

THE PUSHBACK AGAINST ANTI-GENDER DISCOURSES

GOOD PRACTICES



◀◀ PUSH*BACK*LASH

◀◀ PUSH*BACK*LASH

DELIVERABLE: T7.1 Desk research about existing strategies of organizations (Lead: G5+; M1-M10)

Version: 22 December, 2023.

Work package WP7 (G5+) – Analysis of Pushback Strategies

Author: **Valentina Maglietta, Ph.D./ Gender Five Plus**

Gender Five Plus coordinator: **Barbara Helfferich, Ph.D.**

About PushBackLash

Project: 101061687 — PushBackLash — HORIZON-CL2-2021-DEMOCRACY-01

The goal of PUSH*BACK*LASH is twofold: (1) Firstly, to systematically inquire into the present-day contestation of gender equality issues and policies at both elite and citizen levels. Approaching democracy from a global feminist perspective, we employ a rigorous, comparative, multi-method design (e.g. experiments, surveys, interviews, participatory theatre). Our project enables: (a) identifying anti-gender strategies as well as best practices in counter-acting them across space and time; and (b) assessing the effects of anti-gender discourses by focusing on parties, social media and the public opinion. Secondly, to (2) develop and test strategies that can effectively counteract anti-gender and anti-feminist discursive strategies. Aiming at supporting the quality of democratic governance in more inclusive European societies, we acknowledge intersections between gender and other social categories at all stages of the project (composition of consortium and advisory board; theory formulation, empirical investigation, and policy recommendations) and thus engage with stakeholders. To develop sustainable solutions, we bring together gender activists, EU experts and researchers from several fields of political science (political theory, public policy, political parties, public opinion, political behavior), anthropology, communication and media, philosophy, sociology and social psychology. PUSH*BACK*LASH is a transdisciplinary, gender-diverse consortium aiming at equipping pro-equality actors with practical toolkits for responding to anti-gender equality and anti-feminist discursive strategies and backlash tactics.

Keywords: Gender in political sciences; Political science; Social issues; Women and gender studies



**Funded by
the European Union**

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2021 research and innovation programme under grant agreement N° 101061687.

Views and opinions expressed are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	5
I. Introduction	6
II. Methodology: Mapping and Assessing Good Practices	8
III. Literature Review on Pushback Strategies	11
3.1. The starting point: investments in research	11
3.2. Legislative reforms, policies and policy advocacy as an effective deterrent to anti-gender movement	12
3.3. Addressing structural inequalities	14
3.4. Civil society: networking and alliances.....	20
IV. Promoting a Gender Equal European Union	23
4.1 Key actors involved	26
4.2 Strategies and tools	29
4.2.1. <i>In the field of research</i>	29
4.2.2. <i>Legislative reforms, policies, and policy advocacy</i>	31
4.2.3. <i>Addressing structural inequalities</i>	38
4.2.4. <i>Civil society, networking and alliances</i>	40
4.3 Obstacles and opportunities	43
V. Selected Examples of Good Practices in EUMS (+ UK)	50
5.1. Investments in research	51
5.2. Legislative reforms, policies, and policy advocacy	52
5.3. Tackling structural inequalities through education and awareness building	55
5.4. Grassroots organizing and networking	62
VI. Preliminary Conclusions	68
References	70
Annex I: List of Non-governmental Organisations	74
Annex II: Country Reports	76

Executive Summary

This report focuses on the pushback strategies of governments, political parties, civil society, and other key stakeholders in all EU Member States (+ UK). It was carried out with the aim of collecting evidence about existing pushback strategies against anti-gender discourses at the EU and national levels. The examples of good practices collected herein may help support future policies and actions by governments, political parties, and civil society. They are evidence of the strength of democratic forces in the European Union.

- Chapter 1: Starts by charting the overall scope of the problem, spells out the main research questions, identifies the broader purpose of this study.
- Chapter 2: Describes the methodology applied for mapping the main actors involved and selecting examples of good practices, whilst defining what is a 'good' practice.
- Chapter 3: Reviews existing literature, which is of paramount importance to outline categories of pushback.
- Chapter 4: Explores the European framework on gender equality, focusing on efforts by EU institutions, foundations, NGOs, political groups, parties, among other actors, to counter the backlash.
- Chapter 5: Analyzes strategies employed in all EU Member States (including the UK) to combat anti-gender discourses at the national level, mapping over 50 strategies at the EU level, ranging from legislative reforms to policy responses, international collaboration, networking, alliances, grassroots activism, and awareness-raising campaigns. In addition, civil society also used advocacy (e.g., lobbying for the Istanbul Convention) as one of the more visible strategies.
- Final Chapter: Presents the study's main findings and outcomes derived from the examples provided.

I. Introduction

Over the past years, trends of de-democratization across Europe and the Americas have emerged along with opposition to gender equality and threats to previous gender equality policy achievements, (Roggeband et Krizsán, 2020). Since the level of gender equality is often indicative and serves as a first warning of the deteriorating situation of fundamental rights and values, efforts to restrict or undermine women's rights are frequently seen as a sign of a "broader societal conflict"¹, "the tip of the iceberg" of a vaster phenomenon, which is known in the literature on the subject under the notion of the "rule of law backsliding".

The origins of this phenomenon are well-documented, primarily stemming from citizen disillusionment with traditional political party systems, leading to the rise of more radical political parties and leaders who promise swift and radical changes. Dissatisfied citizens elect these parties and leaders, who soon begin to dismantle the pre-existing constitutional framework, through legalistic tricks that aim to strangle any means of opposition to their consolidation (such as independent courts, free media and other guarantee institutions of the democratic State). Additionally, deceptive tactics such as commissioned referendums and the spread of fake news are frequently employed to manipulate public opinion. As these political entities solidify their power, citizens often realize the damage inflicted too late and find themselves unable to exercise the safeguards they once enjoyed to curtail state authority, (Gonçalo Martins de Matos, 2023). In light of these observed patterns and processes, scholars like Laurent Pech and Kim Lane Scheppele (2017) have proposed a comprehensive definition of rule of law backsliding, a concept widely adopted in academic literature. This definition characterizes rule of law backsliding as "the process through which elected public authorities deliberately implement governmental blueprints which aim to systematically weaken, annihilate or capture² internal checks on power with the view of dismantling the liberal democratic state and entrenching the long-term rule of the dominant party".

In such a context of de-democratization, gender equality comes under attack together with other democratic values, human rights, and rights of other vulnerable groups. Issues as diverse as women's reproductive health and rights, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer and intersex (LGBTQI+ people) rights, sexuality education, and preventing gender-based violence are collectively termed by their opponents as being part of a larger agenda of 'gender ideology' and present them as an integral package, allegedly being imposed on 'traditional families' by an all-powerful feminist and LGBTI lobby (Zacharenko, 2019). Well-organized "anti-gender movements" have arisen, particularly in some EU Member States, obstructing gender equality goals and promoting regressive laws. These movements not only fuel an overall rise in intolerance and hate (against women and their attained rights and against LGBTQI+ people), but they also fuel support for regressive laws and policies running against international and EU human rights standards and commitments on gender equality and non-discrimination, on the fight against gender-based violence and the promotion and protection of sexual and reproductive health and rights (EIGE, 2019).

¹ EP Resolution on experiencing a backlash in women's rights and gender equality in the EU (2018/2684(RSP)).

² The concept of "*constitutional capture*" is provided by Jan-Werner Müller, which is understood as the systematic weakening of the checks and balances of a State's legal system, and it may even go so far as to seriously hinder changes in political power, through control of the entire political system by vitiation of democratic processes and legal guarantees. Laurent Pech and Kim Lane Scheppele, "Illiberalism within: rule of law backsliding in the EU", *Cambridge Yearbook of European Legal Studies*, vol. 19 (2017): 6: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3009280.

Despite progress, gender equality remains a disputed concept within the European institutional context (EIGE report 2022). Understanding the pushback against gender equality remains a challenge, and responses to it are often inadequate. (Carothers, 2016). Given the lack of systematic comparative analyses, and because anti-gender discourses constitute a moving target, we still know little about successful strategies against anti-gender discourses. Questions remain about countering narratives, effective alliances, and the overall impact of the anti-equality agenda. Within this context, identifying strategies to engage with hostile governments and audiences and reinforcing democratic values and practices is crucial more than ever.

II. Methodology: Mapping and Assessing Good Practices

With this purpose in mind, our research proceeded in four stages. The first stage involved collecting and evaluating the academic literature on pushback strategies to counter anti-gender discourses. The literature analysis provided a starting point for identifying the key actors/stakeholders, which included governments, political parties, and civil society, in particular women's rights organizations, as well as NGOs involved in the fight against discrimination.

Although scant, the literature helped, in a first step, to identify clusters of strategies, which serve as a guide for the next phase of research. This step looked at the macro-political level, assessing the extent to which the EU gender equality and anti-discrimination legislation and policy framework could be regarded as an effective strategy to counteract anti-feminist discourses and activities. On the basis of the analysis, further research was done to ascertain the extent of public speeches and statements by political elites and individual Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), as well as of activities and debates among EP political groups. Our empirical research entailed collecting and studying a corpus of official EU documents published during the 2010-2023 period and tackling, directly or indirectly, the subject of equality between women and men³. Furthermore, we gathered information on pushback strategies developed and implemented by European foundations and civil society groups working on social policy, anti-discrimination and gender equality (for a comprehensive list of the key European stakeholders that were studied, please refer to Annex I).

As a result, more than 50 strategies at the EU level were mapped, ranging from legislative reforms to policy responses, international collaboration, networking, alliances, grassroots activism, and awareness-raising campaigns. In addition, civil society also used advocacy (e.g., lobbying for the Istanbul Convention) as one of the more visible strategies.

After the mapping was finalized, the strategies collected were organized along four main clusters.

1. Investments in research
2. Legislative reforms, policies and policy advocacy
3. Addressing structural inequalities
4. Networking and alliances between pro-gender equality civil society actors

After the EU-level engagement in the pushback effort was fully documented and categorized, the focus of the research shifted to the 27 Member States of the EU plus the United Kingdom. The objective was to gain a general overview of the existing pushback strategies in the Member States in the last ten years. As with the EU level, we started to look at the legislative framework and policy initiatives by governments and political parties. The focus here, as before, was to gain an understanding of the framework conditions for effective actions against anti-gender voices. In a follow-up step, the desk research tried to identify at least one prominent strategy per Member State initiated or promoted by the same type of stakeholders as for the European level.

³ At this stage, we conducted a comprehensive analysis of the discourse among political elites. This entailed an extensive review of conclusions and declarations issued by the European Council, focusing on matters related to gender equality. We also delved into parliamentary debates, motions, and resolutions passed by the European Parliament (EP) from 2019 to 2023. Furthermore, we examined position papers, campaigns, and studies conducted by various EP political groups, with our primary emphasis on the 9th legislative term.

Once these were mapped and categorized, we started the analysis of all the collected strategies with a view to identifying good practices as well as general recommendations for the most effective pushback strategies.

The selection was based on a set of criteria, rooted in EIGE's work, which defines practices with potential by considering a framework of basic, common and specific criteria⁴. From our extensive research, we have developed our own set of criteria to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of specific strategies, focusing on their content, design, implementation, and outcomes. We found that the effectiveness of gender equality practices relies on their capacity for sustainability, adaptability to various contexts (transferability), and their ability to bring about a measurable improvement in gender equality (impact). Essential elements for identifying an initiative as having potential effectiveness include the allocation of budgetary resources and the presence of well-defined policy actions with clear responsibilities and targeted action plans.

⁴ The selection was based on a set of criteria, taking as a starting point EIGE's work on good practices (available on the EIGE's website: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/good-practices/eige-approach>). EIGE's approach is based on the assessment of practices with potential through the analysis of set of criteria. Those criteria are divided in three groups: - Basic criteria - Common criteria- Specific criteria. The basic elements for defining a practice with potential are: 1. It works well; 2. It is transferable; 3. It shows a learning potential; 4. It is embedded within wider gender mainstreaming strategy; 5. It has provided achievement in terms of gender equality. The common criteria are designed and developed specifically for an area of concern (women and the media, women's entrepreneurship, reconciliation of work, family and private life). These criteria represent the key elements of the next level to assess the content, design, implementation and outcomes of the practices. The specific criteria are directly related to the single areas of concern, on which the identification of good practices is focusing (ad es, networking, funding, and training for the area of women's entrepreneurship). They allow the identification and the assessment of good practice, focusing on one single specific dimension and they characterize the good practice.

Key chapter's take-away points: A Four-Stage Research Process

Literature Review: The literature review helped identify four clusters of strategies: investments in research, legislative reforms, policies, and policy advocacy, addressing structural inequalities, and networking and alliances between pro-gender equality civil society actors.

Stakeholders Identification: Key stakeholders include EU institutional (and non-institutional) actors, governments, political parties, civil society organizations and women's rights groups engaged at EU and national levels promoting gender equality and anti-discrimination.

Desk Research: Included the analysis of EU documents published between 2010 and 2023 which addressed equality between women and men and anti-discrimination. The research also examined public speeches, statements by political elites, activities, and debates within EU institutions. Data on pushback strategies developed and implemented by European foundations and civil society organizations were also gathered. The focus then shifted to the 27 EU Member States and the United Kingdom, with the aim of gaining an overview of pushback strategies implemented in the past decade.

Criteria for Identifying Good Practices: The selection of good practices was underpinned by specific criteria, rooted in sustainability, transferability and the potential for positive impact. These criteria were further refined by considering other variables such as the allocation of budgetary resources, well-defined policy actions with clear responsibilities, and targeted action plans.

III. Literature Review on Pushback Strategies

The backlash against women's rights remains a persistent challenge across the European Union (EU), threatening the progress made in achieving gender equality. Scholars and experts have recognized the urgency of addressing this trend and have put forward a range of strategies to counter the backlash and promote gender equality effectively. The following summary outlines key strategies and insights drawn from the extensive literature collected. By analyzing a spectrum of approaches, from legislative reforms to policy responses, international collaboration, networking, alliances, and grassroots activism, this review seeks to underscore the significance of a multifaceted and unified approach in addressing the multifarious challenges that the backlash brings.

3.1. The starting point: investments in research

Before outlining these strategies, it is crucial to emphasize that authors across various disciplines have highlighted the necessity of understanding and recognizing anti-gender attacks⁵ as a preliminary and foundational step toward effective intervention and prevention. The literature has, thus, pointed to the need to provide funding for the initiatives that document anti-rights movements in a multilateral system and analyze their strategies, their support networks, and their financing (Daniel et Dereudre, 2023; Köhler, 2021; Datta, N., 2018; Carothers et Brechenmacher, 2014). As Goertz et Mazur (2008) have highlighted: "Better conceptual work is needed to bring the various dimensions of backsliding together in a sound conceptual framework". Further investments in targeted EU- and national-level research, together with a better involvement of concerned groups in law and policymaking processes, could also enhance the authorities' ability to understand and address the needs of all people affected by discrimination and victimization as a result of the intersection between gender-based inequalities and other forms of discrimination (EIGE, 2022, p. 19).

- A Shift from political activism to academic feminism

Another tactic that has been suggested by the literature and is familiar terrain for many women's movements in the EU is to shift away from political activism and towards academic feminism, which also involves the organization of workshops and small group debates (Krizsán et Roggeband 2020). In these debates, gender aspects of de-democratization processes are generally sidelined while significant attention tends to be devoted to democratic (and rule of law) backsliding. As the existing and extensive literature on populism demonstrates, there is a striking lack of research into its gendered aspects

⁵ Anti-gender attacks, often termed 'anti-gender' or 'anti-gender ideology' campaigns, represent a diverse range of actions and discourses opposing gender equality efforts, challenging traditional gender norms, and undermining the rights of marginalized gender groups. The term is often used critically by those opposing gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights. These attacks encompass rhetorical opposition, spreading misinformation, stigmatization, and discrimination of activists, obstructing gender equality legislation, organizing protests against gender-related policies, and conducting online harassment. The definition and perception of anti-gender attacks can vary among different groups and contexts.

and implications (Berthet, 2023). As a result, despite the significant implications of the pushback, the roots and full scope of the phenomenon remain poorly understood and responses to it are often weak (Carothers, 2016). More and more studies reveal, indeed, the interconnectedness of democracy and gender equality, meaning both that a quality democracy is essential for advancing gender equality through feminist initiatives, and that democratic setbacks are influenced by gender-related factors (Kantola and Lombardo, 2017; Walby, 2015;). Consequently, it becomes imperative to integrate a democratic perspective into feminist dialogues in order to comprehensively grasp the implications of democratic erosion for women and effectively respond to the challenges it presents (Baker et al. 2017; Bishop 2017). This shift in approach has led many scholars to focus on the decline of gender equality policies and its adverse effects on the participation of women's groups and feminist experts in the policy-making arena (Krizsán et Roggeband 2020).

3.2 Legislative reforms, policies and policy advocacy as an effective deterrent to anti-gender movement

It is now widely accepted that democracy and gender equality are mutually reinforcing (Lombardo, Meier and Verloo, 2009; Evans, 2005), with democracies providing more opportunities for feminist, LGBTIQ*, antiracist, and Human Rights groups to work towards deepening gender equality rights of individuals, democratizing societies even further (Tilly, 2007). A quality democracy is, therefore, essential for deepening gender equality, recognizing and guaranteeing women's rights, and challenging discriminatory legislation (Carvalho et al., 2018).

In line with the 2019 Report on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing+25), strategies such as legal reform, the strengthening of gender-responsive social protection and public service delivery, the implementation of quotas for women's representation, and support for women's movements have proven effective and warrant broader implementation. The role of legislative reforms, both as a resistance strategy against recent regressions in gender equality policies and as a potent tool for empowering women across all facets of life, has garnered significant attention in academic discourse. One underlying theme in the literature is the transformative effect of legal changes on societal perceptions of women's roles and rights (MacKinnon, 1991; Walby, 2009; Dhawan, 2014). Scholars across various disciplines have emphasized how legal frameworks provide the bedrock upon which effective strategies can be built to challenge gender-based discrimination and inequality (Williamson and Kerekes 2011, Aldashev et al. 2021, Christopherson et al. 2022, Sever 2022). Through criminalizing gender-based violence, promoting workplace gender equality, and ensuring women's political representation, legislative reforms lay the groundwork “for reshaping societal attitudes and fostering gender equality” (Barker et al. 2010; Puh, Yiadom, Johnson, Fernando, Yazid and Thiemann, 2022). Authors such as Lombardo (2014) and Rubio-Marín (2009) have explored the intricate connections between gendered citizenship, legal frameworks, and women's rights protection. In the opinion of these authors, a robust legal framework on gender equality sets clear standards and acts as a deterrent to anti-gender movements attempting to roll back progress.

There is a widely shared agreement among scholars that the EU gender equality legislation and its enforcement plays an important part in framing strategies that counter antifeminism and discrimination by questioning gender and intersectional inequalities in areas such as economy, gender-based violence, care, sexual and reproductive health, political representation, intimate citizenship rights, and knowledge, as well as by promoting

inclusionary and participatory processes in the public sphere (Lombardo, 2023). In this sense, the European Union has acted as a trailblazer forcing the sometimes reluctant Member States or candidate countries to reform their legislation with a view to strengthening their gender equality framework. Certainly, gender equality legislation varies among EU Member States but reflects a commitment to equality as a fundamental right enshrined in European Treaties. In this vein, EU directives and regulations have driven Member States to implement legal measures to ensure equal treatment, making gender equality widely accepted as a political goal (Lombardo, Meier and Verloo, 2009). Moreover, European civil society actors such as the European Women's Lobby, have also been instrumental in advancing the European equality framework by lobbying for legislation that protects women's rights, such as laws against gender-based violence and harassment, or pushing for policies that promote greater gender diversity in the workplace. Other international legal instruments, such as the European Convention on Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) have equally influenced women's rights legislation in Member States, demonstrating the positive impact of international legal mechanisms on society (Havelková, 2018).

- Gender “transformative” and “gender-synchronized” policies

Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women requires a transformation of unequal gender relations which involves change within the structures that underpin gender inequality and discrimination, including changes to discriminatory social and legal norms (UN Women Independent Evaluation and Audit Services, 2022).

To achieve genuine gender equality, policies must be “gender-transformative” (Lombardo, Meier, and Verloo, 2009), meaning they challenge traditional gender norms and relationships, promoting equitable relationships (Gupta et al., 2003), as well as “gender-synchronized”, engaging both men and women to challenge harmful constructions of masculinity and femininity (Barker et al., 2009; Greene & Levack, 2010). Scholars have also emphasized the need to adopt an intersectional lens, recognizing that the intersectionality of experiences such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and disability, when combined with gender, compounds inequalities⁶ (Daniel & Dereudre, 2022). Gender budgeting and mainstreaming gender considerations in policy development are equally critical for equitable resource allocation (Olczak, 2022). Finally, effective implementation is key for lasting change in gender equality policies (Charles et al., 2013), considering that policy change and implementation are intertwined (Cerna, 2013; Fullan, 2007) and that the success or failure of policies hinges on post-adoption phases (Engeli and Mazur, 2018). Research underscores the need for comparative studies on post-adoption gender equality policy implementation, from the one hand, to understand why some countries excel in promoting gender equality more than others; or to identify conditions that foster policies capable of effectively transforming gender and sexual hierarchies (Engeli and Mazur, 2018; Htun and Weldon, 2018).

- Challenging Neoliberalism for Effective Gender Equality Policies

While most of the academic literature acknowledges the potential of policies to address gender and sexual inequalities, a notable lack of consensus exists regarding the circumstances under which these are likely to contribute to the dismantling of gender and sexual hierarchies of power and achieve gender transformation (Htun and Weldon, 2018).

⁶ We refer to section 4.3 for an in-depth analysis on intersectionality.

In this context, the connection between neoliberal economic policies and women's realization of human rights, particularly the interplay of human rights and economic efficiency, has sparked extensive scholarly discussion. In the midst of this discourse, Grzebalska (2016), Zacharenko (2017), Sever et al. (2019), Hubert (2022), and Olczak (2022), among many others, have criticized the underlying neoliberal system. They contend that tackling gender equality policies without considering the influence of neoliberalism can hinder their effectiveness and result in backlash (Zacharenko, 2017) and thus, advocate for a shift from a human rights discourse, which emphasizes individual rights and choices within a neoliberal context "towards a broader social and economic rights-for-all discourse" (Hubert, 2022).

The following section reviews the existing literature on this issue whilst exploring several interconnected themes related to gender, family, and social justice and argues for a comprehensive and general rethinking of feminist positions and strategies.

3.3. Addressing structural inequalities

Achieving the empowerment of women is a multifaceted goal that involves addressing various aspects of social, economic, and political inequality.

