A policy paper presented by

G5+♀
Gender five plus

GENDER EQUALITY AND THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

From the Conference on the Future of Europe to a Feminist Europe

Written by **Victoire OLCZAK**

OUTLINE

FOREWORD

When the proposal for a Conference on the future of Europe was made in 2019 by the Commission and the European Parliament, prospects for Europe and gender equality were grim. The pandemic had not struck yet, but Europe was still paying the toll of the 2008 crisis and years of neglect of social policy; proposals for new legislation was stuck in the Council and the term backsliding became common to define gender equality at European and national levels.

In this dark landscape, the official launch of the Conference in April 2021 shined as a glimpse of hope and the first opportunity to concentrate on a future which could be brighter with more European solidarity to challenge the big issues of climate change and digital transformation and eradicate the patriarchal governance structures which had de facto excluded women and minorities from decision making. This opening on the future appeared to us in Gender Five Plus to be an opportunity to think ahead and develop a younger, updated and more democratic and feminist vision of Europe while politicians are increasingly drawn into competing for media attention and twittering linked to short term, national(ist) policies.

Against the long-held conviction that gender equality was on a slow but constant upward trend, recently the frailness of our democratic progress has gone beyond the alert level with the emergence of anti-democratic and anti-gender rulers even in Europe and the destruction of a long established and core women's right in the US. In this context, on top of the Pandemic which mobilised much of our attention, G5+ engaged in this new exercise with contributions to the platform, participation in expert fora when invited and by organising public online events. These events confirmed that the gender perspective should have been an essential component to create a better and more inclusive Europe.

We are proud to offer for discussion a policy paper on the gender perspective of the Conference. While adopting both a descriptive and analytical approach to the Conference's processes and outcomes, the paper aims at designing recommendations for the future policies coming out of it. It was written by Victoire Olczak, a junior researcher in G5+, under the responsibility and supervision of the board and the advisory committee. We are particularly grateful to all the officials and institutions which have opened their doors to help Victoire with her research. In particular we wish to thank[1] Jeromine Andolfatto (EWL), Valentina Balzani (Citizen Ambassador), Gabi Bischoff (Socialists & Democrats MEP), Aline Bruser (ETUC), Stefana Di Battista (Common Secretariat), Mattia de' Grassi (Cabinet of Commission Vice-President Šuica), Susanne Hoeke (Common Secretariat), Camille Hubac (Cabinet of

---

[1] In alphabetical order.

Commission Vice-President Šefčovič's), Eduard Hulicius (Cabinet of Commission Vice-President Jourova), Inete Ielite (Women's NGO Cooperation Network of Latvia), Maria Joao Rodriguez (FEPS President), Sarah King (EESC Workers Group Secretariat), Margherita Logrillo (EESC), Noelle O Connell (European Movement Ireland), Danièle Réchard (Common Secretariat of the CoFoE), Lorenzo Repetti (ETUC), Stefanie Ricken (Socialists & Democrats), Arielle Rouby (Socialists & Democrats), Federico Terreni (Europe Mouvement International), Laeticia Thissen (FEPS), Reka Safrany (EWL president), Christa Schweng (EESC president), and Marina Zelenetska (Citizen Ambassador).

Introduction

The first stage or the COFOE ended on 9 May in Strasbourg with the formal presentation of 49 recommendations and 326 measures. During this last plenary session, as throughout the conference, gender parity among participants was duly observed. One could say that the gender contract was indeed respected. However, as only 4% of the measures finally adopted addressed gender issues or contained a gender-sensitive approach[2], in G5+we believe that it was only symbolically respected.

To understand the discrepancy between a rhetorically open and inclusive formal process and the lack of measures to "eliminate discrimination and inequalities between men and women" in the content produced by the conference, we will first describe a democratic process that was not helped by the circumstances. This first part provides an overview of the complex process underlying the holding of the conference and its structures, highlighting both the continuum and the innovation embodied by the CoFoE.

The findings then highlight that despite the unprecedented presence of women in both the leadership structures and the citizen discussion space, the content of the conference remained gender-blind and completely lacked an intersectional approach. As a result, we will find that some of the most prominent issues for creating a gender equitable future were simply not considered or discussed. After looking at the obstacles that explain why gender issues were formally but not substantially integrated into the conference and based on the interviews conducted and documents produced for the conference, as well as the literature, this paper demonstrates how holding the conference with a gender perspective could have provided inclusive recommendations.

Although these results are disappointing, we are convinced that policy implications can be drawn from both the content of the recommendations and the processes of citizen participation set up for the conference. Part IV therefore provides us with an overview of how the contributions of CoFoE can be used to promote gender equality in the European Union.

Finally, given that the conference did not consider gender equality issues holistically, this paper offers important policy recommendations that would follow the design of the conference and lead us towards a feminist future for Europe. Particular attention is given to gender-based violence as well as the issue of care, which surprisingly after #MeToo and the COVID pandemic did not feature in the conference.

---

[2] See p.14.

I. OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS BEHIND THE CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE (CoFoE)

A. An innovative feature for a recurrent concern

The CoFoE, a democratic atonement?

Even though holding such a large-scale European citizens' consultation is a first, the **involvement of citizens has always been a concern of the EU**. In fact, this concern was significantly reinforced by the Treaty referendum in 2005. Indeed, the EU attempted to address its "democratic deficit" by launching the ambitious *Convention on the Future of Europe*, also known as the *European Constitutional Convention*, in 2002. What was relatively[3] new was that the **mode of discussion was more deliberative**, the **proceedings were made public and civil society** was asked for feedback[4]. Nevertheless, only members of the EU institutions and national governments participated. An important point in the analysis of the consideration of gender issues at the conference is the remarkable development compared to the Convention. When only 18 out of 105 Convention members were women, the Conference achieved parity - almost in all areas.

Their work eventually led to the *Draft Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe*, which was signed by representatives of the then 25 member states. However, the rejection of the document by French and Dutch voters brought the ratification process to an end. Although most of the provisions of this constitution were eventually adopted under the Lisbon Treaty in 2007, **this failure entailed the EU's democratic legitimacy**. Thus, Alemanno & Nicolaidis argued that **"todays' COFOE can be seen as a much delayed, post Eurocrisis, democratic atonement[5]."** Indeed, the project is reminiscent of this Convention not only in name, but also in its structure, as both were chaired by the presidents of the three EU institutions (Parliament, Commission and Council) and aimed to increase the involvement of civil society and citizens[6]. **Initiating such a process therefore falls under a certain continuity** with the *European Constitutional Convention*.

---

[3] This method has already been used for the drafting of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights in 2000

[4] Lombardo, Emanuela. "Integrating or setting the agenda? Gender mainstreaming in the European constitution-making process." Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society 12.3 (2005): 412-432.

[5] Alemanno, Alberto, and Kalypso Nicolaïdis. "Citizen Power Europe. The Making of a European Citizens' Assembly." Alberto Alemanno and Kalypso Nicolaidis, Citizen Power Europe: The Making of a European Citizens' Assembly, in A. Alemanno and P. Sellal, The Groundwork of European Power, RED (Revue Européenne du Droit) 3 (2022).

[6] Blokker, Paul. "The Constitutional Deficit, Constituent Activism, and the (Conference on the) Future of Europe." Imagining Europe. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, (2021): 303-340.

An event drawn upon previous experiences

The CoFoE thus draws on **the experience of the European Constitutional Convention, but also on recent national events**. For example, there have been several large-scale citizens' consultations in Europe in recent years, notably in Ireland, the United Kingdom (UK) and France. They all confirmed the idea that there are **clear benefits in involving citizens in shaping societal development in response to major challenges**[7]. Like these three events, the CoFoE was intended to gather citizens chosen at random but representing the diversity of European society. To achieve this goal, gender parity had to be strictly observed in each of these events.

While in Ireland the citizens' assemblies were described as "a vital step on the road to generating support for constitutional change[8]", the concrete effects in France and in the UK were relatively weak. Those conferences are also illustrations of unsatisfactory practices, in particular they have proven **the crucial role of conducting a proper follow-up**.

Learning from those previous experiences, the CoFoE had the potential to boost the building of a common vision, beyond the specific interests of each Member State, foster pan-European solidarity, and contribute to the creation of a genuine European common good[9].

