the Strategy commits to supporting transposition of the Violence Against Women Directive, strengthens the EU response to cyberviolence through investigations into Grok and VLOP pornographic platforms, trusted flagger guidelines, and cross-border cooperation, and reiterates the call to implement the Istanbul Convention. On **equal pay and economic empowerment**, it supports Pay Transparency Directive implementation with a joint EIGE toolkit on gender-neutral job evaluation, introduces gender-smart targets in funding programmes, supports women-led businesses through the European Competitiveness Fund, and includes a Council Recommendation on housing inequality with an intersectional approach.

These economic gains must be matched by structural change in the **labour market**. The Strategy introduces sector-specific initiatives EWL called for, an Action Plan for Women in Research, Innovation and Startups; a Women in Farming platform; the EU Artists' Charter addressing cultural sector inequalities; a "Boys in HEAL" approach to occupational desegregation; gender-responsive measures in defence and transport; and references to the AI Act's obligations on algorithmic discrimination in hiring. In **education**, the Strategy includes a Girls Go STEM initiative, support for teachers on challenging gender stereotypes, and sports gender mainstreaming through the European Week of Sport and Erasmus+ Sport.

On **political participation**, the Strategy includes a Recommendation on safety in politics, AgoraEU funding for women organisations, and a study on online narratives targeting young men and boys. On **institutional mechanisms**, EWL welcomes gender mainstreaming in the next MFF with budget tracking guidance; however, the EWL supports a more pro-active gender budgeting mechanism. The Recommendation on equality data, national gender equality action plans by 2027, support for Directives on Standards for Equality Bodies, and CERV and AgoraEU funding for feminist civil society. Finally, on **external action**, the launch of SHIELD, the renewal of GAP IV, and the new Women, Peace

and Security Action Plan mark meaningful advances in the EU's external gender commitments, and all directly respond to EWL demands.

II. INTRODUCTION

The **European Women's Lobby (EWL) welcomes the European Commission's Gender Equality Strategy 2026–2030**, hereafter referred to as the Strategy, published on 5 March 2026. The Strategy reaffirms the EU's commitment to advancing gender equality over the next five years.

The Strategy comes at a time of **intensifying global backlash against women and girl's rights**. From the rise of cyberviolence to the erosion of reproductive freedoms and persistent economic inequalities, women and girls across Europe continue to face systemic discrimination and emerging risks that require strong and coordinated policy responses.

While the Commission's analysis of these challenges is comprehensive, it falls short in one critical respect. It **does not propose legally binding measures**, leaving **implementation largely voluntary**. The Strategy relies almost entirely on soft instruments, regulatory dialogue, exchanges of best practices, monitoring reports, and guidelines, leaving its ambitious goals dependent on Member State goodwill. **Without enforceable commitments, the impact of the Strategy remains limited** despite its ambitious goals.

The gap between political aspiration and legal enforceability runs through every pillar.

- Violence against women is still not recognised as a Eurocrime, leaving key forms of gender-based violence without a clear EU legal framework. We do recognise that such a measure requires unanimity and, in the current context, this will be difficult to obtain. Nevertheless, the long-term goal should lead to this outcome even if it is beyond the current period of the Strategy.
- The Directive on Violence Against Women omits consent-based definitions of rape, sexual harassment, forced sterilisation, and femicide, meaning that progress on these issues will remain fragmented across jurisdictions.
- The Strategy contains no legal definition of intersectionality, structurally limiting the EU's capacity to address the compounded discrimination faced by disabled, migrant, racialised, and LGBTQI+ women.
- Mental health is named as an objective but receives no concrete action, despite overwhelming evidence linking gender-based violence, unpaid care burdens, and economic precarity to women's disproportionate mental health burden.
- Important issues such as the situation of migrant women, the gendered impacts of climate change, and access to justice receive limited attention.
- While menstrual poverty is acknowledged, the proposed response is limited to exchanges of best practices rather than concrete and enforceable measures.
- The revision of the Maternity Directive is entirely absent, there is no engagement with ILO Convention 190 as a guiding framework for workplace safety, and the gendered impacts of climate change receive only marginal attention.

- We welcome the Commission's positive reply to the European Citizens' Initiative *My Voice, My Choice*; however, the absence of a proposal for a dedicated fund in the future Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) highlights a critical gap, as reliance on ESF+ reallocation depends on national political will—often lacking in the very Member States where access to safe and legal abortion is most restricted.
- On care, the promised European Care Deal is based on monitoring and review rather than new legislation, binding targets, or dedicated investment, and unpaid care work is framed as a barrier to labour market participation rather than as productive economic activity in its own right, falling short of the transformative vision articulated in EWL's Purple Pact.
- The gender pension gap is acknowledged but not acted upon, there are no care credits, no structural reform of the male-breadwinner model, and no pathway toward an equal-earner–equal-carer framework.

