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ILGA-Europe's contribution to the consultation on the future “EU 2020” strategy

1. General comments on the Commission working document

ILGA-Europe¹ is disappointed to note that the Consultation Document presented by the European Commission towards the *Future ‘EU 2020’ Strategy* fails to meet the equality and social dimensions that were laid out in the Renewed Social Agenda of 2008. We concur with the Commission that the strategy for the next 10 years needs to urgently address the negative impact of the financial crisis; however, ILGA-Europe also believes that this aim cannot be reached unless it is supported by a strong anti-discrimination and social backbone.

Europe of 2020 cannot afford to be a society where discrimination and negative stereotypes continue to limit the full economic potential of the European workforce. ILGA-Europe therefore strongly believes that the EU 2020 strategy needs to be widened in scope and incorporate an *Equality and diversity key driver*.

Moreover, ILGA-Europe strongly believes that the European Union needs to be ambitious and look beyond replacing the lost jobs, and actively tackle other growth limiting aspects such as high levels of long term unemployment within various vulnerable communities.

¹ *ILGA-Europe, the European Region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex Association (ILGA), is a European NGO with nearly 300 national and local lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) member organisations in 46 countries. ILGA-Europe works for human rights and equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people at European level. ILGA-Europe enjoys consultative status at Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC) and participative status at the Council of Europe and receives financial support from the European Commission. It is a member of the Platform of European Social NGOs. ILGA-Europe was established as a separate region of the ILGA in 1996. (www.ilga-europe.org)*

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2. The need to focus on Equality and Diversity in times of economic hardship

a) EU equality legislative developments 2000-2010

When the Lisbon Strategy was adopted in the year 2000, the European Union signed and proclaimed the *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union* which came into force last December. In 2000, the European Union also adopted two anti-discrimination directives, namely, *Dir 2000/43/EC Race Equality Directive* and *Dir 2000/78/EC Employment Framework Directive*. The EU has since adopted two additional gender equality directives, namely, the 2004 *Dir 2004/113/EC Goods and Services Directive* and the 2006 *Dir 2006/54/EC Gender 'Recast' Directive*. In 2008 the European Commission has also initiated a new legislative proposal towards a *Horizontal Anti-discrimination Directive*.

b) The Lisbon Strategy and the current economic crisis

The Lisbon Strategy of 2000 had called for "the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, and respect for the environment by 2010". The economic crisis may have over a relatively brief period of time dented these aspirations by reversing some of the Lisbon Strategy's achievements, particularly when it comes to the reduction of the European unemployment rate. It would be a mistake, however, to abandon the ambitious social goals of the European Social Agenda and focus almost exclusively on economic recovery, since economic growth does not by itself guarantee social cohesion and integration.

c) Absence of equality and diversity in the EU 2020 working document

The above highlighted body of legislation for the period 2000-2010 (albeit still incomplete) shows how the EU commitment to anti-discrimination has been a driving force behind some of the most far reaching anti-discrimination legislation in the world. Regrettably, legislation by itself cannot guarantee equality for all; nor can economic growth. The EU can only enhance its achievements in this field by sticking to its strong commitments on equality and diversity irrespectively of the economic crisis, and use them as its strategies to reverse the impacts of the crisis.

The European Commission, knows very well the lasting impact that the 2007 Year of Equal Opportunities for All had in raising awareness on discrimination and giving rise to a number of innovative multiple ground initiatives, including some that tackled multiple discrimination in employment. Sadly, the working document on the future EU 2020 strategy seems to be rolling back some of the social and anti-discrimination aspirations found in the 2008 Renewed Social Agenda. This is very worrying, particularly since the studies and reports published by the European Commission over the past ten years indicate clearly that diversity and equality are important keys to growth and innovation, and provide Europe with a competitive edge.²

In view of the above, the EU cannot afford to lower its aspirations during harder times. The latest Eurobarometer on discrimination³ has shown worrying signs of the economic crisis's impact on a number of communities, particularly those that were already vulnerable. It also

² E.g. *The Business Case for Diversity: Good Practices in the Workplace*, European Commission (2005)

³ *Special Eurobarometer 317: Discrimination in the EU in 2009*, European Commission (2009)

shows that discrimination is on the rise across the EU, and that this rise is correlated to impact of the economic crisis. We fear that a domino effect may be allowed to be triggered into motion and quickly roll back many of the gains of the past years unless the European Commission carefully incorporates social measures horizontally in its policy.

3. ILGA-Europe's Recommendations to the EU 2020 strategy

✓ *Place equality and diversity as a key driver of the EU 2020 strategy*

The EU 2020 needs to adopt equality and diversity as one of its key drivers. Otherwise it will be unlikely that many of Europe's vulnerable individuals will be reached by the strategy.

✓ *Move towards EU consolidated anti-discrimination legislation*

It is important for the European Union to continue to consolidate its equality legislation over the coming 10 years by adopting the Anti-discrimination Directive and bridge the remaining gaps and inconsistencies between the levels of protection for the various equality grounds.

✓ *Tackle causes for long term unemployment within vulnerable communities*

✓ *Set clear employment equality targets and benchmarks*

The EU 2020 strategy cannot afford to be unclear on equality targets and benchmarks. Such targets should ideally consist of a mixture of quantitative and qualitative targets that look both at the number of vulnerable individuals that are successfully integrated in the labour market, and the growing sophistication of equality policy and initiatives at national and local level.

✓ *Funding instruments for the national and local levels*

Effective equality strategies require adequate financial resources to effectively address discrimination and to address issues that are specific to the different groups. EU funding should continue to be put in place to support initiatives that tackle the situation of those experiencing discrimination. Funding needs to be made available for national and local projects on multi-ground equality and diversity and to tackle high levels of long term unemployment within vulnerable communities.

✓ *Remove any visible and invisible barriers to labour mobility*

Discrimination against various minorities, both within the home country or the receiving country, may act as an invisible barrier towards their labour market mobility and hence their employability. It is important that the European Union steps up its efforts towards ensuring free movement of workers and to take action against discriminatory legislation or policies of that are still in force in some Member States.

✓ *Work closely with social partners and civil society to combat discrimination*

During 2009 the European Commission launched a process entitled, '*The role of civil society and trade unions in the fight against discrimination at national level*' that culminated in a

conference and publication⁴. It is important that this process is continued and strengthened through the inclusion of employersqrganisations in future initiatives.

ANNEX

- *International Competitiveness and the New Economy: The role of diversity and Equality*, Gay and Lesbian Equality Network, Ireland (2009)

⁴ *The Role of NGOs and Trade Unions in Combating Discrimination*, European Commission (2009)