





Mission Creeps:  
EU funding, activist NGOs and  
the Gender Agenda

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# Contents

<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>1 The discovery of gender</b>	<b>13</b>
1.1 From women’s rights to gender identity	13
1.2 From women’s rights to gay rights	14
1.3 From gay rights to gender identity	15
<b>2 A story of mission creep and policy capture</b>	<b>22</b>
2.1 EU Gender Equality Strategy (2020–2025)	22
2.2 LGBTIQ Equality Strategy (2020–2025)	23
2.3 Whither women? Whither democracy?	25
<b>3 Funding a captured policy agenda</b>	<b>27</b>
3.1 Corruption of academic research	28
3.2 Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) Programme	30
3.3 IGLYO	32
3.4 ILGA	34
3.5 The weaponisation of civil society	35
<b>4 Policy capture in action</b>	<b>37</b>
4.1 The family and family policy	37
4.2 Parental autonomy and parent-child relationships	38
4.3 Sovereignty and subsidiarity: the Parenthood Certificate	42
4.4 Education	43
<b>5 The attack on women’s rights in the name of gender identity</b>	<b>46</b>
5.1 Violence against women creeps to ‘gender-based violence’	46
5.2 The impacts of gender self-ID	47
5.3 Far-reaching consequences	48
<b>Conclusions</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Endnotes</b>	<b>51</b>

## Executive summary

### In short

- The European Union's gender policy has undergone a radical transformation, moving far beyond its original focus on women's rights to embrace a broad and ideologically driven agenda centred on gender identity.
- This shift has been driven not by democratic debate or public demand, but by a powerful network of EU-funded NGOs that have embedded their priorities deep within EU policymaking. With millions in EU funding, these organisations have reshaped policies, redefined gender, and silenced dissenting voices – all without democratic oversight.
- This report exposes how gender activism has been institutionalised through strategic lobbying, enormous EU grants, and direct involvement in policy formation. It outlines the mechanisms through which a small but well-connected group of NGOs, heavily subsidised by EU programmes, have dictated the EU's gender agenda.
- By funnelling public money into activist organisations and activist research, the EU has not only bypassed national governments but also imposed policies that have important consequences for families and women – policies that many citizens and member states strongly oppose.

### Massive EU funding for gender identity NGOs

- The EU has allocated at least €220 million<sup>1</sup> to projects involving NGOs promoting gender identity ideology over the past decade.
- At least €40 million has gone to projects involving the most radical transgender advocacy groups.<sup>2</sup>

- Major beneficiaries include:
  - ILGA-Europe (involved in projects of €16 million, and directly receiving €12.2 million)
  - ILGA-Worldwide (involved in projects of €64.95 million)
  - IGLYO (involved in projects of €6 million, and directly receiving €4.5 million) Transgender Europe (TGEU) (involved in projects of €4.6 million, and directly receiving €4 million)
  - EuroCentralAsianLesbian\*Community (directly receiving €6.2 million)
  - Organisation Intersex International Europe (involved in projects of €1.2 million, and directly receiving €1 million)
- At least €26 million has been used to fund activist-driven research promoting gender identity ideology.

### **Covert NGO influence on EU policy**

- Activists shape EU laws: NGOs have played a direct role in drafting EU gender policies, frequently operating without public transparency.
- Secretive lobbying tactics: ILGA urged politicians to keep their activities ‘out of the public eye whenever necessary’, with over 1,000 candidates signing a 2024 European Election pledge to support this strategy.
- Radical new LGBTIQ strategy: The EU has officially adopted a strategy calling for self-ID for children.

### **Policy capture through extensive EU institutional access**

- ILGA-Europe: 42 meetings with Commissioners, 14 public consultations, 16 roadmap contributions, 10 European Parliament meetings, and three expert groups.

- Transgender Europe: seven Commissioner meetings, eight public consultations.
- The influence of these organisations raises concerns about democratic accountability, as policies are increasingly dictated by unelected activists rather than open national debates.

### **Undermining national competencies**

- NGOs use EU funding to pressure national governments into adopting gender-identity laws, bypassing national sovereignty.
- The proposed EU Certificate of Parenthood could override national definitions of family law, forcing member states to recognise legal parenthood definitions imposed by Brussels.
- Education policies influenced without and often explicitly against parental consent:
- NGO campaigners push for gender transitions in children to be hidden from parents, and for parents to be forced into compliance through the courts if necessary.
- Reports indicate that in Portugal, schools can facilitate child social transitioning without parental knowledge, and parental opposition may lead to state intervention.
- Mandatory LGBTIQ-inclusive curricula are being implemented despite parental concerns.

### **Weaponisation of research funding**

- EU-funded research is being used as an advocacy tool to justify policy changes rather than for neutral academic inquiry.

- Horizon Europe grants fund ideological projects, including:
  - ‘Challenging the gender binary’ (€2.4 million)
  - ‘MEN4DEM’, a €3 million study treating traditional masculinity as a threat to democracy.

### **Policy consequences**

- Erosion of women’s rights: policies originally designed to protect women and girls have been reshaped to prioritise gender identity.
- Redefinition of legal terms: the shift from ‘violence against women’ to ‘gender-based violence’ dilutes protections specifically for biological females.
- Single-sex spaces at risk: the push for gender self-identification raises concerns over privacy, safety, and the integrity of women’s rights.

### **Call for transparency and oversight**

- The report demands democratic accountability and urges the EU to ensure policy decisions are subject to public debate rather than activist lobbying.
- Greater scrutiny of EU funding allocation is needed to prevent ideological capture.
- Safeguards must be implemented to respect national sovereignty, parental rights, and the safety of women and children.

## Introduction

The European Union's gender policy has been hijacked. What began as a fight for women's rights and equality has been transformed into an ideological project dictated by a handful of well-funded NGOs. These activist organisations, bankrolled by millions in EU funding, have embedded their radical vision into EU law, redefining gender, silencing dissent, and bypassing democratic debate. Under the guise of 'progress', the EU is using public money to enforce policies to which many citizens never agreed and about which they were never asked.

This report exposes how the EU funds its own policy capture, creating a closed system where activists influence lawmakers, lawmakers fund activists, and the public is left out of the conversation. Policies that undermine women's rights, erase biological sex, and strip parents of authority are being pushed through without transparency or accountability. As member states face financial pressure to comply, the EU is not just legislating – it is dictating culture. This is not democracy. It's ideological enforcement – and it's time to call it out.

The report is structured as follows. First, it provides a historical overview of how gender has been conceptualised and integrated into EU policy, from its origins in women's rights to its current expansive focus on LGBTIQ issues. Next, it examines the role of EU-funded NGOs in shaping a captured agenda, highlighting how these groups have used their financial resources and access to EU institutions to push for policy changes and bypass public debate. Finally, the report explores the consequences of these policies for families,

education, women's and gay rights – consequences that the icy atmosphere of policy capture and authoritarian tactics have made it increasingly difficult to talk about. But the time for silence has ended.

By shedding light on the connections between EU funding, NGO lobbying, and the expansion of the gender agenda, this report aims to spark a broader debate about the role of unelected actors in shaping EU policy and the need for greater transparency and accountability in the allocation and use of EU funds.

In this report, we compile information about the funding for NGOs and specific projects, using the available information from EU transparency systems.

The primary tool used is the European Commission's Financial Transparency System (FTS), supplemented where possible by the EU Funding and Tenders Portal. The EU Funding and Tenders Portal also allows for limited search, and it is often possible to match amounts noted by the FTS to specific projects listed in the Funding and Tenders Portal. However, it should be noted that sometimes the FTS is incomplete – and supplemented by the FTP.

The FTS allows users to search beneficiaries via filters such as 'Name of beneficiary', though results are often inconsistent due to variant spellings, acronyms, sub-entities, and multilingual naming conventions.

