

GIRLS SPEAK OUT

WITH YOUTH VOICES

EUROPEAN WEEK OF
ACTION FOR
GIRLS

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Save the Children



In light of the recent European elections, we put forward how the new EU leadership can turn the EU into a champion for girls' rights globally.

The EU has made strong promises to girls. In addition to its commitments in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its 17 Goals (SDGs), it has put in place policies and initiatives of its own, such as the new EU Consensus on Development, the Gender Action Plan II and the Spotlight Initiative, and has signed the Istanbul Convention. However, many steps still need to be taken to ensure that the EU lives up to these commitments. It is therefore crucial that the new members of the European Parliament listen and act for girls, meaning: they commit to taking concrete actions to advance gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women globally.

We urge the European Parliament to push for a comprehensive approach to realise human rights for girls everywhere, with matching investments reflected in the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) – both internally and externally – and actions directed towards what matters most to girls: enabling their civic and political empowerment and their participation in decisions that concern them by ending all forms of discrimination and violence, ensuring their economic empowerment and their right to education. With the upcoming elections and the MFF on the agenda, we believe it is time for the European Parliament to show girls and women all over the world that it stands with them.

HOW CAN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT REALISE A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH FOR GIRLS?

Members of the European Parliament can hold EU institutions to account for the implementation of their commitments and ensure the rights of girls and young women are integrated in all the European Parliament's actions and initiatives, legislative and non-legislative.

- 1. Call on the EU to mainstream a gender perspective in all policies and actions.** This involves the systematic consideration of the different conditions, situations and needs based on gender, while applying an intersectional perspective.
- 2. Promote and secure targeted and specific measures to eliminate, prevent or provide remedy for gender inequalities.** Indeed, mainstreaming alone is not enough to ensure meaningful impact.
- 3. Monitor progress on the implementation of EU policies and call out violations of girls' rights.** This includes monitoring the implementation of the EU Guidelines for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of the Child, the EU Strategic Framework on Human Rights and Democracy, and the 10 principles for integrated child protection systems as well as improving policy coherence for sustainable development and striving for sufficient resources for implementation at EU Delegation and Member State level. Additionally, the European Parliament should call on violations of girls' rights and redress mechanisms in a constructive and systematic manner.

HOW CAN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ENSURE INVESTMENTS TO MATCH THIS APPROACH?

The European Parliament should commit to ensure that investments are made in protecting and empowering girls both internally and externally within the EU annual budgets and the new MFF negotiations. The European Parliament should make sure that this commitment becomes reality both when adopting the next 7-year EU budget, and throughout its legislature when voicing its opinion on annual budgets.

- 1. Guarantee a gender-responsive budget.** To that end, the European Parliament must ask that the EU budget is subject to a gender budgeting approach and that its structures, mechanisms and tools are appropriately adjusted. In this regard, a system¹ supported by adequate resources should be put in place, allowing the monitoring of EU spending to ensure investments are on track with its commitment

¹ Such a system would require the EU to build capacity at all levels, to adopt a clear set of tools and indicators and a robust tracking system to monitor progress and ensure (at least) the collection of gender- and age- disaggregated data, to conduct regular and publicly available impact assessments and establish clear mechanisms to adjust the budget taking advantage especially of the mid-term review, and finally, to consult civil society organisations and in particular women's and girls' organisations in Europe and in partner countries throughout this process.

to reach the most marginalised girls.

- 2. Call for an increase in budget for gender equality and tackling discrimination and violence against girls and young women** as well as call for an increase in visibility and communication around such funding, as done in previous years with the DAPHNE programme within the EU, or in external funding with the Spotlight Initiative.
- 3. Ensure that 85% of all external EU programmes have gender as a principal or significant objective**, in conformity with the commitment made in the EU Gender Action Plan. MEPs should ensure that the EU allocates at least 20% (of these 85%) to targeted actions that have gender equality as a principal objective. Gender should also be present under each geographic and thematic windows of the EU external action budget.

HOW CAN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT FOCUS ON WHAT MATTERS MOST?

The European Parliament should play a key champion role in the following four areas. Although these do not encompass all issues that are relevant to and have an impact on girls' lives, they are critical to their rights and empowerment.

Deliver an EU strategy to end all forms of discrimination and violence against all girls and young women both internally and externally

- Call for a systematic integration of a Sexual Gender Based Violence response in every humanitarian and peacebuilding intervention and promote investment in protection, mental health and psychosocial services to address the specific needs of girls and young women affected by violence;
- Encourage mandatory, specialized child-focused and gender training for EU Delegation and CSDP staff, including capacity building to prevent and monitor girls' rights violations.
- Promote and open spaces for representatives and participants of programmes on girls' empowerment and awareness-raising of girls' rights in and out of school, which also involve boys and men, community leaders, faith-based leaders and communities at large.

“We want you guys to create helplines and safe spaces that are accesible online and offline for everyone and we want you to ensure that there is trained staff and that children and students are educated about gender based violence including sexual health education” (Rea, 15)

Ensure the economic empowerment of girls and young women

- Call for a dedicated budget to promote youth entrepreneurship and employment in partner countries in the next MFF, with a clear focus on girls young women;
- Call for an increased and specific focus in EU policy and practice to improve young women's land tenure, financial literacy, inclusion, market access, as well as to support the development of local micro, small and medium enterprises and young and female smallholders and entrepreneurs, to contribute to equality of employment and education opportunities;
- Call on the EU only to invest in private sector actors which respect and contribute to the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement and the Decent Work Agenda, thus promoting workers' rights and the UN business and human rights principles;
- Call on the EU to invest in capacity building for youth-, grassroots- and community-led organisations, including in terms of finance and project management, to ensure their empowerment and resilience. In addition, the European Parliament should call for lightening administrative requirements and lowering grants' amounts so that EU funding can be more accessible to these organisations.

“Women's economic empowerment boosts productivity, increases economic diversification and boosts GDP. When more women work, economies grow” (Hawa, 23)

Promote quality, gender-sensitive, accessible and inclusive education for all girls and young women in all EU external and internal policies

- Encourage the adoption of legislation and policy that fights against gender stereotypes and discrimination in formal and non-formal education;
- Champion the promotion and completion of quality, gender-sensitive and inclusive education of girls and young women and safe, quality learning environments;
- In external action, explicitly ensure ring-fenced levels of spending for health, education and social protection as per the EU commitment to allocate at least 20% of EU ODA for human development and social inclusion.

“The EU should step up its long-term financial support to quality education systems and other key sectors that are prerequisite to enable girls to attend school. The next EU long-term budget should be the key tool to achieve that” (Peace, 21)

Support girls' participation and political empowerment

- Call on the EU to invest in the next MFF in child and youth-focused approaches that are participatory, empowering, and innovative in parallel with specific programmes dedicated to the political empowerment of girls and young women. Especially important in this regard is more flexible funding of smaller amounts, to support local movements of girls' rights activists;
- Encourage the EU - including the EU Delegations - to work with governments to increase their consultation of young people, ensuring that girls are equally represented, as well as themselves opening up safe spaces for young people to share their views with government officials including local governments;
- Call for the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda to be systematically integrated in every peacebuilding intervention and promote the pivotal role of girls and young women for sustaining peace and violence prevention.

“I want you all to listen and hear what we have to say, to validate our opinions and encourage us to move forward in our plans to change the world” (Laura, 19)

Find out more about our youth advocates at www.europeanweekofactionforgirls.org.

