FEANTSA's statement on the European Commission's Gender Equality strategy 2026-2030

At FEANTSA, we welcome the publication of the new Gender Equality Strategy (2026–2030) and support efforts to strengthen and promote equality across the European Union. We particularly welcome the Strategy's emphasis on intersectionality and its recognition that gender inequalities are shaped by multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination.

However, despite this commitment, the Strategy reveals a significant gap when it comes to those most severely excluded, something FEANTSA is very concerned about. While it refers to vulnerable groups in the context of housing exclusion, such as single parents, older people, and victims of gender-based violence, it fails to explicitly address homelessness, and in particular women experiencing homelessness.

Across Europe, women experiencing homelessness remain one of the most marginalised and invisible groups. Their experiences are shaped by complex and intersecting vulnerabilities, including poverty, gender-based violence, migration status, and limited access to social protection. According to FEANTSA's latest report across Europe, an estimated 1.2 million people are homeless. While women are reported to account for 15-20 percent of the homeless, these figures are underestimating the true scale of women's homelessness. Due to prevalence of hidden homelessness, women may represent up to 50 percent of those experiencing homelessness. Yet, these realities remain largely absent from EU gender equality frameworks.

As the Strategy outlines concrete actions under each of the eight principles of the Roadmap for Women's Rights, FEANTSA proposes a number of targeted additions to ensure that women experiencing homelessness are not overlooked in its implementation.

Principle 1: Freedom from gender-based violence - the right to security and dignity

Gender-based violence is a clear violation of human rights, as well as a serious threat to people's safety and dignity. The Strategy highlights that one in three women in the EU has experienced such violence in their lifetime. However, homeless women are often overlooked or not included in official data and reporting, even though gender-based violence is a near universal experience in their lives.

Experiencing violence is not only a major pathway into homelessness for women, but also a frequent reality once they are homeless. This cyclical relationship remains insufficiently recognised. While the Commission commits to supporting Member States in developing national action plans and to transposing the GBV Directive into national legislation to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence, it is essential that these efforts explicitly take into account women experiencing homelessness and the specific risks they face.

To ensure that no one is left behind, FEANTSA calls on the European Commission and Member States to:

- Specifically include women experiencing homelessness in the implementation of the Victims' Rights Directive, ensuring access to safe, adequate and inclusive housing solutions, as well as gender-sensitive support services.
- Explicitly address homelessness in the development of guidelines for the prevention, detection, handling and prosecution of violence against women, as violence against homeless women often remains invisible and underreported.
- Ensure that women experiencing homelessness are included in the second, extended wave of the EU-wide survey on gender-based violence, in order to address current gaps in data. A Mutual Learning Programme in gender equality should be included, dedicated specifically to women's homelessness.
- The survey should include specific questions on housing difficulties to improve data collection on the intersection between gender-based violence and housing exclusion.
- Add a call for dedicated funding under CERV, addressing women's homelessness with a specific focus on the intersection between gender-based violence and housing insecurity.

Principle 2: The highest standards of physical and mental health

As the Commission rightly highlights, access to healthcare and health outcomes are strongly shaped by gender inequalities. Women continue to be affected by a lack of gender-sensitive research, diagnosis and treatment, as well as by barriers in access to services.

These challenges are further exacerbated for women experiencing homelessness. Many shelters and homelessness services are not equipped to provide gender-sensitive care, despite the specific health needs of homeless women. At the same time, mainstream healthcare systems often remain inaccessible to them, as services are not adapted to their circumstances or realities.

As the Commission plans to launch a new initiative with the World Health Organization to improve the quality and accessibility of women's healthcare, as well as a study on the economic and societal benefits of closing the women's health gap, FEANTSA calls on the Commission to:

- Ensure that these initiatives include all women, including those in the most excluded situations and those who are hardest to reach.
- Explicitly refer to women in vulnerable situations, including women experiencing homelessness, and ensure that recommendations reflect the intersectional barriers they face.
- Support the training of healthcare and social service professionals to deliver inclusive and gender-sensitive care, including in homelessness services.

Principle 3: Equal pay, economic empowerment and financial independence

Under this principle, the Commission recognises that women in vulnerable situations are at increased risk of poverty and social exclusion. This is particularly evident in the case of women experiencing homelessness.

The Strategy announces the integration of a strong gender perspective in the forthcoming Anti-Poverty Strategy, as well as a proposal on fighting housing exclusion, in line with the European Affordable Housing Plan, including a study on housing inequality and discrimination.

FEANTSA welcomes these commitments and would like to reinforce the importance of ensuring that they effectively reach those most excluded. In this context, FEANTSA calls on the Commission to:

- Ensure that the Anti-Poverty Strategy explicitly addresses women at risk of homelessness, as well as those currently experiencing homelessness.
- Include people experiencing homelessness in the planned study on housing inequality and discrimination.
- Further explore and promote the benefits of Housing First approaches as a key tool for supporting women's economic independence and long-term inclusion.

Principle 4: Work-life balance and gender equality in care

The Strategy rightly highlights that women continue to bear a disproportionate share of unpaid care and household responsibilities, which significantly affects their participation in the labour market and their economic independence.

