



EUROPE AT A CROSSROADS

**Equal participation of women at
all levels: prerequisite for peace,
prosperity & societal change**

#FeministEurope #Elections2024

A Manifesto by the European Women's Lobby

**Safeguarding & improving women's rights & leadership
via functioning institutionalised mechanisms**

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Despite significant wins for women's and girls' rights in Europe, the recent challenges have shown again that crises impact women, girls and women's rights organisations disproportionately.

In the EU, 1 in 3 women have suffered physical and/or sexual violence and 1 in 2 women have experienced sexual harassment since the age of 15¹.

Europe has started to embark on an appalling backward trend. Gender stereotypes and patriarchal values are still thriving in our societies. Women are being relegated to unpaid or underpaid and non-recognised care roles, rampant sexism deprives women of equal opportunities and empowerment in all areas of life. Some of the most fundamental and hardest won women's and girls' rights have been revoked; in present-day Europe women are still dying from lack of access to abortion or killed by their intimate partners or family members!

ONLY 33,4%
OF MINISTERS IN THE EU ARE WOMEN²

We want a Europe where women and girls in all their diversity enjoy equal rights and participation in every area and across all levels of society and where they are free from all forms of oppression and exploitation.

The average gender gap in pensions in Europe is³ 30%

Putting women's and girls' rights at the core of European policies is mandatory to deliver on the European project of peace, democracy, inclusion, equality and solidarity.

We call on EU and national decision-makers to provide funds for and take binding measures to:

- ✓ **Achieve parity democracy and women's equal representation;**
- ✓ **Champion women's economic independence towards a feminist economic model;**
- ✓ **Put an end to all forms of violence against women and girls perpetuated by the patriarchal system;**
- ✓ **Put an end to the neo-liberal and patriarchal exploitation of women's and girls' bodies;**
- ✓ **Guarantee women's bodily autonomy;**
- ✓ **Include women's voices in peace-building;**
- ✓ **Make women an integral part of the green and digital transitions.**

FIND OUT MORE ON HOW YOU CAN CONTRIBUTE
to realising true equality between women & men in Europe in the full version of our manifesto

The EU Should

- Provide active **support to women's rights organisations**, including financial resources and safe spaces;
- Adopt a **gender mainstreaming** strategy, including **gender budgeting**, to apply in all EU political instruments and paying specific attention to major changes like the digital and green transitions;
- Ensure **equal representation of women and men in political decision-making** as a **50/50** representation of each sex in any EU decision-making body, including the EU "top jobs";
- Carry out a **gender budgeting analysis** during the 2023 mid-term **review of the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF)**;
- Swiftly adopt the Directive on violence against women and domestic violence including its provisions on sexual exploitation and cyberviolence against women;
- Propose the **inclusion of violence against women and girls** to the list of **Eurocrimes** in order to ensure the completion of a comprehensive EU legislative framework that addresses all forms of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG);
- **Adopt the Equality Model** at the EU level and harmonised EU legislation in alignment with the **end-demand approach**,
- Recognise **Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)** including the **right to safe abortion**, as a part of **women's and girls' human rights** and include them in the **European Charter of Fundamental Rights**;
- **Implement fully the UNSC Resolution 1325** and the whole agenda on women, peace and security;
- Systematically **apply gender mainstreaming and take an intersectional approach** when it comes to framing **climate policies and regulations**.

