



## **Empowering Women: WAVE's Manifesto for a Feminist Future in the 2024 European Parliament Elections**

As we stand on the cusp of the 2024 European Parliament elections, we find ourselves at a pivotal moment in our ongoing journey towards gender equality and the eradication of gender-based violence against women. Amidst a backdrop of escalating challenges, from the resurgence of far-right extremism to economic instability and global health crises, it is imperative that we steadfastly uphold the principles of gender equality and human rights. We must elect representatives who are unwavering in their dedication to advancing feminist agendas, prioritising the safety and well-being of women and girls, and dismantling the structures of oppression that perpetuate gender-based violence.

As the largest European network dedicated to preventing and tackling violence against women and domestic violence, Women Against Violence Europe (WAVE) represents over 1,600 women's organisations, primary prevention services, and Women's Specialist Services (WSS) through 178 members across 46 European countries. We call upon voters to support candidates who champion feminist values and advocate for policies that promote gender equality and empower women and girls. Together, let us ensure that the next European Parliament continues the legacy of progress established in the previous term and remains committed to creating a more just, inclusive, and equitable Europe for all.

Over the years, we have witnessed a significant evolution in the recognition and prioritisation of gender equality and violence against women issues within EU policies and politics. The establishment of dedicated portfolios, such as the European Commissioner for Equality, marks a pivotal moment in this journey. Throughout the 2019-2024 European Parliament's 9th term, significant strides were made to promote gender equality and reshape the discourse surrounding gender-based violence against women.

These advancements include landmark legislative measures such as the EU Directive on Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence and the EU accession to the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention), both important steps which our network welcomes, although their adoption falls short of their full potential. Furthermore, as we celebrate the adoption of key policies such as the EU Care Directive, we recognise that this is just the beginning of our journey. Nonetheless, as the 9th European Parliament term draws to a close, it marks the culmination of one of the most progressive periods in the Parliament's history concerning the advancement of gender equality and combating violence against women, yielding tangible results in challenging systemic inequalities and amplifying the voices of women across Europe.

The rights of migrant, undocumented, asylum-seeking, and refugee women must be at the forefront of our feminist agenda. We must unequivocally reject the hypocritical policies that exploit these women's labor while denying them fundamental rights and support. The European Parliament must address neocolonial practices that perpetuate their marginalization and vulnerability. It is imperative to exercise caution in implementing the EU Migration and Asylum



Pact, ensuring that its provisions do not exacerbate the plight of these women. We must adhere to international responsibilities and commitments, guaranteeing that migrant, undocumented, asylum-seeking, and refugee women receive the protection, rights, and dignity they deserve. This includes providing access to essential services, legal support, and pathways to regularization, thereby affirming their place within a just and equitable European society.

The next crucial step is the effective implementation of these policies. Therefore, we call for the appointment of an EU Coordinator tasked with overseeing the implementation of these vital measures. Institutions must stand alongside women and feminist civil society to advance gender equality in Europe and beyond. By continuing to prioritise gender equality, we can ensure that the benefits of our efforts trickle down to EU candidate countries and neighbouring regions, fostering a more just and equitable society for all.

As we reflect on the achievements made, we also recognise the work that lies ahead. The journey toward gender equality is far from over, and the struggle against gender-based violence remains ongoing. We cannot afford to become complacent or rest on our laurels. Instead, we must redouble our efforts and seize the opportunity presented by the upcoming European Parliament elections to reaffirm our feminist commitment to these crucial issues. This recognition reflects a growing understanding of the pervasive nature of gender-based violence against women and the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to end it.

Looking ahead to the 10th European Parliament term (2024-2029), the strong focus on achieving gender equality and ending violence against women must remain at the forefront of EU policies and strategies. To achieve this, WAVE proposes a fundamental change in how we address violence against women and domestic violence, and broader women's and human rights issues. We will work to elicit a paradigm shift to be able to envision a new reality where preventing gender-based violence against women and girls before it occurs is possible.

The new European Parliament must prioritise primary prevention efforts. This involves initiatives such as comprehensive sexual education for girls and young women, promoting respect for the autonomy of women and girls, ensuring access to reproductive rights and health services, and recognising the importance of intersectional equality. The equality agenda cannot afford to overlook the diverse identities and experiences of individuals, as well as the economic dimension of intersectionality. Therefore, intersectional and holistic prevention approaches must be at the forefront of the EU feminist agenda, recognising the interconnected nature of oppression and privilege.

