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**STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION - SYNOPSIS REPORT**

*Accompanying the document*

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

**Gender Equality Strategy 2026-2030**

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*Fractal Consulting conducted the data analysis and drafted this report.*

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## Executive Summary

Between May and August 2025, the European Commission undertook extensive consultations to inform the development of the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2026–2030. These activities aimed to take stock of the progress made on gender equality in the EU, under the current Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025, and to identify ongoing challenges and priorities for further advancement under the post 2025 strategy. The consultation process engaged a wide range of stakeholders to ensure that future actions are evidence-based, transparent, and inclusive.

The following consultation activities took place:

- an Open Public Consultation;
- a Call for Evidence;
- targeted consultations (social partners; international organisations and EU agencies; civil society organisations (CSOs)).

Across all consultation activities, stakeholders broadly welcomed a renewed Gender Equality Strategy and asked for continuity with stronger delivery, clearer responsibilities, and measurable progress over 2026–2030. Priorities consistently included preventing and combating gender-based violence, advancing equal pay and women’s economic empowerment, and improving women’s health and access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). These objectives need to be supported by gender mainstreaming and systematic use of sex-disaggregated data across policies and programmes.

Stakeholders also pointed to gaps and emerging risks. Inputs highlighted online and workplace harassment, AI-related bias in recruitment and progression, and occupational safety and health (OSH) blind spots in female-dominated sectors, calling for guidance and indicators to ensure coherent prevention and response across services at EU and Member State level. Intersectionality was a recurring theme, with barriers reported for racialised and migrant women, Roma women, LGBTIQ women, and women with disabilities. Respondents called for inclusive language, better data disaggregation, and targeted measures where needs are acute. Health actors emphasised life-course approaches, links between gender-based violence (GBV) and health systems, and women’s under-representation in research and leadership, recommending common indicators in administrative data and integrated victim support pathways.

Views diverged on the balance of legal and policy tools. Trade unions urged full and broad transposition and enforcement of existing acquis, and new minimum standards where gaps persist. This would include action on GBV at work and psychosocial risks, as well as improved job quality in feminised sectors. Employers favoured simplification, practical guidance, exchange of best-practice, and non-legislative approaches on GBV in the world of work, alongside support for implementing pay transparency and enablers such as affordable childcare and flexible scheduling. Several contributions underlined structural levers, such as tax and benefit design, childcare and long-term care capacity, gender-neutral job classification, and investment in public services, as central to raising participation and closing pay gaps over time.

There was broad, though not universal convergence on the main areas to be tackled, among respondents. Some questioned EU action in specific areas, two opposed elements related to SRHR or gender mainstreaming, while most asked for higher ambition and firmer measures where evidence shows persistent gaps. Support was widespread for stronger monitoring and evaluation, including indicators, sex-disaggregated data, and gender-responsive budgeting within the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and programme cycles, to enhance transparency and accountability. Stakeholders encouraged coherent links with related EU initiatives and regular progress reporting, while recognising competence limits and the need to tailor approaches by sector and group.

## I. Introduction

In May 2025, the European Commission launched its consultation activities for the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2026-2030, to be published in early 2026. This initiative aims to build on progress under the 2020-2025 strategy and the Roadmap for Women's Rights to advance gender equality, strengthen women's rights, and combat gender-based discrimination in the European Union.

This document provides an overview of all consultation activities conducted with stakeholders as part of the drafting of the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2026–2030. The general objective of all consultation activities was to collect stakeholders' views on the current challenges and situation of gender equality in the EU, to enable the Commission to gather evidence on the areas requiring further action at EU level, drawing on a comprehensive, transparent, and inclusive stakeholder perspective. This synopsis report summarises inputs across all channels and does not pre-judge Commission decisions.

## II. Overview of consultation activities

The following consultation activities took place between May 2025 and August 2025:

- an **Public Consultation** (PC) through the 'Have Your Say' portal (19 May 2025 – 11 August 2025) which took the form of a questionnaire, respondents had an opportunity to contribute and also to attach a document.
- a **Call for Evidence** (CfE) through the 'Have Your Say' portal (19 May 2025 – 11 August 2025), allowed stakeholders to give feedback via open text input and gave the opportunity to attach a position paper.
- **Targeted consultations** (TC) were conducted with specific groups of stakeholders, in the form of hearings, in-person and online meetings. They were complemented by invitations to submit written inputs. Consultations included:
  - Recognised European cross-industry **social partners** and their national organisations under the Social Dialogue framework<sup>1</sup> were invited to an online hearing (26 June 2025), receiving in advance steering questions for discussion, Roadmap principles, and proposed concrete actions.<sup>2</sup>
  - **International organisations (IOs) and EU agencies**<sup>3</sup> participated in an online consultation (24 June 2025) to discuss key challenges, proposed actions, gender mainstreaming across policies, and the external dimension of the future Strategy.<sup>4</sup>
  - **Civil Society Organisations** were invited to an in-person consultation in Brussels (4 July 2025), and an additional online session (11 July 2025). The in-person meeting was divided into one session focused on key challenges and priorities, with a second session looking at gender mainstreaming and intersectional analysis.<sup>5</sup>
- Ad hoc contributions were also received via email from stakeholders.

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<sup>1</sup> More information on social partners within the framework is available at the dedicated [website](#).

