

Working Group

“Women Empowerment and Fight Against Gender-Based Violence”

Summary Document and Proposal for Political Commitment

Presented by the Coordinator of the Working Group

Marcella Zappaterra

CALRE Plenary Assembly – Santa Cruz de Tenerife, 28 January 2026

Summary

ACCOMPANYING REPORT 3

1. Introduction: Women’s empowerment as a European issue 3

2. The European framework: legislative progress and open challenges 5

3. The role of Regions: experiences and good practices 6

4. Regional focus: the experience of Emilia-Romagna 7

5. The CALRE Working Group: objectives and methodology 9

COMMITMENT TEXT 11

6. Proposal for action by CALRE 11

Conclusion..... 12

ACCOMPANYING REPORT

1. Introduction: Women's empowerment as a European issue

Women's empowerment and the fight against gender-based violence represent a structural priority for the European Union and for the regional democracies that compose it. Speaking today about women shaping Europe does not mean addressing a sectoral or niche issue, but rather questioning the quality of our democracies, the protection of fundamental rights, and Europe's capacity to respond to the social, economic and cultural crises of our time.

Violence against women constitutes a serious and persistent violation of human rights, recognised at international level by the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979), the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993), the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention (2011) and, more recently, by Directive (EU) 2024/1385, which represents the first comprehensive European legislative framework on this issue.

Despite legislative progress, European data confirm the structural nature of the phenomenon: one woman in three in the European Union has experienced gender-based violence since the age of 15; 17% have suffered violence from an intimate partner and a further 17% sexual violence. Behind these figures are individual stories, lives deeply affected and rights denied, calling European, national and regional institutions to a shared responsibility that must be systemic rather than episodic.

Women's empowerment also concerns economic, employment and social inequalities that continue to limit women's autonomy.

In 2023, the gender pay gap in the EU stood at around 12% on average, while the employment gap remained at approximately 10 percentage points, with significant territorial differences between Member States and regions.

These inequalities are compounded by the disproportionate burden of unpaid care and domestic work, which continues to fall predominantly on women, producing cumulative effects over the life course: more fragmented careers, lower incomes, smaller pensions and a higher risk of poverty. Economic independence therefore remains an essential condition for personal freedom and for the concrete possibility of escaping situations of violence.

In this sense, women's empowerment and the fight against gender-based violence are not separate fields, but two inseparable dimensions of the same European democratic challenge.

2. The European framework: legislative progress and open challenges

With the adoption of Directive (EU) 2024/1385, the European Union has taken a historic step towards a common and coordinated response to violence against women. The Directive introduces:

- a shared definition of gender-based violence offences, including digital and online violence;
- strengthened penalties for particularly serious practices, such as female genital mutilation and forced marriage;
- common minimum standards for victim support, access to specialised services, safe accommodation, and sexual and reproductive health care.

In the field of economic equality, Directive (EU) 2023/970 on pay transparency represents a further step forward in reducing the gender pay gap. However, as with many European policies, its real effectiveness will depend on the quality of territorial implementation, the capacity of regional institutions to translate principles into concrete measures, and the availability of monitoring and evaluation tools.

A central challenge therefore remains: bridging the gap between legislation and reality, between enshrined principles and rights that are actually enforceable. In this perspective, Regions and Regional Legislative Assemblies play a strategic role, as institutional levels responsible for making European policies effective in people's everyday lives.

3. The role of Regions: experiences and good practices

In a Europe characterised by strong territorial, social and economic differences, there is no single female experience, but rather a plurality of conditions shaped by local and regional contexts. Gender inequalities often intersect with territorial ones: between urban and inner areas, between stronger and more fragile regions, and between the centre and peripheries of Europe.

Regions and local authorities operate precisely in those fields that have a direct and daily impact on women's lives: healthcare, education, social services, proximity policies, mobility, and work-life balance. They represent the first institutional level at which European and national policies become concrete, measurable and assessable.

