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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL
COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

A Roadmap for Women's Rights

ANNEX

Declaration of principles for a gender-equal society

Introduction

Equality between women and men is a fundamental principle and a common value enshrined in Union law. Over the years, the EU has made significant strides in promoting gender equality, with a gradually evolving policy framework built through successive strategies, roadmaps and action plans. The most recent Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 has played an important role in setting out gender equality policies and in promoting cooperation at all levels and across policy fields. It was complemented by various sectoral initiatives successfully integrating a gender mainstreaming approach. This policy framework has allowed the EU to advance on commitments made 30 years ago in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

The EU also plays a leading role internationally, in its neighbourhood and beyond, in promoting gender equality and women's rights in bilateral and multilateral engagements and in all its actions across the world, both through policy dialogues and financial assistance. The EU's action plan on gender equality and women's empowerment in external relations (GAP III) aims to accelerate progress towards the full realisation of international commitments, including the Sustainable Development Goals, notably SDG5. The EU Strategic Approach to Women, Peace and Security strives to engage, empower, protect, and support women and girls in order to achieve sustainable and lasting peace and security as intrinsic components of human rights and sustainable development.

The European Parliament has strongly and repeatedly urged the Union to strengthen its policy in the field of equal opportunities for women and men and called for EU leadership in achieving that. The Council recently called on the Commission to ensure that the long-term strategic commitment to advance gender equality will be sustained and further reinforced beyond 2025.

This Declaration reiterates, reaffirms and reinforces the Commission's commitment to women's rights. It aims to drive forward and steer the gender equality policy agenda in the longer term, inspiring policy measures and gender mainstreaming both at EU and international level. Special attention must be paid to women facing intersectional discrimination, based on characteristics such as racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, or sexual orientation.

The promotion of gender equality is not merely a moral imperative and a fundamental right - harnessing the full potential of the whole population would allow the EU to create a more competitive, inclusive and cohesive society, thereby reinforcing democracy.

This Declaration reflects the aspiration to achieve gender equality within the context of existing EU legal frameworks and international commitments, while respecting the national competences of the Member States. It does not affect the content of legal rules or their application. It respects in particular the responsibilities of the Member States for the definition of their health policy and for the organisation and delivery of health services and medical care, and the responsibility of the

Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity.

The Declaration serves as a guide for internal EU policy as well as EU diplomatic and external action.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS PRINCIPLES FOR A GENDER-EQUAL SOCIETY

Principle 1: Freedom from gender-based violence

Every woman and girl has the right to security and to be treated with dignity, both on-line and off-line, in public and private life.

Upholding and advancing this principle includes pursuing the following objectives:

- preventing and combating all forms of violence against women and girls, including domestic violence, femicide, and technology-facilitated gender-based violence;
- preventing and combatting sexual violence, including rape, based on lack of consent;
- preventing and combatting harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and forced marriage;
- making the digital environment, including online platforms, a safe place for women and girls, in all their diversity, free from violence, sexism, hate speech, and harassment;
- preventing and combatting exposure of boys and girls to sexualised violence online, and other harmful sexist digital content;
- preventing and combatting all forms of sexual and gender-based violence in conflict;
- preventing and combatting all forms of sexual exploitation, including in the context of trafficking in human beings;
- providing adequate, victim-centred support and protection to victims of violence against women and domestic violence, and ensuring their effective access to justice.

Principle 2: The highest standards of health

Every woman has a right to the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health.

Upholding and advancing this principle includes pursuing the following objectives, fully respecting the Member States' responsibilities for the definition of their health policy including bioethical questions and for the organisation of health services and medical care:

- promoting women's and girls' physical and mental health, including through improving access to evidence-based information on women's health and sexuality;
- protecting women's health by supporting and complementing, in full respect of the Treaties, health action by the Member States regarding women's access to sexual and reproductive health and rights;

- ensuring respectful and high quality obstetric, gynaecological, antenatal, childbirth and postnatal care, free from discrimination and combatting harmful practices;
- access to affordable menstrual hygiene products and contraception;
- gender-sensitive medical research, clinical trials, diagnostics and treatments.

