

## **POSITION PAPER ON EUROPEAN UNION GENDER EQUALITY STRATEGY**

July 2021

58 years ago, Mary Kay Ash, iconic entrepreneur and barrier-breaking businesswoman, founded her company with the intention to create equal opportunities for women and empower them by putting them in control of their own future. She envisioned a company where “thinking like a woman” would be considered an asset—not a liability. Today, Mary Kay Inc. is providing millions of women around the world, including in the European Union, an entrepreneurship opportunity through the direct selling of cosmetic products.

Over the years, the company has become a leading advocate of women’s economic empowerment through entrepreneurship and gender equality on the global stage.

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Mary Kay Inc. warmly welcomes the **European Commission’s Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025**. We believe that significant progress can be made towards our common objective of a more inclusive society where everyone, irrespective of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, culture and, sexuality, can live freely and benefit from equal opportunities to thrive.

This position paper presents some of the policy measures we believe would create a positive impact for women in the European Union and around the globe.

### **Removing Barriers for Women’s Economic Empowerment**

Women constitute 52% of the total EU population but only 34.4% of the self-employed and 30% of start-up entrepreneurs<sup>1</sup> due to a range of existing barriers. Among those are access to finance and capital as well as non-financial barriers such as access to education and training, legal discrimination, social prejudice, gender stereotyping, as well as gender-biased procurement. In fact, globally, one in three small, medium, and large businesses are owned by women, yet women win only 1% of the procurement spent of large corporations and governments.

- Mary Kay supports the EU proposal to increase women’s representation on corporate boards. Mary Kay has more female leadership at the C-suite level (54%), than the Top-15 Global & U.S. Fortune 500 companies, as identified by Fortune magazine.
- We believe in the enormous potential of gender-responsive procurement, and that supplier diversity programs are transformative strategies for combatting social injustice while enabling entrepreneurship and sustainable innovation. We are advocating to create awareness and influence companies around the world to take on more inclusive procurement. As of February 2021 (US): 12% of Mary Kay’s Indirect Suppliers are Women, Minority or Veteran Owned; 5% of Mary Kay’s Direct Suppliers are Women, Minority or Veteran Owned; 76% of our Procurement & Supplier Development team are women; 66% of Directors are Women.

<sup>1</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/promoting-entrepreneurship/we-work-for/women\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/promoting-entrepreneurship/we-work-for/women_en)

- With our partners UN Women and UN Global Compact and in support of the Women’s Entrepreneurship Accelerator, we have committed to establish the business case for gender-responsive procurement with a strong focus on capacity building and return on investment. In July 2021, a Community of Practice will be launched to engage the private sector. In addition, 49 interviews will substantiate the Advocacy Report which will include 5 business cases. The Gender-Responsive Procurement Advocacy Report will be released in October 2021.

Women still carry the main burden of unpaid domestic work—a situation that has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic—reducing their opportunities for economic empowerment. Yet, women’s economic empowerment is central to realizing equal participation in the labor market, which can only be achieved if regulators address persistent disparities:

- We thus encourage the European Commission to support global efforts removing barriers to empower women entrepreneurs, such as the Women Entrepreneurship Accelerator initiative, and increase funding opportunities for women entrepreneurs, including via dedicated projects under Horizon Europe and through a gender-smart finance initiative under the InvestEU programme as announced in the SME Strategy.
- We support the creation of equal work opportunities for women; as well as opportunities for women to earn the pay they deserve.
- We welcome the EU Skills Agenda’s focus on fostering entrepreneurial skills for young women, as education, life-long learning and capability building are key to achieving economic empowerment. It is imperative to ensure that all women across age groups benefit from training and learning opportunities across the Union. Mary Kay has funded a 27 module-digital entrepreneurship curriculum to be launched in September 2021 under the umbrella of the Women’s Entrepreneurship Accelerator. Developed by ITC SheTrades, this online curriculum will be free of charge with no barrier to access and available in English, Arabic, French and Spanish. Mandarin and Russian will follow early 2022.
- We welcome the launch of the WEgate platform to support women entrepreneurs during the COVID-19 crisis and help build supportive networks. We encourage the inclusion of global tools and best practices to further expand the platform’s reach.

## Ending Gender-Based Violence and Sexual Harassment

One in three women in the EU has experienced physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15<sup>2</sup>. Cases of domestic violence have drastically increased during the COVID-19 confinement period across Europe and the globe.

- Mary Kay has committed to eliminate gender-based violence including domestic violence for over 20 years. In 2020, Mary Kay joined forces with two stewards of human rights, the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women and CARE, a global humanitarian leader to achieve a world free of violence against women.

It is therefore imperative that the Council urgently conclude the EU ratification of the Istanbul Convention. Signed by the EU in June 2017, the Istanbul Convention is the first international instrument setting legally binding standards to prevent gender-based violence, protect victims and punish perpetrators. Should the deadlock among Member States remain, other measures should be proposed to achieve the same objectives as the Istanbul Convention.

