



Policy briefing

'A gender mainstreamed COVID-19 recovery plan for Europe'

1. Why is it important:

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and reinforced existing gender inequalities in Europe. According to Eurofound, measures taken by governments to control the spread of the virus are exacerbating gender divides in unemployment, domestic labour and financial security to the disadvantage of women.¹ Women are on the frontline of the coronavirus crisis; they make up 76% of healthcare workers in the EU and disproportionately work in jobs where exposure to the virus is high, as supermarket cashiers, cleaners, personal carers, teachers etc. Women are more likely to be in temporary, part-time and precarious employment than men, leaving them especially vulnerable to the economic consequences of the crisis. The lockdown has also led to a rise in unpaid care work for women taking care of children and vulnerable relatives and a deterioration in their work-life balance. Finally, gender-based violence has increased and access to sexual and reproductive health rights, such as abortion and contraception, has been deprioritized, or even restricted, in some countries.

To tackle the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the European Commission has proposed a recovery plan for Europe, which consists of an already approved package of safety net measures for workers, businesses and member states worth €540 billion, the Next Generation EU instrument of €750 billion, and reinforcements to the long-term EU budget for 2021-2027 of €1100 billion. The PES family supports the proposal, which is expected to be finalised at the EU summit of 17-18 July.

2. What needs to happen:

- Women and girls must be placed at the heart of Europe's COVID-19 response. A green and gender-equal recovery is the only way to build an inclusive, sustainable and resilient society for the future. The disproportionate burden carried by women during the pandemic deserves an appropriate financial response at EU, national, regional and local levels. Without gender mainstreamed budgets and targeted funding for gender equality, the crisis response risks perpetuating and aggravating existing inequalities.
- The actual needs of women and their economic recovery have to be taken into account by applying gender budgeting to the EU recovery funds²:
 - EU funding should be based on a measurable gender mainstreaming principle as a precondition for a fair, adequate and coherent distribution of the money.
 - An EU 'Women Corona Fund' should be set up. This is an umbrella label for extra money in the EU budget to top-up those budget lines and programmes (such as the REC, ESF+, cohesion and health funds) that target women in particular, especially in 3 key areas: (1) fighting against gender-based violence, (2) sexual and reproductive health and rights and (3) women on the labour market.

¹ <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/blog/covid-19-fallout-takes-a-higher-toll-on-women-economically-and-domestically>

² <https://socialistsanddemocrats.eu/channel/women-must-be-heart-our-covid-19-financial-response>

- Gender equality improvements, just like environmental sustainability, should be a precondition for receiving money under the EU recovery plan. Zero tolerance for member states who undermine democracy and human rights and violate the rule of law.
- Gender checks/impact assessments must be carried out for all recovery policies at all governance levels, in order to evaluate their impact on gender equality and women's rights.
- Adequate EU funding must be spent on supporting 'female-dominated' sectors, such as personal services, care, retail, hospitality etc.
- The EU Multiannual Financial Framework for 2021-2027 must follow the principles of gender budgeting³.
- A dedicated Council configuration for gender equality is needed to show that the EU is taking gender equality seriously and is willing to put women's rights at the heart of its recovery strategy.
- More women in political and economic leadership positions are needed to ensure a gender equal recovery. Women working on the front line of this crisis need to be consulted.
- In the long term, Europe must shift towards a feminist economic system, which puts equality, wellbeing and care at the centre of macroeconomic policy.

3. Relevant communications:

- [PES declaration strongly urges the European Council to agree on an ambitious Recovery Plan for COVID-19](#)
- [PES Presidency reaffirms fight against gender inequality and racism](#)
- [PES Women: 'It is time to create a formal Council configuration for Gender Equality'](#)
- [PES Women Gender Equality Network presents 'A Feminist Economy for Europe'](#)
- [PES Ministers for gender equality and women's rights call for a feminist response to the COVID-19 crisis](#)
- [PES Women: 'Women are on the COVID-19 frontline –the EU must not leave them behind'](#)
- [PES Women: 'PES Women: Women are on the front line of the corona-crisis, yet gender-issues are being ignored'](#)
- [PES ministers for gender equality reaffirm commitment to accelerate women's rights for a truly feminist and equal Europe](#)

³ <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/methods-tools/gender-budgeting>