



THE ALLIANCE FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN EUROPE

Supporting progress for gender equality and women's rights

The Alliance for Gender Equality in Europe brings together for the first time local and pan-European civil society actors with diverse funders to support progress in the areas of gender equality and women's rights in Europe. It is a two-part initiative comprising both a pooled fund and a knowledge platform.

Background

In 2019 the Fondation CHANEL engaged in a broad stakeholder consultation to assess and analyse the lack of funding for gender equality issues across Europe.¹ The aim was to explore how to successfully build up philanthropy to support women and girls within the region.

While gender inequality is often viewed as a larger problem outside of Europe than within, the situation is nevertheless disconcerting. Some troubling statistics include: women on the average earn 16% less than their male counterparts; the gap between pensions for men and women is nearly 40%; only 6% of large European companies are headed by women; and one in three women has experienced physical or sexual violence.²

Underfunding of the sector is due to a variety of factors, including the limited allocation of resources from national governments impacted by austerity; a focus on allocating EU funds for gender equality to the global south; the relatively weak philanthropic culture in the field; and a lack of individual donor engagement.

This notable paucity of funding contrasts sharply with the ever-growing influence and effectiveness of grassroots women's movements driving momentum on issues of gender equality across the globe. Indeed, networks of women's rights organisations and stakeholders are more likely to bring about transformative change due, in part, to their capacity to collaborate and act collectively.

While societies seem increasingly aware of the pressing need to support women's issues, no collective philanthropic effort to fund across Europe itself has successfully emerged up to now. Responding to this opportunity, the Alliance for Gender Equality in

Europe (the Alliance) has been created as the first pan-European multi-stakeholder funding initiative to focus on gender equality and women's rights across the European Union.

Given the challenges ahead, no single organisation can achieve enough progress on its own. A collective engagement such as the Alliance enables donors to combine forces, leverage funding, raise awareness, build support, and help sustain the sector and the organisations working on gender in the region.

Context

The COVID-19 pandemic is disproportionately impacting women and girls worldwide.³ Over the past year substantial media attention has focused on the fact that women are losing traction in their quest for equality. Heightened poverty and a dramatic rise in Violence Against Women (VAW)—with some countries reporting as much as a 30% increase—are two examples of this downward trend. Women and girls belonging to disadvantaged groups and/or at risk of multiple discrimination depending on their social or ethnic/national origin, such as women with disabilities, women in prostitution, elderly women, migrant and asylum-seeking women, are particularly at risk. Moreover, access to sexual and reproductive health services, legal aid, hotlines and other protections may become even more limited as resources for women's organisations become stretched to the breaking point. Strengthening the sector as a whole, including boosting capacity and sustainability, is critical.

This is a unique moment for women's issues globally. 2020 marked the 25th anniversary of the UN's Beijing Platform for Action⁴, a key resolution which committed to taking steps towards achieving gender equality worldwide. To mark the occasion and assess progress and implementation, UN Women has convened the Generation Equality Forum in Mexico and France from June 30 to July 2, 2021. This multi-stakeholder global gathering is a landmark effort that brought together governments, corporations, civil society organisations and others to secure a new set of concrete, ambitious, and transformative commitments. The Forum was "a rallying point to finally achieve the human rights of all women and girls."⁵

¹ A feasibility study was undertaken in conjunction with the European Women's Lobby (EWL).

² See: [International Women's Day Report, European Commission, 2019](#).

³ See: [Understanding Covid-19's impact on women, European Parliament, 2021](#).

⁴ See: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/01/beijing-declaration>.

⁵ See: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/get-involved/beijing-plus-25/generation-equality-forum>.

The launch of the Alliance is intended to be part and parcel of this broader movement. It aims to address long-term structural challenges for women's equality as well as offering a unique opportunity to engage with partners on shorter-term immediate needs.

Vision

The Alliance for Gender Equality in Europe brings together civil society actors to fund and support progress in the areas of gender equality and women's rights in Europe. It aims to attract donors that are not currently giving in this historically under-funded field in Europe.

The Alliance aspires to explore opportunities for participatory philanthropy, such as incorporating grantee feedback into grant guidelines and strategy development, in order to give a stronger voice to non-grant making actors in the sector.

Unique positioning

The Alliance is the only pooled fund and network of its kind in Europe, creating and sharing knowledge, building capacity and bolstering a culture of strategic philanthropy for gender equality issues in the European Union. It emerged from consultations with the women's sector as a whole, women's funds and civil society organisations, as well as corporate and private donors.

A joint funding and learning initiative, it enables foundations and others to collaborate at the European level through a streamlined and transparent process. Its goal is to increase resources for those organisations most in need while also generating new knowledge which will boost stakeholder engagement through the following activities:

- A pooled fund that allows donors to engage in areas such as ending violence against women, promoting women's equal rights, and building an inclusive society. Grantees may include organisations working in rights-based movements; health and education services; employment; and entrepreneurial networks, amongst others.
- A Network/Learning Platform which is a flexible, open platform for donors and women's rights advocates aiming to build trust, partnerships and impactful responses. It will develop a program of knowledge-creation and dissemination between relevant donors, women's organisations, support networks and other stakeholders, including the general public and the media. It also aims to produce relevant, reliable and comprehensive research to influence policy initiatives.

The Alliance's activities

1. Pooled Fund

- Establish a flexible dynamic pooled funding mechanism to provide grants for social purpose organisations and women's funds to be launched in September 2021.
- The first year of funding will be dedicated to a pop-up "Fund for Covid Solidarity."
- Grants will prioritize small frontline organisations (with budgets not to exceed 450 000€) and can be awarded either for unrestricted core funding or for projects. There will be several calls for proposals every year. Full details of the grant-making policy and application materials will be provided at launch.

2. Network/Learning Platform

- Create a dedicated platform to share and develop new sources of information and knowledge.
- Share research, innovations and best practices in Europe to improve collaborative work and respond effectively to policy change.
- Enable advocacy for women's full participation in society, addressing issues of economic and social vulnerability, and promoting gender equality.

Organisation and Governance

The Alliance currently includes Fondation CHANEL, King Baudouin Foundation and L'Oréal Fund for Women. The Alliance is established under the auspices of the Brussels-based Network of European Foundations (NEF), an umbrella organisation dedicated to mutualising philanthropic support in Europe.

A Steering Committee comprised of donors to the pooled fund will make final granting decisions. An Advisory Council made up of representatives from women's organisations, networks, women's funds, the business world and others will ensure robust stakeholder participation. The Network/Learning Platform will welcome a broad cross section of engaged actors.

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