

# EL\*C PERSPECTIVES ON THE UNION OF EQUALITY

## An EU Gender Equality Strategy that works for Lesbians

:: AUGUST 2025 REPORT ::



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## Introduction

The EuroCentralAsian Lesbian\* Community (EL\*C) is a feminist, intersectional, pan-European network of over 200 LBQ-led and LBQ-focused civil society organisations in Europe and Central Asia, including all 27 EU Member States, as well as more than 6,000 individual members.

EL\*C is the only European network dedicated exclusively to the rights, needs, and interests of lesbian, bisexual, and queer (LBQ) women, both cis and trans, and other gender non-conforming persons identifying themselves within the lesbian identity (hereinafter LBQ women). Our mission is to make LBQ women visible, strengthen their participation in decision-making, improve their access to human rights, social and economic justice, and wellbeing, and ensure that their realities are reflected in policies at national, regional, European, and international levels.

EL\*C's advocacy is grounded in substantial evidence base: over five years of sustained research, extensive community consultations, and continuous policy engagement at the EU and international levels. This makes EL\*C the leading, and in

many contexts the only, international organisation systematically documenting and representing the realities of LBQ women across Europe and Central Asia.

While the Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025 marked an important step forward, its implementation largely overlooked the specific realities of LBQ women. This omission perpetuates systemic invisibility and leaves significant gaps in addressing violence, health disparities, economic inequalities, and barriers to political and public participation. As the Roadmap for Women’s Rights states, “special attention must be paid to women facing intersectional discrimination, based on characteristics such as (...) sexual orientation.”. As stated also by Commissioner Lahbib, the renewal of the Gender Equality Strategy provides the opportunity to “take an intersectional approach, taking into account the particularly vulnerable position of, for instance, women with disabilities, migrant women, or LGBTIQ women, thus ensuring coherence with other Union of Equality strategies<sup>1</sup>.”

This submission builds upon EL\*C’s extensive research and the work of its wide membership to highlight the specific needs, priorities, and lived experiences of LBQ women and it aims to provide expertise on how to make sure that the next Gender Equality Strategy embeds LBQ women specific needs and priorities across all eight gender equality priorities.

## 1. Freedom from Gender-Based Violence

LBQ women experience violence at the intersection of gender-based violence (GBV) and bias-motivated crimes, facing threats and abuse because they are both women and because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation. This dual dimension results in patterns of violence that differ from those experienced by other LGBTIQ groups and from heterosexual women.

The phenomenon is particularly complex and truly intersectional as it includes experiences that can be classified both as hate crimes as well as motivated by the perceived gender of the victim or survivor, such as in the case of violence in public spaces or forms of abuses within families. At the same time, being LBQ will influence the type of violence suffered by the person or will determine specificities when facing broader phenomena, such as in the case of sexual violence intended to “punish” or

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<sup>1</sup> Commissioner Lahbib written responses to the Questionnaire for Commissioners-Designate [https://hearings.elections.europa.eu/documents/lahbib/lahbib\\_writtenquestionsandanswers\\_en.pdf](https://hearings.elections.europa.eu/documents/lahbib/lahbib_writtenquestionsandanswers_en.pdf)

“correct” one’s sexual orientation or psychological abuse in an intimate partnership based on the threats of outing or isolation from the community. Because of this variety, data concerning violence against LBQ women is often scattered and difficult to collect; therefore, this chapter will present data from sources that each focus on a particular aspect of GBV against LBQ women. Despite important work conducted by EL\*C and its members on the topic, more efforts in analysis and understanding the specificities of GBV against LBQ women are urgently needed.

Over the past 5 years, the EL\*C’s Annual Observatory on Lesbophobic Violence and Discrimination against Lesbians (hereinafter “EL\*C Observatory on Lesbophobia”) has documented a sustained rise in both physical assaults (often against lesbian couples or people with non-conforming gender expression) and online harassment targeting LBQ women (especially publicly exposed individuals)<sup>2</sup>. This is also confirmed by the FRA’s LGBTIQ Survey III that reported high levels of violence and harassment against the LGBTIQ community across the EU and a rise compared to 2019<sup>3</sup>.

This increase is happening in a context where LBQ women were already largely affected by gender-based violence and violence against them is often motivated also by being or being perceived as a woman. According to the FRA’s LGBTIQ Survey III, between 38% and 57% of cisgender LBQ women reported being harassed because of their sex in addition to their sexual orientation, while only between 2% and 5% of cisgender GBQ men report being harassed because they are male<sup>4</sup>. The 2014 FRA survey on violence against women highlighted that non-heterosexual women show much higher rates of violence than heterosexual women, in all type of violence considered by the survey<sup>5</sup>. This survey, despite being now quite dated, remains the

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<sup>2</sup> EL\*C Observatory on Lesbophobic Violence and Violence against Lesbians, Annual Report 2024 [https://lesbiangenius.org/wp-content/uploads/2024-Observatory\\_final-report.pdf](https://lesbiangenius.org/wp-content/uploads/2024-Observatory_final-report.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> In particular, FRA’s LGBTIQ Survey III shows that physical or sexual attacks rose from 11 % in 2019 to 14 % in 2023, while hate-motivated harassment increased from approximately one-third to over 50 % — highlighting both the persistence and escalation of violence across the EU. FRA (2024), LGBTIQ equality at a crossroads – Progress and challenges, p. 20 [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2024-lgbtqi-equality\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2024-lgbtqi-equality_en.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> FRA (2024), EU LGBTIQ Survey III – Data Explorer, Perceived reasons for experiences of harassment beside being LGBTI (filters - sexual orientation: lesbian, gay, bisexual and pansexual – gender identity: cisgender woman, cisgender man. Answer: female/male) <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/data-and-maps/2024/eu-lgbtqi-survey-iii>

<sup>5</sup> 16 % of non-heterosexual women say that they have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a male non-partner since the age of 15, compared with 12 % of heterosexual women, whereas 11 % of non-heterosexual women have experienced this type of violence by female perpetrators, compared with 4 % of heterosexual women. However, the biggest difference is between non-heterosexual and

only EU data that explicitly covers non-heterosexual women in the context of GBV<sup>6</sup>, showing the need for an improvement and better disaggregation with EU data collection efforts both by FRA and EIGE<sup>7</sup>.

The FRA's LGBTIQ Survey III also reveals that between 88% and 75% of LBQ women survivors (cis and trans) did not report their most recent incident, citing mistrust of authorities or fear of secondary victimisation and showing some of the worst reporting rates among LGBTIQ respondents<sup>8</sup>. EL\*C data obtained via the Observatory on Lesbophobia highlights and confirms these systemic failings: incidents are routinely misclassified, downgraded, or stripped of bias motivated charges, allowing impunity for lesbophobic- violence<sup>9</sup>.