The FTS – as if designed to be as un-transparent as possible – presents a bewildering array of figures. The key terms for our study are:

- 'Commitment contracted amount' – the total budget of a project in which the organisation was involved.
- 'Commitment consumed amount' – the thus far consumed budget (spent) of a project in which the organisation was involved.
- 'Beneficiary's contracted amount (EUR)' – the estimated figure of the amount actually allocated to a specific organisation.

As we can see, this means that the FTS can display information linking an organisation to a project in which it may have received (beneficiary's contracted amount) only a proportion of the total project value (commitment contracted amount).

However, the lack of transparency of EU systems here presents a serious issue. In many cases there is no estimated breakdown of the actual beneficiaries of the projects in which an NGO was involved. Instead, the FTS informs us that 'The repartition for each beneficiary was not available in our central accounting system 'ABAC' at the time of publication, 100% of the amount is displayed with the coordinator and no amount allocated to the other beneficiaries. Please contact the responsible department as additional information might be available there.' In layman's terms, this means that the FTS has no information about who actually received the money for a project. The 'responsible department' is one of the huge number of alphabet agencies that make up the running of the EU, who often barely have a website let alone a searchable portal of projects.

This means, therefore, that the total 'Beneficiary's contracted amount' for each organisation is likely to be higher, perhaps much higher, than the FTS lists.

The lack of transparency about who received what from the EU is a huge and ongoing problem.

# **1 The discovery of gender**

When we read the term ‘gender’ in current policy documents and NGO activities, it’s often unclear what it actually means. Over decades, the term has transformed from a shorthand for women and women’s rights to a much broader and confusing concept of ‘gender identity’. This shift has been driven by academic theories, activist movements, and well-funded-NGOs – many of whose funds come from the EU itself. These groups have been successful in enshrining a nebulous concept of gender increasingly disconnected from sex into EU policy and funding programmes. It is a story of policy capture through which, ironically, the voices of biological women have been systematically sidelined.

## **1.1 From women’s rights to gender identity**

Movements for women’s rights began to emerge as early as the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Liberal figures like John Stuart Mill defended the rights of women, arguing their inferiority was not innate, but came from social arrangements like enforced domestic drudgery. Toward the middle of the twentieth century, the differences between men’s and women’s bodies were core to political demands aiming to further women’s equality, for instance, in movements for labour market and family policies around pregnancy, birth and childcare.<sup>3</sup>

The early feminist movement had seen sex as the basis of women's inequality and 'gender' was not used widely until the 1970s. The term emerged from psychologists working with intersex people as a way of separating biological sex from gender roles which they argued were learned in childhood.<sup>4</sup> By the 1970s and 1980s, the term had made its way into the feminist vocabulary as part of a criticism of masculine and feminine stereotypes and to distinguish between biological sex and the social expectations attached to it.<sup>5</sup> Still, gender acted as a shorthand for the specific difficulties that women experience in society. However, the gradual distancing of sex from gender in academic discussions made it possible to eventually downplay the importance of sex and biology.

One of the most significant ways in which gender entered policy at the European level was through 'gender mainstreaming'. Still functioning as a shorthand for women's equality, gender mainstreaming called to integrate strategies designed to achieve equality between men and women into the creation, implementation and monitoring of any policy or programme.<sup>6</sup> Gender mainstreaming was formally adopted as a legal obligation for all EU member states with the signing of the Amsterdam Treaty in 1997. While this approach was initially focused on addressing inequalities between men and women, it laid the groundwork for the eventual expansion of the gender agenda to include LGBTIQ issues and for these to be widely embedded in the policy and practice of the European Union and its member states.

## **1.2 From women's rights to gay rights**

Over time, the project of supporting women's rights became subject to significant mission creep. The rumblings of change appeared as early as the 1980s, as intersectional critiques emerged questioning how much traditional feminism had really reflected the 'lived experience' of the people for whom

it was supposed to advocate. Intersectionalism argues for ‘recognition of the ways that race, class, age, and – fundamentally – power intersect with issues of gender and sexuality.’<sup>7</sup> From this perspective, liberation could only be achieved if movements incorporated ‘the story of gay rights, recognising the combination of a variety of insurgent struggles across race, gender, class and sexuality’.<sup>8</sup>

This coincided with policy shifts at the European level. Already by the 1990s, there was a sense in EU policy circles that the gender equality issue had lost its ‘sex appeal’.<sup>9</sup> Officials looking for new challenges were sympathetic to lobby groups like ILGA (then the International Lesbian and Gay Association) and Stonewall who wanted to introduce policies combatting discrimination based on sexual orientation onto the EU agenda. In the 1990s and early 2000s, claims-makers’ encounters with ‘friendly elites’, linkage with existing issues, the rising resonance of human rights, and the widening of the social policy agenda in the EU contributed to the salience and institutionalisation of the rights of gays and lesbians.<sup>10</sup>

### **1.3 From gay rights to gender identity**

The expansion of the EU’s gender agenda to include LGBTIQ rights accelerated in the early 2000s, driven by a combination of academic theories, activist movements, and the strategic efforts of NGOs. The result is a dramatically transformed concept of gender, which no longer refers to the specific difficulties of women or even of gays and lesbians, but a more expansive agenda that includes a broad interpretation of gender increasingly divorced from biology. EU-funded NGOs have been key to driving this, as they used financial resources and strategic positioning to redefine gender in clandestine ways that align with their ideological priorities. How did this happen?

As we have seen, the concept of gender had been used by early feminists to argue that gender roles were socially constructed, not biologically determined. This meant that while biology can hold women back (for instance, when pregnancy, birth and childrearing affect work), there is no innate reason why women should not have the same rights and opportunities as men. It was this understanding of gender equality that was institutionalised into early international policymaking, including in the Amsterdam Treaty, and which was still dominant in the early 2000s. For instance, commentators across a 2003 volume published for and on behalf of the UN, titled *Mainstreaming gender, democratizing the State?* refer persistently to women and men as the most significant categories of people, making no explicit reference to gender identity.<sup>11</sup>

However, as LGBTIQ individuals were included into the gender equality and discrimination agenda, academic discussions began to distance gender from sex, even arguing that gender precedes sex as a cultural system of expectations arbitrarily imposed on people at birth.<sup>12</sup> These developments paved the way for prioritising ‘gender identity’ over sex-based protections.

The increased emphasis on gender is reflected in the changing makeup of gay-rights organisations in the 1990s and early 2000s. Organisations previously concerned with the rights of lesbians and gays began changing their names and adapting their missions to include trans, intersex and other groups. For example, prominent campaign group ILGA-Europe began its life in 1996 as the European branch of a gay rights group founded in 1978. By 2008, it had changed its name from the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) to ‘ILGA, the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association’.<sup>13</sup>

Similarly, an associated and highly influential campaign group, IGLYO, was founded in 1984 as the International Gay and Lesbian Youth Organisation.

By the mid-2000s, it had renamed itself the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer & Intersex Youth and Student Organisation.<sup>14</sup>

As issues concerning lesbians and gays also became part of the ‘normal policymaking process’, advocates for more expansive concepts of gender identity had a clearer entry point.<sup>15</sup> Transgender advocacy groups’ alignment with pre-existing LGB groups accelerated after the First European Transgender Council in Vienna in 2005 and allowed them to benefit from funding earmarked for these causes.<sup>16</sup> Intentionally avoiding public scrutiny, more contentious policies like gender self-identification (the ability to change one’s official gender without the need for surgery or other medical acts) started being bundled into policies with greater public support, like gay marriage.<sup>17</sup> In this way, the net of LGB issues was widened to include concerns for transgender people, but the populations of many countries remained largely unaware as policy advancements headlined by greater acceptance of gay and lesbian people took centre stage.

Through these activities, gay rights no longer meant lesbians and gay men, but also a range of other sexualities and identity categories. And the idea of gender began to expand so that it no longer simply referred to men and women, but to a range of new gender categories at variance with biological sex.