In light of these shortcomings, EWL has conducted a detailed analysis of the new EU Gender Equality Strategy and its principles.

III. PRINCIPLES

Roadmap Principle 1: Freedom from gender-based violence, the right to security and dignity

Key actions by the Commission:

- Support Member States in transposing and implementing the Violence Against Women Directive, monitor national plans, and develop guidelines for law enforcement and prosecutorial authorities, including on cross-border cooperation (2026-2030);
- Update the mapping of the legal landscape on rape legislation based on the concept of consent across the EU, in view of identifying further EU action (2027);
- Pursue a structured regulatory dialogue with very large online platforms on gender-based cyber violence and help build up the capacity of Trusted Flaggers;
- Support the implementation of the next EU gender-based violence survey (2027-2028) and the collection of administrative data (2026-2030)

The EWL welcomes the commitment stated in the Strategy by the European Commission to ensure a world free from gender-based violence for women and girls. We strongly support the Commission's commitment to oversee and assist Member States in the effective **transposition of the Directive on Combatting Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Directive VAW)** by 14 June 2027. The increased focus on addressing cyber-violence offences is particularly timely. Online abuse, image-based violence, deepfakes and digital stalking are growing harms that disproportionately affect women and girls, and it is positive that the Commission acknowledges this.

However, EWL remains concerned regarding the **absence of explicit provisions on rape based on lack of consent, sexual harassment, forced sterilisation, and femicide**. These omissions risk undermining the Directive's ability to address the full continuum of violence. EWL reiterates its longstanding call for **violence against women to be added to the list of Eurocrimes** in the Treaty of Functioning of the

EU ([article 83.1](#)).

EWL acknowledges the Commission's commitment to support national reforms introducing consent-based definitions of rape, to update its mapping of the legal landscape in the EU, and to promote education on what consent truly means. Yet, in the **absence of binding harmonisation, progress will remain uneven across Member States**. EWL therefore continues to advocate for the tabling and adoption of a legislative proposal aligned with the [European Parliament's position \(2025/2040\(INI\)\)](#).

Moreover, EWL emphasises that a truly effective Gender Equality Strategy must be grounded in intersectionality. Women with disabilities, migrant women, refugees, asylum seekers, racialised women, and LGBTQI+ women face compounded barriers to accessing justice, protection, and support. The Strategy acknowledges these disparities but **does not yet embed intersectionality as a structural principle**, nor provide a legal definition of intersectionality.

EWL supports the revision of the [Victims' Rights Directive](#) and the European Commission's intention to contribute to the development of guidelines for the prevention, detection, and prosecution of cases of violence against women, in cooperation with the networks, activities and expertise of EU agencies. However, EWL reiterates the importance of **systematically integrating survivor-led input** into the reform of responses to gender-based violence, in order to ensure that measures are grounded in lived experiences and respond to victims' actual needs.

Furthermore, EWL strongly welcomes the commitment to facilitate cross-border cooperation between relevant authorities. Such cooperation is essential, particularly in addressing gender-based cyber violence, where the transnational nature of offences may allow perpetrators to exploit jurisdictional gaps and evade accountability.

EWL recognises the European Commission's investigations into Grok and several VLOP pornographic platforms, as well as its ongoing risk monitoring, as a significant positive step. These reflect an important recognition of the scale, systemic nature and evolving form of online gender-based violence. However, the reliance primarily on soft instruments, such as regulatory dialogue and non-binding guidelines, remains a concern. **Without strong, enforceable penalties, there is a risk that platforms will not fully comply** with their obligations. EWL also stresses that **content removal remains a major challenge for victims**, with procedures often slow and ineffective. The forthcoming guidelines on trusted flaggers must therefore ensure rapid removal of illegal content and significantly strengthen platform accountability.

Furthermore, EWL call for an ambitious and comprehensive anti-trafficking strategy that explicitly recognises that prostitution and pornographic online platforms exploit women's bodies, normalise violence, and facilitate multiple forms of abuse, including trafficking and online sexual violence. EWL also welcomes the Strategy's emphasis on strengthening data collection towards improving the EU's overall response to gender-based violence. As well as, the continued commitment to fund projects combatting gender-based violence under the next MFF.

Finally, EWL support the commission's reiterated call on all Member States to **ratify and fully implement the Istanbul Convention** (IC). EWL, however, stresses the Commission's need to go further by condemning the five countries that have yet to do so to date.

Roadmap Principle 2: The highest standards of physical and mental health

The Gender Equality Strategy 2026–2030 marks significant progress in how the EU approaches women's health. For the first time across any EU gender equality framework, **health is established as an independent pillar**. This is a structural development the EWL had long advocated for in its consultation contribution to the Commission and which had been absent from the Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025, which addressed health primarily through gender mainstreaming within the violence and employment sections; SRHR was acknowledged in principle but not operationalised, and mental health did not feature at all. Against that baseline, the dedicated health chapter under Roadmap Principle 2 in the new Strategy represents genuine progress, which EWL welcomes, although, as this analysis demonstrates, significant gaps remain due to the **absence of binding commitments**.