<sup>2</sup> Submitted written contributions: BusinessEurope (Confederation of European Business); Confederation of German Employers' Associations (BDA); Confederation of Danish Employers (DA); Services of General Interest Europe (SGI Europe); SMEUnited (Association of Crafts and SMEs in Europe); CGIL (Italian General Confederation of Labour); DGB (German Trade Union Confederation); ETUC (European Trade Union Confederation); EUROCADRES (Council of European Professional and Managerial Staff); FNV (Netherlands Trade Union Confederation); ÖGB (Austrian Trade Union Federation); industriAll Europe (industriAll European Trade Union).

<sup>3</sup> Equinet, EU-OSHA, ILO, OECD, UNFPA, UN Women, WHO

<sup>4</sup> Written submissions were received from Equinet, UN Brussels, and UN Women.

<sup>5</sup> Written submissions were received from 26 of the consulted CSOs.

The table below provides an overview of participation in each of the consultation activities:

|  | Public Consultation <sup>6</sup>      | Call for Evidence       | Targeted consultations  |
|--|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|---|
| EU citizens  | 287 (47% <sup>7</sup> )               | 132 (38%)               |   |
| NGOs/CSOs  | 115 (19%)                             | 131 (38%)               | 30 CSOs <sup>8</sup> (46 participants) in person + five online <sup>9</sup> |
| Public authorities   | 69 (11%)                              | 9 (3%)                  |   |
| Trade unions   | 36 (6%)                               | 13 (4%)                 | 19 <sup>10</sup>  |
| Academic/research institutions   | 24 (4%)                               | 16 (5%)                 |   |
| Companies/businesses   | 14 (2%)                               | 9 (3%)                  |   |
| Business associations  | 6 (1%)                                | 7 (2%)                  | 16  |
| Consumer organisations   | 1                                     | 1                       |   |
| Non-EU citizens  | 18 (3%)                               | 3 (1%)                  |   |
| Others   | 35 (6%)                               | 26 (7%)                 | 7 IOs and EU agencies <sup>11</sup>   |
| <b>TOTAL contributions considered</b>  | <b>605<sup>12</sup></b>               | <b>346<sup>13</sup></b> |   |
| <i>of which submitted open text or attached documents</i>  | 180 open text + 83 attached documents | 346                     |   |
| Additional late and email submissions (not considered in totals and participant breakdown above) |                                       | 36                      |   |

<sup>6</sup> A more detailed presentation of the results of the Open Public Consultation is available in the [summary report](#) published on the 'Have your say' platform.

<sup>7</sup> All percentages refer to valid responses, i.e. calculated based those that answered the question and ignoring blank answers.

<sup>8</sup> AGE Platform Europe, Amnesty International, Autism Europe, Brussels Binder, Center for Reproductive Rights, Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union (COFACE), EuroCentralAsian Lesbian Community (EL\*C), End Female Genital Mutilation European Network (End FGM), EuroHealthNet, European Family Justice Center Alliance (EFJCA), European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN), European Disability Forum (EDF), European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA), European Network Against Racism (ENAR), European Network of Migrant Women (EnoMW), European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights (EPF), European Women's Lobby (EWL), Gender Five Plus (G5+), International Planned Parenthood Federation European Network (IPPF), Men Engage Alliance Europe (Men Engage), Organisation Intersex International Europe (OII Europe), Red Cross EU Office, European Sex Workers' Rights Alliance (ESWA), Siempre, Trans Feminist European Union (TFEU), Victim Support Europe, WO=MEN Dutch Gender Platform, Women Against Violence Europe Network (WAVE), Women Engage for a Common Future (WECF), and Women Political Leaders (WPL).

<sup>9</sup> Men's Perpetrator Programmes Europe (WPP), Women in Development Europe Plus (WIDE+), International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association – Europe (ILGA-Europe), European Network of Women of African Descent (ENWAD), and European Roma Grassroots Organisations Network (ERGO).

<sup>10</sup> Employers' delegation: BusinessEurope (Confederation of European Business), City of Vienna Public Utilities (Wiener Stadtwerke), Confederation of Danish Employers (DA), Confederation of German Employers' Associations (BDA), Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employers (VNO-NCW), Confindustria (General Confederation of Italian Industry), Council of European Employers of the Metal, Engineering and Technology-Based Industries (Ceemet), European Banking Federation (EBF), European Chemical Employers Group (ECEG), European Association of Hotels, Restaurants, Pubs and Cafés (HOTREC), Federation of Austrian Industries (Industriellenvereinigung), Polish Confederation Lewiatan, Services of General Interest Europe (SGI Europe), SMEUnited (Association of Crafts and SMEs in Europe), Swedish Enterprise (Confederation of Swedish Enterprise), UNISOC (National Union of Social Profit Enterprises), and Italian Confederation of Craft Trades and Small- and Medium-Sized Enterprises (CNA).

Trade unions' delegation: CGIL (Italian General Confederation of Labour), CISL (Italian Confederation of Workers' Trade Unions), DGB (German Trade Union Confederation), EFJ-FEJ (European Federation of Journalists – Fédération Européenne des Journalistes), EFBWW (European Federation of Building and Woodworkers), EFFAT (European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism Trade Unions), Unión General de Trabajadoras y Trabajadores (UGT-E), National Union of Autonomous Trade Unions (UNSA), ETF (European Transport Workers' Federation), ETUC (European Trade Union Confederation), EUROCADRES (Council of European Professional and Managerial Staff), FERPA (European Federation of Retired and Older People), FNV (Netherlands Trade Union Confederation), FPU (Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine), LPSK (Lithuanian Trade Union Confederation), ÖGB (Austrian Trade Union Federation), TUC (Trades Union Congress), UIL (Italian Labour Union), USO (Workers' Solidarity Union), and industriAll Europe (industriAll European Trade Union).