This expanded language was able to make considerable inroads into policymaking with little public debate because the agendas were still the same: promoting gender equality and gay rights. But what was meant by these terms had changed. For example, a handbook on ‘new dimensions of gender mainstreaming’ published in 2020 warns at the outset that:

Women do not represent a homogenous group, and hence, the question of intersectionality should be of prime importance while designing strategies for women empowerment. The inclusion of

*all genders including transgender* and other sexual minorities also should be taken care of to ensure sustainable development.<sup>18</sup>

*(emphasis added)*

Even the Wikipedia page for the topic ‘gender mainstreaming’ now refers to it as involving a concern for ‘all genders’ instead of its initial concern for ‘men and women’.<sup>19</sup>

These changes were driven in large part by LGBTIQ advocacy groups, which successfully leveraged a complex interplay of institutions and agendas at the European level including the European Commission, the Council of Europe (CoE), the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR).<sup>20</sup> For example, gender NGOs have used strategic litigation to reshape the European legal landscape in relation to gender. In landmark cases like *A.P., Garçon et Nicot v. France* (2017) and *X and Y v. Romania* (2021), ILGA-Europe and Transgender EU (TGEU) intervened to challenge states that required some form of medical transition as part of the process of legal gender change.<sup>21</sup> This strategic litigation has allowed these groups to bypass national legislatures, pushing their preferred gender policies from the top down.

What is more, through programmes like JUST EU, resources for this strategic litigation are financed by the EU itself. JUST EU works with NGOs to ‘enhance their knowledge of LGBTI fundamental rights’ as well as strengthening the ‘legal and non-legal skills’ needed by NGOs to ‘engage in strategic litigation’ at the national and EU level.<sup>22</sup> Both ILGA-Europe and TGEU have been involved in strategic litigation projects which have received millions in EU funds.<sup>23</sup>

Activist NGOs also took advantage of an expanded remit provided by the EU and CoE’s growing focus on social policy and social inclusion since the 1990s. They used these new channels to push for policies at the interna-

tional level, again bypassing national politics and imposing their desired policies from the top down.<sup>24</sup> For example, in 2008, ILGA-Europe and Transgender Europe (TGEU) received funding from the European Commission to conduct research on the situation of trans people in the EU, which they used as an advocacy tool,<sup>25</sup> kicking off what would become a powerful lobbying approach where the EU funds advocacy research that is then used to lobby itself for an expanded trans policy agenda.<sup>26</sup>

After 2008, TGEU expanded its role as an advocacy NGO, participating in expert meetings, CoE consultations, and OSCE working groups on gender rights.<sup>27</sup> Officials and lobbyists began to develop a ‘back and forth’ relationship, where NGOs exerted a powerful influence over key issue papers at the European level, which in turn reinforced the legitimacy of their mission.<sup>28</sup> European Parliament reports, which became pivotal in placing LGBTIQ issues on the European agenda, were drafted by activists working as assistants within parliamentary groups.<sup>29</sup> These same activists engaged in lobby work that resulted in, for instance, Article 13 of the EC Treaty (TEC), which enlarged the EU’s competence to take action on discrimination grounds, to which they successfully added discrimination based on sexual orientation.<sup>30</sup> It is successes like these that provided clearer entry points for gender identity within the ‘normal policymaking process’ at the supranational level. For instance, as gender identity gradually grew more prominent in organisations previously devoted to gay rights, ‘gender identity’ became affixed to sexual orientation so that ‘SOGI’ (sexual orientation and gender identity) became common parlance, echoed by supportive government representatives who ‘follow this language’.<sup>31</sup>

**Table 1. Involvement of LGBTIQ groups in the EU policymaking process<sup>32</sup>**

Organisation	Commissioner meetings <sup>33</sup>	Public consultations <sup>34</sup>	Roadmaps <sup>35</sup>	Expert Groups <sup>36</sup>	Meetings in EP <sup>37</sup>
ILGA <sup>38</sup>	42	14	16	3	10
IGLYO <sup>39</sup>	2	2	0	2	2
TGEU <sup>40</sup>	7	8	8	0	7
EL*C <sup>41</sup>	1	2	2	0	5
OII Europe <sup>42</sup>	2	6	2	0	8

LGBTIQ groups have moved beyond mere lobbying and have become active and integral to shaping EU policy around gender identity. For instance, the extensive involvement of ILGA in expert groups allows it to provide crucial input on the drafting and implementation of EU laws. Expert groups consist of a range of actors – including NGOs, activists, academics, and national experts – giving them a powerful influence over the direction of policies. Through this close engagement with Commission officials who write initial drafts of legislative texts, they are not only able to advocate for their agendas, but they are also positioned at the very heart of the process.

In these ways, activists successfully piggybacked LGBTIQ claims onto the women’s rights agenda, framing LGBTIQ rights as an extension of women’s demands for bodily autonomy and against rigid sex roles.<sup>43</sup> However, these initial moves were largely framed around gay rights; piggybacking

again on the salience of gay rights, the gender identity agenda positioned itself as an obvious and necessary extension thereof. Largely shielded from public scrutiny, gender identity activists embedded their demands into a range of policies at the European level, and most significantly, they were able to elevate the concept of gender and transform it into a broader framework that subsumes multiple gender identities.

## **2 A story of mission creep and policy capture**

By framing transgender issues within the context of human rights and equality, trans advocacy groups effectively lobbied for the inclusion of gender identity into EU anti-discrimination legislation. They strategically framed their demands in terms of EU foundational principles, allowing the integration of LGBTIQ concerns into mainstream policy frameworks.<sup>44</sup> One key result of these efforts is the integration of gender identity into gender equality strategies.

### **2.1 EU Gender Equality Strategy (2020–2025)**

The most recent of these, the EU's Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025 'pursues a dual approach of gender mainstreaming combined with targeted actions' with 'intersectionality' as its 'horizontal principle' for implementation.<sup>45</sup> While materials associated with the strategy talk of 'women and men' and 'girls and boys', it adds ambiguously 'in all their diversity'. It is in the fine print that we learn that gender no longer refers even implicitly to sex, but rather to 'the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for women and men'. The European Commission even commits to combatting existing gender norms, with battling gender stereotypes an explicit thread of the Strategy and with a corresponding campaign launched in 2023.<sup>46</sup>

Binary gender gave way to an expansive spectrum, reinforced through dedicated funding mechanisms and incorporation in European institutions that seek to percolate these new ideas into member states through active campaigns to change the culture. Key ‘takeaways’ of advocacy groups participating in Strategy-related workshops highlight this agenda: existing civil-society programmes where gender should be understood in its ‘broadest sense’ are being promised a stronger funding push.<sup>47</sup>

Policies with wide-ranging repercussions for women, children and families were made opaque through the exploitation of rights frameworks so that opposition became tantamount to a denial of rights, with potential repercussions for member states who failed to follow through. Indeed, gender advocacy groups use the Gender Equality Strategy to attack member states for policies that seem to reflect too much a gender binary.<sup>48</sup>

As we will see in later sections, this strategy has had far-reaching consequences for a variety of institutions and groups, many of which only became clear after recognition of trans identities had already been institutionalised and made its way into everyday life.

## **2.2 LGBTIQ Equality Strategy (2020–2025)**

Another key case study in policy capture, the Union of Equality: LGBTIQ Equality Strategy (2020–2025) is heavily structured around the concept of gender as a loose array of identities. The LGBTIQ Strategy is heavily influenced by intersectionality theory emerging out of the academic debates discussed above and the strategic lobbying of LGBTIQ advocacy groups who have embedded its outlook.<sup>49</sup> While the document takes ‘intersectionality as a cross-cutting principle’ defined as ‘sexual orientation, gender identity/expression and/or sex characteristics’ alongside ‘other personal characteristics or identities, such as sex, racial/ethnic origin, religion/belief,

disability and age’, the concept of gender is paramount.<sup>50</sup> For instance, same-sex attraction becomes those ‘who are attracted to others of their own *gender* (lesbian, gay) or any *gender* (bisexual)’ (emphasis added).<sup>51</sup> It shows a commitment to institutionalising this understanding further into the Union’s broader equality objectives, but more than this, it demonstrates growing suspicion toward the use of the word ‘sex’, for instance in the anti-discrimination policies of member states.<sup>52</sup>

The strategy has four pillars: Tackling discrimination against LGBTIQ people; Ensuring LGBTIQ people’s safety; Building LGBTIQ inclusive societies; and Leading the call for LGBTIQ equality around the world.<sup>53</sup>

Through the demand for LGBTIQ mainstreaming, or ensuring that ‘discrimination affecting LGBTIQ people as well as the promotion of equality is integrated into all EU policies, legislation and funding programmes, both internal and external’,<sup>54</sup> the LGBTIQ Strategy seeks to cascade its understanding of gender as a social construct with only a loose relation to biological categories not only to EU member states, but across the world through the EU’s global commitments.

