

Gender Equality Conflicts in Europe

– Joint conference of the Agendis project & DGS section ‘Sociology of Europe’ –

15.-17. April 2026

Europa-Universität Flensburg (Germany)

Over the past two decades, conflicts over gender equality have become a key dynamic in European politics and societies. While legislative and institutional advances have promoted gender parity, reproductive rights, and LGBTQI+ inclusion, these gains are increasingly contested by (transnational) anti-gender movements, right-wing political actors, and reactionary civil society groups. These conflicts unfold not only within national contexts but also within the European Union (EU) and its institutions. Thus, these disputes, visible in parliaments, on the streets, and across digital platforms, reflect deeper contestations over democracy, social cohesion, and cultural identity.

From Poland’s rollback on reproductive rights to transnational anti-gender campaigns targeting the Istanbul Convention, from polarising debates on gender-based violence in Spain to clashes over gender-inclusive language in Germany and anti-LGBTQI+ policies in Hungary, the European landscape is marked by both progress and regression. These developments call for a closer examination of the actors, narratives, and institutional contexts shaping these conflicts as well as for comparative perspectives that capture these social and political dynamics across Europe.

The conference invites scholars to examine one of the following themes:

1. Backlash Politics and Anti-Gender Mobilisations

Research on actors, strategies, and transnational networks opposing gender equality, drawing among others on backlash theory, social movement theory and Europeanisation approaches. Comparative analyses of mobilisation tactics, coalition-building, and policy influence across European contexts are especially encouraged.

2. Institutional Arenas and Policy Contestation

Studies of how gender equality is advanced or challenged in the EU multi-level governance system, domestic politics and local administrations. We especially welcome work on the role of the European Union in shaping institutional arenas. How do processes of Europeanisation influence domestic gender equality debates, and how do national conflicts feed back into EU-level policymaking? We also welcome empirical analyses informed by institutionalist approaches focusing on high-stakes issue areas such as reproductive rights, gender-based

violence, care work, and labour market equality. Approaches may include comparative policy analysis and longitudinal studies that trace shifts over time using qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods approaches.

3. Civil Society, Mobilisation and Activism

Work examining (anti-)feminist and (anti-)LGBTQI+ movements, solidarity networks, and grassroots advocacy, with attention to intersectionality and cross-border/transnational collaboration. Contributions might use ethnographic approaches, frame or discourse analysis, or network analysis to explore how progressive and regressive movements articulate claims, build alliances, and respond to political and societal changes.

4. Media, Culture, and Public Discourse

Analyses of how gender equality conflicts are represented in traditional and digital media, including the role of social platforms in amplifying ideological or affective polarisation. We welcome computational text analysis, visual analysis, and ethnographic studies of online communities, as well as cross-country comparisons of media debates and online mobilizations via hashtags or around key events.

The conference welcomes contributions covering **all parts of Europe**. We especially encourage **comparative and cross-regional analyses** that explore both commonalities and divergences across political, cultural, and institutional settings.

We welcome submissions from early-career researchers. Moreover, the conference aims to engage stakeholders such as activists, political actors, and trade union representatives from across Europe.

The DGS Section 'Sociology of Europe' and the Agendis project offer (limited) financial support for travel and accommodation costs to non-professorial conference participants. For further information, please contact the organisers.

Please submit an abstract of up to **400 words**, outlining your research question, theoretical approach, methodology, and main findings or expected contributions until **October 31st 2025**. Include your name, institutional affiliation, and contact details in your submission. Your submission shall be sent to stefan.wallaschek@uni-flensburg.de

Until November 17th, we inform all applicants about the acceptance for the conference.

For questions about the conference, please contact Stefan Wallaschek (stefan.wallaschek@uni-flensburg.de) or Monika Eig Müller (monika.eigmueller@uni-flensburg.de)

Information on the organisers:

The *Agendis research project* “Gender politics and (anti-)gender discourses - between progress and regression” is funded by the Gerda Henkel Foundation since 2023. We analyse the political and public discourses on reproductive and productive rights in Germany, Ireland, Poland and Spain. Information on the research project: <https://www.uni-flensburg.de/en/ices/projects/social-transformation-conflicts/gender-politics-and-anti-gender-discourses-between-progress-and-regression-a-comparative-discourse-and-policy-analysis-in-four-european-countries>

The section ‘*Sociology of Europe*’ of the German Sociological Association (DGS) is the scholarly forum for the sociological analysis of Europe as well as European integration and for advancing this field from theoretical, empirical, and methodological perspectives. Website of the section: <https://soziologie.de/sektionen/europasozioologie>