

25 years after Beijing:

Recommendations to the EU for the protection of women in light of COVID-19 and beyond



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The EU-LAT Network is a recognized actor in the European Union, consisting of 40 movements and organizations from 12 European countries. We work towards influencing the transformation of European policies related to Latin America in areas like political dialogue, cooperation and trade.

The year 2020 marks 25 years since the Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing, during which 189 countries adopted the Beijing Platform for Action, a framework of policies for gender equality and the rights of women and children. On this 25th anniversary, it is apparent that the existing challenges for women have increased and have become even more acute as a result of the current health, economic and social crisis caused by COVID-19, which is causing a dramatic increase in the different forms of violence against women.

The EU-LAT Network seeks to eradicate all forms of violence against women and girls and works to ensure that this issue is included as a priority in relations between the European Union and Latin America. In a series of recommendations, we are asking the EU and its member states to reaffirm their commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action and to respond to the current coronavirus crisis with political leadership and cooperation mechanisms with a gender perspective.



Situation of women 25 years after Beijing

Latin America

In the last 25 years, Latin America has undergone many changes in all areas affecting the lives of women and girls. Despite the fact that certain progress can be seen, the region has the highest rate of femicides and the highest levels of perception of physical insecurity by women. According to the United Nations, almost 20 million women and girls suffer sexual and physical violence every year.

The data that has emerged following the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic indicates

an alarming increase in violence against women, especially domestic violence. Home confinement places women and girls at greater risk of violence and social exclusion, away from essential protection services and support networks. The situation of women is likely to worsen as the economic and social consequences of the crisis progress further. Informal work has become paralysed during the health crisis, and as this is the main source of income for many women, this alarmingly increases women's poverty levels.

Europe

The European Union shows the greatest regional progress on gender equality, nevertheless, violence and discrimination persist. One in three women has suffered physical or sexual violence at some point in their lives; one in two has experienced sexual harassment and one in ten has experienced cyberbullying since the age of 15. Gender-based violence can affect all women, but the risk increases when factors such as ethnic origin, advanced age, disability, administrative situation or sexual orientation intersect. The EU has not passed any European legislation of its own that addresses gender-based violence and the Istanbul Convention has

not yet been ratified by all Member States. For example, the Hungarian government has taken advantage of the pandemic to make Parliament reject in an extraordinary procedure that would make the Istanbul Convention legally binding.

Several European countries are being hit hard by the health crisis caused by COVID-19, with serious socio-economic impacts, which increase the risk of experiencing domestic violence during confinement. As time spent online has increased, there are also signs that cyberbullying and cyber violence against women and girls are increasing.



Main concerns

United Nations declaration CSW-64 of March 2020 recognises that, 25 years after Beijing, no country in the world has achieved gender equality. Women and girls experience multiple forms of violence, discrimination and vulnerability.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, gender-based violence has increased in both regions. With more than 50% of murders of women committed by their partners or close relatives, the home is the most dangerous place for women.

Women human rights defenders face increased risk of harassment, verbal assault and attacks on their reputation, sexual harassment, sexual violence and rape, and all kinds of threats directed at their sons, daughters and / or family members.

New forms of violence against women in the digital age increase the possibility of women and girls becoming victims of digital sexual violence, such as human trafficking and all modern forms of economic and sexual exploitation.

In the last 25 years, the number of underage marriages and forced pregnancies in girls and adolescents in Latin America has remained more or less the same. Countries such as Brazil and Honduras with high rates of forced pregnancy have failed to implement comprehensive prevention programs and sex education activities.

More than 70% of global human trafficking victims are female. Trafficking women and girls for the purpose of sexual exploitation persists in Latin America and is increasing every day.

Of the 32 countries in the region, 22 have not passed legislation guaranteeing equal remuneration for work of equal value. Women are overrepresented in the informal sector and suffer higher underemployment rates. Many women work in the economic sectors most affected by the COVID-19 crisis, such as commerce and tourism.

Women are on the front line of care work during the COVID-19 pandemic: in Latin America 70% of healthcare personnel are women and in the European Union 78% are women.

Women continue to be the most affected by unpaid care work, especially in times of crisis.

**The EU-LAT network
urges the European
Union and its Member
States to incorporate a
gender perspective in
the implementation of its
cooperation instruments
and trade agreements
between the EU and the
Latin American region.
To achieve this, we
recommend:**

- Incorporating a gender perspective and a differential approach in all its external policies and cooperation programs. Funding cooperation programs and/or projects that include a gender perspective and funding programs with specific gender objectives.
- Carrying out country-specific consultations on the European Commission's future NDICI cooperation instrument for 2021–2027, so that it integrates a gender perspective and has an intersectional approach, facilitating the participation of civil society organisations, associations of women, feminist movements and women human rights defenders.
- Within the new NDICI instrument, increasing funding for civil society organisations in Latin America that support women to meet the new needs emerging from the current crisis stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic. Increasing levels of information and transparency about the mechanisms that the EU can make available to civil society.
- Strengthening the next Gender Action Plan (GAP III) and ensuring transparency and the participation of civil society in the consultation, implementation and monitoring phases. Civil society participation must include representative women's associations and feminist movements at the local, regional, national and international levels. The GAP III must be made public through an official communication and have the support of the Member States through the Council Conclusions, so that it engages both the Member States and the EU institutions.
- Expanding the scope and the implementation timescale of programs such as the Spotlight Initiative, ensuring that feminist and women's organisations have direct access to resources to address priority situations in each country, adapted to the consequences of the pandemic and with the flexibility to define priorities according to the most urgent needs. Reviewing and evaluating the program to make the necessary adjustments for its improvement.



