

Resolution on experiencing a backlash in women's rights and gender equality in the EU

2018/2684(RSP) - 13/02/2019 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution tabled by the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality on experiencing a backlash in women's rights and gender equality in the EU.

Members believed that the present decade is witnessing a visible and organised offensive at global and European level against gender equality and women's rights, including in the EU and particularly manifested in a number of Member States. The main targets of this backlash appear to be common across countries and include gender mainstreaming, social and labour protection, education, sexual and reproductive health and rights, combating violence against women, LGBTI+ rights, the presence of women in political decision-making positions, and adequate funding for women's organisations. Members also pointed out that in the first half of 2018 a backlash against the Istanbul Convention occurred in several Member States, opening up space for hate speech and especially targeting LGBTI+ people. They condemned the reinterpretation and refocusing of gender equality policy in terms of family and motherhood policy, which is happening in some Member States. They expressed concern that the opponents of reproductive rights have had a significant influence on national law and policy in some Member States, seeking to undermine women's health and reproductive rights, particularly with regard to access to family planning and contraception as well as attempts to restrict or end the right to voluntary termination of pregnancy.

Members also pointed out that the Gender Equality Index shows persistent inequalities with only marginal progress from 2005 to 2015, and stated that significant improvements are still needed in all Member States.

Parliament called on the Commission and the Member States to remain strongly committed to gender equality, women's rights and LGBTI+ rights, including the rights of the most vulnerable minorities. It highlighted the need for the extensive denunciation of those discourses and measures undermining women's rights, autonomy and emancipation in every field.

Stressing that education is a key factor in preventing the backlash, Members called on the Commission and the Member States to strengthen public awareness of the importance and benefits of safeguarding women's rights and gender equality and eliminating gender stereotypes for society, and to further support the development and dissemination of evidence-based research and information in the area of women's rights.

Parliament called on the Commission and Member States to:

- ensure that women's rights and LGBTI+ rights are protected and recognised as equality principles in the framework of democracy and the rule of law;
- increase funding for the protection and promotion of women's rights and gender equality, including for sexual and reproductive health and rights, in the EU and in the world;
- review their mechanisms for the distribution, monitoring and evaluation of funding and to ensure that they are gender sensitive and adapted to the problems that specific organisations and movements, face at the time of backlash;

- provide sufficient financial resources to implement instruments to combat all forms of violence, and particularly violence against women;
- provide direct and significant financial support to women's organisations in those countries experiencing a systemic defunding and attacks by civil society organisations, in order to ensure the continuity of interrupted services protecting and supporting women and their rights;
- encourage an assessment to be made of the current situation regarding prostitution in the EU, whose network of traffickers benefits from the single market, and to allocate financial resources to programmes enabling victims of human trafficking and exploitation to escape prostitution;
- include the promotion and improvement of sexual and reproductive health and rights in the next Public Health Strategy;
- end and reverse cutbacks that apply to gender equality programming, public services and, in particular, the provision of sexual and reproductive healthcare;
- revise the recast Directive 2006/54/EC on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment, with a view to eliminating the persisting gender pay gap.

Parliament regretted that gender budgeting has not been recognised as a horizontal principle in the Multiannual Financial Framework regulation for 2021- 2027, and called on the Council to amend that regulation as a matter of urgency. It also called on the Council to:

- unblock the directive on gender balance among non-executive directors of companies listed on stock exchanges in order to address the considerable imbalance between women and men in economic decision-making at the highest level;
- unblock the directive on implementing the principle of equal treatment outside the labour market, irrespective of age, disability, sexual orientation or religious belief, which aims at extending protection against discrimination through a horizontal approach.