Regions, strategic partners for a *Union of Equality* *(Approved by the CPMR Political Bureau, 24 June 2021)*

**Context**

While the EU is a global leader in gender equality and has made significant progress in the last decades, gender-based violence and stereotypes continue to persist: one in three women in the EU was subject to physical and/or sexual violence. Even though more women graduate from universities, they earn on average 16% less than men do and only 8% of CEO’s of the EU’s largest companies are women.

As Ms. Ursula Von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, expressed in her political guidelines, a *prosperous and social Europe depends on all actors*. In the programming period 2021-2027 under the new MFF, the promotion of equality between women and men, through a gender mainstreaming strategy, has been considered a horizontal principle. This was also highlighted by the European Council in July 2020, calling for the role of the EU budget to be further enhanced in the support of the implementation of EU wide policy objectives, notably in the framework of the European Semester.

This impetus follows the European Pillar of Social Rights, proclaimed by the EU leaders in 2017, built upon 20 key principles. One of these principles is gender equality: Equality of treatment and opportunities between women and men must be ensured and fostered in all areas, including regarding participation in the labour market, terms and conditions of employment and career progression. Women and men have the right to equal pay for work of equal value. The European Pillar of Social Rights has been further enhanced with the publication of its Action Plan in March 2021, aiming at mapping concrete actions for the implementation of the principles.

Gender equality is a growing priority in the EU and a joint responsibility which requires teaming up and action by all EU institutions, Member States and EU agencies, in partnership with civil society and women’s organizations, social partners and the private sector. It is an aim to achieve in all territories. Regions, through their social and economic knowledge and experience on the local level, can play an essential role to fill the gap effectively with tailor-made actions and insights. In the context of the CPMR Gender Task Force, this political declaration represents a first step of the CPMR member regions to commit to:

- Contributing to achieving gender equality in the European Union, in partnership with civil society and women’s organisations, social partners and the private sector;
- Reflecting together on the state-of-play, challenges and opportunities to foster gender equality in the regions;
- Making the most of their territorial assets to exchange best practices and inspire each other;
- Voicing the essential role of the regions to shape and implement gender equality policies;
- Identifying and delivering key actions, valuing synergies with the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025.

*The following key messages constitute a basis for the future works of the CPMR Gender Task Force.*
The need to strive for a Union of Equality:

The CPMR welcomes the initiatives of the new mandate towards Gender Equality, especially:

- The establishment of the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, which represents a significant political commitment on the promotion of gender equality. This is a valuable step up from the previous European Commission term for 2014 – 2019. In that respect, CPMR member regions involved in the Gender Task Force will particularly focus on an exchange of best practices based on the six identified priorities in the strategy: Being free from violence and stereotypes, Thriving in a gender-equal economy, Leading equally throughout society, Gender mainstreaming and an intersectional perspective in EU policies, Funding actions to make progress in gender equality in the EU, Addressing gender equality and women’s empowerment across the world.

- The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, strengthened by the Porto Social Commitment, on its ambitions and the series of actions planned by the European Commission in the dedicated section Building a Union of Equality. In that respect, the CPMR also welcomes the synergies with the European Commission’s goals to Rally forces from all actors promoted in the same Action Plan and reaffirms local and regional authorities as essential actors to consult and coordinate with, for a better identification of gender related issues and an effective production and implementation of gender equality policies. The Action Plan however lacks clear mentions on the equal access to education and job opportunities in the digital and green skills transition for girls and women, which will be a major issue to address in order to shape a sustainable future for the EU.

- Gender Equality as a horizontal principle in the new Common Provisions Regulation for Cohesion Policy funds 2021-2027, and more broadly under the new MFF. Gender mainstreaming is an essential tool to tackle gender gap as a transversal issue and involve the integration of a gender perspective into the preparation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, regulatory measures and spending programmes, with a view to promoting equality between women and men, and combating discrimination.

- The creation of a European Commission Gender Equality Task Force, which aims at reaching all the different policy areas in a structured manner, under the monitoring of DG JUST. This initiative sets an example at EU level. The CPMR Gender Task Force would welcome regular contacts with this Task Force to exchange good practices.

The CPMR stresses essential contextual elements to take into account for the building of a gender-balanced future in the EU:

- The economic importance of gender equality. Equality between men and women is fundamental to economic growth, and a well-functioning economy depends on the participation of all European citizens regardless of their sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion, or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation. A social market economy implies an economy based on social fairness, where people and business can only prosper if the economy works for them. Therefore, working towards reducing gender pay gap is essential to a sustainable society and economy in Europe. To this end, it is essential to arbitrate more conciliation measures and promote the progressive incorporation of man into care (for minors, for the elderly, for dependent persons).

- The need for a particular attention to the context of recovery, including the implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF). In the COVID-19 pandemic, bail out and stimulus packages must tackle inequalities between men and women, include protections that take into account consideration of the special circumstances of women and recognise the care economy. Women must be included in the response and recovery decision-making at all levels.
• The necessity to ensure a fair and just transition in the EU and global ambitions for carbon neutrality and a digital green future. Digitalisation will be a key component in the future of Europe, thus it is essential to work on closing the gender gap from the access, use, education, to the participation in the labour market in the digital sector, which should allow equal chances for men and women. A special attention should be given notably to the place of women in the innovation sector with STEM positions, predicted to double over the next 10 years.

• Equal rights, equal opportunities, and the freedom from abuse and discrimination is a fundamental human right. All forms of discrimination based on gender-related difference must be combatted and ending gender-based violence should be a core priority in order to ensure the well-being of all European citizens.

Gender Equality is a global issue as much as it is a local one. Thus, regions must be involved in decision-making and implementation of EU and international strategies related to gender equality. The CPMR calls for:

• A greater involvement of the regional and local authorities. Regions have responsibilities and competences in the implementation of their national strategies on gender equality, which makes them essential actors to consider and to consult at the EU level. These regional strategies should be considered in the development of the equality strategy 2020-2025. Multi-governance is key and regions can bring an important added-value to policy-making and implementation.

• A disaggregation of data by region. Currently, important differences between regions in levels of progress and capacity for gender equality are holding back the full potential to implement policies. Regional data and indicators should be further encouraged.

• An improved importance of gender mainstreaming in sectoral policies. In the next EU budget (2021-2027), gender equality-related projects will be supported and funded through several EU programmes: from dedicated grants under the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme to the big structural, social and cohesive EU funds.