EUROPEAN COMMISSION

STATEMENT

Brussels, 7 March 2019

Statement by the European Commission on the occasion of International Women's Day 2019

"Equality is a core value of the European Union, and a principle we will keep fighting for. Equality between women and men is no exception.

Europe ranks among the safest and most equal places for girls and women in the world. The number of women in employment has reached historically high levels in the EU. More and more women are in positions of power today. That is something we can be proud of.

But that does not mean that we are there yet or that these achievements should be taken for granted. Also in Europe many women are still facing challenges, inequalities and threats in their everyday lives: abuses and harassment, lower wages, fewer job and career opportunities. And that is unacceptable.

Particularly worrisome is the trivialisation of sexist hate speech, especially online, but also in the public discourse. Words matter and can lead to actions. They can be a first step towards unequal treatment or even physical violence. We call on all EU Member States to show zero-tolerance towards hate speech and all forms of violence and discrimination against women.

Many of the remaining inequalities are linked to the place of women at work. The EU's new rules on Work-Life Balance will contribute to getting more women at work by giving families a real choice on how to organise their professional and private life. It will open up opportunities for working women and men to share caring responsibilities, for children and relatives, on an equal basis. This will increase opportunities for women to find jobs that reflect their level of education and ambition. Unlocking this potential would be the best economic stimulus we could offer to boost our economies.

Women remain underrepresented in politics. In the upcoming European elections, we would like to see more women across the EU not only voting, but standing and succeeding as candidates. The Commission also calls for more women to be represented in the highest level of all EU institutions, including as Commissioners. This Commission has been leading by example: today we have 9 female Commissioners and women account for almost 40 % of our managers.

Gender equality is also at the core of our continuous engagement with partner countries worldwide. The EU is striving to accelerate the efforts towards gender equality in the

different fields of its external action, as part of the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. All around the world , we remain strongly committed to implement actions fighting all forms of violence against women and girls, including those affected by war, poverty or displacement, for example through our global Spotlight Initiative together with the United Nations. We are committed to giving all women and girls equal access to health services, education and economic empowerment, and the opportunities to shape their own future. We will never stop fighting for true equality for all inside and outside the European Union to make sure that the progress achieved is not undone."

Background

Across the EU, thanks to the newly agreed Work Life Balance directive, fathers will have a right to take at least 10 working days off around the birth of their child. Parental leave also becomes an individual right for mothers and fathers without a transfer of the four months to the other parent, a strong incentive for men to also make use of this possibility. Across the EU, both women and men will be able to use a 'carer's leave' of five days per year in the event of sickness of a relative who depends on them for care.

While working to implement all these initiatives, the Commission is itself leading by example. At the beginning of this mandate, President **Jean-Claude Juncker** committed to have at least 40% female participation in the Commission's management by 1 November 2019. Thanks to a number of measures introduced since then, we are well on track and, as of 1 February 2019, women represented 39.6% of all managers in the Commission.

The European Commission promoted effective access to justice and realisation of rights for women and girls who were victims of trafficking, as described in the European Commission second progress report. In cooperation with the Commission, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) published on EU Anti-Trafficking Day practical guidance to practitioners for implementing the anti-trafficking directive in a gender-specific manner.

EU Cohesion policy directly supports gender equality through business support to women entrepreneurs and improving the quality and access to childcare. For early childhood education and care infrastructure, €1.23 billion has been programmed in the 2014-2020 period.

Europe needs more women in science. Through Horizon 2020, the EU's research and innovation programme, the European Commission is supporting research organisations and universities to put in place gender equality plans. These will help improve the conditions for more women scientists to work in research and innovation.

The 'Women in Transport – EU Platform For Change' strengthens women's employment and equal opportunities in the transport sector across all modes and also serves for

exchange good practices.

Today the Commission published the *'She Figures'* report; which monitors the level of progress made towards gender equality in research and innovation in the European Union. The report shows that the number of women with a career in research is slowly growing in Europe. Yet, they remain significantly underrepresented, and their potential is today not fully recognised and valued.

The European Commission encourages and empowers women to play a more active role in the digital age through many initiatives such as the no woman no panel campaign, gender equality in the creative Europe MEDIA programme. Women's participation in tech will also provide a boost to the economy and allow for full participation in society.

The EU places gender equality at the centre of its external action through multiple partnerships with multilateral and regional partners. In the G7 context, the EU and Canada co-hosted the first-ever meeting of Women Foreign Ministers in September 2018 where they pledged to build a network of governments and civil society organisations to advance gender equality and girls' and women's rights, and to work towards implementing existing commitments.

The launch of the Spotlight Initiative by the European Commission together with the United Nations addresses gender-based violence at global level. Several country programmes have already been launched, including in Latin America and the Pacific region. In Africa, country programmes are expected to be launched shortly.

The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) Regional Dialogue on Women Empowerment established a mechanism to monitor the progress made by the UfM Member States towards gender equality. In addition, a €3.24 million grant contract was recently signed with EuroMed Feminist Initiative to launch a regional campaign to combat and prevent violence against women and girls in the Southern Neighbourhood countries. Under the EU Trust Fund in response to the Syrian Crisis, two important initiatives were launched last year to strengthen the resilience of Syrian women and hosting communities in Iraq, Jordan and Turkey, and to reinforce access to protection, participation and services for women refugees, internally displaced persons and hosting communities.

For more information

Spotlight: EU action for women

EIGE Gender Equality index

Factsheet: A Year of Focused Action to Stop Violence against Women (also available as a printable booklet)

Public Consultation on EU rules implementing the Treaty principle on 'equal pay' – open until 5 April 2019



Call for proposals to prevent and combat gender-based violence and violence against children, youth people and women – open until 19 June 2019

2018 Data collection on trafficking in human beings in the EU