EU Gender Action Plan 2016-2020 at year one

European Implementation Assessment

STUDY

EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service
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Ex-Post Evaluation Unit
PE 603.256 - October 2017
EU Gender Action Plan 2016-2020 at year one

European Implementation Assessment

Study

On 13 December 2016, the Conference of Committee Chairs approved the joint request by the Committee on Development (DEVE) and the Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) to undertake an implementation report on the ‘Implementation of the Joint Staff Working Document (SWD(2015)0182) – Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment: Transforming the Lives of Girls and Women through EU External Relations 2016-2020’ – Rapporteurs: Linda McAvan (DEVE) and Dubravka Šuica (FEMM). This decision triggered the automatic production of a European Implementation Assessment, which routinely accompanies such implementation reports.

This European Implementation Assessment on the one-year evaluation of the Gender Action Plan for 2016-2020 was drawn up by the Ex-Post Evaluation Unit of the Directorate for Impact Assessment and European Added Value, in the European Parliament’s Directorate-General for Parliamentary Research Services. It aims at contributing to the Parliament’s discussions on this topic, enhancing understanding of the subject, and ultimately feeding into the implementation report under preparation by the two aforementioned rapporteurs.

Abstract

The EU’s Gender Action Plan 2016-2020 (referred to as GAP II) is the Union’s framework for promoting gender equality and women and girls’ empowerment in external relations in third and partner countries, as well as in international fora and agendas. GAP II is significant, as it constitutes the manifestation of the principles related to gender parity outlined in the new European Consensus on Development. Its goals are also key to the successful achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Against this background, this European Implementation Assessment seeks to provide an initial assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of GAP II at its first milestone: the end of its first year of operation in third countries. Given the short timeframe of the evaluation, this study presents some preliminary findings on the achievements and shortcomings in the application of GAP II, but also aims to assess the new framework itself. Moreover, it provides Members with a number of opportunities for action and recommendations for improving EU performance on promoting and protecting gender parity and women’s empowerment in partner countries.
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The author wishes to thank Marta Mendez Juez, Trainee in the Ex-Post Evaluation Unit, for her research assistance on this study. The author is also grateful to the peer reviewers for constructive comments and to anonymous interlocutors in the European Commission for their insights on the topic at hand.

ABOUT THE PUBLISHER
This paper has been drawn up by the Ex-Post Evaluation Unit of the Directorate for Impact Assessment and European Added Value, within the Directorate-General for Parliamentary Research Services of the Secretariat of the European Parliament.

LINGUISTIC VERSIONS
Original: EN

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Manuscript completed in October 2017.

PE 603.256
DOI: 10.2861/75103
CAT: QA-02-17-807-EN-N
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<td>ACP</td>
<td>African, Caribbean and Pacific countries</td>
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<tr>
<td>ADB</td>
<td>Asian Development Bank</td>
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<td>AfDB</td>
<td>African Development Bank</td>
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<td>AU</td>
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<td>CEDAW</td>
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<td>CSD</td>
<td>Civil Society Dialogue</td>
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<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil Society Organisation</td>
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<td>CSOLA</td>
<td>Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities</td>
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<td>CFSP</td>
<td>Common Foreign and Security Policy</td>
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<td>CSDP</td>
<td>Common Security and Defence Policy</td>
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<td>DAC</td>
<td>Development Assistance Committee, OECD</td>
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<td>DCI</td>
<td>Development Cooperation Instrument</td>
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<td>DEVE</td>
<td>Committee on Development, European Parliament</td>
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<td>DG</td>
<td>Directorate General</td>
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<td>DG DEVCO</td>
<td>Directorate General for International Cooperation and Development, European Commission</td>
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<td>DG NEAR</td>
<td>Directorate General for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, European Commission</td>
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<td>EAMR</td>
<td>External Action Management Report</td>
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<td>EBRD</td>
<td>European Bank for Reconstruction and Development</td>
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<td>EC</td>
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<td>Directorate General or European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, European Commission</td>
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<td>EDF</td>
<td>European Development Fund</td>
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<td>EIA</td>
<td>European Implementation Assessment</td>
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<td>EIDHR</td>
<td>European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights</td>
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<td>ENP</td>
<td>European Neighbourhood Policy</td>
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<td>EOM</td>
<td>Electoral Observation Mission</td>
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<td>European Union</td>
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<td>EUD</td>
<td>European Union Delegation</td>
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<td>EURS</td>
<td>European Union Special Security Representatives</td>
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<td>EVAL</td>
<td>Ex-Post Evaluation Unit, Directorate for Impact Assessment and European Added Value, European Parliamentary Research Service, European Parliament</td>
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<tr>
<td>FEMM</td>
<td>Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality, European Parliament</td>
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<td>GAP</td>
<td>Gender Action Plan</td>
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<td>GAP I</td>
<td>Gender Action Plan 2010-2015</td>
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<td>GAP II</td>
<td>Gender Action Plan 2016-2020</td>
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<td>GDP</td>
<td>gross domestic product</td>
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<td>GFP</td>
<td>gender focal person</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<td>GII</td>
<td>Gender Inequality Index</td>
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<td>HoD</td>
<td>Head of Delegation</td>
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<tr>
<td>HRD</td>
<td>human rights defender</td>
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<td>HQ</td>
<td>Headquarter</td>
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<tr>
<td>IcSP</td>
<td>Instrument contributing to Security and Peace</td>
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<td>IDB</td>
<td>Inter-American Development Bank</td>
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<tr>
<td>IFI</td>
<td>International Financial Institution</td>
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<tr>
<td>IIS</td>
<td>Instrument for Stability</td>
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<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>INTA</td>
<td>Committee on International Trade, European Parliament</td>
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<td>JAES</td>
<td>Joint Africa-EU Strategy</td>
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<td>MDGs</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>M&amp;E</td>
<td>monitoring and evaluation</td>
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<tr>
<td>MENA</td>
<td>Middle East and North Africa</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>ODI</td>
<td>Overseas Development Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>ODA</td>
<td>Overseas Development Assistance</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>OSCE</td>
<td>Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe</td>
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<tr>
<td>PCD</td>
<td>policy coherence for development</td>
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<tr>
<td>SARD</td>
<td>Southern African Development Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>SDGs</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIA</td>
<td>Sustainability Impact Assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>SME</td>
<td>Small and medium-sized enterprise</td>
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<tr>
<td>VP/HR</td>
<td>Vice-President (of the European Commission)/High Representative (of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy)</td>
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<tr>
<td>WTO</td>
<td>World Trade Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNSCR</td>
<td>United Nations Security Council Resolution</td>
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<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>United States (of America)</td>
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Executive summary

The EU’s Gender Action Plan 2016-2020 (referred to as GAP II) is the Union’s framework for promoting gender equality and women and girls’ empowerment in external relations in third and partner countries, as well as in international fora and agendas. GAP II is significant, because it constitutes the manifestation of the principles related to gender parity outlined in the new European Consensus on Development. Its goals are also key to the successful achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This European Implementation Assessment (EIA) of the first year of implementation of GAP II was prepared to accompany the drafting of the implementation report on this topic by the European Parliament Committee on Development (DEVE) and the Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM). This evaluation was prepared in full recognition of the short timeframe since the adoption of GAP II and its application (only one year to date). Accordingly, the objectives set take into consideration that, under these circumstances, it is too early to make a full assessment of the impact of GAP II.

The objectives of this EIA are threefold:

- First, to take stock of, on the one hand, the progress and achievements of GAP II and, on the other, the difficulties and possible inconsistencies met when implementing GAP II in third countries and across the whole spectrum of its external action.
- Second, given the short timeframe for the evaluation, to examine and assess GAP II framework itself.
- Third, to draw conclusions on how to improve EU action in support of gender equality and women’s empowerment in third countries and offer some openings for action for improving EU performance in this area.

This evaluation’s first section lays out the main tenets of gender equality and the limits of the use of quantitative data in this area. It goes on to place the notion of gender equality and women’s empowerment within the international context and the EU framework. While the new framework offers a real opportunity to improve EU action on gender equality, its strengths also depend on how well GAP II has addressed the potential risks and weaknesses of the previous framework, GAP 2010-2015 (also referred to as GAP I). In addition to delving into this issue, this section also examines how the EU’s new GAP II compares to the best practices of other international donors on gender equality and women’s empowerment in third countries.

First insights into the application of GAP II show that the EU has fundamentally mainstreamed the notion and significance of gender equality and women’s empowerment in partner countries in its discourse and external relations and cooperation programmes. It has taken on board a number of lessons identified from its experience of the preceding Gender Action Plan 2010-2015 (GAP I). Progress on supporting gender equality in EU external action demonstrates that there is an understanding at EU decision-making level that empowering girls and women across the globe is not an option in our times, but a duty and a responsibility to future generations. In turn, gender
parity in partner countries has become synonymous with increasing productivity and economic growth, respect and protection of human rights, sustainability and resilience of a society.

Important GAP II successes so far include a better understanding of the underpinnings of gender equality, including the role of men in ensuring gender equality and promoting women’s empowerment. One of the most important achievements has been making progress on GAP II focus on shifting EU institutional culture at headquarters (HQ) and delegation levels, therefore pushing for a true systemic change in the EU institutions on gender equality issues. In addition, much effort has been made in reaching out to civil society actors, working better with other international donors present on the ground, and consulting with stakeholders. This has in turn translated into stronger investments in human capital and financial assistance for gender parity; an improvement of and systematic monitoring of relevant activities; and the use of clear guidelines for programme implementation. In that respect, the first annual European Commission/EEAS monitoring report provided a clear template for identifying how well their services have responded to the gender equality requirements of their programmes at HQ and EU delegation levels.

Some weaknesses, however, persist, especially in terms of focusing on specific facets of EU external action – the framework tends to concentrate on development aspects per se and not enough on the EU’s potential in fragile and conflict countries and the use of trade as political leverage to promote human rights. In addition, GAP II monitoring over-concentrates on quantitative assessments of programmes and activities rather than centring on the quality of delivery and potential (short-term, medium-term and long-term) impact on recipient countries.

This study demonstrates that sustainable change in women’s empowerment and gender parity in partner countries is a complex and lengthy process. It necessitates that the EU engages consistently and in the long-term; that EU efforts are adapted to local realities in recipient countries; that the EU demonstrates its political commitment clearly across regions and at all levels; that improvements and further specialisation in training on gender equality issues is necessary and that it should be made available to local partners at government and among non-state actors (including NGOs); and, finally, that a ‘whole of society’ approach be adopted in parallel to a ‘whole of government’ approach when engaging with partner countries.
Introduction

The reviewed European Union (EU) framework on ‘Gender equality and women’s empowerment: transforming the lives of girls and women through EU external relations 2016-2020’ (referred to as Gender Action Plan 2016-2020 or GAP II),\(^1\) was published in September 2015 and has created many expectations. GAP II outlines an ambitious and clear approach to gender equality and the promotion, protection and fulfilment of women and girls’ human rights in third countries. It follows and builds on the Gender Action Plan for 2010-2015 (known as GAP I),\(^2\) which was seen as lacking institutional leadership, accountability and capacity.\(^3\) EU efforts on gender equality have received scant prioritisation in EU external action and a recent evaluation gave a scathing assessment of the EU’s support in this area.\(^4\)

At the time of its launch, experts had projected that ‘if implemented fully, [GAP II] would greatly increase women’s and girls’ opportunities to improve their lives, to enjoy and exercise their full human rights and seek redress when these rights are denied or abused.’\(^5\) This European Implementation Assessment, which seeks to inform the improvement of performance of the EU in this field rather than determine its impact, aims at examining whether the expectations set can be and have been met.

Even following decades of efforts at an international – not only EU – level and despite the progress made towards enabling women to become equal partners with men in the economy and society, the gap between the genders remains large. Gender equality and women’s empowerment are now mainstream dimensions of any development discourse, including the EU discourse. Gender equality has become a standard barometer for measuring the maturity of a society. Nonetheless, persistent social norms, structures, institutions and entrenched power relationships still prevent girls and women in numerous third countries from participating on equal terms in public, social and political life.

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Nevertheless, gender equality is not just a matter of social justice or of principles; it is also one of ‘smart economics’. Women’s participation in the economy is essential for sustainable development and economic growth. A 2012 OECD study estimated that closing the labour force gender gap by 2030 could yield a potential average gain of 12 % GDP in relation to the size of the total economy across OECD countries. The same study noted that if women had equal access to productive resources as men, they could increase yields on their farms by 20-30 % and raise total agricultural outputs. This could lift an estimated 100-150 million people out of hunger worldwide, amongst other benefits.6

![Figure 1: GDP gain in 2025 by closing the global gender gap](image)


In a more recent study that examined 15 gender equality indicators8 for 95 countries, the McKinsey Global Institute showed that narrowing the global gender gap in work would not only be equitable in the broadest sense, but could double the contribution of women to global GDP growth between 2014 and 2025 (see Figure 1). Effectively, according to that study, a ‘full-potential’ scenario in which women participate in the economy identically to men, female participation would add up to $28 trillion (the equivalent of € 26.5 trillion), or 26 %, to the annual global GDP in 2025 compared with a business-as-

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7 These estimates assume that there is no decline in male participation as a result of the rising number of women entering the workforce.

8 These indicators fall into four categories: (1) equality in work; (2) essential services and enablers of economic opportunity; (3) legal protection and political voice; (4) and physical security and autonomy.
usual scenario. This impact is roughly equivalent to the size of the combined United
States (US) and Chinese economies.  

1.1. Objectives
Against this backdrop, this European Implementation Assessment seeks to examine if the
attention the EU has given to gender equality and women’s empowerment in third
countries as a result and within the context of GAP II has positive results in its first year in
operation, and whether it has the potential to ensure that positive results are
consolidated.

Systematic reporting on GAP II by all EU actors has been set to improve the effectiveness,
transparency and coherence of EU investments and their impact on gender equality and
to improve accountability of EU investments to EU citizens and ultimately to
beneficiaries. The Council called on the European Commission services and the EEAS to
inform the Council on an annual basis on the implementation of GAP II. It is in this
context that the Conference of Committee Chairs approved the request by the DEVE and
FEMM Committees for an implementation report on GAP II, which automatically
triggered the preparation of this European Implementation Assessment.

In this context, this study has a threefold aim:
- First, to take stock of, on the one hand, the progress and achievements of GAP II
  and, on the other, the difficulties and possible inconsistencies met when
  implementing GAP II in third countries and across the whole spectrum of its
  external action.
- Second, the timing of this evaluation (at the end of only one year of
  implementation, as the starting date for implementation of GAP II was
  January 2016) provides Members with the opportunity to recommend ways of
  rectifying weaknesses identified in the GAP II framework itself. For this reason,
  beyond examining and assessing the implementation of GAP II, this study also
  evaluates the GAP II framework itself.
- Third, this evaluation seeks to draw lessons on how to improve EU action in
  support of gender equality and women’s empowerment in third countries and
  outlines possible opportunities for action for improving EU performance in this
  area.

1.2. Methodology
The preparation by the DEVE and FEMM Committees of the implementation report on
GAP II coincides with the drafting of the first year monitoring report by the European
Commission Directorate General for International Cooperation and Development (DG
DEVCO) in cooperation with the European External Action Service (EEAS). This

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9 Woetzel, Jonathan et al., The Power of Parity: How Advancing Women’s Equality Can Add $12 Trillion

10 Council of the EU, Gender Action Plan 2016-2020 - Council Conclusions (26 October 2015), reference
no.: 13201/15, Brussels, 26 October 2015, p. 6.
European Implementation Assessment aims at accompanying the work of the two Committees on their implementation report on the topic.

Three factors affected the choice of objectives and methodology for this study. First, the timeframe of the evaluation, which in this case is of only one year. As noted in the Ex-Post Evaluation (EVAL) Unit of the Directorate for Impact Assessment and European Added Value working document on the ‘method and process’ that EVAL follows when undertaking implementation assessments, an interval of at least three years of policy intervention/implementation is recommended before undertaking an evidence-based evaluation of the relevance, impact, effectiveness and efficiency of EU action. Otherwise, the findings are limited to an overview of the state of the transposition of the policy, to the extent that relevant information on the implementation is available. This European Implementation Assessment therefore recognises the limits to evaluating GAP II, the fact that it is not possible to assess whether change has taken place, whether it is the result of GAP II, and if it can be sustainable. Accordingly, engaging in change on gender equality during the first year of implementation is recorded as a success.

Second, the limited availability of first hand data on the single year of implementation of GAP II. This results from the fact that the first final draft of the study was written before the European Commission/EEAS annual monitoring report was published. Alternative sources of information were therefore used. More specifically, this evaluation examined experiences and possible lessons on the implementation of EU efforts on gender equality and women’s empowerment in its external action, collected and analysed by think tanks, NGOs and other non-state actors. These are also complemented by the accounts of think tanks, EU and NGO workers in the field, which have been collected either through interviews or at events organised on the issue at hand in the Brussels environment. These accounts were further supplemented by the data, lessons, achievements and weaknesses of GAP II, as identified in the annual European Commission/EEAS monitoring report.

