



EUROPEAN WOMEN'S
LOBBY
EUROPEEN DES FEMMES

Time to step-up: Women's & girls' rights cannot wait

An EU budget for equality between women and men

The European Women's Lobby (EWL), the largest umbrella organisation representing over 2,000 women's associations across Europe, advocates for transformative social change towards a **Feminist Europe**. At the forefront of EWL's work is advancing the rights of all women and girls in Europe, and dismantling structural and persisting inequalities that hold them back. Yet with the devastating impacts disproportionately felt by COVID-19,¹ EU decision-makers are at a significant crossroad to urgently adopt a robust recovery plan (Next Generation EU 2021-2024) and Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021-2027 that harmonises solidarity and EU fundamental rights. **The EU and its Member States must step-up and fulfil their legal obligations to protecting EU fundamental rights, including equality between women and men (as per Articles 2-3 TEU and Article 8 TFEU), to ensure half the population is not excluded from forthcoming spending priorities.**

We welcome the recent decision by the [European Commission](#) in June 2020 to reverse the 20% cut to the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme to €638 million (current prices), which is just under the Commission's 2018 proposal of €641 million (current prices). These commitments were further welcomed by the [European Council](#) in July 2020 who also matched the amount of €841 million (2018 prices) to the Justice, Rights and Values Fund that was initially proposed by the Commission in 2018.

Yet these amounts remain insufficient to fully advance the rights of women and girls in the aftermath of COVID-19. EWL recalls that progress on equality between women and men in the EU has been moving at a snail's pace, the result of which women faced the brunt of stringent economic austerity measures over the past decade.² As such, EWL welcomes the vote of the [European Parliament](#) on 23 July 2020 to withhold its consent for the MFF due to concerns that **"as of 2024, the EU budget as a whole will be below 2020 levels"** and **"strongly regrets"** the diluted measures to uphold the rule of law, a fundamental component to preventing the current backlash against women's rights and the shrinking civil society space across Europe.

The EU and its Member States must urgently rectify this and ensure **Next Generation EU (NGEU) and the upcoming MFF mirrors its political priorities, by visibly committing to defending equality between women and men as a fundamental right**. This must include the streamlining of women's perspectives and experiences across all funding areas, coupled with increased and targeted funds to close obstacles preventing women's full participation in all areas of life. Increased funds must specifically be made to the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme, the only programme in the EU budget dedicated to advancing the rights of women and girls as per the EU Treaties, eliminating violence against women and girls, and providing financial resources to women's civil society organisations.

In-line with the objectives set out in the European Commission's five-year Gender Equality Strategy released in March 2020, this paper reiterates the urgent need to ensure gender mainstreaming is at the centre of both NGEU and the MFF. Our recommendations are presented to the European Parliament and European Council as the adoption of both proposals now rely on co-decision. These recommendations take on a holistic approach to incorporate **women's essential perspectives across**

¹ See EWL's policy brief, "[Women must not pay the price for COVID-19](#)", March 2020.

² See EIGE, "[Gender Equality Index 2019 in brief: Still far from the finish line](#)", October 2019.

all spending priorities; sufficiently address **women's care work** at the centre of COVID-19; increase funds to **advance women's rights and women's civil society organisations**; strengthen mechanisms to **combat the shrinking civil society space**; and guaranteeing equality between women and men as a **prerequisite to spending EU funds**. Together, the implementation of these key recommendations will ensure that no woman or girls is left behind.

Investments are not gender neutral. All women and girls are now turning to the EU and its Member States to ensure no one is left behind in the upcoming economic decisions.

i. Incorporating women's essential perspectives across all spending priorities

To ensure the spending of Union funds have equal outcomes for women and men, **EWL stresses the absolute need to ensure women's perspectives are incorporated across all political priorities, initiatives and programmes**. This must be fulfilled in-line with Articles 2-3 TEU and 8 TFEU, in which gender mainstreaming measures should be incorporated across all activities, while temporary special measures are set-up to comprehensively address systemic inequalities preventing women's full participation.

EWL welcomes the political commitment by the European Council in July 2020 with regards to the MFF, in which the mainstreaming of equality between women and men "should be taken into account and promoted throughout the preparation, implementation and monitoring of relevant programmes."³ Furthermore, EWL welcomes the position taken by the European Parliament in July 2020 who, "Supports strongly the introduction of gender mainstreaming and gender impact obligations (gender budgeting) in both the MFF regulation and the NGEU regulation; considers, therefore, that a transparent, comprehensive and meaningful tracking methodology should be adopted swiftly and adapted, if necessary, during the MFF midterm revision".⁴

Yet this approach has been inconsistent across EU budgetary processes so far: in 2019, **only 1% of the EU's Structural and Investment Funds were allocated towards specific gender equality measures**.⁵ Furthermore, the European Court of Auditors is expected to release its assessment in 2021 with regard to whether gender mainstreaming has been applied in the current EU budget to promote equality between women and men.⁶ We would also like to recall the interinstitutional agreement⁷, under the current MFF, which has yet to be fully implemented.

