



Declaration of the PES Presidency

'European progressives together against gender-based violence'

Adopted by the PES Presidency on 3/12/2020

The Party of European Socialists is proud to stand up for gender equality as a fundamental value of the European Union. Following the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women on 25 November, we, as progressive feminists, are reiterating our commitment to fight for a Europe where everyone, no matter their gender, can lead a life free from violence.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a dark and uncertain time for all of society. But for many women, lockdown and confinement have also cast another shadow, that of increased gender-based violence. In many countries, domestic violence helplines and shelters have reported a rise in the number of calls for help. In some EU Member States, cases of domestic violence rose by a third in the week after the first lockdown started. Women trapped at home with their abusers have had limited access to health services and shelters. At the same time, violent attacks on women in public spaces continue and, with more people staying at home, there is an increased risk of online harassment. As many parts of Europe are facing a second round of confinement, the risks posed by gender-based violence as a “shadow pandemic” must be fully addressed.

For all PES member parties and organisations, combatting gender-based violence is high on the agenda. Over the past months, our progressive governments, from the national to the regional and local level, and parties have worked together with support services, NGOs and other actors to develop digital solutions to help affected women in lockdown, provide temporary shelter, or train emergency services, pharmacists and other personnel to recognize and assist those affected.

Yet, gender-based violence is not a new phenomenon. The COVID-19 crisis has simply aggravated an already unacceptable problem. We, the member parties and organizations of the Party of European Socialists, say enough is enough.

It is unfathomable that 1 in 3 women in the EU has experienced physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15, that half of all women have experienced sexual harassment, and that hundreds of women are killed every year by an intimate partner, ex-partner or family member.

In this context, we are deeply concerned by the ongoing backlash against women's rights in Europe, especially the rising conservative opposition to the Istanbul Convention, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), as well as escalating police brutality against women demonstrating against the flagrant curtailment of their fundamental rights. We condemn the spread of myths and disinformation about the Convention, and attempted withdrawal by some Member States. The Istanbul Convention in fact is the strongest international instrument available to ensure uniform protection from violence and to persecute the perpetrators. Not ratifying it means turning a blind eye to all women and girls affected by violence and failing to protect and support them.

Gender-based violence is one of the biggest, most systematic human rights violation and deeply rooted in gender inequality and power structures. Whether it is expressed through physical, psychological or sexual abuse and exploitation, its causes are many. It therefore calls for a holistic response, focusing on long-term and systemic rather than ad hoc solutions. Women will never be able to live on an equal footing with men until they are free from the threat and devastating consequences of violence.

In this spirit, we, the PES Presidency, are joining the PES Ministers for Gender Equality, who in a declaration of 5 November called for a progressive Europe free from gender-based violence.



We call for the full ratification and implementation of the Istanbul Convention by the EU and all Member States without delay, in order to create a robust legal framework which helps prevent violence, protect victims/survivors and punish perpetrators. Additionally, we call on the full ratification and implementation of the ILO Convention 190 for the eliminating of violence and harassment in the world of work.

We deplore the attempts by right-wing governments to discredit the Istanbul Convention, curtail legal access to SRHR and limit rights for LBT women, which serve to encourage rather than condemn gender-based violence.

We welcome the commitments set out in the European Commission's Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 and LGBTIQ Equality Strategy, under the leadership of Commissioner for Equality Helena Dalli, to combat all forms of gender-based violence, including to propose alternative measures should the Istanbul Convention remain blocked.

We welcome the commitment of our parties in the German and Portuguese governments in securing the Trio Council Presidency Declaration on Gender Equality to take decisive action to combat gender-based violence, including the proposed initiative for a Europe-wide telephone number on which the respective national violence against women helplines can be reached.

We call on the EU and all Member States to gender mainstream their COVID-19 response, especially with regards to supporting efforts to prevent gender-based violence and assist victims/survivors. Earmarked financial resources and gender-budgeting is essential in this regard.

We call for special attention to be paid to combatting online violence against women and girls, which is an increasing problem that must be tackled as part of European and national digital strategies.

We call for improved EU-wide data collection on gender-based violence as well as improved infrastructures for best practice exchanges, such as through a dedicated and formal forum at Council level for gender equality ministers.

We urge the European Commission to extend the areas of Eurocrimes to specific forms of gender-based violence in accordance with Article 83(1) TFEU.

We commit to fighting gender stereotypes and cultural narratives which contribute to sexism, toxic masculinity, victim-blaming and oppression of women's personal and sexual liberty and choices.

We, the PES Presidency, are joining together to combat all forms of gender-based violence. Europe should be a safe place for women and girls in all their diversity. We are asking all EU and national leaders to join us by ratifying and properly implementing the Istanbul Convention and deliver ambitious policies to create a Europe free from gender-based violence. The only way forward is to adopt a zero tolerance policy for violence against women and girls.