LBQ women are also subject to high rates of domestic violence, especially within the family of origin, which is often identified as the first site of violence against LBQ women. As denounced by EL\*C Observatory on Lesbophobia, such violence often aims to enforce conformity to heteronormative and gender norms<sup>10</sup>. The so-called “corrective” rapes often escalates from these contexts. Preliminary findings from EL\*C member and grantee Bilitis Foundation, collected during an EU-funded research project, indicate that in Bulgaria women of the LGBTI community are often subject to frequent physical, sexual and psychological abuse, forced outings,

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heterosexual women who say they have experienced physical and/ or sexual violence by both male and female perpetrators: 23 % of non-heterosexual women indicate having experienced non-partner violence by both male and female perpetrators, compared with 5 % of heterosexual women. FRA (2014), Violence against women: an EU-wide survey. Main results report, p. 185. [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2014-vaw-survey-main-results-apr14\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2014-vaw-survey-main-results-apr14_en.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> FRA, EIGE and Eurostat conducted a more recent survey and the key results were presented in 2024. The data currently available do not provide any clear information concerning sexual orientation, FRA, EIGE, Eurostat (2024), EU gender-based violence survey – Key results. Experiences of women in the EU-27 [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/eu-gender\\_based\\_violence\\_survey\\_key\\_results.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/eu-gender_based_violence_survey_key_results.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> EIGE Gender Equality Index 2024 includes data on violence and intersecting inequalities, however none of the indicators available can be used to analyse the situation of LBQ women: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2024/domain/violence>

<sup>8</sup> FRA (2024), EU LGBTIQ Survey III – Data Explorer, “Violence and harassment – Reporting of most recent physical or sexual attack” (filter: sexual orientation = lesbian and bisexual; gender identity = cis/trans woman answer: No).

<sup>9</sup> EL\*C Observatory on Lesbophobic Violence and Violence against Lesbians, Annual Report 2024 [https://lesbiangenius.org/wp-content/uploads/2024-Observatory\\_final-report.pdf](https://lesbiangenius.org/wp-content/uploads/2024-Observatory_final-report.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> EL\*C Observatory on Lesbophobic Violence and Violence against Lesbians, Annual Report 2024 [https://lesbiangenius.org/wp-content/uploads/2024-Observatory\\_final-report.pdf](https://lesbiangenius.org/wp-content/uploads/2024-Observatory_final-report.pdf)

eviction from the home, and restrictions on movement<sup>11</sup>. Similar data are also available in other EU countries, such as Italy<sup>12</sup> and France<sup>13</sup>. As shown by 2023 EL\*C research on the Istanbul convention implementation, despite its prevalence, family-based violence remains underrecognised in GBV policy and service provision, leaving LBQ survivors without safe and accessible protection mechanisms<sup>14</sup>.

Same-gender relationships are also subjects to blind spots when it comes to intimate partner violence. Bilitis' preliminary findings confirm that LBQ women, including trans, non-binary, and intersex persons, face high levels of intimate partner violence (IPV), often compounded by other forms of bias-motivated abuse. Similarly, data from a survey conducted by Liberas, an EL\*C member and grantees, based in Italy show high rates of physical or sexual violence as well as psychological abuse among LBT women<sup>15</sup>. The violence is often specific to LBQ individuals as survivors also face threats of outing, economic dependency, and social isolation as forms of control while the social stigma surrounding non-heteronormative relationship often leads survivors to struggle in recognising and reporting the violence. In legal systems where same-gender relationships are not legally recognised—as in Bulgaria—these survivors face additional barriers to protection<sup>16</sup>. The absence of legal recognition means that IPV within same-gender couples may not fall under domestic violence legislation, excluding victims from emergency protection orders, shelter access, or specialised support services. This legal gap reinforces impunity for perpetrators, limits survivors' ability to seek justice, and forces many to remain in unsafe environments.

The adoption of the **EU Directive (EU) 2024/1385 on Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence** is a critical opportunity to address these gaps —

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<sup>11</sup> Bilitis Foundation (2025), Analytical report of the research on Gender-based violence against LGBTI+ people in Bulgaria, forthcoming publication, available upon request

<sup>12</sup> Rete Medus3 (2024), Report 2024 Osservazioni sulla Lesbofobia, [https://www.retemeduse.it/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/report-rete-meduse-2024\\_web.pdf](https://www.retemeduse.it/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/report-rete-meduse-2024_web.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> C. Hamel (2021) Violences intrafamiliales : les filles et les jeunes LGBT plus touchés, available at this link: [https://juridique.defenseurdesdroits.fr/doc\\_num.php?explnum\\_id=19717](https://juridique.defenseurdesdroits.fr/doc_num.php?explnum_id=19717)

<sup>14</sup> Mestre i Mestre R., De Vido S., EL\*C (2024): Lesbianising the Istanbul Convention. Research on the Implementation of the Convention to Protect LBT Women, pp. 12–14

<https://lesbiangenius.org/wp-content/uploads/Lesbianising-the-Istanbul-Convention-report.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> 1 out of 3 LBT respondents reported physical violence while 40% reported psychological abuse. The survey collected over 253 responses of LBT individuals living in Sardinia (Italy). Liberas (2025), Preliminary results of the survey on Perceptions of Violence in LBT Intimate Relationships\* in Sardinia, publication forthcoming, available upon request.

<sup>16</sup> Bilitis Foundation (2025), Analytical report of the research on Gender-based violence against LGBTI+ people in Bulgaria, forthcoming publication, available upon request

but only if implementation explicitly includes LBQ women. Transposition must ensure that prevention, protection, and prosecution measures address their specific realities. In 2023, EL\*C conducted a research on the implementation of the Istanbul Convention to LBQ women, revealing substantial gaps in knowledge, practices and policies aimed at combating violence against LBQ women in Member States<sup>17</sup>. For this reason, it is key that LBQ-led organisations are meaningfully involved in policy design, service provision, and monitoring. Member States should integrate LBQ- specific indicators into GBV data systems, ensure law enforcement and judiciary receive targeted training on lesbophobic- violence, and apply the Directive’s aggravating circumstances for offences motivated by sexual orientation.

For what concern online violence, preliminary results from 2025 EL\*C research on online violence against LBTIQ women shows that lesbian and bisexual women are more often exposed to online harassment and violence (between 28%-48 – depending on the country) than heterosexual women (10%-18% depending on the country)<sup>18</sup>. Online abuse, including rape and death threats, do not only function as hate speech but as a form of GBV aimed at silencing and intimidating women in public life. Public-facing women, such as politicians, journalists, and influencers, are especially targeted. Research by the International Center for Journalists and UNESCO on the online experience of women journalists found that those that identify as lesbian and bisexuals experience some of the highest rates of online violence, and that the intersection between stigma related to sexual orientation and sexism and misogyny worsens and deepens women journalists’ experiences of online violence<sup>19</sup>.