This is significant as it heavily pressures member states not only to step up against discrimination, which would seem uncontroversial, but to adopt the ideological framework that affirms a broad interpretation of gender and downplays the importance of sex. Crucially, the strategy affirms that ‘The Commission will foster best-practice exchanges between member states on how to put in place accessible legal gender recognition legislation and procedures based on the principle of self-determination and without age restrictions.’<sup>55</sup> To be clear, the LGBTIQ Strategy enshrines one of the most radical demands of transgender activists: the principle of self-ID *at any age*.

The LGBTIQ Strategy also directs attention at speech both online and offline, promising to include LGBTIQ-directed hate speech and hate

crime in existing initiatives focused on racism and xenophobia.<sup>56</sup> However, critics have argued that the concept of hate speech is often ill-defined and has a tendency to expand, endangering the right to offend and criminalising dissent.<sup>57</sup> Going further, the LGBTIQ Strategy states that EU funds may be suspended or withdrawn from member states that do not contribute to the furthering of its objectives. This can hold member states to ransom, such as when a case was brought against Hungary for objecting to LGBTIQ education being taught to children, although Hungary argued that education came under member-state jurisdiction.<sup>58</sup>

While the strategy aims to promote equality and non-discrimination, a key area of discord is the bypassing of democratic debate and the disregarding of national cultural and legal traditions, encroaching on areas that are meant to fall under member-state jurisdiction. The downward cascade of gender identity into diverse areas, from education to women's rights, has led to significant pushback from women's groups as well as member states. By embedding gender identity into the EU's legal and funding structures, profound shifts have been made without broader public consultation and with an air of disregard for the principle of subsidiarity and national sovereignty.

### **2.3 Whither women? Whither democracy?**

The EU's discovery of gender is a story of extensive mission creep. The result is overarching and wide-ranging policy strategies that reflect the priorities of disconnected academics and narrow interest groups rather than the will of the people who are increasingly realising that 'transgenderism is not just another live-and-let-live 'type of gay''.<sup>59</sup> Ironically, given how this agenda ultimately began with a concern for women's sex-based rights, other views of gender, and especially those of gender-critical feminists, have been systematically sidelined and maligned as 'harassment or violence'.<sup>60</sup>

New drafts of these policies are currently being prepared and it is highly likely that they will only reflect the further entrenchment of gender mission creep, with little input from dissenting voices nor concern for the protestations of member states.

### 3 Funding a captured policy agenda

Policy capture is tightened by the EU's generous funding of NGOs that align with its priorities. EU funding allows these organisations to conduct research, organise campaigns, and in turn, lobby EU institutions for their desired policies, bypassing national debates to impose these policies from the top down. Funding takes the form not only of project-based funding, but also operational funding for gender-based lobby groups, providing them with financial stability and allowing them to act as permanent policy influencers at the EU level.

Over the past 10 years, the EU has committed at least €220 million in funding to projects involving NGOs that adopt and spread gender identity ideology.<sup>61</sup> Of this, at least €40 million is allocated to projects involving a network of NGOs who push the most radical gender identity and transgender ideology.<sup>62</sup> ILGA-Worldwide, which pushes gender identity ideology globally, is involved in projects totalling €64.95 million.<sup>63</sup>

Top beneficiaries of EU funding over the past decade includes organisations explicitly devoted to the most radical understanding of sex and gender:<sup>64</sup>

- ILGA-Europe was involved in projects totalling €16 million, and directly received €12.2 million
- IGLYO was involved in projects totalling €6 million, and directly received €4.5 million

- TGEU was involved in projects totalling €4.6 million, and directly received €4 million
- Eurocentralasian Lesbian\* Community (EL\*C) received €6.2 million
- Organisation Intersex International (OII) Europe was involved in projects totalling €1.2 million and directly received €1 million

### **3.1 Corruption of academic research**

This funding does not include the huge number of projects to which the EU has committed funds. For instance, through Horizon, at least €26 million euros (a highly conservative figure) has been committed to projects that align with gender identity ideology over the past decade. A selection of these projects illustrates the extent to which the EU and NGOs subtly work together to infuse the gender agenda with gender identity, and to spread this ideology across borders:

#### **G-VERSITY - Achieving Gender Diversity<sup>65</sup>**

- EU Funding: €4,106,266.48 (100% EU funded)
- Coordinated by the University of Bern, this project endorses gender ideology by focusing on sexual and gender minority groups (SGMs), encouraging employers to increase their representation in the workplace.

#### **GENDERACTIONplus - Gender Equality Network to Develop ERA Communities to Coordinate Inclusive and sustainable policy implementation<sup>66</sup>**

- EU Funding: €2,999,814 (98.67% EU-funded)
- This project aims to coordinate gender equality and inclusiveness objectives in the European Research Area, but in doing so, it uses the language and concepts of gender ideology, aiming to reach countries and

regions with lower participation in these initiatives – thus spreading the influence of gender ideology.

### **BeyondGenderBinary<sup>67</sup>**

- EU Funding: €2,446,001 (100% EU funded)
- This project aims to challenge the traditional binary understanding of gender by collecting data on psychological components of gender (such as psychological characteristics, gender identity, attitudes towards the sexed body, and sexuality). It explicitly seeks to explore non-binary gender and to undermine the categorisation of human beings into men and women.

### **RESIST - Fostering Queer Feminist Intersectional Resistances<sup>68</sup>**

- EU Funding: €2,379,425.75 (100% EU funded)
- Among other objectives supportive of gender identity ideology, this project explicitly maps movements and policies contesting the gender identity agenda, which it sees as ‘anti-gender’ politics.

### **Trans-End<sup>69</sup>**

- EU Funding: €215,285.40 (100% EU-funded)
- This project supports transgender ideology by advocating for the inclusion of transgender and intersex individuals in gender-based violence protections, accepting and promoting notions that male or female are too-exclusive categories that ignore other gender identities.

These projects exemplify a pattern where the EU funds research that is then used by advocacy groups to lobby the EU itself for an expanded pro-transgender policy agenda. This creates a self-referential loop where research outcomes, shaped by the priorities of these organisations, are used to justify further policy changes and funding. Under the guise of

academic inquiry, these projects promote ideological activism, transforming researchers into advocates for gender self-identification, transgenderism, and intersectional politics.

### **3.2 Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) Programme**

The commitment to funding an agenda aimed at radically reshaping the public's ideas of gender and sex has only accelerated toward the present. For example, the CERV Programme is the largest-ever EU fund dedicated to promoting democracy, rights and so-called European values. It was this commitment to 'European values' that offered a foot in the door for the LGBTIQ movement, and it continues to oversee the release of masses of funding promoting gender identity ideology. Running from 2021–2027, CERV boasts a €1.55 billion budget,<sup>70</sup> significantly surpassing the respective €187.7 million and €439.5 million budgets of its predecessors, The Europe for Citizens programme and the Rights, Equality, and Citizenship programme.<sup>71</sup>

CERV has four pillars:

- 1 Equality, Rights and Gender Equality – promoting rights, non-discrimination, equality (including gender equality), and advancing gender and non-discrimination mainstreaming
- 2 Citizens' engagement and participation – promoting citizens engagement and participation in the democratic life of the Union, exchanges between citizens of different Member States, and raising awareness of the common European history
- 3 Daphne – fight violence, including gender-based violence and violence against children
- 4 Union values – protect and promote Union values<sup>72</sup>

Gender ideology is deeply embedded across all four of these strands – gender, as we have seen, being redefined to refer to in its 'broadest sense'.

