

EPP Group Position Paper on

# GENDER EQUALITY

17 December 2020



The European Union, since its inception, has been a project based on equality of opportunity, allowing all citizens to reach their full potential in a peaceful and prosperous continent. **Women are at the core of that vision**, and enabling women to reach higher and go further has been a European ideal for decades.

**Equality is a core value for the EPP. Ensuring that all citizens have equal opportunities to succeed, economically, socially and politically, is at the heart of the EPP's mission.** The EPP and its governments have consistently sought to advance women's opportunities in society and in the economy, including the labour market, and to promote the balance between work and family life for the benefit of all. The EPP Group in the European Parliament seeks to ensure that every woman has the opportunity to lead an ambitious and fulfilling life. From a healthy birth to a fulfilling education, from the decision to enter a fair labour market to choosing to have a family, from full participation in public life to providing for women as they grow older, the EPP Group will ensure that **every woman is empowered to reach their full potential**. Our goal is to advance equal rights, opportunities and equality for all. As equality between women and men is a core and horizontal value of the European Union, it should be at the heart of the **Conference on the Future of Europe**. Women should be actively encouraged to participate in the Conference, and women's organisations should be involved in setting the agenda of the Conference. Their voices should be heard and included in the final recommendations.

Crucial to achieving gender equality is the collection of gender disaggregated data in all policy areas. The EPP Group therefore calls on Eurostat, EIGE, and Eurobarometer to intensify their efforts to collect gender and

age disaggregated data in all areas through the Gender Equality Strategy.

## 1. Addressing violence against women<sup>1</sup>

Combatting violence in all its forms (physical, psychological, financial, cyber violence, as well as sexual harassment or female genital mutilation) and in all locations, including both inside and outside of the home, is an absolute priority for our political family<sup>2</sup>. Violence against women is not just a major obstacle to achieving gender equality, but an unconscionable violation of human rights. Currently 1 in 3 women in the EU aged 15 or over has experienced some form of physical and/or sexual violence<sup>3</sup>, and **reports of domestic violence have risen rapidly through COVID-19** confinement. The EPP Group has zero tolerance for gender-based violence, both inside and outside the EU.

Violence against women is not only societal violence, but is often used as a means of controlling the population by the populist, illiberal, or anti-democratic regimes. Political violence perpetrated by the state is a way of suppressing citizen dissent. Every act of violence against women should be treated as a direct attack on our democratic values and as a threat, not only to a specific group of persons, but as a threat to our existence as a healthy, participative and equal society.

<sup>1</sup> See also EP resolution on the EU's accession to the Istanbul Convention and other measures to tackle gender based violence, 28 November 2019.

<sup>2</sup> See also EPP Party Resolution on Female visions for a better Europe, 21 November 2019

<sup>3</sup> Source: FRA EU wide survey on violence against women 2014, (the most comprehensive at EU level in the field, based on 28 MS).

**Action points on violence against women:**

- > **To address violence and its root causes at all levels**, through awareness raising, prevention and information campaigns, including on the risks and harmful impact of pornographic materials; supporting helplines and the promotion of good practices is crucial, as well as campaigns to encourage women, men and children to report incidents; access to safe, accessible and age-appropriate channels to report abuse without fear, in particular when the abuser is in the inner circle of the victim, is essential so that underreporting is effectively addressed;
- > To urge the remaining Member States and the EU to **ratify the Istanbul Convention**;
- > **To develop an EU-wide definition of violence against women, including forms online and offline**, as well as adding violence against women to **the list of EU crimes**, ensuring no impunity for these crimes in any Member State. **New legislative measures to outline** minimum standards regarding types of violence should also be considered;
- > To support victims through the upcoming EU Strategy on Victims' Rights, as well as with existing instruments such as the European Protection Order; To continue the Daphne strand under the 'Rights and Values' programme 2021-2027.