For these reasons, at the EU level, effective enforcement of the **Digital Services Act** is also central to tackling the online dimension of GBV against LBQ women. It would be important to consider that current automated moderation systems compound the harm by misclassifying legitimate LBQ speech — including the word “lesbian” — as sexually explicit, thereby erasing LBQ voices from public discourse. Automated systems frequently disadvantage or “shadow ban” words used for -self-identification within the community, simply because they are misclassified as pornographic or

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<sup>17</sup> Mestre i Mestre R., De Vido S., EL\*C (2024): Lesbianising the Istanbul Convention. Research on the Implementation of the Convention to Protect LBT Women, pp.12–14 <https://lesbiangenius.org/wp-content/uploads/Lesbianising-the-Istanbul-Convention-report.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> EL\*C (2025), preliminary result of the research on online violence against LBTIQ women, forthcoming publication, available upon request

<sup>19</sup> ICFJ and UNESCO (2021), The Chilling: A global study of online violence against women journalists [https://www.icfj.org/sites/default/files/2023-02/ICFJ%20Unesco\\_TheChilling\\_OnlineViolence.pdf](https://www.icfj.org/sites/default/files/2023-02/ICFJ%20Unesco_TheChilling_OnlineViolence.pdf)

insulting-, leading to reduced visibility of LBQ voices online and reinforcing harmful stereotypes.<sup>20</sup> Addressing these systemic issues requires that the DSA's implementation explicitly mandate transparency in algorithmic decision-making, require platforms to assess the discriminatory impact of automated moderation, and prevent content classification systems from disproportionately silencing LBQ voices.

## 2. Highest Standards of Health

LBQ women face persistent, systemic barriers in accessing quality, non-discriminatory healthcare. These barriers stem from bias, heteronormative assumptions, and a chronic lack of research on their specific health needs. EL\*C research shows that less than 10% of sexual and gender minority health studies focus on non-heterosexual women, with most originating in North America<sup>21</sup>.

FRA's LGBTIQ Survey III data explorer reveals specific vulnerabilities of LBQ women in the EU: around 5% of LBQ cisgender avoided healthcare in the past 12 months due to fear of discrimination while 15% had to suffer inappropriate comments and curiosity by healthcare personnel in the same period. Trans LBQ respondents show much higher rates with 15% of transwomen avoiding healthcare and 1 out of 3 respondents reporting inappropriate comments. The health markers are also cause of concerns: 5% of LBQ cisgender and 10% respondents perceived their health as bad or very bad; around a third of the respondents felt downhearted or depressed<sup>22</sup> in the two weeks preceding the survey; and alarming rates of LBQ women report having had suicidal thoughts in the previous 12 months<sup>23</sup> and between 16% and 28% of LBQ women (cis and trans) report having attempted suicide<sup>24</sup>. These figures reflect

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<sup>20</sup> EL\*C Observatory on Lesbophobic Violence and Violence against Lesbians, Report 2019-2022 <https://lesbiangenius.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Observatory-Lesbophobia-2019-2022.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> EL\*C Observatory on Lesbophobic Violence and Violence against Lesbians, Report 2019-2022 <https://lesbiangenius.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Observatory-Lesbophobia-2019-2022.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> 27% of cisgender lesbians, 35% of bisexual cisgender women, 37% of trans lesbian and 43% of bisexual trans women felt depressed at least more than half of the time, FRA (2024), EU LGBTIQ Survey III – Data Explorer, Felt depressed or downhearted” (filter: sexual orientation = lesbian/bisexual; gender identity = cis/trans woman)

<sup>23</sup> 9% of cisgender lesbians, 14% of bisexual cisgender women, 25% of trans lesbian and 23% of bisexual trans women reported suicidal thoughts. FRA (2024), EU LGBTIQ Survey III – Data Explorer, suicidal thoughts” (filter: sexual orientation = lesbian/bisexual; gender identity = cis/trans woman answer: Yes)

<sup>24</sup> 16% of cisgender lesbians, 18% of bisexual cisgender women, 27% of trans lesbian and 34% of bisexual trans women reported suicidal thoughts. FRA (2024), EU LGBTIQ Survey III – Data Explorer, suicidal attempt” (filter: sexual orientation = lesbian/bisexual; gender identity = cis/trans woman Answer: Yes)

deep-rooted structural inequalities and the compounded impact of sexism and lesbophobia on LBQ women's health.

These are not isolated or individual vulnerabilities – they are the cumulative result of minority stress, driven by discrimination, invisibility, and the daily navigation of hostile or exclusionary environments. Persistent exposure to lesbophobia, misogyny, and, in the case of racialised, migrant, and trans LBQ women, further intersectional forms of bias, leads to lasting psychological and physical harm.

These inequities are further compounded by discriminatory reproductive rights policies. According to a European Parliament's Policy Department study on gendered aspects of sexual and reproductive health, there are pronounced disparities in access to quality fertility treatments across EU Member States, particularly affecting single women, and lesbian and same-sex couples. The study explicitly outlines uneven legal frameworks, exclusion of single women and same-sex couples from treatment eligibility, and financial barriers in multiple countries, outlining how reproductive care remains inaccessible or prohibitively expensive for many LBQ women across Europe. Trans lesbian women, intersex lesbians, and LBQ women from racialised or migrant backgrounds face additional barriers, including racism, language obstacles, and, particularly for racialised women, limited donor availability<sup>25</sup>.

While health policy is a shared competence under the EU Treaties, the EU has a clear responsibility to act within its mandate to address these inequities. This includes strengthening the enforcement of non-discrimination obligations in healthcare under the **EU Charter of Fundamental Rights** and the **Equality Directives**, ensuring that sexual orientation and gender identity are explicitly covered in all health-related laws and policies. For example, older LBQ women report being forced to go “back into the closet” to access long-term care or residential facilities, while care environments remain- overwhelmingly heteronormative<sup>26</sup>

Data collection is another key area. The EU should mandate targeted health data collection through **Eurostat** and the **European Health Interview Survey**, with

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<sup>25</sup> EL\*C (2021): Resistance as a Way of Living: Lesbian lives through the COVID-19 Pandemic, p. 17 <https://europeanlesbianconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Covid-Report-final-1.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> EL\*C (2023): Making the invisible visible, a first analysis of older lesbians lived experiences. [https://europeanlesbianconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Making-the-Invisible-Visible-an-analysis-of-older-lesbians-lived-experiences\\_ELC-research.pdf](https://europeanlesbianconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Making-the-Invisible-Visible-an-analysis-of-older-lesbians-lived-experiences_ELC-research.pdf)

oversampling of LBQ women to address their systematic invisibility in statistics. It should support the **European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC)** in developing guidelines for LBQ inclusive sexual, reproductive, and mental healthcare, and ensure that EU4Health Programme funding (and other future iteration of this funding programme) are used to provide mandatory training for healthcare providers on LBQ specific needs, intersectional bias, and inclusive communication. Furthermore, LBQ health indicators should be integrated into the **European Semester's social inclusion and health performance monitoring**, and the EU should facilitate **mutual learning between Member States on inclusive ART policies and equal access to reproductive rights**, drawing on EU case law and best national practices.

### 3. Equal Pay and Economic Empowerment

LBQ women experience compounded economic disadvantage, shaped by both structural gender inequalities and discrimination linked to sexual orientation and gender expression. According to EIGE's Gender Equality Index 2023, women in EU Member States earn on average 12.7% less than men and receive 29% smaller pensions<sup>27</sup>. Gendered income gaps translate into sharper financial insecurity for many LBQ women, who are more likely to depend on single incomes and have weaker pension entitlement<sup>28</sup>. Additionally, FRA's LGBTIQ Survey III further confirms that 20% of lesbian and bisexual women face discrimination at work and when looking for work, contributing to uneven career progression and workforce exit. Trans women reported even higher discrimination, with almost 1 out of 2 trans lesbian and bisexual women (45%) reporting feeling of discrimination in the last 12 months<sup>29</sup>.

