

# Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men

## THE FUTURE OF GENDER EQUALITY STRATEGY AFTER 2019: *THE BATTLES THAT WE WIN NEVER STAY WON*

*Opinion on the future gender equality policy after 2019, old and new challenges and priorities*

*The Opinion of the Advisory Committee does not necessarily reflect the positions of the Member States and does not bind the Member States*

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## INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of 2018, the European Union economy is slowly recovering, but remains fragile, both internally and externally. While growth figures were exceptionally high in the last year, outlooks for the years to come have been revised downward. On the eve of the European elections and the renewal of the European institutions and leaders, and even though economic measures have been taken, especially fiscal consolidation policies, the EU is still confronted with new challenges that are likely to prevail beyond 2019: Women's and girls' rights are being challenged in Europe and elsewhere. The labor market is undergoing a profound change with still a fairly high incidence of informal and non-standard forms of employment even if permanent full-time employment remains the norm. There is still a much higher prevalence of women in part-time work than men. Violence and harassment remain the most common and widely unpunished violations of women's human rights and manifestation of gender inequality. These changes and developments take place in a context where the well-known challenges to gender equality remain as valid as ever. According to the 2017 Gender Equality Index, progress towards gender equality in the EU-28 is rather slow — the Gender Equality Index score increased from 62 points in 2005 to 65 points in 2012 and 66.2 points in 2015. Each Member State has room for improvement and faces particular obstacles to achieving gender equality.

Moreover, any discussions on a new perspective for gender equality will take place simultaneously with preparations for the EU's next multiannual financial framework, the European Structural and Investment Funds, and the policy to follow the current Europe 2020 strategy. These preparations will play a significant role on the political agenda and can present a challenge but also an opportunity for the discussions on gender equality.

Therefore, this opinion incorporates itself in the frame of these negotiations and renewals aiming at allowing a better consideration of the gender equality challenges in the definition of the EU's next priorities and developing more effective and adequate tools.

As called for in the Trio Presidency Declaration signed by Estonia, Bulgaria and Austria on the 19 of July 2017, the future gender equality strategy should be ambitious and favor a global and methodological approach which takes into account all the dimensions of gender equality and involves all the concerned actors from policy makers to the civil society.

### **1. A GLOBAL AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH**

#### **1.1. The EU's international framework**

Gender Equality is an essential part of the EU rule of law, a founding value and one of the objectives of the European Union.

As 2020 marks the 25th anniversary of the fourth world conference on women, it is only relevant to review progress made across the EU in the quest to achieve gender equality and women's rights and to make recommendations to ensure that all women and men experience equality as envisaged in the founding principles of the Union and the Charter of fundamental rights<sup>1</sup>:

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<sup>1</sup> Charter of fundamental rights of the European Union (2000/C 364/01) : *The Union is founded on the indivisible, universal values of human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity ; it is based on the principles of democracy and the rule of law*

Indeed, the EU already has a strong legal basis in order to promote gender equality: articles 2 and 8 of the Treaty on the functioning of the EU refer to gender equality and mainstreaming as well as does the European Pact for Gender Equality 2011-2020.

The next European Union's gender equality policy after 2019 should further strengthen the implementation and enforcement of the European *acquis* and contribute to implement the EU's international commitments, such as the United Nations 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and sustainable development goals (SDGs)<sup>2</sup>, and the application (and where needed ratification) of, amongst others, the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action and the Council of Europe Conventions.

In fact, the European institutions – including the Commission, the Council of Ministers and the Parliament – have collaborated with the member states and other international organizations to foster gender equality. Among the commitments that were made is the adoption in 2010 of the Charter for women, the Commission Strategy for equality between men and women (2010-2015) and the *Strategic engagement for gender equality 2016-2019*. The progress made to achieve the goals set in these documents is recorded by an annual report of the Commission on progress on equality between women and men which includes good practices by member states.