It also embeds through the programme's tightened relationship with NGOs, with support for civil-society organisations a key feature of the programme, which are supposed to promote Union values, filtering them back to member states. Under the banner of promoting human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, the EU uses financial strangleholds to enforce conformity to a set of narrowly conceived ideologies. Through funding mechanisms like CERV, the Commission ensures that those governments that resist face financial penalties and/or political pressure.<sup>73</sup>

CERV is a powerful tool for enforcing ideological conformity across the EU. It finances organisations that advance EU-defined 'European values' that are now expanded to include gender identity politics, bypassing national democratic debates in the process. Its pronounced focus on funding NGOs ensures that the voices guiding policy align with the European Commission's ideological agenda, itself long captured by these groups, creating a self-referential feedback loop. Dissenting voices, such as those of gender-critical feminists, receive no comparable funding, effectively silencing opposition and preventing genuine democratic pluralism.

The impact of a much-expanded gender agenda is clear when looking at the list of the top-funded NGOs between 2021 and 2023.<sup>74</sup> According to the EU Financial Transparency System, over 800 NGOs received funding through CERV in this period.<sup>75</sup> Topping the list of those receiving the most funds we find, yet again, organisations advocating some of the most radical forms of gender identity ideology:

- The EuroCentralAsian Lesbian\* Community (ELC) (ranked first at €6.22 million)
- ILGA-Europe (ranked sixth at €4 million)
- IGLYO (ranked eighteenth at €2.36 million)

Each of these organisations is explicitly devoted to an expanded version of gender equality (indeed the asterisk after Lesbian in the ELC name indicates its interpretation of ‘lesbian’ to include trans and other identities). This list does not include other NGOs who also adopt this ideology, but for whom it is not necessarily a core part of their mission. Moreover, it includes groups that have undertaken some of the most controversial activities – all with EU funds that they continue to receive in large quantities. Looking at two key examples makes this particularly clear.

### **3.3 IGLYO**

Perhaps the most controversial organisation on the list of well-funded gender NGOs is the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex (LGBTIQ) Youth & Student Organisation (IGLYO), a network of over 125 lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex youth and student organisations in 40 countries across Europe.<sup>76</sup> It came to widespread public attention when its 2019 report revealed the extent of clandestine activities promoted by trans activists – especially those aimed at children and young people.<sup>77</sup> The report, titled ‘Only Adults? Good Practices in Legal Gender Recognition for Youth’ sees gender self-identification or ‘allowing trans people to have their gender identity legally recognised through self-determination rather than medical diagnosis or court order’ as a key goal, even and especially for children and young people.

To this end, it summarises successful tactics used by trans organisations across Europe. It directs activists to ‘fly under the radar’ by avoiding public scrutiny and media attention, seek out sympathetic policymakers directly, get ahead of the legislative agenda and even draft legislation before opposition can form, and to bundle desired policies in with more publicly

acceptable ones like gay marriage.<sup>78</sup> For instance, the authors approvingly describe how Irish legislation:

*[W]ent under the radar [...] because marriage equality was gaining the most focus. In a way, this was helpful according to the activists, because it meant that they were able to focus on persuading politicians that the change was necessary. This is a common technique that we have seen in many of the successful campaigns, and it was very effective in Ireland.*<sup>79</sup>

Publics are described in this report as hopelessly ill-informed and change best affected through direct targeting of not only policymakers but also education systems. It advocates developing sex and relationships education and targeting schools directly by exploiting opportunities where teachers felt awkward delivering neglected but required curriculum.<sup>80</sup>

With the help of EU funds, IGLYO has only expanded its network and activities further since that report. It continues to develop and promote educational materials and, in 2022, released the second edition of its LGBTIQ Inclusive Education Report which calls for mandatory LGBTIQ-inclusive curricula and teacher training.<sup>81</sup> It also continues to see parental consent for transitioning as a restrictive requirement, at least for those aged 16–18, and advocates the involvement of outside parties where parents of younger children do not consent.<sup>82</sup> IGLYO also conducts and oversees advocacy research and monitoring which is then used to pressure supranational powers to push national governments to fall in line.

Activities of groups like IGLYO and its extensive network explain how very few seemed aware of trans issues before suddenly governments, organisations and institutions started introducing far-reaching linguistic and even punitive measures to enforce ideological adherence. These groups intentionally bypassed national legislatures and public debate, seeking to change

education, institutions, and the very words that people use to describe their world – all coordinated with EU funds.

### 3.4 ILGA

Another of the top-funded organisations, ILGA-Europe and ILGA World, its global incarnation, has used millions in EU funds to lobby for the inclusion of gender identity in EU legislation. It brings together over 700 organisations globally<sup>83</sup> and is officially partnered with the EU.<sup>84</sup> Since its founding in 1996, it's grown to become the key organisation driving the EU's LGBTIQ agenda.<sup>85</sup> It has been receiving core funding from the EU since 2001.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, 'ILGA-Europe could not have been built up as a professional lobby organization without Commission support'.<sup>87</sup> This funding has allowed it to embed in policymaking activities, positioning itself as a leading voice on LGBTIQ issues within the EU, effectively monopolising debate and sidelining alternative perspectives.

Like IGLYO, ILGA-Europe sought to get ahead of the policy agenda at the European level and entirely bypass debates at the national level, making key early inroads by getting the Council of the EU to adopt toolkits and policy instruments geared towards LGBTIQ rights as early as 2010.<sup>88</sup> The LGBTIQ Equality Strategy (2020–2025) is the culmination of years of lobbying on the part of groups like ILGA-Europe. The group's influence is evident across documents associated with the Strategy, which are littered with reference to its advocacy research and which mirrors many of the organisation's policy priorities.<sup>89</sup> For example, the LGBTIQ Strategy's promises to take steps toward extending the list of 'EU crimes' to cover 'hate crime' and 'hate speech' targeted at LGBTIQ people<sup>90</sup> reflect steps for which ILGA-Europe had extensively lobbied and applauded.<sup>91</sup>

ILGA-Europe works closely with other NGOs like TGEU, which as we have seen above, also receives substantial funding. Together, these groups have used EU resources to push for policies that allow individuals to change their gender based on ‘self-determination’ without significant impediment, which is reflected in the LGBTIQ Strategy’s call for member states to develop easier legal pathways toward changing gender. Perhaps more shockingly, like IGLYO, ILGA continues to express a desire to shield its activities from public scrutiny, even asking candidates in the 2024 European Elections to sign a pledge promising to keep their work ‘out of the public eye whenever necessary’. Over a thousand potential candidates dutifully signed.<sup>92</sup>

### **3.5 The weaponisation of civil society**

Some groups funded by CERV do a great deal of important work. ILGA and IGLYO are just two examples of LGBTIQ groups that have made transgender ideology central to their remit, but even they engage in important activities that improve the lives of many. However, while combatting discrimination against minority groups is important, the demands of these groups demonstrate considerable mission creep and encompass an injunction to accept a particular and controversial worldview. It’s a worldview that can have significant impacts in practice and which at the very least warrant open public discussion and debate. For instance, gender self-ID has been raised by numerous LGB and women’s groups as encroaching on privacy, and the rights of women and same-sex attracted people. Biology, the thing that had once been recognised as lying at the heart of women’s equality, is rendered meaningless as is the concept of ‘same sex’ attraction. By the same token, ‘hate speech’ has, like gender, experienced significant expansion so that it has quickly become a way of policing public and online debates in favour of LGBTIQ-preferred interpretations and language.

