

Women's rights under threat: the EU must ratify and implement CEDAW at last!

On the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the adoption of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), WIDE Network reminds the European Union about the importance and timeliness of CEDAW for women's human rights and about the EU's commitments to advance gender equality!*

Three decades have passed since CEDAW was adopted by over 90% of the Member States of the United Nations; **yet the EU still has not ratified the convention, and EU Member States have not implemented it.**

WIDE believes that in the present context of the multiple global crises, women's rights and gender equality are at stake more than ever, and Europe needs to act urgently!

The EU's political agenda of today is dominated by unfettered trade liberalisation, deregulation, privatisation and nonintervention of governments. We are experiencing a global backlash against policies that promote gender equality, women's rights and social justice. This backlash has additionally been aggravated by the the global crisis and by religious and political fundamentalism and conservative right-wing policies.

Nevertheless, the policies put into place to curb the crisis fail to pinpoint the unsustainability of the current neo-liberal economic system, based on competitiveness, profit-making and artificial separation of the productive and reproductive economies.

The 30th anniversary of CEDAW in 2009 is a crucial reminder for the European Commission and Member States to meet their commitments towards the advancement of gender equality and women's rights in Europe and worldwide. CEDAW is a key convention, an instrument to drive national and international law and policy.

Thus, WIDE asks the EU and Members States to take action and comply with their commitments to gender equality and women's rights as stated in the Treaty of Lisbon, the EU Pact for Gender Equality, the Communication on Equal Opportunities between Men and Women, the Consensus on Development and the Communication of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment for Development.

Therefore, WIDE calls on the EU to take the following measures:

1. ***The EU must commit itself to CEDAW by ratifying and implementing the convention without any reservation.*** The EU must condemn discrimination against women in all its forms, agree to pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating discrimination against women and, to this end, undertake action in political, social, economic and cultural fields (article 3 of CEDAW). By ratifying the convention, the EU has a duty to present reports in compliance with CEDAW's provisions and to implement the recommendations of the CEDAW Committee.
2. ***The EU must involve civil society organisations – especially women's rights organisations – in consultations while preparing the reports.*** As a first step, we ask the EU to organise a high-level conference to commemorate the 30th anniversary of CEDAW and to bring the EU, national governments, CEDAW Committee, civil society and women's human rights organisations together to launch the discussion on women's rights.
3. ***The EU must lead a more gender- and socially just economic and social policy.*** The EU must promote a social and economic model that puts people at the centre and incorporates the reproductive economy or 'care economy' at the heart of its policies. Women's paid and unpaid work has to be recognised and taken into account.
4. ***The EU must have proper legislation on gender equality which is strong, binding, and going further than the current 'Road Map for Gender Equality'.*** The implementation of such legislation needs to be supported by adequate resources and budget allocations.
5. ***The EU must increase policy coherence and link women's rights, trade and development.*** The European Commission must commit itself to CEDAW when conducting the European Neighbourhood Policies as well as development and trade policies with developing countries. The EU institutions and Member States must place CEDAW at the centre of their policymaking!

**Thirty years ago (in 1979), governments worldwide reached a milestone for women's equality with the adoption of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) to reinforce equality between men and women and to defend the rights of women.*

WIDE Network is a European feminist network of women's organisations, development NGOs, gender specialists and women's rights activists. WIDE monitors and influences international economic and development policy and practice from a feminist perspective. Its work is grounded on women's rights as the basis for the development of a more just and democratic world order and the search for alternative approaches to the economic mainstream. WIDE enables members and partners to articulate alternatives to the negative impacts of globalisation, and makes feminist alternatives visible. WIDE is committed to advance CEDAW implementation in Europe through policy advocacy, lobbying and capacity building.