The stigma related to sexual orientation and gender expression compounded with sexist discriminations make precarious employment widespread: a 2021 EL\*C surveys show 40% of LBQ women work under insecure conditions such as fixed-term contracts, part-time roles without social protection, or in informal sectors<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> EIGE (2023), Gender Equality Index

<https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/Gender%20Equality%20Index%202023.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> EL\*C (2023): Making the invisible visible, a first analysis of older lesbians lived experiences. p. 21

[https://europeanlesbianconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Making-the-Invisible-Visible-an-analysis-of-older-lesbians-lived-experiences\\_ELC-research.pdf](https://europeanlesbianconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Making-the-Invisible-Visible-an-analysis-of-older-lesbians-lived-experiences_ELC-research.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> FRA (2024), EU LGBTIQ Survey III – Data Explorer, Felt discriminated in employment in the last 12 months” (filter: sexual orientation = lesbian/bisexual; gender identity = cis/trans woman answer: Yes)

<sup>30</sup> EL\*C (2021): Resistance as a Way of Living: Lesbian lives through the COVID-19 Pandemic, p. 17  
<https://europeanlesbianconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Covid-Report-final-1.pdf>

Racialised, migrant, disabled, and trans LBQ women are disproportionately affected, often pushed into low-paid or precarious work<sup>31</sup>. The economic risks deepen with age: the EL\*C research highlights that many older LBQ women retire with minimal pensions, housing insecurity, and little access to credit or financial services. Social isolation and exclusion from familial inheritance further reduce their long-term financial resilience<sup>32</sup>.

EL\*C's research on older LBQ women documents how older LBQ women frequently experience economic insecurity as a result of long-term patterns of discrimination and exclusion from the labour market.<sup>33</sup> Many LBQ women had interrupted careers or reduced working hours while providing unpaid care for family or chosen community members. Since pension systems in most EU countries are tied to consistent formal employment, LBQ women, especially older, face double disadvantage: lower lifetime earnings and reduced pensions.

Even more starkly, an EL\*C research on racialised LBQ women highlights how they are disproportionately represented in precarious jobs and informal economies, with higher rates of job instability, eviction, and financial insecurity than white LBQ peers<sup>34</sup>

The **EU Pay Transparency Directive (Directive (EU) 2023/970)** explicitly acknowledges intersectional discrimination and provides legal grounds for compensation. Yet to benefit LBQ women, national implementation must include sexual orientation and gender identity in pay reporting, enforce intersectional equality measures, and support enforcement bodies in understanding these dual axes of disadvantage.

At EU level, lesbian-specific economic vulnerabilities should inform the **European Semester's review of gender pay and pension gaps**. As much as possible, the **EIGE**

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<sup>31</sup> EL\*C (2025), Intersectionality in action — When racism gets in the way of LBQ women and non-binary persons. Lived Realities of Black, Racialized, Roma, and Central Asian lesbians\* in the EU [https://lesbiangenius.org/wp-content/uploads/Racialized\\_Lesbian\\_Report.pdf](https://lesbiangenius.org/wp-content/uploads/Racialized_Lesbian_Report.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> EL\*C (2023): Making the invisible visible, a first analysis of older lesbians lived experiences. p. 21 [https://europeanlesbianconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Making-the-Invisible-Visible-an-analysis-of-older-lesbians-lived-experiences\\_ELC-research.pdf](https://europeanlesbianconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Making-the-Invisible-Visible-an-analysis-of-older-lesbians-lived-experiences_ELC-research.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> EL\*C (2023): Making the invisible visible, a first analysis of older lesbians lived experiences. [https://europeanlesbianconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Making-the-Invisible-Visible-an-analysis-of-older-lesbians-lived-experiences\\_ELC-research.pdf](https://europeanlesbianconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Making-the-Invisible-Visible-an-analysis-of-older-lesbians-lived-experiences_ELC-research.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> EL\*C (2025), Intersectionality in action — When racism gets in the way of LBQ women and non-binary persons. Lived Realities of Black, Racialized, Roma, and Central Asian lesbians\* in the EU [https://lesbiangenius.org/wp-content/uploads/Racialized\\_Lesbian\\_Report.pdf](https://lesbiangenius.org/wp-content/uploads/Racialized_Lesbian_Report.pdf)

**Index** should incorporate sexual orientation–sensitive data and include indicators and frameworks that are inclusive of LBQ experiences when analysing intersecting inequalities. EU funding programmes such as ESF+ and CERV (and similar future programmes) should prioritize LBQ-led employment initiatives, reskilling schemes, and entrepreneurship opportunities for those facing intersectional barriers or exclusion. **Mutual learning across Member States** should showcase effective practices in inclusive social protection, pension portability, and equal pay compliance.

## 4. Work-Life Balance and Care

Work–life balance challenges disproportionately affect LBQ women, especially because LBQ women are over-represented in precarious employment and those LBQ women living in Member States that do not provide legal recognition for their families. In those cases, non-biological parents are routinely excluded from parental leave, adoption benefits, or family-based caregiving rights in many Member States. These structural barriers leave LBQ caregivers without formal recognition or entitlement—even when they are fully functioning parents.

The EL\*C research on older LBQ women highlights through lived testimonies how older LBQ women often take on caregiving responsibilities – caring for peers, elderly relatives, and chosen-family members – frequently at personal expense of paid employment and access to social supports<sup>35</sup>. This has lasting consequences, including fragmented career trajectories and drastically reduced pension entitlements.

A recent Italian Constitutional Court ruling further confirms the legal invisibility faced by lesbian families: the Court ruled that a non-biological mother in a civil union is entitled to Italy’s mandatory ten-day paternity leave, declaring exclusion from this benefit unconstitutional and discriminatory<sup>36</sup>. This ruling builds on an earlier decision by the same Court in May 2025, which recognized both same-sex mothers as legal parents on birth certificates, eliminating previously mandatory adoption procedures for second-parent recognition and ending decades of discriminations and

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<sup>35</sup> EL\*C (2023): Making the invisible visible, a first analysis of older lesbians lived experiences, pp. 11-13 [https://europeanlesbianconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Making-the-Invisible-Visible-an-analysis-of-older-lesbians-lived-experiences\\_ELC-research.pdf](https://europeanlesbianconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Making-the-Invisible-Visible-an-analysis-of-older-lesbians-lived-experiences_ELC-research.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> <https://apnews.com/article/italy-paternity-leave-samesex-unions-lgbtq-constitution-discrimination-fc1752ce4ddd9150c4a98af695f67ec8>

vulnerability to political shifts in the country<sup>37</sup>. These judicial advancements underscore how vulnerable LBQ women in caregiving roles find themselves in the EU. Since recognition of same-gender families remains inconsistent in many Member States, the consequence when it comes to employment and social security rights are stark.