**Human trafficking**

**Human trafficking is an especially egregious violation of human rights**, and is recognised as a form of structural violence against women. Trafficking of human beings is a European problem: almost half of victims (44%) are trafficked within the EU. Women and girls, particularly Roma women and girls, due to their low level of education and socio-economic status, continue to be the most vulnerable to trafficking (68%), while trafficking for sexual exploitation remains the most widespread form (56%)<sup>4</sup>. **The EPP Group is committed to fighting the trafficking of women and girls.**

**Action points on trafficking:**

- > **For the European Commission to produce a Directive on Combatting Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation in the EU**;
- > To enhance efforts to transpose and fully implement current legislative measures<sup>5</sup> by Member States, focusing on and regularly assessing the characterisation of all practices surrounding trafficking as criminal offences,

enhancing prevention, awareness raising, and training for officials;

- > For Member States to enhance efforts to fight the identified vulnerability factors linked to trafficked persons, such as Roma women and girls, including poverty, social exclusion, low education, high level of unemployment, domestic violence and discrimination;
- > For the European Commission to develop a new EU Strategy on the Eradication of Trafficking in Human Beings;
- > To **counter the widespread culture of impunity for perpetrators, abusers and exploiters** through the continuation of the coordinated work approach between the relevant EU agencies in partnership with Member States, EU institutions and other partners, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of investigations and prosecutions;
- > To promote the reinforcement of a **coordinated response in police and judicial cooperation** through Europol and Eurojust;
- > To strengthen the implementation of the Victims' Rights Directive, so that **all victims have access to justice and support, as well as to increase child protection within the general social protection systems of Member States**. This should include supports for civil society organisations, NGOs and law enforcement authorities working with the victims of trafficking;
- > For the competent authorities, such as public officials and judicial and law enforcement officials and agencies dealing with victims or potential victims of trafficking, **to receive appropriate gender sensitive training** which would be reinforced through effective supervision and management;
- > The prevention of, and fight against, women and children smuggling, through cooperation with third countries either of origin or of transit, together with the protection of the victims of trafficking, ensuring comprehensive support, reintegration and rehabilitation programs;

<sup>4</sup> European Commission, Second report on the progress made in the fight against trafficking in human beings, 3 December 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Directive 2012/29/EU establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime; and the Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims and its complementing policy framework.

> For anti-trafficking measures to be considered and incorporated as a measure in all trade agreements;

> To improve reporting of trafficking cases and data collection at Member State and EU level to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon and to better coordinate amongst the various data sources;

> **To continue supporting and resourcing the work of the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator;**

> The EPP Group condemns any involuntary treatment, such as Female Genital Mutilation, forced sterilisation, forced abortion or forced medical examinations of women, particularly from marginalised groups including Roma women, women with intellectual disabilities or women belonging to ethnic minorities.

### **Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)<sup>6</sup>**

The EPP Group **strongly condemns Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)** as a gross violation of human rights and as an act of violence against women and girls with long-lasting psychological and physical consequences, including death. FGM affects at least 200 million women and girls in 31 countries<sup>7</sup>, and according to 2018 UNFPA data, if population trends continue in same direction, 68 million girls worldwide will be at risk of FGM by 2030. The EPP Group denounces the growing medicalisation of this practice, as a dangerous attempt to legitimise and even potentially to profit from FGM.

### **Action points on Female Genital Mutilation:**

> Calls on the European Commission, the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the Member States to **enhance cooperation with third countries to prioritise the eradication of FGM** through the existing and future programs;

> **To reinforce prevention of FGM through education and information**, and by creating preconditions for the economic empowerment of women and girls;

> To focus various existing programmes on awareness raising, information, education and training for relevant professionals (medical **professionals**, nurses, social workers), across the EU and in external policies to prevent and tackle FGM;

> **Earmark EU funding for training and awareness-raising projects** to effectively

prevent, detect and respond to cases of FGM and violence against women and girls.

### **Cyber violence and hate speech**

Cyber violence against women is closely linked to the growing access and use of social media and technology platforms, and can be expressed in various ways, such as sexual harassment, image-based sexual abuse, grooming, or sexist hate speech. These forms of **cyber violence** and **hate speech** against women are part of the violence process, often starting offline and continuing online or vice versa.

