



OPEN LETTER

To EU Heads of State on funding the fight to end violence against women and girls

Brussels, 23 September 2020

Dear President of the European Council, Charles Michel
 Dear Head of Presidency of the Council, Chancellor Angela Merkel
 Dear EU Heads of State
 Dear Members of the European Parliament

We, the undersigned, members of the [European Coalition to end violence against women and girls](#) consisting of civil society organisations, networks and trade unions fighting for gender equality and the rights of women and girls to live free from violence, are writing to you regarding the MFF 2021-2027 and Next Generation EU (NGEU). **We urge all EU decision-makers to demonstrate their political leadership and commitment to protecting gender equality, women's and girls' rights, and eliminating violence against women and girls in all of its activities through increased funds to the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme.**

We are pleased about the recent decision by the [European Commission](#) to reverse the 20% cuts of the budget to the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme, which is now proposed at €638 million (current prices). These commitments were further welcomed by the [European Council](#) following the July 2020 Special Meeting, who supported the Commission's 2018 proposed amount of €841 million (2018 prices) to the Justice, Rights and Values Fund.

In light of the [European Parliament's](#) vote to withhold its consent for the MFF on 23 July 2020, we urge EU decision-makers to swiftly come to an ambitious agreement and meet the Parliament's demands for targeted increases to flagship programmes, including **tripling the amount allocated to the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme to €1.83 billion (current prices).**

Stronger political action is urgently needed to address the persistent gender inequalities that have been exacerbated by COVID-19 and the increased discrimination against women.¹ Particularly, this crisis has: led to an increase of cases violence against women, including domestic violence, intimate partner violence and institutional violence; and also heightened barriers in access to protection and

support services for women and sexual and reproductive health services. These have disproportionately impacted women and girls facing multiple forms of discrimination.

As per the Commission's Statement of Estimates for 2021, the *Daphne* strand of the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme will have a total amount of €110 million (current prices). **To address the cost of violence against women, which is €226 billion per year,² the European Council and European Parliament must call for increased funds.** With the situation of persistent underfunding and rise in expenses for women's specialist organisations worsening in the aftermath of COVID-19, there is a risk that funds will become more limited and difficult to obtain, setting progress on women's and girls' rights back further. Sufficient funding must thus also be coupled with **strengthened accountability measures within the EU budget to protecting the rule of law and EU fundamental values, including equality between women and men (as outlined under Article 2 TEU and Article 8 TFEU).**

As such, NGEU and the MFF must be gender mainstreamed to address the multiple forms of discrimination against women and girls, and to respond to the increase of violence against women and girls witnessed throughout the EU. To facilitate in this, this must include increased resourcing to the **European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), who receives less than one-fifth of the average budget given to decentralised agencies,** to ensure the sufficient funding of data and research that identifies and addresses gender inequality gaps in society.

We urge the European Council and the European Parliament to uphold their commitments from 2019: **"Combating all forms of violence, in particular gender-based violence, promoting its prevention and protecting and supporting victims are priorities of the Union which help fulfil individuals' fundamental rights and contribute to gender equality. Those priorities should be supported by the Programme."**³

We call on all EU decision-makers to demonstrate their political leadership and commitment to protecting gender equality, women's rights, eliminating violence against women and girls, and to urgently:

1. **Increase funds to the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme to at least €1.83 billion in current prices, with 50% earmarked to support civil society organisations.**⁴
2. Address the emergency with regards to violence against women and girls that has worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic, by allocating:
 - a. **At least €72.6 million to the sub-strand on Gender equality, within the Equality, Rights and Gender Equality strand (15% of €484 million in current prices);**
 - b. **At least €193.6 million to the sub-strand on Gender-based violence, within the Daphne strand (40% of 484 million in current prices),⁵** to prevent and combat, at all levels, all forms of gender-based violence against women and girls and domestic violence, and promoting the standards laid down in the Istanbul Convention.
3. **Increase investments to EIGE** to sustain their independent work in advancing gender equality and ending violence against all women and girls.
4. **Ensure gender mainstreaming across all funding areas of NGEU and the MFF 2021-2027, and adopt a gender budgeting lens** across all programmes, to alleviate any detrimental effects gender-blind funds may have on women and girls. We call for the same willingness to be shown in the framework of EU's external action budget.

Now is the time for EU decision-makers to step up and ensure no woman or girl is left behind as a result of this pandemic. The EU's long-term budget and recovery plans must match political commitments to promoting and protecting the fundamental rights of women and girls across and beyond the EU, ensuring gender equality, women's human rights and women's and girls' lives free from all forms of violence.

We trust that you will give your utmost and urgent attention to our demands and welcome the opportunity to discuss this issue with you further.

Yours sincerely,

Signatories

[ActionAid International](#)

[AGE Platform Europe](#)

[Business and Professional Women \(BPW\) Europe](#)

[Center for Reproductive Rights](#)

[COFACE Families Europe](#)

[End FGM European Network](#)

[EuroMed Rights](#)

[European Disability Forum \(EDF\)](#)

[European Women's Lobby \(EWL\)](#)

[Inclusion Europe](#)

[International Alliance of Women \(IAW\)](#)

[International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association \(ILGA-Europe\)](#)

[International Planned Parenthood Federation \(IPPF\) - European Network](#)

[Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants \(PICUM\)](#)

[Women against Violence Europe \(WAVE\)](#)

¹ See: European Women's Lobby policy brief: "[Women must not pay the price for COVID-19! Putting equality between women and men at the heart of the response to COVID-19 across Europe](#)"; End FGM EU COVID-19 survey: <https://www.endfgm.eu/news-en-events/news/covid-19-and-fgm-an-end-fgm-eu-survey-on-the-pandemic-impact-on-women-girls-and-organisations/>; IPPF EN recommendations: <https://www.ippfen.org/resource/how-address-impact-covid-19-women-girls-and-vulnerable-groups-and-their-sexual-and/>; WAVE Policy Statement on COVID-19 and Violence against Women and Girls: <https://www.wave-network.org/2020/05/12/press-release-wave-policy-statement-on-covid-19-and-violence-against-women-and-girls/>; EuroMed Rights' Articles on the States' Responses to the surge in VAWG: <https://euomedrights.org/publication/no-lockdown-for-violence-against-women-what-measures-are-being-taken/> and on the burden of care during COVID-19 lockdowns: <https://euomedrights.org/publication/who-cares-during-a-pandemic/>.

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

³ Para 9 of the European Parliament and Council's common agreement, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7249-2019-INIT/en/pdf>

⁴ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2019-0407_EN.pdf, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2018-0468_EN.html

⁵ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2018-0468_EN.html