



Brussels, 5.3.2026  
COM(2026) 113 final

**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN  
PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL  
COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**Gender Equality Strategy 2026-2030**

{SWD(2026) 82 final}

## 1. Introduction

**Gender equality is a core value of the EU** and an aspiration uniting European institutions, governments and the public<sup>1</sup>. The **EU has made significant strides** towards achieving a Union of Equality and is a **global champion of women’s rights**. Europeans enjoy some of the most advanced legislation worldwide to protect their rights and combat gender-based violence.

**Gender equality is indispensable for achieving the EU’s strategic goals**, from upholding **democracy** and the **rule of law** to fostering **social cohesion** and bolstering **security** and **competitiveness**. Equal rights and opportunities for women and men, in all their diversity, are instrumental in sustaining Europe’s vibrant democracy, strengthening representativeness, institutional legitimacy, and democratic decision-making. Inequality wastes talent, blocks careers, and reduces productivity. **Improving gender equality in the EU could lead to a 9.6% increase in GDP per capita** and an additional 10.5 million jobs by 2050<sup>2</sup>.

An escalating backlash against gender equality threatens hard-won progress, while the ambition of a gender-equal Europe is not yet achieved<sup>3</sup>. In this context, the Commission reaffirmed its strong commitment to promoting gender equality in the [Roadmap for Women’s Rights](#), adopted in March 2025. All 27 Member States, EU institutions, and numerous civil society and international organisations endorsed the objectives of the Roadmap.

This Gender Equality Strategy builds on the achievements of its predecessor<sup>4</sup> and translates the long-term vision of the Roadmap for Women’s Rights into action. It will ensure that the EU contributes to achieving **Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality** by 2030, the renewed objectives of the **Beijing Platform for Action**, and the obligations under the **Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women**. To do so, this Strategy proposes **concrete actions** for each of the eight principles of the Roadmap for Women’s Rights, keeping gender equality at the heart of the EU’s action both within the EU and across the world.<sup>5</sup> The Strategy follows a **dual approach**, combining **targeted actions** with systematic **gender mainstreaming** across all policy areas.

**Gender equality benefits everyone**: it is about harnessing the full potential of women and men, for the benefit of the whole society. This Strategy aims to achieve equality between women and men, girls and boys, in all their diversity. It recognises the **crucial role of men and boys**, as agents and beneficiaries of gender equality<sup>6</sup>. It adopts an **intersectional approach to gender equality**, acknowledging that sex and gender intersect with other grounds of discrimination, leading to specific inequalities and unique experiences of discrimination<sup>7</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> See Articles 2 and 3(3) TEU, Articles 8, 10, 19 and 157 TFEU and Articles 21 and 23 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

<sup>2</sup> [European Institute for Gender Equality's study on the economic impact of gender equality in the EU](#).

<sup>3</sup> [European Institute for Gender Equality's Gender Equality Index 2025](#).

<sup>4</sup> The 2020-2025 Gender Equality Strategy: [Gender equality strategy - European Commission](#).

<sup>5</sup> In line with the objective of gradual integration, candidate countries and potential candidates for EU accession will be integrated into relevant actions and associated similarly to Member States in the Strategy.

<sup>6</sup> Three out of four Europeans agree that men also benefit from gender equality: [Gender stereotypes - December 2024 - Eurobarometer survey](#).

<sup>7</sup> The Strategy pays particular attention to women from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds, migrant women, women with disabilities, women from lower socio-economic backgrounds, young and older women, and LGBTIQ+ women.

This Strategy will be implemented alongside other **Union of Equality Strategies** to create the conditions for **everyone to freely choose their path in life, thrive and lead**, regardless of their gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation<sup>8</sup>. This Strategy benefited from an **inclusive consultation process**, bringing together citizens, Member States, European institutions, social partners, equality bodies, as well as international and civil society organisations<sup>9</sup>. Both the Council and the European Parliament called on the Commission to present a Gender Equality Strategy for 2026–2030<sup>10</sup>.

## 2. Advancing Gender Equality and Women’s Rights

### ***Roadmap Principle 1: Freedom from gender-based violence - the right to security and dignity***

**Gender-based violence** is not only a violation of fundamental rights but also a serious threat to EU common security, as it undermines the safety, dignity and equality of individuals and communities. **One in three women** in the EU have suffered gender-based violence in their lifetime. **Domestic violence** is a prevalent form of gender-based violence, with one in five women in the EU having experienced **physical or sexual violence** from their partner or ex-partner, a relative or another member of their household. Too often, domestic violence leads to the most extreme form of violence against women: **femicide**, which claims the lives of 18 women per week in the EU<sup>11</sup>. Many **children** also suffer from gender-based and domestic violence, as direct victims or as witnesses. **Addressing attitudes and behaviours** is key to preventing gender-based violence, and **engaging men and boys** is crucial.

**Gender-based cyberviolence** presents a quickly escalating threat to women and girls, with the rapid spread of non-consensual intimate images across the internet, difficulties in having such illegal content removed, and hateful and violent threats online. Some studies show that 98% of all **deepfakes** on the internet are of a pornographic nature, and that 99% of these depict women<sup>12</sup>. This undermines women’s integrity and forces many out of the online environment, from online debates and the digital economy, thereby threatening democracy and EU competitiveness. The Commission will pay specific attention to the role of artificial intelligence in the production and dissemination of sexually explicit harmful deepfakes and deepnudes.

**The Directive on Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence ([VAW Directive](#))** is the EU’s main tool to fight gender-based violence. The Directive provides a strong legal framework that prevents violence and protects victims across the EU. It criminalises the offences of female genital mutilation, forced marriage and several forms of gender-based cyber violence.<sup>13</sup> The Commission will continue to support the Member States in the Directive’s

<sup>8</sup> See [LGBTIQ+ equality Strategy](#), [Anti-Racism Strategy](#), [Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities](#), [EU Roma strategic framework](#).

<sup>9</sup> [Public Consultation and Call for Evidence on the Gender Equality Strategy 2026–2030](#).

<sup>10</sup> [European Parliament resolution of 13 November 2025 on the Gender Equality Strategy 2025](#) (2024/2125(INI)); [Council Conclusions on Economic empowerment and financial independence of women as a pathway to substantive gender equality](#) (8957/24).

<sup>11</sup> See [Intentional homicide victims by victim-offender relationship and sex \[crim\\_hom\\_vrel\]](#).

<sup>12</sup> See [report by Security Hero from 2023](#).

<sup>13</sup> Non-consensual sharing of intimate or manipulated material, cyber stalking, cyber harassment and cyber incitement to violence or hatred.

transposition as swiftly as possible (deadline: 14 June 2027) and the effective implementation thereafter, including by organising implementation workshops and bilateral exchanges. Particular attention will be given to the provisions on cyberviolence offences, the removal of illegal content, accessible online reporting channels and specialist services for victims of cybercrimes.

