

EU Gender Equality Strategy Call for Evidence feedback

August 2025

Feedback by WO=MEN Dutch Gender Platform

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This is the moment for the European Union to show leadership and to sustain and reinforce its commitment to gender equality and women's rights, both in European Member States and through its external action. The EU must build on the achievements of the 2020-2025 Gender Equality Strategy and respond to current challenges that threaten hard won rights and freedoms.

Gender equality is not only a moral imperative, but also economically smart and essential for achieving the EU's policy objectives. Investing in gender equality globally could yield up to \$28 trillion in economic benefits. Peace agreements last longer when women participate in the negotiations. And inclusive and gender diverse teams make better and more sustainable business decisions.

WO=MEN Dutch Gender Platform welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the next EU Gender Equality Strategy. In this document, on behalf of all our members, we present 10 key recommendations for the next Gender Equality Strategy.

1. Make gender equality a cross-cutting priority in all EU policies and programmes.

Gender equality must be fully integrated and systematically mainstreamed across the EU's internal and external actions. This requires robust gender mainstreaming across defence, security, migration and crisis preparedness, and the EU's agendas on sustainable competitiveness, economic security, and the green and digital transitions.

Maintain the EU's commitment to ensuring that 85% of all new external action programmes contribute to gender equality, as outlined in the 2020-2027 third Gender Action Plan (GAP III).

2. Ensure adequate and sustainable financing for gender equality.

Funding is essential to advance gender equality. Gender-responsive budgeting must be applied to all EU internal and external funding instruments, including in the Social Fund, Global Europe, Horizon Europe, and the Recovery and Resilience Facility, and the next Multiannual Financial Framework, including the national and regional plans and Competitiveness fund.

The EU must significantly increase funding for women's rights organisations (WROs), particularly feminist and grassroots movements, both in Europe and externally, who are critical actors in upholding human rights, advancing democracy, and reaching marginalised communities. Ensure funding is flexible, long-term, accessible and allocated through transparent and participatory mechanisms that allow women rights organisations to set their own priorities.

3. Pushback against anti-rights and anti-democratic forces and regulatory rollbacks.

The EU needs to take proactive and coordinated action to counter the growing influence of anti-gender, anti-rights, and anti-democratic movements. These actors undermine gender equality, human rights, and the rule of law through digital disinformation, populist narratives, and attacks on civil society. These movements are increasingly organized, transnational and well-resourced.

Connected to this is the deregulation agenda, which seeks to dismantle human rights safeguards and reduce accountability. All “Better Regulation” or simplification initiatives must be subject to robust human rights and gender impact assessments, democratic oversight, and public scrutiny. Strengthened support for civil society watchdogs, independent media, and human rights defenders is essential.

4. Uphold agreed language on gender and rights.

The EU must uphold and defend internationally agreed language on gender equality and human rights as enshrined in its own treaties, legislation, strategies and action plans, as well as in internationally binding frameworks such as the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW). Watering down language means giving in to anti-rights actors and entrenches harmful social norms. Consistent, rights-based language ensures legal clarity, protect rights holders, and support more effective policy making.

5. Guarantee full and equal participation in economic, political and public life.

Women and girls in all their diversity must have equal decision-making power at all levels, particularly in areas of peace and security, climate action, just transition, trade, and investment. Structural barriers continue to hinder women's and gender-diverse people's full participation in economic, political, and public life. We call on the EU to support equal pay and pay transparency laws, care economy investments, and targeted support for underrepresented groups, including women with disabilities, migrant and refugee women, women of colour and LGBTQIA+ persons.

6. Prevent and address gender-based violence online and offline.

The EU must take stronger action to prevent and respond to online and offline gendered violence targeting women in all their diversity. This includes implementing the EU Directive on violence against women, in alignment with the Istanbul Convention, now ratified by the EU. A comprehensive EU strategy must include specific measures to protect women human rights defenders, journalists, politicians, and activists. The labour market and workplaces must be made safer through full implementation of the ILO Convention 190 on violence and harassment in the world of work.

7. Address the root causes of inequalities through an intersectional and rights-based approach.

Tackling structural gender inequalities requires a transformative and intersectional approach that addresses root causes and overlapping systems of oppression, based on race, class, disability, migration status, sexual orientation, and more. This means recognising and supporting the voice and leadership of underrepresented groups, including women with disabilities, migrant and refugee women, women of colour, LGBTQIA+ persons and sex workers. Engage men and boys to challenge harmful gender norms and stereotypes and encourage shared caregiving responsibilities.

8. Fully implement the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda.

The EU must institutionalize the Women, Peace and Security agenda as outlined in UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and subsequent resolutions. In the past decade, the world registered a disturbing 50 percent increase in the number of women and girls living in conflict. Gender-responsive inclusive peacebuilding and conflict prevention are central to EU values of peace, democracy, and human rights. Women need to be equally represented in formal peace processes and post-conflict reconstruction, particularly in roles with decision-making power.

9. Advance an inclusive and gender-just green transition.

To protect its global competitiveness and economic security the EU must guarantee that its transition to a green and digital economy is inclusive and gender-just. Europe can simply not afford to leave half of its population behind. Closing gender gaps in employment, leadership, and entrepreneurship is a strategic imperative for economic resilience. Ensure the full and equal participation of women, including Indigenous women, rural women and environmental defenders in shaping the transition. And enhance Europe's leadership a values-based economy that prioritises sustainability, equality and human rights.

10. Protect sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) are fundamental to gender equality, enabling women and girls to make autonomous choices essential for full societal participation. The EU has both the duty and the legal competence to uphold SRHR as a core part of its Gender Equality Strategy. Ensuring access to SRHR enables women and girls to make autonomous decisions about their bodies, relationships, and futures – decisions that are essential for their full participation in education, employment, and public life. The EU needs to ensure that women and girls in all their diversity have access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services.

About WO=MEN Dutch Gender Platform

WO=MEN is the Dutch platform working for global gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. Our platform consists of over 130 member organizations and individuals, including migrant and refugee women-led organizations, entrepreneurs, trade unions, knowledge institutions, and civil society groups. Together with our members, we monitor and influence politics and policy, share knowledge and good practices, and mobilize diverse stakeholders. Reach out to us at info@wo-men.nl.