<sup>11</sup> Equinet, EU-OSHA, ILO, OECD, UNFPA, UN Women, WHO. In addition to those participating in the targeted consultations, several EU and international agencies, as well as national public authorities also submitted responses: European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE); European Training Foundation (ETF); European Investment Bank (EIB); European Network of Equality Bodies (Equinet); CEN and CENELEC (European Standardisation Organisations); German Federal Government; Government of Cyprus High-level Group on Gender Mainstreaming; French regional public authority Région Bretagne; Emakunde, the Basque Institute for Women (Spain); Belgium's Walloon Public Service for Employment and Vocational Training (Forem); European Representation of French Social Security Institutions (Reif); and Equal Opportunities Office of the Municipality of Messina, Italy.

<sup>12</sup> Includes 8 responses to easy-to-read questionnaire.

### III. Consultation results

The following analysis of the consultation results focuses on feedback received to contribute to the preparation of the EU gender equality strategy 2026-2030. The analysis combines insights and input received through all the consultation activities, presented thematically. For each topic, the analysis starts with general trends identified through the PC, which are then further detailed with input received through other channels – identified under “open text submissions”. The order in which these insights are presented does not reflect prevalence or ranking.

Responses to the Call for Evidence and to the PC did not suggest the presence of organised campaigns.<sup>14</sup> In the analysis below, statements on the number of respondents followed by ‘and their networks’ indicates unique contributions, thus avoiding duplicate counts.

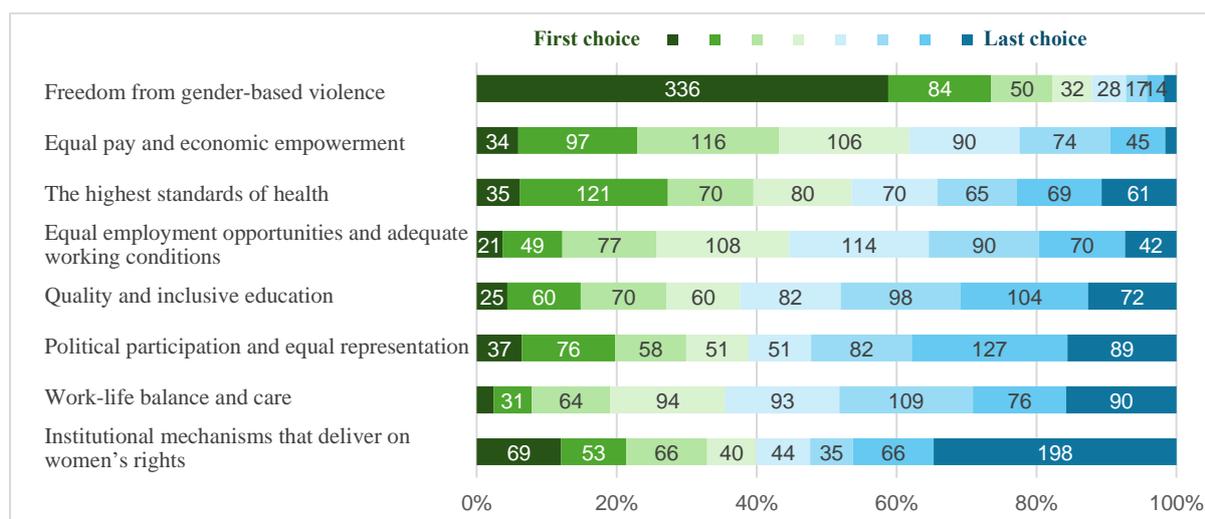
Responses submitted to the PC were analysed manually and through statistical software (JASP). Submissions to the Call for Evidence, including open text and attachments submitted to the PC, were analysed using qualitative analysis software (ATLAS.ti).

#### Current situation and priorities for gender equality

In the PC, respondents noted there is room for improvement as to the overall situation of gender equality in the world, with a majority (67%, 398 of 605 responses) considering it as having significantly or slightly deteriorated. The situation in the EU and in the respondents’ home countries seemed more balanced, with comparable numbers of respondents seeing it as having deteriorated or improved. A wide range of groups is seen as very affected by gender inequality, chiefly women and girls (92%, 541 of 605 responses), but also LGBTIQ people (84%, 494 responses), refugees, asylum seekers and migrants (83%, 485 responses), and women and men from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds (80%, 469 responses).

When prioritising principles of the ‘Roadmap for Women’s Rights’ for action by the European Commission in the next Gender Equality Strategy, the top-ranked priority was ‘freedom from gender-

Figure 1 – Roadmap for Women’s Rights principles – ranked preference for action (from PC)<sup>15</sup>



<sup>13</sup> A total of 347 contributions were received. Of these, one was unpublished due to non-compliance with moderation rules i.e. due to abusive, slanderous or hateful content. The rules for feedback and suggestions are available on the [‘Have Your Say’ web portal](#).

<sup>14</sup> In the Call for Evidence, four networks of stakeholders submitted responses with some similar sections of text, each of which did not reach the threshold of ten responses to be considered a campaign.