The Commission will support national reforms putting in place definitions of rape based on the concept of consent. Building on its 2022 proposal for a VAW Directive, which included an EU-wide definition of rape, the Commission will update its **mapping of the legal landscape in the EU** in view of identifying **further action, including legislative, to ensure that sex without consent is defined as rape across the EU**. The Commission will also support Member States in implementing Article 35 of the VAW Directive, which requires them to make available and distribute educational material promoting the understanding that consent must be given voluntarily as a result of a person's free will, mutual respect, and the right to sexual integrity and bodily autonomy, including through providing guidance as necessary.

The Commission will also support Member States in developing their **national action plans for preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence**<sup>14</sup>, due by June 2029. The implementation of the VAW Directive and the national plans will be sustained through the sharing of best practices between Member States, including through the [Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality](#) and the **Network for the Prevention of Gender-Based and Domestic Violence**.

Moreover, the **Victims' Rights Directive**<sup>15</sup> ensures that victims of gender-based violence will benefit from better access to integrated support services and legal aid, facilitated crime reporting, better protection of their personal data and strengthened protection measures.

Law enforcement and prosecutorial authorities play a key role in preventing and combating domestic violence and femicide. Improving their capacity to promptly detect risks and intervene is key to ensuring victims' safety and ending impunity. The Commission will therefore help develop **guidelines for the prevention, detection, efficient handling and prosecution of cases of violence against women**, thereby seeking synergies with the networks, activities and expertise of EU agencies, in particular Europol, Eurojust and CEPOL. As part of this work, the Commission will look into how to **facilitate cross-border cooperation** between relevant authorities, which is necessary particularly for tackling gender-based cyber violence, often involving perpetrators, victims, platforms and servers located in different jurisdictions. This will be essential to avoid that perpetrators exploit jurisdictional gaps and evade accountability, leaving victims without effective protection or remedy.

The [Digital Services Act \(DSA\)](#) recognises gender-based violence as a systemic risk<sup>16</sup>, which providers of very large online platforms (VLOPs) and very large online search engines

---

<sup>14</sup> Art. 39, VAW Directive.

<sup>15</sup> See [The EU strengthens the protection and support of victims of crime - Consilium](#).

<sup>16</sup> Art. 34(1)(d) Digital Services Act.

(VLOSEs) have to assess and mitigate. In this context for example, the Commission is investigating whether the provider of X properly assessed and mitigated risks to the dissemination of illegal content such as manipulated sexually explicit images in relation to the deployment of Grok AI functionalities. The Commission also has ongoing investigations against the providers of four online platforms disseminating pornographic content to ensure that minors do not have access to such content. The Commission will continue to ensure rigorous enforcement of these cases and the legislation as a whole.

To inform this enforcement, the Commission will also continue its **risk monitoring and evidence-gathering work** under the DSA, including through dedicated studies supporting the assessment of systemic risks related to gender-based violence. In parallel, the Commission will pursue **a structured regulatory dialogue with VLOPs** to strengthen compliance. Based on an analysis of risks, and in cooperation with national authorities, the Commission will use **all tools available to ensure the effective mitigation of risks against gender-based violence**, including where necessary issuing **guidelines for VLOPs and VLOSEs**. Such guidelines are envisaged in the DSA and designed to present best practices and recommend possible measures in relation to specific risks – in this case those related to gender-based violence. They can help the Commission set out which measures it considers that providers of VLOPs and VLOSEs should put in place to comply with their obligations under the DSA.

In the same vein, the Commission will follow up with online platforms to ensure that they are implementing the 2025 DSA [Guidelines on Protection of Minors](#), where the Commission explains the measures that providers of online platforms accessible to minors should put in place to ensure a high level of privacy, security and safety to minors on their services, including measures to prevent the unwanted spread of sexualised or intimate content of children. The Commission has made requests for information and will continue to engage with several providers of VLOPs on how they manage the risks of users being able to download illegal or harmful apps, including so-called ‘nudify’ apps.

The Commission will also help build the capacity of trusted flaggers on gender-based cyberviolence, to ensure that more such content is flagged to online platform providers. It will issue **guidelines on trusted flaggers**, aimed at clarifying their role in tackling illegal content, including gender-based violence. These guidelines will also help clarify the obligations on the providers of online platforms as regards notices received from trusted flaggers.

A further area of attention is the protection of child victims of gender-based violence. The Commission will ensure enforcement of EU legal provisions on protecting child victims. These efforts will be strengthened through an **Action Plan on the Protection of Children against Crime** which will also contribute to combating violence against girls and making the digital environment safer for them. The Commission also launched its [Action Plan against Cyberbullying](#), highlighting that women and girls are disproportionately targeted, and inviting Member States to establish comprehensive national anti-cyberbullying policies.

Most victims of trafficking are women and girls, mainly trafficked for sexual exploitation<sup>17</sup>. The amended [Anti-Trafficking Directive](#) includes a gender-sensitive approach and strengthened response. In 2026, the Commission will present a **new Strategy** to address emerging challenges and needs in preventing and combatting trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims, in particular women and children.

Robust data is key to effectively addressing all aspects of gender-based violence. The Commission will finance a **second, extended wave of the EU-wide survey on gender-based violence**, also covering new forms of cyberviolence, to be carried out by Eurostat. The Commission and the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) will also support Member States in **improving the collection of administrative data on gender-based violence**.

The Commission will continue offering funding to combat gender-based violence through the **Daphne strand of the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV)** programme, with a budget of 200 million Euro for 2021-2027<sup>18</sup>. The Commission intends to continue doing so under the [proposed AgoraEU programme](#) in the 2028-2034 multiannual financial framework (MFF), pending interinstitutional negotiations. Moreover, the Commission will **support projects' long-term impact** by promoting the visibility of their results, encouraging exchanges between project partners and identifying actions for scale up.

All these efforts will contribute to the effective EU implementation of **the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention)** to which the EU acceded in 2023. It is essential to ensure implementation of the Convention, including by following up on the 2027 baseline evaluation report of the independent Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence and implementing subsequent recommendations. The Commission also repeats its **call on all Member States to ratify and fully implement the Istanbul Convention** as the main international framework to combat violence against women.

**Key actions by the Commission:**

- ✓ Support Member States in transposing and implementing the Violence Against Women Directive, monitor national plans, and develop guidelines for law enforcement and prosecutorial authorities, including on cross-border cooperation (2026-2030);
- ✓ Update the mapping of the legal landscape on rape legislation based on the concept of consent across the EU, in view of identifying further EU action (2027);
- ✓ Pursue a structured regulatory dialogue with very large online platforms on gender-based cyber violence and help build up the capacity of Trusted Flaggers;
- ✓ Support the implementation of the next EU gender-based violence survey (2027-2028) and the collection of administrative data (2026-2030).

<sup>17</sup> Eurostat ([Trafficking in human beings statistics - Statistics Explained](#)).