*Therefore, the Advisory Committee recommends Member states to:*

- **• Ratify and implement relevant international instruments<sup>3</sup> and especially the Council of Europe's Convention on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention)**

## **1.2. Reinforce gender mainstreaming and budgeting in all policy sectors**

Gender mainstreaming holds a strong legitimacy as it is rooted in the Article 8 of the TFEU. The multifaceted underlying determinants of gender inequality must therefore be addressed simultaneously. It seems cardinal for member states to implement a holistic approach focusing on several policy areas at once and tackling them through multiple instruments.

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<sup>2</sup> SDG 5 is dedicated to gender equality and empowerment of women and girls. Indicators under Goal 5 include "Whether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex" (5.1.1); "Proportion of seats held by women in local governments" (5.5.1b); "Number of countries with laws and regulations that guarantee full and equal access to women and men aged 15 years and older to sexual and reproductive health care, information and education" (5.6.2); "Proportion of countries with systems to track and make public allocations for gender equality and women's empowerment" (5.c.1)..

<sup>3</sup> As a consequence of the international and European commitments, the relevant instruments for the implementation of the gender equality policy should be generalized to all member states, especially the Council of Europe's Convention on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention), the European Convention on Human Rights and related case-law, the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention), the Council of Europe's Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings and the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and its optional protocol.

## a) Ensure a global effective implementation of gender mainstreaming

The Advisory committee recommends the **European Commission** to:

- **Re-establish gender equality as a priority issue of the EU's political agenda.**
- **Implement a gender mainstreaming strategy through administrative routines and preparatory work to strengthen the commitment to and coordination of gender mainstreaming in all policy areas, as well as its effective implementation, monitoring and evaluation.**
- Acknowledge and integrate expertise in European processes and institutions on a regular basis by consulting expert bodies like the High level group on gender mainstreaming and the advisory committee on equal opportunities for women and men.
- Shape a defined role for the European Parliament in monitoring progress and the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) in providing robust data through the annual Gender Equality Index.

The Advisory Committee also recommends the **Member States** to:

- **Encourage high-level political debate, by ensuring that gender equality topics are adequately debated in EPSCO council meetings, including with ministers responsible for gender equality.**
- **Facilitate regular meetings of EU Ministers for Gender Equality**
- Define and effectively implement a national gender mainstreaming action plan through a strong political commitment, preparation and organization, especially from people in decision-making positions with the help of tools like the EIGE mainstreaming platform<sup>4</sup>.
- Ensure that gender equality is regularly discussed in other Council meetings (e.g. finance) to strengthen gender mainstreaming in Council formations and in all policies.

## b) Develop a gender budgeting approach at EU and Member States level

Gender budgeting is a transformative tool that strengthens coherence between government budgets and gender equality objectives by focusing on how public resources are collected and spent. Nevertheless, gender equality is still not considered in a systematic manner across the budgetary process. Further efforts are needed to translate political commitments into financial allocations for advancing gender equality and women's rights.

Similarly to the Commission's proposal for the MFF 2014-2020, the recently announced MFF 2021-2027 does not include gender equality as an objective. Even if gender equality is not recognized as a primary policy objective in terms of the MFF, it is important that micro level programs or projects that are designed to improve gender equality are still able to achieve their objectives.

The Advisory Committee therefore recommends the **EU and its Member States** to:

- **Assess how gender equality is reflected in the MFF and the annual EU budgetary cycle in a horizontal way similar to climate change and biodiversity**

<sup>4</sup> <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming>

- Assess how the integration of the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights through the social scoreboard brings in the gender perspective in the different phases of the European semester, e.g. where appropriate through the inclusion of gender equality objectives in the commission's country specific recommendations.
- Use the audit and discharge procedure as an opportunity to keep the European Commission accountable for gender budgeting and mainstreaming commitments.
- Integrate a gender perspective in ESI Funds through an operational guidance as well as an accurate monitoring and evaluating of gender strategies. Resources should also be earmarked across funds through the identification of gender specific and/or gender relevant priorities, measures or focus areas.