B. A laborious construction initiated during the pandemic

An event co-led by the European Parliament, the Commission, and the Council of the EU

Following the French President's call, the European Commission and the European Parliament announced a first proposal for such a conference at the end of 2019. However, as from the very start the European Parliament and the Member States have had **polar opposite ideas on the conference's purpose** and **how it should operate**[10], the conception of the whole event was a long process. Indeed, **it rather "morphed into another manifestation of typical inter-EU tensions"** as obtaining a compromise

---

[7] Eymard, Laurence. "From the French Citizens' Convention on Climate to the Conference on the Future of Europe: A participatory science and democracy perspective." European Law Journal 26.1-2 (2020): 136-140.

[8] "The Irish Times view on citizens' assemblies: out-sourcing political decisions". The Irish Times. 14 June 2019.

[9] Eymard, op.cit., p.140.

[10] Ålander, Minna. "EU Member States' Views on the Conference on the Future of Europe." European Policy Institutes Network (2021).

between the three institutions for such a large event was found to be even more complex than usual[11].

Eventually, on 10 March 2021, the [Joint Declaration on the Conference on the Future of Europe](#) was signed by the late President of the European Parliament David Sassoli, Portuguese Prime Minister António Costa on behalf of the Council of the EU and Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. This Joint Declaration, the first document defining the lean governance structure, emphasised that the **three EU institutions would be equally represented in each of them**. This composition allowed for the **continuous collegiality of the work yet meant lengthy processes**. Nonetheless, as it gathered ALL the EU institutions as well as the civil society organisations and above all the European citizens, the Conference **achieved to include the full diversity of actors involved in the Future of Europe**.

A process limited by the pandemic

The **initially proposed duration of the conference of two years** provided enough time to put in place a mechanism combining national and transnational citizen panels working on the different issues in cooperation with the relevant EU institutions. [12]. Nonetheless, **the pandemic delayed the whole process** and led to the joint decision to make it a **one-year event** instead. If one can understand the reasons behind this decision, it has been **criticised by civil society organisations[13].** It has proved to **be very complex to organise such an event** which involves so many different actors **in such a short time**. It was pointed out that the sometimes late communication of agendas or programmes **hampered the work of all participants**, be they EU citizens, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) or civil society organisations.

---

[11] Russack, Sophia. "The Good, the Bad and the Ugly of the Conference on the Future of Europe." CEPS (2022).

[12] Eymard, op.cit., p.140.

[13] The European Movement International organisation in particular had highlighted the crucial role of a two-year process.

C. A multi-level conferences

Citizen's inputs

The citizens had **three main ways to put forward their ideas** and discuss them with other European citizens namely, the multilingual digital platform, the European and National Citizen's Panels and the Additional events set up.

The topics were divided into nine themes, integrated in four different panels, as followed:

- **Panel 1 - Stronger economy, social justice, jobs and education, youth, culture, sport, and digital transformation.**

It included the working group 3 "Stronger economy, social justice, and jobs", the working group 6 "Education, culture, youth, and sport", and the working group 9 "Digital transformation".

- **Panel 2 - Values, rights, rule of law, democracy and (internal) security**

This panel included the working group 7 "European democracy" and the working group 5 "Values and rights, rule of law, security".
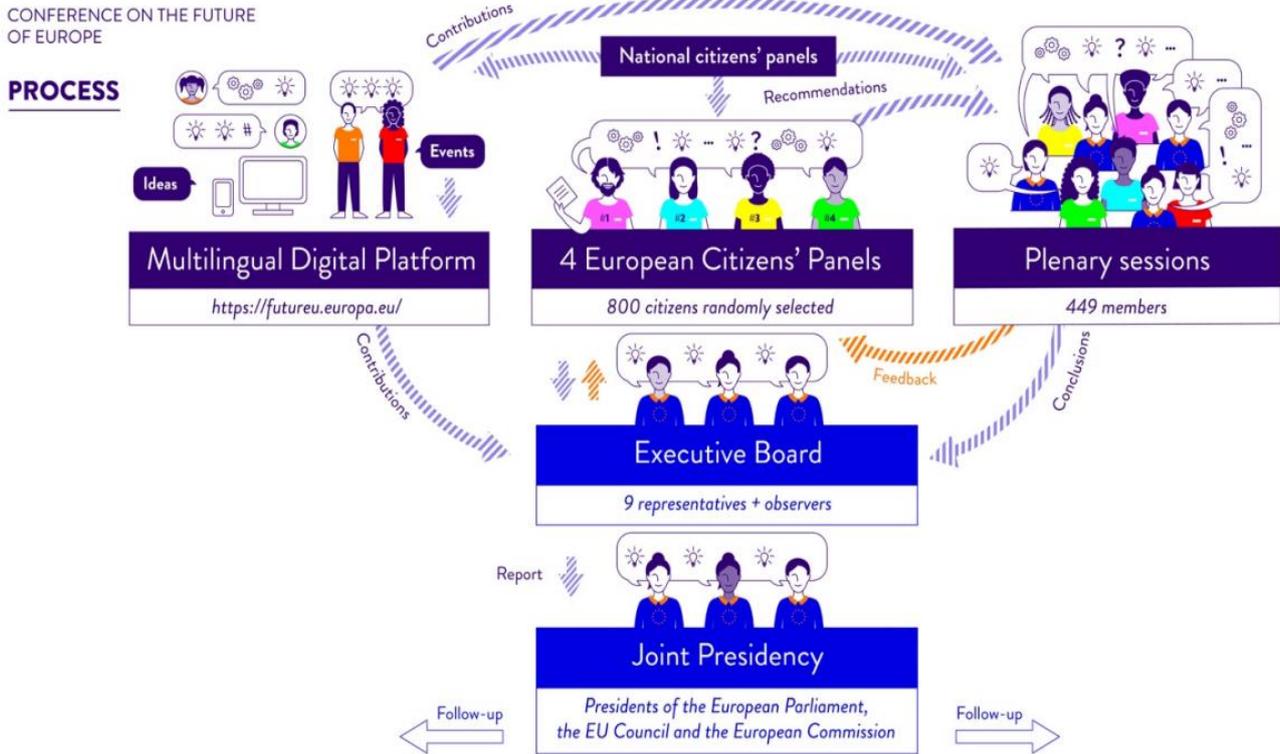
- **Panel 3 - Climate change, environment, and health**

The working group 1 "Climate change and the environment" and working group 2 "Health" were addressed in this panel.

- **Panel 4 - EU in the world and migration**

The working group 4 "EU in the World" and the working group 8 "Migration" were discussed in this panel.

Main bodies of the conference (CoFoE document)

1) Multilingual Digital Platform

The multilingual digital platform was the **main hub for citizens' contributions and information** and an interactive tool for sharing ideas and contributions from the multitude of events that took place during the conference. The main feature of this platform is its **multilingual dimension**, which allowed citizens with different languages to discuss their ideas. There were **three ways to contribute to the platform**, namely to **publish an idea**, to **comment on an idea** or to **organise an event**.

2) Citizen's panels

- European Citizens' Panels

The **central feature of the CoFoE was the European Citizens' Panels**. A total of 800 randomly selected citizens, representative of the **EU's sociological and geographical diversity**, organised into four Panels of 200 citizens, met for three deliberative sessions each.

- National Citizens' Panels

Member States were encouraged to organise **National Panels, following the same guidelines as the European level ones**. Overall, six Member States organised one panel (Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, and the Netherlands).

3) Other events (National events and the European Youth Event)

In addition, Member State authorities were also able to **contribute to and enrich the debates with a variety of events and initiatives**. They were **organised by various institutions and stakeholders**, including national, regional and local authorities, civil society organisations, social partners, associations and citizens. Most of these events subsequently **published reports on the Digital Platform**. The European Parliament also took the lead in organising the *European Youth Event* (EYE2021), which brought together over 10,000 young Europeans in Strasbourg and online on 8and 9 October 2021.

4) The Conference Plenary system

Those **inputs were then discussed during plenary sessions**. The Conference Plenaries included members of the European Parliament (108) and national parliaments (108), representatives of the Council (54) and European Commission (3), as well participants of the European Citizens' Panels (80), participants of national events and National Citizens' Panels (27), representatives of the Committee of the Regions (18), regional and local authorities (6+6), European Economic and Social Committee (18), social partners (12), civil society (8), and the European Youth Forum (1).