<sup>18</sup> Unless otherwise specified, all funding mentioned in this Strategy refers to funding under the Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF) running until 2027. Any future funding as part of the 2028-2034 MFF is not yet confirmed, pending interinstitutional negotiations.

\*\*\*

## ***Roadmap Principle 2: The highest standards of physical and mental health***

**Gender inequalities significantly impact access to healthcare.** Women are affected by a range of gender-specific barriers to accessing healthcare and suffer from a **lack of gender-sensitive medical research, diagnostics and treatments**<sup>19</sup>. For example, there is insufficient awareness that risks and symptoms of several diseases, like cardiovascular diseases, differ between men and women. Moreover, this issue is often absent in medical education curricula. Gender norms associated with traditional masculinity can also adversely affect men and boys' health, including discouraging help-seeking and increasing engagement in harmful behaviours. Furthermore, **intersecting inequalities** worsen barriers to healthcare access and can lead to discrimination in treatment, for instance for women with disabilities, migrant women, women in situations of financial vulnerability, LBTIQ+ women, Roma women or women in rural and remote areas.

Advancing women's health requires strengthening the **training of healthcare professionals**. Gender-responsive content in medical, nursing and other health curricula throughout the training and professional lifecycle can help ensure that healthcare professionals better understand how different diseases present in women, how gender-related risk factors influence outcomes, and how structural biases contribute to misdiagnosis and delayed care.

Challenges persist in advancing **women's access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)**. **Access to contraception** remains uneven across the EU and alternative contraceptive solutions for men are under-developed. Moreover, too many women and girls lack **access to affordable menstrual products**<sup>20</sup>. Women's health experiences and conditions, such as **menstruation, menopause, endometriosis, and post-partum depression** have not received sufficient attention in health research or treatment<sup>21</sup>.

The Commission has **mainstreamed gender in health research and provided targeted funding** on women's health issues such as endometriosis and Polycystic Ovary Syndrome under the [Framework Programme for Research and Innovation \(Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe\)](#)<sup>22</sup>. Additionally, it has integrated a gender perspective in the [EU Beating Cancer Plan](#)<sup>23</sup> and the [Health Package](#), including the [Safe Hearts Plan](#).

The Commission will launch a **new initiative with the World Health Organization (WHO)** to explore ways to **improve the quality and accessibility of women's healthcare**, including for those with disabilities. The project will provide opportunities to exchange best practices on improving the monitoring and analysis of gender inequalities, help policy makers identify

<sup>19</sup> See, for example: [European Institute for Gender Equality's 2021 thematic focus on health](#).

<sup>20</sup> [European Parliamentary Research Service's 2025 briefing on addressing menstrual poverty in the EU](#).

<sup>21</sup> See, for example: [European Parliament 2025 Report on Gender Inequalities in Medical Research, Drug Development and Access to Care](#).

<sup>22</sup> By 2025 under Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe, the EU had invested over 2 billion euros in more than 1000 projects focused on women's health. See: [EU Research and Innovation on Women's health](#).

<sup>23</sup> See: [Analytical report 2026 | ECIR - European Cancer Inequalities Registry](#).

priorities and offer evidenced-based solutions for women’s health. Its results can help to bolster gender mainstreaming in all health-related initiatives, including EU-funded health research.

The Commission will also fund a **study on the macro- and micro-economic and societal benefits of closing the women’s health gap** related to certain conditions, like menopause. To ensure that medicines are safe and effective for all, the Commission, together with the European Medicines Agency, will investigate the feasibility of developing a systematic **gender-sensitive check in the product lifecycle of human medicine**, including research and development. This will build on the work on gender-sensitive clinical trials within the Accelerate Clinical Trials in the EU initiative, considering that EU pharmaceutical legislation, including the [Medicines Directive](#), ensures that only medicinal products meeting quality, safety and efficacy requirements are authorised for all patients. Further, the proposed **revision of the Clinical Trials Regulation** under the [EU Biotech Act](#) requires consideration to ensure **trials reflect population diversity and improve treatments for vulnerable groups**. In addition, women who become pregnant or begin breastfeeding will not be automatically excluded from trial participation. The Commission will also adopt a gender-responsive approach when ensuring access and availability to **medical countermeasures**, such as vaccines, therapeutics, diagnostics, and personal protective equipment.

In full respect of the Treaties, and in particular Member States’ responsibilities for the definition of their health policy including bioethical questions and for the organisation of health services and medical care, in order to protect women’s health by supporting and complementing Member States’ health action regarding women’s access to **SRHR**, the Commission envisages to carry out a **mapping of practices and international frameworks** in this area. It also plans to **develop a framework and methodology for systemic data collection** to improve the evidence base on SRHR. In addition, the Commission intends to support initiatives that aim to **enhance access to contraception in the EU**, to improve availability and accessibility.

Moreover, in February 2026, the Commission gave its [reply](#) to the “**My Voice My Choice: For Safe and Legal Abortion**” **European Citizens Initiative (ECI)**. The reply acknowledges that unsafe abortion is a matter of public health, and underlines that Member States may, if they wish, use the European Social Fund+ to improve equal access to legally available and affordable safe abortion services.

**Key actions by the Commission:**

- ✓ Launch a new initiative with the World Health Organization on women’s health (2026);
- ✓ Launch a study on the economic and societal benefits of closing the women’s health gap related to certain conditions, such as menopause (2028);
- ✓ Support Member States’ health action regarding sexual and reproductive health and rights by mapping practices and international frameworks (2028);
- ✓ Implement the Commission’s reply to the European Citizens’ Initiative: “My Voice My Choice: For Safe and Legal Abortion” (2026-2027).

\*\*\*

### ***Roadmap Principle 3: Equal pay, economic empowerment and financial independence***

**Women still earn on average 12% less per hour than men in the EU<sup>24</sup>**, highlighting persistent gender inequalities in the labour market. Tackling this is a matter of righting an injustice and delivering on the EU Treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights<sup>25</sup>, thereby unlocking the economic potential of improved gender equality.

The [Pay Transparency Directive](#) is a game changer for tackling pay discrimination and the undervaluation of female-dominated jobs, which are root causes of the gender pay gap. The Commission will continue to support Member States in the **effective and timely implementation** of this Directive. In cooperation with EIGE, it will publish a **toolkit on gender-neutral job evaluation and classification** in 2026. The toolkit will include tailored tools to help small and medium-sized companies to carry out these processes in-house, without the need for external consultancy. Moreover, the Commission will **provide additional funding to support** the implementation of the Directive and will organise a **workshop for social partners** on how they can support its implementation.

In addition, the Pay Transparency Directive refers to the provisions in the 2014 [Public Procurement Directives](#), and it requires Member States to take appropriate measures to ensure that in the performance of public contracts economic operators comply with their obligations related to the principle of equal pay<sup>26</sup>.