Third, the study acknowledges the inherent limitations of this approach. These refer to the fact civil society actors consulted for the preparation of this study are not representative of the entire civil society in a country or region. In addition, it is recognised that civil society does not necessarily have the full picture of either the EU intervention in a country or region, or of the diverse aspects of its external action (development, trade, humanitarian aid, security support) that are underway.

Considering the short timeframe since the implementation of GAP II, this evaluation also examines whether the lessons identified by think tanks and other civil society actors, as

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12 For the purpose of this study, non-state actors are understood, to include the private sector, economic and social partners, including trade union organisations, and civil society, which is in line with agreements the EU has with the developing world (see, for example, *Article 6: Definitions*, in the Cotonou Agreement, p. 7).
well as the evaluation of GAP I that the European Commission contracted, and recommendations proposed therein, have been incorporated when preparing GAP II.

To respond further to the above limitations, the analysis in this European Implementation Assessment makes use of statistical data available in Eurostat and OECD databases. It also includes empirical evidence collected in secondary literature related to the evaluation of the EU contribution to gender parity and women’s empowerment in third countries because of GAP II and its implementation. Moreover, this study includes, when and where necessary, quantitative data regarding specific EU external action financing programmes that is found in the European Commission/EEAS monitoring report on GAP II.

When it comes to the sources of data used in the European Commission/EEAS annual monitoring report on the first year of implementation of GAP II, an internal database and reporting tools regularly used by the European Commission and the EEAS for their management implementation, helped to collect the necessary data for the monitoring of activities. These tools include the External Action Management Report (EAMR); data drawn from the EU Results Framework and Commission’s Statistical Dashboard database, the International Cooperation and Development Result Framework; the OECD DAC policy marker for gender equality and women empowerment; and a specific survey targeting Gender Focal Persons. The annual monitoring report also drew on findings from semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders in the EEAS and the European Commission. Reporting on the thematic objectives was collected from EU delegations (EUDs) (a Scoping Study of Gender Analysis Studies/Profiles) and the thematic operational units at HQ level, in line with the March 2016 guidance note on GAP II.

**Box 1: Key definitions**

**Empowerment:** the range of options that create opportunities and reinforce individual and collective capacities to exercise control over the life of individuals and offer them more choices. In that sense, empowerment can mean access to and control over resources, but also self-determination and participation.

**Gender:** social and cultural differences between men and women that assign value and create unequal opportunities in life. These characteristics are variable. Policies and

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structures play a very important role in shaping the conditions of life and, in doing so, they often institutionalise the social construction of gender.\textsuperscript{15}

*Gender analysis* refers to ‘the study of differences in the conditions, needs, participation rates, access to resources and development, control of assets, decision-making powers, etc., between women and men in their assigned gender roles.’\textsuperscript{16}

Gender analysis is the basis for gender mainstreaming (explained below) and helps to understand gender inequalities in a given situation or sector and to formulate projects or (sector) programmes in a way that they address and redress the situation.

Gender analysis also helps to understand the root causes of inequalities, how they might impact on the outcomes of a programme, how to tackle these; as well as to detect if there is a need for specific, targeted actions for women and girls (or, in a given situation, for men and boys). At the very least, it helps to understand how not to cause any further damage (‘do no harm’ principle), thus avoiding incorrect assumptions and stereotypes and reproducing unequal power relationships.\textsuperscript{17}

**Gender equality:** the absence of discrimination based on gender in the allocation of resources, benefits and access to services.

**Gender equity:** achieving equal treatment in the distribution of benefits and opportunities between women and men under the law and in practice by mainstreaming gender into various areas of policy, and in public and private life.

**Gender mainstreaming** refers to the integration of gender analysis in all aid projects, programmes and policies.\textsuperscript{18} Building on the 1995 UN Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing and a relevant European Commission communication,\textsuperscript{19} the passing in December 1998 of the EU Council Resolution on

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Integrating Gender Issues in Development Cooperation constituted a breakthrough as regards gender awareness in official policy.\textsuperscript{20}

**Gender Focal Person (GFP):** ‘a member who is responsible for facilitating the promotion of women’s empowerment and gender equality issues in the activities of the [EU] delegation.’\textsuperscript{21} More specifically, the GFP should spend 40-60\% of their weekly time on gender issues. Duties notably include:

- Maintaining contact with civil society organisations (CSOs), women’s groups, European and global networks and collaborating in identifying partner organisations representing women’s and gender equality interests related to the technical areas of interest;
- Soliciting a gender-balanced participation of experts used for European Commission-funded activities; and
- Maintaining a roster of gender-sensitive experts to call on, whenever needed, for the review, evaluation, etc. of all activities.

An additional gender champion, if deemed necessary, who is picked and appointed from an EU delegation or EU Member State staff, may complement the GFPs work.\textsuperscript{22}

**Intersectionality:** an analytical tool for understanding and responding to the ways gender identity intersects with and is constituted by other social factors, such as race, age, ethnicity, class, colonial histories, religious, social and cultural categories and identities, and sexual orientation.\textsuperscript{23}


\textsuperscript{22} CONCORD, *EU Gender Action Plan II: Opportunities for Civil Society Participation to Kick-start Implementation*, CONCORD: European NGO confederation for relief and development, Brussels, p. 3.

2. EU framework for gender parity and women’s empowerment in third countries

This section lays out the main tenets of gender equality and the limits of the use of quantitative data on the issue. It goes on to place the notion of gender equality and women’s empowerment within the international context and the EU framework.

2.1. Closing the gender gap in third countries

It is difficult to assess the exact degree of gender inequality across regions, as different organisations use different variables, do not define geographic regions in a homogeneous way, and do not use quantitative data in the same way. This should alarm policy makers to the over-simplification of complex issues using quantitative data, and to the limits of such data (see section on Quantity over quality).

The McKinsey Global Institute report on ‘The Power of Parity’, for example, had received much attention for the conclusion it drew from using the Gender Parity Score, which measures the distance each country has travelled toward gender parity (set at 1.00). This report found that there is more gender inequality in sub-Saharan Africa (0.54) than in the Middle East and North Africa (0.48), India (0.48) and South Asia (excluding India) (0.44). However, the use of the more prominent Gender Inequality Index (GII), developed by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and its adaptation to how the EU organises its development aid across the world (Figure 2 labels the geographic regions according to how the EU designates regions for its financial instruments), gives quite different results.

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25 UNDP’s Gender Inequality Index (GII) links gender inequality to human development and provides a notable guide to measuring gender inequalities in three important aspects of human development: reproductive health (measured by maternal mortality ratio and adolescent birth rates); empowerment (measured by proportion of parliamentary seats occupied by females and proportion of adult females and males aged 25 years and older, with at least some secondary education); and economic status (measured by labour force participation rate of female and male populations aged 15 years and older).

26 It should be noted that the UNDP does not provide a GII variable for all the countries for which the EU makes aid available. Accordingly, for each of the regions, the following countries were included: Africa (Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo-Brazzaville, Congo-Kinshasa, Cote d’Ivoire, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe), Asia (Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Laos, Myanmar/Burma, Bhutan, Nepal, Thailand, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines), Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan), Caribbean and Pacific (St. Lucia, Cuba, Bahamas, Barbados, Dominican Republic, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Haiti, Suriname, Belize, Jamaica, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga), Eastern neighbourhood (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine), Gulf (Yemen, Iraq and Iran), Southern neighbourhood (Algeria, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Syria and Tunisia), and Latin America (Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, Argentina, Peru, Venezuela, Chile,
As Figure 2 illustrates, when the distinction is made between the Gulf and the Southern neighbourhood, it becomes clearer that although extreme poverty (most pertinently, in Africa) plays an important role in fuelling gender inequality (McKinsey’s Gender Parity Score), social norms and attitudes can also have devastating effects on gender equality in terms of violence against women, access to (reproductive) health, education, and (quality) jobs (UNDP’s GII). When considering the data presented in Figure 2, note that, contrary to the Gender Parity Score, the higher the GII value the bigger the disparity between females and males, and the more loss to human development.27

Figure 2: Gender Inequality Index - Regional comparison of EU development aid

Source: Author using data from UNDP’s Gender Inequality Index 2016.

Regardles of the divergence across organisations on the level of gender inequality, what comes across resoundingly from stakeholders working on women’s empowerment is that ‘gender gaps exist in capabilities as well as opportunities, and progress is still too slow for realising the full potential of half of humanity’.28 Consequently, it is important to look at what types of intervention experts and policy makers across the world consider as necessary to bridge the gender gap, and against which GAP II can be evaluated. Experts suggest that to strengthen gender equality in external relations, the following factors must be tackled in parallel through ‘a comprehensive and sustained portfolio of initiatives’.29

Ecuador, Guatemala, Bolivia, Honduras, Paraguay, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Panama, Uruguay).

27 For further information on how the GII is calculated, refer to the Technical Notes.


A key factor affecting women’s empowerment is labour market characteristics. Women’s economic participation per se is not necessarily equal to women’s economic empowerment. While increasing the number of women in the workforce is an important objective, it is necessary to provide decent working conditions (in line with the International Labour Organisation decent work agenda) to improve their empowerment. Women (especially in developing countries and conflict environments) often face exploitation, dangerous or stigmatised work, low pay, and job insecurity. In addition, although women’s capacity to seize economic opportunities can be substantially improved through individual support (e.g., training in business management skills), what remains most important is to simultaneously tackle the structural causes of gender inequality. In addition, fiscal policy has significant gendered impacts given that it concerns the resources available to governments to advance gender equality, either directly or indirectly (via spending on health, education and other services), and that revenue-raising methods can be gender-discriminatory. This encompasses gender-sensitive government budgeting and public expenditure, access to public jobs, recognition of unpaid housework, taxation policies and measures to reduce possible disproportionate tax burden on women.

Collective norms and perceptions have affected women’s place in society and in the workplace. Dominant patriarchal societies tend to tolerate gender-based violence, creating a challenging environment to promote gender equality and women empowerment. Furthermore, in these societies, human rights and culture are perceived as conflicting concepts. McKinsey Global Institute has established a strong link between gender equality in society, attitudes and beliefs about the role of women, and gender equality in work. More specifically, it has found that an increase in gender equality in society is linked with an increase in gender equality in work. Therefore, beyond economic development, progress in four areas in particular – political underrepresentation; legal protection and countering violence against women; health; and education level and digital inclusion – could help accelerate closing the gender gap.

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Experts on gender equality in third countries argue that no development strategy will be effective unless women play a central role. As Rodríguez Ruiz and Rubio-Marín conclude in their analysis of Europe’s parity laws, the equal representation of men and women in public office is not about matching quota laws to electoral institutions, but about achieving ‘a structural prerequisite of the democratic state’ and ‘a permanent feature of good governance’. Public policy has an important role to play to bring down structural barriers to gender parity. It can push for men and women to be equally perceived as workers and caregivers at home through the right legislation, the provision of care services. It also can help protect women and girls from violence, including intimate partner violence, child marriage and female genital mutilation.

Health is a key factor to consider when examining the dynamics of gender inequality. Despite women’s contribution to the wellness of their families and communities, hazards to their own health are among the key factors holding women back. According to the World Health Organisation, 18 million women worldwide die every year from non-communicable diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, infectious and parasitic diseases, respiratory diseases and infections, diabetes, autoimmune disorders and forms of cancers.

Education, including community-level education, has a key role to play in addressing collective norms and perceptions that instigate gender inequality. Investing in girls and women has multidimensional benefits—for example, if all girls in developing countries completed secondary education, the under-five mortality rate would be halved. ‘Lower legal gender equality is associated with fewer girls attending secondary school relative to boys, fewer women working or running businesses and a wider gender wage gap.’

Women also need support to pursue higher education, particularly in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, where future demand for high-level work will be. Access to education (beyond primary education), technology and skills, and health services, protect against internal and international migration (affecting in particular vulnerable groups, e.g., domestic workers, adolescent workers) and sexual violence and abuse.

### 2.2. International prerogatives on gender parity

The protection of women’s rights and gender equality for both men and women in all spheres of life is solidly embedded in the international regulatory and policy framework. First included in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) as a core human rights principle, the protection of women’s rights and gender equality is further enshrined in a range of international instruments, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979) and the Protocol to the Convention on the Political Rights of Women (2010). These and other international standards and legal instruments are designed to ensure that women are fully included in all aspects of society, including political, economic, social, and cultural life.

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right, it has also been endorsed in numerous UN conventions. These include most notably, the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979), the ‘Beijing Platform for Action’ (1995), the ‘Agenda 21’ of the UN Conference on Environment and Development (1993), the ‘Declaration and Action Plan of the World Food Summit’ (Rome, 1996), and the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 that calls for the active participation of women in all stages of conflict prevention and conflict management and their protection against sexual violence and rape in armed conflict. International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions and recommendations relevant to women’s economic empowerment and other UN-led initiatives (e.g., the Guiding principles on business and human rights and the Women’s empowerment principles) also protect and promote gender equality.\textsuperscript{42} In addition, the EU’s candidate countries (covered by the GAP II) have ratified the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul, 2011).

2015 was a pivotal year for gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women in the global context with the inter-governmental negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda leading to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The strong EU (and EU Member States) positioning on the development agenda clearly contributed to gender equality being accepted as a central element within the new SDGs. In 2016, as the SDGs began to be implemented, so did the promises made in the Agenda 2030 to ensure that gender equality is achieved. As Box 2 illustrates, gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls is enshrined as a stand-alone goal (Goal 5), but more importantly, it runs as a thread throughout all the other goals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 2: The sustainable development agenda and gender equality</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5</strong> aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls by 2030. It has nine associated targets, all with links to economic empowerment. They include:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking, sexual, and other types of exploitation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EU Gender Action Plan 2016-2020 at year one

Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights.
Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws.
Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women.
Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.

SDG 8 for decent work and economic growth also tackles gender disparities through ‘full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value’ (Target 8.5) and to ‘protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment’ (Target 8.8).

SDG 10 for reduced inequalities addresses gender disparities by ensuring ‘equal opportunity and by reducing inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard’ (Target 10.3) and by adopting ‘policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality’ (Target 10.4).

SDG 1 for ending poverty and underline the importance of social protection, with fiscal and wage policies, in addressing the needs of ‘the poor and the vulnerable’ (Target 1.3), while the revitalisation of finance, technology, capacity building, trade, and systemic change fall under the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development in SDG 17.


The SDGs built on the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of July 2015 that committed states to eliminating gender-based violence and discrimination in all its forms and to ensuring at all levels that women enjoy equal rights and opportunities in terms of economic participation, voice and agency.43 It was adopted at the end of the UN Third International Conference on Financing for Development that includes measures to overhaul global finance practices to promote gender-responsive budgeting and monitoring. 2015 was also the 15th anniversary of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, and the 20th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. These landmark events have given added impetus to the EU to reaffirm its strong commitment to gender equality, social justice, non-discrimination and human rights and by extension to review its own gender equality framework for external relations.

2.3. EU agenda for women’s empowerment in partner countries

The Lisbon Treaty considers ‘equality between women and men’ among the EU’s four core values and objectives – in Articles 2 and 3(3) of the Treaty on European Union and in the EU’s Charter of Fundamental Rights –, which the EU is committed to integrating into all of its activities (Article 8 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU). Moreover, the EU has developed its gender equality policy in its external action in accordance with these core values, mirrored in the EU’s extensive gender equality legislation applicable in the EU Member States, and in line with the aforementioned international agreements.

Since 1995, following the Beijing UN Women’s Conference, the Council committed to integrate five gender considerations into all aspects of its operations and policies.44 The 2007 Conclusions of the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council are among the strongest expression of EU policy on gender equality, as they broaden the focus beyond development cooperation to other areas, ‘such as economic growth, trade, migration, infrastructure, environment and climate change, governance, agriculture, fragile states, peace building and reconstruction’.45 Among the most important EU actions in this field was the adoption of the EU Gender Action Plan 2010-2015 (GAP I), which resulted from the growing awareness of the gap between the policy and operational levels of the EU on gender equality.

