

European Democracy Shield

EIGE's contribution to the Call for Evidence

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) produces independent research and shares best practice to promote gender equality and eliminate discrimination based on gender. As the EU agency for gender equality, we welcome the European Commission's initiative to establish a European Democracy Shield, and provide evidence to feed into that process based on EIGE's extensive work and data in areas relevant to the EU Democracy Shield ⁽¹⁾.

Gender equality is an essential pillar of democracy. It is not just a goal; it is a fundamental principle that underpins a fair and just society. It ensures that everyone is treated with respect and dignity. A focus on gender equality is essential for protecting the way we live and upholding democratic values and the rule of law. By promoting gender equality, we are safeguarding the principles of justice, fairness, and inclusivity that are fundamental to our societies.

EIGE expresses its willingness to share further evidence upon request, to ensure that gender equality, with an intersectional perspective, is integrated when countering disinformation, designing measures for broad and inclusive participation in elections, and supporting a culture of democratic participation or promoting citizen engagement in policymaking.

Countering disinformation and foreign information manipulation and interference

Gender equality is fundamental to democratic resilience

Anti-gender movements thrive in backsliding democracies and are essential in de-democratisation attempts, pushing for traditional gender and heteronormative norms. Across Europe and beyond, **anti-gender movements** present gender equality as a force of destabilisation. At a macro level, it is framed as part of a broader authoritarian overreach—an agenda imposed by a progressive elite that seeks to reshape society from above. Gender equality is no longer seen as a core democratic value; rather it is increasingly depicted as a threat to democracy. Portrayed as disconnected from the values and concerns of “ordinary” people, it is declared that this imposed agenda undermines free speech, erodes national

¹ This work includes EIGE's [Gender Statistics Database](#) and its data collection on [women and men in decision-making](#), data collection on [gender-sensitive parliaments](#) ahead of the EP elections, EIGE's [Gender Equality Index](#), and [gender-based violence](#). It is also based on two forthcoming publications, whose links will be valid once published, namely [Impact driver: marking milestones and opportunities for gender equality in the EU](#) and [Institutional mechanisms for gender equality in the EU: Present realities, future priorities](#)



sovereignty and weakens the fabric of democratic societies. These movements work to discredit women's rights organisations, compete for resources and influence policy. As a result, women, and women's rights and gender equality organisations face both physical and verbal threats and are targeted with online attacks, surveillance, criminalisation, legal restrictions and strategic lawsuits.

According to work done by the Council of Europe Gender Equality Commission's (GEC) Working Group on positive narratives in the context of anti-gender movements ⁽²⁾, the growing disconnection between gender equality and democracy is undermining the moral and social legitimacy of gender equality. In the current context of democratic backsliding, rising authoritarianism, and renewed emphasis on national security and remilitarisation, this leaves gender equality at a growing risk of being deprioritised or actively undermined across the region.

This has serious consequences for democratic institutions. European institutions, whose mandate is to uphold democracy, human rights and the rule of law, have a unique responsibility to push back against efforts to decouple gender equality from the democratic agenda. By reinforcing the message that gender equality is not a threat to democracy, but rather one of its essential pillars—ensuring fairness, participation, social wellbeing and inclusive governance—we help protect democracy itself from erosion. It is also very important to actively work towards countering backlash narratives on gender equality and democracy.

To address these issues, the European Commission should consider to:

- Collaborate with relevant institutions (such as the European Institute for Gender Equality, the Fundamental Rights Agency, EEAS, or the Council of Europe) and Member States over the monitoring & tackling of democratic backsliding, to reinforce democratic principles, ensuring that gender equality remains a priority across the EU.
- Counter disinformation regarding gender equality and women's rights through EU efforts to protect democracies.

Gender equality is key to countering disinformation, foreign information manipulation and interference

Violent extremism is another growing threat to democratic norms and values. It is exacerbated by digital spaces that amplify gendered narratives. In the past few years, anti-feminist and anti-gender movements have gained momentum in their attempts to roll back women's rights (particularly in areas such as violence against women and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)), silence women in politics, and undermine activists through violence, hate speech, and funding cuts, with growing links to radicalisation and extremism.