Prevention strategies are typically categorized into three tiers: primary, secondary, and tertiary. Primary prevention focuses on averting violence before it occurs by addressing risk and protective factors. This can include initiatives such as feminist self-defense workshops, peer education programs, and school-based prevention efforts. Secondary prevention involves identifying and responding to violence at an early stage to support survivors and interrupt the cycle of violence. Tertiary prevention concentrates on long-term care for survivors to alleviate trauma, prevent future violence, and hold perpetrators accountable.



While all three tiers of prevention are crucial, primary prevention has historically received less attention and resources. This is primarily due to its direct challenge to entrenched gendered power dynamics compared to secondary and tertiary prevention measures. Thus, the issue lies not in integrating primary prevention as an additional component, but in recognising the need to allocate equal resources to primary prevention as we do for addressing the consequences of gender-based violence against women after it occurs. True progress lies in preventing all forms of violence against women from occurring in the first place, including institutional violence.

By embracing a prevention-oriented approach and centring intersectional perspectives, the new European Parliament can lead the way in creating a future where violence against women is not just reduced, but ultimately prevented. This requires a collective commitment to challenging harmful norms and structures and prioritizing the rights and dignity of all women and girls in Europe.

Additional pending tasks for the new European Parliament at the policy level include the vital finalisation of the revision of the Victims' Rights Directive. It is crucial that this revision is grounded in feminist principles, recognising the inherent value of women's specialist support services, particularly those provided by women from women, integral members of our network. Victims of violence against women require tailored, feminist responses that centre their safety and autonomy. Therefore, the revised Victims' Rights Directive must not only acknowledge but prioritise the vital role of WSS in upholding the rights and dignity of survivors.

Moreover, sustainable budgets for gender equality are paramount. The new Parliament must embrace a feminist ethos, understanding that women's rights are non-negotiable and cannot be subjected to the whims of political agendas. Non-sustained budgets imply a conditional commitment to gender equality, a notion antithetical to feminist principles. Furthermore, amidst discussions of potential conflict in Europe, we must reject the patriarchal notion that war is a solution. War is a patriarchal project that has historically led us astray, perpetuating violence and oppression.

Recent research, such as studies by the Women's Refugee Commission, underscores the disproportionate impact of war on women and children, emphasising the urgency of prioritising peacebuilding efforts. We are deeply concerned by the reduction of financial resources for feminist organisations that support the peace movement. The new European Parliament should take to heart the role of women in peacebuilding as per the Women, Peace and Security UN Resolutions.

Make no mistake: war is an inherently anti-feminist approach. WAVE stands firmly against war and refuses to lend support to such destructive endeavours, understanding that it is women and children who bear the brunt of armed conflict. Instead, the new European Parliament must commit to feminist peacebuilding efforts, investing in dialogue, diplomacy, and conflict prevention. By prioritising the prevention of both war and violence against women and domestic violence, the Parliament can pave the way for a more just and equitable future for all.



Indeed, the work of the new European Parliament must extend beyond legislative revisions and budget allocations. Gender mainstreaming remains a crucial task, integrating gender perspectives into all policies and programs to ensure they address the specific needs and experiences of women and girls. The continuation of initiatives like the EU Gender Equality Week is essential for raising awareness and fostering dialogue on gender equality issues.

Moreover, the Parliament must continue to address challenges such as the prevalence of sexual harassment, and the rejection of a culture of sexual consent, thus shedding light on the pervasive nature of gender-based violence in all its forms. Reproductive and sexual health rights remain under threat, with access to essential services often restricted or denied, particularly for marginalised communities. Economic inequality persists, with women disproportionately affected by poverty and facing barriers to full participation in the economy. We expect further action on the legal access to abortion at the EU level and urge the new parliamentarians to adopt the call of feminists on the European Citizens' Initiative to secure abortion rights in Europe.

Cyberviolence is another urgent issue that demands attention, as online platforms become increasingly common sites of harassment and abuse targeting women and girls. The Parliament must take decisive action to combat this digital gender-based violence and ensure the safety and security of all women and girls.

Furthermore, promoting the meaningful participation of women in the economy is essential for achieving gender equality and economic empowerment. This includes addressing structural barriers such as the gender pay gap and lack of access to leadership positions. In addressing these challenges, the new European Parliament has a responsibility to centre the voices and experiences of women and marginalised communities. By prioritising gender equality in all its forms, the Parliament can contribute to building a more inclusive and equitable Europe for future generations.

In our pursuit of gender equality, we recognise the interconnected nature of oppression and privilege. Intersectional approaches must be central to the EU feminist agenda, acknowledging and addressing the diverse identities and experiences of individuals. By centring intersectional perspectives, the new European Parliament can lead the way in creating a future where violence against women is not just reduced but ultimately prevented.