<sup>15</sup> Blank submissions and data labels for values 15 and lower are omitted.

based violence’ (first choice for 336 responses, 59%). Other high ranked areas were equal pay and economic empowerment, the highest standard of health, and equal employment opportunities and adequate working conditions.

## **Actions for the Commission’s Gender Equality Strategy 2026–2030**

Overall, stakeholders considered the 2020-2025 EU Gender Equality Strategy a solid foundation for action which achieved notable milestones. NGOs appreciated that the strategy secured dedicated funding for gender equality and measures to end gender-based violence (GBV). Legislative progress clarified regulatory expectations (Women on Boards, Pay Transparency, Work-Life Balance), according to international organisations, public authorities and business stakeholders. Two contributions expressed fundamental disagreement with the premise and concepts driving the strategy, one linking it to ‘gender ideology’.

### *Freedom from gender-based violence*

Within the PC, respondents highlighted the need to prevent and combat GBV as the top priority for the next period. In term of actions, they called for all forms of GBV to be defined as EU crimes (ranked first for 206 responses, 37%), as well as for stronger action in prevention and against online abuse and harassment. Respondents stressed the importance of comparable data to ensure coherent implementation across Member States and organisations.

In their open text submissions to CfE and TC, respondents framed GBV as a systemic security issue linked to economic and structural inequality. Key asks from NGOs, trade unions, and some public authorities revolved around effective implementation, close monitoring, and where appropriate, revision of the Directive on Combatting Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (VAW). Several NGOs requested clear, evidence-based guidelines for implementation, closer monitoring, and revision to explicitly cover consent-based rape, forced sterilisation, and femicide. Over ten NGOs and their networks (in 36 contributions) called for GBV to be listed as an EU crime (Article 83 TFEU).

In the context of workplaces, sexual harassment is seen as a major, pervasive component of GBV that disproportionately affects women in their professional lives, as well as LGBTQI and other marginalised groups. Among legislative asks, trade unions sought a directive to prevent and eradicate workplace GBV (including third-party and cyber violence). One NGO called for including sexual harassment in the scope of the VAW Directive, and another, EQUINET, called for the reversal of the burden of proof in cases of workplace sexual harassment to strengthen victims’ protection and access to justice. The UN Women, NGOs and professional societies also called for the ratification by the missing Member States, and effective implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention), in particular as regards consent-based legislation on rape.

As regards criminal justice and law enforcement, organisations called for comprehensive victim-survivor-centred justice reform to remove procedural barriers and ensure women’s privacy, safety, and access to support. To address systemic bias and inconsistent responses, submissions called for compulsory, continuous, gender-sensitive, and trauma-informed training for all justice professionals. This should be combined with greater specialisation within police and courts, including dedicated units on domestic and intimate partner violence. Inclusive survivor support is a priority for NGOs, notably through legal ‘firewalls’ to secure access to essential services and protection for undocumented women. During targeted consultations, CSOs recommended improved victim support with coordinated links between health, justice, and community services. Several NGOs also recommended that ‘parental alienation’ in domestic violence and divorce cases be recognised as an aggravating circumstance to

better protect women and children. On prevention, beyond education and awareness measures, the next Strategy should explicitly promote evidence-based perpetrator interventions as key to preventing reoffending and breaking cycles of violence.

NGOs called for eliminating abusive and degrading pornography, noting prevalence of violence in content accessed by minors, which fuels toxic masculinities and teen violence. They urged the revision of the VAW Directive to explicitly classify the production and dissemination of pornographic material depicting acts of sexual violence as a crime and a form of sexual exploitation, covering all digital sexual forgeries. Contributions called for regulation to go beyond simple age verification to challenge the harmful content itself, mandating platforms to regulate harmful content and be held accountable for online violence – areas where transposition of the VAW directive should be aligned with the Digital Services Act (DSA).

A wide range of stakeholders actively advocated for increased and improved data collection. The broad consensus is that existing data is often insufficient, non-comparable across Member States, or lacks the disaggregation needed for effective, targeted policymaking. NGOs and UN Women called for harmonised definitions and categories to be used in regular data collection and sought systematic data collection on AI systems enabling technology-facilitated violence.

### *Highest standards of health*

Within the PC, health also featured as a priority area where the EU can support and complement national action to ensure access to high-quality services, including Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), and to embed sex- and gender-responsiveness across research, diagnostics, and treatments.

In their written submissions to CfE and TC, stakeholders identified health as integral to economic participation and to preventing violence. NGOs and academics proposed embedding SRHR in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and addressing denial of care. NGOs (12 organisations and their networks) made detailed requests for guaranteeing safe and accessible abortion across the European Union. They view abortion access as a non-negotiable component of equality and institutional health standards, urging the EU to constitutionally enshrine the right and eliminate systemic barriers like conscientious objection. Nine NGOs and their networks explicitly indicated support to the ‘My Voice, My Choice’ European Citizens’ Initiative as the vehicle to create a cross-border funding mechanism for abortion care. Others focused on national reform, demanding abortion be decriminalised and covered by health insurance. One contribution opposes these efforts, arguing that abortion violates the ‘fundamental right to life’.

NGOs strongly urged the EU to combat obstetric and gynaecological violence as a form of institutional GBV, requiring mandatory professional training and criminalisation of harmful practices like forced sterilisation. They also called for the recognition of abortion as a fundamental component of obstetric care. UN Women emphasised guaranteeing universal, affordable maternal health and SRHR access for all, especially migrants and asylum-seekers. A local public authority stressed mainstreaming an intersectional health perspective and reforming care systems. Specialised health NGOs, pharmaceutical and medical technology industry and academia called for substantial investment in research to combat the historical neglect of conditions like endometriosis, menopause, and menstrual health.

