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EU Gender Action Plan (GAP) III – An ambitious agenda for gender equality and women’s empowerment in EU external action

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EUROPEAN
COMMISSION

HIGH REPRESENTATIVE
OF THE UNION FOR
FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND
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**JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE
COUNCIL**

**EU GENDER ACTION PLAN (GAP) III – AN AMBITIOUS AGENDA FOR GENDER
EQUALITY AND WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT IN EU EXTERNAL ACTION**

{SWD(2020) 284 final}

EU GENDER ACTION PLAN (GAP) III – AN AMBITIOUS AGENDA FOR GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT IN EU EXTERNAL ACTION

Gender¹ equality is a core value of the EU² and a universally recognised human right, as well as an imperative to well-being, economic growth, prosperity, good governance, peace and security. All people, in all their diversity, should be free to live their chosen life, thrive socially and economically, participate and take a lead as equals.

The EU is a global front-runner in promoting gender equality as a key political objective of its external action and common foreign and security policy, aimed at accelerating progress towards global goals including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) at the core of the 2030 Agenda. The EU pursues a **three-pronged approach**, combining gender mainstreaming, targeted actions and political dialogue.

The challenges to gender equality are as varied as the contexts in which they emerge and call for context specific responses. **There is, however, not a single country in the world that is close to achieving by 2030 gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls.** In 2020, it is 25 years since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action³ and 20 years since UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security⁴ were adopted. **Some progress has been achieved, but deep-rooted inequalities** persist, including on basic access to health, education and jobs, but also with regards to widespread gender-based violence everywhere in the world.

In many places, women’s and girls’ rights are called into question and often denied. Instability, fragility, conflict, climate change, environmental degradation, migration, forced displacement and lately the COVID-19 pandemic are among the critical factors exacerbating inequalities and threatening hard-won gains. Civil society organisations, including women’s rights organisations, are facing shrinking civil, civic and democratic space.

However, **challenges also bring opportunities.** Women and girls increasingly take part in shaping global transformations, with new generations active in global and grassroots movements for a green and just transition, equal rights for all, democracy, and for peaceful and inclusive societies. This shows that positive change is possible. The post-COVID-19 recovery must be an opportunity to address structural inequalities and build more inclusive societies.

Drawing from the **EU gender equality strategy 2020 - 2025**, which calls for a **gender-equal Europe**, this new EU gender action plan for 2021–2025 (GAP III) calls for a **gender-equal world** and is complementary to the LGBTIQ equality strategy for 2020-2025. It will scale up the EU contribution to reach SDG 5⁵ in all EU internal and external policy areas and across the **2030 Agenda**.

¹ ‘Gender’ means the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for women and men.

² Art. 2, 3(3) and 21 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU), Art. 8 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), and Art. 21 and 23 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

³ https://www.un.org/en/events/pastevents/pdfs/Beijing_Declaration_and_Platform_for_Action.pdf

⁴ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/docs/2000/10/un-security-council-resolution-1325>

⁵ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5>

Building on the evaluation of EU support to gender equality⁶ and stakeholder consultations⁷, GAP III provides a **policy framework for the EU** to boost its level of engagement, focusing on **five pillars**:

- (1) Making EU engagement on gender equality more effective as a **cross-cutting priority** of EU external action in its **policy and programming work**. The European Commission and the High Representative reconfirm that by 2025 **85% of all new external actions will contribute to this objective**⁸. This requires further **gender mainstreaming in all external policies and sectors** and a **gender-transformative**⁹, **rights-based and intersectional**¹⁰ approach.
- (2) Promoting, together with EU Member States, strategic EU engagement **at multilateral, regional and country level** and jointly **stepping up implementation of GAP III in each partner country and region**, in close cooperation with partner governments, civil society, the private sector and other key stakeholders. This will require greater coordination, cooperation and transparency.
- (3) **Focusing on key areas of engagement**: ensuring freedom from all forms of gender-based violence; promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights; strengthening economic and social rights and the empowerment of girls and women; advancing equal participation and leadership; implementing the women, peace and security agenda, addressing challenges and harnessing the opportunities offered by the green transition and the digital transformation.
- (4) **Leading by example**, by establishing **gender-responsive**¹¹ and **gender-balanced leadership at top EU political and management levels**. This requires leadership buy-in, investing in knowledge, resources and pooling action with EU Member States.
- (5) Reporting and communicating on results, putting in place a **quantitative, qualitative, and inclusive monitoring system** to increase **public accountability, ensure transparency and access to information** and achieve better EU outreach on the **impact** of its work worldwide.

1. Making EU engagement for gender equality more effective

1.1. Tackling the root causes of gender inequality: three core principles

To address the root causes of gender inequality and contribute to counter the multiplicity of stereotypes and biases still prevailing in many contexts, the EU action should be guided by **three principles**:

- **Take a gender-transformative approach**. This means examining, questioning, and changing rigid gender norms and imbalances of power which disadvantage women

⁶ Evaluation on 'EU support to gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment (2010-2018)', https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/tenders/monitoring-and-evaluation_en

⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/topics/empowering-women-and-girls_en

⁸ Targets will be aligned with the Regulation establishing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), once adopted.

⁹ An approach is gender transformative when it aims to shift gender-power relations, for a positive change of the paradigm(s) that produce discriminations and inequalities.