More recently, the EU Global Strategy46 and the Commission’s proposal for a new European Consensus on Development (May 2017)47 and relevant Council conclusions48 have committed the EU to building on these remarkable progress by strengthening further the Union’s partnership with civil society and by protecting its space, two key principles for the decades to come. The new European Consensus gives gender equality and women empowerment a central role as the main principle for EU policy-making and as a key enabler for obtaining results. It integrates social, economic and environmental

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44 In a ground-breaking resolution of late 1995 the EU Council of Ministers first declared the integration of a gender perspective in development cooperation as a crucial principle underpinning the development policy of the Community and the Member States. See, Council of the EU, Resolution on Integrating Gender Issues in Development Cooperation, reference no.: 12847/95, 20 December 1995.


dimensions, and retains poverty eradication as the main goal of EU development policy.\footnote{For an analysis of the merits and challenges of the new European Consensus, see Latek, Marta, \textit{New European Consensus on Development: Will it Be Fit for Purpose?}, reference no.: PE 599.434, European Parliamentary Research Service, European Parliament, Brussels, April 2017, p. 1.}

In the context of the negotiations on a new European Consensus, the European Parliament had advocated for poverty eradication to remain the main goal of development policy and defended need- and efficiency-based criteria for the allocation of development aid. It also proposed a strong reinforcement of legal tools and institutional mechanisms to implement EU-wide coordination and policy coherence for development (PCD), without which EU internal inconsistencies could jeopardise EU contribution to the Agenda 2030 implementation.\footnote{European Parliament, \textit{European Parliament Resolution of 14 February 2017 on the Revision of the European Consensus on Development}, reference no.: P8_TA(2017)0026, Strasbourg 14 February 2017.}

The new framework GAP II builds on the lessons learned from and achievements of, the previous Gender Action Plan 2010-2015 (GAP), which are further examined in the section on \textbf{Lessons from GAP I}. In 2013, as the ‘EU Action Plan for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in Development 2010-2015’\footnote{European Commission, \textit{Commission Staff Working Document ‘EU Plan of Action on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in Development 2010-2015’}, reference no.: SEC(2010) 265 final, Brussels, 8 March 2010.} (GAP I) was coming to an end, the Council entrusted the Commission and the EEAS with setting up a Taskforce to develop a new Gender Action Plan for 2016-2020. This Taskforce was composed of representatives from the European External Action Service (EEAS), EU delegations, the European Commission services and Member States, and drew on consultation with Member States and civil society.

GAP II takes a comprehensive and cross-sectoral approach (so-called gender mainstreaming across all EU external action policies and programmes) for action. Its aim is to support partner countries, especially in developing, enlargement and neighbouring countries to achieve tangible results towards gender equality, which is at the core of European values, as well as the new SDGs. GAP II also strives aim to increase EU financial contribution to gender objectives in the current EU financial framework 2014-2020 through targeted activities and gender mainstreaming,\footnote{Vila, Blerina (Wexam Consulting, Brussels), \textit{EU Gender Action Plan 2016-2020}, capacity4dev.eu - Connecting the development community, 17 October 2016.} as will be analysed later (see section on \textbf{Available financing and aid modalities}).
3. Learning from past experience

While the new framework offers a real opportunity to improve EU action on gender equality, its strengths also depend on how well GAP II has addressed the potential risks and weaknesses of the previous framework, GAP I. In addition to delving into this issue, this section also examines how the EU’s new GAP II compares to the best practices of other international donors on gender equality and women’s empowerment in third countries.

3.1. Lessons from the Gender Action Plan 2010-2015 (GAP I)

Both the evaluations of GAP I produced by the Overseas Development Institute and the one prepared by the consortium composed of COWI A/S, ADE and Itad53 for the European Commission, gave a rather bleak picture on progress made on gender equality and women’s empowerment in third countries through GAP 2010-2015 (GAP I). Although some important and inspirational results had been achieved on gender parity, these were patchy and poorly documented.

The COWI A/S, ADE and Itad evaluation first argued that EU delegations did not demonstrate an understanding of the gender equality context, nor implement it. The integrated three-pronged approach that effectively combined gender mainstreaming, gender specific actions with political and policy dialogue to maximise outcomes, that was proposed in GAP I, was not applied. Nor did the implementation of GAP I consider how various instruments and modalities could be used to support outcomes on gender equality and women’s empowerment. Despite successes at the international level through EU work on ‘women, peace and security’ and on gender-based violence, these efforts were not well reflected at the level of country cooperation.54

Similarly, the Overseas Development Institute evaluation of GAP I concluded that GAP I had not recognised or responded to the structural inequalities that perpetuate unequal gender power relations, nor did it take into account how gender inequality intersects with other inequalities (e.g., class, race and age). In that vein, that same evaluation observed that gender equality and women’s empowerment could no longer be regarded as being only a development aid matter.55 A positive change is observed in GAP II (see section on Understanding gender parity).


Second, the evaluation commissioned by the European Commission pointed to the lack of necessary commitment to and institutional and political leadership on gender equality and women’s empowerment during the time of implementation of GAP I. It argued that the European Commission services and EEAS leadership and management had not clearly communicated gender equality and women’s empowerment priorities to their own staff at headquarters or in EU delegations. Neither had they put in place the necessary institutional architecture and incentives to motivate staff to take issues related to gender equality and women’s empowerment seriously in their work, and to require and facilitate delivery on the policy commitments made.

This meant that, in an environment where staff were overstretched and faced competing priorities, gender parity issues were put on the backburner.56 ‘Lack of consistent and long-term leadership on gender equality and weak accountability and incentives’ was also noted by the ODI, which, in response, had called for the responsibility for implementation of the successor GAP II to rest with the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP).57 On this point too, there has been noticeable improvement in GAP II on support to gender parity and gender mainstreaming at the highest levels of the EU leadership, and with more commitment to actual implementation at HQ level (see section on EU leadership).

Third, the COWI A/S, ADE, Itad evaluation pointed to a mismatch between commitments to gender equality and women’s empowerment made on paper and the low organisational capacity to deliver them. Although EC financial commitments to programmes on gender equality in external action had increased in the period 2007-2013, human resource capacity to manage this increasing volume of work had not. Staff, including gender focal points (GFPs), had not given gender the required attention in their work nor did they have the right or adequate technical expertise to tackle this issue. Furthermore, technical guidelines and resources were available to staff but they were not comprehensive, not adapted to staff needs and not well known or utilised by staff.58 Some of these concerns have been addressed in GAP II, as the section on EU leadership demonstrates. However, more needs to be done on training (see section on Enhance training and access to training).

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Fourth, on **programming and financing**, the evaluation contracted by the European Commission argued that it was not possible to know exactly how much money had been spent on mainstreaming gender into programming (largely due to poor application of the gender marker\(^\text{59}\) that assesses how well programmes consider gender) and assess the quality of investments. These needs have been better accounted for in the first year of operation of GAP II (see section on Available financing and aid modalities).

Fifth, when assessing the **EU method for institutional and programmatic accountability**, that same evaluation demonstrated that the programme/project results frameworks and consequently the results reporting did not adequately integrate gender sensitive indicators. EU delegations made little attempt to develop a robust analytical tool to understand the gender context to inform country strategy objectives, programmes/projects and dialogue. The systematic and methodical mandatory monitoring of activities related to gender equality and women’s empowerment has been reformed (see section on Clear guidelines and Consistent monitoring). But ultimately, it is the progress made in shifting the institutional culture that have pushed for programmes to be better monitored.

Last but not least, the lack of understanding of the local context of gender inequality in third countries impeded on EU delegations’ ability to grab opportunities for promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment in country strategies and their implementation. It also results in **missed opportunities for working with partner governments and relevant stakeholders**, such as other donors and civil society.\(^\text{60}\) This concern has to some extent been addressed in GAP II and its implementation (see section on Working together), but more needs to be done (see section on Adopt a whole of society approach).

### 3.2. Lessons from other international donors on gender equality and women’s empowerment

The EU and its programmes – as it happens with other international financial donors – need to be held accountable for negative, not only positive, gender impacts of the EU development and cooperation policies. A comparative study that evaluates the operationalisation of gender policies of five international financial institutions (IFIs) – the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the African Development Bank (AfDB) and Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) – has shown that IFIs need strong gender safeguard policies to

\(^{59}\) More specifically, the OECD Gender policy marker (G-marker), which is compulsory in EU cooperation, is a donor policy indicator used when the donor agrees with the objectives of the programme (PIN, or sector programmes, budget support, projects) to check that gender equality is included in the objectives. A monitoring of the G-marker is done at the stages of identification, formulation and implementation of a given programme. See, [Gender Equality Policy Marker](https://capacity4dev.eu), Public Group on Gender, capacity4dev.eu - Connecting the development community, 15 May 2012.

guard against policies that often marginalise and even harm women. These policies may drive women to losing traditional farmland and income, which in turn increase their dependence on men, driving some of them into sex work. This creates a chain of possible consequences: it can spread HIV, creates unstable households for children, and intensifies violence against women.\(^\text{61}\)

With these assumptions in mind, this comparative study analyses and outlines potential benchmarks for assessing gender equality and women empowerment. First, **gender policy goals have the potential to influence IFIs’ strategic objectives and resource allocation.** Because of this, it is crucial that they inclusively promote women and men’s equal rights and uphold economic and social wellbeing. The IDB’s Operational Policy on Gender Equality and Development (Operational Gender Policy) is a case in point. It integrates gender as a cross-cutting issue throughout all IDB interventions and commits to proactive and preventive actions to safeguard and advance women’s equal rights. The AfDB’s 2001 Gender Policy, which aims to promote gender equality across Africa and within the AfDB structure, is also considered relatively strong in committing to a rights-based goal oriented toward gender-inclusive interventions.\(^\text{62}\)

In the same vein, the EU GAP II constitutes an attempt at mainstreaming gender equality across the full spectrum of the EU external action, as analysed in the sections on Understanding gender parity and Clear goals and connecting the dots. For a fully optimal EU policy on gender parity and women’s empowerment in external relations, this study makes relevant suggestions in the section entitled Openings for action.

Second, **gender policies require robust mandates to implement their initiatives.** The strongest mandates are those that make it mandatory for gender considerations to be integrated into all relevant frameworks. Such is for example the case for all aspects of the ADB operations.\(^\text{63}\) As will be demonstrated later in this study, the EU GAP II does not go far enough on this aspect (see the sections Underdeveloped themes and Trade and gender).

Third, in practical terms, **the strongest operational gender framework and policy and programme (financial instruments) mandates are those that incorporate ‘essential do-no-harm safeguard measures’ and are all-inclusive,** that is, they are applied ‘without exceptions for different lending types’.\(^\text{64}\) This is the case, for example, of the IDB’s Operational Gender Policy. This is not the case, however, for the EU’s GAP II.

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Fourth, a ‘good gender policy requires solid mechanisms to effectively carry out its goals and priorities. The strongest mechanisms include identification of an authority responsible for implementing gender initiatives, tools to conduct proposed actions, and a plan for reporting measurable progress on baseline and targeted indicators.’

Such tools may include the possibility to identify a department dedicated to carrying out the gender policy and programmes. Such a department also adopts gender capacity building tools for staff that aim to improve gender analysis, data, knowledge and research, as is the case with at the IDB.

By choosing to mainstream gender equality throughout its EU external action policies, tools and financing programmes, GAP II has opted not to develop such a centralised responsible department. Nevertheless, there is a specific Unit, ‘B1. Gender Equality, Human Rights and Democratic Governance’ in DG DEVCO’s Directorate on ‘People and Peace’ with primary responsibility on gender parity and women’s empowerment in external action. On the EEAS side, Ambassador Mara Marinaki is the Principal Adviser on Gender and on the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

Other mechanisms may include those adopted by the ADB, such as the requirement for a gender assessment in each project’s Initial Poverty and Social Assessment and countries’ Country Strategy Programmes, the outlining of in-depth gender implementation tools in the ADB’s Operations Manual outlines, and the inclusion of gender guides for assessing key gender considerations throughout project design and implementation, including negative impacts arising from user-fees, land loss, or resettlement.

Equally, the COWI A/S, ADE and Itad evaluation of GAP I that was prepared for the European Commission highlighted the need for the results framework used in monitoring gender equality to include targets, mandatory gender-sensitive indicators and gender-disaggregated baseline data used in all sectors in order to provide the basis for evaluation. The EU’s GAP II has also developed strong monitoring tools and guidelines (see sections Consistent monitoring and Clear guidelines).

Fifth, in order to implement gender policy mechanisms and advance an actionable, broad mandate that promotes women’s rights, IFI staff must possess strong gender capacity. Developing this capacity requires sufficient resources to support gender integration, a demonstrated institutional commitment to gender equality, and incentives to encourage staff development. For example, the IDB incentivises staff gender capacity-building by

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integrating staff contributions to gender equality into annual performance reviews. GAP II, as will be analysed, has put much emphasis on pushing forward with shifting the institutional culture at HQ and EU delegation levels on gender parity issues. In that context, the European Commission and the EEAS have developed specialised training for EU officials working on gender issues in external relations, even though it is not compulsory (see section Focus on EU institutional culture shift).

Sixth and related to the aforementioned point, adequate IFI funding not only demonstrates institutional and cultural commitment to sustainable and consolidated gender equality in the functioning of the donor and recipient’s institutions, but is also essential to carry out gender policy initiatives. As explained later in this study, GAP II has provided the conditions for gender aspects to be included in the EU’s financial instruments. According to the European Commission/EEAS first monitoring report, finances on gender parity in external relations have been made available systematically and consistently over the past year and the conditions have been set for this to continue (see section entitled Available financing and aid modalities).

Last but not least, clear monitoring and evaluation (M&E) guidelines are essential for IFIs to measure their progress towards achieving women’s rights, empowerment, and gender equality goals. The strongest M&E guidelines adopt project and institution level indicators to measure long-term progress towards gender equality, as is the case in the IDB’s Operational Gender Policy. As already mentioned, the Council has called on the European Commission services and the EEAS to inform it on an annual basis on the implementation of the GAP II. Moreover, the GAP II promotes more efficient monitoring of EU activities and resource and budget allocation in this area. In that respect, the European Commission has also issued a ‘Guidance Note on Indicators and Reporting Methodologies’ for its staff at HQ and EU delegation levels (see sections on Consistent monitoring and Clear guidelines).

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69 Inter-American Development Bank, Operational Policy on Gender Equality in Development, Washington, DC, 3 November 2010.

4. Assessing the implementation of the Gender Action Plan 2016-2020

This section aims to provide an insight into the first results of the implementation of GAP II. Considering that the EU’s new framework on gender equality and women’s empowerment has been in operation only since a year, this study also examines and assesses the framework itself. While on the one hand, GAP II has laid a solid base for strengthened implementation in 2017 and beyond to 2020, on the other, shortcomings in GAP II itself have led to sub-optimal implementation results.

4.1. Achievements

The first year of operation of GAP II has laid the foundations for solid improvement of the protection and promotion of gender equality and women’s empowerment in EU external relations. The European Commission and the EEAS have markedly demonstrated that they understand the multi-faceted nature and complexity of the gender parity dimensions. They have also integrated this understanding in the implementation of GAP II, illustrated by the clear operationalisation and strong commitment of EU leadership to the objectives of the framework examined. Furthermore, the shift of the EU institutional culture on gender equality in third countries has been a centre feature in the implementation of GAP II, as illustrated in the responsiveness of European Commission services to gender issues and attention to training. The relevant EU institutions also appear to have worked well together and with EU Member States, some of which have made much progress in integrating the principles of GAP II in their development aid. A solid monitoring system that has the potential to hold EU actors at all levels to account for their shortcomings and determine effective implementation has been put in place. Equally, guidelines at EU level and among Member States allow for this monitoring to take place consistently. While funding earmarked for gender equality in EU external relations has increased, more commitment is needed to ensure that this continues, as will be developed in the sections on Shortcomings and Openings for action. These two latter sections will also demonstrate that monitoring of GAP II could be further improved and the guidelines further developed and better used.

4.1.1. Understanding gender parity and women’s empowerment

GAP II is in line with the EU’s fundamental norms underpinning its democratisation and peacebuilding efforts and in full alignment with the EU ‘Human Rights Action Plan’ and the ‘Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016-2019’. It has substantially built on GAP I, adopting a broader view of gender equality and inequality. More specifically, GAP II identifies and analyses the underpinnings of gender inequality, namely the unequal gender power relations and gender-based social norms that discriminate against

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women and girls, in turn marginalising them from the benefits of social, economic and political change. It also accepts that the promotion of gender equality is about building conducive environments within which all people can enjoy greater opportunities and improve their lives: women and girls, men and boys, and those who identify and express their gender differently. Therefore, it includes in its analysis of the key factors affecting gender equality all the elements that experts and other international organisations take into account, as outlined in the section on Closing the gender gap in third countries.

4.1.1.1 The role of men and masculinity

The European Consensus talks of ‘gender inequality intersecting with other forms of exclusion. Promoting women’s and girls’ advancement and gender equality requires working with boys, men, girls and women to foster an understanding of rights, equality and roles in society.’73 The participation and commitment of men is thus fundamental in the gender mainstream paradigm to change the social and economic position of women. Even if policies are directed at women only, the gender mainstreaming approach stresses that in order to remove imbalances in society both women and men must share the responsibility.74 This means involving and engaging men in gendering efforts.

GAP II explicitly calls for ‘[s]upporting agents of change working to shift negative social or cultural norms, including the media, women’s grassroots organisations and the active involvement of men and boys,’75 in line with the ‘Council conclusions on Gender in Development’.76 It systematically takes into consideration the role of men as actors able and needing to contribute to the solution, nor only as a measure of comparison for identifying the gender gap. For example, under the thematic priority on ‘Physical and Psychological Integrity’, GAP II includes in its objectives the following: ‘[p]rotection for all women and men of all ages from sexual and gender based violence in crisis situations; through EU supported operations.’ Similarly, in its indicators for the same thematic priority, the following possible activity is suggested: ‘[e]ncourage broad based education for behavioural change regarding gender based violence, engaging men and boys and communities.’77 Similar examples could also be noted in the section on thematic priority on ‘Political and Civil Rights - Voice and Participation’.

