

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

A report by the Central Eastern Europe, the Balkan and the Baltic States Taskforce of the European Women's Lobby



EUROPEAN WOMEN'S
LOBBY
EUROPEEN DES FEMMES



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1. INTRODUCTION

The story of gender inequality and women's rights in the region of Central Eastern Europe, the Balkan and Baltic States is not a happy one. By extension, EU architecture to support the voices of women in the region in rewriting the story is not what it could be. And yet the solutions are there. This report articulates the solutions drawing on the powerful collective knowledge of the women of the region.

Who are we to speak? The European Women's Lobby (EWL) is the largest umbrella organisation of women's associations in the European Union (EU), working to promote women's rights and equality between women and men. EWL has members in all 28 EU member states, 3 candidate countries, and 19 European-wide bodies, representing more than 2,000 powerful women's organisations.

Our work in the Central Eastern Europe, the Balkan and the Baltic States (CEEBS) region began at the end of the 1990s, when the EWL established itself as a strong contact point between national networks of women's organisations and the EU institutions and forums in the region. Those networks became members of the EWL before the formal accession of individual countries to the EU. What membership offered to those national associations was the potential to be part of an agenda to shape an inclusive feminist Europe. It helped them to get support to fight for the advancement of women's rights with knowledge of EU advocacy, information and tools. It enabled them to play an important role in ensuring the translation of EU values and policies for gender equality at the national level. In this way, the EWL is essentially building bridges between national and European level efforts to make inequality between women and men a thing of the past and to promote women's rights towards an inclusive feminist Europe.

In the past decade, progress on women's rights in the EU has been neither linear nor uniform across member states. We are now taking stock of efforts in the region and see this as an important opportunity to amplify the voices of women's organisations from the region by sharing their views at EU level. While, overall, women in the EU face similar structural challenges in reaching full equality (lack of adequate public participation, economic opportunities, violence against women, gender stereotypes, chronic lack of adequate funding), national and regional contexts are key in determining the scope and type of action for change. This report will bring that specific context into focus drawing on input from members of the European Women's Lobby Taskforce on Central Eastern Europe, Baltic and Balkan States.

“It's a crucial moment for global feminism. (...) We women sometimes play a role in the continuity of patriarchy, because patriarchy is not a black and white system in which men oppress women. It's much more complicated. I think we need to go back to the basics. Remember the solidarity. The sisterhood. And expand it.”

Elif Shafak, writer and women's rights activist, Turkey

2. WHAT IS THE CENTRAL EASTERN EUROPE, THE BALKAN AND THE BALTIC STATES (CEEGBBS) TASKFORCE?

Many of the challenges with tackling gender inequality and enforcing women's rights are associated with a lack of hard usable data and a lack of joined up common cause. Set up in 2014 after the EWL General Assembly, the CEEGBBS Taskforce responds to those challenges by bringing women's organisations together to share information, identify common challenges and strategies for action in the region of Central Eastern Europe, the Balkan and Baltic States.

The CEEGBBS Taskforce brings together women's rights advocates from Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, FYR of Macedonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Turkey as well as representatives of 2 network organisations, the European Network of Migrant Women and the European Centre of the International Council of Women (ECICW). Together we are working to promote inclusive democratic and peaceful societies free of gender stereotypes and discrimination.



The Taskforce is concerned that progress on gender equality in the region is seriously stalling, as demonstrated in successive European Gender Equality Indexes (see box 1). The CEEGBBS Taskforce urges immediate action by domestic and European decision-makers to address this situation. The region needs a new political commitment in order to achieve progress on equality between women and men and respect for women's human rights.

FACT BOX 1

GENDER EQUALITY IS STALLING

The 2017 European Gender Equality Index, measuring gender equality in the European Union from 2005 to 2015, shows that CEEGBBS countries all, with the exception of Slovenia, ranked below the EU-28 average score. Hungary ranks second to lowest in the ranking, followed by Romania and Slovakia¹.

1. Gender Equality Index (2017). *Measuring gender equality in the European Union 2005-2015*, p.5:

<http://elge.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/mh0517042enn.pdf>

What priorities for women's rights in the region?

The Taskforce has identified eight key priority areas for women's rights in the region. Further in this report, we are proposing a number of strategies for action and recommendations for decision-makers for each priority area (pp. 12-37):

- 1 Strengthening, supporting and resourcing a strong women's rights movement in the region.**
- 2 Reclaiming feminism and equality between women and men as European values. ²**
- 3 Ensuring women's economic independence, reducing economic disparities between women and men and urgently tackling poverty-based on gender and other intersecting forms of discrimination.**
- 4 Increasing women's participation and representation in politics and increasing the number of feminist politicians in power.**
- 5 Strengthening accountable and well-resourced gender equality machineries whose mandates will take into account the principle of diversity and will be responsive to the needs of all women and girls.**
- 6 Ending violence against women and ensuring sexual and reproductive health and rights for all.**
- 7 Ending intersectional discrimination of women from minority groups, including of Roma women and migrant and refugee women.**
- 8 Maintaining a peaceful Europe by ensuring participation and representation of women in all stages of peace-making processes.**

What are some of the constraints to women's rights in the region?

The Taskforce has identified six key constraints:

- 1 – Reluctance to recognise gender equality as a democratic value and a fundamental human right.
 - 2 – A strong religious, anti-women's human rights lobby and the rise of right wing populist politics, growing nationalism and conservatism.
 - 3 – Civil society, freedom of speech and assembly are under threat. Democratic spaces and financial resources are shrinking for civil Society and in particular for women's movements and women's organisations.
 - 4 – Limited financial resources and institutional infrastructure to advance women's rights.
 - 5 – The dramatic increase in violence and discrimination against women including prostitution, trafficking, the murder of women (femicide), and underage and forced marriages.
 - 6 – Armed conflicts in the neighbouring countries and post-conflict transition processes.
-

3. THE HISTORY OF PROMOTING WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY IN THE CEEBBS REGION

You must know the past to understand the present, as the saying goes. The history of the struggle for women's rights and gender equality in the CEEBBS region is a fascinating, if troubling one. The reluctance to advance on the agenda reflects an inheritance from the socialist period, the subsequent developments during transition, as well as the changes brought by the region's accession to the European Union (EU). There are of course significant differences between countries in the region, but some of the experiences and trends are captured here.

Let us start with the socialist period.

Equality between women and men was one of the perceived advances of the Eastern Bloc in Cold War times. In 1929, following the Soviet Communist party doctrine, 'the woman's question' was ostensibly solved when constitutional provisions recognised equality between women and men in the Soviet Union. After the Second World War (1939-1945), state socialist regimes in Eastern Europe also formalised equality between women and men as a constitutional right and granted women equal rights of participation in the public sphere and in family law.

On the socio-economic level things looked good, at least on paper. Most countries in the Eastern bloc legalised abortion before their Western counterparts and provided universal and free access to health care and education. Former Eastern countries had a strong rhetoric of equality between the sexes. In reality however, the most significant way in which gender equality was implemented was in terms of female employment. Women's full integration in the labour market was limited by women's significant responsibilities for child rearing and housework. Meanwhile the gender pay gap and gender segregation in the labour market was similar to levels found in OECD countries³.

Women's political participation was also part of the authoritarian state socialist regimes measures of equality between the sexes and many introduced a quota system to stimulate participation, especially after the 1970s⁴. Nonetheless, commentators observed the fact that women's positions in politics were rather toothless compared to those of men⁵ and that decision-making was rather a formal, empty game with decisions taken only by the top Party echelons.

Commitment to global efforts also seemed to be in place. Most countries of the Eastern Block had ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) earlier than Western countries. However, the Convention's provisions were not visible to ordinary women, nor were there institutional mechanisms to support and defend women's rights or to counter forms of violence against women. In other words, formal measures including adherence to most progressive international norms did not ensure substantial equality between women and men.

Paradoxically, the effect of the strong rhetoric of socialist authoritarian regimes on the equality between the sexes sometimes led to a total rejection of feminism, gender equality and women's rights issues during the democratisation period, often portrayed as signs of a defunct political order.

2. Equality between women and men is one of the European Union's founding values: <http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/>

3. UNICEF (1999), "Women in transition,

Regional Monitoring Report, No. 6", UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Florence.

4. Sloat Amanda (2004) "Where are the Women? Female Political Visibility in EU Accession States,"

Transitions.

5. Pollert, A. (2003), "Women, work and equal opportunities in post-Communist transition", Work, Employment and Society, Vol 17(2), pp. 331-357

Then came the 1990s and an enormous impact on people living in post-transitional countries. Women's participation in politics dropped dramatically in the first elected parliaments across the region (Romania from 30% to 3.3%, Hungary from 33% to 7%, Bulgaria from 30% to 2.6%) as quotas disappeared.⁶ GDP fell accompanied by a huge increase in poverty and income inequality.

It can be difficult to provide a full picture of the different impact of the transition from a command economy to a market economy that took place in the 1990s, but it is possible to attempt to draw out trends that impacted on women's lives across the region, while recognising that there are significant differences in the experiences of different countries.

The costs of the transition process were not distributed equally, as women bore a higher burden. They experienced significant public and political pressure to focus on the domestic sphere and to leave the work place behind in economies unable to provide sufficient jobs. Transition rhetoric also emphasised women's return to the home as a restoration of "proper, traditional gender relations" that had been artificially altered by dictatorial regimes⁷. In some countries, attempts to restore patriarchal gender order included among other effects, various restrictions to abortion, extended maternal leaves and defunding of childcare facilities, the commodification of women's bodies.

