Co-Creating Inclusive Intersectional Democratic Spaces Across Europe (CCINDLE)

D4.1– Report on feminist institutional responses to anti-gender forces challenging inclusive democracy across Europe

[WP4 – WP4 Feminist institutional responses to anti-gender and anti-democratic forces]

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Executive summary

This deliverable identifies the feminist institutional responses to anti-gender anti-democratic forces in the European Parliament and in seven European countries: Belgium, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. The identification of these responses is based on both secondary and primary sources, through an in-depth analysis of parliamentary debates and interviews with key figures in political, administrative, technical roles, and civil society organisations. The report includes a brief introduction that lays out the theoretical framework, developing the central concepts that underpin our understanding of feminist institutional responses. Following this, we detail the methodology employed to collect the data, and in section 3 the case studies where the context-specific feminist institutional responses are addressed, as well as a pilot on social media. Conclusions summarise the main findings about feminist institutional responses across the cases, how intersectional they are in relation to their capacity to counteract racism, homophobia and transphobia, and what factors enable or constrain the responses.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The objective of WP4 is to identify the feminist institutional responses that are articulated in parliament to anti-gender and anti-democratic forces across Europe, paying special attention to how they relate to racism, homophobia and transphobia. In this report, we interpret feminism in broad terms, encompassing a comprehensive understanding of discrimination that integrates an intersectional perspective. However, it is crucial to recognise the contextual nuances that may shape this understanding. In certain contexts, we may encounter individuals who articulate anti-racist views yet reproduce misogynistic beliefs, or feminist advocates who express transphobic views. The identification of feminist institutional responses in each of the cases included in this report is, thus, sensitive to context-based interpretations. This report collects and analyses data on feminist institutional responses in the parliaments of seven European countries and in the European Parliament. We conceptualise 'feminist institutional responses' as "the response to anti-gender politics that is articulated by politicians, staff, committees in a parliamentary context, or by a body that represents the whole institution" (Kantola and Lombardo forthcoming). Feminist responses are not necessarily those that come from self-defined feminist actors, they are responses to anti-gender politics, thus they may come from a varied spectrum of political ideologies. Feminist institutional responses are carried out by institutional actors working both inside and outside institutions (Banaszak 2010). Within institutions, the responses can be articulated at the level of individual 'critical actors' -that in the scholarship on gender and political representation in legislatures refers to the role and impact of individual highly committed agents that are very active in promoting gender equality despite their number (Celis 2009; 2006; Childs and Krook 2009)-, or collectively through structures of feminist governance such as gender equality committees whose objective is to integrate gender equality in parliamentary work (Sawer 2020).

The report identifies first who the responding actors are, and what institutional strategies and discourses are articulated, and second, it assesses how feminist responses relate to racism and homo- and trans-phobia and what factors enable or constrain the feminist institutional responses identified within the parliaments studied.

Feminist institutional responses emerge in a context of increasing presence of anti-gender and far-right actors in national parliaments across Europe, which poses a threat to the advancement of social rights, particularly feminist, anti-racist and pro-LGBTQIA+ rights (Dietze and Roth 2020; Graff and

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Korolczuk 2022). A growing body of research has connected this threat to a process of de-democratisation (Vida 2022; Lombardo, Kantola and Rubio-Marin 2021; Roggeband and Krizsán 2018). This scholarly literature argues anti-gender campaigns and political actors actively partake in the erosion and weakening of democratic institutions and norms.

In this report, we understand anti-gender actors as those who oppose and seek to dismantle feminist, anti-racist and LGBTQIA+-oriented politics and advances in Europe. This is carried out through a variety of mechanisms, both formal (gender policy backsliding, defunding feminist NGOs) and informal (verbally attacking feminist politics, delegitimising feminist claims). Additionally, anti-gender actors also produce alternative knowledge to attack, displace and replace feminist knowledge (Verloo 2018; Patternote and Verloo 2021).

Empirical analysis in WP4 addresses what feminist responses are articulated to anti-gender politics in the parliamentary arena. The conceptualisation of feminist institutional responses is operationalised through four specific analytical categories that allow us to identify different forms of responses enacted to oppose anti-gender attacks and defend progressive legislation in parliamentary settings. The categories are: “knowledge”, “coalition-building”, “rule-making” and “everyday pragmatic engagement” (Kantola and Lombardo forthcoming).

The category of **“knowledge”** refers to the study of discursive and framing strategies employed to contrast anti-gender discourses. Knowledge is, for both anti-gender and feminist actors, a critical tool to shape their societal projects. While anti-gender actors seek to produce knowledge and misinformation to delegitimise feminist politics, feminist actors produce critical feminist knowledge to counteract this opposition. In this context, knowledge encompasses discursive methods, including strategies like (counter)framing (Cullen 2021), which play a crucial role in fostering cultural changes to counter the ongoing attempts to undermine feminist progress, particularly feminist efforts to protect and defend marginalised communities and women of colour (Zavella 2020).

The category of **“coalition-building”** comprises bringing pro-equality actors, both inter-institutional and extra-institutional actors, together in a coordinated or loose way to expand awareness of gender issues and foster support from actors who had not defended publicly gender equality (Kriszan and Roggeband 2021; Kantola and Lombardo forthcoming). Coalition-building between inter-institutional actors involves negotiation, bargain, conflict, compromise and cohesion-making. Coalitions can occur between individuals in the same parliamentary groups, which can facilitate cohesive voting practices, or between different groups as a way to unite forces to contest anti-gender advances. Coalitions can also be developed inside parliamentary committees, where an agreement on equality is reached.

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However, a potential drawback may arise when pro-equality parliamentarians need to persuade other members from the political factions to join the agreement, especially if it touches on polarised issues (Kantola 2022). In anti-gender times, coalition-building in the European Parliament can forge broader alliances but may hinder consensus on contested issues within the constraints of political dynamics.

"Rule-making" responses encompass both formal and informal institutional efforts and resources undertaken by political parties, parliamentary committees or the parliament itself to address anti-gender attacks and opposition (Kantola and Lombardo forthcoming). Within this response, special attention is paid to 'rules in use' (Gains and Lowndes 2022), referring to the interactions between specific institutional rules and those who interpret and implement them. The category of rule-making provides a framework for identifying the formal regulations that institutions either adopt or revise to counter opposition to gender equality. Additionally, it includes pro-equality informal institutional practices that may discipline anti-gender conducts.

"Everyday pragmatic" responses is a complementary category to rule-making as it comprises individual and collective practices that feminist institutional actors enact to oppose and respond to anti-gender groups in parliamentary settings. These practices can be distinct forms of engaging (or not) with each other's work, parliamentary routines and ways of doing things, such as organising meetings or work sessions, or deciding whether and how to respond to anti-gender discourses in plenary debates.

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2 Methodology

The methodological framework for D4.1 has involved the collection of primary data including parliamentary debates and interview transcripts in which individual and collective actors articulate feminist responses. The research teams were instructed to look for the following actors: individual MPs/MEPs, political staff, feminist governance structures, specific LGBT, anti-racist and gender equality committees and parliamentary political parties articulating responses to anti-gender discourse. Each team was also encouraged to identify further actors that formulate responses that may be pertinent to their case's unique parliamentary landscape and context, and this is reflected in the country and EP reports in the following sections.

2.1 Parliamentary debates

The procedure followed to collect the data for the parliamentary debates consisted of identifying two to three main issues that have particular relevance to the feminist institutional responses against the anti-gender opposition that is currently part of the public debate in each context. Most issues selected across the different countries and the EP can be grouped in three main themes: 1) sexual and reproductive rights; 2) trans and LGBTQIA+[1] rights; 3) borders and migration rights. Two other issues, while receiving less attention, were also present in the reports: 4) academic freedom and gender, and; 5) violence against women and the Istanbul Convention.

Pinning down these themes allowed for the subsequent selection of a total of 156 parliamentary debates. 'Parliamentary debates' in the context of this report refers to specific debates that take place during parliamentary sessions. One area of debate such as trans and LGBTQIA+ rights may have generated 10 related debates across different parliamentary sessions in a given context. Parliamentary debates thus refer to the number of times a topic was discussed in Parliament.

It should be noted that the Hungarian team faced context-specific methodological circumstances when collecting parliamentary debates data. Due to the hybrid-autocratic regime in Hungary, there are virtually no debates about the topics delineated above. Firstly, opposition MPs face significant challenges in initiating debates as they must navigate approval processes controlled by government-led committees. Consequently, they have three ways to introduce topics in parliament: (1) through a

[1] In this report, we use the inclusive acronym LGBTQIA+ to refer to the diversity of gender and sexual identities. The report maintains the acronyms that have been employed in the EP and country cases, which may differ from this one, to reflect the specific context of each study.

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single speech via interpellation, (2) through a single speech either preceding or following the agenda session, and (3) by raising the issue within a different debate context. For this reason, the Hungarian team has enacted appropriate changes to their selection of parliamentary content, detailed in the 3.3 section of this report.

2.2 Interview transcripts

The teams have conducted a total of 144 semi-structured interviews with key actors from the different parliamentary institutions selected, which have allowed us to identify the main feminist institutional responses articulated to anti-gender opposition in the selected cases. Since the teams were instructed to carry out a maximum of 20 interviews depending on the challenges and availability of those identified actors, the number of interviews varies in the different contexts. Interviewees include 112 women, 30 men, 2 non-binary people. Most interviewees are politicians (97), who are the primary actors the teams selected for capturing feminist institutional responses in parliaments, but we also conducted interviews with parliamentary staff (28) and civil society actors (19) that collaborate with MPs in the promotion or making of equality policies. Civil society interviewed includes actors who participate in institutional politics, for instance by speaking in public hearings or collaborating with MPs in the collection and production of knowledge to counteract anti-gender politics. Interviewees were selected for reasons including the following: their expertise on issues of equality, gender equality, LGBTIQ+ rights and anti-racism in the respective parliaments; their participation in equality committees; and their voicing of feminist responses to anti-gender politics in parliamentary debates. After this purposeful sampling, snowball sampling was also used as a method of recruitment.

	Gender			Profile		
Countries	Women	Men	Non-binary	Politician	Staff	CSO
Belgium	17	5	2	14	3	7
EP	17	0	0	1	16	0
Hungary	6	3	0	8	1	0
Italy	20	6	0	25	1	0
Spain	18	2	0	16	2	2
Sweden	11	8	0	16	2	1

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Poland	16	2	0	12	3	3
U.K.	7	4	0	5	0	6
Total:	112	30	2	97	28	19

Table 1 Number and type of interviews

Based on this data collection, country and EP teams mapped and analysed key strategies and mechanisms (both formal and informal) of feminist institutional responses to anti-gender opposition in the selected parliaments.

2.3 Social media pilot

A pilot on social media analysis of the content of tweets has been conducted in the case of Italy. Since the social media analysis of feminist institutional responses to anti-gender opposition is a novel kind of research, the CCINDLE team identified a need to pilot the methodology in one of the cases to understand the extent to which this analysis contributes to the overall understanding of feminist institutional responses to anti-gender politics.

The Trento University partner, with their expertise in social media analysis, explored the involvement of politicians within the Twitter discussion revolving around the so-called DDL Zan – i.e., the law against homophobia and hate crimes in Italy. After collecting tweets related to the law[2], a network of interactions was drawn considering only exchanges established only between politicians and distinguishing ties between infra-party (i.e., occurring within members of the same party) or inter-party (i.e., occurring between members of different parties). After examining the overall structure of the network, a closer inspection was conducted at the micro and the meso levels by identifying politicians who have been taken as points of reference in the discussion or, conversely, have contributed more to its development; but also exploring the main clusters of exchange amongst parliamentarians.

[2] Tweets were collected if publicly published and including one or more of the following hashtags: #ddlzan, #moltopiúdizan, #ddlzanemoltopiù, #leggezan, #ddlzanleggecontroomofobia, #ddlzan_subito_legge, #ddlzanbucato, #noddlzan, #maiddlzan, #noleggezan

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3 Feminist institutional responses

3.1 BELGIUM

Introduction: Belgian Parliament's context to feminist institutional responses

The Belgian Chamber of Representatives is the directly elected lower house of the bicameral federal parliament and comprises 42.7% of women. This percentage has slowly progressed over the last four elections (2007, 2010, 2014, 2019), as women made up 35% of the MPs after the 2003 elections, when the new quota legislation (50% of all candidates on the list and zipper principle for the two top positions) was first applied. This makes Belgium rank somewhere in the IPU top 25 countries in terms of gender equal descriptive representation. There is no data on other social markers, but some MPs (and other top politicians) openly communicate about their SOGI and Belgium is internationally known for having (a few) top politicians with other than cisgender heteronormative white social markers.

Belgium has a proportional list system and tradition of majority governments comprising a large coalition with a growing number of parties due to its increasingly fragmented and polarised multi-party system. This goes hand in hand with detailed coalition agreements, voting along majority-opposition lines, strong party discipline, and a passive parliament dominated by the executive. Key decisions are prepared by cabinets, the bulk of legislative initiatives comes from the executive (or is handed over to MPs of the coalition), to then be discussed within parliamentary committees before going to the plenary. Debates in the plenary are a repetition of discussions in committees, but for the purpose of a larger public (plenaries are public and broadcasted directly).

The main anti-gender actors can be found within the two biggest political parties of the Dutch-speaking group of MPs, the conservative Flemish nationalist N-VA and the radical right VB. Together they make up 48% of the Dutch-speaking, respectively 28% of all MPs. Both are part of the opposition, the VB because of the *cordon sanitaire* (in the French-speaking part of Belgium this also includes the media). While none of them has a French-speaking sister party, their long-lasting strong electoral position makes them important political actors. They reduced the other Dutch-speaking parties to small factions, made them shift to the right, fostered a normalisation of the presence of the (radical) right in public office, and over the last years their discourse sharpened, they play out their ideology more explicitly (I6) and 'without complexes' (I5).

In the case of the VB, the anti-gender ideology strongly resonates with the party's shift to a more identitary discourse and the overall party programme. The picture of the N-VA is less clear-cut. The

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party has always had both a progressive and a conservative wing, the latter clearly dominating for the moment, and the party as a whole shifting to a more comprehensive conservative programme.

Anti-gender actors can also be found within the French-speaking Liberals MR, but this concerns especially the party leader and communication outside parliament. The MPs of MR within the federal Chamber of Representatives do not articulate typical anti-gender discourse. The same can be said of the Christian-Democrats who traditionally adopt a conservative position when it comes to ethical issues such as abortion, euthanasia, etc.

Since long one of the parliamentary committees deals with matters of equal opportunities, as the portfolio is called in Belgium. In the current legislature it is the parliamentary committee on health and equal opportunities, but there also is the advisory parliamentary committee on societal emancipation. Chairs of and seats within such parliamentary committees are based on the electoral result and thus especially on the Dutch-speaking side represent the overall shift to the right. While for long these committees were the hub of femocrats (that is policymakers working on gender equality), over the last legislatures the presence within them became mainstreamed and reflects the shift to the right among Dutch-speaking MPs.

In terms of further institutionalisation of equality policies, Belgium set up a federal gender equality institute in the early 2000s, adopted a gender mainstreaming law in 2007, applies procedures of gender budgeting, has gender equality and LGBTQI+ policy plans, and is especially known for its – in international perspective – progressive LGBTQI legislation.

Methodological note

This report is based on 23 semi-structured in-depth interviews, including 16 MPs and/or their assistants, and four interviews with the federal institute for gender equality as well as feminist and SOGI (umbrella) organisations. We started by recruiting interviewees among the active members of the current parliamentary committee on health and equal opportunities and the advisory parliamentary committee on societal emancipation with a progressive profile. We expanded the group adding similar interviewees from the previous legislature. We completed the selection of interviewees relying on the snowball method. Our selection procedure was based on the fact that it was often difficult to convince a potential interviewee to participate, most of them being heavily solicited for interviews and studies, overwhelmed with work, and in pre-campaign mode. As a result, we have interviews with MPs and/or their assistants from nine different parties, mostly from the Green parties (Ecolo and Groen), but also

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Social-Democrats (PS and Vooruit), Dutch-speaking Christian-Democrats (CD&V) and Liberals (Open VLD), as well as the French-speaking nationalists (Défi), N-VA, and the radical left (PVDA-PTB). Interviews were conducted October - December 2023, in person at the location of choice of the interviewee, unless the latter preferred an online interview (5/20 interviews). Eight interviews were in French and 12 in Dutch, depending on the preference of the interviewee, and lasted between one and one and a half hours. Three interviews comprised one or two extra participants (not counting the presence of an MP's assistant), a choice of the interviewee contacted.

The recorded interviews were transcribed using *My good tape*, and analysed in two steps, first by preliminary hand-coding and then using *NVivo*. The interviewees are referred to with a number in order to preserve their anonymity, but background information is provided where necessary.

At this stage no parliamentary debates have been analysed as they would reveal articulations of anti-gender discourse rather than providing insights in feminist institutional responses.

Findings

Actors

Actors voicing feminist responses to anti-gender articulations in the Chamber of Representatives can mainly be found within the parliamentary group of the Green parties, both Dutch-speaking and French-speaking as they form one parliamentary group. The strongest voices come from the French-speaking green party Ecolo. First, French-speaking parties are traditionally more to the left than their Dutch-speaking counterparts (with the notable exception of the Liberal parties). Second, they do not face the electoral competition of parties such as the N-VA and VB and thus do not need to fight for their electoral survival. Finally, one of the members of Ecolo is the State Secretary who resigned earlier this legislature and rejoined the ranks of the parliamentary group. She is one of the main targets of VB and the N-VA, which puts her constantly in the picture. It cannot be said that her work is but a reaction to attacks from N-VA and VB, but she constantly has to react to these parties. And her experience as well as her expertise make her and her colleagues very responsive to an anti-gender agenda and its articulations.

Feminist responses to anti-gender articulations in the Chamber of Representatives also come from MPs of the Social-Democrats, both French-speaking and Dutch-speaking, the Dutch-speaking Liberals, and sometimes the French-speaking nationalists.

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Most of these feminist responses are conducted by individual MPs. Roughly speaking we can divide these MPs in two categories. First, there are those who are specialized in LGBTQI+ or SOGI issues within their parliamentary group and focus on these matters for their party. Most of these MPs would be catalogued as feminist actors by the CCINDLE team. Second, feminist responses come from feminist actors with often a long track record of political feminist activism within their party and its political women's movement. Third, feminist responses come from MPs with a more traditional but progressive liberal background. While the second and the third group of MPs would not necessarily be catalogued as feminist actors by the CCINDLE team (none of them are TERFS but they might not be willing to extend the existing abortion legislation beyond 12 weeks), all of them perceive the danger emanating from anti-gender actors and the ideas they ventilate.

MPs do have contacts with civil society organisations but this is more on a one on one basis than structural and several of the most active MPs underlined that they would like civil society organisations to be more proactive and soliciting political actors.

Content

During the current legislature three issues were on the political agenda which triggered anti-gender interest in the Chamber of Representatives: 1) gender equality policies in general, 2) LGBTQIA+ issues, and 3) abortion. It should be noticed, however, that anti-gender articulations are more widespread as any occasion to make a diminishing comment is seized.

Gender equality

Anti-gender actors regularly present gender equality as achieved and consequently argue for the dismantling of equality institutions as these are no longer necessary. They underline that these institutions weigh too heavily on the budget and spend their resources on unnecessary initiatives. Actors in charge of equality policies, such as the federal State Secretary, are depicted as incapable, hysteric and ridiculous. Interviewees indicate that in response they continue to draw attention to existing gender inequalities and attempt to correct the picture depicted by anti-gender actors. The experiences of women and the importance of their presence in parliament itself is a recurring theme in the interviews. Even though a generational shift has been noticeable, the interviewees underline the presence of sexist stereotypes, discourses and behaviour by colleagues from certain parties (and outside parliament).

LGBTQIA+ issues

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LGBTQIA+ issues on the agenda are blood donation or surrogacy, as well as issues related to transgender identities and intersex genital mutilation. Blood donation is a very old topic on the political agenda and the opposition to it has not changed. Interviewees relate the ridiculing of the topics in debates and the need to constantly get back to facts.

Abortion

The Belgian abortion legislation has been on the political agenda of this legislature, more particularly the question of an extension of the period for legal abortion beyond the now acceptable 12 weeks (a last remnant of a larger revision of the Belgian abortion legislation). As with other matters a committee of professionals and other experts was designed to advise on the matter. It unanimously argued to extend the current period to 18 weeks and even beyond. Interviewees relate classical examples of resistance to the issue.

Strategies of response

Participants indicated that there are currently no attempts to revert legislation by anti-gender actors. Anti-gender tactics are restricted to (social) media attacks or taking up space and time during debates. Therefore, we are hesitant to call the strategies the interviewees employed feminist. It was often unclear if the actions of MPs were inspired by feminist intentions rather than part of their usual parliamentary work.

Knowledge

A first strategy is to spread awareness about anti-gender actions towards other MPs during debates, as many interviewees were worried about the lack of thought given to equality subjects. The former State Secretary for equal opportunities identified the lack of knowledge on anti-gender activism in Belgium and financed a study to investigate different aspects (including political) of such activism.

A second strategy is the development of a discourse independent from anti-gender discourses thereby emphasising inclusion and diversity: “[We have to] make sure we have better story” (I2). A crucial element of this discourse is the omission of any anti-gender terminology and references to recent anti-gender actions in order to prevent indirectly supporting them.

Coalition building

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Collaborations among MPs across parties have traditionally been confined to the majority group. Within parties, interviewees referred to LGBTQIA+ networks present in all parties, except the radical right. Interviewees also conveyed that they routinely engage with civil society organisations to listen to their concerns. These collaborations predominantly revolve around immediate concerns of politicians and lack a strategic focus on fostering enduring and structural alliances to counter anti-gender opposition. On the other hand, civil society organisation participants indicate that MPs are not their primary interest group when lobbying. Instead, they mainly point their attention to ministers and state secretaries.

Everyday pragmatic engagement

In the Belgian parliaments, engagement with anti-gender actors was done in various manners. Some interviewees opted to ignore hateful language, either out of discouragement or as an intentional strategy.

Responding to anti-gender discourse mainly depended on practical circumstances according to the interviewees. This could be the order sequence MPs are allowed to speak in debates within committees or the plenary or the preparation they had or had not done. Others appeared more passionate in their fight against homophobia: one MP claimed to always react to homophobic utterances in parliament.

Rule-making

Under the current government, legislation on several women's issues, racism, and LGBTQIA+ issues have been expanded. It is, as we indicated earlier, unclear how much of this work is motivated by a feminist strategy against anti-gender opposition. One aspect of this work, by the government, has been the refinancing of equality bodies and subsidies for civil society organisations. MPs indicate that their power lies mainly in the propositions of bills, but that they cannot cross the boundaries laid out by the coalition agreement. Overall, MPs are well aware of the limited power they dispose of within the Belgian Chamber of Representatives.

Intersectionality in responses

The comprehension and practice of intersectionality by MPs in responding to or even the understanding of anti-gender opposition depended very on their political positionality. MPs from the

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green parties were more likely to consider issues intersectionally than others. Overall, attention for race and racism was scarce, although some interviewees expressed worries on right-wing positions on migration and identity. Other social and identity axes, such as disability and class inequalities, remained underexposed.

Participants did widely recognise LGBTQIA+ topics as a target of anti-gender attacks. However, the understanding of LGBTQIA+ issues was limited. The focus of parliamentary work was often aimed at reducing homophobia suffered by cis gay white men. Transgender issues were identified as a target of anti-gender opposition mainly by specialists on LGBTQIA+ themes.

Overall, the participants showed a lack of understanding of the connection between different forms of oppression and separated race, gender, class, and sexuality issues, thereby losing important connections between different marginalizations.

Constraining and enabling factors for feminist responses

Enabling factors include, first and foremost, the capacity of some critical progressive MPs to detect anti-gender articulations within parliament and Belgian society, and how these attack the foundations of the equality acquis. Second, the split political landscape, allowing French-speaking MPs and politicians to take progressive stances without all fearing immediate hate reactions from the right (indeed, this does not count for (former) members of government, who are among the favourite targets of N-VA and VB, both opposition parties with a virulent hate for any French-speaking political actor beyond some members of the MR).

Constraining factors include, first, a lack of awareness of the existence of the problem, at least within Belgium, among many MPs, it has not been thought about and some MPs do not even understand and grasp the term. It is therefore not easy to formulate feminist responses as they are considered to exaggerate and tackle an-issue. The problem is considered to be one of countries such as Hungary or Poland, and many MPs consider that what actors from parties such as VB, N-VA, MR (outside the Chamber of Representatives) articulate is part of the discourse and ideas they always articulate. Second, Belgium is considered a champion of rights by many MPs (and others), of there being a good acquis. There is a lack of consciousness that such rights need protection and could be/are in danger; the underlying understanding being that these rights will always be there. It is thus not considered to be necessary to (re)act. Third, and partly related to the previous point, issues related to gender

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equality, LGBTQI+ rights or SOGI matters are no political priority. By many MPs (and others) they are considered as secondary or even symbolic issues, and only make it to the political agenda when there is nothing else to do. This understanding is no different from before, but generating feminist responses is not seen as more urgent than otherwise. Fourth, many aspects of some of the topics tackled are very technical or require a lot of expertise, especially when it comes to problems of transgender or intersex persons, something many MPs do not possess. Also, equality issues are transversal, some of the aspects concerning LGBTQI+ or SOGI issues are dealt with in other parliamentary committees, such as justice or home affairs, whereas the MPs in charge of those committees might not be expert in gender, LGBTQI+ or SOGI issues. This complicates smooth and easily accessible communication on these issues.

Fifth, parliament has very little power as compared to government (see introduction to context) and is to a large extent considered to serve publicity purposes (I1). It is also difficult for MPs to work together across party lines, certainly beyond the majority, and to coordinate activities along other lines such as women MPs working together or MPs with an LGBTQI+ background. Sixth, the parliamentary protocol is very strict. It defines for instance, the order of interventions by MPs of different political groups. This allows only MPs intervening after anti-gender actors have presented, to react to what has been said. On the whole, there is very little room for sanctioning verbal and non-verbal communication in parliament by the president of the parliament. Seventh, Dutch-speaking parties are much more confronted with anti-gender actors and more broadly the radical right than the French-speaking parties, both within the Chamber of Representatives, but also regional and local politics, (social) media, public opinion, and electorally. They face different challenges than the French-speaking MPs and parties, and their reaction often tends to be a cautious one. For some MPs it is a conscious strategy to not react to anti-gender actors or to be silent on certain topics so as to give anti-gender actors and articulations as little attention as possible and to face as little violence as possible oneself. It is mainly (though not only) women (and other MPs) from the LGBTQI community who address anti-gender issues and it is also mainly they and MPs with non-Belgian roots who face most and most violent comments and reactions, within parliament and beyond. MPs (and other actors) know that hate messages and more will follow as soon as they address progressive ethical issues. These three factors constrain progressive action in relation to anti-gender articulations.

