

# EPA GENDER EQUALITY POLICY

Aligned with EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 & Charter of Fundamental Rights

## Preamble

European Parents' Association (EPA), as the premier voice for parents across the continent, recognizes that gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but a core principle of the European Union.

Bearing in mind that parents regardless of gender are the primary partners in their children's education and well-being. EPA is committed to a "Union of Equality" where all individuals are free to pursue their chosen path in life without the limitations of gender roles or stereotypes.

Reaffirming our EPA Value Statement, we believe that true inclusion requires a gender-sensitive approach that considers the intersectional challenges faced by families from diverse backgrounds, including those with migration histories, Roma families, and families of children with disabilities.

Stressing our commitment to the EPA Code of Conduct, we maintain a zero-tolerance policy toward gender-based discrimination, harassment, and violence, both in physical meetings and in the digital sphere.

The Association hereby adopts this Gender Equality Policy to ensure that gender perspective is mainstreamed into all aspects of our governance, project management, and advocacy, reflecting the diversity and talent of the millions of parents we represent.

## Purpose

The purpose of this Policy is to translate EPA's values of respect and equity into actionable organizational standards:

- **Mainstreaming Equality:** To integrate a gender perspective into all EPA activities, from high-level advocacy at European institutions to the design of local workshops.
- **Safety and Dignity:** To provide a safe and supportive environment free from gender-based harassment, bias, and discrimination.
- **Balanced Participation:** To ensure equal access to leadership, decision-making, and representation within the Association for all parents.
- **Challenging Stereotypes:** To actively combat gender stereotypes in education and parenting, promoting a more equitable division of care and educational support.
- **EU Compliance:** To meet the rigorous Gender Equality Plan (GEP) requirements for **Horizon Europe** and other EU-funded projects.

## Scope

This policy applies to all individuals acting on behalf of or representing the European Parents' Association (EPA), including:

- The Board of Directors and Advisory Committee.
- EPA Staff and Interns.
- Delegates and Volunteers from member organizations participating in EPA-led initiatives.

- Contractors and External Experts hired for European projects.

These standards are integrated into all EPA operations:

- **Governance:** Recruitment, election processes for the Board, and internal committee formations.
- **Advocacy:** Policy papers, representations to the European Commission/Parliament, and public statements.
- **Project Lifecycle:** From the initial design and proposal stage (e.g., Horizon Europe, Erasmus+) to implementation and final evaluation.
- **External Communications:** Website content, social media, and conference speaker selection.

## Key Principles and Definitions

EPA's commitment to gender equality is guided by five core principles derived from the European Research Area (ERA) and EU Charter of Fundamental Rights:

1. **Gender Mainstreaming:** The systematic integration of a gender perspective into all stages of EPA's work from policy drafting and project design to implementation and evaluation.
2. **Intersectionality as a Horizontal Principle:** Recognizing that parents do not experience gender in a vacuum. EPA's actions must account for the intersecting layers of discrimination based on ethnicity (e.g., Roma families), migration background, disability, and socio-economic status.
3. **Balanced Participation and Decision-Making:** Proactively striving for gender balance (a 40/60% target) in leadership roles, board membership, and expert panels to ensure diverse talent is utilized.
4. **Zero Tolerance for Gender-Based Violence (GBV):** Maintaining a safe environment, both physical and digital, free from all forms of harassment and violence. This includes challenging the "continuum of violence" that starts with sexist jokes or derogatory remarks.
5. **Evidence-Informed Transparency:** Committing to the collection of sex-disaggregated data to monitor gaps and ensure equal pay for work of equal value.

To ensure common understanding across all EPA member organizations, the following definitions apply:

- **Gender:** Refers to the social attributes, opportunities, and relationships associated with being female and male, which are socially constructed and learned through socialization.
- **Gender Equality:** The state where all genders are free to pursue their chosen paths and have equal opportunities to thrive without being limited by gender stereotypes or rigid roles.
- **Direct Discrimination:** When a person is treated less favorably than another is, has been, or would be treated in a comparable situation on grounds of sex.
- **Indirect Discrimination:** When an apparently neutral provision, criterion, or practice puts persons of one sex at a particular disadvantage (e.g., scheduling all EPA meetings during evening hours, disproportionately affecting those with primary caregiving roles).
- **Gender-Based Harassment:** Unwelcome behavior or comments related to a person's gender that create a hostile, intimidating, or demeaning environment. This includes sexist jokes, stereotypical prejudices, or silencing individuals.
- **Sexual Harassment:** Any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal, or physical behavior of a sexual nature with the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity.