EWL therefore holds the European Council and European Parliament to their commitments to ensure that women's perspectives and voices are visibly incorporated in NGEU and the MFF. **Gender budgeting** must be applied across all forthcoming budgetary processes, in consultation with **gender budgeting experts and women's rights organisations**. This must include **ex-ante gender impact assessments**, measurable **indicators** such as the Gender Equality Index⁸, **tracking and correction mechanisms** and the use of **sex-disaggregated data** to ensure funds continue to promote equality between women and men rather than widening gender gaps. Increased resourcing must also be provided to the **European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), who receives less than one-fifth of the average budget given to decentralised agencies**,⁹ and lead in critical data collection and research in relation to addressing gender inequality gaps in society.

³ Para 2 of the [Special meeting of the European Council](#), 21 July 2020.

⁴ Para 16, [European Parliament resolution on the conclusions of the extraordinary European Council meeting of 17-21 July 2020](#), 22 July 2020.

⁵ <https://eige.europa.eu/news/gender-equality-deserves-more-1>

⁶ <https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/Pages/NewsItem.aspx?nid=13421>

⁷ <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P7-TA-2013-0455+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>

⁸ See EIGE, [Gender Equality Index](#), 2019 EIGE.

⁹ Dr Elisabeth Klatzer and Dr Azzurra Rinaldi, "[#nextGenerationEU Leaves Women Behind](#)", July 2020, p 59.

ii. An EU recovery plan that places the rights of women and girls at the forefront

As EU Member States continue to respond to the COVID-19 crisis, EWL welcomes several aspects of the Commission's €750 billion recovery package, NGEU, which directs investments towards unemployment, SMEs, and the introduction of a standalone health programme. Yet EWL is concerned at the absence of targeted funds and measures to address inequalities between women and men made worse during the pandemic.¹⁰ **It is indisputable that women have been at the forefront of this crisis**, working in sectors with the highest risks of infection, working as cashiers, cleaners, elderly and dependant person carers, or frontline health workers. Yet proposed investments do not address this reality, and are instead directed at boosting employment in male-dominated industries, such as the energy, construction, agriculture and transport sector.¹¹

EWL concurs with the proposal that a **"women's corona funds"** should be introduced within the recovery funds via additional top-ups to budget lines and programmes.¹² EWL calls for **standalone and increased budget lines** within NGEU and the MFF to specifically address women's persisting inequalities made worse during COVID-19: eliminating all forms of male violence against women and girls, enhancing access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, addressing women and girls at risk of/living in poverty, and boosting resources for women's specialist organisations. **Robust monitoring mechanisms such as a Recovery and Gender Equality Advisory Body**¹³ should be established at EU and Member State level, consisting of **gender budgeting experts and women's rights organisations**, to ensure NGEU funds are distributed to gender mainstreaming measures. As a minimum, this should be established for the Recovery and Resilience Facility, the instrument with the largest financial envelope, to ensure women are not excluded.

Furthermore, while 76% of the 49 million care workers in the EU are women,¹⁴ NGEU fails to target any investments towards the care sector. It has been demonstrated that investing in care doubles the employment rate compared to investing in construction.¹⁵ EWL urges EU decision-makers to **direct immediate and long-term investments towards the care sector, moving towards a Care Deal for Europe**¹⁶ that recognises women and men as *equal-earners-equal-carers* across the life cycle, **improves working conditions within the care sector, and boosts the creation of jobs**. A Care Deal would also complement the European Green Deal, in which the wellbeing of all and the planet are at the centre of all political and economic decisions.

iii. Increasing funds to promote and defend equality between women and men

The Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values is the only programme to funding the objectives outlined in the Commission's Gender Equality Strategy (in which to date, has yet to receive any dedicated funding): advancing the rights of women and girls as per the Treaties, eliminating male violence against women and girls, and providing resources to women's civil society organisations. While EWL welcomes the visible commitment by the European Commission and the European Council to reverse the proposed cuts to the programme, EWL echoes the concerns of the European Parliament stated in July

¹⁰ See EWL's policy brief "[Women must not pay the price of COVID-19!](#)"

¹¹ See the Greens/EFA commissioned gender impact assessment of Next Generation EU: Dr Elisabeth Klatzer and Dr Azzurra Rinaldi, "["#nextGenerationEU" Leaves Women Behind](#)", July 2020, pp 35-36.

¹² See PES Women, "[Policy briefing 'A gender mainstreamed COVID-19 recovery plan for Europe'](#)", 2020; See amendments proposed by S&D members of FEMM to [Draft report on the EU Strategy for Gender Equality](#), 2019/2169(INI), 8 June 2020.