**Hate speech** is increasingly directed at women, with public figures such as journalists, human rights defenders and politicians being particularly exposed.

### **Action points on cyber violence and hate speech:**

> To work with the European Commission to **prepare a comprehensive strategy addressing the issue of cyber violence as well as hate speech directed at women**, as online hate speech can incite real-world violence;

> To **increase synergies between existing instruments at European level** on online violence against women, such as the General Data Protection Regulation, the Electronic-Commerce Directive, as well as the Directive on Victims' Rights;

> To collaborate with **tech platforms and the ICT sector** to combat violence against women, cyber violence, and child abuse online and offline through technical measures as well as media moderation policies. The development of prevention techniques and response mechanisms to harmful content, including cooperation with justice agencies in removing violent or harmful content or disabling access, is essential;

> **To develop indicators** on the prevalence and harms of cyber violence against women to measure the effectiveness of interventions;

> To further develop **awareness-raising campaigns** for women and girls about cyber violence, their legal rights and available support services etc.;

---

<sup>6</sup> See also EP resolution for an EU strategy to put an end to female genital mutilation around the world, 5 February 2020

<sup>7</sup> UNICEF, February 2020.

> To take a gender-sensitive approach when considering measures to protect the safety of journalists, as women journalists face gender-specific forms of violence, such as sexual and online harassment.

### Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment is the most persistent form of gender-based discrimination, and approximately half of the women in the European Union have experienced sexual harassment<sup>8</sup>. The EPP Group strongly condemns all forms of harassment and insists on effective implementation of the existing legal framework addressing this phenomenon, at the same time encouraging EU Member States, public and private companies and institutions to take further measures to effectively end and prevent harassment in the workplace.

#### Action points on sexual harassment:

> To **monitor the effectiveness of existing legal frameworks** and the implementation of international conventions;

> To introduce a **strategy on the prevention of sexual harassment in the workplace** and other social environments based on the **ILO convention from June 2019 on violence and harassment in the world of work**, recognising violence and harassment at work as a human rights violation;

> To work with Member States, the public and private sectors, as well as the institutions concerned, to effectively **monitor** the situation, exchange best practices and to advance measures to tackle sexual harassment in all settings.

## 2. Building an inclusive economy

Empowering women as citizens and economic actors is critical to our economies and our societies, and to tackling poverty. Structurally, there has long been a gap between men and women in the economy, due to the gender pay gap, the gender pension gap, pressures of providing care, and the leaky pipeline phenomenon<sup>9</sup>.

### Gender mainstreaming of the labour market

Most EU graduates are women: within the EU-28, they constitute close to three-fifths (57.6%) of all graduates<sup>10</sup>. However, they are

underrepresented in the labour market<sup>11</sup>, with just 64.3% of women in employment, compared to 75.9% of men. Despite their higher qualifications, women work more frequently in part time positions<sup>12</sup>, particularly women with children. Combining work and family life poses many challenges, and women in particular seek to adjust their careers for family life and care responsibilities. Carers may be obliged to reduce their working hours or even leave paid work<sup>13</sup>.

**The COVID-19 pandemic has had a differential impact on women, as they are more exposed to the socio-economic impacts of the virus, increasing their risk of poverty. Throughout the crisis, women have been carrying out the majority of care**, despite often having additional work responsibilities to juggle.

The role of families in society is a critical one, offering a grounding and a comforting familiarity. Yet it cannot be cherished and enjoyed if, in the pace of modern life, the balance between work and family life is not achieved. We must seek to ensure that everybody can have the full enjoyment of family life. Achieving a genuine work-life balance is central to this.

Provision of care is critical to family wellbeing, with women providing the vast majority, including childcare, after school care, care for those with disabilities and care of older persons. In the EU, the majority of informal carers are women (62% care for older persons or persons with disabilities, while 58% provide informal care to children<sup>14</sup>), thereby indicating the existence of a **gender care gap**. In addition, 29% of households report an unmet need for professional home

<sup>8</sup> FRA, Violence against women report, 2014

<sup>9</sup> The 'leaky pipeline' refers to the situation where the further a woman advances in her academic studies and profession, the higher the likelihood she will drop out. The leaky pipeline is due to a number of conditions: non-family friendly work environments, lack of female peers and mentors, and a lack of professional recognition.