Principle 3: Equal pay and economic empowerment

Every woman has the right to equal pay for equal work or work of equal value and to be economically independent.

Upholding and advancing this principle includes pursuing the following objectives:

- closing the gender pay gap and gender pension gaps;
- tackling the undervaluation of jobs predominantly done by women and ensuring pay transparency;
- combating women’s poverty, including energy poverty;
- promoting financial literacy among women and girls as a foundation to their financial security and resilience;
- promoting gender-equal access to finances and economic opportunities, including entrepreneurship;
- promoting taxation and social protection reforms that support the economic independence of women;
- promoting women’s rights and the economic empowerment of women through economic and trade policy, international development and partnerships.

Principle 4: Work-life balance and care

Every woman has the right to balance her professional and private life.

Upholding and advancing this principle includes pursuing the following objectives:

- promoting the equal sharing of care responsibilities between women and men;
- promoting working conditions that facilitate the reconciliation of private, family and working lives;
- widespread access to flexible work arrangements for all;
- encouraging fathers to take up paternity and family leaves;
- ensuring affordable, accessible, and quality early-childhood education and care for all children;
- affordable and accessible high-quality long-term care;
- promoting investment and formal employment in the care sector, ensuring quality care jobs.

Principle 5: Equal employment opportunities and adequate working conditions

Every woman has the right to equal employment opportunities and adequate working conditions.

Upholding and advancing this principle includes pursuing the following objectives:

- eradicating the gender employment gap, paying specific attention to occupational segregation and to the employment of under-represented groups;
- quality jobs and decent work, taking into account, in particular, psycho-social risks at the workplace, working time arrangements, access to training, and equal career prospects;
- eliminating gender-based violence and sexual harassment in the world of work;
- ensuring a high level of protection of health and safety against risks in the physical working environment and safety equipment fitting female workers.

Principle 6: Quality and inclusive education

Every girl and woman has the right to high quality and inclusive education and training, free from discrimination.

Upholding and advancing this principle includes pursuing the following objectives, while fully respecting Member States' competences in this area:

- promoting a gender-balanced perspective in education, including in curricula, teaching materials, textbooks, teacher training and guidance, at all levels of education;
- promoting comprehensive sexuality education;
- ensuring equal opportunities and access to vocational training as well as upskilling and reskilling;
- ensuring zero-tolerance for gender-based violence, harassment and bullying in education;
- encouraging girls and women to engage in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics sectors;
- encouraging boys and men to engage in the education, health and welfare sectors;
- encouraging women and girls' acquisition of digital skills and competences, including in artificial intelligence.

Principle 7: Political participation and equal representation

Every woman has the right to actively and safely participate in public life.

Upholding and advancing this principle includes pursuing the following objectives:

- promoting gender-balanced representation in positions of responsibility and decision-making and women's full, equal and meaningful participation in all spheres and at all levels of public and political life;
- promoting gender balance in management and decision-making at all management levels and across the public and private sectors;
- promoting gender balance in participation and leadership in the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts and crises, preparedness, security and peace-building;
- ensuring the safety of women in public life and zero tolerance towards violence, hatred or harassment against women and girls in public life, both online and off-line;
- preventing and combatting sexism in media and advertising.

Principle 8: Institutional mechanisms that deliver on women's rights

Advancing women's rights requires effective gender mainstreaming, financing and institutional infrastructure, as well as gender-sensitive research, data collection, design and planning that address women's needs with an intersectional approach.

Upholding and advancing this principle includes pursuing the following objectives:

- specialised institutional infrastructure for gender equality and gender mainstreaming, and independent equality bodies;
- sustainable funding for gender equality policies, and for women's rights organisations;
- effective gender mainstreaming in all policy areas and in budgets, including the EU budget;
- leveraging diplomacy and strategic partnerships to promote gender equality on the global political agenda;
- research and innovation addressing women's needs and closing the gender knowledge gap;
- the systematic collection of sex-disaggregated data and assessing the gender impact of public policies;
- systematic consideration of anthropometric data and factors affecting women's lives, including in relevant European standards;
- gender-sensitive spatial planning and transport infrastructure;
- the design and use of digital tools mindful of gender equality, bias and gender stereotypes.