



## POLICY POSITION

# Towards Gender Equality, Greater Inclusion And Representation

## INTRODUCTION


In recent years, the European Union (EU) has witnessed a troubling rise in anti-gender discourse and ideology, a phenomenon that not only threatens to reverse decades of progress towards gender equality but also to deepen societal divides and undermine democracy. This resurgence is marked by a deliberate propagation of regressive ideologies and gender stereotypes, leading to increased discrimination, violence, and diminished opportunities for women and other historically marginalised and underrepresented groups. This policy position outlines a holistic approach to address these challenges, emphasising the importance of legal protections, education and civil society engagement.

## ENSHRINING INSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS AND REFORMING THE INSTITUTIONS

The EU's dedication to gender equality necessitates stronger legislative measures against hate speech, discrimination, and gender-based violence, including rape and femicide. A cornerstone of this commitment is the full ratification and implementation of the Istanbul Convention by all Member States; as of January 2024, only 22 Member States have ratified it. Parallel to this, the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 and

the Strategy for Equality of LGBTIQ Persons 2020-2025, which introduce a series of ambitious initiatives, set a clear path for the EU to champion gender equality. They must be actively promoted and monitored to ensure their comprehensive and effective implementation.

The European Parliament's recent proposals to amend the Treaties, which advocate for gender equality throughout the text, are a much-needed change from the current Treaties which make no reference to gender or gender equality at any point. These changes must now be considered by the European Council, which should take all steps necessary to enact them, not least by convening a Convention as soon as possible in accordance with the EU's ordinary revision procedure. At the same time, the EU must tackle gender blindness more rigorously by accounting for intersectional- and gender-specific repercussions and working to dismantle persisting gender inequalities when designing and implementing future policies. Moreover, there is an urgent need for comparable data on gender-based violence in all EU Member States. The EU must conduct systematic research on the details of funding and resources for anti-gender movements. To this end, the



EU should provide more funding for the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), the smallest and least-funded EU agency.

To safeguard women's rights and autonomy across the continent, the EU should follow the example of France and institutionalise the right to abortion in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. Furthermore, the implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda in the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions is pivotal. Strategies to implement the WPS agenda effectively within CSDP missions should include ensuring meaningful participation of women in decision-making processes, incorporating gender perspectives into mission planning and operations, providing gender-sensitive training for mission personnel, and actively engaging with local women's organisations and civil society groups. These efforts can contribute to more inclusive and sustainable peacebuilding processes, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness and legitimacy of CSDP missions.


Reforms in the European Parliament concerning codes of conduct, data collection, and transparency regarding gender issues are urgently needed, especially in light of the recent scandals

that shook the institution.

## **GREATER REPRESENTATION AND MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION**

The quest for greater representation and the meaningful participation of women and underrepresented genders within the EU's political and economic spheres is a cornerstone of advancing gender equality and strengthening democracy. A crucial strategy in this pursuit involves the implementation and enforcement of gender quotas across the public and private sectors, including political appointments and electoral candidate lists. We welcome the adoption of the Women on Boards Directive in 2022, which enhances gender balance on corporate boards across the bloc. To achieve genuine gender parity, we now call for a parity-based European Parliament, where transnational lists of candidates alternate between men and women.

This drive towards equal representation must be complemented by fostering gender-inclusive policies that embed gender mainstreaming principles into the heart of all EU policies and programmes. Such an approach would ensure that gender considerations are integral to policy development and implementation,



promoting a more equitable society. To support this goal, targeted leadership development programmes are essential, providing women and gender-diverse individuals with the skills and opportunities to ascend to leadership positions and effectively influence decision-making processes.

Furthermore, collaborative efforts with Member States to launch awareness campaigns and dismantle systemic barriers to women's participation are vital. These initiatives aim to ensure equal access to information, resources, and opportunities, thereby levelling the playing field for all genders. Furthermore, monitoring and evaluating progress toward gender equality in decision-making processes enables the identification of gaps and the formulation of responsive strategies.


## **DISMANTLING STEREOTYPES THROUGH EDUCATION**

Recognising the transformative power of education as a cornerstone for advancing gender equality, the EU must strive to dismantle gender stereotypes and broaden public understanding of sexual and reproductive rights. The integration of gender-sensitive materials into curricula and textbooks at all educational levels is essential to effectively

highlighting women's significant contributions to European integration and to supporting young girls' interest in traditionally underrepresented fields.

Additionally, the EU should promote more vigorously the inclusion of civic education courses designed to promote gender equality and prevent sexual or sexist violence and discrimination, fostering an environment of respect and inclusivity. The EU needs to counter hurtful stereotypes and gendered disinformation by supporting fact-based campaigns and conducting research into the funding and operations of anti-gender movements.