<sup>10</sup> European Commission. Eurostat statistics explained: Gender Statistics. Source: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Gender\\_statistics](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Gender_statistics)

<sup>11</sup> European Commission. European Semester Thematic factsheet. Labour force participation of women. P.2 Source: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/european-semester\\_thematic-factsheet\\_labour-force-participation-women\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/european-semester_thematic-factsheet_labour-force-participation-women_en.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> 29.8% of women who work do so part-time compared to 6.9% of men. Source: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/EDN-20171117-1>

<sup>13</sup> Reconciling work and care: the need to support informal carers, Eurocarers, [https://eurocarers.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Eurocarers-Work-Life-balance\\_final.pdf](https://eurocarers.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Eurocarers-Work-Life-balance_final.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> EIGE, Gender Equality Index, Work-Life Balance. <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/thematic-focus/work-life-balance>

care services, with this varying significantly across EU countries<sup>15</sup>.

When women do work, the gender pay gap is a significant obstacle, amounting to 16% in Europe on average<sup>16</sup>, and can mask horizontal and vertical labour market segregation, including the glass-ceiling factor.

Ensuring the economic independence of women seniors is another pivotal challenge for the coming years. The level of poverty among seniors is constantly increasing, but the indicators of poverty and social exclusion among women over the age of 75 are visibly higher than equivalent rates among men. In 2018, women aged over 65 in the EU received a pension that was on average 30% lower than that of men, known as the gender pension gap. However, the gap has slowly been closing<sup>17</sup>. It exists due to inequalities accumulated throughout women's lives, such as the gender pay gap, the employment gap and their periods of absence in the labour market.

#### **Action points on gender mainstreaming the labour market:**

> The **EPP Group stands for equal pay for equal work**<sup>18</sup>, and we await the forthcoming proposal from the European Commission on this topic. We support working towards a harmonised European framework on pay transparency with suitable coordination of best practices of the Member States, while taking due account of the unique circumstances of European SMEs and the variety of labour market models existing in the EU;

> **Improve data collection through the establishment of a gender pension gap indicator**, as well as further **research on the root causes of the gender pension gap**. The **EPP Group supports best practice sharing** between Member States on the alignment of retirement ages of men and women, and consideration as to whether recognition of childcare periods should be counted for the purposes of pension entitlements;

> For Member States to fully transpose the **Work-Life Balance Directive** for working parents and carers and for the European Commission to closely monitor its implementation;

> To ensure access to **high quality, affordable and accessible public and private care facilities**, as well as the potential for the **flexible organisation of work** to be agreed with employers. While responsibility for the

organisation and content of early childhood education and care systems, as well as long-term care, rests with the Member States, **cooperation at European level combined with the efficient use of EU funds, including adequate budget allocation from European Structural and Investment Funds for the development of quality care services**, should be explored;

> To collect quality data on the provision of care available for children, older persons, persons with disabilities and other dependents through public and private financing, including formal and informal care. Such data should pave the way for a **European Care Strategy**<sup>19</sup>, while taking into account the principle of subsidiarity and Member States competence in doing so;

> Equal opportunities to share parental leave between both parents with a view to sharing the responsibilities of raising children. We encourage Member States to exchange best practice on parental leave models. In addition, the EPP Group advocates for an **EU-wide campaign to promote paternity leave**;

> To introduce a **European Day of Work-Life Balance** on the 20th of March each year, symbolically reflecting the spring day-night equality;

> To combat gender stereotypes through education and information in all fields including business, sports, academia, etc.

#### **Female entrepreneurship**

The role of business, enterprise and SMEs is central for the EPP Group, and we seek to encourage and empower women to advance and succeed. Research indicates that inclusivity builds economies and GDP. Female entrepreneurship is a significant factor in today's economy, particularly through SMEs, but has the potential to expand further. Currently women constitute only 34.4% of the EU self-employed and 30% of start-up entrepreneurs<sup>20</sup>; they are missing in the most promising sectors and are underrepresented in decision-making.