The Plenary discussed the proposals made by the Citizens' Panels and popular ideas from the Digital Platform. On 29 and 30 April, **the final Plenary of the Conference adopted its conclusions which consisted of <u>49 proposals </u>across the <u>nine themes</u> and more than <u>326 affixed measures</u>.**

As direct results, the Commission issued its first Communication since the end of the Conference in June 2022 highlighting its will to carry out a proper follow up and to pursue the democratic involvement of citizens. For its part, the EP called for a Convention for the revision of the Treaties[14]. Finally, the Czech Presidency took the initiative to distribute a questionnaire to the governments of all MS to assess if they want to continue the path of reform opened with the conclusions of the CoFoE and in which area.

---

[14] European Parliament, European Parliament Resolution on the call for a Convention for the revision of the Treaties, 9 June 2022, P9_TA (2022) 0244.

II.   AN INCLUSIVE YET GENDER-BLIND EVENT

A.   An unprecedented level of women's participation

Looking at Conference's executive structures and the Citizen's Panels

As set out in the first article of the [Common Principles for the CoFoE](#), **all the components of the lean governance had to be gender-balanced**. The reality, however, is a little more nuanced. Indeed, if we look at all board meetings, gender parity is not always maintained as members change depending on the meeting. If we exclude the observers, at the first meeting held[15] there were 4 women out of a total of nine. However, if we include the observers, only 12 women are present out of the 32 participants. For its part, the Joint Secretariat paid strict attention to gender parity, especially among the members who attended the Executive Board meetings. The efforts made to ensure parity in the governance structures must be highlighted, but they need to be nuanced, as **gender parity was not always effective in all structures during the Conference**, contrary to the provisions of the Rules of Procedure. Some pre-existing inequalities in the EU institutions can be blamed for this situation. For example, there is only one woman among the chairpersons of the seven political groups represented on the EP and it is rather complicated to achieve gender parity in a structure that includes all political groups.

According to article 5 of the rules of procedure, "the citizens shall be chosen randomly, and be representative of EU sociological diversity, in terms of citizens' **geographic origin**, **gender**, **age**, **socioeconomic background** and/or **level of education**. One third of each Citizens' panel shall be composed of people younger than 25". Those five criteria were the ones used by the company *Kantar* [16] when they took care of the composition of the panels. **The Citizen's Panels**, whether at national or European level, **were effectively designed as gender balanced**. Particular attention has also been paid to **ensuring a similar diversity**, including in terms of gender parity, **among the specialists** accompanying the citizens during the preliminary sessions. Additionally, the article 16 clearly stated that "the composition of the Conference Plenary shall respect gender balance", which was also rigorously respected.

There is a **consensus** among the various representatives of the EU institutions, of the civil society organisations and the citizens who took part in the panels that **parity has been**

---

[15] See the Summary report of the first and constitutive meetings of the Executive Board of the Conference on the Future of Europe available here https://futureu.europa.eu/pages/executive-board
[16] Kantar Group is a data analytics and brand consulting company working in various research disciplines, including social media monitoring, advertising effectiveness, consumer and shopper behaviour, and public opinion. The EU employed Kantar in particular for the Eurobarometer.

respected and that **speaking times were equally divided between men and women**. When interrogated on the topic, women appointed citizen ambassadors declared they "didn't feel any differential treatment as women" and that they "felt confident taking the floor[17]".

Looking at the specific case of the digital platform

As soon as the first report on contributions by Member States on the digital platform was published in September 2021, a **major disparity between the participation of women and men in the platform** was pointed out. Considering the fact that a quarter of contributors did not provide information on their gender, we find that only 14.7% of those who contributed to the platform identified themselves as women[18], while the vast majority were men (60.4%). Furthermore, in the states where the majority of participants have indicated their gender, the percentage of those who identify as men has increased the most. This is the case in the Netherlands, where only 2% of participants did not indicate their gender and 84% identified themselves as men and only 13% as women. This overall average thus reflects the different realities across Member States. While men generally contributed significantly more than women, some countries managed to achieve a greater gender balance on the platform, such as Lithuania (with 36% women and 34% men), or even reverse the trend, such as Latvia, where women made up the majority of participants who provided information on their gender (52%).

It is worth noting that the Member States that **rank first in the EU in the Gender Equality Index do not necessarily have experienced a higher participation of women**. The best example is probably **Finland**, the first country to grant women full political rights in 1906, which ranks 4th in the EU. Between April and September 2021, only 3% of participants were women. Participation then rose to 8% between September and February 2022, but never exceeded 10%, while the proportion of men never fell below 88% throughout the period.

This situation was raised in a first online conference organized by G5+ on October 4th (2021) and recommendations were made to add gender equality as a cross-cutting issue and a theme of the Conference and to provide support for women's rights organizations to take a leadership role in engaging citizens, especially women in the CoFoE[19]. Yet, as the final report show, those recommendations were not considered or not sufficiently. If the CoFoE's leading

---

[17] Quote from interviews with Marina Z. and Valentina B.
[18] Is considered as a "contribution" any idea, comment or event published on the Platform.
[19] https://www.genderfiveplus.com/single-post/conference-on-the-future-of-europe-why-a-gender-perspective-is-needed-1

structures recognized this disparity and tried to tackle it, the final report (with only 15.9% identified as women) shows that **these efforts did not produce conclusive effects**.

Additionally, the **lack of accessibility of the platform** must be pointed out. Although the European Disability Forum highlighted several issues faced by persons with disabilities when using the platform[20], it was never adequately corrected. There are over **60 million women and girls with disabilities in Europe** whose needs are already less likely heard and therefore **missed an occasion to raise their concerns to the public debate**.

B. A complete absence of gender mainstreaming and intersectionality in the content

What is gender mainstreaming?

Gender mainstreaming was described as the policy approach for achieving gender equality for the first time in 1995 at the United Nations Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. The European Commission defined it in 1996 as "**not restricting efforts to promote equality to the implementation of specific measures to help women but mobilising all general policies and measures specifically for the purpose of achieving equality[1]**". The concept of gender mainstreaming was then officially adopted in the EU treaties with the Amsterdam Treaty [1]in 1997. The legal basis for gender mainstreaming was further strengthened in **Article 8 TFEU**, which commits that "**in all its activities, the Union shall aim to eliminate inequalities, and to promote equality, between men and women[1]**".

The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) in the European Parliament detailed the definition gender mainstreaming by adding it includes "the integration of a gender perspective **into every aspect of EU policy** – preparation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, legal measures and spending programmes – with a view to achieving equality between women and men[1]."

In a second online conference organised by G5+ on 1 February 2022, CoFoE participants pushed to address three main issues to address concerns raised by women for the future: the care economy, parity democracy and gender-based violence. Discussions also

---

[20] EDF commissioned an accessibility audit of this website from the Swedish accessibility company Funka. The thorough report showed that persons using assistive technologies such as screen readers, or those who rely on keyboard navigation because of a motor disability cannot use the website. EDF sent this to the Executive Board who acknowledged the issue without addressing it fully. https://www.edf-feph.org/the-platform-of-the-conference-on-the-future-of-europe-must-fix-its-accessibility-problems/

revolved around how to prevent the pandemic crisis from jeopardising progress for women and how to ensure that Europe is a role model in the field of gender equality, both towards its member states and on the international stage[21].

In addition, mainstreaming gender inequalities, includes intersectional circumstances. Indeed, **gender inequalities intersect with other structural inequalities including class, race/ethnicity, physical ability, sexuality, religion, and age**[1]. Instead of assuming that, for example, gender operates in the same way across all women's experiences, "intersectionality seeks to understand the many different ways in which socio-economic status, race, disability, age, sexuality, nationality, faith and gender identity can shape women's lives and create distinct forms of inequality[1]." Indeed, as Oxfam researcher Fenella Porter puts it, "**No one is just poor, or just working class, or just a woman, or just a disabled person**[1]". By opening broad social categories and looking at how inequalities interact, intersectional analysis supports a far richer understanding of how inequalities multiply or compound one another[1].