The EU Member States Should

- Adopt **binding legislation on quotas and zipped lists**, depending on the electoral system, to reach **parity for elected representatives** for political decision-making positions;
- Build, invest and maintain **accessible, affordable and high quality care infrastructures and services** within a human rights, life-cycle approach to meet care needs at every stage;
- Provide **women with access to decent quality work, including a decent income, equal pay, security, personal development and adequate social protection**, paying specific attention to women with higher rates of unemployment and lowest pay such as women with disabilities, migrant women, older women and women living in rural areas;
- Provide, **free of charge and easily accessible support to all, which is tailored to the needs of victims of violence against women and girls**, including women with disabilities, women living in rural areas, migrant women affected by homelessness;
- Provide **effective support to women victims of sexual exploitation** by implementing **exit programmes** including legal, health, housing and employment support;
- Guarantee **access to safe, legal and free abortion to all women** regardless of the circumstances and paying particular **attention to the needs of minority groups** like migrant women or women with disabilities;
- Include **comprehensive relationship and sexuality education** in school curricula, based on **autonomy, respect, mutuality, consent, safe and pleasurable sex and tackling gender stereotypes, the realities of the violence of pornography and the objectification and pornification**;
- Develop **specialised support services for all women and girls displaced by war** including universal access to legal, medical, psychosocial, and sexual and reproductive health services that are **fully accessible and tailored to women with disabilities, older women, and women and girls from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds**;
- Seize the opportunity of the **green transition to tackle the gender pay, employment, and long-term earnings and pension gaps, and to guarantee women's economic independence**.

**LET'S CAPITALISE ON THE 2024 EU ELECTIONS
TO FIRMLY ESTABLISH WOMEN'S RIGHTS & EQUALITY
AT THE CORE OF THE EU!**

OUR CALLS 

After the 2019 EU elections, there were only 17 female Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) from ethnic minorities amounting to only

2,4%
of total MEPs¹³

During the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic women spent

6,5 hours
more on average per week on housework & cooking than men¹⁴

ONLY 33,4%
OF MINISTERS IN THE EU ARE WOMEN¹²

Manifesto

European Commission's first ever female President with her historic cabinet made of a team of Commissioners that almost reached 50/50 gender parity, the nomination of a Commissioner for Equality, the adoption of the long-awaited **Women on Board Directive**, a **Directive on Pay Transparency**, as well as an **European Commission's proposal on a Directive on Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence**: those are some of the recent **significant wins** for women's rights and for all people in Europe.

Yet, amid the multiple challenges - the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the energy crisis, the climate crisis and natural disasters, the galloping inflation, the shrinking space and limited resources for women's rights - women and women's rights organisations have been once more severely and disproportionately impacted and we witnessed the erosion of women as specific political subjects. **A robust commitment to put women's and girls' rights at the core of European policies is required.**

For the first time in a decade, gender inequalities have increased in employment, education, health status and access to health services⁴

Traditional roles based on gender stereotypes and patriarchal values are on the rise in our societies, relegating women to unpaid or underpaid and non-recognised care roles and putting a high burden on women's equal participation in the political space and formal labour market. The prevalence of sexism continues to suppress and oppress women and girls, maintain them in a subordinate place and hamper women's and girls' equal opportunities and empowerment in every domain. As disparities between EU Member States worryingly increased, **Europe has started to embark on an appalling backward trend**. Some of the most fundamental and hardest won women's and girls' rights have been revoked. It is horrifying that in present-day Europe, **women are still dying from lack of access to abortion**, such as in Poland where the de facto ban of this fundamental right has caused the death of at least six women⁵. According to CEDAW review results, many countries also withhold access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights services⁶ to women⁷ from minorities including women with disabilities, asylum seeking and migrant women⁸. No country is immune to this backlash on women's rights. For example, in France **113 women were killed by their (ex-)partner in 2021⁹ and in Europe, approximately 2600 women were killed by their intimate partners or family members in 2020¹⁰**. Despite, the **EU's legal obligation to deliver on equality between women and men and gender mainstreaming, i.e. applying a gender perspective to all policies**, women's fundamental rights are yet to materialise in practice.