- *Addressing gender inequality in the economy*

The persistent theme of historical gender discrimination and women's underrepresentation in the labor market and broader society is a focal point in feminist literature. Despite the existence of extensive regulatory frameworks at international, European, national, and regional levels, reality demonstrates the challenges women continue to face, even today, in achieving long-desired equality, especially in the realms of labor, politics, and the economy.

The drive to enhance gender equality between women and men in corporate boardrooms primarily hinges on the integration of policies and a gender perspective within labor law and collective bargaining (Figueruelo Burrieza, 2014). The literature that surrounds this issue highlights the significance of extending equal opportunities to all workers within any high-quality business project, implementing measures such as equality plans and quotas on the boards of different companies, so as to prevent discrimination in the workplace and ultimately improve the efficiency of human resources (Merino Segovia, 2009; Figueruelo Burrieza, 2014).

Overall, there is a general consensus among feminist scholars that gender equality and diversity within company boards are fundamental democratic principles that undeniably yield positive economic effects (Merino Segovia, 2009). Yet, crucially, for the development of policies and "positive actions" by governments and policymakers, it is imperative to distinguish between the principles of gender equality and diversity (Freixes, 2021). This distinction is important because women are not merely a group or a minority; they constitute more than half of the world's population and account for 45% of the European workforce (Hubert, 2022). Balanced participation of women and men in decision-making bodies of companies is not just a matter of diversity but a basic requirement of fundamental principles of democracy and human rights, as recognized in the EU Treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, whose legally binding values were recognized in the Lisbon Treaty. Given that women's decision-making skills have historically been undervalued, it is imperative to usher in changes, particularly within the business environment. This transformation is essential not only for strengthening competitiveness but also for addressing economic crises and shaping a sustainable future

within the context of a united and diverse Europe (Figueruelo Burrieza, 2014; García Campá, 2014).

- Addressing gender inequality in politics

Despite a century of progress, women remain underrepresented in politics. Empirical evidence reveals that this deficit persists not only in the European Parliament, but also in national legislative bodies, and local government positions (Shreeves and Boland, 2021). Remarkably, there exists a notable dearth of EU-wide data on the political representation of diverse women's groups, including those from ethnic minorities, LGBTIQ+ women, older or younger women, and women with disabilities. Nonetheless, the limited available information clearly indicates that these groups also face inadequate representation (European Commission, 2017). Yet the arguments in favour of achieving gender balance in politics are multifaceted, benefiting not only women and female politicians but also political parties and society at large (Berthet, 2023; Roggeband et Krizsán, 2020). Furthermore, political representation and the participation of women in political decision-making are recognized as potential factors in advancing women's rights, as suggested by Galligan in 2015. However, it is important to note that the relationship between increased female political leadership and the realization of women's rights is not straightforward. Scholars have emphasized the importance of a 'critical mass' of women in political leadership positions, underlining that merely increasing their numbers may not invariably lead to substantial progress in women's rights (Lombardo, 2008; Verloo, 2007).

Pointing to the specific problems of lack of political representation and of receptiveness of political parties to feminist demands, feminist scholarship has expanded on a variety of approaches aimed at empowering women by enhancing their leadership skills. These approaches encompass awareness campaigns, targeted training for women candidates, advocacy efforts, and political tools, like gender quotas or electoral system reforms aimed at increasing female representation among candidates, thus improving women's political opportunities (EPRS, 2021). However, these solutions primarily emphasize numerical targets and may not address the root causes of gender inequality in all its implications (Lombardo, 2008).

Furthermore, existing policies tend to frame the problem as women's underrepresentation in political institutions, portraying women as the "problem-holders" impacted by gender inequality, while men are seen as the "norm". It is thus not men's overrepresentation that is depicted as a problem for which solutions are needed, but rather female under-representation (Lombardo, 2008). Logically, "the way a problem is framed in policy discourse can lead to significantly different solutions" (Verloo, 2007). When discussing gender inequality in politics, policy discourses may differ in whether they frame it as primarily a problem for women, men, or society as a whole. If male domination is identified as the issue, solutions should challenge male politicians to change their behavior. Differently, if the problem is framed as women lagging behind men, the solutions may focus more on women making changes. In this context, frame analysis - as Verloo (2007) suggests - can arguably help researchers assess whether there is "balance", that is "consistency between the diagnosis of a problem and the proposed solutions within a policy text."

The attribution of the problem of gender inequality in politics to women only reveals, in any case, the limited capacity of policy discourses on gender equality to challenge patriarchal political cultures embedded in existing institutional frameworks and, thus, address broader structural causes of the problem (Lombardo, 2008). This approach is criticized for a. its limited problem diagnosis (Lombardo, 2008, Verloo, a. 2005, b. 2007), b. lack of consideration of intersectionality (Verloo, 2007; Olczak, 2022), c. insufficient

implementation of gender mainstreaming (Verloo, 1999 and 2001), and d. inadequate attention to men's roles in addressing gender-related issues (Lombardo, 2008; Barker et al., 2009; Greene & Levack, 2010). Section 4.3 of this report will expand on these points.

- Addressing gender inequality in education

Initially, research attributed women's underrepresentation in politics refers to a lack of political ambition; however, it is now acknowledged that deeper structural and societal barriers impede women's political engagement and leadership access (Shreeves et al., 2021). Particularly, gendered political inequalities in attitudes conducive to political engagement are found to originate early in an individual's life and persist into adulthood, with gender stereotypes playing a significant role in shaping distinct career aspirations for girls and boys.

Educational systems often mirror societal inequalities, affecting academic autonomy, funding, and leadership opportunities for women (Hoskins, Janmaat, and Melis, G, 2017; Berthet et al., 2021). As a result, power and decision-making remain overwhelmingly dominated by men (UN, 2020). Yet, it is widely accepted that, on the one hand, the participation of women in political decision-making and leadership roles are key elements for advancing equality (Bacchi, C. 1999; Verloo and Lombardo, 2007) and, on the other hand, increasing women's access to education boosts women's labor force participation rates, delays marriage and having children, makes women less vulnerable to violence, and ultimately, fosters women's participation in civil, political and economic spheres (Connell, 2014; Adichie, 2015; Heath et Jayachandran, 2016).

Public policies, particularly in education, are recognized as influential in promoting equitable attitudes and behaviors, primarily among men, and in addressing gender inequality issues (Hoskins and García-Albacete, 2021). By fostering collaboration, supporting research, and implementing targeted policies, the EU can pave the way for a future where gender inequalities in education are eliminated, enabling all individuals to reach their full potential regardless of gender.

The literature emphasizes the need for the European Union to prioritize gender-sensitive education across Member States, including comprehensive data collection and initiatives aimed at early childhood education to challenge stereotypes and biases from an early age. Providing educators with training on gender-sensitive teaching methods and curriculum design to create more inclusive learning environments is also a good practice, (Hoskins, Janmaat, and Melis, G, 2017). Strengthening partnerships with NGOs, academic institutions, and private sector stakeholders can amplify efforts to combat gender inequalities (Hoskins and Janmaat, 2019).

Lastly, the literature delves into the contentious issue of teaching subjects related to gender equality and homosexuality, an issue that faces vehement opposition from the anti-

gender movement, often grounded in biased or inaccurate information⁷. Scholars such as Kuhar and Zobec (2017) contend that public education should prioritize the acquisition of scientific knowledge rather than engaging in indoctrination. In their opinion, discussing 'morally controversial' topics is crucial to fulfilling the fundamental educational objectives of public schools, which include establishing a pluralistic democratic society and fostering respect for diversity. Public schools and, especially, teachers, should demonstrate a strong commitment to the framework of shared European values and human rights (Kuhar and Zobec, 2017). This commitment is crucial in preventing mass populist attempts by anti-gender movements to interfere with the educational process.

- Addressing the digital gender gap

The digital divide poses a significant hurdle, with women and girls, particularly those in disadvantaged communities, facing unequal access to online education and resources. This inequality can hinder their educational opportunities and future prospects. Hurdles to access, affordability, lack of education, as well as inherent biases and socio-cultural norms curtail women and girls' ability to benefit from the opportunities offered by the digital transformation. Concrete policy actions are, therefore, needed to foster women's and girls' full participation and inclusion in the digital economy, while at the same time addressing stereotypes and social norms that lead to discrimination against women. Co-ordinated policy action can help narrow the digital gender gap. This requires raising awareness and tackling gender stereotypes; enabling enhanced, safer, and more affordable access to digital tools; and stronger co-operation across stakeholders to remove barriers to girls' and women's full participation in the digital world (OECD, 2018).

- Addressing sexual harassment and cyber violence

The issue of online sexual harassment or cyber violence is also gaining prominence. Studies have revealed that a significant proportion of young women experience gender-based cyber violence, and many are reluctant to participate in online debates due to harassment. This phenomenon disproportionately affects women in the public eye, including female parliamentarians who receive online threats (UN Women, 2020). Hurdles to access, affordability, and lack of education as well as inherent biases and socio-cultural norms also curtail women and girls' ability to benefit from the opportunities offered by the digital transformation (EU-LAC Foundation, 2023). Addressing violence against women, both online and offline, is also crucial for combatting

⁷ The teaching of subjects such as gender equality and homosexuality meets with strong opposition from anti-gender movements, which argue that an excessive focus on sex education can lead to the 'sexual promiscuity' and 'hypersexualization' of children. An illustrative case is Romania, where in June 2020, the national parliament passed a law banning gender identity studies in schools and universities. Conservative groups, backed by the Parliamentary Prayer Group, a mix of Romanian deputies and senators linked to the Coalition for the Family, advocated for this law as part of their campaign against 'gender ideology'. However, on 21 January 2021, the Constitutional Court of Romania declared it unconstitutional, emphasizing the distinction between 'sex' and 'gender'. At a time when the rights of women and LGBTIQ+ people face global challenges, the Romanian court reaffirmed the principles of equality, non-discrimination, and fundamental rights, emphasizing the importance of international human rights standards. Particularly noteworthy is the Court's statement that the ban on gender studies would violate the principle of the rule of law enshrined in Article 1(3) and (5) of the Constitution. This decision underscores the need to respect the principle of non-discrimination and promote gender equality while maintaining legal coherence, also in educational matters. Similarly, the Italian anti-gender movement has succeeded in blocking or weakening legal and education reforms related to sexual minorities and shaping the public debate on sexual rights, often using the terminology favored by anti-gender actors to frame their discourse. Kuhar and Paternotte (2017) emphasize that the term 'gender ideology' has become a powerful political category, evident in actions such as the removal of children's books promoting family diversity from public primary schools and the establishment of anti-gender hotlines by public authorities for concerned parents to report the presence of 'gender' in education programs.

the patriarchal culture that disempowers girls in schools and discourages their participation in political office (UN Women, 2020).

- *Addressing gender inequality in economics*

The 'pervasive' gender-based differences in economic outcomes make gender inequality, not only a matter of human rights but also an economic phenomenon (Sever, 2022). Extreme levels of inequality, widespread joblessness and insecurity, large-scale environmental disasters, and the rise of right-wing movements and governments within Europe and all over the world indicate the urgency of rethinking economics and economic policy (Balakrishnan, 2019). The positive associations between gender equality reforms and women's economic empowerment suggest eliminating legal barriers to women's economic inclusion can unlock their potential and drive economic development, especially in the aftermath of the pandemic's disruptive impact on economic growth, income disparities, and gender imbalances (Sever 2022). The intricate interplay between economic growth and gender dynamics is a focal point within this discourse. A growing body of evidence shows that economic growth is a gendered process and that gender inequalities can be barriers to shared prosperity (Elson et. Seth, 2019). Feminist economists have, thus, stressed the importance of adopting gender-sensitive policies for women's well-being and bridging gender gaps. Approaches include integrating gender into macroeconomic policymaking to facilitate a transition away from austerity and towards objectives that constitute a caring economy (Hubert et. Helfferich, 2016); addressing the precarisation of working and living conditions that disproportionately affect families with children and especially single mothers (Korolczuk, 2015), increasing women's employment rates and quality jobs (Olczak, 2022), and adopting a human rights framework for gender-equitable inclusive growth (Balakrishnan, 2019). The call for a paradigmatic shift gains prominence through Elson and Seth's perspective. These authors emphasise the need to reevaluate macro-level policies. They also stress the importance of profound changes in the sphere of finance, to benefit low-income women, prevent instability, and support the reduction and redistribution of unpaid care and domestic work (Elson and Seth, 2019). Within this context, the design of a gender-equitable industrial policy addressing occupational segregation, promoting decent work, and transforming traditional service sector jobs does also assume paramount significance. (Elson and Fontana, 2019).

- *Rethinking motherhood, fatherhood, and care*

Although women account for half of the world's working-age population, they constitute only about a third of the labor force globally. About 700 million fewer women relative to men are in paid employment, and even when women are paid, they tend to be employed in less secure jobs with limited career prospects, poorer work conditions, and lower pay (Dabla-Norris and Kochhar, 2019, Bertay et al., 2020). An in-depth analysis of family and gender policy discourses reveals that genuine work-family compatibility, especially for women, remains a distant goal (Helfferich, 2021). This recognition underscores the complexity of the issue and the need for comprehensive policy responses. The analysis of existing literature on this topic has highlighted interconnected themes related to gender, family, and social justice, underscoring the pressing need to reconsider feminist perspectives on parenting and caregiving. Within this context, Hubert's 2022 work sheds light on the often unnoticed and unequal division of unpaid labor, predominantly borne by women, which significantly impacts their autonomy, health, and well-being. Numerous scholars have recognized the imperative need for holistic approaches that encourage shared caregiving duties. This recognition has become even

more critical in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, as the reassessment of caregiving roles and the alteration of societal perspectives on motherhood and fatherhood have gained paramount importance (Hubert, 2022; Helfferich, 2021; Fernández et al., 2019; Martsenyuk, 2018).

- Rethinking family policy

Family-friendly policies and flexible worktime models are suggested to promote gender equality and challenge traditional gender roles. Authors such as Diehl, Breimaier, Menge, and Vespermann (2016) have advocated for measures such as flexible worktime models and a 30-hour workweek to achieve a better balance between work and family responsibilities. This involves endorsing policies like flexible work hours, comprehensive parental leave, and care strategies, as well as developing family-friendly policies to promote gender equality and challenge traditional gender roles, ultimately leading to a broader socio-political reevaluation. Their vision entails a society where a woman returning to her career shortly after childbirth is not viewed as an "uncaring mother," and it is commonplace for fathers to reduce their working hours and take extended parental leave, moving towards gender parity. Additionally, suggestions include the implementation of gender budgeting and the creation of family-friendly workplaces to drive societal changes, as proposed by Olczak in 2022.

In contrast to these progressive reforms, the anti-gender movement strongly opposes such changes, viewing them as a gateway to a concerning socio-political reassessment. These reforms are seen as specifically targeting the elimination of the "traditional" and "natural" roles of mothers and fathers, along with challenging the binary gender concept of only two sexes for women and men, especially in the context of the increasingly accepted "rainbow-family model." The resulting sexual diversity is portrayed as tantamount to the "abolition of the concept of family," particularly the heteronormative nuclear family, while "gender ideology" is presented as a "threat" to a particular order (e.g. gender roles, family) and the perceived consequences (e.g. endangering the welfare of the child) are used to fuel fear and anger towards political correctness, "the elite" or politics in general (Landes, Wittenius and Lange, 2021). These arguments are instrumentalized by conservative political entities to fabricate both a gender-related controversy and a counter-discourse supporting anti-gender, pro-life, and pro-family policies and legal reforms within their respective domestic systems⁸ (Garbagnoli and Prearo, 2018).

- Rethinking the meaning of social justice

The literature review demonstrates the limitations of the current EU model of promoting reproductive rights and advocating for the concept of reproductive justice (Budgeon, 2015, Zacharenko, 2017; Roggeband et. Krizsán, 2020). The conventional

⁸ For instance, in Italy, Minister of Health Beatrice Lorenzin introduced the National Fertility Plan on May 27th, 2015, aiming to prioritize fertility in the nation's healthcare and educational policies. Notably, this initiative received a substantial budget of €150,000 for its implementation, in contrast to the Anti-Violence Plan. This policy, with its focus on promoting women's maternal roles, overlooks the necessity of challenging prevalent societal stereotypes regarding traditional gender roles. The plan's objectives explicitly reflect this bias by attempting to redefine fertility as a fundamental societal need and celebrating a 'Prestige of Maternity' through the establishment of a designated 'Fertility Day' on September 22nd. A similar example can be seen with the Religious Right organization 'Coalition For The Family' in Romania, which called for a 2016 referendum to amend the country's Constitution, defining marriage as between "a man and a woman" as opposed to "spouse," in an attempt to preemptively ban same-sex marriage. Although the 2018 vote was declared invalid due to low turnout, the campaign had a significant impact, raising visibility for the LGBTIQ community and sparking a rise in public homophobia. In Slovenia, the most vocal opponents of equal marriage rights included the association Civil Initiative for the Family and the Rights of Children and the group Koalicija Za otroke gre!, primarily backed by the Roman Catholic Church and supported in public communications by prominent church officials.

approach, predominantly rooted in the mainstream human rights discourse, “with a heavy emphasis on individual rights and choices, rather than broader social and economic rights for societies” (Budgeon 2015), “fails to address the wider systemic causes of existing neoliberal policies and their implications” (Zacharenko, 2017). This critique paves the way for the introduction of the concept of “reproductive justice”, which emerges as a proactive alternative, emphasizing a more comprehensive approach that addresses societal well-being and fairness, necessitating an overhaul of social policies (Budgeon, 2015).

3.4. Civil society: networking and alliances

Apart from the commitment of states to advance gender equality policies and legal frameworks, a crucial factor in this endeavor is the involvement of feminist groups and organizations, as well as other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society groups dedicated to advocating for the rights of women and the LGBTIQ+ community. Throughout the world, feminist organizations are at the frontline of efforts to counter backlash and bring about the necessary societal change to achieve gender equality (Daniel and Dereudre, 2023). Research has demonstrated the activism and impact of civil society actors for achieving women’s rights across a wide range of issues, including violence against women, economic rights, access to childcare, inheritance, and land rights, reproductive rights, and political representation. Overall, there is a significant academic literature to support the contention that “feminist activism works” (Mama Cash, 2020). However, while some states seem to be embracing or at least adapting to the new realities of empowered civic spheres, others remain deeply fearful and resistant. Laws and regulations restricting or impeding access to external funding for domestic NGOs and feminist activists have multiplied around the world. Numerous governments vilify and harass local organizations that accept external support, seeking to undercut their domestic legitimacy and discourage other actors from cooperating with foreign partners. Governments also use tax laws, invasive auditing procedures, or other legal and administrative regulations to harass NGOs that are recipients of foreign support. The efforts by many governments to restrict foreign funding for nongovernmental organizations and other forms of international support for democracy and rights are a “major area of pushback” (Carothers et Brechenmacher, 2014). They are often part and parcel of a larger drive to regulate and suppress independent civil society altogether. Furthermore, these restrictive measures against international support for democracy and rights are not temporary setbacks. The trend is lasting, and it is global. Dozens of governments around the world, democratic as well as authoritarian, are lashing out at a wide spectrum of democracy programs and groups (Carothers et Brechenmacher, 2014). The question that international actors now face is thus how best to limit or soften the impact of these efforts and to support the upholding of rights and lay the groundwork for a longer-term evolution in a more promising direction. Scholars have proposed multiple strategies to this end.

- Increasing funding to women activists, feminist organizations, and movements

Increasing financing to women activists, organizations, and movements is a key strategy to counter the recent rollback of women’s rights and achieve gender equality. To this end, priority should be given to removing obstacles that prevent feminist organizations from accessing financing and creating a culture of trust in feminist activists and their networks (Daniel et al., 2023). Also, women’s organizations should be given resources commensurate to the proportion of citizens they represent (Olczak, 2022). In this context, leveraging social media and digital platforms for fundraising campaigns and crowdsourcing

initiatives may offer new opportunities for moving beyond the old paradigm of NGO funding (Carothers et Brechenmacher, 2014).

- *Support transnational solidarity, coalition building, networking and alliances*

It is time to forge alliances between women's rights activists, civil society groups working with men (and male leaders), and the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual (LGBT) and other social justice movements. All of these movements have a common interest in ending gender inequalities (Barker et al., 2016). Alliances between the gender equality movement and other civil society actors involved in the struggle against democratic backsliding are important in supporting institutional moves towards a more human-centered societal model, (Hubert et. Helfferich, 2016). Gendering wider pro-democracy coalitions is shown by research to be a fundamental element of gendering democratization and bringing about gender policy progress (Kantola, 2010). The successful coalitions between feminists and pro-democracy and human rights groups build on wider popular discontent with the state of democracy and curtailing rights well beyond the gender equality agenda. They achieve their results by linking important gender equality issues to wider democracy concerns. More wide-ranging coalition work is not only a strategy for widening the constituency for women's rights claims but may also have the potential to mainstream gender equality objectives into wider pro-democracy protest frames. Overall, one can notice how the hostility and outspoken resilience to it may have the potential to increase the politicization of gender equality issues and make gender equality more inherently part of the wider democracy agenda than was the case before (Roggeband et Krizsán, 2020).

Key chapter's take-away points: Literature Review on Pushback Strategies

The literature review provided a starting point for identifying clusters of strategies, which serve as a guide for the next phase of research.

Investment in research: Adequate funding for research is crucial to document anti-rights movements and uncover their strategies, support networks, and financing.

Legislative reforms, policies and policy advocacy: Democracy and gender equality are mutually reinforcing, with legislative reforms and policies playing a pivotal role in promoting gender equality and challenging discriminatory legislation. Legal changes can reshape societal attitudes and foster gender equality. Achieving genuine gender equality requires policies that challenge traditional gender norms and engage both men and women to challenge harmful gender constructions. Intersectionality is recognized as pivotal in addressing multifaceted gender disparities, while the practice of gender budgeting stands as a cornerstone of equitable resource allocation.

Addressing structural inequalities: Addressing structural gender inequalities is a complex endeavor, involving multiple dimensions of society.

- In the economic realm, the imperative to eliminate gender-based disparities is not just a matter of human rights but an economic necessity, especially in the context of economic crises and environmental challenges. This entails implementing gender-sensitive policies to unlock women's potential and guard against anti-feminist activism.
- In politics, rectifying women's underrepresentation goes beyond mere numerical targets; it involves striving for a critical mass of female leaders and challenging the structural causes of gender inequality.
- Education systems, mirroring societal biases, demand equitable policies to ensure women's leadership opportunities.
- Bridging the digital gender gap requires addressing barriers and stereotypes.
- Combating sexual harassment, whether online or offline, is essential for empowering girls and women. It necessitates increased awareness, policy initiatives, and a shift in societal norms.
- The reconsideration of motherhood, fatherhood, and caregiving necessitates a reevaluation of gender roles, especially in the post-pandemic era, promoting shared caregiving responsibilities. Family policies aiming for gender equality challenge traditional roles but encounter opposition from anti-gender movements. A transition from reproductive rights to reproductive justice is also advocated to address broader systemic causes and societal well-being, calling for a reevaluation of social policies.