### 1.3. Ensure a specific stand-alone and high-level strategy for gender equality in the EU

The dual approach combining gender mainstreaming and specific gender-equality actions should be continued at all levels. Therefore, in this context, it is also crucial to ensure that social and economic policy strategies post 2020 at EU level also pay adequate attention to this issue. It is important to ensure commitment across all EU institutions, building on the previous 2010-2015 strategy, the 2016-2019 strategic engagement, the 2017 action plan on the gender pay gap and the European Pillar of Social Rights (2017).

*The Advisory Committee recommends the EU to:*

- **Adopt a high level Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 as a Commission Communication, and ensure that its future implementation is under the responsibility of the highest political level, i.e. President of the EU Commission.**
- **Develop Transparency and accountability,** by discussing the annual report on gender equality not only in the High level group but also in the EPSCO and other council meetings (such as Finance).
- Use the broad and inclusive consultation prior to the current strategic engagement (public consultation and global forum held in 2015) as a role model for developing a new strategy.
- Include gender equality targets in other strategic documents.

### 1.4. Take an intersectional approach

Tackling all forms of discrimination is important. At the same time, increased gender equality can decrease other forms of discriminations. It is therefore vital that the future policies take intersectionality and multiple discriminations, related to age, race, ethnicity, religion, belief, disability, sexual orientation, socio-economic background etc. into account.

Intersectional discrimination can for instance be related to migration which is an important policy area for the EU, as demonstrated by the proposed 2.6 times increase in the MFF 2021-2027 allocated for the management of external borders, migration and refugee flows in comparison to the MFF 2014-2020.<sup>5</sup> Yet, to date, specific gender equality measures and gender mainstreaming have only been incorporated into the EU migration and integration policies to a limited extent. It is therefore

<sup>5</sup> European Commission (2018) *Commission Communication (...) on the EU Budget for the Future*, 2.5.2018, COM(2018) 321 final.

vital to engage in gender-sensitive and humanitarian response with inward migration, both regular and irregular, to ensure safe passage routes.

*Therefore, the Advisory Committee recommends the EU to:*

- **Ensure intersectionality in the gender equality strategy after 2019 by actively addressing and tackling intersectional discriminations and inequalities faced by women on various grounds such as age, education, socio-economic background, race, ethnicity, age, disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief etc.**
- Ensure that migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls are informed and have access to their human and social rights, in line with national legal frameworks, notably in relation to employment, health, housing, social security and education.
- Ensure that EU migration and asylum policies, including the EU funding instruments, are gender sensitive and include: Partnerships (multi-agency cooperation), Prevention (awareness raising and training), Service Provision (free, provided in different languages and offered regardless of legal status), Protection (risk assessments, code of conduct for law enforcement agencies) and Prosecution (end impunity).

## **2. ENSURE GENDER EQUALITY: RIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES**

Women and men must be able to make free choices at every step of their life and have the same opportunities of succeeding in these choices. This can only be achieved if their fundamental rights are respected and implemented in practice. And yet, certain disadvantages experienced in younger years accumulate throughout the life cycle and can cause subsequent difficulties later in life. A life cycle approach to gender equality policies is therefore necessary to capture this reality.

### **2.1. Address discrimination in law**

The women and girls left behind by discriminatory laws are often permanently excluded from the benefits of development. Conversely, the implementation of laws that conform to human rights principles of equality and non-discrimination can help sustain efforts to move towards just, peaceful and inclusive societies.

*The Advisory committee recommends the Member States to:*

- **Eliminate discriminatory laws and enact laws to advance gender equality**
- Introduce gender-impact assessment in legislative processes

### **2.2. Prevent and fight gender stereotypes and sexism in education**

Traditional gender stereotypes and sexism affecting women and men, girls and boys continue to be present in all areas, including education, training, career orientation, childcare systems and all the way to the labour market and beyond. They have a strong influence on the division of labour between women and men, at home, work and more generally in all areas of society. They enable continued discrimination limiting women in the fulfilment and utilization of their potential and also impacting men and boys' life choices. They impact both girls and boys who sometimes do not choose

certain pathways because they are seen as male or female ones.<sup>6</sup>. Educating and involving women and men as well as girls and boys is a prerequisite to the achievement of a gender-equal society.