WAVE remains steadfast in our commitment to advocating for the visibility and recognition of women and girls. We reject the notion of gender-neutral policies that obscure the distinct needs and experiences of women under the guise of equality. Despite progress, the reality is that women and men are not yet equal, and we refuse to allow women to be sidelined or made invisible. We denounce and expect MEPs to reject the continued use of policies as tools to silence and restrict Human Rights defenders and women's associations through the use of "so-called foreign agents" policies, as recently adopted in Georgia.



We are also deeply concerned about the backlash against young female MEPs and politicians, and we expect the EP elections to be a truly free space where gender-diverse and young female politicians can run their campaigns without the constant fear of backlash.

We will continue to champion initiatives that prioritise women and girls, ensuring that their voices are heard and their rights are upheld. It is imperative that policies and programs acknowledge and address the systemic barriers and inequalities that women face, rather than perpetuating the myth of gender neutrality.

By placing women at the forefront of our advocacy efforts, we strive to create a world where all women and girls are empowered to thrive and flourish. Our commitment to gender equality is unwavering, and we will not rest until every woman and girl is afforded the respect, dignity, and opportunities they deserve.

### **Action Plan for a Feminist Future: WAVE's Direct Asks to MEPs**

- *Prioritize Primary Prevention Efforts:* Allocate resources and support initiatives focused on primary prevention of gender-based violence against women, including comprehensive sexual education, promoting autonomy for women and girls, ensuring access to reproductive rights and health services, and advancing intersectional equality.
- *Facilitate Transposition Workshops:* Organize workshops to aid in the transposition of EU directives related to gender equality and violence against women into national legislation, fostering consistent implementation across member states.
- *Finalize Recommendations on Harmful Practices:* Expedite the finalization of recommendations aimed at combating harmful practices like female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage, and honour-based violence, ensuring robust protective measures for women and girls.
- *Strengthen EU Network on Prevention:* Enhance the EU network on the prevention of gender-based violence, providing a more prominent role for feminist civil society organizations in shaping prevention strategies and initiatives.
- *Challenge Gender Stereotypes:* Launch targeted campaigns and initiatives to challenge and dismantle gender stereotypes, addressing the root causes of gender-based discrimination and promoting gender equality in all spheres of society.
- *Collect Comprehensive Data:* Sustain efforts to collect comprehensive data on violence against women and domestic violence in alignment with EU directives, enabling evidence-based policymaking and effective interventions.
- *Close Gender Gaps:* Continue efforts to close gender gaps in society, including those related to salaries, care responsibilities, and access to opportunities in the labor market, with strategies to promote equal pay and redistribute care responsibilities.
- *Implement EU Care Strategy:* Ensure effective implementation of the EU Care Strategy, particularly in childcare, long-term care, and childhood education, to promote gender equality in caregiving roles and alleviate the burden primarily borne by women.





- *Support Migrant and Undocumented Women:* Reject hypocritical policies toward migrant, undocumented, asylum-seeking, and refugee women, addressing neocolonial practices that exploit their labor while denying them rights and support.
- *Exercise Caution with EU Migration and Asylum Pact:* Exercise caution in implementing the EU Migration and Asylum Pact, particularly concerning its implications for migrant, undocumented, asylum-seeking, and refugee women, ensuring adherence to international responsibilities and commitments.
- *Enforce Pay Transparency Measures:* Implement robust pay transparency measures to address gender pay gaps and promote women's rights in the workplace, empowering women to advocate for fair and equal compensation.
- *Advocate for Gender Equality in Political Representation:* Champion gender equality in the European Parliament and the European Commission, ensuring women's equal representation in leadership positions and decision-making bodies at all levels, including within EU institutions and EP offices. Additionally, support the continuation and strengthening of the FEMM Committee to address gender equality issues effectively.
- *Ensure a Commissioner for Gender Equality and Combatting Violence:* Advocate for the continued presence of a Commissioner dedicated to advancing gender equality and combating violence against women, ensuring these critical issues receive attention and resources.
- *Secure Abortion Rights:* Take further action on the legal access to abortion at the EU level and adopt the call of feminists on the European Citizens' Initiative to secure abortion rights in Europe.
- *Enhance Support for Peacebuilding:* Increase financial resources for feminist organizations that support the peace movement, taking to heart the role of women in peacebuilding as per the Women, Peace and Security UN Resolutions.

These direct asks are aligned with our manifesto's vision for a feminist future in the 2024 European Parliament elections.