Key actions by the Commission:

- Launch a new initiative with the World Health Organization on women's health (2026);
- Launch a study on the economic and societal benefits of closing the women's health gap related to certain conditions, such as menopause (2028);
- Support Member States' health action regarding sexual and reproductive health and rights by mapping practices and international frameworks (2028);
- Implement the Commission's reply to the European Citizens' Initiative: "My Voice My Choice: For Safe and Legal Abortion" (2026-2027).

On **SRHR and access to safe and legal abortion**, the gap between EWL's recommendations and the 2026–2030 Strategy's response is significant. EWL called for a comprehensive set of actions. Commission guidelines on abortion care in line with WHO standards, the right to abortion to be included in the EU Charter of fundamental rights, sharing of good practices between Member States, monitoring and data collection on access gaps; legislative initiatives to strengthen access to abortion medication, including through the revision of the pharmaceutical package and the Critical Medicines Act, inclusion of SRHR under the EU4Health programme in the next MFF, and EU-level support to civil society organisations working on SRHR. **None of these has been delivered.**

While the 2020–2025 Strategy referenced SRHR primarily through the lens of good practice exchanges and external policy, without committing to concrete domestic action on abortion, the 2026–2030 Roadmap at least goes further by formally responding to the "[My Voice My Choice](#)" **European Citizens' Initiative (ECI)**, acknowledging unsafe abortion as a public health matter.

The [Commission's reply](#) in February 2026 to the ECI, backed by over 1.1 million signatures, illustrates the limits of what has been offered. Rather than proposing new legislation or a dedicated funding mechanism, the EC made a political gesture, allowing Member States on a voluntary basis and in accordance with their national laws, **use the existing European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) to support access to abortion services**. This is significant as a first formal acknowledgement that EU funds can be used in this way. However, it falls well short of the structural change women in countries with

restrictive laws need and the acknowledgement that access to **safe and legal abortion is a matter of life or death**. The ESF+ is already allocated by Member States to a wide range of social, employment, and education priorities; any reallocation toward abortion access requires national political will and a formal programme amendment, conditions that are precisely absent in the countries where barriers are most severe, such as Malta and Poland. A woman in those countries therefore remains dependent on other Member States choosing to act, while nine have signalled willingness to do so, **access remains contingent rather than guaranteed**.

In regards to the **lifecycle approach to women's health** the Strategy goes further than the previous one in naming specific conditions such as menopause, endometriosis, post-partum depression, menstrual health, backing these with references to over €2 billion invested under Horizon programmes. Moreover, the **new WHO initiative on healthcare quality** and accessibility, as well as the study on the economic benefits of closing the women's health gap partially answer EWL's call for evidence-based, comprehensive approach. While these represent progress over the previous cycle, structural gaps persist.

The lifecycle framing EWL proposed, with specific attention to childhood, adolescence, mid-life, and older women as distinct policy targets, is absent in the Strategy. EWL's call for mandatory sex-disaggregated and **intersectional health data systems is missing**; however, **data collection on SRHR is included**. Similarly, while the [Clinical Trials Regulation](#) revision is mentioned, EWL's core recommendation on mandatory integration of sex and intersectional analysis across all EU-funded health research is missing.

Considering marginalised women, the gap is even more significant and inconsistent across other strategies. **Roma, migrant, disabled, and LGBTIQ+ women appear in the 2026-2030 Strategy but have zero dedicated measures**. Furthermore, free or subsidised menstrual products, universal healthcare access for asylum-seeking women, obstetric violence, maternity services, and the proposed 10% national health budget floor EWL called for, are entirely absent from the committed actions.

It is worth noting however, that **menstrual health appears for the first time in any EU Gender Equality strategy**. The 2026–2030 Strategy acknowledges menstrual and menopause poverty as issues affecting many women across the EU and references a 2025 European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS) briefing on the topic. The framing, however, is primarily about tax reduction rather than treating menstrual products as an essential healthcare need, which EWL calls for. In addition, the Strategy does not include sufficient measures to address access to menstrual and hygiene products and only foresees an exchange of best practices at national level on effectively tackling menstrual and menopause poverty. EWL therefore calls on the Commission to address this issue more comprehensively in the upcoming EU Anti-Poverty Strategy.

On the issue of mental health, EWL made a detailed, explicit case for a gender-specific mental health pillar, through investment in gender-sensitive national policies, trauma-informed care for survivors of violence, research on gender differences in mental health, recognition of caregiving-related burnout, and EU-wide awareness campaigns. The 2026–2030 Strategy reaffirms the goal of achieving the highest standards of physical and mental health, but falls short as **no concrete action on mental health** follows. This mirrors the 2020–2025 Strategy, which named mental health as an objective without translating it into targeted actions.