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3.2 EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Introduction: European Parliament's context to feminist institutional responses

With a relatively high representation of women elected as Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) (39,3% during the 9th term, 2019-2024), a well-established specialised Committee for Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM), a long tradition of collaborating with feminist academics and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and a formal commitment to gender mainstreaming[3] the EP has the reputation of an 'equality' parliament. In contrast, recent studies estimate that around 1/3 of MEPs opposed gender equality during the 8th term (2014-2019)[4] while strategies of direct and indirect opposition persist in the 9th term (2019-2024).[5]

Simultaneously, the EP's working culture is cordial and consensus oriented. Hostility or direct interactions between MEPs during debates are unusual. Key policy decisions are taken well ahead of debates, in technical meetings where the influence of anti-gender (AG) actors is easier to contain.

In this context, the impact of AG actors on gendered and feminist policymaking remains limited, as exemplified by the adoption of a resolution on sexual and reproductive health and rights with mentions of abortion rights in 2021 (2020/2215(INI)). Yet, their presence influences both the politicisation of equality issues by making it more polarising, and FEMM as an AG discourse now exists in the committee. In turn, feminist MEPs tend to react more to AG attacks taking place at national levels and less to those heard in the hemicycle. In contrast, attacks from AG MEPs are very much targeting the role of the EP and of the EU.

Methodological note

This report is based on 17 interviews with parliamentary actors and 20 parliamentary debates. The interviewees were selected for their expertise on issues of equality, gender equality, LGBTIQ+ rights and anti-racism in the EP. In great majority interviewees belonged to the S&D group, followed by the Greens/EFA, the Left, and Renew. Members of the EP Administration and of euro parties (The Party

3 Elomäki, A., & Ahrens, P. (2022). Contested gender mainstreaming in the European Parliament: political groups and committees as gatekeepers. *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, *1*, 1-19.

4 Zacharenko, E. (2020). Anti-gender mobilisations in Europe. Greens/EFA of the European Parliament.

5 Kantola, J., & Lombardo, E. (2021). Strategies of right populists in opposing gender equality in a polarised European Parliament. International Political Science Review, 42(5), 565-579.

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of European Socialists) are also represented in the interview pool. The interviews were conducted mostly online between August 2023 and January 2024, and lasted about 30 minutes each. Interviews were discontinued after saturation, that is when themes and issues discussed during interviews became repetitive. The debates were selected for their relevancy to issues on violence against women, reproductive rights and LGBTIQ+ rights during the 9th term (2019-2024).

Findings

Actors

Actors voicing a feminist response can be regrouped under coalitions and political groups. FEMM is the main feminist coalition in the EP with actors belonging mostly to political groups on the centre left. These are the Socialist & Democrats Group (S&D), Renew Europe Group (Renew), the Greens/EFA group (Greens/EFA) and the Left group (the Left). Although heterogeneous on equality issues, the biggest European People's Party (EPP) has strong feminist MEPs in FEMM. Further, the EP has at least 4 intergroups and informal networks allowing coalitions under an umbrella theme. For instance, the *LGBTI Intergroup*, the *Anti-Racism and Diversity Intergroup*, the *All of Us* network, and *MEPs for Sexual and Reproductive Rights* contribute to the fight against AG forces.

Content

FEMM is a very active agenda-setter for equality issues in the EP. There are thus many occasions (debates, resolutions, events) for MEPs to articulate a strong feminist position on equality issues counterbalancing the AG discourse. Few of these debates include '*The spread of "anti-LGBTIQ" propaganda bills by populist parties and governments in Europe*'; '*Identifying gender-based violence as a new area of crime listed in Article 83(1) TFEU*'; and '*Sexual and Reproductive health and rights in the EU, in the frame of women's health*'.

So far, feminist MEPs tend to ignore the presence of AG actors. When voicing a response, they stress the anti-democratic and anti-right features of AG actors and steer the conversation back to EU values of equality and respect for human rights.

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Strategies of response

Knowledge

A first strategy of response is to build knowledge through **policymaking**. For instance, the hate speech draft report (2023/2068(INI)) aims to combat gender-based hate speech and anti-gender rhetoric by specifically targeting the harmful anti-gender ideology discourse that hinders equality progress. Likewise, the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) resolution (2020/2215(INI)) is a turning point for the construction of a common EU discourse on SRHR and abortion rights. Although non-binding, reports and resolutions are mutual agreements that help establish minimum standards (Interview 11).

A second strategy is the formulation of a **consistent discourse** that distinguishes and defines 'us' as protectors of EU values and 'them' as anti-democratic actors. AG actors are often portrayed as distrusting scientific evidence, manipulating facts, and being emotional. In turn, EU values are framed as protecting gender equality, reproductive rights and as being under attack (SRHR plenary debate, 23.06.2021). Defining the "right-side" and the "wrong side of history" was especially helpful to convince undecided MEPs to join the progressive majority on the SRHR resolution (Interview 11). Recent debates on abortion rights explicitly framed anti-abortion and anti-gender rhetoric as anti-democratic and as an infringement on the rule of law. Such framings allowed for a broader coalition, namely amongst FEMM, LIBE (Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affair) and INGE (Special Committee on Foreign Interference in all Democratic Processes in the European Union, including Disinformation).

A third strategy consists in **raising awareness** on specific AG attacks targeting MEPs and on the misinformation they spread. Frequently MEPs mention during plenary debates the attacks and lobbying tactics they receive from AG actors. They are vocal about being the target of specific campaigns, such as mass emailing or receiving dolls of foetuses by post. MEP Matic, rapporteur on the SRHR resolution, openly talked about attacks targeting him personally and mentioned how he was compared to Hitler (SRHR plenary debate, 23.06.2021). Our interviewees specifically stressed the importance of being prepared to counter the misinformation of AG actors and to actively steer back the conversation around facts with the proper communication. Organising events in the EP is also a

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way to raise awareness, one example being the “interactive lunch event on anti-gender movements” with policymakers, researchers, and activists organised by MEP Vera Tax (S&D) in October 2023.

The above examples however mainly seek to raise awareness on AG attacks that are external to the EP. Yet many MEPs are aware that the threat is not coming from “lunatics who stood with the signs of bloody foetuses outside the house before. They are here inside the house” (MEP Al-Sahlani, SRHR plenary debate, 23.06.2021).

Coalition-building

In contrast, the strategy of building a coalition is directly connected to countering inhouse AG actors. Although the biggest formal feminist coalition in the EP is FEMM, broader informal coalitions emerged as a response to AG actions. For instance, in November 2022 MEP Margarita de la Pisa Carrión (ECR) organised an anti-abortion event in the EP titled “Pro-life movements in the US and in Europe: a way forward” in which Grégor Puppinck from the European Centre for Law and Justice, a well-known AG organisation, was guest speaker. In response, a coalition of MEPs from the centre-left organised a ‘hall of shame’ **protest** at the entrance of the room where the event took place. Media coverage showed MEPs stood in silence, with coat hangers and signs promoting the right to choose. Our interviewees described this coalition as “quite huge” (Interview 5), stressing that anti-abortion events are disapproved of in the EP.

Feminist MEPs can also build alliances around initiatives for containing the influence of AG actors in the EP. For instance, MEP Rafaela (Renew) requested the withdrawal of a few ultraconservative lobbyists from entering EP premises, as discussed below, in **a letter co-signed** by a group of other MEPs from the centre left. Coalition is also visible in policymaking where several MEPs endorse **amendments** together to show greater support. For instance, a group of 10 MEPs from S&D supported the addition of “whereas these movements create an ‘anti-gender’ ideology and discourse that fuels gender-based hate crime and hate speech against women and LGBTIQ+ persons" (amendment 31, FEMM, 2023/2068 (INI)) in the hate speech report.

Likewise, collaboration exists between **current and former MEPs**. MEPs working on the SRHR report in 2021 exchanged with MEP Estrela who in 2013 faced severe inhouse backlash and AG mobilisation against her report on a similar theme. The informal exchange allowed a better anticipation of the backlash and countered it more efficiently (Interview 11).

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Exchanges with **civil society organisations** (CSOs) help countering AG MEPs and external actors. FEMM regularly organises public hearings with CSOs actors working to combat the AG movement. The *European Parliament Forum for Sexual & Reproductive Rights* is particularly active and presented in the EP its "*Tip of the Iceberg*" report that traces religious extremist funders working against SRHR in Europe. Finally, CSOs were invited to train MEPs and staff on how to respond to anti-LGBT and especially anti-Trans narrative (Interview 16).

Everyday pragmatic engagement

Many interviewees said that AG parliamentary actors were generally ignored. Their provocation is deemed 'without political force' (e.g., Interviews 5 and 12) and thus not systematically responded to. Interviewees were aware that the situation may change after the elections of 2024, after which an increase of far-right MEPs is expected. All the following examples illustrate **everyday pragmatic engagements**.

Our interviewee raised a strategy of **democratic engagement** with AG actors. During negotiations around the SRHR resolution, feminist MEPs invited AG actors to all talks and meetings letting them express their views. This responded to a key populist argument that some actors are marginalised during parliamentary work. Yet their participation was emotional more than rational and without any substantive contribution (Interview 11). Likewise, the FEMM Chair often urges all MEPs to stay throughout the committee session and to listen to statements made by AG MEPs. In the same vein, our interviewees acknowledged that they were elected and are legitimate (Interview 7).

However, AG actors are allocated reports that are less likely to be damaged. For instance, one AG MEP in FEMM was an opinion rapporteur on a file on parenthood rights in the EU (2022/0402(CNS)) – a position that AG MEP hold rarely as their participation is usually constrained by informal strategies. Following the decision-making process, other MEPs adopted several amendments transforming the initial text into a progressive one. In consequence, the AG MEP withdrew from her position as opinion rapporteur and her impact was thus side-lined.

Rule-making

Although direct interactions between MEPs during debates are unusual, the use of **blue cards** allow MEPs to react to previous speeches by asking a 'blue-card question'. Feminist MEPs used this strategy, although unsystematically, to react to AG speeches by asking them a question and by stressing common values of equality. For instance, blue cards were used several times during a

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debate on parenthood to defend the rights of same-sex couples (Parenthood plenary debate, 13.12.2023). Blue cards were also used to request from the President of session an assessment of whether the previous speech constituted hate speech or racial discrimination (Istanbul Convention plenary debate, 09.05.2023). Some forms of hate speech are sanctioned by the **Rules of Procedures** (Art 10(1)), yet such requests are generally not taken forward (Interviews 8, 6, 13).

The Rules of Procedure (RoP) were also tentatively used by feminist MEPs in a letter addressed to the EP President requesting 'to withdraw accreditation of radical ultraconservative anti-abortion lobbyists with transnational links in EP premises' (Letter, 19.01.2023). According to our interviewees, the withdrawal of access to state organisations from EP premises is possible under the RoP – a mechanism previously used against Russian lobbyists and as a reaction to the so-called corruption scandal 'Qatar-gate'. However, the lobbying of AG organisations is not regarded as foreign interference from state actors under the current understanding of the RoP (Interview 6). Many interviewees told us that such requests are often seen as too radical and as limiting freedom of speech (Interviews 3, 5). Under the RoP, freedom of speech must be considered in the assessment of conducts (Art. 10). For most MEPs, the threat of AG actors remains largely invisible and the letter addressed to the EP President is best described as symbolic.

Inclusiveness of responses in terms of intersectionality and capacity to counteract racism and homophobia

Feminist actors in the EP aim to develop an intersectional perspective to gendered issues and their response to AG actors is often intersectional. Gendered issues are broadly understood as encompassing gender identity and sexual orientation, migrant status, ethnicity, class, and disability. However, fighting inequalities around race remains a bigger challenge than fighting inequalities around gender (Interview 15). A prime example is the report by the High-Level Group on Gender Equality and Diversity titled "Diversities *other than gender* in the European Parliament's Secretariat"[6] (emphasis added) that stresses in its very name the preponderance that gender takes in the fight over inequalities, whilst discriminations based on disability, sexual orientation and gender identity, racial or ethnic origins, religion or belief, and nationality are less visible.

6 High-Level Group in Gender Equality and Diversity Report to the Bureau on Diversities other than Gender in the European Parliament's Secretariat. State of Play and Roadmap 2019-2020.

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The EU is often criticised for not addressing racism and race inequalities appropriately and its own institutions are constructed around whiteness as a norm.[7] Intersectionality in the EU is often less about race than it is about the intersectional identities of white women (e.g., LGBTIQ+, age, class, disabilities).

Factors enabling and constraining feminist institutional responses

We have identified three enabling factors. They include first the EP coalition-building culture which under the current majority in FEMM allows the adoption of policies with a gendered perspective and the continuation of a discourse of respect for equality and human rights. Second, the EP feminist governance structure – with its high level of women MEPs; its FEMM Committee; its commitment to gender mainstreaming; and its collaboration with CSOs and academics – provides institutional stability and ensures the politicisation of feminist issues in the EP, including LGBTIQ+ and anti-racism issues. Finally, the presence of critical actors in FEMM, LIBE and JURI (Committee on Legal Affairs) as well as in the biggest EPP group is key to obtaining political force on feminist issues.

Simultaneously, constraining factors include first the weak institutional position of FEMM. The Committee has a low reputation and is rarely in charge of legislative files. Likewise, political tensions exist in FEMM too, notably given the presence of vocal radical-right AG actors within its ranks. Second, EP politics are fragmented by political struggles, contradictions and oppositions that emerge at different levels (i.e., committees, political groups, and national party delegations) despite its consensus-oriented culture. National politics sometimes prevail and prevent unanimous consensus on certain salient issues in groups that otherwise largely support gender equality (e.g. the Istanbul Convention). Thirdly, many issues remain gender-blind and feminist MEPs tend to be silenced or their expertise underestimated in several committees (e.g. EMPL, the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs). In times of crisis, feminist perspectives tend to be side-lined (e.g. Covid). Lastly, antisemitism and colonialism left their legacies on how race is tackled – or silenced – in EU policies. The term ‘race’ is almost always excluded from EU texts due to historical traumas (i.e., holocaust, colonialism) where crimes against humanity were justified with a biological understanding of race. Excluding race from the conversation, however, overlooks processes of racialization taking place in

7 Kantola, J., Elomäki, A., Gaweda, B., Miller, C., Ahrens, P., & Berthet, V. (2023) “It’s Like Shouting to a Brick Wall”: Normative Whiteness and Racism in the European Parliament. American Political Science Review, 117(1), 184-199.

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society at large and within EU institutions.[8] As a result, feminist responses to AG forces are more likely to be intersectional from the perspective of integrating LGBTIQ+ rights but not in their efforts to tackle racism.

8 See, Fundamental Right Agency report on Being Black in the EU: Experiences of People of African Descent. October 2023.

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3.3 HUNGARY

Introduction: Hungarian Parliament's context to feminist institutional responses

Hungary's National Assembly (Parliament in the following) is a unicameral legislative body with 199 members (386 between 1990 and 2014), which operates under a 4-year term structure. The electoral process employs semi-proportional representation, utilising a mixed-member majoritarian system with partial compensation, transfer votes, and a 5% popular vote threshold for list seats. Presently, the ruling Fidesz-KDNP government commands 135 seats, while the opposition coalition "United for Hungary" holds 57 seats, and the extreme right-wing party "Our Homeland" has 6 seats. The Fidesz-KDNP coalition has been in power since 2010.

Regime – autocracy

Initially a success story of post-socialist democratisation, from 2010 Hungary is one of Europe's most prominent cases of de-democratization, the only electoral autocracy in the EU (Alizada et al. 2021). As de-democratization progressed democratic institutions gradually decayed, including the legislative branch. The Parliament, while it still has 1/3 opposition members, it has increasingly become a theatre of representation which serves legitimacy purposes for the regime but does not serve democratic representation and political debate. In its operations formal rules and informal practices are used to undermine the access and voice of opposition.

As a constitutive part of its autocratizing tendencies Orban's regime has also become the main actor and instigator of the anti-gender project. The formal rules and informal practices of the Parliament become part and parcel of the anti-gender project to which democrats in opposition stand up to. It is frequently difficult to disentangle opposition against the regime and its representatives from resistance and responses to the anti-gender campaign.

However, opposition has limited space to voice resistance and argue against the anti-gender position of the government and the parties supporting it. Our data sources devote extensive attention to the ways in which their access and voice is curtailed, how the Parliament is not the arena of the opposition but rather an institution for window dressing. They argue that all the opposition can do is speak their mind – everything else is controlled by Fidesz. Opposition does not get a chance to initiate debates and influence the agenda. Committees cannot be set up if the governing coalition is not supportive. They are frequently sanctioned by the Speaker and have to pay exorbitant fines. Therefore, the main

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location of resistance is parliamentary speeches prior to the agenda and interpellations as well as extra-parliamentary venues.

Methodological note

Our findings need to be situated within this context. This defined the selection of the debates we picked for analysis as well as the method of sampling. Given the hostility of the regime to gender equality and the constrained agenda setting capacity of opposition actors in the Parliament we moved in our debate selection beyond the most recent period and also covered an earlier debate. We have chosen the most recent anti-gender legislative proposal – the so-called Child Protection Law (2021) and also the prolonged debate over the ratification of the Istanbul Convention (IC) (between 2014-2020). While the recent debate is a demonstration of the constraints the opposition faces in articulating a proper parliamentary response, the IC debate spans over a period during which the Parliament was initially more democratic. In identifying MP responses, we paid particular attention to interventions before the agenda.

Data sources

- 9 interviews
- Two roundtable debates with opposition MPs about responses to the regime (April 2022, CEU)[9] and their responses to gender inequality (March 2022, CEU)[10].
- All relevant parliamentary contributions to the two legislative issues with particular attention to questions prior to the agenda and interpellations.
- Related news reporting.

Building on the Spanish model codebook we developed our own codebook.

Content

Ratification of the Istanbul Convention (Gender Based Violence)

The Parliamentary debate on ratification of the IC took place between 2014-2020, with explicit opposition to gender equality peaking in the period 2017-20. We follow responses throughout the entire debate. Hungary signed the Convention in March 2014 without any controversy. Following its signature, the Government took three years to codify the draft law for ratification. The Parliamentary

[9] https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=374951541199155
[10] https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=304330088271295

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debate during this period revolved around repeated attempts by the opposition to pass a Parliamentary Decision forcing the government to start ratification, all of which were blocked by the governmental majority without substantive parliamentary debate[11]. A draft act on the promulgation was submitted for public consultation on February 14, 2017.

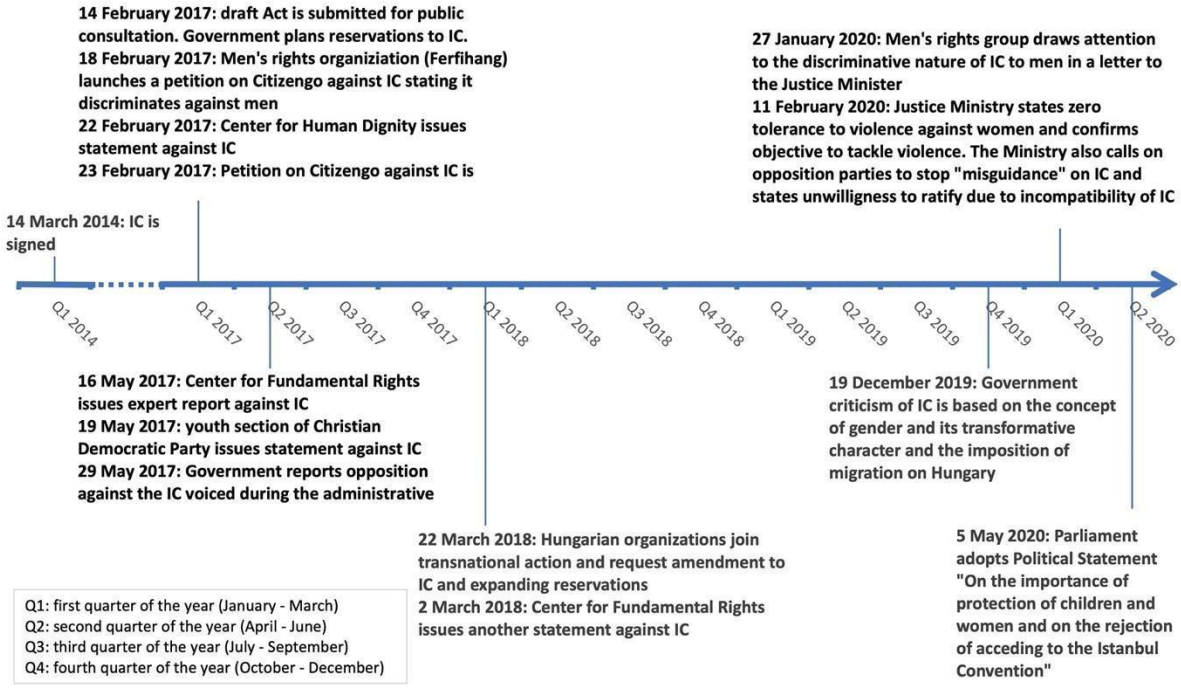

Figure 1 Timeline of opposition to the IC in Hungary (Source: Kriszan and Roggeband 2021)

Contestation started during this period and was initially spearheaded by various government sponsored think tanks and civil society actors. Their arguments were integrated into the government's rhetoric. While the government continued to evade policy action repeated interpellations by opposition MPs and attempts to pass a Parliamentary Decision to force ratification were going on. The Parliament became a major arena of contestation. Following the 2018 elections, opposition parties realigned and reissued the proposal for a Parliamentary Decision which now framed ratification as a democracy issue: "Restore democracy by ratifying the IC". The proposal was blocked from parliamentary debate. The parliamentary discussion of the IC ratification was closed by a Political Statement of the Parliament instructing the government against ratification. Issued in May 2020 and called "On the importance of protection of children and women and on the rejection of acceding to the Istanbul

[11] Such attempts took place in: June, September, November, December 2014, March, May, December 2015, March, April, May, November 2016, Feb, May, July, October, November, 2017, September 2018, November 2018, December 2019.

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Convention" (Hungarian Parliament, 2020) was approved by full governmental majority. It called on the government to reject ratification and to oppose it in all EU forums because of its introduction of the term "gender", because recognizing gender-based violence as a form of persecution in asylum procedures, and because of endangering Hungarian culture, laws, tradition and national values.

Amendment of the Child Protection Act (anti-LGBTQI regulations)

The second debate is the amendment of the Child Protection Act, which included discriminatory regulations against LGBTQI people and the representation of LGBTQI people while deliberately confusing paedophilia with homosexuality and creating moral panic around gender transition. The amendment process took place in June 2021, but relevant discussions started earlier and continued afterwards with a popular referendum on the matter (April 2022). In this debate, we focus on the period 2018-2022/2023.

The original objective of the bill was to make the prevention, detection, and sanctioning of paedophile criminal offences more effective, but with a last-minute amendment MPs from the governing parties included anti-LGBTQI provisions as well. In particular, the act amended the Child Protection Act, the Family Protection Act, the National Public Education Act, the Advertisement Act, and the Media Act to introduce a ban on access of minors to any content that “propagates or portrays divergence from self-identity corresponding to sex at birth, sex change, or homosexuality.”

The anti-LGBTQI provisions were introduced to the Parliament by the government party coalition members of the Legislative Committee just five days before the final vote on the law, following a thorough debate in the Committee on Justice, Committee on Welfare, and during the plenary session. The short time frame did not allow members of parliament to engage in a more substantial discussion of the proposed law. The political field for opposition MPs was not only difficult because of the speedy legislative process, but because the new legislation was introduced as a “salad law”, along with a mix of other, equally problematic, changes. This resulted in the gender issue being overshadowed by other problematic legislative amendments.

Findings

Actors

In Hungary the government and their allies are the main orchestrators of the anti-gender campaign. Responses to the anti-gender campaign can largely be connected to democratic opposition to the

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regime and, in our context, opposition forces within the Parliament. We focus on political actors related to the "United for Hungary" opposition platform. During the 2022-26 electoral cycle this platform is made up of one independent MP and six political parties: ***Hungarian Socialist Party*** "MSZP" (10 MPs), ***Democratic Coalition*** "DK" (15 MPs), ***LMP – Hungary's Green Party*** (5 MPS), ***Dialogue*** (6 MPs), ***Momentum Movement*** (10 MPs), and ***Jobbik*** (a radical right party recently realigning to centre, 10 MPs). We also look at the only relevant parliamentary group (For a Diverse Hungary (FDH): MPs for the LGBTQ community) established by opposition MPs and civil society in 2022.

As our political debates span over several parliamentary cycles our sample covers parliamentarians from previous cycles, some who are MPs now and some who were present throughout several cycles. This allows us to see overtime changes. Our interview sample also includes personnel of the parliamentary group.

Framing of feminist content by actors

Predating the autocratic regime Hungarian political debates have a tradition of de-gendering even the most fundamental gender equality issues, both in advocacy and in opposition for gender equality (Krizsan & Roggeband 2018). However, as misogyny strengthened after 2010 and was channelled into the orchestrated anti-gender project of the government, responses mobilised an increased number of supporters and shifted previous frames towards more radical gender equality terms (Krizsan & Roggeband 2021). Our analysis of parliamentary debates and interviews confirms this previously identified tendency in the parliamentary arena.

Parliamentary speeches discuss gender equality openly. They frame it in a complex manner, with transformative objectives, representing a mainstreaming vision which allocates responsibilities to society, politics and men and projects the need for transforming gender power relations. Several dimensions of gender are tackled in interrelated ways: widely discussing how violence, employment and pay, care and politics are interrelated and contribute to inequality. There is a focus in most speeches on power relations which is seen to parallel inequality mechanisms on grounds similarly neglected or manipulated by the regime such as race, nationality, LGBTQI or class issues. However, even if parallels between various inequalities are recognized, most speeches/interviews talk about women's rights and less about gender relations, gender equality, gender identity or trans rights. Other interviews focus in a similarly single-issue manner on LGBTQI rights and explain why LGBTQI rights as distinctive from women's rights issues mainly because direct attacks against LGBTQI people as

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opposed to women never being targeted directly, just being neglected. Another MPs explains how merging LGBTQ issues with women's rights issues would be detrimental to protecting women because it would shadow the specific problems they face.

