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Brussels, 27 January 2026

### **Recommendations to the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the European Union**

Dear Ambassador Christina Rafti,

I am writing to you on behalf of the [End Female Genital Mutilation European Network \(End FGM EU\)](#), and our founding member [Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies \(MIGS\)](#), following the release of the Cyprus Presidency programme. As a Network of 42 civil society organisations (CSOs) across 16 European countries, **we are committed to eliminating female genital mutilation (FGM), supporting Survivors and protecting persons at risk**. We advocate for a Europe and a world free from violence, where gender equality and human rights are not only values but realities.

Your Presidency comes at a crucial moment for the European Union (EU), amidst key **negotiations for the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). Moreover, 2026 represents an important moment as the future of key equality strategies and the implementation of major policies are at stake**: the Pact on Migration and Asylum (the Pact) and the Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence, the revision of the Victims rights Directive and the EU implementation Istanbul Convention.

**We particularly welcome Cyprus' stated commitment to inclusivity, ending all forms of discrimination, children's rights, youth participation, democracy, the rule of law, and**

**respect for fundamental rights.** Yet we also note important gaps, particularly in relation to the non-prioritisation of **gender-based violence, intersectionality, access to health and support services and the specific needs of vulnerable groups**, including migrant women and those affected by harmful practices such as FGM, while there is an acute prioritisation of competitiveness and defence.

**An ‘autonomous Union. Open to the world’ cannot be accomplished without guaranteeing human dignity and fundamental rights for all.** Women’s rights and gender equality are facing a **global backlash**, where extreme discourses have been normalised, targeting the most vulnerable. We see **increased attacks on civil society**, especially those working to promote and protect sexual and reproductive health and rights, racialised and LGBTIQ+ people, migrant communities, victims of gender-based and domestic violence, among others. We urge the Cyprus Presidency to uphold EU commitments to protect and promote fundamental rights and accelerate the implementation of EU-wide policies **maintain human rights at the core of its action for an increasingly credible role of the EU as a global leader by example.**

Based on the core values of the European Union, its legislation and policy, including Council Conclusions on violence against women<sup>1</sup>, as well as the Union’s global commitments, End FGM EU calls on the Presidency and the Council to:

1. **Prompt all Member States to prioritise equality and effectively address Gender-Based Violence (GBV) including FGM, with a focus on prevention and protection.**
2. **Ensure asylum and migration policies uphold fundamental human rights standards.**
3. **Increase and improve data collection specifically on gender-based violence, including FGM and early and forced marriage.**
4. **Increase civil society and affected-community engagement** and recognise their core role in upholding the Union’s values and supporting policy implementation.
5. **Negotiate an MFF proposal that prioritises equality and ending gender-based violence;**
6. **Reaffirm the EU’s external human rights commitments.**

Annexed to this letter you will find our detailed recommendations.

We appreciate the opportunity your Presidency offers to make real progress on building a more equal, safe, and inclusive Europe. We remain ready to collaborate with you to ensure that EU policies deliver for women and girls, uphold the rights of Survivors, and address the root causes of gender inequality.

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<sup>1</sup> Council Conclusions on Preventing and combating all forms of violence against women and girls, including female genital mutilation (Doc. 9543/14); Council Conclusions on Violence against women and domestic violence: prevention, early detection and intervention  
<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13244-2025-INIT/en/pdf>



Wishing the Cyprus government, a fruitful and constructive Presidency Semester, we reiterate our readiness to support you and cooperate to achieve our common goals.

Yours sincerely,

Xheni Dani, Policy and Advocacy Coordinator, **End FGM European Network**  
On Behalf of Ms. Marianne Nguena Kana, Director, **End FGM European Network**

## Annex

End FGM EU calls on the Cyprus Presidency and the Council to:

**1. Prompt all Member States to prioritise equality and effectively address Gender-Based Violence including FGM, with a focus on prevention and protection.**

We welcome the reference to equality including gender equality and the emphasis on the support of the new EU Anti-Racism Strategy, the focus on mental health, child rights, youth and fundamental rights. However, we regret the lack of detail on gender-based violence and intersectionality, which are pre-requisite to ensure social justice and equality.

We urge the Cyprus Presidency to

- Ensure full implementation of the Directive to efficiently tackle FGM, we insist that the EU, including through this Directive, must do more to increase measures on the prevention of gender-based violence and the provision of specialised holistic support services to all Survivors.
- Push for Member States to ratify and fully implement the Istanbul Convention without delays.
- Support the Commission in finalising and publishing the long-awaited recommendation on preventing and combatting harmful practices, including FGM.
- Reinforce efforts for the renewal and ambition of the EU gender Equality Strategy, the Anti-Racism strategy, ensuring a clear follow-up framework and strong mechanisms.
- Follow up with Member States to ensure the full implementation of new policy framework including the revised EU Victim's rights directive, the LGBTQI+ strategy 2026-2030 and the new Democracy Package.
- Prioritise access and enjoyment of full sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) as well as mental health rights, with a holistic approach to SRHR services that includes mental health support, especially for survivors of gender-based violence.
- Prevent through the promotion of non-discrimination and gender-mainstreaming: a Europe free from discrimination and racism through an intersectional approach to tackle the enduring issues of racism, xenophobia and islamophobia, all of which negatively affect the mission of ending FGM, reinforcing stereotypes and the marginalisation of affected communities.