The WHO and several CSOs during targeted consultations, along other stakeholders, recommended adopting a life-course approach to women’s health. This should address chronic conditions such as endometriosis and integrate menopause into labour and social policy to retain talent. NGOs stressed the need for consistent, intersectional data collection and recognizing menstrual health as a gender equality

and human rights issue. Trade unions call for Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) standards to be updated to cover reproductive and menstrual health, including menopause and endometriosis.

NGOs urged the EU to treat menstrual poverty as an economic barrier, demanding abolition of value added tax (VAT) on menstrual products, subsidised access and ensuring free provision in schools, shelters, and public buildings. Policymakers were urged to regulate product safety by banning toxic substances and mandating ingredient transparency in menstrual products.

Health equity was presented by stakeholders as an area that requires addressing disparities that affect marginalised groups, such as migrant and undocumented women. Especially for women with disabilities, healthcare interventions must rely solely on free and informed consent. During targeted consultations, CSOs health proposals included addressing gaps in HIV care, transgender health, and cancer screening and treatment for LBTQI+ women.

To combat systemic bias, researchers and NGOs sought mandatory sex/gender analysis in all EU-funded health research, increasing women's participation in clinical trials, and addressing diagnostic biases in clinical practice.

### *Equal pay and economic empowerment*

Economic equality and empowerment emerged as a central theme in the PC, with calls to address structural drivers of pay gaps and promote financial literacy. Contributions pointed to fiscal and social protection levers that shape incentives and security for second earners and caregivers, as well as the value of entrepreneurship support to reduce inequalities at work.

In their CfE and TC open submissions, stakeholders emphasised that equal pay and economic empowerment require addressing structural financial and labour market inequalities. Many trade unions, NGOs, and some public authorities was to call for the full transposition, as well as rigorous monitoring of the Pay Transparency Directive, although two employer/business organisations expressed concern about the resulting administrative burden. Stakeholders, including a national public authority, suggested collecting and publishing disaggregated data on pay and benefits.

To ensure women's long-term financial security, NGOs suggested reforming pension systems, specifically by adopting an 'equal-earner-equal-carer' model and developing EU standards for care crediting toward pension entitlements. Furthermore, a national public authority, along with NGOs, noted the need to address features of the tax system that disincentivize secondary earners -primarily women-from working or increasing their hours.

NGOs and Business stakeholders further recommended specific reforms including conducting gender impact assessments of national tax regimes, such as joint taxation models, and promoting the individualisation of tax regimes to treat liable family members as individuals. NGOs and academics also noted that access to safe and affordable housing is a key element of gender equality and economic independence. Women's homelessness is an under-recognised and gendered issue, often manifesting as 'hidden homelessness' (sofa surfing, staying in unsafe situations). They called for integrating gender-responsive frameworks into the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy and the EU Affordable Housing Plan, further recommending supporting social housing, enforcing anti-discrimination laws in rental markets, and adopting Housing First models specifically designed for women, particularly survivors of GBV.

UN Women, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) and several NGOs supported expanding EU funding, grants, and microcredit programmes for women entrepreneurs, particularly for SMEs in the digital and green sector, coupled with supporting networking platforms and mentorship programmes. An NGO network suggested applying gender impact assessments to EU financial and capital policies, such as those under the Savings and Investment Union. UN Women, EIGE and NGOs

also recommended launching gender-sensitive financial literacy campaigns and providing targeted guidance on debt, investments, and digital financial literacy.

Dismantling horizontal and vertical occupational segregation would require robust measures to challenge stereotypes and boost women's participation in high-growth fields like STEM. To make male-dominated sectors (like STEM/ICT) attractive for women, UN Women, businesses and NGOs suggested expanding STEM education, digital literacy, and targeted mentorship or scholarship programmes. Establishing quotas in underrepresented sectors, including STEM, was supported by one NGO network.

### *Work-life balance and care*

In the PC, prioritised care and work-life balance actions included engaging men in the sharing of unpaid care and household tasks, normalising flexible and reduced working arrangements without stigma, and investing in childcare, care, and long-term care services.

In CfE and TC contributions, stakeholders identified the unequal distribution of unpaid care as the principal structural obstacle to women's economic independence, stressing that women continue to perform the bulk of informal care. The OECD pointed to the challenge presented by gender gaps in paid and unpaid work.

A key demand by the UN, EIGE, NGOs and trade unions was substantial public investment in affordable, high-quality care services. NGOs also called for acknowledging the central economic value of unpaid care work and fully integrating the value of unpaid care into economic analyses. NGOs and trade unions called to move beyond the current European Care Strategy to introduce a comprehensive 'Care Deal for Europe' in synergy with the Green Deal, recognising care work as a fundamental pillar of the economy, not subjected to market logic. A national authority called for stronger monitoring and implementation of the revised Barcelona targets on Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems, with a professional association urging the development of comparable targets for long-term care access and quality.

There was broad support for the strict implementation and strengthening of the Work-Life Balance Directive. Trade Unions noted that parental leave in some Member States remains unpaid. An academic suggested removing mandatory concurrent parental leave periods to promote shift use, as designs that mandate or encourage simultaneous take-up hinder the father from taking on a primary carer role, reinforcing gender roles. To achieve genuine work-life balance, NGOs and trade unions argued that the focus must shift from the 'male-breadwinner' to the 'equal-earner-equal-carer' model, including by introducing gender-equal care credits for pension rights to formally recognise time spent out of the labour market for care responsibilities.