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76 Council of the EU, Council Conclusions on Gender in Development, reference no.: 9242/15, Brussels, 26 May 2015.
77 European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Joint Staff Working Document ‘Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment: Transforming the
4.1.2. Clear goals and connecting the dots

The new framework for gender equality and women’s empowerment (GAP II) has come a long way in putting forward a comprehensive and clear agenda that spans across the entire EU foreign policy agenda. It goes well beyond GAP I, which limited itself to a ‘three-ponged approach’ consisting of political and policy dialogue, gender mainstreaming, and specific actions to put gender equality more systematically on the agenda of the political dialogue with partner countries.78

In doing so, the EU has pushed forward with connecting the dots between EU external action instruments, policies and actors – DG DEVCO, the Directorate General for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR), the Directorate General or European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), the EEAS and the EU delegations. It has also focused on clear objectives putting forward thematic pillars for the first time. This has meant that four pivotal areas have been identified, which could transform the lives of women and girls if action is taken.79 Three of these pillars are functional and include:

1. **Fighting violence of any kind against women and girls**, including protecting women against violence in situations of conflict, preventing the trafficking of girls and women, fighting harmful practices like Female Genital Mutilation and Cutting, and empowering women to have control over their sexual and reproductive life.

2. **Economic and social empowerment** by, for instance, increasing access of women and girls to quality education and training, including on entrepreneurship, facilitating their access to financial services, to decent jobs and to basic services like energy or clean water.

3. **Strengthening voice and participation** by, for instance, supporting women’s increased participation in policy and decision-making at all levels, enhancing their role as peace-builders, supporting them in changing social and cultural norms through grassroots organisations or media.

A last pillar is horizontal:

4. **Shifting institutional culture** to one that systematically supports, tracks and measures gender equality and that enables a more effective delivery on EU commitments. To do so, all EU actors are expected to analyse the development priorities in the third countries where they work and the local context for women and girls, as well as implement those priorities that are most relevant to

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them. Furthermore, the coordination, coherence and leadership on those priorities would be further strengthened.

Accordingly, GAP II is seen as being ‘narrow in focus, but broad in scope and engagement.’ Including the gender equality aspects of the entire EU external action in one framework (GAP II) and in a single document has enabled the EU to find and track progress in the entire external family. The stated aim is to avoid overlap and fragmentation (which existed in the past), and make it easier to push for change where it is needed. Moreover, the framework’s alignment with the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development could help further boost the EU role in international fora.

4.1.3. EU leadership

Already with the Gender Action Plan 2010-2015 (GAP I), the EU demonstrated that it recognises that gender equality is more than a benchmark against measuring the maturity of a society (thus, a matter of human rights and principles). GAP II has gone further in setting strong foundations that ensure dedicated political and management leadership across EU actors, both at HQ and delegation levels.

GAP II applies to the European services (DG DEVCO, DG NEAR, and ECHO), the EEAS and the EU Member States, all of which endorsed the joint staff working document in the Council Conclusions on the Gender Action Plan 2016-2020 on 26 October 2015. However, the guidance note of 8 March 2016 that outlines the resources and tools for the implementation of GAP II only applies to DEVCO (HQ and EU delegations) and EEAS (only at EU delegation level). EU Member States were to generate their own guidance or adapt this one and some have already done so (see section on Working together).

At the level of political leadership, European Commissioner for Development Neven Mimica has made it a point to put gender equality a priority, arguing that ‘women’s participation in the economy is essential for sustainable development and economic growth and is intrinsically linked to the global goal of eradicating poverty.’ Equally, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission has declared that gender is a priority in relations with third countries.

At a more operational level, but still at HQ level, a specific Unit (‘B1. Gender Equality, Human Rights and Democratic Governance’) in DG DEVCO’s Directorate on ‘People and Peace’ has primary responsibility on gender parity and women’s empowerment in external action. On the EEAS side, Ambassador Mara Marinaki is the Principal Adviser

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83 See, for example, European External Action Service, *Stepping it up for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Worldwide*, Brussels, 16 June 2016.
on Gender and on the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. The cooperation between these two EU actors appears to have functioned well, with a clear division of tasks and division of reporting/monitoring, also attested in the European Commission/EEAS first annual monitoring report.

At the level of the EU delegations, the Head of Delegation (HoD) is in charge of steering the implementation of EU external policy in the partner country. It is up to the EU delegations to translate the available policy and guidance in relevant areas in a way that fits the context. They also have a key role in adapting the EU strategy as the situation evolves, provided that they are given the power and the tools to adapt or change the course of action in the face of developments on the ground. This inevitably also applies to gender policies in a given country. Since the leadership of the HoD determines to a large extent the role of the EU delegation on a policy, when a HoD is a gender champion, women’s empowerment is more visible in activities implemented and the manner these are monitored. Every delegation staff is under his/her political direction, but whether there is a shared sense of purpose depends in large part on how the delegation operates internally. Involving the whole of the delegation in context analysis exercises and in joint reflection over the implications for the EU strategy in a country, is likely to facilitate synergies across policy areas and activities. HoD leadership and knowledge of EU’s technical and political complexity determines also (along with collaborative attitude of the staff) his/her ability to circumnavigate the institutional differences and create a culture of joint work, regardless of the institutional affiliation of staff.  

The European Commission/EEAS report shows mixed results on this issue and admits that there ‘is still a long way to go but progress is significant regarding synergy of hierarchy support and involvement of GFPs with the GAP implementation.’  

In addition, focus has been put on improving the ratio of women HoDs, which is down to 20.3 % (the equivalent of 28 women out of 138 EU delegations) compared to 24 % in 2014. Similarly, five out the 10 civilian CSDP (Common Security and Defence Policy) missions are headed by women, while all 7 military missions are headed by men. This yields 29 % of female HoMs. Based on these statistics, the EEAS concludes that ‘there is still a gender barrier for women to have access to management posts.’  

This has also been strengthened by the continuous renewal and reinforcement of the GFPs network.

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4.1.4. Focus on EU institutional culture shift

Prioritising the transformation of the EU’s institutional culture is the sign of a more robust EU approach to delivering on gender equality and women’s empowerment in external relations. It addresses a key conclusion of the evaluation of GAP I commissioned by European Commission, which explained that the EU’s weak delivery is primarily an institutional problem rather than a technical one (see section on Lessons from GAP I). Experts have demonstrated how the EU’s ‘institutional practices’ have structurally marginalised the voices of women and their movement, which is problematic in the context of an increasingly authoritarian state. ‘The largest stumbling block to putting gender sensitive policies into practice seems to be a broader institutional weakness’ of EU programme.87

GAP II, however, appears to have set the conditions for a solid change in this domain. Commission services and EEAS – both at HQ and delegation levels – were required to act and report on each of six objectives to shift institutional culture and select and report on at least one objective under the three thematic priorities. This can been seen by the responsiveness of the European Commission services and the EEAS. Their implementation report is based on the contributions of progress in the implementation of GAP II in 2016 received from 108 EU Delegations (reporting on 133 countries, including the regional mandate of some of them, which is equivalent to 81% of the total number of Delegations); Commission services related to external relations, the EEAS and 22 Member States.88

In addition, as the European Commission/EEAS annual monitoring report notes, some Head of Missions, Heads of Delegation and Heads of Cooperation have made gender equality promotion a bigger priority with the advent of GAP II. First, some new Gender Champions have been nominated or appointed. During 2016, a continuous renewal and reinforcement of the gender focal persons (GFPs) network emerged and some are enjoying greater leadership/management backing.89

87 See, for example, Dubusscher’s work on the implementation of EU development aid in Rwanda: Debusscher, Petra, ‘Gender Mainstreaming on the Ground? The Case of EU Development Aid Towards Rwanda’, in Weiner, Elaine and Heather MacRae (eds), The Persistent Invisibility of Gender in EU Policy, European Integration online Papers (EIoP), Special issue 1(18), 2014: 1-23.

88 26 Delegations did not report, including the delegations to developed OECD countries (it was optional) and the delegations to partner international organisations (UN, WTO, OECD, etc.) that were not requested to report. European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Joint Staff Working Document, EU Gender Action Plan II, “Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment: Transforming the Lives of girls and Women through EU External Relations 2016-2020”, Annual Implementation Report 2016, reference no.: SWD(2017) 288 final, Brussels, 29 August 2017, p. 2-3 and 11.

Second, training on the integration of gender analysis is taking place in several EUDs, EU Member States, DGs and HQ Units, and is often attended not only by GFPs but also by Programme Managers and Political Section staff. There has also been a positive move in the direction of mainstreaming gender in the core training curricula for EU staff. More specifically, ‘[a]s of the end of 2016, 42 new Gender Analysis Studies were prepared. Of these, 15 were written anew in-house using existing and reliable sources, 11 were prepared anew through contracting external experts commissioned under Framework Contracts (supported by Commission HQ funding), 10 analyses were carried out jointly with other partners (implying also pooling of funds), and there were 6 instances where the delegations relied on gender analysis of trustworthy external resources (e.g. development banks’ country gender profiles).’

4.1.5. Working together

GAP II made clear that Member States would report on their selected thematic priority or priorities, and feed in their own international reporting on the institutional culture shift. According to the European Commission/EEAS first annual report on GAP II, coordination amongst EU institutions and with EU Member States has increased. The report argues that GAP II has provided additional opportunity to the EU delegations, European Commission services and EEAS at headquarters, and Member States – both in Embassies and capitals – to coordinate their efforts when identifying thematic objectives and preparing the 2016 reports. When implementing activities on gender parity, coordination and collaboration with EU Member States continues took place at ‘HQ level (for example, through the regular EU Member States Gender Expert meetings) and at partner country level (through, for example, gender coordination groups, the EU Heads of Mission meetings).’

In addition, some Member States have issued their guidelines for the implementation of GAP II and have put cooperation with the EU institutions, particularly on the ground, squarely at the heart of their objectives. Equally, partnerships are fostered between EU and stakeholders to build national capacity for gender equality, allowing for the time taken for GAP II start-up and implementation. More specifically, ‘some informal or formal burden sharing between EUD and EU Member States is in place in 29 partner countries. Coordination is led by an EU actor in 35 partner countries; in several, however,

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donor coordination mechanisms on gender do not exist or are not functioning.  It is, however, unclear who or what will drive Member States’ endorsement of the thematic areas and how their contribution and burden-sharing will be reported and measured.

Furthermore, gender equality and women’s empowerment must not be seen as a stand-alone objective. Beyond cooperation between the EU organs, among EU Member States and with the EU institutions, and between European actors and the beneficiaries, the EU organs must also work with other multilateral/inter-governmental donors that are present in the recipient countries. Closer collaboration and coordination among these organisations will enhance efficiency by avoiding duplication of efforts and services, and ensure complementary planning and programme delivery that will accelerate the integration of a gender approach in policies, planning, programming, monitoring and evaluation.  It will also help to manage competition for scarce resources, as will be further explained in the section on Available financing and aid modalities.

The Instrument contributing to Security and Peace (IcSP) supports the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in undertaking a ‘Data collection on Violence against Women in conflict-risk areas’ in 10 OSCE countries in the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe over 3 years starting in 2016. Similarly, the FPI identifies programmes that will directly involve CSOs working for women’s rights in the targeted countries. For instance, the European institutions are the second biggest donor worldwide for Africa through various funding instruments, such as the Instrument for Stability (IfS) and the European Instrument of Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), through which they also promote women’s empowerment and protect gender equality. Moreover, the EU delegation to the African Union (AU) was established to create closer linkages between the EU and the AU in operational terms and at the level of political dialogue. See Box 3.

Box 3: Case study – Gender equality and African Union-European Union cooperation

In view of the upcoming African Union-European Union summit in Abidjan, in November 2017, is it worth delving into the ways for boosting gender equality and women’s empowerment in Africa. The summit will mark the 10-year anniversary since the 2007 Africa-EU Summit in Lisbon that launched the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES) that sets out the intention of both continents to move beyond a donor/recipient

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relationship towards long-term cooperation on jointly identified, mutual and complementary interests.

The AU-EU partnership is the fruit of a gradual relationship that has reshaped and deepened the Africa-Europe reciprocal partnership. The EU has tended to favour region-to-region cooperation, first through their grouping with African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries, and then through the new context outlined in the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES) that aims for the relationship to be more egalitarian. Since the first Africa-EU Summit in Cairo in 2000, considerable changes have taken place on both continents. This summit underlined the need to combat gender-based discrimination and violations, and to include a gender perspective in policies, programmes and legislative action, but with reservations (i.e. ‘where appropriate’).

During the second Africa-EU Summit in Lisbon in 2007, both organisations agreed to work together on key political challenges, such as gender issues. Lastly, in the third Africa-EU Summit in Tripoli in 2010, the action plan for 2011-2013 included the development of a strategy of cooperation on gender equality and the establishment of a gender observatory. The European Commission has committed € 24.4 billion through its various financial instruments for the period 2007-2013 in support of the JAES and its thematic partnerships.

The 4th Africa-EU Summit of April 2014 reaffirmed the commitment to the 2007 Joint Africa-EU Strategy and the ambition to deepen political dialogue and cooperation. The principle of EU-AU Summits every three years, annual College-to-College meetings (that include the AU Commission and European Commission) to monitor progress, and Peace and Security Council-to-Political and Security Committee meetings to provide political leadership, was confirmed. These are complemented by regular high-level contacts between European and African Leaders on common challenges and crisis situations (e.g. Valletta).

In its latest Joint Communication, the European Commission and the EEAS call for the inclusive participation of women in formal political and decision-making processes to increase trust in state institutions. It also calls for creating wealth through more and better jobs to favour women’s empowerment and for transforming African agriculture, agro-business and its blue economy (key economic activities in which half the labour force is composed of women). Last but not least, it calls for supporting the development of digital skills and literacy, including women entrepreneurs. These areas of action reflect the objectives outlined in the GAP II and demonstrate that the gender dimension has been standardised in EU policy-making. However, they have not been made a priority; instead, the focus of the European Commission’s Joint Communication is on youth.

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Equally, the JAES still needs to mainstream gender into the eight priority areas of cooperation, since it does not include gender as a stand-alone priority. These are: peace and security; democratic governance and human rights; trade, regional integration and infrastructure; the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); energy; climate change; migration, mobility, and employment; and science, information and space. In each of these eight priority areas, African and European experts meet on a regular basis to strengthen Africa-EU cooperation. Every six months, AU and EU Commission staff, together with representatives from Member States, the Pan-African and European parliaments, civil society, and the private sector, meet to discuss progress and develop new areas of cooperation.


### 4.1.6. Consistent monitoring

Contrary to the voluntary and narrative-biased reporting mechanism of the GAP I, the GAP II commits to an annual reporting of all EU actors on the EU contribution to at least one objective per thematic priority and on each of the six objectives regarding the shifting of institutional culture. Reporting seeks to serve two purposes:

- to improve effectiveness of EU initiatives and their impact on gender equality;
- to improve accountability of EU initiatives to EU institutions and citizens, and ultimately to beneficiaries.

Annex 1 of GAP II provides the monitoring and accountability framework against which to measure progress on gender equality and girls’ and women’s rights and empowerment in third countries. The indicators, reflecting thematic priorities, apply to all partner countries where the EU and its Member States are funding international cooperation and development assistance. The reporting aims to inform EU knowledge of the national context and provides an overall picture of the development status across partner countries. For the most part, these indicators are SDG indicators and will be reported on by partner countries irrespective of EU activity.

