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Copy to: Vice-President for Values and Transparency Jourová and Commissioner for Equality Dalli

Brussels, 2 July 2020

Subject: Need for increased funds for equality between women and men and for the EU's legal obligation to implement gender mainstreaming

Dear President,

We are writing to you in regards to the European Commission's new proposal for the upcoming MFF 2021-2027 and recovery instrument Next Generation EU 2021-2024, as a follow-up to two letters EWL submitted on 3 April 2020 and 20 May 2020. We would like to take this opportunity to thank Commissioner Dalli for her response to our most recent letter, received on 5 June 2020, detailing the Commission's plans to address the impact of COVID-19 on women and girls across Europe.

While we welcome the European Commission's five-year Gender Equality Strategy released in March 2020, and funding measures currently in place to address women's unemployment, **we wish to express our astonishment and concern at the apparent gender neutrality taken in both key political and economic decisions, in particular, proposals for the future EU's seven-year budget**. Greater targeted action is urgently required to address women's inequalities made visible by COVID-19: increased cases of male violence, heightened rates of poverty, and the over-dependence on women's unpaid care work.¹ **We are urgently turning to you now, to demonstrate your political leadership and commitment to protecting equality between women and men and eliminating inequalities in all of its activities (as per the 'gender mainstreaming' clause of Article 8 TFEU). This includes the obligations to ensuring they will be a *sine qua non* of the future European budget, expenditure and investment plans.**

We must also raise our deep concerns about the new MFF proposal presented on 27 May, which we believe goes against our previous asks to ensure increased EU funding and resources are available to advance the rights of women and girls in the EU. **We are extremely concerned about the severe reduction amounting to 20% less (€186 million in current prices) of the Justice, Rights and Values Fund, compared to the Commission's 2018 proposal.** These cuts form only a drop in the ocean of the EU's long-term budget, yet have enormous and far-reaching ripple effects on women's and girls' rights now, and over the next seven years. Consequently, it will lead to the subsequent dilution of funds within the **Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme** (hereby the Rights and Values programme), the only funding programme specifically targeted towards the objectives set out in the EU's Gender Equality Strategy: advancing women's rights, eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls, and providing crucial funds – already woefully inadequate – to women's civil society organisations.

Cuts to funding would only worsen the situation for women's and feminist civil society organisations who are operating in shrinking civic spaces against challenging political contexts. These organisations have been central to providing tailored essential services during the COVID-19 crisis to women victims of male violence and homeless women for example. Under this new proposal, **a 20% reduction to the Rights and Values programme would amount to an estimated €500-€510 million (current prices), which means an annual budget of approximately €72 million**. Given the costs of addressing violence against women in the EU is €226 billion per year,² and noting the alarming increase of domestic violence cases during COVID-19, these funds will be completely insufficient to address this issue.

We recall that progress on gender equality has been moving at an absolute snail's pace in the EU as per EIGE's Gender Equality Index.³ Investments in achieving the outcome of equality between women and men have been extremely low over the past decades. Cuts to these funds are in complete contradiction to the European Commission's commitment to protecting and promoting equality between women and men as a fundamental value, as well as the Gender Equality Strategy presented by Commissioner Dalli in March 2020, to which no targeted funds have been allocated. **We call on you to urgently remedy this proposal, noting that a reduction of crucial funds from the programme primarily responsible for advancing women's rights and eliminating all forms of violence against women will only set progress back even further.**

We recall the European Commission's 2019 programme statements of the current EU budget 2014-2020, in which only 11 out of 60 spending programmes had provided some financial estimates in regards to the EU Budget's contribution to gender mainstreaming.⁴ In 2019, EIGE found that only 1% of the EU's Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) were allocated towards gender equality specific measures.⁵ We further recall that the European Court of Auditors is set to release a report on whether the current EU budget promotes equality between women and men.⁶

Furthermore, **we are deeply concerned to see cuts of 45% (amounting to €1.3 billion in current prices) to decentralised agencies under Heading II: Cohesion & Values, including to EIGE and FRA, compared to the Commission's 2018 proposal.** There can be no cost-cutting exercise when it comes to advancing equality between women and men. The recent vote in the European Parliament calling for the European Commission to conduct a feasibility study looking at potentially merging EIGE and FRA.⁷ is extremely concerning, given EIGE's expertise on gender equality and gender mainstreaming, leading on collecting sex-disaggregated data such as the Gender Equality Index and developing evidence-based research to address deeply entrenched gender inequality gaps. **We expect the European Commission to visibly and vocally support the continued development and financing of EIGE as an independent institution dedicated to equality between women and men as mandated.**

To ensure your proposal works towards a healthy, green and digital Europe, **we urgently call on your political commitment to ensure a gender perspective is incorporated across policy headings to ensure funds promote women and men equally under all the EU's initiatives and programmes (as per the Treaty commitment to gender mainstreaming).** Targeted, gender-responsive measures, including gender impact assessments, must be in place in both current funding initiatives temporarily set up to combat the impacts of COVID-19, as well as the EU's long-term budget and recovery plans.

We call on you to urgently remedy the following:

1. **Put the €186 million in current prices back into the Justice, Rights and Values Fund** as an absolute minimum, and increase investments towards equality between women and men and eliminating male violence against women and girls.
2. **Demonstrate ongoing political and sustained financial support to decentralised agencies, particularly EIGE, by redressing the €1.3 billion cuts as a minimum**, and ensuring its ongoing, independent work to protecting one of the EU's fundamental values and advancing equality between women and men.
3. **Ensure a gender dimension across all funding areas and adopt a gender budgeting lens** across all programmes, to alleviate any detrimental effects funds may have on women.
4. **Ensure, at a time when the public health pandemic has revealed our common needs, that overall investments in Cohesion and Values, including achieving equality between women and men, are increased so that the social fabric of all communities is strengthened with reassurance that the EU cares about the real lives of women, men, girls and boys in Europe.**

The EU's long-term budget and recovery plans must benefit all of the EU's population, and ensure no woman or girl is left behind now, and in the future. As stated in your opening statement as President of the European Commission in July 2019, "We want our fair share", as half of the population.⁸ **Women and girls, and women's and feminist civil society organisations, are now holding you to these words.**

We trust that you will give your upmost and urgent attention to our demands.

Yours sincerely,



Gwendoline Lefebvre
President of the European Women's Lobby

¹ See EWL's brief: [Women must not pay the price of COVID-19!](#)

² <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-based-violence/estimating-costs-in-european-union>

³ [Gender Equality Index for the EU for 2019](#)

⁴ See: European Commission, [Draft General Budget of the European Union for the financial year 2020 – Working document part 1: Programme statements of operational expenditure](#), COM(2019)400, June 2019, p.10.

⁵ <https://eige.europa.eu/news/gender-equality-deserves-more-1>

⁶ <https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/Pages/NewsItem.aspx?nid=13421>

⁷ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2020-0058_EN.html

⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_19_4230