These movements align with the rise of new governing systems in which emotional appeals and personal beliefs dominate politics, and anti-democratic actors gain influence ⁽³⁾. Anti-gender mobilisation has become a transnational movement, uniting politicians, parties and

² <https://www.coe.int/en/web/genderequality/working-group-on-developing-positive-narratives-in-the-context-of-anti-gender-movements>

³ European Commission, 'The Megatrends Hub', https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/foresight/tool/megatrends-hub_en

organisations across the EU to undermine women's rights. These movements are often backed by religious, conservative and nationalist groups and rely on clandestine transnational funding systems from foreign powers (4). They take advantage of the opaque nature of AI algorithms to challenge gender equality politics. Spread of disinformation, especially with the help of AI tools, creates a fertile ground for violent extremism and anti-feminist, racist and anti-immigration hate speech. The lack of transparency makes it difficult to identify and address discriminatory practices.

Hybrid threats, such as fake news and disinformation or misinformation campaigns whose objectives are to amplify and aggravate social tensions and erode social cohesion and trust in authorities, are highly gendered. For example, the use of the hijab has been recurrently exploited by the far-right to convey anti-immigrant messages, with arguments related to the defence of women's rights, as well as the propagation of fake stories about acts of sexual violence being perpetrated by migrants against European women (5). Women and men are targeted with different fake news stories according to their gender identity to create social division (6). In particular, large disinformation campaigns orchestrated by foreign powers tend to target female public figures disproportionately (7). Such deliberate digital smear campaigns often lead to online violence including death threats (8). Women in public roles, such as journalism, activism or politics, are frequently subjected to gendered misinformation and disinformation, with women leaders from minority groups facing particularly severe attacks (9). This hostile environment pressures many women and girls to withdraw from online spaces and forgo careers in public affairs.

Several recent studies, including from King's College London's Policy Institute and Global Institute for Women's Leadership in partnership with Ipsos (10), indicate signs of an emerging gender divide in young people's attitudes. The 2024 study, for example, notes a gender split in views is starkest among the young when it comes to how helpful the term "toxic masculinity" is, whether it's harder to be a man than a woman today, or whether feminism has done more good or harm to society.

One driver of the gender divide among young generations is the growing digital exposure to 'online misogyny influencers' who offer advice on relationships, mental health, well-being and achieving material success and status (Botto and Gottzén, 2022; Haslop et al., 2024). Among these, **the manospheres** - groups that promote male supremacy, blame women and gender equality for various social ills - play an important role in fuelling radicalisation and recruitment into extremist movements. The content shared by these influencers can also steer young men towards more conservative and misogynistic ideologies. Growth in these attitudes among young men could significantly challenge the progress made and further efforts to achieve gender equality, as they may resist policies and cultural shifts aimed at promoting women's rights and reducing gender disparities.

⁴ Forthcoming, [Impact driver: marking milestones and opportunities for gender equality in the EU](#).

⁵ Freedman, Gjørsv, and Razakamharavo, 'Identity, Stability, Hybrid Threats and Disinformation'.

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Di Meco, Monetizing Misogyny. Gendered Disinformation and the Undermining of Women's Rights and Democracy Globally.

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Di Meco, L., Brechenmacher, S. (2020). [Tackling Online Abuse and Disinformation Targeting Women in Politics](#), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

¹⁰ [Masculinity and women's equality: study finds emerging gender divide in young people's attitudes | Ipsos](#)

The recent Flash Eurobarometer 544 on ‘gender stereotypes – violence against women’ shows that, in almost all questions, men aged 18-24 and 25-44 have more stereotyped perspectives and entrenched victim-blaming attitudes than older men. Gender differences in the acceptance of all forms of violence against women are also the largest in these age groups. Such emerging security threats demand innovative approaches that integrate a gender perspective as an effective response to today’s complex and rapidly evolving global environment. In the digital era, disinformation exacerbates misogynistic views and creates a fertile ground for violent extremism, anti-feminist, racist and anti-immigration hate speech, and a questioning of democratic norms.

To address these issues, the Democracy Shield should consider to:

- Keep gender equality in the agenda of discussions on changing (geo)political contexts and EU’s priorities, such as security and competitiveness. Ensure continuation of funding for gender equality and combatting gender-based violence and gender mainstreaming in security and competitiveness policies.
- Strengthen EU-wide legislation and enforcement against cyber violence.
- Ensure the comprehensive enforcement of the Digital Services Act, while aligning cyber violence measures with the Directive on violence against women and domestic violence. Enhance platforms’ complaint systems and improve law enforcement’s capacity for online violence. Focus on tackling online abuse against women in public roles on social media by increasing platform transparency and accountability.
- Align all EU security policies, such as the Counter-Terrorism Agenda, with the EU’s Women Peace and Security agenda and integrate a gender approach to all actions regarding the EU’s cyber defence and cyber security.

