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CCBE response to the European Commission's call for evidence on the 2026-2030 gender equality strategy

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The Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE) represents the Bars and Law Societies of 46 countries, and through them more than 1 million European lawyers.

The CCBE welcomes the opportunity to respond to the European Commission's call for evidence on the 2026-2030 gender equality strategy.

The CCBE considers that equality of gender and protection from discrimination, as well as from physical and mental harm on the basis of gender, are not political positions but fundamental human rights. The principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, the European Convention on Human Rights, and the EU Treaties, which collectively establish equality and non-discrimination as core values and binding legal obligations. As such, the realisation of gender equality is a matter of upholding the rule of law and the dignity of all individuals, not of political debate or expediency. Fundamental rights, by their very nature, must be protected and promoted irrespective of changing political climates or differing ideological perspectives. Politicising gender equality undermines its status as a universal and inalienable right and risks eroding the legal protections and societal progress that have been achieved in this area. The CCBE therefore stresses that the pursuit of gender equality should be regarded as an essential duty of all democratic institutions and legal systems, and not subject to political negotiation or compromise.

Gender-based violence and discrimination remain persistent issues across the European Union, undermining the enjoyment of rights such as dignity, security, and equal protection under the law. Addressing these issues is essential for the realisation of a just and democratic society. The ongoing prevalence of gender-based violence, as evidenced by recent EU surveys mentioned in the call for evidence, demonstrates the urgent need for coordinated and effective measures to safeguard the rights of all individuals, regardless of gender.

The CCBE underlines the necessity to strengthen support, protection, and access to justice for victims of gender-based violence. Victims must be able to report violence safely, be treated with dignity, and receive effective legal assistance and protection throughout legal proceedings. Ensuring access to justice is a core component of

upholding fundamental rights and combating discrimination and violence based on gender.

The CCBE highlights the importance of specialised training and capacity building for all professionals within the justice system, including lawyers, judges, prosecutors, police, and other relevant actors. Such training is essential to equip professionals to respond appropriately to cases involving gender-based violence, to uphold victims' rights, and to address stereotypes and biases that may hinder access to justice. The CCBE supports initiatives aimed at promoting continuous and specialised training in this area.

Furthermore, the CCBE stresses the critical importance of adequate and sustainable funding for legal aid systems across the EU[1]. Access to legal aid is fundamental to ensuring that all individuals, particularly victims of gender-based violence, can exercise their rights and obtain effective remedies, regardless of their financial means. Legal aid must be available, accessible, and of high quality to guarantee proper access to justice.

Bars and Law Societies can also play an important role in supporting victims of gender-based violence, including through outreach and awareness-raising activities, and the promotion of best practices within the legal profession. The CCBE encourages continued collaboration between Bars, civil society organisations, and public authorities to ensure a comprehensive and victim-centred approach to combating gender-based violence and advancing gender equality.

The CCBE invites the Commission to ensure that the 2026-2030 gender equality strategy places the protection of fundamental rights at its core, with a strong focus on strengthening support, protection, and access to justice for victims of gender-based violence; supporting the training and capacity building of justice professionals; and ensuring the proper funding of legal aid systems across the EU. The CCBE remains available to contribute its expertise to the advancement of these objectives and the protection of fundamental rights for all, regardless of gender.

[1] https://www.ccbe.eu/fileadmin/speciality_distribution/public/documents/ACCESS_TO_JUSTICE/ATJ_Guides_recommendations/EN_AtJ_20230331_CCBE-Recommendations-on-legal-aid.pdf