Transition also brought with it market liberalisation, cuts and state reforms, which hit women hard. Many people lost their jobs (dismissed from large state owned industries) and women were often hit hardest. They were deprived of special measures and social benefits associated with state socialist commitments to women's emancipation.

Rising nationalism and militarisation resulted in full blown civil wars and conflict throughout the Balkans. In the context of widespread violence and the breakdown of social infrastructure, women's rights were severely undermined in many places, including the horrific use of rape as a weapon of war, and the significant displacement of women throughout Europe and the world.

Meanwhile women were organising. The 90s saw the establishment of many women's

rights organisations in the region⁸ and re-establishment of those existing in the pre-Second World War period. Their mission and scope varied widely from promoting culture, to women's entrepreneurship, to lobbying and advocacy for women's reproductive rights or women's protection from violence. Much of their work was intertwined with efforts to push for democratisation and face the impacts of transitional economics. Women's organisations efforts were enhanced by the momentum towards the Beijing World Conference in 1995, and were supported by the establishment of institutional mechanisms for gender equality.

However, faced with huge challenges, the battles became reactive. Much of the swell of public campaigning and organising came in reaction to threats to women's rights, rather than pro-actively seeking to create and promote a change agenda. Women's organisations faced many challenges including limited funding and limited organising experience. They began fulfilling functions formerly managed by the state, filling the vacuum left by economic restructuring. The twin track of service provision and advocacy work is still today one of the features of women's organisations in the region.

Funding was particularly difficult. Women's rights NGOs in the region relied on international funding, as nationally there were no funds available and limited possibilities for local fundraising. With EU accession, the international donor agenda changed leaving women's rights organisations with the only possibility for financing through EU funding schemes. However, EU funding was and is still often inaccessible for organisations in the region, as they cannot provide matching funding, nor can they easily provide the organisational infrastructure required by the management of such projects. Most of the funding is targeting reconciliation of work and family life, while other important issues such as poverty, reproductive rights or violence against women are not funded.

Yet European Economic Area grants (EEA grants) had beneficial effects on the promotion of equality. The grant scheme led to a revival among women's rights NGOs as they provided accessible system of funding (smaller grants, more flexible conditions of reporting and monitoring, no conditions on cross border consortium) and were much friendlier to women's

rights organisations than EU's European Social Fund or Daphne projects. The chronic lack of funding for women's rights organisations is still a key challenge throughout the region today and one of the causes for limited gender equality and women's rights advocacy.

With feminism a vilified term during transition, women's advocates turned towards less ideologically loaded terms such as women's empowerment, gender equality or equal opportunities between women and men. In long run, this strategy did have its pitfalls as currently the term gender equality is under attack⁹, but proved to be an efficient strategy not only to legitimise feminist debates in the region but also to prepare the terrain for the adoption of EU legislation on gender equality. It is widely recognised that women's rights NGOs contributed to the transfer of EU legislation on equality between women and men to candidate countries, and in this way to the actual accession project.

EU membership required the transposition of equality and non-discrimination legislation and the creation of domestic institutions to enforce the laws within all future member states. Women's NGOs had developed expertise in EU legislation on equality between women and men, thanks to their participation in wider networks like the EWL. In many parts of the region, this included special attention not only to proper terminology but also to including enforcement mechanisms within domestic laws.

After EU accession, the fine-tuning of institutional mechanisms for gender equality and the monitoring of institutional efforts on gender equality were crucial for women's rights NGOs. However, as austerity economics hit both old and new EU, the agenda was undermined across the entire EU. National machineries in the region were severely affected by cuts, as were other public services that women relied upon. The situation worsened in the region as women's rights advocates lost influence and leverage through the marginalisation of women's rights and gender equality as a European priority (an external challenge) and the rise of conservative populist politics in some countries and neoliberal economics (a domestic one). Domestically, many countries in the region faced and still face a dual attack on women's rights – by conservative and populist politicians and by the cutting of

programmes and policies to advance equality as part of a neoliberal agenda. Since 2009, the entire region has faced cuts to public sector spending that most dramatically impacted on health care and social protection systems. This in turn has led to more jobless women and more women at risk of poverty. Meanwhile, populist politicians continue to capitalise extensively on nationalist discourses sometimes slipping into overtly misogynist, anti-LGBTQI, anti-migrant and racist attacks (including antigypsyist, afrophobia, islamophobia, anti-Semitism and xenophobia).

If there is one red thread throughout the modern history of the CEEBBS region, it is that neither the gender equality and women's rights agenda nor the movement behind it ever had enough real support. Today, women's rights organisations see one of the most important tasks the strengthening of the women's movement in the region. The CEEBBS Taskforce works to build common programmes of action, to increase collaboration with women's rights advocates and feminists working in different spheres, to connect with other coalitions and networks of civil society and to improve sharing of good practices among the different countries in the region.

A concrete step in this direction is to articulate a number of priorities as the basis for joint campaigning and advocacy. These priorities build on taskforce member consultations and will be the main lines of action in the coming years.

6. Sloat Amanda (2004), "Where are the Women? Female Political Visibility in EU Accession States," Transitions.
7. Gal, Susan and Kligman, Gail. (2000), "The Politics of Gender after Socialism: A Comparative-Historical Essay", Princeton University Press.

8. Open Society Institute (2005). "Equal Opportunities for Women and Men: monitoring law and practices in the new member states and accession countries".
9. For a good illustration of current attacks on gender ideology, see debates organised by Friedrich

Ebert Stiftung entitled Gender Revolution-Theological and Political Battlefields in Central and Eastern Europe. Also Foundation for European Progressive Studies publication "Gender as Symbolic Glue" <http://www.feps-europe.eu/en/publications/details/314>

4. TASKFORCE PRIORITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- p. 12 **1** Strengthening, supporting and resourcing a strong women’s rights movement in the region.
- p. 14 **2** Reclaiming feminism and equality between women and men as European values.
- p. 16 **3** Ensuring women’s economic independence, reducing economic disparities between women and men and urgently tackling poverty-based on gender and other intersecting forms of discrimination.
- p. 18 **4** Increasing women’s participation and representation in politics and increasing the number of feminist politicians in power.
- p. 22 **5** Strengthening accountable and well-resourced gender equality machineries whose mandates will take into account the principle of diversity and will be responsive to the needs of all women and girls.
- p. 26 **6** Ending violence against women and ensuring sexual and reproductive health and rights for all.
- p. 32 **7** Ending intersectional discrimination of women from minority groups, including of Roma women and migrant and refugee women.
- p. 34 **8** Maintaining a peaceful Europe by ensuring participation and representation of women in all stages of peace-making processes.

1

STRENGTHENING, SUPPORTING AND RESOURCING A STRONG WOMEN'S RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN THE REGION

Women's organisations in the region have actively contributed to the development of their societies and of women's rights.

Nonetheless, women's NGOs have been unable to capitalise on their contribution, becoming increasingly marginalised within civil society and on the political level. In most countries, women's NGOs remained pariahs also in the eyes of the general public and were often the first targets of sexist attacks. This situation needs to change. The Taskforce is committed to strengthening the women's movement in the region and will reach out to different feminist advocates as well as to other parts of civil society with a view to integrating a women's rights agenda into the public narrative. The Taskforce is also deeply concerned about the limited availability, decrease or even disappearance of funding for human rights and women's rights NGOs in the region. It is calling for urgent investment in the women's movement, by funding women's rights

NGOs and building their long-term financial resilience.

Strategy for action by women's organisations, EWL, EWL members and working structures:

- Promote women's rights NGOs as the main sources of knowledge on equality between women and men and expertise on violence against women;
- Build alliances with other feminist and women's rights advocates; hold national consultations on women's rights and invite different kinds of advocates from other segments of civil society;
- Participate in regional CSO forums including those organised with the help of EEA Grants;
- Develop and run educational programmes on feminism and women's rights, such as summer camps and boot camps for young leaders;
- Support each other through capacity-building focused on organisations' strategic development, communication and campaigning frameworks;
- Enhance women's rights NGOs financial resilience and funding by experimenting with innovative funding schemes such as women's funds, crowd funding, individual donors, Corporate Social Responsibility.

FACT BOX 2

THE CONTRIBUTION OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANISATIONS IN THE CEEBBS REGION

Women's Rights NGOs have pioneered and even invented new forms of support in social services, including introducing different kinds of services for survivors of abuse, impoverished women, women with disabilities, etc. They helped to bring about sound legislation on anti-discrimination, equality between women and men, social services, child protection and protection from violence. Some actively helped women politicians to develop skills and supported them with political contacts across domestic boundaries. Others have focused on women entrepreneurs and supported women's initiatives with expert knowledge and funding.

Recommendations for European and national decision-makers:

- Allocate funding to women's rights NGOs through funding schemes that cover both service provision and advocacy work and ensure that smaller women's rights NGOs have access to funding;
- Support the strategic development of women's rights NGOs, including the development of communication campaigning capacity, organisational and financial sustainability strategies to ensure continued existence of a women's movement and long-term resilience of NGOs;
- Recognise the knowledge and expertise that sits with women's rights NGOs; integrate

their work and actively seek their input into policy areas like economics and poverty reduction, care systems, pension reform and labour laws, civil rights, election and democratisation, anti-corruption, peace-building and prevention of armed conflict;

- Establish urgently new and innovative ways and methods of financial support, other than highly bureaucratic project budget lines to ensure the survival, independent functioning and strengthening of women’s NGOs.