Networking and alliances between pro-gender equality civil society actors: Pro-gender equality civil society actors, including feminist groups and NGOs, play a crucial role in advancing women's rights. Strategies involve increasing funding for these organizations, removing funding barriers, and using digital platforms for fundraising. Additionally, building alliances between gender equality activists, civil society, and social justice movements can help integrate gender equality into wider pro-democracy agendas, making it a more prominent part of the democracy framework.

IV. Promoting a Gender Equal European Union

Over the past few decades, the European Union (EU) has established a comprehensive legal and policy framework to promote equality and combat discrimination. This framework encompasses equal treatment legislation, gender mainstreaming across policies, and targeted measures to empower women.

From a legal perspective, the most remarkable progress in the field has been achieved through the Treaty of Amsterdam⁹, the Treaty of Lisbon¹⁰, the Charter of Fundamental Rights¹¹, a number of regulations and directives¹², soft laws on gender equality¹³, and, last but not least, the guides¹⁴ and jurisprudence stemming from the Court of Justice of the European Union (EUCJ)¹⁵, whose body of case-law evolved against the background of a renewed commitment on social policies by Member States¹⁶ and the growing influence and persistence of the women's rights movement, both within Europe and on a global scale. From a policy standpoint, the EU's primary guiding document for gender equality is the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, which symbolizes a renewed commitment to gender equality and is particularly noteworthy because it emerged after a relatively slow-paced decade receiving political backing from the first female President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen.

⁹ The Treaty of Amsterdam marked a significant shift in the EU social policy by explicitly promoting positive measures to address gender imbalance in employment. It also established gender equality as a central objective of the European Community and introduced the concept of gender mainstreaming, which calls for integrating a gender perspective into all EU policy areas. This legal and policy evolution is outlined in EIGE's report on "the EU'S evolving legal and policy approach to Gender Equality", 2022, p. 7,8. <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/eus-evolving-legal-and-policy-approaches-gender-equality>

¹⁰ In the Treaty of Lisbon equality is defined as a value, as an objective, as a fundamental right of EU citizens. This Treaty also alludes to the transversality of equality, and non-discrimination, and imposes the prohibition of all types of discrimination on grounds of sex or sexual orientation.

¹¹ The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, which acquired legally binding status with the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon in December 2009, contains a number of provisions connected to gender equality. By reaffirming equality and non-discrimination as fundamental rights and serving as a privileged source of interpretation of EU secondary law in this area, the EU charter is perceived by many as a significant contribution to expanding and strengthening the EU's approach to gender equality.

¹² See, among many others, the recent: Women on Boards Directive (EU) 2022/2381 and the EU Pay Transparency Directive proposal (approved by the European Council on 15 December 2022).

¹³ The EU supports increased protection of women through soft law, including strategies, communications, and recommendations, among other tools, which provide guiding principles, exchange of best practices, and capacity building (for example through the Daphne Programme).

¹⁴ See among others: the Guide on the application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, https://curia.europa.eu/jcms/upload/docs/application/pdf/2018-05/fi-che_thematique_-_charte_-_en.pdf; also, the Guide on the Admissibility of court actions against 'soft' law measures, https://curia.europa.eu/jcms/upload/docs/application/pdf/2020-06/ndr-2017-007_synthese_en_-_neutralisee_finale.pdf.

¹⁵ The CJUE has played a pivotal role in ensuring that individuals have the means to effectively assert and uphold their right to gender equality. As it is well known, the first decisions in this field adopted by the CJUE were related to the principle of equal pay and equality in employment and work. Overall, from a legal-political perspective, the very first steps towards what had then laid the basis for a gradual construction of an EU political approach to gender equality were essentially connected to economic arguments.

¹⁶ Council Resolution of 21 January 1974 concerning a social action programme, OJ C 13, pp. 1–4.

These political and legal developments have certainly contributed to strengthening cooperative efforts coming from a robust network of both institutional and non-institutional actors dedicated to advancing gender equality within the EU. In this context - as will be further explored in the next section - the European Commission (EC) plays a crucial role. It has a dedicated Equality Commissioner and, since 2019, a newly established 'Equality Task Force' focused on integrating equality considerations into all policy domains. This work is often assisted by various EC services responsible for equality issues, including the Secretariat General of the EC, the Directorate-General Justice and Consumers (DG JUST), and the Directorate-General Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL). These efforts are complemented by valuable research, surveys, analyses, and shadow reports conducted by entities such as the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), and women's rights organizations like the European Women's Lobby (EWL). Similarly, the European Parliament, particularly through its Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM), consistently champions gender equality, emphasizing the importance of upholding EU commitments, monitoring progress, and initiating new proposals through numerous reports.

While the EU Council has faced criticism for its occasional inability to translate rhetoric into practical implementation and its lack of a dedicated committee focused on women's rights and gender equality, as pointed out by Hubert in 2022, it has made slow but steady progress in incorporating gender equality discussions into its biannual meetings of Member States' leaders. This transformation began with the adoption of the inaugural European Pact for Gender Equality in 2006. However, challenges persist due to the opposition from certain Member States regarding discussions on "gender ideology," making the Council perhaps the EU institution that encounters the most obstacles in pushing forward initiatives aimed at creating a more equitable Union.

This challenge is particularly noticeable in the case of various directives and proposals that have lingered on the Council's agenda for extended periods. Notable instances include the Women on Boards Directive, which remained deadlocked for a decade, the relatively recent decision to ratify the Istanbul Convention, initially opened for signature in 2011, and the Anti-discrimination directive proposed by the Commission in 2008, which still encounters impediments within the Council.

Some of the most significant advancements in areas like employment, occupation, and social security equality have been driven by the jurisprudence of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU). Throughout its existence, the CJEU has upheld the fundamental right of equality between women and men, significantly impacting EU equality legislation and policies.

Despite their limited influence, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions have contributed significantly by producing valuable reports on gender equality. Notably, the European Court of Auditors has conducted a substantial study recently, shedding light on the deficiencies in the implementation of gender budgeting.

Furthermore, in addition to these EU institutions, a multitude of stakeholders, including equality bodies, NGOs, networks, and private foundations, have played active roles in a challenging environment where the consensus on the importance of equality is under constant threat, and discriminatory practices are regrettably becoming more normalized.

This comprehensive institutional framework, encompassing both institutional and non-institutional elements, has positioned the European Union (EU) as a pioneering force in instigating gender equality reforms within its Member States and candidate countries. Even in cases where resistance may have persisted, the EU's unwavering commitment to these core principles has exerted pressure, compelling EUMSs to align their legislation

with the European gender equality standards. As a result, the EU and its Member States have emerged as global leaders in the pursuit of gender equality¹⁷. The EU's momentous accession to the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention in 2023, along with its forthcoming implementation that establishes international benchmarks for safeguarding women against all forms of violence and combating violence against women and domestic violence, will further substantiate the assertion that the EU can serve as a trailblazer. The EU's historic endorsement of the Istanbul Convention will compel sometimes reluctant Member States to reform their legal frameworks, strengthen their commitment to safeguard women against all forms of violence (including ensuring access to safe and legal abortion care), and align with European standards. In this sense, this Convention serves as a potent strategy to counter backlash in this realm.

Yet, despite these achievements, gender equality remains a contested concept, subject to dispute even within the European institutional context (EIGE, 2022). This is especially evident within the European Parliament, where the backlash¹⁸ gained momentum with an increasing representation of Eurosceptic radical-right populist groups (RRPs), mostly after the 2016 elections¹⁹. The frequent recourse to the subsidiarity principle²⁰ by these conservative political groups in the European Parliament blocs the adoption of new stringent measures, such as regulations and directives concerning gender equality, hindering progress in this regard.

The EU's reliance on "soft law" in cases of perceived competence gaps in gender-related policy areas reflects its adaptability and pragmatism in addressing evolving

¹⁷ In fact, 14 out of the 20 top ranking countries on gender equality are in the EU, according to the data available on the website of the Council of Europe. See the article posted on 28 June 2023: "The European Union deposited the instrument of approval of the 'Istanbul Convention'" via the following link: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/-/the-european-union-deposited-the-instrument-of-approval-of-the-istanbul-convention->

¹⁸ In the plenary session of 6-02-2019, the term "backlash" appeared in a EU parliamentary debate for the first time. On that occasion, the Parliament expressed concerns on the intensification of hate speech - especially sexist and LGBTI-phobic hate speech - and called on its members to demonstrate a zero-tolerance policy towards sexist hate speech during Parliament's sessions by amending the EP's rules of procedure to include a ban on such speech. As a result, on the 13.02.2019, the MEPs adopted the "resolution on experiencing a backlash in women's rights and gender equality in the EU (2018/2684(RSP))" calling for the development of a coherent and common roadmap, within the EU, to achieve gender equality and protect equal rights for women, including the elimination of all forms of violence against women.

¹⁹ According to a study conducted by Zacharenko, as a result of the 2019 European Parliament election, in fact, the number of newly elected MEPs who oppose women's reproductive rights, gender equality, sex education, same sex marriage and the Council of Europe Convention on Violence Against Women (the Istanbul Convention) almost doubled as compared to the previous legislation, reaching around 30 per cent (Zacharenko, 2019).

²⁰ The principle of subsidiarity, while designed to ensure that decision-making power resides at the most appropriate level of governance, can sometimes have unintended consequences when it comes to addressing gender equality in the European Parliament (EP). Gender and politics researchers have identified that the strategic use of 'the subsidiarity card' can be a deliberate tactic employed by certain political actors to dilute or undermine progressive measures related to gender equality. This strategy often involves shifting the focus of debates away from the substantive aspects of gender equality policies and towards what are framed as 'technical' or procedural matters. In practice, when 'the subsidiarity card' is played, it often results in a scaling back of ambitious gender equality initiatives. Proponents of this approach may argue that certain gender equality policies are national competences, and should be handled at the national or regional level, rather than at the European level, in the name of subsidiarity. This can lead to the fragmentation of gender equality efforts across Member States, potentially creating disparities in protections and opportunities for individuals.

challenges. Nevertheless, it also means that the effectiveness of these measures depends on the willingness of member states and stakeholders to embrace and implement them²¹.

In light of this, Chapter V aims to evaluate the adequacy and effectiveness of the institutional and regulatory framework for gender equality within the EU and, in particular, its suitability for framing the development of strategies to combat anti-feminism and discrimination²². To achieve this goal, the next section will begin by identifying the key actors involved at both institutional and non-institutional levels within the EU, as well as the tools they have at their disposal to succeed, including programs, funding mechanisms, legislation, directives, motions, resolutions, and soft laws. With the goal of compiling a compendium of successful strategies and good practices at the EU level, the following section will examine the approaches adopted by these key EU actors in each of the “areas of action” outlined in Chapter III, following the clusters identified in the literature review (Chapter III). The final section of this chapter will assess obstacles and opportunities arising from these collective efforts and discuss how progress toward gender equality can be further enhanced within the European Union in the face of the proliferation of anti-feminist and anti-gender narratives.

4.1 Key actors involved

At the EU level, several key actors are actively engaged in promoting gender equality. They are the European Commission (EC), the European Parliament (EP), the Council of the European Union, the European Council, the EU Court of Justice (CJUE), the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) as well as several European Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).

The European Commission (EC) .The EC, with its dedicated Equality Commissioner²³ and (since 2019) a newly-established ‘Equality Task Force’ dedicated to mainstream

²¹ In the realm of European Union (EU) policymaking, addressing gender inequality is a multifaceted challenge. When the EU faces situations where it may not possess explicit competences or authoritative powers in certain policy areas related to gender equality, it often resorts to the utilization of “soft law” measures. “Soft law” in the context of the EU refers to non-binding, informal instruments, guidelines, recommendations, or declarations. These instruments are designed to offer a flexible and adaptable approach to addressing complex issues, such as gender inequality, that may not be fully addressed by the existing “hard” laws or treaties of the EU. However, it’s essential to recognize that “soft law” measures differ significantly from the legally binding “hard” laws that form the core of EU legislation. While “hard” laws are directly enforceable and carry clear legal obligations for member states, “soft law” instruments lack this level of enforceability. Instead, they rely on the cooperation and commitment of member states and relevant stakeholders to voluntarily implement the suggested principles and guidelines

²² The effectiveness and adequacy of gender equality practices relies on their capacity for long-term sustainability, adaptability to various contexts (transferability), and their ability to bring about a substantial improvement in gender equality (impact). Essential elements for identifying an initiative as having potential effectiveness include the allocation of budgetary resources and the presence of well-defined and policy actions with clear responsibilities and adequate action plans. We refer to the methodology section for a further analysis on assessment criteria to define ‘good practices’.

²³ The European Commission's Equality Commissioner is a key figure in the EU's efforts to promote gender equality and combat discrimination in all its forms. This Commissioner holds a prominent role in advocating for and implementing policies and actions that address gender disparities and inequalities. The Equality Commissioner works closely with other commissioners and institutions to ensure that gender equality is integrated into various policy areas. Their responsibilities encompass not only women's rights but also broader equality issues, including those related to LGBTQ+ rights, disability rights, and combating discrimination on various grounds. This position serves as a focal point for gender and equality issues within the European Commission and works in coordination with various stakeholders, including civil society organizations and women's rights advocates.

equality in all policy areas²⁴, has been instrumental in formulating policies addressing gender inequalities, often assisted by the different EC services in charge of the Union of Equality in the Secretariat General of the EC, in the Directorate-General Justice and Consumers (DG JUST) and in the Directorate-General Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL). The EC is the only institution empowered to initiate legislation; therefore, it has the capacity to propose new laws, directives, and regulations to the European Parliament and Council of the European Union. The European Commission also provides funding for projects and initiatives in this area, through EU funding programmes like the Structural Funds, which with 1/3 of the EU budget, support social and economic developments in the Member States, the New Generation EU (an 800 billion EURO temporary instrument to help the recovery from the pandemic), Horizon Europe, the EU research and innovation fund, Erasmus+, which support education, training, and sports. The EC is also responsible for monitoring and overseeing the accurate and timely implementation of EU laws and, if need be, for initiating formal infringement proceedings against the respective country pursuant to Article 258 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). In this capacity, it is commonly referred to as the 'guardian of the treaties.'

The European Parliament (EP). The European Parliament is another key actor in advancing gender equality. It has a dedicated Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM), which works on legislative initiatives and policy recommendations related to gender equality. Together with the representatives of EU governments in the Council, the Parliament is responsible for adopting EU legislation. Under the ordinary legislative procedure, both institutions act as equal co-legislators, however, in some special cases, other procedures may apply. Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) participate in debates, vote on legislation, and advocate for gender equality. They also produce reports and resolutions on gender-related issues and oversee the work of EU institutions, (notably the European Commission, which is the executive arm of the European Union).

The Council (of ministers) of the European Union. The Council of the European Union, often referred to as the Council of Ministers or simply the Council, is a forum where representatives of Member States meet to discuss and coordinate their policies. Different configurations of the Council exist, each dealing with specific policy areas (e.g., agriculture, finance, foreign affairs). The configuration of the Council depends on the subject under discussion. Its pivotal function lies in the adoption and modification of legislation presented by the European Commission. In the context of advancing gender equality, the Council wields significant influence. This is because it is actively engaged in deliberations and negotiations with Member States, which ideally should ensure that gender considerations are adequately integrated into proposed legislation. However, the practical reality presents a different picture. The Council has encountered substantial resistance to progressive initiatives aimed at achieving a more gender-equitable Union. This resistance primarily arises from the opposition of some Member States, which pejoratively label such initiatives as "gender ideology." Consequently, this opposition has resulted in a protracted stalemate for numerous directives and proposals that have

²⁴ The establishment of the Equality Task Force in 2019 marks a significant step in the European Union's approach to advancing equality. This specialized task force is committed to mainstreaming equality considerations across all policy areas, ensuring that gender equality and non-discrimination are seamlessly integrated into the entire EU policy framework. The Equality Task Force works closely with diverse European Commission departments and institutions, with its key functions encompassing policy coordination to infuse equality principles into policy design and implementation, monitoring and reporting on progress, and actively engaging with stakeholders and international partners to foster cooperation and develop joint initiatives.

lingered on the Council's agenda for extended periods. These obstacles and delays have made it challenging to make substantial progress on gender equality issues at the Council level, despite the potential for meaningful change through legislative action. Creating a formally dedicated Council configuration for gender equality where ministers in charge would meet would likely make a difference in the way gender equality is dealt with by the Council (Hubert, 2022).

The European Council: The European Council, comprised of the heads of state or government of EU member states, along with the President of the European Council and the President of the European Commission, plays a pivotal role in setting the overall political direction and priorities of the European Union. It is responsible for defining the EU's overarching strategy and policies, offering guidance on diverse issues, including economic affairs, foreign policy, and major EU initiatives. While the European Council itself doesn't implement specific policies, it actively contributes to shaping the broader EU agenda, encompassing matters related to gender equality. Efforts to promote gender equality within this institution are reflected in initiatives such as the 'A new strategic agenda 2019-2024,' which outlines priority areas steering the work of the European Council and guiding the work programs of other EU institutions. One of the main priorities of the strategic agenda is building a climate-neutral, green, fair, and social Europe, with a focus on equality between women and men, as well as rights and equal opportunities for all.

The Court of Justice of the European Union. The CJEU (formerly ECJ) has played a very important role in the field of equal treatment between men and women by ensuring that individuals can effectively invoke and enforce their right to gender equality. Throughout its existence, the EUCJ has issued important judgments interpreting EU equality legislation and relevant Treaty articles, upholding the legal status of equality between women and men as a principle of the European Economic Community law²⁵ (since the Defrenne Case, C-80/70) by putting it in connection with a variety of other different legal situations²⁶. As a result, concepts such as 'gender equality', 'gender identity', 'direct' and 'indirect' discrimination, 'sex' and 'sexual orientation', as interpreted by the CJEU and the ECtHR, have been embedded in almost all recent EU gender equality law and policies and serve as important legal instruments to combat anti-feminist developments.

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE): The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) is a central EU agency committed to advancing gender equality across the European Union. EIGE conducts research, maintains the Gender Equality Index²⁷, and supports member states in developing gender equality policies.

The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA): FRA focuses on fundamental rights issues within the EU, including gender equality and non-discrimination.

²⁵ It will become a fundamental right with the inclusion of the Charter of fundamental rights in the Treaty of Lisbon.

²⁶ Similarly, within the context of the Council of Europe, when the European Court of Human Rights - whose jurisprudence is binding for the EU pursuant to Art. 6 TEU - has dealt with concepts such as "gender identity" or "sexual orientation" has applied Art. 14 ECHR (the "umbrella clause on non-discrimination") in combination with other articles of the ECHR (like Art. 8 ECHR stating respect for private life).

²⁷ EIGE's Gender Equality Index is a comprehensive tool that measures gender equality in the EU. It assesses multiple dimensions of gender equality, including work, money, knowledge, time, power, and health. This index provides valuable data and insights for policymakers and researchers.

It conducts research, collects data, and provides expertise to support EU policies and initiatives. FRA's reports and studies contribute to evidence-based policymaking in the area of gender equality.

European Civil Society Organizations (CSOs): Various CSOs, including women's rights organizations, such as the European Women Lobby, think tanks like Gender Five Plus (G5+), and advocacy groups, such as ILGA and Equinet (a coalition of 38 equality bodies from 31 countries), actively engage in policy advocacy and hold EU institutions accountable on gender equality commitments (see Annex II for a comprehensive list of CSOs involved at the EU level). They participate in consultations, organize campaigns, do research, and provide expertise on gender-related matters. CSOs can receive funding and support from the EU through programs like the Rights, Equality, and Citizenship Programme, Erasmus+ and Horizon. European civil society actors such as the European Women's Lobby have also been instrumental in advancing the European equality framework by lobbying for legislation that protects women's rights, such as laws against gender-based violence and harassment, or pushing for policies that promote greater gender diversity in the workplace.

4.2 Strategies and tools

With the goal of identifying effective strategies at the EU level, this section will examine the approaches adopted by all key EU actors in each of the primary areas of action outlined in Chapter III, following the clusters identified in the literature review.

4.2.1. In the field of research

As highlighted in Chapter III, feminist scholars have placed significant emphasis on the need to acknowledge and understand anti-gender attacks, also stressing the necessity for improved conceptual frameworks and research to effectively address discrimination and victimization stemming from gender-based inequalities and their intersectionality with other forms of exclusion. This underscores the imperative need for funding initiatives dedicated to documenting and understanding anti-rights movements.

Within the EU, institutions, agencies, and CSOs actively engage in funding and supporting projects designed to advance gender equality and counter backlash across diverse policy domains and geographical regions. These initiatives are often supported and financed by institutional (and non-institutional) actors within the European Union, which provide crucial funding and oversight for projects that align with the core principles of gender equality and democracy. These actors include the European Commission, which plays a central role in funding and overseeing projects through programs like Horizon Europe, a flagship research program supporting gender equality initiatives. The European Parliament influences and shapes policies related to gender equality and democracy, often producing research reports through the European Parliament Research Service (EPRS). The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) conducts research, facilitates policy development, and offers grants for gender-related projects. Additionally, the European Women's Lobby (EWL) advocates for women's rights, using evidence-based strategies, while the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) conducts research on

gender equality and non-discrimination, notably the Violence Against Women Survey (VAWS²⁸).

In 2022, the EU Commission selected 21 projects to support gender equality under the equality and rights strand of CERV with a total budget of EUR 6.8 million²⁹. Similarly, the EU structural funds, such as the European Social Fund (ESF), support projects aimed at improving gender equality in areas like employment and education. Furthermore, programs like the “Rights, Equality, and Citizenship Programme” and Erasmus+ contribute to funding initiatives that combat discrimination and promote gender equality, often benefiting civil society organizations and NGOs. Gender mainstreaming is the pivotal approach used by EU institutions to integrate gender perspectives into all policies and projects.

Examples of good practices³⁰

In the context of Horizon 2020 projects funded under the democracy and gender equality call, several initiatives exemplify the European Union's dedication to promoting gender equality, countering the anti-gender backlash, and upholding democratic principles. The Push*Back*Lash project, financed by the EC Horizon program serves as a timely demonstration of the EU's commitment to these values. Similarly, the RESIST project under Horizon 2020 seeks to comprehend the recruitment strategies employed by extremist groups, including those espousing anti-gender and anti-democracy ideologies, and develop policies to counteract them. Similarly, FIERCE develops an in-depth understanding of feminist and anti-feminist/anti-gender movements, activities, and discourses, and their impact on the institutional arena and on policy outcomes in four key areas focusing on the period 2010-2021, relying on a systematic construction of eight case studies (eight countries across Europe) and a comparative dimension-driven analysis of the way debates and controversies on gender influenced the dynamics and output of the policy process. Meanwhile, RECONNECT, another Horizon 2020 project, delves into the state of democracy and the rule of law in Europe, addressing broader challenges to democracy and human rights, although not exclusively centered on gender issues. CCINDLE works directly with feminist grassroots activists, institutional actors, and gender professionals, co-creating theoretical and practical knowledge on anti-gender campaigns and how they challenge democracy, particularly through pathways to violence and politics of knowledge. In a similar vein, the European Research Council (ERC) Project “Beyond Opposition”, which is the first large-scale, transnational study to consider the effects of the backlash to Sexual and Gender Rights and Equalities (SGRE), engages with the

²⁸ The “Violence against women (VAWS): an EU-wide survey” project, led by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency collects data on the prevalence and impact of violence against women in the EU. This data informs policy and action to combat gender-based violence and helps design targeted interventions.

