

Defend AgoraEU now: No democracy without investment in women's rights

[Brussels, 19 October 2026] The European Women's Lobby (EWL) is closely following the negotiations on the EU's next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) to ensure that women's rights, gender equality and civil society remain central to Europe's political and financial priorities.

A proposed 30% cut to AgoraEU is not only unacceptable but a profound political failure

The European Women's Lobby is outraged and shocked by the Irish Presidency's revised MFF negotiating box, circulated on 10 October 2026 and discussed by EU leaders on 15 October, which proposes to reduce funding for the future **AgoraEU instrument by approximately 30%**. The proposal would reduce its seven-year budget from €8.582 billion, as proposed by the European Commission, to €6.007 billion — a reduction of €2.575 billion. This is a Presidency compromise proposal, not an adopted EU budget, and negotiations are ongoing.

AgoraEU brings together EU funding for fundamental rights, democracy, equality, civil society, culture and media. It encompasses priorities essential to women's rights organisations and democratic participation, including action against violence against women, the protection of children and young people through the Daphne strand, anti-discrimination, and support for independent civil society, media freedom and cultural expression.

"We are deeply concerned that once again fundamental human rights in the EU are under attack at a time when Europe needs to take the lead, to give hope and show its commitment and assurance to everybody across the continent. Such a move will carry long-term devastating consequences, including widening gaps in equality between women and men and widening inequalities, weakening of social cohesion, rising poverty and social exclusion and, above all, a loss of trust in institutions, democracy and the rule of law. In other words, a straight line towards disastrous long-term generational consequences," stated **Mary Collins, EWL Secretary General**.

A political choice with long-term consequences

The European Commission's initial AgoraEU proposal already represented only approximately **0.43% of its proposed MFF of almost €2 trillion** for 2028–2034. The €2.575 billion reduction proposed by the Irish Presidency represents approximately 0.14% of that overall budget. These figures raise a fundamental question about the political priorities guiding the next EU budget: why should investment in fundamental rights, equality and democratic participation bear such a substantial reduction when its contribution to the overall budget is so limited?

EWL considers that these proposed cuts risk undermining the EU's commitments to equality, fundamental rights and democracy. At a time of growing attacks against women's rights and civil society, reducing the resources available to organisations defending these values would weaken the very institutions and communities that sustain democratic resilience, social cohesion and trust in Europe.

EWL calls for action

The European Women's Lobby calls on **the Council and the European Parliament to oppose the proposed reduction and defend an adequately funded AgoraEU programme**. The EU must preserve at least the European Commission's proposed €8.582 billion envelope and pursue a more ambitious settlement that ensures sufficient, identifiable funding for CERV+, including women's rights and gender equality organisations.

The stakes are far too high — now and for future generations. The EU cannot credibly champion democracy, equality and fundamental rights while withdrawing the resources needed to make these commitments a reality. **Protecting AgoraEU is an investment in Europe's democratic future, not a saving to be made at the expense of fundamental rights.**

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