50

women die every week from male domestic violence in Europe¹¹

On average women earn

12,7%

per hour less than men in the EU¹⁵

06

The average gender gap in pensions in Europe is

30%

impacting women's economic independence and old age security¹⁶

WE WANT

A Europe where **women and girls in all their diversity enjoy equal rights and participation in every area** and across all levels of society; where women are **free from all forms of oppression and exploitation**. Such a Europe **would be beneficial** to the whole European society by:

- Increasing the **legitimacy and representativeness of European institutions**;
- Contributing to **bridging the democratic gap** between the EU and its citizens in particular its women and girls;
- Improving the **efficiency and responsiveness of EU policies**;
- **Creating wealth**: improved gender equality would lead to an **increase of 6.1 to 9.6 percentage points in EU GDP per capita** by 2050, which amounts to **€1.95 to €3.15 trillion**;¹⁷
- Boosting employment rate: **equal opportunities in STEM education** and in the labour market would trigger a growth of **EU employment rate by 2.1 to 3.5 percentage points by 2050**.¹⁸

WE CALL ON

- **Candidates** - to address the **diversity of women's and girls' real life concerns in their campaigns** and keep **women's rights high on the political agenda** once elected!
- **European and national political parties and European political groups** - to apply **gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting** to their programmes!
- **The media** - to provide voters with **unbiased, independent, complete information and a comprehensive view** of their options, by giving an **equal platform to both female and male candidates**; to increase **coverage of women's rights** topics and dismiss once and for all gender stereotypes and the objectification of women!
- **The electorate** - to engage, assess candidates' track records and commitment to women's rights and to **vote for feminist leaders!**
- **EU Institutions** - to enable and take responsibility for democratic fair and equal election processes for female and male candidates, where they are equally safe and welcome to use all public fora to communicate with the electorate, without the risk of facing gendered mis- or disinformation or online and offline harassment.

It is only **together**, by **leaving no woman and girl behind**, that we can successfully face the current challenges. **Women are** not only more than half of the population but also key **agents of change**; that's why women must be free and empowered to engage in all spheres of life, at all levels, including to actively participate in political life by voting, belonging to democratic mechanisms etc. It is with **women's inclusion and expertise** that we can find appropriate solutions and operate a **socially, economically and environmentally fair transition**.

**THE 2024 EU ELECTIONS
WILL BE A TURNING POINT**

**LET'S ALL TAKE OUR
RESPONSIBILITY!**

SAFEGUARDING & IMPROVING WOMEN'S RIGHTS SUSTAINABLY VIA INSTITUTIONALISED MECHANISMS

Existing inequalities are deeply rooted in unequal power relations between women and men and exacerbated by the shrinking space for women's rights and the erroneous perception that equality achieved in legislation leads to real gender equality. "Natural" progress will not be efficient in materialising equality between women and men - we must be proactive.

WE CALL ON FUTURE EU DECISION-MAKERS:

- To adopt a **gender mainstreaming** strategy, including **gender budgeting**, to apply to all EU political instruments and paying specific attention to major changes like the digital and green transitions;
- To **assess the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025**, incorporate the results in a **Gender Equality Strategy 2.0 for 2025-2030**, and include a **dedicated budget** into this strategy;
- To establish an **EU Council configuration on Women's Rights and Gender Equality**;
- To provide active **support to women's rights organisations**, including financial resources and safe spaces;
- To **appoint an EU Commissioner with sole responsibility for Women's Rights and Gender Equality** and for the enforcement with all other Commissioners of gender mainstreaming in all portfolios;
- To take ambitious measures, to **combat gender stereotypes, sexism and sexist hate speech** and its impacts in all sectors of society, including in the media, online, in education, in the labour market; these should pay particular attention to the **myths and disinformation around women from minorities and the intersecting discriminations** they experience also based on other grounds such as disability, ethnicity, age and sexual orientation and status.

REALISING PARITY DEMOCRACY & WOMEN'S EQUAL REPRESENTATION

Women are not a minority; they represent over half of the population. Women are not homogeneous, their real life experiences intersect with a multitude of factors. Therefore, diverse and equal representation of women in the political, social and economic spheres is essential for European democracy.