Systematic gender analysis for all new external actions will be carried out and will cover all relevant European Commission services in developing, enlargement and neighbourhood countries, and all relevant EEAS’ activities in all partner countries, including fragile and conflict-affected states and emergency situations. In particular, systematic reporting on the institutional culture shift for all EU actors against the indicators is set out in the document. In its Joint Staff Working Document, the European Commission and the EEAS ‘adopt a clear results-driven approach that sets high

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standards for reporting, evaluation and accountability mechanisms, and promotes evidence-based decision making. This will include investing in, and using, systematic high quality gender evidence and analysis to contextualise and tailor approaches to the specific social, political and demographic characteristics of the partner country where the EU operates, and the commitment to data disaggregation across all EU’s monitoring and evaluation.98

EU Delegations, Commission services, the EEAS and EU Member States were required (by June 2016) to have a gender analysis at the correct level of intervention (context specific, and, as appropriate, at sector, project or national level), unless such a study existed already and was still current. ‘The gender analysis would inform the selection of thematic objectives and indicators and all subsequent project actions’ design and formulation.’99 The gender analyses prepared or referred to during 2016 are broad in scope, covering the legal, human rights and policy frameworks, political, economic, social and socio-cultural context, and key government, civil society and international actors. In the case of the EU’s flagship initiative on the garment sector, for example, the European Commission aims to ensure that all initiatives have a positive impact on women and girls, that child rights are respected, and that women are empowered to higher positions through skills development and entrepreneurship programmes.100

For each objective, GAP II proposes a series of actions, each with indicators and timing, to be carried out by the EU delegations, the European Commission and Member States. EU thematic and geographical actions will be able to point to where they have contributed to the overarching four priorities highlighted in the GAP II, to how progress has been measured and to resources dedicated to supporting gender objectives. EU contribution is defined as development outputs and direct outcomes of EU projects and programmes that can be linked to the achievement of specific objectives of the GAP II.101

Importantly, the new monitoring system has set the foundations for stronger and clearer accountability, as the European Commission/EEAS monitoring report shows. Consistent efforts were made to increasingly leverage the internal quality support procedures to improve the quality of gender mainstreaming of new programmes. Moreover, as

mentioned in the section on **Focus on EU institutional culture shift**, as of the end of 2016, 42 new Gender Analysis Studies were prepared. ‘Of these, 15 were written anew in-house using existing and reliable sources, 11 were prepared anew through contracting external experts commissioned under Framework Contracts (supported by EU funding), 10 analyses were carried out jointly with other partners (implying also pooling of funds), and there were 6 instances where the delegations relied on gender analysis of trustworthy external resources (e.g. development banks’ country gender profiles).’\(^{102}\)

The European Commission/EEAS implementation report on GAP II clearly identifies which EU delegations have been good students by reporting on progress and which have not. The disaggregated information is detailed enough to also pin point which parts of the reports received from each delegation are missing. It also sets out clear recommendations in the monitoring: senior level and operational level for improvement in the future. This monitoring system has the potential of holding EU actors at all levels to account for their shortcomings and determine effective implementation.

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**Box 4: Linking GAP II monitoring to the EU and international development context**

The important shift in assessing activities on women’s empowerment and gender equality as part of GAP II is in line with the European Consensus on Development, which takes a comprehensive approach to implementation, drawing on the Addis Ababa Action Agenda. This agenda combines aid with other resources, sound policies, and a strengthened approach to Policy Coherence for Development.

The new European Consensus includes a more coordinated approach to development between the EU and its Member States, one that promotes joint programming and actions. It puts emphasis on better-tailored partnerships with a broader range of stakeholders and partner countries. It has bound the EU and its Member States to ‘integrate the respect of human rights, democracy, the rule of law and gender equality into their political dialogue’. According to the European Consensus, ‘[t]his dialogue would be conducted with and beyond partner governments and will be a major platform for action, where a shared understanding will be promoted, progress will be regularly reviewed and appropriate supporting measures identified.’\(^{103}\)

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In line with this, the GAP II makes the systematic use of gender analysis and gender disaggregated data, which is a requirement for all new external actions (bilateral, regional and thematic).\textsuperscript{104} This is in line with the SDGs agenda as well as with guidelines used by the UN in it work. It should be noted, however, that the UN goes further in recognising that ‘key economic data must be disaggregated by sex, as well as other relevant characteristics’ [italics my own]. There is also a need for improved data and analysis on issues of particular importance to women’s economic empowerment, such as unpaid work, paid care work, informal work, part-time work and domestic work.’\textsuperscript{105}

Despite notable improvements in the EU monitoring of gender parity in third countries, the methodology and implementation of the monitoring of the GAP II needs to be further developed (see section on Further streamline monitoring).

### 4.1.7. Clear guidelines

For the most part, GAP II indicators are based on the indicators proposed in the ongoing international discussions on SDGs indicators and on the EU Results Framework.\textsuperscript{106} In October 2015, the Council had emphasised that ‘[g]iven the importance of the GAP as a tool for implementation of the 2030 Agenda, [it looked] forward to the final set of SDG indicators expected in 2016 and call[ed] on the Commission to revise the GAP indicators and the EU International Cooperation and Development Results Framework accordingly. In this context the Council underline[d] an important role of the European Institute of Gender Equality.’\textsuperscript{107}

More specifically, to ensure real and long-lasting improvements to gender equality, the European Commission services and the EEAS set out a number of measures, including:

- to set up a gender advisory board with leading experts from partner countries;
- to provide additional detailed guidance to ensure rigorous and outcome focused reporting on these measures;
- to hold themselves and implementing partners to account, including by ensuring that an independent evaluation of the implementation of the measures set out in Annex 1 is carried out;


\textsuperscript{105} Italics are the author’s. Secretariat of UN Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel on Women’s Economic Empowerment, \textit{Leave No One Behind: A Call to Action for Gender Equality and Women’s Economic Empowerment}, Report of the UN Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel on Women’s Economic Empowerment, 2016, p. 99.


• to establish a helpdesk at headquarters in Brussels to support EU delegations and headquarters’ operational units in implementing the measures proposed.\textsuperscript{108}

According to the European Commission/EEAS annual monitoring report, these have been met. Gender advisory boards to consult external senior expertise on strategic and \textit{ad hoc} issues in relation to gender equality has been set up in 15 EU Member States and the guidance note DG DEVCO has created a Gender Equality Helpdesk at HQ level. Moreover, detailed guidelines, in the form of a comprehensive guidance note of 8 March 2016, have been developed to support the implementation of GAP II, European Commission HQ and EU delegation operational and management staff at all levels, involved in programming, policy development and political dialogue.\textsuperscript{109} Since the role of the EU delegations has increased with the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty – the diplomatic missions of the EU now mandated to act as EU delegations representing EU institutions in third countries – such a guidance note targets EU civil servants and providing clear tools and resources for the implementation of GAP II could bring significant results.

This guidance includes numerous entry points for cooperation with CSOs and EU Member States. EU Member States are responsible themselves to ensure implementation of GAP II via that note or other guidance. As already mentioned in the section on \underline{Working together}, some Member States have already developed their own indicators for the implementation of gender equality and women’s empowerment programmes in their respective development policies. Their guidelines have affected primarily the social sectors, and is limited to separate components in other sectors enumerated in GAP II. According to the European Commission/EEAS first monitoring report, ‘in some MS [Member States] development cooperation, legislation requires, inter alia, the integration of gender analysis or assessment of impact on gender equality, for example, in Belgium and the UK, while in several other MS gender mainstreaming is mandatory or common practice across the board, as with The Netherlands, Spain, and Germany which emphasised its three-pronged approach (gender mainstreaming, empowerment, policy dialogue).’\textsuperscript{110}

Last but not least, as explained in the section on \underline{Consistent monitoring}, implementing partners are held to account on the EU funding they receive and use through independent evaluation of the implementation of the measures set out in Annex 1.


4.1.8. Available financing and aid modalities

At a practical level, GAP II seeks to be more focused on tangible results. GAP II responds to civil society and the Council concerns that have called for greater financial resources to be committed to gender equality work as an essential requirement.\(^{111}\) About € 100 million has already been allocated to concrete measures specifically targeted to improve women and girls’ rights, while gender will also be mainstreamed throughout other sectors of development cooperation.\(^{112}\) In the period 2007-2013, the EU committed an amount of around € 1 258 million to activities targeted at improving gender equality and girls and women’s empowerment.\(^{113}\)

In this context, the EU has a wide range of external assistance instruments in furthering its goals of promoting gender equality and empowering girls and women in third countries:

- Specific bilateral or regional development support programmes: for instance, the women’s economic empowerment project financed by the EU Trust Fund for Central African Republic, and the Pan-African programme on female genital mutilation.
- A number of targeted activities are also to be funded through the Global Public Goods and Challenges thematic programme included in the Development and Cooperation Instrument (DCI), with around € 100 million committed to improve the lives of girls and women.
- In addition, gender aspects are taken into consideration in several other thematic actions like food security, rural development, private sector development, and for instance, gender specific actions will be developed under the climate change programme for the years 2014-2016 (estimated € 16 million, DCI).

To facilitate GAP II implementation, the European Commission has put aside specific funding for carrying out such gender analysis for a number of EU delegations. It has also ensured that the relevant expertise is made available in the EU delegations. Robust gender evidence is used to inform all EU external spending, programming and policy-making, and progress is systematically measured against indicators.\(^{114}\)

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\(^{111}\) See, for example, Cox, Tanya, Plan International EU Office Response to the Council Conclusions on the Gender Action Plan 2016-2020, Plan International, Brussels, not dated; Council of the EU, Gender Action Plan 2016-2020 - Council Conclusions (26 October 2015), reference no.: 13201/15, Brussels, 26 October 2015.


\(^{113}\) Provisional OECD data shows that already in 2013, 39 % of the EU ODA considered gender dimensions as either significant or principal. See, Vila, Blerina (Wexam Consulting, Brussels), EU Gender Action Plan 2016-2020, capacity4dev.eu - Connecting the development community, 17 October 2016.

In 2016, DG DEVCO consistently increased its ODA commitment on the amount of funds used for gender-mainstreamed actions in all regions (see Table 1). In the same year, DG DEVCO gender mainstreamed actions in Africa, Americas, Asia, and Oceania. This increase is consistent with the trend from 2015 and demonstrates a significant increase, with Oceania having the highest increase from the previous year (nearly 32%). One could question why a bigger increase was not afforded to Africa, which is a region in the immediate neighbourhood of the EU and which experiences extreme poverty affecting women in particular.

When looking at the work of specific European Commission services, the 2016 analysis in the European Commission/EEAS annual monitoring report demonstrates that 58.8% (i.e. 213 out of 362) of new initiatives adopted in DG DEVCO have been marked as primarily or significantly aiming at promoting gender equality and/or women empowerment. In DG NEAR, the percentage amounts to 56.6% (47 out of 83) of new initiatives in the same period. As far as the quantitative investment in gender equality is concerned, these results point to an improvement from 2015 when on average 47.3% of new actions were launched. In addition, in 2016 the EU has more than quadrupled its humanitarian assistance to education in emergencies as a follow-up to the European Commission’s commitment to reach the global target of 4%.

Table 1: EU commitment to ODA on OECD Gender Maker actions (administrative costs excluded, co-financing included)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>European Commission Service</th>
<th>Commitment 2016 (in €)</th>
<th>Disbursement 2016 (in €)</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>DG DEVCO</td>
<td>9 423 449.659</td>
<td>6 047 205.779</td>
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<tr>
<td>DG NEAR</td>
<td>4 600 625.059</td>
<td>3 040 166.063</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other DGs</td>
<td>3 007 865.662</td>
<td>3 426 225.483</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>17 031 940.380</strong></td>
<td><strong>12 513 597.326</strong></td>
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</tbody>
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EU commitment to gender parity and women’s empowerment in third countries was reinforced with the launch, on 20 September 2017, of the joint EU-UN global gender initiative, the so-called Spotlight Initiative,117 focused on eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls. More specifically, this initiative seeks to address sexual and gender-based violence and harmful practices; specific forms of domestic and family violence; femicide; trafficking in human beings and economic exploitation, depending on the needs and challenges faced by the targeted regions. Its stated aim is ‘achieving transformational change at the regional level’, that is, not only deal with physical violence but also its institutional, cultural and legal roots. It will be made available for Asia, the Pacific region, Africa (particularly sub-Saharan Africa), Latin America and the Caribbean. This new multi-stakeholder trust fund, which will be opened to other donors, is envisaged to carry a budget of €500 million. On the EU side, the funding is provided through the DCI and European Development Fund (EDF). This Initiative will be implemented together with the UN system, in particular through UN Women, the UNFPA and the UNDP.118

4.2. Shortcomings

The joint European Commission/EEAS annual monitoring report, unlike many other evaluations carried out internally, includes quite openly the weaknesses of the implementation of GAP II and provides ways for remediying them. This section goes beyond the deficiencies identified in that monitoring report, since – as already mentioned in the section on Methodology – this evaluation comes early in the process, it is also worth examining the GAP II framework itself.

Despite having set solid foundations for progress in the field of mainstreaming, protecting and promoting gender equality in the EU’s external relations, GAP II faces certain weaknesses. When operationalising GAP II, efforts on gender parity have primarily centred on development aid and cooperation, while women’s role in fragile contexts and their role in mediation and negotiation are neglected. Additionally, GAP II does not address sufficiently nor in specific terms the link between trade and gender, an area where women are affected in terms of access to finances/resources, labour and employment conditions, and wage conditions. Furthermore, while a solid monitoring framework and clear guidelines have been established with GAP II, these are disproportionately focused on quantitative data and analysis. What is missing is a qualitative analysis in terms of evaluating the choice of objectives, the results of activities, potential risks and benefits, and likely long-term effects. Furthermore, when looking at the programming of EU activities, the gender dimension seems to be sidelined in situations of crisis or difficult conflicts, and occasionally activities are of a broad nature, which makes it difficult to track real progress and to have a specific outcome.

117 See The Spotlight Initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls (initiated by the European Union and the United Nations)

4.2.1. Underdeveloped themes

While GAP II has managed to deconstruct the notion of gender equality and women’s empowerment and to contextualise it within the entire spectrum of external relations, when it comes to operationalising GAP II, the focus has remained on development assistance and cooperation. Key issues, such as the role of women in fragile, post-conflict and emergency environments, and the role of women in mediation and negotiation, remain underdeveloped.

4.2.1.1. Women in state fragility

The elimination of gender-based inequalities is a key prerequisite for achieving peace, security and sustainable development. This idea is recognised in GAP II, which clearly states that the ‘EU and its Member States will address all aspects of preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence in conflict and post-conflict situations, and will support women as positive agents for conflict prevention, conflict resolution, relief and recovery, and building sustainable peace.’\(^{119}\) It is also an issue that the European Parliament has raised in its resolutions.\(^ {120}\)

In practice, however, this has been limited to adopting a gender-sensitive approach in the programming of relevant EU instruments (e.g. Partnership Instrument and the Instrument contributing to Security and Peace, IcSP) and in the organisation of other relevant activities (e.g. the implementation of EU Electoral Observation Missions).\(^ {121}\) Work in conflict affected and crisis contexts does not feature significantly in the EUD reports from the six geographical regions.\(^ {122}\) Only a small number of EUD reports mention support to the development and review of National Action Plans on UNSCR 1325 (Women, Peace and Security). Equally, the gender dimension in conflict settings has been under-addressed in the political dialogues that the EU holds (featuring only in the framework of the annual human rights dialogue with Ukraine).\(^ {123}\)

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\(^{122}\) These include the Americas, Asia & Pacific, Eastern & Southern Africa, Europe & Central Asia, Middle East & North Africa, and Western & Central Africa.

specifically at the activities underway on women’s role in peace and security these are minimal. They include a project in Nigeria on ‘Promoting Women’s engagement in Peace and Security in Northern Nigeria’ (for the period 2014-2017, funded by the EU with € 9 600 000 and implemented by UN Women); and a project in Ethiopia that aims to support the CSO interventions in the areas of women leadership.

Moreover, gender considerations are important in fragile states in two basic ways. First, the acknowledgement that men and women are affected differently by state fragility in terms of human rights violations, access to justice, extreme poverty, and discriminatory politics/ regimes. Second, gender roles and relations are crucial to understanding opportunities and obstacles to statebuilding. However, while the GAP II addresses gender equality in such challenging settings, it tends to focus on minimalist priorities, such as promoting gender equity in service delivery and providing basic education to women and girls, rather than embedding gender equality in broader and more comprehensive human rights and good governance context and practice.

4.2.2.2. Women in mediation and peace negotiations
While the role of women in peace negotiations and mediation is taken into consideration in GAP II, it remains underdeveloped. It is only mentioned under the thematic priority on ‘Political and Civil Rights - Voice and Participation’ and associated solely with a quantitative indicator. The single example of an activity is broad, imprecise, giving no sense how it could be implemented. The European Commission/EEAS monitoring report counted four countries (EUDs and/or Member States embassies) selected to work with female mediators, negotiators and technical experts under that priority. Most such thematic programmes were in the Asia and Pacific region. It would have been important to consider the role of women in mediation (especially through civil society actors) in the other thematic priorities, in particular on ‘Physical and Psychological Integrity’, in order to promote a change in societal norms.

Similarly, while an all-inclusive concept of security — encompassing physical but also economic security — of women is developed in GAP II when developing the risks and challenges to women’s security, the recommendations for tackling the problem do not meet the same standards. The concept of security used in the recommendations for tackling gender inequality is limited to physical security of women from threat, without demonstrating a clear understanding of all the aspects of violence against women (physical, psychological and economic, present in societies that are dominantly patriarchal). Moreover, the indicators are again quantitative and concentrate on the role of EU security personnel (peacekeepers) rather than women in security in third countries. Similar observations can be made for issues regarding peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and humanitarian action.

This situation exists despite the fact that the Council of the EU in October 2015 ‘welcome[d] the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 which stressed the unique role of women and girls in resilience building, vulnerability reducing and risk management in the respective communities.’ The Council also ‘stre[se]d the centrality of gender equality and women’s empowerment in ongoing international processes and their subsequent implementation, such as the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP21) and the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit.’