Ensuring the fairness and integrity of electoral processes and the strengthening of democratic frameworks and checks and balances

Persistent gender gaps in political decision-making undermine democratic legitimacy

Women’s political participation and equal representation are a central component of democracy. The [Commission's gender equality strategy 2020-2025](#) and the EU [Roadmap for women’s rights](#) highlight that gender equality and women’s rights contribute to strong and well-functioning democracies. The EU's Gender Equality Index score in the domain of "power" remains the lowest among all measured areas ⁽¹⁾, indicating significant gender disparities in political decision-making. These disparities reflect a democratic deficit, as decision-making bodies do not adequately represent the gender composition of the electorate.

EIGE’s 2023 report on **gender-sensitive parliaments** defines five core dimensions: access, influence on procedures, agenda visibility, gender-sensitive lawmaking, and symbolic representation. Indicators include quotas, gender budgeting, anti-harassment policies, and

¹¹ [Gender Equality Index | European Institute for Gender Equality](#)

inclusive language. These criteria help identify structural gaps that affect women's equal participation⁽¹²⁾.

European Parliament:

- Despite hopes for progress, the 2024 European Parliament elections led to a decline in women's representation. 38.8 % women and 61.2% men took their seats at the constitutive session of the new European Parliament in July 2024. This was the first-ever European Parliament election in which the share of women MEPs fell compared to the previous election (from 40.7 % in June 2019) ⁽¹³⁾.
- There is uneven representation of women and men MEPs according to age. There are more women (60 %, or 9 out of 15) MEPs aged under 30 compared to men (40 %, 6 out of 15). Although the 30–39 age group is gender balanced (with at least 40 % of each gender), men account for around two thirds of the older age categories: 40–59 (63.2 %) and 60+ (68.2 %) ⁽¹⁴⁾.

National parliaments:

- Most national parliaments in the EU still fall short of becoming gender-responsive institutions. Based on EIGE's research, only six parliaments in the EU have achieved at least half of the maximum possible gender sensitivity rating. This indicates limited progress and wide variation across countries⁽¹⁵⁾.
- According to EIGE's 2023 assessment, most national parliaments still lack strong institutional structures for gender equality. Only 20 have a parliamentary committee with a gender equality mandate, and just 8 require gender impact assessments on legislation⁽¹⁶⁾.
- Member States with no quotas will take twice as long to achieve gender-balanced national parliaments. EIGE's evidence shows that gender balance, among both Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and national Members of Parliament (MPs), tends to be better in countries with legislative quotas than in those without them. For example, out of the 10 Member States that had at least 40 % of each gender among their MEPs in November 2023, 5 have a legislative quota in place. In contrast, of the seven Member States in which women account for less than 30 % of MEPs, only one has a quota⁽¹⁷⁾.
- One in three women MPs sit in national parliaments across the EU. The share of women MPs has slightly improved over the last 20 years (28% in 2014 and 21% in

¹² [2023 Data Collection on Gender-sensitive Parliaments – Methodological report | European Institute for Gender Equality](#)

¹³ [Despite hopes for progress, European Parliament elections led to a decline in women's representation | European Institute for Gender Equality](#)

¹⁴ [Gender balance in politics: November 2024 | European Institute for Gender Equality](#)

¹⁵ [Gender sensitivity ratings show that most EU parliaments have space for improvement to deliver gender equality | European Institute for Gender Equality](#)

¹⁶ [Gender equality in the European and national parliaments ahead of the 2024 election year | European Institute for Gender Equality](#)

¹⁷ [Resources for the Commissioner of Gender Equality.docx](#)

2004) ⁽¹⁸⁾. At the current rate of change, it will take another 11 years to achieve gender balance (at least 40 % of each gender) and 28 years to achieve gender parity (50 % of each gender) ⁽¹⁹⁾.