According to the gender mainstreaming commitments that the EU has imposed on itself, the **conference should have included a gender perspective as an EU activity**. However, according to the recommendations that have emerged from this whole process, **it can hardly be said that this was the case.**

Looking at the few recommendations addressing gender issues

Out of a total of 326 measures, 13 measures consider a gender related issue or/and include a gender approach. Those thirteen measures, reported in the following table, reflect that the CoFoE did include some measures likely to improve gender equality. Yet, **with only 4% of the measures considering gender issues, there has been no specific effort to mainstream gender issues in the Conference**[22] nor to adopt an intersectional approach.

---

[21] See conclusions and recommendations of COFOE, women and the future of Europe https://www.genderfiveplus.com/single-post/cofoe-women-and-the-future-pf-europe-recommendations-and-highlights

[22] When we asked the secretariat, the answer was that gender equality was not the issue of the conference.

Gender content extracted from the 49 recommendations

Working group	Proposal	Objective	Concerned measures
Health	9 - A broader understanding of Health	Adopt a **holistic approach to health**, addressing, beyond diseases and cures, health literacy and prevention, and **fostering a shared understanding of the challenges faced by those who are ill or disabled**, in line with the "One Health Approach", which should be emphasized as a horizontal and fundamental principle encompassing all EU policies.	*Measure 5*: **Recognise as regular medical treatment in terms of taxation the hormonal contraception products used for medical reasons**, such as in the cases of fibromyalgia and endometriosis, as well as female sanitary products. **Ensure access to reproductive treatments for all individuals suffering fertility problems**.
A stronger economy, social justice and jobs	12 - Enhancing EU's competitiveness and further deepening the Single Market	We propose strengthening the competitiveness and resilience of the European Union's economy, single market, industry and addressing strategic dependencies. There is **a need for a strong functioning market economy in order to facilitate the vision of a more social Europe**.	*Measure 21*: New **EU policy initiatives** should undergo a "**competitiveness check**" to analyse their impact on companies and their business environment. **Such check shall be in accordance with**, the Paris Agreement, the Sustainable Development Goals, including **gender equality**. To this effect, we also propose the **establishment of a European Advisory Competitiveness Body**. Such body **should include organised civil society** and the social partners in its governance.
A stronger economy, social justice and jobs	13 - Inclusive labour markets	We propose to **improve the functioning of labour markets** so that they ensure fairer working conditions and **promote gender equality**, employment, including that of young people and vulnerable groups. We need to **ensure the full implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights** at EU, national, regional and local level **in the areas of "equal opportunities and access to the labour market"** and "fair working conditions".	*Measure 6*: Ensuring gender equality, in line with 2020-2025 EU Gender Equality Strategy. The EU should continue measuring the gender equality through a gender equality index, monitor the strategy yearly and be transparent with the achievements; and encourage the sharing of expertise and best practices and set up a **possible direct citizen-feedback mechanism**. There is a need to **address gender pay gap** and introduce quotas in senior positions.There should be **more support for women entrepreneurs** in the business environment and women in STEM (discussions).
A stronger economy, social justice and jobs	15. Proposal: Demographic transition	We propose to **address the challenges arising from the demographic transition**, in particular low birth rates and a steadily ageing population, by ensuring support to people throughout the lifecycle. This should involve **comprehensive action aimed at all generations**, from children and young people, to families, to the working-age population, to older persons who are still prepared to work as well as those in retirement or need of care.	*Measure 10*: . Taking **coordinated action** at the European level **for collecting data disaggregated by factors such as gender** and analysing demographic trends, sharing best practices and knowledge and supporting Member States in shaping and **implementing adequate policies** including by establishing a specialized EU body in this area.
A stronger economy, social justice and jobs	16 - Fiscal and tax policies	We propose that the EU promotes **future-oriented investments** focused on the green and digital transitions with **a strong** social and **gender dimension**	
Values and rights, rule of law, security	29 - Anti-discrimination, Equality and Quality of life	**Take action to harmonize living conditions across the EU and improve EU citizens' socio-economic quality of life**	Measure 2: **Increasing** and facilitating direct public **investment in** education, health, housing, physical infrastructures, care for the elderly and people with disabilities. Additional investment should also aim to guarantee **appropriate work/life balance for citizens**
Values and rights, rule of law, security	29 - Anti-discrimination, Equality and Quality of life	**Take action to harmonize living conditions across the EU and improve EU citizens' socio-economic quality of life**	*Measure 4*: **Providing EU-wide criteria on anti-discrimination in the labour market** and **incentivizing the hiring by private companies of people** that are usually **most subject to discrimination** (e.g. youth, elders, **women**, minorities), including through **subsidies**, and, as a second step, **temporary quotas**. Social partners should be closely associated in this regard. **Discrimination outside the labour market should also be prevented by law, and equality promoted.**
Values and rights, rule of law, security	29 - Anti-discrimination, Equality and Quality of life	**Take action to harmonize living conditions across the EU and improve EU citizens' socio-economic quality of life**	*Measure 5*: Ensuring the **creation** and **facilitation** of **affordable kindergartens**, both public and in the private sector, and **free childcare for those in need of it**.
Values and rights, rule of law, security	29 - Anti-discrimination, Equality and Quality of life	**Take action to harmonize living conditions across the EU** and **improve EU citizens' socio-economic quality of life**	*Measure 4*: **Providing EU-wide criteria on anti-discrimination in the labour market** and **incentivizing the hiring by private companies of people** that are usually **most subject to discrimination** (e.g. youth, elders, **women**, minorities), including through **subsidies**, and, as a second step, **temporary quotas**. Social partners should be closely associated in this regard. **Discrimination outside the labour market should also be prevented by law, and equality promoted.**
Values and rights, rule of law, security	29 - Anti-discrimination, Equality and Quality of life	**Take action to harmonize living conditions across the EU** and **improve EU citizens' socio-economic quality of life**	*Measure 5*: Ensuring the **creation** and **facilitation** of **affordable kindergartens**, both public and in the private sector, and **free childcare for those in need of it**.
Digital Transformation	32 - Digital literacy and skills that empower people	We propose that the EU ensures that **all European citizens can benefit from digitalisation**, by empowering them with the necessary digital skills and opportunities	*Measure 1*: **Ensuring access to** formal and non-formal **digital literacy** and skills training and education, [...] with special focus on the **inclusion of vulnerable groups** and elderly, [...] and **tackling digital inequalities, including the digital gender gap**
European democracy	36 - Citizens information, participation and youth	**Increase citizens' participation** and youth involvement in the democracy at the European Union level to **develop a 'full civic experience' for Europeans**, ensure that **their voice is heard also in between elections**, and that the **participation is effective.**	**Measure 1: Improving the effectiveness of existing and developing new citizens' participation mechanisms**, in line with EU acquis, by better informing on them. A mechanism should be devised to monitor policy and legislative initiatives, which have emerged from participatory democracy processes; **Participatory mechanisms should be inclusive** and their commination able to **reach a diverse public**. Attention should be paid to content material, topics and moderators' skills. They should include an **analysis on the impact of the policies discussed on**, interalia, **women** and vulnerable persons.
Migration	42 - Irregular migration	Strengthen the EU's role in tackling all forms of irregular migration and **strengthen the protection of the European Union's external borders, while respecting human rights**	**Measure 2: Adapting EU legislation to further address the present challenges of irregular migration**, such as human smuggling, **human trafficking, sexual exploitation**, hybrid attacks by countries instrumentalising migrants and violation of human rights.
Migration	43 - Irregular migration (bis)	**Apply common rules uniformly in all Member States on the first reception of migrants**	*Measure 1*: **Developing EU-wide measures to guarantee the safety** and **health** of all migrants, **in particular pregnant women**, children, unaccompanied minors and all vulnerable people.

What "gender mainstreamed measures" should look like?

Most of the recommendations, if not all of them, did not undergo a gender impact assessment. European and national women organisations such as the European Women's Lobby pointed out this lack of gender mainstreaming, yet their requests stayed unheard. Some political efforts should also be highlighted as the Social & Democrats [23] published an extensive policy paper on how gender should be included in every area discussed during the Conference.