Story

From EWL members in Hungary
(Magyar Női Erdekérvényesítő Szövetség
– NőiÉrdek – Hungarian Women’s Lobby)

“ In 2013, the Hungarian government and several other State and media stakeholders started a campaign to attack a group of NGOs dealing with democracy and human rights issues, including women’s rights. These NGOs were deceptively accused of being ‘Soros-hirelings’, ‘leftist fake NGOs’, ‘paid political actors’, or ‘serving foreign interest’. In 2014, the Hungarian Women’s Lobby (HWL) and 3 of its member organisations were included on a list of 13 NGOs considered problematic to the government. The prime minister ordered an ad

hoc Government Control Office audit targeting 55 organisations. In 2015, the HWL faced a tax audit. The attacks on NGOs intensified in 2016, when the government issued controversial and offensive statements accusing those NGOs to support illegal smuggling of migrants. In 2017, Act No. LXXVI on the transparency of organisations receiving foreign funds was adopted. It requires NGOs receiving foreign funding to register themselves as such at court, and to label themselves as such in their publications and communication. On 20 June 2018, the Hungarian government stepped up its ongoing crackdown on civil society when the Hungarian Parliament adopted a new law criminalising a range of

activities in support of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants. Women’s human rights NGOs will highly likely be affected by this legislation.¹⁰ Central European University, which has been offering, among others, a Hungarian-accredited master’s program in gender studies, has been threatened with a ban since the spring of 2017, and its status is still pending. As of 12th October 2018, a government decree removed gender studies from a list of Hungarian language master’s programs approved by the government. In the same month, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, in an act of self-censorship, removed a lecture concerned with gender aspects in IT from the planned agenda of its annual ‘Hungarian Festival of Sciences.’ ”

Story

From a women’s rights NGO in Poland

“ The Foundation is now in something like hibernation because we do not have possibilities to get funding for the activities that we implement. That is, in our case, supporting

women to enter and function in the labour market and working for gender equality. As Minister Rafalska pointed out: ‘In women, we find care potential’. Or MP Pięta who said that he would give women an additional 600 zloty if they would stay at home and take care of kids. ”

¹⁰. European Women’s Lobby (June 2017). “Disrupting the Continuum of Violence Against Women and Girls”: https://www.womenlobby.org/IMG/pdf/facsheet_violence_against_women_and_girls_in_europe_2017_website.pdf

2

RECLAIMING FEMINISM AND EQUALITY BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN AS EUROPEAN VALUES

The CEEBBS Taskforce has observed a worrying trend of increased attacks by conservative forces on women's rights, denouncing "gender" as criminal ideology, in many countries across the region such as Poland, Bulgaria, Hungary and Slovakia¹¹. The anti-choice international lobby gathers popular support and co-opts politicians in public denunciations of gender equality as "an ideology threatening family values". One of the main documents under attack is the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, which is criticised by conservatives as an instrument of gender ideology promoting "non-stereotypical sexual roles"¹². Voices in opposition to the Istanbul Convention deliberately mislead the public about the purpose of the Convention and put women and girls across the region at increased risk of various forms violence¹³. Attackers of the "gender ideology" target in particular women's access to sexual and reproductive health, young people's access to sexuality education as well as the rights of LGBTQI people.

"So much of feminism has been women speaking up about hitherto unacknowledged experiences, and so much of antifeminism has been men telling them these things don't happen."

Rebecca Solnit, writer, USA

Strategy for action by women's organisations, EWL, EWL members and working structures:

- Reclaim and promote equality between women and men as a core value of democratic and inclusive societies;
- Re-value European feminist history as a progressive social movement and its contribution to EU Enlargement and EU values;
- Emphasise women's rights as a key part of the European Charter for Fundamental Human Rights; use all means to seek justice for women's human rights infringements, including judiciary remedies at the European Court of Human Rights; use processes such as Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) reports to input on women's human rights infringements at national levels;
- Take active measures to initiate annual country monitoring on the application of EU standards and laws on gender equality by the European Commission.

Recommendations for European and national decision-makers:

- Decision-makers at all levels, irrespective of political colour must actively promote equality and the long traditions of feminism that have made possible the recognition of women as full members of our societies. A full political strategy for equality between women and men in the EU should be developed and implemented;
- Hold EU member states and accession countries accountable for the full implementation of EU standards and laws on gender equality, through annual monitoring on the implementation of EU standards and laws on gender equality by the European Commission, including supporting women's organisations to carry out shadow reporting;
- Establish a regional or European campaign to highlight the contribution of women's rights activist and feminists to European

history, modelled on 'Women's History Month';

- Introduce active measures to recognise sexism as an aggravated form of discrimination and evaluate the options of introducing Anti-Sexism Laws;
- Allocate funding to women's rights NGOs through funding schemes that cover both

service provision *and* advocacy work, ensuring that small grassroots women's rights NGOs have access to funding;

- Ratification and full implementation by the EU and Member states of the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence.

Story

From EWL Members in Serbia
(Mreza za Evropski Zenski Lobi, Serbia –
Network for European Women's Lobby)

“ In the last few years, women human rights defenders in Serbia, especially Women in Black, have been exposed to public lynching in traditional media and on social networks, physical attacks while performing activities in public spaces, and marginalisation and degradation via the labelling of women human rights defenders as anti-Serbs, enemies of the

state, secret agents of foreign policies. Ongoing campaigns against human rights defenders in Serbia have exactly the same characteristic or methods as the ones held during Milosevic's regime in the nineties. There is a constant attempt by the media close to the government to present women human rights defenders who are critical of the government as traitors and enemies of the state. Examples include the series of newspaper articles called 'Who is receiving dollars in Serbia?' or 'Women in Black - the greatest foreign funded NGO'. Experience of

women rights defenders in pressing charges against the attackers in most cases ends with acquittals, or waiting too long for the court trials to begin or to end. Women human rights defenders are also witnessing that MPs and representatives of the state institutions are using the same war rhetoric, tendencies and politics as they did in the 1990s by inventing enemies and fabricating attacks on the state and state representatives - based on these inventions, they are building the arguments for protection of the state from 'enemies'. ”

11. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung organised a series of events on the topic of "gender" as a criminal ideology such as 'Gender Revolution: theological and

political battlefield' (in Budapest 2014): <https://www.fes.de/gender/infobrief4/review/review.php>
12. This has been particularly the case in countries that

haven't ratified the Istanbul Convention; Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Slovakia
13. See which

countries in Europe have signed or ratified the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women

and Domestic Violence: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/210/signatures?desktop=true>

3

ENSURING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE, REDUCING ECONOMIC DISPARITIES BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN AND URGENTLY TACKLING POVERTY BASED ON GENDER AND OTHER INTERSECTING FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION

The storm of austerity politics has placed women in a downward spiral. The Taskforce has much evidence to show that the recent economic crisis and ensuing fiscal reforms in member states has had a devastating gendered impact. Women's employment rates have dropped¹⁴ and the pace of labour market reintegration is very slow. Women's earnings have also significantly fallen, while the quantity and quality of jobs available to women has deteriorated. As part of austerity packages introduced across the region, governments adopted new legislations to cut labour costs, including temporary contracting provisions, lower benefits associated with employment status and reduced parental benefits. Cuts in social protection schemes (CZ, RO, FYR MACEDONIA, HU), in pension provisions and in public services (health, childcare, education, services for women victims of VAW) impact women's lives and increase the risk of women's poverty. Though in some countries such as FYR of Macedonia recent years

have seen positive changes, such as increase to minimum wage, we still see that single women, rural women and Roma women are facing the most severe poverty and overall the feminisation of poverty is a burning issue.

Women's safety is put at risk with cuts to shelters, counselling centres and hotlines providing help to victims of violence. Decision-makers must respect women's human rights and states must ensure the protection of all their citizens. Governments need to implement holistic policies that prosecute perpetrators and prevent violence against women. The Istanbul Convention provides an essential framework to achieve this and emphasises the importance of supporting and collaborating with front-line women's organisations'.

Strategy for action by women's organisations, EWL, EWL members and working structures:

- Develop a vision of a new economic system for Europe based on feminist values of more equal redistribution and sustainability;
- Continue to contribute to the European and national discussions on EU2020 and economic governance¹⁷;
- Build capacity and expertise within women's NGOs in the region on macroeconomic policy;
- Women's rights organisations must become stakeholders in monitoring employment, social protection, and anti-poverty governmental strategies and providing gender analysis of labour codes, tax legislation, employment, social protection and retirement benefits and anti-poverty strategies;
- Take stock and monitor the implementation of gender budgeting at all levels (EU, national, local governments); conduct independent gender impact assessments of draft budgets when they are published;

FACT BOX 3

WOMEN AND POVERTY IN THE CEEBBS REGION

The CEEBBS region has the largest European population at risk of poverty with 4 member states where over a third of the population is on the poverty threshold (Bulgaria 48%, Romania 40.4%, Latvia 35.1%, Hungary 33.5%). The region has a large population of working poor¹⁵ and the highest rate of child poverty¹⁶, as earnings are insufficient. Single mothers and women pensioners as well as rural women and minority women have been most affected although the introduction of guaranteed minimum wage did have some impact on extreme poverty.