Another Hungarian legacy is the limited engagement of feminist advocacy with mainstream democracy frames, the absence of a clear feminist articulation how gender equality connects to democracy (Krizsan & Roggeband 2018). Democracy is widely touched upon in this data, and is mainly framed in terms of participation, consultation with civil society and marginalised groups. Integrating a diversity of perspectives is seen as key to democracy. Unbalanced power relations and hierarchies as obstacles to democracy are also tackled. Formal democratic institutions are also emphasised by some, but overall, the common focus remains on a participatory notion of democracy. The relation between democracy and gender equality is only tackled by few: they all agree linking attacks on gender to democratic erosion, viewing misogynist, racist, homophobic and anti-poor social and political vision of the government inherently anti-democratic.

Strategies of response

Knowledge

MPs mobilise extensive external knowledge and data to make their claims. Two points emerge. First, responses change as the regime becomes more closed. Reasoning utilising knowledge and facts change over time moving from more rationalistic data based arguing to interventions where government arguments are refuted with reference to various moral grounds. Second: as attacks on and exclusion of civil society progresses, and academics and researchers working on gender and other inequality fields are coming under attack as enemies of the regime, use of knowledge and data from them with explicit referencing becomes a significant political act.

Sources of knowledge

MPs often use data/evidence from nationally or internationally acknowledged **research institutions**, **statistical offices,** or various EU level organisations with research activities. Such references are highlighted as reliable sources. Evidence is lined up about the prevalence of violence for example. Much of it comes from **feminist movement/CSOs** in Hungary. Specific feminist civil society experiences are invoked: thus, feminist groups are given voice and recognition in the Parliament.

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The feminist practice of invoking **testimonials** is used as well. Interviews sometimes refer to own experiences with GBV, in parliamentary speeches they narrate specific mediatized incidents, infamous cases of revictimization by state. Retelling the story of violence practices in the Parliamentary arena is a strategy to create empathy and resonance and express condemnation and the need for change.

References to the **international** level are extremely prevalent. They serve as inspiration for responses, but also to instruct the government on improving performance. FDH is a clear case where inspiration was taken from other countries. In many instances international good practice is used as a moral compass to instruct the government and the parliamentary majority. These can also serve as a threat about sanctions or shaming from the international community.

Use of knowledge by responders shows their predominant reliance on non-state sources as well as sources that can be connected to vulnerable groups (both through invoking representative civil society, and through the use of experiential or testimony-based knowledge).

Reasoning for truth claim

Reasoning is more predominantly facts and rationality based in the earlier periods while later, as opposition space shrinks, refuting arguments on moral grounds, reckoning, comparative reasoning and forward-looking reasoning become more predominant.

Comparative reasoning is used to compare actions of the regime with opposition parties to highlight the positive features of one's own actions or the negative features of the other. Next to comparative and expertise driven arguments for challenging government rhetoric we also see **forward looking argumentation** indicating feminist visions.

Affective reasoning changes over time. In the early years **mocking** was used to degrade representatives of the regime by ridiculing them, marking them as incompetent, often highlighting stories that have been popularised and ridiculed by the media. This cynical tone about male representatives of the regime seems to be absent from more recent years.

While initially truth claims are more reliant on expert knowledge and comparative claims, as the regime moves towards foreclosing democratic opposition voices, arguments turn more confrontative. **Refuting arguments** by pointing to lies and distortions in the government rhetoric is one way of confronting. Calling out specific ministers or the government in general both by relying on contrary evidence or simply by highlighting the lack of evidence behind government proposals is used throughout.

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Reckoning is another argumentative strategy where MPs demand accountability from regime representatives. **Shaming** the government and MPs in the governmental coalition emerges increasingly over time: expresses the anger and sense of helplessness of the opposition. In addition, we see **personalization** used both to responsibilize government representatives as well as to generate understanding of consequences.

The changes in the use of different rhetorical tools over the years are apparent. While in the case of IC both mocking and shaming are typical, in the case of the Child Protection Act shaming and reckoning and anger are taking over. Overall, knowledge and argumentation types are diverse, they mix hard data and experiential knowledge, rationality based with morality-based argumentation, but they change over time.

Strategic framing

Strategic framing stands out as an important response used by opposition MPs. Several have the sense that reframing problematic government narrative is one of their key jobs. Taking back concepts that are now used and abused by the regime (such as “family’, “care”, “feminism”) is key. The coordinator of FDH, highlights the importance of not entering the reactive response trap and instead maintaining an autonomous agenda and framing, regardless of what the regime wants. In the case of the parliamentary group this means that they frame their issue as LGBTQ politics, not as part of family, care, paedophilia or minority politics. Overall strategic framing is a core element of the battle the opposition fights against the regime, one in which feminist and LGBTQ activist autonomy should be mindfully protected.

Coalition-building

Intra-parliamentary

In Hungary cross party coalitions tend to be short-term, issue based, and informal, and this characterises coalitions built to support women’s rights, LGBTQI rights or minority rights as well. There were no institutionalised cross-party groups since 2010, not in relation to feminism/women’s rights or else. In fact, organised, institutionalised cooperation between women has never existed in the Hungarian Parliament: the country never had a fully operational women’s caucus. However, after 2010 women MPs in opposition (except far right Our Homeland, in Parliament since 2022) have stood together, supporting each other in the case of specific issues and cases. Women MPs of the Fidesz-KDNP government coalition have shown some interest in cooperation in the early years of the FIDESZ

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regime (around 2012) however their interest and willingness decreased and was closed altogether as the traditionalist discourse of the government strengthened (after 2014).

Informal coalitions focused on single issues both among parliamentary actors and with extra-parliamentary actors. They tended to be ad-hoc and temporal and strengthened under constraining political circumstances, such as around elections. Cooperation took various forms including press conferences, joint political action, and mutual support but also protest actions. Cooperation between women MPs in opposition was particularly intensive until the end of the IC debate in 2020 when the Parliament issued its political statement against ratification.

Coalition work started moving towards formalisation after the 2018 elections, when opposition parties united in a common oppositional platform (United for Hungary). The only formalised coalition on a gender related issue emerged after 2022 when upon civil society initiative the *For a Diverse Hungary* (FDH) parliamentary group was established. The objective is to coordinate action for LGBTQI rights. It has delegates from the *United for Hungary* coalition, except far right Jobbik, but it also brings together MPs with civil society actors. The group may also be a promising example for a long-term coalition.

As FDH came into being to support LGBTQI issues coalition work between women politicians plateaued. This is mentioned in several interviews without clear explanations. The focus now is more on sexual minorities and coordination towards that took a different, much more institutionalised format, possibly not unrelated from the focus of governmental attacks.

Interviews also talk about the impact of coalition work in the field of gender on other issue areas and cooperation more generally, about how cooperation between women MPs but also within the FDH triggers or serves as venues and entry points for cooperation in other democracy issues.

Overall coalitions within the Parliament for purposes of gender equality strengthened and strived until 2022 but remained informal. Meanwhile the coalition working towards LGBTQI issues came much later but in a stronger, institutionalised format which also included civil society in the coalition. In general, these coalitions are seen as catalysts for cooperation beyond the issue.

Extra-parliamentary

Coalition-building with non-parliamentary actors tends to be issue-specific too. Cooperation often goes along the lines of and information sharing which operates as a two-way street. On the one hand, MPs acquire inaccessible data and share it with CSOs. On the other hand, opposition MPs rely extensively on knowledge provided by CSOs and researchers in various forms of knowledge transfers. Opposition

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MPs have contributed to knowledge transfer also by interviews such as those used for the present research.

The FDH parliamentary group is a prominent institutionalised manifestation of such cooperation. Initiated by two Hungarian LGBTQ CSOs (Háttér Társaság and Budapest Pride) it models parliamentary good practices in other EU countries to lobby for LGBTQ rights in an organised manner. It is a form of organised knowledge exchange between parliamentary and non-parliamentary actors.

MPs also gain experiential knowledge about gender inequality problems through their cooperation with civil society. Intensive networking with civil society members was one practice used during the IC debates, (e.g., MPs referring to their experiences from women shelters). Besides knowledge exchange, coalition-building manifests in the form of attending protests or actions organised by CSOs or at other times inviting CSOs to the parliament. Cooperation is often orchestrated by feminist civil society actors to which MPs join for various political, strategic or knowledge reasons.

Overall, in the context of autocratization, the continuity between opposition politics and their responses to anti-gender attacks and civil society is remarkable. MPs bring civil society's voice and presence to the parliament, to compensate for the systematic political exclusion of these groups from the legislative and policy arena (Roggeband & Krizsan 2021). Only one MP in our sample sees civil society as part of a separate sector who may inform politics but cooperation with whom should not be more than incidental.

Finally, international actors are also seen as valuable coalition partners, a backup which helps compensate for the increasing silencing of opposition.

Cost of coalitions and non-cooperations

Opposition sees coordinated resistance as the way to prevail over the regime: this grounds a strong co-dependency between opposition parties. Value alignment is reasonable between the 5 parties that identify as centrist, leftist or green. While there are ideological differences they can be considered as **natural allies** within the present context. Jobbik, however is a **problematic ally** with its right wing, conservative ideological foundation, an openly racist and homophobic past which is slowly consolidating since 2018. Nevertheless, Jobbik has been an ally in the last years of the struggle to ratify the IC and has also lined up to criticise the amendment of the Child Protection Act. However, it did not join FDH and is not contributing to LGBTQI related actions of the opposition.

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Cooperation with the Speaker on sanctioning Our Homeland's racist speech in the Parliament is a particularly contentious issue. The sanctioning practice of the Speaker is seen as a highly arbitrary tool used to silence opposition. Yet its use for sanctioning racist speech pushed most opposition actors to align with the Speaker.

Another, somewhat uneasy cooperation is bringing together feminist and LGBTQI issues under one umbrella. While MPs advocating for these issues are partly the same, with the exclusive institutionalisation of LGBTQI issues feminist resistance seems to be left in vid. Rather than a pooling of resources and identifying common objectives it seems that the uneasy cooperation between feminist and LGBTQI civil society actors translates to the parliamentary arena and mirrors a competition Olympics situation.

Everyday pragmatic engagement

Autocratizing parliamentary routines push the opposition to turn to other, often non-conventional instruments to advocate issues that are silenced by the regime.

Non-conforming and other performative actions, corridor practices and outreach

One of their everyday pragmatic strategies is to resubmit numerous times their proposals to the plenary and to committees, regardless of the repeated refusals or outvoting they face. Attempts to pass a Parliamentary Decision forcing the government to ratify the IC (19 occasions between 2014-2019) that were all blocked without substantive parliamentary debate is a good example (Krizsan & Roggeband 2021). Here they turned regular parliamentary action into protest by repetitiveness.

Another tactic is to bring issues before or after the main agenda (which is controlled by the FIDESZ majority). MPs talk about utilising this possibility extensively: while their statements are rarely listened to by the government, the possibility of expressing their opposing views and reaching out to wider publics are mentioned as fundamental.

MPs used **non-formal protest strategies** inside the parliament in order to express and visualise their opinions in the form of dress codes or billboards. One of the most symbolic actions was when women MPs wore white scarf/hat to protest violence against women and for the ratification of the IC. However, starting from 2018 the Speaker (Kövér) amended the house rules to tie the use of demonstrative tools or performative action within the Parliament to authorization, and otherwise punishable by withdrawal of salary or further fines.

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In cases of extreme disappointment with the process MPs protest by leaving the premises of the session or by abstaining from voting (e.g., in the case of the Child Protection Law).

MPs also use spaces beyond the Parliamentary sessions extensively. **Corridor** is where a lot of opposition politics is seen to happen. They use corridor chat and other personal encounters to appeal to morality.

Similarly **outreach through media** becomes an important arena for representation. Some MPs see the press statements after the parliamentary sessions more important than the sessions themselves. Reaching the public through the media is a primary aim. This serves political purposes but is also about providing representation to their constituency. Several MPs see their immediate constituency to which they owe most accountability: personal support becomes fundamental to opposition MPs and they try to remedy responses of a flawed state.

Rule-making

During this regime opposition could not intervene in rulemaking in the Parliament as the institution is controlled by the Fidesz-KDNP majority and its speaker MP Kövér. Procedural rules while on the face neutral serve the interest of the majority. Rules are frequently amended to close windows of opportunity for what is seen as 'unruly' opposition behaviour. This was the case, with the use of supporting material such as posters. Sanctions are frequently issued against 'misbehaving' MPs. A solidarity response used by opposition parties is to redistribute fines.

Yet, despite the biased interpretation, opposition MPs apply a creative use of existent rules, constantly looking for the gaps that can open opportunities for intervention. We see the former Ombudsperson instruct MPs how to identify gaps in procedures to force accountability on the regime. Good examples for such practices in parliament are repeated submission of the same proposals (as discussed above). Another practice used is to strategically push issues of importance on the agenda in unconnected debates thus reframing the parliamentary agenda. Unresolved policy issues such as the IC ratification emerge in basically all debates about budget, social policy, family policy and others.

Next to the creative use of formal rules we also see patterns of informal rule making. For example, several parties have internal practices that contribute to gender equality (e.g., being conscious about the equal representation of women and men in various roles in the party).

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Overall, however, rules and formality are not the strength of feminist responses to anti-gender attacks. Patterns of responses, except for the single-issue FDH group, are for the most part ad-hoc, and rarely driven by protocols and formalised action.

Inclusiveness of responses in terms of intersectionality and capacity to counteract racism and homophobia

Hungarian political debates have a legacy of siloing various equality issues (race, gender, LGBTQI, disability or class) despite the increasing attacks by the autocratizing regime against all of these issues. Common mobilisation between advocacy groups remained absent or at best incidental. Our parliamentary sources seem to overcome this siloed thinking and emphasise the common logic of exclusion, the similarity in how the regime is challenging and disregarding them. A common treatment of all these topics is frequent. Despite this almost no instance of genuine intersectional thinking can be detected. A carefully maintained separate logic is characteristic even in the two aspects of this report: gender equality and LGBTQ rights, where speakers identify only remote connections and place the emphasis on how politics constructed them as very different. We see instances of articulating gender as transversal to all policy issues and as such crosscutting with class, but remarkably no mention of specific groups at points of intersection could be found in our data. Connection between gender inequality and class (or rather poverty) has been highlighted most frequently.

Another more indirect intersectional sensitivity comes with the discussion of gender aspects in the context of the war in Ukraine. Overall, intersectional thinking is remarkably absent from our data. Instead, a logic of essentializing is characteristic, even if mechanisms of inequality and exposure of these groups to autocratic abuse are connected.

Few of the interviewees addressed racism in the context of anti-immigration rhetoric of the government (focusing on refugee people of color). Racism against Roma has been also highlighted by a few MPs: On the one hand in the form of speeches made by MPs of the far right and the government coalition discussing for example "gypsy-crime". On the other hand in the form of everyday racism/semantic violence within the House of Parliament targeting Roma MPs - comparing it to the everyday sexism effecting women MPs.

Factors enabling and constraining feminist institutional responses

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Feminist institutional responses have been **constrained** by the 13 years of authoritarian ruling that oppose feminism/LGBTQ rights. Navigating the shrinking democratic space has consumed a lot of energy of opposition MPs. As new discriminatory constraints were imposed the political field became even more tilted which often forced MPs into reactive politics. Nevertheless, such political and institutional context had some enabling effects. The regime drives opposition parties and MPs to fight together in coalition for democracy. Additionally, attacks on gender and other inequalities bring inequality more generally and gender inequality specifically in the mainstream of the pro-democracy agenda. The above detailed content and diverse forms and tools of responses showcase the various progressive, creative and cooperative approaches that opposition MPs were forced into adapting.

We show how democratic opposition actors in formal politics come very close to civil society actors and repertoires. There are multiple reasons for this. First, these are a new generation of MPs, many were formerly members of various civil society organisations. This gives them a proximity and understanding of civil society objectives and strains under autocratic attacks. Second, the shrinking democratic arena forces MPs to adapt alternative approaches to institutionalised politics, where relying on familiar civil society language, tools and allies comes handy but is also often the only morally acceptable path of action. The necessity of blurring the line between oppositional political actors and civil society is discussed in the interviews and roundtables, but it is often also apparent from the very direct and confrontative formulation of opinions in the speeches made in the parliament as well as the radicalising framing of gender equality and its relation to democracy. Most MPs (even if not all) see themselves as being part of the same political pro-democracy project as their civil society partners under attack. We find that the autocratizing regime and the increasingly undemocratic parliamentary operation narrows the gap between formal political opposition and civil society. It makes all issues politicised and challenged by the regime part of a pro-democracy agenda, where drawing the line between responses to anti-gender attacks and the autocratizing nature of the regime is difficult and, in many ways, unnecessary.

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3.4 ITALY

Introduction: Italian Parliament's context to feminist institutional responses

Italy is characterised by a 'public-conservative' gender regime (Alonso et al., 2023), that encompasses structural, political, and cultural features: a welfare system mainly based on families (Saraceno, 1994); an intense influence of the Vatican State on Italian politics, which has traditionally favoured conservative attitudes towards gender and sexuality (Ozzano & Giorgi, 2015); an autonomous feminist movement with limited connections with institutions, and an equally limited institutionalisation of gender equality policies (Pietrobelli et al., 2020).

Against this backdrop, since the early 2010s, right-wing populist parties and anti-gender organisations have jointly framed so-called 'gender ideology' as a 'threat' to the 'traditional natural (heterosexual) order' (Garbagnoli, 2016) to prevent legislative changes on gender equality and LGBTQIA* rights (Lavizzari & Siročić, 2022).

After the 2018 national elections, the entanglement of anti-gender discourses with anti-immigration rhetoric became evident. If 'gender ideology' was described by governmental forces as an 'attack' to Italian national identity (Garbagnoli, 2016), migrants and racialized minorities, especially Muslim, were addressed as 'threats' to Italian women and to Italian 'traditional (Christian) values' (Colella, 2021). Building on these insights, this report examines the institutional responses to both anti-gender and anti-immigration discourses and policies articulated in the Italian Parliament.[12]

Methodological note

To investigate the institutional responses to anti-gender and anti-immigration stances in the Italian Parliament, we used parliamentary debates and semi-structured interviews with Parliament members from the XVII (2013-2018), XVIII (2018-2022), and XIX (since 2022) Legislatures. Due to the complementarity of their data, these sources allowed us to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the institutional responses.

[12] The national Parliament of the Italian Republic is a bicameral body constituted by the Chamber of Deputies (composed of politicians elected on a national basis) and the Senate of the Republic (composed of politicians elected on a regional basis and by a small number of Senators either appointed by the President of the Republic or former Presidents themselves).

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We selected two bills providing us with rich information on responses to both anti-gender and anti-immigration rhetoric: the so-called '*Decreto Sicurezza*' (Security Decree) concerning security and migration issues, enacted by the Government and then approved by the Parliament in 2018;[13] and the so-called '*DDL Zan*' concerning the recognition of hate crimes on grounds of gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, and disabilities, presented in 2018 and rejected in 2021.[14] We consulted the Senate and Chamber websites to retrieve, respectively, 10 and 15 public transcripts of the Parliamentary sessions in which Decreto Sicurezza and DDL Zan were discussed.

Between September and November 2023, we conducted 26 interviews, 24 on Zoom and 2 in person. We interviewed 25 MPs and 1 member of a Parliamentary office (20 women and 6 men). Party affiliations included mostly centre, centre-left, and left parties, as well as the Movimento 5 Stelle.[15] 15 interviewees belonged to the Chamber of Deputies, 9 belonged to the Senate, and 1 had been a member of both. The interviews were anonymized and identified through identification codes.

We coded our data through a hybrid approach (Schreier, 2012). Firstly, we developed a deductive coding scheme, to which we added inductively generated codes. Secondly, we performed a second round of coding to enhance internal validity.

Findings

Actors

Most of the responses to anti-democratic forces and attacks are voiced by individual MPs[16] (69% and 87% in Decreto Sicurezza and DDL Zan respectively, and 37% in the interviews) and by politicians speaking on behalf of their parties (30% and 13% in Decreto Sicurezza and DDL Zan respectively),

[13] For more information on the discussion of the bill, please consult the following link: https://www.camera.it/leg18/126?tab=1&leg=18&idDocumento=1346&sede=&tipo= [Last accessed 14.11.2023].
[14] For more information on the discussion of the bill, please consult the following link: https://www.camera.it/leg18/126?tab=1&leg=18&idDocumento=107&sede=&tipo= [Last accessed 14.11.2023].
[15] It is not straightforward to determine which party the MPs belong to, since they often change political groups during or after the end of the parliamentary term. Here, we mostly refer to the party they belong to when they are in charge. When they belong to more than one during the same term, we choose the party they belong to for most of the time).
[16] Remarkably, in the Italian political system politicians speak following the broader political and discursive strategies defined by the governance structure of their party. Hence, even when they speak individually, they are often expressing their party's positions.

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or directly by their parties (26% mentioned in interviews). The main political groups voicing such responses are leftist (LEU, SI, Alleanza Verdi e Sinistra) and centre-leftist (PD). However, we need to consider that centre-leftist responses are at times contradictory due to internal divisions: Catholic MPs tend to support migration issues, but not LGBTQIA* rights. Furthermore, interviewees report feeling rather lonely when it comes to dealing with personal attacks, which are rarely addressed by groups, parties, or parliamentary bodies.

Content

In interviews we find a heterogeneity of issues addressed through feminist institutional responses: gender-based violence (GBV) (11%), misogyny and sexism (8%), gender equality and hate speech (8% each), education (7%), human, civil, and social rights (6%), and anti-gender stances (6%). Instead, the contents discussed in the debates echo the main issues addressed in the bills.

During Decreto Sicurezza, the most discussed issues were racism (28%), democracy (19%), social exclusion (12%), and safety (10%). During DDL Zan, the most addressed topics were homolesbobitransphobia (32%), democracy (14%), and equality (15%). References to democracy and democratic values are more present in the debates than in the interviews, suggesting that the concept of democracy and democratic values may be strategically mobilised in the Parliament as an institutional response to anti-democratic forces.

Strategies of response

With respect to the strategies through which feminist institutional responses are articulated, our analysis shows differences between interviews and parliamentary debates. In the interviews the most reported strategies are rulemaking (41%), knowledge production strategies (28%), and coalition-building (22%). Conversely, in both debates, most responses (67% and 52% in Sicurezza and Zan respectively) are articulated through pragmatic engagement with other politicians.

Knowledge

With respect to knowledge production strategies, our interviewees mainly refer to institutional documents (23%), especially the Istanbul Convention, Parliamentary reports (20%), documents by relevant CSOs (11%), and the Italian Constitution (10%). The reports produced by the Parliament

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Study Bureau, together with public hearings, are defined as “the democratic core of the Parliament” (Interview B3_200923) and are considered a fundamental tool to incorporate the demands of civil society through data-informed bill proposals. In Decreto Sicurezza, knowledge is mainly mobilised by citing statistics (33%), referring to experts (13%), citing reports by CSOs (9%) and by Italian institutions (9%), while in the Zan debate by citing reports by Italian institutions (18%) and by European institutions (14%), as well as past jurisprudence (12%).

Coalition-building

Evidence of coalition-building strategies mostly stems from interviews. MPs report creating coalitions mainly with CSOs and movement actors (38%), across political parties (21%), and within parties (12%). The latter often occurs through the creation of women’s coalitions, such as *Conferenza Nazionale Donne Democratiche* (within PD). Cross-party coalitions can occur through inter-groups, namely informal parliamentary groups often working through WhatsApp chats, focusing on issues such as women or LGBT rights (18%). While participants in the LGBT inter-group are said to be only from the current opposition parties, the women’s inter-group covers a broader political participation, though mostly from women MPs. In the parliamentary debates, coalitions were only rarely mentioned (9 and 7 mentions during Sicurezza and Zan respectively). Such coalitions involved CSOs, other political parties, and Italian or EU institutions (only in Decreto Sicurezza). In both data sources, coalition-building processes mainly encompass non-institutional organisations and extra-parliamentary bodies. This evidence can be explained through the words of our interviewees, who argue that the relation with civil society is a key feature of the parliamentarian process and the cornerstone of a representative democracy.

Everyday pragmatic engagement

Debates are the main source of everyday pragmatic engagement strategies, which mainly occurred by discarding the efficacy of the proposed law on migration (Decreto Sicurezza 29%), calling out politicians and parties for their exclusionary statements (Decreto Sicurezza 24%, DDL Zan 18%), citing the Constitution (Decreto Sicurezza 23%, DDL Zan 19%), and denouncing direct attacks against MPs (DDL Zan 28%). The importance of downplaying the efficacy of punitive measures to counteract GBV (22%) and denouncing direct attacks (17%) was also emphasised in the interviews. Furthermore, interviewees referred to end-of-session speeches (12%) - brief discourses articulated by MPs on topics of their choice at the end of the Parliamentary sessions -, and to solidarity with other politicians (12%). Solidarity was nonetheless problematised by one interviewee, who argued that it is mainly

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given to members that hold popularity within the party (Interview F9_061023). Remarkably, while in the debates the mentioning of the Constitution functions as a strategy to engage with other politicians, in the interviews the Constitution is mostly used as a means of knowledge production, for example referring to Article 3 of the Constitution and explaining it is meant to protect against discrimination. Likewise, while during the debates references to direct attacks by right-wing actors are used as a strategy to elicit specific reactions in the discussion, during the interviews they are used to elaborate on the meanings and implications of such attacks.

Rule-making

In the interviews, rulemaking strategies are often framed as proactive actions, for instance by proposing laws to achieve equality or protect from discrimination, rather than as strategies to respond to attacks. MPs mostly rely on formal strategies, such as presenting new bills (29%), working within Committees (12%), defending or allocating funding (10%). Amongst the few mentioned informal strategies, MPs work to implement gender-sensitive policies within their parties (7%). During the debates, the mostly used strategies consisted in enquiring about discussion timeline (Decreto Sicurezza 21%, DDL Zan 52%), making acts of address (Decreto Sicurezza 19%), requiring intervention of the President (Decreto Sicurezza 16%, DDL Zan 28%), presenting motions of no confidence (Decreto Sicurezza 11%), and referring to work conducted by Committees (DDL Zan 10%). Despite MPs' higher use of formal strategies, our analysis unveils that such strategies are often used for informal purposes. For instance, acts of address - documents presented by political parties to demand that the Government commits to the implementation of a bill or its interpretation in a certain way - are used to obstruct the enactment of given measures (e.g., 146 acts of address were presented to change the implementation of Decreto Sicurezza).

