



Resourcing Movements for Gender Equality in Europe

REPORT

What grassroots activists
need and how philanthropy
can support movements

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Executive Summary

This report is the first-ever mapping of feminist and gender equality movements in Europe to inform future philanthropic support. It draws on 30 in-depth interviews, consultations, and contextual research to capture how organisers across the continent are advancing gender justice, democracy, and human rights, often with minimal support and against significant odds. The study is driven by the need for evidence-based recommendations for resourcing movements in Europe today, at a critical time of democratic rollback, shrinking civic space, and unprecedented funding cuts for gender equality.

The research revealed an ecosystem of movements that are organising, connecting, and building power in community spaces, in policy and culture, online and offline. Evidence from the research indicates that despite resource limitations, these movements are contributing to transformative change. Across Europe, feminist and women's rights movements are reshaping public life – from Spain's Territorio Doméstico, where migrant care workers organised to secure labour rights and visibility for domestic work; to My Voice, My Choice, the large scale European campaign, uniting more than 300 organisations and 1.2 million citizens to demand reproductive freedom across the EU; to Serbia's student-led protests, where feminist organisers reframed political corruption as a question of care, accountability, and gender justice. Together, these movements show how storytelling, solidarity, and strategy can turn moments of crisis into catalysts for structural transformation.

These movements are diverse and complex by design. Their strength lies in their interconnectedness – across borders, issues, and identities – and their refusal to ignore nuance or be reduced to a single voice or method. They are built on deep relationships, shared analysis, and collective action. They centre healing, culture, mutual aid and leadership development as vital strategies for building durable power.

Yet the scale of the challenge cannot be underestimated. Movements in Europe face a well-organised and well-resourced backlash, one that is global in reach and growing in confidence. The backlash is, in part, a reaction to the successes of these movements and a sign that they are making progress on issues of rights and justice. The burden of that success is heavy. The anti-gender movement has billions in funding and a coordinated playbook. Movements for gender equality continue to organise for rights, safety, and democratic space with a fraction of the resources and often under threat.

Philanthropy must meet this moment with purpose. The research has found that too often, funding frameworks are misaligned with what movements actually need. Our findings indicate that current funding models not only fail to support movement-building; they often actively undermine it. What is required is a shift towards long-term, flexible, trust-based resourcing that values relationships and experimenting.

The feminist and gender equality movements featured in this report are demonstrating what is possible within constrained conditions. The research suggests that if they were more consistently and adequately resourced, their capacity to advance progress towards gender equality could be significantly strengthened.

Movements for gender equality across Europe are advancing systemic change not through a single strategy or structure, but through interconnected practices that build, organise, and transform power. This report draws on a feminist theory of change to highlight how movements make change—and what kind of resourcing enables them to thrive, outlining specific recommendations for the wider philanthropic field:

01. Building Power:

At the foundation of movement building is the work of healing, reflection, and leadership development—especially among those most affected by structural injustice. Groups that nurture “power within” through popular education, mutual aid, and consciousness-raising are often invisible to formal philanthropy, but deeply catalytic.

Who thrives when supported:

- Women's Funds and intermediary organisations;
- Grassroots and community-based groups led by women of colour, LGBTQI+, migrant, and disabled activists.

Effective funding looks like:

- Flexible core funding that supports healing spaces and leadership development.
- Lowering grant barriers to include groups often excluded;
- Trusting local actors to define their own needs and pace of growth.

02. Organising and Mobilising Power:

Feminist and gender equality movements gain momentum through networks of solidarity and shared struggle. This organising work—often informal, under the radar, and labour-intensive—requires time, trust, and infrastructure to sustain.

Who thrives when supported:

- Coalitions and networks linking movements across borders and issues (e.g. migration, labour, climate, racial justice);
- Regional or translocal organising hubs and campaigns.

Effective funding looks like:

- Resourcing for convenings, coalition-building, and shared strategy development;
- Support for under-the-radar organising;
- Investment in infrastructure to connect and sustain cross-movement collaboration.

03. Transforming Power:

Movements are changing norms, laws, and systems. These wins are rarely linear or easily measurable—but they reflect deep shifts in public consciousness and political possibility.

Who thrives when supported:

- Narrative strategists, storytellers, and organisers;
- Advocacy groups working on policy and legislative change;
- Feminist leaders reshaping civil society and philanthropic practice itself.

Effective funding looks like:

- Supporting policy advocacy and narrative change, including in polarised contexts;
- Embracing longer timelines and new indicators of success;
- Making space for experimentation, failure, and emergence as part of the movement journey.

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Purpose & Methods

The core purpose of this report is to:

- **Surface insights and strategies from the field**, capturing the lived experiences, knowledge, and visions of feminist and equality organisers, especially those working at the grassroots and on the margins.
- **Generate a compelling evidence base** to support long-term investment in movements as a critical force for gender equality and social change in Europe.
- **Inform strategic grant-making** by providing concrete recommendations for resourcing feminist and gender equality movements in Europe.

This report provides the insights and strategic grounding needed to back impactful, broad, reliable, flexible, and long-term investment.

Methodological Approach

The methodology combines traditional qualitative research methods with feminist facilitation and listening practices to ensure that the process is inclusive, reflective, and grounded in community realities.

- **30 in-depth interviews** with organisers, civil society leaders, funders, researchers, and other movement actors from across Europe.
- **Review of background literature** and key documents on funding and organising in the region.

Limitations of the Research

While this study provides valuable insights into feminist and gender equality movement-building across Europe, several limitations should be noted. The research draws on 30 in-depth interviews, which, although rich and diverse, do not represent the full range of gender justice organising in the region. The sample was designed to capture variation across geography, thematic focus, and organisational type, but certain areas will inevitably remain underrepresented. Most interviews were conducted in English or French, which may have limited participation from activists working primarily in other languages. In addition, the qualitative nature of the research means that findings reflect the perspectives and experiences of participants rather than statistically generalisable trends. These limitations should be kept in mind when interpreting the results, which aim to illuminate patterns and lived realities rather than provide exhaustive coverage.

Safeguarding and Ethical Considerations

All interviews were conducted in accordance with feminist research ethics and safeguarding principles. Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all contributors before the interviews. Participants' responses remain anonymous, and all personal data were treated with strict confidentiality. Where requested, identifying details have been removed or generalised to protect individuals and organisations. Researchers took care to create safe and supportive spaces for participants to share their experiences, recognising the potential sensitivity of discussing topics related to activism, discrimination, and personal risk.

Acknowledgements

This report was made possible thanks to the generous time, insight, and courage of those who participated in the interviews and shared their lived experiences. We extend our deepest gratitude to every respondent who spoke with honesty about the challenges and possibilities of resourcing movements.

We also acknowledge the work of feminist researchers and practitioners whose contributions this report builds upon – particularly the **Just Associates (JASS)** and other bodies of research on movement-building, and transformative funding practices. Their decades of experience have provided the theoretical and practical foundations for understanding how movements for gender equality grow, resist, and thrive.

Special thanks go to the **staff and steering committee of the Alliance for Gender Equality in Europe**, whose vision and dedication guided this process from conception to completion.

We are also grateful to the **Alliance's grantees and partners** across Central, Eastern, Southern, and Western Europe – for their daily work in the face of political and social pressures.

Finally, we wish to recognise all those who contributed behind the scenes – translators, note-takers, and reviewers – who helped ensure that diverse voices and languages were faithfully represented in this report.

This report is dedicated to the many organisers who continue to build movements of equality, justice, care, and solidarity across Europe.

Useful Definitions

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Activism | Collective action taken to challenge injustice, influence social and political change, and promote equality. Feminist activism often combines protest, advocacy, and everyday acts of resistance and care. |
| Care | The practice of nurturing people and relationships as a political act. In feminist movements, care is both a value and a strategy for sustainability, solidarity, and resistance. |
| Ecosystem | The interconnected web of actors, organisations, and relationships that make up a movement. Recognises that no single group drives change alone – impact emerges through coordination, solidarity, and shared purpose. |
| Emergence | The process by which collective action, insight, and direction arise from the ground up, often unpredictably, in response to the changing needs, relationships, and conditions within communities. |
| Healing | Processes that address individual and collective trauma caused by oppression and violence. Healing practices within movements build resilience, connection, and long-term capacity for change. |
| Intersectionality | A framework recognising that people experience overlapping systems of oppression (such as sexism, racism, classism, ableism, and homophobia) that shape their lives and access to power. Central to feminist analysis and organising. |
| Movement | A dynamic, collective effort to transform power relations and advance systemic change. Movements encompass both formal organisations and informal networks rooted in shared values and long-term vision. Movements are not centralised machines; they are ecosystems, constantly evolving through participation, reflection, and action. |
| Oppression | The systemic and structural exercise of power that privileges certain groups while marginalising others, maintained through institutions, culture, and everyday practices. |
| Political | Refers to the analysis and action that challenge existing power systems and inequalities. In this report the word 'political' does not mean political parties or being partisan. In feminist contexts, being political means addressing root causes of injustice, not merely providing services or charity. |
| Power | The capacity to influence change. Feminist frameworks are centred on the move from coercive to collaborative power: the "power within" (self-awareness and confidence), "power with" (collective strength), and "power to" (the ability to act and transform systems). |
| Structural Change | Transforming formal institutions, laws, and policies that shape society - for example, reforms to the legal system, labour laws, or access to education and healthcare. It is different from systemic change (see below). |
| Systemic Change | Transforming the underlying norms, power dynamics, and cultural values that sustain inequality, ensuring that reforms lead to lasting justice. |
| Grassroots Groups | Community-based initiatives led by those directly affected by inequality. They organise locally, often informally, to meet immediate needs and advocate for systemic change. |
| Informal Collectives | Flexible, non-hierarchical and unregistered groups that come together around shared issues or moments of crisis. Their strength lies in agility, trust, and collective decision-making. |
| NGOs | Non-governmental organisations that operate formally—often registered and funded—to provide services, advocacy, and policy influence. Many feminist, women's rights, and gender equality NGOs also connect with grassroots movements to amplify their impact. |
| Network Organisations | Platforms or alliances that link multiple actors and collectives across geographies or issues, facilitating shared strategy, learning, and solidarity. |
| Women's Funds | Feminist funding organisations that mobilise and redistribute resources to advance gender justice. They prioritise trust-based, flexible support for grassroots and movement actors. |



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CHAPTER 01

Feminist and Gender Equality Movements in Europe Today

WHY MOVEMENTS ARE ESSENTIAL

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CHARACTERISTICS OF FEMINIST AND GENDER EQUALITY MOVEMENTS

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Why Movements Are Essential

Research participants described feminist and gender equality movements across Europe as agile and forward-looking. They emphasised that these movements are not simply reacting to crises and repression but are actively developing alternative visions of society.

