



EUROPEAN WOMEN'S  
LOBBY  
EUROPEEN DES FEMMES

## Written statement of the European Women's Lobby for the 64th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, 9-20 March 2020

### OUR FUTURE – THE TIME TO DELIVER IS NOW! UNFINISHED BUSINESS: TURNING VISION INTO EFFECTIVE ACTION

The European Women's Lobby (EWL), together with its 2000 women's organisations across Europe calls on governments worldwide to **reaffirm** their **commitment** to the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), UN Security Council Resolution 1325, and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). 25 years on, a new generation of feminist activists have joined the global mission for women's human rights and equality between women and men, girls and boys bringing about new momentum to tackle systemic and intersectional aspects of gender inequality. 2020 marks a critical moment in assessing the visionary agenda of the BPfA, a quarter of a century after its adoption. As we celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the creation of UNWomen, the full implementation of the BPfA must remain a priority for the future. It is also a critical moment to assess the fifth year of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular goal 5, ensuring that no girl and woman are left behind.

While some progress has been made over the past 25 years, there is still a long way to go to the full achievement of women's human rights and equality between women and men, girls and boys. In particular, there are significant gaps in the implementation of the overarching commitments in the BPfA twelve critical areas of concern. In Europe, progress on women's human rights and equality between women and men has stalled. Women worldwide have witnessed how political responses that focus on austerity measures, have impacted disproportionately on women, pushing women into low paid, precarious work, coupled with a disproportionate burden of unpaid care work. Austerity and neo-liberalism have pushed equality between women and men even further down the political agenda. We have seen the shocking decimation of funding for women human rights and women's organisations in Europe. This is unacceptable. The EWL seeks to ensure that the implementation of the BPfA and the SDGs by both the European Union (EU) and its Member States remain at the top of the political agenda, supported by powerful institutional mechanisms, including resources.

We call on governments to reaffirm the commitment to affirmative actions and **gender mainstreaming**, which remains the most powerful transformative tool to ensure that a gender perspective is an integral part of all policies and actions across the spectrum of every policy area, including in macro-economic policies and gender budgeting.

Today in Europe, we are seeing pivotal changes towards equality between women and men, both at the structural level and in mind-sets. The results of the European Parliament Elections in May 2019 saw an increase of elected women representing a positive shift towards parity democracy, notably through women's participation and representation in key political decision-making positions. For the first time, the European Union (EU) welcomes its first woman President of the European Commission leading a gender-balanced Commission. As leaders of the EU over the next five years, it is imperative that these decision-makers take responsibility for **accelerating the pace of change to guarantee women and girls their right to a free, equal and dignified life.**

EU political leaders need now to take action to guarantee women's human rights, equality between women and men and the full implementation of the BPfA, CEDAW and the SDGs. Indeed, despite these



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positive developments in EU leadership, women's human rights and equality between women and men continue to stagnate in the EU and beyond.

We call for a **robust European political strategy on equality between women and men** with ambitious goals, targets, benchmarks and strong inter-institutional mechanisms and resources to support implementation, including annual ministerial meetings to monitor progress. The specific focus of such a strategy should be the elimination of all inequalities between women and men. Women's lived experiences and life circumstances should be at the heart of this strategy to allow specific actions to improve their lives. The strategy should also be consistent throughout the EU's internal and external policies, reflecting the continuum of inequalities faced by women within and outside the EU, and in the context of the universal principles of the SDGs and other human rights instruments, notably CEDAW.

Despite growing evidence that the patriarchal neo-liberal economic system is unsustainable, the obsession with *growth in GDP remains central to our economic policies*. The neo-liberal model reinforces gender stereotypes. Women and girls continue to face inequalities within the formal employment sector throughout their life cycle. The **gender pay, pension and poverty gaps remain endemic** and **unpaid care and domestic work** remains unrecognised in an entrenched outdated male breadwinner model. **Stringent austerity measures** have disproportionately impacted women who already face multiple forms of discrimination: poor women, women from ethnic minorities, women of colour, women with disabilities and older women. There can be no business-as-usual; the economy must serve the wellbeing of all, and not the other way round. Feminist economists are an inspiration for a radical new vision for people and the planet, including the care economy. **We call on all EU member states to deliver a feminist economic model for the wellbeing of all, putting the care of ourselves, each other and the planet at its core.**

Violence against women is a human rights violation. The BPfA clearly states that violence against women is *a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of women's full and advancement*. Preventing and ending all forms of violence against women and girls, including sexual exploitation in all its forms, protecting and supporting victims, ending impunity, prosecuting perpetrators and addressing all the structural dimensions must be a major priority for all governments. This must also include emerging forms, as the digital revolution is also witnessing the continuum of violence against women increasingly taking place in the online space. All women and girls must have the right to live a life free from male violence and free from the fear of such violence, including displaced, asylum seeking and undocumented women and girls. **We call on all EU member states to reiterate their commitment to ending all forms of violence against women and girls and on the EU to ratify the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, the Istanbul Convention, as well as establish and implement a comprehensive framework to combat violence against women, including sexual exploitation and prostitution.**

**We call on the UN and all governments to reaffirm their commitment to existing UN agreed language and instruments on women's rights.** We condemn the trivialisation of prostitution as 'work' by some UN agencies and reports, which renders invisible the structural damage of the prostitution system and its links with human trafficking. All governments must address the root causes, recognise prostitution as violence against women, end impunity of the commercialisation and purchase of women and girls' bodies and develop exit policies and resources to guarantee women and girls real choices in their lives.



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Since the adoption of the BPfA, the world has changed considerably. Emerging issues that have accentuated and arisen in the past 25 years, must be addressed now and prioritised in the future. These include growing conflicts and ensuing displacement of women and girls and violations of their human rights. Accelerating climate change has become increasingly an urgent issue impacting disproportionately on women. Young women are leading mass movements demanding urgent action on the climate crisis.

In Europe as in many other parts of the world, we have seen growing anti-feminist populism, which promotes patriarchal traditional values which directly threaten women's human rights, and push back on women's sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). The shrinking space of civil society is silencing women's collective voices and withdrawing funding for women's organisations. This must urgently be addressed as a priority for now and the future. A vibrant, independent critical civil society feminist movement is vital for democracy and fundamental to achieving women's human rights.

The EU and its member states are at a political turning point: we demand action now to complete the unfinished business in turning the visionary BPfA of 25 years ago into tangible and effective actions to guarantee women and girls human rights and an equal future. Investing in women's rights is the core commitment for a more sustainable, democratic and inclusive world.