Regional experiences demonstrate that the most effective responses to gender-based violence and the promotion of women's empowerment are based on:

- multi-level and participatory governance;
- networking between institutions, local authorities, public services and the third sector;
- integration between prevention, protection, economic autonomy and the treatment of perpetrators of violence.

Recognising the role of Regions therefore means moving beyond a purely implementation-oriented vision of European policies and valuing regional legislative assemblies as spaces for political innovation, institutional experimentation and the development of distributed leadership.

4. Regional focus: the experience of Emilia-Romagna

For over twenty years, the Emilia-Romagna Region has considered the fight against gender-based violence a structural policy rather than an emergency response, building a solid legislative and planning framework based on:

- Regional Law No. 6/2014 on equality and the prevention of gender discrimination;
- Regional Plan against Gender-Based Violence (Assembly Resolution No. 54/2021);
- Implementing measures of the Plan (Regional Government Resolution No. 1785/2022).

The regional model is based on multi-level governance involving the Region, Territorial Social and Health Conferences, municipalities, local networks and anti-violence centres, promoting networking as a structural method.

The regional strategy is articulated along four main axes:

- prevention, protection, empowerment and treatment of perpetrators of violence;
- coordinated and homogeneous territorial networks;
- a Regional Observatory on Gender-Based Violence for data monitoring;
- active involvement of schools, healthcare services, social services, law enforcement and the third sector.

Particular importance is given to supporting women's economic autonomy, including through instruments such as the Reddito di Libertà (Freedom Income), complemented by additional regional resources to ensure concrete and continuous support along pathways out of violence.

The Emilia-Romagna experience is not proposed as a model to be mechanically replicated, but as a politically exemplary case, based on transferable principles: policy continuity, integration of interventions, centrality of territorial networks and constant monitoring.

5. The CALRE Working Group: objectives and methodology

The CALRE Working Group “Women Empowerment and Fight Against Gender-Based Violence”, coordinated by Marcella Zappaterra, stems from the awareness that women’s empowerment and the fight against gender-based violence are inseparable dimensions.

Violence, in all its forms – physical, psychological, economic and digital – is a structural phenomenon, rooted in persistent inequalities, cultural stereotypes and power asymmetries. Combating it means addressing its deep causes by promoting equal opportunities, economic autonomy, access to services and cultural change involving society as a whole, starting with younger generations.

The Working Group aims to:

- promote gender equality and women’s empowerment across all public policies;
- share legislative experiences and regional good practices;
- strengthen European cooperation in the educational, training and cultural fields;
- develop common recommendations to be presented within CALRE and in dialogue with European institutions.

The working method is based on continuous collaboration among European regional legislative assemblies, the exchange of data, experiences and documents, the involvement of experts and European networks, and the shared drafting of political guidance documents.

The Group also intends to contribute to the construction of stable European alliances, in the awareness that women's rights in different European countries are not separate stories, but a single European story founded on solidarity, shared responsibility and the defence of fundamental rights.

COMMITMENT TEXT

6. Proposal for action by CALRE

The CALRE Working Group “Women Empowerment and Fight Against Gender-Based Violence” proposes that the CALRE Plenary Assembly:

- reaffirm women’s empowerment and the fight against gender-based violence as cross-cutting priorities of European and regional policies;
- support the full and uniform implementation of Directive (EU) 2024/1385 and Directive (EU) 2023/970, enhancing the role of Regions;
- promote integrated policies combining prevention, protection, economic autonomy and social inclusion;
- strengthen the involvement of regional legislative assemblies in European decision-making processes on gender equality;
- encourage the creation of permanent European networks for the exchange of good practices and the monitoring of gender policies.

CALRE also commits to keeping the Working Group active as a stable space for dialogue, proposal and political guidance, contributing to the construction of a more equitable, safe and inclusive Europe for all women.

Conclusion

The work of the “Women Empowerment and Fight Against Gender-Based Violence” Working Group demonstrates how Regional Legislative Assemblies can be central political actors in promoting women’s rights and strengthening European democracies.

Through this process, CALRE can consolidate its role as a European political space for Regions, capable of concretely influencing European policies and contributing to the construction of a fairer, safer and more inclusive future.