As an illustration of how the recommendation should have been designed if the Conference did integrate a gender perspective as well as an intersectional approach, this table proposes to rethink some key recommendations.

What a gender approach should entail: gender mainstreaming of key CoFoE measures

Working group	Number of the proposal	Initial CoFoE recommendation	Recommandation including a gender and intersectional approach
Migration	42 - Irregular migration	**Measure 2**: Ensuring the protection of all external borders, by improving transparency and accountability of Frontex and by strengthening its role and **adapting EU legislation to further address the present challenges of irregular migration, such as human smuggling, human trafficking, sexual exploitation**, hybrid attacks by countries instrumentalising migrants and violation of human rights.	Ensuring the protection of all external borders, by improving transparency and accountability of Frontex and by strengthening its role and adapting EU legislation to further address the present challenges of irregular migration, such as human smuggling, human trafficking, sexual exploitation, hybrid attacks by countries instrumentalising migrants and violation of human rights including adopting specific EU legislation **to further protect women from human smuggling, human trafficking, sexual exploitation**, as they represent 71% of the victims.
Health	9 - A broader understanding of Health	**Measure 1**: Improve understanding of mental health issues and ways of addressing them, including from early childhood and early diagnostics, building on good practices developed throughout the EU, which should be made readily accessible through the Public Health Best Practice Portal. To raise awareness, EU institutions and relevant stakeholders should organise best practices exchange events and help their members disseminate them in their own constituencies. An EU Action Plan on mental health should be developed, that would provide long term Mental Health Strategy, including on research and also tackle the issue of availability of professionals, including for minors and the setting up in the near future of a dedicated European Year of Mental Health.	Improving understanding of mental health issues and ways of addressing them, **including how gender interacts with it. Particular attention should be given to mental health awareness for boys and men**. An EU Action Plan on mental health should be developed, that would provide long term Mental Health Strategy, **including on research which must be gender sensitive** and also tackle the issue of availability of professionals, including for minors and the setting up in the near future of a dedicated European Year of Mental Health. The **design of the European Year of Mental Health must undergo a gender analysis and gender budgetting.**
Health	10 - Equal access to health for all	**Measure 1**: Establish common minimum healthcare standards at EU level, covering also prevention and accessibility as well as proximity of care, and provide support to achieve these standards.	Establish common minimum healthcare standards at EU level, covering also prevention and accessibility as well as proximity of care, and provide support to achieve these standards. **Those minimum healthcare standards must be designed as gender senstive and tackle intersectional discrimination.**
A stronger economy, social justice and jobs	15 - Demographic transition	**Measure 7**: Preventing old age poverty by introducing minimum pensions. Such minimum levels would need to take account of the living standard, the poverty line and purchase power in the respective Member State.	Preventing old age poverty by introducing minimum pensions. Such minimum levels would need to take account of the living standard, the poverty line and purchase power in the respective Member State **as well as the existing pay gap. It includes adopting measures to promote the consideration of house work and care performed by women to ensure higher pensions for women, as the gender pension gap (EU) is nearly 40%,.**
A stronger economy, social justice and jobs	16 - Fiscal and tax policies	None	**Promoting individual taxation** as it is a key lever to achieve tax fairness for women.

---

[23] Social and Democrats, "S&D FEMM Input to CoFE Working Groups", 2022.

C. Looking at the barriers

Institutional barriers

Although considerable efforts have been made for some years to combat gender blindness and lack of awareness of gender equality in the institutions, **gender mainstreaming is not effective in all areas of EU activity**. When the conference organisers are asked about this lack of gender mainstreaming, the answer is usually that "the theme of the conference is not gender equality". But it is precisely this assumption that the issues discussed at the conference do not have gender implications that is the problem. The theme of the conference may not be gender equality, but **gender equality must be considered in all aspects when discussing the future of Europe**. The insufficient institutional prioritisation of gender and the lack of awareness of gender issues among staff prevent effective implementation of gender mainstreaming, especially at the conference.

This situation also results from the existing democratic deficit of the EU. Indeed, the EU is not only created by its insufficiently democratic processes, but also by its systematically unequal representation of women in decision-making processes. Indeed, when **more than half of the population is permanently underrepresented** and **under-considered**, a democratic deficit is created that can only be corrected through targeted measures for women's participation. Even though efforts were made towards parity in some bodies of the conference, the disproportionate representation of men on the platform shows that **women's participation should have been promoted from the outset**.

Political resistance to gender equality

Europe is currently facing a **backsliding in gender equality progress** caused, among other things, by the **rise of political right-wing extremism** in some Member States. At the national level, the adoption of laws reflecting an "anti-gender ideology" has increased considerably in recent years. This radical attitude is also reflected in European affairs, especially at the conference. In Hungary, this has led to the decision to use a Hungarian vocabulary in the translated CoFoE documents that is intentionally not as inclusive[24] as the original English wording. The **Demographic Summit** held in Budapest is also a clear example of how the Hungarian government used the conference to reinforce its political views by promoting its own ideology. Indeed, the summit, as well as the other events within the conference, was **embedded in heteronormativity and homophobia**. Even if the situation was not so critical, it should be stressed that some other member states were reluctant to address gender equality as part of the future of the Union. For example, in some

---

[24] Reka Safrany, European Women's Lobby President

Member States, such as as Czechia[25] and Estonia[26], gender equality and women's empowerment were not addressed in any way, either at events or through contributions from citizens.

These political resistances to gender equality also **hinder the European institutional framework**, as the representatives of the Council countries and some right-wing parliamentarians reflect and push this political opposition. Moreover, this opposition from some Member States **prevents the Commission from making innovative commitments in this area**, as it runs the risk of reaching a 'legislative deadlock[27]'. Furthermore, Maria Stratigaki argues that the reasons for the failure of a deeper integration of gender mainstreaming into the European policy process also lie in the resistance of the prevailing political framework in the EU, which is based on a hierarchical gender distribution of power[28]. This combination prevents the alignment of policy priorities with substantive efforts to **bridge gender inequality** and ensure gender mainstreaming in all EU activities, whether in the policies adopted or in the events organised under its aegis.

---

[25] Kantar Public, "Contributions per Member State on the Multilingual Digital Platform of the Conference on the Future of Europe", (February 2022): 24.

[26] Kantar Public, "Contributions per Member State on the Multilingual Digital Platform of the Conference on the Future of Europe", (February 2022): 40.

[27] Lombardo, Emanuela, and Lut Mergaert. "Resistance in gender training and mainstreaming processes." In The Politics of Feminist Knowledge Transfer, 43-61. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

[28] Stratigaki, Maria. "Gender mainstreaming vs positive action: An ongoing conflict in EU gender equality policy." European Journal of Women's Studies 12.2 (2005): 165-186.

III.   DRAWING ON DISAPPOINTING RESULTS

A. Implementing the content of the recommendations

a) Drawing on the non-gender focused recommendations

- *A right of legislative initiative for the EP*

The EU decision-making process was a central theme during the conference, discussed in most of the citizens' panels as well as in the Digital Platform and during the plenary session. Proposal 38 therefore states that "the **European Parliament should have the right to take the legislative initiative** to propose the subjects to be discussed and then to adopt the necessary texts to follow up the recommendations resulting from the deliberations." As far as gender equality is concerned, giving the European Parliament such powers in some of the more "political" areas where people's opinions matter most could advance the gender mainstreaming of EU policies. Experience shows that **EP has so far adopted a more positive attitude towards gender equality than other institutions**. Therefore, it seems appropriate to give EP more powers. It could put forward legislative proposals on policy and societal issues that do not necessarily fall within the strict remit of the European Commission but would **update the gender contract** (e.g. the proposal to develop universal access to quality care) [29].

- *Extend the Qualified Majority Voting (QMV)*

Another key recommendation is **proposal 39** that advocates for a broader use of the Qualified Majority Voting (QMV). The recommendation advanced that "**All issues decided by way of unanimity should be decided by way of a qualified majority**. The only exceptions should be the admission of new members to the EU and changes to the fundamental principles of the EU as stated in Art. 2 TEU and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union."