Women across the EU also face difficulties in accessing investment, significantly holding back women-led companies. For every 100 euros of venture capital investment, less than 3 euros go to women-led teams, and only 15 euros go to mixed gender teams<sup>27</sup>. Closing this **gender investment gap** is key for EU competitiveness. Moreover, closing the **gender financial literacy gap**<sup>28</sup> is crucial for boosting women's entrepreneurship and investment, and empowering women in financial decision-making.

**Gender-smart financing targets** in implementing agreements for **EU investment funding** play a crucial role in improving access to funding. Building on the experience of the European Investment Bank (EIB) – an implementing partner under InvestEU, which largely surpassed the current **gender-smart financing target** of 25% – the Commission will propose to further expand gender-smart targets in the context of future funding programmes. In collaboration with the EIB Group, the Commission will continue actions to improve access to finance for women entrepreneurs in the EU and increase female representation in the financial sector (such as through the [Gender Finance Lab](#)). Future programmes such as the [European Competitiveness](#)

---

<sup>24</sup> [The gender pay gap situation in the EU - European Commission](#).

<sup>25</sup> Art. 157 TFEU and Art. 23 Charter of Fundamental Rights.

<sup>26</sup> [Gender-responsive Public Procurement: Step-by-step toolkit | European Institute for Gender Equality](#).

<sup>27</sup> [The European Innovation Council and SMEs Executive Agency's 2025 report on the gender investment gap affecting both women-led companies and women-led investment funds](#).

<sup>28</sup> Source: Eurostat [Monitoring the level of financial literacy in the EU - July 2023 - Eurobarometer survey](#).

**Fund** (pending interinstitutional negotiations), could also provide support to women-led business development and promote women's entrepreneurship. Furthermore, the implementation of the **Financial Literacy Strategy** will aim to reinforce its gender-responsive approach. The **ESTEAM initiative**, aimed at enhancing women's and girls' digital and entrepreneurial competences, will train approximately 10 000 girls and women by 2028.

Furthermore, the Commission will publish a report on the implementation of **Directive 2004/113 on the access to and supply of goods and services** and will carry out a stress test of **Directive 2010/41 on self-employed work**. The aim is to identify why the directives are currently under-used although gender equality challenges persist in both areas. This will provide a comprehensive evidence base for future action to address gaps in the scope and application of the existing legislation.

**Women**, particularly women in situations of vulnerability, **are at a heightened risk of poverty or social exclusion** across the EU. For example, single parents, predominantly women, have difficulties in making ends meet and face twice as high a risk of poverty or social exclusion as the general population. The **Council Recommendation on adequate minimum income ensuring active inclusion** calls on Member States to ensure the possibility of requesting the minimum income to be provided to individual members of the household. Individual benefits can promote gender equality, income security and the economic independence of women. Going forward, the Commission intends to integrate a strong gender perspective in the **EU's first ever Anti-Poverty Strategy**.

In line with the **European Affordable Housing Plan**, the Commission will propose a **Council Recommendation on fighting housing exclusion** to promote inclusive data collection and support vulnerable persons in precarious housing situations, including single parents (majority women), older people (women live longer) and victims of gender-based violence. The Commission will also publish a **study on housing inequality and discrimination**, taking an intersectional approach.

**Menstrual and menopause poverty** affect many women across the EU. Although reduced VAT rates cannot be targeted to low income (or any specific) groups, the revision of the VAT Directive in 2022 made it possible for Member States to apply a reduced or 0% rate on female hygiene products. Other possible measures, that can be better targeted to those in need, include making menstrual products free of charge or organising free distribution to specific groups. The Commission will organise an **exchange of best practices on measures to effectively combat menstrual and menopause poverty** at national level.

The EU **gender pension gap** still stands at 25%<sup>29</sup>, contributing to older women being at greater risk of poverty and social exclusion than older men. The **Intergenerational Fairness Strategy** highlights how the inequalities in employment, pay and care responsibilities widen gender gaps

---

<sup>29</sup> Source: Eurostat ([Women's pension 25% lower than men's in 2024](#)).

in income security and pensions in later life. Further efforts to address the root causes of the gender pension gap, including career breaks, part-time employment, and insufficient savings, and to adapt pension system design, are necessary to close the gap. To this end, the Commission **will explore ways to address labour market outcomes and relevant pension system features that drive the gender pension gap**, and map and support exchange of best practices in addressing the gap. The Commission will enhance the monitoring of the gap and its root causes under the [Social Scoreboard](#) and put forward recommendations under **the European Semester**. Moreover, the principle of equal opportunities for women and men to acquire pension rights is implemented under the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#). The Commission will also provide an analysis of the situation of older women and the gender gaps in pension benefits and poverty in the **2027 Report on Adequate Social Protection in Old Age**.

**Key actions by the Commission:**

- ✓ Publish, together with the European Institute for Gender Equality, a toolkit on gender-neutral job evaluation and classification, and support social partners in the implementation of the Pay Transparency Directive (2026);
- ✓ Publish a report on Directive 2004/113/EC on access to and supply of goods and services (2029) and conduct a stress test of Directive 2010/41/EU on self-employment (2028);
- ✓ Map and support exchange of best practices in addressing the gender pension gap and explore ways to address its drivers (2026-2030).

\*\*\*

***Roadmap Principle 4: Work-life balance and gender equality in care***

**Many women struggle to combine their professional and private lives**, as they continue to bear the **larger share of unpaid care and household responsibilities**. More than double the share of women (41 %) than men (20%) in the EU spend more than 35 hours a week on childcare<sup>30</sup>. Caring responsibilities are among the main reasons why women work part-time or are economically inactive<sup>31</sup>. Increasing the uptake of family leaves and flexible working arrangements by fathers and male carers is key to closing this **gender care gap** and will help men benefit more from their rights. Moreover, despite significant investments under the [Recovery and Resilience Facility](#) in building and expanding childcare services<sup>32</sup>, many families still do not have access to **high quality and affordable early childhood education and care or long-term care services**, hampering women's participation in the labour market. The **care sector itself is highly gender-segregated**, with structurally low wages and difficult working conditions, requiring gender-responsive action.

The [European Care Strategy](#) sets out a framework for high-quality, affordable and accessible care services and improve the situation for both caregivers and care receivers. The [Work-Life Balance Directive](#) establishes a robust legal framework to ensure the availability of flexible

<sup>30</sup> EIGE [Sharing Care. Closing the Gender Gaps Survey 2024](#).

<sup>31</sup> See 2025 Eurofound research report [Unpaid care in the EU](#).

<sup>32</sup> [Recovery and Resilience Scoreboard - Thematic analysis Equality 2023](#).

working arrangements and adequately paid family leaves for parents and carers, encouraging fathers to take up paternity and family leaves. The proposal for the future Common Agricultural Policy includes the possibility for Member States to provide support for Farm Relief Services, enabling farmers to take parental and family care leave. With the [Council Recommendation on the Barcelona targets for 2030](#), Member States committed to targets for participation in early childhood education and care as well as to standards for quality and affordability. Similarly, with the [Council Recommendation on access to affordable high-quality long-term care](#), Member States committed to improve services and address workforce challenges.