This is a persistent and compounding omission, further underscored by the psychological burden of stigma surrounding women's health, where delayed care, dismissal of symptoms, and constrained access to services contribute to significant mental health impacts. Mental health's exclusion is

particularly difficult to justify given that gender-based violence, caregiving burdens, and economic uncertainty, all addressed elsewhere in the 2026-2030 Strategy, are well-documented drivers of women's disproportionate mental health burden.

Furthermore, EWL welcomes the recognition of **gender equality within the healthcare workforce** within the Strategy. As the 2020–2025 Strategy noted in the context of the pandemic, women make up the majority of the health and social workforce, often at minimum wage, and called for improved wages and conditions in female-dominated sectors. The 2026–2030 Strategy references the need to strengthen **gender-responsive training for healthcare professionals**, which is a limited overlap with EWL's call for gender-sensitive professional education. However, beyond this, the Strategy does not address healthcare workforce inequalities as a structural gender equality issue, nor does it incorporate the broader set of EWL recommendations on gender-sensitive healthcare systems, including gender parity in leadership, pay equity, and gender-sensitive training across the healthcare sector.

A new element introduced by the Strategy is the **“Boys in HEAL” initiative**, aimed at encouraging more men to enter health and education professions. While this contributes to addressing occupational segregation, it does not respond to EWL's core concern of improving equity within the existing workforce, nor does it address the **structural undervaluation of care work**. As such, although the Strategy partially advances recognition of the need for gender-sensitive training, it falls short of EWL's call for a comprehensive, structural approach to gender equality within the healthcare workforce.

Roadmap Principle 3: Equal pay, economic empowerment and financial independence

Key actions proposed in the Strategy:

- Publish, together with the European Institute for Gender Equality, a toolkit on gender neutral job evaluation and classification, and support social partners in the implementation of the Pay Transparency Directive (2026);
- Publish a report on Directive 2004/113/EC on access to and supply of goods and services (2029) and conduct a stress test of Directive 2010/41/EU on self-employment (2028);
- Map and support exchange of best practices in addressing the gender pension gap and explore ways to address its drivers (2026-2030).

EWL welcomes the European Commission's commitment to equal pay, as well as to women's economic empowerment and financial independence in the Gender Equality Strategy. It commends the Commission's efforts to strengthen women's inclusion in the labour market and to continue addressing the gender pay, pension and investment gaps.

However, EWL remains concerned about the **effective implementation and transposition of the [Pay Transparency Directive](#)** by Member States. It supports the planned publication later this year, in cooperation with EIGE of a toolkit on gender-neutral job evaluation and classification, as well as the provision of additional funding and the organisation of workshops to facilitate the Directive's implementation. Nonetheless, EWL questions whether these measures provided in the Gender Equality Strategy will be sufficient and calls for further concrete actions to ensure robust and consistent enforcement across all Member States.

EWL believes that expanding **gender-smart targets** in the context of future funding programmes is a positive measure to improve access to finance for women entrepreneurs and to increase women's participation in the financial sector. Similarly, EWL strongly supports the Strategy when it comes to the possibility for the **European Competitiveness Fund** to **support** the development of **women-led businesses**.

EWL agrees with the need to assess existing legislation, in particular [Directive 2004/113](#) on access to and the supply of goods and services and [Directive 2010/41](#) on self-employed work. **However, poverty remains a key concern for EWL.** While we support the proposal for a Council Recommendation on fighting housing including and the study on housing inequality and discrimination with an intersectional approach, we would have welcomed more concrete and binding measures. Furthermore, EWL welcomes the Strategy's intention to explore ways to address labour market outcomes and relevant features of pension systems that drive this gap and looks forward to the 2027 Report on Adequate Social Protection in Old Age.

However, **closing the gender pension gap is urgent**, and EWL would have welcomed more concrete measures to start a shift from the standard male-breadwinner model, towards an **equal-earner-equal carer-model**. For instance, EWL would have appreciated the development of European standards such as care credits. EWL calls on the European Commission to take a leading role in ensuring gender-sensitive pension reforms that take into account women's life-cycle patterns and employment breaks due to care responsibilities. EWL stands ready to work with the European Commission to develop concrete and effective policy solutions.

EWL has always advocated for a **shift towards a feminist economy** and has developed recommendations for policymakers, known as the [Purple Pact](#). In its commitment to collaborate with the European Commission, EWL will update and disseminate **the "Purple Pact 2.0"** to support the Commission in moving in that direction.

