



**In Europe**

# TAKING A STAND

**for Gender Equality Everywhere  
and for Everyone**

**GroupeSOS**  
Entrepreneurs for common good

**European  
position paper**

# Current European Challenges

**Gender equality is a core value of the European Union (EU), a fundamental right, and a key principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights.**

In recent years, political progress has been made, notably through the five-year strategy (2020–2025) unveiled by the European Commission on 5 March 2020 to advance gender equality<sup>1</sup>. This document guides the EU's actions to combat gender inequality: ending violence and stereotypes, reducing economic disparities, promoting leadership parity, mainstreaming gender equality in public policies, funding gender equality initiatives, and integrating more equality into the EU's foreign policy. «The objective is a Union where women and men, girls and boys, in all their diversity are free to pursue their chosen path in life and reach their full potential, where they have equal opportunities to thrive, and where they can equally participate in and lead our European society.” Despite this ambition, significant progress is still needed, and the role of social and social economy actors is crucial to accelerate this essential societal transformation.

**For 40 years, Groupe SOS has welcomed, housed and supported thousands of vulnerable women through its social and medico-social facilities. Having progressively expanded our actions to ecological transition, regional exclusion, sustainable commerce, and accessible culture.**

## 3 key figures

### OVER 1 IN 3 WOMEN

in the EU has experienced physical and/or sexual violence<sup>2</sup>.

In 2022, women in the EU earned on average

### 12.7% LESS THAN MEN

according to Eurostat<sup>3</sup>.

Only,

### 66.1% OF WOMEN AGED 20–64

were employed in 2020, compared to 77.2% of men, according to Eurostat<sup>4</sup>.

Our expertise and transversality allows us to develop comprehensive solutions for all women, ensuring gender equality informs all European decision-making.

<sup>1</sup>Une Union de l'égalité : stratégie en faveur de l'égalité entre les hommes et les femmes 2020–2025, Commission Européenne, 2020

<sup>2</sup>European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Communiqué de Presse du 25 novembre, 2024

<sup>3</sup>Ecart des rémunérations entre hommes et femmes, Eurostat, 2024

<sup>4</sup>Eurostat, Employment and activity by sex and age, 2024

# #1

## TRAINING SOCIAL CARE PROFESSIONALS TO SYSTEMATICALLY COMBAT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

**Let us train all professionals supporting vulnerable women to address violence at every level. Over one-third of women in the EU have faced physical or sexual violence.** European data on women in social facilities experiencing violence remains insufficient for a full assessment and improve the awareness of the challenges these women face.

Social workers, as key contacts for vulnerable women, play a central role in preventing, identifying, and addressing violence. However, victims often remain silenced by their abusers, which prevents them from speaking up and asking for help. It is therefore essential for professionals to receive training on recognizing and discussing violence issues with them in a safe, supportive manner.

### OUR ACTIONS

For over 20 years, Groupe SOS has supported female victims of violence, beginning with our first shelter for couples referred by homeless services. Since then, we have expanded our actions so that each woman suffering from violence entering one of our facilities can receive shelter, protection and support. Today, we reserve spaces for these women across our generalist assistance schemes and run dedicated programmes. Yet, many victims remain unidentified when taken in: our field experience shows that in mixed-gender settings, intimate partner or family violence too often persists unchecked.

To address this, we train social care professionals in prevention, detection, and response to domestic violence, as part of a global evolution of our practices that includes a training for all our workers as well as change management through, among other things, professional practice support: standardisation and implementation of tools, procedures, and resources, working groups, and practice review. This large-scale initiative aims at consistent detection of violence issues and implementation of practical solutions.

**In France, 143,000 children live in households where women report experiencing physical or sexual violence perpetrated by a current or former partner.** Furthermore, according to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 73% of these women state the children were aware of the abuse. Drawing on expertise from its Youth and Social Solidarity divisions, Groupe SOS now includes the identification and support of child co-victims into the staff training programmes of these two sectors.



#### RECOMMENDATIONS :

Permanently integrate domestic violence prevention, detection, and support into European social facilities.

Train European social care professionals to identify and assist child victims of family violence.

Support research and data collection by all European NGOs, a key to prevent and combat violence against women.