Organising is taking place on the streets, in community spaces, in parliaments, and at international forums, where activists are engaging with questions of power, culture, and systems with transformative effect.

Many respondents characterised current feminist and intersectional organising as moving beyond responding to symptoms with service delivery to challenge systemic causes of inequality, including racism, climate change, and economic injustice that undermine people's ability to live safe and fulfilled lives.

Across our interviews, movement leaders and funders shared a real-time reality check: gender equality organisations across Europe are experiencing the sharp edge of major funding cuts, worsening repression, and democratic rollback. Despite these pressures, participants described continued mobilisation, and in some cases, expansion of influence and power. Many of the respondents referred to movements as a bedrock for social resilience and cultural change.

“Movements are where people stay when the laws disappear.”

— Respondent, Feminist activist and organiser in France

“[If] the backlash is so strong today, it's because we are winning.”

— Respondent, Leader in philanthropy

In many of our interviews, we heard examples of how activists are contributing to shifts in their local and national contexts:

Solidarity even in adversity,

as seen in Slovenia where young feminist campaigners were supported by older socially conservative environmentalists who, despite differing views on abortion rights, volunteered to get signatures for the campaign in their communities and provide physical protection from threats of violence when it was really needed.

Reclaiming political space,

especially when mainstream movements or political parties fail to meet people's needs and concerns. One interviewee in Bulgaria described efforts of their organisation to bring nurses and their demands for fair pay and universal free healthcare into the feminist movement rather than being co-opted by the far right.

Building belonging in times of polarisation,

as seen in France, where diverse feminist movements joined forces around the common goal of ending violence against women. In October 2025, the French parliament voted to add consent to the country's rape law – a historic reform that will redefine rape in France to mean any non-consensual sexual act, with consent required to be free, informed, specific, prior and revocable, and explicitly noting that silence or lack of reaction cannot be taken as consent.

“When the nurses started striking, their demand for universal healthcare wasn't recognised as a feminist issue... so they went elsewhere. Sometimes to the far right.”

— Respondent, Feminist activist in Bulgaria

Movements for gender equality continue to organise with a fraction of the resources and often under threat. That they persist is a testament to their resilience. That they succeed is proof of their strategic ability.

Characteristics of Feminist and Gender Equality Movements

There's so much energy at the edges.

– Respondent, Activist and organiser from a European Network

This quote captures the dispersed feminist power emerging across Europe, often in the most unexpected places. What the research confirmed is that movements are not centralised machines; they are ecosystems, constantly evolving through participation, reflection, and action. A critical part of any movement is that it is in motion and does not begin or end with a campaign or a grant cycle.

At their core, movements respond to a deep human need: the need to be part of something larger, to believe in possibility, and to act together with purpose. Movements include but go beyond NGOs and formal organisations. They include informal groups, grassroots collectives, and anyone pushing for structural change as well as NGOs.

According to the research, feminist and gender equality movement building takes varied forms across countries and communities, but certain shared principles were identified:

01 Fluid and dynamic

Interviewees repeatedly noted that there is no single women's rights movement. Organising is plural and contextual, shaped by place and politics. This is not an obstacle to overcome, but a strength.

Movements are shaped by emergence. Emergence reflects the dynamic, adaptive nature of feminist and gender organising, where solutions are not pre-designed but grow from listening, learning, and co-creating with those most impacted. It values process as much as outcome, allowing space for experimentation, decentralisation, and mutual accountability.

Recognising emergence invites funders, allies, and organisers to stay responsive and humble, trusting that meaningful change often begins in small, interconnected efforts that can grow into broader transformation.

02 Diverse and intersectional

Respondents consistently described movements as inherently diverse, across people, strategy, and ideology. Many viewed this diversity as both a strength and a source of complexity. Holding space for multiple perspectives requires nuance and dialogue.

Many interviewees shared how today's movements are shaped by an evolving understanding of oppression and power. We heard in all interviews examples of how intersectionality has become foundational to movements for equality over the past decade. Many respondents saw this as a big and positive shift from a decade ago.

We really see the new generation getting organised based on an intersectional understanding of oppressions. They understand they cannot only be feminist, but they also need to be anti-racist.

– Respondent, Youth movement organiser from Germany

03 A shared 'political' project

Across interviews, a clear consensus emerged that feminist and gender equality movement building must challenge systems of exploitation and oppression, not just fill service gaps. Movements are about securing rights and justice for people and the planet—not delivering charity.

Respondents argued that movements can bridge people's lived experiences with strategies that build collective power to bring about structural and systemic change. The research found that they are pushing for tangible reforms while also reshaping narratives, consciousness, and the conditions that make those reforms meaningful and lasting – as chapter 2 documents in greater detail.

In some places, the feminist movement has become so service oriented. It's been relegated to filling the gaps and no longer has the time and space to understand the political underpinnings to why they're even having to be providing these services and stop-gap measures in the first place.

– Respondent, NGO director from Spain

04 Building belonging, connection and hope

A further theme that emerged across the research was the importance of building relationships of trust and shared purpose. Many respondents also highlighted the importance of offering connection and care, while also shifting power. That means creating spaces for dialogue, rest, grief, and joy.

Far-right narratives make use of strong emotions such as fear and anger, leading to compelling arguments. It's not as easy for us to reproduce this because our tactics are based on connection and hope. These are more complex arguments to make.

– Respondent, Communication strategist from Central Europe



CHAPTER 02

Movement Strategies and Tactics

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A Theory of Change for Movement Building



[Movement building] is like a political project that has a lot of components to it and a lot of actors in it. It's messy - it can look like you're taking two steps forward and five steps back. But underlying this is a sort of commitment to something in common, that goes beyond any one individual identity or area of work, [because the] political project is bigger.

— Respondent, Movement organiser from France

Movement-building is not a single strategy or structure, but a dynamic and interwoven set of actions that centre lived experience, collective power, and systemic transformation.

To frame these dynamics, the report draws on Just Associates (JASS)'s feminist theory of change. JASS is a feminist organisation dedicated to strengthening and amplifying the voice, visibility, and collective power of women for a just and sustainable world.

JASS has developed a movement-building Theory of Change, which guides our understanding of how change happens through building, organising, and transforming power. JASS grounds its theory of change in the belief that transformative and lasting change for gender equality is only possible through the collective power and agency of women to reshape the systems - policies, institutions, and norms - that perpetuate inequality, violence, and environmental harm.

In this Theory of Change, movement building happens through three key strategies:

01. Building power
02. Organising and mobilising power
03. Transforming power

The next sections outline how each of these strategies work in practice, by connecting them to the stories and examples of feminist and gender equality movement-building in Europe that we heard in our interviews.

01 Building Power

According to JASS, "building power is about raising women's awareness and sense of self," equipping them with the tools to build critical consciousness, leadership, and eventually, a strategy for change. At the heart of movement building is the creation of spaces that foster "power within", "power with", and "power to"—enabling communities to grow their capacity to act collectively.

- **Power within:** Popular education equips women to critically analyse power, develop leadership, and cultivate shared strategies.
- **Power with:** Community-building fosters belonging, protection, and resistance, especially in hostile or isolating environments.
- **Power to:** Movements build the roots from which collective resistance, voice, and imagination grow.



You can't just add on a bit of care. We see feminists reimagining how to live, work, and care for each other—especially in contexts where they're deeply under attack.

— Respondent, Activist in a women's rights network in Poland

At the centre of movement building is the nurturing of individual and collective capacity to imagine and act for change. Below are some of the activities highlighted in our interviews that are associated to building power:

- **Feminist Leadership:** Rooted in intersectional values, feminist leadership is collaborative, inclusive, and transformative. It challenges hierarchical power and empowers those most marginalised.
- **Healing and Dialogue:** Movements cultivate spaces for intergenerational and intersectional mentorship, and reflection to unite around a common goal.
- **Mutual Aid and Care:** From community gardens to informal support networks, feminist and gender equality movements model the systems of care and justice they seek to create.
- **Strategic Capacity:** Legal aid and pooled advocacy and communication strategies help movements transform systems and amplify their reach.
- **Infrastructure for Connection:** A European mapping or digital platform could connect smaller-scale contextual efforts into a broader ecosystem.

Case study

— Single SuperMom

To highlight one example, we interviewed Single SuperMom, an organisation formed when its founder realised first-hand the difficulties and limited support available for single mothers in the Netherlands. She began hosting informal support groups which were first convened in her living room, before expanding to a wider network of community support that eventually gained the recognition and endorsement of the government. The Single SuperMom methodology has now been endorsed as a national empowerment programme by the Ministry of Social Affairs. Beyond service delivery, Single SuperMom is also shifting power by engaging directly in local and national policymaking. The organisation has participated in numerous policy discussions that led to "single mothers" being recognised as an official category within the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science's emancipation policy—ensuring their perspectives and needs are represented in national strategies for gender equality.