¹³ Dr Elisabeth Klatzer and Dr Azzurra Rinaldi, "["#nextGenerationEU" Leaves Women Behind](#)", July 2020, p 46.

¹⁴ EIGE, [Frontline workers](#), 2020

¹⁵ See the Greens/EFA commissioned gender impact assessment of Next Generation EU: Dr Elisabeth Klatzer and Dr Azzurra Rinaldi, "["#nextGenerationEU" Leaves Women Behind](#)", July 2020, p 29.

¹⁶ See EWL's [Purple Pact: A feminist approach to the economy](#)

2020, in which “flagship programmes are now at risk of experiencing an immediate drop from funding from 2020 to 2021 [...]”.¹⁷

With the European Commission’s revised proposal of the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme amounting to €638 million (current prices), this would now mean an annual budget of €91 million, split between several sub-strands, including the *Daphne* strand. This amount would be insufficient given the costs of violence against women in the EU is €226 billion per year.¹⁸ With the alarming increase of domestic violence cases during COVID-19, and the growing demand for funds under the current *Daphne* programme,¹⁹ EWL is concerned that funds under *Daphne* will be completely insufficient to address this issue.

As such, EWL calls for increased funds to the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme to match the **€1.83 billion (current prices) proposed by the European Parliament, with at least 15% allocated to the sub-strand on equality between women and men within the *Equality, Rights and Gender Equality* strand, and 40% earmarked to the *Daphne* strand.**

iv. Strengthen mechanisms to combatting the shrinking space for civil society

Civil society organisations, including women’s rights and feminist organisations, are crucial to raising awareness of injustices on the ground and providing tailored services, often on a voluntary or under-resourced basis. Yet women’s rights and women’s civil society organisations, as testified by EWL’s members,²⁰ are currently facing a huge political, financial and human resourcing backlash across Europe due to a rise in nationalism, conservatism, sexism and anti-feminist movements. This was recently made evident through the alarming considerations by Poland’s Law and Justice (PiS) party to withdraw from the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, otherwise known as the Istanbul Convention.²¹

Upholding the rule of law as per Article 2 TEU, and protecting EU fundamental values by extension, is crucial to offsetting the current impacts of the shrinking space, which has resulted in devastating cuts to women’s rights organisations, women’s frontline services, and women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights. With no mid-term review of the new MFF foreseen,²² coupled with complex administrative processes and co-funding requirements, EWL is concerned that access to funds will become almost impossible to obtain, particularly for women’s grassroots organisations.

EWL calls on the European Parliament and Council to keep true to their words in their 2019 agreement whereby “an increase in funding and adequate financial support are key to the development of a conducive and sustainable environment for civil society organisations to strengthen their role and perform their functions independently and effectively”²³. In-line with the European Parliament’s

¹⁷ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/B-9-2020-0229_EN.pdf

¹⁸ <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-based-violence/estimating-costs-in-european-union>

¹⁹ A 2019 FEMM study found that almost half the total applications received under the current Rights, Education and Citizenship (REC) programme 2014-2020 were directed to *Daphne*. Yet, of the 380 applications received on average, only 11% of the funding requested had been approved due to the limited budget. See FEMM, [Implementation of the Daphne programme and other funds aimed at fighting violence against women and girls](#), January 2019, p 29.

²⁰ For more information, see EWL’s report, “[Time for women’s rights, time for a united Feminist Europe: The state of women’s rights in Central Eastern Europe, the Balkans and the Baltic States: Under Attack and Under Resourced](#)”, 2018.

²¹ See EWL, [European Women’s Lobby rejects any attempt to backtrack on women’s and girls’ safety in Poland](#), 28 July 2020.

²² Para 6, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/45109/210720-euco-final-conclusions-en.pdf>

²³ Para 18 of the European Parliament and Council’s common agreement, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7249-2019-INIT/en/pdf>, referencing the European Parliament resolution of 18 April 2018, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2018-0184_EN.pdf

demands, “targeted increases”²⁴ must also be made to flagship programmes, including the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme, and the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) which funds the principles outlined in the European Pillar of Social Rights, including equality between women and men in the labour market, work-life balance and pensions.

