

Joint civil society statement on the draft EBRD Gender Equality and Human Capital Strategy

We, the undersigned civil society organisations, welcome the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development's (EBRD) commitment to advancing gender equality and inclusion through its 2026–2030 Gender Equality and Human Capital Strategy.

The draft Strategy rightly recognises the persistent structural barriers faced by women and LGBTIQ+ people, including unequal access to employment, finance, infrastructure and public services, as well as gender-based violence and the criminalisation of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.

Global progress on gender equality is increasingly fragile. Hard-won gains are being reversed due to austerity measures, rising debt, shrinking civic space, underfunded climate action, growing corporate concentration, the spread of far-right narratives, geopolitical tensions and rapid digital transformation. Legal protections are weakening in many of the EBRD's countries of operation, while anti-gender discourse is gaining political traction, with feminist and LGBTIQ+ organisations facing increasing restrictions, intimidation and violence.

The experience of civil society organisations monitoring EBRD projects also shows that even projects intended to promote and support gender equality often fall short in practice. Persistent gaps remain in the effective prevention of gender-based violence,¹ the meaningful engagement of women and LGBTIQ+ groups in project² and product design,³ addressing intersectional discrimination⁴ and using policy dialogue to drive systemic change.

In response to these challenges, the Strategy commits to broadening access to skills and employment, while building inclusive and gender-responsive infrastructure, services, financial systems and business environments. While these are important commitments, they largely reflect the 'business as usual' approach and do not sufficiently respond to the scale of the current challenges. The Strategy also fails to adequately account for the broader political and economic context, the need to address the structural root causes of inequality, and the urgency of responding to the growing backlash against vulnerable groups in order to safeguard and advance progress on gender equality.

Recent evidence highlights the scale of the challenge: only a small fraction of women lives in countries approaching full legal equality, and no economy offers equal economic opportunities.⁵ LGBTIQ+

¹ Mariam Patsatsia, [A flawed rollout: How the EBRD's efforts to tackle harassment on Tbilisi public transport have fallen short](#), CEE Bankwatch Network, 11 October 2024.

² CEE Bankwatch Network, [Key trends and shortcomings in community engagement on high-risk EBRD projects](#), 24 May 2024.

³ Amina Dizdar, Dajana Bakić, Emina Bošnjak, [Gender-related issues in the urban mobility sector in the Canton of Sarajevo, Sarajevo Open Centre](#), CEE Bankwatch Network, 5 December 2023.

⁴ CEE Bankwatch Network, [Beyond mainstreaming: Advancing gender impact in the EBRD's new Gender and Inclusion Strategy](#).

⁵ World Bank, [Women, Business and the Law 2026: Benchmarking Laws for Jobs and Inclusive Growth](#), 24 February 2026.

people continue to lack legal recognition in many contexts, and consensual same-sex relations remain criminalised in several countries, with new restrictive laws emerging elsewhere.⁶ Progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 5 is stalling, and nearly a quarter of countries report a backlash against gender equality.⁷ These trends are not only social concerns; they also pose direct risks to democratic governance, economic inclusion and the effectiveness and sustainability of development investments.

In the current context, incremental progress is not enough. The EBRD must adopt a more ambitious, explicit and operational approach to gender equality and inclusion.

We therefore call on the EBRD to strengthen the Gender Equality and Human Capital Strategy by taking the following actions:

- Increase the target to at least 50% of annual projects promoting gender equality.
- Align gender equality and LGBTIQ+ inclusion with the EBRD's democracy mandate and its investment commitments based on transition progress.
- Integrate a backlash risk lens into country diagnostics, project design and policy dialogue.
- Engage with governments on gender equality and anti-discrimination reforms even in sensitive contexts.
- Ensure gender-responsive green and digital transitions, supported by clear impact indicators.
- Consider the gendered impacts of macroeconomic policies, including debt and austerity.
- Develop programmes to expand access to employment, finance and services for LGBTIQ+ people.
- Strengthen the participation of feminist and LGBTIQ+ groups in EBRD decision-making.
- Invest in the care economy as a core economic infrastructure.

At a time of increasing inequality and democratic backsliding, the EBRD has a critical role to play in advancing gender equality, protecting human rights and supporting inclusive and democratic societies. We urge the EBRD to strengthen its Gender Equality and Human Capital Strategy accordingly and to work in partnership with civil society and other international financial institutions to ensure its effective and accountable implementation.

⁶ ILGA World Database, [Advanced Search - ILGA Database \(LGBTI Rights\) | ILGA World Database](#), accessed on 13 April 2026.

⁷ UN Women, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, [Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2025](#), 15 September 2025.

Signatories (in alphabetical order):

Bir Duino Kyrgyzstan

CEE Bankwatch Network

Ecolur informational NGO

"Ekolog" public association

Feminist queer collective "Qun Jelesi"

Foundation CURE Bosnia & Herzegovina

Fulcrum UA

GENDERDOC-M Information Center

Háttér Society

Human Rights Center Glotion

Human Rights Consulting Group Public Foundation

Human Rights LGBTQIA+ Initiative REQUEST

ILGA-Europe

ILGA World

Inisiasi Masyarakat Adat (IMA)

Invisible rainbow Turkmenistan

Jamaa Resource Initiatives

„LGBTI DEYSTVIE" ASSOCIATION

Nemolchi.uz (Don't Be Silent)

Outright International

Sarajevski otvoreni centar / Sarajevo Open Centre

Tuzla Open Center

Udruženje nezavisnih stvaralaca i aktivista GETO

Others (five civil society organisations working on LGBTQIA+ rights) preferred to maintain confidentiality due to security concerns.