02 Organising and Mobilising Power

According to JASS, organising and mobilising power are all about forging alliances, creating shared political agendas, and building influence. Organising connects the individual to the collective, while mobilisation channels shared purpose into wider action.

Cross-movement alliances deepen safety, visibility, and impact, especially when centred on feminist values. Intersectional alliances involve organising, mobilising and building shared power across interconnected movements working on climate justice, racial justice, labour rights and economic justice, LGBTQI+ rights, and migration, to name a few.

Case study

– Ukrainian Women’s Fund

Movements mobilise through crises. Several interviewees referenced the feminist response to Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, citing how the Ukrainian Women’s Fund mobilised within days to channel emergency grants directly to grassroots women’s groups in frontline areas—long before most international NGOs could engage. Because the Fund had spent years building trust with local collectives, it could disburse small-scale grants, understanding precisely which responses—legal aid, trauma counselling, safe houses—were needed to support women and children, rather than one-size-fits-all humanitarian kits.

Everything about equality and climate justice are under threat now, and we need to connect.

– Respondent, Ecofeminist activist from Germany

Examples from our interviews included:

- **Pan-European campaigns and actions:** Coordinated advocacy or mobilisation efforts that target European institutions or amplify shared demands across the continent.
- **Strategic Coalitions:** Building shared agendas across diverse identities, struggles, and geographies.
- **Cross-Movement Coalitions:** Cross-sector alliances connecting feminist movements with movements for migrant justice, climate justice, labour rights, LGBTQI+ rights, and disability activism.
- **Trans-local connections:** Currently, cross-border initiatives are mainly made up of networks and campaigns that transcend borders from local to national to international. Supporting translocal initiatives—such as collaborations between grassroots actions and groups in various municipalities and across different countries—might offer an extra opportunity than relying solely on national-level channels.
- **Transnational Convenings:** While platforms like AWID offer this globally, a gap remains in the Europe region for movement-led, cross-border, multi-issue convenings. From our interviews, events like the Festival Trans Europa and the EuroCentralAsian Lesbian* Community’s conferences were highlighted as fostering connection, strategy, and resilience amidst backlash.

For me, this is most important, that people are not just able to localize whatever is happening but also look at what is happening somewhere else... this enables them to counter oppression and discrimination.

– Respondent, Cross-border feminist network in the Netherlands

By having these spaces, we can figure out these [political] developments with others and feel stronger to address this, to use our strength and motivate each other and not lose hope.

– Respondent, EL*C participant from Italy

Case studies

– Festival Trans Europe and EL*C conference

The Festival Trans Europa - “Margins on Fire”, organised by European Alternatives, gathers diverse feminists and gender equality advocates from across Europe, integrating debates, assemblies, cinema, and performances. It is organised to resist anti-gender movements and celebrate solidarity through culture, politics, and digital arts. It is a unique example of translocal and transnational organising using culture as resistance.

The EuroCentralAsian Lesbian* Community’s (EL*C) conference, most recently held in May 2025 in Rome, gathered nearly 400 lesbian and bisexual activists from across Europe, creating space for strategy, connection, and solidarity, specifically in the Italian context where attacks on gender equality and LGBTQIA+ rights are growing. In bridging divides across language and geography, EL*C is a space for empowerment, centring lesbian voices, and building collective momentum.

03 Transforming Power

According to JASS, transforming power is the process by which movements dismantle harmful systems and build new ones, grounded in equity, care, and justice. It is about changing the structural and cultural conditions that uphold inequality, from rewriting narratives to reforming laws and embedding feminist principles into institutions.

This strategy works across three interlinked approaches:

- **Narrative Change:** Shifting public discourse and cultural norms.
- **Strategic Advocacy:** Driving policy reform and legal transformation.
- **Institutional Transformation:** Embedding feminist values into governance and resourcing systems.

Through persistent organising, feminist and gender equality movements win legal and policy reforms that improve lives.

My hope comes from history. Eventually, all empires collapse. We've learned to be resilient and street-smart.

– Respondent, Feminist researcher from Hungary

Feminist movements are dreaming forward... It's not just about protecting what we have, it's about imagining something radically better.

– Respondent, Activist from Spain

A Narrative Change

Movements for gender equality challenge dominant narratives, change culture, and shift mindsets about what is just and what is possible.

This type of narrative organising:

- Builds public support and political will,
- Reframes backlash as evidence of progress.
- Creates shared symbols and language across generations and geographies.

EXAMPLE

Protests in Poland mobilised millions and shifted public opinion.

Ongoing protests in Poland have mobilised millions and shifted public opinion and voting patterns, especially among women and young people. One respondent from Poland reflected on the political power and visibility of women's rights organising during recent elections in Poland and neighbouring countries. She notes that Polish gender equality organisations – particularly those focused on abortion rights – were **central to mass mobilisations**, helping to **drive turnout and shape political debate**, especially among **women and younger voters**.

Campaigns such as these show how storytelling can build dignity, connection, and resistance, paving the way for deeper structural change.

Case study

– My Voice, My Choice,

Europe's largest feminist campaign to date, united over 300 organisations and mobilised 1.2 million citizens through a European Citizens' Initiative to demand access to abortion across the EU.

Their campaign has become an example of democracy in action. When the NGOs behind the campaign realised that health policies fall under the competency of EU member states and that it would not be possible to harmonise EU legislation, My Voice, My Choice focused instead on the creation of a dedicated EU fund for reproductive care.

Through compelling narratives, a creative communications strategy, and on-the-ground grassroots mobilisation, it built unprecedented public support for the cause.

It managed to put a clear message on the EU agenda for the first time: every woman in Europe must have access to safe and legal abortion, regardless of where she lives.

In December 2025, members of European Parliament voted to endorse the My Voice, My Choice initiative. In its text, the Parliament called on the European Commission to pass legislation creating a voluntary, EU-funded financial mechanism that would help member states who choose to participate provide safe abortion care for all those who currently lack access to it.

What My Voice, My Choice is doing is managing to combine something very grounded with something very connected through social networks. And this ensured that the work resonated beyond the feminist sector to the broader general public.

– Respondent, Activist involved in My Voice, My Choice campaign from Poland

B Strategic Advocacy

Through persistent organising, feminist and gender equality movements win legal and policy reforms that improve lives and shift power.

EXAMPLE

Movement-led advocacy across the EU helped secure both the EU Directive on Violence Against Women and the EU's accession to the Istanbul Convention.

These victories mandate legal reform in multiple countries, including criminalising forced marriage, female genital mutilation, cyber violence, and online harassment. Together, they mark a significant step toward standardising protections across member states and closing long-standing gaps that have left survivors without justice or support.

However, these wins are hard-fought and far from uncontested. The backlash against the Istanbul Convention has provoked strong resistance in several countries, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe. Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia refused to ratify the treaty, while Poland has at times threatened to withdraw, framing the Convention as a threat to "traditional values." In November 2025, the Latvian parliament voted to withdraw, underscoring how fragile these advances remain. Ten thousand protesters took to the streets to demand this decision be overturned.

This dynamic reveals the complexity and long-term nature of movement work. Each gain in legal protection is often followed by organised pushback, requiring movements to sustain pressure, build new alliances, and adapt their strategies over years or even decades. The struggle around the Istanbul Convention exemplifies how progress and backlash coexist, and how organisers continue to defend, reinterpret, and expand rights frameworks in the face of shifting political tides.

EXAMPLE

In Ireland, decades of organising culminated in a successful campaign that overturned one of the strictest abortion bans in the EU.

Building on generations of activism since the 1983 constitutional ban on abortion, feminist and equality networks, community groups, and advocacy coalitions mobilised through the Repeal the 8th campaign (2016–2018). These groups combined grassroots storytelling, digital organising, and cross-movement alliances to centre compassion and lived experience. Their strategy reframed abortion not as a moral or religious issue, but as one of care, health, and equality.

The campaign's success – with 66.4% voting to repeal the Eighth Amendment in 2018 – marked a turning point for reproductive rights in Europe. It demonstrated how women's rights movements can translate storytelling and solidarity into systemic change, influencing both public opinion and constitutional law. The movement's organising model has since inspired reproductive justice activism across Europe, including in Poland and Malta.

“Their narrative campaign appealed to countless people and literally helped to shift minds, hearts and votes... That, in turn, led to Constitutional reform.”

– Respondent, from Ireland

Each gain in legal protection is often followed by organised pushback, requiring movements to sustain pressure, build new alliances, and adapt their strategies over years or even decades.

EXAMPLE

In Serbia, students mobilised for democratic accountability.

In Serbia, the student-led protests that erupted after the Novi Sad railway station roof collapse in late 2024 rapidly grew into one of the country's largest anti-corruption movements in decades. Sparked by grief and anger over preventable deaths, the movement's demands soon broadened – calling for democratic accountability, institutional reform, and an end to political violence and impunity. Female students marked International Women's Day by leading the daily street protests against corruption while also sending a message decrying widespread violence against women in the Balkan country. Feminist activists and women's organisations played a visible role in amplifying these calls for justice.

This framing – linking state negligence with gender-based violence – helped broaden public understanding of accountability beyond corruption alone. Young women, and feminist organisers were among the first to take to the streets, challenging both political repression and deeply ingrained sexism within Serbian society.

Together, these accounts demonstrate how Serbian youth organisers leveraged a sudden “window of opportunity” to connect systemic corruption, attacks on democracy, and gendered violence – transforming a local tragedy into a national movement for justice and democracy.