<sup>15</sup> Ibidem

<sup>16</sup> The [https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/equal-pay/gender-pay-gap-situation-eu\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/equal-pay/gender-pay-gap-situation-eu_en)

<sup>17</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/DDN-20200207-1>

<sup>18</sup> Article 147, Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

<sup>19</sup> EPP Group, A European Solidarity Pact against the Coronavirus pandemic.

<sup>20</sup> <https://wagate.eu/women-entrepreneurship-facts-and-figures>

## Action points on female entrepreneurship:

> Further development of women's creativity and entrepreneurial potential, as they are an **untapped source of economic growth and jobs**. Female entrepreneurship and access to loans and equity finance should be advanced through **EU programmes and funds as well as the European Investment Bank in terms of access to microfinance**;

> The Court of Auditors should conduct an audit of the EU's existing financial instruments for women's economic empowerment and the Commission to identify gaps and shortages to be addressed for better use of the EU budget;

> **Awareness raising** of EU funding possibilities: a tailored support and information campaign targeting women business owners and female entrepreneurs is necessary to raise awareness of EU programmes and funding giving opportunities for women to boost their skills, access to capital and financial support;

> Further expand the European Business Angels Network and European Network of Mentors for Women Entrepreneurs, including through gatherings of female innovators, tech professionals and investors to encourage and boost innovations and funding for women-led ventures. **This can promote female role models in business and business angels**, and encourage entrepreneurship as a career option through **career counselling and mentoring**. Consequently, there is potential to create the next generation of female entrepreneurs in sectors such as the digital economy, ICT and Artificial Intelligence (AI), by working with schools and with grassroot organisations;

> For the European Commission to prioritise large-scale investment in digital education and skills on all levels, including computational thinking in basic education, as well as digital education in the Erasmus+ programme, to anticipate the growing demand for **high-level digital skills** and to close the wide digital skills gap which exists in the EU. This can be of benefit to those returning to the labour market after a period of absence, particularly as entrepreneurs.

## STEM, digital, ICT and Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Women are an untapped resource even in emerging fields, such as digital, AI and ICT, with women accounting for 34% of STEM graduates and only 17% of ICT specialists,

while earning 19% less than men in the information and communication sector in Europe<sup>21</sup>. In addition, the share of men working in the digital sector is three times greater than the share of women. By integrating more women into the digital jobs market, there is potential for a €16 billion GDP boost<sup>22</sup> to the European economy.

## Action points on STEM, digital, ICT and AI:

> Advance **education, training and maintenance of new digital skills and capacities**, and particularly STEM subjects, with a special focus on girls (universal access to coding, maths and ICT classes), through training and life-long learning, and to prioritise diversity and inclusion in STEM to enhance equal opportunities in the economy and in business. Girls should be encouraged to take up mathematics and science subjects in school;

> **To use EU funds and programmes, including Erasmus+, to effectively support lifelong learning and training in these areas.**

> To create additional and greater incentives for both companies and women for **role models, mentoring programmes and career paths**, to increase the visibility of women and to promote their access to these sectors.

> **Establish campaigns or awards for businesses who take exemplary measures** to improve women's presence in the digital economy, in particular **in decision-making fora**;

> To ensure gender, impairment and age sensitive development of technologies and applications, taking into account the end user's needs.

## Women in decision-making

Women continue to be under-represented in senior positions in many fields, including business, science, trade union representation, and politics and public office, despite the fact that they account for nearly half of the workforce and more than half of university graduates in the EU. The proportion of women in decision-making roles has increased since 2013, but progress has been slow and uneven. In October 2018, just 6.7% of chairs of boards in the EU were women,

<sup>21</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/women-ict>  
<sup>22</sup> 2018, European Commission. Women in the Digital Age.

and only 6.5% of CEOs<sup>23</sup>. However, **gender balanced corporate boards may improve a company's performance and even be associated with greater financial stability**<sup>24</sup>.

Where quotas are needed to advance equality, the EPP Group believes them to be a temporary yet necessary measure.