²⁹ The projects will: (i) promote the equal participation and representation of women and men in political and economic decision-making; and/or (ii) tackle gender stereotypes, including in advertising and in the media, with a focus on young people. Tackling gender stereotypes also figures on the agenda of an expert group on the promotion of supportive learning environments and well-being in school at the European and national levels, which will kick-start its work in March 2023. The expert group will address gender specific challenges such as gender stereotypes in education and gender-based (cyber-) bullying and sexual harassment.

As part of the mutual learning programme on gender equality, the Commission has also organised a seminar to facilitate the exchange of good practices between Member States on promoting the role of men and boys in advancing gender equality and breaking stereotypes. The seminar was hosted by Ireland and Austria in mid-February 2023 and was an opportunity to exchange knowledge, share good practices and discuss novel approaches to engage men and boys in gender equality efforts EIGE, 2023 Report on gender equality in the EU, EU Commission, Bruxelles, 2023; p. 12 and following.

³⁰ For a more in-depth examination of the criteria used to define a “good” practice, please refer to Chapter II, where we delve into the assessment criteria, including sustainability, transferability, and impact.

dramatically altered social and political landscapes in the late 20th and early 21st Century created through the development of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans, and women's rights and has the potential to create tangible solutions that tackle contemporary societal issues, which are founded in polarisations that are seemingly insurmountable. Further initiatives such as "Gender Equality in Engineering through Communication and Commitment," funded through Erasmus+, extend support for gender equality within the engineering field, potentially addressing biases and challenges linked to gender equality in STEM disciplines. These programs often allocate funds to civil society organizations and public institutions engaged in gender-related initiatives.

Together with the EU Institutions, a number of equality bodies, NGOs, networks, foundations, and other equality bodies and stakeholders have a crucial role and responsibility to remind Member States, institutions, and all Europeans that equality and non-discrimination are fundamental European values and, ultimately, hold the violators of equality legislation accountable. It follows that studies conducted in these venues may also be relevant for this research. For example, in January 2019, ILGA hosted a workshop for LGBTI+ activists, focusing on addressing the challenges posed by the anti-gender movement. The workshop, titled "Responding to the anti-gender movement: The rhetoric of the opposition, our movement's capacities, and ways to build our narratives", aimed to share knowledge and experiences, and to discuss how to better tackle the anti-gender movement, not only through local and national strategies, but also through collaborative international efforts. Drawing from ongoing research, five key recommendations were presented. Firstly, engaging in dialogue with opponents by appealing to their better intentions and understanding their journey can help reduce prejudice. Second, building common ground, such as emphasizing shared objectives and struggles, can enhance visibility and acceptance. Third, raising awareness about discrimination should be coupled with a clear message on how individuals can contribute to solutions. Fourth, increasing visibility of LGBTI+ individuals and their experiences through personal stories and relatable issues like employment is crucial. Lastly, avoiding the reinforcement of stereotypes and using non-inflammatory language is recommended to make the message more inclusive and appealing³¹. Another example might be the 2012's study by The Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung "The anti-feminist men's rights movement – lines of thought, networks and online rallying", whose author Hinrich Rosenbrock proposes some strategies to deal with the anti-feminist men's rights movement. Also, the study by FEPS: "Gender as symbolic glue: the position and role of conservative and far-right parties in the anti-gender mobilizations in Europe" critically analyses anti-gender discourses in European far-right and conservative party programmes and the role of the respective parties in shaping the discourse and mobilizations in 5 Countries.

4.2.2. Legislative reforms, policies, and policy advocacy

Based on the findings of Chapter III's literature review, the legal and policy framework for gender equality in the EU plays a crucial role in developing strategies against discrimination and anti-feminism. The legal framework serves as the basis for creating proactive measures and policies that protect the rights and well-being of all individuals, regardless of their gender. The EU gender equality framework is a collection of laws that have been carefully crafted to promote gender equality. These laws are divided into two categories: primary, which come from the EU Treaties, and secondary, which include directives, regulations, and soft laws that are designed to address

³¹ Refer to ILGA's blog post dated January 31, 2020: "5 things you can do to respond to the anti-gender discourse" available at this link: <https://www.ilga-europe.org/blog/5-things-you-can-do-to-respond-to-the-anti-gender-discourse/>.

discrimination and ensure equal treatment for all genders. These measures are aimed at promoting gender parity in all aspects of life. This legislative framework addresses a spectrum of critical issues, including equal pay, the eradication of gender-based discrimination, violence, sexual harassment, and cyber violence of women and girls, and the removal of barriers to equal opportunities in education, employment, political participation, and representation. It also encompasses provisions for the essential concept of gender mainstreaming, which mandates the integration of gender perspectives into all policies and initiatives. Last but not least, it upholds the status of gender equality as a human right and a fundamental value of the EU.

In practical terms, this robust body of EU gender equality legislation serves a dual purpose. On the one hand, it empowers citizens of the EU and the EU to challenge discriminatory practices in the Member States, seek redress for gender-based injustices, and demand accountability from institutions and organizations (at any level) that transgress these laws. On the other hand, it allows the EU to act as a trailblazer, forcing sometimes hesitant Member States to align their legislation with the European standards, principles, and values of inclusivity and gender equality.

Examples of good practices

- Upholding equality as a fundamental value in EU Treaties

Equality between women and men was established as a core value in the European Union (EU) through Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and later reinforced in Article 23 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, which gained legally binding status with the Treaty of Lisbon. According to these Treaties, gender equality is not only recognized as a fundamental value (Art. 2 TEU) but also as an "objective" of the EU (Art. 3.1 TEU). Consequently, the Member States are not only obliged to acknowledge but also to actively promote gender equality, and candidates seeking EU membership must align with these fundamental EU values (Art. 49 TUE). In interpreting this framework, The European Court of Justice (ECJ) has consistently upheld 'gender equality' as a fundamental value, thereby providing a solid legal foundation for combating discrimination based on sex or sexual orientation.

From a legal perspective, the incorporation (positivisation) of a set of core values within the Treaty on European Union means that these values are enshrined in a legally binding document, the Treaty, which holds the highest hierarchical position in the EU's legal framework (hard law). It follows that these values are not mere vague or abstract principles; instead, they possess specific, institutionally recognized content and functions, as defined by the EU's Treaties (Freixes, 2014).

To safeguard these values, Article 7 of the Treaty on European Union establishes a procedure for imposing sanctions in case Member States fail to adhere to these values, which can lead to the suspension of rights of infringing states within EU institutions, including their voting rights in the Council. This entails both a political and a judicial procedure with significant legal implications and considerable political importance. Furthermore, since the Treaty of Lisbon, this procedure can serve as both a tool for post-violation sanctions and a preventive measure for anticipated violations of these values. When an EU Member State is declared non-compliant with EU values following an infringement procedure under Article 7 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), various consequences may ensue. These consequences can range from the loss of voting rights to financial sanctions, legal actions, damage to reputation, increased political pressure, isolation, loss of support, and potential domestic implications (Freixes, 2005).

The integration of values into the Treaty on European Union provides a robust legal basis and a framework of measures and protections to ensure the actions of EU Member States are consistent with EU-proclaimed values. This underscores the importance of addressing gender equality concerns within the context of EU values, as these values serve as a normative tool that can be strategically employed to advance gender equality goals (Berthet, 2023).

In this context, the infringement procedure has proven to be a crucial instrument for addressing "rule of law concerns" and safeguarding EU values, including gender equality. The European Commission has emphasized its importance as a means of addressing discriminatory laws, policies, and practices in EU Member States. However, despite its potential effectiveness as a powerful means to protect EU values, the use of the infringement procedure within the EU has been relatively infrequent³². This action can indeed be time-consuming, and their outcomes may not always yield immediate compliance. Moreover, the decision to initiate infringement proceedings is not solely a legal matter but is intertwined with political considerations. Therefore, the EU Commission might hesitate to take action in politically sensitive areas or cases, particularly when met with strong opposition from the Member State in question. Furthermore, some cases involve complex legal issues that require time for investigation and legal analysis. Given that the EC operates with finite resources and faces numerous potential infringement cases across a broad spectrum of policy areas, not every case can receive equal attention. Ultimately, due to the potential adverse political repercussions of losing an infringement procedure before the EUCJ, the EU must establish a robust legal foundation before taking action. Legal measures are typically considered a last resort, and, in most cases, the EC actively pursues dialogue and cooperation with the Member State to amicably resolve the issue through negotiation and mediation.

To avoid long-lasting legal battles and leverage a more efficient means of compelling Member States to align their legislation with EU standards and rules, the EC often adopt alternative mechanisms. One such approach, frequently employed, involves blocking funds that are designated for specific purposes. This strategy proves effective in ensuring compliance with EU values and regulations. In this context, the European Union budget plays a crucial role in acting as an additional safeguard when instances of rule of law breaches impact EU financial interests, as exemplified by the experiences of Hungary and Poland. These Member States have faced criticism and concerns regarding their adherence to EU values and rules, particularly in areas such as abortion rights and LGBTQI+ rights.

Under the "conditionality regulation," the EU can take targeted measures to address these breaches and ensure compliance. For instance, in the case of Hungary, the EU had the right to block the utilization of equality funds for financing anti-abortion campaigns, a practice that was deemed inconsistent with EU values. Similarly, in the case of Poland, the EU had the power to delay the disbursement of funds until Poland demonstrated full compliance with the rule of law, particularly in relation to eliminating LGBTQ+ "free zones" and similar discriminatory practices. These examples underscore how the EU can employ budgetary measures to encourage Member States to adhere to EU standards and regulations, thereby reinforcing the significance of EU values and their integration into the broader European framework.

³² Only in July 2022, the European Commission referred Hungary to the Court of Justice of the EU over a law discriminating against people based on their sexual orientation and gender identity, marking the first instance of using this procedure directly based on violations of EU values in Article 2 TUE.

- Recent EU directives adopted by the EU Parliament

In addition to this strong body of hard (and primary) EU laws, a number of regulations, and directives, soft laws on gender equality complement the robust European Union (EU) legal and policy framework to promote equality and combat discrimination.

- Equal Pay for Equal Work Directive (2010/41/EU) concerning the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity in a self-employed capacity, was adopted on July 7, 2010, repealing Council Directive 86/613/EEC;
- Directive 2011/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 April 2011 on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/629/JHA;
- Directive 2011/99/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 2011 establishing the European Protection Order;
- Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220/JHA;
- Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU;
- Pay Transparency Directive (2021/54/EU), adopted on April 22, 2021;
- Women on Boards Directive (2022/2381/EU), designed to address gender imbalances in corporate leadership. The directive sets a target of at least 40% of non-executive directors being women by a specified deadline;
- Proposal for a DIRECTIVE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on combating violence against women and domestic violence (COM/2022/105 final).

- Soft laws

- The European Pact for Gender Equality (2011–2020). This pact was adopted in the EU Council in March 2011, with the aim of encouraging the EU and Member States to take measures to eliminate gender stereotypes, ensure equal pay for equal work promote the equal participation of women in decision-making; improve the supply of affordable and high-quality childcare services, and promote flexible working arrangements; strengthen the prevention of violence against women and the protection of victims, and focus on the role of men and boys in order to eradicate violence. It also reaffirms the importance of integrating the gender perspective into all policies, including external actions of the EU.
- The EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025. Delivering on the commitment made before the European Parliament in the area of equality, the Von der Leyen Commission has put gender equality at the forefront of its political actions and set out an ambitious strategy for 2020-2025³³. The European Commission's 2020-2025 Gender Equality Strategy aims at "achieving a gender equal Europe where gender-based violence, sex discrimination and structural inequality between women and men are a thing of the past. A Europe where women and men, girls and boys, in all their diversity, are equal." This

³³ The EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 is structured around six themes: 1. Being free from violence and stereotypes; 2. Thriving in a gender-equal economy; 3. Leading equally throughout society; 4. Gender mainstreaming and an intersectional perspective in EU policies; 5. Funding actions to make progress in gender equality in the EU; 6. Addressing gender equality and women's empowerment across the world.

will take a dual approach in implementing the Strategy that combines gender mainstreaming with specific targeted actions to achieve gender equality. It is also the first time that an EU Strategy aims to integrate an intersectional perspective in its implementation³⁴. Following the adoption of the EU Commission's Gender Equality Strategy, in 2020, a number of initiatives were issued by the EU institutions:

- In June 2020, the Commission adopted the EU Strategy on victims' rights (2020-2025). In the Strategy the EU committed itself to do all it can to prevent and combat hate crime, in all its forms, including racial, anti-Semitic, homophobic, or transphobic hate crimes.
- In September 2020, the EU Commission presented the "EU anti-racism action plan 2020-2025". With this Plan, the Commission complements already existing instruments by putting forward an overarching tool to make sure that the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights is applied effectively in Member States.
- In October 2020, the Commission presented the Strategic EU Framework for Roma equality inclusion and participation, which is the first direct contribution to implementing the EU Action Plan against racism 2020-2025.
- In November 2020, the Commission presented the first EU Strategy for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, non-binary, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ) equality³⁵. In it, the Commission recognised that whilst the EU has very high standards in the area of fundamental rights, they are not always equally applied. This strategy complements existing initiatives to promote the EU dimension of equality in general.
- On November 30, 2020, the 2020-2024 Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy was adopted by the European Union (EU). It renews the EU's commitment and calls for action to combat all forms of discrimination, with a specific focus on multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.
- In December 2020, the Commission published the evaluation of the European Disability Strategy 2010- 2020. In March 2021, the Commission adopted The Union of Equality: Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 and also a Report from the Commission on the application of Council Directive 2000/43/EC ('the Racial Equality Directive') and of Council Directive 2000/78/EC ('the Employment Equality Directive').

• Motions and resolutions

- European Parliament resolution of 11 February 2021 on challenges ahead for women's rights in Europe: more than 25 years after the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (2021/2509(RSP));
- EP motion for a resolution on the future of the LGBTI List of Actions (2019-2024);
- EP motion for resolution on the criminalization of sex education in Poland (2019/2891(RSP)), European Parliament resolution on public discrimination and hate speech against LGBTI people, including LGBTI free zones;
- European Parliament resolution on the EU priorities for the 64th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women;

³⁴ The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) defines 'intersectionality' as an "analytical tool for studying, understanding and responding to the ways in which sex and gender intersect with other personal characteristics/ identities, and how these intersections contribute to unique experiences of discrimination" (see: <https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1263>). Gender Equality Strategy Factsheet – Striving for a Union of Equality: The Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025

³⁵ COM/2020/698 final: Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic Social committee and the Committee of the Regions. Union of Equality: LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025.

- European Parliament resolution on the need for a dedicated Council configuration on gender equality;
 - European Parliament resolution on challenges ahead for women's rights in Europe: more than 25 years after the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (2021/2509(RSP));
 - European Parliament resolution on the EU priorities for the 66th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women;
 - European Parliament resolution on global threats to abortion rights: the possible overturning of abortion rights in the US by the Supreme Court;
 - European Parliament resolution on the EU priorities for the 67th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (2022/2839(RSP));
 - European Parliament resolution on the 2022 Rule of Law Report – the rule of law situation in the European Union (2022/2898(RSP));
- Guidelines
 - Guide on the application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union³⁶;
 - Guide on the Admissibility of court actions against 'soft' law measures³⁷;
 - Guide on Article 14 of the Convention (Prohibition of Discrimination) and Article 1 of Protocol No. 12 (General Prohibition of Discrimination)³⁸.
 - Awareness raising campaigns
 - *The EU Commission's Gender Stereotype Challenge Campaign*: Launched on March 8, 2023, the EU Commission initiated a communication campaign designed to challenge gender stereotypes. This campaign represents a concerted effort to address stereotypes across various aspects of life, including career choices, work-life balance, the care gap, and decision-making. It aims to dispel stereotypes that limit individual choices and emphasizes the importance of engaging youth in this endeavor. The campaign leverages social media platforms and a dedicated website to reach a wide audience. By tackling stereotypes head-on, it seeks to create a more inclusive and equitable society.
 - *The European Parliament's Commitment to International Women's Day*: Every year on March 8, the European Parliament commemorates International Women's Day by organizing numerous events. These events serve to raise awareness of gender equality

³⁶ The "Guide on the application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union" offers information and guidance on the interpretation and application of the Charter in the context of EU law. It can be a valuable resource for legal professionals, scholars, and individuals interested in EU fundamental rights and legal principles. The document is available at the following link: [Guide on the application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union \(PDF\)](#).

³⁷ The "Guide on the Admissibility of Court Actions against 'soft' law measures" is a document provided by the Court of Justice of the European Union. It offers guidance on the admissibility of court actions regarding 'soft' law measures within the context of EU law. Soft law measures are non-binding or non-legally enforceable instruments such as guidelines, recommendations, or communications, which can have significant effects in various areas. The document is available at the following link: [Guide on the Admissibility of Court Actions against 'Soft' Law Measures \(PDF\)](#).

³⁸ The "Guide on Article 14 of the Convention (Prohibition of Discrimination) and Article 1 of Protocol No. 12 (General Prohibition of Discrimination)" is part of the series of Guides on jurisprudence published by the European Court of Human Rights (hereinafter 'the Court,' 'the European Court,' or 'the Strasbourg Court'), with the aim of informing legal practitioners about the key judgments and decisions rendered by it. In this case, this guide analyzes and summarizes the jurisprudence related to Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights (hereinafter 'the Convention' or 'the European Convention') and Article 1 of Protocol No. 12 to the Convention. The reader will find the key principles developed in this area, as well as the relevant precedents. The document is available at the following link: https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr/Guide_Art_14_Art_1_Protocol_12_FRA

issues and celebrate the achievements of women. One recent event hosted by the women's rights committee was "We are strong: women leading the fight against COVID-19," highlighting the pivotal roles women had played during the pandemic. These initiatives amplify the importance of gender equality and underscore the European Parliament's commitment to advancing women's rights.

- *Political Group Initiatives:* Several political groups within the European Parliament have launched initiatives to combat discrimination and promote gender equality. For instance, the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) Group initiated a Charter of commitment against sexist advertising in cooperation with the the Party of European Socialists (PES) Group in the Committee of Regions. This effort encourages local representatives, such as mayors and councils, to join the platform and combat sexist advertising, addressing a specific form of gender-based discrimination. These initiatives illustrate how political groups actively engage in gender equality advocacy.
 - Renew Europe's "Renew4Equality" Campaign: In March 2020, the Renew Europe group initiated the "Renew4Equality" campaign, specifically focusing on LGBTI+ rights in Europe. This campaign takes a clear stance in favor of equality, particularly in the context of rising homophobia. Renew Europe MEPs presented ten commitments to Helena Dalli, European Commissioner for Equality, pledging support for further legislation to guarantee equal rights for LGBTI+ individuals in the EU and beyond. Recent events, such as the dedication to the 'Simone Veil Pact,' continue to underscore their commitment to women's rights.
 - Greens/EFA's "My Body My Choice" Exhibition: In December 2022, on the occasion of the 6th European Green Party Congress in Copenhagen, the EP political group Greens/EFA organized the "My Body My Choice" exhibition, focusing on sexual and reproductive health and rights. This initiative addresses critical issues related to women's autonomy and access to healthcare. Additionally, the group has organized webinars and conferences to assess how lockdown measures have exacerbated gender-based violence, drawing attention to what the United Nations has termed a 'shadow pandemic.'
 - GUE/NGL's Annual Feminist Forum: Members of the GUE/NGL (European United Left/Nordic Green Left) organize the annual Feminist Forum at the European Parliament. This forum serves as a platform for discussing pressing gender equality issues and advocating for progressive policies. The group also strongly supports the right to abortion, recognizing the importance of defending abortion rights, especially in the face of conservative backlash.
- *Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)*

The European Women's Lobby (EWL) is a prominent CSO that actively engages in advocating for gender equality within the EU. One of their notable campaigns is "50/50 Women on Boards," which calls for gender balance in corporate leadership positions. EWL's advocacy efforts extend to raising awareness and pushing for change in various aspects of gender equality. This organization plays a vital role in influencing policies and fostering a more equitable society.

Beyond the EWL, numerous other CSOs, NGOs, networks, and foundations are involved in gender equality advocacy at the EU level (See annex 1 for a thorough list of NGOs working at the European level).

4.2.3. Addressing structural inequalities

The foundation for this discussion is the "EU Action Plan for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment 2021–2025 (GAP III)." GAP III is an ambitious strategy aimed at fostering gender equality and empowering women in EU external action. This plan draws inspiration from the 2020–2025 gender equality strategy, which seeks a gender-equal world and endeavors to expedite progress. It places particular emphasis on addressing gender-based violence, advocating for sexual and reproductive health and rights, empowering women economically, promoting gender equality in education and healthcare, and integrating gender equality into various policy areas such as trade, migration, and digitalization. Great emphasis is placed, furthermore, on intersectionality.

Section 3 of the document focuses on 'strengthening economic and social rights and the empowerment of girls and women in different domains.

- **Equal Opportunities and Access to Employment:** The plan recognizes the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women, especially in sectors negatively affected by the crisis. It calls for non-discriminatory social protection schemes, formal employment, and improved working conditions and pay for care workers.
- **Gender Equality in Education:** GAP III emphasizes achieving gender parity in school enrollment, improving educational quality, and eliminating barriers to girls' education, such as gender-based violence and stereotypes.
- **Access to Healthcare:** Ensuring equitable access to healthcare services, including sexual and reproductive health, is vital, particularly for women and girls with disabilities.
- **Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR):** The plan stresses the importance of comprehensive SRHR services, encompassing family planning, maternal healthcare, and safe abortion services.
- **Equal Participation and Leadership:** Promoting women's participation in public and private spheres is crucial for functioning democracies and economies. Robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are in place to track progress and ensure accountability.
- **Promoting a fair and inclusive green transition.** Addressing challenges and harnessing opportunities offered by the green transition and digital transformation is also a key area of engagement for the EU, whose actions have to ensure that these transitions are gender-responsive and inclusive, promoting women's participation and leadership in these sectors.

