



EUROPEAN WOMEN'S
LOBBY
EUROPEEN DES FEMMES



OPEN LETTER

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

Brussels, 16 July 2020

Dear President of the European Council, Charles Michel

Dear Head of Presidency of the Council, Chancellor Angela Merkel

Dear EU Heads of State

We, the undersigned, members of the European Coalition to end violence against women and girls consisting of civil society networks and trade unions fighting for the rights of women and girls to live a life free of violence, are writing to you regarding the MFF 2021-2027 and the EU's recovery plans. **We urge all EU decision-makers to demonstrate their political leadership and commitment to protecting equality between women and men and eliminating violence against women and girls in all of its activities and to urgently increase funds to gender equality and the fight to end violence against women and girls.**

We welcome the European Commission's five-year Gender Equality Strategy, released in March 2020, and the commitments towards preventing and combatting violence against women. **We are pleased about the recent decision by the European Commission, outlined in their [Statement of Estimates for 2021](#), to reverse the 20% cuts to the Rights and Values programme, which is now proposed at €638 million (current prices). We also welcome the commitments to the rule of law and European values outlined by President of the European Council Charles Michel, by [proposing increased funds to the Justice, Rights and Values Fund](#).** EU decision-makers must ensure this applies also to funds allocated for gender equality and to combat violence against women and girls.

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, the crisis has led to an increase of cases of violence against women and disruptions to accessing essential sexual and reproductive health services.** These have impacted women living under the same roof with a violent partner, homeless women, women from ethnic minorities, migrant women and Roma women living in temporary accommodation, older women and women with disabilities living in institutional settings, and women from other marginalised groups.

EU recovery plans must be gender mainstreamed to address women's discrimination and to respond to the increase of violence against women and girls witnessed throughout the EU, in line with the EU Treaties and the objectives set out in the Gender Equality Strategy. It must be supported by a robust long-term budget that backs up the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme, the only programme dedicated to advancing these objectives and providing crucial resources – already inadequately low – to civil society organisations within the EU.

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.

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**

Furthermore, while we are pleased that the Commission's proposed budget to the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) is projected to gradually increase over the next seven years, **we recall that EIGE still receives less than one-fifth of the average budget given to decentralised agencies.**

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

1. **Increase funds to the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programme to €1.83 billion in current prices, with 50% earmarked to support civil society organisations.⁴**
2. Address the emergency situation with regards to violence against women that threatens the security of women's lives 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 specifically to preventing and combating, 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 equality between women and men and ending violence against all women and girls.
4. **Ensure gender mainstreaming across all funding areas of the EU's recovery plans and MFF, and adopt a gender budgeting lens** across all programmes, to alleviate any detrimental effects gender-blind funds may have on women.

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 the EU, ensuring a life 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,

End FGM European Network (End FGM EU)

European Women's Lobby (EWL)

International Planned Parenthood Federation European Network (IPPF EN)

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/>

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