#### **Action points on women in decision-making:**

> The EPP Group should be the frontrunner in demonstrating to EU decision-makers, Member State governments, civil society organisations and European SMEs that a workplace with diversity has the tendency to perform better. Diversity should be perceived as a tool of EU competitiveness and business potential instead of a heavy burden<sup>25</sup>;

> To urge company boards to apply transparent selection criteria for candidates and to favour the underrepresented sex when there is a choice between two equally qualified applicants, as proposed in the Women on Boards Directive;

> **To improve the advancement of women into top decision-making positions;**

> **To support the EPP led initiative, the Women on Boards Directive;**

> The EPP Group will be vigilant in respecting the gender quota in its Presidency and will explore the potential to extend these quotas to other organs of the EPP.

### **3. Women's Rights: a cross-sectoral approach**

Gender mainstreaming, that is catering to the specific circumstances and needs of women, must be taken into account across all policy areas. While this paper does not expand on them specifically, a gender lens in policy areas such as migration, Roma inclusion, climate change, development, media, sport, transport and children must be applied, and policies tailored to suit a gender sensitive response.

#### **Women in rural areas**

Women in rural areas play a crucial role in maintaining their communities and in keeping agriculture viable. Yet despite their substantial contribution, they continue to

face numerous challenges, including limited employment opportunities, poorer access to services, less developed infrastructure and underrepresentation in decision-making fora. Much of the work of rural women is informal and unacknowledged. Female farmers in particular face unique challenges that put them at an initial disadvantage, including gender-specific obstacles such as lack of access to land, financing agricultural training and education, and equal treatment.

#### **Action points on women in rural areas:**

> Supporting **entrepreneurial initiatives and access to credit;**

> The creation of **a thematic sub-programme for women in rural areas** through the Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plans financed by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), encouraging women's employment and female entrepreneurship using opportunities linked to agro-tourism and the development of digital villages, improving female farmers' access to land, credit and financial instruments, skills and performance through education, training and advisory services, increased participation in local action groups and the development of local partnerships under the Leader programme;

> The **exchange of best practices** by Member States, in particular **on professional status for assisting spouses in the agricultural sector**, thereby addressing women's social security rights, including maternity leave or pension entitlements, and women's access to available EU funding;

> Explore the development of partnership models in relation to farm ownership.

#### **Women in external policies and development**<sup>26</sup>

**Gender equality is crucial to human rights, sustainable development and smart economies.** Empowering women across the world is crucial to global progress. The EU

<sup>23</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/women-labour-market-work-life-balance/womens-situation-labour-market\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/women-labour-market-work-life-balance/womens-situation-labour-market_en)

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/sites/karstenstrauss/2018/01/25/more-diversity-leads-to-better-profits>

<sup>26</sup> See also EPP Position Paper on EU Development Policy 'Our World, our Future, our Dignity,' November 2015 and the EP resolution on the EU priorities for the 64th session of the Un Commission on the Status of Women, 5 February 2020.

has an important role to play in this, through **supporting partner countries to address gender discrimination**, by establishing a more enabling environment for the fulfilment of girls' and women's rights to achieve real and tangible improvements in gender equality.

#### **Action points for women in external action:**

- > Enforcement of gender equality as the key priority of the GAP II programmes and projects, including tackling women's and girls' rights in four pivotal areas: physical and psychological integrity, including the fight against female genital mutilation; promoting the economic and social rights and the empowerment of girls and women; strengthening women and girls participation; and a horizontal pillar to shift the institutional culture to more effectively deliver on the EU's commitments;
- > **GAP III** must further improve women's rights, by increasing awareness of and access to sexual and reproductive health for women and girls, and enabling them to maintain and improve it, free from coercion, violence, discrimination and abuse;
- > To accurately **track all spending on gender activities**, with indicators, to assess the impact and to improve the quality of gender mainstreaming;
- > To ensure **coherence between internal and external policies**, actions and funding on gender equality to maximise learning and synergies.

