



The European Network of Migrant Women Calls for Clearer Sex-Based and Legislative Action in EU Gender Equality Strategy

BRUSSELS, 10TH OF MARCH, 2026

Following the publication on March 5th of the European Commission's new Gender Equality Strategy, the European Network of Migrant Women welcomes the European Union's continued commitment to advancing equality between women and men. Strengthening women's rights and ensuring the full participation in social, economic, and political life remains essential objectives for European Institutions and Member States.

At the same time, the European Network of Migrant Women considers that the Strategy would have benefitted from a clearer and more explicit sex-based approach to understanding and addressing inequality between women and men. Effective policy responses require clear language and a consistent analytical framework grounded in the structural discrimination faced by women and girls.

With regard to violence against women, the European Network of Migrant Women notes that the EU has taken an important step through the adoption of the Directive on Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence as a key legislative framework. However, the Strategy does not clearly articulate how the European Union intends to further strengthen legislative action to dismantle male violence against women as a structural and systemic form of inequality.

In particular, the exclusion of rape from the Directive leaves a significant gap in the EU's legislative response to violence against women. The European Network of Migrant Women stresses that future EU initiatives should ensure that legal definitions of rape fully recognise the realities of coercion, power imbalance, and the conditions under which women experience sexual violence. A purely consent-based definition risks failing to capture the structural nature of male violence against women and the circumstances in which consent may be constrained, pressured, or impossible to freely give.

Forms of exploitation that disproportionately affect women and girls, including prostitution and surrogacy,

should also be clearly recognised in European policy discussions as practices linked to the exploitation of female bodies and to broader patterns of inequality between women and men.

With regard to digital and cyber violence, the European Network of Migrant Women notes that the Strategy would also have benefitted from explicitly addressing the role of pornography, particularly in relation to online exploitation, the dissemination of non-consensual sexual content, and the normalisation of violence against women and girls in digital environments.

Achieving genuine equality requires clarity in both language and policy. Recognising the sex-based nature of inequality and strengthening the European Union's legislative response to male violence against women are essential steps toward protecting the rights, dignity, and safety of women and girls across Europe.

The European Network of Migrant Women encourages continued dialogue between European institutions, Member States, and civil society – especially women's rights and feminist organisations - actors to ensure that future policy initiatives strengthen protections against violence and exploitation, while reinforcing the European Union's commitment to substantive equality between women and men.

About the European Network of Migrant Women:

European Network of Migrant Women is a feminist secular migrant-women led platform of NGOs and individual women that advocates for the rights, freedoms and dignity of migrant, refugee and ethnic minority women and girls in Europe. Our membership ranges from grassroots service providers to NGOs focused on advocacy and research. Our members cover a diverse range of subjects in the area of human rights of migrant & refugee women, with economic empowerment, anti-discrimination & access to justice, and combatting male violence against women and girls, being the most frequent activities.