4.2.2. Trade and gender — the missing link

It is unfortunate that GAP II, which poses itself as a one-stop shop and an overarching EU strategy for promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment in third countries, does not address in specific terms the link between trade and gender.

Admittedly, the European Commission has considered gender aspects in the EU Strategy on Aid for Trade. Nevertheless, the updated Aid for Trade document (prepared by DG DEVCO in 2016) clearly states that this strategy will ‘fit within the framework established by and build upon existing parallel strategies and initiatives’ [italics my own], which points to possible overlap and confusion. The EU Gender Action Plan 2016-2020 is one of the parallel initiatives named in the updated Aid for Trade strategy. Moreover, the 2015 edition of the annual monitoring report on EU Aid for Trade, reporting on figures from 2013, did not mention gender or women once. Nor does the new EU trade and investment strategy ‘Trade for All’. However, the latest EU ‘Action Plan on Human

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128 Council of the EU, Gender Action Plan 2016-2020 - Council Conclusions (26 October 2015), reference no.: 13201/15, Brussels, 26 October 2015, p. 3.


130 European Commission, Towards an Updated EU Strategy on Aid for Trade: Making Aid Fit to Support Trade as an Enabler of Sustainable Development in Developing Countries, Background document, DG DEVCO C.4, Brussels, version of 5 May 2016.


132 European Commission, Trade for All - Towards a More Responsible Trade and Investment Policy, Brussels, October 2015.
Rights and Democracy’ acknowledges that research has demonstrated that ‘labour provisions in trade agreements ease labour market access, particularly for women and narrow the gender wage gap.’\textsuperscript{133}

There are conflicting observations on the impact of trade on women in third countries. On the one hand, it is believed that trade liberalisation helps bring women into paid employment. According to this logic, globalisation and trade liberalisation have – for some women – resulted in higher incomes, increased economic independence, replaced unpaid work at home or in informal economy, and elevated their social status. Trade creates jobs, particularly for women in export-oriented sectors in middle-income countries (e.g. in Latin America). In addition, women are heavily employed in two sectors that continue to undergo adjustment and change due to trade liberalisation: agriculture, and textiles and clothing. These jobs bring more household resources under women’s control, which in turn has a positive effect on investments in the health and education of future generations.\textsuperscript{134} An OECD study estimated that ‘the average per capita growth over 30 years could have been as much as 64 % higher in Sub-Saharan Africa, 40 % higher in South Asia and 32 % higher in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), if initial gender enrolment conditions and enrolment gender gaps had mirrored those in East Asia.’\textsuperscript{135}

On the other hand, there are also concerns about the impact of EU trade on women in third countries, in particular the impact of trade expansion and trade intensification on decent work, wages, including gender wage gaps, and the potential of female- (and male-) owned micro and small businesses to scale-up to increasingly larger-sized enterprises that would enable sustainable livelihoods and a life with dignity. Some experts argue that, due to limitations on government regulation (particularly public services and the liberalisation of government procurement), trade liberalisation can generate greater adjustment burden for low-income women, namely gross re-allocation rates. Moreover, most informal cross-border trade (e.g. affecting domestic workers) is conducted by women, which exposes them to bribery, harassment and physical attacks at border points.\textsuperscript{136} Female farmers, as noted by ILO, are also more affected by standards and other


\textsuperscript{136} Williams, Mariama, The South Centre, \textit{Presentation} for ‘Gender Equality in EU Trade Agreements: Perspectives from the South’, at the Hearing on Gender Equality in EU Trade Agreements, jointly organised by the Committee on International Trade (INTA) and the Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM), European Parliament, in Brussels, May 11 2017.
technical barriers to trade. Additionally, women not only face more demands on their time because of family responsibilities, but also face restricted access to productive resources such as land or credit.

Beyond the ethical concerns regarding women’s wellbeing that may be related to the above issues, experts explain that gender inequality has serious negative effects for sustainable economic development because in the long term it discourages skill development and technical innovation. In other cases, gender inequalities in access to land, other productive resources and markets, have muted supply response in agriculture, particularly in Africa. These issues are most notably linked to Goals 8 and 9 of the SDGs.

Notwithstanding the need to monitor the impact of trade on women, the 26 sustainability impact assessments (SIAs) that had been completed as of June 2017 in the European Commission did not include any specific statistics on Trade and Gender. Similarly, monitoring the impact of such agreements on women’s empowerment and gender equality during implementation, has also been neglected.

4.2.3. Quantity over quality

GAP II has concentrated on ensuring that progress on gender parity is measured in the planning and execution of EU actions/programmes, as well as their monitoring to ensure accountability. In practice this means, in line with the European Commission Communication on Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Development and the Council Conclusions on Gender in Development, ‘defining expected results, tracking resources,

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138 Fontana, Marzia, SOAS, University of London, *Presentation* for ‘Gender Equality in EU Trade Agreements: Perspectives from the South’, at the Hearing on Gender Equality in EU Trade Agreements, jointly organised by the Committee on International Trade (INTA) and the Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM), European Parliament, in Brussels, May 11 2017.

139 Goal 8 refers to promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. Goal 9 talks of building resilient infrastructure, promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialisation, and fostering innovation.


monitoring and evaluations, and integrating gender into indicators/results data and corporate results frameworks, where relevant. Increased visibility of results obtained for girls and women will be key."\[144\]

Specifically, as explained in the sections on **Clear guidelines** and **Consistent monitoring**, every new EU-funded project must include measurable targets and objectives on gender. The European Commission/EEAS annual monitoring report demonstrates that solid foundations have been laid towards collecting quantitative data in the monitoring of EU programmes and projects, which are then used for measuring progress towards meeting GAP II objectives. These are complemented by systematic gender analyses carried out in the designing phase of all new external actions undertaken, such as in projects, and bilateral and regional programming to understand the specific problems of the sector at hand and how to respond to them. The European Commission/EEAS annual monitoring report demonstrates that the Commission services and the EEAS have used in their reporting on activities sex-disaggregated data, wherever the EU delegations provided such data.

The merit of the statistics produced is that it helps identify the slackers: the EU delegations and Commission/EEAS services that have not reported, have partially reported and/or have not incorporated gender when carrying out their activities/programmes. Nonetheless, quality of gender equality outcomes and not only quantity – thus going beyond the averages and disaggregating statistics – is imperative when assessing social-economic and political development that aim to ensure that human development benefits reach everyone.\[145\] The European Commission/EEAS annual monitoring report does not provide a qualitative analysis and evaluation of the results of its activities on gender equality and women’s empowerment in external relations. It is not clear whether the chosen objectives were the right ones, how these were received by the third country (at government and civil society levels), and what the results of the activities/programmes undertaken were.

The European Commission/EEAS annual report notes that ‘[i]t is not possible from the reports to gain a full understanding of the substance of dialogues in partner countries given that they are often confidential. The reports from DG NEAR are a notable exception, providing detail on the topics discussed, commitments made and follow-up actions.’ The same evaluation admits that this is important to ‘integrate[e] gender dimensions into Sector Dialogues, such as on Public Finance Management, Public Administration Reform, Trade, Energy, Agriculture, Transport and Infrastructure’, which will not be fully met before the institutional cultural shift leads to gender mainstreaming throughout

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and across all parts of the EU’s external actions. The same applies for the human rights dialogues carried out by the EEAS: the information on what happened and whether there was any follow up, and if so, what that was, are questions that remain unanswered.

In addition, the availability and quality of the data used is unclear. Questions could be raised as to how the data is produced and whether and to what degree it is comparable. The European Commission/EEAS annual monitoring report admits, for example, that ‘the indicator and question on EU Member States programmes supporting the achievement of GAP II was interpreted in two ways: most delegations counted the number of EU Member States programmes, others provided a number for the EU Member States operating in the country.’

In addition, the structure and length of Thematic Priority and Objective reports received by EUDs has varied considerably. Some were ‘more elaborate, selecting multiple objectives and listing multiple programmes and projects. Others are brief, or partial, for example presenting only one section, e.g. the one on institutional culture shift or on thematic priority and objectives.’ Contributions from EU Member States into the EUD also varied widely, since not all EU Member States present in each country sent in their contributions.

Furthermore, determining which lines of disaggregation are needed to reveal inequalities along particular dimensions (health, education, economic growth, poverty, to name a few) could be difficult without making the distinction among the different societies’ processes of exclusion and marginalisation. Factoring in political, social and cultural sensitivities is also important since these elements can promote exclusions and deprivations.

4.2.4. Sidelining gender equality in difficult contexts

When it comes to including gender equality and women’s empowerment in the EU work in fragile, conflict and post-conflict contexts, the implementation of GAP II principles remains rather weak. It should be recognised that, gender mainstreaming has increasingly become a comprehensive and multi-sectoral strategy, whereby women have been recognised for the strategic and challenging role they play in advancing and stabilising their societies. This has been particularly true at country level policies, but it seems more complicated for regional policies, where GAP II also applies. A case in point would be the Mediterranean region, where the EU operates through the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Experts argue that the concept of ‘gender equality’, although spelt out and progressively better understood, has been used with ‘elasticity’ in

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the EU’s external goals and the necessity of coping with many emergencies in the Mediterranean region, especially after the 2011 awakening.\textsuperscript{148}

In that context, Guisti argues that the ENP allows for a certain flexibility through the principle of ‘joint ownership’, which is mainly intended to give the possibility of choosing a set of objectives already endorsed by the EU. In practice, the ENP offers partners the opportunity to select what is more suitable and convenient for them without actually letting them take part in the making of policies over which the EU holds full power. Moreover, the EU’s conditionality, which is very pervasive in the accession process, is weaker in the ENP since each partner benefits from a wider space for manoeuvring with regard to prioritising the reforms. As a result, gender parity, which is seen as a cultural and political product of the West, can be sidelined.\textsuperscript{149}

4.2.5. Wide-ranging activities lead to mixed results

Some non-governmental actors have argued that GAP II is not ‘sufficiently ambitious or comprehensive’ because it is not enough ‘for any EU actor work on just one objective under the three thematic pillars of the Plan’, and that discrimination against women – ‘the single most important root cause of all forms of gender inequality’ – is not tackled sufficiently in GAP II objectives and indicators.\textsuperscript{150} This evaluation, however, finds that discrimination against women is explicitly addressed under the three thematic priorities of GAP II.

Instead, what seems to be lacking in GAP II – not only regarding the specific issue of discrimination against women – is specific activities against measurable indicators. The broad nature of the proposed activities make it difficult to track real progress and to ensure that these will lead to specific results. Some examples of broad activities include: ‘prevent and decrease sexual and gender based violence in conflict, through community level redress systems, empowerment of women, and engagement of men and boys’; and ‘implement safeguarding policies for adequate humanitarian responses that address the specific needs and vulnerabilities of men and women of all ages.’\textsuperscript{151} It is difficult to see how these can been operationalised to bring concrete outcome and how the EU contribution can be measured.


5. Opportunities for action

Having taken stock of the merits of GAP II and the progress made in implementing it, as well as the weaknesses faced, this section outlines measures that could further enhance EU efforts to enhance gender equality and women’s empowerment in the EU’s external relations.

5.1. Adopt a ‘whole of society’ approach

Since the Lisbon Treaty came into force, the EU has made progress on its ‘whole of government’ approach. It has moved from an EU comprehensive approach that links tools and policies across the EU external action, to an EU integrated approach that also links EU external action at a strategic level. This approach was used when establishing cooperation among the different EU organs, cooperating with EU Member States, and engaging with governments in partner countries.

As of 2012, the EU also shifted its approach to supporting societies in third countries, according to which CSOs, including women’s NGOs, are no longer perceived and treated as mere implementers of development assistance; instead, they have become key development policy actors in their own right. In the same vein, the EU has introduced a permanent structured dialogue with CSOs, the Policy Forum on Development, which has helped establish new local strategies through CSO country roadmaps in 105 countries. CSOs also now play a central role in the EU’s external financing instruments that they help to design, implement and monitor. With a contribution of €2 billion, representing 73% of the world’s support to local CSOs in partner countries, the EU is the leading donor worldwide supporting local civil society. The EU is also the first global donor for CSOs in humanitarian crises and has the largest human rights and democracy CSO programme. This has often been an EU mantra on its development efforts; reality on the ground, however, is more complex and opinions from recipients more mixed, as this study has aimed to demonstrate.

EU support for local CSOs has not been aided by the shrinking space for civil society in recent years. Civil society (including women’s groups) has become a victim of its own

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success with a backlash from governments in third countries (and not only), leading to restrictions of their rights (e.g. changing the laws governing their existence, cutting available funding, and incarcerating their leaders). Even civil society actors present in what could be argued are less challenging transitional contexts, such as the Western Balkans, argue that it is not enough to support civil society through aid; ‘the EU needs to facilitate our relationship with our governments’.\textsuperscript{156} At a time when the space for civil society is shrinking, and notwithstanding the EU effort to mainstream this ‘shrinking space problem’ at the heart of its external action both at policy level\textsuperscript{157} and through its instruments,\textsuperscript{158} the EU needs to sharpen and broaden its strategies. Such considerations would also better incorporate the gender dimension in policy discussions.

In response, the EU could develop a ‘whole of society’ approach, whereby all relevant non-state stakeholders can be actors of change. NGOs have often criticised EU foreign policy instruments for not being ‘people-centred’,\textsuperscript{159} and especially in terms of gender equality, for being unable to ensure women’s effective participation. In response, a twin-track approach on gender mainstreaming and specific policy and programmes is needed. This would, on the one hand, address gender inequalities and women’s empowerment and, on the other, ensure that specific measures to combat societal discrimination and gender inequality always accompany legal and policy commitments.

\textsuperscript{156} Participant from the Western Balkan region, in \textit{‘Reflection Forum on the run-up to the Trieste Summit on Western Balkans’}, Berlin Process side event for think tanks, organised by Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Rome, Centre international de formation européenne (CIFE), Nice/Berlin, Austro-French Centre for Rapprochement in Europe (CFA), Vienna, and supported by a number of other think tanks and EU Member States, in Trieste, 26-27 June 2017.

\textsuperscript{157} Beyond a new generation of EU external action instruments to support CSOs as actors of development and democratic governance, the EU has also adopted an \textit{‘Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy’} that addresses the threats to civil society space, and a ‘rights-based’ approach to development to protect all human rights (including gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women).

\textsuperscript{158} The EU funds a human rights defenders (HRD) protection mechanism, now known as ProtectDefenders.eu, through the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR). The Emergency Fund for HRDs at risk channels funds to human rights defenders quickly when they face a moment of acute danger. Other instruments have also increasingly paid more attention to the shrinking space problem: the EU’s new ‘Civil Society Roadmaps’, now implemented in 105 countries; a new generation of ‘Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategy Papers'; the European Neighbourhood Instrument; and the thematic programme under the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI) for Civil Society Organisations and Local Authorities (CSOLA). EU delegations’ capacity has been enhanced through human rights focal points and human rights defenders liaison officers, who are responsible for supporting the protection of vulnerable groups and individuals (including women).

\textsuperscript{159} People-centred development is an approach to international development that focuses on improving local communities’ self-reliance, social justice, and participatory decision-making. It recognises that economic growth alone is not enough to ensure human development, and calls for changes in social, political, and environmental values and practices.
5.1.1. Structure relations with non-state actors

The commitment to mainstreaming or integrating gender analysis and perspectives across all instruments and modalities is gaining prominence in the European Commission, even if the practice is not yet as robust as intended. For the ‘whole of society’ approach to work, formal and consistent relations with women’s NGOs/CSOs are needed. While this is carried out in the context of the Instrument contributing to Security and Peace (IcSP), this is not the case for other EU tools. For example, civil society is mentioned in several places in the Joint Africa-EU Strategy (JAES), especially in the role of monitoring, but mechanisms should be in place to translate the principles agreed at political level in practice. In most SADC countries, while NGOs are recognised, their relationships with the national mechanisms are not spelled out and proceed on an ad hoc basis.160 The need for a growing role for women in local communities and female NGOs in monitoring and holding government/authorities accountable and acting as catalysts for change, is an issue that comes up repeatedly when speaking with activists and experts in the field.

Experts also explain that it is important to extend the narrow playing field with which the EU engages when working with/supporting women in third countries, to regions away from the urban centres and dense rural areas. There is an increasing need to encourage female participation in the rural areas, where their struggles are usually different (and sometimes more difficult) than those in urban areas.161 The contribution of women to civil society and non-state actors as accountability mechanisms, in response to the situation in the Mediterranean, has already been analysed in the section on Sidelining gender equality in difficult contexts.