LBQ women also face unique challenges in elder care: many report being forced to hide their identity to access residential care, or encountering outright discrimination from care providers<sup>38</sup>. For racialised and migrant LBQ women, language barriers, xenophobia, and cultural insensitivity further restrict access to both elder and childcare services<sup>39</sup>. These compounded disadvantages deepen isolation and limit support networks.

Implementation of the **EU's Work–Life Balance Directive** (Directive (EU) 2019/1158) and alignment with the **Barcelona childcare and care strategy** must be reinterpreted through an LBQ lens. That means explicitly recognising same-gender, non-biological parents in care and leave entitlements—including carers' leave for non-legal family members and intentional parents. It means ensuring social protection systems recognize care contributions even absent biological ties or legal marriage.

At the EU level, monitoring under the **European Care Strategy** should involve LBQ-specific indicators on access to parental and carers' leave. Funding programmes – such as the current and future ESF+ and CERV – must support LBQ-led care advocacy, access to inclusive childcare and elder systems, and training for providers on LGBTIQ-inclusive practice. **Mutual learning across Member States** should promote best practices in inclusive leave entitlements, formal recognition of rainbow families, and protection of caregiving roles across life stages.

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<sup>37</sup> <https://apnews.com/article/italy-lgbtq-parents-00eda04c4a03e2b4274ebb1f6b3ddcc1>

<sup>38</sup> EL\*C (2023): Making the invisible visible, a first analysis of older lesbians lived experiences, p. 19 [https://europeanlesbianconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Making-the-Invisible-Visible-an-analysis-of-older-lesbians-lived-experiences\\_ELC-research.pdf](https://europeanlesbianconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Making-the-Invisible-Visible-an-analysis-of-older-lesbians-lived-experiences_ELC-research.pdf)

<sup>39</sup> EL\*C (2025), Intersectionality in action — When racism gets in the way of LBQ women and non-binary persons. Lived Realities of Black, Racialized, Roma, and Central Asian lesbians\* in the EU [https://lesbiangenius.org/wp-content/uploads/Racialized\\_Lesbian\\_Report.pdf](https://lesbiangenius.org/wp-content/uploads/Racialized_Lesbian_Report.pdf)

## 5. Equal Employment Opportunities and Adequate Working Conditions

LBQ women face distinct and intersecting risks of workplace discrimination arising from both gender and sexual orientation. As mentioned above, according to FRA's LGBTIQ Survey III, 46% of trans women, 20% of lesbians and 16% of bisexual women reported discrimination at work or in job applications in the previous 12 months<sup>40</sup>. This figure is significantly higher than the EU average for women overall. According to the available Eurostat data, 6.1% of employed women across the EU reported feeling discriminated against at work<sup>41</sup>.

Discrimination often manifests in subtle but systemic ways: exclusion from informal workplace networks; pressure to conform to gender norms in dress, speech, or behaviour for masculine-presenting LBQ women and non-binary persons and heightened vulnerability to sexualised harassment – particularly for feminine-presenting LBQ women<sup>42</sup>. In some Member States, discrimination against LBQ women has been reported within sectors where employment is strongly linked to religious organisations, which may not be welcoming to LGBTI people. Because such employers are concentrated in highly feminised sectors - such as education, health, social services, and care for persons with disabilities or older people - the impact disproportionately affects LBQ women and non-binary persons. The education sector, particularly early childhood teaching, remains a notable site of bias, with persistent stereotypes portraying LGBTI teachers as a negative influence on young people<sup>43</sup>.

The testimonies collected in the EL\*C research on older LBQ women highlight how longstanding discrimination, precarious labor market conditions, and lack of social

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<sup>40</sup> FRA LGBTI Survey III – Data Explorer, “Discrimination at work/in job applications,” (filter: sexual orientation = lesbian/bisexual, gender identity = cis/trans woman).

<sup>41</sup> Eurostat (data extracted in 2022), Self-perceived discrimination at work – statistics [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Self-perceived\\_discrimination\\_at\\_work\\_-\\_statistics](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Self-perceived_discrimination_at_work_-_statistics)

<sup>42</sup> EL\*C (2024), Comprehensive review on discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity, <https://lesbiangenius.org/wp-content/uploads/Comprehensive-review-ELC-report.pdf>

<sup>43</sup> EL\*C (2024), Comprehensive review on discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity, <https://lesbiangenius.org/wp-content/uploads/Comprehensive-review-ELC-report.pdf>

protection contribute to career disruptions and employment instability among older LBQ women—often compelling them to leave jobs <sup>44</sup>.

For racialised and migrant LBQ women, these challenges are amplified by systemic racism and xenophobia. The EL\*C research on racialised LBQ women documents that they are overrepresented in insecure, low-paid sectors, face higher rates of recruitment discrimination, and experience layered forms of harassment combining sexism, racism, and lesbophobia<sup>45</sup>. This intersectional exclusion is compounded by limited access to trade union representation or legal aid, particularly for those in informal employment or without secure residency status.

The EU has in place robust legal tools to combat such discrimination, notably the **Employment Equality Directive (2000/78/EC)**, which prohibits discrimination in employment and occupation on the grounds of sexual orientation, and the **Gender Equality Directives** (2006/54/EC and 2010/41/EU), which cover discrimination based on sex, including harassment and less favourable treatment linked to pregnancy or family responsibilities. However, these frameworks have not been fully implemented or enforced with an intersectional perspective.

**Member States should be encouraged** to systematically collect equality data disaggregated by sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity, to integrate LBQ women into gender equality plans, and to ensure workplace diversity policies and complaint mechanisms are explicitly inclusive. The European Commission should strengthen infringement proceedings where Member States fail to comply with the Equality Directives. **EU funding** should support LBQ-led employment initiatives, workplace training programmes, and legal support schemes targeting those most affected by systemic barriers— including older, racialised, migrant, trans and disabled LBQ women.

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<sup>44</sup> EL\*C (2023): Making the invisible visible, a first analysis of older lesbians lived experiences, pp. 14-16 [https://europeanlesbianconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Making-the-Invisible-Visible-an-analysis-of-older-lesbians-lived-experiences\\_ELC-research.pdf](https://europeanlesbianconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Making-the-Invisible-Visible-an-analysis-of-older-lesbians-lived-experiences_ELC-research.pdf)

<sup>45</sup> EL\*C (2025), Intersectionality in action — When racism gets in the way of LBQ women and non-binary persons. Lived Realities of Black, Racialized, Roma, and Central Asian lesbians\* in the EU [https://lesbiangenius.org/wp-content/uploads/Racialized\\_Lesbian\\_Report.pdf](https://lesbiangenius.org/wp-content/uploads/Racialized_Lesbian_Report.pdf)

## 6. Quality and Inclusive Education

The inequalities and discrimination LBQ women face in the workplace often have their roots in the patterns of exclusion and bias they experienced in education, where prejudice, erasure, and hostile environments laid the groundwork for barriers that persist throughout their working lives.