“These protests started because of corruption, but very quickly it became about the system that normalises violence – not only political, but also gendered. Feminists were there from the start, helping to frame the protests as a question of care and accountability.”

– Respondent, from Serbia

C Institutional Transformation

Feminist and gender equality movements also work to embed equity, care, and justice in governance, philanthropy, and public systems. Below are some illustrative examples of how they are challenging hierarchy in political parties and civil society organisations.

EXAMPLE

In Hungary, young feminists confront hierarchies in civil society and politics.

Young Hungarian women, and feminists are pushing back not only against state repression and NGO restrictions but also against the **deep hierarchies embedded in political parties and traditional civic structures**. Within both opposition and progressive parties, activists describe a persistent culture of sexism and token representation – where women are invited to speak about “women’s issues” but remain excluded from real decision-making.

In Hungary, our members have been attacked from the beginning. Have been silenced.

– Respondent, European feminist network

For many younger women, the answer has been to **organise outside formal party structures** – through student networks, informal collectives, and campaigns that focus on reproductive rights, gendered violence, and democratic renewal. These spaces model more horizontal leadership. In doing so, young women are not withdrawing from politics, but **redefining what political participation looks like**.

EXAMPLE

Feminist leaders are promoting gender-responsive budgeting and entering municipal politics to influence systemic change from within.

Across Europe, feminist leaders and equality advocates are entering **municipal politics** to advance systemic change from within, bringing principles of equality into how cities are governed and resourced. From Italy to Spain, Hungary, and Austria, they are demonstrating that public budgets and institutions can be tools for justice rather than neutral mechanisms of administration.

EXAMPLE

In Brussels, young women are reimagining power in institutions and political spaces.

In Brussels, young feminists are also confronting hierarchies within both civil society and the institutional “Brussels bubble,” where established gender equality NGOs and EU-level organisations can reproduce exclusionary practices. One Brussels-based activist reflected:

Representation is also an issue in a lot of feminist movements... women that are working class, poor, racialised, queer, aren’t in any positions of power in most structures of the feminist movement... It really requires fundamentally assessing strategy. If you’re a membership organization, it requires fundamentally assessing your membership, base, etc. And it requires changing your mind on issues.

– Respondent, Brussels-based feminist activist

These younger activists are insisting that **inclusion must translate into leadership**, demanding not just seats at the table but a reshaping of how political and organisational power operates. Their advocacy extends into party structures, where youth platforms are challenging hierarchical decision-making.

Community building is an important part of movement building. But movement building has to include political power.

– Respondent, from Italy

This shift is part of a wider movement for **feminist municipalism**. In **Barcelona**, former mayor **Ada Colau**—a long-time housing and anti-austerity activist—used her time in office to introduce **gender-responsive and eco-social budgeting**, prioritising affordable housing and environmental sustainability as interconnected gender equality issues.

Colau’s approach meant transforming decision-making itself: decentralising power, expanding participatory processes, making it possible for those who often get excluded to be present, and re-centering policy around everyday life.

The result was tangible progress in social housing, public transport equity, and climate-sensitive urban design—showing **how such leadership** can make structural change measurable.

Elsewhere, **Vienna represents Europe’s longest-running example of gender budgeting at the municipal level**, having applied this approach across all policy areas since 2005. The city’s budget systematically analyses how expenditure and infrastructure planning affect women and men differently, leading to concrete shifts in **transport design, housing allocation, and urban planning**.

For instance, pedestrian networks were redesigned to prioritise safety and accessibility; housing projects now include shared spaces; and public transport timetables were adapted to reflect the travel patterns of carers.

Vienna’s experience demonstrates that **when gender budgeting becomes institutionalised**, it can transform the everyday structures of urban life—not only promoting equality but also improving overall quality of life.

EXAMPLE

Advocates are transforming philanthropy.

Philanthropy is also playing its role in this work as part of the movement. **Funders** such as Mama Cash, Urgent Action Fund, and the Black Feminist Fund, along with networks like EDGE Funders Alliance and Prospera International Network of Women’s Funds, are **transforming philanthropy itself—shifting to long-term, trust-based resourcing**.

Summary Table

These strategies reflect how movements create change from the ground up. Understanding these strategies is essential for funders who seek to resource feminist and gender equality movements effectively and with integrity.

| STRATEGY | MOVEMENT PRACTICES | PHILANTHROPIC ENTRY POINTS |
|--------------------|--|--|
| Building Power | Feminist leadership, care, healing, mutual aid | Fund leadership development, organisational strengthening, care, healing and community building activities |
| Organising Power | Cross-border alliances, convenings, local-to-global networks | Support convenings, joint strategy development, and coalition work |
| Transforming Power | Narrative campaigns, strategic advocacy, countering backlash | Resource narrative work, community organising and advocacy initiatives |



CHAPTER 03

How Can Philanthropy Meet the Moment?

Insights and Recommendations for Funders

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Context

Why Feminist and Gender Equality Movements Need Resourcing Now

Across Europe, feminist movements are confronting overlapping crises – from democratic backsliding and austerity to gendered violence and the rise of anti-democratic, anti-gender forces. In this context, feminist organisers are not only responding to urgent threats but also building the long-term conditions for justice, care, and collective power.

The year 2025 marked a turning point. For the first time, public funding dedicated to gender equality started trending downward. A recent survey by Fondation des Femmes of 148 French feminist and gender equality organisations found that more than 70% of them are worried about their future. The USAID Central Europe Program was also terminated in 2025, creating a €35 million funding gap for civil society and media in Central and Eastern Europe working on civic engagement and collective action, including on women's rights and gender equality.

The other side of the funding coin is the alarming rise in funding for anti-rights and anti-gender movements across Europe, amounting to US\$1.18 billion between 2019 and 2023, according to the European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights. This funding, originating from 275 donors, has been spent by organisations working in Europe to undermine sexual and reproductive rights, LGBTQ+ rights, sex education, while also imposing a harmful worldview about gender roles in family and public life.

On the other hand, the gender equality sector is woefully underfunded, especially in Europe. In the UK, only 1.8% of grants went to women's and girls' organisations in 2021 and at EU level, only 2% of the total 2023 budget was allocated to "interventions where the primary objective was to improve gender equality."

Money that flows directly to grassroots feminist movements is a tiny fraction of these amounts. Grassroots movements tend to be seen as more challenging to fund because they do not always fit into traditional metrics and methods for assessing impact. And yet movement building is often cited as a more strategic investment strategy, as it is more likely to lead to deeper structural change. The funding case is clear – so how can resources be best allocated to feminist movement-building in Europe? The feminist activists, organisers, funders and researchers we spoke with shared ideas for how philanthropy can meet the moment and best support feminist movement building in Europe.

275
Donors financing anti-rights and anti-gender organisations in Europe

2%
Share of the EU 2023 budget with gender equality as the primary objective

70%
Share of French women's rights associations that were worried about their future in 2025

Philanthropy's Transformative Potential

With all this in mind, funders have a critical role to play in this work. As one respondent reflected, feminist philanthropy is "not just about distributing funds – it's about redistributing power." The lessons from this research highlight how philanthropy can be a partner in transformation, not merely a financier of projects.

Feminist organisers across Europe called for a shift from short-term projects to long-term power-building; from measuring outputs to sustaining care and resilience; from funding individual organisations to strengthening ecosystems. Movements need funders who can accompany them through uncertainty, experimentation, and collective visioning.

Philanthropy can play this role by offering patient, flexible, and political support that recognises movement work as essential democratic infrastructure. This requires a shift in mindset – from transactional grant-making toward trust-based partnerships that nurture imagination and leadership.

These insights underpin the recommendations that follow, which are structured around the three dimensions of feminist movement-building identified throughout the research: building power, organising power and transforming power. Through this framework we then explore and further elaborate where philanthropy can invest and fund to make a real difference now.

Funders should operate like organisers: not deciding for people, but creating the conditions for collective power to grow.

– Respondent, Feminist fund representative from France

We build power not through funding, but through trust and relationships. That's how we move people.

– Respondent, Feminist fund representative

Funders should operate as community organiser. Because a community organiser basically is a person that doesn't belong to any organisation and that helps groups to organise by giving them resources and space to discuss, asking the right questions. The role of an organiser is that you're not deciding for the people. But you're stirring up and facilitating the conversation that needs to happen.

– Respondent, from France, philanthropy expert

01 Building Power

Foundations of Care, Leadership, and Resilience

A Support a Diverse and Inclusive Ecosystem

Feminist and gender equality movements rely on a web of actors – from informal collectives to long-established organisations. Each plays a vital and distinct role. Funders can expand their reach and deepen impact by resourcing the full ecosystem rather than a single “type” of organisation.

Several types of actors and strategies were consistently identified as high-impact when adequately resourced, especially as part of an ecosystem approach.

→ **Backbone organisations and Intermediaries:** These groups provide vital infrastructure, capacity support, and cross-regional connection. Women’s Funds in particular were praised for their alignment with feminist values and ability to equitably redistribute power and resources.

→ **Organisations focused on systems change:** With adequate support, these organisations can step back from crisis response and invest in long-term political strategies and root cause analysis.

→ **Intersectional Coalitions and organisations:** Organisations embedded in broader ecosystems—across race, class, gender, and migration—tend to be more resilient and impactful. Funders should avoid siloed funding and support intersectional collaborations.

→ **Grassroots Collectives:** These are usually unregistered and volunteer-led. They operate outside formal NGO structures and rooted in affected communities; when trusted and resourced flexibly, they are highly catalytic.

→ **Community-Based Feminist BIWOC groups:** Often sidelined in mainstream philanthropy and sometimes not recognised as feminist or gender equality organisations, these actors led by women of colour, migrant, disabled, and LGBTQ+ people are essential to advancing gender equality.