The Commission will assess the implementation by all Member States of the **Work-Life Balance Directive** and **report** on this by 2028. This report will be accompanied by **two studies** on the rights to family leave for self-employed persons, and on interactions between the leaves provided for in the Directive and other types of family-related leaves. The Commission will also address persistent **stereotypes that lead to the lack of uptake of leaves by men** and support the **monitoring of men's uptake of leaves** by encouraging Member States to adopt the work-life balance indicator framework, jointly developed in the advisory committees to the Employment and Social Affairs Council<sup>33</sup>. Alongside this, the Commission will present **reports on the implementation of the Council Recommendation on the Barcelona targets and on the implementation of the Council Recommendation on long-term care**. Moreover, the EU **Demography Forum** will address gender equality aspects of demographic developments, drawing on data from the **Demography Report**.

**Working conditions in the care sector** remain a particular area of attention. This female-dominated sector is characterised by low salaries, higher prevalence of precarious work contracts than in other sectors, and tenuous working schedules, lack of collective bargaining and lack of access to training. A sectoral social dialogue committee was set at European level to support social dialogue in the sector. Domestic workers, who often have a migrant background, are particularly vulnerable. The Commission therefore urges Member States to ratify and implement [ILO Convention 189 on decent work for domestic workers](#).

To review progress achieved under the European Care Strategy, the Commission will conduct an **Implementation Dialogue on Care**. This dialogue will review progress on provision of early childhood education and care services, long-term care services, fair working conditions and training in the care sector. The dialogue will inform the **European Care Deal**, which will integrate a strong gender perspective. It will lay out a comprehensive set of measures to address the challenges of the care sector and workforce. This includes improving the working conditions and career development of carers and the affordability, accessibility and quality of care. The Care Deal will also promote more equal participation of men and women in formal and informal care, and look at investment in care, exploring opportunities brought by digitalisation and different business models, to promote fair employment and high-quality care.

---

<sup>33</sup> See: [Monitoring and benchmarking frameworks - Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion](#).

**Key actions by the Commission:**

- ✓ Publish a report on the implementation of the Directive on Work-Life Balance (2028);
- ✓ Publish reports on the implementation of the Council Recommendation on early childhood education and care and of the Council Recommendation on long-term care (2027);
- ✓ Present a comprehensive European Care Deal (2027).

\*\*\*

**Roadmap Principle 5: Equal employment opportunities and adequate working conditions**

The 2030 EU headline target for employment aims at halving the **gender employment gap**. Yet women's employment rate remains 10 percentage points lower than that of men<sup>34</sup>. This gap alone was estimated to account for a **loss of EUR 390 billion for the EU economy in 2023**<sup>35</sup>. The gender employment gap is the result of various barriers and incentive structures, such as those in national tax systems, lacking flexible work arrangements and unequal wages. Gender stereotypes inhibit many women and men from pursuing their professional goals and lead to male- and female-dominated sectors. The gender employment gap is particularly pronounced for mothers, migrant and Roma women, women with disabilities and women in rural areas.

The Commission will enhance the gender and intersectional lens in actions under the **European Pillar of Social Rights**, including to increase women's labour market participation. It will also keep promoting diversity and inclusion through the [EU Platform of Diversity Charters](#), facilitating dialogue and providing guidance, including on inclusive hiring practices.

Women face barriers to progressing to the top levels of management, due to gender stereotypes, discrimination, career breaks (related to care responsibilities), and a lack of flexible working arrangements. The [Directive on gender balance on corporate boards](#) constitutes an important legislative framework to address gender imbalances in corporate leadership. In 2026, the Commission will report on measures adopted by Member States that are equally effective and allow to suspend the application of the merits-based selection procedure set out in the Directive. The Commission will present a **comprehensive assessment of the Directive's effectiveness and efficiency** by 2029. Gender balance in leadership and participation is crucial also in public administration to ensure policy-making reflects society's diversity<sup>36</sup>. Within its own organisation, the Commission has taken measures to reach **gender parity in management positions**, resulting in 49% of management positions filled by women, up from 40% in 2019. This achievement will be sustained with targeted measures, as consolidating the progress remains a political priority.

Women are also exposed to **specific risks at work** across different sectors and types of work, including for women in mobile and seasonal workplaces. One in three women in the EU have

<sup>34</sup> [Gender statistics - Statistics Explained - Eurostat](#).

<sup>35</sup> Eurofound's Press Release 2025: '[Mind the Gap! The Gender Employment Gap Cost Europe Over €390 Billion in 2023](#)'.

<sup>36</sup> While on average in the EU, there is close to gender parity in the top tiers of national public administrations (48% women in senior civil service roles), significant disparities remain between Member States (ranging from 26% to 63% women): [Indicator: National administrations: top two tiers of administrators by function of government | Gender Statistics Database | European Institute for Gender Equality](#).

experienced **sexual harassment at work**, a figure that rises to **41.6% among women aged 18–29 years**<sup>37</sup>. Sexual harassment at work is prohibited in EU legislation<sup>38</sup> but there is a lack of dedicated prevention, reporting, and victim support mechanisms. While the EU has a robust framework for occupational health and safety (OSH), more action is needed to prevent and remedy sexual harassment at work as a psychosocial risk, including possible legislative action. In the framework of the **Quality Jobs Act**, on the basis of social partners' replies to the first stage consultation<sup>39</sup> and pending the second stage consultation, the **Commission will consider action to better address sexual harassment in the workplace**. The future [EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work](#) will also be an opportunity for a broader gender-responsive approach, including on third-party violence. The Online Interactive Risk Assessment tool on sexual harassment and third-party violence developed by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) provides practical support to employers and workers on preventing and detecting sexual harassment. In 2027, EU-OSHA will also launch a **Healthy Workplace Campaign** on mental health at work and preventing psychosocial risks, including sexual harassment and violence.

Moreover, the Commission will further work on eliminating psychological and sexual harassment in its own public administration. This will build on the work of the Chief Confidential Counsellor and the renewed anti-harassment framework, by implementing dedicated action plans on harassment prevention, and addressing repercussions of domestic violence in the workplace, in line with the EU's obligations under the Istanbul Convention.

**New risks to women are also arising due to artificial intelligence**, such as gender bias in recruitment, evaluation, or algorithmic management. The [AI Act](#) imposes obligations on providers and deployers of high-risk AI systems in the areas of employment, workers' management and self-employment. Certain deployers of high-risk AI systems need to conduct a fundamental rights impact assessment, aimed at identifying and evaluating possible risks that high-risk AI system can pose to fundamental rights, including sex-based discrimination. In the [Quality Jobs Roadmap](#), the Commission identified algorithmic management and AI at work as potential areas for EU action in the context of the Quality Jobs Act.