Experiences of bullying, teacher prejudice, and the erasure of LBQ identities in curricula contribute to reduced self-confidence, disrupted studies, and lower educational attainment, which in turn limit access to higher-paid and stable employment. The stereotypes reinforced in schools – about gender norms, perceived professionalism, and the supposed “unsuitability” of openly LBQ women in roles involving children or care – are carried into hiring practices, workplace cultures, and promotion decisions. This continuity between discriminatory educational environments and the labour market helps explain the disproportionately high rates of workplace discrimination, career stagnation, and economic insecurity documented among LBQ women, especially those who are racialized, migrants, trans or disabled.

Education systems play a decisive role in shaping equality, yet for many LBQ girls and young women they remain unsafe and exclusionary spaces. Data from the 2023 EL\*C & IGLYO survey that collected over 1000 replies from LBTQI youth show that more than half of respondents witnessed bullying at school (55.2%) or personally experienced it (52.7%), with the primary motivations being gender (60.9%), gender expression (55%), and sexual orientation (49.9%). The consequences were serious: one in three affected students considered changing schools, over 11% had to change schools entirely, and 6% dropped out<sup>46</sup>.

The problem is not confined to peer interactions. Teachers and school staff are often direct perpetrators of prejudice, with 68% of respondents reporting negative comments from teachers based on gender, 54% based on gender expression, and 49% based on sexual orientation. As documented in the 2024 Observatory on Lesbophobia, such attitudes from authority figures legitimize peer bullying and reinforce the notion that non-heterosexual women are deviant or dangerous. This is particularly acute in contexts shaped by anti-gender movements, where school

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<sup>46</sup> EL\*C & IGLYO (2023), Report on a European Survey of LBTQI Youth, publication forthcoming, available upon request

environments become a conduit for the broader societal backlash against women's and LGBTIQ rights<sup>47</sup>.

This situation is exacerbated by the spread of so-called “anti-LGBTIQ propaganda” laws and policies in some EU Member States, which restrict discussion of sexual orientation and gender identity in education. The Observatory on Lesbophobia documents how such measures, often framed as protecting children, effectively erase LBQ realities from curricula, prohibit positive representation, and foster a climate of fear among educators. In these environments, teachers may face disciplinary action or dismissal for addressing LGBTIQ topics, leading to a chilling effect that discourages any mention of diverse sexual orientations or gender identities. This censorship not only removes vital sources of support for LBQ students but also emboldens prejudiced actors within schools, resulting in increased surveillance of teachers, book bans, and the removal of inclusive educational materials.

Inclusive curricula remain rare. Between 65% and 77% of respondents reported that their schools provided no information on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or sex characteristics. When these topics were addressed, the information was more often negative than positive, reinforcing stereotypes and deepening stigma. Trans and non-binary students were especially likely to report that their identities were ignored or disrespected in school documentation and by staff, illustrating that erasure is a systemic feature of educational institutions rather than an occasional lapse<sup>48</sup>.

For LBQ youth, the cumulative effect of bullying, teacher prejudice, lack of inclusive facilities, and legal restrictions is profound. School is not only a place for learning but also a critical site of identity formation and social integration. When it becomes a source of violence, erasure, and fear, the damage extends beyond educational outcomes to self-esteem, mental health, and civic engagement. For those who are also racialized, migrants, or disabled, these harms are compounded by multiple forms of discrimination, leading to entrenched disadvantage that persists into adulthood.

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<sup>47</sup> EL\*C Observatory on Lesbophobic Violence and Violence against Lesbians, Annual Report 2024 [https://lesbiangenius.org/wp-content/uploads/2024-Observatory\\_final-report.pdf](https://lesbiangenius.org/wp-content/uploads/2024-Observatory_final-report.pdf)

<sup>48</sup> EL\*C & IGLYO (2023), Report on a European Survey of LBTQI Youth, publication forthcoming, available upon request

Challenging lesbophobia in education requires coordinated EU-level action to address both structural and cultural barriers. The European Commission should ensure that protection from discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression is consistently applied in education and existing equality legislation and should address restrictive “anti-LGBTIQ propaganda” measures through the **Rule of Law Mechanism** and targeted infringement procedures. The EU can act as a driver of inclusive education by using **Erasmus+**, **CERV**, and **Creative Europe** (and similar funding programmes in the next MFF) to fund curriculum development, teaching resources, and exchange programmes that provide accurate, positive, and age-appropriate representation of LBQ women, co-created with LBQ-led organisations. EIGE and FRA should develop LBQ-specific education indicators and data collection, while the Commission should promote an EU framework for teacher training on SOGIESC inclusion through **Erasmus+ Teacher Academies** and **ESF+ professional development resources**. Embedding these measures in its equality, education, and fundamental rights agendas would enable the EU to create safe and inclusive learning environments for LBQ girls and young women across the Union.

## 7. Political Participation and Equal Representation

LBQ women continue to face severe and persistent barriers to full political participation across the EU. The EL\*C Observatory on Lesbophobia documents that visible LBQ women in politics are frequent targets of coordinated online harassment, sexualised insults, and smear campaigns questioning their morality, often amplified by far-right and anti-gender actors<sup>49</sup>.

The Horizon Europe-funded RESIST research project confirms that these patterns are part of a broader strategy of anti-gender mobilisation, in which women and LGBTIQ politicians are delegitimised through hate speech, disinformation, and personal defamation<sup>50</sup>. In several Member States, LBQ activists and elected officials reported

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<sup>49</sup> EL\*C Observatory on Lesbophobic Violence and Violence against Lesbians, Annual Report 2024 [https://lesbiangenius.org/wp-content/uploads/2024-Observatory\\_final-report.pdf](https://lesbiangenius.org/wp-content/uploads/2024-Observatory_final-report.pdf)

<sup>50</sup> RESIST Project 1<sup>st</sup> phase mapped how ‘anti-gender’ politics are produced and expressed in contemporary Europe focusing on mediatic and political discourses in the UK, Poland, Switzerland, Hungary and the European Parliament between 2016 and 2022. The detailed results of the mapping are available here:

[https://theresistproject.eu/sdc\\_download/980/?key=dd7usqfers4bhgbssprwna7rjeo94x](https://theresistproject.eu/sdc_download/980/?key=dd7usqfers4bhgbssprwna7rjeo94x).

The 2<sup>nd</sup> phase of the project analysed the impact of ‘anti-gender’ politics on everyday lives and forms of resistance, using data gathered via interviews, focus groups and a survey across 9 case studies:

coordinated campaigns by extremist groups and sympathetic media outlets to frame them as a threat to “family values” or “national identity.” These campaigns not only increase the personal safety risks faced by LBQ women but also have a chilling effect on candidacy, reducing the diversity of political representation.

The EL\*C research on racialised LBQ women highlights that they face additional systemic barriers to political engagement, including exclusion from mainstream feminist and LGBTIQ political spaces, lack of access to party networks, and heightened exposure to racist abuse when they run for office or engage in activism<sup>51</sup>. Many reported being treated as “diversity tokens” while being excluded from substantive decision-making, and some avoided public political activity altogether due to fears for their safety or immigration status. The report underlines that the cumulative effect of racism, xenophobia, misogyny, and lesbophobia in political life is to effectively silence a significant segment of LBQ voices.