- A crucial first step in improving the representation of women in parliament is to increase the number of women standing for election. Yet women account for an average of just a third (34 %) of candidates across the 20 Member States (23 houses of parliament) for which data on the numbers of women and men candidates are available for the most recent parliamentary election ⁽²⁰⁾. This suggests that women are disadvantaged as candidates, with men occupying the top positions on party lists, as well as ‘safe’ or ‘winnable’ seats.
- Gender equality bodies within national parliaments vary widely in structure and effectiveness. Only 20 parliaments have a designated committee on gender equality, and less than one-third require gender impact assessments for draft legislation. Monitoring, enforcement and visibility remain weak across most Member States⁽²¹⁾.
- The evidence shows that the proportion of women elected tends to be lower than the proportion of women candidates. To achieve any given target for the proportion of women in parliament (e.g. 40 %), it is necessary to have a higher quota level for candidates (e.g. 50 %) ⁽²²⁾.
- Political parties play a key role as gatekeepers as they select the candidates and determine how and where they are presented for election (e.g. zipped lists). EIGE’s data shows that in the EU Member States, men hold three out of four leadership positions in political parties. This means that the political parties that control the selection of candidates lack gender-equal representation in their leadership ⁽²³⁾.
- In the EU, women leading major political parties rose from 16 % in 2011 to 25.8 % in 2024, though men hold three out of four leadership positions. Women’s representation in deputy leadership roles has shown a progressive increase, now reaching 33.5 %. This represents a slight decline from 2023⁽²⁴⁾.
- In both the European and national parliaments, women remain under-represented in leadership roles. In the EP, 29% of committee chairs were women, compared to 40% of MEPs — an 11-point deficit. Similar patterns were found in 15 national parliaments⁽²⁵⁾.

¹⁸ [Indicator: National parliaments: presidents and members | Gender Statistics Database | European Institute for Gender Equality](#)

¹⁹ [Gender equality in the European Parliament and in national parliaments in the European Union: 2023 state of play | European Institute for Gender Equality](#)

²⁰ [Gender equality in the European Parliament and in national parliaments in the European Union: 2023 state of play | European Institute for Gender Equality](#)

²¹ [Gender equality in the European Parliament and in national parliaments in the European Union: 2023 state of play | European Institute for Gender Equality](#)

²² [Gender equality in the European Parliament and in national parliaments in the European Union: 2023 state of play | European Institute for Gender Equality](#)

²³ [Gender balance in politics: November 2024 | European Institute for Gender Equality](#)

²⁴ [Gender balance in politics: November 2024 | European Institute for Gender Equality](#)

²⁵ [Gender equality in the European and national parliaments ahead of the 2024 election year | European Institute for Gender Equality](#)

National governments:

- Senior ministers with a seat in the cabinet were predominantly male, representing 67.2 % of the positions, as of November 2024. The proportion of women in government has seen a slight decline compared to November 2023, decreasing by 0.6 percentage points to 33.4 % ⁽²⁶⁾.
- It will take at least 10 years to reach gender balance in regional assemblies. As of November 2024, women accounted for 36.3 % of members of regional assemblies across the EU, and 34.8 % of members of local/municipal councils ⁽²⁷⁾.

Gender inequality in political representation is not only a matter of numbers in parliaments and governments, but it also affects who leads policy areas. For example, in areas related to environment and climate change, women are significantly under-represented in decision-making roles. EIGE's 2023 data shows that women make up only 33% of senior ministers responsible for environment and climate portfolios across the EU. At subnational level, the share drops to 25%. This highlights a gap in **gender-balanced leadership** in one of the most pressing policy areas of our time⁽²⁸⁾.

Furthermore, **unequal distribution of care responsibilities** limit women's time and resources to engage in political activities

- Nearly 1 in 3 women outside the labour force and wanting to work said it was because of care responsibilities, compared to 1 in 10 men ⁽²⁹⁾.
- Due to the special status of elected public officials at the EU level and in most countries, measures to support MEPs' and MPs' work-life balance are generally missing. Only half of national parliaments in the EU have provisions regulating work-life balance or provide access to family leave options; combined with unregulated working hours and a lack of flexible working arrangements, this lack of measures hinders the ability of carers (still mostly women) to participate on equal footing in parliamentary work ⁽³⁰⁾.
- Parliaments in fewer than half of Member States have dedicated childcare facilities or other family-friendly rooms on their premises ⁽³¹⁾.

To address these issues, the Democracy Shield should consider to:

- Implement legislative gender quotas mandating a minimum share of each gender among candidates for election to ensure minimum standards across the board. The numerical quota must be accompanied by meaningful sanctions if there is non-compliance and by appropriate placement rules to ensure equal visibility of both sexes.