- **Gender Mainstreaming:** The strategy of making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, and evaluation of all EPA policies and programs.
- **Intersectionality:** An analytical tool used to understand how different personal characteristics (gender, race, disability, etc.) intersect to create unique experiences of discrimination and power imbalances.

## Standards of Behavior and Digital Safeguarding

General Standards of Professional Conduct:

- **Respectful Communication:** All interactions, whether in person or via digital channels (email, Slack, WhatsApp), must be professional and free from sexist language, derogatory stereotypes, or "Gender-based condescension and silencing tactics" (the practice of explaining something to a woman in a condescending way).
- **Inclusive Participation:** Moderators and leaders in EPA meetings must actively ensure that all genders have equal "airtime." This includes using inclusive facilitation techniques to prevent the dominance of any single gender in discussions.
- **Physical Boundaries:** EPA maintains a strict zero-tolerance policy for any unwanted physical contact or non-verbal conduct of a sexual nature (e.g., suggestive gestures or leering).

Digital Safeguarding and Online Conduct:

- **Combatting Cyber-Harassment:** EPA recognizes that women and gender-diverse individuals are disproportionately targeted by online abuse. Any form of "cyber-stalking," unauthorized sharing of private images (image-based abuse), or targeted trolling within EPA digital frameworks will result in immediate removal.
- **Safe Digital Spaces:** For webinars and workshops, EPA will utilize moderators trained to identify and intervene in cases of gender-based micro aggressions in chat functions.
- **Digital Image Integrity:** EPA will not use images of its members or participants in a way that reinforces gender stereotypes or objectifies individuals. All promotional material must reflect a diverse and balanced representation of parents.

Reporting and Redress in the Digital Sphere:

- **Screenshot Policy:** Participants are encouraged to keep records (screenshots) of any digital harassment or discriminatory behavior encountered during EPA online activities to facilitate investigations.
- **Moderator Authority:** Digital event moderators have the authority to "mute" or "remove" participants who violate gender equality standards, with a follow-up report sent to the Ethics Officer.

## Procedures for Reporting and Disciplinary Actions

In cases of minor misunderstandings or unconscious bias, individuals are encouraged (if they feel safe) to address the behavior directly. EPA supports a "learning culture" where members can be called in to correct behavior before it escalates.

All formal complaints of gender discrimination, harassment, or bias should be sent to [office@europarents.eu](mailto:office@europarents.eu) or directly to the EPA Ethics Officer.

Reports should ideally be made within 30 days of the incident, though EPA will review all reports regardless of the timeline if the safety of members is at stake. However, EPA will investigate all reports regardless of the time elapsed, recognizing that survivors of harassment may require time to come forward.

All investigations will be conducted with the highest degree of discretion to protect the privacy of the complainant.

Confirmed breaches of this policy will result in sanctions as defined in the EPA Code of Conduct, ranging from formal warnings (Level 1) to a recommendation for withdrawal of membership status (Level 4).

## Final Provisions

This policy enters into force immediately upon its adoption by the General Assembly. It supersedes any previous project-specific gender drafts.

The Board of Directors holds ultimate responsibility for the implementation of this policy, ensuring that gender equality remains a standing item on the organizational agenda.

In accordance with European Commission requirements for a formal Gender Equality Plan (GEP), EPA commits to allocating "earmarked" time for staff and the Ethics Officer to monitor and implement these equality measures.

EPA will facilitate regular training sessions for Board members and project leads focusing on unconscious bias, gender-sensitive communication, and intersectionality.

This policy shall be reviewed every two years to incorporate changes in European Union directives and feedback from member organizations.

EPA will maintain sex-disaggregated data on its leadership and project participation to track progress toward a 40/60% gender balance.

## Annex: Contact and Resources

For any inquiries regarding the interpretation of this policy, or to suggest improvements, please contact the EPA Gender Equality Officer (currently the Ethics Officer).

Any member, staff member, or project participant who witnesses or experiences gender-based discrimination or harassment should report the incident to:

- **Email:** [office@europarents.eu](mailto:office@europarents.eu)
- **Subject Line:** Private & Confidential – Gender Equality Concern

EPA encourages members to stay informed via the following European resources:

- **EIGE:** European Institute for Gender Equality ([eige.europa.eu](http://eige.europa.eu))
- **EU Gender Equality Strategy:** ([ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1511](http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1511))

By representing the European Parents' Association (EPA) in any capacity, I acknowledge that I have read, understood, and agree to uphold the standards of this Gender Equality Policy, contributing to a Union of Equality for all families.