



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL JUSTICE AND CONSUMERS

Directorate D: Equality and Union citizenship  
Unit D.2: Gender equality

Brussels  
JUST.D.2/KV/LR

Ms Foster  
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Dear Ms. Foster,

Firstly, let me thank you on behalf of President von der Leyen for contacting us on 8 March 2021 and endorsing the Statement of your organisation as submitted to the United Nations ECOSOC for the sixty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW65), accompanied by a letter of the President of Soroptimist International of Europe, Anna Wszelaczyńska. Your message was forwarded to me, as my unit is in charge of the EU's actions on gender equality.

The Commission recognizes the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women. The EU Gender Equality Strategy was adopted just before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in Europe and has framed the Commission's response to it in terms of gender equality. Women have been on the front line of tackling the pandemic, providing the most basic and essential services, very often in low-paid jobs. At the same time, men have remained the majority of decision-makers and speakers in public debates about the COVID-19 crisis. We must make sure that women's voices are taken into account when designing and executing the pandemic response and that Member States maintain a clear gender dimension in their actions both during the pandemic and in the recovery stage. The EU's Recovery and Resilience Facility requires gender equality to be a major guiding principle in the recovery plans developed by EU Member States.

The Commission also acknowledges the importance of women's and girls' full and effective participation in leadership, decision-making and public life. In line with this, the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025<sup>1</sup> reaffirms the meaningfulness of ensuring equal opportunities for women and men to participate and lead in society. Within this framework, the Commission committed, in the European Democracy Action Plan adopted in December 2020, to ensure that equality is mainstreamed in actions at all levels to foster inclusiveness and equality in democratic participation, gender balance in politics and in decision-making. Furthermore, the Commission is striving to promote the participation of women as voters and candidates in the 2024 European Parliament elections, in collaboration with the European Parliament, national parliaments, Member States and civil society, including through funding and by promoting best practices.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-equality-strategy\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-equality-strategy_en).

We also consider a balanced representation of women and men in decision-making bodies and management positions to be necessary. Therefore, we remain committed to our legislative proposal from 2012 for a Directive on improving the gender balance among non-executive directors of companies listed on stock exchanges, and will continue pushing for its adoption at EU level.

Reconciliation measures between work and private life and equal sharing of care responsibilities between women and men are of utmost importance. These are the main goals of the EU Directive on Work-Life Balance for Working Parents and Carers. Member States have until 2022 to implement this Directive in national law.

Most recently, we have taken action to ensure that women and men receive equal pay for equal work or work of equal value. Delivering on one of the key elements of the EU's Gender Equality Strategy, the Commission adopted on 4 March 2021 a legislative proposal for pay transparency measures enforcing the equal pay principle.

Regarding gender-based violence, the EU has already signed the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence – the so-called Istanbul Convention. We are currently working on concluding the Union's accession as a matter of priority. Accession proves to be difficult though, in light of the opposition of some Member States. Considering these difficulties, the Strategy foresees legislative action at EU level to realise the same objectives as the Istanbul Convention in EU legislation. President von der Leyen confirmed that this action will be coming later this year.

Finally, gender stereotypes underlie all the above-mentioned social and economic inequalities. Combating stereotypes is therefore a condition *sine qua non* to overcome existing inequalities. We will launch a campaign to challenge such stereotypes later this year or next year.

I warmly welcome your commitment to equality and combatting discrimination, and would like to thank you again for bringing your perspectives to our attention.

Yours faithfully,

Karen VANDEKERCKHOVE  
Head of Unit