EU funding has propelled this extreme view of gender, has crowded out the views of other groups and brought in an iron fist that destroys dissent. The attempt to bypass democratic debate at the national level and impose a particular culture and worldview from the top down has inspired significant criticism in countries where these values are at great variance from traditional cultures. This convinces no one and only fuels further backlash. But this backlash is not interpreted as a need to open democratic debate or take into account different perspectives, but rather as a threat to human rights and further evidence for the importance of these organisations' central mission. Opposition only further empowers their resolve and that of European policymakers to close debate and impose their agenda.

The level of influence wielded by NGOs like these to shape the policy agenda across so many different countries with so many different traditions and cultures raises serious questions about the democratic legitimacy of EU policymaking. By relying on NGOs to shape its gender agenda, the EU has effectively sidelined national governments and marginalised alternative perspectives. The result is a policy framework that prioritises the demands of activists over the needs and values of ordinary citizens. It is a deliberate attempt to weaponise civil society to punish member states who do not follow suit by funnelling millions into NGO budgets that align with its ideological priorities. These groups then lobby the EU for the need for their own continued existence in a never-ending, self-referential feedback loop.

## 4 Policy capture in action

The expansion of the concept of gender has had profound implications for EU policy and, in turn, the policies of member states in areas as diverse as the family and family law, education, healthcare, women's and gay and lesbian rights. As we have seen, these changes have been pursued by well-funded NGOs, often in clandestine ways, with their effects on other groups dismissed as illusions trumped up by a hate-filled agenda. This is not the case, and only some of the effects bear this out.

### 4.1 The family and family policy

The rising concern for gender identity has accelerated existing trends within the EU where the family is considered a self-evidently backward and regressive institution, and concern for the family as merely a cover for discrimination. As we described in our earlier report, *Families in Fragments*, the EU does not have a family policy so much as it has an anti-family policy: an approach that sees the family as a target for interventions aimed at solving social problems and rooting out unwanted values, beliefs and behaviours, and replacing them with new ones.<sup>93</sup> A key target of gender-mainstreaming is frequently families, seen as places where the haplessness of parents leads to the perpetuation of harmful gender stereotypes. As one text on gender mainstreaming summarises:

Knowingly or unknowingly, parents condition their daughters from early childhood onwards to suffer in silence and adjust with all the injustices and atrocities directed at them and mould them to become good wives and good mothers.<sup>94</sup>

Member states who still have family policies – as opposed to, for example, gender equality strategies – are seen as merely covering up for anti-woman and anti-LGBTIQ agendas.<sup>95</sup> On the other hand, policy documents and parliamentary discussions wax lyrical about ‘our wonderful rainbow families’<sup>96</sup> and worry about the plight of ‘same gender’ partnerships.<sup>97</sup> Contrast this with the language used for the traditional family, where ‘the family’ is singled out in scare quotes, and policy and social science scholars muse about whether the family is a passé or even ‘zombie’ category.<sup>98</sup>

#### **4.2 Parental autonomy and parent-child relationships**

In this context, the family has come to be viewed as increasingly problematic and a barrier to the full realisation of gender identity in policy and practice. Organisations like IGLYO turn a disdainful eye toward parents that do not wholeheartedly embrace their children’s gender transitions, even advising that ‘states should take action against parents who are obstructing the free development of a young trans person’s identity in refusing to give parental authorization when required’.<sup>99</sup> Following this lead, Scotland has made proposals to ban ‘conversion therapy’ that would see parents who refuse to allow their children to change gender face up to seven years in prison.<sup>100</sup> While stopping short of imposing legally binding prohibitions on member states, the LGBTIQ Equality Strategy makes similar statements regarding moves toward conversion therapy bans, through which suggestions that one’s teenage daughter ‘might want a surgeon to remove her breasts’ for any other

reason than a scientifically unproven notion of ‘being in the wrong body’ risk being criminalised.<sup>101</sup>

To say that the gender identity movement undermines parental autonomy, then, would be an understatement.

Parents who act in any other way except complete acceptance of their child’s transgender identity are seen as the enemy across gender identity discourses. They are warned that their children will commit suicide if they do not affirm their new identity.<sup>102</sup> Parents who demonstrate concern over their children’s transition, particularly in relation to their children’s other mental-health difficulties and the irreversible nature of any bodily changes, are vilified. Courts rule against them. In Switzerland, parents whose daughter began identifying as trans at 13 but who refused to support medical transition were separated from her and ordered to hand over her identity documents so that her name and gender could be legally changed.<sup>103</sup>

Like the family more generally, parental concerns about children’s transitions are communicated with scepticism, using scare quotes and other distancing and dismissive language. Trans activists call ‘concerned parents’ a ‘trope’.<sup>104</sup> One of the most prominent trans activists in Sweden, Lukas Romson, differentiates between ‘real parents’ who affirm their children’s transition and ‘so-called concerned parents’ who do not.<sup>105</sup> Another critic of parental-rights movements that object to teaching sexuality and gender identity in schools dismissively states that it comes ‘under the auspices’ of protecting children and ‘protecting parents’ rights to raise children as they see fit’.<sup>106</sup>

This has become particularly pronounced in relation to education. Objections to teaching gender identity in school are dismissed as driven by bigotry, the far-right, conspiracy theorists and religious fanatics.<sup>107</sup> Ironically,

numerous parents and parent groups identify as left-wing.<sup>108</sup> Parents have also objected to not being informed when their children have socially transitioned. In Portugal, children and young people are allowed to socially transition at school without informing parents, and parents who refuse to support transition risk being reported to the Child Protection Commission and even having their children removed.<sup>109</sup>

ILGA-Europe and TGEU support concealment of children's shifting gender identities from parents, arguing: 'Trans children and young people should be supported in choosing for themselves when and how to share information about themselves with their parents or guardians.'<sup>110</sup> They also reject recommendations that trans-identifying youth be referred for 'clinical help and guidance' as 'dehumanising and pathologising.' Instead, ILGA-Europe and TGEU say: 'Parents and guardians should listen to trans children and young people and respect their identity and wishes. Not rush them off to a doctor's office.'<sup>111</sup>

Many parental concerns about gender identity education in schools stem from the fact that schools themselves can be the source of their children's seeming abrupt decision to transition, along with social media and online videos promoting transition as a solution to personal issues. As *The New York Times* reported:

Many parents of kids who consider themselves trans say their children were introduced to transgender influencers on YouTube or TikTok, a phenomenon intensified for some by the isolation and online cocoon of Covid. Others say their kids learned these ideas in the classroom, as early as elementary school, often in child-friendly ways through curriculums supplied by trans rights organizations, with concepts like the gender unicorn or the Gingerbread person.<sup>112</sup>

These latter phenomena refer to globally adopted educational materials created by the trans youth activist organisation Trans Student Educational Resources (TSER), which portray a cartoon unicorn overlaid with a variety of colourful sexualities and gender identities.<sup>113</sup> The Gender Unicorn is an update of a similar graphic called the ‘Genderbread Person’, which changes the latter’s earlier wording of ‘biological sex’ to ‘sex assigned at birth’.<sup>114</sup>

Claims about any element of social contagion involved in the adoption of transgender identities are dismissed by ILGA-Europe and TGEU, who released an EU-funded document claiming that the increase in people identifying as trans is simply the result of greater openness and acceptance in society.<sup>115</sup> While they refer to ‘sociocultural factors’ as well as ‘biological dispositions and experience’, they state that being ‘trans is something that no one can be forced into, including children’, and ‘[p]eople know who they are’.<sup>116</sup> The implication, while confused, is a claim that gender identity is somehow intrinsic, which has doubtful scientific legitimacy.<sup>117</sup> But this has no impact on the decisiveness with which parents have been pursued as impediments to realising this form of ‘gender equality’.