The contributions made at the EU Partnership Forum organised by the European Commission in Brussels, in June 2017, demonstrate the utility of regular fora/seminars/conferences/debates, not only for connecting local state and non-state actors from the field with relevant EU actors, but especially for creating a platform for voicing concerns, exchanging lessons and building cooperation for future projects. However, while dialogue is structured with relevant CSOs at the HQ level (also through the Civil Society Dialogue Network), the situation is more arbitrary in the field. In the area of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), only 9.8% of peacekeeping and peacebuilding missions contain specific provisions to improve the security and status of girls and women of all ages. Nevertheless, CSDP missions and EU Special Security Representatives (EUSR) aim to consult with relevant CSOs to promote the security and status of women; but this is done on an ad hoc basis. Similarly, gender sensitivity does not apply to Electoral Observation Missions (EOM), where women represent only 17.9% of technical experts. Efforts are currently in progress to counter this trend: ‘the standard EU methodology for EOMs foresees that the issue of women’s participation is

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mainstreamed into all aspects of the mission and its reporting on women’s participation in the electoral process.\textsuperscript{162}

When looking at EU engagement in Rwanda, for example, Dubusscher raises concerns as to the opportunities that are given to marginalised and vulnerable women. She argues that the ‘institutional practices and norms at the EU delegation – including the almost exclusive use of budget support as well as the strict bureaucratic criteria for civil society funding – structurally marginalise the voices of Rwandan women and their movement. This process endangers Rwandan women’s country ownership, which is particularly problematic in the context of an increasingly authoritarian state.’\textsuperscript{163} It is also important to go beyond the partnership, signed in April 2012, between the EU and UN Women, set up to strengthen cooperation on empowering women and gender equality and ensuring closer collaboration, sharing of information, expertise and analysis effectively to advance women’s rights in the Southern Mediterranean region, Africa and Europe. The EU relationship with UN Women should not be privileged over partnering with other CSOs, including local NGOs.\textsuperscript{164} As pointed out in the case of EU democracy-building in Africa, ‘the EU should take care not to promote or support its preferred non-state actor partners and collaborators, but instead agree jointly with African governments on preferred non-state actor partners in African states.’\textsuperscript{165}

5.1.2. Involve the private sector

Internationally, the EU needs to invest more effort in building partnerships that are more effective, with other organisations working to address the shrinking civil society space problem. One way could be to get the private sector more involved. The EU needs to push CSOs to pay more attention to building links downwards through their own societies and with business actors. Experts argue that if they were less isolated domestically, they would be better protected from regimes.\textsuperscript{166} According to a recent McKinsey Global Institute, the private sector would also benefit from focusing on the large economic opportunity of improving parity between men and women. Although not a goal that can realistically be met in the short-term, private companies could benefit both

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{163} Dubusscher’s work on the implementation of EU development aid in Rwanda: Debusscher, Petra, ‘Gender Mainstreaming on the Ground? The Case of EU Development Aid Towards Rwanda’, in Weiner, Elaine and Heather MacRae (eds), The Persistent Invisibility of Gender in EU Policy, European Integration online Papers (ElOIP), Special issue 1(18), 2014: 19.
\item \textsuperscript{164} Interview with European Commission official 1, Brussels, March 2017.
\item \textsuperscript{165} Bradley, Andrew, The European Union and Challenges to Democracy Building in Africa, in Democracy in Development. Global Consultations on the EU’s Role in Democracy Building, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), Stockholm, 2009, p. 62.
\end{itemize}
directly and indirectly by taking action on gender equality in the workplace in concert with governments and non-governmental organisations.

In that context, the same study provides examples of financial incentives that the private sector can offer to boost gender equality. On incentivising behavioural changes in the family and community on the role of girls and women, for example, the Naning’oi Girls Boarding School project in Kenya is mentioned, which substitutes the traditional practice of ‘booking girls for marriage’ with booking them for school. According to this project, the traditional dowry of livestock or gifts offered to the girls’ parents is given in exchange for the girl going to school rather than getting married.

Another example offered as a way to promote higher labour force participation, corporations could supplement government-subsidised childcare through school scholarship programmes made available for girls. The business world could also support movements/associations working on the removal of tax disincentives to both partners working. Moreover, the private sector could finance infrastructure and technology projects to ensure, for example, that schools offer sanitation facilities for girls, and to create apps designed for female entrepreneurs, and gender- and mobile-based emergency services for female victims of violence. To create economic opportunities, multinationals could invest in skills-building programmes tied to future job placements and employment opportunities; provide offices that are adapted to the local culture (e.g. all-female business processing centres in Muslim societies); and provide capacity-building programmes and peer networks for women in the workplace. The private sector can also play a role in shaping attitudes by financing advocacy efforts, either by working with communities through NGOs or through public relations and corporate social responsibility efforts.167

5.2. Ensure that political commitment for EU action translates into real action

5.2.1. Make gender a priority at all levels

Experts have accused the EU of discrepancy between its strategic level (where gender equality is conceptualised) and its operational level (where gender dimensions are integrated throughout its programming). While the highest formal (i.e. binding) EU rules are very clear that ‘equality between women and men’ is a core objective that must be integrated into all aspects of its operations and policies (Article 2, Treaty of Amsterdam, 1997), ‘this is not matched in the EU’s external services on the ground, which tend to marginalise gender equality issues and/or implement gender mainstreaming in an instrumental and limited manner.’168 By adopting such an approach to development, the EU is seen as pursuing multiple and often competing goals, with its gender equality project crafted on top and out of an economic edifice oriented principally towards

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economic growth and competitiveness. The result of this situation is that only ‘purely formal’ gender mainstreaming policy is put in practice, where only basic and instrumental gender issues are included (such as maternal health and basic education). Less evident policy areas, such as transport and agriculture, are – falsely – assumed to be gender-neutral. The ensuing problem is that underlying processes that aggravate social inequality (e.g., structural and cultural obstacles) are neglected.169

The predominant focus of gender equality policies on the public sphere (even though equality in the public sphere heavily depends on equality in the private sphere), and their use in an instrumental fashion (especially to contribute to employment-led goals) is not new.170 For example, an analysis of the programming of EU development aid towards Rwanda (until programming year 2014) reveals that gender is included extensively in the country analysis, but to a much lesser extent in the strategy and budget. More specifically, the Country Strategy Paper on Rwanda mentioned several problems of gender inequality (e.g., poverty, HIV/AIDS and women’s limited access to employment, credit and higher education), while the National Indicative Programme that is the most concrete part of the document (it includes timetables, budgets and measurement indicators), contained only two general sentences on the participation of women/vulnerable groups in employment creation in rural development and infrastructure. The document did not specify how women’s participation would be guaranteed. Instead, ‘gender seems to get filtered out when measures become more concrete’. In addition, while integration of gender issues in EU development aid has been a formal requirement since 1995, Dubusscher argued that it was difficult to assess how gender would figure into the development policy programming (2014-2019).171 GAP II has set solid foundations for the gender dimensions to appear clearly at all levels of programming: the country strategy, the indicative programme, the budget, and the specific activities.

5.2.2. Further streamline monitoring

While much progress was made with GAP II in addressing the monitoring of gender parity and women’s empowerment in external relations, a number of shortcomings still need to be addressed. Some of these are acknowledged by the European Commission and the EEAS in their first implementation report, which notes that, ‘in many instances the statistics and data available are not sufficiently in-depth for use in the design of action documents on the EU’s selected concentration areas. This means that even where a

169 Debusscher, Petra, ‘Gender Mainstreaming on the Ground? The Case of EU Development Aid Towards Rwanda’, in Weiner, Elaine and Heather MacRae (eds), The Persistent Invisibility of Gender in EU Policy, European Integration online Papers (EIoP), Special issue 1(18), 2014: 11.


171 Debusscher, Petra, ‘Gender Mainstreaming on the Ground? The Case of EU Development Aid Towards Rwanda’, in Weiner, Elaine and Heather MacRae (eds), The Persistent Invisibility of Gender in EU Policy, European Integration online Papers (EIoP), Special issue 1(18), 2014: 9-10.
gender country profile exists, further action is required for generating data – as part of the preparation of the action documents – to provide the level of detail required. Thus, in many cases, additional sector-specific gender analysis is/will be required at programme or project formulation stage.172

Equally, as noted in the minutes of the Member States Gender Experts Meeting of July 2016, ‘gender analysis is still included as an annex (in the check list) and not yet in the core of the programme document’.173 The European Commission/EEAS report notes that ‘a review of selected programme proposals in the second-half of 2016 (submitted to the internal Quality check by the so-called Quality Support Group) showed that most Action Documents were prepared before the gender analysis was done or completed. Some draw on existing gender analysis of EU, international and/or national partners, but are weakened by a lack of sector-specific gender analysis. Gender analysis and data are present in some Action Documents cross-cutting Annexes, and briefly in the cross-cutting issues section of Action Documents, but not in the main body of the Action Document (context, problem analysis, objective, risks/assumptions, activities, results, log frame).’174

In addition, it is important to clarify how reliable the gender analysis is, how EU delegations and Member States have collected the data, how developed the data is, and to ensure that it is prepared in a streamlined manner to make it comparable to that of other EU delegations. Importantly, the input and expertise from international and national partners, academia/think tanks, and women’s organisations should not only be consulted but should also feed into the monitoring of EU financed activities and programmes on gender equality. It is not clear whether this is the case today.

While new gender focal points have been appointed or nominated in the EUDs, for some their time is stretched as the GFP tasks are in addition to their core or other responsibilities. The European Parliament has often called on VP/HR and the EEAS to develop clear operational guidelines on the role of focal points in delegations, so that they may improve, act as true human rights advisors and carry out their work efficiently.175

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173 Minutes, Member States Gender Experts Meeting, 7-8 July 2016, in Brussels, p. 2.


5.2.3. Include gender equality in trade negotiations and the monitoring of trade agreements

As explained in the section on Trade and gender, although trade affects women’s wellbeing both positively and negatively, it is not explicitly considered in the European Commission’s SIA, nor when monitoring trade agreements that are in force. To respond to these problems, Fontana suggests better documenting of the gender dynamics associated with changes in services, standards and regulations, and taking a more comprehensive approach to gender than is currently the case in SIAs. Fontana also calls for gender analysis to be regularly included in the monitoring of implementation of trade agreements that are in force. At the implementation level, and in particular in relation to trade with developing countries, the EU could more effectively use multilateral development cooperation frameworks such as the ‘Aid for Trade’ initiative to support governments in the implementation of gender equality goals within their trade strategies.176

Furthermore, in order to pursue gender smart procurement in all political and economic settings, governments should seek to implement a three-pronged approach (in the image of policies that are adopted in EU Member States): targets and strategies to increase diversity in procurement (no more all-male boards in companies), including supporting women as procurement professionals; targeted action to help women overcome the barriers to participate in government tenders, with a special focus on SMEs; and increased transparency around gender equity in procurement.177 Moreover, studies have shown that the introduction of labour rights chapters in trade agreements is welcomed. More specifically, such provisions ease labour market access, in particular for working age women; they impact on the narrowing of the gender wage gap; and they do not divert or decrease trade flows. It is essential that ILO decent work standards are enforceable.178

5.2.4. Include men in EU programmes on gender equality

As analysed in the section entitled Understanding gender parity, there is a clear shift in the EU discourse on gender mainstreaming in GAP II, which compared to earlier EU efforts, has moved forward. This is also exemplified in earlier studies conducted by gender experts who argued that, before the review of GAP I, the EU did not conceive


177 Subacchi, Paola, Presentation: Gender-Smart Procurement, Gender Equality in EU Trade Agreements: Perspectives from the South’, at the Hearing on Gender Equality in EU Trade Agreements, jointly organised by the Committee on International Trade (INTA) and the Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM), European Parliament, in Brussels, May 11 2017.

gender as a relation between men and women, but simply as a ‘women’s issue’.179 While this has changed in GAP II, the role of men and boys in EU financed programmes on women’s empowerment remains limited.

As the first annual European Commission/EEAS monitoring report admits, although adolescent boys were to some degree involved in EU programmes that fall under Objective 7 (Girls and women free from all forms of violence against them both in the public and in the private sphere) of the priority related to the shift in institutional culture, more needs to be done to engage men.180 Similarly, in her interviews with gender professionals in European Commission services, Debusscher had found that expertise and knowledge on gender mainstreaming was ‘sometimes rather limited’ and that ‘the words ‘men’ (or ‘male’, or ‘boy’) were barely mentioned in the interviews, only when explicitly put into a question.’ In response, as experts have over the years pointed out, it is important to educate men in equal representation in politics, at the workplace and in society at large.181

5.3. Adapt to local realities

As already mentioned in the section entitled Adopt a ‘whole of society’ approach, the EU has moved forward on linking its external policy tools and programmes in line with the EU comprehensive approach,182 and at strategic level in line with the EU integrated approach.183 Nonetheless, EU intervention on promoting gender equality in third countries appears to have left out some relevant stakeholders in the design, planning, implementation, and monitoring of its activities.

5.3.1. One size does not fit all

While women across the world often face similar challenges, such as limited access to property and financial services, lack of social protection and the unpaid care burden, the

proposed solutions cannot follow the same format. When it comes to governance reforms in the recipient countries, the EU needs to make sure that these are pursued in a way that is not generic and abstract, but instead more connected to the immediate diplomatic policy in specific countries. Formal improvements in the legal environment for CSOs, for example, often fail to protect civic activists in practice. The EU needs a foreign policy capable of tackling the political specificities of the shrinking civil society space in individual states (see section on Adopt a ‘whole of society’ approach). Freedom of association must be backed up by a more expansive focus on the right to participate. For this, the EU needs to leverage oblique forms of political pressure.  

In addition, the GAP II monitoring scheme should consider intersectionality more clearly, in line with SDG 17.18: ‘By 2020, enhance capacity-building support to developing countries to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.’ The intersection of these variables makes for new needs to which the EU must tailor its approach. Intersectionality has not been integrated sufficiently in the EU efforts so far and is only alluded to once in GAP II, as follows: ‘Critical moments in a girl’s or woman’s life, the need for age-specific support, as well as the intersection of gender with other social inequalities, will inform the [rights-based] approach.’ The importance of taking ‘age into account because gender discriminations do pile up while ageing’, was an issue that was raised by civil society organisations at the Member States’ expert meeting in the context of the implementation of GAP II, in July 2016.  

Demographic, economic and cultural contexts also affect women’s experience and make it different from others. It should be recognised that each region and country, with their own legal, institutional and cultural underpinnings are at differing stages of compliance with international (and EU) standards on gender equality. As Hudson and Lowe have pointed out, merely ‘copying’ the same policies in different circumstances can lead to different results, which are dependent on previous policies, institutional and structural factors, as well as the normative understanding of policies.  

Furthermore, transitions, democracy-building and embedding human rights (including gender equality) in a state and society is complex and messy. In any transition, the new social reality that is created is not a mere result of transfer of existing models. Instead,
there is a great deal of continuity with the past – legacy is important.\textsuperscript{188} The force of resistance and inertia in organisational settings, be they EU foreign policy organs or recipient country institutions, should not be underestimated.\textsuperscript{189} Experts and field workers have often noted the domestic resistance to implementing and discussing gender equality in certain third countries/regions.\textsuperscript{190} Experience in supporting transitions can also be a precursor for strengthening EU policies in other regions. For example, using Croatia as a case, Dobrotić et al. showed that the gender agenda was added to the EU accession negotiation process rather late – primarily via EU conditionality. Although narrow in scope and often limited in impact to just ‘paper compliance’ with EU legislation, it led to the opening of discussions in the gender equality area in post-communist countries and empowered women’s organisations.\textsuperscript{191}

\begin{quote}
**Box 5: Case study – Gender equality in the Western Balkans**

Gender equality is one of the requirements with which Western Balkan candidates and potential candidates for EU accession (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Serbia) must comply. Despite having adopted or amended their relevant legislation (e.g., criminal and labour laws), elaborated national strategies and action plans, and established institutional mechanisms to carry out and monitor the policies in the area of gender equality, in practice, such policies are seen as low-priority.\textsuperscript{192}

As a result, the institutions responsible for implementing gender equality policies are weak and enjoy little public trust; women do not tend to use them when they are in need. Lack of effective rule of law protection from gender inequality, abuse and violence against women, means that women in the region still share similar challenges of increased personal, economic, and social insecurity. For example, in Serbia, one in two women has suffered some form of violence and 330 women have been killed in the last 10 years as a result of gender violence. Cases of abuse of women remain


\textsuperscript{189} For a development of this argument, see Elgström, Ole, ‘Norm Negotiations. The Construction of New Norms Regarding Gender and Development in EU Foreign Aid Policy’, *Journal of European Public Policy* 7(3), Special Issue, 2000: 457-476.

\textsuperscript{190} See, for example, Vasiljević, Snježana, Gender Equality in Croatia, in Örtenblad, Anders et al., *Gender Equality in a Global Perspective*, Routledge, New York and London, pp. 246-260.


\textsuperscript{192} For a description of the legislative and institutional framework regulating gender equality in each of the Western Balkan countries, see Lilyanova, Velina, *Rights and Empowerment of Women in the Western Balkans*, reference no.: PE 607.273, European Parliamentary Research Service, European Parliament, Brussels, June 2017.
unreported or unrecorded, especially in Kosovo, because women are too afraid to come forward since there is no real implementation of rule of law (e.g. complaints are not recorded when reported to the police and perpetrators are not prosecuted by the courts).  