- Work together with other stakeholders in producing analysis of most marginalised groups and stress the gender component of social exclusion and provide recommendations.

Recommendations for European and national decision-makers:

- Ensure that gendered targets for poverty reduction in the context of Europe2020; take targeted measures to improve the living conditions of those who have been most impacted by cutbacks, including lone mothers, women pensioners, Romani women, migrant and minority women, women living with disabilities and rural women;
- Strengthen measures for tackling the pay gap and increasing women's employment in the European Commission's Strategic engagement on equality between women and men 2016-2019;
- Make vital services (crèches, women's shelters, community based health services) more affordable and accessible by providing adequate funding for services which are an investment and not a cost;
- Strengthen women's role and participation in collective bargaining and ensure that female dominated sectors are unionised and represented in and working with trade unions;
- Ensure the individualisation of rights with regards to social protection and taxation as a means of guaranteeing women's economic independence; whereby carrying out

gender impact assessment of proposed policy measures to avoid any negative consequences for women;

- Provide significant financial incentives to lift barriers to accessing finance faced by women entrepreneurs; providing funding and fiscal incentives for social economy projects targeting women as main beneficiaries;
- Ensure that country reports produced by the European Commission and issued at the beginning of the European Semester contain information on women's socio-economic status and information from women's NGOs in the different countries;
- Engage in meaningful consultation with women's organisations on National Reform Programmes and other country specific tools, subsequently submitted to the European Commission to prioritise country-specific recommendations.

<p>14. European Women's Lobby (2012). 'The Price of Austerity – the impact on women's rights and gender equality in Europe': https://www.womenlobby.org/IMG/pdf/the_price_of_austerity_-_web_edition.pdf</p> <p>15. Eurostat. In-work</p>	<p>poverty in the EU: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/DDN-20180316-1?inheritRedirect=true and Inequality Watch/ Observatoire des Inégalités: https://inequalitywatch.eu/sqip.php?article</p>	<p>199&id_groupe=17&id_mot=89</p> <p>16. Caritas Europa (2015). 'Poverty and Inequalities on the Rise: A study of the impact of the crisis and austerity on the people'</p> <p>17. Since 2012, EWL has published documents on</p>	<p>EU2020 and European Semester, including input from members on 'alternative country-specific recommendations'. They are available here: http://www.womenlobby.org/eu2020-and-european-semester/?lang=en</p>
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Story

From EWL Members in Bulgaria (Bulgarian Platform of the EWL):

“ Patriarchal stereotypes exist and are even reborn due to new political tendencies (nationalistic, rights wing parties, etc.) and due to low economic situation (high level of unemployed women, poverty of women, economically dependent on their husbands/ partners; lack of alternatives,

etc.). According to information provided by Trade Unions in Bulgaria in March 2017, 719,000 of Bulgarian women, aged between 15-64, do not work. For more than a third for them, the main reason is personal and/or family. 25 % of unemployed women who care for elderly people would work with appropriate services for the sick and the elderly. The unemployment rate of young women up to 29 years of age continues to increase. 56.8 % of

unemployed women are long-term unemployed. In addition, women receive lower average wages, and as a result, because of their lower retirement age, they receive a lower pension and compensation. There is a tendency to increase the gender pay gap and in 2015 it reaches 14.2 %, according to National Statistical Institute data, at 10.6 % in 2007). The whole environment supports sexism and patriarchy, or so called 'women to be put in her place' ”

4

INCREASING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION IN POLITICS AND INCREASING THE NUMBER OF FEMINIST POLITICIANS IN POWER

Most countries of the region score below the EU average on women's political representation¹⁸. There is an urgent need for measures to tackle the overrepresentation of men in all areas of power and decision-making.

Croatia, FYR of Macedonia, Poland, Serbia and Slovenia are the only countries to have introduced compulsory special measures to promote women in politics. Although some political parties have introduced voluntary measures to bring women into the rank and file of party members, quota systems are highly resisted. Women's access to politics is constrained by multiple factors including gender stereotypes and sexism within politics, as well as capacity gaps.

Meanwhile, temporary special measures such as compulsory quotas are effective in promoting women into parliaments and government. In FYR of Macedonia, women's representation went from under 10% in the national parliament to 30% in one election cycle, as the result of quota legislation. The Taskforce notes that women politicians are essential to ensure the representation of women's rights in laws and policies. Perhaps most importantly, feminist politicians who are deeply committed to gender equality and women's rights must be promoted. Women in politics should not simply be tokens of gender equality within conservative politics. Other measures and indicators for the presence of women's rights on the political agenda should also be used, such as the actual implementation of gender sensitive policy analysis and budgeting.

FACT BOX 4

WOMEN AND POLITICS

Women make up in between 9,5% (Hungary) and 28% (Poland) of elected delegates in national parliaments and score much lower when it comes to executive positions. In Hungary, no single woman holds a ministerial portfolio. With the exception of two women heads of state in Croatia and Estonia, there is little popular support for women candidates seeking election for the highest office.

While recognising that women (and men) have been socialised in a patriarchal society, resulting in internalised gender unequal values; that women's interests vary greatly - depending on their class, race, religion, sexual orientation, geographic location (urban/rural) and age; and that women entering the masculine world of politics sometimes reject the prioritisation of gender equality issues so as not to stand out - we are convinced that more women in politics in itself will be an important step in transforming politics. More women - from diverse backgrounds and ages - entering politics, means less mediocre and unrepresentative men occupy positions of power.

Sometimes more women in politics does not mean step forward in gender equality and transforming politics. We need more gender sensitive women politicians and we need women in parliament who think differently and independently than the men holding power in their political party. There is a need for more feminists in political parties and a stronger

feminist voice in civil society to bring a challenge to the impact of patriarchy and power on the overall political landscape. A strong women's movement supports women politicians and women leaders in the business sector. Parity on boards and in politics is essential for creating a just society where interests of both men and women are adequately reflected.

Story

From EWL Members
In Czech Republic (Česká ženská lobby –
Czech Women's Lobby)

“ The share of women in the Czech parliament has languished at around one in five, while their share of the Czech seats in the European Parliament is under one in four. The NGO Fórum 50 % decided to do something about this by launching projects to raise the level of women's political representation. One of them is a mentoring scheme,

which partners Czech female politicians with Danish and Norwegian women who have successful political careers and valuable experience to share. The mentoring involved face to face meetings and regular contact by email and Skype. Fórum 50 % also organised two short courses for 15 female candidates in the 2014 European Parliament elections. These comprised media training, individual coaching, a weekend seminar and a debate with a sitting MEP. The European Parliament candidates found the training

especially valuable, as it taught them new soft skills and enabled them to network with other Czech female politicians. It is difficult to say whether the programmes had any direct impact on the outcomes of the elections. However, it is true that recent years have seen certain improvement in women's participation particularly in the European Parliament elections. Compared to 2009 the 2014 elections demonstrated some increase in the proportion of elected female MEP: from 18,2 % to 23,8 %.”

18. In the Gender Equality Index 2017, measuring gender equality in the EU from 2005-2015, all CEEBBS countries scored lower than the EU 28 average on the share of women member of national parliaments: http://elge.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/20177277_mh0517208enn_.pdf (p.49)

Story

From EWL Members in Estonia (Eesti Naisteühenduste Ümarlaud – Estonian Women's Association Roundtable)

“ Women's participation in politics is taken as something natural in Estonia. This is not yet reflected in equal sharing of power, but there has been constant and clear progress over the years. Estonia has a female president since 2017; a

woman leading one of Estonia's most influential political parties, the Reform Party (Kaja Kallas, elected in March 2018); 50 % of members of the European Parliament elected from Estonia have been women (from 2006 onwards). We currently have 33 % of women among government ministers (5 out of total 15), 28 % of women in the Parliament and 54 % of women in political parties' membership. ”