These challenges are particularly acute for women experiencing homelessness or housing exclusion. Many homeless women are single mothers or primary caregivers, and face compounded difficulties in accessing childcare, stable housing and employment. At the same time, the lack of stable housing makes it extremely difficult to maintain family life or to benefit from existing work-life balance measures. In some cases, women risk losing custody of their children due to inadequate housing conditions, further reinforcing cycles of exclusion.

While the European Care Strategy and the Work-Life Balance Directive aim to improve access to care services and support carers, their effectiveness depends on the extent to which they reach those in the most precarious situations.

FEANTSA therefore calls on the Commission to:

- Recognise the link between access to housing and the ability to benefit from work-life balance measures, including family leave and flexible working arrangements.

- Ensure that care and work-life balance policies explicitly take into account women experiencing homelessness or housing exclusion, particularly single mothers.
- Call for greater recognition and support for homelessness workforce which forms part of the feminised social and care sector which is undervalued and mostly staffed by women. Strengthening this workforce is essential to provide integrated services for women experiencing homelessness and gender-based violence.
- Recognise the importance of stable and safe housing as a social determinant for education and a precondition to access to equal education.

Principle 5: Equal employment opportunities and adequate working conditions

The gender employment gap affects all women, but some face significantly greater barriers than others. Women experiencing homelessness encounter severe obstacles in accessing and maintaining employment, due to factors such as the lack of a permanent address, experiences of gender-based violence, limited access to childcare, and complex administrative barriers. FEANTSA calls on the Commission to:

- Recognise the specific challenges and structural exclusion faced by women experiencing homelessness when accessing and remaining in employment.

While we support the Commission's efforts to combat sexual harassment in the workplace and to promote gender balance in leadership positions, it is equally important to ensure that policies do not overlook those who are furthest from the labour market. FEANTSA therefore also calls on the Commission to:

- Ensure that employment policies and initiatives are inclusive of women who face multiple and intersecting barriers to labour market participation, including those experiencing homelessness.

Principle 6: High-quality and inclusive education and training

Access to high-quality and inclusive education and training is indeed essential and can be transformative in addressing gender inequalities. Initiatives such as "Girls in STEM" and "Boys in HEAL" are important steps towards reducing gender-based disparities in educational choices and outcomes.

However, to be truly effective, these efforts must take into account the broader range of factors that shape educational access and outcomes. FEANTSA therefore calls on the Commission to:

- Ensure that educational materials and initiatives addressing gender stereotypes also take into account other dimensions of inequality, including socio-economic background and housing exclusion, so that the most vulnerable groups are not left behind.
- Promote an intersectional approach in education policies, ensuring that gender equality measures are inclusive of those facing multiple and overlapping forms of disadvantage.

Principle 7: Active, equal and safe participation in public and political life

FEANTSA strongly condemns all forms of violence against women, both online and offline. As the Commission commits to presenting a recommendation on safety in politics, it is important that these efforts reflect the diversity of women's experiences. FEANTSA calls on the Commission to:

- Ensure that measures addressing violence and safety are inclusive of all women, across different social and economic contexts, and not limited to those in formal political roles.
- Ensure that the planned study on online networks and narratives also captures hate speech and harmful narratives targeting women in vulnerable situations, including those experiencing homelessness.
- Recommend recognising the expertise of women with lived experience of homelessness and gender-based violence and systematically include them in gender equality, housing policy processes and service development.

Principle 8: Institutional mechanisms that deliver on gender equality

FEANTSA welcomes the commitment to strengthen gender mainstreaming across EU policies and to support research on gender equality, including through an intersectional approach.

It is essential that these efforts translate into concrete support for those who are most often overlooked. Women experiencing homelessness frequently fall between different policy frameworks and funding streams, limiting the effectiveness of existing measures.

FEANTSA therefore calls on the Commission to:

- Emphasise the need to actively include the most excluded groups in gender equality policies and funding programmes.
- Strengthen dialogue with civil society organisations working on homelessness, including those supporting women.
- Ensure that initiatives such as the European Capitals of Inclusion and Diversity Awards reflect the realities and inclusion of people experiencing homelessness.
- Include homeless women in the EU Agenda for Cities to promote impact on local levels.

Conclusions

The reliance on broad commitments and general principles risks leaving the most excluded women behind. Without explicit reference to homelessness, there is a real risk that Member States will not adequately address the specific needs of women experiencing housing exclusion in the implementation of the Strategy.

To ensure that no one is left behind, FEANTSA calls on the European Commission and Member States to:

- Recognise homelessness and housing exclusion as key dimensions of gender inequality.
- Integrate the right to housing into gender equality policies and strategies.
- Ensure that intersectionality is translated into concrete measures, including for women experiencing homelessness.
- Develop and fund gender-sensitive homelessness policies, including prevention, protection, and long-term housing solutions.
- Strengthen data collection on women's homelessness, including hidden forms of homelessness.

A truly intersectional Gender Equality Strategy must address the structural conditions that prevent women from living in safety and dignity. Without access to safe and stable housing, gender equality will remain out of reach for many of the most vulnerable women in Europe.

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