#### The European Commission

*In March 2022, the European Commission proposed a directive to combat violence against women and domestic violence. Designed to protect victims and harmonise penalties for perpetrators across member states, the directive was adopted by MEPs in April 2024 and by EU member states in May 2024 and is due to come into force within two years.*

## FOCUS

### Let us promote networking

*Santé Plurielles, a Groupe SOS establishment, works to improve healthcare access for women in vulnerable situations. By harnessing the strength of inter-organisational partnerships, Santé Plurielles has driven the creation of a support network tailored to women's specific needs. It equips social support workers who engage daily with women facing hardship with practical tools, while systematically addressing the violence experienced by many of these women.*

## #2 RAISING SOCIETAL AWARENESS ON GENDER EQUALITY

**We must make sure that all of civil society is aware of gender equality issues.** Due to physical or social isolation, or lack of resources, women – particularly those at risk – often struggle to access information, support, or existing services when facing gender inequalities, including violence. Better-informed women are better equipped to respond and seek help from specialist services. To be effective and facilitate a lasting shift in mindsets, this awareness-raising must reach every level of society.

### OUR ACTIONS

Whether it's isolated women, couples, couples with children, single-parent families, pregnant women, victims of domestic abuse, children in social care, or even perpetrators of violence, we believe all those welcomed in social support systems should be made aware of gender equality issues, including health, the cycle of violence, and which support services victims can turn to.

We support outreach initiatives like Ysos' Plurielles Van, which travels through rural communities in the Orne region to make them aware of issues around gender equality, healthy relationships, period poverty, employment support, healthcare access and combatting violence against women. This mobile unit provides a free safe space for residents to access information, counselling, and referrals to local support services, covering everything from healthcare and prevention to legal rights and violence support. Since 2022, the Plurielles Van has reached 1,365 residents across 40 towns.

### RECOMMENDATIONS :

Massively educate the individuals welcomed in European social facilities about domestic violence.

Support and expand outreach programmes to raise awareness about gender inequality throughout society, especially in rural areas.



<sup>5</sup>Lutter contre les violences faites aux enfants, Ministère des Solidarités, 2024



# #3 LASTINGLY CHALLENGING GENDER STEREOTYPES

**Let us cultivate gender equality from childhood.** Gender stereotypes lie at the root of persistent inequalities across all societies. 44% of Europeans believe a woman's main role should be caring for home and family<sup>4</sup>, while just 21% of men (compared to 40% of women) spend more than 5 hours daily on childcare. From early childhood, the gendered expectations we hear about domestic roles, careers and abilities shape limiting beliefs that constrain future choices.

## OUR ACTIONS

We created Les Epicènes, a programme to train early childhood professionals in identifying stereotypes and implementing gender-neutral education. Run through our Crescendo network of solidarity nurseries, this programme establishes genuine equality-based pedagogy benefiting both our nurseries and facilities supporting vulnerable youth. Thus, better equipped, parents and professionals integrate an egalitarian vision of children's capabilities into education: encouraging development based on interests rather than gender. Through European mobility programmes, Crescendo staff can go and learn from European counterparts in Germany, Iceland and Norway who are more advanced on these issues.

To combat stereotypes, we must also give children tools to develop critical thinking and independent thought. Our Play International organisation achieves this through girls-boys equality programmes in France and internationally. Play creates non-judgmental spaces for dialogue, using games as powerful tools to help children reflect on and rethink gender differences.



### RECOMMENDATION :

Promote the development of programmes combating gender stereotypes early on, benefiting both professionals and children through cross-border collaboration.



### The fight against stereotypes according to the European Commission

*The fight against stereotypes is a key objective of the European Commission's five-year strategy for gender equality: « Women and men, girls and boys, in all their diversity, should be free to express their ideas and emotions, and pursue their chosen educational and professional paths without the constraints of stereotypical gender norms. »*

<sup>4</sup> Equilibre entre vie personnelle et vie professionnelle, “#EndGenderStereotypes”, Union Européenne, 2022