Philanthropy can ensure that grassroots, and under-resourced groups have access to funding by adapting eligibility requirements, simplifying language, and supporting intermediaries that can reach informal networks.

B Shift to funding Movement-Building Capacity, Infrastructure, and Sustainability

Respondents stressed that movements cannot thrive on short-term project funding alone. They need stable infrastructure, staff capacity, and time to plan strategically.

Long-term, flexible support enables gender equality organisations to grow roots and adapt. To take a case study for what long-term flexible funding makes possible for social justice, two informants highlighted the successes of Ford

Foundation’s Building Institutions and Networks (BUILD) Initiative, which provided flexible, five-year grants to 300+ social justice organisations with the aim of advancing civil society’s capacity to think, collaborate, plan, invest, take risks and innovate. An evaluation of the program surfaced promising results: that by strengthening institutions and networks, there was improved programming and impact.

Interviewees across Europe stressed that **healing and care are not add-ons to feminist and gender equality organising**, but its foundation. Movements cannot sustain their creativity, courage, or reach without spaces for rest, reflection, and restoration. Burnout and staff turnover are common, particularly in smaller, community-based organisations led by women, LGBTQI+, and racialised activists.

Many respondents said that while funders recognise the visible outputs of crisis response, they rarely invest in **rest, reflection, or organisational care** – the very conditions needed to move from firefighting to future-building.

The first thing to go in funding cuts? **Convenings and care. But those are the very lifelines of the feminist movement.**

– Respondent, Funder from France

Funders who call when we’re under attack – not to ask for a report, but to ask how to help – those are the ones we’ll remember.

– Respondent, Feminist activist in the Western Balkans

This vision of care stretches beyond the emotional to the structural. Activists described how **chronic precarity, burnout, and backlash** erode their capacity to act. Yet care and connection are often the first casualties when resources are cut.

This type of work rarely fits neatly into a project logframe, but it is vital to sustaining movements. Several interviewees urged funders to recognise that **healing and care are strategic priorities** – not soft or secondary concerns – and to design grantmaking accordingly.

To meet these needs, funders could:

- **Provide flexible core grants** that explicitly include resources for collective care and well-being, rather than only for programme delivery.
- **Cover mental health infrastructure**, such as trauma-informed counselling, peer support circles, or access to therapists for activists under sustained stress or surveillance.
- **Offer leadership sabbaticals and rest periods**, especially for grassroots organisers and movement founders who rarely have the chance to step back or heal.
- **Fund community-based care spaces**, including **community gardens, group art projects**, or retreats, where activists can reconnect, create, and recover together.
- **Support informal solidarity gatherings** – small convenings that enable activists to talk and decompress after moments of crisis or mobilisation.

By resourcing such activities, funders are not indulging comfort but **investing in resilience, imagination, and long-term power**. As the interviews make clear, care is not a pause in the struggle – it is the very **practice that keeps movements alive**.

C Develop Participatory, Power-Shifting Models

Transforming power also means rethinking how decisions are made. Several respondents described emerging models of participatory grantmaking that decentralise authority and bring movement actors into governance structures.

There were different approaches suggested by informants to meaningfully solicit feedback and guide funder strategies, including tailoring and implementing participatory approaches in grant-making processes.

Participatory grant-making refers to a range of practices that span the full remit of engagement, from end-product consultation to delegation of strategy, design and decision-making. A few examples from our interviews included fully participatory approaches from Mama Cash, Black Feminist Fund, as well as a number of Women's Funds involved in the Prospera International Women's Network. Evaluations of participatory approaches indicate the multifaceted impact of meaningful participation, such as improved service delivery, policy responsiveness, and community power.

Funders can explore how to embed participatory practices within general philanthropic management, from governance and leadership to grantmaking and operational protocols, using established tools, such as Advancing Participation in Philanthropy Tool (APPT) or the Weaving a Collective Tapestry: A Funders' Toolkit.

I'm a big fan these days of [philanthropic initiatives] that try and experiment with different ways of holding power and governance and decision-making that allow for a much more lateral way of working. It is about power building across different groupings, while having a common agenda.

– Respondent, Philanthropy researcher from the UK

Building on this insight, funders can apply participatory principles in several concrete ways:

→ **Create diverse advisory panels of movement actors** – including youth, LGBTQI+, racialised, migrant, and disability activists – who co-design funding priorities, review applications, and vote on grant decisions.

Example: Allocating 10–15% of a fund's annual budget to a participatory pot managed by an activist advisory board, rotating every two years.

→ **Adopt shared governance structures** – inviting movement partners to join boards or funding strategy groups with real decision-making power, not only consultative roles.

Example: Establish a "movement co-chair" model, where one seat on the fund's governance board is reserved for a grassroots leader elected by grantee partners.

→ **Pilot participatory budgeting cycles** within existing programmes.

Example: Host a participatory budgeting assembly where partner organisations collectively discuss trade-offs, priorities, and potential allocations – making resource distribution transparent and collaborative.

→ **Fund peer review and mentorship processes.**

Example: Support grantee partners to review and mentor one another's proposals or projects, fostering collective accountability and horizontal learning.

These models reflect the understanding that how decisions are made is as important as what is funded. By embedding participatory governance, gender equality funders can move beyond symbolic inclusion and toward a practice of shared power – one that mirrors the movements they aim to sustain.

D Providing Long-Term, Flexible Core Funding

As we heard across interviews, many gender equality organisations – especially those working at the **intersection of gender and other forms of injustice** such as racism, migration, disability, or environmental harm – are operating in **permanent crisis mode**. They face multiple, overlapping pressures: shrinking civic space, backlash against women's and LGBTQI+ rights, unstable funding, and growing social need.

Because they are often the **first responders** when violence erupts, when new restrictions on reproductive rights appear, or when humanitarian crises unfold, these groups are forced to **prioritise urgent survival work** over long-term visioning. Respondents from Poland, Hungary, and the Balkans described constantly shifting between providing emergency support – legal aid, safe shelter, or digital safety – and defending their own legitimacy under hostile political conditions.

Many respondents argued that the **form of funding matters as much as the amount**. Multi-year, unrestricted grants allow organisations to plan, pivot, and take political risks. Such funding also supports reserve-building and leadership transitions, ensuring that movement infrastructure endures beyond individual projects or donors.

We are always reacting – to new laws, new attacks, new cuts. There's never time to think about the next five years when you're trying to make it through the week.

– Respondent from Poland

Our essence is trust. We fund for ten years. We don't tell groups how to spend their money we ask what they need to thrive.

– Respondent, Fund representative

E Simplify and streamline paperwork

A common challenge identified in the research was the time and capacity nonprofits spend on funder-driven applications and reports. Many noted the need for grant processes to align to the capacities and realities of grassroots movements. This means reducing the barriers that exclude those who are on the frontlines.

Suggested improvements include lowering the minimum organisational budget thresholds for grant applications, which often require smaller organisations to team up with larger, well-established organisations, reinforcing power dynamics that can stifle solidarity. Other due diligence requirements could be reassessed, such as financial audit reports, English-only applications, or common visibility requirements like active websites and social media accounts.

You can't expect grassroots feminists who are constantly under attack to have the same visibility metrics as a corporate NGO.

– Respondent, Feminist NGO leader from Poland

F Fund basic costs

Funders can also support the basic and often undervalued functions that keep organisations alive: salaries, rent, translation, wellbeing, leadership sabbaticals, and internal strategy retreats. By resourcing these foundational capacities, philanthropy helps gender equality actors reclaim time for reflection, learning, and visioning – to plan not only how to resist, but how to rebuild. In doing so, funders help transform cycles of reactivity into cycles of resilience, ensuring that movements for gender equality have both the endurance to survive the present and the imagination to shape the future.

02 Organising and Mobilising Power: Solidarity, Scale, and Strategy

Building power also requires investing in the relationships, infrastructures, and collaborative spaces that allow movements to act collectively and strategically. Interviewees described how solidarity, convening, and shared learning are at the heart of effective gender equality organising across Europe.

Supporting convenings is not about funding meetings. It's about investing in infrastructure for movement coherence, collaboration, and imagination. When well-resourced, convenings become the heartbeat of feminist and gender equality organising: places where relationships are built, strategies are shaped, and courage is renewed.

A Support Convening, Collaboration, and Coalitions

Almost all interviewees highlighted the value of convening and the need to fund it. Grassroots activists need to discover, connect and collaborate across geographies. Through convening, collaboration, and transnational solidarity, movements for gender equality build the connective tissue of power. Interviewees noted that such gatherings enable trust and collective strategising that are rarely possible within traditional project cycles.

Convenings are how we build shared language and trust – they are our infrastructure for imagination.

– Respondent, Feminist network organiser in Central Europe

Convenings like this allow us to move from reacting to imagining – from firefighting to building.

– Respondent, Activist from Central Europe

Building on this insight, funders can apply participatory principles in several concrete ways:

- Fund national and regional gatherings that cultivate relationships and shared strategies.
- Use a two-phase grant model: first for relationship-building, second for aligned action.
- Allocate adequate resources for the labour involved in coalition coordination.
- Provide €50,000–€100,000 per year in unrestricted support to regional feminist and gender equality networks to convene cross-country strategy meetings.

B Investing in Digital and Cross-Border Infrastructure

Digital connection is now as essential as physical gathering. Interviewees stressed the importance of secure, accessible, and multilingual technology that supports movement coordination across borders. Feminist and gender equality movements emphasised that safety, accessibility, and multilingual communication are vital but can never replace physical convening.

Funders can:

- Provide €30,000–€60,000 to maintain secure tech platforms, mapping tools, or online translation capacity for transnational coordination.
- Support database mapping of European activism, ensuring it is regularly updated and secure.