Photo by Pablo Tosco, Oxfam

- Supporting and funding via cooperation programs, the participation of women in dialogue forums, such as the Generation Equality Forum in Mexico and France, and UNGA in New York.
- Including binding provisions in the EU trade agreements with Latin American countries to guarantee respect for human rights, including gender equality and protection of

the environment and labour rights, as well as ensuring policy coherence in issues related to sustainable development, poverty reduction and gender equality.

• Ensuring that trade policies are fair from a gender point of view and do not exacerbate inequality, beyond the inclusion of a gender chapter. Carrying out an impact analysis before and after on the effects of

the agreements on women's human rights.

• Including a gender perspective in the forthcoming European legislation on human rights and environmental due diligence for companies and financial institutions which operate or offer a product or service within the EU. The consultations during the drafting of the legislation must include the participation of civil

society, women's associations and feminist movements. The legislation should order companies to carry out due diligence that takes into account gender and multiple forms of discrimination.

The EU-LAT network urges the European Union and its Member States to strengthen commitment to women's rights and to the fight against gender-based violence in the context of the health crisis, by confronting the differential impact of COVID-19 in the region. To achieve this we recommend:

- Urging governments to collect and report on data disaggregated by sex that enables a response to the crisis and recovery plans with a gender perspective. When the difficulty in collecting data is due to a lack of national capacity, the EU should support the development of the capacities of national statistical offices, ministries and other relevant public authorities.
- Monitoring and raising awareness of violence against women, especially the increase in domestic and sexual violence during confinement. The new EU Gender Action Plan (GAP III) must have clear, measurable and time-bound indicators and place importance on the collection and analysis of statistics.
- Urging the Latin American States to guarantee support services in response to violence against women during the pandemic, and to consider them as essential services (health services, legal advisory services, psychosocial services and other social services).
- Promoting specific strategies for women's empowerment and economic recovery (access to credit, adequate financial services, technology, new markets, among others) to face the crisis caused by COVID-19, including the promotion of community and solidarity economies.



Photo by AIETI

**The EU-LAT network
urges the European Union
and its Member States
to promote structural
changes in the region
to combat all forms
of gender violence.
To achieve this we
recommend:**

- Promoting the harmonisation of currently existing legislation on femicide in Latin American states, in accordance with the Inter-American Model Law to Prevent, Punish and Eradicate the Violent Death of Women and Girls, as established by the Convention of Belém do Pará.
- Ensuring compliance with, and the implementation of, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and other international conventions on violence against women. Supporting Latin American States in their duty to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women, and to take measures to investigate, prosecute and punish acts of violence against women defenders.
- Within the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders, adopting an annex with gender-specific recommendations and tools for their implementation, to serve as a guide to the External Action Service, EU Delegations and Member States. The recommendations should be developed in consultation with civil society and organisations of women human rights defenders.
- Ensuring that Latin American governments guarantee access to adequate health services for sexually diverse women and access to medicines for women and girls living with HIV, and that they work for the eradication of all forms of discrimination faced by these women and fund the prevention of HIV transmission.
- Creating cooperation programs to support civil society organisations that provide women and girls with access to education, including comprehensive sex education. Promoting through political dialogue, access to public, free and good quality education throughout life with a gender perspective and a differential approach, for all women and girls.

- Urging Latin American governments to adopt direct measures, to undertake a massive formalisation of the informal economy, with a gender perspective, and ensure universal social protection coverage with a gender perspective, which protects women throughout their lives.
- Using political dialogue to call for the ratification of ILO Convention 190 and recommendation 206 for the elimination of “Violence and Harassment in the World of Work”, as these were approved as international standards at the 108th International Labour Conference of the ILO in 2019.
- Exercising global political leadership in defending the rights of women and girls and counteracting speeches, narratives and measures that represent setbacks to the progress of women’s human rights

and gender justice in international forums. Formally supporting the feminist declaration prepared by civil society from the CSW-64.

- Opening up new spaces for dialogue and communication channels with organisations working for gender justice, ensuring the participation of women’s delegations in formal international forums. These women’s delegations should be representative of different countries and of social, economic, and gender identity diversity as well as sexual, ethnic, age, and race diversity, so that they can directly present the problems and alternatives.



The EU-LAT Network consists of the following organizations and individual members:

11.11.11; ActionAid International; AIETI; ASTM; Broederlijk Delen; CISV; CNCD 11.11.11; Cooperació; Comité Oscar Romero; Diakonia; Entraide et Fraternité; Entrepueblos; FIAN; FIDH; ForumCIV; FOS; Greet Schaumans; Gerard Karlhausen; Honduras delegation; Oxfam IBIS; Svenska Kyrkan; IM; Oxfam Intermón; Justice et Paix; Mundubat; OMCT; Oxfam Solidarité; PBI Guatemala; PBI Honduras; PBI México; Protection International; Solidaridad Suecia-América Latina (SAL); SweFor; Terre des Hommes France; TNI; Trócaire; We Effect; WSM.

The EU-LAT Network is a pluralistic network of European movements and organizations that promote solidarity between the people of Latin America and Europe. The network was founded on October 11, 2017 after two European networks – CIFCA (Copenhagen Initiative for Central America and Mexico) and Grupo Sur – decided to join forces in order to strengthen their advocacy actions to promote participatory European policies, with a gender perspective, that contributes to the comprehensive respect for human rights, democratization and sustainable development in Latin America.



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