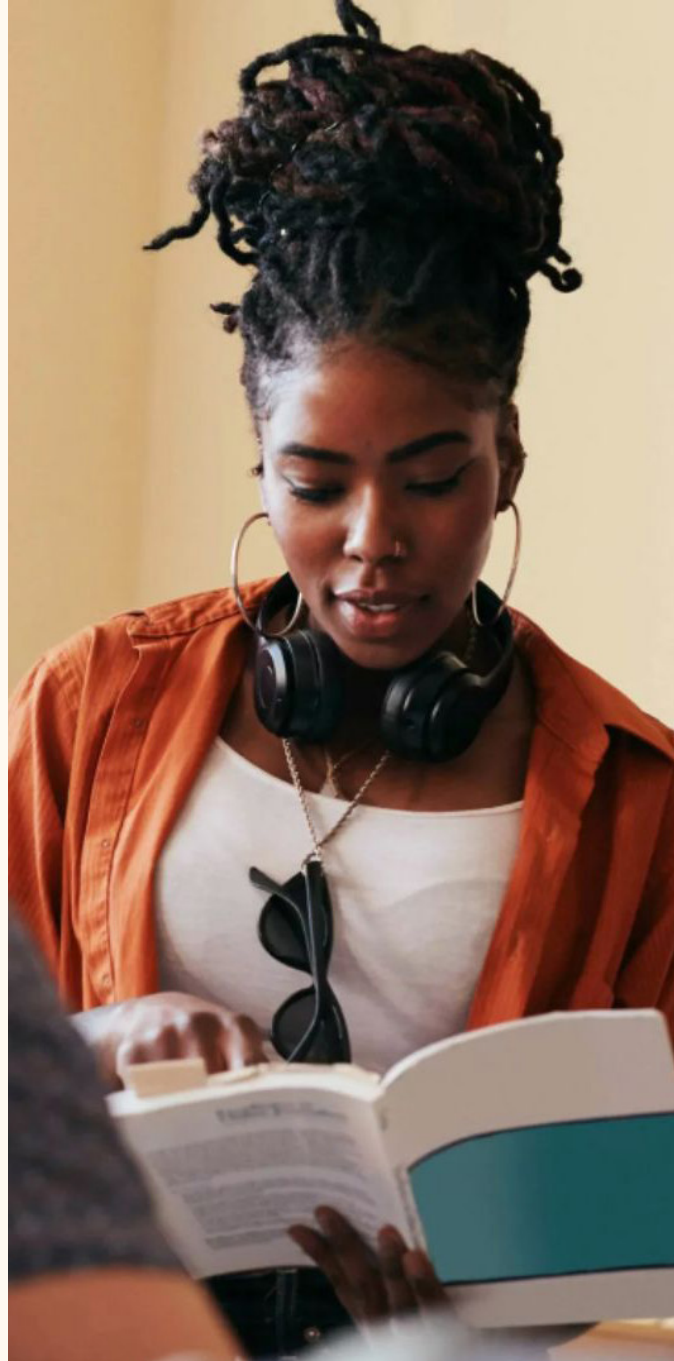
## #4 ADVANCING WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

**Let us make entrepreneurship inclusive and accessible for all women.** Gender inequalities continue to plague the entrepreneurial landscape, pushing many women to abandon their business aspirations and thus remain underrepresented. Many factors push women away from entrepreneurship including lack of knowledge, fear of failure, fear of not being competent or relevant, gender bias from investors, and support programmes that fail to address their specific needs and expectations. In France, only 10% of startups have all-female founding teams, and a mere 2% of funding goes to women-led ventures (SISTA 2022). Yet entrepreneurship remains a powerful vehicle for women's professional empowerment.

### OUR ACTIONS

**Groupe SOS and its organisations are deeply involved in European social innovation projects, including around gender equality.** The PULSE association, convinced that impact entrepreneurship simultaneously drives social and environmental progress, promotes the development of female entrepreneurship, fostering innovation and helping women's economic emancipation. Through the "Fostering Women Social Entrepreneurship in Europe" (FoWoSE) project, funded by EU Erasmus+, PULSE developed gender-sensitive tools for entrepreneurship support with European partners like Empow'Her. This enriched its Elles Ensemble programme, which mentors women entrepreneurs in Île-de-France and Marseille to refine and develop their project.

**In France, only 11 of the 100 biggest cultural enterprises are run by women, even though women make up the majority of the sector.** Through its Source programme, our incubator Créatis works to encourage the emergence and growth of women-led cultural businesses, helping to diversify and energise the cultural landscape while advancing gender equality. Source is a direct response to the needs of female entrepreneurs in culture. It sparks careers, diversifies content production, fosters game-changing connections, and builds confidence; all while breaking down the barriers that too often hold women back from developing and leading high-impact social projects. Open to both established and aspiring female entrepreneurs who lack access to cultural networks, Source is a free programme with no age or qualification requirements.



### RECOMMENDATIONS :

Support the expansion of impact entrepreneurship as a key driver of the acceleration of social and environmental transition and of female entrepreneurship.

Mainstream gender equality across all entrepreneurship support programmes

Embed gender considerations in EU-funded initiatives, ensuring women's specific access needs are met.