Men and boys should also be involved early on as allies: the EU must encourage an open dialogue that underscores the benefits of gender equality for all, including men, and actively engage in education on dismantling harmful stereotypes. Techniques of mediation, conflict management, and supervision should be integrated into educational programmes to address and reduce instances of gender-based violence, rape, femicide and promote non-violent conflict resolution. Highlighting the intersections of oppression is crucial for building a united front against regressive ideologies.



Moreover, the EU must commit to regularly monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of these educational initiatives, ensuring they contribute positively towards achieving gender equality. The roles and perceptions of men and boys in several sectors, especially the military field, are deeply rooted in traditional gender norms. Efforts should continue to challenge these norms and promote inclusivity, with the aim of recognising the multiple contributions and capabilities of different genders.

## **ADVANCING EQUALITY FOR UNDERREPRESENTED GROUPS**

The empowerment of marginalised groups, particularly LGBTQIA+ persons, remains a critical area where the EU should lead by example, for instance by advocating for the establishment of civil unions for same-sex couples across Member States in alignment with the European Convention on Human Rights. This includes advocating for the legal acknowledgment of homoparental families, thereby ensuring both parents have legal responsibilities for their children and calling for an EU-wide ban on conversion therapies. Additionally, the recognition of legal decisions regarding parental authority from other states represents a crucial step towards

respecting the diversity of family structures.

To truly empower historically underrepresented communities, the EU must also focus on providing targeted support services, including healthcare, mental health support, and access to essential resources. Creating safe spaces for these groups to voice their concerns and share their experiences is paramount, ensuring that their unique perspectives are heard without patronisation. This effort extends to fostering allyship and representation through strategic communication, thereby amplifying the voices of those often sidelined in societal discourse.

Finally, youth involvement is especially vital in this context. The EU should continue supporting youth-led civil society organisations with the necessary resources, including funding for training, mentorship programmes, and advocacy campaigns. This support should also encompass capacity-building initiatives to equip young activists with the skills to navigate challenges such as hate speech and doxing, ensuring they can effectively contribute to the promotion of gender equality and the rights of marginalised communities.

## **BUILDING STRONG ALLIANCES IS KEY**

In anticipation of the shifting dynamics within EU institutions post-2024 elections, marked by projections suggesting an increase in far-right political representation, the imperative for fostering an alliance for gender equality has never been more critical. The foundation of these efforts rests on the establishment of robust alliances encompassing a broad spectrum of stakeholders committed to gender equality, including civil society organisations, activists, the private sector, public officials, and elected politicians. This would consolidate these forces before the EU elections, ensuring readiness to advocate effectively for gender equality from the onset of the new legislative term. Such preparedness is crucial for overcoming ideological divisions and demonstrating a unified front in support of gender equality principles.


Moreover, fostering structured dialogues between EU institutions, civil society organisations, and marginalised communities is vital for addressing the underpinnings of far-right ideologies. Through these dialogues, a deeper understanding of the challenges at hand can be achieved, paving the way for the

development of targeted, results-oriented solutions. Frontline national civil society organisations play a particularly pivotal role in this context by forming alliances with like-minded entities to address structural barriers and eliminate gender stereotypes, especially in male-oriented domains.

Cooperation with NATO, the United Nations (UN), especially UN Women, and the Council of Europe are just a few examples of cooperation with partners that can present a formidable counterforce to the well-resourced and strategically coordinated anti-gender movements, ensuring that the narrative around gender equality remains strong.

## **CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS AS CATALYSTS FOR GENDER ADVOCACY**

Civil society organisations are indispensable in the EU's pursuit of gender equality, serving as the frontline defenders against the backdrop of growing polarisation and authoritarian tendencies. Their mission extends beyond advocacy, playing a crucial role in mobilising public support for gender equality and the rights of historically marginalised groups. Their efforts in



holding authorities accountable are critical to ensuring the implementation and advancement of inclusive and equitable policies.

Increasing funding and support for frontline civil society organisations is paramount for them to effectively counteract regressive narratives and fight legal battles. The EU should strengthen support for civil society through European funds such as the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV) and the European Social Fund (ESF), and should provide funding towards training programmes, mentorship initiatives, and the provision of technological tools that facilitate collaboration and the creation of safe spaces.

Moreover, integrating civil society organisations into legislative processes as experts and legal advocates for women and LGBTQIA+ persons would enrich the policy-making process, ensuring that legislation is informed by on-the-ground realities and expertise. As a bridge between the political sphere and grassroots activism, civil society organisations are instrumental in bringing politics closer to citizens, fostering a more engaged and informed public discourse on gender equality.

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*Only by working together can we provide common solutions to the challenges Europe faces and ensure that Europeans' ambitions mirror the future work of the European Union. By bringing our member organisations together in our Political Committees, we continuously develop new policy positions and put existing ones to good use. Please visit our website [www.europeanmovement.eu](http://www.europeanmovement.eu) to take a look at our main policy positions that guide our current work and get in touch if you would like to join us or support our work.*





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