



Coalition for Fertility

PRESS RELEASE :

COALITION FOR FERTILITY RESPONSE TO THE EU GENDER EQUALITY STRATEGY 2026-2030

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Brussels, 5 March 2026 – The Coalition for Fertility welcomes the European Commission’s Gender Equality Strategy 2026–2030, published today, as an important step toward a more equal Europe, and a timely opportunity to embed reproductive autonomy into the EU’s gender equality agenda. With International Women’s Day on 8 March 2026 approaching, attention to women’s rights and gender equality is rightly heightened. If gender equality is to be real and lasting, Europe must go beyond symbolism and ensure that the right to try to build a family is treated as a matter of health equity, non-discrimination and social justice.

Following our formal [contribution](#) to the public consultation, the Coalition for Fertility welcomes the 2026–2030 EU Gender Equality Strategy’s recognition of persistent challenges in sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), gender gaps in medical research and treatment, and barriers to healthcare access for women facing intersecting inequalities. Moreover, the announced SHIELD initiative (Sexual and Reproductive Health in Emergencies and Life in Dignity), aimed at improving access to SRHR in humanitarian contexts, further demonstrates the Commission’s commitment to strengthening reproductive health policies.

However, the Coalition deeply regrets the omission of fertility, an essential component of SRHR, which represents a missed opportunity to acknowledge the gendered dimensions of involuntary childlessness and the healthcare needs of those affected. For millions of people experiencing infertility, access to fertility treatment, including IVF, and fertility preservation is a fundamental element of reproductive autonomy. This matters not only in principle, but in practice: IVF and other medically indicated fertility treatments should be covered by public health systems like any other necessary healthcare, yet access and reimbursement remain highly uneven across many Member States. In addition, eligibility and coverage rules in some countries continue to exclude or limit non-heterosexual couples, reinforcing inequities in access to care. Ignoring this dimension in the 2026–2030 Gender Equality Strategy risks entrenching structural discrimination and undermining genuine equality in reproductive health. Moreover, by failing to include fertility within the Strategy, the text overlooks the [stigma](#) that disproportionately affects women, when the Strategy could have been an important starting point for addressing them.

To conclude, the Coalition views the Commission’s planned action to support Member States’ work on SRHR, by mapping practices and relevant international frameworks (2028), as a key opportunity to address this gap. We urge the Commission to ensure that this exercise also assesses disparities in access to fertility care across the EU, and we reiterate the Coalition’s readiness to support the Commission in this work. We also welcome the announced initiatives with the World Health Organization to improve women’s healthcare and encourage that fertility is clearly reflected in these actions.

Maciej Śmiechowski, Chair of Fertility Europe, said: *“International Women’s Day reminds us how far we still have to go. Reproductive autonomy is not only the right to prevent pregnancy, it is also the right to try to build the family you want, as a matter of fundamental rights, without being priced out, pushed out of work, or left behind by policy. If Europe’s Gender Equality Strategy is to deliver, fertility must be reflected in the targets, funding and accountability in the next Multiannual Financial Framework 2028-2034, because equality means real choices, backed by real systems.”*

Why fertility is a gender equality issue

- **Infertility is common and not marginal.** It affects around **1 in 6 people globally**, according to the World Health Organization. While infertility can affect anyone, **women often carry a disproportionate share** of the medical burden and the social, professional and economic consequences.

- **Gender equality must reflect the full spectrum of reproductive autonomy.** That means protecting not only the right to avoid having children, but also the right to **try to have them, without stigma, discrimination or systemic barriers.**
- **Today, structural conditions still determine who can build a family.** Across Europe, many people face **limited access to affordable fertility care**, unequal coverage, fragmented pathways, and workplace constraints. In some countries, legal restrictions also limit access to fertility treatment for certain groups, including same-sex couples and single women. Moreover, financial and geographic barriers, precarious employment and uneven support systems mean that reproductive intentions are often shaped by policy choices, not personal choices. These are **not individual failures; they are policy gaps** that reinforce inequality in healthcare access, labour market participation and economic security.
- **What isn't measured stays invisible.** Closing fertility-related gaps requires **stronger collection of gender-disaggregated data**, better investment in research, and meaningful integration of sex and gender considerations in clinical trials and health policy. Without robust evidence and monitoring, fertility inequalities remain under-recognised in policy design and budgeting.

The Coalition for Fertility stands ready to engage constructively with EU institutions and Member States to ensure that reproductive autonomy, including fertility, is fully reflected in implementation plans, funding priorities, health policy coordination and equality reporting over the 2026–2030 period.

ABOUT THE COALITION FOR FERTILITY

This Coalition for Fertility is a collaborative effort of diverse partners from civil society and stakeholders united in advocating for integrated and inclusive fertility policies in Europe. We stand for policy reform to overcome involuntary childlessness, recognising the deep-seated impact on individuals and broader socio-economic domains. This Coalition aims to drive discourse and initiatives that foster reproductive health and education, reflecting a shared vision of allowing all across the continent to build the family they desire.

For more information, please visit our [website](#), read our [joint statement](#), or contact Anita Fincham, Advocacy Manager, Fertility Europe (anita@fertilityeurope.eu | +44 7920 033551).