Furthermore, the **recommendation 6** on Information, awareness, dialogue and lifestyle states that the EU should "strengthen its role and action in the area of environment and education, by extending the EU's competence in the area of education, climate change and the environment and extending the use of qualified majority decision-making on topics identified as being of 'European interest'". **Gender equality should also be considered as being of 'European Interest' as it is implicitly recognised in the Treaties,** thus this recommendation strengthens the one above.

---

[29] This can happen with the relative balance of political forces in the EP. However, should the European elections give rise to a black wave, a real backlash could be institutionalised.

Although those two measures do not refer directly to gender equality, implementing such a reform on QMV would **facilitate the adoption of legislative acts promoting gender equality**

QMV and gender mainstreaming

Although the 1992 Maastricht Treaty's Social Protocol provides for qualified majority voting on equal opportunities for men and women, unanimity is still required for anti-discrimination measures (Article 19(1) TFEU). Current EU legislation - Council Directive 2004/113/ EC, Council Directive 2000/43/ EC and Council Directive 2000/78/ EC - provides some protection of gender and race equality in employment and occupation, as well as in a number of other areas. However, equal treatment on the grounds of religion or belief, disability, age, and sexual orientation is only protected in relation to employment and occupation. The requirement for unanimity in the Council has led to an inconsistent legal framework in this area and incoherent effects of Union law on people's lives, with some people being better protected than others. The implementation of these two recommendations could therefore accelerate the adoption of legal acts in this area and ensure **intersectional action against discrimination**. Since gender aspects need to be taken into account in all policy areas, **an increased application of QMV in all areas could have a positive impact on the state of gender mainstreaming** in EU policies.

It must be remembered, however, that QMV is not a solution in itself. Let us look at the so-called "Women on Board" Directive. Although only the QMV was required, the dossier was blocked in the Council for almost a decade. **Strong political will is always needed to move forward.**

In any case, it must be remembered that these recommendations, whether the legislative initiative right for EP or the extension of the QMV, require treaty change to be fully effective. The transition from unanimity to qualified majority voting in the Council can be made in 67 cases by using the current passerelle clauses (general or specific). However, there are 27 cases where the change from unanimity to QMV would require a treaty amendment.

b) Drawing on the gender focused recommendations adopted

● *Using existing instrument/legislation*

<u>HEALTH</u>

The **recognition of hormonal contraception products and female sanitary products as regular medical treatment in terms of taxation** has been pushed forward with the **Directive 2022/542**[30] which allow Member States to apply reduced or zero rates on "pharmaceutical products including products used for contraception and female sanitary protection and absorbent hygiene products". **Yet, it is not a mandatory requirement, the EU could further encourage it.**

<u>DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION</u>

The gender digital gap could be tackled thanks to the **Digital Europe Programme**. Indeed, it provides funding for the development of advanced digital skills for Europeans, which can be mobilised to reduce digital inequalities. Substantial **investment needs to be made in learning programmes dedicated to women and in women designing digital solutions**.

● *Using EU legislative procedure*

<u>A STRONGER ECONOMY, SOCIAL JUSTICE AND JOBS</u>

Commission proposals typically include a gender impact assessment and include competitiveness impacts when the proposal affects industry and/or business. However, there is no specific panel to address this issue. The **competitiveness check** (Proposal 12 - Action 21) needs to be **strengthened so that it can be conducted** in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly regarding the **gender equality component**. To ensure evaluation, civil society organisations and social partners should be involved.

<u>MIGRATION</u>

If the Council Directive 2013/33 ensures minimum reception conditions, as those reception conditions continue to highly vary across the EU, this actual instrument needs to be updated to guarantee higher protection for (pregnant) women. The EU should **move forward with the 2016 recast proposal of the Common Asylum System** which aims

---

[30] Council Directive (EU) 2022/542 of 5 April 2022 amending Directives 2006/112/EC and (EU) 2020/285 as regards rates of value added tax

at further harmonisation of reception conditions. Its adoption thus ensures a dignified treatment of applicants in line with fundamental rights and rights of child, across the EU. It includes guarantees for the protection of applicants with "special needs", in particular pregnant women and victims of human trafficking or torture, rape and others form of violence (who are more likely to be women).

EDUCATION, CULTURE, YOUTH AND SPORT

As **the EU has competence under Article 19 TFEU to adopt anti-discriminatory legislation**, the Union can already take supporting measures to promote gender equality in **the area of sports** (proposal 49 - measure 1). Indeed, the EU has competence to carry out actions to support, coordinate and supplement the actions of Member States (article 6 & 165 TFEU) and Member States can cooperate in sport issues in line with the principle of subsidiarity.

VALUES AND RIGHTS, RULE OF LAW AND SECURITY

In order to guarantee an appropriate work/life balance, investment must be carried out in care infrastructures (**proposal 29 - measure 2**). When *Minister Jurecka* highlighted the **Czech EU presidency** priorities regarding gender equality before the FEMM Committee, he mentioned that they "welcome the Commission's intention to declare a European Care Strategy[31] and are ready to intensively **negotiate the Barcelona targets on long term care**." Some further advancements could therefore be expected in the upcomings months.

- *Using a Convention for treaty changes*

The only adopted measure concerning gender equality that requires treaty change is regarding childcare (**proposal 26 - measure 5**). Indeed, ensuring in a mandatory way the creation of affordable kindergartens and free childcare throughout the EU would require Treaty change. Nevertheless, without making it mandatory but by putting forward practices to facilitate economic access to childcare, using the treaty existing instruments, the EU could alleviate this issue.

---

[31] Meanwhile the Commission has presented on sept 7th 2022 a proposal for a comprehensive European care strategy.
(see here: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_5169)

Pursuing a convention for treaty changes would be the occasion to strengthen the legal basis for gender equality. On the one hand, if the Treaties were to be discussed again, it would be essential to reinforce the EU binding obligations towards gender equality and gender mainstreaming. An amended Article 17 TFEU, for example, could institutionalise a 'one woman-one man' requirement and oblige presidents-elect to propose fully equal teams[32].

On the other hand, this would also be an opportunity to expand EU competences in areas such as education. Indeed, as of now, the EU cannot make an issue mandatory part of education throughout the EU. Education is a key area the EU must work upon to embrace a culture of gender-sensitivity across its MS.

The role of education in attaining gender equality

Educational systems – contents, learning materials, teacher attitudes and behaviours, classroom, and discipline practices – are formed within specific social contexts may sometimes therefore often reflect the inequalities that exist in those contexts. Biased and harmful social norms about the expected roles and opportunities for boys and girls can be trivialised in educational systems[1]. That is exactly why it is fundamental to focus on education when addressing gender inequalities.

If enabled to do so following treaty change, the EU must work on guaranteeing gender-sensitive curriculum, teaching and learning materials in every MS.

If achieving a convention for treaty change might enhance the EU's engagement regarding gender equality obligation, as we have seen several backlashes of women's rights in the EU member states lately, **there is nothing ensuring the treaty change would go in favour of gender equality**. We must **remain cautious about such a process** and allow women's organisations to follow it closely if it were to be launched.

---

[32] Scherpereel, John A. "Pursuing 'full gender equality' in the European Commission: the case of a constrained selector." European Politics and Society (2021): 1-19.

B. Strengthening women's civic participation

1) Maintaining a platform and enhance women's participation

In its first communication post conference, the Commission affirmed their will to see the Have Your Say portal "become a one-stop-shop for online citizen engagement[33]". They highlighted the portal "will integrate key features of the Conference's multilingual digital platform: direct exchanges between citizens, commenting – in all EU official languages thanks to e-Translation – but also online polls and hosting online participatory events". While we can only welcome such an initiative, to live up to its ambition of forming "the basis for a new ecosystem of democratic engagement and innovation", the Commission's portal must become a place where men and women are equally represented.

Women are highly under-represented on the digital platform, and the Commission must redouble efforts to reach them. The main instruments the Commission should use are: giving a central space to gender equality and issues of more direct interest to women like education and health and promote targeted communications campaigns. The Commission should analyse the Platform's results as to identify the categories of women least represented on the Platform and why. **Gender statistics need to be cross-cutting** with age, level of education, geographic origin, socioeconomic background of the participants. The concept of intersectionality is central to the work on gender equality. **Once the Commission has identified the least represented categories of women, these campaigns can be carried out and specific spaces for gender equality issues must be added to all citizens' consultation forum/platform/etc**.

