

Transforming the lives of girls and women through EU external relations, 2016-2020

A motion for a resolution on the implementation of the Gender Action Plan is scheduled to be voted during the May II plenary session. It is founded on four thematic pillars, namely: ensuring girls' and women's physical and psychological integrity; promoting the economic and social rights as well as empowerment of girls and women; strengthening girls' and women's voice and participation; and shifting the institutional culture within the Commission and the EEAS. The motion for a resolution highlights a number of positive trends that have been noted after the first year of functioning of the Gender Action Plan II 2016-2020 as well as a series of issues and areas for improvement.

Background

The European Parliament, in a previous [resolution](#), had already acknowledged the important progress achieved in the implementation of the [EU Gender Action Plan 2016-2020](#) (often referred to as GAP II). This is the EU's [instrument for promoting gender equality](#) and women's and girls' empowerment, in its external relations with third and partner countries as well as in international fora and agendas. GAP II is significant, as it constitutes a concrete set of proposals based on the principles related to gender parity outlined in the new [European consensus on development](#). Success in reaching its goals is key to the successful achievement of the UN [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs). Action under GAP II further complements the [strategic engagement for gender equality 2016-2019](#), which is also welcomed in the motion for a resolution.

European Parliament position

On 24 April 2018, the Committee on Development (DEVE) and the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) jointly adopted a [report](#) on Gender equality and women's empowerment: transforming the lives of girls and women through EU external relations 2016-2020. This report assesses a Commission [staff working document](#) on this same topic.

Girls' and women's physical and psychological integrity

The motion for a resolution deplores the increase in [sexual and gender-based violence](#), particularly the use of rape as a weapon of war and human trafficking, as a result of regional conflicts and mass migration, which enable organised gangs to prey on the most vulnerable. It welcomes the launch of the joint [EU-UN global gender initiative, Spotlight](#) to address such violence and harmful practices. It calls for more resources to be ear-marked for Spotlight to ensure its success. It calls on all Member States to adopt the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women (the [Istanbul Convention](#)) as an effective measure to curb both violence against women and domestic violence. This convention, which came into force in 2014, is the first legally binding international instrument on preventing and combating violence against women and girls at international level. Though it has been signed by all EU Member States, only [17](#) have so far ratified it. The strategic engagement for gender equality 2016-2017 calls upon all Member States to adopt the Istanbul Convention. The convention also provides for EU accession, to the extent of its competences. This would require the European Parliament's consent.

Girls' and women's economic and social rights

The motion for a resolution highlights the need for the EU to step up its commitment to the adequate implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women ([CEDAW](#)). It maintains that greater inclusion of women on the labour market, better support for

female entrepreneurship, safeguarding equal opportunities and equal pay for men and women, and promoting work-life balance are key factors in achieving long-term inclusive economic growth, combating inequalities, and encouraging women's financial independence. It also stresses the need to empower rural women by improving their access to land, water, education, training, markets and financial services. Access to [sexual and reproductive health](#) services is also an essential pillar of women's rights, given that family planning and contraception rights succumb to [revisionist rhetoric](#) even in key developed countries. On average, [214 million women](#) in developing countries wish to avoid pregnancy but do not have access to, or fail to use, effective contraception, which leads to around [75 million unintended pregnancies annually](#). Unplanned parenthood is a serious cause of premature termination of education or employment, thereby further aggravating gender disparity and dependence.

Girls' and women's voices and participation

As highlighted in the motion for a resolution and in a recent European Parliament [study](#) on the implementation of GAP II, the role of women in peace negotiations and mediation remains under-developed. GAP II highlights the important role of [women in promoting dialogue and building trust](#), building coalitions for peace and bringing different perspectives on what peace and security mean, in particular in conflict prevention and resolution, and post-conflict reconstruction. GAP II also notes that the promotion of women's rights in crisis or conflict-ridden countries fosters stronger and more resilient communities. In GAP II though, this role is mentioned only under the thematic priority on 'Political and Civil Rights – Voice and Participation' and is associated solely with a quantitative indicator. Advancing women's political participation is [crucial for delivering on the SDGs](#). That is why the fifth target for SDG 5 aims to 'ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life'. The motion for a resolution regrets that the role of women in peace negotiations and mediation, as taken into consideration in GAP II, is not sufficient, and calls for a dedicated budget line on gender equality to be established in order to address, in a more prominent way, women's political participation in the EU's neighbouring countries and within the EU.

A shift in institutional culture

The motion for a resolution notes that the empowerment of girls and women is one of the stated goals of EU external action through the [global strategy for common foreign and security policy](#). The motion draws attention to the Commission's commitment to gender mainstreaming and integrating gender analysis and perspectives across all instruments, and calls for this approach to be reflected in all EU tools, in particular in the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR). To this end, it welcomes the designation of an [EEAS Principal Advisor on Gender](#). It calls on the Commission and EEAS to take further steps to facilitate exchange of best practice in improving gender equality and gender mainstreaming in delegations and headquarters units, such as establishing and promoting a network of gender focal points. On the implementation of [UN Security Council Resolution 1325](#) on women, peace and security, it encourages the strengthening of EU Member State and international action through the United Nations, to address more effectively the impact of conflict and post-conflict situations on women and girls. To this end, it calls on the Commission to support the new global 'women, peace and security focal points' network, and highlights the importance of [UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on youth, peace and security](#) and the importance of finding the best possible ways for the EU to implement this UN resolution.

Own-initiative report: [2017/2012\(INI\)](#); Joint Committee procedure (Rule 55); Committees responsible: DEVE and FEMM; Rapporteurs: Linda McAvan (S&D, United Kingdom), Dubravka Šuica (EPP, Croatia).