Promoting flexible work was viewed as a necessary tool to improve work-life balance for all workers. Stakeholders cautioned that certain flexible forms may heighten discrimination risks for pregnant workers or those taking leave and called for safeguards. A professional association suggested a Flexible Working Time Act to promote the equitable sharing of care.

Furthermore, policies must actively challenge gender stereotypes, using role models and campaigns to normalise male caregiving. CSOs called for campaigns to challenge stereotypes portraying men as incompetent caregivers and promote positive patterns of masculinity.

A trade union noted that special attention was needed for intersectional issues, such as ensuring rights for migrant care workers, while an NGO called for legally recognising LBQ caregivers in family leave entitlements.

### *Equal employment opportunities and adequate working conditions*

In the PC section on equal employment opportunities and working conditions, contributions pointed first to measures to prevent and address harassment, including sexual harassment, in the workplace. They further called for measures to support sustained labour-market participation for specific groups of women in a situation of vulnerability and address discrimination based on pregnancy or maternity. Respondents further supported using social dialogue to improve balanced representation and tackle gender inequalities in the workplace.

During targeted consultations, the ILO recalled the unprecedented pace of changes in the world of work and related challenges including those linked to the digital transition and to the use of AI (such as bias in recruitment processes). They emphasised occupational segregation, GBV and harassment in the world of work (including the need for proper reporting mechanisms and enforcement measures), difficulties women face to gain and retain access to full-time, regular employment, the persistence of discrimination based on maternity and pregnancy, and of the gender pay gap – stressing the link of all these challenges to the dimension of care. According to the ILO, focusing on fundamental rights and principles at work is key to ensure that women are equipped to participate fully in the world of work.

According to CfE and TC open submissions, ensuring equal employment opportunities and adequate working conditions requires decisive legislative and cultural shifts addressing deeply entrenched structural barriers and systemic risks. Trade unions were unanimous in demanding a new directive on the prevention and eradication of GBV and harassment in the world of work, while NGOs stressed the need for full ratification and implementation of ILO Convention No. 190 on Violence and Harassment, by all Member States. There was demand by social partners to promote workplace policies against GBV through collective bargaining, implementing zero-tolerance policies with clear reporting and enforcement mechanisms, and establishing anonymous whistleblower systems. During targeted consultations, employers emphasised best-practice exchange and non-legislative tools on workplace gender-based violence.

This must be complemented by strengthening gender-responsive Occupational Health and Safety (OSH) frameworks. During targeted consultations, EU-OSHA noted as challenges gendered exposure to risk factors linked to sectoral segregation, the invisibilisation of risks present in female-dominated sectors, the ‘double burden’ faced by women, as well as gender bias in ergonomics and workplace standards. They recommended working with standard setting bodies, establishing indicators to monitor gender equality progress in OSH, and tackling stigma and social norms.

Trade unions advocated for revising OSH regulations to reflect gender-specific needs and experiences, including reproductive systems and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). This also requires systematically integrating gender-based analysis in risk assessments. OSH strategies should use social dialogue and collective bargaining to incorporate women’s specific health issues, such as menstrual health, menopause, and breastfeeding/lactation. Domestic workers, who are often in vulnerable situations, must not be forgotten and should be included in OSH frameworks, ideally through ratification of ILO Convention No. 189 on Domestic Workers, by all Member States.

Measures must target management culture and decision-making structures to achieve inclusion. A trade union and NGO network called for binding measures, including quotas, to public administration, mid-sized companies, and sectors facing segregation (STEAM, ICT, care). Others considered incentives should be offered to promote equal participation in leadership positions. Organisational culture must be made more gender-responsive, including actively removing gendered references in job descriptions and rewarding participation in equality initiatives. Stakeholders urged mandating comprehensive training on gender equality, anti-discrimination, and unconscious bias for all staff and high-level decision-makers.

To dismantle career barriers, the Strategy must strengthen protections against widespread pregnancy and maternity discrimination and target precarious forms of work, particularly affecting women. Inclusion efforts must prioritise targeted support and vocational training for disadvantaged groups, notably migrant women and women with disabilities, ensuring reasonable workplace accommodation is provided. The ILO and other stakeholder argued the full potential of social dialogue must be harnessed, supporting trade unions and collective bargaining efforts to mainstream equality, secure safer jobs, and improve working conditions.

### *Quality and inclusive education*

In the PC, education themes focused on widening opportunity, with support for gender-responsive up- and reskilling, balanced perspectives across curricula, and measures linked to outcomes such as comprehensive sexuality education where relevant to Member State contexts.

In their open submissions to CfE and TC, stakeholders positioned inclusive education as the engine for cultural and economic change to reduce segregation and combat limiting stereotypes. EIGE recommended an EU-wide long-term prevention strategy that includes a review of curricula and providing publishers with anti-bias guidelines to dismantle segregated career choices. The UN Brussels Team called for Gender Transformative Education Systems to encourage boys into traditionally female-dominated fields (like care and teaching) and counter narratives that affect boys' disengagement from education. NGOs advocated for effectively dismantling occupational segregation through the development of a gender-neutral education system and career planning.