OUR CALLS TO THE EUROPEAN UNION:

- To establish **mandatory parity** in candidate lists for EU elections;
- To ensure **female candidates are placed at electable places** on EU elections lists by making **compulsory the use of quotas** and **methods to alternate** female and male candidates such as zipped lists;
- To ensure the **equal representation of women and men in political decision-making as a 50/50 representation** of each sex in any EU decision-making body, including the EU "top jobs";
- To spell out the **obligation for political parties to nominate both a woman and a man as lead candidates** on EU election lists.

OUR CALLS TO THE EU MEMBER STATES:

- To propose candidates as Commissioners in a way that **equal representation of women** and men among members of the **European Commission** is ensured;
- To adopt **binding legislation on quotas and zipped lists**, depending on the electoral system, to reach **parity for elected representatives** for political decision-making positions;
- To **ensure the rights to vote, stand for election and participate in democratic life of all women, including women with disabilities** who may still currently be deprived of these rights, and/or face additional barriers in the process;
- To **adopt, adequately implement and fund binding measures** to guarantee **women's safety** when engaging in the **public online or physical space**;
- To ensure the **swift implementation of the Women on Board Directive** to improve equal representation of women at decision-making positions in the economic sector.

Learn more



CHAMPIONING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE TOWARDS A FEMINIST ECONOMIC MODEL

We must adopt a **feminist economic model** enshrined in **economic justice, social justice and environmental justice which recognises care as the backbone of our society**. We must invest in reversing the feminisation of poverty which especially affects marginalised women due to their experience of several forms of discrimination.

OUR CALLS TO THE EUROPEAN UNION:

- To integrate a **gender perspective into fiscal, economic, employment and social policies**;
- To ensure the **European Care Strategy** is embedded in a human rights framework, takes a holistic life-cycle approach recognising that care is an essential part of our economy;
- To move beyond this Strategy to establish a **Care Deal for Europe**, on par with the European Green Deal and Digital Agenda, with earmarked investments similar to these;
- To carry out a **gender budgeting analysis** during the 2023 mid-term **review of the 2021-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and integrate gender budgeting into the future 2027-2033 MFF**;
- To set up an EU wide pilot project with targets for **gender mainstreaming in budgetary decisions**, and monitor its implementation and outcomes through a **dedicated Task Force**;
- To adopt **European targets for care support and services recognising the role all women, including older women and women with disabilities play as carers**.

OUR CALLS TO THE EU MEMBER STATES:

- To build, invest and maintain **accessible, affordable and high quality care infrastructures and services within a human rights, life-cycle approach to meet care needs at every stage**;
- To provide **women with access to decent quality work, including a decent income, equal pay, security, personal development and adequate social protection**, paying specific attention to women with higher rates of unemployment and lowest pay such as women with disabilities, migrant women, older women and women living in rural areas;
- To guarantee the **individualisation of social rights** and (progressive) personal **taxation**;
- To systematically carry out **gender assessment of economic and social policies** so as to address the structural causes of the feminisation of poverty;
- To address and redress the gender pension gaps in the context of **pension reform**.

Learn more



PUTTING AN END TO ALL FORMS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN & GIRLS PERPETUATED BY THE PATRIARCHAL SYSTEM

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is the most pervasive violation of women's human rights. Male violence is a daily reality for many women and girls across Europe and is a visceral expression of structural inequalities between women and men. There can be no peace and security while women fear for their safety in their homes, in workplaces and in public places in Europe. **In the EU, 1 in 3 women have suffered physical and/or sexual violence and 1 in 2 women have experienced sexual harassment since the age of 15.**¹⁹

OUR CALLS TO THE EUROPEAN UNION:

- To swiftly adopt the **Directive on violence against women and domestic violence including its provisions on sexual exploitation and cyberviolence against women**;
- **Following the EU accession to the Istanbul Convention, to appoint an EU Coordinator for ending all forms of VAWG**, who ensures coherence in the implementation of the different legislative instruments;
- To ensure that **all forms of sexual exploitation of women**, as per the Eurocrime referenced in Article 83(1) of the Treaty of the functioning of the EU (TFEU), are adequately **addressed in EU legislation** including prostitution and surrogacy;
- **To propose the inclusion of violence against women and girls to the list of Eurocrimes in order** to ensure the completion of a comprehensive EU legislative framework that addresses all forms of VAWG.

