



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Dear President,

The Commission would like to thank the Camera Deputaților for its Opinion on the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, {COM(2020) 152 final}.

The Commission welcomes the support expressed by the Camera Deputaților for this Strategy. Gender Equality is at the forefront of the Commission's priorities for the current mandate. The launch of the Gender Equality Strategy in March this year was a first key deliverable on President von der Leyen's promise of a Union of Equality. It frames the Commission's work on gender equality and sets out the policy objectives and key actions for the 2020-2025 period. With this strategy, the Union has an empowered framework for gender equality, to ensure progress towards the goal of a gender equal Europe.

Ending gender-based violence is a priority for the Commission, and a central objective of the Gender Equality Strategy. Finalising the EU's accession to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence remains a priority. Moreover, as indicated in the context of the President's State of the Union 2020 speech, the Commission intends to issue a new legislative proposal on gender-based violence against women. This initiative is included in the Commission Work Programme for 2021. In addition, the Commission plans to propose a Recommendation on the prevention of harmful practices, including female genital mutilation, forced abortion and forced sterilisation, early and forced marriage, and so-called 'honour-related violence'. The envisaged Recommendation aims to address the strengthening of public services, prevention and support measures, capacity building of professionals and victim-centred access to justice.

Trafficking in human beings is a serious and organised crime, often with a transnational aspect, driven by high profits and fostered by impunity. Trafficking in human beings for

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sexual exploitation is a form of violence against women and is rooted in gender inequalities. Victims need special assistance, support and protection. The Commission is working on a new strategic approach towards the eradication of trafficking in human beings as part of the Security Union. The EU addresses trafficking in human beings comprehensively through coordination in all relevant areas and as a joint effort with stakeholders.

The Commission will also facilitate the development of a voluntary cooperation arrangement, modelled after the 2016 Code of Conduct on racist and xenophobic hate speech, between internet platforms and other stakeholders. As concerns more widely the general regulatory framework, the Commission has recently proposed the Digital Services Act to clarify, inter alia, online platforms' responsibilities and expected actions with regard to illegal online activities and user-disseminated content. Protecting fundamental rights, including the freedom of expression, will be of crucial importance. The Commission will take into account the general framework of EU law on content regulation, as well as the criteria developed by the European Court of Human Rights in its case-law when designing these measures.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become an area of strategic importance and a key driver of economic progress, hence women have to be part of its development as researchers, programmers and users. While AI can bring solutions to many societal challenges, it risks intensifying gender inequalities. Algorithms and related machine-learning, if not transparent and robust enough, risk repeating, amplifying or contributing to gender biases that programmers may not be aware of or that are the result of specific data selection.

In her Political Guidelines, President von der Leyen committed to making the European Education Area a reality by 2025. To this end, the Commission has adopted a proposal on Achieving the European Education Area by 2025¹, which includes a proposal for new targets for the uptake of Early Childhood Education and Care. In addition, the Council Recommendation on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems², adopted in 2019 by Member States and the Commission, recommends improved access to accessible, affordable and inclusive early childcare and education, with particular consideration for support of young children's development. Principle 11(a) of the European Pillar of Social Rights states that 'Children have the right to affordable early childhood education and care of good quality'. The European Child Guarantee, scheduled for adoption by the Commission in beginning of 2021, as a proposal for a Council Recommendation, will help to implement this principle.

Expansion of early childhood education and care is crucial for disadvantaged children because of the direct benefits linked to better educational outcomes, as well as the indirect impacts of better employment prospects for parents, in particular women. On

¹ COM(2020) 625 final

² Council Recommendation of 22 May 2019 on High-Quality Early Childhood Education and Care Systems OJ C 189, 5.6.2019, p. 4–14.

average in the EU-27, the employment rate of women who have at least one child aged less than six years is 14.3 percentage points lower than of women who do not have a young child. Comparisons of the PISA reading scores of 15-year-old students with immigrant parents show that those who attended preschool consistently achieve higher scores. Across the EU, the added benefit of attending preschool among children with immigrant background is roughly equivalent to 1.5 school years, compared to the effect for native-born children of natives, which measures to half a year of schooling.

The Commission hopes that these clarifications address the issues raised by the Camera Deputaților and looks forward to continuing the political dialogue in the future.

Yours faithfully,

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Vice-President*

*Helena Dalli
Member of the Commission*