Legally mandated, age-appropriate Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) that is inclusive, comprehensive and evidence-based was a high priority for two national authorities, the UN, and 17 NGOs and their networks. To dismantle entrenched labour market imbalances, stakeholders urged coordinated EU action to encourage girls into STEM/digital and vocational fields and to actively promote boys/men into undervalued sectors like care and teaching. Educational underachievement of boys and young men (e.g., in literacy and tertiary attainment) should also be targeted through support programmes – a suggestion also supported by CSOs during targeted consultations. Stakeholders sought mandatory, continuous gender equality training for all educational professionals to eliminate unconscious bias and ensure curricula, learning materials, and career guidance reflect an intersectional, non-discriminatory perspective.

### *Political participation and equal representation*

To strengthen political participation and equal representation, PC contributions proposed action targeting decision-makers and institutions to reduce bias, empowerment programmes such as training and mentorship to increase participation in decision making and political leadership, potential use of quotas, and protections against online harassment in public and political life.

In their open submissions to CfE and TC, stakeholders identified that achieving meaningful political participation, and representation requires legislative mandates for parity in democracy, advocating for shifting the goal from aspirational targets to binding gender quotas and mechanisms. A public authority suggested adopting mandatory gender parity in the EU Commission, as Commissioners and Directorates-General should serve as role models. The EIGE suggested the zipper system across all governmental, parliamentary, and administrative structures, while the UN and NGOs particularly urged reform of the EU electoral law to embed gender equality as a core democratic principle. Trade unions recommended expanding the scope of binding quotas beyond corporate boards to include public administrations.

Increasing participation also hinges on the urgent need to strengthen protections for female politicians and activists against sexist attacks, gender-based hate speech, and cyberviolence.

Contributions also sought robust measures to ensure women’s safety in public life, alongside the systematic inclusion of marginalised groups.

NGOs also highlighted the ‘well-funded’ anti-gender backlash that aims to undermine SRHR and democratic values. They demanded legal action, including integrating a gender perspective into the European Democracy Shield to combat gendered disinformation. Stakeholders recognised the threat of growing polarisation and conservative push-back among young men, demanding strengthened critical media and digital literacy education to counter the influence of the ‘manosphere’. The UN Brussels Team emphasised expanding campaigns to counter the impact of media representations on harmful social norms. Academics classified anti-gender mobilisation as a systemic threat linked to democratic backsliding and misinformation, demanding the activation of Rule of Law Mechanisms. EIGE recognised the political instrumentalisation of gender issues through sophisticated disinformation campaigns and stressed the necessity of strengthening critical media and data literacy.

### *Institutional mechanisms & EU policy areas*

In terms of institutional mechanisms, participants in the PC backed gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting. These are horizontal enablers to deliver coherence, impact, and accountability throughout the policy cycle and EU spending. Respondents also emphasised the value of enforcing the existing acquis, addressing gaps through binding rules, and providing sustained funding for civil society and grassroots organisations working on gender equality. As regards areas for strengthened integration of gender perspectives across EU policy, contributions mentioned justice and fundamental rights, migration and home affairs, economic and financial affairs, education and youth, and employment and social affairs.

*Figure 2 – Institutional mechanisms: prioritized actions (from PC)*



In their open submissions to CfE and TC, stakeholders made recommendations focused on achieving structural change by solidifying institutional roles, ensuring robust coordination, and mandating transparent accountability mechanisms. A public authority and multiple NGOs suggested that each EU Commissioner should mandate a full-time staff member as a gender focal point, or an EU Coordinator be appointed at cabinet level to ensure EU policies mainstream gender horizontally. The EIGE as well as several NGOs demanded the formation of a formal Council of the European Union configuration dedicated to gender equality that regularly gathers ministers responsible for gender equality and gender

mainstreaming. EIGE further recommended establishing a network on gender equality/gender mainstreaming in EU funds, issuing guidance and technical support for managing authorities and desk officers. CSOs during targeted consultations underlined the need for strengthened rule-of-law tools and monitoring, and coherent, cross-sectoral implementation to overcome silos and backlash, supported by mainstreaming, indicators, regular reporting.

When highlighting, in their open submissions, EU policy areas in which gender perspectives should be integrated, public authorities, the UN and several NGOs underscored the importance of gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting. This should apply to all EU funding mechanisms (including Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), structural funds, and the EU Competitiveness Fund), as well as all levels of public administration. Some NGOs and trade unions also voiced strong demand for mandatory gender budgeting across all EU budgets and the next MFF, allowing to shift accountability from coordination structures to financial compliance. The European Semester was also mentioned as an instrument to reinforce gender commitments in National Reform Programmes (NRPs). Fundamental to this integration is the systematic use of Gender Impact Assessments (GIA), which NGOs and academic institutions demanded be compulsory for all new EU legislation, especially in complex areas such as the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum and new EU climate/environmental policies (European Green Deal). Some contributions suggested that the upcoming revision of the Public Procurement Directive integrates gender mainstreaming as a criterion and conditionality for accessing contracts.

Other recommendations included: A public authority and EIGE further suggested promoting a broad understanding of equality as regard to digital participation, AI literacy, and accessibility in a digital society.

### *Horizontal issues*

In the PC, participants asked the Commission to tackle **gender stereotypes** through awareness, evidence, and partnerships. Priority actions included EU-level campaigns, dedicated funding for proven initiatives, systematic data collection on stereotype prevalence, and active engagement of men and boys as allies and participants in programmes that reshape norms in care, education, and work. Closer cooperation with media, advertising, commercial sectors and cultural industries could help remove gendered cues and amplify diverse role models.

