Gender equality and women's empowerment: transforming the lives of girls and women through EU external relations 2016-2020

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PURPOSE: to present a staff working document on gender equality, in particular on transforming the lives of girls and women through EU external relations 2016-2020.

BACKGROUND: equality between men and women is at the core of values of the European Union (EU) and enshrined in its legal and political framework. The EU is at the forefront of the protection and fulfilment of girls' and women's rights and vigorously promotes them in its external relations.

2015 is a pivotal year for gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women. Nonetheless, the level of achievement has been uneven across regions and within countries. Worldwide, girls and women continue to be systematically left behind and discriminated against.

This document builds on the lessons learnt from the previous Gender Action Plan 2010-2015, and consolidates the context, rationale and priorities of a **refreshed approach** that reaffirms and translates the EU's policy and political commitments to gender equality into more effective delivery of concrete results for girls and women, while promoting more efficient coordination, implementation and monitoring of EU activities in this area.

CONTENT: according to the document, progress should be accelerated in the following issues:

Transforming the lives of girls and women: the EU is committed to breaking the vicious cycle of gender discrimination. The Commission services and the EEAS will strengthen their efforts to place gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women at the heart of the EU's external actions, focusing on:

- ensuring girls' and women's physical and psychological integrity;
- increasing the number of girls and women receiving quality education at all levels as well as training;
- increasing women's participation in policy, governance and electoral processes as well as in decision-making processes on climate and environmental issues.

Taking action and transforming lives: the following points aim to contribute in a measurable manner to preventing, and responding to, all forms of violence against girls and women:

- eliminating of all forms of violence against girls and women and of gender-based violence;
- eradicating the trafficking of girls and women;
- ending sexual violence and gender-based violence in conflict and post-conflict situations, and in humanitarian crises;
- increasing access by girls and women of all ages to quality, affordable health care services;
- ensuring access to sexual and reproductive health services and rights, including sexuality education;
- eliminating the phenomenon of gender-based sex selection and female infanticide;
- ending child, early and forced marriages.

Institutional culture shift: the single most important factor to make results more effective in the areas of girls' and women's psychological and physical integrity, economic and social empowerment and voice

and participation would be to **significantly shift the institutional culture**. Commitments on gender equality should be translated into clear and tangible outcomes which should be accompanied by improved coordination, coherence, leadership, gender evidence and analysis, and should work towards ensuring adequate financial and human resources.

In order to achieve this, the Commission services and the EEAS intend to continue investing in efforts to:

- focus on a rights-based approach to development and on transformative areas with clear results for girls and women;
- ensure dedicated leadership on gender equality across Commission services and the EEAS;
- engage more effectively across Commission services and the EEAS in implementing EU gender equality objectives for policy coherence, particularly on issues such as FGM, trade and migration that have clear links to EU internal policies;
- adopt a clear results-driven approach that sets high standards for reporting, evaluation and accountability mechanisms, and promotes evidence-based decision making. This will include investing in, and using, systematic high quality closely monitor external relations' resource and budget allocations to gender and identify means of ensuring adequate financial support for these measures.

Responsibility and Implementation: in order to ensure real and long lasting improvements, the Commission services and the EEAS shall, *inter alia*:

- ensure strong and dedicated leadership on commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment in external relations;
- set up a **gender advisory board** with leading experts from partner countries;
- promote **incentives** for good performance on gender equality in thematic, bilateral and regional programmes;
- establish a **helpdesk** at headquarters in Brussels to support EU Delegations and headquarters' operational units in implementing the measures proposed herewith.