Examples of good practices

Economic Empowerment: Strengthening economic and social rights and empowering girls and women is a priority for the EU. This involves promoting equal access to employment, decent work, and social protection. The EU recognizes the economic benefits of gender equality and aims to close the gender gap in labor force participation rates. It supports initiatives to empower women economically, such as providing access to finance and promoting women to start and grow businesses.

- The EU supports women's entrepreneurship through the WEgate platform, offering resources and networking opportunities.
- European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) allocate funds to empower women economically through training, mentorship, as well as access to finance and investments.

Women in Leadership: Efforts have led to increased female representation in political leadership roles, with a commitment to gender-responsive and balanced leadership.

- Since the third medium-term Community action programme on equal opportunities (1991–5), the EU has devoted funds to researching the causes of women's under-representation in politics (Lombardo, 2008). This included exploring the role of electoral systems (Leyenaar 1997), gathering comparative data on women in politics (e.g., the Expert Network on 'Women in Decision-Making' and the 'European Database on Women in Decision-Making'), and preparing guidelines on how to create a gender balance in political decision making. In addition, the Commission promoted conferences demanding power sharing between the sexes, such as those held in Athens in 1992, Rome in 1996, and Paris in 1999.
- The European Parliament's Committee of Women's Rights has played a leading role in the development of the EU debate on gender inequality in politics, preparing reports and resolutions from as early as 1988, when it presented its first report on the position of women in political decision-making. 'Soft' policy measures adopted have included the 1995 Council Resolution on the balanced participation of men and women, promoted by the Committee on Women's Rights of the European Parliament (EP); the 1996 Council Recommendation inviting both the Member States and the EU institutions to develop an integrated approach for advancing women's political representation; and the EP Resolution of March 2000, followed by another in 2001, proposing quotas as a transitional measure to bring more women into politics (Lombardo, 2008).
- The EU has also implemented directives to promote women's participation in political leadership roles, leading to significant increases in female representation in government, among them: the Directive on Gender Equality in Decision-Making Positions; the "Directive 2004/113/EC on implementing the principle of equal treatment between men and women in the access to and supply of goods and services"; and more recently, the Women on Board Directive.
- Other measures to encourage a more balanced participation of women and men in political institutions also included the 2000 Commission decision on reaching a gender balance within its committees and expert groups³⁹, and a report by the EP Committee on Women's Rights on how to ensure a gender balance among candidates in the 2004 European elections.
- Within this context, the recent adoption of Directive (EU) 2022/2381 on November 23, 2022, aimed at improving the gender balance among directors of listed companies and related measures, marks an initial step toward breaking the glass ceiling within the boards of listed companies. Notably, this directive had faced more than a decade of blockage within the European Council due to strong opposition from some EU Member States. The proposal was initially tabled by the Commission in November 2012, and although the European Parliament adopted its position in 2013, the Council faced difficulties reaching an agreement. The political commitment of President von der Leyen to build a majority and unblock the Directive played a crucial role. Finally, on March 14, 2022, the Council adopted its general approach, unblocking the file. Subsequently, on March 23, 2022, the European Parliament reconfirmed its position, setting the stage for negotiations with the Council of the EU. On June 7, 2022, the European Parliament and the Council reached a political agreement, clearing the path for the final adoption of the directive in November 2022. This adopted directive aims to establish gender balance in

³⁹ The gender balance among Commissioners has effectively improved in recent years. The European Commission under President Ursula von der Leyen is committed to achieve gender parity among Commissioners in the 2019-2024 term. However, gender balance in the broader Commission staff can vary across departments and levels, while other EU institutions prioritize gender balance more than others.

the corporate boards of large, listed EU companies across the EU. It seeks to ensure transparent appointments to board positions and objective assessments of candidates based on individual merit, regardless of gender. Once formally adopted, Member States will have two years to transpose the directive's provisions into national law. They will be required to ensure that companies work toward meeting the target of 40% for non-executive boards or 33% for all board members by June 30, 2026.

Girls' Education Initiatives: Investments are made in girls' education, including STEM fields, to ensure equal access and combat gender stereotypes and violence in schools.

- The Erasmus+ program promotes equal access to education, including STEM, to create inclusive learning environments.
- STEM education programs encourage girls to pursue careers in science and technology.

Freedom from Gender-Based Violence: Comprehensive measures are taken to prevent and respond to gender-based violence, along with support for initiatives against harmful practices.

- The DAPHNE program combats violence against women, children, and young people.
- EU's accession to the Istanbul Convention commits to addressing gender-based violence.

Reproductive Health and Rights: The EU supports global programs addressing SRHR issues, promoting universal health coverage and access to essential services. This includes promoting universal health coverage, equitable access to essential services and information, and addressing the specific health needs of women and girls, including maternal care and reproductive health by raising awareness, promoting school sanitation programs, and providing sanitary facilities in schools.

- The EU supports the UNFPA to improve sexual and reproductive health and end harmful practices.
- The European Medicines Agency ensures access to safe medications, including contraceptives.

Promoting a Fair and Inclusive Green Transition: The EU aims to ensure that green and digital transitions are gender-responsive and inclusive, fostering women's participation and leadership in these sectors.

- Horizon Europe funds research projects focused on gender-responsive green initiatives.
- The EU advocates for gender-responsive climate policies, empowering women in sustainable efforts.

4.2.4. Civil society, networking and alliances

Drawing from the insights gathered in Chapter III's literature review, there is substantial evidence emphasizing the necessity of backing women activists, feminist groups, and movements within the European Union. This multifaceted effort aims to promote gender equality, counter recent setbacks in women's rights, and resist the encroachment on civil and democratic spaces.

- Financial support

Central to this endeavor is the amplification of financial resources directed toward women activists and feminist entities. Across the globe, there has been a proliferation of

laws and regulations that hinder the ability of local NGOs to access external funding. Some governments even adopt a hostile stance, subjecting domestic organizations receiving foreign support to harassment, with the intention of undermining their credibility and dissuading collaboration with international partners. This tactic often involves employing tax laws, conducting intrusive audits, and implementing various legal and administrative measures, all aimed at targeting NGOs receiving foreign assistance (Carothers et Brechenmacher, 2014).

This clampdown on foreign funding for NGOs, as well as international support for democracy and human rights, constitutes a substantial area of resistance, frequently forming part of broader efforts to regulate and suppress independent civil society. Moreover, these restrictions on international support are not temporary; they represent a long-standing and global trend. Governments, regardless of their democratic or authoritarian nature, are increasingly cracking down on a wide range of democracy programs and organizations.

Beyond mere financial injections, it is crucial to remove these barriers that impede their access to financing. Simultaneously, the cultivation of trust within these activist circles and their networks becomes a pivotal facet. Exploring innovative financing methods beyond conventional NGO funding models is essential. Leveraging the potential of social media and digital platforms for fundraising and crowdsourcing can create fresh avenues for financial support, rendering the funding process more dynamic and inclusive.

- Transnational solidarity and coalition building

Another crucial strategy for progress lies in empowering feminist activists to collaborate effectively across various levels, including local, national, and international, while fostering transnational feminist networks. Gendering broader pro-democracy coalitions is fundamental to advancing gender policy objectives within a more human-centered societal framework. These alliances link gender equality issues with wider democracy concerns, broadening support for women's rights and integrating gender equality goals into pro-democracy activism, ultimately elevating the political significance of gender equality issues and embedding them more deeply in the broader democratic agenda. For example, local organizations addressing gender-based violence may benefit from collaborating with national and international partners to advocate for legal reforms, share good practices, and raise awareness. To facilitate effective collaboration and strengthen transnational feminist networks, it is essential to provide financial support to feminist activists engaged in international efforts, covering the costs of organizing conferences, workshops, and other events that bring together activists from different regions and supporting international advocacy initiatives that influence global policies on gender equality. Existing feminist funds, such as grant-giving organizations that support gender equality initiatives, should be enhanced with increased financial resources and operational flexibility, ensuring more funding is available for feminist projects and activities and making these funds more accessible to grassroots organizations and activists, including those in underserved regions.

- Advocating for gender equality in external relations

Advocating for gender equality in external relations requires incorporating a gender perspective into a country's foreign policy and international engagements. This approach includes adopting gender-sensitive diplomacy, supporting women's rights abroad, prioritizing gender-responsive foreign aid, and actively participating in international forums dedicated to gender equality. These efforts recognize that gender equality transcends

domestic boundaries and is a critical element of a country's interactions with the global community.

- Gender mainstreaming and monitoring

Gender mainstreaming is a strategic approach to infuse gender considerations into all aspects of policymaking and organizational activities. It entails analyzing policy impacts on different genders, implementing institutional changes to promote gender equality, routinely monitoring and evaluating progress, and establishing accountability mechanisms. In this context, monitoring and evaluation processes are indispensable for identifying areas where gender disparities persist, pinpointing effective interventions, and ensuring that policies and programs yield positive outcomes for all genders.

Examples of good practices

- Increasing Funding to Women Activists and Organizations

The EU allocates a significant portion of its Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) to projects that promote gender equality, social inclusion, and combat discrimination. This includes initiatives to support women's economic empowerment and entrepreneurship. More specifically, the the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) is set to play a pivotal role in bolstering gender equality, with Member States planning to allocate nearly €85 billion from ESF+ investments for the 2021-2027 period. These funds are earmarked to support gender equality either through the integration of gender considerations across policies (gender mainstreaming) or the implementation of specific measures. Notably, Member States have dedicated €4.3 billion from the ESF+ to promote gender-balanced participation in the labor market. This substantial financial allocation empowers Member States to develop policies that facilitate work-life balance, both in and outside the workplace. It fosters the creation of gender-sensitive policies, encourages increased women's participation in the labor market, facilitates access to affordable and accessible care services for children, older individuals, and persons with disabilities, and combats gender stereotypes. Furthermore, the ESF+ Regulation mandates both Member States and the Commission to actively support initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality. These actions encompass enhancing women's engagement in employment, fostering improved work-life balance and childcare options, addressing the disproportionate representation of women in poverty, and combating gender discrimination in labor markets, education, and training. In the 2021-2027 funding period, ESF+ investments will be closely monitored to assess their impact on gender equality. The implementation of a new reporting system will offer enhanced visibility into how funding is directed toward projects that exert the most significant influence on advancing gender equality.

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) also provides funding, resources, and research support for gender equality initiatives across Europe. It works to promote gender mainstreaming and collects data to inform policy decisions.

- Supporting transnational solidarity

The European Women's Lobby (EWL) serves as a significant example of an organization supported by the EU that promotes transnational solidarity among women's groups and activists across Europe. With EU funding, the EWL creates a collaborative platform for women's organizations from various EU countries, enabling them to work together, share ideas, and coordinate actions. This backing allows the EWL to engage in various activities to advance gender equality, including advocating for gender-sensitive policies, raising awareness about women's rights, and actively participating in EU policymaking processes. The EWL's advocacy has had a notable impact on gender-

related policies within the EU and has contributed to the broader transnational feminist movement. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the EWL campaigned for gender-responsive recovery plans, emphasizing the pandemic's disproportionate impact on women and pushing for measures like increased funding for women-led businesses and better social protection.

The EU also supports transnational feminist networks and organizations through external action programs, partnering with international entities dedicated to gender equality. This support encompasses funding, technical assistance, and collaborative initiatives aimed at addressing global gender-related challenges. For instance, the EU collaborates with UN Women to advance gender equality and women's empowerment worldwide. EU-funded programs focus on eradicating gender-based violence, promoting women's participation in peace and security processes, and ensuring women's access to education and economic opportunities in different regions. Additionally, the EU's collaboration with regional organizations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America supports transnational feminist networks working to eliminate gender-based discrimination and promote gender equality within their regions, fostering the sharing of knowledge and resources for more effective advocacy efforts.

- Advocating for gender equality in external relations
 - EU Gender Action Plan (GAP III): GAP III is an ambitious agenda for gender equality and women's empowerment in EU external action. It focuses on promoting gender equality, addressing gender-based violence, and integrating gender into various policy areas, including trade and migration.
 - EU Gender Equality Strategy: The EU's Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 outlines a comprehensive approach to promoting gender equality both within the EU and in external relations.
-
- Gender mainstreaming and monitoring
 - Gender Mainstreaming: The EU follows a gender mainstreaming approach, which involves integrating gender perspectives into all policies and initiatives. This ensures that gender considerations are taken into account in various policy areas.
 - Monitoring and Reporting: The EU monitors progress on gender equality through various mechanisms, including data collection, impact assessments, and reports. This multifaceted approach includes monitoring the gender pay gap, conducting impact assessments in education, assessing gender mainstreaming in employment policies, reporting on gender-based violence, and tracking maternal health and pregnancy leave. The EU also monitors gender representation in decision-making, assesses the gender digital divide, and examines gender balance in research and innovation. These reports and data analyses play a crucial role in identifying gender disparities, informing policy adjustments, and guiding initiatives to advance gender equality.

4.3 Obstacles and opportunities

Despite notable advancements, persistent hurdles continue to shape gender disparities in the EU. Stemming from the findings of the analysis conducted in preceding sections, which drew from a wide range of EU official documents and policies, several impediments and prospects have become apparent.

While acknowledging the significance of the EU's gender equality policy and legal frameworks in framing pushback strategies, it cannot be overlooked, however, that EU official documents and policies tend to predominantly frame the issue of

gender inequality as women-centered, with women being the primary focus of actions, while men are rarely called upon to take action or targeted by proposed measures. As a result, the problem of male domination and patriarchy is diagnosed but left without a solution, and “no appeals are made to men to initiate change” (Lombardo, 2008). This absence of an explicit discourse on men's roles in gender inequality undoubtedly contributes to the preservation of existing power hierarchies and minimizes discussions around structural inequality. This approach has faced criticism for a. its limited problem diagnosis (Lombardo, 2008, Verloo, a. 2005, b. 2007), b. lack of consideration for intersectionality (Verloo, 2007; Olczak, 2022), c. insufficient implementation of gender mainstreaming (Verloo, 1999 and 2001), and d. inadequate attention to men's roles in addressing gender-related issues (Lombardo, 2008; Barker et al., 2009; Greene & Levack, 2010).

- *Limitations in problem framing and diagnosis*

As Verloo (2007) aptly points out, the framing of a problem in policy discourse can significantly shape the solutions proposed. For example, whether gender violence is perceived as a women's problem, a men's problem, or a societal problem can lead to vastly different policy solutions. Policy discourses implicitly or explicitly attribute different roles to different actors, affecting the diagnosis and prognosis of gender inequality.

This issue becomes particularly evident when examining the framing of women's qualitative representation in politics in the European Union (EU). EU policies addressing gender inequality in politics often focus on women's underrepresentation as a problem that needs to be resolved. They frame this problem mainly as a quantitative issue – the low number of women in political institutions – and propose measures such as quotas, changes in electoral rules, and monitoring the progress on women in politics, as solutions. Debates on the need to change electoral rules centre on the advantages of a proportional system and the relevance of an equal composition of candidate lists. Furthermore, the EU often presented gender inequality in politics as a waste of women's skills and human resources for the labor market, using utilitarian arguments to justify the need for women's participation, underpinned by the idea that women's skills are needed in the labour market. Less often is the under-representation of women situated in the larger context of the traditional gendered division of labour. EU texts promote the responsibility of parties to increase women's numbers. However, the EU privileges soft measures to pressure parties to revise their selection procedures to increase women's numbers, due to the lack of remit or ‘competence’, which excludes the possibility of enforcing legislation on quotas in the member states. This can help us understand the EU focus on benchmarking, elaborating guidelines for member states and monitoring progress on women in politics, with the limited enforcement that is imposed by ‘soft law’ measures (Lombardo, 2008).

The role of state and EU institutions in encouraging and supporting women in politics by training and qualifying them is among the most frequently suggested solutions. Although it arguably reveals “signs of a patronizing attitude towards women” (Lombardo, 2008), this frame also has more progressive features, in that the training and information programmes for women candidates contain elements fostering women's autonomy. Conversely, no solution is offered to the problem of male domination. The assertion of the need to change male political elites is a very ‘minor’, or marginal, frame. The EU's focus on target figures avoids more difficult and controversial issues such as the challenging of male hegemony over positions of power in the political sphere. Rather than providing a comprehensive diagnosis of the problem of gender inequality in politics, official documents eagerly offer solutions to it.

Furthermore, this exclusive focus on women's underrepresentation implies that women are solely responsible for addressing gender inequality in politics, while men are not called upon to contribute to the solution. This approach reflects a limited capacity of policy discourses to challenge patriarchal political cultures deeply embedded in existing institutional frameworks (Hubert, 2022; Olczak 2022; Zacharenko, 2019; Grzebalska, 2016; Stratigaki, 2005). The predominant emphasis on achieving numerical targets tends to overshadow more comprehensive solutions that address structural causes like the traditional division of labor and patriarchal power relations (Hubert, 2022; Olczak 2022; Zacharenko, 2019; Grzebalska, 2016). These broader solutions, often referred to as "minor frames" are underrepresented in EU policy discussions due to limited inclusion of feminist activists and gender experts in official texts and a lack of consideration for intersectionality (Lombardo, 2008).

- Lack of attention to intersectionality

A noteworthy limitation in EU policy frames is the lack of attention to intersectionality. EU policies primarily address gender inequality in isolation, disregarding how it intersects with other factors such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and disability. This approach overlooks the complex nature of inequalities and the need for tailored solutions (Verloo, 2007).

As in the previous example regarding gender inequality in politics, official documents at the EU level tend to presume that the low number of women is responsible for the fact that women's interests are not represented and that policy outcomes are not women-friendly. The underlying assumption is that quantitative representation will by default lead to the qualitative representation of women. This, however, is a contested view in current scholarly debate, due to the risks involved in treating women as subjects sharing a common identity as 'women', not intersected by class, race, sexual preference or any other structural inequality. In effect, it reduces a multiplicity of different subject positions to a shared 'essence' derived from a privileged, hegemonic identity (Lombardo, 2008).

Certainly, EU legal and policy instruments, along with CJEU case law, have gradually reflected a more careful appreciation of issues of multiple and intersectional discrimination and inequalities. However, two main issues seem to stand in the way of a genuine integration of intersectionality in the EU's approach to equality, including gender equality. The first problem is linked to the inherent limitations of the current EU legal framework on anti-discrimination. On the one hand, existing EU legislation, as it stands, fails to provide even and comprehensive protection against discrimination on all grounds mentioned by Article 19 of TFEU (sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, and sexual orientation) in all areas of life. The European Network of Equality Bodies (Equinet) has referred in this respect to the existence of a 'hierarchy of grounds', with racial or ethnic origin at the top, closely followed by sex, with religion or belief, disability, and sexual orientation below this and age at the bottom. On the other hand, intersectional discrimination is as such currently not protected under EU law. Against this background, experts have called on the EU's legislature, and in particular, the European Parliament and the Council, to swiftly deblock negotiations on the proposed horizontal equality directive and to introduce in existing legal instruments specific provisions aimed at providing protection against intersectional forms of discrimination. The role and capacity of equality bodies to prompt progress at the national level could also be better explored and supported, as suggested by Equinet, also with a view to the forthcoming proposal by the Commission establishing minimum binding standards on the mandate, powers, status, independence, resources and effectiveness of such bodies. A second challenge concerns the limited use of intersectional analysis in the process of law and policymaking, including

impact assessments, implementation monitoring, and evaluation of existing legal and policy instruments, (EIGE, 2022).

The EU gender equality strategy helpfully recognizes the need to adopt policies that take into account an intersectional perspective by acknowledging the diversity among women and men and girls and boys. The Commission's study "New Visions for Gender Equality 2019" also notes the need to address the complexities of inequalities in gender equality policies. According to civil society stakeholders, however, more concrete measures should be put forward at the level of EU law and policymaking to ensure that the needs of specific groups are adequately identified and catered for, (EIGE, 2022). Thus, it appears necessary to tackle "intersectionality" in the structure of a policy frame by questioning the extent to which policy discourses represent any other structural inequalities beyond gender (class, ethnicity, race, age, sexuality, etc.) as part of the diagnosis and prognosis of the problem of gender inequality (Verloo, 2007; Olczak, 2002). Further theoretical and empirical research appears to be needed to explore what other 'minor' frames are present and how they are articulated in the discourse of both governmental and non-governmental actors. Such studies might generate a complementary set of questions to those asked by the current research on political representation, thus broadening the range of insights on how to address gender bias in the sphere of politics (Lombardo, 2008).

- *A misunderstanding of 'gender mainstreaming'*

Another recurring theme in the existing body of literature is the misconception surrounding the concept of Gender Mainstreaming. While it is recognized as a "legal category" within the EU policy discussions, it is often perceived merely as a procedural aspect within the EU framework. This limited view tends to emphasize data collection related to gender-related issues, rather than embracing its potential as a tool for challenging and reshaping the fundamental structural causes of gender inequality in politics, as advocated by the literature (Squires 2005; Verloo 2005a; Walby 2005).

Verloo (2005) underscores the prevailing trend in Gender Mainstreaming, where the primary focus has predominantly been on analytical and educational tools. Mechanisms involving consultation and participation are rarely encountered, and when they do surface, it is primarily in local or regional Gender Mainstreaming initiatives. This heavy emphasis on analytical and educational tools may suggest a technocratic approach to addressing gender inequality as a policy matter. This approach can be problematic because it overlooks the inherently political nature of interpretations of needs (Fraser, 1989) and undermines active citizen involvement. Furthermore, a technocratic approach often leads to the depoliticization of issues by presenting problems as objective "facts" immune to differing political opinions and perspectives.

Similarly, as highlighted by Meier et al. (2005), the attribution of the problem of gender inequality in politics to women only, and the lack of a call for change on the part of men, reveal the limited capacity of policy discourses on gender equality to challenge patriarchal political cultures embedded in existing institutional frameworks. Furthermore, an exclusive focus on numerical targets without an equally robust discourse promoting a comprehensive approach could have unintended consequences by de-politicizing the issue. This approach may suggest that the problem is solely about women and achieving numerical goals rather than addressing the transformation of gender power dynamics.

- *Lack of engagement of men and boys*

Returning to our initial point, the absence of an explicit discourse concerning men's roles in perpetuating gender disparities serves to uphold existing power structures and

minimizes confrontations regarding structural inequality. This lack of discourse is not without consequences. Hearn argues that refraining from explicit mention of men and their power dynamics in relation to women, children, young people, and even among themselves is a systematic means of avoiding a critical examination of these dynamics (1998b, 786; see also Hearn, Pringle, and Balkmar 2018). Weiner (2023) posits that men are often treated as "unproblematic" and "undifferentiated," with their privilege rarely being openly acknowledged. This omission in dialogue obstructs a thorough understanding of the intricacies of privilege and obstructs efforts to deconstruct gender power structures.