OUR CALLS TO THE EU MEMBER STATES:

- **To ratify and implement the Istanbul Convention in its entirety without any reservations**, addressing violence against women and girls as a structural human right violation and discrimination and applying a gender sensitive perspective into all policies and practices;
- To ensure the **rights of migrant and refugee women and girls victims are protected, specifically in granting autonomous residency status** - gender-based asylum claims should be considered, reception procedures must be gender-sensitive, and the principle of non-refoulement must be applied to victims of violence against women and girls;
- To **fully implement** the provisions of the **Directive on violence against women and domestic violence** once adopted;
- To provide, **free of charge and easily accessible to all, support tailored** to the needs of **victims of violence against women and domestic violence**, including women with disabilities, women living in rural areas, migrant women affected by homelessness.

Learn more



PUTTING AN END TO THE NEO-LIBERAL & PATRIARCHAL EXPLOITATION OF WOMEN & GIRLS' BODIES

Trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation remains the most prevalent form of exploitation in the EU. The vast majority of the victims are women (87%).²⁰ **Trafficking for sexual exploitation would not exist without the demand for prostituted women:** this is why we need to combat prostitution and sexual exploitation which are forms of violence against women and girls.

OUR CALLS TO THE EUROPEAN UNION:

- To adopt the **Equality Model at the EU level** and harmonised EU legislation in alignment with the **end-demand approach**;
- To ensure **effective transposition of the Directive 2011/36/EU to combat trafficking in human beings, with a special focus on gendered analysis and trafficking for sexual exploitation**;
- To ensure the **continued mandate of a standalone, full-time Anti-Trafficking Coordinator to ensure the implementation of the Anti-Trafficking Directive and extend their mandate** following the introduction of legislation on sexual exploitation to also oversee the implementation of all aspects related to combating trafficking and the sexual exploitation of women and children as per Article 83(1) of the TFEU;
- To ensure **coherence with CEDAW** and its General Recommendation 38 in all legislative frameworks and recognise the links between trafficking and prostitution.

CALLS TO THE EU MEMBER STATES:

- To provide **effective support to women victims of sexual exploitation** by implementing exit programmes including legal, health, housing and employment support;
- To **remove the conditionality of the sanction being linked to the fact that one "knows"** that the person is trafficked;
- To develop and finance **specific infrastructures and services adapted to the most vulnerable groups to trafficking and sexual exploitation** such as women from minority groups, migrant women, young women, women with disabilities, women experiencing poverty or with backgrounds of abuse, including **shelters, helpline and trained professionals**.

Learn more



GUARANTEEING WOMEN'S BODILY SELF-DETERMINATION

Reproductive coercion and the denial of safe and legal abortion care is a form of Violence Against Women and Girls.

OUR CALLS TO THE EUROPEAN UNION:

- To **recognise Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) including the right to safe abortion, as a part of women's and girls' human rights** and include them in the **European Charter of Fundamental Rights**.

OUR CALLS TO THE EU MEMBER STATES:

- To guarantee **access to safe, legal and free abortion to all women** regardless of the circumstances and paying particular **attention to the needs of minority groups** like migrant women or women with disabilities;
- To **ensure free, qualitative and equal access to a full range of contraceptives, including emergency contraceptives** and support additional research to reduce the risk of harmful side-effects of women's contraceptives, as well as to **develop and commercialise new forms of male contraceptives**;
- To include in school curricula, **comprehensive relationship and sexuality education** based on **autonomy, respect, mutuality, consent, safe and pleasurable sex and tackling gender stereotypes**, the realities of the **violence of pornography and the objectification and pornification of women**;
- To **prevent, prohibit and criminalise female genital mutilation and coercion to other elective surgeries**, and all other forms of **sex-based violence and abuse of women's sexuality and reproductive rights** included in the Istanbul Convention such as **forced abortion, forced marriage and forced sterilisation** including of **any women and girls with disabilities**.