Roadmap Principle 4: Work-life balance and gender equality in care

Work-life balance and care are among the most significant areas of EWL's advocacy, rooted in its Purple Pact framework and its vision of a feminist economy centred on a universal social care system. The Pact's Care Deal for Europe frames care as a shared societal responsibility and calls for investment, stronger work-life balance policies, and recognition of the care sector's value. Against this vision, the Strategy remains incremental, as we very much welcome the upcoming European Care Deal.

Key actions by the Commission:

- Publish a report on the implementation of the Directive on Work-Life Balance (2028);
- Publish reports on the implementation of the Council Recommendation on early childhood education and care and of the Council Recommendation on long-term care (2027);
- Present a comprehensive European Care Deal (2027).

In relation to **recognising the value of care**, EWL called on the Commission to acknowledge its central economic importance. It further advocated for the introduction of a Care Deal for Europe as a macro-

economic framework placing care at the heart of the EU's socio-economic model, going beyond the existing [European Care Strategy](#).

EWL called on the Commission to recognise the central economic value of care and to introduce a Care Deal for Europe as a macro-economic framework that places care at the heart of the EU's socio-economic model, going beyond the existing European Care Strategy. The 2026–2030 Strategy responds by committing to a **European Care Deal by 2027**, building on the current Strategy and an Implementation Dialogue reviewing progress in areas such as early childhood education and care, long-term care, working conditions, and men's participation in care.

This represents a step forward from the European Care Strategy. However, the proposed Care Deal is limited in scope. It is based on monitoring and review rather than new legislation, binding targets, or dedicated investment, falling short of the structural transformation and economic reorientation envisioned in EWL's Purple Pact. Moreover, the **Strategy does not explicitly recognise the economic value of unpaid care work**; care is framed primarily as a barrier to labour market participation rather than as productive work in its own right, falling short of the transformative feminist economic vision of the EWL's Purple Pact.

In relation to work-life balance and care, the Strategy builds on the [Work-Life Balance Directive](#) and **the European Care Strategy**, promoting the equal sharing of care responsibilities. It also commits to a report on the implementation of the Directive and studies on family leave for self-employed people, which is directly relevant to EWL's call for an impact study on men's take-up of leave, though framed as evidence-gathering rather than a commitment to corrective action.

However, **key EWL demands remain unmet**. The revision of the [Maternity Directive](#) is absent, reviews of part-time and fixed-term work directives are framed only as analytical exercises without commitment to reform, and there is **no reference to EU accession to the ILO Domestic Workers Convention**, despite its relevance for migrant women in the care sector. On pensions, while the gender pension gap is acknowledged, the Strategy does not commit to structural reforms such as strengthening public systems, ensuring gender equality outcomes in second and third pillar systems as part of the single market, introducing care credits, and setting minimum living standards.

More fundamentally, EWL's vision of an **equal-earner–equal-carer model**, including care credits in pension systems and moving beyond the male-breadwinner framework, finds no direct reflection in the Strategy addressing pension gaps but not adopting a systemic revaluation of care as economic labour.

The **mental health dimension of care work** is also entirely absent. Extensive research shows that women, who perform the majority of unpaid care, face higher risks of chronic stress, burnout, anxiety, and depression. By failing to address the psychological burden associated with care responsibilities, the Strategy overlooks a key dimension of gender inequality and further weakens its approach to both care and health.

Roadmap Principle 5: Equal employment opportunities and adequate working conditions

The adoption of the Pay Transparency Directive, the [Women on Boards Directive](#), and the Work-Life Balance Directive are major achievements. The Strategy builds on these milestones, focusing on their implementation and enforcement rather than introducing equivalent new legislative instruments. This continuity has both strengths and limitations when measured against EWL's recommendations.

Key actions by the Commission

- Present an assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of the Directive on gender balance on corporate boards (2029);
- Consider action to better address sexual harassment in the workplace in the context of the Quality Jobs Act (2026) and the future EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work (2028);
- Present an Action Plan for Women in Research, Innovation and Startups (2026);
- Encourage the European Standardisation System to adequately account for all the elements directly impacting women (2026-2030).

EWL called for 50-50 parity in underrepresented sectors, STEAM, cybersecurity, and care, and a gender equality impact assessment of the Platform Work Directive. **The Strategy introduces several sector-specific initiatives**, such as the Action Plan on Women in Research, Innovation and Startups, a Women in Farming platform, a new EU Artists' Charter, a "Boys in HEAL" approach for health, education, and social sectors, and gender-responsive measures in defence and transport. These represent genuine **progress in sectoral targeting**, which addressed occupational segregation more broadly without sector-specific delivery mechanisms. However, mandatory 50-50 parity, building on the [EWL's Parity Now! Campaign](#), is not proposed outside the existing corporate boards framework. The Platform Work Directive impact assessment EWL called for does not appear, nor does specific protection for women working in digital platforms.