In their work, Gary Barker and co-authors (2016) underscore the significance of actively engaging men in endeavors to promote gender equality and the role of public policies in facilitating this endeavor. While various initiatives to involve men in gender equality have concentrated on educational and awareness campaigns, it is imperative to acknowledge that well-designed interventions can lead to alterations in men's behaviors and attitudes, especially those that challenge traditional norms of masculinity. However, these interventions have frequently had a limited scope, mainly addressing health issues, and have not ventured into the transformation of policies or deeply ingrained gender norms within crucial societal institutions. According to these authors, achieving more extensive societal change necessitates the alteration of gender norms and the cultures within institutions that perpetuate inequalities and violence. Laws and policies explicitly addressing violence prevention and gender equality can exert a profound and enduring influence. Moreover, it is crucial to investigate gender inequality, men, and masculinities within the broader context of poverty and social exclusion. Structural factors like poverty can exacerbate gender inequalities, affecting men's behaviors concerning seeking healthcare and their overall well-being. Consequently, addressing gender disparities should adopt a more holistic perspective that includes marginalized groups such as migrants, individuals impacted by armed conflict, and LGBTQ+ individuals. Strategies for advancing gender equality and involving men encompass collaborating with women's rights movements, framing gender equality as a collective benefit for all, seizing opportunities presented by specific issues and events for constructive dialogue, engaging civil society in policy implementation and enforcement, and empowering the younger generation to champion gender justice. Additionally, forging alliances among women's rights advocates, civil society organizations focused on men, and social justice movements can generate a formidable collective force to combat gender inequalities and promote favorable shifts in attitudes and behaviors related to gender roles and responsibilities (Barker et al., 2016).

- Ways forward

In this section, we have explored contemporary challenges and identified ways to move forward drawing from recent literature and numerous policy analyses. Rather than merely highlighting the deficiencies in EU efforts to address gender inequality, the identified obstacles point towards fresh opportunities and underscore the importance of considering "minor frames" in the formulation and implementation of policies. The prevalence of the dominant "major" quantitative frame in EU policies often obscures the significance of alternative "minor" frames that delve into the root causes of issues, such as the traditional gender-based division of labor and the presence of patriarchal relations across various aspects of society. These "minor" frames also advocate for political strategies centered on women's empowerment. However, the effectiveness of these "minor" frames in addressing gender bias within political cultures and institutions is limited, partly due to their infrequent appearance and the possibility that their proposed solutions may not align with the challenge of male domination in politics. This scarcity of alternative frames can be attributed to the underrepresentation of feminist activists and gender

experts in official policy documents, as well as the absence of intersectionality analyses in policy discussions. The inclusion of these voices and analyses within policy texts holds the potential to shift the focus of political discourse toward recognizing the role of power dynamics in perpetuating gender and other forms of inequality (Lombardo, 2008). Finally, our consideration of the importance of the infringement procedure as a short-term judicial solution to protect EU values, underscores the potential for discussing gender equality issues within the framework of EU values, considering that EU values have a normative function that can be strategically used to advance gender equality objectives. In this sense, equality should be upheld as a non-negotiable democratic value in the EU wherever possible, even if only in debates and non-binding measures because they create an environment in which gender equality is protected.

Key chapter's take-away points: Promoting a Gender Equal EU

The EU has developed a comprehensive legal and policy framework to promote gender equality, with key milestones including the Treaty of Amsterdam, the Treaty of Lisbon, and the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025. EU directives and regulations complement the legal framework and provide additional means to promote gender equality.

Various EU institutions and organizations, such as the European Commission, the European Parliament, and women's rights groups, play essential roles in advancing gender equality.

The EU is a pioneering force in instigating gender equality reforms within its Member States and candidate countries to align to its standards on gender equality.

The EU employs a combination of hard and soft law, including the infringement procedure and budgetary measures, to ensure compliance with its values and regulation; although, these procedures can be complex and politically sensitive.

The EU's gender equality initiatives cover various domains, including economic empowerment, education, healthcare, and the digital realm, with a focus on intersectionality. Transnational solidarity and coalition building among feminist activists are crucial for advancing gender policy objectives.

The EU's commitment to gender equality has positioned it as a global leader, as evidenced by its accession to the Istanbul Convention in 2023.

Despite progress, gender equality remains a contested concept within the EU, with challenges stemming from anti-feminist sentiments and political opposition.

Disagreement and resistance to gender equality persist, particularly in the European Parliament, where Eurosceptic groups impede the adoption of new measures. Similarly, the European Council faces challenges in advancing gender-related initiatives due to opposition from some member states.

While recognizing the importance of the EU's gender equality policy and legal structures in framing pushback strategies, this analysis has uncovered certain hurdles and possibilities. These encompass concerns regarding problem definition, notably the limited emphasis on women's quantitative underrepresentation, the need for greater attention to intersectionality, the misunderstanding of 'gender mainstreaming,' and the necessity of engaging men in tackling gender imbalances. To move forward, the research recommends exploring alternative viewpoints in policy formulation, recognizing the role of power dynamics in perpetuating inequality, and strategically leveraging EU common values to advance gender equality.

V. Selected Examples of Good Practices in EUMS (+ UK)

The effectiveness of gender equality practices hinges on their ability to be sustained over time, their potential to be applied in different contexts, and their capacity to bring about a substantial improvement in gender equality. The identification of initiatives with such potential hinges on factors like the allocation of budgetary resources and the presence of well-defined policy actions with clear responsibilities and targeted action plans. In this chapter, we examine innovative policies and initiatives designed to counter the anti-feminist backlash. Our research encompasses evidence of good practices gathered from all EU Member States, including the UK, across the 5 areas of action identified in previous chapters. While the categories serve to systematize the use of strategies, we have uncovered convincing strategies that include actions across these four areas.

But before developing this further, it is important to keep three premises in mind. First, we should be aware that when it comes to legal and other measures to advance women and girls' rights and push back the backlash, there are large differences between EU countries, reflecting different gender policy traditions. By acknowledging the diversity of contexts and challenges, it becomes clear that effective strategies must be context-specific and tailored to address the particular obstacles and opportunities in each setting. In other words, there is no one-size-fits-all approach or universal set of strategies that can be uniformly applied in all contexts. The experiences, needs, and barriers faced by feminist protagonists can differ significantly based on the factors such as cultural norms, socio-political context, legal frameworks, and historical conditions. For example, organizations focusing on reproductive rights may face different challenges than those focused on economic empowerment or gender-based violence. Strategies need, therefore, to be responsive to these specific challenges and goals. This requires understanding and working, not only at the EU and international level, but also within the local context to develop strategies that resonate with the communities and effectively address the specific barriers to gender equality and women's rights in that context. To paraphrase an American activist and feminist Charlotte Bunch, when struggling with the current backlash we should «think globally and act locally»⁴⁰.

Secondly, it is our premise that gender equality and its effective defense constitute an important indicator of the strength and resilience of democratic societies. Democratic backsliding, as we can observe in some EU countries, can effectively undermine the best of strategies. Therefore, it pays to have a closer look at the existing legal gender equality frameworks and their impact on gender equality. To this end, we use EIGE's Gender

⁴⁰Grabowska, M. "Cultural War or Business as Usual? Recent Instances and the Historical Origins of the Backlash Against Women's Rights and Sexual Rights in Poland" in: *Anti-Gender Movements on the Rise? Strategising for Gender Equality in Central and Eastern Europe*, Heinrich Böll Foundation, 2015, p. 64.

Equality Index to link existing strategies that counter antifeminism to the country's score on the index⁴¹. We will come back to this at some point in the conclusion.

Thirdly, it is important to emphasize that, due to the limited scope and objective of this report, the examples of good practice cited are not intended to be representative. Instead, they are examples of effective and possibly relevant solutions implemented across Europe, (inter alia, by countries with considerable differences in their gender equality scores), with the broader aim to provide a scoping overview of the various ways to combat backlash and strengthen women's rights within the EU.

5.1. Investments in research

As highlighted in chapter III, feminist scholars have emphasized the critical importance of recognizing and comprehending anti-gender attacks, as well as the necessity for funding initiatives dedicated to documenting anti-rights movements, also stressing the need for improved conceptual frameworks and research to effectively address discrimination and victimization stemming from gender-based inequalities and other forms of discrimination.

At the national level within the European Union Member States (EUMS), there is evidence of a range of initiatives and projects that are dedicated to advancing gender equality, strengthening democratic principles, and countering the resistance against these core values. These projects often secure funding and support from diverse sources, including the European Union itself (as seen in the Horizon research and innovation programme mentioned earlier), national governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international entities.

For instance, in France, local authorities in Marseille have initiated "Citizenship Workshops." These workshops are funded endeavors designed to engage marginalized communities, including women, in constructive dialogues concerning democracy, inclusion, and strategies to combat extremism. In Catalonia, Spain, government grants are channeled into projects such as "Women Breaking Barriers," which provide essential training and resources to empower immigrant women, thereby enabling their active participation in local communities and democratic processes. Likewise, local governments in Warsaw, Poland, provide grants to support projects like "Women in Politics Training." These initiatives actively encourage women's engagement in local politics while concurrently challenging gender-based discrimination in leadership roles. In Ireland, research institutions receive government funding for projects such as "Populism in the Digital Age." These endeavors are dedicated to the analysis of the strategies and consequences of populist movements, with a particular focus on their impact on democratic principles and gender equality. Furthermore, in the Netherlands, the Dutch government actively backs initiatives like "Gender-Equal Media Campaigns" that take on the task of challenging and deconstructing gender stereotypes in media, with the ultimate goal of promoting gender equality and countering the proliferation of discrimination. Additionally, in Athens, Greece, regional authorities fund projects such as "Civic

⁴¹ As for the selection of countries to report on good practices, reference was made to the latest Gender Equality Index published by the EIGE in 2022. The Gender Equality Index score for the EU is 68.6 points out of 100 – a 0.6-point increase since the 2021 Index. The score is only 5.5 points higher than in 2010, pointing to an unbearably slow pace of change, barely averaging a 1-point increase every 2 years (EIGE, 2021e). These hard-won and fragile gains have been undermined in some domains and sub-domains by the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, the index shows that gender equality levels vary considerably among Member States – from 83.9 points in Sweden to 53.4 points in Greece. Following the G.E. Index it was possible, therefore, to group the 27 EUMS into three sub-groups: those with a gender equality score above 70 points, those with an index ranging between 60 and 70 points, and those below 60 points. (See the sections below).

Empowerment Workshops." These workshops facilitate dialogues among women and other minority groups (such as LGBTQ+ individuals, refugees, people with disabilities, and ethnic minorities, among many others), providing a platform for discussions on democratic values, civic engagement, and social inclusion. Finally, in Portugal, the government allocates funding to organizations like "Women's Rights Watch." These organizations are at the forefront of advocacy efforts aimed at advancing gender equality and safeguarding women's rights, with a clear mission of challenging discrimination and advocating for legal reforms.

5.2. Legislative reforms, policies, and policy advocacy

Advocating for and enacting policies and laws that promote gender equality are powerful strategies used to combat antifeminism. In this context, the European Union has acted as a trailblazer forcing the sometimes reluctant Member States or candidate countries to reform their legislation with a view to strengthening their gender equality framework. As discussed in section IV, EU gender equality legislation and its enforcement play an important part in framing strategies that counter antifeminism and discrimination. Moreover, European civil society actors such as the European Women's Lobby, have also been instrumental in advancing the European equality framework by lobbying for legislation that protects women's rights, such as laws against gender-based violence and harassment, or pushing for policies that promote greater gender diversity in the workplace.

At the Member State level, gender equality legislation is as diverse as the different cultures in the European Union, but they converge on the basic commitments to equality as a fundamental right as enshrined in the European Treaties. However, there are still areas related to gender equality where the EU competence is questioned or does not exist, so it is up to the Member States to enact legislation that goes beyond the EU directives. In recent years, EU legislation has been broadening its scope with the new directive against violence against women. Widening the scope of European legislation on gender equality to areas like violence against women, including possible prostitution, is a strong signal against anti-feminist actions and discourses.

Good practices in Countries with a gender equality score above 70 points⁴²

Sweden and Finland have the most effective gender equality frameworks of the EU 27 and thus score the highest with the GEI. Their national plans to promote gender equality in various areas, including education, employment, and political representation also include

⁴² A score above 70 points in the Gender Equality Index generally indicates that a country is making significant progress towards achieving gender equality across various dimensions, including areas such as:

- Work: Equal opportunities, participation, and treatment in the labor market.
- Money: Gender pay gap, gender gap in income, and gender gaps in poverty.
- Knowledge: Access to education, participation in lifelong learning, and gender gaps in educational attainment.
- Time: Division of unpaid care and domestic work.
- Power: Representation in decision-making positions in politics and business.
- Health: Gender differences in health and health outcomes.
- Intersecting Inequalities: Addressing how gender equality intersects with other forms of inequality, such as age, disability, ethnicity, etc.

Countries with scores above 70 points are generally seen as more advanced in addressing gender disparities across these dimensions. They tend to have policies and initiatives in place that promote gender equality, such as laws against gender-based discrimination, support for work-life balance, and efforts to increase women's representation in leadership roles.

measures to address gender stereotypes, promote work-life balance, and combat gender-based violence⁴³.

Sweden

Sweden has a strong tradition of gender equality, notably demonstrated by its groundbreaking introduction of a feminist foreign policy framework in 2014, making it the first country to do so. This policy underscores Sweden's commitment to integrating gender equality into all aspects of its foreign relations. It emphasizes gender equality as a fundamental human rights issue and seeks to ensure that women's rights and perspectives are at the forefront of its foreign policy initiatives. Sweden actively supports women's empowerment, advocates for gender equality in various international forums, and allocates resources to projects that improve the status of women and girls globally. This feminist foreign policy serves as a model for other nations by showcasing how gender equality commitments can be translated into concrete diplomatic actions, promoting women's participation in peace and security processes, combating gender-based violence, and advancing women's economic and political empowerment. Ultimately, Sweden's feminist foreign policy asserts that gender equality is vital not only for women but also for achieving global peace, security, and sustainable development. Moreover, In November 2016, the Swedish cabinet handed over a document entitled "Power, Aims and Authority – Feminist Policy for a Gender-Equal Future" (2016/17:10, only available in Swedish) to the national parliament. The document sets out the future direction of Swedish gender equality policy with an organization for policy implementation, a system for follow-up, a ten-year national strategy for the prevention and elimination of men's violence against women, and two new policy sub-goals. And in 2018, Sweden introduced Consent Act with the view of combatting violence against women and, in particular, rape.

Spain

Spain, which scores 74,6 on the GEI has made significant efforts to promote women's rights. The Organic Law on Effective Equality between Women and Men passed in 2007, promotes gender equality by prohibiting gender-based discrimination in all spheres of life. It mandates gender mainstreaming, encourages work-life balance, and provides legal protection against gender-based violence. It includes provisions for specialized support services, awareness campaigns, and training programs for professionals. The country has also enacted legislation to combat gender-based violence (through the Organic Law 1/2004 of 28 December, on Comprehensive Protection Measures against Gender Violence, B.O.E number 313, of 29 December 2004), and introduced measures to promote equal pay and work-life balance (through the Organic Law 3/2007, of 22 March, for the Effective Equality between Women and Men). In politics, Spain requires political parties to include a minimum percentage of women candidates in their electoral lists as mandated by the Organic Law on Electoral Regime (Ley Orgánica del Régimen Electoral General), aiming to address the underrepresentation of women in politics. Spain also actively supports women's organizations and provides funding for promoting work-life balance and gender equality in the workplace through initiatives like menstrual leave, parental leave policies, flexible work arrangements, and efforts to encourage shared caregiving responsibilities.

⁴³ Gender Equality in Academia and Research - GEAR tool: <https://eige.europa.eu/gener-mainstreaming/toolkits/gear/where>

Belgium

Belgium, with a score of 74,2 has implemented policies to counter backlash and promote gender equality. The country has strong laws against gender-based discrimination and actively supports awareness campaigns and educational programs to challenge gender stereotypes. Belgium has also introduced gender quotas for political representation and has initiatives to encourage women's entrepreneurship.

Example of good practices in Countries with a gender equality score between 60 and 70 points: The case of Germany

Germany, with a score of 68,7 lacks ambition to go beyond the EU standard. Nevertheless, in 2018, Germany passed the “The Act on Pay Transparency”. This law promotes pay transparency by allowing employees in companies with more than 200 employees to request information about the pay levels of their colleagues of the opposite sex. It aims to address gender pay gaps and promote pay equality. However, with the recently adopted EU directive on pay transparency, Germany will have to change and improve its existing transparency legislation.

Example of good practices in Countries with a gender equality score below 60 points⁴⁴: The case of Poland

Despite its relatively low gender equality score of 57.7, Poland has implemented a noteworthy legislation to combat violence against women. An exemplary instance is the 2005 Act on Counteracting Domestic Violence, which offers legal measures to safeguard domestic violence victims and establish support services. This legislation includes provisions for protection orders (interim injunctions) that prohibit individuals perpetrating domestic violence from contacting or approaching their victims, with violations subject to criminal penalties. Poland's National Program for Counteracting Domestic Violence encompasses a comprehensive approach, spanning prevention, victim protection, and perpetrator prosecution, and features public awareness campaigns. Additionally, Poland's Labor Code incorporates provisions to address sexual harassment in the workplace, obligating employers to take measures to prevent and address such harassment, while ensuring that victims can report incidents without fear of retaliation. It is crucial, however, to acknowledge that Poland faces substantial controversies and challenges concerning gender equality and women's rights, including concerns about the government's stance on reproductive rights and broader issues related to societal and political attitudes toward

⁴⁴ Countries with a gender equality score below 60 points typically indicate that there is a need for substantial policy changes, awareness campaigns, and societal efforts to address these disparities and improve gender equality. Governments and organizations often use these scores as a basis for identifying areas where they need to focus their efforts to promote gender equality. For the most current and detailed information about the status of gender equality in countries with scores below 60 points, it is advisable to refer to the latest EIGE reports or updates.

gender equality. As a response to perceived threats to gender equality and women's rights, protests and demonstrations have arisen and continue to take place⁴⁵.

5.3. Tackling structural inequalities through education and awareness building

Education plays a crucial role in countering backlash against gender equality and feminist progress as it can equip individuals with critical thinking skills and media literacy, enabling them to analyze and question biased narratives. By encouraging a critical examination of media representations and fostering awareness of societal power dynamics, education helps individuals navigate and challenge harmful discourses.

The cross-country analysis carried out in the 27 EU Member States in the framework of this study clearly demonstrates a variety of approaches in this field of action.

Promoting gender-inclusive curricula

Developing and implementing curricula that incorporate gender studies and promote gender equality can challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes. By educating students about the experiences and contributions of diverse genders, education can help dismantle backlash rooted in misinformation and bias. For example, countries like **Sweden and Norway** have incorporated gender equality and feminist perspectives into their national curricula.

In **Italy**, the initiative by the Italian Ministry of Education Piano Nazionale Scuola di Genere (National Gender Education Plan) aims to integrate gender equality into the education system. It focuses on promoting gender-sensitive teaching practices, combating gender stereotypes, and fostering equal opportunities for students. The plan includes training programs for teachers and the development of educational resources on gender issues.

In **Portugal**, the “Programa Nacional para a Promoção da Igualdade de Género” (National Program for the Promotion of Gender Equality), led by the Portuguese Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality, aims to promote gender equality across various sectors, including education. It supports projects and initiatives that raise awareness, challenge stereotypes, and promote gender equality values in schools and educational institutions.

Addressing sexism, gender stereotypes and promoting gender equality and respect, by fostering discussions, organizing workshops, and implementing policies that challenge discriminatory attitudes and behaviors

In **Spain**, for example, a number of national organizations are actively involved in promoting gender equality and implementing education programs. The Fundación Mujeres (Women's Foundation), for instance, works towards promoting gender equality and fighting

⁴⁵ In Poland, feminist organizations and activists have been instrumental in advocating for gender equality, reproductive rights, and the prevention of gender-based violence. Notable among these organizations are the Feminoteka Foundation ([Fundacja Feminoteka](#)), which promotes gender equality and conducts research on issues like reproductive rights and gender-based violence, and the Women's Rights Center ([Centrum Praw Kobiet](#)), which focuses on protecting women's rights and advocating for gender equality. The Federation for Women and Family Planning ([Federacja na rzecz Kobiet i Planowania Rodziny](#)) champions women's rights, including reproductive rights and access to safe abortion, challenging restrictive laws and providing support services. [ASTRA Network](#), a consortium of organizations in Central and Eastern Europe, advocates for sexual and reproductive rights in Poland. Additionally, the [Polish Women's Strike \(Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet\)](#), a grassroots movement, has been at the forefront of campaigns for reproductive rights, gender equality, and combating gender-based violence.

against gender-based violence. They engage in educational programmes and awareness-raising initiatives to challenge gender stereotypes and empower women. The Instituto de la Mujer (Institute for Women), a government agency, strives to achieve gender equality by developing and implementing projects that empower women, combat gender-based violence, and promote equal rights. They also collaborate with educational institutions to integrate gender equality principles into educational programs. Fundación Atenea is an organization addressing various social issues, including gender equality, through educational projects aimed at creating a gender-sensitive environment. Additionally, AmecoPress, a feminist news agency, provides information and resources on gender equality topics, serving as a valuable resource for educational purposes and raising awareness about gender equality.

Germany: Mädchenarbeit in der offenen Jugendarbeit (Girls' Work in Open Youth Work): is a German program that focuses on girls' empowerment and gender equality in youth work settings. It aims to provide safe spaces for girls to discuss gender-related issues, challenge stereotypes, and develop skills and self-confidence. The program offers workshops, counseling, and mentorship opportunities. Pinkstinks Germany - Pinkstinks is another organization that challenges gender stereotypes, particularly those perpetuated in the media and advertising. They advocate for diverse and non-stereotypical representations of gender, especially to counter harmful messages targeted at children and young people.

France: Laboratoire de l'égalité - The "Laboratoire de l'égalité" (Laboratory of Equality) is a feminist organization that works to fight gender stereotypes and promote gender equality in various areas of society, including education, media, and the workplace.

Sweden: Make Equal (Gör Lika) - Make Equal is an organization in Sweden that aims to challenge and change normative gender roles and stereotypes. They focus on initiatives that promote equality in parenting, education, and the labor market.

Portugal: UMAR - Women's Union for Alternative and Response - UMAR works on projects and campaigns to challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes, aiming to create a more equal and inclusive society.

Italy: Non Una di Meno Italia - Non Una di Meno is a feminist movement in Italy that fights against gender-based violence and advocates for gender equality. They organize protests, campaigns, and educational initiatives to challenge harmful gender stereotypes.

The Netherlands: Women Inc. - Women Inc. is an organization that promotes gender equality and fights against gender stereotypes through campaigns, research, and advocacy efforts in the Netherlands.

Belgium: Garance ASBL - Garance is an organization based in Belgium that aims to challenge gender stereotypes and fight against gender-based violence through educational programs, workshops, and awareness-raising campaigns.