Learn more



INCLUDING WOMEN'S VOICES IN PEACE-BUILDING

Women always bear the raw realities of all wars and armed conflicts, not only are they the ones disproportionately having to flee their country but their bodies are also the battlefields on which their perpetrators claim victory as the war in Ukraine is showing once again. Yet, women remain essential to ensure the functioning of societies in times of war. **All EU responses to war and conflicts must therefore include a gender equality dimension.**

OUR CALLS TO THE EUROPEAN UNION:

- To **implement fully the UNSC Resolution 1325** and the whole agenda on women, peace and security;
- To foster and budget for a **Culture of Peace in the Medium to Long Term**;
- To ensure that **women's rights organisations and women are included in decision-making processes** (peace negotiations, reconstruction and peace building, etc.);
- To **perform gender audit/assessment of reconstruction programmes and policies** to evaluate the impact on gender equality and women's rights and conduct efficient monitoring.

OUR CALLS TO THE EU MEMBER STATES:

- To develop **specialised support services for all women and girls displaced by war**, including universal access to legal, medical, psychosocial, and sexual and reproductive health services that are **fully accessible and tailored to women with disabilities, older women, and women and girls from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds**;
- To ensure that **support services to migrant women and girls are given by specially trained staff**, in particular on Violence Against Women and Girls and sexual exploitation.

Learn more



MAKING WOMEN AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE GREEN TRANSITION

The intersection of gender, ethnic, racial, disability, and other factors, including global social inequalities, makes **climate change a feminist issue**. Women are disproportionately affected by the impacts of the climate crisis, while being **powerful agents of environmental change** who must be fully included in the green transition.

OUR CALLS TO THE EUROPEAN UNION:

- To systematically **apply gender mainstreaming and take an intersectional approach** when it comes to framing **climate policies and regulations**;
- To **apply gender budgeting to climate and sustainable finance**.

OUR CALLS TO THE EU MEMBER STATES:

- To **increase women's representation in decision-making in climate related local administrations and ministries**;
- To proactively **prevent the escalation of energy poverty** which disproportionately affects women;
- To seize the opportunity of the **green transition to tackle the gender pay, employment, and long-term earnings and pension gaps, and to guarantee women's economic independence**;
- To fully implement the Agreed Conclusions on women, gender and climate of the Commission on the Status of Women (E/CN.6/2022/L.7).²¹

Learn more



Endnotes

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**LET'S END FOR GOOD THE PATRIARCHAL SYSTEM
& ATTITUDES THAT UNDERMINE THE DIGNITY OF ALL
WOMEN & PUT WOMEN'S & GIRLS' LIVES IN DANGER!**

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ABOUT THE EUROPEAN WOMEN'S LOBBY

Founded in 1990, the European Women's Lobby (EWL) is the largest European umbrella network of women's associations representing more than 2,000 organisations in the EU coming together to campaign for their common vision of a Feminist Europe. The EWL has members in 26 EU Member States, three Candidate Countries (Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey), Iceland and the United Kingdom, as well as 17 European-wide organisations representing the diversity of women and girls in Europe.


Together with our members, we aim to influence the general public and European Institutions in support of women's human rights and equality between women and men.


ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



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LET'S REASSERT A STRONG POLITICAL WILL & ALLOCATE SUBSTANTIAL RESOURCES
TO DELIVER ON THE EU COMMITMENTS
ON EQUALITY BETWEEN WOMEN & MEN!

<https://www.womenlobby.org/>

European Women's Lobby, June 2023