These developments have profound implications. Parental authority is increasingly seen as a problematic barrier to be overridden by activist interventions backed by supranational powers. As schools are seen as important purveyors of new values, the role of the family as a foundational site of primary socialisation is steadily eroded and made into a problem. What emerges is an atmosphere in which parents feel kept out of key decisions about their children’s futures, and where any hesitation risks both social and institutional backlash. Dialogue, nuance and long-term considerations are all sacrificed to a single-minded approach to gender identity.

### **4.3 Sovereignty and subsidiarity: the Parenthood Certificate**

The threat to autonomy goes beyond that of parents. The expansion of gender has also had significant implications for family law. One key barrier to imposing LGBTIQ agendas, especially where the family is concerned, is that the EU does not have competence in dictating the family laws of member states. Each state is entitled to decide for itself how it will recognise and support families. But the EU, led by a coalition of gender activists, has proven creative in evading this principle and attempting to overrule ongoing debates within member states. A proposed EU Certificate of Parenthood is a key example in this respect.

A European Certificate of Parenthood would require member states to acknowledge the rights of same-sex parents that have been granted in another EU country – even if those rights conflict with national laws. The certificate would be obtainable in the country where initial family links were established, and each member state would be obliged to accept it. This policy, heavily influenced by EU-funded NGOs like ILGA-Europe and NELFA (Network of European LGBTIQ\* Families Associations),<sup>118</sup> represents a significant ‘workaround’ for those member states that do not recognise LGBTIQ identities in family law. It is a policy that ILGA-Europe has been lobbying for since the early 2000s.<sup>119</sup>

In December 2022, Didier Reynders, the Commissioner for Justice, claimed that the move would not seek to interfere with national law and what each country recognises as a family.<sup>120</sup> Yet it is difficult to see how it would not effectively do so in practice, since it would require the legal recognition of parents and parenthood that may not reflect what a member state has decided constitutes a family. While it would require unanimous agreement from all member states, Reynders added ominously that if the proposal was vetoed,

the Commission would seek to ‘strengthen cooperation’ between member states.<sup>121</sup>

This example highlights the way that policy capture can lead to pushes for top-down impositions that are in practice little impeded by formal declarations of member state autonomy. Because so many aspects of law and policy involve complex and crisscrossing frameworks, any number of technical mechanisms at the EU’s disposal can be used to impose a value change on its members. In this case it is freedom of movement that opens the door to bypassing national debates about family life, pressuring nations to redefine implicitly what they recognise as a family. There are still other mechanisms being exploited here – for instance in terms of global standards for recognising and recording vital events. In a 2013 UNICEF report, *A Passport to Protection*, referenced in documents related to the Certificate’s proposal, a ‘vital event’ is subtly defined to include recognition of parenthood.<sup>122</sup> Countries wishing to fall in line with global agendas regarding the efficient and thorough recording of statistics may find themselves vulnerable to missing what is a very basic technical benchmark if they question these subtle redefinitions.

In these ways, apparently neutral administrative mechanisms can be leveraged to drive ideological change under the guise of legal and bureaucratic harmonisation. By embedding contested definitions within technical frameworks, institutions can create de facto obligations that sidestep democratic debate, leaving member states with little choice but to comply or risk isolation from broader policy and regulatory frameworks.

#### **4.4 Education**

Because socialisation in the family is so frequently seen as the cause of problems, education has increasingly become central to the gender identity

agenda. The goal of developing a European Economic Area (EEA) by 2025, though not yet fully realised, places gender at the core of its mission. It proposes that education and training within the EEA promote greater ‘gender sensitivity’, challenge gender stereotypes, and work towards a ‘proper gender balance in leadership positions’.<sup>123</sup> The EU’s Strategic Framework for Education and training (ET 2020) also positions schools as key sites for shaping social values and promoting its particular vision of equality. To this end, actions taken by many countries as early as preschool to ‘dismantle gender stereotyping’ have been praised and further steps toward ‘a change of mindsets’ starting ‘early in the socialisation process’ suggested.<sup>124</sup>

Part of the concern for gender stereotypes is that getting more women into the workplace is seen as a key driver of economic growth. Particularly where supports for families have seen significant rollback, both parents being in work is seen by the EU as a prerequisite for having children.<sup>125</sup> Women who may wish to care for their children directly, or for whom other arrangements are simply infeasible, are thus a problem for policymakers and clear victims of ‘gender stereotyping’.

However, as we have seen, what is actually meant by gender is more expansive than just men and women. The move to ‘dismantle gender stereotypes’ via education represents a convergence of interests on the part of policymakers and gender identity advocacy groups. Addressing gender stereotypes is key part of both the Gender Equality Strategy and the LGBTIQ Equality Strategy, as is gender identity education in general. In addition, EU funded NGOs have pushed for the inclusion of gender identity and LGBTIQ issues in school curricula; ILGA-Europe even creates a ‘Rainbow Map’ showing to what degree each country lives up to its ideals – one criterion of which is the teaching of gender identity in sex education.

According to their map, 75% of EU member states' education systems have some form of gender identity education.<sup>126</sup>

Perhaps the most striking example of educational policy capture is Portugal. Genspect reports that in Portuguese public schools, children and adolescents who question their gender are allowed to socially transition without requiring parental consent.<sup>127</sup> These policies were introduced under the previous left-wing government led by António Costa, who now serves as President of the European Council. The current Centre-Right coalition (PSD-CDS) is working to repeal these guidelines, responding to public opposition reflected in a petition signed by over 55,000 people. The guidelines are outlined in *The Right to Be in Schools*, a manual developed under João Costa – formerly Minister of Education and now President of the European Agency for Special Needs Education and Inclusive Education – in collaboration with the Commission for Gender Equality (CIG).<sup>128</sup> Seven LGBT organisations, along with two gender identity 'specialists', contributed to the document. The manual, which asserts that sex is non-binary and includes numerous gender identities, is implemented across all levels of education, from primary to secondary school. As described above, any parent who disagrees with these insidious policies, risks being reported to the Child Protection Commission.

The relentless push to embed gender identity ideology into education systems represents a profound overreach, again evading parental autonomy as well as nation states' own ongoing democratic debates. By targeting children as young as preschool and dismissing dissenting parents as obstacles to progress, these policies not only undermine biological realities but also erode the very foundations of the family and trust in key institutions like education.

## **5 The attack on women's rights in the name of gender identity**

The effect of broadening the concept of gender identity far beyond its original remit has had perhaps the most impact on women's rights. This is perhaps most expected, even if it is the most ironic outcome of a movement that began with a recognition of women's sex-based rights.

### **5.1 Violence against women creeps to 'gender-based violence'**

One area in which mission creep has become most palpable is violence against women, which through its recasting as 'gender-based violence' has significantly shifted focus from women's sex-based protections to a much more expansive approach to violence affecting 'all genders'.<sup>129</sup>

As key feminist critics have pointed out:

In other words, gender-based violence can be committed by anyone against anyone, and unless specified, says nothing about who the victim is. In short, it has nothing to do with women (though that doesn't stop legislators using it to brag about their feminist bona fides).<sup>130</sup>

Many later policies and directives take their expansive definition of gender and minimisation of the importance of sex from documents on gender-based violence.<sup>131</sup> This redefinition has far-reaching effects, especially in terms of diluting resources devoted to combating specifically violence against women. In addition, shelters and resources intended to protect women from men around the world have had their funding threatened or cut for refusing

to allow in or otherwise provide services to males who identify as women. This move dilutes the original intent of policies designed to protect women, undermining recognition of its grounding in sex-based inequalities and exploitation and the specific experiences of biological women.

## **5.2 The impacts of gender self-ID**

A further key threat to women's rights and privacy, gender self-identification, a central policy goal of most if not all the gender-identity focused NGOs funded by the EU, has been fiercely contested by feminists. Such policies would allow individuals to legally declare their gender with few legal or medical impediments, compromising the integrity of single-sex spaces. Women's shelters, prisons and restrooms would essentially become mixed-sex spaces. Prominent recent controversies have also shown the negative effects on women's sport, where titles were grasped by men identifying as women, robbing young women of success, funding, and scholarships. It is only one of many areas of life in which biology matters greatly.