Inclusiveness of responses in terms of intersectionality and capacity to counteract racism and homophobia

Instances of intersectional discourses are more present in the interviews than in the debates, also due to the composition of our sample that mostly include left and centre-left MPs. Interviews show that, while MPs mobilise the meaning of intersectionality, they are not familiar with the term itself. In Italy,

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the concept and usage of intersectionality stems from movements and civil society actors (Chironi, 2019) and has been incorporated into the institutional context through an incomplete process (Del Giorgio & Lombardo, 2009).

The institutional understanding of intersectionality articulated by MPs mainly addresses the dimension of rights, which are discussed in two ways. First, we find instances of an *interlocking understanding of attacks*, mainly framed in terms of *deprivation of rights*. In this sense, MPs argue that political, social, economic, and civic rights are intersected, and that not recognising or taking off rights to a community means diminishing rights to the whole society. Furthermore, they denounce right-wing actors' instrumental references to certain rights (e.g., women or disabled people) to marginalise specific communities (e.g., migrants). Secondly, we find instances of an *interlocking understanding of responses*, mainly framed in terms of *broadening the range of rights* available to marginalised communities. In this sense, MPs argue that more rights to protect marginalised groups equate to more rights for everybody. This suggests that intersectionality is mainly understood in terms of amplifying rights, which in turn creates a 'more democratic democracy' (which, against this backdrop, means inclusive of everybody). Intersectionality is, thus, inscribed in transformative understandings of democracy.

However, instances of intersectional responses are very limited in our data. We mostly find evidence of responses that lack a feminist and intersectional rooting. First, we identify *short-sighted responses*, meaning responses that fail to address the intersectional entanglements of exclusionary processes and discourses. These responses are fragmented and not systematic. For instance, MPs mobilise on some issues more than others (e.g., gender equality), thus pointing to an implicit predominance of such issues. These responses are called 'unitary', meaning that they address one inequality at a time as the main one (Del Giorgio & Lombardo, 2009). Furthermore, MPs list different inequalities as they were separate from each other. These responses are called 'multiple', meaning that they address more than one inequality yet without addressing their intersectional co-articulations (Del Giorgio & Lombardo, 2009). These responses run the risk of being silent when intersecting attacks are articulated and of not being efficacious in the ways such attacks are dealt with.

Second, we identify *failed responses*, meaning responses that lean on exclusionary discourses and end up reproducing them. Amongst these, we include instances of femonationalist arguments through which MPs state migrants lack Italian cultural models to adapt to Italian society, which in such understandings is supposed to be 'more gender equal' (Colella, 2021). We also find instances of

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homonationalist rhetoric according to which some countries, often Northern-European, are more 'civilised' than others. This narrative subtly conveys the idea of a hegemony of 'European civilisation' to which Italy should aspire to (Colpani & Habed, 2014). Furthermore, we encountered arguments according to which migration is a problem for Italian society and should be 'governed' through deportations.

Factors enabling and constraining feminist institutional responses

Evidence on the factors that enable or constrain feminist institutional responses mainly stems from interviews and concerns both Italian society and the Parliamentary political system. As for societal factors, MPs argue that the cultural script of Italian society, the influence of the Vatican State, and the economic conditions of the country, which in turn also affect the availability of public funding, inhibit the articulation of feminist institutional responses. Conversely, demands and claims from civil society organisations are considered to enhance such responses.

With respect to the political system itself, the obstacles outlined by MPs mainly concern the lack of political compromises between political parties, also related to the political interests affecting how governmental coalitions are created and implemented, and internal divisions within parties or coalitions. Constraining features of the Parliament are represented by slow-moving bureaucracy, an ineffective representation within Parliament due to electoral laws, and the use of formal language to bypass the Parliamentary rules on hate speech, while still conveying hate discourses, as well as lack of interest in establishing formal rules. Moreover, a strongly rooted sexist culture in the Parliament is identified as a worrying factor that discourages female MPs from engaging in responses.

Conversely, political system elements that are considered to enable institutional feminist responses are Constitutional Court sentences that allow to push forward more progressive legislation. Further enabling factors are the guidelines from European and international institutions, as well as European funding and sanctions. Furthermore, some strategies of responses, such as coalitional endeavours between MPs, political parties and CSOs, cross-parties coalitions, alliances in parliamentary groups, and coalitions among women MPs are strongly regarded as enabling factors, as they provide the human and political networks for the articulation of future responses. Moreover, a Parliamentary majority that supports inclusiveness is considered a crucial starting point to be able to articulate feminist institutional responses. Lastly, the role of feminist MPs in positions of leadership is deemed as fundamental, as well as women and LGBT representation in the Parliament.

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Notably, the use of so-called “motions of confidence” - i.e., when the Government asks the Parliament to give an opinion on one of its actions and faces the possibility of ending its term in case of negative feedback - is seen as a constraining and enabling factor at the same time. It is constraining as it diminishes the efficacy of the Parliamentary functions, taking legislative power away from the Parliament, and as enabling as it may allow the Parliament to pass bills that otherwise would not be cohesively supported.

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3.5 POLAND

Introduction: Polish Parliament's context to feminist institutional responses

In 2011 gender quotas were introduced to the Polish electoral law requiring political parties to include at least 35% women on their electoral lists to the lower house of parliament (*Sejm*)[17]. However, even before that there had been slow but steady increase in the representation of women among MPs which is still the case[18].

In the previous term of the Polish parliament (2019-2023), a coalition of right-wing populist and conservative parties was in power for the second consecutive term. The ruling party's eight years of rule (2015-2023) have been marked by strong anti-gender, anti-LGBTQ and nationalistic rhetoric and also policies. The latter include restricting access to the morning-after pill, stopping state funding for IVF, toughening abortion laws and cutting off funding for feminist organisations. The name and function of the Office of the Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment (national equality body) were also changed. It was renamed the Government Plenipotentiary for Civil Society Affairs and hollowed from any gender equality expertise and stripped from the actual political powers.

With the 2023 elections, the Polish political scene witnessed a seismic shift. The historically high turnout (74%) gave political victory to the pro-democratic, pro-EU, centrist, liberal and left parties and the highest level of women's political representation achieved in Poland (29,6%). Within the new government women hold 33% of ministerial positions, including well-recognized feminist actors. One of them - Katarzyna Kotula, who was one of the leaders of the Women's Strikes in 2016, has been appointed as Minister of Equality.

Methodology note

The study focused on feminist political strategies in the 2019-2023 parliamentary term. The research findings presented in the report are based on a qualitative analysis of data collected from June 2023 to January 2024. This period coincides with a political change after the parliamentary elections in the

[17] Śledzińska-Simon, A. (2018). Gender quotas and women's solidarity as a challenge to the gender regime in Poland. *Transforming Gender Citizenship: The Irresistible Rise of Gender Quotas in Europe*, 245; Fuszara, M. (2010). Citizenship, representation and gender. *Polish Sociological Review*, *172*(4), 367-389.
[18] Fuszara, M. (2017). Poland-a success story? Political history of introducing gender quota in post-communist Poland. *Teorija in praksa*, *54*(2), 317.

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fall of 2023. In result, the political position and context for some feminist institutional actors (FIA) meaningfully changed: they had moved from the opposition and political minority to the new ruling coalition.

The research covers two cases of feminist institutional responses: (1) policy toward refugees crossing the Polish-Belarusian border (7 parliamentary debates) and (2) abortion law (10 parliamentary debates). Data from 18 structured interviews with 12 MPs, 3 assistants, and 3 people from NGOs cooperating with feminist institutional actors supplemented our analysis of the stenographic reports. We used ATLAS.it to code the research material based on a code tree created from the project guidelines and adapted to the Polish context.

Findings

Actors

In the ninth term of the parliament (2019-2023), the group that openly supported feminist agendas was The Left Parliamentary Club [Koalicyjny Klub Parlamentarny Lewicy] of 42 MPs (parties: New Left [Nowa Lewica] and Together [Razem]). It is also important to distinguish politicians promoting feminist parliamentary responses among groupings belonging to the parliamentary opposition: the Civic Coalition Parliamentary Club [Koalicyjny Klub Parlamentarny Koalicja Obywatelska], to which 129 MPs belonged (parties: Civic Platform [Platforma Obywatelska], Modern [Nowoczesna], Polish Initiative [Inicjatywa Polska], Green Party [Zieloni]) and Poland 2050 [Polska 2050] (6 MPs). FIA have worked on women's rights, queer rights, refugee rights and environmental rights within parliamentary groups such as the LGBT+ Equal Rights Group, the Group for the Protection of the Białowieża Forest and Other Valuable Natural Areas, the Group on Migration and Integration Policy, the Group on Humanitarian Aid and International Humanitarian Law, the Group on Women's Rights and the Group on Reproductive Rights.

Moreover, civil society organisations working closely with FIA, such as FEDERA, Abortion Dream Team [Aborcyjny Dream Team], the Border Group [Grupa Granica], Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, Medics at the Border [Medycy na Granicy], Doctors Without Borders [Lekarze bez Granic] played a significant role in the parliamentary coalitions and debates.

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Content

The Polish-Belarusian border

On September 2, 2021, a state of emergency was declared by decision of the Polish President in 183 Polish towns and villages near the border with Belarus, which was subsequently extended by decrees of the Minister of the Interior and Administration and the Podlasie Voivode. The access to the border area was temporarily restricted. The new limitations also extended to media, civil society organisations and politicians. The Border Guard started using illegal push-backs of people crossing the Polish-Belarusian border and activists rescuing refugees were criminalised. Feminist institutional responses focused on direct interventions by MPs in the zone of the state of emergency and issuing official parliamentary inquiries to the Border Guard or the government. Additionally, feminist MPs informed the public opinion about the situation of refugees on the border, prevented push-backs and deportations, and undermined the government's official (mis-)information on the political and humanitarian crisis in the prohibited area. They also challenged the legality of the state of emergency and the amendments made by the ruling party to the acts on foreigners. The latter restricted the fundamental rights of foreigners protected by the European Convention on Human Rights and the EU law[19].

Abortion

On 22 October 2020, when the Constitutional Tribunal ruled that one of the preconditions of abortion was unconstitutional, one of the most restrictive abortion laws in Europe came into force in Poland. The decision sparked widespread public protests and brought abortion back to the centre of political debate. The topic was almost constantly present in the parliament also due to the following events: a) the reading of draft of legislation "Legal Abortion without Compromises"; b) the problem of access to abortion for Ukrainian women fleeing to Poland after wartime rape; c) the criminal trial of Justyna Wydrzyńska, an activist accused of aiding and abetting abortion; d) the first reading of the citizens' legislative project "Abortion is murder". The issue of abortion was also linked to debates on: a) the deaths of women in Polish hospitals as a result of being denied access to abortion; f) the parliamentary debate on the law on institutional support for carers of people with disabilities; g) the lack of access to gynaecological care for women in rural areas and small towns; h) the project to abolish the conscience

[19] Stowarzyszenie Interwencji Prawnej, *Interweniujemy w sprawie zmian w ustawie o cudzoziemcach*, 17 February 2023, available at: https://interwencjaprawna.pl/interweniujemy-w-sprawie-zmian-w-ustawie-o-cudzoziemcach/ [accessed 20 January 2024].

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clause; i) the debate on the draft law "Yes to the family, no to sex"; j) the debate on the demographic situation in Poland.

Strategies of response

Knowledge

Activists and NGOs played a crucial role in providing expertise to develop strategies for parliamentary action. In interviews, both MPs, their assistants, and activists, highlighted the significance of this role. As one NGO worker admitted, "the main source of knowledge about the situation on the Polish-Belarusian border was ourselves from the very beginning. We, that is, those activist groups, social organisations, and residents of the borderland, who were there on the spot" (Interview GR_06). In the absence of official data, government propaganda and (mis-)information, and the criminalization of activities in both areas, it was activists and NGOs that were the first source of knowledge for FIA, e.g., regarding the situation of refugees in detention centres, the number of deaths at the Polish-Belarus border, or the situation of pregnant people in need of pregnancy due to foetal damage. Their data formed the basis for interpellations, parliamentary inquiries, the creation of the Legal Abortion without Compromise bill proposal, and the efficient operation of a helpline for people with unwanted pregnancies by politicians from the New Left. Expertises and reports by NGOs and activists served as expert knowledge in consulting amendments to laws within parliamentary committees and teams.

Parliamentary actions concerning border policy and abortion law aimed to protect not only the lives of pregnant people and refugees but also to maintain the rule of law (Interview GR_04). Thus, the strategy of feminist institutional actors was to raise awareness of specific bills, legal acts, and civil society organisations' reports highlighting the international human rights legal frameworks. References to such documents appeared in parliamentary debates and interviews with MPs regarding their work "in the field," outside the parliament. In the case of parliamentary interventions on the Polish-Belarusian border, MPs paid particular attention to international legal standards mentioned in the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights, recommendations of the Commissioner for Human Rights, and UN reports (Interview GR_09). Regarding abortion law, MPs referred to WHO data, the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, GREVIO data, recommendations of the UN Human Rights Committee in 2016, and good practices on abortion law from other countries.

Coalitions

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Feminist coalitions in the ninth term of the Sejm (2019-2023) often had an informal character due to (1) the interventionist nature and "emergency mode" of many actions undertaken, and (2) the activist biography of MPs and their assistants (previous professional or activist experience in human rights' field, informal ties and networks with civil society organisations or informal collectives). This influenced the structure of coalitions, formed simultaneously with groups from inside and outside parliament (activists, NGOs, MPs and assistants from other parties), as exemplified by parliamentary teams, such as the Group on Migration and Integration Policy or the Group on Reproductive Rights.

The way feminist coalitions communicated often took on an informal character, such as through Signal or groups on WhatsApp, where MPs, assistants and activists informed each other about the organisation of pro-abortion and anti-deportation protests, necessary parliamentary interventions, or the situation in the state of emergency zone. Activists thus mobilised MPs to take to the street or forest to intervene on the spot, to draw public attention or to gain access to information not available to the media and civil society. As one MP points out, it was precisely this nature of activist-parliamentary networks, which involved the use of parliamentary immunity outside the parliamentary space, that influenced the effectiveness of coalitions (interview GR_06).

It is also worth noting that due to the predominance of anti-gendered actors sitting in government and their establishment of hostile laws against women and refugees, feminist coalitions had a distinctly intervention and reactionary character. Thus, the meetings of pro-abortion and pro-refugee parliamentary teams did not take place regularly and constantly, and their strategy adapted to the circumstances and actions of anti-gender actors.

Everyday pragmatic engagement

During the analysed period of the parliament, the FIAs belonged to the political opposition, and their activities were significantly hampered. FIA MPs' legal proposals were not given a print number (making it impossible for them to proceed), their bills were rejected at first reading, their parliamentary speeches were cut by 30 seconds or they were excluded from parliamentary debates altogether.

The main formal strategies of the FIA consisted of: (a) submitting formal proposals during parliamentary sessions (e.g. questions to the Minister of Health about the standards of treatment of pregnant women in hospitals and the number of legal abortions performed there); (b) submitting questions to parliamentary committees; (c) submitting parliamentary interpellations (e.g. monitoring the actions of the Border Guard, checking the quality of abortion care standards in public health

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facilities); (d) organising parliamentary team meetings, where 3 practices were followed: 1) to invite representatives of NGOs and activists in order to strengthen the voice of the public and benefit from their expertise, 2) not to invite government representatives to the meetings as strategy of ignorance, 3) to invite government representatives in order to reveal their ignorance on a particular issue. Another formal strategy was to file complaints with the Ethics Committee against politicians for using inappropriate, dehumanising language against various social groups: women, people with disabilities, refugees.

There are four types of formal strategies that took place outside the parliament.

1. Use immunity as a tool to defend civil society actors and individuals by: a) intervening in detention centres for refugees; b) controlling the actions of border guards: treatment of refugees and the use of push-back procedure; c) assisting activists in providing direct support to refugees crossing the Polish-Belarusian border: providing food and humanitarian aid; d) intervening in hospitals to ensure compliance with the applicable abortion law, e) protecting people during protests - mediating with the police, physically protecting demonstrators from police brutality, requesting information about detained participants of street protests.

2. Circumventing the restrictions and bans imposed by the ruling party. The MPs Urszula Zielińska and Klaudia Jachira opened an MP's office in a state of emergency zone to support refugees, activists and the local community during the state of emergency imposed on the area.

3. Establishment of a hotline for people in need of abortion when health professionals refuse to provide abortion to people whose life and health would be endangered by pregnancy.

4. Participation in conferences and the media as a space to combat misinformation on issues important to the feminist agenda.

The following informal strategies can be distinguished: (1) using activist language during the parliamentary hearings - slogans used by the pro-abortionists: “You'll never walk alone” and pro-refugees: “No one is illegal”; (2) communication strategies - insulting the ruling party by calling them extremists, fundamentalists, misogynists or comparing them to Putin or Lukashenko; (3) referring to material reality - to stories of people who have had abortions, women's fear of getting pregnant, to stories of refugees dying in the forest, including pregnant women and children (4) having a minute's silence in memory of women who have died because inaccessible abortion; (5) giving visibility to other

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FIAs - listing the merits of their female colleagues and political allies; (6) directly addressing the sovereign (the people, the society) from the parliamentary rostrum - a direct address to the women protesting in the streets against the Constitutional Court ruling: "Dear Polish women! Dear women! Dear girls! (Interview AB_04); (8) use of visual material - showing pictures of refugees at the parliamentary rostrum, e.g. a child detained by the Border Guard and deported to Belarus; (9) providing very specific and practical information on how to make abortion - explaining the use of pharmacological abortion pills from the parliamentary rostrum. The last practice was introduced by activist Natalia Broniarczyk during the first reading of the 2022 bill to liberalise abortion access, and later it was copied by left-wing MPs in other debates.

Rulemaking

During the last parliamentary term, only one law presented by the government was in line with the feminist agenda: the immediate isolation of the perpetrator of violence. In general, rule bills proposed by FIA have not received a print number (without one they cannot be read in parliament hearings) or they have been the subject of first-reading rejection.

The FIA's strategy for ensuring that the proposed bill reached at least its first parliamentary reading was the creation of civil legislative proposals in cooperation with NGOs and activists.This strategy was based on the government's promise that any law proposed by citizens would be given a print number and further proceeded. The “Legal Abortion without Compromise” project was an example of such cooperation. Even though FIA knew the bill would not pass, they used it as a tool to show public support for changing abortion law: “No one had any illusions that this project would be voted for, because the arithmetic in the parliament is inexorable and, as it were, here we were certain that nothing would come of it, but (...) the main objective of this project was to say that abortion is important, that abortion has a lot of support” (Interview AB_03).

Inclusiveness of responses in terms of intersectionality and capacity to counteract racism and homophobia

Feminist institutional actors emphasise that in the ninth term (2019-2023), solidarity between parliamentary actions in favour of various marginalised communities strengthened (interview GR_07). This was a direct response to the ruling party’s strategy of dehumanising and violating the rights of multiple social groups. In this sense, each of the parliamentary efforts on behalf of legalising abortion

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or improving the situation of refugees was part of a broader response defending human rights in Poland. However, our research shows a difference in how MPs and their assistants perceive feminism and intersectionality. In interviews, MPs tend to view feminism as advocating solely for women's rights, while assistants have a broader understanding of feminism as a means of protecting human rights, including refugees' rights (interview GR_05). In contrast to their assistants, MPs also acknowledge the difficulty of addressing queer rights in discussions about reproductive justice or migration policies due to opposition from anti-gender actors and their strong transphobic and homophobic attitudes.

As for the parliamentary action in terms of the Polish-Belarusian border, interviews emphasised its anti-racist and anti-xenophobic dimension ("(...) the fight against a system that puts these [refugee] people in a very unprivileged position and extreme, radical violations of their rights is an anti-racist fight," interview GR_02). Moreover, the analysis of parliamentary debates shows the desire of feminist institutional actors to intersect the protection of refugee rights with the fight for environmental ones. In this context, it is worth highlighting the submission of interpellations to both the Minister of Climate and Environment and the Minister of Defense opposing the construction of the border barrier and demonstrating its negative impact on forest nature and animal migration (MPs' cooperation with the Institute of Mammal Biology of the Polish Academy of Sciences).

Rather than being discussed within an intersectional framework, abortion is more often discussed within the reproductive justice frame. Abortion is presented as a basic human right, and the lack of access to abortion is seen as a form of discrimination against women. In an intersectional context, abortion overlaps with the following categories: national identity (an attempt to facilitate access to abortion for Ukrainian women who have been raped during the war), the experience of disability (mainly in the context of caring for disabled people who are insufficiently supported by the state), financial exclusion (lack of access to public gynaecology services in villages and small towns) and queerness (slogan: "Abortion available to all who need one"). The last three categories were included in the bill proposal "Legal Abortion Without Compromise". This was the first legal project on abortion written in gender-neutral language, taking into account the rights and needs of adolescents, people with disabilities and those with lower economic status.

Factors enabling and constraining feminist institutional responses

We have identified three factors enabling feminist institutional responses.

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Activist biographies of MPs

Feminist MPs often have previous experience of working in civil society organisations and informal groups, also with a clear feminist or human rights agenda. As former employees or co-founders of such NGOs, they are well networked with feminist actors outside of the parliament and often remain in close, collegial relationships with them. Their activist background transfers into strong abilities to build both formal and informal feminist coalitions quickly, and reach out easily to the expertise of civil society organisations working outside the parliament. Abortion activists were invited as experts to run a workshop for MPs on supporting people in need of abortion, to prepare legal opinions on abortion and appear at the parliamentary sessions. Pro-refugee activists educated MPs on providing legal assistance to people crossing the Polish-Belarusian border.

The presence of the Left

In comparison to the 2015-2018 term, when no left party was present in the parliament, the presence of the Left in 2018-2023 highlights the importance of parliamentary representation itself.

The Left in the Polish parliament has been the only party whose all of the MPs are committed to women's rights, and their presence is crucial for feminist institutional response. The representatives of the Left were important actors in preparing Legal Abortion without Compromise Act, the Emergency Abortion Act, and establishing parliamentary groups on LGBT, women's rights and reproductive rights

More liberal social attitudes and civil mobilisations

According to FIA civil mobilizations against anti-gender policies and the ruling right-wing coalition motivated and supported their responses in the parliament. It was crystal clear especially with massive street protests following the Constitutional Tribunal's decision to tighten the abortion law in 2020, but also was important in the case of the Polish-Belarussian border, where local residents of the area started to rescue refugees hiding in the border forests.

As right-wing parties constituted an overwhelming majority in the parliament and formed the government, their rule was the crucial hindering factor of feminist institutional responses. Far-right politicians held key ministerial and parliamentary positions and forced anti-gender legislation. They obstructed and blocked the initiatives of FIA. Moreover, the ruling coalition violated the rule of law while implementing "unlawful regulations" in executive and criminal law (interview GR_09) and accepting and justifying illegal activities of public institutions (police, Border Guard). They also used

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parliamentary, formal instruments against political opposition and targeted feminist MPs, e.g. by filing complaints to the Committee on Parliamentary Ethics.

At the same time, splits and rivalry among liberal and left parties in the opposition, limited effectiveness of feminist responses. In the case of the humanitarian crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border, some liberal, centrist and left-wing politicians were reluctant to establish a parliamentary coalition working on protection of refugees' rights. Some MPs associated the involvement in such parliamentary activities with a possible drop in public support in the upcoming elections of 2023. They described the issue as a "politically dangerous topic" (interview GR_02).

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3.6 SPAIN

Introduction: Spanish Parliament's context to feminist institutional responses

The Spanish Parliament shows a relatively high representation of women, with 44% of the 350 seats in the 2019-2023 term, and institutionalisation of gender equality (structures and policies).

The main anti-gender actor in the Spanish Parliament is the far-right party Vox, which in 2019 obtained 15,09% of the vote and 52/350 MPs (Spanish Parliament, 2019b). Vox's parliamentary entry has polarised debates on gender equality, migration and LGBTQIA+ rights[20]. Vox's anti-gender stance has moved the mainstream right PP (21% of the vote) to right their agenda in the right-wing electoral competition in Spain[21] (I_041023; I_200923). Vox and PP[22] have forged alliances on issues such as sexual and reproductive rights, but keeping their distance. Additionally, issue-specific ideological alliances have formed among Vox, PP and some 'gender critical feminists' MPs from PSOE[23]. Vox's presence has eroded previous consensus regarding gender equality among parties, including PSO (28% of the vote), UP[24] (9,82% of the vote), Cs[25] (6,8% of the vote), and regionalist parties (ERC, En Comú Podem, and JxCat).

Methodological note

This report is based on content analysis of 12 parliamentary debates and related policy documents (collected and codified between March and July 2023) on three laws[26] adopted since 2021 and 20

[20] Hernando Alcoceba, J.A.; Homont, L.P.P. and Hernández Fernández, C. 2023. Análisis del discurso parlamentario de Vox en la XIV Legislatura; crispación, polarización y nacionalpopulismo. Estudios sobre el mensaje periodístico (1), pp. 1-14.https://doi.org/10.5209/esmp.82341

[21] García Lupato, F.; Ruiz Rodríguez, L.; Sánchez Medero, G. 2020. La derecha española dividida: posiciones ideológicas y clivaje territorial. Política y Sociedad 57 (3), pp. 719-745. https://doi.org/10.5209/poso.69207

[22] Partido Popular (Popular Party), the traditional national right-wing party in Spain.

[23] Partido Socialista Obrero Español (Spanish Socialist Workers' Party), the traditional national left-wing party in Spain.

[24] Unidas Podemos (Together We Can), a national left-wing party in Spain.

[25] Ciudadanos (Citizens), a national centre-right-wing party in Spain.

[26] Organic Law, 10/2022, of September 6, 2022, on the comprehensive guarantee of sexual freedom. Organic Law 4/2023, of February 28, 2022, for real and effective equality of transgender people and to guarantee the rights of LGBTI people. Organic Law 1/2023, of February 28, amending Organic Law 2/2010, of March 3, of sexual and reproductive health and voluntary termination of pregnancy.

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semi-structured interviews (conducted, transcribed and codified between July 2023 and January 2024).

The 20 semi-structured interviews include fifteen MPs, two parliament's technical personnel, one advisor to the Minister of Equality, and two representatives of civil society organisations (CSO) with institutional presence (in total, eighteen women and two men). They lasted an average of forty-five minutes and took place in-person and online. Interviewees were selected on the basis of their expertise on issues of equality, gender equality, LGBTIQ+ rights and anti-racism, their participation in equality committees, and their voicing of feminist responses in parliamentary debates. Snowball was the main method of recruitment.

