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OPEN LETTER TO EU LEADERS

European non-discrimination and equality NGO networks welcome an ambitious Rights and Values Programme 2021-2027 as an essential instrument to support human rights and democracy across the EU

In today's global turbulent political context, a group of NGOs join forces to call on the EU to take strong action to help civil society across the EU in their work to defend the core values of non-discrimination and equality in the EU. More than ever people living in the EU need to regain trust in the EU project of peace and security, respect for fundamental rights and human dignity, non-discrimination and equality, democracy and freedom of expression, the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary. It is at this time, when there is so much pressure on civil society, including within the EU, that EU institutions need to ensure civil society organisations are adequately resourced.

Together with our national member organisations and the millions of citizens they represent at grass-roots level, we stand united to protect the achievements of European integration. For that reason we strongly welcome the European Commission's proposal to establish a Rights and Values Programme¹ in the new programming period as a concrete way to achieve a Union of democratic change that actively engages its citizens in shaping the Union's action.

Respect and enjoyment of human rights by all is a fundamental feature of our democratic societies and the EU needs to take strong action to address the current challenges to human rights and the rule of law in the EU, as well as the disenchantment of many Europeans. The right to be respected and treated with dignity, and to participate in society is enshrined in EU treaties and acknowledged in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. Yet in practice it can be a real challenge for many persons living in the EU in particular those in vulnerable situations.

¹ COM(2018) 383 final 2018/0207 (COD)

We hope that the EU institutions and national policy leaders will give their utmost attention to ensuring that this budget line meets the needs of civil society organisations at European level and on the ground, given the threats to democracy and human rights and the momentum for the EU. We also hope that they will ensure that on-going negotiations on the future EU budget will succeed in the establishment of an ambitious Rights and Values Programme 2021-2027.

In December this year, we will celebrate the [70th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights \(UDHR\)](#). The European Union must seize this opportunity to show that it cares about its citizens and is willing to invest in empowering civil society to ensure that everyone living in the EU can enjoy their rights and no one is left behind.

List of signatories:

AGE Platform Europe (AGE): Largest EU network of older persons' organisations representing more than 40 million citizens aged 50+ and advocating on behalf of more than 190 million senior citizens in the EU. <https://www.age-platform.eu/>

European Disability Forum (EDF): The European Disability Forum is an independent NGO that defends the interests of 80 million Europeans with disabilities. We are a strong, united voice of persons with disabilities in Europe. <http://www.edf-feph.org/>

European Network against Racism (ENAR): ENAR is the only pan-European anti-racism network that combines advocacy for racial equality and facilitating cooperation among civil society anti-racism actors in Europe. www.enar-eu.org

European Network On Religion and Belief (ENORB): ENORB is a European Network with member organisations in 30 countries which seek to combat discrimination and prejudice on grounds of religion and belief, and promote harmony and shared values between different religious and non-religious traditions. www.enorb.eu

European Roma Information Office (ERIO): The European Roma Information Office is an international advocacy organisation that promotes political and public discussion on Roma issues by providing factual and in-depth information on a range of policy issues to European Union institutions, Roma civil organisations, governmental authorities and intergovernmental bodies. <http://www.erionet.eu/>

European Women's Lobby (EWL): The European Women's Lobby brings together the women's movement in Europe to influence the general public and European Institutions in support of women's human rights and equality between women and men. <https://www.womenlobby.org/?lang=en>

ILGA Europe are an independent, international non-governmental umbrella organisation bringing together 490 organisations from 45 European countries working towards equality and human rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex people in Europe and Central Asia. <https://ilga-europe.org/>

IGLYO- The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex (LGBTQI) Youth & Student Organisation is the largest LGBTQI youth and student network in the world, with over 95 members in 40+ countries. <http://www.iglyo.com/>