Addressing these barriers requires EU-level action to protect the democratic participation of LBQ women. The European Commission should strengthen the enforcement of the **EU Victims’ Rights Directive** and the **Digital Services Act** to ensure that online platforms act swiftly against gendered and SOGIESC-based abuse targeting politicians and candidates. **FRA** should systematically collect disaggregated data on political participation and hate crimes against LBQ women, **EIGE** should develop indicators on the presence, role, and influence of LBQ women in political decision-making. **Targeted support under CERV** (and future funding programmes) should be made available to LBQ-led organisations to fund leadership programmes, digital and physical security measures, and campaign infrastructure for candidates facing heightened risks.

## 8. Institutional Mechanisms that Deliver on Women’s Rights

The EU Roadmap for the next Gender Equality Strategy outlines the need for strong institutional infrastructure, sustainable funding, and effective gender mainstreaming

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Belarus, people living in exile in Europe, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Poland, Spain (Catalonia & Basque Country) and Switzerland. Detailed results are available here: Kiening M., Blidon M, Rodó-Zárate M., and Freude L. (2024). The RESIST Project Report Effects of, and Resistances to ‘Anti-Gender’ Mobilisations Across Europe: A Report on Transnational Findings.

[https://theresistproject.eu/sdc\\_download/820/?key=z0j920hmu2ek4a0nyo112couhbglxu](https://theresistproject.eu/sdc_download/820/?key=z0j920hmu2ek4a0nyo112couhbglxu)

<sup>51</sup> EL\*C (2025), Intersectionality in action — When racism gets in the way of LBQ women and non-binary persons. Lived Realities of Black, Racialized, Roma, and Central Asian lesbians\* in the EU [https://lesbiangenius.org/wp-content/uploads/Racialized\\_Lesbian\\_Report.pdf](https://lesbiangenius.org/wp-content/uploads/Racialized_Lesbian_Report.pdf)

across all policy areas. For LBQ women, these commitments must be interpreted through the lens of the specific and compounded discrimination they face – both as women and as sexual minorities – and the escalating backlash driven by anti-gender movements.

Specialised institutional infrastructure for gender equality must explicitly include LGBTIQ-responsive mandates and ensure that independent equality bodies are equipped to address intersectional discrimination, including the combination of sexism, lesbophobia, transphobia, and others. Evidence from the EL\*C Observatory on Lesbophobia<sup>52</sup> shows that anti-gender actors deliberately target LBQ women, mobilising sexualised hate speech, online harassment, and smear campaigns to drive them out of public and political spaces. This targeting is not incidental: LBQ women embody the intersection of gender and sexual diversity, making them strategic targets in attempts to roll back both women's rights and LGBTIQ equality. Equality bodies and EU-level monitoring structures must be able to document and address these attacks as structural threats to democracy and gender equality.

EIGE's 2025 analysis on Institutional Mechanism for gender equality confirms that Member States with stronger, well-resourced gender equality institutions consistently achieve better equality outcomes in areas such as political representation and economic autonomy, yet many equality bodies lack the resources and intersectional competence to address discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and race<sup>53</sup>. This reinforces the need for EU-level leadership to ensure these institutions have both the mandate and the capacity to protect LBQ women against structural bias and coordinated backlash.

**Sustainable funding** is a critical precondition for LBQ women's full participation and safety. LBQ-led organisations, many of which operate at the intersection of feminist and LGBTIQ activism, face structural underfunding and, in some Member States, active defunding as part of anti-gender strategies. The EL\*C Observatory on Lesbophobia documents cases where LBQ organisations lost public funding after being targeted by disinformation campaigns<sup>54</sup>, while RESIST shows that defunding is

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<sup>52</sup> EL\*C Observatory on Lesbophobic Violence and Violence against Lesbians, Annual Report 2024 [https://lesbiangenius.org/wp-content/uploads/2024-Observatory\\_final-report.pdf](https://lesbiangenius.org/wp-content/uploads/2024-Observatory_final-report.pdf)

<sup>53</sup> EIGE (2025), Institutional mechanisms for gender equality in the EU: Present realities, future priorities, <https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/publications/institutional-mechanisms-gender-equality-eu-present-realities-future-priorities>

<sup>54</sup> EL\*C Observatory on Lesbophobic Violence and Violence against Lesbians, Annual Report 2024 [https://lesbiangenius.org/wp-content/uploads/2024-Observatory\\_final-report.pdf](https://lesbiangenius.org/wp-content/uploads/2024-Observatory_final-report.pdf)

used alongside reputational attacks to weaken activist infrastructure<sup>55</sup>. **EU funding programmes, especially in the new MFF**, must establish dedicated, multiyear funding streams for LBQ-led organisations, with reduced co-funding requirements and explicit protection for advocacy activities. Without sustained financial support, LBQ organisations cannot provide essential services, conduct advocacy, or protect their communities from organised backlash.

**Effective gender mainstreaming** in all policy areas and budgets must account for LBQ realities, with the EU applying an intersectional lens that integrates sexual orientation and gender identity into its budgetary and policy impact assessments. The EU should use gender budgeting tools to track and report expenditure benefiting LBQ women especially in the construction of the next EU budget itself, ensuring that equality objectives in funding programmes are operationalised with concrete criteria

**Diplomacy and external actions** are also crucial. LBQ activists are at the forefront of resisting anti-gender mobilisation globally, yet they remain under-represented in EU external action. The EU should integrate LBQ women's rights into its human rights dialogues, support LBQ-led participation in international forums, and ensure that funding for human rights defenders includes dedicated support for LBQ women, particularly those facing intersecting risks due to race, migration status, or disability.

**Research** must address the persistent knowledge gap on LBQ women's needs and realities — a gap that LBQ-led civil society has long been filling with limited resources. Across Europe, LBQ organisations are conducting groundbreaking research, documenting violence, discrimination, health disparities, and barriers to participation that remain largely invisible in official statistics. This heavy lifting by community-led initiatives underscores the urgency for EU institutions to step up their role. The phenomena affecting LBQ women are deeply intersectional, meaning that relevant data is often scattered across separate policy areas and rarely analysed together, resulting in incomplete or misleading policy pictures.

To close these gaps, EU institutions should act along three priority axes. First of all, **EIGE Gender Equality Index** is an indispensable tool that can be strengthened by improving the inclusion of LBQ experiences. In particular, EIGE analysis of “intersectional inequalities” within the Gender Equality Index should include

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<sup>55</sup> Kiening M., Blidon M., Rodó-Zárate M., and Freude L. (2024). The RESIST Project Report Effects of, and Resistances to ‘Anti-Gender’ Mobilisations Across Europe: A Report on Transnational Findings. [https://theresistproject.eu/sdc\\_download/820/?key=z0j920hmu2ek4a0nyo112couhbglxu](https://theresistproject.eu/sdc_download/820/?key=z0j920hmu2ek4a0nyo112couhbglxu)

frameworks and indicators that can be used to analyse the situation of LBQ women<sup>56</sup>.

**Survey methodologies at EIGE, FRA, and Eurostat** should be improved to better capture LBQ women's realities, including by over-sampling non-heterosexual women, by planning outreach in collaboration with LBQ organisations, by ensuring sufficient disaggregation of results, and widely disseminating the findings to inform policymaking<sup>57</sup>. EU research funding — particularly under the current and future **Horizon Europe and CERV** — must be sustained and expanded for projects focusing on LBQ women's lived experiences, including in health, employment, political participation, and exposure to gender-based and bias-motivated violence.