We codify both materials using the software Atlas.Ti. To preserve the interviewees' anonymity, the interviews are referred to with a code of letters and numbers (e.g. I_111123). MPs and government members' contributions to parliamentary debates are cited in parentheses including the speaker's last name, the party or government position, the proceedings and the date (e.g. (MonteroGil_UP_F_DSCD_130_141021).

Findings

Actors

Actors voicing feminist responses to AG politics in the Spanish Parliament include parliamentary groups, individual MPs and CSO.

Parliamentary groups develop the main feminist response to Vox and PP's antigender stance. PSOE and UP are the two main self-proclaimed feminist political parties (120 and 33 MPs out of 350, respectively, in the 2019-2023 legislature). They formed a coalition national government and developed bills advancing women and LGBTQIA+ rights. The third nation-wide political party that articulates a response to anti-gender politics is CS, with 9 MPs. Cs self-labels as liberal feminist. Regionalist parties proactively contesting anti-gender politics include the Catalan Junts per Catalunya (JxCat), Candidatura d'Unitat Popular (CUP) and Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC); the Basque Euzko Alderdi Jeltzalea-Partido Nacionalista Vasco (EAJ-PNV) and Euskal-Herria Bildu (EH Bildu); and the Galician Bloque Nacionalista Galego (BNG).

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Although some interventions are made on behalf of the parliamentary group, most of the feminist responses are conducted by Individual MPs to counteract racist, trans-homo-phobic discourses by Vox and forge feminist alliances.

The main feminist governance structure in the Spanish Parliament developing feminist responses to anti-gender opposition is the Parliamentary Gender Equality Committee, through debates, reports and public hearings. The Subcommittee for the renewal and updating of the State Pact on gender violence (BOGC 2022) and the State Pact against Anti-Roma Discrimination and the Inclusion of the Roma People also host feminist responses, such as expert reports.

Civil society organisations collaborating with the Parliament (Fundación Mujeres, FEGLTB+, Asociación Mujeres Juezas, Fundación Triángulo) counter AG politics through their participation in parliamentary hearings and contribution to feminist policymaking.

Content

The feminist responses to anti-gender opposition in the 2019-2023 legislature of the Spanish Parliament focus on three issues that align with progressive laws approved between 2021-2022.: 1) sexual violence (Act 10/2022, 2) trans and LGBTQIA+ rights (Act4/2023, 3) sexual and reproductive rights (Act1/2023).

1. Sexual violence

Sexual education

Debate on sexual freedom law (Act 10/2022).

Anti-gender discourse: sexual education creates indoctrination, over-sexualisaton of children, and criminalisation of men (ToscanodeBalbin_VOX_F_DSCD_204_250822).

Feminist responses: sexual education is needed to curtail sexual violence, change the paradigm of sexual relations and ensure a better feminist future (MonteroGil_UP_F_DSCD_227_291122).

Negationism of gender-based violence (GBV)

Debate on sexual freedom law (Act10/2022).

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Anti-gender discourse: denial of patriarchy and GBV, defence of the concept 'intra-familiar violence', accusations of financial corruption against organisations tackling GBV (ToscanodeBalbin_VOX_F_DSCD_130_14102021).

Feminist responses: empirical data to counter the claims regarding false GBV allegations, demand more institutional mechanisms and public funding to combat it, ask PP to position themselves on the issue against Vox negationism (VerjaBega_PSOE_F_DSCD_117_210921).

2. Trans and LGBTQIA+ rights

Gender self-determination

PP and Vox of amendment to the Trans Law (Act 4/2023).

Anti-gender discourse: gender self-determination as an ideological tool to destroy family, motherhood and women, unscientific and cultural indoctrination for children (ToscanodeBalbin_VOX_F_DSCD_216_061022).

Feminist responses: gender self-determination as the door to sexual and gender freedom with legal guarantees, empirical data on violence against trans women, need for depathologisation of trans experiences to meet international UN Human Rights standards by(FernándezCastañón_UP_F_DSCD_216_061022). Amendment is rejected by all parties.

3. Sexual and reproductive rights

Harassment of women going to abortion clinics

Debate of PP and Vox amendments against PSOE's bill to tackle harassment outside abortion clinics.

Anti-gender discourse: claims of freedom of expression and religious freedom for people praying outside reproductive health clinics. No need for specific legislation as harassment is already in the Penal Code. Abortion reform framed as totalitarianism (RuizSolás_VOX_F_DSCD_137_111121); (AnguloRomero_PP_F_DSCD_137_111121).

Feminist response: harassing women going to abortion clinics needs specific entry in the Penal Code because it is sexist violence and attempts to limit women's bodily autonomy.

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(BerjaVega_PSOE_F_DSCD_137_111121); (VallugeraBalaña_ERC_F_DSCD_137_111121). Amendment is rejected by all parties.

Strategies of response

Knowledge

Knowledge is articulated as a feminist response in four ways: 1) expert public hearings in the Gender Equality Committee; 2) working group reports; 3) institutional training; 4) data-based arguments.

Feminist expert hearings

The Equality Committee regularly invites feminist experts to hearings in Parliament, in the 2019-2023 term regarding sexual freedom, Trans and abortion rights (I_260923, I_041023). Concerns emerge on the decrease of expert consultation and funding to commission reports to counter false claims by anti-gender groups (I_180723; I_051023). The capacity of the Parliament to include experts' knowledge might be faltering and extra-institutional collaboration needs strengthening (I_041223).

Working group reports

Reports are crucial to articulate feminist institutional responses to oppositional forces. In 2023, the Commission on Social Rights and Comprehensive Disability Policies approved the final report by the Subcommittee for the study of a State Pact against 'Anti-gypsyism' and the Inclusion of the Roma People that identifies measures for the participation, inclusion and equality of the Roma community in Spain (Spanish Parliament, 2023[27]).

Institutional training

Institutional training and outreach activities raise MPs' awareness on harassment protocol, anti-discrimination behaviour and gender mainstreaming (I_051023; I_241023). However, training is voluntary and few MPs undertake them (I_241023, F_291123).

[27] Spanish Parliament. 2023. El Pleno da luz verde al informe para estudiar un Pacto de Estado contra el Antigitanismo y la Inclusión del Pueblo Gitano. Accessed January 2024. https://www.congreso.es/es/notas-de-prensa?p_p_id=notasprensa&p_p_lifecycle=0&p_p_state=normal&p_p_mode=view&_notasprensa_mvcPath=detalle&_notasprensa_notaId=44751

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Data-based arguments

Individual actors respond by arguing based on data published in official reports (I_101023; I_181023), from international bodies to respond to anti-gender discourses regarding LGBTphobia, sexual violence and reproductive rights (MonteroGil_UP_F_DSCD_216_061022[28]; BerjaVega_PSOE_F_DSCD_123_210921[29]; MonteroGil_UP_F_DSCD_190_260523[30]; CalvoGómez_JxCat_F_DSCD_227_291122[31]).

Coalition-building

Strategic alliances are built to defend equality legislation among parliamentary actors, as well as with extra-institutional actors and members of other parliaments and institutions.

Parliamentary alliances with institutional actors

interviewees stress the strategic importance and great difficulty in forging alliances (*cordon sanitaire*) to isolate Vox (I_051023; I_181023; I_041223). Some interviewees mention an implicit *cordon sanitaire* to never negotiate or consider Vox's parliamentary initiatives (I_171123). Internal divisions regarding specific issues within feminism (e.g. trans rights, sex workers rights) have hindered articulating a united front against Vox and PP (I_041023; I_121223). Isolation of Vox was enacted on specific occasions not to legitimise anti-gender denial of GBV (I_051023; I_041023). This coordinated action was organised informally between female MPs during social meetings to strategise inter-parties negotiations projecting a united image (I_101023; I_200923). Other forms of coalition appeared, particularly among left-wing regionalist parties to push for the reform, advancement and approval of progressive bills (I_111023; I_251023). Moments of joint action to respond to Vox include: 1) the collective reading - except MPs from Vox, Cs and PP - of the names of the 1,081 women murdered by sexist violence during a plenary session to respond to Vox proposal of 'intrafamily violence' (I_051023); 2) a collective action by left female MPs to denounce political violence against the Ministry

[28] Diario de Sesiones, Spanish Parliament. Pleno y Diputación Permanente. 2022. Accessed January 2024. https://www.congreso.es/public_oficiales/L14/CONG/DS/PL/DSCD-14-PL-216.PDF
[29] Diario de Sesiones, Spanish Parliament. Pleno y Diputación Permanente. 2021. Accessed January 2024. https://www.congreso.es/public_oficiales/L14/CONG/DS/PL/DSCD-14-PL-123.PDF
[30] Diario de Sesiones, Spanish Parliament. Pleno y Diputación Permanente. 2022. Accessed January 2024. https://www.congreso.es/public_oficiales/L14/CONG/DS/PL/DSCD-14-PL-190.PDF
[31] Diario de Sesiones, Spanish Parliament. Pleno y Diputación Permanente. 2022. Accessed January 2024. https://www.congreso.es/public_oficiales/L14/CONG/DS/PL/DSCD-14-PL-227.PDF

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of Equality[32] (I_281123; and, 3) the collective signing of a letter asking the Parliament Board to block entry to extreme right journalists (I_111023).

Extra-parliamentary alliances with institutional actors

Outside the Spanish Parliament, MPs build informal alliances with members of the Spanish Senate (I_291123) and regional parliaments (I_200923) to share experiences and co-articulate anti-gender responses (I_251023). Collaboration at the international level is also highlighted: 'We are part of what is beginning to be the Feminist International, which is a space in which we collaborate with certain feminists in some government positions, others in parliament, mainly from Latin America' (I_231123). There is also ongoing inter-parliamentary cooperation of the technical personnel with international bodies such as the European Parliament and the European Commissioner for Equality, to share best practices, particularly on political violence against women (I_241023).

Parliamentary alliances with extra-institutional actors

Alliances with extra-institutional feminist organisations and other civil society actors occur through intergroups and public hearings. An important actor is the Parliamentary Intergroup on Population, Development and Reproductive Health which worked closely with pro-choice organisations (I_041023; I_171123).

Everyday pragmatic engagement

In the Spanish Parliament, the strategy of everyday engagement with anti-gender actors has been explicitly debated within some parliamentary groups. However, a consensus was never reached and the decision was left to individual MPs: either engaging, not engaging or articulating support and protection networks.

Engagement

Some interviewees stress the importance of responding during plenary and committee sessions: 'you always have to answer, you always have to confront' (I_101023). This direct engagement strategy,

[32] Rúperez y Cuello. 2022. Unión de las diputadas en apoyo a Irene Montero y contra la violencia política en una foto sin PP y Vox. La Sexta. Accessed January 2024. https://www.lasexta.com/noticias/nacional/union-ministras-violencia-politica-foto-vox_20221124637fab65bef62f00011c9962.html

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while different from the knowledge response in that its focus is on engaging or not with anti-gender actors, employs knowledge by bringing relevant data to debunk Vox and PP's anti-gender arguments (I_111023; I_231123) so to avoid 'giving them the truth' (I_202923) and expose their lies and incoherence. The goal was to put in action a data-based feminist pedagogy with the intention not only to confront Vox but to 'speak to the citizens' and explain feminist positions in order to gain civil support (I_041023; VehíCantenys_CUP_F_DSCD_204_250822[33]).

Non-interaction

Some prefer the policy of non-interaction and ignoring Vox's discourse in plenaries not to give Vox -and far right media- the 'oxygen' they seek (I_251023). The non-interaction policy is contingent. Before the plenary, MPs consider whether it is more effective to not engage with certain topics (I_041023; I_281123) for several reasons: not allowing Vox to dictate the political debate and gain media exposure (I_051023); the impossibility of having an actual debate with Vox MPs due to their lack of political baggage and clear ideological stance (I_051023). The non-interaction policy is sometimes practised in informal settings, such as the cafeteria, thus enacting a 'democratic cordon' against Vox MPs in all contexts (I_111023).

Protection and support

Individual female MPs respond through protecting and accompanying each other in hostile and violent plenaries (I_231123). In the face of constant political violence female and left-wing politicians working on equality issues face in 'brutal' (I_260923), plenaries in common spaces such as elevators or bathrooms (I_111023; I_231023), or in social media (I_180923) informal strategies include: 'self-contention, rationality and self-control' (I_051023) not to be dragged into a heated argument with Vox; accompanying and supporting attackedMPs; and feminist solidarity, where an informal agreement is based on 'if they attack one of us, they attack all of us' (I_101023).

Rule-making

[33] Diario de Sesiones, Spanish Parliament. 2022. Pleno y Diputación Permanente. Accessed in January 2024. https://www.congreso.es/public_oficiales/L14/CONG/DS/PL/DSCD-14-PL-204.PDF

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There is no formal agreement or democratic pact to help counteract or isolate the far-right party Vox in Parliament. Some formal and regulatory proceedings are articulated to respond, albeit in a limited way, as well as some informal strategies developed by parliamentary groups and individual MPs.

Use of legislation and parliamentary rules

Parliamentary Regulations on Parliamentary Discipline[34], though seldom used, provide rules to protect equality and MPs attacked by Vox 'permanent hate speech' (I_21223). During a session, the Equality Spokesperson for PSOE, Laura Berja Vega was called a 'witch' by a Vox MP. In this instance, the Vice-President of the Parliament invoked articles 103 of the Regulations to call to order Vox MP and following his resistance, invoked articles 104.1 and 104.2 to ask for his expulsion from the session (GómezdeCelis_PSOE_M_DSCD_123_210921[35]).

Another use of parliamentary rules is article 104.3, comprising the rule to remove certain expressions or words deemed to violate the decorum of the Parliament. This article was invoked by the Vicepresident following a personal and sexist insult by a Vox MP to the Ministry of Equality (GómezdeCelis_PSOE_M_DSCD_224_231122) and by a left-wing Catalan MP following a racist speech by a Vox politician (CarvalhoDantas_ERC_F_DSCD_204_250822[36]).

Parliamentary rules to delineate the limits of parliamentary speech, such as long-term sanctions and suspension of parliamentary activity to MPs, have never been invoked (I_241023). Due to the perceived insufficient formal intervention of the President of the Parliament to protect politicians from anti-gender attacks (I_200923), some MPs launched official complaints with the President Bureau of Parliament to sanction hate speech, which were left unattended (I_051023; I_111023).

A final formal response called for the Subcommittee on the Renewal of the State Pact against Gender Violence to be held behind closed doors to prevent Vox' strategic use of social media to attack and disparage the Subcommittee (I_191023).

Informal responses

[34] Spanish Parliament Regulation. https://www.congreso.es/webpublica/ficherosportal/reglam_congreso.pdf
[35] Diario de Sesiones, Spanish Parliament. 2021. Pleno y Diputación Permanente. Accessed January 2024. https://www.congreso.es/public_oficiales/L14/CONG/DS/PL/DSCD-14-PL-123.PDF
[36] Diario de Sesiones, Spanish Parliament, 2022. Pleno y Diputación Permanente. Accessed January 2024. https://www.congreso.es/public_oficiales/L14/CONG/DS/PL/DSCD-14-PL-204.PDF

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MPs and parliamentary groups articulate informal responses of rule-making to overcome Vox opposition. Parliamentary groups' replacement of Institutional Unanimous Declarations with press releases, due to Vox refusal to agree and sign them (I_181023), is an informal response. Institutional Unanimous Declarations is a formal mechanism whereby the Parliament positions itself on a public matter of parliamentary interest, for example, against gender-based violence and LGBT-phobia. To do this, all parliamentary groups must agree and sign the declaration. However, since Vox's entrance to Parliament, there have not been any formal Institutional Declarations about equality issues. To bypass Vox's blockage, parliamentary groups have replaced this formal mechanism with their own informal press releases.

Other informal practices involve trying to amend or expand the interpretation of the Parliamentary Regulation to include protection against discriminatory or hate speech (I_180923; I_200923). Another is preventing the PSOE majority party's approval of amendments brought by PP but jointly processed with Vox by exercising constant vigilance over them (I_111023).

Contestations about rule-making

Vox's attack on equality and feminism is so 'relentless' that the existing formal mechanisms either are too limited in their action or, if enacted, would severely disrupt parliamentary activity, leading to a potential infringement in the freedom of ideological expression (I_260923; I_291123). Creating a list of 'unparliamentary expressions' is being considered, as well as creating a mandatory legal advice to assist the presidents of Parliament and committees when facing offensive speech (I_241023).

Inclusiveness of responses in terms of intersectionality and capacity to counteract racism and homophobia

While responses tend to counteract homophobia and develop intersectionality with sexuality, counteracting racism and intersectionality with race is limited. One possible explanation is that, whereas one of the adopted bills targeted LGBT rights, the bill targeting migrant and racialised communities did not reach Parliament due to the call for a snap election.

In the parliamentary debates selected, the capacity to counteract homophobia is salient, with data-informed arguments and public hearings of experts (knowledge strategy). Interviews show coalition-

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building and rule-making mechanisms: strategic alliances between female MPs to approve the Trans Law in the Gender Equality Committee (I_111023).

The Spanish Parliament shows limited counteraction of racism. One example is the halting of the creation of a group to study institutional racism in the security forces and bodies of the State, due to the dissolution of Parliament in May 2023. This initiative was connected to the massacre of migrants in Melilla by Moroccan and Spanish authorities, which resulted in the death of 23 migrants. Counteracting racism in this event involved both the proposal of a study-group on institutional racism and denouncing the Spanish Ministry of Home Affairs of racism and xenophobia (I_111023; I_180923; I_051023).

Six debates feature MPs integrating an antiracist perspective to both critiquing existing gender equality legislation and articulating a feminist response, showing limited intersectionality (MonteroGil_UP_F_DSCD_130_141021[37]; LegardaUriarte_PNV_M_DSCD_137_111121[38]; GiménezGiménez_Cs_F_DSCD_137_111121[39]; VehíCantenys_CUP_F_DSCD_190_260522[40]; CarvalhoDantas_ERC_F_DSCD_216_061022[41]; Pozueta_Bildu_F_DSCD_236_211222[42]; CalvoGómez_JxCat_F_DSCD_236_211222[43]; CarvalhoDantas_ERC_F_DSCD_236_211222[44]). Interviewees report the lack of formal response to Vox racist speech (I_051023; I_111023; I_181023; I_041223; I_121223).

Factors enabling and constraining feminist institutional responses

[37] Diario de Sesiones, Spanish Parliament. 2021. Pleno y Diputación Permanente. Accessed January 2024. https://www.congreso.es/public_oficiales/L14/CONG/DS/PL/DSCD-14-PL-130.PDF
[38] Diario de Sesiones, Spanish Parliament. 2021. Pleno y Diputación Permanente. Accessed January 2024. https://www.congreso.es/public_oficiales/L14/CONG/DS/PL/DSCD-14-PL-137.PDF
[39] idem
[40] Diario de Sesiones, Spanish Parliament. 2022. Pleno y Diputación Permanente. Accessed January 2024. https://www.congreso.es/public_oficiales/L14/CONG/DS/PL/DSCD-14-PL-190.PDF
[41] Diario de Sesiones, Spanish Parliament. 2022. Pleno y Diputación Permanente. Accessed January 2024. https://www.congreso.es/public_oficiales/L14/CONG/DS/PL/DSCD-14-PL-216.PDF
[42] Diario de Sesiones, Spanish Parliament. 2022. Pleno y Diputación Permanente. Accessed January 2024. https://www.congreso.es/public_oficiales/L14/CONG/DS/PL/DSCD-14-PL-236.PDF
[43] idem
[44] idem

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Enabling factors include first a *medium institutionalisation of gender equality* in Spain Parliament, with 44% representation of female MPs (2019-2023), a Gender Equality Plan (2020-2024)[45], a Protection Protocol for personnel suffering GBV[46] and a Protocol for Sexual Harassment Protocol[47], a Head of Equality (permanent staff, legal expert), and anti-discrimination committees: the Committee on GE and Social Policies, the Subcommittee on Anti-discrimination of Roma people and the Subcommittee on State Pact against gender-based violence. Second, a *constellation of progressive forces* defend gender equality policies. In this constellation, mainly constituted by left-wing parties, the regionalist logic plays a crucial role: while Vox and PP represent national far-right and right parties, right-wing regionalist parties oppose them and form alliances with the left to defend gender equality. Third, the presence of *critical actors* for the defence of feminist, antiracist and LGBT rights is pivotal for the forging of alliances, lobbying for the advancement of feminist legislation and exercising pressure to articulate formal responses from the President of Parliament (I_111023).

Five factors constrain feminist responses. First, the *limited scope of gender equality plan and sexual harassment protocols*, that do not apply to the political personnel (I_241023; I_291123). Second, the *constellation of oppositional forces*, with a significant representation of Vox (53 MPs) and the alliances formed with PP (88) and other anti-gender civil society organisations, creates a violent parliamentary atmosphere and heightens polarisation around gender & sexist/racist/LGBTIphobic attacks. Third, the *lack of formal response and intervention from the President of Parliament* (I_28123; I_231123; I_281123; I_171123; I_260923) even in 'very violent situations' (I_200923) and *partisan dynamics* hinders coalition-building and capacity of strong unitary institutional response (*cordon sanitaire*) to the far right. Left political parties seek political and media gains from parliamentary confrontations against Vox (I_251023; I_171123). Four, *far-right media* promote political and social polarisation and reproduce hate speech (I_131223; I_1041223).

[45] Gender Equality Plan, Spanish Parliament. 2020. Accessed January 2024. https://www.congreso.es/es/cem/plan_de_igualdad

[46] BOCG B 19, 2023. Protocolo de protección al personal de las Cortes Generales víctima de violencia de género. Accessed January 2024. https://www.congreso.es/public_oficiales/L15/CORT/BOCG/B/BOCG-15-CG-B-19.PDF#page=2

[47] BOCG B 66. 2021. Protocolo de actuación frente al acoso sexual, al acoso por razón de sexo y frente a todas las formas de acoso y violencia en las Cortes Generales. Accessed January 2024. https://www.congreso.es/public_oficiales/L14/CORT/BOCG/B/BOCG-14-CG-B-66.PDF

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3.7 SWEDEN

Introducion: Swedish Parliament's context to feminist institutional responses

Since the 1994 election, women in the Swedish Parliament (Riksdag) have consistently held a minimum 40% representation. As of January 2024, 47.6% of MPs are women[48]. The importance of gender parity among MPs is highlighted on the Parliament's website, together with a historical account of women's suffrage and the first women MPs[49].

In line with the Swedish gender equality objectives dating back to 1994, and the strategy of gender mainstreaming in government agencies, the Parliament decided in 2006 to continuously work for gender equality internally[50]. In its latest gender equality action program, it is stated that:

> "Sweden's Riksdag is – and should remain – a role model internationally in [gender equality] matters, partly for the existing gender equality work and its results, but beyond that, not least for the constant work for further improvements"[51].

The report from the Working Group for Gender Equality in the Parliament Council published in 2023 notes progress in treating all parliamentarians equal, but acknowledges the need for further efforts, especially regarding harassment, sexist comments, and leadership positions[52]. Notably, the latest action program focuses on equality between women and men but lacks an intersectional approach and does not reference the term *gender (genus)*[53].

Given a relatively long history of institutionalisation of feminism and gender equality, there are several key actors within the institutional field of Swedish gender equality. The Swedish Gender Equality Agency, a government agency under the Ministry of Employment, was "created to contribute to effective implementation of the Swedish gender equality policy"[54]. So far, it has not officially voiced

[48] Riksdagen. 2024. *Ledamotsrapport*. Available at: Ledamotsrapport (riksdagen.se) (2024-01-28)
[49] Riksdagen. 2023a. Kampen om rösträtten. Available at: Kampen om rösträtten | Sveriges riksdag (riksdagen.se)
[50] Riksdagen. 2023b. *Handlingsprogram för jämställdhet i riksdagen, 2022-2026*. Available at: PM (riksdagen.se) (2023-11-15)
[51] Riksdagen. 2023b, p.2 [our translation]
[52] Riksdagen. 2022a. *Rapport om handlingsprogrammet för jämställdhet, 2018-2022*. Available at: *PM (riksdagen.se) (2023-11-15)
[53] When comparing the latest version (2022-2026) with the one valid for 2018-2022.
[54] See About us | Swedish Gender Equality Agency

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any direct response to AG campaigns. The Institute for Human Rights[55], formed in January 2022, provides important data on equality and human rights. The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) is tasked with implementing gender mainstreaming at local level. Some governors of county administrative boards[56] can also be understood as important gender equality actors in the field as they promote gender mainstreaming on the local level. The Swedish Secretariat for Gender Research is a feminist institutional actor, which functions as a hub of knowledge production, promoting gender knowledge and expertise. In addition, civil society organisations - working on issues such as VAW, women's rights, LGBTQ rights, SRHR, human rights, xenophobia and anti-racism[57] - collaborate with Parliamentary groups, networks and MPs.

Notably, the Swedish state agency Delegation against Segregation (Delmos), which was tasked with providing data on and countering economic and racial segregation, was closed in 2022 due to budget cuts proposed by Moderates, Christian Democrats and SD.[58]

Simultaneously, the ethno-nationalist party Sweden Democrats (SD) is the second largest party since it gained 20 % of the parliamentary seats in 2022. Through the "Tidö-agreement" the coalition government (Moderates, Christian Democrats, and the Liberals) cooperates with and relies on support from SD, which affects equality politics, especially in relation to migration, and ethnic and religious minorities.

Methodological note

This report is based on parliamentary debates analysis and content analysis of 19 qualitative interviews conducted with institutional feminists between June 2023 and January 2024. Most interviewees are current MPs, mainly from the Social Democrats and the Greens, but also from the Left party, the Centre party and the Liberals, selected either for their expertise on gender issues and anti-racism, or for their frequent participation in debates responding to AG campaigns. We also interviewed two feminist politicians working outside of the parliament, two employees of institutions focusing on gender equality and one representative of a civil society organisation. We have chosen

[55] See https://mrinstitutet.se/
[56] Such as former minister for gender equality Maria Arnholm.
[57] Such as: EXPO, RFSU, RFSL, Unizon, Roks, Kvinna till Kvinna, Sveriges kvinnoorganisationer, and Civil Rights Defenders.
[58] The network on segregation issues established by Delmos is since coordinated by SALAR.

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to include interviewees from institutional gender equality agencies due to the above-mentioned institutionalisation of feminism and gender equality in which the Swedish state defines itself as a pro-(gender) equality actor. Interviews lasted between 45 and 80 minutes and mainly took place in-person.