Stakeholders across all groups called in their open submissions to CfE and TC for integrated measures to dismantle entrenched gender stereotypes, namely awareness, education, media representation, cultural norms, and targeted action in traditionally segregated sectors. Public authorities and academics suggested promoting positive male role models and systematic training for education and employment professionals. Public authorities, the United Nations and NGOs suggested adopting broad preventive measures from an early age to modify sexist attitudes and address destructive masculinity norms. Equinet suggested launching an EU survey on sexism to identify issues and tackle access to justice for victims of discrimination.

**Intersectionality** was repeatedly stressed by stakeholders in their open submissions. It was framed as a foundational and non-negotiable principle that must be fully integrated into the 2026-2030 Gender Equality Strategy to ensure its effectiveness and legitimacy. Stakeholders considered that an intersectionality lens could help identify risks and structural aspects of inequality more accurately, segmenting groups of ‘even higher risk’. Intersectionality is also key to ensure policies target ‘all’ women and gender diverse people who are affected. In this sense, an NGO urged that the strategy consistently use the phrase ‘in all their diversity’ to cover sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics.

Stakeholders across all groups also made consistent recommendations as to intersectionality requiring deliberate alignment of gender equality efforts with policies targeting **other diversity groups** such as LGBTIQ, racialised communities, disability, and the Roma population. UNFPA suggested to consider designing and implementing targeted intersectional interventions, moving beyond mere analysis. A regional public authority stated that gender equality serves as a lever for acting effectively against other discriminations, while another national education authority recommended that achieving gender equality depends on progress on a range of factors including race equality, precarious employment, and family status and disability equalities. CSO inputs during targeted consultations highlighted specific gaps affecting racialised and migrant women, Roma women, and LGBTIQ communities, and encouraged inclusive language and closer alignment with anti-racism and sectoral policies in education, health, justice, housing, and employment.

Stakeholders were also unified in demanding **data collection** to underpin the EU Gender Equality Strategy. They recognised that current gaps severely hamper effective policy design and accountability, and called for it to be systematic, comprehensive, and intersectional. A core recommendation across all groups was to mandate the collection and publication of sex-disaggregated data (by ethnicity, disability, migration status, and age) for all key policy areas, especially GBV, pay equity, and SRHR. NGOs stressed the need to leverage existing tools like the EIGE Gender Equality Index and Social Scoreboard by integrating detailed gender and intersectional indicators, thereby strengthening EU-wide comparability and monitoring mechanisms. Furthermore, to combat data bias and ensure evidence-based policy, specific recommendations included mandating Sex and Gender Analysis (SGBA) in all EU-funded research and health initiatives, supporting qualitative, community-informed research, and ensuring data collection methods and reporting tools are fully accessible to marginalised communities.

To strengthen coordination among Member States, neighbouring third Countries and other stakeholders, respondents consistently emphasised the need for robust mechanisms. These should ensure effective cooperation, policy coherence, and the exchange of best practices across national borders, institutions, and civil society, particularly in facing contemporary challenges like democratic backsliding and rising anti-equality movements. Public authorities considered it essential to intensify and consolidate effective coordination between local and regional, national, and European authorities to guarantee multilevel governance and ensure that objectives, policies, and actions are mutually reinforcing. Public authorities also voiced the need to recognise regional and local governments as key strategic partners in implementation, monitoring and evaluation, while preserving their role in managing EU cohesion funds.

### *External action*

As regards external action policies, including security and defence mentioned in open submissions to CfE and TC, NGOs were the stakeholder group to make most recommendations, stressing the need for mandatory gender impact assessments for all EU trade, investment and development cooperation agreements; full implementation of the Gender Action Plan III and committing to ambitious Gender Action Plan IV post-2027; as well as developing EU-level guidelines for gender sensitive asylum procedures.

UN Women, along with other NGOs, urged strengthening and making explicit the links to the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda in the new strategy, as well as addressing underrepresentation of women among negotiators, mediators and signatories of peace agreements. One NGO recommended promoting the recruitment and retention of women in the military, and integrating gender perspectives in military planning and operations, which ensures the protection and empowerment of women in conflict zones and contributes to more effective engagements. NGOs further deemed that a gender perspective must be mainstreamed in security policies using tools such as gender

analysis, gender impact assessments, and gender statistics. The shift in political priorities toward defence and security necessitates ensuring that these goals do not compromise progress toward gender equality. NGOs further called for humanitarian programming to be gender-responsive, urging the EU to guarantee the provision of comprehensive SRHR (with a Minimum Initial Service Package (MISP)) in all humanitarian and conflict-related responses.

A local public authority noted the need to address gender equality in crisis preparedness and civil defence, making women's needs visible, especially regarding climate crises, pandemics and geopolitical threats. An academic contribution suggested recognising 'anti-gender' mobilisations as a systemic threat linked to democratic backsliding and use EU Rule of Law Mechanisms (e.g., Article 7 TEU procedures) to address systemic violations.

Stakeholders recommended mainstreaming gender equality in enlargement. NGOs called for the integration of gender equality into Accession and Neighbourhood policies, viewing these as vital mechanisms for systemic change beyond the EU borders. They specifically called for enlargement policy to establish robust indicators on SRHR for assessing candidate countries against the Copenhagen criteria. The UN Brussels Team emphasised that gender equality must be a necessary precondition for a stable expansion of the Union.