The Strategy recognises that **one in three women have experienced sexual harassment** at work and signals possible legislative action through the Quality Jobs Act to better address this issue, while also referencing EU-OSHA's 2027 Healthy Workplaces Campaign on psychosocial risks and positioning the future **EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work as gender-responsive**, including on third-party violence. The proposed **EU Artists' Charter** also partially addresses EWL's call on cultural sector inequalities.

However, [ILO Convention 190](#) is **only referenced in a footnote** rather than as a guiding framework, and there is no active promotion of its ratification, completed by only 13 Member States. As such, while the Strategy operationalises workplace safety in a more concrete way, it falls short of the explicit implementation pathway called for by EWL, and does not address concerns such as age-related discrimination against older women at work.

EWL welcomes the Strategy's references to the [AI Act's obligations on high-risk systems](#) in employment and the **Quality Jobs Roadmap's attention to algorithmic management**, which partially address EWL's call to combat algorithmic discrimination in hiring. However, EWL had sought a more proactive, Commission-led framework rather than reliance on implementation by individual deployers of AI systems.

Similarly, on public procurement, EWL called for a gender equality impact assessment of the [Public Procurement Directive](#) and for gender mainstreaming to become a binding conditionality. While the Strategy references **gender-responsive public procurement through an EIGE toolkit**, EWL regrets that it does not commit to revising the Directive or introducing enforceable gender conditionality.

EWL also notes gaps in the Strategy's approach to women's entrepreneurship and economic participation more broadly. While the commitment to work with the **European Investment Bank on women's access to finance** is a welcomed step, EWL's broader call for gender mainstreaming in social action plans and for dedicated social support structures for women entrepreneurs remains unaddressed. Likewise, EWL's call on the Commission to strengthen the role of trade unions in ensuring safe workplaces and supporting victims of workplace violence, including through enhanced cooperation with national equality bodies, finds **no reflection in the Strategy**, which engages social partners primarily through the **Quality Jobs Act consultation process** without specifically reinforcing unions' protective role for women.

Finally, EWL is concerned by the **absence of targeted employment measures for women with disabilities**. EWL called for access to reasonable accommodation to ensure their full labour market participation, yet the Strategy references **intersectionality only as a horizontal principle** without translating it into concrete, dedicated measures in the employment domain.

Roadmap Principle 6: High-quality and inclusive education and training

Important actions proposed in the Gender Equality Strategy, which the EWL welcomes:

- Present an education package that will contribute to attracting more girls to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) fields and careers (2026);
- Promote a “Boys in HEAL” (Health, Education, Administration and Literacy) approach (2026–2030) and publish a handbook on reducing gender-based disparities in study choices and educational outcomes (2028);
- Support the development and promotion of material on tackling gender stereotypes for schools and teachers.

EWL welcomes the European Commission's commitment to promoting gender equality in education and training as outlined in the Strategy. Addressing gender stereotypes and gender segregation in education is crucial to ensure that girls and boys can freely pursue their ambitions and have equal access to opportunities throughout their lives that will take our societal progress further.

EWL commends the Commission's efforts to **increase the participation of girls and women in STEM fields**, especially via the upcoming education package and the “Girls Go STEM” initiative. Encouraging girls to pursue studies and giving girls more opportunities to have a career in STEM are important steps to overcome the occupational segregation and to ensure that women can equally benefit from the STEM sector opportunities, as they are strategic and fast-growing sectors.

At the same time, EWL acknowledges the importance of addressing the gender-specific challenges faced by boys in education. EWL welcomes initiatives such as the proposed “**Boys in HEAL**” (Health, Education, Administration and Literacy), which could contribute to reducing gender imbalances in

sectors such as health, education and care that remain highly feminised. Challenging stereotypes around gender roles in these fields is essential to promote more gender-balanced participation across all sectors of the labour market.

Nevertheless, EWL remains concerned that the measures outlined in the Strategy may not be sufficient to address the **structural causes of gender stereotypes and gender segregation in education** systems across Member States. Tackling these issues requires long-term and comprehensive approaches, including gender-sensitive curricula, early interventions, and systematic training for teachers and education professionals.

EWL, thus, appreciates the Commission's intention to support schools and educators in addressing gender stereotypes, including through educational materials and EU programmes such as [Erasmus+](#). Although EWL would have welcomed stronger commitments to ensure the systematic integration of gender equality in education and evaluate-able criteria to determine improvements or shortcomings on policies across the EU.

Finally, EWL stresses the importance of adopting an **intersectional approach for education policies**, meaning particular attention should be paid to students facing multiple forms of discrimination: race, ethnic origin, different socio-economic backgrounds, disability, lack of parent(s), different self-expression ways or learning difficulties. As these children face additional barriers in accessing inclusive and high-quality education.

For women and girls' sports participation, EWL fully supports the gender mainstreaming via [European Week of Sport](#), [#BeActive EU Sports Awards](#), [Erasmus+ Sport](#) and the [Strategic Vision for Sport in Europe](#) (expected to be published around the end of 2026). However, the **lack of a specific programme for girls to be supported for sports**, especially considering success in sports requiring years of training, is concerning.