Parliamentary debates were collected from the Parliament's official website, selected by using the search words: gender, gender equality, feminism, gender theory, LGBTQ, gender identity, and context-sensitive words. With the realisation that many AG campaigns concerned migration we extended our search with words such as immigration, integration, racism, and ethnicity.

In total we collected 55 documents in which AG campaigns are expressed. In 27 of these, we found direct feminist institutional responses. In addition, a report on AG movements in Sweden written by a member of the Green party and commissioned by a MEP is included. The selected documents have been organised into four themes (see below).

Findings

In the Swedish context two parties: Sweden Democrats and Christian Democrats, are most often identified as the main political actors expressing anti-gender rhetoric. However, over the last years exclusionary discourses have been used also by some conservative MPs from other parties, including Moderates.

Actors voicing feminist responses

Most visible in the selected debates are MPs (and former ministers) from the Social Democrats, the Green Party, and the Left Party. There are also a few MPs from the Centre Party and the Liberals. None of the feminist responses are voiced by members of the Moderates and the Christian Democrats, – MPs from the latter are rather voicing opinions associated with anti-gender campaigns alongside the main AG actors: Sweden Democrats. At local- and EP-level, members of the Feminist Initiative party are also important actors voicing feminist responses. Feminist Initiative was formed in 2005, with an outspoken feminist, antiracist and decolonial perspective[59]. However, they never had seats in the Swedish Parliament.

[59]See: https://feministisktinitiativ.se/

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The main feminist governance body focusing on gender equality *within* the Parliament is the aforementioned formal Working Group for Gender Equality in the Parliament Council. It includes representatives from all parliamentary parties and focuses on gender equality among the MPs. There are also less formal cross-political parliamentary forums such as the LGBTQI-network, and the SRHR-network. None of the 15 parliamentary committees deal specifically with gender equality or minority rights and racism. Instead, such issues are mainstreamed and addressed in the committees of the Labour market, Education, Justice, and Foreign affairs.

Content of feminist responses

1) Migration and Race: featured in debates on sexual violence, VAW, honour-related oppression, integration, international aid, gender equality, and discrimination. Actors promoting anti-gender discourses often associate increased immigration with VAW and portray immigration as a threat to gender equality in Sweden. Feminist responses are oriented towards countering the implicit (sometimes explicit) racism behind AG initiatives, by advocating for women's economic empowerment, stressing the role of an extended welfare state in providing economic independence for migrant women, and calling for international solidarity with oppressed women and victims of abuse. Responses highlight progressive measures such as the Law of Consent, the Sex Purchase Act, extensive childcare, and parental leave.

2) Academic Freedom and Gender Studies: featured in debates on higher education, universities, research, and gender quotas. Anti-gender actors question the scientific validity of gender studies, advocate against “political ideologies” influencing curricula, and suggest abolishing the Secretariat for Gender Research. Feminist responses emphasise the importance of gender perspectives in academia and advocate for freedom from political influence for professions, experts, and researchers.

3) Gender Pedagogy: featured in debates on education policies, sex education, parental codes, and VAW. It includes the sub-theme of “gender neutrality and sexlessness”. Anti-gender actors dismiss gender pedagogy as unscientific and ideologically driven, “directed towards erasing sex differences”, while feminists highlight gender inequality as a structural problem of patriarchal regimes and advocate for education to combat destructive masculinity norms.

4) Gender Identity: featured in debates on gender dysphoria, transgender care, LGBTQ rights, and gender pronouns. Anti-gender actors view trans and non-binary identities as unnatural/harmful for the

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youth and oppose initiatives like drag queens reading to children as a form of sexualization. Feminist responses stress human rights, the need to combat queer- and transphobia, and shift discussions from "culture war" towards facts regarding discrimination of minorities and structural issues.

In the winter of 2023/2024, migration and gender identity topics dominated AG campaigns and feminist responses.

Strategies of response

No specific measures or structural changes within the Parliament have emerged to directly address or counter AG campaigns. Our research shows also that there are no concerted initiatives within parties or parliamentary groups. An exception is a report[60] on AG campaigns in Sweden written by a Green Party MP and presented to a small group of MPs, yet no clear opposition strategies emerged from it. However, progressive institutional feminists frequently intervene during parliamentary debates, offering immediate responses to AG campaigns on a daily basis.

Knowledge

In general, feminist critical actors are not aware of the concept 'anti-gender'[61]. There might even be a "reluctance"[62] towards this concept as not fitting the Swedish context, where gender equality is a widely accepted norm. Instead, interviewees used concepts such as 'anti-feminism', 'feminist backlash', 'pushback on feminism' and 'right-wing populism' to describe the current situation. An attempt to raise awareness of 'anti-gender campaigns' in the parliament came from the Green party and took the form of the aforementioned report. Commissioned by Alice Bah Kuhnke, vice-president of the Greens/EFA group in the European Parliament and presented at a meeting organised in the Swedish Parliament, the report is an example of how knowledge on anti-gender campaigns travels to Sweden from abroad. The interviewees confirmed that the notion of AG campaigns often comes from the international arena (e.g. MEPs).

[60] Westerlund, U. 2021. *Swedish anti-gender movements.* Available at: https://eupress.mp.se/media/189371/swedish-anti-gender-movementspdf (2024-01-28)
[61] Green party MP, 2023-06-21.
[62] Director of an institution, 2024-01-10.

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Similarly, interviewees highlighted various instances of international transfer of knowledge and know-how: inviting renowned scholars to seminars within parliamentary groups to discuss progressive responses to right-wing populism, studying Bernie Sanders' campaign to obtain insights on countering 'Trumpism', exchanging ideas with politicians from other countries or drawing lessons from the recent Polish election to forge coalitions beyond traditional blocs, participating in projects led by a German Social Democratic foundation addressing common European challenges, embarking on study trips to gender-equal parliaments like Iceland's, examining threats to abortion rights in the US, and collaborating with Nordic parliamentarians and experts to combat violence within parliamentary settings[63].

An important arena for feminist knowledge-building is the LGBTQI-network[64]. An MP from the Green party says that the network has had several educational seminars, on topics such as the situation in Uganda, on the attacks on drag queens, and on the proposed Legal Gender Recognition Act[65]. Similarly, the SRHR-network has invited MPs from all parties to seminars on issues such as abortion rights and it collaborates with the main civil society organisation for SRHR-issues[66].

In the debates we identified the strategy of regularly calling upon feminist knowledge and existing data. For instance, MPs often refer to public inquiries and reports by international organisations such as EIGE and the UN Women's committee, and by national expert government agencies and civil society organisations. Interviewees confirmed that they employ this strategy to legitimise their claims. They emphasised the importance of being well-prepared when debating with populists and the need to rebut lies by referring to facts and reports, for instance published by the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society, the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention, or the Swedish Gender Equality Agency. However, as pointed out by one MP, this strategy only works inside the parliament where SD (and others) has to acknowledge the legitimacy of knowledge coming from state institutions, but not in media debates[67].

Framing the right

[63] Social Democratic MPs, 2023-12-20, 2023-12-15, and 2023-12-13; Green party MP, 2023-12-18, Left party MP, 2023-10-19.
[64] In which representatives from all parties except SD and the Christian Democrats participate (all are invited).
[65] Green party MP, 2023-06-21.
[66] Social Democratic MP, 2023-12-20.
[67] Social Democratic MP, 2024-01-29.

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Swedish feminist institutional responses to AG initiatives can be understood in terms of strategic framing of *us vs them*, aimed at delegitimizing the opponents and strengthening the legitimacy of gender progressive actors. Building on McCaffrey and Keys (2000), we identified three rhetorical strategies employed by MPs: *polarisation-vilification*, *frame debunking*, and *frame saving*. Most AG claims are voiced by members of SD, but also the Christian Democrats. Given that SD is a nationalist party with a historical background in, and contemporary connections with, Nazi- and white power-organizations, feminist MPs often highlight these aspects to vilify their opponents, thus using the *polarization-vilification* rhetorical strategy to counter-frame their opponents. For instance, when the former leader of the Centre party argued that SD cannot see outside of their "xenophobic bubble" or their "own racist mental figures". Another example is a response from a member of the Green party, warning about the dangers of a "racist party holding the keys to Rosenbad [*seat of the government*]".

As part of the *polarisation-vilification* rhetorical strategy, SD is also framed as a party that poses danger to democracy. This was pronounced in a debate on academic freedom in which the SD is portrayed as closely connected to their illiberal Hungarian "sister party" Fidesz. Similarly, SD is shamed for being uncivilised, dishonest and ignorant of existing policies, and hence, as not deserving to be MPs. In a debate on integration, a Social Democrat and former minister of migration responded to a speech by a SD parliamentarian implying she is ignorant of the policies being discussed. In the same debate, he framed SD as unconstructive and uncivilised:

> "They shout and scream, but do not have particularly constructive or successful suggestions."

Humour, in the form of sarcasm and irony, is regularly used as affective responses to AG claims, for instance by saying: "Women apparently always choose a lower salary than men". Opponents are framed as ignorant (*vilification*), and gender progressive actors challenge the opponents' views as expressive conservative ideology (*frame debunking*). As an affective response, MPs also use testimonies and personalise their narratives by referring to their friends, family members or their own experiences.

Interviewees point out the importance of emotions and they see how SD have been successful because they allude to people's emotions and provide a simple narrative about sources of social ills.

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Progressive actors cannot always refer to facts but need to learn how to respond in a similar manner, by evoking strong emotions[68]. One MP argues that:

> "When you enter a debate which is about feelings, you can't have that debate based on whether it's right or wrong, but you have to replace one feeling with another feeling. So it is about creating other perspectives."[69]

Defence of feminist democracy

MPs align themselves with, cherish, and remind others of the achievements of Swedish feminist democracy and the women's movement. This strategy can be understood as a *frame saving* strategy – as it honours and gives recognition to the feminist achievements in politics and portrays political actors as willing and able to fight for gender equality. Social Democrats in particular use this strategy, for instance by listing all the gender equality measures which their party has initiated or participated in implementing.

Interviewees point out that with the new conservative government working in cooperation with SD, the former focus on gender equality in most policy areas have disappeared from the political agenda, and that the former *feminist* foreign policy - which Sweden was a pioneer in - no longer has any legitimacy. As a response to these changes, feminist MPs argue for the benefits for women (and minorities) of an extended welfare state, point out the prevalence of gender injustice and promote discourse of equality, stressing the importance of state funding[70].

Coalition-building

There is a noticeable lack of coalition-building efforts among feminist critical actors. In the parliamentary debates we analysed, we have only identified some attempts at constructing a *discursive distinction* between "us" - the progressive actors in the parliament - and "them", the conservative, misogynist, and racist parties. There are also efforts to appeal to all progressive political actors, when MPs use phrases such as: "let us all work on this together", or "we all have responsibility", suggesting that the issue at hand is something that potentially regards everyone. Yet, these are not *actual* coalition-building strategies. Interviewees confirm that cooperation across party groups is rare

[68] Left party MP, 2023-10-19; and Social Democratic MP, 2023-12-20.
[69] Social Democratic MP, 2023-12-15.
[70] Left party MP, 2023-10-19.

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in general, and since the new government came to power, the situation became even worse. The Liberals, who otherwise have a lot in common with progressive parties on human rights issues, find it hard to oppose SD when their coalition-government relies on them[71]. Another obstacle are the so-called "feminist wars" within the progressive camp around issues concerning gender identity and prostitution/sex work, which often prevent coalition-building in the parliament[72].

There are however coalitions *within* party-groups, and between MPs and civil society actors. MPs from all parties in opposition emphasise the importance of keeping long-term and regular contact with civil society actors for mutual support and learning, and some MPs have initiated a platform for awareness-raising and coalition-building, both within the party group and with other citizens. An interviewee argues the platform was formed:

> "to be able to raise issues concerning this government and the policies that they're pushing…we need to also have a strategy that is counter to these racist and oppressive policies that we're seeing".[73]

Everyday pragmatic engagement

Direct and indirect engagement

Swedish MPs are obliged by the rules of conduct to refer to other MPs by full name when debating, or by the term "the member of the parliament". It is not allowed to speak directly to each other as all speeches have to be directed towards the speaker of the parliament. The rules make the speeches and the interaction between MPs scripted, structuring the types of engagement that can occur. These rules are being used by progressive politicians, who point out who has made a problematic claim and shame these actors, without engaging in a direct face-to-face exchange. Combined with the Swedish norms, which discourage open conflict and display of strong emotions, the rules of engagement in the parliamentary setting result in a relatively polite and collegial tone of debates.

Regarding day-to-day interaction, interviewees reveal that when they see right-wing MPs from SD in the corridors, the cafeteria or in the parliamentary buildings, they behave in a polite way. Likewise, they greet each other and act professionally in parliamentary debates and at committee meetings.

[71] Liberal party MP, 2024-01-24.
[72] Local politician, 2023-07-06.
[73] Left party MP, 2023-12-14.

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One MP recounted how he and others "get along well" with some SD parliamentarians on a personal level even though they despise their political views[74]. Personal attacks inside the parliament are rare, however they do occur on social media, where several progressive MPs have been subjected to attacks from AG actors. This is dealt with by the political parties, or the local police if it is a question of a crime. One interviewee argues there are several MPs within her group who *have* been subjected to racist slurs by MPs from other groups *inside* the parliament but that there is a lack of an anti-racist understanding at the institutional level of the parliament. It is the group leader of the party who has the responsibility to act in such scenarios[75]. Such attacks are specifically targeting racialized politicians, and some of the interviewees voiced the opinion that neither formal rules, nor law enforcement can provide adequate protection in such cases.

Indirect engagement includes a range of tactics, such as hinting to the racist ideologies behind SD or to its far-right connections, referring to the close relations between SD and the government in Hungary, or by using the term "forces":

> "In the societal debate, *certain political forces* like to present it as if feminism has gone too far. But nothing could have been more wrong." [emphasis added]

Since the conservative-liberal coalition-government cooperates with SD, progressive MPs use the interaction strategy of holding the government accountable, for instance by writing questions to ministers or posing questions to ministers at parliamentary hearings. They can *indirectly* hold SD[76] accountable by mentioning SDs' demands and influence when forcing ministers to explain their actions[77].

Non-engagement

Some MPs choose to not engage with AG actors by simply ignoring a lot of what is said in their speeches, or by trying to shift the focus of the debate, e.g., from "culture war" issues or "the problem of immigration" to labour market and welfare issues[78]. For instance, when a SD MP attacked gender

[74] Social Democrat MP, 2023-12-15.
[75] Social Democrat MP, 2023-12-13.
[76] Who are not officially part of the government.
[77] Left party MP, 2023-12-14, and Social Democrat MP, 2024-01-29.
[78] As is often the case when honour-related violence and VAW are framed by SD as one of the main problems related to immigration.

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studies, one MP replied by talking about taxes and prioritising schools, rather than responding to the specific claims concerning gender studies.

Some interviewees explained that there is a mutual recognition of the futility of engaging with each other, so they choose a pragmatic approach in which MPs from both camps simply ignore each other by not responding to each other's speeches. Another strategy employed by some MPs is to avoid trying to convince the AG actors that they are wrong, but instead highlight their own progressive politics[79]. One MP reckons more MPs should stop responding to AG actors in the debates, arguing that even though it is necessary to denounce racism or to stand up for LGBTQ-rights, this cannot be the main strategy:

> "you have to move the whole societal debate. You have to make it about your own 'playing field' where you have political trust and where you have a problem statement of your own politics".[80]

Consequently, one strategy is to initiate debates rather than simply respond to attacks.

Rulemaking

There was no indication that the political actors aimed to make any new rules to respond to the anti-gender campaigns. The Parliament's working culture is based on an assumption that everyone is respectful and willing to cooperate[81]. The three deputy speakers ensure that the code of conduct is followed in daily work[82]. Together with a low level of acceptance for open conflict, typical for Swedish culture, the code of conduct structures the interactions of MPs during parliamentary debates.

Some MPs use the strategy of commenting on language use by AG actors. For instance, an MP openly critiqued a SD parliamentarian for referring to honour-violence as an "imported problem" and for claiming that immigrants are a "cultural burden". In a debate on gender dysphoria, one MP made an appeal to SD to use the term "gender-affirming care" instead of "girls who want to be boys".

[79] Social Democrat MP, 2023-12-13.
[80] Social Democrat MP, 2023-12-20.
[81] All interviewees emphasise this.
[82] Riksdagen (2022b). *En uppförandekod för ledamöterna i Sveriges riksdag*. Available at: https://www.riksdagen.se/globalassets/04.-ledamoter-och-partier/ledamoternas-arvoden-och-villkor/uppforandekod-for-ledamoter/uppforandekod-2022-webb.pdf (2023-11-15)

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To write parliamentary motions, even if very few of them are put forward to votes, is another way to respond. This is a long-term strategy and a way for progressive groups to show their positions on various issues, which in the long-run might have an influence on policymaking[83].

Inclusiveness of responses in terms of intersectionality and capacity to counteract racism and homophobia

There is a notable lack of *institutional* understanding of racism and of anti-racist strategies within the Parliament. Individual MPs may have an intersectional approach to inequalities (often due to their positionality and embodied experiences), but parliamentary groups, networks and governance bodies of the Parliament show an absence of awareness of these issues. While the work on gender equality is institutionalised in the form of a working group and there is an LGBTQ-network, there is no similar anti-racist network or a body working against racism in the Parliament. Nor is there a specific state agency working on this, as is the case with gender equality. It could be argued that the longstanding emphasis on gender equality in Swedish political and public discourses has overshadowed other issues such as racism (and partly LGBTQ rights). Also, Swedish feminism has been criticised for its white ignorance and lack of attention to the claims of specific groups, including Sámi, Roma and immigrant women (Alinia 2020).

The responses of individual feminist institutional actors are to some degree inclusive and intersectional. Due to a social democratic feminist legacy, many MPs typically include class issues and economic equality when debating gender issues, by highlighting the importance of economic independence, welfare, and labour rights. MPs often refer to multiple systems of oppression (such as gender and ethnicity), minority groups and vulnerabilities in their responses. They speak up against racism, they include LGBTQ-rights, and talk about the situation for migrant women. In some occasions, structural racism is referred to in debates, and political actors stress that the existing law against discrimination include seven distinct categories:

> "To be protected from discrimination is a human right. The grounds for discrimination that we have are *gender*, *gender identity or expression*, *ethnicity*, *religion or other belief*, *disability*, *sexual orientation*, and *age*."

[83] Green party MP, 2023-11-22.

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Factors enabling and constraining feminist institutional responses

The institutionalisation of gender equality, including bodies within parliament such as the gender equality working group, has fostered wide acceptance of feminism and gender equality. Sweden has a self-image of being the forerunner in promoting gender equality since the 1970s. This legacy is upheld by successive progressive governments and collaboration among women's movement organisations, “femocrats”, and feminist politicians, forming a “velvet triangle”, and symbolised by the creation of the Gender Equality Agency.

Yet, what can be enabling can also be constraining. The hegemonic and dichotomous image of Sweden as “gender-equal” and “gay-friendly,” in combination with the belief in “Swedish exceptionalism,” helps to perpetuate femonationalist and homonationalist discourses and to obfuscate discrimination against other groups, especially migrants (Martinsson and Nygren, 2016). Since the relation between gender equality and whiteness remains largely unexplored, SD effectively positions itself as a defender of women’s rights, which are allegedly under threat due to immigration. Consequently, their initiatives are often seen as benevolent, and are not taken seriously by progressive actors. Today, the language of feminism is effectively used against feminist values and goals.

The government relies on support from SD which gives them legitimacy and influence on important policy areas (especially migration), while it becomes difficult to hold SD accountable. The current constellation also prevents cooperation across the political blocs. The Liberal party prioritises LGBTQ-rights and have a lot in common with the opposition parties. Yet cooperation is impossible since they are constrained by the government constellation and because the Liberals are seen as traitors by the opposition for cooperating with SD[84]. Meanwhile, the Left party is disappointed in the Social Democrats for moving towards the government in migration policies[85]. The entrance of SD in the Parliament and its influence on the government disrupts potential coalition-building among feminist institutional actors and hampers progressive change.

[84] Liberal party MP, 2024-01-24.
[85] Left party MP, 2023-12-14.

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3.8 UNITED KINGDOM

Introduction: United Kingdom Parliament's context to feminist institutional responses

For this report, we analysed feminist institutional responses at both the Scottish and Westminster parliaments regarding their engagement with the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) 2022 Bill. The party of government in Scotland, the Scottish National Party (SNP), outlined in their 2016 manifesto that they would 'review and reform gender recognition law, so it is in line with international practice for people who are Transgender' (SNP, 2016). While the SNP won the 2016 Scottish Parliament Election, delays from the coronavirus pandemic and lockdown measures postponed these intended reforms. After the 2021 Scottish Parliament elections, the SNP returned to government in coalition with the Scottish Greens. Both the SNP and the Scottish Greens detailed a commitment to reforming the Gender Recognition Act (GRA), and the so-called Bute House Agreement was made to introduce these reforms before the end of May 2022 (SNP, 2021; Scottish Greens, 2021)

The Gender Recognition Reform (GRR) Scotland Bill (The Scottish Government, 2022) aimed to shift the process of obtaining a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC) in Scotland to a self-declaration model to make the process less bureaucratic and dehumanising for those whose gender identity does not match their sex assigned at birth. The reform proposed in the GRR suggested lowering the minimum age at which people can apply for a GRC by two years, from 18 to 16, and removing any fees from applying for a GRC. The Scottish Parliament passed the GRR Bill on 22 December 2022 by 86-39 votes, amounting to an approximate two-thirds majority vote. However, on 17 January 2023, Alister Jack, the Secretary of State for Scotland and member of the Conservative Party, announced at Westminster that he would use Section 35 of the Scotland Act to block the GRR Bill. Jack stated that a review by UK government lawyers suggested the bill would have 'adverse effects' on UK-wide equalities law, specifically the 2010 Equality Act. Using this portion of the Scotland Act is unprecedented, as it is the first time that Section 35 has been invoked since the passage of the Scotland Act in 1998 (Torrance, 2023). The Scotland Act (1998) is a key founding document of devolution and legislates for the establishment of a devolved Scottish Parliament. A Section 35 order is a constitutional order that the Scottish Parliament cannot overturn.

We selected the debates and politics about the GRR Bill for three reasons. Firstly, the bill at the Scottish Parliament and its blockage at Westminster represents a critical blow to equality legislation in the UK. The bill's passing was only made possible through pro-equality coalition work by feminist

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institutionalist actors. Yet, the subsequent blocking of the GRR Bill can be seen as an important victory for anti-equality and anti-gender actors. Secondly, the debates around the GRR Bill are highly complex and nuanced. A key tactic of anti-gender actors, which feminist institutional actors found difficult to respond to, was to flatten and simplify these complexities to turn trans people into an existential threat to 'women and girls'. The proceedings around the bill offer fertile ground to explore how and in what ways feminist and anti-gender actors broadly understand gender and human rights within the UK context and how effective they are in persuading both their parties and the public to support their cause. Lastly, the Scottish case offers a unique opportunity to investigate the relationship between actors within and across parties, parliaments and equality sector organisations in central and devolved governments. This observation was raised several times[86] in our interviews with equality sector actors.

This report will first outline the methodological approach taken by the UK team. We justify and outline our qualitative data collection using content analysis of parliamentary debates and interviews with key feminist institutionalist and civil society actors. The report will then outline our preliminary findings. We conclude with reflections on our findings and suggest pathways to proceed in our case study and other work packages.

Methodological note

The parliamentary transcripts we selected and analysed were retrieved through the respective parliamentary transcript archives of the Scottish Parliament and Westminster. For the Scottish Parliament, a keyword search of documents in the official report was run for 'GRA' for 2022. In the case of the Westminster transcripts (The Hansard), a keyword search under GRA rendered no results, so the relevant transcripts surrounding Section 35 were retrieved through a search for 'gender recognition'.

Following our analysis of parliamentary debates, we conducted actor interviews with 11 participants. 5 of our actors were parliamentarians in Holyrood, while the remaining 6 participants were civil society actors working in the Scottish and UK equality sectors[87]. Parliamentarians have a unique vantage

[86] Participants 6, 7, 8 and 9.

[87] As the GRR Bill was a Scottish bill to reform the GRA, all interview participants were pro-gender actors in Scotland. All parliamentarians were MSPs, and all civil society actors were from the Scottish sector. Yet, due

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point in understanding how legislation is made and unmade and the relationships formed amongst and outside political institutions. Regarding the civil society actors, many of our participants were present for debates and committee meetings in parliament for the progression and passing of the GRR Bill, and the reactions after Westminster blocked the bill. These actors have an important perspective as non-partisan actors who support and advocate for vulnerable and marginalised communities across Scotland and have links to other equality organisations in the UK. Interviews were unrecorded and off-the-record to offer a richer data collection in which participants felt more comfortable divulging the *who, what, where* and *why*. The deep contextual data provided through interviews was crucial in understanding how and in what ways feminist institutionalist responses are shaped via coalitional politics and whether institutional norms were upheld or challenged (Weldon, 2014, p. 664).

Findings

This section outlines feminist institutionalist and civil society responses in parliament to anti-gender and anti-democratic forces. The section is divided into five parts: (1) understanding key actors, (2) analysing parliamentary debates, (3) dominant strategies from pro-equality actors and institutions, (4) the intersectional inclusivity in pro-equality actors' responses and (5) the actors which enable and/or constrain feminist institutionalist responses.

Actors voicing feminist responses

Our interviews demonstrated how support for the GRR Bill was complex. The Scottish Parliament voted in a two-thirds majority supporting the bill. Support for the bill came from all five parties represented in the Scottish Parliament[88]. Support for the bill from the SNP, Scottish Liberal Democrats, Scottish Labour and Scottish Greens was not surprising as these four centre-left parties made varying manifesto commitments to reforming the GRA (SNP, 2016, 2021; Scottish Greens, 2021; Scottish Liberal Democrats, 2021; Scottish Labour, 2021). Opposition to the bill came from

to the devolved nature of Scotland, actors must be aware of both Scottish and UK institutional practice. All parliamentarians supported the GRR Bill, and all participants from the equality sector are from organisations which helped shape and/or support the GRR Bill.

[88] SNP (53), Scottish Labour (17), Scottish Greens (7), Scottish Liberal Democrats (4), and Scottish Conservatives (3).

