

Commissioner Hadja Lahbib, distinguished guests,

First of all, I would like to thank you for this opportunity to speak on behalf of Plataforma Portuguesa para os Direitos das Mulheres (PpDM) - the Portuguese Platform for Women's Rights, the largest women's human rights network in Portugal. Our platform unites 34 NGOs, amplifying our collective voice and strengthening our impact.

Today, as we have heard throughout these past days, we are witnessing an alarming pushback on women's rights globally. History has shown us that in times of crisis—whether economic, political, or humanitarian—women suffer the most. Violence against women increases, inequalities deepen, and yet, too often, our needs and voices remain sidelined.

Right now, while the world's attention is justly on the wars in Ukraine, Gaza, and elsewhere, we cannot allow militarization and the arms race to overshadow another ongoing war—the daily war against women. We must ensure that women are included in peace negotiations and decision-making processes. At the same time, we must not neglect the urgent need to combat sex-based violence, which continues to threaten millions of lives.

In Portugal, the reality remains troubling. Support structures for women victims of domestic and sexual violence rely almost exclusively on European funds rather than the national budget. This means that essential services—shelters, psychological support, legal assistance—are constantly at risk of disappearing. Without stable, long-term funding, organizations that have been saving lives for years are forced into cycles of uncertainty, unable to plan for the future or expand their reach. How can we expect real progress if the very organizations on the frontlines are left fighting for survival?

On top of this, political instability has catastrophic consequences for women and women's organizations. Just yesterday, our government fell. And with it, everything stops—funding approvals, policy developments, and the implementation of critical measures to protect women. In times of political crisis, gender equality is always one of the first issues to be deprioritized. But we cannot afford to be put on hold. Women's lives do not pause because of political uncertainty, and neither should the support systems that protect them.

Access to housing remains a critical barrier, and single mothers—many of them survivors of domestic violence—face severe economic hardship, with no adequate policies to prevent or reduce their poverty. Although Portugal has strong laws on domestic violence, they are not effectively implemented. Nearly 70% of cases are archived before even reaching trial. Shockingly, domestic violence is not taken into account in parental custody decisions, often leading to joint custody rulings that put women and children at further risk. In cases involving children, child support is often not even determined, worsening the financial vulnerability of mothers.

Finally, we must ensure protection for all women—migrant women, disabled women, women in prostitution, and those whose fundamental rights are at risk. We are all connected, and when we fail to fund women's organizations and services, we turn our backs on the reality of millions who live in fear, poverty, and exclusion.

Women's rights cannot be an afterthought. They must be a priority—not just in words, but in budgets, in political commitments, in sustainable action. Investing in women's organizations is not charity; it is the foundation of a just and equal society. If we want lasting change, we must guarantee secure, predictable, and adequate funding for the organizations that are already doing the work. Anything less is a failure to act.

Thank you.

Ana Beatriz Cardoso