Gender imbalances, particularly pronounced in certain sectors, are being addressed by specific initiatives such as the [Digital Decade Policy Programme](#), the [Construction Blueprint](#), the [EU Space and Defence Industry Diversity & Inclusion Network](#), the '[Women in Transport](#)' Platform and [the network of Ambassadors for #DiversityInTransport](#). The Commission will also launch new gender-responsive initiatives to address imbalances in other sectors, such as a **Women in Farming platform**, an **EU Artists' Charter** and an **Action Plan on Women in Research, Innovation & Startups**. The Commission will also carry out an **EU survey on diversity and inclusion in the defence, industry and space sectors**.

---

<sup>37</sup> [ILO Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment](#) addresses also gender-based violence and harassment. 13 EU Member States have ratified the Convention so far.

<sup>38</sup> [Directive 2006/54/EC on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation \(Recast Directive\)](#).

<sup>39</sup> [Quality Jobs Act First-phase consultation](#).

Standards need to be inclusive of the whole EU population, including women. The Commission will further promote **inclusive standard-setting** by supporting the creation of a representative data sample of the EU population and building on the [study on the inclusiveness of anthropometrics](#) in European harmonised standards. In the context of the upcoming **European Product Act**, the Commission will strive to promote the full diversity of the EU population by addressing gender-specific elements in relevant sectoral legislations, notably in standard setting. It will also encourage the **European Standardisation System** to adequately account for elements that have a direct impact on women and will continue promoting equal representation of women in the governance of European Standardisation Organisations.

Moreover, the Commission will further support the full implementation of the [General Product Safety Regulation](#) regarding the explicit inclusion of gender in the assessment of safety of products, recognising that biological and physiological differences can influence how risks affect women. Notably, the Commission will support gender-sensitive product safety through guidance tools, dedicated exchanges with authorities and economic operators.

#### **Key actions by the Commission**

- ✓ Present an assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of the Directive on gender balance on corporate boards (2029);
- ✓ Consider action to better address sexual harassment in the workplace in the context of the Quality Jobs Act (2026) and the future EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work (2028);
- ✓ Present an Action Plan for Women in Research, Innovation and Startups (2026);
- ✓ Encourage the European Standardisation System to adequately account for all the elements directly impacting women (2026-2030).

\*\*\*

#### ***Roadmap Principle 6: High-quality and inclusive education and training***

All girls and boys should have the chance to freely pursue their ambitions **but often face gender-specific challenges in education**, leading to uneven educational outcomes. Gender stereotypes influence educational choices with lifelong consequences, contributing to occupational segregation. **Gender-sensitive education can be a truly transformative tool** to tackle gender inequalities and ensure all children in the EU, regardless of their gender, have access to **high-quality and inclusive education and training**. Ensuring access and dismantling barriers is especially pressing for girls and boys from underrepresented groups, including those with a racial or ethnic minority background, lower socio-economic or migrant background, and children with disabilities. Under the [2021-2030 Strategic Framework for European cooperation in education and training](#), the Commission will continue to support Member States in achieving these goals in the full respect of their competences in this area.

Effectively fighting gender imbalances in education requires targeted actions in strategic sectors such as STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics), where women are

under-represented. Interest in these disciplines must be fostered from an early age. The Commission will present a comprehensive **education package** in 2026 to strengthen the acquisition of basic skills – including mathematics, sciences and digital competences. Together with the [‘Girls Go STEM’](#) initiative, proposed by the Commission and led by the European Institute of Technology under the [STEM Education Strategic Plan](#), it will contribute to the wider target of attracting one million girls to STEM by 2028. Advancing women in STEM is one of three key objectives of the Strategic Plan. A European STEAM Executive Panel will advise on strategic issues, including on how to mainstream successful practices to attract more **girls and women to STEM**.

In parallel, greater emphasis is also needed on addressing the gender-specific needs of boys, who are less likely to be among the top performers in all EU countries. The Commission will promote a **“Boys in HEAL”** (Health, Education, Administration, Literacy) approach. It will publish a **handbook on evidence-based solutions to reduce gender-based disparities in study choices and educational outcomes**. Drawing on this, the Commission will consider launching an initiative to help attract more boys and men into these study fields and sectors. The Commission will also better **support teachers and schools in tackling gender stereotypes** by supporting the development and promotion of material on this topic, for example through the [European School Education Platform](#) and [Erasmus+](#) projects.

In higher education, men are underrepresented and women tend to out-perform them in terms of educational achievement. The Commission will consider further initiatives to **increase the accessibility of higher education** and ensure that a wide range of learners graduate.

**Culture and sport** are powerful enablers to fight gender stereotypes in educational settings and beyond. At EU level several initiatives use culture to promote gender equality, whilst sport policy encourages women role models and contributes to closing the gender gap in physical activity. The Commission will further gender mainstreaming in these areas, particularly in the [European Week of Sport](#), [#BeActive EU Sport Awards](#), Erasmus+ Sport and in the **Strategic Vision for Sport in Europe** to reinforce the European Sport Model.

**Key actions by the Commission:**

- ✓ Present an education package that will contribute to attract more girls to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields and careers (2026);
- ✓ Promote a “Boys in HEAL” (Health, Education, Administration and Literacy) approach (2026-2030) and publish a handbook on reducing gender-based disparities in study choices and educational outcomes (2028);
- ✓ Support the development and promotion of material on tackling gender stereotypes for schools and teachers.

\*\*\*

***Roadmap Principle 7: Active, equal and safe participation in public and political life***

Existing power structures hold women back from full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership in politics and public life. Only **one-third of national parliamentarians and senior ministers in the EU are women**. Moreover, the 2024 European elections saw a decline in the share of women elected to the European Parliament, falling below 40%<sup>40</sup>. **Women in politics are also often the target of attacks** about their qualifications, experience, and skills, with **disinformation** used to undermine their credibility, question their legitimacy, and discourage both public support and their own political participation<sup>41</sup>. One-third of women in politics suffering from cyberviolence quit social media<sup>42</sup>. Gender-based violence against women journalists is also widespread, with women journalists more often targeted online, and subjected to more vicious and sexualized attacks<sup>43</sup>. The misogynist hate and violence women in politics and public life experience undermines their fundamental rights and the very foundation of democracy.

At EU level, the [Regulation on the status and funding of European political parties and European foundations](#) requires European political parties and foundations to publish information about the gender balance among their members and governing bodies. The [Commission Recommendation on inclusive and resilient electoral processes](#) encourages national political parties to put in place gender-balanced candidate lists and promotes action to address gender-based hate speech against politically active women. The Commission will update its **mapping of legal and policy measures** in Member States promoting the **participation and leadership of women in politics, public administration and parliaments** by including the most recent best practices. It will assess best practices and progress made, forming the basis for possible further action.