Coupled with increased funds to the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme as mentioned above, **50% should be earmarked to civil society organisations**²⁵ to ensure the sustainability of women’s rights organisations. The unacceptable cuts of **€2 billion to European Social Funds Plus (ESF+) must be urgently reversed**, to ensure the ‘appropriate amount of ESF+ resources’ under Article 8(2) is allocated to women’s rights organisations working to promote women’s socioeconomic rights and reduce women’s poverty.²⁶ **Earmarked funds for gender-sensitive services** should also be established in the Asylum and Migration Fund, to finance **early-stage integration programmes and essential services for women and girls experiencing the most extreme forms of vulnerability**. We further urge the European Parliament and European Council to establish a **strong rule of law mechanism within the EU budget**, to prevent women’s rights and women’s civil society organisations from facing the brunt of the shrinking civil society space.

v. Equality between women and men as a prerequisite

In the current MFF 2014-2020, the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI Funds)²⁷ are linked to seven **ex-ante conditionalities**, including “the implementation and application of Union gender equality law and policy”,²⁸ as a prerequisite to ensuring the effective and efficient use of all ESI Funds. Yet new initiatives under NGEU such as REACT-EU exempts EU Member States from complying with these ex-ante conditionalities.²⁹ Furthermore, the new Common Provisions Regulation setting out the new rules for cohesion policy for 2021-2027,³⁰ which includes the implementation of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights,³¹ must also streamline the establishment of a ‘Strategic policy framework for gender equality’ across all ESI Funds as part of this requirement.³² **EWL urges EU decision-makers to ensure Member States uphold their commitments to EU fundamental values by including, as a minimum, enabling conditions that explicitly promote equality between women and men, as part of using funds within NGEU and the upcoming MFF.**

Recommendations

EWL urgently calls on the political commitment of EU decision-makers and EU Member States to ensure the following before the adoption of Next Generation EU and the upcoming EU budget:

1. **Ensure a gender perspective and adopt a gender budgeting lens** across all programmes, including concrete objectives, targets, *ex-ante* and *ex-post* gender impact assessments, indicators (i.e. EIGE’s Gender Equality Index), regular review cycles (i.e. the reintroduction of

²⁴ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/B-9-2020-0229_EN.pdf

²⁵ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2018-0468_EN.html

²⁶ As per the [European Council conclusions](#), July 2020, para 76.

²⁷ Which include the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF); European Social Fund (ESF); Cohesion Fund (CF) European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD); and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF).

²⁸ For more information on the Common Provisions in the current European Structural and Investment Funds, see Annex XI, part II within [Regulation \(EU\) No 1303/2013](#), 20 December 2013.

²⁹ [Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulation \(EU\) No 1303/2013](#), 28 May 2020, para 14.

³⁰ See Annex III and Annex IV, [Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council COM\(2018\) 375 final](#), 29 May 2018.

³¹ Ibid, Annex III.

³² Ibid, Annex IV.

- a mid-term review of the MFF), tracking and correction mechanisms, and drawing on sex-disaggregated data, to alleviate any detrimental effects funds may have on women.
2. Introduce a **'women's corona fund'** within NGEU, with increased funds and standalone budget lines dedicated to eliminating all forms of violence against women, enhancing access to women's sexual and reproductive health and rights, addressing women and girls living in poverty, and increasing funds towards women's specialist services.
 3. Establish a robust **monitoring mechanism** such as a **Recovery and Gender Equality Advisory Body** at EU and Member State level, consisting of gender budgeting experts and women's rights organisations, to ensure the recovery funds, including the Recovery and Resilience Facility as a minimum, are distributed to gender mainstreaming measures.
 4. Direct immediate and long-term investments towards a **Care Deal for Europe** to complement the European Green Deal, that recognises **women and men as equal-earners-equal-carers across the life cycle, improves working conditions within the care sector, and boosts the creation of jobs.**
 5. **Increase funds to the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme to €1.83 billion in current prices, with at least 15% allocated to the sub-strand on equality between women and men within the Equality, Rights and Gender Equality strand.**³³
 6. **Earmark 40% of the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values financial envelope to the Daphne strand,**³⁴ to address the alarming surge in cases of male violence against women during COVID-19 and to fully resource women's civil society organisations.
 7. **Ensure increased and earmarked funding to support women's civil society organisations, to actively combat the shrinking space for civil society and uphold the rule of law,** including:
 - a. **50% of earmarked funds** in the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme;
 - b. **Reverse the €2 billion cuts** to the European Social Fund Plus, to ensure an 'appropriate amount of ESF+ resources' is sufficiently directed to women's rights organisations;
 - c. **Earmarking funds** in the upcoming Asylum and Migration Fund for **early-stage integration programmes** and essential services for women and girls experiencing the most extreme forms of vulnerability.
 8. Make **equality between women and men, as per the EU Treaties and fundamental rights, a prerequisite enabling condition** for EU Member States to uphold when using EU funds.
 9. **Increase the total budget to EIGE** to ensure its sustainable work to advancing equality between women and men as mandated.

European Women's Lobby, Rue Hydraulique 18, 1210 Brussels - Belgium
www.womenlobby.org #WomenForEurope @EuropeanWomen



Funded by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme of the European Union

³³ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2018-0468_EN.html

³⁴ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2018-0468_EN.html