*The Advisory Committee recommends the **EU and Member States**, according to their competences, to:*

- Foster actions to improve knowledge about the extent of sexism.
- **Initiate and develop awareness raising programs targeting parents and professionals working at all levels in the education sector, promoting the elimination of sexism and gender stereotypes.**
- Implement a strong gender aware and objective education policy starting at an early age to foster a shift in mentalities through specific attention to school curricula and gender-sensitive training for teachers in order to encourage young people to aspire to non-traditional and non-gender stereotypical jobs and life-paths.
- Engage women and men as well as girls and boys in the achievement of gender equality

### **2.3. Foster equal labour market participation and economic independence**

Women remain a largely untapped pool of competence for the workforce and although there are notable differences between Member States, the EU-28 gender employment gap is 11.6 percentage points, going up to 18.2 percentage points in full-time equivalents<sup>7</sup>. Among the different factors, for example, depending on the leave and childcare arrangements, women may still have difficulties in entering and remaining on the labour market because of caring duties. The economic loss induced by the gender employment gap is estimated at 370 billion euro a year<sup>8</sup> which makes gender equality in the labour market crucial for sustainable growth and employment in Europe.

The EU also suffers a waste of potential as women and girls are more educated than men but hold only few of the most prestigious positions<sup>9</sup>. The labour market is highly segregated by sex, vertically as well as horizontally.

Women's economic empowerment therefore requires measures that support equal opportunities, equal pay for work of equal value, implementation of existing legislation and abolition of discriminatory legislation, as well as providing economic incentives for women to work, including making sure that welfare systems are targeted at getting women into the labour market, adequate and appropriate leave arrangements, access to quality and affordable childcare and other social services and a facilitating a working culture, norms, attitudes and practices which move away from gender stereotypes.

Supporting women-entrepreneurs also appears primordial for innovation in a changing economy. It is both economically and socially essential that they are provided the means to choose to actively participate in the labour market, optimising the available qualifications and skills of a person and actuating personal fulfilment. Fostering entrepreneurship is particularly relevant to improve EU productivity as it is a factor of innovation as well as of value and job creation.

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<sup>6</sup> For example, in information communications and technology (ICT), women only make up 17% of graduates in the EU. From 2004 to 2012, the number of women studying in this field went down in 20 Member States (EIGE, *Study in the EU: set apart by gender*, 2018)

<sup>7</sup> Eurostat, Labor Force Survey, 2016

<sup>8</sup> Eurofound (2016), *The gender employment gap: challenges and solutions*.

44% of women aged 30-34 across the EU completed tertiary education compared to 34% of men (Eurostat, 2016)

The Advisory Committee recommends the **EU and Member States**, according to their competences, to:

- **Set national specific targets for female employment rates (in full-time equivalents) including for specific groups of women (with disabilities, from migrant background, etc.)<sup>10</sup>.**
- Encourage women's entrepreneurship through better access to credit and funding, mentoring programs, or the creation of networks.
- Implement specific measures for certain sectors such as agriculture that are more gender segregated<sup>11</sup>.
- Make sure that women benefit from a strong gender-sensitive education at an early age as well as a life-long learning / training and access to adequate opportunities even while in employment.

### **a) Eliminate the gender pay gap**

Women in the EU, across the economy, earn on average over 16% less per hour than men (even though some heterogeneity can be observed between countries and between sectors). Part of the difference can be explained by various factors, but for those parts that remain "unexplained", it is important to look into the root causes of the issue and to tackle them at the appropriate level.

The Advisory Committee recommends the **European Commission and Member States** according to their competences to:

- **Ensure the effective implementation of the "EU Action Plan 2017-2019 - Tackling the gender pay gap" with concrete follow-up measures on European and national level.**
- **Focus on the full and comprehensive implementation of existing legal frameworks at national level and introduce or enforce legislative measures to ensure pay transparency and to better implement equal pay<sup>12</sup>, including by raising awareness for the principle of equal pay for work of equal value. and non-discriminatory job classification in a cross-sectorial approach.**
- Strengthen awareness for equal pay for equal work and work of equal value amongst companies, including by developing practical tools (such as pay roll systems, non-discriminatory job classification systems, equality plans) together with them
- Enhance the role played by social partners in tackling the gender pay gap and promoting equal pay by collective bargaining through the creation of practical tools for companies (such as pay roll systems, non-discriminatory job classification systems, equality plans) and programs to help women better negotiate salaries

<sup>10</sup> The Europe 2020 strategy targeted a general employment rate of 75%. Yet, it hides a great gap as in the third quarter of 2017 male employment rate was above this ratio while female employment reached 66.6%.