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three parties, with the Conservatives forming the majority of the opposition[89]. When speaking with parliamentarians, pro-gender actors confirm that opposition to equality initiatives such as the GRR Bill derives predominantly from the Scottish Conservatives. Yet, there were actors in Scottish Labour and the SNP who also opposed the gender recognition reforms. Participants 1, 3 and 5, all centre-left parliamentarians, stated that the 2021 Scottish Conservative parliamentary party is responsible for stoking a culture war within the Scottish Parliament and advancing what they perceived as a far right discourse.

The parliamentarian and civil society actors we interviewed stressed that critics of the bill exist across and within all parties in the Scottish Parliament. Opposition to pro-gender initiatives such as the GRR Bill is not a simple partisan split. For example, there were a few SNP MSPs who left the party due to their opposition to the bill. In some cases, a parliamentarian's opposition to the GRR derived from their faith-based values, such as evangelical Christianity. All actors we interviewed cautioned that although these resignations were notable, they were not considered major or effective anti-gender events. Rather, as Participant 9, a centre-left parliamentarian, stated, the most effective inter-parliamentary opposition to equality initiatives, such as the GRR Bill, derives from parliamentarians who are self-identified feminists and/or utilise arguments and talking points from the gender critical movement (GCM), gender critical feminist ideology[90], and/or bio-essentialism[91]. Pro-gender actors who voice support for feminist initiatives in the parliament are in the majority. Nevertheless, they face hostility from well-organised, far right gender critical and trans-exclusionary actors, many of whom consider themselves mainstream feminists, both within and outside parliamentary structures in England and Scotland.

Content of feminist responses

[89] Scottish Conservatives (29), SNP (9), and Scottish Labour (2).

[90] Gender critical discourse can be defined as discourse 'which attempts to juxtapose a vulnerable and silenced homogenous mass of real women to pathological individuals who are neither authentically female nor male' (Bassi and LaFleur, 2022, p. 315. Crucially, gender critical discourse rejects the gender spectrum and upholds the belief that there is no gender, only sex. Gender critical discourse takes issue with the belief that gender and sex are societally and culturally constructed and upheld. Gender critical feminism and its movements utilise this discourse.

[91] Bio-essentialism and bio-essentialist views provide a story in which womanhood is consistently in danger. Cisgender women and girls are under threat, vulnerable and in need of protection from men. Yet, these views are complexly highly paternalistic and patriarchal in nature (Kuhar and Paternotte, 2017).

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Analysing Parliamentary Debates

This section outlines the dominant themes in our analysis of parliamentary debates at Holyrood and Westminster. We first begin with themes found in the initial stages of the GRR Bill proposal at the Scottish Parliament. Then, we outline themes found in debates at Westminster. There is an important distinction here between the devolved and central parliaments, which is unique due to this country's devolved nature of governance. There is a significant overlap in the content and strategy of the feminist contributions to the bill's discussion in both parliaments. Table 1 aids the visualisation of this thematic data below.

Parliament	Scottish Parliament	Westminster Parliament
Themes	1. Compliance with Human Rights Law	1. Compliance with Human Rights Law
	2. Technocratic change/scope of change	2. Technocratic change/scope of change
	3. Defending trans rights against the concerns about the rights of women and girls	3. Defending trans rights against concerns about the rights of women and girls
	4. Marginalised position of trans people	4. Democratic concerns about devolution - Attack on democracy - Concerns about 'correct' democratic procedure - Procedural validity of Article 35
		5. Reference to a culture war

Table 2 Comparison of the prominent themes in parliamentary debates in the UK

Debates at the Scottish Parliament

Shona Robison, Deputy First Minister and Finance Minister, introduced the GRR Bill in the Scottish Parliament on 3 March 2022. We identify four dominant themes in the contributions of those speaking in favour of the bill in parliamentary debate at Holyrood: (1) compliance with human rights law; (2) the marginalised position of trans people; (3) technocratic change/scope of change that the bill represents; (4) defending trans rights against concerns about the rights of women and girls.

Speakers emphasising the compliance of the bill with human rights law argued that the procedure currently in place for accessing a gender recognition certificate posed a significant barrier to trans people accessing and realising their human rights. These arguments are sometimes made concerning international best practice examples in gender recognition procedures. Those speakers emphasising the marginalised position of trans people argued that given the marginalised position of trans people

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in Scottish society, this places a moral duty on elected officials to combat this inequality, and the GRR is crucial to this endeavour.

An emphasis on the scope of the change intended by the GRR, as well as the technocratic nature of these changes, is one of the more dominant themes in feminist contributions to the debates on the GRR and one of their main defences of it to opposing actors. For example, Fulton MacGregor, an SNP MSP, argued that 'the bill does not give trans people any new rights; nor does it change the Equality Act 2010. It simply makes the process of obtaining a GRC much simpler, less degrading and more humane for trans people' (27.10.2022, p.87).

The discursive strategy of defending trans rights against concerns about the rights of women and girls can only be understood in relation to the gender critical opponents of the bill. Scottish opposition to the reform, both inside and outside of parliament, has focused primarily on the idea that the rights and safety of 'women and girls' are negatively affected by these proposed gender self-identification reforms. The belief that trans women, in particular, pose a material and existential threat to cis girls and women is the dominant argument of all actors advocating against the GRR. This argument alleges an inherent predatory nature of trans people and also denies the humanity and legitimacy of trans people and their rights. To refute the claims, feminist parliamentarians attempt to disrupt the zero-sum argument that trans rights translate into a loss of rights for cis women. For example, Shona Robison, both when introducing the bill and in the second stage 1 discussion of the bill on 27 October 2022, addresses the rights and safety of women and girls by arguing that it is 'predatory and abusive [cis-het] men, not trans women or trans men' (27.10.2022, p.70) who perpetrate violence against women and girls.

As we move on to the themes that emerged in the Westminster debates, it will become clear that there is a significant overlap in the feminist contributions in favour of the bill in both parliaments.

Westminster Themes

In the Westminster debates regarding the GRR Bill, we have identified five themes; the first three also featured in the Scottish parliamentary debate: (1) compliance with human rights law; (2) technocratic change/scope of change; (3) defending trans rights against concerns about the rights of women and girls.

The following themes are unique to Westminster debates: (4) democratic concerns about devolution and 5) references to a culture war. The fourth theme, 'democratic concerns about devolution', has

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sub-themes which relate to the legality of the reform in Scotland and its impact on UK-wide equality legislation. These themes include (i) Holyrood's devolved decisions in gender reform as an attack on democracy, (ii) the emphasis placed on 'correct' democratic procedure and lastly, (iii) the questioning of the procedural validity of Section 35.

As stated, themes 1-3 are topics that appear in both parliaments. In the Westminster debate, the themes of technocratic change, i.e. those speeches emphasising the scope of the bill as making technical and procedural changes rather than substantively changing rights, are still present, though less dominant than in the Scottish parliamentary debates. The theme of defending trans rights against concerns about the rights of cis women and girls is also a dominant discursive strategy, and just as in the Scottish debate, this strategy is deployed against gender critical opponents. There are also references to human rights made by speakers defending the necessity of the bill.

The most notable difference between the two parliaments is that the Westminster debates were primarily concerned with the cross-border impacts of the difference in legislation between Scotland and England. Debates largely concerned the scope of Scotland's devolved powers and whether the GRR Bill amounted to a substantive change to the 2010 Equality Act to which the Scottish Parliament has no standing to reform. In terms of the analysis of this report, the context in which the bill comes under discussion in Westminster therein leads to a diversification of themes in the feminist institutional responses and notably shifts the focus of speakers in defence of the bill.

Westminster themes 4 and 5 must be understood in the context of surprise and anger by supporters of the bill and elation and joy by opponents when Section 35 was invoked. Parliamentarians supporting the bill argued that the Conservative government at Westminster was attacking Scottish democracy and weaponizing fear of trans people for such attacks. For example, speakers reference the use of Section 35 as 'an act of desperate democratic vandalism' (SNP MP, 17.01.2023, pp.215-216) and 'a calculated attack on devolution, democracy and trans rights' (Plaid Cymru MP 17.01.2023, p.214).

The second subtheme to theme 4 is that of insistence on a careful democratic procedure. These speeches seek to refute the argument that the GRR bill was rushed and emphasise the extent of the procedure of passing it and the care taken in that process. Mhairi Black, an SNP MP, refers to the bill as 'the most consulted upon piece of legislation that has ever gone through the Scottish Parliament' (17.01.2023, p.210), and Ian Blackford, the former SNP Westminster leader, references 150 amendments to the bill arguing that 'effective scrutiny took place' (17.01.2023, p.245). The third subtheme, the questioning of the procedural validity of the use of article 35, in turn, is comprised of

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speeches that criticise the way Article 35 was used. Notably, the responses categorised in theme 4 become less legible as feminist arguments and stances. With the most prominent theme in defence of the bill at Westminster being a concern with the democratic procedures surrounding both the initial passing and subsequent blocking of the bill, there are fewer substantive arguments for and defence of the validity of trans people's claims-making for justice. Similarly, speeches under theme 5, referencing a culture war, tend to position trans people as weaponised in such a culture war rather than those victimised and under attack in this culture war. In these cases, feminist defences of the GRR Bill and trans rights are made rather by extension than explicitly.

Strategies of response

Knowledge

Despite the successful coalition-building by feminist parliamentarians to support the bill, they encountered a key problem that is currently bedevilling mainstream British feminism, namely, the mobilisation of 'feminism' for anti-gender and anti-equality politics. Thus, stating that an MSP is a feminist is in no way descriptive of their politics and/or position in relation to the GRR since it is important to specify whether actors are so-called 'gender critical/trans-exclusionary radical feminists' or trans-inclusive feminists. When speaking to participants, they had to navigate the tricky waters in both their parties and in parliament in terms of party members, supporters and voters who describe themselves as feminists but opposed trans rights and other pro-equality legislation.

Our participants reported that former and current parliamentarians who opposed the bill are often in public and private spaces with leaders of gender critical movements across the UK. In turn, many of the prominent people within the gender critical movement are former elected officials, largely within the SNP and Scottish Labour, who identify as feminists. The coalitions built between those who oppose the GRR are well-funded and run deeper than interview participants had initially expected. Evangelical Christians, gender critical feminists, right wing parliamentarians, and far right groups are united under one banner against trans people's existence. Resources such as time, knowledge, legal understanding, activists, and, most importantly, money are shared amongst these groups, which, in turn, greatly increases their power and influence. Pro-gender actors refer to their opponents as 'The Unholy Alliance' as the composition of this coalition is seemingly unlikely due to broader ideological differences. Yet, together, this ostensibly disparate group becomes 'the perfect storm' as one

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participant stated. Both MSPs and civil society actors stated that so-called 'feminists' within the unholy alliance are gender critical feminists who 'no longer seem to care who their bedfellows are.' For example, participants describe how cis women activists who once supported the decriminalisation of abortion are now cooperating with evangelicals and the far right to criminalise abortion. Many of our participants describe this surprising political volte-face as that of the mythological Ouroboros; the mainstream British feminist movement is stuck in a cycle where it is slowly consuming itself—and further strengthening the far right.

Coalition-Building

The GRR Bill, as envisioned by the manifesto pledges of various parties and as shaped by parliamentary debates and committee meetings, represents what is possible when feminist institutional actors organise across and within their parties and draw on the support and advocacy of civil society organisations and activist networks. Given its cross-party support and the two-thirds majority vote for passage, the strategies that feminist actors in parliament used were a success—to an extent. However, anti-gender actors were also able to mobilise unlikely coalitions to achieve their goals to disrupt parliamentary procedures and to stop the bill. These divergent strategies are worth careful consideration.

When speaking with parliamentarians who supported the GRR, actors stated that coalitions were formed across party lines in support of the bill. During debates regarding the bill, the Scottish Conservatives were the main opposition. In our interviews, feminist actors recalled how prominent Tory party MSPs filibustered into the early morning hours to delay the bill's passing. Unlike Westminster, the Scottish Parliament is not a traditional first past the post system in which coalitional politics are rare. Nevertheless, one of our parliamentarian interviewees noted how exceptional it was that a cross-party coalition was formed to pass the GRR. They recalled that after the bill passed, MSPs from other parties came to shake their hand in the parliament café, which was unprecedented.

Everyday Pragmatic Engagement

Parliamentarians and civil society actors outline how skilled those within the Unholy Alliance are at entryism as they are nebulous and can often infiltrate institutional structures such as women's equality

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organisations and political parties. Largely, those within this anti-trans alliance will organise outside of parliament but still manage to access and infiltrate grassroots organisations as well as institutional structures such as civil service and parliamentary parties. Pro-gender actors described how anti-gender actors utilise time-wasting tactics to drain resources. Anti-gender actors are highly litigious and routinely organise, for example, Freedom of Information (FOI) or Subject Access (SA) requests from organisations stating a concern for women's or children's safety. Participant 2 stated that typically, anti-gender actors bring legal cases and stage attacks as lone wolf actors, although they are coordinating with a wider network behind the scenes. Participant 6 stated that these tactics have led to a 'chilling effect' on gender equality and intersectional equality work in Scotland and England. MSPs, MPs and extra-parliamentary pro-gender actors are either fatigued or frightened to stick their heads above the parapet for fear of coordinated and unrelenting violence and harassment by anti-gender actors. Our interviewees agree that while support for pro-gender initiatives is strong, the ways in which anti-gender actors are forming coalitions and organising is paralysing pro-gender initiatives.

Rule-making

We found that feminist institutionalist actors made informal rules in terms of communicating with gender critical actors. Both civil society actors and parliamentarians described how in the early debates of the GRR bill they carved out time for those critical of the reforms in their surgeries and in their email responses. Yet, over time, feminist institutionalist actors stated that it became clear that complaints often came from those that, ideologically, were gender critical and/or transphobic. In our interviews, we found that equality sector actors and parliamentarians began to strategize their responses and communication with these anti-gender actors due to their propensity to waste time, resources, and harass them. For example, parliamentarian Participant 3 stated that they will no longer debate in emails with gender critical public. Participant 6, an equality sector practitioner, stated they now will send a maximum of two emails back to a gender critical messenger as this participant believes they could spend 'all day' responding to emails from gender critical actors regarding the GRR Bill.

Relatedly, actors[92] also stated they had to be much more careful online. Many feminist institutionalist actors stated they no longer looked at comments on Twitter (X) and have had to filter and block who

[92] Participant 2 (practitioner in equalities sector), Participant 3 (parliamentarian of a centre-left party), Participant 4 (practitioner in equalities sector), Participant 6 (practitioner in equalities sector), Participant

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can contact them. Many actors explained that this was not what they wanted, but instead, for their own mental health and physical safety, they needed to protect themselves from harassment and hateful comments. Some feminist institutionalist and civil society actors either had to make their profiles private or deleted their social media accounts completely to protect themselves.

Inclusiveness of responses in terms of intersectionality and capacity to counteract racism and homophobia

While the GRR Bill seeks to improve the lives of trans people, there are limitations to its inclusivity. It should first be noted that the GRR Bill does not extend to non-binary people, as an individual cannot legally refuse the gender binary nor identify as both genders. (Joe Fitzpatrick, 27.10.2022, p.77; Maggie Chapman, 27.10.2022, p.101; Emma Roddick, 27.10.2022, p.108). In those speeches referencing compliance with human rights law, there are some references to other groups historically deprived of equal rights. For example, Pam-Duncan Glancy, a Labour MSP, argues that 'Human rights are our rights not because we are women, or trans, or gay, or disabled, or black, but because we are human' (27.10.2022, p.81). Such discursive strategies position trans rights as part of the tradition of universal human rights rather than acknowledging the specific interests and needs of trans people in accessing, defending and expanding their rights.

While race was not systematically discussed in the selected parliamentary debates, debates about race were dominant in actor interviews in three main themes which require further analysis. Both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary actors highlighted the links between white supremacy and the so-called Unholy Alliance. Participants 2 and 3 each described how gender critical feminism, the far right and evangelical Christian groups uphold misogyny, homophobia and racism in their binary, bio-essentialist beliefs. Importantly, Participants 1, 2, 3 and 7 described how anti-gender actors largely played on the fears of parliamentarians of colour and their constituents. For example, actors described how it was predominantly evangelical Christian organisations that first opposed the GRR Bill. Yet, over time, the Scottish Conservatives and some of its parliamentarians spread misinformation and fear regarding the bill to other faith groups. This needs to be further explored beyond the scope of the report but due to the prevalence of this theme in our interviews, we include it here, however briefly.

8(practitioner in equalities sector), Participant 9 (practitioner in equalities sector), Participant 10(parliamentarian of a centre-left party).

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Facilitators and Barriers

Westminster invoked Section 35 to block the GRR Bill. The surrounding debates regarding the block shifted the nature of the debate from a focus on human rights to that of democratic procedures, Scotland's right to self-governance and the extent of Scotland's devolved powers. The use of Section 35 was primarily received by Holyrood as an attack on Scottish democracy and, therefore, is of high importance when considering the constraining of feminist institutional responses. As previously mentioned, many defences of the bill stopped being legible as feminist arguments supporting trans rights and were displaced in favour of constitutional and legal questions.

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IV. Parliamentary Transcripts

23/02/2022 – Meeting of the Parliament (Hybrid): LGBT History Month
Available under:
https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13593

03/03/2022 – Meeting of the Parliament (Hybrid): Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill
Available under:
https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13611

27/10/2022 – Meeting of the Parliament: Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill: Stage 1
Available under:
https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=13942

22/11/2022 – Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee: Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill: Stage 2
Available under:
https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=14006

14/12/2022 – Meeting of the Parliament: For Women Scotland (Judicial Review)
Available under:
https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=14052

21/12/2022 – Meeting of the Parliament: Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill: Stage 3
Available under:
https://www.parliament.scot/api/sitecore/CustomMedia/OfficialReport?meetingId=14069

17/01/2023 – House of Commons Official Report: Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)
Available under: https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-01-17

18/01/2023 – House of Commons Official Report: Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)
Available under: https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-01-18

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3.9 Social media pilot: Italy

Political discussion and conflict over the so-called "DDL Zan" –a law proposal for the recognition of hate crimes on grounds of gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, and disabilities (cfr. Section 3.4)– heated up in 2021, when the provisional text already approved by the Italian Chamber of Deputies in November 2020 moved on to the Senate at the beginning of summer. Contrary to initial expectations (especially those of the Democratic Party to which the proposer of the law, Alessandro Zan, belongs), at the end of October 2021 the Senate refused to proceed with the examination of the text, in fact shelving the bill for good. Interestingly, October 2021 was a year in which Italy was steered by a government led by Mario Draghi and which comprised almost all political forces from the right, the center and the moderate left, with the exception of the radical right *Fratelli d'Italia* and smaller left-wing groups, amongst which *LEU-Liberi E Uguali*. Ultimately, the conflict on the DDL Zan approval took place and, in fact, contributed to shake the balance of a governmental coalition that was already very fragile and heterogeneous to begin with.

The conversation on Twitter reflect this overall situation, as the greatest majority of collected tweets published by Italian parliamentarians date back to 2021 and, more specifically, to the three moments across the year in which their engagement within the two parliamentary chambers was more intense: In May, when a group of parties from the left (without the support of the moderate forces from the center-left) delivered an official request to the President of the Senate for setting a date for discussing the bill; in July, when the discussion started; and in October, when the law text landed at the Senate. Across this timeframe, parliamentarians used Twitter on several occasions to intervene publicly about the bill[93]. However, most of these tweets were aimed at showcasing personal or party opinions, often commenting (whether in a supportive or a dismissive way) the contents of the bill. Only in a minority of cases did parliamentarians use Twitter to interact with their colleagues and discuss both the contents of the measure itself and the broader issues and value horizons it addressed.

The network charted in fig. 1 represents the overall structure of interactions established amongst parliamentarians across 2021. Overall, 143 parliamentarians are represented, either as authors of tweets or as targets of mentions, retweets, and replies. Interestingly, the network is very sparse and shows rathe low levels of reciprocity: very rarely members of the Parliament have established (even

[93] Overall, starting from the pool of selected hashtags, we collected 3003 tweets authored in 2021 by members of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate.

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over time) dialogic relations amongst themselves, rather using tweets to interact in from of the public opinion with some specific members of their or other parties[94].

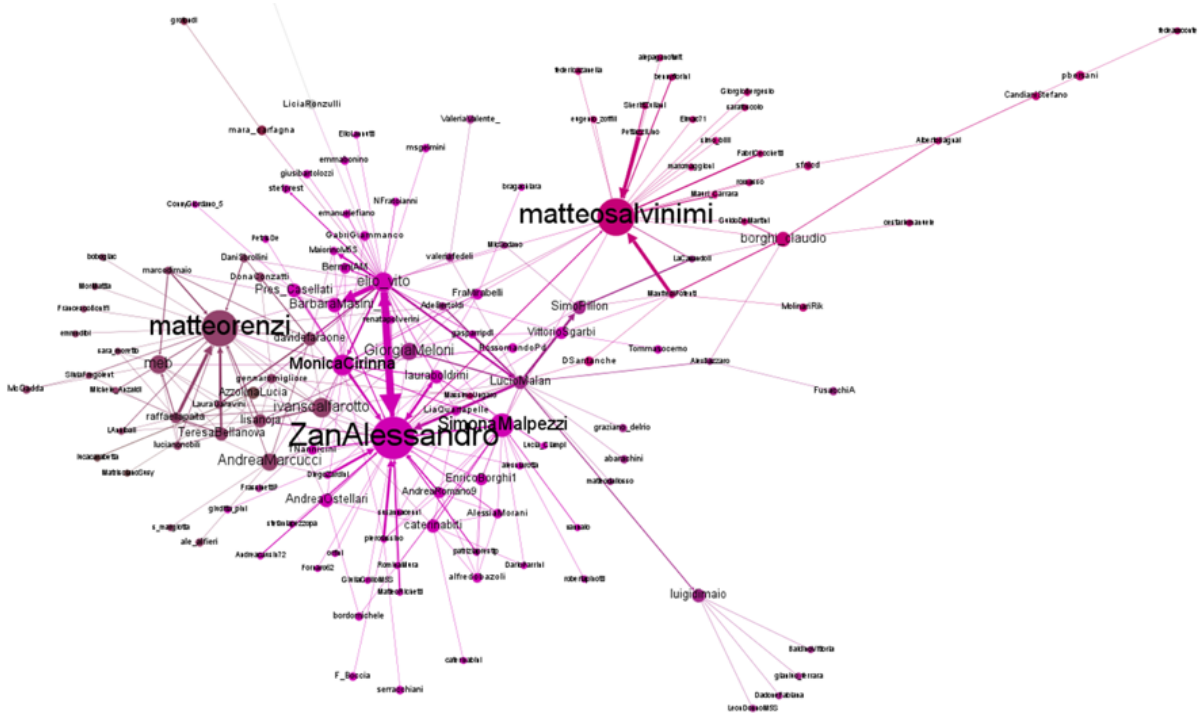

Figure 2 Network of interactions between Italian parliamentarians about the DDL. Zan in 2021 (Source: own elaboration)

On the one hand, this first element seems to discourage investigating social media conversations as places where feminist institutional responses may occur. On the other hand, though, a closer look at the micro and meso dimensions of the network reveal interesting nuances of the discussion which, in turn, offer an entry point to reflect on what shape feminist responses can take within digital spaces.

As it shows in figure 2, interactions amongst politicians are clustered in three main areas which, in turn, are defined around the three most central nodes in the network for the amount of attention (measured in terms of mentions and retweets received) they receive from other politicians involved in the discussion. At the center of the network, a cluster pivots around the account of Alessandro Zan, the promoter of the bill. On the upper right corner, a cluster develops instead around the account of Matteo Salvini, leader of the *League*, and one of the strongest opponents to the Zan bill (to the point of having presented an alternative provision). On the left side, a third cluster gathers around the

[94] Overall network density is 0,01 and only 17% of mapped ties amongst politicians are reciprocal.

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account of Matteo Renzi, leader of Italia Viva – the party that was deemed responsible for the bill's scuttling by virtue of a last-minute voting alliance with right-wing forces[95].

Differently from these last two, the cluster at the center of the network is also the one that contributed the most to the development of the discussion, not only by virtue of the engagement of members of the Democratic party like Alessandro Zan, Monica Cirinnà and Simona Malpezzi, but also for the intense tweeting activity of Elio Vito, one of the few members of Forza Italia (the party founded by Silvio Berlusconi) who openly endorsed the bill during the vote in the Chamber of Deputies and actively engaged for its approval in the Senate. Interestingly, the strongest relationship in the network is the mutual one between Alessandro Zan and Elio Vito, which is sustained, as revealed by a qualitative reading of tweets involved, by a rather regular exchange of positive messages between the two politicians in support of the bill and, at times, even of each other. Established across members of parties which have held, over time, a very different orientation towards gender equality and politics, the strong and sustained interaction between these two politicians hints at the possibility of building *online coalitions* – i.e., collaborative relationships that are played out primarily at the discursive level and publicly display a political closeness and a commonality of intents that may not appear evident in other, more formal exchanges within “offline” discussion or debates like those that take place during parliamentary debates.

If we look more closely to the ties that are activated by politicians who promote/support the bill in the central cluster, we notice that tweets have been also used strategically to complement some response strategies that emerged in the interviews. In several cases, parliamentarians who were particularly active in the construction of the conversation did direct their tweets at members of adversarial parties adopting a “name and shame” tactic. tweets have been used in a kind of "name and shame" tactic: opponents of the law are publicly called to account for attempting to block the passage of the bill specifically by leveraging institutional filibuster mechanisms, such as tabling countless amendments or burying the text of the law within specific committees. In this sense, tweeting becomes another means of *everyday pragmatic engagement* against adversaries that falls side by side with acts of calling out politicians and parties for their exclusionary statements during parliamentary debates. At the same time, when performed via tweets, this tactic of response acquires wider public significance as it is before the eyes of the public that parties and their members are being held to account for

[95] The vote session in the Senate was held through a secret ballot and, therefore, single party responsibilities for the final outcome were difficult to ascertain.

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attempts to block legislative initiatives geared-as in this case-to combating intersectional discrimination and guaranteeing individual rights.

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4 Conclusion

Countering and responding to anti-gender (AG) opposition is done in a variety of ways in the diverse political-socio-cultural contexts analysed in this report, influenced by factors such as the quality of democracy and the degree of institutionalisation of gender equality therein. Similarly, the emergence and strategies of feminist critical actors (FCA) are shaped by these contextual factors, signalling the diversity of FCA, of the responses they articulate, and of the AG opposition they face. In these conclusions we present first, the key actors voicing feminist institutional responses as well as the main anti-gender actors in each context; second, an overview of the strategies identified in the country and EP reports –within our initial categories of knowledge, coalition-building, everyday pragmatic engagement, and rule-making, as well as the expansion of those through our empirical data– and lessons learnt from the pilot on social media; third, a reflection on the inclusiveness of responses in terms of intersectionality and capacity to counteract racism and homo- and trans-phobia; and finally, remarks concerning the enabling and constraining factors shaping these responses.

