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## **Re: Recommendations to the German Presidency of the Council of the European Union**

Dear Mr. Ambassador,

I am writing to you after having had the pleasure of meeting officers from your Permanent Representation and German government representatives on a few occasions and having read your Presidency programme and priorities concerning gender equality and women and girls' rights, both internally and externally.

The End FGM European Network (End FGM EU) is a European umbrella organisation consisting of 30 national NGO experts on female genital mutilation (FGM), in 14 European countries. End FGM EU operates as a meeting ground for communities, civil society organisations, decision-makers and other relevant actors at European level to interact, cooperate and join forces to end all forms of FGM in Europe and beyond. We put at the heart of our work grassroots voices to influence European governments and policy-makers to work towards the elimination of FGM. We build our members' capacity, offer spaces to share expertise and develop partnerships. While dedicated to being the driving force of the European movement to end FGM, we are equally committed to build bridges and cooperation with all relevant actors in the field of FGM both in Europe and globally. In this sense, we actively promote and foster cooperation between the European movement and movements in other regions of the world.

### **FGM & THE EUROPEAN UNION**

FGM is a violation of the **human rights** of women and girls affected by the practice and amounts to **torture**. The European Parliament estimated that over **600,000 survivors** of FGM currently live in Europe, and that **180,000 are at risk** of FGM in 13 countries alone.

We welcome the German Presidency, which is the first of the Trio formed with Portugal and Slovenia. The Trio programme emphasises a key area on **protecting citizens and freedoms**, which is of interest to End FGM EU, since it entails the Trio's commitment to: mainstreaming equality, including gender equality, youth empowerment, social inclusion, combatting gender-based violence and fighting against all forms of discrimination, especially in light of the increase in inequalities and discrimination exacerbated by COVID-19. Moreover, we deem important the focus that the Trio programme puts on **promoting Europe's interests and values in the world**, specifically in relations to Agenda 2030 and the SDGs, promoting human rights, but also reinforcing linkages between the internal and external policies of the Union. End FGM EU welcomes the **Joint Trio Declaration on not allowing the COVID-19 pandemic to increase inequalities and discrimination of any kind**. This is particularly an important priority for us, as the crisis has led to increased cases of violence against women, overwhelmingly impacted organisations working on combatting gender-based violence, including FGM, and has disrupted access to essential support services for women and vulnerable groups.

Concerning the German Presidency programmatic document, we welcome the guiding principle **III. A fair Europe**, which will tackle the social repercussions of COVID-19, in order to preserve social cohesion, ensuring equality between men and women, promoting young people's long-term future prospects in Europe and intergenerational solidarity. We recommend that the Presidency give attention to achieving gender equality through an intersectional approach. We are particularly happy that **Equality of women and men**, which includes **combatting gender-based violence (GBV)**, will be one of the focuses of the German Presidency, as well as advocating for a Europe-wide expansion of and access to protection and counselling for survivors. In this regard, following the launch of the Gender Equality Strategy by the European Commission in March, now is the time for Member States to own such a Strategy. As such, we call upon the German Presidency to ensure adopting **Council Conclusions** around it, during its Presidency semester. We also welcome the Presidency's intention to intensify exchange of experiences between the Member States around the **impact of COVID-19 on women**, within the framework of an informal meeting with Ministers for equal opportunities. During such discussion, we recommend that the voices and recommendations of women with heightened vulnerability, civil society, grassroots and women's organisations be listened to. We call on more efforts be taken to ensure an EU gender-sensitive COVID-19 response, which must adequately involve women and girls-led initiatives within the crisis response. We equally emphasise that these exchanges should include the need for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) and GBV services, including FGM, to be kept at the core of the pandemic response. Moreover, we are pleased that one of the focuses of the German Presidency will be around **'protecting and ensuring the participation of young people'**, who are particularly vulnerable in times of crisis. It must be acknowledged that while youth are often at the centre of movements, they are not always meaningfully engaged with during policy processes.

In relation to the guiding principle **VI. An effective European Union for a rules-based international order anchored in partnership**, we are happy to see that 'health' is included as a priority field of action identified by the Presidency around the adoption of a European-African agenda. As health is one of the core priorities for the EU-AU Summit, we recommend that the international and regional commitments (at African and European level) to combat gender-based violence and end harmful practices, including FGM, are fully respected and translated into concrete actions within the EU-Africa partnership. This partnership must take into consideration key areas such as promoting universal access for women and girls to health services, including sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) which are adapted, equitable, accessible, affordable and needs-based, including in conflict and humanitarian settings, in light of COVID-19.

Finally, we are confident that your Presidency will be inspired by the objective “**Together for Europe’s recovery**” to ensure the EU lives up to the values enshrined in its treaties and strongly supports human rights, non-discrimination and equality, including gender equality, both internally and externally and to counter any opposition movement attacking these core European values, in the face of the global pandemic. In this regard, we strongly recommend that EU recovery plans do not come at the expenses of EU values and we urge the German Presidency to show leadership in ensuring the EU puts money to uphold its core values, including equality between women and men. Building on these elements, on the Council Conclusions “*Preventing and combating all forms of violence against women and girls, including female genital mutilation*” of June 2014 and on the programme and priorities of the German Presidency, End FGM EU calls on the Presidency and the Council to act, in the scope of its competences to:

- ⊗ Ensure **human rights** remain a core priority in the EU agenda, notably by mainstreaming human rights issues when relevant in EU legislation and policy, both externally and internally.
- ⊗ **Mainstream gender** into the Council’s contributions to EU legislation and policy, in particular those related to human rights, migration and international protection, health, research and data collection, development, women’s rights, children’s rights and the fight against gender-based violence, including FGM.