Interviewees explained that this infrastructure helps movements stay connected and visible without compromising safety, especially in countries where civic space is closing.

C Play an Active, Strategic Role Beyond the Cheque

Interviewees repeatedly emphasised that **resourcing movements requires more than money**. Gender funders, they argued, have a unique role to play in offering **non-financial, responsive, and adaptive support** that strengthens leadership, capacity, and organisational health – and helps level the playing field among movements of very different sizes and resources.

Many respondents shared concrete ideas on how funders could put this principle into practice :

[Fund] has some flexibility through 'learning grants,' which fund movement actors to attend conferences, engage in international networking, and invest in their development. In addition to that, we bring them together at least once a year.

– Respondent, Funder

Mentorship between organisations, to connect with each other in person; more ideas get generated, more connections, more real difficult questions and debates emerge, also getting courage, inspiration from each other.

– Respondent from a European feminist network

Funders can also use their own influence as a tool for change, advocating among philanthropic peers or institutional funders to shift norms and bring new donors to the field.

Many informants also highlighted practical ways for philanthropy to implement these principles:

- **Facilitating exchanges between movements** in different regions
- **Mentorship and accompaniment** between established and emerging groups.
- **Skill-sharing** in strategy, communications, or financial management.
- Creating resource libraries.
- **Solidarity actions**, such as joint statements, letters of support, or introductions to allies.

“Sometimes the best support isn’t money – it’s the listening, the visibility, or the connection you facilitate.”

– Respondent, Feminist foundation

D Strengthen Cross-Border Infrastructure

Feminist and gender equality movements are inherently transnational. Across interviews, respondents emphasised the need for funders to resource cross-border collaboration, learning, and solidarity between European and Global South organisers.

Funders can:

- Support peer learning between European and Global South organisers.
- Invest in **regional hubs** or **shared infrastructure** that sustain ongoing relationships beyond single projects.
- Fund **translation, travel, and digital exchange** to make transnational collaboration accessible to smaller organisations.

As one respondent summarised, cross-border organising “isn’t about scale for its own sake – it’s about solidarity that transcends borders.”

“We learn from feminists everywhere – Latin America taught us about abortion, Africa about care economies, and Asia about mutual aid. These connections are how we survive.”

– Respondent, European feminist activist

“If we can connect what’s happening in Poland, Italy, and Serbia – that’s when we start to see a power shift. We become part of something bigger.”

– Respondent, Feminist network member

03 Transforming Power: Shifting Systems, Narratives, and Norms

Transforming power means changing not only what and who is funded, but how philanthropy itself operates. Interviewees emphasised that funders must model the same feminist values – trust, participation, reflection, and accountability – that they seek to promote.

This transformation requires funders to embrace uncertainty, share decision-making power, and value care and learning as integral to impact.

“To fund feminist movements, philanthropy must also become feminist in practice – it’s not only about money, but about the kind of relationships we build.”

– Respondent, Feminist fund representative

A Resource Work in Polarised and Emerging Spaces

Women’s rights and gender equality movements often operate in contexts of polarisation and backlash, where visibility can carry real risk. Supporting them requires funders to be politically grounded and flexible.

Funders can play a crucial role by resourcing work in high-stakes environments and evolving political contexts, offering protection, continuity, and solidarity when public or institutional support fades.

“We need funders who stay when it’s hard, not only when it’s easy.”

– Respondent, Feminist activist in Central Europe

“Sometimes the safest way to fund us is quietly – without the press release.”

– Respondent, Feminist activist in Central Europe

Interviewees also encouraged philanthropy to embrace experimentation and learning – providing space for gender equality actors to test new ideas without fear of failure.

“Feminist organising is about building new systems, not fixing old ones. It’s deeply experimental. We’re learning our way forward. Funders need to see that learning is also impact.”

– Respondent, Feminist fund in Western Europe

B Adopt Broader Measures of Impact

Funders often ask for quantifiable KPIs, yet gender work – care, consciousness-building, healing, and narrative shifts – is rarely measurable by conventional standards. Respondents called for **broader, values-based approaches** to assessing progress.

Impact in feminist and gender equality movement-building looks like **political or cultural shifts, deeper alliances, and movement momentum**, not just numerical outputs. Several interviewees also stressed that healing, rest, and collective care are themselves forms of effective organising.

This means funders can reimagine success as **collective resilience, imagination, and solidarity** – the living infrastructure that enables sustained change.

This is so difficult... Because to do this work, to change norms, it doesn't happen in six months. Numbers work and we can use them, but also explain the processes... A girl said, 'I now know that I can say no to my father and look him in the eye when I do it. That is a wonderful result.' ... These are things that we know.

– Respondent, Movement organiser

C Reflect on practices

To stay aligned with movement realities, funders must continuously reflect on their own structures and practices.

Interviewees encouraged funders to **embed feedback mechanisms and participatory learning processes** that involve grantees and partners directly in evaluation and strategy.

Grantees and communities provide valuable perspectives that can inform a funder's strategy and approach, inherently making its work more successful in the long run. As one funder we spoke with noted: *'Instead of saying, "we will give you money to do X," ask instead: "What do you need this money for?"'*

Some suggested building these practices into the governance of funds, using participatory panels or rotating advisory groups composed of movement actors who help design decision-making processes or vote on funding allocations.

Several respondents observed that it is helpful when funders take time to get to know prospective grantees, saving nonprofits' time in the early stages of the vetting process.

D Reframe Risk and Practice Solidarity

Ultimately, all of these recommendations require philanthropy to adapt its modus operandi, which can often choose what is most likely to succeed in the short-term. However, research tells us that this approach rarely leads to the kind of innovation or scale that is required for transformative, long-lasting change. Despite all the attention that is put on 'systems change' within the philanthropic field, investments that support new or innovative approaches rarely receive the amount of grant dollars needed to test their work at scale.

A movement-building approach to grant-making requires philanthropy to take higher-stakes bets for greater rewards. It also means accepting that there may be some set-backs, which provide valuable insights on what is and isn't working to effect system-level change, for both funder and grantee. "Lighting the Way: A Report for Philanthropy on the Power and Promise of Feminist Movements" calls for funders to **reexamine risk**: *"Feminist movements fit squarely into the less predictable, more transformational category. Some philanthropists may view them as risky... And yet, to address systemic injustice, the real risk is not investing in these leaders and organizations."*

Many respondents also highlighted the need for funders to redefine risk. Supporting feminist and gender equality movements often means engaging with politically sensitive issues or groups under pressure. True solidarity requires standing alongside them – even when it challenges institutional comfort.

In funding, it is hard to take risks. Anything more radical or different is much harder to get funders on board. To create a movement you have to work weekends, nights and days. There's a difference between building a campaign and movement - the latter is much more demanding and with a lot of personal risks. If you combine this with the fact that you don't get paid, it is hard to sustain.

– Respondent, Activist from Hungary

Conclusion

Philanthropy has the opportunity – and responsibility – to move beyond the transactional logic of projects toward the transformational work of building power. Through this lens, effective gender equality resourcing becomes less about managing grants and more about **cultivating ecosystems** of courage, imagination, and care. It means funding the everyday work that holds movements together – the relationships, convenings, and infrastructures that are too often invisible in conventional grantmaking frameworks.

The work of transformation also requires funders to look inward: to share decision-making power, to practice transparency, and to embrace uncertainty as part of learning. These shifts allow philanthropy to act not only as a financier but as an ally, a connector, and a participant in movement-strengthening.

As the next chapter explores, this path is not without its contradictions. Movements and the funders who support them – continually navigate a series of **core tensions and strategic dilemmas**. Understanding these tensions is essential to resourcing movements wisely and sustainably.

Philanthropy should support not only the work but also the approach of movements. This involves recognizing the legitimacy of unconventional ways of organizing and working, such as grassroots activism or coalition-building. Philanthropy needs to invest in both the process (how movements work together) and the content (what movements aim to achieve).

– Respondent, Feminist foundation leader

We build power not through funding, but through trust and relationships. That's how we move people.

– Respondent, Feminist fund representative



CHAPTER 04

Key Tensions and Strategic Dilemmas

Feminist and gender equality movements in Europe are navigating a complex landscape shaped by competing demands, political pressure, and internal contradictions. Interviewees described these tensions not as failures but as evidence of a process of evolution, of a movement committed to experimenting with new ways of organising. Philanthropy also faces its own set of dilemmas. Recognising and addressing these is essential for all those seeking real impact through movement building.

CORE STRATEGIC TENSIONS FOR PHILANTHROPY

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CORE STRATEGIC TENSIONS FOR THE FEMINIST AND GENDER EQUALITY MOVEMENT

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Core Strategic Tensions for Philanthropy

01 Metrics vs. Meaningful work

Many interviewees described the tension between funders' desire for quantifiable results and the intangible, relational nature of social change organising. Gender equality work often defies traditional measurement frameworks.

Organising builds political power and cultural transformation, outcomes that may take years to surface. Activists repeatedly called for trust-based, process-oriented funding, allowing them to adapt and experiment rather than fit into rigid log frames.

Some funders are starting to reframe what counts as impact. One interviewee from a feminist fund argued that impact should be about shifting power, not just counting outcomes.

Philanthropy should think less about what results it can claim, and more about how it can redistribute resources so movements shape their own futures.

– Respondent, Philanthropy practitioner

The takeaway for funders: metrics must not flatten meaning. Evaluations can include stories of change, relationships strengthened, and narratives shifted – signals of transformation that cannot be captured in spreadsheets.

02 Short-Term Project vs. Long Term Power Building

As cited earlier, a recurring frustration across interviews was the prevalence of short-term, project-based grants that reward delivery over durability. Women's rights and gender equality movements need time and stability to build alliances, leadership, and infrastructure.