Roadmap Principle 7: Active, equal and safe participation in public and political life

Key actions by the Commission:

- Present a Commission Recommendation on safety in politics (2026);
- Update the mapping of legal and policy measures to promote the participation and leadership of women in politics, public administration and parliaments (2027);
- Carry out a study on online networks, spheres and narratives targeting young men and boys (2028).

EWL welcomes the Strategy's commitment to ensuring women's active, equal and safe participation in public and political life. EWL also welcomes the reference to the first ever **decline in the share of women elected to the European Parliament** which highlights the need for continued efforts, particularly in the context of growing backlash against women's rights.

We also applaud the Strategy's **focus on cyberviolence against women** in public life and political life and support the announced update of the mapping of legal and policy measures in Member States

that promote women's participation and leadership in politics, public administration and parliaments, as well as the forthcoming Recommendation on Safety in Politics.

EWL also supports the proposal to make **funding** available under the future **AgoraEU programme for women in politics**, including addressing online hate, and calls on the Commission to ensure that this is implemented. Similarly, we support the development of a study on online networks, spheres and narratives targeting young men and boys.

However, we reiterate our **call for concrete and binding measures** to ensure that women can participate safely and equally in public and political life. We regret the absence of prohibitive measures for online violence, including instant removal as well as measures to ensure the EU institutions' own commitment to permanent gender equality within their own structures.

We strongly support the European Commission President's efforts and her commitment to improving gender balance within the College of Commissioners, the European Commission itself and its senior management. However, we will continue to urge the **Commission to enshrine parity, with an intersectional lens, permanently in its internal regulations**. We also call for the adoption of more concrete and ambitious measures, such as robust diversity, equality and inclusion policies.

We also reiterate our call for **gender equality to be established as a horizontal principle in European Parliament elections**, and for the adoption of concrete measures to ensure that candidate lists include an equal number of women and men and an intersectional perspective, such as the use of "*zipper lists*." We further call for measures to ensure that gender-equal representation is maintained in the European Parliament, including during periods of maternity, paternity and parental leave.

EWL advocates for **fifty-fifty parity in all decision-making bodies** across all sectors of society. We call on the European Commission to align with [UN CEDAW General Recommendation No. 40](#) on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems, and to take concrete steps to make parity a reality.

Roadmap Principle 8: Institutional mechanisms that deliver on gender equality

Key actions by the Commission:

- Ensure gender mainstreaming in the implementation of the next MFF (2028-2034) (pending adoption);
- Present technical guidance on the tracking of gender equality expenditure (2026);
- Strengthen the representation of civil society in the Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (2026).

EWL supports the Strategy's recognition that actions to advance gender equality can only be effective if they are backed by institutions and processes that promote gender equality and mainstream a gender perspective across all policy areas.

However, EWL is concerned that the creation of a **dedicated Council formation on gender equality is not included in the Strategy**. The current lack of a dedicated space for Ministers responsible for gender equality to discuss institutional and cross-cutting issues slows progress and contributes to a fragmented approach across different Council formations. While the Employment, Social Policy,

Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO) addresses certain aspects of gender inequality, it is not sufficiently equipped to address the systemic, structural and cross-sectoral dimensions of gender equality in other domains.

A dedicated Council formation on gender equality would play an important role not only in setting the agenda and advancing legislation, but also in tracking implementation and progress. This includes monitoring the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2026–2030, and complement its initiatives, such as the Gender Mainstreaming Helpdesk, aimed at supporting Member States in implementing gender mainstreaming.

The Council formation could also work in collaboration with EIGE to identify better and quicker, areas requiring further attention and greater harmonisation of approaches, notably through the EIGE Gender Equality Index.

EWL supports the Strategy's commitment to mainstreaming gender across all EU policies and activities. However, EWL is concerned that, while the new Strategy refers to intersectional approaches it **does not propose any new legislation establishing a legal definition of intersectionality**. The absence of such a definition limits the EU's capacity to effectively address compounded forms of discrimination.

EWL supports the Strategy's commitment to developing guidelines on gender mainstreaming, including gender budgeting, and welcomes the European Commission's continued support for the implementation of the **Directives on Standards for Equality Bodies**. EWL also supports the work of the **European Commission's Task Force on Equality**, while advocating for greater transparency to enhance its effectiveness.

EWL strongly supports the need to **strengthen gender mainstreaming in the EU budget**. The next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) is a topic of major advocacy interest for all civil society organisations, but in particular for the feminist movement. In the context of growing backlash against women's rights, the next MFF should provide a clear signal to policymakers and funders regarding standards and priorities. Therefore, EWL also supports the proposed [Performance Regulation](#) and the Strategy's commitment to present technical guidance on the tracking methodology by the end of 2026. However, more ex-ante policies are required to effectively gender mainstream the EU budget. EWL appreciates that the Strategy recognises the key role of civil society in promoting gender equality. It calls on the European Commission to ensure that **adequate funding for feminist organisations** is made available through the CERV programme and the proposed AgoraEU programme.