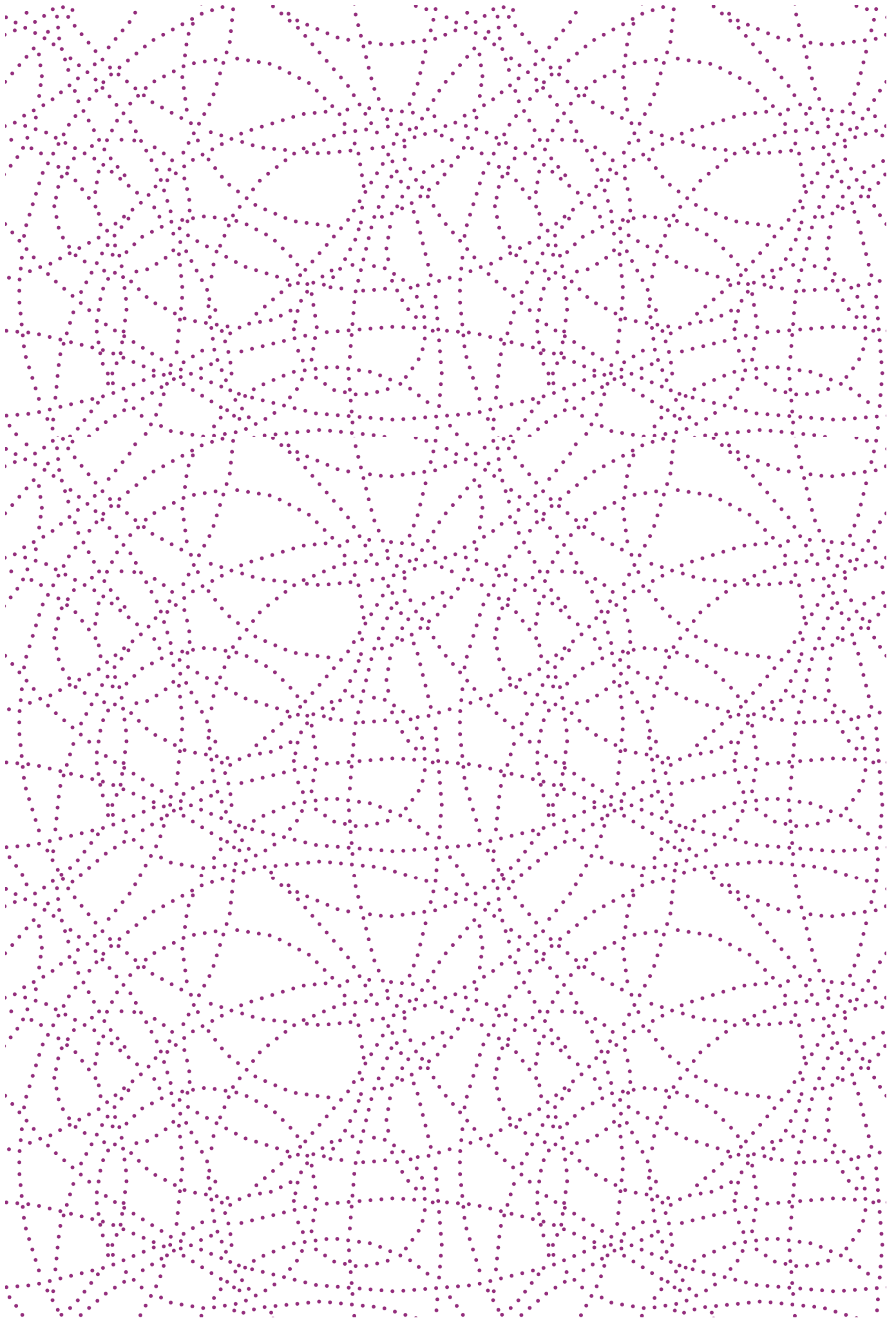
Strategy for action by women's organisations, EWL, EWL members and working structures:

- Call for temporary special measures to increase women's participation such as a compulsory quota system; call for parity law which ensures that equality is a citizenship right; engage in awareness raising campaigns to promote the benefits of quotas;
- Build alliances with women politicians and educate them on a women's rights agenda;
- Reach out to politicians, especially the young to raise awareness on the benefits of gender equal societies;
- Support women's political organising in established political parties and beyond them; support candidacies of independent women politicians, feminist advocates who run for office and more;
- Encourage and participate in political organising around women's issues; simplify access to politics and the rules for establishing political parties; help and support feminist initiatives for forming political parties;
- Monitor sexist attacks on women politicians and issue monitoring reports including during election campaigns;
- Work on changing the culture of political parties so that it becomes feasible for women to engage; work towards the introduction of zero tolerance measures on sexism and

sexual harassment within political party spaces; shift calendars of meetings to accommodate women's schedules and care responsibilities; establish gender quotas for party commissions to engage women politicians in all areas.

Recommendations for European and national decision-makers:

- Adopt compulsory temporary special measures such as quotas to encourage women's participation in politics at all levels; no parliament with less than 50% women, no government without 50% women can actively implement transformative policies of equality between women and men;
- Support funding for women's causes in elected bodies;
- Change legislation regarding the establishment of political parties and political party funding so that women's parties and feminist political forces can participate in elections at different levels;
- Reform education programmes and education materials so that non-stereotypical gender roles are promoted among the young, including with women in leadership positions;
- Sanction sexism during election campaigns as an aggravated form of gender-based discrimination.



5

STRENGTHENING ACCOUNTABLE,
WELL-RESOURCED DOMESTIC GENDER
EQUALITY INSTITUTIONS WHOSE MANDATES
WILL TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE PRINCIPLE
OF DIVERSITY AND WILL BE RESPONSIVE
TO THE NEEDS OF ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS

Since the Beijing Platform of Action in 1995 and following the incorporation of the *acquis communautaire* in the region, institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women's rights have been one of the key demands of women's NGOs. Despite the increasing importance and visibility of some national machinery, a common problem in the region is that such mechanisms have been under serious financial threat with the onset of austerity economics. Equality machineries lost their funds and were temporarily disbanded (e.g. Romania, Slovenia) and re-emerged without trained staff, downgraded within ministerial structures (e.g. Hungary, Bulgaria), understaffed and under-resourced or merged with institutions dealing with different grounds of discrimination (e.g. Estonia). In other regions, such as the Western Balkans, gender equality institutions became competitive with women's rights civil society organisations, undermining their expertise and creating divisions among them (eg. Serbia). Gender equality has been marginalised within governments, which results in reduced influence for the remaining machineries. Equality between women and men, gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting – some of the key areas of action on the mandates of national machineries – are confused or are not yet fully understood by decision-makers themselves. Women's NGOs interaction with national machineries varies

Story

From EWL Members
in Czech Republic (Česká ženská lobby –
Czech Women's Lobby)

“ After the elections in October 2017, the position of Minister for Human Rights and Gender Equality was cancelled in the Czech Republic despite the

protest of women's and human rights NGOs. According to the new prime minister, this will save tax payers' money and he said the post was useless anyway. ”



across the region, but it is usually reported as insubstantial.

Strategy for action by women's organisations, EWL, EWL members and working structures:

- Advocate for strong, accountable and properly resourced gender equality machineries as a main instrument to promote effective and rights-based legislation and policy on equality between women and men, without creating competitiveness with women's rights organisations; follow up on initiatives and
- demand a clear agenda of action;
- Demand women's NGO involvement in the functioning of machineries through consultative processes and the provision of expert knowledge; monitor and speak up against rolling back on women's rights including through international processes that allow input from women's CSOs;
- Promote dialogue with representatives of gender equality mechanisms through public debates and common public campaigns;
- Encourage exchanges between experts working in the national gender equality mechanisms across the region.

Story

From EWL Members in Croatia (Ženska Mreža Hrvatske - Women's Network of Croatia)

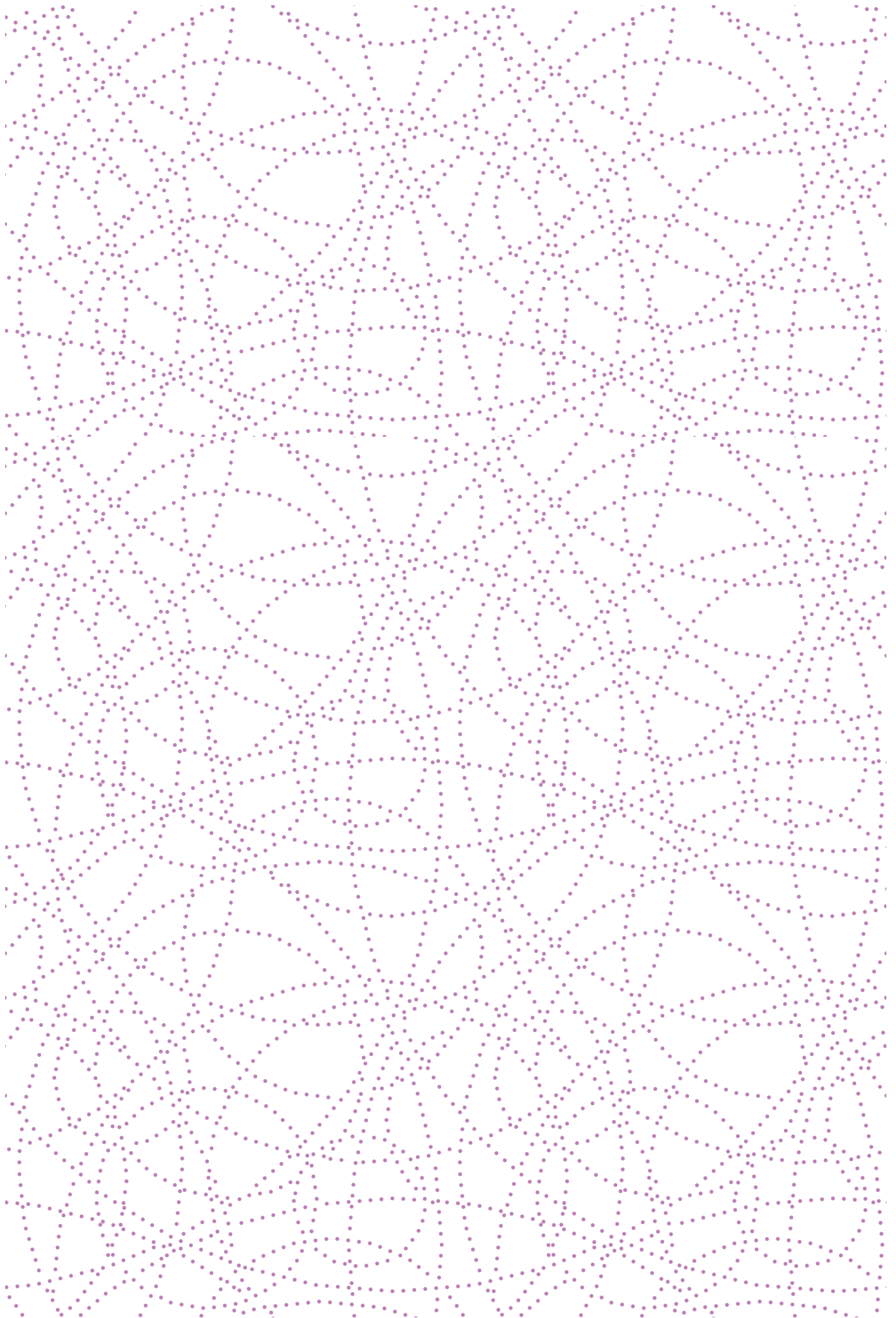
“ In Croatia significant decrease of budgets for gender equality mechanisms leads towards their marginalisation. It is followed by the promotion of militarism and war (ceremonies, maintenance of war memory objects and annual memorials), various forms of ‘social security’ which is actually privileging of war veterans and establishing special categories of financial schemes for this category of population. The Governmental Office for Gender Equality and Office of the Ombudsperson for Gender Equality have been marginalised which can be illustrated by the decrease of their annual budgets: in 2016 annual budget of the Governmental Office for Gender Equality