²⁶ [Gender balance in politics: November 2024 | European Institute for Gender Equality](#)

²⁷ [Gender balance in politics: November 2024 | European Institute for Gender Equality](#)

²⁸ [Decision-making in environment and climate change: women woefully under-represented in the EU Member States | European Institute for Gender Equality](#)

²⁹ [Gender Equality Index | European Institute for Gender Equality](#)

³⁰ [Gender equality in the European Parliament and in national parliaments in the European Union: 2023 state of play | European Institute for Gender Equality](#)

³¹ [Gender equality in the European Parliament and in national parliaments in the European Union: 2023 state of play | European Institute for Gender Equality](#)

- Ensure that electoral bodies monitor instances of violence against women. Provide gender-sensitive training to electoral stakeholders and improve access to funding for women candidates.
- Address online violence against women politicians, journalists and human rights defenders. Update national legal frameworks to define types of violence and describe investigation, punishment and reparation processes. Create synergies with platforms to promote transparency and accountability in preventing and responding to online attacks against women, working together to remove opacity policies that could obstruct investigations.
- Enhance family-friendly working conditions and promote the equal distribution of caring responsibilities between women and men in parliaments. Work–life balance measures would address underlying barriers for the equal representation of women and men in parliaments in their diverse life situations. This includes family leave options, procedures for proxy voting, limitations to working hours and sitting schedules, and childcare provisions.
- Commit to implementing and expanding the use of gender mainstreaming tools – such as gender equality action plans, gender budgeting, gender-responsive public procurement, gender equality training and gender-sensitive language – is crucial to achieve comprehensive and lasting transformation towards more gender-sensitive institutions.

Strengthening societal resilience and preparedness

Gender-based violence hampers women's full participation in democratic processes

Violent misogyny is linked to both violence against women and violent extremism. Perpetrators of violence against women are noted to particularly support extremism, with many of them having histories of violent extremism, radicalisation and terrorism as well as committing violence against women ⁽³²⁾.

- One in three women in the EU-27 (30.7 %) have experienced physical violence or threats and/or sexual violence over their lifetime, by any perpetrator ⁽³³⁾.
- One in three women in the EU-27 (30.8 %) have experienced sexual harassment at work in their lifetime ⁽³⁴⁾.
- The widespread online and offline sexism and violence against women in parliaments, including hate speech and harassment, is a major barrier for women's equal participation. However, few parliaments have provisions to provide a safe working

³² Graff, A. and Korolczuk, E. (2022), *Anti-Gender Politics in the Populist Moment*, Routledge, <https://www.routledge.com/Anti-Gender-Politics-in-the-Populist-Moment/Graff-Korolczuk/p/book/9780367679507>

³³ [EU gender-based violence survey: Key results | European Institute for Gender Equality](#)

³⁴ [EU gender-based violence survey: Key results | European Institute for Gender Equality](#)

environment for members of parliament – gender-based violence, including sexual harassment and cyber violence, demand urgent attention ⁽³⁵⁾.

To address these issues, the Democracy Shield could consider to:

- Advance the EU legal framework to eliminate gender-based violence against women and the standards for women’s human rights.
- Strengthen EU-wide legislation and enforcement against cyber violence, as well as strengthen the response to and awareness of gender-based cyber violence.
- Eliminate gender stereotypes and gender-based violence in education.
- Ensure the comprehensive enforcement of the Digital Services Act, while aligning cyber violence measures with the Directive on violence against women and domestic violence. Enhance platforms’ complaint systems and improve law enforcement’s capacity for online violence. Focus on tackling online abuse against women in public roles on social media by increasing platform transparency and accountability.
- Keep gender equality in the agenda of discussions on changing (geo)political contexts and EU’s priorities, such as security and competitiveness. Ensure continuation of funding for gender equality and combatting gender-based violence and gender mainstreaming in security and competitiveness policies.
- Align all EU security policies, such as the Counter-Terrorism Agenda, with the EU’s WPS agenda and integrate a gender approach to all actions regarding the EU’s cyber defence and cyber security.

Effective institutional mechanisms enable more gender-equal, democratic processes

We have already made the link between gender equality and democratic resilience. **Institutional mechanisms for gender equality and gender mainstreaming are bodies and processes that promote, advocate and support gender equality and the mainstreaming of gender issues across all policy areas.** The underlying premise of calls for stronger institutional mechanisms is that the existing gender inequalities in all areas of life need to be better recognised and understood and then systematically addressed through gender transformative policies and laws. This demands a systemic approach, applied to all areas of policy, the introduction of appropriate tools and methods to make the relevant assessments, comprehensive good quality data to inform decisions and monitor progress, and adequate resources to fulfil all of these tasks.