<sup>11</sup> The primary sector is still particularly male-dominated. For example, women, being slightly less than 50% of EU population, were only 35.1% of the total working population in agriculture (against the average 45.9% of working women).

<sup>12</sup> The 2014 Commission Pay Transparency Recommendation has been evaluated by the Commission itself in 2017. The report shows that only 11 Member States currently have legislation on pay transparency in place

## **b) Encourage equal access for men and women to different sectors, including by improving working conditions**

Gender-based occupational segregation remains a crucial challenge as it leads to women's socioeconomic disadvantages. Both horizontal and vertical segregation are prevalent as women and men continue to be employed in different occupations and at different levels and grades.

*The Advisory Committee recommends the **European Commission and Member States** according to their competences to:*

- **Address the gender gaps in technology access, use, lifelong training, content creation and leadership at all levels of the ICT sector**
- Envisage and address gender differences in a changing labour market due to digitalisation and AI.
- Strengthen and invest in the care economy, an essential sector in which women are overrepresented, by promoting decent pay and working conditions, and developing programs of accreditation and professionalization for this area.

## **c) Combat and prevent sexual harassment in the workplace**

According to FRA's survey, among all women who have experienced sexual harassment since the age of 15, 32 % indicated somebody from the employment context – such as colleague, a boss or a customer - as a perpetrator<sup>13</sup>. Patriarchal structures and behaviours on the labour market have been found to trivialise male violence at work or in situations related to work, making it very difficult for women to detect and denounce such violence<sup>14</sup>.

*The Advisory Committee recommends the **European Commission and Member States** according to their competences to:*

- Strengthen the monitoring of the implementation of the EU directives prohibiting sexual harassment with a specific focus to the workplace.
- Offer full support and encouragement to women in reporting cases of sexual harassment and establish mechanisms that empower and support women in the safe reporting of such cases.
- Raise awareness and take specific actions to tackle workplace cultures, e.g. via codes of conduct to eliminate harassments, empower supervisors and colleagues to react to cases they observe etc.
- Provide adequate funding for continuous training of law enforcement officers, judges and all civil servants who deal with cases of sexual harassment
- Improve and ensure the systematic collection of relevant, gender- and age-disaggregated, comparable data on harassment in the workplace, including cyber harassment

<sup>13</sup> FRA (2015) *Violence against women: an EU-wide survey. Main results report* available at: <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/violence-against-women-eu-wide-survey-main-results-report>

<sup>14</sup> European Women's Lobby (2010), *Position paper towards a Europe free from all forms of male violence against women*, available at: [http://www.womenlobby.org/IMG/pdf/ewl\\_position\\_paper\\_on\\_vaw\\_december\\_2010-2.pdf](http://www.womenlobby.org/IMG/pdf/ewl_position_paper_on_vaw_december_2010-2.pdf)

## 2.4. Equally share unpaid household and care work between women and men

The reconciliation of work and family life still faces many challenges: women continue to spend more time than men in unpaid household and care work which is the main reason for low female labour market participation and other forms of inequalities in the public sphere. This is an area of gender equality where behaviours are still strongly influenced by traditional gender roles, as well as different national, regional, family and individual cultures and values. Access to affordable and quality childhood care and education and care provision for older persons, persons with disabilities and other dependents of care is crucial to support working parents and carers. Indeed, the Barcelona objectives adopted by the European Council in 2002 for childcare facilities are not yet fully met but still valid.

Currently 31.5% of women are working part-time in comparison to only 8.2% of men. In addition, over a quarter (26.4%) of part-time workers do not actively choose this working pattern<sup>15</sup>. Therefore, to foster the achievement of gender equality, it appears necessary to promote flexibility and support structures for both employers and workers, especially working parents and carers.