Project grants can lead to fragmentation, forcing organisations to "chase" deliverables instead of pursuing long-term visions.

Short-term, project-based funding can undermine the sustainability of feminist movements. Philanthropy needs to embrace long-term support that allows movements to grow, adapt, and remain effective over time.

– Respondent, European organiser and activist, France

In contrast, long-term, flexible resourcing allows movements to plan strategically, take risks, and recover from setbacks. As shared earlier with the example of the Ford Foundation's Building Institutions and Networks (BUILD) Initiative, by providing long-term flexible funding there was improved programming and impact.

Grassroots organisers repeatedly said that what they need most is stability and trust, not short-term project cycles. As one interviewee summarised:

The message is clear: only sustained, flexible investment can enable feminist movements to respond to crises today while shaping the systems of tomorrow.

– Respondent, Feminist funder

03 Funders' Need for Scale vs. Movements' Need for Autonomy and Depth

Many funders seek impact at scale – large programmes, measurable reach, and replicable models. This fits institutional imperatives for visibility and efficiency. However, grassroots movements often work through depth rather than breadth, building power through relationships, trust, and political learning that cannot easily be standardised or measured.

Interviewees described how feminist and gender equality organising depends on decentralised, locally rooted processes that evolve through dialogue and experimentation. For many organisers, scaling deep means strengthening connections, capacities, and consciousness within communities before expanding outward. Young Feminist Europe, for example, has grown not by opening offices across the region but

by cultivating a digital network of volunteers who collaborate horizontally across languages and issues. Similarly, the Women's Strike in Poland built mass participation by deepening local alliances – connecting teachers, health workers, and parents – rather than replicating a single campaign model. These examples show that depth can generate scale organically when movements are trusted to grow in their own ways. Scaling deep is not about limiting ambition; it is about ensuring that growth remains transformative, contextually grounded, and led by those closest to the issues.

By recognising depth as a form of scale, funders can align their strategies with the very conditions that make movements effective and enduring.

04 Service delivery vs. Political organising

Many gender equality organisations operate along a continuum between service delivery and political organising. Both are vital and often intertwined: services provide immediate support and insights into systemic problems, while organising addresses those root causes through collective action. The tension, interviewees noted, lies in how each is perceived and funded.

Service delivery is often seen as the safer, more measurable, short-term option for funders, producing tangible results such as numbers served or cases resolved. This work is crucial, especially where public services have been cut or outsourced to underfunded NGOs. Yet, as one respondent cautioned, services alone rarely change the systems that create inequality.

Political organising, by contrast, can seem riskier and harder to measure, but it builds the power and agency needed for long-term transformation.

Some organisations are successfully blending both approaches – using their community work as a base for advocacy. For instance, centres supporting survivors of violence also lead campaigns for stronger laws and better care infrastructure, ensuring that policy change is grounded in lived experience. However, interviewees also warned against expecting every gender equality organisation to deliver services. Because it is easier to fund and measure, service delivery can divert small organisations from their mission of changing systems. A healthy feminist and gender equality ecosystem needs diversity: some actors focus on care and services; others on advocacy, organising, and narrative change.

For funders, the goal is to resource this balance intentionally, valuing both the direct impact of service work and the deeper shifts achieved through organising.

05 Ecosystem support vs. Individual organisation funding

Several interviewees encouraged funders to move from focusing on individual organisations toward strengthening the broader ecosystem of feminist and gender equality movements. Supporting an ecosystem means investing in the relationships, networks, and connective tissue that allow different actors – from grassroots collectives to established NGOs, researchers, artists, and funders – to collaborate toward shared goals.

This approach recognises that systemic change rarely happens through one organisation alone. Movements depend on diverse and interdependent actors. Ecosystem funding might therefore include core support to anchor organisations, grants for coordination or joint strategy, and resources for shared infrastructure such as digital platforms, communications, or safety mechanisms.

However, this shift poses challenges for funders used to clear metrics, linear results frameworks, and grantee accountability structures. Ecosystem impact can be less visible and harder to measure: success looks like stronger alliances, new collaborations, or collective resilience – outcomes that unfold over time rather than within a single grant cycle.

“We have a very tough government to deal with right now. We have our differences, but we have a real structural force that we rally together against. We don’t divide on our separate strategies because our challenges ahead are so big.”

– Respondent, Women’s strike activist in Poland

“We should refrain from thinking that funding movements is the same as funding organisations... The specificity of movements is that they are building power, and sometimes in philanthropy, we’re very afraid to help people build power.”

– Respondent, Feminist fund leader in France

Funders also face practical questions:

- How to determine who holds the funds in a collective context?
- How to balance flexibility and accountability when multiple actors are involved?
- How to ensure smaller or marginalised groups within the ecosystem have equitable access?

Interviewees suggested that these tensions can be managed through trust-based relationships, transparent communication, and participatory decision-making structures that involve movement actors themselves. In doing so, funders can move beyond supporting isolated projects to nurturing the conditions in which movements thrive – an investment in power, connection, and long-term resilience rather than short-term outputs.

Core Strategic Tensions for the Feminist and Gender Equality Movement

Respondents described several strategic dilemmas within feminist and gender equality movements themselves. However, these challenges are navigable—they are essential terrain for any transformative movement. Philanthropy that acknowledges and engages with these tensions can be part of the solution, rather than compounding the problem. Philanthropy should not be put off by these apparent dilemmas and tensions but rather see these as evidence of a diverse and dynamic movement striving to bring systemic change.

01 Unity vs. Ideological Divergence

Building diverse, intersectional, and dynamic movements and coalitions across Europe is both a powerful strategy and a complex undertaking. A recurring theme across interviews was the tension between unity and ideological divergence.

As movements expand to include structurally marginalised groups and transnational solidarities, they must also navigate deep-rooted differences—particularly around approaches to the sex industry, the inclusion of trans women, and religious expression, including dress. These tensions often stem from differing political traditions, lived experiences, and analyses of power. For instance, some feminist groups and gender equality organisations view the sex industry as inherently exploitative, while others prioritise harm reduction and sex workers rights. Similarly, differing positions on religious symbols can reveal clashing understandings of secularism, freedom, and inclusion.

Rather than suppress these divergences, many movements are beginning to intentionally create spaces for dialogue, deep listening, and mutual recognition. These are not always easy conversations, but they are necessary. The aim is not uniformity, but a principled solidarity grounded in respect and shared purpose. Ultimately, it is also about building power to make change happen.

“We are not trying to be one. We are trying to walk together.”

– Respondent, Coalition builder in Italy

02 Grassroots vs. Institutional Feminism

Across Europe, feminist and gender equality movements operate along a spectrum – from **informal, community-based groups** grounded in lived experience to institutionalised NGOs with formal structures, policy access, and professional staff. Both are essential to the health of the gender equality ecosystem, yet tensions often arise over **resources, legitimacy, and recognition**.

Smaller, grassroots groups bring **creativity, proximity, and moral clarity**. They are embedded in communities, often leading rapid responses to crises and experimenting with new forms of organising. However, they frequently face structural barriers to accessing funding, visibility, or policy spaces. Many interviewees described how **grant requirements, reporting demands, and donor language** push informal groups to professionalise – sometimes at the cost of authenticity or autonomy.

For a long time, there's been a push for the grassroots as the 'nice' ones vs. the professional NGOs that are bad. But you need them both and you need them to be connected! Make sure they're connected, because those are different roles. Always think about building power.

– Respondent, Feminist network member from France

Institutional gender equality organisations, by contrast, often have the infrastructure, visibility, and advocacy access to influence policy and engage with governments or international institutions. They can anchor long-term initiatives, build data and legal expertise, and open doors for smaller groups. Yet several interviewees noted that large NGOs can also become detached from movement realities, constrained by donor expectations or bureaucratic logic.

In practice, the most effective change often emerges when these two forms of gender equality work in concert: grassroots organisers providing energy, legitimacy, and direct connection to lived realities, while institutional actors translate those insights into policy and advocacy at scale. Interviewees emphasised that this collaboration requires intentional relationship-building, humility, and trust – as well as funders who are willing to bridge these divides.

It's not about choosing between community and professionalism – it's about weaving them together so feminist power can flow in every direction.

– Respondent, from Italy

03 Scarcity vs. Solidarity

Limited funding fuels competition, yet many feminist and gender equality actors are actively fostering mutual aid and collaboration.

The persistence of a scarcity mindset—where resources are perceived as too limited to share—can make coalition work particularly challenging. Instead of being supported to build long-term, strategic alliances, groups are often forced to compete for the same limited pots of funding, which can create tension, mistrust, and fragmentation.

This is especially true for intersectional coalitions that span across race, migration, gender, disability, labour, and climate justice. These coalitions are connecting the dots between struggles and building a shared vision for justice. But they are also among the most under-resourced. Their work is complex and requires time, care, and deep relationship-building—something that short-term, project-based funding rarely supports.

When funders operate from a scarcity mindset themselves—prioritising narrow thematic silos or expecting immediate, measurable outcomes—they risk undermining the very ecosystem of collaboration and solidarity that movements are working to build.

People rarely talk about collaborations, really on eye level, shifting the help around... without asking anything in return.

– Respondent, Grassroots organiser from Germany

When funders operate from a scarcity mindset themselves, they risk undermining the very ecosystem of collaboration and solidarity that movements are working to build.

04 Online vs. Interpersonal Organising

Interviewees reflected on the ongoing tension between digital activism and in-person organising – two modes of feminist and gender equality mobilisation that each carry distinct advantages and risks. Both are essential, but they shape movement dynamics in profoundly different ways.