- EIGE’s 2025 data highlights that many Member States still lack fully resourced and accountable gender equality bodies. Areas for improvement include the availability of human resources (average score: 47%) and the use of gender mainstreaming tools (average score: 34%) ⁽³⁶⁾. While most governments have committed to gender

³⁵ [Gender equality in the European Parliament and in national parliaments in the European Union: 2023 state of play | European Institute for Gender Equality](#)

³⁶ [EU Member States need to strengthen institutional mechanisms for the promotion of gender equality | European Institute for Gender Equality](#)

equality, only a few translate this into concrete, costed action plans with measurable targets and regular reporting to parliament ⁽³⁷⁾.

- The use of gender mainstreaming tools and methods, such as gender impact assessments and gender budgeting, is still not widespread. Governmental and independent gender equality bodies are not routinely consulted on new laws and policies, limiting their impact on gender mainstreaming efforts.
- Data also reveals lack of comprehensive frameworks and accountability mechanisms. Too often the government's vision for gender equality is not converted into a concrete, well-costed and fully transparent action plan with clear and quantifiable targets against which progress can be monitored. Sixteen (16) Member States have national action plans on gender equality. Out of these, in 9 Member States the plans include specific quantifiable targets and regularly monitor progress in gender equality outcomes. Ten (10) Member States have a system where the governmental body regularly reports to the parliament. This is a key area for improvement ⁽³⁸⁾.

CSOs working on gender equality and women's rights remain vital in ensuring inclusive and representative democratic processes, yet they **face systemic challenges such as underfunding and shrinking civic space**. Many CSOs face significant resource constraints, with funding often provided on an annual and short-term basis. This financial pressure limits their capacity to carry out their work and advocate for gender equality effectively ⁽³⁹⁾. Furthermore, the rise of conservative anti-gender movements has created a polarised environment, posing significant challenges to gender equality advocacy. These movements often oppose progressive gender policies and can influence public opinion and political agendas against gender equality initiatives ⁽⁴⁰⁾.

To address these issues, the Democracy Shield should consider to:

- **Strengthen Member States' obligations to align with EU gender equality policy framework**, by integrating gender equality and gender budgeting into the EU macroeconomic framework and allocating dedicated percentages of the EU long-term budget to gender equality and gender mainstreaming interventions and activities.
- **Endorse a formation of the Council of the European Union dedicated to gender equality** that would regularly gather EU ministers responsible for gender equality and gender mainstreaming.
- **Consider to initiate a legislative process for an EU Directive on substantive gender equality**, which would foster transformative gender equality and gender mainstreaming standards across the EU, address structural inequalities and fully realise a gender-equal society.

³⁷ [The pathway to progress: strengthening effective structures for gender equality and gender mainstreaming in the EU | European Institute for Gender Equality](#)

³⁸ Forthcoming, [Institutional mechanisms for gender equality in the EU: Present realities, future priorities](#)

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

- **Renew the EU commitment to gender mainstreaming by adhering to the European Commission Roadmap for Women’s Rights and enhance its implementation** by embedding a gender perspective in all key EU strategic policy documents, supported by robust data collection, effective use of gender impact assessments and gender budgeting and dedicated resources to ensure comprehensive integration.
- **Strengthen public consultations on EU gender equality and other relevant policies and legislation**, ensuring broader participation from stakeholders, including national gender equality and women’s rights organizations, in policymaking across all areas and funding programmes.
- **Ensure sustainable funding for CSOs, women’s rights and other relevant organisations working on gender equality** and expand their capacity to champion policy reforms and promote long-term transformative changes in gender equality.

Fostering citizens’ participation and engagement

Tackling persistent stereotypes that harm women, girls, men and boys demands sustained efforts from a wide range of stakeholders, including governments, educational and media institutions and civil society. These efforts should encompass public awareness campaigns and educational initiatives to promote gender equality and challenge harmful norms. Specifically, enhancing media literacy and tackling gendered disinformation are critical measures needed to counter the online spread of misogynistic ideologies, particularly among young men and boys, who may resist policies and cultural shifts promoting gender equality. These efforts are vital to ensure everyone in the EU can thrive without fear of gender-based violence, discrimination or harmful stereotypes.

To address these issues, the Democracy Shield could consider to:

- Promote digital literacy programs on online safety, respectful communication and responsible use of AI.
- Counter rising anti-democratic values among boys and young men concerning gender equality and women’s rights by promoting gender equality education in schools, strengthening critical media literacy, countering misinformation and challenging gender stereotypes.
- Cooperate with CSOs to support a bottom-up approach to awareness-raising initiatives. Engage companies, sports organisations, media organisations and other organisations in tackling misogyny across all life spheres.