There is a wider Gender Care Gap – women taking up substantially more unpaid work in families and at home than men do. Gender-equal organisation of paid work and (unpaid) care work must provide everyone irrespective of gender with the ability to combine employment and care work on an equal footing during the life course. Everyone should be able to contribute private care work in addition to paid work; it should also always be possible for informal/unpaid care work to coexist alongside paid work (earner-carer-model).

*The Advisory Committee recommends the **Member States** to:*

- **Invest in affordable and quality infrastructures for early childhood care and education as well as care for dependant adults**
- Ensure that persons in vulnerable situations have access to these services (rural areas, lower-income, minority, migrant and refugee families).
- **Implement innovative work-life balance policies to encourage all parents to the same extent to choose flexible work or part-time employment.**
- Ensure that the provision of early childhood care and education as well as infrastructures for care of dependant adults comply with the needs of employees (daily opening hours, vacation closings, locations, quality, affordability etc.) while ensuring decent pay and working conditions for educators
- Reduce tax and benefits disincentives for “second earners” and introduce individualized tax systems in order to encourage women’s economic engagement and full labour market participation.
- Assess the potential costs, benefits/disadvantages of enhancing paid maternity, paternity and parental leave for all parents, particularly the principle of non-transferable parental-leave and how this can give incentives to encourage fathers to make use of the parental leave.
- Enhance the role of the social partners and the collective bargaining in the promotion of work-life balance

<sup>15</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/DDN-20180608-1?inheritRedirect=true>

## 2.5. Ensure equal access to economic and political decision making positions

Economic and political decision-making has been highlighted as a continued priority challenge and a complex gender equality issue for many years. Progress remains slow in this area, as shown for example by the recent monitoring exercise undertaken by the Council of Europe.<sup>16</sup>

*The Advisory Committee recommends the EU and Member States according to their competences to:*

- **Ensure equal representation of women and men in all European institutions; taking into account that a new Commission will be appointed, a new Parliament will be elected and several high-profile positions will need to be filled across the EU institutions in 2019.**
- **Set numerical targets and timelines for women to ensure gender parity in all political areas at national level and economic high-level positions through temporary legislative and/or non-legislative measures<sup>17</sup> (including positive actions).**
- Support awareness-raising and capacity building activities and programs to break the glass-ceiling and encourage women's access to economic and political leadership positions.

## 2.6. Prevent and combat gender-based violence

In 2014, the survey on violence against women conducted by the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) revealed that a third of European women aged over 15 have experienced sexual or physical violence since the age of 15<sup>18</sup>. Gender-based violence takes many forms but always constitutes a human rights violation and the most pronounced expression of the unequal power relations between women and men.

Besides, rapid digitalization has created new forms of violence such as cyber stalking, revenge pornography or online hate speech. Cyber violence is rapidly growing. Women of all backgrounds are often confronted with violent and sexualised threats online: 20% of women aged 18-29 have experienced cyber harassment in the EU<sup>19</sup>.

The prevention of gender-based violence as well as the protection, empowerment and social inclusion of victims are key components of an effective approach. Improving the redress of victims is a critical priority to make progress in preventing and reducing the prevalence of this violation of human rights.

Moreover, the gender norms and behavior patterns related to men's and boys' use of violence and exposure to violence have a negative impact on women and girls' life opportunities but also men's, and boys'. Therefore, men's and boys' participation in gender equality work as actors of change is a prerequisite for a gender-equal society.

Still, a number of significant challenges persist in developing policies and actions to address violence against women and girls.

