

Brussels, 2 July 2020

To Mr Charles Michel, President of the European Council,
Copy to Mr Michael Clauss, Permanent Representative of the German Presidency,

Subject line: Increase the budget allocated to the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme in the EU Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027

Dear President,

We are writing you to express our deep concerns regarding the **significant cut of the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (Rights and Values Programme)** in the revised Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 [proposal](#). The European Commission is proposing a **20% cut** in the budget allocated to both the Justice and Rights and Values Programmes, from the €841 million originally proposed in 2018 to €677 million (in 2018 prices).

We call upon the European Council to oppose this cut, and instead ensure an increase of the budget allocated to the Rights and Values Programme. This is the only Programme dedicated to supporting civil society organisations promoting and protecting common European values of the rule of law, democracy and fundamental rights, including gender equality and combating gender-based violence, within the EU.

The 2018 initial budget was already insufficient to counter the continuous attacks on EU fundamental values, the backlash against women's rights and gender equality, and the shrinking civic space in the EU. **The European Parliament's 2019 [position](#), which we fully [support](#)¹, is to triple the budget and bring it to €1.834 billion.** The Parliament has also asked for significant and earmarked budget for gender equality and combating gender-based violence.

Instead, the European Commission is now deciding to further decrease the already low amount allocated to the Programme. **This cut is particularly disappointing given the political prioritisation of gender equality and tackling gender-based violence** in the [Gender Equality Strategy](#), which the European Commission launched only three months ago. Moreover, this decrease is even more concerning in a recovery context, given the **disproportionate harm that the COVID-19 crisis is causing to women, girls, vulnerable and underserved groups across Europe**. COVID-19 and its consequences have endangered women and girls' rights including their sexual and reproductive safety, and have led to an alarming increase of domestic violence under lockdowns. The EU must address the needs of women and vulnerable groups and support civil society organisations in the post-crisis response.

Civil society organisations are at the forefront of responding to the crisis, both in protecting human rights, and providing essential, potentially life-saving services. Women's rights groups, shelters for survivors of domestic violence, and organisations working for sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) are essential partners in protecting those whose needs are greatest.

The European Commission committed to advancing gender equality and promised a recovery based on EU values and fundamental rights. However, the current proposed budget is sending a negative signal about the importance granted by the EU to its own values. **This Programme will not be effective without adequate financial resources.**

We count on your support, as a President of the European Council, to increase the budget allocated to the Rights and Values Programme, in line with the European Parliament's 2019 position.

Yours sincerely,

End FGM European Network
International Planned Parenthood Federation European Network

¹ Please also see the [open letter](#) of the European Civic Forum signed by over 300 civil society organisations