EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR JUSTICE AND CONSUMERS

Directorate D – Equality and Non-Discrimination
The Director

Brussels
JUST.D.3/ABD

BACKGROUND NOTE FOR THE CONSULATION MEETING WITH THE SOCIAL PARTNERS ON THE GENDER EQUALITY STRATEGY 2026-2030

[26 June 2025]

1. INTRODUCTION

The EU has made historic progress on gender equality policy and legislation over the last mandate – including new legislative frameworks such as the directives on work-life balance, gender balance among directors of listed companies, pay transparency and combating violence against women, the EU's accession to the Istanbul Convention. The EU has incorporated a gender perspective in various sectoral policies, such as in budgets and research. However, the commitments made by the United Nations Member States, including all EU Member States, in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 30 years ago are still far from being reached, including in the EU. On 7 March 2025, the European Commission adopted the Roadmap for Women's Rights, setting out its-long term vision for the full realisation of women's rights and reaffirming its commitment to gender equality.

Gender inequality is a structural issue, which manifests across all spheres of society and negatively affects people, prosperity, security and democracy. The EU currently (2024) scores 71 out of 100 in the Gender Equality Index and recent gains are fragile. Employment and pay gaps are only slowly closing (in 2023 they amounted to 10.2 p.p. and 12.7% respectively), and structural barriers such as discriminatory social norms remain. One in three women in the EU has experienced physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15, a statistic that has remained stagnant for over a decade[1], reflecting a persistent challenge despite extensive policy efforts. The cost of violence against women in the EU is estimated at €289 billion euros per year[2].

While women across the EU are increasingly well qualified and tend to out-perform men in terms of educational achievement, their participation in the labour market remains lower than

[1] https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/eu-gender_based_violence_survey_key_results.pdf
[2] https://eige.europa.eu/gender-based-violence/costs-of-gender-based-violence?language_content_entity=en

that of men: in 2023, the gender employment gap was 10.2 percentage points. According to the EU's social targets outlined in the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, by 2030 at least 78% of people aged 20 to 64 should be employed and the gender employment gap should be halved compared to 2019. Increasing women's participation in the labour market is essential to meet these goals. The annual economic loss due to the gender employment gap is about €390 billion a year. The gender pay gap in the EU stands at 12.7% (2023). This gap is compounded across the life course, and women in the EU aged over 65 receive a pension that is on average 25.4% lower than that of men (2023). In 2023, more than 1 in 5 women aged 75 and older were at risks of poverty or social exclusion in the EU.

The gender employment gap and gender pay gap are a consequence of various factors, including the division of occupations and sectors into those typically dominated by women or men as well as differences in career types, the prevalence of part-time or more precarious work contracts for women, under-representation of women in senior positions, unequal sharing of unpaid caring responsibilities, specific features of the tax-benefit systems, and the persisting gender inequalities and (un)conscious gender biases individuals face at work, at home and in society. Women on average account for 39% of Members of the European Parliament, 33% of the Members of national parliaments in the EU and 26.5% globally, and 37% of local government seats in the EU. Female politicians experience more frequent attacks than their male counterparts based on their gender.

Certain groups of women, such as women with disabilities, women with a certain racial or ethnic background, Roma women, migrant women or rural women, face even higher risks of poverty, unemployment and gender-based violence, as well as other challenges in domains ranging from healthcare to housing. Moreover, worrying tendencies are emerging, such as a growing polarisation on gender equality matters among younger generations. Anti-equality and anti-gender movements have gained traction in some areas, fuelling a backlash on women's rights and questioning progress made towards equal rights and non-discrimination.

2. POLICY CONTEXT AND FORMAT

The Gender Equality Strategy 2026-2030 will deliver on the commitment made by President von der Leyen in the Political Guidelines for the European Commission 2024−2029, where the renewal of the gender equality strategy post-2025 was announced. This initiative was also included in the Mission Letter to the Commissioner for equality, preparedness and crisis management, Hadja Lahbib. As a first step, the Commission adopted ahead of International Women's Day 2025 the Roadmap for Women's Rights. The Roadmap consists of eight guiding principles for a gender-equal society: (1) freedom from gender-based violence, (2) the highest standards of health, (3) equal pay and economic empowerment, (4) work-life balance and care, (5) equal employment opportunities and adequate working conditions, (6) quality and inclusive education, (7) political participation and equal representation, and (8) institutional mechanisms that deliver on women's rights. The new gender equality strategy will constitute the European Commission's contribution to realising the long-term vision outlined in the Roadmap for

Women's Rights. It will build on the achievement from the last mandate, and address areas requiring further or new action.