Ireland: National Women's Council of Ireland (NWC) - NWC works on various projects and campaigns to challenge gender stereotypes and promote gender equality in Ireland.

Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Greece: The governments in these countries have implemented initiatives to address gender-based violence, such as the establishment of counseling centers, support services for victims, and awareness campaigns.

Empowering marginalized Voices

Education should amplify the voices and experiences of marginalized groups, including women with disabilities, LGBTQI+ individuals, and other gender minorities. By incorporating diverse perspectives into the curriculum and creating inclusive learning environments, education provides a platform for marginalized voices to be heard, recognized, and valued. Several EU Member States have implemented programs to support LGBTQ+ students and promote their rights. These initiatives may include awareness campaigns, safe space policies, anti-bullying measures, and inclusive sex education.

For instance, **the Netherlands** has implemented programs that provide support and resources for LGBTQ+ students, including counseling services and support groups.

In **the UK**, there have been several initiatives to integrate intersectional approaches within educational programs. In 2020, the UK government announced that it would introduce mandatory sex education in all primary and secondary schools. This curriculum includes teaching about healthy relationships, consent, gender equality, and LGBTQ+ issues. The aim is to provide an inclusive and comprehensive education that supports the well-being and understanding of all students, regardless of their gender or sexual orientation. For example, some schools and organizations have implemented programs that focus on understanding and addressing the intersection of gender with other aspects of identity, such as race, ethnicity, religion, and disability in order to address the specific needs of marginalized communities, such as Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) women, by promoting inclusive policies and providing support for empowerment. These initiatives aim to foster a more comprehensive understanding of gender equality and social justice.

Sweden has made significant efforts to incorporate gender and LGBTQI+ inclusive education in its curriculum. The subject of gender equality is taught across different subjects, and LGBTQI+ perspectives are included in various educational materials. This approach aims to challenge stereotypes, promote understanding, and create a more inclusive learning environment for all students.

Empowering women with disabilities

Several EU Member States have also implemented good practices to empower women with disabilities.

Sweden: the Swedish Disability Rights Federation runs leadership programs specifically designed for women with disabilities, aiming to enhance their skills, confidence, and representation in decision-making roles. The program includes mentorship, training, and networking opportunities.

Germany: Germany has taken steps to ensure the inclusion and representation of women with disabilities in politics. The German Disability Council, an umbrella organization representing people with disabilities, has established a Women's Commission. This commission advocates for the rights and interests of women with disabilities, promotes their participation in politics, and raises awareness of their specific challenges.

Ireland: In Ireland, the National Disability Authority has launched initiatives to support the participation of women with disabilities in civic and political life. They have developed training programs focused on leadership, advocacy, and communication skills.

These programs aim to equip women with disabilities with the necessary tools and knowledge to actively engage in public decision-making processes.

Finland: Finland has implemented measures to promote the inclusion and representation of women with disabilities in media. The Finnish Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (FAIDD) has collaborated with media outlets to develop guidelines and training programs for journalists. These initiatives aim to enhance accurate and inclusive portrayals of women with disabilities in media, challenging stereotypes and promoting their visibility.

United Kingdom: The UK has established Disabled People's User-Led Organizations (DPULOs), which are organizations led and controlled by disabled people themselves. These organizations work to ensure the inclusion and empowerment of women with disabilities. For example, the Sisters of Frida is a DPULO that specifically focuses on supporting and advocating for disabled women's rights and empowerment.

Croatia: Croatia has developed initiatives to promote the employment and entrepreneurship of women with disabilities. The Croatian Employment Service provides targeted support and resources to women with disabilities who want to start their own businesses. This includes training, mentorship, and access to financing opportunities, helping to overcome barriers and promote economic empowerment.

Promoting gender-sensitive education materials, through guidelines, projects, and collaborations with educational stakeholders

Sweden: In Sweden, the National Agency for Education has developed guidelines for gender equality in education. These guidelines emphasize the importance of gender-sensitive education materials. They provide practical recommendations for educators and publishers to develop inclusive and diverse textbooks, teaching resources, and lesson plans. The guidelines focus on challenging gender stereotypes, promoting equal representation of all genders, and ensuring that educational materials are sensitive to the needs and experiences of students.

Denmark: The Danish Ministry of Children and Education has taken initiatives to promote gender-sensitive education materials. They provide guidelines to publishers and educational institutions on developing gender-neutral and inclusive textbooks and teaching resources. The guidelines aim to challenge traditional gender roles, encourage equal opportunities for all students, and promote inclusive learning environments. The focus is on avoiding gender stereotypes and providing diverse representations in educational materials.

Spain: The Spanish government has implemented the coeducation approach in education. This approach emphasizes the use of gender-sensitive education materials to challenge stereotypes and promote equal representation. The approach encourages the development and use of textbooks, teaching resources, and lesson plans that provide diverse perspectives, challenge gender biases, and address the needs and experiences of students of all genders. The goal is to foster inclusive and equitable education environments.

Germany: Germany has launched the "Gender School" project to promote gender-sensitive education materials. This project aims to challenge traditional gender roles and biases in textbooks and teaching resources. It provides support to publishers and educational institutions to develop gender-neutral and inclusive educational materials. The focus is on incorporating diverse narratives, challenging stereotypes, and promoting equal representation of all genders in educational materials.

Finland: The Finnish National Agency for Education emphasizes the importance of gender-sensitive education materials. They provide resources and guidelines to educators on incorporating gender perspectives into textbooks, teaching resources, and lesson

plans. The focus is on challenging stereotypes, promoting equal representation, and ensuring that educational materials reflect the diverse experiences and identities of students. The aim is to create inclusive and empowering learning environments.

Netherlands: In the Netherlands, organizations like the Women's Council and the Netherlands Institute for Gender Equality and Women's History work towards promoting gender-sensitive education materials. They provide resources, training, and support to educational institutions and publishers. Their focus is on developing educational materials that challenge gender stereotypes, promote equal representation, and foster gender equality in education. They aim to ensure that textbooks, teaching resources, and lesson plans provide inclusive content and diverse perspectives.

Promoting inclusive language policies

Many EU member states have introduced policies to promote inclusive language in educational institutions. These policies encourage the use of gender-neutral language and challenge gender stereotypes.

Finland: in Finland, schools have adopted inclusive language policies that aim to avoid gendered language and promote gender equality in communication. The Finnish National Agency for Education provides guidance to educators on using inclusive language in teaching materials, classroom communication, and official documents. The focus is on adopting gender-neutral language and avoiding gender stereotypes to create an inclusive and respectful learning environment for all students.

Sweden: Sweden has been at the forefront of promoting inclusive language policies. The Swedish Language Council actively promotes gender-neutral language and inclusive linguistic practices. They encourage the use of gender-neutral pronouns, such as "hen" alongside "han" (he) and "hon" (she), and advocate for inclusive language in official documents, educational materials, and public discourse.

Belgium: In Belgium, particularly in the Flemish region, efforts have been made to promote inclusive language policies. The Vlaams Ministerie van Onderwijs en Vorming (Flemish Ministry of Education and Training) provides guidelines to educational institutions, encouraging the use of inclusive language in educational materials, teaching practices, and communication. The focus is on avoiding gender-specific language and adopting gender-neutral alternatives.

France: In France, the French Ministry of Education has taken steps to promote inclusive language policies. They encourage the use of gender-neutral language in educational materials and official documents, aiming to address gender biases and promote equal representation. The Ministry provides guidelines to schools and educators on using inclusive language and avoiding gender stereotypes.

Spain: Spain has made efforts to promote inclusive language policies, particularly in education. The Ministry of Education encourages the use of inclusive language in textbooks, teaching materials, and educational communication. They provide guidelines to educational institutions to adopt gender-neutral language and challenge traditional gender stereotypes. The aim is to create an inclusive educational environment that promotes equal representation and respect for all genders.

Portugal: In Portugal, the Portuguese Language Council has been working towards promoting inclusive language policies. They encourage the use of gender-neutral language and alternatives that are inclusive of all genders. The Council provides guidelines to educational institutions, emphasizing the importance of using inclusive language in educational materials, teaching practices, and official documents.

Fostering Empathy and Understanding through the exposure of students to diverse experiences and perspectives.

By incorporating lessons about the historical struggles for gender equality and the persistent challenges faced by marginalized groups, education can cultivate empathy, motivating individuals to champion gender equality and counteract any resistance.

United Kingdom: The Women's History Network (WHN) in the UK promotes the teaching of women's history and gender equality in schools. They provide resources, lesson plans, and training opportunities for educators to incorporate women's history and the struggles for gender equality into their teaching. The WHN also organizes conferences and events to disseminate research and promote dialogue on women's history and gender equality.

Spain: In Spain, the Institute of Women's Affairs (Instituto de las Mujeres) has developed educational materials that focus on teaching about the historical struggles for gender equality. They provide resources and lesson plans that highlight the contributions of women in various fields, including politics, science, literature, and arts. These materials help raise awareness of the historical and ongoing challenges faced by women and promote gender equality in education.

Sweden: Sweden has implemented initiatives to teach about gender equality and the historical struggles for women's rights. For example, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) has developed educational materials for schools, which include topics such as women's suffrage, equal pay, and gender-based violence. These materials aim to foster critical thinking and understanding of gender equality issues among students.

Finland: In Finland, the Finnish National Agency for Education has included the teaching of gender equality as part of the national curriculum. The curriculum emphasizes the historical struggles for gender equality and the ongoing challenges faced by marginalized groups. It provides guidelines and resources to educators to incorporate gender equality topics into various subjects, including history, social studies, and language arts.

Portugal: The Portuguese government has developed initiatives to teach gender equality in schools. The Ministry of Education has implemented programs that include teaching modules on gender equality and the historical struggles for women's rights. These modules cover topics such as the suffrage movement, gender stereotypes, and women's contributions to society. The goal is to raise awareness and promote a more inclusive and equal society.

Germany: Germany has introduced gender equality education initiatives in schools. The Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women, and Youth provides materials and resources for educators to teach about gender equality and the historical struggles for women's rights. These materials address topics such as gender stereotypes, the women's rights movement, and gender-based discrimination. The aim is to foster understanding and empower students to challenge gender inequalities.

Poland: The Women's Rights Centre in Poland has developed educational materials and resources that focus on teaching about women's history and gender equality. These materials cover topics such as the women's suffrage movement, women's contributions to society, and the ongoing challenges faced by women. They aim to raise awareness and promote gender equality in education.

Czech Republic: The Czech Republic has implemented initiatives to teach about gender equality and the historical struggles for women's rights. For example, the NGO Gender Studies has developed educational programs and resources for schools, which address topics such as gender stereotypes, gender-based violence, and women's

empowerment. These initiatives aim to foster critical thinking and understanding of gender equality issues among students.

Romania: The Romanian Institute for Women's Studies (ISCF) has developed educational materials and initiatives that focus on teaching about women's history and gender equality. These resources cover topics such as the women's rights movement, gender stereotypes, and women's contributions to society. The ISCF also organizes workshops and seminars for educators to promote the integration of gender equality topics into the curriculum.

Bulgaria: The Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation (BGRF) has implemented initiatives to promote gender equality in education. They provide educational materials and resources for schools that address gender stereotypes, gender-based discrimination, and women's rights. The BGRF also conducts training and workshops for teachers to enhance their knowledge and skills in teaching about gender equality.

Hungary: The Hungarian Women's Lobby (NANE) has developed educational materials and campaigns to promote gender equality in schools. These materials cover topics such as women's history, gender stereotypes, and the challenges faced by women. NANE also provides teacher training programs to support educators in incorporating gender equality topics into their teaching practices.

Estonia: The Estonian Women's Studies and Resource Centre (ENUT) works towards promoting gender equality education in Estonia. They develop educational materials and resources that focus on teaching about women's history, gender stereotypes, and the ongoing challenges faced by women. ENUT also organizes conferences and seminars for educators to raise awareness and promote gender equality in education.

Engaging men and boys in discussions on gender equality and encouraging them to become allies in the fight against backlash.

By challenging traditional masculinity norms and promoting healthy relationships based on equality and mutual respect, education can help counter backlash perpetuated by patriarchal ideologies

Sweden: Sweden has implemented initiatives such as the Men for Gender Equality platform (MÄN), which engages men and boys in discussions on gender equality. MÄN provides workshops, training, and resources that promote dialogue, challenge stereotypes, and encourage active participation in the fight against gender inequality.

Finland: The Finnish organization HeForShe Finland has established the "HeForShe Impact Champions" campaign. This initiative encourages men and boys to publicly pledge their commitment to gender equality and take action to challenge gender stereotypes and discrimination.

Denmark: The Danish government supports initiatives like "Men for Gender Equality" which engages men and boys in promoting gender equality. The program offers workshops, awareness campaigns, and resources that aim to challenge harmful masculinities and foster allyship.

Germany: The "Men's Council" in Germany is a network of men and boys committed to gender equality. They organize events, discussions, and campaigns that encourage dialogue, self-reflection, and actions to challenge gender norms and support gender equality initiatives.

Ireland: The organization "Men Overcoming Violence" in Ireland works to engage men and boys in discussions on gender equality and violence prevention. They offer workshops and educational programs that explore healthy relationships, consent, and the role of men in promoting gender equality.

Spain: The "Men for Gender Equality" program in Spain works towards engaging men and boys as allies in the fight for gender equality. They conduct awareness campaigns, workshops, and training sessions to challenge gender stereotypes, promote healthy masculinity, and encourage male involvement in gender equality initiatives.

Netherlands: The "Mannenemancipatie" (Men's Emancipation) initiative in the Netherlands focuses on engaging men and boys in discussions on gender equality. They provide educational materials, workshops, and events that address topics such as gender stereotypes, violence prevention, and the importance of male allyship.

Portugal: The Portuguese government has launched the "Homens na Igualdade" (Men in Equality) initiative. It aims to engage men and boys in promoting gender equality through campaigns, workshops, and training programs that encourage reflection, challenge stereotypes, and foster a sense of responsibility towards achieving gender equality.

Belgium: The "Be a Man" campaign in Belgium targets young men and boys to promote positive masculinity and challenge harmful stereotypes. The campaign utilizes workshops, online platforms, and multimedia resources to address issues such as gender norms, violence prevention, and healthy relationships.

Austria: The "Männerberatung" (Men's Counselling) centers in Austria provide support and counseling services for men, including discussions on gender equality. These centers offer workshops, group sessions, and individual counseling to engage men and boys in conversations that challenge gender stereotypes and promote positive attitudes towards gender equality.

A final reference should be made to "the Champions of Change for Gender Equality and Girls' Rights programme", active in 41 countries, which aims to advance gender equality through youth engagement. The programme aims to empower girls and engage boys to identify and challenge harmful, negative masculinities that perpetuate discrimination and inequality. The "Champions of Change" training handbook was tested as a pilot project from 2012 to 2015 in Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, and Germany. Due to its success, its implementation has been expanded globally since 2016. Worldwide "Training of Trainers" have taken place and are ongoing. Currently (as of May 2023), there are 117 "Champions of Change" projects in a total of 46 Plan program countries. 4,000 Plan staff and partners have been trained as trainers, and parents and influential individuals such as teachers or religious leaders have been included through awareness campaigns. 51,285 girls and 48,016 boys have participated in the program so far. On average, an additional 7,000 girls and 5,000 boys join every year.

5.4. Grassroots organizing and networking

Grassroots organizing is a strategy that involves building local networks of activists who work together to promote feminist ideas and challenge antifeminist attitudes. This can involve organizing protests, rallies, and other public events to raise awareness about issues related to gender equality.

Examples of international grassroots organizing initiatives for gender equality:

Women's March Global: The Women's March movement has gained international recognition for its grassroots organizing efforts. National chapters organize marches, rallies, and protests to advocate for women's rights, gender equality, and social justice.

These events bring together diverse communities and raise awareness about various women's rights issues.

#MeToo Movement: The #MeToo movement has sparked grassroots organizing efforts worldwide. National campaigns and organizations work to raise awareness about sexual harassment, assault, and gender-based violence. They encourage survivors to share their stories and provide support and resources for those affected.

Reclaim the Night Marches: Reclaim the Night marches take place in various countries, aiming to raise awareness about women's safety and challenge violence against women. These grassroots events involve community members, activists, and organizations who come together to reclaim public spaces and demand an end to gender-based violence.

SlutWalk Movement: SlutWalk is a grassroots movement that originated in Canada and has since spread globally. It involves organizing marches and demonstrations to challenge victim-blaming and slut-shaming. Participants aim to reclaim the word "slut" and advocate for sexual autonomy, consent, and freedom from gender-based judgment.

Feminist Activist Networks: National-level feminist activist networks form alliances and coalitions to address gender inequality. These networks bring together various organizations, activists, and individuals working towards gender equality. They collaborate on campaigns, advocacy efforts, and public awareness initiatives to promote feminist ideas and challenge antifeminist attitudes.

Women's Rights Workshops and Training: Grassroots organizations at the national level often conduct workshops and training to empower women and build their leadership and advocacy skills. These initiatives provide a platform for women to learn about their rights, gain confidence, and engage in activism. Topics covered may include gender-based violence, reproductive rights, economic empowerment, and political participation.

Grassroots Campaigns for Policy Change: Grassroots activists often engage in campaigns to influence policy change at the national level. They may organize letter-writing campaigns, petition drives, and grassroots lobbying efforts to advocate for legislative reforms and policies that advance gender equality and women's rights.

Examples of good practices in EU Countries with a gender equality score below 60 points

Poland: In recent years, there have been protests and mobilizations in Poland in response to attempts to restrict reproductive rights. Activists and feminist organizations have campaigned against proposed laws that sought to further limit access to safe and legal abortion. These movements have involved street demonstrations, strikes, and advocacy efforts to raise awareness and resist regressive policies. Additionally, feminist organizations and activists in Poland have been actively working to raise awareness about gender-based violence and push for stronger legal measures to protect victims. They have called for the ratification and implementation of the Istanbul Convention, an international treaty aimed at preventing and combating violence against women.

Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet (Polish Women's Strike): The Polish Women's Strike is a grassroots movement that gained prominence through massive protests and strikes in

response to proposed legislation restricting abortion rights. They have been at the forefront of advocating for reproductive rights, gender equality, and combating gender-based violence.

Hungary: The Hungarian Women's Lobby (Magyar Női Érdekérvényesítő Szövetség) has participated in protests and demonstrations against gender-based violence, discrimination, and regressive policies. For example, they have been active in protests against proposed legislation that restricts women's reproductive rights, such as the "Stop Soros" bill and attempts to ban abortion. They have worked to raise awareness about women's rights to reproductive autonomy and have called for the protection and expansion of reproductive healthcare services. The organization has also focused on combating gender-based violence in Hungary. They have participated in campaigns to raise awareness about domestic violence, sexual assault, and harassment, and have advocated for stronger legal measures, support services, and prevention initiatives. Furthermore, the Hungarian Women's Lobby promotes gender equality in the workplace, advocating for fair pay, equal opportunities, and improved work-life balance. They have raised concerns about gender disparities in employment and have pushed for policies and practices that promote gender equality in all sectors.

Greece: Women's Strike (Γυναικεία Απεργία) is a grassroots feminist movement in Greece that has gained significant visibility and impact in recent years. It emerged as a response to gender inequality, discrimination, and violence against women. It was inspired by the global feminist movement and particularly influenced by the success of the Women's Strike movement in other countries. Women's Strike in Greece has played a crucial role in raising awareness about gender inequality, advocating for women's rights, and mobilizing collective action. Through their protests, strikes, and campaigns, they have contributed to the ongoing fight for gender equality and social justice in Greece. They were also actively involved in the International Women's Day protests and strikes⁴⁶ by organizing and leading large-scale marches and protests on International Women's Day (March 8) in cities across Greece. These protests highlight women's rights issues, demand gender equality, and challenge gender-based violence. Women's Strike has also organized protests specifically addressing gender-based violence. For example, they have organized demonstrations outside courthouses to demand justice for survivors of gender-based violence and to raise awareness about the need for stronger legal measures and support services. They have participated in protests against proposed legislation that sought to restrict women's access to safe and legal abortion in Greece. They have been vocal advocates for reproductive rights and have mobilized to defend women's right to choose. They have also participated in demonstrations and rallies in support of LGBTQI+ rights, anti-racist causes, and other progressive movements, highlighting the intersectional nature of struggles for justice.

Bulgaria: The Protest Network has organized numerous protests in Bulgaria, primarily focusing on democratic reforms, corruption, and social justice issues. While not exclusively centered on women's rights, they have supported gender equality and women's rights causes through their activism.

Malta: The "Women's Rights Foundation" in Malta has organized protests and demonstrations to raise awareness about gender-based violence, advocate for legislative reforms, and promote gender equality. They have actively participated in campaigns such as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

⁴⁶ For example, on 8th March 2019 women organizations and unions launched a Feminist Strike in Greece calling on female workers and students to refrain from their obligations during the whole day. In the strike participated public and private sector unions ADEDY and GSEE and the women's department of center-left parties SYRIZA, KINAL/PASOK, KIDISO, and Green/Ecologists.

Italy: “Non Una di Meno” has organized significant protests in Italy against gender-based violence, discrimination, and inequality. They led demonstrations under the slogans “Not One Less” and “Against Every Violence on Women” to demand justice, safety, and equality for women.

France: The feminist movement “NousToutes” has organized large-scale protests and marches across France to denounce gender-based violence and demand concrete actions to address the issue. They mobilize annually for the November 25th International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

Spain: The “Feminist Strike” movement in Spain has organized nationwide strikes and protests on International Women's Day (March 8) to demand gender equality, challenge violence against women, and advocate for women's rights.

United Kingdom: “Reclaim the Night” organizes annual marches and protests across the United Kingdom to highlight the issue of gender-based violence and reclaim public spaces as safe for women. The protests advocate for an end to violence against women and for the right to live without fear.

Key chapter's take-away points: Selected Examples of Good Practices in EUMS (+ UK)

In this section, the report highlights good practices from various European Union Member States (and the UK) that are aimed at advancing gender equality and combating anti-feminist backlash. Key take-away points from this section include:

Context-Specific Strategies: Effective gender equality strategies must be tailored to the specific challenges and opportunities in each country. There is no one-size-fits-all approach, and solutions need to resonate with local communities.

Gender Equality as a Democratic Indicator: Gender equality and its defense are essential indicators of the strength and resilience of democratic societies. Backsliding on democratic principles can undermine gender equality efforts.

Diverse Approaches in EU MS with different GEI Score Ranges: Effective strategies vary depending on a country's Gender Equality Index (GEI) score range. Examples of good practices are provided for countries with gender equality scores above 70 points (e.g., Sweden and Finland), between 60 and 70 points (e.g., Germany), and below 60 points (e.g., Poland). Good practices to combat anti-feminism include investments in research, legislative reforms, policies, and policy advocacy, education and awareness campaigns, initiatives aimed at engaging men and boys, grassroots organizing and networking between pro-gender equality civil society actors.