Moreover, End FGM EU would like to draw the German Presidency’s attention to a few priority areas that we deem crucial to ensure the end of all forms of gender-based violence, including FGM, in Europe and beyond. Therefore, we would like to call on the Presidency and the Council to take, in the scope of its competences, the following specific actions.

### **International protection**

- ⊗ Work with the European Commission and Member States to ensure the effective transposition and implementation in all EU Member States of **Directive 2012/29/EU** (Victims’ Rights Directive).
- ⊗ Continue the work to reform the **Common European Asylum System** with the aim of concluding discussions on all instruments, and by ensuring these principles are taken into consideration:
  - Mainstream gender and human rights to enhance the protection of migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees, particularly women and girls.
  - Give clear guidelines to Member States as regards to the international protection of vulnerable groups fleeing past or fear of persecution, including FGM survivors and persons at risk of FGM e.g. gender and child sensitivity, access to female interviewers and interpreters, credibility assessment taking trauma into account, gendered data collection - including concerning country of origin information -, acknowledgement of past persecution etc.
  - Develop high gender- children- and culturally-sensitive standards as regards to the qualification process, the asylum procedures process and the reception conditions of asylum-seekers and refugees to ensure the respect of human rights and international law.
  - Create an effective and adequately funded EU Agency for Asylum to support Member States, in particular on gender-sensitive country of origin information, training of asylum officers and fairness of the asylum system.
  - Involve tailored training of professionals e.g. health practitioners, public and asylum officers etc., notably on gender issues and gender-based violence, including FGM.

- ☒ In particular, work with Member States, the European Commission and European Parliament to ensure that the new **Asylum Procedures Regulation** (former Directive 2013/32/EU) will maintain a strong focus on vulnerable groups, particularly women and girls victims of gender-based violence and subsequently adopted.

## Istanbul Convention and the Sustainable Development Goals

- ☒ End FGM EU strongly welcomes that the German Presidency will continue to work towards the **ratification of the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention by the EU and all Member States**. We encourage that this is supported through organised bilateral talks with Member States who have not yet ratified the Convention at national level, to try and unblock the situation while waiting for the European Court of Justice's opinion. We stand ready to support in this process. Furthermore, we recommend to ensure obstacles for the ratification of the Istanbul Convention by the EU are overcome by the end of the Presidency semester and that there is full unreserved implementation. To this purpose, ensure that a clear, specific and detailed Code of Conduct is adopted within the shortest delay as a framework for EU and Member States' actions. Finally, ensure that an EU Coordinator on ending violence against women is appointed within the European Commission to overview the implementation.
- ☒ End FGM EU also welcomes that the German Presidency intends to adopt **Council conclusions on the Gender Action Plan III**, which should be adopted by end of October by the European Commission. Moreover, we recommend the Presidency works with relevant stakeholders, notably the European Commission, European Parliament, EEAS, the UN, EU Member States' governments and third countries to develop internal and external joint actions towards the implementation of **Agenda 2030** on Sustainable Development, with particular attention to SDG 5.3 on eliminating all harmful practices, and the **European Consensus on Development**. We particularly welcome that Agenda 2030 are a guiding principle for German's Presidency, including the submission of the concept for the comprehensive implementation of the 2030 Agenda, prior to relevant Council consultations.

## Data collection and funding

- ☒ Encourage **data collection** using a common methodology on the prevalence of gender-based violence in each Member State, including on refugee status granted on such ground within the asylum system, with a special focus on FGM. Ensure the cross-border coordination and sharing of collected data through e-databases among Member States.
- ☒ Work in collaboration with the European Parliament and the European Commission, including on the next Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027, to ensure **adequate, sustainable, accessible and flexible funding**, especially concerning its geographical scope and timeframe, on relevant matters e.g. joint programmes between EU and third-countries, programmes against harmful practices and violence against women and girls, longer-term community-led awareness-raising and behavioural change programmes, etc. Moreover, ensure that funding dedicated to fight gender inequality and gender-based violence against women and girls are adequate in size and scope, within the EU financial schemes, both internally and externally. Regarding the MFF 2021-2027 and the EU's recovery plans, we **urge the German Presidency to encourage all EU Member States 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**. In particular, we strongly call for

**increasing the currently proposed amounts to ensure an appropriate action to tackle gender-based violence against women and girls**, which is a phenomenon that is still affecting 1 out of 3 women within the EU.

## Member States

- ☒ Call for Member States to develop and fund **education and awareness-raising** actions and programmes on **human rights** and on **gender-based violence**, including on FGM and in collaboration with FGM-affected communities.
- ☒ Call for Member States to ensure appropriate **training of relevant professionals** (health practitioners, public officers, asylum officers, police, teachers, social workers, journalists, etc.) and **access to holistic and specialised services** to address the issue of gender-based violence, including FGM.
- ☒ Call for Member States to develop actions and programmes to end violence against women and girls, including FGM, dedicated to **prevention and protection**, and to collaborate with each other as well as third-country partners to identify and implement promising practices in this area.

We wish the German Government a fruitful and constructive Presidency Semester and we are looking forward to a close cooperation during this period and beyond.

Yours sincerely,



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Head of Policy & Advocacy

On Behalf of Ms. Anna Widegren, Director

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