Other elements of the Roadmap – such as the systematic consideration of factors affecting women's lives in European standards, gender sensitive spatial planning and transport infrastructure, and the design of digital tools mindful of gender equality – also have LBQ dimensions. For example, urban safety measures should incorporate the realities of LBQ women, who often face both sexual harassment and lesbophobic violence in public spaces.

## Conclusion and Key Recommendations

The EU Gender Equality Strategy 2026–2030 must move beyond broad commitments on intersectionality to explicitly address the realities of LBQ women, whose lives are shaped by the compounded effects of sexism, lesbophobia, and other intersecting forms of discrimination. As the evidence from EL\*C's research and community consultations shows, LBQ women experience unique patterns of violence, economic marginalisation, health disparities, and political exclusion that remain largely invisible in EU policy frameworks. Without targeted measures, the Strategy risks perpetuating these gaps, undermining the EU's commitments to full equality.

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<sup>56</sup> As clearly shown by EIGE website and data explorer, currently it is impossible to use the Index to extrapolate information concerning intersecting inequalities that concern LBQ women. <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2024/domain/intersecting-inequalities>

<sup>57</sup> The 2014 survey by FRA on violence against women collected only 524 responses from non-heterosexual women (against over 42000 answers). FRA (2014), Violence against women: an EU-wide survey. Main results report, p. 183. [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2014-vaw-survey-main-results-apr14\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2014-vaw-survey-main-results-apr14_en.pdf) The report on the key results of the new Gender Based Violence research by FRA, EIGE and Eurostat does not report any data concerning non-heterosexual women FRA, EIGE, Eurostat (2024), EU gender-based violence survey – Key results. Experiences of women in the EU-27. [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/eu-gender\\_based\\_violence\\_survey\\_key\\_results.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/eu-gender_based_violence_survey_key_results.pdf)

By embedding LBQ-specific perspectives across all thematic priorities, ensuring robust and disaggregated data collection, and allocating sustainable funding for LBQ-led initiatives, the EU can set a global standard for inclusive gender equality policies. This is not only a question of rights and justice, but of democratic resilience: when LBQ women are safe, visible, and fully able to participate in every sphere of life, all of society benefits. The next Gender Equality Strategy is the opportunity to make this vision a reality.

### Strategic and Structural Recommendations

#### 1. Explicit inclusion of LBQ women in the EU Gender Equality Strategy

The new Strategy should name lesbian, bisexual, and queer women explicitly as a priority group across all policy areas. This must be reflected in its objectives, indicators, monitoring tools, and evaluation processes, ensuring that LBQ women's realities are not subsumed under generic LGBTIQ or gender categories.

#### 2. Strengthen EU data systems to capture LBQ women's realities

EIGE should explicitly include LBQ women in their Intersectional Inequalities framework and improve survey design through targeted oversampling of non-heterosexual women. Data collected by EU bodies (FRA, Eurostat, EIGE and others) must be disaggregated by sexual orientation, gender identity, and other relevant characteristics, and findings systematically integrated into EU policy monitoring frameworks and widely disseminated to inform policymaking.

#### 3. Ensure sustainable EU funding for LBQ-led civil society and projects

The post-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework must guarantee long-term, accessible, and adequate funding for LBQ-led organisations and for projects addressing LBQ women's realities across sectors. This requires dedicated envelopes, simplified co-funding requirements to ensure small and grassroots organisations can access EU funds, and continuation of re-granting schemes that were successful in the current budget. Funding should explicitly support both service provision and advocacy, so that LBQ organisations can meet growing community needs or engage meaningfully in policy design, monitoring, and implementation.

### Priority-Specific Recommendations

#### 1. Freedom from Gender-Based Violence

- Include lesbophobic and bias-motivated violence in the implementation guidelines of Directive (EU) 2024/1385, ensuring that Member States recognise it as a form of gender-based violence with specific aggravating circumstances.

- Encourage Member States to perform targeted training for law enforcement, judiciary and first responders on identifying, recording, and prosecuting lesbophobic violence, in cooperation with LBQ-led organisations.
- In the enforcement of the DSA, ensure that lesbophobic hate speech and harassment against LBQ women is taken into account and require digital platform to assess and mitigate discriminatory impacts of automated moderation that suppress LBQ voices or misclassify LBQ content.

## **2. Highest Standards of Health**

- Integrate LBQ-specific needs into ECDC public health guidelines and address the specific disparities concerning LBQ women's sexual, reproductive, and mental health.
- Facilitate mutual learning among Member States on inclusive assisted reproductive technology (ART) policies for same-gender couples and single women.
- Develop EU-supported professional development modules for healthcare providers on LBQ-inclusive practices, covering intersectional bias and respectful communication.

## **3. Equal Pay and Economic Empowerment**

- Use available tools (such as the Pay Transparency Directive and the European Semester tools) to assess pay and pension gaps through an LBQ lens to highlight risks linked to single-income households and interrupted careers.
- Promote mutual learning between Member States on inclusive social protection schemes, ensuring coverage for non-traditional family structures.
- Support LBQ-led entrepreneurship and cooperative economic models through targeted EU funding.

## **4. Work-Life Balance and Care**

- Ensure the European Care Strategy includes recognition of care provided to and by non-legally recognised partners.
- Promote exchange of best practices on recognising non-biological parents rights to parental leave across Member States.
- Fund LBQ-led initiatives improving access to inclusive childcare and eldercare.

## **5. Equal Employment Opportunities**

- Support trade unions in developing intersectional strategies to protect LBQ workers cross-sectorally and with a specific attention to feminised sectors such as education, healthcare, and social services.
- Ensure that Member States integrate LBQ women in workplace equality plans for public institutions and large companies.

- Fund LBQ-led legal aid for victims of discrimination and workplace rights awareness projects

#### **6. Quality and Inclusive Education**

- Address exclusionary “anti-LGBTIQ propaganda” laws through the Rule of Law Mechanism, highlighting their impact on inclusive education and age-appropriate sexual education.
- Develop an EU framework for teacher training on LBQ-inclusive education and ensure that anti-bullying initiatives include the perspective of LGBTIQ youth.
- Fund LBQ-led educational resource creation, ensuring positive representation in curricula and school materials.

#### **7. Political Participation**

- Ensure that the EU Victims’ Rights Directive includes specific provisions for politicians and candidates facing gendered and SOGIESC-based harassment.
- Support LBQ organisations supporting LBQ women in politics, enabling rapid response to coordinated disinformation or hate campaigns.
- Provide targeted CERV (or successor) grants for LBQ-led leadership programmes and campaign infrastructure.

#### **8. Institutional Mechanisms**

- Require equality bodies to have LBQ-inclusive mandates, with capacity-building support from the European Commission.
- Embed LBQ inclusion into EU gender budgeting methodologies, tracking funding flows and outcomes for LBQ women.
- Support LBQ-led participation in EU external action, including human rights dialogues and international advocacy spaces.