3. SCOPE OF THE INITATIVE

As set out in the mission letter to the Commissioner for equality, preparedness and crisis management, the new strategy will place particular emphasis on the fight against gender-based violence, the economic empowerment of women, their participation in politics and addressing discrimination in health, education, housing, social protection and in the supply of goods and services. It will also look at the challenges facing women in the labour market, online violence and work life balance.

The new strategy will continue to be based on a dual approach combining targeted measures to achieve gender equality and gender mainstreaming across all EU policies. To this end, the strategy will strive to foster synergies across key Commission initiatives contributing to a 'Union of Equality', as well as relevant initiatives in other areas, creating cross-sector synergies. It will help to bring to life the principles outlined in the European Pillar of Social Rights, which aim to support fair and well-functioning labour markets and welfare systems.

The following principles of the Roadmap for Women's Rights are of particular relevance for social partners. A short description is included for the purpose of the discussion, noting that this list is not exhaustive and the content remains subject to change.

- **Freedom from gender-based violence**

This could cover measures to support the elimination of all forms of violence, including femicide, domestic violence, economic, physical, sexual and psychological violence. Gender-based violence can happen in all spheres of life, including in the world of work. Besides its evident human cost, it also carries economic costs and negatively impacts labour market participation.[3] In addition to supporting the transposition and implementation of the Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence Directive as well as the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, further action will be needed to realise the objective of a society free from gender-based violence.

- **Equal pay and economic empowerment**

This could cover supporting the implementation of the Pay Transparency Directive to address and close gender pay and pensions gaps, as well as addressing the feminisation of poverty and the undervaluation of female work. It could tackle existing gender-based inequalities in access to finance and promote economic opportunities for women to act as economic agents, including through entrepreneurship, and support measures to improve women's financial independence.

- **Work-life balance and care**

[3] See introduction on page 1, and footnote 2 for costing of this phenomenon.

This could cover supporting the proper application of the Work-Life Balance Directive, enhancing the economic value of care work (encompassing both early childhood education and care and long-term care), and increasing access to quality childcare services to meet the Barcelona targets, thereby encouraging women's participation on the labour market. It could also encourage the equal sharing of care responsibilities at home, which is crucial to close the gender care gap. Employers and workplaces have a key role to play to support and achieve work-life balance, among others through organisational culture and flexible work arrangements.

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

This could cover efforts to eliminate the gender employment gap, tackle sectoral segregation, and address algorithmic discrimination that impacts women in the workforce. It could also address sexual harassment in the workplace, support efforts to create safe workplaces and promote good mental health and working conditions, especially in feminised, high-stress sectors like care.

- **Quality and inclusive education**

This could cover addressing gender imbalances and sectoral segregation in education by actively challenging stereotypes that limit opportunities based on gender. It could underline the need to encourage boys and girls to explore different paths beyond those preset on the basis of gender-based biases and to develop essential skills for today's society and world of work. It could thus support efforts to encourage women in STEM and promote their inclusion in the twin digital and green transitions.

- **Political participation and equal representation**

This could cover supporting the implementation of the Women on Boards Directive and promoting leadership training opportunities for women to increase their representation in decision-making roles, as well as supporting efforts to make the digital environment a safe place for women, including through the elimination of sexism in media and advertising.

4. TIMELINE

The Commission's Gender Equality Strategy 2026-2030 will be presented to mark International Women's Day in March 2026.

The **public consultation**, including a questionnaire and a call for evidence, were launched on 19 May and will run until 11 August. In addition to the hearing with social partners, several other targeted consultations with key stakeholders are being organised. This consultation process intends to give all stakeholders the opportunity to share their views, thereby enabling the Commission to draw on a wide range of views and inputs in preparing the new 2026-2030 gender equality strategy.

In line with the Commission's better regulation guidelines, a factual summary report summarising the key elements of the public consultation will be published on the consultation page within 8 weeks of its closure.

5. STEERING QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSIONS

Social partners are asked to share their views on the following questions.

1. *What are the biggest challenges to gender equality or gender gaps, from the perspective of your organisation?*
2. *Which of the principles outlined in the Roadmap would you consider a priority to advance gender equality, from the perspective of your organisation?*
3. *To realise those principles, what actions or measures should be prioritised in next Gender Equality Strategy, from the perspective of your organisation?*