was 660,060 EUR in 2017, 331,494 EUR in 2018, and projected to drop to 266,695 EUR in 2020. For the comparison we can look into annual budget of the Memorial Centre of Homeland War Vukovar whose annual budget over the years varies from 4,5 to 5 million EUR. Minimum financial support is given to stop most serious violations of human rights, such as human trafficking – which is mostly trafficking in women. The budget for the implementation of National Action Plan against Human trafficking is around 25,000 EUR. Decrease of funds for gender equality mechanisms is followed by lack of national action plans for this area. After entering EU membership, the Croatian Government, despite of recommendations from international bodies such as UN CEDAW Committee or Council of Europe GRETA, has not been eager in acting

against inequality and violence. The last National Policy for Gender Equality was from 2011 to 2015, the National Action Plan for the implementation of UN Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security was from 2011 to 2014, the National Action Plan against Trafficking in Persons was for the period from 2012 to 2015. Previously, committees on local level were inclusive and open to external members, whereas now they are functioning as more closed work bodies. Gender equality institutional framework in reality does not function, due to lack of financial support, and hence there is no real influence on public policies and gender budgeting. **In spite of this challenging environment, the hard work of our Croatian members led to the ratification of the Istanbul Convention by a 2/3 majority in April 2018 despite very organised and well-resourced opposition. ”**



EWL Member the Women's Network of Croatia's protest to "Stop Fundamentalist Violence against Women" in front of the Parliament on 15 December 2017, warning the public that the Prime minister did not keep his promise to ratify Istanbul convention in a year's time as he said on 25 November 2016. The main banner said "You are lying to us". The hard work of EWL's Croatian members led to the ratification of the Istanbul Convention by a 2/3 majority in April 2018 despite very organised and well-resourced opposition.



ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND ENSURING SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS FOR ALL

The current situation of violence against women is incompatible with human rights commitments and democratic standards.

The Taskforce urges governments to sign, ratify and fully implement the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, the Istanbul Convention. While some criminalisation of domestic violence exists, many countries are reluctant to design laws for the protection and safety of women from a women's rights perspective. Civil and criminal laws on domestic violence still refer to 'violence among family members', failing to recognise the gendered dimension of domestic violence. Some states fail to recognise non-physical dimensions of domestic abuse²⁰; others ignore inter-partner violence among couples who are not legally registered; others do not comprehensively legislate against forms of violence against women such as stalking, sexual abuse, marital rape, or sexual harassment. Protective measures for victims do not cover all forms of violence against women, like rape, sexual harassment²¹, FGM, prostitution and trafficking. Women from the region, and specially women from minority ethnic background like Roma women, are overrepresented in prostitution in Western Europe and victims

FACT BOX 5

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

One in three women in the European Union has been a victim of physical violence and every second woman in the EU has experienced sexual harassment since the age of 15. The most dangerous place in a woman's life is her home¹⁹.

Story

From EWL Members in Romania
(Romanian Women's Lobby)

“ In Romania, 15,313 requests have been recorded in the Courts for Protection orders in interval from 2012-2016. 88 % of the requests came from women. In 6 years, the numbers increased five times (from 937 in 2012 to 5,132 requests in 2016). ”²⁵

of trafficking for sexual exploitation. Laws on prostitution and trafficking are unacceptable: some criminalise women in prostitution; there are no exit programmes for women who want to exit prostitution, and laws do no focus on the demand side (buyers and pimps) and their role in perpetuating prostitution.

The urgency of the situation of violence against women and girls is not fully recognised. Services for women victims are insufficient and many times provided without a **gender perspective or a women focus or without acknowledging the expertise of women's organisations in provision of specialised support**²². Service providers who depended on non-governmental/private donors are now increasingly under pressure from these donors to drop their women-centred approach: to shift from women services to integrated services. They are often expected to reassess their position on prostitution: being expected to work with survivors of prostitution without denouncing the system of prostitution. Some countries lack shelter services altogether²³, others fail to provide helpline numbers²⁴,

others still lack specialised services for victims of sexual violence such as rape crisis centres. The increasing normalisation of domestic violence being treated as a “personal” affair prevents victims from obtaining the assistance they require. Without adequate shelters or housing, women often have no choice but to live with their abuser. This situation hits the most vulnerable women: migrant, refugees and undocumented migrant women, poor women, Roma women, women with disabilities who also face specific form of male violence such as institutional violence or forced sterilisation.

A particular concern is the stereotyped portrayal of women and girls in the media and pop culture (including school books in some countries e.g. Poland), and the insensitive ways in which media report on cases of violence against women. The misguided use

of sensational language, the focus on details pertaining to the victims’ ordeal, the use of testimonials further amplifying violence has the effect of re-victimising survivors of abuse. Such media depictions also transform the public’s perception of violence against women and girls reducing empathy and understanding to the point of perceiving violence against women as infotainment. Gender myths and stereotypes about male and female sexuality and sexual behaviour are especially prevalent in the region and there is an alarming persistence of victim-blaming attitudes about consent and against victims, especially when it comes to sexual violence²⁶. These myths are also still widespread among police, prosecutors and judges. Women often face additional risks when reporting violence to the authorities: there is often no guarantee that they will be treated respectfully by the judicial system or that the cases will end up in a conviction.

Story

From Dovilė Masalskienė, EWL Observatory expert from Lithuania, from the Women’s Issues Information Centre

“ In Lithuania, sexual violence from intimate partner is a taboo, and in a majority of cases it is not considered as violence, more as a duty of the spouse. When a case of domestic

violence is reported, the physical violence might be taken into account but not the sexual violence. Victims of rape are still blamed and that is why they are afraid of reporting rape to the authorities. When women dare to report, they face secondary victimisation during the judicial process. There have been cases where even the judge blames the victim). ”^{27, 28}

(2016). “ Special Eurobarometer 449 - Gender-based violence”: <https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/ResultDoc/download/DocumentKy/75837>

27. Questionnaire Lithuania

28. European Women’s Lobby (June 2017). “Disrupting the Continuum of Violence Against Women and Girls”: https://www.womenlobby.org/IMG/pdf/facsheet_violence_against_women_and_girls_in_europe_2017_website.pdf

19. EU Fundamental Rights Agency (2014), “Violence against women: an EU-wide survey”: <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/violence-against-women-eu-wide-survey-main-results-report>

20. For country-by-country details see EIGE (2014), “Administrative Data Sources on Gender Based Violence Against Women in the EU: current status and potential for compatibility”: <http://eige.europa.eu/rdc/>

[eige-publications/administrative-data-sources-gender-based-violence-against-women-eu-report](http://eige.europa.eu/rdc/)

21. Protection Orders can be issued only for situations of domestic abuse (Ro, Po, and others)

22. See the case of Estonia: <https://www.womenlobby.org/Anatomy-of-a-backlash-in-providing-assistance-and-support-to-victims-of>

23. Latvia

24. Romania

25. Campania

„Împreună pentru siguranța femeilor”, Romania (October 2017), <http://violentaimpotrivafemeilor.ro/infografic-cereri-de-emitere-a-unui-ordin-de-protectie-2012-2016/>

26. European Commission

The Taskforce notes that sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) have been under serious attacks almost in every single country in the past 5 years²⁹. A strong, coordinated and well-resourced anti-women, anti-choice, homophobic lobby is very active across the region and has made headway in some countries in limiting women's reproductive choices. This lobby has been strongly supported by populist politicians and national churches and has increased stigmatisation of women seeking abortion, limited reproductive health services available to women and powerfully re-stereotyped women in motherhood roles. Restrictions to women's access to abortion and contraception services are often pushed through by far-right governments. For example,

abortion rights have come under serious threat in Poland with the election of the far-right Law and Justice party (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, or PiS) in 2015 who are pushing for a total ban on abortion (see story box). Women's access to abortion is key to preserving women's control of their futures and ownership over their bodies and in that respect, governments need to make medical services available to all women on a non-discriminatory basis.

Forced sterilisation documented among Roma women and women with disabilities in the region is also a grave violation of human rights and should be stopped. Reparations and access to justice to victims should be ensured. Obstetric violence is also widespread across the region and women also often lack the freedom to decide how and where to deliver their babies.