EWL supports the Strategy's will to strengthen the representation of civil society in the **Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men** and hopes that the Civil Society Platform will provide for a regular and structured framework for dialogue. EWL is pleased to read that the Strategy has a specific focus on **engaging and supporting men and boys** to achieve gender equality. To achieve gender equality and leave no one behind, it is essential to recognise all grounds of discrimination, which requires the collection of accurate and disaggregated data. EWL welcomes the European Commission's inclusion in the Strategy of the forthcoming Recommendation on equality data.

EWL appreciates the call on Member States to put in place **national gender equality action plans** by the end of 2027, and hopes that the Commission will be equipped with the necessary powers and tools to ensure their development and effective implementation.

EWL also supports the launch of a communication campaign on the **Union of Equality**, as well as the report on the implementation of all strategies under the Union of Equality. EWL calls on the European Commission to take stock of the challenges identified and to make every effort to address them, in order to advance gender equality and ultimately achieve it. The reports may highlight the need for more concrete measures, and EWL therefore calls on the European Commission to reflect on their findings and act accordingly.

Gender Equality in EU External Action

The EWL welcomes the **inclusion of Women, Peace and Security (WPS)** provisions in the Strategy. This was one of EWL's central asks during the consultation, and its absence from the Roadmap for Women's Rights. WPS does not constitute a standalone chapter in the new Strategy, but its integration within the external action chapter represents a **meaningful step forward**. The Strategy moves in EWL's direction in its framing while stopping short of the binding mechanisms as called for by EWL. The bright spots are the SHIELD initiative, the GAP IV commitment and the WPS Action Plan renewal, all of which respond to concrete EWL demands.

Key actions by the Commission:

- Launch the Gender Action Plan IV (2028-2034);
- Launch the EU Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2028-2034);
- Launch SHIELD (Sexual and Reproductive Health in Emergencies and Life in Dignity) – focused on access to SRHR and supporting survivors of gender-based violence (2026).

While the Strategy demonstrates a general commitment to gender-based violence prevention, it stops short of explicitly addressing sexual violence as a weapon of war. EWL called for a zero-tolerance, explicit invocation of the Rome Statute, and accountability commitments, which are not reflected in the Strategy. Given the well-documented and rising conflict-related sexual violence in Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a more explicit articulation would have been warranted.

At the same time, the Strategy does deliver concretely on SRHR and humanitarian programming. The **launch of SHIELD in 2026**, focused on SRHR access in emergencies and gender based violence (GBV) survivor support, directly responds to key EWL priorities and represents a meaningful advancement. Similarly, the commitment to evaluate the EU's humanitarian aid gender policy is a constructive step towards strengthening implementation. However, EWL's calls for safe spaces, income support, food security, including access to clean and safe water and, critically, **transparent funding mechanisms for local women-led organisations** in humanitarian settings which remain unaddressed. These organisations are the most effective first responders in crises, and their invisibility in the Strategy is a gap that SHIELD alone cannot fill.

The Strategy is silent in identifying **women's poverty as a driver of conflict**. Economic empowerment features as a **Global Gateway and Mediterranean development priority**, not as a peace and security

imperative. There are no commitments to gender-responsive recovery plans in post-conflict settings, social protection, and no acknowledgement that economic exclusion increases women's vulnerability in conflict zones. EWL's intersectional approach, integrating poverty, ethnicity, displacement status and disability into programme design, is structurally absent, and could weaken the Strategy's ambition across all its external action commitments.

The Strategy also takes steps to **promote women's participation in political processes**, notably through its support for election observation missions and its recognition of the importance of "meaningful participation." These elements signal a continued commitment to inclusive governance. At the same time, the approach remains largely aspirational. EWL's call for more concrete measures, such as binding 50/50 parity across all phases of peace and security engagement, and an explicit reference to [UN Security Council Resolution 1325](#).

IV. CONCLUSION

As highlighted in the Gender Equality Strategy, **"no country in the world is currently on track to achieve full gender equality by 2030."** This underscores a fundamental truth, that **achieving full and effective equality between women and men is a political choice** that requires strong and sustained leadership to make it a reality.

While **EWL regrets the lack of binding measures** in the Gender Equality Strategy 2026-2030, we **believe in the EU's commitment, determination and ambition** to make the EU a place where women's rights and gender equality are the cornerstone of a well-functioning, healthy society for the benefit of all. **We owe it to the present and future generations.**

The EWL **stands ready to accompany the European Commission** in the implementation of the Gender Equality Strategy, and the enforcement of the EU existing legal framework.