As announced in the [European Democracy Shield](#), the Commission will present a **Commission Recommendation on safety in politics** for political candidates and elected representatives concerning offline and online threats, including as regards disinformation and a dedicated guide of best practices. This will pay specific attention to women, as they are disproportionately targeted. Measures will also include **coaching, mentoring and networking** for women politicians, **training** for political leaders, and **awareness-raising actions**.

The Commission takes disinformation attacks against women in politics very seriously. The [DSA Code of Conduct on Disinformation](#) provides a key tool in this regard. Under the future AgoraEU programme (pending adoption), the Commission could make funding available to support women in politics, including for example for tackling online hate. The [ProtectEU Internal Security Strategy](#) highlights the importance of training Member States' competent authorities to use legal tools to remove illegal content online, including to tackle gender-based cyber violence.

<sup>40</sup> See [Commission's Report on the 2024 elections to the European Parliament](#), COM(2025) 287 final.

<sup>41</sup> See JRC: 'Shut up and do the dishes! Toxicity and Gender in Digital Political Spaces: Evidence from the 2024 European Elections' (2025).

<sup>42</sup> [The Council of European Municipalities and Regions' 2024 Study on 'WOMEN IN POLITICS Local and European Trends'](#).

<sup>43</sup> [Violence Against Women Journalists and Politicians - OSCE report 2021](#).

**Anti-gender narratives**, online illegal content and its artificial amplification threaten the EU's democratic space<sup>44</sup>, including by **driving polarisation between young women and men**<sup>45</sup>. Studies show that this is promoted and funded by well-resourced global movements<sup>46</sup>, and increasingly exploited through foreign information manipulation and interference. Through Horizon Europe, the Commission has supported research to counter disinformation and hate speech, understand the roots of polarisation and address anti-gender narratives. The Commission will launch a **study on the online networks, spheres and narratives targeting young men and boys**, and their possible links to anti-democratic forces and hate movements. The Commission will also enhance its engagement with **civil society organisations and community-building initiatives** that counter information manipulation and disinformation on gender, including through roundtables with men and boys. Moreover, the Commission will organise a [Policy Practice Joint Event on misogyny and incel ideology](#) among young people under the [EU Knowledge Hub on the prevention of radicalisation](#).

**Key actions by the Commission:**

- ✓ Present a Commission Recommendation on safety in politics (2026);
- ✓ Update the mapping of legal and policy measures to promote the participation and leadership of women in politics, public administration and parliaments (2027);
- ✓ Carry out a study on online networks, spheres and narratives targeting young men and boys (2028).

\*\*\*

**Roadmap Principle 8: Institutional mechanisms that deliver on gender equality**

Actions to advance gender equality can only be effective if supported by **institutions and processes that promote gender equality** and the **mainstreaming of a gender equality perspective** across all policy areas. EIGE will launch a **Gender Mainstreaming Helpdesk in 2026** to further support gender mainstreaming at Member State level. In addition, the Commission will support Member State authorities to build capacity and develop guidelines on gender mainstreaming, including gender budgeting. The Commission will also continue to support the implementation of the [Directives on Standards for Equality Bodies](#).

To promote **gender mainstreaming across all EU policies**, including in cross-cutting areas such as climate and environmental policies, the Commission will further build on progress made by the [Task Force on Equality](#) with the network of Equality Coordinators in all Directorates-General and Services and the European External Action Service (EEAS). Equality contact points have also been appointed in the cabinets of each Commissioner.

**EU funds will continue to promote gender equality.** Under the CERV programme, the Commission will continue to support civil society organisations, social partners and public

<sup>44</sup> [ProtectEU: a European Internal Security Strategy](#), COM/2025/148 final.

<sup>45</sup> See JRC Policy Brief: '[Gender Attitudes in the EU: Uneven Progress and Partial Polarisation](#)' (2025).

<sup>46</sup> Datta, Neil, [The Next Wave: How Religious Extremism Is Regaining Power](#) | EPF (2025).

authorities in implementing EU gender equality legislation and policies. Through Horizon Europe, the Commission also reaffirms its commitment to fund dedicated research on gender equality, with an intersectional approach. It will also continue supporting the mandatory integration of the gender dimension in research and innovation content.

The implementation of the [2028-2034 MFF](#) (pending interinstitutional negotiations) provides a key opportunity to strengthen **gender mainstreaming in the EU budget**. The proposed [Performance Regulation](#) makes gender equality a horizontal principle for most EU funding programmes, including the National and Regional Partnership Plans. The Performance Regulation also introduces a consistent framework for mainstreaming gender equality across the budget, through a methodology to track EU expenditure supporting gender equality and through disaggregation by gender of performance indicators. The Commission intends to present **technical guidance on the tracking methodology** by the end of 2026<sup>47</sup>. Moreover, gender equality will continue to be addressed in the **European Semester**, to identify and tackle pressing gender equality challenges.

The **EU Committee of the Regions** plays an important role in promoting women's political participation in cities and regions, and the local and regional authorities are central in fostering gender equality and equal political representation. Likewise, the **European Economic and Social Committee** channels the commitment of social partners and civil society organisations to gender equality as a pillar of democracy, social justice, and inclusive growth.

The role of **civil society** in promoting gender equality is key. The Commission will continue to make funding available for feminist and women's rights organisations, both as part of the current CERV programme and the proposed AgoraEU programme (pending interinstitutional negotiations). The Commission will strengthen the representation of civil society in the [Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men](#) and provide a regular and structured **framework for dialogue on protecting and promoting EU values** under the [Civil Society Platform](#)<sup>48</sup>. This will enhance the resilience of CSOs, including organisations dedicated to gender equality. The Commission will specifically **expand cooperation with gender equality-focused organisations that engage and support men and boys**.

Evidence-based gender equality policy requires robust, sex-disaggregated data and the Commission commits to its systematic collection. The upcoming **Recommendation on equality data** will include a recommendation that data be disaggregated by sex and by other grounds of discrimination.

**Preparedness policies need also to be gender-responsive.** As recognised in the [Preparedness Union Strategy](#), women and girls can be disproportionately affected by crises and emergencies. For example, extreme weather events create serious health complications for pregnant or older women, including increased risk of hospitalisation. To address this, the

---

<sup>47</sup> Pending adoption of Art. 7(3) of the proposal for a Regulation establishing a budget expenditure tracking and performance framework and other horizontal rules for the Union programmes and activities, COM(2025) 545 final, 16.07.2025.

<sup>48</sup> See [EU Strategy for Civil Society](#), COM(2025) 790 final.

Commission will continue to mainstream diversity and inclusion in [Union Civil Protection Mechanism](#) training activities and operations, with a focus on promoting gender balance.

**Urban planning** has great potential for advancing gender equality through ensuring that public spaces are safe for women and girls, and that infrastructure and services such as care services and public transport are adapted to their needs<sup>49</sup>. The [EU Agenda for Cities 2025](#) recognises the gender-specific challenges of urban planning and offers ways to further advance these matters with cities, such as through the future EU Cities Platform. The Commission will also continue to support and recognise local authorities championing inclusivity through the [European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Awards](#).