4.1 Actors voicing feminist institutional responses

The main actors voicing feminist institutional responses (see table 3) are progressive political parties (left, green, social democrats, pro-democracy centre and liberal parties), feminist governance structures (equality committees, intergroups on gender equality, LGBT rights and antit-racist politics) and CSO and feminist activists. However, especially in autocratic contexts, also right wing actors come to respond to anti-gender attacks.

Countries	Feminist critical actors (FCAs)	Anti-gender (AG) actors
Belgium	Green parties Former State Secretary; MPs of the Social-Democrats; Dutch-speaking Liberals, sometimes French-speaking Nationalists	Both French and Dutch-speaking right-wing parties.
EP	Political groups on the centre-left Institutional and parliamentary bodies: Women's Rights and Gender Equality Committee; LGBTI Intergroup; Anti-Racism and Diversity Intergroup; All of Us; MEPs for Sexual and Reproductive Rights.	Far-right political groups. Some MEPs from the European People's Party (EPP) group.

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Hungary	Multi-party platform encompassing right, left and green parties Institutional and parliamentary bodies Parliamentary group For a Diverse Hungary	Current ruling party Extreme far-right group
Italy	Left-wing parties Green parties Centre-left parties Institutional and parliamentary bodies: Conferenza Nazionale Donne Democratiche within PD;Women's intergroup; LGBT intergroup; Intergroup on abortion (Bill 194); Former President of the Chamber (Boldrini); Parliamentary Committee on Femicide; Parliamentary Committee on human rights; Parliamentary Committee entitled to Jo Cox; Parliamentary Committee Segre Individual MPs from left and centre-left parties	Ruling far-right government The Vatican Centre-right parties
Poland	The Left Parliamentary Club Institutional and parliamentary bodies: The LGBT+ Equal Rights Group; the Group for the Protection of the Białowieża Forest and Other Valuable Natural Areas; the Group on Migration and Integration Policy; the Group on Humanitarian Aid and International Humanitarian Law; the Group on Women's Rights and the Group on Reproductive Rights)	Ruling party and coalition Government Plenipotentiary for Civil Society Affairs
Spain	Left ruling parties Centre-right party Regional parties Institutional and parliamentary bodies: Ministry of Equality; Equality Committee; Subcommittee for the renewal and updating of the State Pact on gender violence; State Pact against Anti-Roma Discrimination and the Inclusion of the Roma People	Far-right party Right-wing party
Sweden	Left parties Green Party Centre parties Institutional and parliamentary bodies:	Far-right party Right-wing party

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	Working Group for Gender Equality	
UK	MPs from centre-left parties Green party	Right-wing party Centre-left parties

Table 3 Feminist Critical Actors and Anti-Gender Actors

4.2 Concluding remarks on strategies

Concerning the articulations of feminist institutional responses by feminist critical actors, we have paid attention to four specific dimensions: knowledge, everyday pragmatic engagement, coalition-building, and rule-making (see tables in Annex 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9). While these strategies sometimes overlap, as shows the use of feminist knowledge when FCA pragmatically engage with anti-gender actors in everyday interactions, the different categories allow us to identify distinctive traits of the institutional responses studied.

Knowledge is an important strategy for all country cases and the EP. It entails discursive strategies, use of expert data, grassroots information from CSO, international and national reports, as well as holding regular public hearings where experts are invited to share their knowledge and experience. The purpose of knowledge as a strategy is to debunk misinformation and fake news disseminated by AG actors, develop a pro-active and inclusive discourse independent from anti-gender opposition, raise awareness about specific feminist issues in order to give them legitimacy and appeal to affects by generating solidarity and empathy. To put this strategy in motion, FCAs enact a Human Rights discursive approach that draws on international knowledge such as reports and conventions from the European Union and United Nations. Institutional gender equality training is highlighted as another knowledge strategy. The use of civil society knowledge emerges in feminist institutional responses, as shows the case of testimonials of violence (whether of LGBTQ, racist or gender-based) in parliamentary speeches. It is important to note that the richness and capacity to unfold this response strategy is influenced by the quality of democracy and the parliamentary rules about participation.

The multifaceted strategy of **everyday pragmatic engagement** serves several purposes: FCAs use it to expose the contradiction and misinformation in AG actors' discourses, deny them the opportunity for self-victimisation, and directly confront their attempts to dominate parliamentary discourse with their narratives. Everyday pragmatic engagement varies widely among feminist critical actors, involving strategies ranging from deliberate non-engagement aimed at denying anti-gender forces a

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platform and agenda-setting power; to active involvement. Non-engagement tactics occur both in formal spheres such as the Parliament, but also in informal circles, such as the cafeteria or after-work gatherings. Conversely, engagement strategies include repetitive actions to bring refused issues back on the agenda, posing parliamentary questions and interpellations to address gender and border issues, non-formal protests, and democratic engagement, with the latter aimed at exposing the ignorance of AG actors. Various forms of engagement through counterarguing are present across several cases, expressed in the form of direct response to anti-gender (e.g. calling out politicians for their exclusionary statements or direct attacks on MPs), indirect mentions, or expressions of support and solidarity with attacked MPs.

Empirical findings expand our original categories of feminist institutional responses. In particular, the EP and country reports provide additional information to **nuance the category of everyday pragmatic engagement** through the following **subcategories**: 1. acts of protests, such as the use of public office to circumvent bans and restrictions imposed by the ruling party, the use of slogans from feminist movements in parliament and the direct appeal to women protesting in the streets; 2. reclaiming institutional spaces for gender issues when they are opposed or non prioritised, such as repetitively bringing gender issues to plenary and committees regardless of the repeated refusals, sneaking important gender issues in non-related debates or at the end of Parliament sessions when MPs have the freedom to do so, as well as providing practical information on pharmacological abortion from the parliamentary stand; 3. repurposing formal rules for extra-parliamentary protection, such as using parliamentary immunity outside parliament to support activists' work; and 4. democratic engagement to discuss anti-gender actors' ideas and expose limitations of certain proposals rather than to dismiss them or follow a strategy of non-engagement.

Coalition-building is necessary to make everyday pragmatic engagement strategies effective and comprehensive. **Coalition-building** shows the articulation of both inter-parliamentary and extra-parliamentary coalitions. Regarding inter-parliamentary coalitions, there is a prevailing tendency across cases to informal, short and issue-based coalitions such as ad-hoc alliances to work on a specific topic and urgent matters. Coalition-building differs depending on the context. Formal approaches encompass strategic *cordon sanitaire*, opposition platforms to the government, organising public press conferences as substitutes for institutional declarations on feminist issues blocked by AG actors, establishing of inter-groups, and collective signing letters to Parliament urging protection from ultraconservative lobby groups and far-right media. Amongst the more informal approaches, we

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highlight the use of social drinks and whatsapp groups amongst FCAs to plan and strategize responses.

The forging of coalitions is facilitated by the need to form a united front in the face of blatant attacks by AG actors and the presence of a parliamentary culture that fosters allyship. However, challenges to coalition-building arise from internal division within progressive forces, as well as from the dynamics of partisan politics. Within-party coalitions are easier, especially when agreement is found around specific issues (e.g. transgender rights, LGBTQIA+ rights).

Extra-parliamentary coalitions appeared to be common in all cases, particularly highlighting the relationship between institutional and civil society organisations (CSO) actors. The holding of public hearings inviting CSO actors is frequent in all contexts. The presence of activist-parliamentary networks is also underlined in certain cases, alongside the establishing of inter-groups featuring CSO actors. Coalitions with CSO actors also appear in the testimonials of violence included in parliamentary speeches that draw from experiences shared by civil society. The objective of extra-parliamentary coalitions is to amplify civil society voices within the parliamentary arena and to design/exchange effective strategies in different arenas and on different issues to counter anti-gender politics. Extra-parliamentary coalitions also occur with actors from other institutions, such as regional parliaments, the EP or feminist MPs from Latin America.

Rule-making responses encompass both formal and informal strategies. Formal rules are not frequently implemented, with occasional invocation of procedural rules and mechanisms such as the “blue card” system or sanctioning of speech against decorum. Informal rules, however, play a more significant role, often employed to continue advancing on the equality agenda hindered by anti-gender action and protect actors promoting gender-related topics. Examples include re-purposing acts of address to obstruct the enactment of specific measures as in the case of legislation that restricts migrants’ rights, or issuing press releases to bypass the far-right obstruction of formal institutional declarations condemning gender-based violence and LGBTQIA+phobia. These informal strategies demonstrate a high level of creativity in articulating alternative responses considering the absence of institutional mechanisms to sanction hate speech (often due to interpretations of such intervention as a limitation of freedom of expression) and protect attacked MPs and invited CSO that work for the promotion of equality, or their insufficient implementation within parliamentary contexts. The function of rule-making initiatives varies from setting limits on hate speech, isolating and sanctioning anti-gender actors, to protecting critical feminist actors.

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In addition to the afore-mentioned responses, we observe another type of strategy focused on the **mobilisation of affect and emotions**, exemplified by the use of testimonials, humour and expressions of empathy and solidarity.

The pilot on **social media analysis** conducted on the case of Italy on the Zan bill on hate crimes on grounds of gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, and disabilities offered some interesting insights on the forms that institutional feminist responses can take when they are performed online. The main category of feminist institutional response that we could identify in this case is that of 'everyday pragmatic engagement', which are performed through tweets as routine acts of political communication. Against this background, some more specific insights emerged: a) two main forms of engagement were identified, namely taking an active stance either 'against' or 'in favour' of the bill; b) supporters of the bill repurposed mundane tweets into a 'naming and shaming' tactic to reveal the opponents' filibustering mechanisms. Importantly, the social media analysis exposed the possibility also to construct unexpected discursive alliances between supporters of the bill and members of the right-wing parties who dissent from the official line of their party and show explicit support for the bill both in the Parliament and on social media.

Future analyses of feminist institutional responses on social media will have greater potential to provide additional information to data based on interviews and parliamentary debates, particularly if they put in relation interview and social media data. Above and beyond tracing public discussion on specific bills, like we did in this case, the cross-fertilization of these analytical strategies would allow, for instance, to understand the extent to which, how, and by whom digital violence is employed against political actors, such as women, LGBTQIA and racialised politicians, and how these actors responded. We therefore invite further research in this direction to best develop this novel methodology.

4.3 Concluding remarks on inclusivity of responses

In this report, one of our objectives was to assess the extent to which feminist institutional responses are intersectional, that is whether actors frame gender as an intersectional issue, and thus pay attention to different and intersecting oppressions, and if the coalitions that are made are more or less inclusive. To discern this, we generally tried not to explicitly convey the intersectional focus of our study to the interviewees, to assess whether their responses actually incorporated an intersectional perspective. However this methodological decision might exclude the detection of data on intersectionality in contexts where more siloed approaches to gender equality have been favoured.

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Common to all cases is a general lack of inclusiveness of intersectionality and the dominance of a single-issue approach to treating inequalities in their responses. Although this varies in relation to national parliamentary cultures, gender is the predominant inequality addressed through whiteness and with some intersection with LGBTI inequalities, and, in some parliamentary contexts, gender-class intersections. There is a generalised absence in the treatment of race and ethnic inequalities and their intersections, except when migration and refugee issues are addressed.

Considering this, the reports show that feminist institutional responses reflect a continuing tendency to follow a single-issue approach with regards to gender. Further study is required at this stage. As part of task 4.2 concerning the analysis of findings about feminist institutional responses, additional exploration will be conducted to assess the extent to which intersectional perspectives are overlooked when articulating responses to anti-gender politics.

4.4 Concluding remarks on enabling and constraining factors

Factors that enable feminist institutional responses normally tend to match opposite factors that constrain them. *Democracy* and its quality is a key enabling factor, by facilitating the organisation and expression of feminist responses, as much as autocracy is determinant for constraining them, through practices that make the parliament window-dressing or that sanction actors voicing political opposition to ruling parties. However, determining the enabling or constraining dimension of factors is extremely contextual. For example, if gender equality is a key politicised issue in an autocratic regime, feminist responses may become more outspoken and coherent and new coalitions may emerge in support of equality (Krizsan and Roggeband 2021; Ayoub 2016).

Political context offers or constrains opportunities to respond depending on the state system and party system, in the former by offering multiple possibilities for voicing claims at different levels of government in federal or quasi-federal systems and split party systems, and in the latter by limiting the influence of the executive that is typical of national and subnational parliamentary contexts as compared to the European.

Political representation and constellations of either progressive or anti-gender majorities and forces can enable or constrain feminist institutional responses. Among the progressive forces observed in our cases are Left, feminist critical actors, MPs with activist backgrounds advocating for CSO issues in parliament, progressive women, LGBTQIA+ and racialised MPs, as well as a new generation of progressive MPs stemming from CSOs.

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The *institutionalisation of equality*, *feminist governance structures* and *commitment to gender equality* can be both responses to AG actors and enabling factors of feminist institutional responses depending on the specific context where they are articulated. It is therefore crucial to emphasise their contextual dimension. However, data across cases signal the limitations and weaknesses of feminist parliamentary governance structures as a significant constraining factor. In this regard, the presence of equality institutions such as equality committees, intergroups and networks, parliamentary equality policies such as plans and protocols against sexual harassment, LGBTQIA-phobia and racism both articulate and enable feminist responses. However, the weak role of feminist governance structures within parliament, the absence of antiracist structures, the lack of intersectionality work, and tensions within feminist governance structures due to presence of anti-gender actors within parliamentary committees may lead to a siloed approach to equality and thus to constrain the responses. Similarly, while a parliamentary commitment to gender equality due to political will is a paramount factor to facilitate responses, the general lack of priority given to gender and racial equality, LGBTQIA+ and SOGI rights in parliamentary contexts, as well as gender blindness and sidelining of gender experts are constraining factors of feminist institutional responses.

The level *of knowledge about anti-gender* actors appears to shape the capacity to formulate responses. In contexts where anti-gender actors and politics are easily identified and perceived to be a threat to democracy, responses tend to be articulated more strongly and with a more unified conviction, whereas in contexts characterised by a lack of knowledge on AG, responses may be weaker and less cohesive. Further research is needed to understand the extent to which the articulation of feminist institutional responses is connected to the knowledge of who anti-gender actors are, or also to strategic choices. For instance in some countries feminist actors may opt to split gender equality and LGBTQIA+ issues for strategic purposes as they fear it will be harmful for them to show solidarity with LGBTQIA+ or migration issues, and could expose them more to anti-gender attacks.

Coalitions -articulated in a variety of forms that include cross-party collaboration, intra-parliamentary groups, women's formal and informal groups, civil society organisations, international actors, and other institutional extra-parliamentary actors- can either enable or constrain feminist institutional responses. They are favoured in the presence of: a culture of coalition-making (more developed in some parliamentary contexts than others); when broader coalitions in favour of democracy emerge; or when there is political commitment around Human Rights especially under attack as in the case of LGBTQIA+ and SOGI rights. The cases show a high variety of very contextual reasons that trigger awareness of anti-gender politics as a threat to democracy and need for intersectional alliances. Whilst

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democracy is identified as an enabling factor, democratic backsliding can trigger significant awareness of anti-gender groups, thus fostering solidarity with marginalised communities and claims for 'a more democratic democracy' that understands that more rights for marginalised groups means more rights for everybody.

By contrast, partisan dynamics that are common in liberal electoral democracies make it difficult to work across party lines and hinder a strong unitary capacity to respond to anti-gender opposition and isolate the far right, for instance by creating a *cordon sanitaire*. Fractures that exist in centre-left and in left coalitions, due to rivalry among pro-democracy parties for electoral reasons, and taking sometimes femo-homonationalist features, weaken the capacity and strength of responses. Finally, divisions exist within feminist coalitions, exemplified by alliances among 'strange bed-fellows' such as anti-gender actors and self-denominated 'gender critical feminists' that oppose transgender rights.

Rules adopted, used and enforced can favour feminist institutional responses, as in the case of codes of conduct to address hate speech and protect attacked actors, a culture of respectful deliberation, or the legitimacy of EU and international progressive laws and judicial Court sentences. By contrast, the absence, weakness, or lack of enforcement of parliamentary rules by parliament presidence -such as codes of conduct and parliamentary proceedings to sanction hate speech- curb feminist institutional responses.

While the above mentioned factors can be matched into enabling/constraining pairs, two factors emerge without an opposite in the empirical findings: violence as constraining feminist institutional responses, and 'critical feminist actors' as enabling them.

A key factor actively constraining the capacity to respond is *violence*. Across the cases, the exercise of violence is highlighted as a factor that intimidates MPs, fostering a culture of silence and fear in parliamentary contexts, thus hindering the ability to articulate responses to AG actors. This differs across cases, depending on the extent to which the quality of democracy has been damaged. MPs face distinct forms of targeting by anti-gender groups, particularly displaying heightened hostility towards women, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and MPs who are racialised and/or migrant. The extent and nature of this targeting often vary depending on the specific context. Additionally, social media is underlined as a pivotal space for the enactment of violence against progressive MPs.

Among the enabling factors, *feminist critical actors* or individuals highly committed and active in the promotion of equality despite their number, play a crucial role in the articulation and voicing of feminist institutional responses in all cases, through a multiplicity of strategies, ranging from knowledge to

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coalition-building, rule-making or everyday pragmatic engagement, and in both parliamentary and civil society arenas.

Interviews and parliamentary debates in the European Parliament and in Belgium, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Scotland and UK parliaments have offered us novel empirical findings on feminist institutional responses conceptualised as knowledge, coalition-building, everyday pragmatic engagement, rule-making, as well as the mobilisation of affect and emotions. Future steps in the analysis and co-creation will include deepening comparisons across cases in order to explore the contextual character of factors of individual cases and through a comparative analysis that helps to identify and account for enabling and constraining factors. Further analysis of intersectionality is also essential, along with connecting these issues to theories about problematic legacies in European democracies such as colonialism, fascism or neoliberalism. These academic and co-creation activities will be developed in the next steps of our research, through the submission of a book proposal on feminist institutional responses (D4.3 due in M40) and the organisation of two feminist democracy labs with politicians (D4.2 policy brief due M29) in Madrid (October 2024) and in the European Parliament (January 2025).

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6 Annex

6.1 Annex 1

Countries	Knowledge
Belgium	Spread awareness of AG; develop independent discourse from AG (inclusion & diversity)
EP	Policy-making; discourse us vs. them; raise awareness on external AG
Hungary	Inter/national reports (esp international); testimonials; CSO; rational-based to moral-based (affect); rich variety of framings
Italy	Institutional documents; Istanbul Convention; Parliamentary/CSO reports; Constitution
Poland	Activist knowledge; first-hand knowledge source; cooperation between activists & MPs for drafting amendments; grassroot awareness-raising campaigns (international HHRR law)
Spain	Feminist expert hearings; reports; GE training; data-based arguments
Sweden	International transfer of knowledge; arguments based on data; polarisation - vilification, debunking, frame saving
UK	Debunking gender critical feminists' framings and entryism; HHRR framing & compliance with human rights law; technocratic change/scope of change; defending trans rights against concerns about the rights of women and girls

Table 4 Feminist institutional strategies of response: knowledge

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6.2 Annex 2

Countries	Coalition-building
Belgium	General collaboration on LGBTQIA+ issues; *cordon sanitaire*
EP	United protests; joined amendments; relations with former MEPs; CSO public hearing
Hungary	Informal short-term around women/LGBTQ rights; strong alliance with CSO; creation of UfH platform and parliamentary group FDH to lobby; inner ideological tensions
Italy	Women's coalition; cross-party informal groups; main alliances of MPs with CSO and movement
Poland	Feminist informal, reactionary & intervention-oriented coalitions; effective activists/parliamentary networks; formal use of parliamentary immunities for activism
Spain	Intra-institutional coalitions (e.g. occasional isolation of far right, coordinated action pro-GE); interinstitutional coalitions (e.g. regional, European parliaments, Feminist international with LA); extra-institutional coalitions with CSOs; mostly informal
Sweden	Rare feminist coalition across party groups; some coalitions within groups; few discursive strategies to create clusters (us vs. them); coalition with CSOs more common; international coalition with political actors
UK	Cross-party coalitions; alliances with CSOs and activist networks

Table 5 Feminist institutional strategies of response: coalition-building

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6.3 Annex 3

Countries	Everyday pragmatic engagement
Belgium	Ignoring hate speech / responding if speaking after antigender MP (constrain of parliament protocol)
EP	Ignore / invite to express views to counter 'marginalisation'; side-line rapporteur
Hungary	Parliamentary protest by repetitiveness; discourse before/after agenda; non-formal protest; corridor dynamics; media strategies; constituency relation; strategic (re)framing
Italy	Debates-based; downplaying efficacy of bills; end speeches; solidarity with attacked MPs
Poland	Parliamentary questions & interpellations; use of parliamentary immunity outside of parliament; invite CSOs to parliamentary team meetings; strategic inviting (or not) of government representatives; discursive and communication strategies
Spain	Informed-based debunking strategy; ignoring far right in informal settings (cafeteria); solidarity-based response to attacks
Sweden	Cordial everyday interactions; non-engagement strategy; holding coalition government accountable by writing questions; (re)appropriation of debate rather than respond to AG
UK	Limited engagement; mention of fear and exhaustion to engage; monitoring and privatisation of social media accounts

Table 6 Feminist institutional strategies of response: everyday pragmatic engagement

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6.4 Annex 4

Countries	Rule-making
Belgium	Expanding legislation on GE, and LGBTQIA+ issues (not clear if in response or regular policy making)
EP	Blue-card questions; Rules of Procedure for access of AG lobbying in EP
Hungary	Speaker sanctioning alignment on racist speech; creative use of rules (push important issues on agenda of unconnected debates); internal party dynamics regarding equality
Italy	Proactive formal actions - new bills, Committee work, defending funding; informal (re)purpose to block enactment of bills (acts of address)
Poland	Feminist civil legislative proposals; use of immunity outside Parliament
Spain	Parliamentary rules on discipline; official complaints; press release to bypass obstruction of far right to institutional joint declarations on GE
Sweden	Not a strategy (no aiming at new rules to respond to AG, code of conduct is enough); write parliamentary motions (few to votes) to influence policy making; lack of protection against racist attacks (individual responsibility of party leader)
UK	None identified

Table 7 Feminist institutional strategies of response: rule-making

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6.5 Annex 5

Countries	New strategies
Belgium	No new strategies identified
EP	Democratic engagement
Hungary	Affective strategies: Testimonials Acts of protest Reclaiming institutional spaces for gender issues when they are opposed or non prioritised
Italy	(Re)Purposing formal strategies for informal use Reclaiming institutional spaces for gender issues when they are opposed or non prioritised
Poland	Acts of protest Reactionary- and intervention-oriented responses Repurposing formal rules for extra-parliamentary protection: e.g. Parliamentary immunity to defend civil society actors
Spain	Interinstitutional coalitions
Sweden	Affective strategies: Humour
UK	No new strategies identified

Table 8 New strategies of feminist institutional response

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6.6 Annex 6

Countries	Inclusiveness of response regarding racism and homophobia
Belgium	Recognition of LGBTQIA+ topics from experts; scarce attention to race and racism; overall lack of understanding of interconnected forms of oppression.
EP	White gender dominance.
Hungary	No intersectionality, siloing logic (except autocracy triggers more awareness of common exclusion), emphasis on class.
Italy	HHRR approach linking to improving democracy of whole society; gender predominance; homo/femonationalism.
Poland	Strong cooperation between feminist actors and actors working with marginalised communities; anti-racist & anti-xenophobic dimension of feminist responses, reproductive justice frame regarding abortion.
Spain	White gender dominance; strong on LGBTQIA+ phobia, less so on racism.
Sweden	White gender dominance; social feminist democracy legacy (class centrality); LGBTQIA+ network; lack of institutional understanding or governance structures addressing racism
UK	Emphasis on universal human right framework rather than addressing the needs of specific groups. Link between gender critical feminist and white supremacy circles/ideology.

Table 9 Inclusiveness of response regarding racism and homophobia

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6.7 Annex 7

Countries	Enabling and constraining factors
Belgium	Enabling: critical progressive actors; split political context allows French-speaking MPs to take progressive stance without fearing hate Constraining: lack of awareness; lack of knowledge; GE as no political priority; partisan politics limits alliance; strict parliamentary protocol; violence intimidates and silences MPs, differently targeted by anti-gender
EP	Enabling: coalitions; governance structure & critical actors presence Constraining: weak FEMM & inner tensions; political fragmentation; gender blindness; exclusion of race/antisemitism/colonialism
Hungary	Enabling: autocracy triggers opposition creative strategies, blurring lines CSO/Politician and increased collaboration. Presence of MPs belonging to CSO Constraining: autocracy; parliament window dressing; economic fines by Speaker; no women caucus or cross-party groups since 2010
Italy	Enabling: Constitutional court sentences; EU guidelines, funds & sanctions, coalitions/alliances; inclusive Parliamentary majority; feminist in leadership posts; women/LGBTQIA+ presence; CSO engagement Constraining: 'Italian cultural social script'; Vatican influence; lack of political compromise; internal divisions in parties & coalitions; bureaucracy; ineffective representation for electoral law; Parliamentary sexist culture
Poland	Enabling: activist background of MPs; Left representation; more liberal social attitudes and civil mobilisations Constraining: overwhelming majority of far-right actors; disagreements & rivalry between Left and centrist parties in the opposition
Spain	Enabling: medium institutionalisation of gender equality; constellation of progressive forces; critical actors Constraining: limited scope of GE plan and SH protocol; constellation of oppositional forces; lack of formal response by Parliament Presidency; partisan dynamics; far-right media
Sweden	Enabling: high institutionalisation of GE; parliamentary rule & polite tone (culture) mitigate attacking discourses Constraining: femo/ homonationalist; feminist wars; fractures in center-left parties coalition; budget cuts closing down Delegation against Segregation; lack of anti-racism understanding institutionally
UK	Enabling: parliamentary majority in Scottish parliament in favour of the bill; presence of pro-trans critical actors Constraining: shift the debate from human rights to democratic procedures (Scotland's right to self-governance devolved powers); feminist actors compete with gender critical feminist building alliances with the far-right ('Unholy Alliance')

Table 10 Enabling and constraining factors of feminist institutional responses

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