**2. Ensure asylum and migration policies uphold fundamental human rights standards**

While the priorities include the implementation of the Pact on migration and asylum in respect of fundamental rights, the Pact has been adopted with limitations which risk undermining safeguards of basic human rights of asylum seekers and migrants, including FGM-affected individuals. We urge the Cyprus Presidency to

- Ensure a human rights-based, gender, age and culturally sensitive asylum system. It is fundamental that all migration and asylum policies take into consideration the human rights of people migrating, in particular girls and women, and their right to receive international protection when affected or at risk of being affected by FGM in the countries they are fleeing.
- Ensure the Pact's implementation and interpretation is carried out in full compliance with European and international law and fundamental rights standard, in line with commitments to promote the adherence to international law and respect for human rights, the Union's accession to the European Convention on Human Rights.

### 3. Increase and improve data collection specifically on gender-based violence and FGM

We continue to face a lack of robust and comparable data on FGM and other forms of GBV, as highlighted in the Gender Equality Index<sup>2</sup>. The data assessing the prevalence of violence against women is scarce, outdated and fails to reflect the full extent of the situation.

- We ask the Cyprus Presidency to lead efforts toward establishing an **EU-wide methodology for data collection**, particularly in relation to asylum claims based on GBV and FGM by leading efforts to establish a common data collection methodology.

### 4. Increase civil society and community engagement and recognise their core role in upholding the Union's value

Civil society plays an indispensable role in advancing EU values and supporting vulnerable populations, in particular community-based engagement is crucial to better understand the need of those most affected by FGM.

While we welcome the commitment to implement the European Democracy Shield and the EU strategy for Civil Society, in a civic space increasingly shrinking, we urge the Cyprus Presidency to

- Promote structured dialogue and meaningful youth and community engagement
- Increase core and flexible funding to grassroots organisations, especially those working with marginalised groups such as FGM affected communities
- Embed civil society participation in the implementation of the MFF and EU external actions
- Ensure the newly adopted first Civil Society strategy is implemented by all Member States and encourage stakeholders to go above and beyond its content.

### 5. Work towards a new MFF that prioritises gender equality and ending gender-based violence

We acknowledge the strong emphasis placed on the MFF and competitiveness in your programme. However, we highlight that budgetary planning must also align with the EU's human rights and equality objectives.

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<sup>2</sup> [Gender Equality Index 2025: Sharper data for a changing world | European Institute for Gender Equality](#)

Therefore, we call on the Cyprus Presidency to:

- Prioritise human rights, gender-equality and ending all forms of violence emphasising FGM prevention and survivor support, aligned with the EU's priorities including the Istanbul Convention.
- **Ensure adequate resources are dedicated to ending gender-based violence and promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights** by ensuring the next MFF prioritise vital programmes such as the Citizens Equality Rights and Values programme (CERV+) under AgoraEU, ensuring it remains under direct management of the Commission, fund same type of activities as the previous programme and increase the resources allocated to it<sup>3</sup>.
- Mainstream gender across all budget lines, from humanitarian aid to education and climate.

## 6. Reaffirm the EU's external human rights commitments

We welcome the mention of the European Convention on Human Rights and references to the EU's global role and partnerships with other regions, particularly with the African Union and the implementation of the outcomes of the EU-AU Summits. We call on the Cyprus Presidency to:

- Lead all Member States, EU institutions and stakeholders towards the realisation of the 2030 Agenda. There is a need to increase investments specifically targeted at SDG 5.3 (ending harmful practices including FGM and child, early and forced marriage) if we want to achieve this goal in the few remaining years there is still a 2.1 billion funding gap to be filled<sup>4</sup>.
- Ensure the EU's external action upholds human rights, gender equality, and the commitments made under the Istanbul Convention and CEDAW.
- Ensure to include FGM and gender-based violence prevention and support to Survivors in the Union's crisis response. These areas are often deprioritised in the Union's humanitarian action despite the acute needs in emergency situations as in Sudan<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Read our full recommendations for AgoraEU and the CERV: [AgoraEU and the CERV+ Strand: joint civil society recommendations | End FGM](#)

<sup>4</sup> [United Nations Human Rights Council adopts new resolution on the elimination of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting \(FGM/C\) at its 59th session | End FGM](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Urgent call for EU action to protect women and girls in Sudan | End FGM](#)