- For **countries with scores above 70 points** like Sweden and Finland, their comprehensive national plans address gender equality in areas such as education, employment, and political representation. These plans combat gender stereotypes, promote work-life balance, and address gender-based violence. Sweden, in particular, stands out with its feminist foreign policy framework, a ten-year strategy to eliminate violence against women, and the Consent Act to combat violence, including rape.
- **Countries with scores between 60 and 70 points**, like Germany, have taken measures to address gender inequality. Germany passed "The Act on Pay Transparency" in 2018, promoting pay transparency and aiming to reduce gender pay gaps. However, recent EU directives will require improvements to Germany's existing transparency legislation.
- Even **countries with lower GEI scores**, like Poland at 57.7, have implemented notable legislation to combat violence against women. Poland's 2005 Act on Counteracting Domestic Violence provides legal measures to protect victims and establish support services, including protection orders and a comprehensive approach spanning prevention, victim protection, and perpetrator prosecution. The country has also addressed sexual harassment in the workplace, obligating employers to prevent and address such incidents.

Education and Awareness: Education plays a crucial role in combating backlash by promoting gender-inclusive curricula, addressing sexism and gender stereotypes, empowering marginalized voices, and promoting gender-sensitive education materials. Multiple countries, including the United Kingdom, Spain, Sweden, Finland, Portugal, Germany, Poland, Czech Republic, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Estonia, have implemented educational initiatives that focus on teaching women's history, gender equality, and the historical struggles for women's rights. These programs provide valuable resources, lesson plans, and teacher training to promote gender equality in schools.

Key chapter's take-away points: Selected Examples of Good Practices in EUMS (+ UK)

Engaging Men and Boys: Several countries, such as Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Spain, Netherlands, Portugal, Belgium, and Austria, have instituted programs and campaigns to involve men and boys in discussions about gender equality. By challenging traditional masculinity norms and encouraging male allyship, these initiatives contribute to the fight against patriarchal ideologies and anti-feminist sentiments.

Grassroots Organizing and Networking between pro-gender equality civil society actors: Grassroots movements and organizations, including Women's March Global, the #MeToo Movement, Reclaim the Night Marches, the SlutWalk Movement, and feminist activist networks, engage in local and national efforts to promote feminist ideas and address anti-feminist attitudes. These initiatives help raise awareness about gender equality, sexual harassment, violence against women, and reproductive rights.

VI. Preliminary Conclusions

This report presents a comprehensive analysis of strategies to tackle antifeminism and anti-gender movements that oppose gender equality in the European Union. Based on the literature review in Chapter III, the study has identified various strategies such as legislative reforms, the use of EU funding and judicial procedures, policy responses, international collaboration, networking, alliances, and grassroots activism. These strategies can serve as a guide for governments, political parties, and civil society across the European Union to take appropriate actions and adopt effective policies in the future. It's important to recognize that gender equality is a key indicator of a healthy democracy. The relationship between these two concepts is intricate and mutually reinforcing.

Any attempt to curtail or undermine women's rights should be seen as a sign of "democratic backsliding." This phenomenon refers to the erosion of fundamental elements of the rule of law and the decline of democratic rights and values due to the influence of radical political parties or leaders.

It is evident that since the 2010s, anti-feminist and anti-gender discourses have gained in popularity in Europe. This has made women's rights and gender equality critical issues within the European Union. Although gender equality indices among Member States are gradually improving, the impact of the conservative turnaround on women's and minorities' rights cannot be ignored. This democratic regression not only poses a threat to democracy but also to the very foundations of the European Union and its core values. However, despite the significant implications of this phenomenon, its roots and extent remain inadequately understood, and responses to it often fall short. Additionally, due to the lack of systematic comparative analyses and the evolving nature of anti-gender discourses, our knowledge of successful strategies against these narratives remains limited. Thus, questions persist about how to counter these narratives effectively, form alliances, and assess the overall impact of the anti-equality agenda.

Given the current situation, this report has thoroughly examined legislation and policies at both the EU and national levels to identify some promising strategies. Further research conducted by national researchers will delve deeper into these matters, helping us to identify a set of good practices and recommendations that could support future policies and actions by governments, political parties, and civil society.

Based on the data presented in Chapters 4 and 5, it can be inferred that the European Union has been more proactive than the individual Member States in addressing gender equality. The European Union has established a comprehensive legal and policy framework in recent decades to champion equality and combat discrimination, with a specific focus on addressing gender and intersectional inequalities across various domains. These legislative and political advancements have undoubtedly contributed to fostering collaborative efforts within a robust network of both institutional and non-institutional actors committed to advancing gender equality within the EU. The EU has been instrumental in compelling its Member States to improve their legislation and strengthen their gender equality frameworks. The ratification of the Istanbul Convention was a notable step towards addressing gender-based violence. Additionally, the infringement procedure, which allows for legal action against Member States not adhering to EU laws and values, has been invoked in the Hungarian case. While the infringement process can be quite protracted, entailing a complex interplay of both political and legal considerations, the mere start of the process is sometimes enough to convince Member States to comply. Sanctions are often seen as a last resort when it comes to legal action. The European Commission prioritizes alternative mechanisms such as blocking funds to

force Member States to align their legislation and actions with EU standards and rules. In such cases, the Union budget can be used not only as an additional but also as a more effective layer of protection if the rule of law, EU values, and principles are breached or at risk of being affected. This is pursuant to the conditionality clause. It is extremely important to enhance the linkages between the judiciary of the European Union and the enforcement of its declared principles. It is also essential to strengthen monitoring and reporting mechanisms while increasing the regular use of Article 258 (TFEU) and the conditionality clause. This will help set an example and put pressure on Member States to comply with European standards.

It is important to conduct systematic comparative studies that focus on the post-adoption implementation of gender equality policies, as this can help uncover the conditions that foster effective policies capable of fundamentally reshaping gender and sexual hierarchies. Monitoring and reporting mechanisms should be reinforced and comprehensive and transformative policies that effectively challenge societal norms and structures perpetuating inequality should be adopted. An intersectional approach and the inclusion of gender considerations in policy development are also integral to this process.

It is crucial to conduct further research on the strategies and effects of anti-gender and anti-feminist mobilizations in the European Union (EU) and beyond. A multi-dimensional approach should be taken to explore the use of traditional and social media platforms, the spread of online hate speech and harassment, the dynamics of street protests, and the violation of academic freedom. Understanding how these anti-equality movements use these channels to spread their ideologies and mobilize their supporters is of utmost importance. Similarly, it is imperative to recognize the intricate connections between these mobilizations and the positions of extreme populist discourses, political actors, and traditionalist religious movements, as these factors often intersect and reinforce each other in anti-feminist efforts.

While promoting full gender equality and nurturing a high-quality democratic system are potent strategies against anti-feminist discourse, further exploration is necessary to ascertain why some strategies have shown resilience against anti-equality movements while dissecting the reasons behind the failures of others. Initiatives such as the 'Push*Back*Lash Horizon Project' are essential, as they provide funding for projects that document anti-rights movements and analyse and assess the effectiveness of the counter strategies. However, for a more effective response to the gendered dimensions of democratic erosion, a more substantial allocation of resources to feminist causes is necessary. Robust conceptual frameworks are needed to comprehensively address the multifaceted aspects and gendered implications of democratic and women's rights backsliding.

References

- Abendschön, S. Tausendpfund, M. (2017). Political knowledge differences between children. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 61(2), 204-221.
- Adichie, C. N. (2015). *We Should All Be Feminists*. New York, NY: Anchor Books.
- Andrews, K.T. (2001). "Social Movements and Policy Implementation: The Mississippi Civil Rights Movement and the War on Poverty, 1965 to 1971." *American Sociological Review* 66 (1): 71-95.
- Bacchi, C. (1999). *Women Politics and Policies: The Construction of Policy Problems*. London: Sage Publications.
- Balakrishnan, R. (2019). The Current Crisis and the Crucial Role of Economic Policy. *Development*, 62(1), 6-11.
- Barker, G., Ricardo, C., Nascimento, M., Olukoya, A., & Santos, C. (2010). Challenging Gender Norms for Better Health. *Global Public Health*, 5(5), 539-553.
- Barker, G. et al., (2016). What man have to do with it. *Public Policies to Promote Gender Equality*, International Center for Research on Women and Instituto Promundo. <https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/What-Men-Have-to-Do-With-It.pdf>
- Berthet, V. (2021). *Politicizing Gender and Democracy in the Context of the Istanbul Convention*. By Andrea Krizsán and Conny Roggeband. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Pivot.
- _____, (2023) Spotlight on the political groups as gender equality actors. Struggles over issues of gendered violence in the EP. *Foundation for European Progressive Studies and Fondation Jean Jaurès*.
- Bussey K and Bandura A (1999) Social cognitive theory of gender development and differentiation. *Psychological review* 106(4), 676.
- Bustelo, M., & Lombardo, E. (Eds.). (2007). *Políticas de igualdad en España y en Europa*. Catedra.
- Carothers, T., & Brechenmacher, S. (2014). *Closing Space: Democracy and Human Rights Support Under Fire*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Carvalho, S., Ramos, A., & Moraes, M. (2018). Gender-Based Violence as a Barrier to Social and Economic Inclusion: An Analytical Review. *The World Bank*.
- Cerna, L. (2013). The Limits of Policy Change: The Implementation of the Czech Gender Equality Law. *Social Politics*, 20(3), 345-370.
- Daniel, A., & Dereudre, R. (2022). *Intersectionality and Public Policy: Theory and Practice*. Springer.
- Datta, N. (2018). *Anti-Gender Campaigns: Strategies to Counter the Closing Space for Sexual and Reproductive Rights in Europe*. EuroNGOs.
- Denkovski, D., Bernarding, N., & Lunz, K. (2021). *Power Over Rights: Understanding and Countering the Transnational Anti-Gender Movement, Volume I*. Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy.
- Diehl, E., Breimaier, S., Menge, J., & Vespermann, S. (2016). The compatibility of aspiration and reality. *Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. "Gender matters! antifeminism" Newsletter on gender activities* N. 6.
- EIGE. (2022). *Gender Mainstreaming and Intersectionality*. European Institute for Gender Equality.
- Elaine Weiner (20016) *A Missing Piece? Men and the Puzzle of Gender Mainstreaming in the European Union*
- Elson, D., & Seth, S. (2019). *Macroeconomic Policy, Employment, and Inclusive Growth: Gender Perspectives*. In *Handbook of Macroeconomics* (Vol. 2, pp. 2363-2456). Elsevier.

- Engeli, I., & Mazur, A. (2018). The Politics of Post-Adoption: Why Some Gender Equality Policies Succeed and Others Do Not. *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, 1(3), 373-392.
- EP Resolution on experiencing a backlash in women's rights and gender equality in the EU (2018/2684(RSP))
- Estrada Fernández, M. E., et al. (2019). Informal care. European situation and approximation of a reality. *Health Policy*, 123(12), 1163-1172.
- Figueruelo Burrieza, A. (2014). "Igualdad de género en la toma de decisiones; sobre la composición equilibrada de los consejos de administración de las grandes empresas" in: *Igualdad y democracia: el género como categoría de análisis jurídico*. Cortes Valencianas.
- Fraile, M., & Sánchez-Vitores, L. (2020). Tracing the gender gap in political interest over the life span: A panel analysis. *Political Psychology*, 41(1), 89-106.
- Freixes Sanjuán, T. (2005). Derechos fundamentales en la Unión Europea. Evolución y prospectiva: la construcción de un espacio jurídico europeo de los derechos fundamentales. *Revista de derecho constitucional europeo*, 4, 43-86.
- _____ (2014). La Juridificación de los Valores y la Igualdad como Valor en la Unión Europea. In VV. AA. *Igualdad y Democracia: el género como categoría de análisis jurídico*. Estudios en homenaje a la profesora Julia Sevilla Merino (Corts Valencianes).
- _____ (2021) Gender Perspective in European Law; in: Cremades, J., Hermida, C. (eds) *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Constitutionalism*. Springer.
- Fullan, M. (2007). *The New Meaning of Educational Change*. Teachers College Press.
- Garbagnoli, S., & Prearo, M. (2018). La crociata "anti-gender". Dal Vaticano alle manif pour tous. Kaplan.
- García Campá, G. (2014). "Primera doctrina judicial sobre los planes de igualdad en las empresas", in: *Igualdad y democracia: el género como categoría de análisis jurídico*. Cortes Valencianas.
- Goertz, A. L., & Mazur, A. G. (2008). *Politics, Gender, and Concepts: Theory and Methodology*. Cambridge University Press.
- Greene, M. E., & Levack, A. (2010). *Synchronizing Gender Strategies: A Cooperative Model for Improving Reproductive Health and Transforming Gender Relations*. Washington, DC: Population Reference Bureau.
- Grünberg, L., et al. (2011). From gender studies to gender IN studies: case studies on gender-inclusive curriculum in higher education. *UNESCO-CEPES Studies on Higher Education*, Bucharest.
- Gupta, G. R., Whelan, D., & Allendorf, K. (2003). *Integrating Gender into HIV/AIDS Programmes: A Review Paper*. Washington, DC: International Center for Research on Women.
- Havelková, H. (2018). European Convention on Human Rights and Women's Rights Legislation in the Visegrad States. *European Yearbook of Minority Issues Online*, 15(1), 1-32.
- Heath, R., & Jayachandran, S. (2016). The Causes and Consequences of Increased Female Education and Labor Force Participation in Developing Countries. NBER Working Paper Serie.
- Helfferich, B. (2021). Towards a fairer, care-focused Europe. FEPS-FES, March.
- Htun, M., & Weldon, S. L. (2018). The Civic Origins of Progressive Policy Change: Combating Violence against Women in Global Perspective, 1975–2005. *American Political Science Review*, 112(1), 53-70.
- Hubert A, Helfferich B (2016): *Integrating Gender into EU Economic Governance. Oxymoron or Opportunity?*, Brussels: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung EU Office.

- Hubert, A. (2022). Care, Work, and Value: Revisiting the Nature of Paid and Unpaid Labour. *Gender and Development*, 30(1), 149-166.
- _____ (2022). The EU and gender equality. FEPS Primer Series.
- Kantola, J. (2010). *Gender and the European Union*, Bloomsbury.
- Kauppert, P. (2016). From diversity to solidarity. In: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. "Gender matters! antifeminism" Newsletter on gender activities N. 6., 2016. <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/dialog/09501/06-2016-eng.pdf>;
- Köhler, G. (2021). Strategies against Anti-Gender Mobilizations. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.
- Kuhar, R., & Zobec, A. (2017). The anti-gender movement in Europe and the educational process in public schools. *CEPS Journal*, 7(2), 29-46.
- Landes, B., Wittenius, M., & Lange, K. (2021). No to Gender – Yes to what exactly? Insights into the European anti-gender movement. *Observatory for Sociopolitical Developments in Europe. Newsletter*, 2. <https://beobachtungsstelle-gesellschaftspolitik.de/f/d259f29a4c.pdf>
- Levinson, M. (2010). The Civic Empowerment Gap: Defining the Problem and Locating Solutions. In *Handbook of Research on Civic Engagement in Youth* (pp. 331–361). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Lombardo, E. (2008). Gender Inequality in Politics. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 10(1), 78-96.
- _____, Meier, P., & Verloo, M. (2009). Policy Windows and Multiple Streams: An Analysis of Gender Policy in the European Union. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, 16(4), 408-437.
- _____ - (2023). EU Gender Equality Legislation and Its Impact. In R. Connell, R. Pearse, & C. Zorn (Eds.), *Handbook on Gender and Politics* (pp. 431-447). Routledge.
- MacKinnon, C. A. (1991). Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State: An Agenda for Theory. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 16(2), 515-544.
- Martins de Matos, G. "What is the role of the infringement procedure in tackling rule of law backsliding in the EU?" In: *UNIO - EU Law Journal*. Vol. 8, No. 2, March 2023, pp 17-31; p. 21.
- Martsenyuk, T. (2018). Gender Issues in Ukraine: Were the EuroMaidan Protests Patriarchal or Egalitarian? In *Anti-Gender Movements on the Rise? Strategizing for Gender Equality in Central Eastern Europe*.
- McClain, L. C., & Grossman, J. L. (Eds.). (2009). *GENDER EQUALITY: Dimensions of Women's Equal Citizenship*. Cambridge University Press.
- Merino Segovia, A. (2009). *Igualdad de género, empresa y responsabilidad social*. Albacete. Editorial Bomazo.
- Miroiu, M. (2003). Guidelines for Promoting Gender Equity in Higher Education in Central and Eastern Europe. *Papers on Higher Education*, Bucharest, UNESCO-CEPES.
- Olczak, V. (2022). Gender equality and the future of Europe. From the Conference on the Future of Europe to a Feminist Europe. *Gender Five Plus*.
- Paternotte, D. (2023): Victor Frankenstein and its creature: the many lives of 'gender ideology', *International Review of Sociology*.
- Pech, L. and Scheppele, K.L., (2017); "Illiberalism within: rule of law backsliding in the EU", *Cambridge Yearbook of European Legal Studies*, vol. 19
- Puh, T., Yiadom, F., Johnson, R., Fernando, S., Yazid, H., & Thiemann, B. (2022). Inequality of the Genders in STEM: Factors that Contribute to the Educational and Workplace Gender Gap. *Computers & Education*, 179, 104419.
- Roggeband, C., & Krizsán, A. (2020). Discussion paper No. 35: Democratic backsliding and the backlash against women's rights. UN Women, June.
- Ruxton, S. (Ed.). (2004). *Gender Equality and Men: Learning from Practice*. Oxfam GB.

- Sever, L. (2022). Feminist Economists in the European Parliament: What Will They Do for Gender Equality? *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 29(1), 99-115.
- Shreeves, R., & Boland, N. (2021). Women in politics in the EU: State of play. EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service, March. to PDF
- Stratigaki, M. (2005). Gender Mainstreaming vs Positive Action. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 12 (2), pp.165-186.
- UN Women (2020), 'Women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls', UN Women Expert Group Meeting, Sixty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 65) - EGM/CSW/2021/EP8. Full report available at: https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/65/EGM/Di_Meco_Online_Threats_EP8_EGMCSW65.pdf
- UN Women Independent Evaluation and Audit Services. (2022). Empowering Women and Girls: Making Gender Equality Central to Human Rights, Democracy, and Sustainable Development. United Nations.
- Van Deth, Abendschön, Vollmar (2011). Children and Politics: An Empirical Reassessment of Early Political Socialization. *Political Psychology*, 32(1), 147-173.
- Verloo, M. (2005). Mainstreaming Gender Equality in Europe: A Critical Frame Analysis Approach. *The Greek Review of Social Research*, 117, 11-34.
- _____ (Ed.). (2007). *Multiple Meanings of Gender Equality: A Critical Frame Analysis of Gender Policies in Europe*. Budapest-New York: Central European University Press.
- _____, & Lombardo, E. (2007). Contested Gender Equality and Policy Variety in Europe: Introducing a Critical Frame Analysis Approach. In M. Verloo (Ed.), *Multiple Meanings of Gender Equality: A Critical Frame Analysis of Gender Politics in Europe* (pp. 21–49). Budapest: CEU.
- Walby, S. (2009). *Globalization and Inequalities: Complexity and Contested Modernities*. Sage Publications.
- Weiner, E. (2023). A Missing Piece? Men and the Puzzle of Gender Mainstreaming in the European Union. *Men and Masculinities*, 0(0), 1–20.
- Wrigley, J. (Ed.). (1995). *Education and Gender Equality*. London: The Falmer Press.
- Zacharenko, E., (2019). "The neoliberal fuel to the anti-gender movement", in <https://www.ips-journal.eu/regions/europe/the-neoliberal-fuel-to-the-anti-gender-movement-3747/>

Annex I: List of Non-governmental Organisations working at the European level and as umbrellas of national NGOs

- [AGE Platform Europe](#)
- [Autism Europe](#)
- [Caritas Europa](#)
- [CECOP - European confederation of industrial and service cooperatives](#)
- [EAPN - European Anti-Poverty Network](#)
- [EASPD - European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities](#)
- [ECDN - European Consumer Debt Network](#)
- [EDF - European Disability Forum](#)
- [ENAR - European Network Against Racism](#)
- [ENSIE \(European Network of Social Integration Enterprises\)](#)
- [EPA - European Parents' Association](#)
- [EPHA - European Public Health Alliance](#)
- [ERGO Network - European Roma Grassroots Organisations Network](#)
- [ESAN - European Social Action Network](#)
- [EURAG - European Federation of Older Persons](#)
- [EUROCHILD](#)
- [EURODIACONIA – European Federation for Diaconia](#)
- [EURORDIS - European Organisation for Rare Diseases](#)
- [European Parliamentary Forum on Sexual and Reproductive Rights](#)
- [EWL - European Women's Lobby](#)
- [FEFAF - European Federation of Parents and Carers at Home](#)
- [Housing Europe - The European Federation of Public, Cooperative Social Housing](#)
- [ICSW - International Council on Social Welfare Europe](#)
- [IFSW - International Federation of Social Workers Europe](#)
- [IGLYO – The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex \(LGBTQI\) Youth & Student Organisation](#)
- [ILGA Europe - The European Region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association](#)
- [IPPF-International Planned Parenthood](#)
- [IUT – International Union of Tenants](#)
- [PICUM – Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants](#)
- [SOLIDAR](#)

- [SOS Children's Villages International](#)
- [TGEU – Transgender Europe](#)
- [VOLONTEUROPE](#)
- [YFJ - European Youth Forum](#)
- [the Social Platform](#)

Trade Unions working at European level – with national and European affiliates

- ETUC [European Trade Union Confederation](#)
- EAEA [European Arts and Entertainment Alliance](#)
- [EUROCOP](#) European Confederation of Police
- [EFBWW/FETBB](#) European Federation of Building and Woodworkers
- [EFFAT](#) European Federation of Food, Agriculture and Tourism Trade Unions
- [EFJ/FEJ](#) European Federation of Journalists
- [IndustriAll](#) European Federation for Industry and Manufacturing workers
- [EPSU](#) European Federation of Public Service Unions
- [ETF](#) European Transport Workers' Federation
- [ETUCE/CSEE](#) European Trade Union Committee for Education
- [UNI-EUROPA](#) European trade union federation for services and communication

European Foundations

- [Heinrich Böll Foundation Feminist Platform](#)
- [Friedrich Ebert Foundation Brussels](#)
- [Foundation of European Progressive Studies](#)
- [Rosa-Luxemburg-Foundation](#)
- [European Green Foundation](#)

European Networks

- [EQUINET](#) European Network of Equality Bodies

Annex II: Country Reports

Detailed analyses of 9 EU countries and the United Kingdom

This section will be added after the next phase of research is concluded in April 2025.