In addition, we call on the European Commission to present a legislative proposal to prevent and combat gender-based violence and domestic violence against women to address persistent discrepancies in victims’ protection and inconsistent standards across Member States.

<sup>2</sup> According to a survey conducted in 2014 by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights.  
<https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/violence-against-women-eu-wide-survey-main-results-report>

## Ensuring a Gender-Responsive Recovery from the COVID-19 Crisis

The global COVID-19 pandemic has exposed vulnerabilities in our socio-economic systems and deepened pre-existing inequalities. In particular, the crisis has put women increasingly at risk as they represent the majority of workers in the front-line health, social care and the services sector. Similarly, women-led firms have been more sensitive to the crisis and have fewer support options, compared to businesses led by men<sup>3</sup>. These disparities should be carefully considered in the implementation of Member States' recovery plans as well as in the drafting of legislation across policy areas ("gender mainstreaming"). Women's economic and social rights should be at the heart of Europe's recovery and resilience efforts, in line with the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

## Becoming a Global Leader for an Equal and Sustainable Future

The European Union is in a unique position to become a global advocate for gender equality. Discriminatory laws, gender bias and stereotyping, violence against women and girls—these are all global issues and must as such be tackled in partnership with the public and private sectors across the world. Gender equality is not only a basic human right but crucial for a sustainable future as highlighted by the fifth United Nations Sustainable Development Goal.

- In June 2021 in Paris, Mary Kay joined the UN Women Generation Equality Forum aiming at accelerating progress for Gender Equality by 2030. Mary Kay became a commitment maker and joined four global Action Coalitions: Economic Justice and Rights, Gender-Based Violence, Feminist Action for Climate Justice, and Technology & Innovation for Gender Equality. Through communication and advocacy, Mary Kay will also encourage its peers from the private sector to join the Action Coalitions as commitment makers.
- We welcome that European policymakers continue to seek partnerships on the international stage and support global efforts to achieve gender equality. Mary Kay Inc. is committed to working with policy-makers to empower women and their families around the world.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.intracen.org/uploadedFiles/intracenorg/Content/Publications/ITCSMECO2020.pdf>

## More about Mary Kay Inc.

One of the original glass ceiling breakers, Mary Kay Ash founded her beauty company 58 years ago with three goals: develop rewarding opportunities for women, offer irresistible products, and make the world a better place. That dream has blossomed into a multibillion-dollar company with millions of independent sales force members in nearly 40 countries. Mary Kay is dedicated to investing in the science behind beauty and manufacturing cutting-edge skin care, color cosmetics, and fragrances. Mary Kay is committed to empowering women and their families by partnering with organizations from around the world, protecting survivors from domestic abuse, beautifying our communities, and encouraging children to follow their dreams. Since 1996, Mary Kay has contributed more than \$80 million in support of breakthrough research to find cures for cancers affecting women and to bring an end to domestic violence.

Mary Kay supports **global mandates and management frameworks** that reflect the view that development needs to be economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable and aligns to the following:

### ECONOMIC ACTION

- United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) 10 Principles (signatory: August 2019)
- UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights
- International Labour Organization (ILO) Fundamental Conventions

### ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION

- CEO Water Mandate Signatory (signatory: June 2021)
- Ocean Principles signatory (signatory: June 2021)
- The Sustainable Packaging Initiative for CosmEtics (SPICE) - (member: 2020)
- World Economic Forum/Future Consumption (member: 2020)
- Ellen MacArthur Foundation/New Plastics Economy Global Commitment (member: 2021)
- Paris Agreement/Target (commitment) alignment to limit global warming to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels

### SOCIAL ACTION

- Women's Empowerment Principles (signatory: February 2019)
- Reykjavik Global Forum/Achieving Gender Equality in Entrepreneurship (commitment: November 2019)
- UN Global Compact/Target Gender Equality Initiative (commitment: June 2021)

## About the Women's Entrepreneurship Accelerator

In 2019, the Women's Entrepreneurship Accelerator (WEA) was launched to inspire, educate, and empower women entrepreneurs around the world. With no qualifying barriers to participate, the ground-breaking initiative conceived by Mary Kay is a strategic collaboration with five United Nations agencies: UN Women, International Labour Organization, International Trade Centre, UN Global Compact, and the United Nations Development Programme.

A multi-stakeholder partnership of unique magnitude, the Accelerator's mission is to help create an enabling ecosystem for women entrepreneurs to thrive through:

- Increasing access to financing for women entrepreneurs;
- Increasing access to education and capacity building;
- Addressing intersectional discrimination and advocating for law and policy reform;
- Focusing on systemic change by addressing structural inequalities.

**The Accelerator has joined the Generation Equality Forum Action Coalitions in support of the Global Acceleration Plan.**

**The Accelerator has committed to empower 5 million women by 2030.**

Access the Accelerator's [One-Year Anniversary statement](#) in support of women entrepreneurs.

Follow the Women's Entrepreneurship Accelerator:

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