Parliamentary Assembly
Assemblée parlementaire
https://pace.coe.int

COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Doc. 16339
29 January 2026

Countering the backlash against women's rights: a European response

Motion for a resolution
tabled by the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination

This motion has not been discussed in the Assembly and commits only those who have signed it

Movements seeking to reverse progress in the field of gender equality and women's rights have recently gained visibility and influence, notably through social media. While framed as the defence of "traditional family values", many of these movements promote narrow and exclusionary gender roles. So-called "masculinist" groups and anti-gender actors disseminate narratives that encourage the subordination of women and the restoration of patriarchal social structures, with growing resonance among younger generations.

The 2025 report "The Next Wave: How Religious Extremism Is Reclaiming Power", prepared by the European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights (EPF), documents the emergence of transnational alliances between religious extremist actors, anti-gender equality organisations, church-affiliated NGOs and populist political parties. These networks have mobilised significant financial and political resources to support anti-gender movements across Europe. Certain religious extremist and anti-gender actors are pursuing a co-ordinated political agenda that seeks to undermine women's rights and erode the principle of secular, pluralistic governance.

The backlash against women's rights forms an integral part of broader efforts to reshape democratic institutions and human rights standards in an authoritarian direction.

The increasing societal polarisation, the amplification of anti-gender discourse in certain media outlets, and the spread of gendered disinformation contribute to an environment in which hard-won advances in women's rights are under pressure.

In its Resolution 2614 (2025) "Women's rights in Europe: progress and challenges", the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has stressed that gender equality and the rights of women, in all their diversity, are cornerstones of democracy. The Assembly should call on member States to step up efforts to counter the backlash against women's rights and democracy and protect the fundamental values of the Council of Europe, notably in the framework of its New Democratic Pact for Europe.