To drive the **realisation of the Roadmap for Women’s Rights’ principles at national level**, the Commission calls on all Member States to put in place **national gender equality action plans** by the end of 2027. The **Mutual Learning Programme on Gender Equality** and the **High-Level Group on Gender Mainstreaming** provide excellent platforms for exchange of best practices and monitoring the implementation of this Strategy and the national plans.

The Commission will monitor and **report on the implementation of all Strategies under the Union of Equality**, including taking stock of progress made under this Strategy and tracking its actions. The Commission will also launch a **communication campaign on the Union of Equality**, featuring a strong gender dimension and an intersectional approach, and launch a Research and Innovation Network for a Union of Equality under Horizon Europe.

**Key actions by the Commission:**

- ✓ Ensure gender mainstreaming in the implementation of the next MFF (2028-2034) (pending adoption);
- ✓ Present technical guidance on the tracking of gender equality expenditure (2026);
- ✓ Strengthen the representation of civil society in the Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (2026).

### 3. Gender Equality in EU External Action

No country in the world is currently on track to achieve full gender equality by 2030. Progress on gender equality is increasingly stalled and reversed across many parts of the world, as record levels of armed conflict, democratic backsliding, geopolitical fragmentation and accelerating impacts of climate change reshape global security environments. Defunding of gender equality threatens human development prospects, including women’s access to SRHR. One third of women worldwide have suffered physical or sexual violence and over 200 million women and girls are affected by female genital mutilation<sup>50</sup>. Women’s rights are severely compromised in

<sup>49</sup> See the Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions on [Stopping gender-based violence – cities and regions leading the way](#) (2024), as well as UN Women’s global initiative on [Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces for women and girls](#) (2025).

<sup>50</sup> [WHO 2024 - Violence against women statistics](#).

conflicts, where women face increased levels of gender-based violence. Women also face higher risks from climate-related disasters, food insecurity, and resource scarcity, while gender inequality also amplifies the impacts of environmental challenges. Recognising the intersectional effects of climate change, conflict, displacement and migration on women and girls, providing gender-responsive recovery and reconstruction support, and supporting women's rights organisations, are essential elements of addressing the root causes of fragility and strengthening societal preparedness and resilience to crises.

**The EU remains committed to prioritising gender equality and eradicating all forms of gender-based violence in its external action** in order to accelerate progress towards international commitments, including the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The implementation of the **Gender Action Plan (GAP) III** until the end of 2027 will be a stepping stone for this. The Commission will launch a public stakeholders' consultation to develop a successor policy framework, the **Gender Action Plan IV for 2028-2034**, which is to be adopted jointly with the High Representative. Based on the consultation and lessons learned, the GAP IV will define priorities and initiatives across external action. EU delegations in third countries and EU missions will implement them.

**Bilateral human rights dialogues** with non-EU countries and regional organisations will continue to include gender equality considerations, to support gender-responsive actions and budgeting in partner countries. In its election observations, the EU will continue to assess the extent to which women enjoy full, equal and meaningful participation in political and public life. The EU will also promote women's increased access to decent jobs, entrepreneurship and income security, while delivering wider benefits for health, food security and nutrition as part of the [Global Gateway](#). Gender equality, women's empowerment, education and training are cross-cutting priorities in the **Pact for the Mediterranean**.

The EU's **engagement in effective multilateralism** is indispensable for maintaining peace, prosperity, security, and the respect of human rights for all. The EU will continue to actively participate in and support the revitalisation of the **Commission on the Status of Women**, and continue to champion gender equality within other relevant UN human rights bodies.

In line with the [Women, Peace and Security Agenda](#), prioritising gender equality will be key to the efforts of the Commission services and the EEAS to promote peace against a global backdrop of rising insecurity and conflicts. A **renewed EU Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security will be for endorsement by the Political and Security Committee in 2027**. The EU will continue to systematically integrate the Women, Peace and Security agenda into its **Security and Defence Partnerships**.

The Commission remains committed to **gender-responsive, principled and needs-based humanitarian aid** and to assisting victims of gender-based violence in humanitarian emergencies, including those experiencing intersectional discrimination. The Commission will launch, in 2026, a **dedicated new flagship initiative – SHIELD (Sexual and Reproductive**

**Health in Emergencies and Life in Dignity) – focused on improving access to SRHR and supporting survivors of gender-based violence.** This commitment will be anchored in the forthcoming **Communication on Humanitarian Aid**. The Commission will also evaluate the EU humanitarian aid gender policy with a view to updating it.

In addition, the promotion of **gender equality is a core aspect of the Commission’s work with candidate countries and potential candidates**, in line with the ‘fundamentals first’ approach set out in the 2020 revised enlargement methodology. The Commission will continue to assess the alignment of enlargement partners’ legislation with the EU gender equality acquis and relevant international standards, and provide support to ensure full implementation. Furthermore, in the framework of the Eastern Partnership, the EU will continue to support partner countries in promoting gender equality. Such priorities will continue to be reflected in the EU’s financial support, notably through the [Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance \(IPA\) III](#) and the [Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument \(NDICI\)](#).

Finally, **gender equality remains an inherent part of the EU’s trade policy**. The Commission will continue to integrate gender equality provisions in trade agreements. In countries benefitting from the [EU Generalised Scheme of Preferences](#), the Commission will keep monitoring compliance with international human rights conventions. The Commission, together with the International Trade Centre, will also publish a practical guide for policy-makers on integrating a gender lens in trade policies in early 2027.

In view of their impact on the external relations of the EU, relevant actions proposed in this section will be carried out in cooperation with the EEAS, within the exercise of its functions.

**Key actions:**

- ✓ Launch the Gender Action Plan IV (2028-2034);
- ✓ Launch the EU Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2028-2034);
- ✓ Launch SHIELD (Sexual and Reproductive Health in Emergencies and Life in Dignity) – focused on access to SRHR and supporting survivors of gender-based violence (2026).

#### **4. Conclusion**

With this Strategy, the Commission commits to **remaining a beacon for gender equality** in a rapidly changing world. While gender equality is under increasing pressure in many countries, the Commission will continue to take concrete steps to advance it. EU citizens support gender equality as beneficial for society. Achieving **a gender-equal society will remain the Commission’s aim**, as expressed in the Roadmap for Women’s Rights. With this Strategy, the Commission pledges to take the lead in promoting the Roadmap’s principles, both within the EU and in its external action. It will also ensure the gender equality and non-discrimination *acquis* is fully transposed and implemented across the EU.

Gender equality will only be achieved if everyone mobilises together: this Strategy is therefore also a **renewed invitation to all allies to work together for gender equality**. Concrete and sustained progress requires cooperation across EU institutions and Member States, with social partners and women's rights organisations. The Commission will work internationally with all partners committed to gender equality, countries outside the EU, including candidate countries and potential candidates for EU accession, and international organisations.