#### **Women in media**

Due to their pivotal role in societal representation and cultural dissemination, as well as in information provision, traditional and social media are hugely influential in their capability to advance women's rights. Stereotypes and the under-representation of women in media continue to persist, and can be seen clearly in media content. The Council of Europe stated that "women represent only about a quarter of the persons heard, read about or seen in the news, they are rarely represented in an expert capacity". Women are also under-represented in the profession at all levels of the governance structure: media ownership, information production, and decision-making process.

#### **Action points for women in media:**

- > To implement the measures outlined in the European Parliament's 2018 Resolution

on "Gender equality in the media sector in the EU"<sup>27</sup>;

- > To work with Member States to raise awareness of women in the media and to exchange best practices in advancing women's representation and portrayal in the media.

## **4. Women's and girls' health**

The EPP Group is committed to a positive and proactive approach to healthcare, throughout the lifecycle. We believe that women should be enabled to guide their own healthcare, supported by medical professionals.

To make informed choices, women must have access to reliable and evidence based information throughout their lives. Age appropriate comprehensive sexual education, contraception, education about fertility and information on medical procedures, conception, pregnancy, and post-natal care are vital. The EPP Group aims to promote women's sexual and reproductive health and rights, with due regard to the Member States competency in this area. Family planning and reproductive healthcare should be available to all women, based on their personal circumstances and individual needs, with a woman centred approach supported by medical professionals, and should be approached in full respect of the principle of subsidiarity.

#### **Action points on women's health:**

- > The EU Strategy for Public Health should be gender mainstreamed to take account of gender bias;
- > For Member States to take measures to fight multiple inequalities and disadvantages experienced by vulnerable women and girls when accessing healthcare services<sup>28</sup>;
- > To ensure that age appropriate comprehensive sexual education, education about fertility and information on conception, contraception, pregnancy, and post-natal care is available to all women;
- > To ensure appropriate pre-natal and post-natal healthcare for all mothers, with the goal that no woman should die in childbirth;

<sup>27</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2018-0101\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2018-0101_EN.html)

<sup>28</sup> <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2013/inequalities-and-multiple-discrimination-access-and-quality-healthcare>

> To develop common European standards in maternal healthcare, and to enable healthcare professionals to share best practice in this field;

> To ensure that medical staff perform their duties in a discriminatory free manner that is adequately sensitised and equipped with competences to gain a better understanding of the situation of vulnerable girls and women;

> To further work with Member States to promote breastfeeding, and the establishment of an EU system on the safe use of medicines during pregnancy and lactation. To work with Member States and the European Commission to promote the cross-border use of milk banks to ensure that women in border regions can avail of this support when necessary;

> To further examine the issue of surrogacy, its various aspects and its legal implications both within the EU and in the EU's external action with a view to considering whether the practice is in full respect of human rights;

> To take a gender sensitive approach to disease awareness, diagnosis and treatment.

## Cancer

Cancer affects both women and men, yet the gender specific types of cancer as well as approaches to diagnostics and prevention can differ. As a result, targeted and differing policy responses are required.

### Action points on cancer:

> A **stronger focus on awareness raising of cancer prevention and treatment among men**, given current lower levels of health awareness;

> While responsibility for the organisation of healthcare systems as well as provision of long-term healthcare rests with the individual Member States, **cooperation and exchange of best practice at European level combined with the efficient use of EU funds** are of benefit when addressing common challenges in the fight against cancer;

> **The integration of gender specific approach** while developing and implementing the EU's Beating Cancer Plan;

> To encourage the EU Member States **to pool resources to purchase the HPV vaccine in bulk**, thereby decreasing its cost and strengthening cancer prevention,

allowing for all children to avail of the vaccine.

## Women with disabilities

46 million women and girls in the European Union are living with disabilities, and women with disabilities experience multiple and intersecting challenges and discriminations.

### Action points on disabilities:

> To further incorporate the gender perspective in the upcoming **Disability Equality Strategy 2021**, including **improved access to the labour market and justice**.

> To further gender mainstream in disability policymaking, and to ensure full access to rights for women and girls with disabilities who are in institutions.

---

<sup>29</sup> European Parliament resolution on the situation of women with disabilities, 2018.