

## European Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025: End FGM EU's reaction

Brussels, 6 March 2020

**The End FGM European Network welcomes the Gender Equality Strategy that was launched by the European Commission on 5 March 2020 ahead of the International Women's Day.**

One out of three women in Europe suffer from physical and/or sexual violence. Gender-based violence is one of the most widespread human rights violations worldwide. The End FGM European Network appreciates the **strong focus on gender-based violence against women and girls** put in this strategy. We commend and support the continuous call by the Commission on all Member States and on the Council for the ratification to the **Istanbul Convention**, as well as the determination - in case ratification is not possible - to propose in 2021 a legislation granting similar rights and enshrining similar obligations to achieve the same objectives for women and girls in Europe.

In particular, the End FGM European Network is very pleased to see the great **emphasis put on preventing female genital mutilation (FGM)** within the European Union. In Europe, there are over 600.000 women and girls living with the lifelong consequences of FGM and further 180.000 are at risk in 13 countries alone. Much more has to be done to ensure that women and girls affected or at risk of FGM can access equal standards of treatment throughout Europe regardless of the country they live in.

**1/** Currently the European Union's response to FGM is guided by a [2013 Communication towards the elimination of FGM](#). Given the need to scale up efforts to End FGM, the Network has been calling for a review of this 2013 Communication to ensure scaling up actions against FGM and addressing the disparities of laws, policies and service provision between Member States. We therefore strongly welcome and support the proposal by the European Commission to table a '**Recommendation on the prevention of harmful practices**'. This will focus on pre-emptive measures, education, as well as help strengthening public services, prevention and support measures, capacity-building of professionals and victim-centred access to justice at Member State level.

- We stand ready to support the Commission in drafting this instrument, particularly to ensure that **FGM is tackled in its specificities** and that, although in an instrument gathering several very different harmful practices, there will still be concrete, effective and tailored actions particularly tackling FGM.
- Moreover, we call upon the Commission and the Member States, once adopted, to establish a strong and systematic **monitoring and evaluation framework** facilitated by an **expert group** including civil society with specific expertise on the different harmful practices, as well as through periodical **experience sharing moments among Member States**.

**2/** In this sense, we also welcome the Commission's proposal to launch a **European network on the prevention of gender-based violence and domestic violence**. The network will comprise of Member States and other stakeholders.

- We call for a meaningful inclusion of civil society in this new mechanism, ensuring an intersectional representation, including from youth movements, as well as from grassroots and migrant background.
- The representation must also be reflective of all forms of gender-based violence as enshrined in the Istanbul Convention.

- As a European Network, we will be happy to put our expertise at the service of such new mechanism and cooperate with other partners in an intersectional way on this important issue.

**3/** The End FGM European Network is pleased to see that the European Commission intends to present a **Victims' Rights Strategy** in 2020 and calls upon it to ensure that concrete actions to protect survivors of FGM, as victims of crime, will be included in such strategy.

**4/** Furthermore, the End FGM European Network welcomes that the Commission intends to assess the **gender impact** of its activities and to strengthen **gender budgeting** in the next Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027. While this is extremely important, it is crucial that such assessment is done in a systematic way and that it is seriously taken into consideration in the policy-drafting process. Gender equality has still not been achieved within the European Union and the progress attained must be protected against the increasingly organised and visible opposition to women's rights and gender equality within our region.

**5/** The End FGM European Network is surprised at the limited reference in the Gender Equality Strategy to **sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)**. This is a crucial area for women's rights and gender equality, yet often under attack. We call upon the Commission to include concrete actions around SRHR in interventions and instruments mentioned in the Gender Equality Strategy. Strong attention must be paid to this important area in a cross-cutting way.

**6/** It will be important also to closely follow up on the intersections that the Gender Equality Strategy will have with other instruments (the Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion and the EU strategic frameworks on Disability, LGBTI+, Roma Inclusion and Children's Rights) to ensure they are integrated to provide a **comprehensive European framework addressing all forms of intersecting discriminations**. In particular, the End FGM European Network will pay specific attention to the concrete implementation of intersectionality, to ensure that the European Union leaves no woman and girl behind, specifically those within the context of migration and asylum in extremely precarious and vulnerable situations.

**7/** Finally, we appreciate the relevance given to ensuring that gender, among all other forms of discrimination, is addressed throughout all European Union policies, through the establishment of a **Task Force for Equality**. While we really welcome this proposal, we are eager to see how it will function in practice. In particular, for this effort to be meaningful, it would be important to ensure that:

- the input of such Task Force on policy drafting will be compulsorily taken into consideration by all Directorates General;
- adequate and continuous training on intersectional forms of discrimination, including on the ground of gender, is provided to the officers part of this Task Force, to ensure appropriate input on European legislation and policies;
- the Task Force will ensure a transparent and open cooperation with civil society organisations, who can bring their relevant expertise on specific policy discussions.

We thank the European Commission for having presented the Gender Equality Strategy that will guide the European Union's action for the next five years and we stand ready to support and monitor its implementation.