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<sup>16</sup> 2016 Monitoring Report of the implementation of Council of Europe Committee of Ministers Recommendation Rec(2003)3 on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/genderequality/balanced-participation>

<sup>17</sup> For instance, putting in place a « zipper system » which requires the strict alternation between female and male candidates on electoral lists

<sup>18</sup> Fundamental Rights Agency, *Violence Against Women: An EU-wide survey*, March 2014

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem

*The Advisory Committee recommends the **EU and Member States** to:*

- **Ratify the Istanbul Convention without reservations and ensure its full implementation since it calls for the adoption of adequate prevention tools to challenge and eradicate harmful gender stereotypes, and all forms of violence against women and girls.**
- **Allocate more resources to specialists and dedicated support services, including civil society organisations, supporting victims e.g. in reporting, taking into account their specificities.**
- **Deliver strong training for service providers in order to give them the capacity to address the needs of women and girls in a gender-sensitive and age-adapted manner.**
- Increase knowledge and trust in criminal justice institutions, by ensuring the effective prosecution and punishment of violence against women and encouraging women and girls to report on- and offline violence.
- Adopt measures to prevent and combat sexism.
- Involve men and boys in violence prevention measures and address destructive masculinity norms as a societal challenge, including by strengthening awareness raising amongst and providing training for men and boys.
- **Implement a coordinated EU strategy to prevent and combat all forms of violence against women and girls in public, private or political life.**

The impact of gender-based violence on women and girls, whether emotional, psychological, sexual and/or physical, can be devastating. Violence also has dramatic social and economic impacts.<sup>20</sup> And yet, there is no EU law or directive covering forms of violence against women beyond sexual harassment and trafficking although such tools might be necessary. Also, when tackling sexual harassment, legal frameworks should go beyond workplaces/educational institutions and for example include public on- and offline spaces.

Moreover, Eurojust has registered a significant increase in the number of cases of trafficking of human beings between 2014 and 2017 (from 71 to 132), most of which were cases of sexual exploitation, affecting mostly women and girls.<sup>21</sup> The EU therefore needs to implement gender-sensitive anti-trafficking policies and legislation and to build a gender-sensitive asylum system.

*The Advisory Committee recommends the **EU and Member States** to:*

- **Dedicate specific attention to migrant women and girls in order to prevent violence and to enable them to report violence and seek support taking into consideration linguistic barriers and structural constraints such as lack of secure asylum status and economic independence.**
- Train professionals working with migrants to better effectively identify and support victims of different forms of violence, including harmful practices, especially female genital mutilation.
- Secure the implementation of the Victims 'Rights Directive 2012/29/EU
- Initiate discussions on a possible new instruments on EU level, including a possible Directive on fighting violence against women

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<sup>20</sup> It is estimated that the cost of gender-based violence against women in the EU sums up to almost 226 billion euros per year. See EIGE (2014) *Estimating the costs of gender-based violence in the European Union*.

<sup>21</sup> Eurojust (2018) *Annual Report 2017*.

## 2.7. Guarantee sexual and reproductive rights: equality among women in the EU

“Sexual and reproductive rights, including the right to sexual and reproductive health, are intrinsic elements of the human rights framework”.<sup>22</sup> The ability to make autonomous and informed decisions about one’s body, health, sexuality and whether or not to reproduce is imperative.

The Advisory Committee recommends **Member States** to:

- **Reaffirm commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action and the Programme of Action of the ICPD both inside and outside Europe and condemn measures undermining women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights.**
- Review sexuality education programmes, invest and support research on age-adequate, inclusive and up-to-date comprehensive sexual education teaching materials, including making these materials available online and accessible for all.
- **Guarantee the accessibility, affordability and quality of modern contraception and maternal health care through an efficient health system, integrating sexual and reproductive health services such as free contraceptive goods and maternal health care.**
- Where such services are permitted by national law, ensure all women’s access to safe and legal abortion services. Safe abortion services should also be integrated into public health insurance, subsidisation or reimbursement schemes.

## 3. GOVERNANCE AND WAYS OF WORKING TOGETHER

### 3.1. Improving drivers of action

The development of a future gender equality strategy requires the improvement of various technical tools both at the EU’s and at the member states’ levels, in order to develop more targeted policies and monitor their implementation.

Available data on violence for instance are still seldom comparable due to different terminologies, legal definitions, data recording and collection systems. It is thus necessary to define joint standards for data collection between the EU Member states, in order also to reach an EU-wide coherent picture of the response to violence against women. Another example, where timeliness and EU-wide comparability could be improved are the time-use surveys which offer an important base to analyse and tackle gender gaps in paid and unpaid work.