# #5 SUPPORTING WOMEN REFUGEES THROUGH RECONSTRUCTION AND SOCIO-PROFESSIONAL INTEGRATION

**Let us build specific tailored solutions to ensure women refugees can successfully integrate into their host countries.** Every year, millions of women are forced to flee their homes due to armed conflict, persecution, or climate disasters. Most carry fractured life stories that require specific support. The gender-based violence that often drives their and their daughters' exile (FGM, forced sterilizations, forced marriage...) compounds with the ones suffered during migration journeys (physical and sexual abuse, dangerous travel conditions for pregnant women), followed by administrative violence and homelessness upon arrival. This triple trauma hinders their socio-professional integration in their host country. In France for instance, only 35% of newly arrived migrant women were employed in 2019 – half the rate of their male counterparts. Refugee women fare even worse at just 22% employment versus 53% for refugee men. According to the FAS (social solidarity federation)<sup>7</sup>, these integration challenges are shared across Europe, with young refugee mothers having children shortly after arrival, entering the workforce later and slower.

## OUR ACTIONS

**At Groupe SOS, we support thousands of women with experiences of exile across our accommodation centres, whether in dedicated facilities (CADA, HUA, CPH) or other structures (CHRS, CHU, integration support programmes, etc.).** We provide multidimensional support designed to address the various barriers preventing their integration, from mental health care and legal aid (ensuring access to their rights) to employment support. In Île-de-France, Groupe SOS – in partnership with the charities Le Chêne and L'Hibiscus – has opened a Psychosocial Support Centre for Exiled People (CAPSE).

This centre assists adult migrants experiencing psychological distress due to their migration journey (e.g., post-traumatic stress) or pre-existing conditions. Among them, women who have survived violence find at CAPSE a safe, trusted environment and the support they need to start over. On the legal front, our partner organisation ASSFAM supports abused exiled women by providing legal guidance throughout their asylum application process, helping them secure their rights effectively.

To help restore their self-esteem, often shattered during exile, the Joséphine Association has launched the Estim'Emploi programme, an innovative approach using socio-aesthetics and wellbeing as tools to re-engage all women in career development.

## RECOMMENDATIONS :

Accompany refugee women toward social integration regardless of their asylum status.

Facilitate employment access by granting work rights from asylum application submission.

Improve training for healthcare and social work professionals on refugee women's specific needs.

## FOCUS

*Facing physical, psychological and sexual violence throughout their journeys, refugee women often also encounter institutional dead ends where their rights are ignored, and their suffering made invisible. Despite the scale of this crisis, victim support remains insufficient, and the existing programmes often fall short of addressing their specific needs.*

*In response, Groupe SOS partnered with Stand Speak Rise Up! and other committed organizations to publish a white paper proposing concrete collective actions to address these inadequacies.*



<sup>7</sup>Fédération des Acteurs de la Solidarité (FAS), "Femmes en exil : prise en compte des violences de genre au sein des structures du dispositif national d'accueil des femmes étrangères" 2022



# About Groupe SOS

**Groupe SOS is a non-profit organisation committed to fostering social cohesion. It develops associations and social enterprises, united by their social and environmental commitments.**

Its initiatives are structured around two main priorities:

- Managing non-profit facilities dedicated to youth, healthcare, vulnerable individuals, and the elderly
- Preparing for a sustainable and inclusive future through initiatives for ecological transition, regional revitalisation, responsible businesses, and access to culture.

Secular and non-partisan, it promotes a genuine social vision focused on the common good.

**With 26,000 employees, 2 million beneficiaries each year, and a presence in 50 countries,** Groupe SOS demonstrates that large-scale impact is both desirable and achievable in building a fairer and more inclusive future.

## In Europe

Groupe SOS is committed daily to initiatives and projects that contribute to the development of the Social and Solidarity Economy in the European Union.

**With over a hundred projects carried out with more than 85 European organisations from 19 countries, Groupe SOS demonstrates its ability to build strong connections across Europe.** Its projects are supported by over 15 European funding programmes, including Erasmus+, Creative Europe, the New European Bauhaus, and the FAMI, ESF+, and ERDF funding programmes. Thanks to EU support, Groupe SOS and its partners lead diverse, impactful, and innovative initiatives, such as vocational training and professional integration projects, activities aimed at improving support for people with disabilities and promoting the social integration of migrants through sports.

Through its partnership network and innovative projects, Groupe SOS is resolutely committed to making the Social and Solidarity Economy a catalyst for social progress in Europe.



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### Crédits pictures :

*Photos taken by Groupe SOS teams within its establishments, associations, and social enterprises*

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