Story

From EWL Members in Serbia
(Mreza za Evropski Zenski Lobi, Serbia – Network for European Women's Lobby)

“ There has been some major improvements regarding violence against women in Serbia including with the ratification of the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence in October 2013. However, harmonisation

of the Serbian legislation with the Istanbul Convention or its full implementation hasn't been achieved. Cases of femicide are consistent every year as well as domestic violence against women. A national SOS helpline for women who have survived male violence hasn't been established yet, despite the fact that negotiations between the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Policy and coalition of specialised women's NGOs for providing support services

started in 2015. Politics of exhaustion of women's CSOs lasts too long. After 25 years without funding from the state, it is now clear that this is a strategy of all governments we had, since the establishment of the first support services in the beginning of nineties. As long as the funding of specialised support services is conditioned by the level of criticism of women's CSOs towards governments, democratic values in Serbia remain out of the place. ”

29. In Estonia, this is not the case, where abortion is freely available to all women and this right is not challenged by Estonian society. Furthermore, sex education is mandatory at school;

which has also led to a sharp decrease in the number of legally induced abortions in Estonia.

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

31. <https://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci->

z-kraju,3/sondaz-ogromna-przewaga-przeciwnikow-zaostrenia-prawa-aborcyjnego.825726.html

32. See also European Women's Lobby (June 2017), "Disrupting the

Continuum of Violence Against Women and Girls": https://www.womenlobby.org/IMG/pdf/facsheet_violence_against_women_and_girls_in_europe_2017_website.pdf

Story

From EWL Members in Poland
(The Network of East West-Women
Poland) on #BlackFriday

“ In March 2018 further risks to women’s rights in Poland were met with huge nationwide protests when a Bill was introduced to Parliament following requests from religious groups for a pull-back on access to abortion services. The Bill, entitled ‘Stop Abortion’, seeks to further criminalise abortion, including in cases of severe or fatal foetal abnormality.

Recognising the anguish, pain and suffering such laws can cause for women who receive a diagnosis on an unviable pregnancy, EWL members joined protests in Poland and throughout Europe, and joined as co-signatory in a letter to the Polish Government calling on them to reconsider support for such damaging laws. More than 200 organisations from all over the world endorsed the statement³⁰. Since the protests, the proposed Bill has not progressed further. An opinion poll by Kantar Millward Brown³¹ showed that 75 % of Poles questioned were

opposed to changes in the abortion law. And even though there is a strong pressure from conservative groups in Poland to start working on the Bill introducing a total ban on abortion, and it appears that there are doubts about the introduction of such a ban within the ruling party itself (Law and Justice). Meanwhile, the protests must and will continue. ”

March 2018 #BlackFriday protest in Poland, where thousands of people demonstrated against a proposed bill that would lead to a total ban on abortion in the country



Strategy for action by women's organisations, EWL, EWL members and working structures:

- Design public campaigns linking violence against women and lack of access to SRHR as human rights violations;
- Promote the signing, ratification and full implementation of the Istanbul Convention; monitor its implementation in terms of legislation and policy; monitor victims' services;
- Ensure that the European Commission monitors the implementation of other related legislation such as Directive on Victim Rights and Protection and European Protection Order;
- Advocate for the Nordic model and better policies on prostitution and trafficking, according to EWL principles and to the needs in the different countries;
- Expose international connections and the hidden agenda of the anti-choice lobby active in the region; monitor international meetings, follow the money and work with friendly media in explaining these organisations and their national political connections;
- Explain and campaign for a comprehensive understanding of women's health including sexual and reproductive health; access to free contraception needs to be part of the minimum health package;
- Raise awareness that changing demographic trends such as population aging and negative birth rates should not impede on women's human rights; and should also be regarded in relation to other factors such as emigration and immigration, the demographic advantage of minority populations, the promotion of active aging etc.

Recommendations for European and national decision-makers:³²

- All member states must sign and ratify and implement the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, without reservations; the EU should also ratify the Convention;
- Ensure systematic consultation of and sustainable funding for women's organisations, providing support for women and girl victims, developing advocacy and awareness raising campaigns, at EU, national and local levels;
- Issue an EU Strategy and new Directive on Violence Against Women and girls that recognises and criminalises all forms of male violence against women, including prostitution, as part of a continuum of violence against women. This should provide support to all women and girl victims and EU policies and legislative corpus for VAWG should be integrated into the strategies and legislation on equality between women and men;
- The violence against women definition should also be broadened at EU level in order to encompass prostitution as a form of violence against women;
- Appoint an EU coordinator to end violence against women and girls within the umbrella of EU's work on equality between women and men with a strong political mandate to coordinate the implementation of the Istanbul convention at EU level;
- The EU is at the forefront of promoting SRHR in international environments and must also do so in its own national contexts; women living in the EU have a right to safe and legal abortion, which is why abortion as a right belongs in the EU equality between women and men agenda;
- The European Commission should follow its mandate on anti-discrimination and recognise that health packages/ public health benefits limiting women's access to sexual and reproductive health and services (abortion, contraception, assisted reproductive technology) are discriminatory and should end;
- Government policies should not promote sexist attitudes, incite to hatred, or be expressed in antigypsyist, anti-migrant or homophobic language and it should not promote gender stereotypes.

Story

From EWL Members in Latvia
(Latvijas Sieviešu Organizāciju Sadarbības tīkls – Women's NGO Cooperation Network of Latvia)

“ Iveta Kelle, Chair of the Board of the NGO Papardes zieds, Family Planning and Sexual Health Association, a partner of the EWL Member in Latvia, talks about access to contraception in Latvia, ‘Each woman has the right to plan her motherhood. This is not always possible when she has to choose between buying pasta to feed her four or five kids or

go to pharmacy to purchase contraceptives. It is logical that preference will be given to purchase what will minimise hunger. In men’s thinking, it can be similar, if they have to choose between cigarettes or condoms, preference will be given to cigarettes. Sadly, the most popular contraception methods in Latvia are unsafe ones, like calendar method and stopped intercourse. It is clear that in situations where there are no other methods available, families are forced to rely on coincidence. Quite often the birth of a child is not the choice of the woman. She would

have been happy to avoid unplanned pregnancy but she is not aware of contraception methods or has no access to them. Secondly, often women’s self-esteem is not at the level to have an impact on the man to use contraception. During pre-election times in Latvia, we were hearing of politicians’ commitments for various benefits – public transportation free of charge, free meals in the schools or allowances. But none of these politicians were offering real solutions for the ignored problem in our society – low access to the contraception.’ ”



Solidarity protest in Prague, Czech Republic, against the abortion ban in Poland.

7

ENDING INTERSECTIONAL DISCRIMINATION OF WOMEN FROM MINORITY GROUPS, INCLUDING OF ROMA WOMEN AND MIGRANT AND REFUGEE WOMEN

Women from minority groups face intersectional discrimination wherever they are; by this we define and recognise that many women experience intersecting or overlapping forms of discrimination such as racism and sexism that women of colour face.

The CEEBBS region hosts the largest Roma population in the European Union. Romani women are often exposed to intersectional discrimination, including on the grounds of gender and ethnic origin and have limited access to employment, education, health, social services and decision-making. Discrimination can occur in mainstream society in the context of growing antigypsyism but also within their communities because of their gender. The Roma population face several social issues due to on-going social exclusion and multigenerational poverty. Romani women in particular, run a higher risk than non-Romani women of all forms of violence against women, notably domestic violence, trafficking and exploitation while

facing additional obstacles in accessing protection.

Lack of economic opportunities has driven women (Roma and non-Roma) from the region to richer EU member states in search for better lives. Usually these women work in grey zones of the economy (care work, low skilled labour-intensive agricultural jobs) and consequently risk exploitation and violence.

Migration occurs both from outside and within European borders to and from the CEEBBS region. CEEBBS Member states have been identified as both source, transit and destination countries for trafficking in human beings,³⁵ with many Member states slow to respond to increasing prevalence of trafficking for sexual exploitation, the emerging issue of exploitative sham marriages and increased vulnerabilities of refugee women and girls to grooming and coercion into the sex trade.

While women and girls have reported being targeted in hate crimes in the CEEBBS region due to their migrant background or perceived ethnicity, women migrants from the CEEBBS region also face discrimination and anti-immigrant sentiment within other EU member states.

Against all of this, migrant women, Roma women, and in fact all women, have a wealth of knowledge, expertise and experience that they are willing to share. We call on the Member

FACT BOX 6

THE SITUATION OF ROMANI WOMEN AND REFUGEE WOMEN IN THE CEEBBS REGION

With one exception, there are no Roma women represented in national parliaments, and in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, there are no Roma, men or women, at all³³.

In Serbia, the ratio social workers/refugees in the refugee camp in Presevo during the height of the refugee crisis was: 4/6,000³⁴.