In turn, traditional stereotypes that place women and girls in a subordinate position are perpetuated, and public awareness of their rights is low. This has meant that, similar to other post-communist countries, the Western Balkans region experiences the remnants of policies dating from the socialist period: the economic independence of women is favoured, primarily by granting them employment in the public sector, but the position of women in the private sphere, that is, societal norms, have not been addressed. This has resulted in a comparatively high participation of women in the labour market, but also in a double burden since the traditional division of care work was preserved and remains a persisting problem. Moreover, unequal access to participation in high-level politics (despite existing quotas) are palpable issues for women and have not been tackled yet.

The response of Western Balkan countries’ governments to these challenges is largely seen as inadequate. In the framework of EU accession, the EU has called for more attention to be paid to ensuring gender equality, including for an increased role for civil society. However, the region’s political instability (high, depending on the country) signifies a high uncertainty about future political developments, including uncertainties about EU membership prospects. EEAS Principal Advisor on Gender and the implementation of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, Ambassador Mara Marinaki’s first visit to Albania was part of the effort to promote the EU gender priorities in the Western Balkans, and included a first stop in Kosovo.

The ambivalence of the EU and its Member States regarding EU enlargement also affects the role of the EU in social development. In these transition societies, social

193 ‘Joint Exchange of Views on Violence Against Women in the Western Balkans and Turkey’, organised by Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM), the Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI), the Delegation to the EU-Albania Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee, the Delegation for relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo, the Delegation to the EU-former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Joint Parliamentary Committee, the Delegation to the EU-Montenegro Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee, the Delegation to the EU-Serbia Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee, and the Delegation to the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee, European Parliament, Brussels, 8 June 2017.


196 Balfour, Rosa and Corina Stratulat (eds.), EU Member States and Enlargement towards the Balkans, EPC Issue Paper No. 79, European Policy Centre (EPC), Brussels, July 2015.
policy-making is influenced by state fragmentation and statebuilding, as well as the fact that welfare is conditioned by a constant re-definition of citizenship.\textsuperscript{197} (Also, see section Long term engagement). For its part, civil society has repeatedly called for stricter monitoring, more consistent implementation and public awareness-raising as part of the national agenda.

What the region needs is more funding for women’s shelters; real commitment from governments in the region to implement relevant laws; a change of societal norms on the issues of sexual harassment and gender equality through the inclusion of gender studies education curricula and the development of advocacy programmes; strengthened institutional capacity in rule of law; the eradication of impunity and the setting up of rehabilitative measures; and the strengthening of the capacity of women’s organisation to carry out government oversight effectively.\textsuperscript{198}

\section*{5.3.2. EU delegations at the frontline}

As confirmed by the European Commission/EEAS annual monitoring report, the EU delegations play a central role in implementing GAP II. As with other EU common policies and actions, the EU delegations represent the EU diplomatically at country level in the dialogue with the government and local actors, carry out the technical and political coordination with Member States in the country, and are the first contact point on coordination of EU efforts with international partners in the country.

In doing so, it is their job to ensure that the implementation of policies, including the mainstreaming, protection and promotion of gender equality is a collective exercise and much more of a two-way street. This implies that information and analysis is shared between the EU and its Member States, as well as proper consultation of local actors (governmental and non-governmental) in the design, drafting and implementation of the EU’s multi-annual programming. EUDs also have a role on regional strategies and programmes. In practice, however, regional programmes are generally managed by one EUD. Experts have noted that often knowledge or involvement of other EUDs in the region is weak, partly as a result of lack of human resources.\textsuperscript{199}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{197} Dobrotić, Ivana et al., Gender Equality Policies and Practices in Croatia – The Interplay of Transition and Late Europeanization, \textit{Social Policy & Administration} 47(2), April 2013: 218-240.
\item \textsuperscript{198} ‘Joint Exchange of Views on Violence Against Women in the Western Balkans and Turkey’, organised by Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM), the Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI), the Delegation to the EU-Albania Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee, the Delegation for relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo, the Delegation to the EU-former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Joint Parliamentary Committee, the Delegation to the EU-Montenegro Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee, the Delegation to the EU-Serbia Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee, and the Delegation to the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee, European Parliament, Brussels, 8 June 2017.
\item \textsuperscript{199} See, for example, Faria, Fernanda, \textit{What EU Comprehensive Approach? Challenges for the EU Action Plan and Beyond}, Briefing Note no. 71, European Centre for Development Policy Management, Maastricht, October 2014, p. 13.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
5.3.3. Women as actors, not victims

NGO experts and activists argue that the participation of women in public spaces, especially in justice, research, and political decision-making, still needs to improve. Ole Elgström demonstrates that, ‘[t]he decision to rely on a network of national and EU gender experts – almost all of them women – in the early phase of the EU decision-making process ensure[s] that gender equality concerns [are] clearly established in the ensuing resolution. The continued involvement of such experts throughout the decision-making process ensure[s] that such concerns [are] not forgotten during the later stages of the process.’ Equally, when it comes to women’s role in a conflict context, an ODI study argues that women play a key role throughout conflict situations, not only for meeting basic needs, but also as advocates, fostering the trust and collaboration – the ‘social capital’ – that are so critical in reconciliation.

Therefore, the EU should strengthen its support to women’s participation, shifting their role to one of actors. It is important to factor into policy the gender expertise that exists in third countries (for example, in Africa) and put creative resource mobilisation strategies in place to promote sustainability of change in gender equality. In that context, the EU should work more closely with CSOs, since these organisations are able to mobilise public support and solidarity and to combine development and advocacy actions anchored in the economic, social and cultural realities of people’s lives. For example, the Women’s Protocol in Africa could be disseminated widely at national level so that it becomes embedded in the population’s psyche, transform mentalities, and ensure its implementation. Women’s organisations therefore have an important role to play in lobbying governments to ratify the Protocol and bring it into force.

5.4. Enhance training and access to training for women – and implement it

In recent years, DG DEVCO has trained an impressive number of EU external services staff on gender mainstreaming in development cooperation (over 2 000 people since 2004). Continuous efforts are made to produce better results for gender mainstreaming in the relevant EU institutions. This is done in two ways: by strengthening the competences of staff both at HQ and EUD levels (e.g. through revision of core curricula, preparation of guidance notes on specific thematic issues, regular training sessions organised by


thematic area or region, etc.); and by increasing the number of gender focal persons that can act as catalysts and orient their peers on resources and available support. The EU Gender Resource Package\textsuperscript{204} is now available online, and additional gender expertise has been made available during the year to support the implementation of GAP II through preparation of gender analysis and mainstreaming of gender in new programmes across sectors.\textsuperscript{205}

Nevertheless, a look at the contractual status and hierarchical position of the trained staff members shows that large parts of the EU staff trained were contract agents with temporary assignments who have since left the EU institutions. Based on that data, experts have concluded that the temporary and least powerful actors in the bureaucracy are becoming more skilled in gender mainstreaming, while the more powerful permanent officials seem more interested in other training opportunities.\textsuperscript{206} Specifically, in a context of ‘gender apathy’, (senior) staff members for whom gender may be a non-issue marginalise a person with gender expertise (in the case the GFP). Indeed, staff members responsible for fostering gender mainstreaming are very often female contract agents with temporary assignments (as opposed to permanent officials) in non-decision-making positions. This is the case not only in the EU delegation in Rwanda but in most EU delegations around the world.\textsuperscript{207} There is thus an obvious power asymmetry, to the disadvantage of staff working on gender equality, which manifests itself in the struggle over which ideas matter and who accumulates resources, privilege and opportunity. This power difference does not only occur between gender policy and non-gender policy staff specifically, but also between female and male staff more generally.\textsuperscript{208}

In response, higher levels of EU staff (officials) should make better use of the training that staff in the EU delegations have received. Dubusscher’s research on training available to officials in the EUD in Kigali, Rwanda shows that there was no follow up to the training that staff received and no necessary pressure and commitment by middle management to support GFPs who attempted to organise EU delegation staff meetings on gender

\textsuperscript{204} European Commission, ILO International Training centre, UN Women, learn4dev: Joint Competence Development, \textit{Resource Package on Gender Mainstreaming in EU Development Cooperation}.


\textsuperscript{208} Debusscher, Petra, \textit{‘Gender Mainstreaming on the Ground? The Case of EU Development Aid Towards Rwanda’}, in Weiner, Elaine and Heather MacRae (eds), \textit{The Persistent Invisibility of Gender in EU Policy}, European Integration online Papers (EIoP), Special issue 1(18), 2014: 15.
equality in EU development. Dubusscher concluded that, in the informal standard operating procedure of the bureaucracy, it is acceptable to put a gender meeting on the bottom of your priority list. Such informally understood conventions and norms are embedded in the everyday practice of a bureaucracy. They are disguised as standard and taken for granted, but they are also ‘particularly sticky and resistant to change’ as they represent the status quo.209

Moreover, DG DEVCO should not only have more gender advisors within the B1 Unit, but it should also train the staff within the geographical units on gender equality issues, and more specifically on the ‘Women, Peace and Security agenda’. Equally, the EEAS and Member States should include training on gender issues in the pre-deployment package that is available for all personnel working in CSDP missions.210

Very importantly, women in recipient communities would benefit from access to training on political participation. Women are neither trained sufficiently nor are they trained to access politics. Their civic participation tends to be limited only to campaigns in favour of the electoral participation of women rather than effective participation of women in politics. It is for this reason that experts have repeatedly pointed to the significance of empowering organisations (especially NGOs) to train women so they can participate in politics.211

5.5. Engage consistently and for the long term

While GAP II laid solid foundations for an institutional shift in all relevant EU institutions/services at HQ level and in third countries, the challenge will be to continue in this direction with consistency and in full recognition that it is unlikely that ‘success stories’ will follow in the short-term. This responsibility is recognised in the first European Commission/EEAS monitoring report.212 Similar to other aspects of EU external action, sustainable change in gender equality will necessitate long-term

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209 Debusscher, Petra, ‘Gender Mainstreaming on the Ground? The Case of EU Development Aid Towards Rwanda’, in Weiner, Elaine and Heather MacRae (eds), The Persistent Invisibility of Gender in EU Policy, European Integration online Papers (EIoP), Special issue 1(18), 2014: 14.


engagement from the EU institutions. Such an approach will also help the EU move towards genuine partnerships and build credibility in its external action. At the same time, there is a need for the EU to recognise the limits of any EU effort in its foreign policy. Doing so, will help the EU set realistic objectives that are outlined and linked to clear benchmarks and to a clear timeline. Despite good intentions, impact on the ground is not always controllable. Moreover, it is determined by the engagement of the third country’s government and community,\textsuperscript{213} in addition to that of the EU and its Member States. As experts have explained, institutions are defined as ‘relatively enduring features of political and social life (rules, norms and procedures) that structure behaviour and cannot be changed easily or instantaneously’.\textsuperscript{214}

Adequate funding on gender equality in external relations will be necessary to sustain political commitment to this goal. Yet, despite significant increases in recent years, the overall funding resources for gender equality and women’s empowerment actions remain inadequate. Experts who have monitored EU development aid distribution over the years argue that EU funds for development have been moved to other priorities on the EU agenda. The amount of money the EU and its Member States commit to promoting human rights, encouraging democratic reforms and strengthening civil society – all of which are policies through which gender equality and women’s empowerment is supported – is extremely limited compared to the budget proposed for a EU defence fund. In addition, in recent years, most EU Member States have slashed their aid budgets.\textsuperscript{215}

In the draft budget for 2018, the European Commission suggests to reduce the total funds under heading 4 of the EU budget, ‘The EU as a Global Player’, by €232 million (i.e. 5.6 %) to €9,593 billion. This money is also used as a ‘margin’ in the budget to support migrants in Turkey, if needed. The most important budget line for development, the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI), is now earmarked for ‘contributing to the fight against the root causes of irregular migration’, instead of exclusively focusing on poverty reduction. This contradicts the EU treaties, which determine that poverty reduction and eradication should be the primary objective of development cooperation. Furthermore, the EU’s recently adopted framework for development policy renewed the EU’s commitment to poverty eradication, gender equality, climate change, and food security.\textsuperscript{216}


\textsuperscript{216} Oel, Florian, \textit{EU Budget: Don’t Use Development Aid For Controlling Migration}, Oxfam International, Brussels, 30 May 2017.
6. Conclusion

This evaluation of the first year of implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan 2016-2020 (GAP II) was prepared to accompany the drafting of the implementation report on this topic by the DEVE and FEMM Committees. This evaluation was prepared in full recognition of the short timeframe since the adoption of GAP II and its application (only one year to date). In these circumstances, it is too early to make a full assessment of the impact of GAP II.

First insights into the application of GAP II show that the EU has fundamentally mainstreamed the notion and significance of gender equality and women’s empowerment in partner countries in its discourse and in external relations and cooperation programmes. It has taken on board a number of lessons identified from its experience of the preceding Gender Action Plan 2010-2015 (GAP I). Progress on supporting gender equality in EU external action demonstrates that there is an understanding at EU decision-making level that empowering girls and women across the globe is not an option in our times, but a duty and a responsibility to future generations. In turn, gender parity in partner countries has become synonymous with increasing productivity and economic growth, respect and protection of human rights, sustainability and resilience of a society.

Important successes of GAP II so far include a better understanding of the underpinnings of gender equality, including the role of men in ensuring gender parity and promoting women’s empowerment. One of the most important achievements has been making progress on GAP II’s focus on shifting EU institutional culture at headquarter and delegation levels, therefore pushing for a true systemic change in the EU institutions on gender issues. This understanding has also been integrated in the implementation of GAP II, illustrated by the clear operationalisation and strong commitment of EU leadership to the objectives of the framework examined. Furthermore, the shift in EU institutional culture on gender equality in third countries has been a central feature in the implementation of GAP II, as illustrated in the responsiveness of European Commission services to gender issues and their attention to training.

The relevant EU institutions also appear to have worked well together and with EU Member States, some of which have made much progress in integrating the principles of GAP II in their development aid. In addition, much effort has been put into reaching out to civil society actors, working better with other international donors present in the field, and consulting with stakeholders. A solid monitoring system that has the potential to hold EU actors at all levels to account for their shortcomings and determine effective implementation has been put in place. Equally, guidelines at EU level and among Member States allow for this monitoring to take place consistently. This has in turn translated into stronger investments in human capital and financial assistance for promoting gender parity in EU external relations.

Despite having set solid foundations for progress in the field of mainstreaming, protecting and promoting gender equality in the EU’s external relations, GAP II faces certain weaknesses. When operationalising GAP II, efforts on gender parity have
primarily centred on development aid and cooperation, while women's role in fragile contexts and their role in mediation and negotiation are neglected. Additionally, GAP II does not address sufficiently nor in specific terms the link between trade and gender, an area where women are affected in terms of access to finances/resources, labour and employment conditions, and wage conditions. Furthermore, while a solid monitoring framework and clear guidelines have been established with GAP II, these are disproportionately focused on quantitative data and analysis. What is missing is an assessment of programmes and activities concentrating on the quality of delivery and potential (short-term, medium-term and long-term) impact on recipient countries. In addition, when looking at the programming of EU activities, the gender dimension seems to be sidelined in situations of crisis or difficult conflicts, and occasionally activities are of a broad nature, which makes it difficult to track real progress and to have a specific outcome.

This study has demonstrated that sustainable change on women’s empowerment and gender parity in partner countries is a complex and lengthy process. It necessitates that the EU engages consistently and in the long-term; that EU efforts are adapted to local realities in recipient countries; that the EU demonstrates its political commitment clearly across regions and at all levels; that training on gender equality issues be improved and further specialised and that it be made available to local partners in government and among non-state actors (including NGOs); and, finally, that a ‘whole of society’ approach be adopted in parallel to a ‘whole of government’ approach when engaging with partner countries.
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This evaluation of the first year of implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan 2016-2020 (GAP II) was prepared to accompany the drafting of the implementation report on this topic by the DEVE and FEMM Committees. This study finds that, while it is too early to make a full assessment of the impact of GAP II, the EU has fundamentally mainstreamed the notion of gender equality and women’s empowerment in partner countries in its discourse. It has also taken on board a number of lessons identified from its experience of the preceding Gender Action Plan 2010-2015 (GAPI).

Key achievements of GAP II include a better understanding of the underpinnings of gender equality, including the role of men in promoting women’s empowerment; progress towards a shift in EU institutional culture at EU headquarter and delegation levels; a smarter investment of human and financial capital on gender parity; the use of clear guidelines for programme implementation; and the enhancement of the monitoring of relevant activities. Some weaknesses persist, however, especially in terms of focusing on specific facets of EU external action and over-concentrating on quantitative assessments of programmes and activities rather than on the quality of delivery.

Sustainable change on women’s empowerment and gender parity in partner countries necessitates: consistent and long-term EU engagement; greater adaptability of EU efforts to local realities; EU political commitment across regions and at all levels; improved relevant training and access of local recipients to that training; and the adoption of a ‘whole of society’ approach in parallel to a ‘whole of government’ approach when engaging with partner countries.