News reports have also brought forth cases of individuals like Isla Bryson in Scotland, a convicted rapist who self-identified as female and was initially placed in a women's prison.<sup>132</sup> In this and many cases like it, the safety of women was an afterthought or even a necessary sacrifice to the gender identity movement. However, beyond concerns for the safety of women and girls, at the very least, the inclusion of biological males in single-sex spaces violates an expectation of privacy and erodes the boundaries of women and girls. It reminds them that when they feel uncomfortable, it is the feelings of others, and especially men, that ultimately matter most. This is a tremendous rollback of the progress made in relation to women and girls over the past 50 years.

There have also been significant impacts on lesbian spaces, technologies and organisations. For instance, the development of a lesbian dating app, *L'app*, drew criticism when it attempted to employ technologies to keep the service exclusive to women.<sup>133</sup> Elsewhere, a transgender woman sued a women-only social-media platform for discrimination after being barred from the site.<sup>134</sup>

Worse, the replacement of biological sex with gender identity risks making lesbian-only spaces effectively illegal and required to admit individuals based on gender identity rather than sex – a complete challenge to the underlying reality for many gay and lesbian people, who consider that their sexuality means they are exclusively same-sex (as opposed to ‘same gender’) attracted.

### **5.3 Far-reaching consequences**

These are just some of the consequences of EU-funded policy capture and mission creep. The healthcare sector could be another. What matters is the expansion of the concept of gender has had profound and far-reaching implications for EU policy, family law, education and women's and gay rights in important ways. The cases described above illustrate the dangers of the EU's reliance on NGOs to shape its gender agenda. By funding organisations that advocate for a specific ideological agenda, the EU has created a self-reinforcing cycle of policy capture that bypasses democratic processes and sidelines alternative perspectives.

While EU-funded NGOs have succeeded in pushing through a wide range of policies that reflect their ideological priorities, they have done so at the expense of democratic legitimacy and public trust in institutions and civil society.

## Conclusions

This report has described the significant mission creep of ‘gender equality’ and how when ‘gender’ is evoked, it is no longer at all clear what is really being said. These developments have had a number of highly ironic outcomes. The overtaking of movements originally aimed at gender (in the sense of the relationship between women and men) and sexuality has led to a backlash against *all of* these movements. In other words, capturing nearly the entire gender policy agenda to further the rights of a minority interpretation has meant a backlash against the rights of the majority. Another irony is that the vision of identity relentlessly pursued had once emphasised the fluidity of gender categories and the freedom of individuals. But it has become inflexible and rigid and pursued by authoritarian means.

This is not about equality. It is a demand for ideological adherence which sees the vast majority – who pay for the budgets that ultimately fund NGOs – as the enemy. It is a demand that member states recognise conceptualisations of gender (and even of sex) that are at wide variance with what the tax-paying public knows to be true. Those who ask questions are not bigoted. There are simply too many questions that remain unanswered, too many effects on too many groups, and authoritarian moves to impose acceptance will only lead to further backlash.

Gender identity needs to be debated on its own merits, away from important concerns regarding biological sex. Despite the view that most

## CONCLUSIONS

people are bigoted and require top-down impositions and educational social engineering, the majority do think that 'live and let live' should be a guiding principle. Unfortunately, this passive acceptance has been used as a Trojan Horse for a much more far-reaching agenda with much deeper effects on everyday life, language and the rights and freedoms of other groups.

The growing public backlash against the EU's gender policies reflects a broader crisis of legitimacy. By allowing a small group of well-funded NGOs to shape its agenda, the EU has alienated large sections of its population and fuelled a growing sense of resentment and distrust. Ironically, trying to create greater unity by manufacturing the values of the people of Europe has led to more division. Its top-down approach raises serious questions about the respect that governing structures have for real diversity: the diversity of views, cultures and values enjoyed by member states.

## Endnotes

- 1 This data is collected from the Financial Transparency System (FTS) for groups focused on and/or generally supportive of gender identity that were contracted to receive funding between 2014–2023. “Financial Transparency System – Analyse,” accessed February–March, 2025, [ec.europa.eu](https://ec.europa.eu)
- Included groups:
- ILGA-Europe (involved in projects of €16 million, and directly receiving €12.2 million)
  - ILGA-Worldwide (involved in projects of €64.95 million)
  - IGLYO (involved in projects of €6 million, and directly receiving €4.5 million)
  - Transgender Europe (TGEU) (involved in projects of €4.6 million, and directly receiving €4 million)
  - EuroCentralAsianLesbian\*Community (directly receiving €6.2 million)
  - Organisation Intersex International Europe (involved in projects of €1.2 million, and directly receiving € 1million)
  - European Women’s Lobby (directly receiving €12.5 million). The European Women’s Lobby is somewhat divided on this issue; some prominent members have condemned ‘transphobia’ in the women’s movement but the organisation itself remains vague in its affirmation of ‘women’s diversity’. We have included it here because it does not take an explicit stance in favour of sex-based rights.
  - Bulgarian Fund for Women (involved in projects of €4.7 million, and directly receiving €4.2 million)
  - European Disability Forum (involved in projects of €28.5 million, and directly receiving €14.1 million)
  - Equinet (involved in projects of €28.5 million, and directly receiving €14.1 million)
  - Mental Health Europe (involved in projects of €48 million, and directly receiving at least €5 million)
  - International Planned Parenthood Federation European Network (involved in projects of €7.5 million, and directly receiving €2.4 million)
  - EuroChild (involved in projects of €12.5 million, directly receiving €10.6 million)
- Four national/regional transgender organisations:
- Associação de transgeneros do rio de Janeiro (involved in projects of €519,000)
  - Stichting Transgender Netwerk Nederland (involved in projects of €499,000, and directly receiving €181,000)
  - Transgender Equality Network of Ireland (involved in projects of €1 million, and directly receiving €55,000)
  - Transgenders for Social Justice (involved in projects of €400,000)
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Ashley Frawley is a sociologist and author of two books, *Semiotics of Happiness: Rhetorical Beginnings of a Public Problem* (2015) and *Significant Emotions: Rhetoric and Social Problems in a Vulnerable Age*. Her expertise is in the public presentation of social problems and the increased policy focus on individuals, families and emotions as a route to solving them. She is a fervent defender of family autonomy and has campaigned to stop the policy encroachment into parental decision-making, which lowers the bar for often punitive interventions into family life. Originally from Canada and a member of Nipissing First Nation, she is the mother of two small children. Her hope for MCC Brussels is to open up a space for critical questioning of regressive policies that are dressed in the language of progressivism.

## **About MCC Brussels**

At a time of unprecedented political polarisation, MCC Brussels is committed to providing a home for genuine policy deliberation and an in-depth exploration of the issues of our time.

MCC Brussels is committed to asking the hard questions and working with people of goodwill from all persuasions to find solutions to our most pressing problems. An initiative of MCC (Mathias Corvinus Collegium), the leading Hungarian educational forum, MCC Brussels was founded in the autumn of 2022 to make a case for celebrating true diversity of thought, diversity of views, and the diversity of European cultures and their values.

This explosive report reveals how unelected, EU-funded NGOs have engineered a radical transformation of gender policy, moving far beyond women's rights to impose a divisive gender identity agenda. Millions in public money are being funneled to activist groups who silence dissent, bypass national governments, and redefine gender behind closed doors.

EU funding fuels a 'mission creep' that undermines women's rights, parental autonomy, and national sovereignty. What's more, activist NGOs secretly lobby to shape EU laws, even urging politicians to keep their activities 'out of the public eye'.

This report exposes how the EU is pushing for self-ID for children and LGBTIQ-inclusive curricula without parental consent, with dissenting parents facing potential state intervention.

Policies originally meant to protect women are being redefined as 'gender-based violence', diluting crucial protections.

This report is a wake-up call demanding transparency, accountability, and the restoration of democratic debate before it's too late.