Online organising has transformed activism by enabling rapid coordination, broad visibility, and transnational solidarity. It allows movements to respond quickly to political opportunities and reach participants who might never attend in-person events. For example, the My Voice, My Choice campaign successfully combined digital mobilisation with grassroots organising, using social media to connect women's rights networks across Europe and push abortion rights into mainstream debate.

However, digital organising also exposes activists to **platform surveillance, algorithmic suppression, and online harassment**. Gender equality organisations relying on commercial platforms must navigate data extraction and content moderation that can silence critical voices. Many described burnout from constant visibility and the emotional toll of online hostility.

By contrast, **in-person organising** allows for the **deep trust, political clarity, and collective care** that digital spaces cannot replicate. Face-to-face convenings help build solidarity, repair, and strategy. The EL*C network, for instance, has used its in-person conferences to bridge language and regional divides, creating affirming spaces where activists can strategise, learn, and rest together.

Similarly, bringing together grantees once a year allows groups working in different contexts to share lessons, debate challenges, and nurture cross-border collaboration – a kind of relational infrastructure that cannot be built online alone.

Yet in-person work demands **time, travel, translation, and care infrastructure**, which many grassroots groups struggle to resource. Accessibility barriers – from visa restrictions to caregiving duties – often limit who can participate.

As several interviewees concluded, most movements are now experimenting with **hybrid models**: using digital tools for mobilisation and coordination while safeguarding time for embodied, interpersonal connection. Online spaces amplify reach and visibility, while in-person gatherings sustain depth, strategy, and resilience.

Real stuff emerges in interpersonal spaces, real connections, ideas, hard debates. The human interpersonal dimension cannot be lost.

– Respondent, Movement facilitator in Czech Republic

For funders, this means investing in **both the digital backbone and the human infrastructure** of organising – secure tech platforms, digital safety, and travel and care costs for convenings. Deep change happens **where connection meets presence**: in spaces that are safe, sustained, and resourced enough for both organising and belonging to thrive.

05 Visibility vs. Safety

For many groups, especially those working in **hostile or authoritarian** environments, visibility is a double-edged sword. Public recognition can amplify impact, attract funding, and build legitimacy – but it can also invite **harassment, legal attacks, or physical and digital threats**. Interviewees described this as a constant balancing act between **protection and presence**, where the very act of being seen can both strengthen and endanger the movement.

Visibility is often linked to access and resources. Donors and media tend to spotlight high-profile organisations, which can marginalise those deliberately operating under the radar – for example, LGBTQI+, migrant, or reproductive rights groups in conservative contexts. In **Poland, Hungary, and parts of the Western Balkans**, interviewees noted that activists face increasing state surveillance, online attacks, and disinformation campaigns designed to discredit women's rights and LGBTQI+ leaders. One respondent explained that being too visible can make international funding a liability:

We learned that visibility can be dangerous. The more attention we got, the more the state came after us.

– Respondent, from Poland

Sometimes the most radical act is to stay small and quiet – to survive, to keep doing the work even when no one can see you.

– Respondent, from Hungary

At the same time, invisibility has its costs. Groups that cannot speak openly or publicise their work may struggle to **access funding, connect with allies, or influence public debate**. Donors often associate visibility with accountability and success, creating a tension between the **need for safety and the expectation of public storytelling**.

In contrast, movements in **Western and Northern Europe** often have more room to claim public space, but even there, visibility can bring online harassment or reputational risk. The rise of far-right digital networks has made visibility precarious even in democratic contexts.

Some groups are developing creative strategies to navigate this tension – for example, using **anonymous storytelling, encrypted networks, collective authorship, or proxy advocacy** through allies based in safer environments. These approaches allow activists to shape narratives and influence policy without exposing individuals or communities to undue harm.

For funders, this dilemma calls for a **nuanced understanding of visibility as both a tool and a risk**.

Visibility, when safely managed, can be a form of power. But for many feminist and gender equality movements today, **safety itself is resistance** – the act of enduring, connecting, and caring for one another in the shadows of hostility.

06 Historical and Regional Contexts

Feminist and gender equality movements across Europe are shaped by **diverse political legacies, donor environments,** and movement histories. The contrasts between East and West, North and South, and across linguistic and cultural communities run deep. Yet, they also form one of the region's greatest sources of learning and resilience.

In **Central and Eastern Europe,** and in the Balkans and Caucasus, gender equality organising has emerged from **post-socialist contexts** marked by rapid transitions, economic precarity, and the dismantling of state welfare systems. Many organisations carry the dual burden of rebuilding civic infrastructure while resisting growing authoritarianism and anti-gender movements. Interviewees noted that pro-equality work in these contexts often focuses simultaneously on **survival and transformation** – offering mutual aid, safe spaces, and care networks while pursuing long-term social change. As one activist reflected:

In our region, we have to build everything from scratch – trust, structures, even the language to talk about feminism. But that also means we can build differently.

– Respondent, from Hungary

There's a real fracture between the language of security and the language of care – and feminists are trying to hold both.

– Respondent, from Poland

Across regions, interviewees called for **more spaces to listen, connect, and exchange across borders and political traditions.** While Western European movements often have longer histories of institutionalisation and donor access, Southern and Eastern European groups bring deep experience in **grassroots organising, and creativity under constraint.** These differences can be a source of strength if funders intentionally invest in **cross-regional relationship-building.**

There is a wealth of experience and history in this region. We just need spaces to connect, learn, and strategise together – not as donors and grantees, but as co-conspirators.

– Respondent, from Serbia

These post-socialist realities also shape relationships with funders. Decades of **externally driven aid models** have sometimes fostered dependency or mistrust, and interviewees from this region highlighted the need for **greater parity and dialogue** with Western-based donors and movements. Many stressed that **solidarity cannot be assumed; it must be built.**

At the same time, the **geopolitical climate** has introduced new complexities. Russia's war against Ukraine, and the resulting **anti-Russian sentiment and rising militarism** in neighbouring countries, have created tension within feminist and gender equality movements that traditionally emphasise peace and anti-militarist values. Some organisers in Eastern Europe described feeling caught between **national survival narratives and transnational feminist ethics,** navigating how to express solidarity without reinforcing militarised discourses.

Conclusion

Resourcing Power with Purpose

The following recommendations outline key areas of action for funders. They are organised according to the three dimensions of movement-building: building power, organising and mobilising power, and transforming power.

Building Power

Foundations of Care, Leadership, and Resilience

Invest in depth before scale

- Resource community workshops, peer support, political education, healing spaces, staff well-being, and the infrastructure that sustains movements over time.
- Support political and narrative work, even when outcomes are intangible or long-term.

Value diverse leadership and inclusion

- Adjust eligibility criteria to ensure access for under-resourced, grassroots, migrant, disabled, LGBTQI+, and East/South European feminist and gender equality groups.
- Support the quiet, often confidential work of groups that may not seek visibility but have significant impact in local contexts.

Offer differentiated funding mechanisms

- Provide flexible, core, multi-year funding for grassroots actors to sustain autonomy and strategy.
- Pair this with structured, multi-year grants for more established organisations to reinforce institutional capacity.
- Allow grantees operating in sensitive environments to opt out of publicity requirements.

Build participatory, power-shifting models

- Create participatory funds where movement actors shape the design, governance, and grant decisions.
- Use tools like the Advancing Participation in Philanthropy Toolkit to embed equity into funding practices.

Organising and Mobilising Power

Solidarity, Scale, and Strategy

Strengthen multi-layered coalitions

- Fund collaborations that bring together grassroots and institutional actors around shared values.
- Recognise that networks of small, autonomous groups often achieve collective impact without needing to replicate a single model.

Support collaboration and convening

- Fund national and regional gatherings, mentorship spaces, and co-strategy development.
- Use a two-phase model: support early-stage trust-building and scoping, followed by resourcing aligned action.

Invest in movement infrastructure

- Fund digital security and communications infrastructure that keeps networks safe and connected.
- Support narrative safety training so groups can manage visibility on their own terms.
- Build platforms and mapping tools that connect movements across borders.

Facilitate cross-regional learning

- Promote peer learning between European and Global South feminist, women's rights and gender equality organisers.
- Recognise the value of cross-border solidarity and joint analysis in addressing shared threats.

Transforming Power

Shifting Systems, Narratives, and Norms

Fund strategic work in contested spaces

- Resource movements working in polarised political environments or at the frontlines of backlash.
- Enable experimentation, narrative work, and policy advocacy that drives systemic change.

Value new indicators of success

- Support work that strengthens political consciousness, builds collective leadership, and transforms narratives—even when outcomes aren't easily quantifiable.
- Recognise healing, rest, mutual care, and long-term trust as legitimate forms of impact.

Foster learning and reflection

- Embed learning loops between funders and movements to ensure continued relevance and accountability.
- Audit language, structures, and power dynamics to identify who's at the table—and who is missing.

Create enabling conditions for risk and resilience

- Reframe "risk" in funding as necessary terrain for social change.
- Fund care and security resources that allow groups to navigate repression and uncertainty.
- Build alliances among funders to share risk, amplify courage, and expand access.

Movements for gender equality across Europe are facing deep challenges, but they are also bursting with creativity, resilience, and vision. Their success will not be measured in numbers or outputs, but in relationships, trust, and shared power. To meet this moment, philanthropy must help carve out space not only to respond to crisis, but to dream – so that movements can build the new systems they need, not just survive the old ones.

About the Authors

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Joanna is one of the co-founders of Flamingo Collective, where she brings decades of experience in feminist leadership and global civil society to help reimagine how we lead, collaborate, and create change. Over the years, she's worked at the intersection of policy, advocacy, and movement building—shaping EU gender equality strategies, leading one of Europe's largest feminist networks, and helping to grow powerful coalitions for justice. Joanna brings decades of practical experience leading teams, organisations and coalitions to support others in building bold visions and collective power for systemic change.

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Credits

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