The Advisory Committee recommends the **EU** to:

- **Improve regular gender-disaggregated data collection and its use in policy-making by defining joint standards for data collection between the EU member states, inter alia in areas of gender-based violence or time use.**
- Make better use of the Commission’s annual report on equality between women and men by including a focus on current or emerging issues as well as on EU actions to ensure gender

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<sup>22</sup> *Women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights in Europe*, issue paper by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, December 2017

mainstreaming in all policy areas. The report should be presented to the European Parliament and translated into every official language.

- Make full use of the European Institute for Gender Equality's work in policy-making.

### 3.2. Mobilize every actor

#### a) Cooperate with social partners, civil society organizations, media and equality bodies

The Beijing Platform for Action recommends and encourages institutional mechanisms to promote, establish and strengthen cooperative relationships with different civil society actors and social partners including:

- **Women's and girls' non-governmental organizations, including organisations in the field of engaging men for gender equality and women's rights organizations** that can support national machineries in participatory consultations, awareness raising and other activities
- **Academic and educational institutions**, involving centres for women's and gender studies and research in the development and testing of methodologies and indicators, as well as evidence-based research
- **Social partners**
- **Informal groups** and initiatives

The active involvement of civil society organizations is understood as a condition for the effective implementation, development and evaluation of gender mainstreaming and gender equality policies and must therefore developed and further strengthened. The active involvement of social partners, in full respect of their autonomy, is essential, given their specific role on the labour market, in industrial relations systems, including through collective bargaining.

*Therefore, the Advisory Committee recommends the EU to:*

- **Include all relevant stakeholders in the development of a new EU Gender Equality strategy<sup>23</sup> in order to advance gender equality and women's rights.**
- **Explicitly include** women's and civil society organisations, local and regional governments and their representative associations working in the field of gender equality in the Justice, Rights and Values funding programmes of the MFF 2021-2027.
- Initiate a follow-up on the Commission's Recommendation on standards for equality bodies<sup>24</sup> in order to strengthen them and ensure that they are adequately empowered to safeguard and promote equal treatment.

*The Advisory Committee recommends the Member States to:*

- Support equality bodies to ensure that gender equality is adequately promoted to empower victims of discrimination to report their cases to seek justice.

<sup>23</sup> Council of the European Union (2006) *Review of the implementation by the Member States and the EU institutions of the Beijing Platform for Action — Indicators in respect of institutional mechanisms*, prepared by the Finnish Presidency.

<sup>24</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2\\_en\\_act\\_part1\\_v4.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2_en_act_part1_v4.pdf)

- Provide financial support for the work of and give voice to the views and requests of civil society organizations and women's associations to support them in the key role that they play in prevention, protection and prosecution efforts and awareness-raising campaigns.
- Mobilize and encourage gender equality initiatives in the media industry, particularly the advertising and gaming industry which are an intense vehicle for gender stereotypes.
- Create/support frameworks at the appropriate level which are conducive to and support actions by social partners.

## b) Reach the whole society

The *#MeToo* movement has shown how strong the mobilizations and will of the society can be. This encourages the raising of awareness to reach the less involved.

It is essential to highlight the critical role of men and boys in the achievement of gender equality, in both the public and private spheres. Therefore, efforts must be strengthened to foster men's role in promoting gender equality in Europe.

Gender equality initiatives supported or started by the Commission are well visible on social media (*#ShelsWe*, *#EU4Women*). And yet, even if a campaign like the *#SayNoStopVAW* gained broad public attention, the important work being done for gender equality across the EU is not given enough recognition on the EU institutional websites. The visibility of the Commission's actions regarding gender equality needs to be improved.

*Therefore, the Advisory Committee recommends the EU and Member States to:*

- **Identify and use influential women and men as role models and activists to break stereotypical behaviours**
- Make the actions, commitments and resources of the Commission more visible for the broader public: effective communications have to be targeted not only at policy makers but at all women and men, particularly young people.