In this continuity, it is essential to guarantee effective access to the platform for ALL women (see II.A.2).

2) Establishing citizen's panels for certain decision

- Ensuring women in their diversity are represented in the Citizen's Panels

The Commission will enable "**Citizens Panels to deliberate and make recommendations ahead of certain key proposals[34]**", on the same model as those performed during the Conference. Therefore, the Commission once again insisted that those "should reflect Europe's diversity and demography". The five criteria successfully employed for the Conference will thus be reused. This announcement is a direct result of the Conference as improving the effectiveness of existing and developing new citizens' participation

---

[33] European Commission, "Communication from the Commission on the Conference on the Future of Europe: Putting Vision into Concrete Action" COM(2022) 404 final, Brussels, 17 June, 2022.
[34] European Commission, "Communication from the Commission on the Conference on the Future of Europe: Putting Vision into Concrete Action" COM(2022) 404 final, Brussels, 17 June, 2022.

mechanisms (**proposal 36 - recommendation 1**) was one of the adopted recommendations.

As specified in the recommendation (see table), those mechanisms must be able to reach a diverse public. Once again, the Commission must redouble its efforts to reach out to ALL women, in particular the most vulnerable and less usually represented such as the Roma women but also lone mothers, and disadvantaged women in general.

Additionally, those five criteria should be applied in any citizen's involvement initiative, whether Citizens' Dialogues, European Citizens' Initiative or any similar endeavour.

- Initiating women-only panels

It is also relevant to launch panels only gathering women. Indeed, there is significant evidence that women speak much less in group settings when men are present[35]. The gender composition of focus groups has been proven to compromise women's ability to voice opinions on all issues, especially when it comes to matters related to gender[36]. Thus, the best way to address this barrier is to hold separate focus groups for men and women when discussing gender-focused proposals.

3) Integrating women's organisations

As the EU decision making process was a core subject in the Conference, increasing the role of civil society organisations and social partners was debated. It was finally adopted that the existing structures (***proposal 39 - measure 6***) should be strengthened to better reflect the needs and expectations of EU citizens. In order to fulfil this objective, women's organisations must be given resources commensurate to the proportion of citizens they represent, and the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) could be empowered as a facilitator.

Women's organisations have a key role to play in this strengthening of civil society voices and must be at the forefront. Christa Schweng, the President of the EESC, acknowledges that and believes the EESC should be a hub for civil society and in particular for women's organisations.

---

[35] Stewart, David W., and Prem N. Shamdasani. Focus groups: Theory and practice. Vol. 20. Sage publications, (2014).

[36] Holmes, Rebecca, and Nicola Jones. "How to design and implement gender-sensitive social protection programmes." (2010).

IV.   BUILDING A FEMINIST FUTURE FOR EUROPE

A. Improving women's economic independence, ensuring gender sensitive approach in digital transformation and fighting gender-based violence including gender stereotypes from the youngest age

In Europe, more than 65 million women live in poverty compared to 57 million men[37]. Poverty is predominantly female and is the result of a lifetime discrimination. The Covid 19 crisis has significantly exacerbated this reality, with women being at the forefront. While it has been acknowledged[38], some more profound changes must be carried out to tackle it. Moreover, in addressing women's poverty and empowerment, we must remember that gender discrimination is even worse when it is compounded by discrimination based on race, age, sexual orientation, disability, ethnicity, or socioeconomics. **Adopting an intersectional approach in every policy is therefore mandatory**. Although the EU's commitment to eliminate the gender pay gap dates back to the 1957 Treaty of Rome, the gap in the EU is still 13%. The EU must work to avoid another decade of deadlock and move forward with the Pay Transparency Directive in the coming months. In addition to equal pay, labour market policies are also needed to close the gender gap. To ensure women's economic independence, it is necessary to increase the overall employment rate of women, create more quality jobs, and improve working and employment conditions, **paying particular attention to disabled women and women of colour, who face greater discrimination in employment**.

As taxation policies have gender biases[39], and even if direct taxes on income and gains are not an EU competence, **the EU should promote gender-responsive tax systems that take gendered consumption patterns into account and introduce compensation measures[40]**. G5+ in particular calls for a system of individual taxation.

Also, a feminist Europe needs to tackle the digital gender gap urgently and effectively. As our societies are increasingly digitalized and connected, ensuring a feminist future for Europe requires bridging this gap.

---

[37] Data from Eurostat available at https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Living_conditions_in_Europe_-_poverty_and_social_exclusion&oldid=544210
[38] European Parliament, European Parliament Resolution on women's poverty in Europe, 5 July 2022, P9_TA (2022)0274.
[39] Grown, Caren. "Taxation and gender equality." Taxation and Gender Equity: A Comparative Analysis of Direct and Indirect Taxes in Developing and Developed Countries (2010).
[40] Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, "Feminist European Green Deal: Towards an Ecological and Gender Just Transition" (2022).

Although this is a reality that has been denounced for many years by feminist scholars, the pandemic that has revived the debate on a need of a **care strategy** at the European level for paid and unpaid carers and people who are cared for. Women constitute 90% of the workforce[41] in the long-term care sector, which is characterised by poor working conditions and a prevalence of part-time jobs that is twice the average OECD rate. In addition to this, informal care is largely performed by women[42]. A comprehensive **Care Deal** for Europe, recognising care as a common good is necessary to address the colossal gender gap in this policy area. It must take into account informal and formal care as well as direct and indirect care. Maria Joao Rodriguez, FEPS President, firmly advocates for a care strategy, arguing it is critical for achieving gender equality.

To a larger extent, it should lead to a rethink of society. First, **gender budgeting,** i.e., the application of gender mainstreaming in the budget process**[43],** must become the norm for the EU and the Member States.

As a key component, we, in G5+, believe the EU must shift the way we consider and calculate **the Gross Domestic Product (GDP)**. As of today, the calculation behind the GDP goes against the environment (cutting a tree increases the GDP) and the well-being of people. For example, care, which is essential to well-being, is not considered an asset, and because it is predominantly provided by women, it generally places a disproportionate burden on their autonomy, health, and well-being.

---

[41] Data from the OECD.

[42] Fernández, Mª Eugenia Estrada, et al. "Informal care. European situation and approximation of a reality." Health Policy 123.12 (2019): 1163-1172.

[43] Council of Europe. "Gender Budgeting: Final report of the Group of Specialists on Gender Budgeting", Equality Division, Directorate-General of Human Rights, Strasbourg (2005).

B. Gender equality as a core European value and basis for our democracy

On several occasions, notably by the CJEU in its rulings, the principle of gender equality in its economic and social dimension has been defined as a "founding principle[44]" of the EU. Therefore, **standing with the EU's values and strengthening the EU's democracy signify embracing gender equality**.

To do so, **we must achieve parity democracy in the EU**. Indeed, parity democracy entails a transformation of our understanding of democracy, political culture and structures, and a true embracement of equality between women and men as a fundamental principle in which a democratic system is based. As recalled in our last policy paper on the 2019 elections, "**parity democracy aims at transforming democracy by including all women in their diversity**".

It includes **achieving gender parity in the EP**. We believe specific attention must be drawn to parity among the Presidents of political groups, as in today's EP there is only one woman holding this position. It also means pushing for gender parity in the **high-level positions of the EU institutions**, such as the President of the Commission and the Council, the High Representative, and the European Central Bank. To enforce that, the EP must use its power of approval to sanction those member states that do not heed this suggestion[45]. The upcoming European elections must ensure gender parity. Though the text adopted on the reform of the electoral system doesn't include a mandatory clause of gender parity, **the European electoral list must be gender-balanced and must strive to represent the diversity of European women**.

Overall, the G5+ believes that all **European institutions must take a leadership role by presenting perfect gender parity**.

Representation of women, and a diversity of women, is a prerequisite for the realisation of a feminist Europe. However, it is not enough to ensure that gender issues are discussed and addressed. **Gender equality goals must be prioritised**, and **policies must be designed in line with a mainstream political agenda**.