33. Council of Europe: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/roma-women> #womensvoices": https://www.womenlobby.org/IMG/pdf_womensvoices_finalforweb.pdf breakdown, see US Trafficking in Persons Report (2017): <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/2714339.pdf>

34. European Women's Lobby (2016), 'From Conflict to Peace?' 35. To see country

Story

From EWL Member, the European Network of Migrant Women (ENoMW)

“ Poland has faced a significant migration influx in recent years. Many of the people who have migrated come from the previous Soviet Republics such as Ukraine or Belarus. Many refugee women from the Caucasus who come to Poland are victims of male domestic violence, but this is often difficult for them to prove and it is not considered as a justified cause to apply for refugee status by the Polish authorities. Therefore, those women who escape domestic violence are often forced to change their migration path from legal to illegal, or face the prospect of returning to

a violent partner. Overall, in Poland, refugee and migrant women experience many levels of discrimination:

- Institutional, as migrant women have a limited access to public services. This situation worsened recently because of an increased flow of migration coming to Poland. Migrant women in the labour market experience various forms of exploitation such as illegal employment and the lack of access to basic working standards (such as breaks, health care insurance, the right to holidays etc.), violence in the workplace, delayed or non-payment of salaries.
- Interpersonal, as there is an increase in hate speech crimes in Poland since 2015. It is difficult to distinguish

the various levels of discrimination (gender and ethnicity/nationality) while talking about the labour market. Refugee and migrant women and girls experience hate speech and the general attitude of Polish society towards refugees changed rapidly in the last two years since the conservative party Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice) is in charge. Nowadays the majority of Poles don't agree with the idea of accepting refugees in their country.

- Within the feminist movement, as there are concerns around the lack of accessibility and inclusion experienced by migrant and refugee women in the feminist movement in Poland. ”

Story

From EWL Members in Romania (Romanian Women's Lobby)

“ Poland Rebeca Nechita, from Voinesti commune in Iasi county, Romania, was talking about multiple discrimination experienced by Roma women in the book 'Her Story – Women in rural inter-ethnic communities (2016)'. She said: 'Life has taught me to solve my problems. I went to the hospital and I learned to tell my point of view. At the hospital, the doctors treated me very badly at first because I'm from the countryside, I'm young, I've born so many kids. But at some

point they have been listening to me and changed their mind. You have to have the courage and to say your point of view, anywhere, anytime.' ”



A meeting of a group of Roma women in Voinesti in rural Romania.

states to see women migrants and Roma women as a resource, and we remind the EU of its human rights obligations towards this vulnerable, yet capable group of the women population in Europe.

Strategy for action by women’s organisations, EWL, EWL members and working structures:

- Develop joint programmes with Roma women’s NGOs and support joint advocacy actions;
- Campaign against racism on national and EU-levels with an emphasis on racism against minority women;
- Campaign for effective and participative national integration programmes, to be developed and implemented on a local and national level between communities, including offering language and practical supports and information, which are structured flexibly to be responsive to the specific needs of different target groups;
- Hold reflective sessions with local minority or vulnerable groups to scope their perceived needs and challenges to ensure responses adequately reflect the barriers they face;
- Discuss the EU care economy supporting women’s employment in formal economies; argue for social benefits and dignified work environments for domestic workers; discuss

risks and violence faced by working women and ensure women are not precluded from accessing these supports due to their migration or residency status;

- Raise awareness on refugee and migrant women and girls, their contribution to national and EU economies, cultures and to rights.

Recommendations for European and national decision-makers:

- Deliver on the promises of National Strategies for Roma inclusion – including on women’s social inclusion and political participation;
- Respect the fundamental rights of Romani, migrant and refugee women, men and children; end policies such as forced evictions that further marginalise them; apply a gender equality perspective to all relevant policies and practice;
- Ensure that Romani and Traveller women and girls are informed about their rights under existing national legislation on gender equality and anti-discrimination and fully benefit from them;
- Implement equality in civic rights and in access to health services, education, employment and accommodation that respect human rights, non-discrimination and compatible with nomadism in relevant cases;

Story

From EWL’s #womensvoices report, on a case in FYR of Macedonia

“ A woman was physically assaulted by her father in her country of origin because she married a man from a different religion. Her father was a police officer and she could not protect herself in her own country. Therefore, she decided to leave the country.

She arrived in Macedonia and asked for asylum. Her claim was refused by the authorities. Currently her case is in front of the constitutional court and she is in the asylum centre in Skopje. During this decision-making process the woman is being accommodated in the Vizbegovo asylum centre in Skopje. The centre is a collective facility where women are often exposed to gender-based violence. The facility is

not light enough, not secure for women, there is limited access to hygiene facilities, access to medical help is very also limited. Other women have complained that they were sexually accosted by police personnel and social workers in the centre. However, these claims never went into procedure due to the fact that women were scared to report in order not to lose the asylum right. ”³⁶

Story

Hatemongering
against migrants in Hungary

“ An extreme form of hatemongering is being deliberately whipped up by the Government in Hungary against ‘migrants’ (this term is used to encompass also refugees). In particular, the Hungarian fence put up to ‘keep out migrants’,

is not simply a physical fence: the country has mobilised its police, its frontier guard and its media against migrants and refugees. Two years of intensive government propaganda has portrayed ‘migrants’ as terrorists and extremists on billboards, direct mail, ads in radio and TV, some of which are directly inspired by 1930s anti-Semitic propaganda. ”

- Review commitments regarding refugee resettlement programmes, commit to meeting existing targets and increase targets where appropriate, in response to the continuing humanitarian crisis being experienced by many asylum seeking women, children and men;
- Review and improve conditions in temporary accommodation sites for refugee people, including ensuring adequate and safe gender-specific measures;
- Ensure access to health, education and employment/financial assistance to all Romani, migrant and refugee women and girls as required, in line with basic human rights requirements;
- Ensure that social inclusion priorities are linked with robust anti-discrimination measures and a zero-tolerance approach to antigypsyism;
- Member states and the EU must sign the UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. Human rights are women’s rights and implicitly migrant women’s rights;
- Social inclusion programmes for refugee and migrant people must have a gender component; design accessible social services for migrant women including free access to health care, education, services for VAW victims and job counselling.

36. European Women’s Lobby (2016), “From Conflict to Peace? #womensvoices”:

https://www.womenlobby.org/IMG/pdf/_womensvoices_finalforweb.pdf

MAINTAINING A PEACEFUL EUROPE BY ENSURING PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN ALL STAGES OF PEACE-MAKING PROCESSES

The more the conflict escalates, the more a militarist patriotic rhetoric explodes, including in countries neighbouring the CEEBBS Region. Populists across the CEEBBS region are attempting to revive patriarchal stereotypes associating men with warriors and women with motherhood and the earth. Such politics poses risks to peace and stability. The Taskforce calls for responsible politics leading towards a de-escalation of conflict and for meaningful participation of women in all stages of peace-making processes.

Strategy for action by women's organisations, EWL, EWL members and working structures:

- Organise together with pacifists in order to promote a culture of peace;
- Lobby for cuts on military budgets;
- Emphasise the modern nature of warfare which produces more human damage among civilians; monitor women's rights violations in conflict zones and provide reports and other inputs to participating governments;
- Draft petitions to governments to ask for peace talks; support the inclusion of women negotiators in all conflict resolution measures;
- Organise together with women refugees to raise awareness about conflicts and governmental shortfalls in meeting their needs.

Recommendations for European and national decision-makers:

- Diplomatic talks should include women negotiators and women peacekeepers according to the recommendations of UN resolution on women and peace and security (UNSCR1325);
- EU foreign policy needs to stress the value of peace and regional cooperation; should also act more decisively towards ending conflicts in the Middle East through multilateral negotiations;
- Grant refugee status and other forms of protection to people fleeing in the face of conflict (especially conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine);
- EU policies must consider the different contexts and extraordinary conditions of the countries and must take substantial measures to protect and support women human rights defenders;
- Direct European aid to conflict zones in the Middle East and Ukraine, especially to refugee camps;
- Recognise violence against women, especially sexual violence as a risk to women in conflict zones; recognise sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations as a crime of war; provide legal remedy to victims.

Story

From EWL Members in Turkey
(EWL Coordination for Turkey – Avrupa
Kadin Lobisi Turkiye Koordinasyonu):

“ In Turkey, civil society members are imprisoned without any tangible allegations and made to stay in prison for long periods. Last year in July 2017, 10 activists, from women and human rights organisations, having a routine CSO meeting were arbitrarily detained and imprisoned for 4 months without any substantial allegations against them,

until they were released at the end of October 2017 (known as the Buyukada Case). One of them was Ilknur Ustun, the Country Coordinator of EWL Coordination for Turkey, and she was made to stay in prison for 4 months without any concrete accusations. Independent women’s organisations and activists are justifiably worried in terms of freedom of speech and association, nevertheless it is promising that there is a resilient, outspoken and strong women’s movement in Turkey. ”

CREDITS

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EWL PRESIDENT

Gwendoline Lefebvre

EWL SECRETARY GENERAL

Joanna Maycock

EDITORIAL AND PUBLICATION COORDINATION

Joanna Maycock and Stephanie Yates

RESEARCH & WRITING

Irina Costache

EDITING

Laura Sullivan

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Lisa Boxus | inextenso.be

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ABOUT



THE EUROPEAN WOMEN'S LOBBY

Founded in 1990, the European Women's Lobby (EWL) is the largest alliance of over 2,000 women's non-governmental associations in the EU coming together to campaign for their common vision of a Feminist Europe.

ABOUT EWL'S CENTRAL EASTERN EUROPE, THE BALKAN AND THE BALTIC STATES (CEEBS) TASKFORCE

The EWL CEEBS Taskforce brings together women's rights advocates from Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, FYR of Macedonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Turkey as well as representatives of 2 network organisations, the European Network of Migrant Women and the European Centre of the International Council of Women (ECICW). Together they work to promote inclusive democratic and peaceful societies free of gender stereotypes and discrimination.

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