Plan International’s recommendations on the draft EU Gender Action Plan 2016-2020
Overarching Recommendations

Gender equality starts with girls
Effectively promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment requires a comprehensive understanding of gender which goes beyond women. Discrimination against women starts from before they are born, and as such efforts to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment must start with girls. As such, the Gender Action Plan should refer to girls and women consistently throughout the sections.

Addressing social norms and discrimination
Harmful social norms and attitudes are at the heart of discrimination against girls and women and are the root cause of all the issues that the EU is seeking to address in the Action Plan. The idea that girls and women are subordinate to boys and men and that they have completely different roles and responsibilities is picked up by girls and boys from the beginning of their lives and continues to be reinforced – within the family, the local community, at school, through the media and in the church, temple, mosque or synagogue. The impact of this gender inequality is far-reaching and pervades the social institutions which structure girls and women’s lives in both private and public spheres. In many societies girls and women are seen as property of the menfolk. Tackling social norms is therefore vital to ensuring transformative change.

No cherry-picking on essential action areas
Since EU Delegations are likely to be asked to draw up country- and context-specific Gender Action Plans for local implementation, it is absolutely essential that the European Commission identifies a number of areas of action that all parts of the EU system must work on without exception. We suggest that one of these is the work on combatting harmful social norms and attitudes, which are at the root of all discrimination and violence against girls and women. This should be the over-riding, over-arching issue to which the most concerted effort must be given.

Leave no one behind: focus on the most marginalised
An important principle which has emerged throughout the post-2015 process to draw up the Sustainable Development Goals, and which the EU fully supports, is that of ‘leave no one behind’. That reflects a rights-based approach and implies that no goal or target would be considered met until it has been met for all people without exception. We recommend that the Gender Action Plan takes the same approach. In order to do so, it should make clear how the plan will focus on the more marginalised girls and women, especially those who experience multiple factors of discrimination.

Policy coherence for sustainable development
The European Commission must ensure that all Directorate Generals with an external mandate are clearly involved in the implementation of the Action Plan and that Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development is
a principle that is applied in the context of this plan. It should therefore be made clear in the Action Plan how this will be achieved.

Objectives, targets and indicators
Monitoring and accountability rely on clear, quantifiable objectives. In order for the EU to be clear about the nature of change that it aims to achieve, terms such as ‘reduce’ or ‘increase’ should therefore say ‘by how much’, while references to ‘improve’ would need to identify in what ways. The draft indicators must be impact-oriented and aligned as far as possible to the indicators for the Sustainable Development Goals framework. The inclusion of actors and timelines is critical to monitoring and accountability, in order to ensure the effective implementation of the Action Plan.

Disaggregated data
Data should be disaggregated - at a minimum - according to age, geographic location, income quintile (of the family in the case of girls), social status and minority status in order to analyse the multiple factors of discrimination, to identify the most marginalised girls and women who are not being reached and to adjust the Action Plan accordingly.

Adequate resources
An ambitious and comprehensive Action Plan must be backed up by commensurate human and financial resources if it is to be implemented effectively. It is critical that all financial resources - both mainstreaming and specific allocations - can be tracked in order to assist in measuring results, which implies a far better understanding and much more consistent use of the Gender Marker. As regards human resources, greater leadership is needed from senior management and increased capacity of all staff on gender issues is essential if commitments are to be translated into action.
Specific Recommendations

**Section A: Physical and Psychological Integrity**
The Action Plan should adopt a *protection system approach* - which operates in emergency and non-emergency situations - focusing on all the components of such a system, rather than just a few, and on all categories of harm that girls and women face. The country context would then determine whether certain issues were highlighted more than others. Those components that the European Commission might like to consider in greater detail include ensuring legislation and policy comply with all human rights provisions, improving coordination across government departments and between sectors, supporting the provision of preventive and responsive services, ensuring regulation, standards and oversight for service providers, and providing support to train the protection workforce.

**Section B: Inclusive and Sustainable Growth**
Economic growth alone will not succeed in addressing poverty and reducing inequality. It has been proven that the benefits of growth do not ‘trickle down’ to reach all people in society. Domestic policies are also key. Such policies - which the EU should urge the government to put in place – include progressive, redistributive taxation systems and comprehensive social protection policies. Furthermore, economic progress must be based on the *growth of the local private sector*, meaning that policies favouring micro, small and medium enterprises will have the greatest effect in reducing poverty.

For these reasons, this section of the Action Plan should be re-named and reflect a **focus on the economic empowerment of girls and women**. As the ILO Convention 138 states that girls as young as 13 may perform some work in certain contexts and it is inevitable that some girls will need (or want) to start work before 18, they should therefore be covered by the Action Plan. It goes without saying, of course, that it is crucial that all efforts are made to eliminate the need for children to work and to create the conditions for them to be able to stay in education as long as possible.

The EU should therefore promote the decent work agenda, which includes social protection, as a key element of any inclusive and sustainable social and economic development. The EU should urge partner governments to put in place the legislation, policies, investments and enforcement mechanisms necessary to achieve the goal of productive employment and decent work for all. Social protection, which is a right, should be provided to all, depending on circumstances, not just to “vulnerable” women, and this must be reflected in the Action Plan.

**Section C: Voice and Participation**
It is crucial that girls’ and women’s civil and political rights – such as freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, the right to information – are realised if they are to be able to participate in social, economic and political life on an equal footing with boys and men. Similarly, all legislation and policy must be reviewed for discrimination against girls and women and mechanisms and processes must be put in place to allow girls and women
to participate in decision-making which concerns their lives. Specific youth participation measures are needed at the level of local governance, including strengthening both the capabilities of local and national government institutions to engage young people and facilitate their participation as well as strengthening the capabilities of young people themselves to participate.

Section D: Institutional Cultural Shift
Greater leadership across the EU institutions is needed on gender equality. There are two key means to ensure that all management better integrate gender transformative actions into their work. The first is to provide capacity-building on how to do so, while the second is to include it in every performance evaluation and to make promotion and/or appointment contingent on promoting and defending all human rights, with a focus on those of girls and women. It will be particularly important to ensure that Heads of Mission receive such training since they very often have little knowledge of or interest in human rights. However, they can set the tone for how the whole EU Delegation functions and play an important role in supporting the prioritisation of girls’ and women’s rights.

In addition, the Action Plan should push for the different EU tools and instruments, including related thematic strategies and guidelines, human rights country strategies, and funding instruments, to better reinforce each other and create synergies between them.

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