



EUROPEAN WOMEN'S
LOBBY
EUROPEEN DES FEMMES

Donald Tusk, President of the European Council

Cc: Mr Juncker, President of the European Commission
Mr Timmermans, Vice-President, EU Commissioner for the Charter for Fundamental Rights
Ms Mogherini, Vice-President, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
Mr Avramopoulos, EU Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship
Ms Jourova, EU Commissioner for Justice and Gender Equality
Mr Mimica, EU Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development
Mr Hahn, EU Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations
Mr Stylianides, EU Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management

Objet: European Council on migration – our #womensvoices recommendations to protect refugee women's and girls' human rights

Brussels, 16 June 2016

Dear President,

On 28 and 29 June, you will be meeting the 28 EU heads of states during a European Council dedicated to important issues for the European Union (EU). One of them will be migration. In light of your discussion, **we would like to raise your attention to the reality faced by refugee women and girls, and call on you to ensure that their voices are being heard during the Council.**

The European Women's Lobby (EWL) just concluded a unique five-month project "[From conflict to peace? Women's and girls' voices on the move](#)", aiming to raise awareness on the reality of violence and human rights' violation faced by refugee women and girls in Europe, in partnership with the Women's Refugee Commission (WRC).

Women and girls fleeing conflicts and travelling to or settling in Europe are at higher risk of suffering from male violence. On the way and in the centres, they face rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, from different perpetrators; they have to resort to prostitution in order to get access to food, housing or transport; they face domestic violence; girls are being sold for marriage or trafficked for sexual exploitation... Moreover, the way that transit, reception and accommodation centres are built, organised and staffed has a direct impact on women's and girls' ability to be safe from male violence. Recent [field assessment by WRC in Greece](#) gives direct evidence of this reality. Finally, the lack of gendered interpretation and disregard for gender sensitive EU and national asylum policies is a massive breach of women's and girls' human rights.

Based on field trip assessments, strategic meetings at national and European levels, and data collected on the ground by EWL members in different countries, the [EWL #womensvoices](#) report calls for:

- Comprehensive policies to end all forms of violence against women and girls in the EU and its member states, and specific measures to ensure that women and girls refugees and asylum seekers are protected and get access to justice.
- A humanitarian response which succeeds in protecting women and girls from male violence and exploitation.



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- Gender-sensitive asylum policies and procedures to help women and girls to escape or denounce male violence and access to their full human rights.

We call on you to bring high attention to our report and its concrete demands. In particular, we call on you to ensure that the EU and all its member states ratify and implement the Istanbul Convention, without any reserve, and mainstream the specific needs of refugee and migrant women through the 5 Ps Framework developed in our report. We call on you to ensure that transit/accommodation centres are built and staffed in a gender-sensitive manner, and to use our check list “Implementing a gender-sensitive humanitarian response” at all levels. We call on you to ensure that EU and national asylum procedures comply with the UNHCR Guidelines on International Protection and include a gender perspective in all aspects, according to our check list “Engendering the asylum systems”.

Moreover, during the EWL General Assembly on 4 June, all EWL members adopted an emergency motion on “Promotion of women protection in EU and UN refugee policies”, which requests the following:

- *That EU Member States should increase the number of UNHCR quota refugees and give priority to women within the quota system;*
- *That EU Member States implement the principle of family unification upheld in the UN Refugee Convention of 1951, in order that mothers, sisters and daughters of men refugees travel to Europe safely and avoid becoming victims of human traffickers;*
- *That EU Member States apply the principle of human rights to women refugees and children including internally displaced persons (IDP), taking into account especially women’s asylum claims, including child, early and forced marriages, as contained in international instruments such as CEDAW and the Convention on the Rights of the Child;*
- *That EU Member States implement EU law dealing with asylum, including relevant Directives on gender and women’s rights.*

We call on you to listen to women’s voices and take these demands with the highest consideration, discuss them during the European Council and ensure their implementation at all levels.

In May, leaders of the world came together at the World Humanitarian Summit and called for gender equality, women’s empowerment and women’s rights to become pillars of humanitarian action. Now is the time for action for Europe to implement a gender-sensitive humanitarian response and protect all refugee women and girls from male violence!

We look forward to your response to this letter and to getting the opportunity to meet with you to discuss further the situation of refugee women and girls.

Sincerely yours,

Edith Schratzberger-Vécsei
EWL President