To date, the only explicit mention of violence against women in the treaties is in a protocol on domestic violence. Considering that gender-based violence and domestic violence are pervasive across the EU, affecting an **estimated one in three women in the EU** and costing €235 million annually, human rights and economic reasons collide with the need to

---

[44] Defrenne v. Societe Anonyme Belge de Navigation Aerienne, 1976, C-43/75 [ECR 455].
[45] For more information, have a look at the G5+ report "European Parliament's elections 2019: towards parity democracy in Europe" by Alazne Irigoien.

strengthen the legal basis in the treaties to eliminate gender-based violence through holistic means, as it **is embedded in the traditional culture of most member states**.

As noted during the online conference of G5+ following the proposal of the European Commission on violence against women and domestic violence, **the draft Directive legal basis is problematic**. The European Commission based the proposal on Article 82(2) and Article 83(1) TFEU, the same as the Directive 2011/36/CE on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings, which intends to complement and reinforce by adding specific rights for women who are victims of violence and domestic violence.

However, **Article 83(1) TFEU does not cover all forms of gender-based violence addressed by the Directive**. This is the reasons why, for example, no criminalization of domestic violence or femicide is envisaged: these offences cannot be brought within the terms of the 'euro-crime' of sexual exploitation of women and children mentioned in Article 83 TFEU. The Commission has therefore not taken on board the European Parliament's position to identify gender-based violence as a new area of crime, as this move would imply unanimity by Member States and compromise the adoption of the Directive.[46] In terms of intersectionality, **the Directive should address the specific needs of refugee women and disabled women victims of violence**. Moreover, the **EU should ratify the Istanbul Convention by QMV**.

---

[46] See https://www.genderfiveplus.com/single-post/towards-a-future-for-europe-without-violence-against-women-recommendations-and-highlights

C. A greener and healthier future comes with gender perspectives

As climate change has a particularly detrimental effect on the poorest parts of the population, and women constitute a large proportion of the poorest in society, "they are and will be amongst the hardest hit and the least well positioned socially, legally and economically, to respond[47]". As a result, **measures introduced to reduce climate change also have different effects on women**, according to their class, wealth, ethnicity, physical ability and other structural inequalities[48]. Yet, the **current climate policy introduced by the EU is sorely lacking a feminist approach**. If we take a look at key documents and files that have been introduced under the framework of the Green Deal, half of them can be considered as gender blind. **Upcoming developments forming part of the Green Deal must adopt a gender and intersectional approach**. For example, G5+ calls for policies that facilitate the transition from private to public modes of transportation, in particular ensuring safety and comfort for vulnerable people (such as women-only carriages).

<u>Gender mainstream climate transition and Normative Power Europe</u>

The theory of Normative Power Europe (NPE), advanced by Ian Manners in 2002, has advocated the idea of **the EU as an 'ideational' actor** characterised by its attempts to promote a set of common principles, and **acting to diffuse norms in international relations**.

Thus, besides the environmental and social expected effects of this policy, gender equality is also essential regarding the EU's normative power. While adopting dispositions allowing **a gender mainstreamed climate transition**, the EU **generates higher international standards** and thus manages to increase its normative power. **By improving its ability to influence global standard-setting in this area, it's the whole EU's capacity to shape the world's rules that is enhanced**.

In the light of the recent restrictions on reproductive and sexual rights, both in Europe (Poland, Hungary) and on other continents (United States), G5+ call for a greater protection of these rights for European citizens. In particular, **G5+ supports the call of the Parliament to include the right to abortion in EU Charter of Fundamental Rights**.

---

[47] Morrow, Karen. "Integrating gender issues into the global climate change regime." Understanding climate change through gender relations. Routledge, (2017). 31-44.

[48] Allwood, Gill. "Mainstreaming gender and climate change to achieve a just transition to a climate-neutral Europe." Journal of Common Market Studies (2020).

D. For a Feminist Foreign Policy

The **EU needs a feminist approach as well in its foreign policy**. Indeed, a Feminist Foreign Policy, as a multidimensional policy framework centred around women's and marginalised groups' experiences and agency, **aims at offering an alternate and intersectional rethinking of security from the viewpoint of the most vulnerable**.

Having a diversity of women around the table is therefore crucial. While G5+ welcomes the GAP III, as women still only account for 31.3% in the European External Action Service, we call for a concrete application of the GAP III's measures. **We can only achieve a feminist foreign policy by integrating women in the policymaking**.

This must also be reflected in how the EU provides international aid. **Every international aid program**, even those whose objective aren't gender equality, **must systematically undergo gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting**.

<u>Feminist Diplomacy and Normative Power Europe</u>

Enhancing the EU's standards in gender equality and gender mainstreaming is also one of the key levers to enforce its normative power. **It is only by adopting the highest international standards that the EU can live up to its commitment in global leadership**.

CONCLUSION

If there was only one single conclusion to draw from this report on gender in the Conference on the Future of Europe**, one should concentrate on how gender mainstreaming has not worked**, despite major progress in the proportion of women represented at the various levels of the Conference and how to make it work.

A large number of specific recommendations are drawn in this report, and we do hope that actors and actresses involved in the follow up actions will take them up. **We will as a European Feminist Think tank**.

If we think of the challenges ahead and of the slow progress realised so far, **gender equality has fundamentally to be more effectively and structurally embedded into the implementation machinery of the EU**, including in the treaties.

While, as it is recalled in this paper, the commitment of Member States to "eliminate discrimination and promote equality between women and men" in some policies (treaty of Amsterdam 1997) and in all EU policies (Treaty of Lisbon 2008) is firmly affirmed in primary law, the blindness on gender issues in the Conference on the future of Europe only reflect the lack of implementation mechanisms to actually transform the commitment to mainstream gender equality in European policies in reality. As such it is a **double democratic deficit**, the EU does not deliver what it promised and betrays the citizens who expect a gender equal Europe.

Implementing gender mainstreaming or integrating gender equality into all European policies and programmes as promised by the treaty, obviously **requires much more political attention and resources (human and financial)** that has been given so far. As mentioned by the European Parliament, gender mainstreaming includes "the integration of a gender perspective into every aspect of EU policy – preparation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, legal measures and spending programmes – with a view to achieving equality between women and men".

For a solid structural implementation, **governance structures have to be adapted**. Space has to be created to properly debate gender issues (ex a council formation for gender equality) and gender analysis of policies should become mandatory with mechanisms in the 3 major EU institutions to make sure the impact on gender equality is taken into account. Moreover, **for women's voices to be heard in all their diversity, more resources and attention should be given to the European Women's Lobby and gender equality actors within institutions**.

A lot could be done that does not necessarily require changes in the Treaties, however if a convention was decided upon, gender equality should stand at the same level as Defence or any important future European policy area needing functional implementation mechanisms.

In the conference, G5+ experienced directly that short of a theme on gender equality amongst the core themes, the piecemeal messages which could be sent on the platform or in panels, could not reflect the holistic reality of gender equality as an agenda for structural change. Hence the little effect of the conclusions of the 3 online events that we organised and the absence of issues like violence against women which cost every year a large part of EU and National budgets and destroys a large part of our humanity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on those conclusions, we propose below **10 key recommendations** to the European institutions as well as the Member States that would enable us to achieve this future feminist for Europe.

TEN KEY RECOMMENDATIONS	
PROCESSES	1. Apply an **intersectional approach in all gender impact assessment activities.**
	2. Establish an **EU Council formation specifically dedicated to Gender Equality** and apply **Qualified majority Voting** in the Council for all proposals advancing gender equality.
	3. **Institutionalise** a **Commissioner for Gender Equality** and set up a **regular meeting** of the **College of Commissioners dedicated to Gender Equality**.
	4. **Make gender budgeting** in the EU as well as Member states budgets **mandatory** and **public**.
	5. Institutionalise **parity democracy** in **all public elections, nominations, and appointments**.
POLICIES	6. Make sure **women in their diversity are integrated in the follow-up** of the CoFoE.
	7. Adopt a **comprehensive care deal**, ensure a **gender mainstreamed climate transition** and **a gender sensitive digital transformation**.
	8. Revive the **Beyond GDP initiative** for the adoption of environmental, social and gender indicators.
	9. Set standards for a **Feminist diplomacy of Europe** and engage all member states to adopt them.
	10. "**Make ALL women's voices heard**" by doubling the resources of the European Women's Lobby and national women's coordination's.