¹⁰ An approach is intersectional when it is based on an acknowledgement of the multiple characteristics and identities of an individual, to analyse and respond to the ways in which sex and gender intersect with other personal characteristics.

¹¹ Gender-responsive: aiming to increase accountability and accelerate implementation of commitments to gender equality with a rights-based approach at international, national and community level.

and girls and generate discriminations at all ages, starting from early childhood, in societies. This means the EU promoting change in social attitudes, including by **actively engaging men and boys and by putting a focus on young people as drivers of change**. To work in a way that is context-sensitive, it is essential to forge strong **partnerships** and dialogue with **local actors, civil society and local communities** and to support women's organisations.

- **Address intersectionality of gender with other forms of discrimination**¹². Focus should also be on the most disadvantaged women, for instance indigenous peoples and persons belonging to racial/ethnic/religious minorities, forcibly displaced, migrant, economically and socially deprived women, those living in rural and coastal areas, as they face multiple discrimination. Specific challenges for girls and of elderly women should be considered. Women with disabilities, also protected by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities¹³, are particularly disadvantaged. The rights of women with disabilities should be at the core of the future strategy on the rights of persons with disabilities for the coming years (2021-2030). In the same spirit, advancing the rights of LGBTIQ persons is the focus of the **EU LGBTIQ equality strategy**¹⁴, to be read in conjunction with GAP III. All intersecting dimensions are equally relevant.
- **Follow an approach based on human rights**, which places the principles of non-discrimination and countering inequalities at the centre of all action¹⁵. This includes helping every human being to exercise their human rights, participate in decisions concerning them and **seek redress** when their rights are violated.

The EU should continue to condemn violations and abuses of women's and girls' rights and to strongly support civil society, as well as women and men working for gender equality and women's empowerment, including **women human rights defenders**.

The EU should support mobilisation of religious actors for gender equality in line with the **Faith for Rights** framework¹⁶.

The European Commission will strengthen and update the methodology connecting gender equality, the right based approach encompassing intersectionality in its *Toolbox: a rights-based approach, encompassing all human rights for EU development cooperation*.¹⁷

1.2. Promoting gender mainstreaming in all areas of EU external action

Gender mainstreaming remains the primary means to achieve gender equality. Its purpose is to ensure that all policies and programmes maximise their benefits for all and contribute to stop the perpetuation of inequality¹⁸. The European Commission and the High

¹² Article 10 TFEU, when 'defining and implementing its policies and activities, the Union shall aim to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation'.

¹³ See UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, so far ratified by 182 countries, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRPD/Pages/ConventionRightsPersonsWithDisabilities.aspx>; Article 6: Women with disabilities.

¹⁴ COM(2020) 698 final.

¹⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/racism-and-xenophobia/eu-anti-racism-action-plan-2020-2025_en

¹⁶ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/FreedomReligion/Pages/FaithForRights.aspx>

¹⁷ <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/doc/srv?l=EN&f=ST%209489%202014%20INIT>

¹⁸ "The aim of gender mainstreaming is to redistribute power, influence and resources in a fair and gender-equal way, tackling inequality, promoting fairness, and creating opportunity." Gender Equality Strategy, p. 15.

Representative are committed to gender mainstreaming in all policies and actions **as a responsibility for all**, including in the EU institutions. Member States are encouraged to join this effort.

SDG 5 is one of the three least financed SDGs globally. The EU has made a commitment that at least **85% of all new external actions**¹⁹ will have gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment as a significant objective or as a principal objective by 2025.²⁰

Building on the progress of the EU Gender Action Plan (2015-2020), this share steadily increased from around 58% in 2016 to 65% in 2019. The EU is now determined to reach the 85% target by 2025.

In this perspective, the design of all external EU-funded programmes will apply **three minimum standards**:

1. conducting and using updated **gender analyses** to inform decision-making on future action and integrating these into all relevant dialogues, policies, strategies, programmes and operations²¹;
2. applying **gender-sensitive and sex-disaggregated indicators and statistics** to monitoring and evaluation²²;
3. giving **robust reasons**, based on the findings of the gender analysis, to substantiate any action deemed **not to contribute to gender equality**.

The European Commission and the High Representative will promote actions targeting gender equality as their principal objective, with a transformative potential. **There will be at least one action with gender equality as a principal objective supported in each country**²³.

The European Commission will also step up its support for **gender-responsive budgeting** via programmes to support public finance management. It will ensure that new public expenditure and financial accountability (PEFA) assessment reports include the module on gender responsiveness.

Following the practice of the **EU's External Investment Plan (EIP)**, the NDICI implementation will take an integrated approach combining support for private investment in partner countries with actions to improve the investment climate. The EIP will address barriers to women's empowerment and gender mainstreaming will be applied to EU blending operation funds and guarantees.

The EU should continue to promote gender equality through its **trade policy**. New trade agreements should include **strong provisions on gender equality**, including **compliance with relevant ILO and UN Conventions**.²⁴ Compliance with these conventions should

¹⁹ "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Transforming the Lives of Girls and Women through EU External Relations 2016-2020" (Joint SWD(2015)182 final); Council conclusions 13201/15, 26.10.2015.

²⁰ GAP III applies the DAC gender equality scoring system. *Significant (marked 1)* means that gender equality is an important objective, but not the principal reason for undertaking the action, while *principal (marked 2)* means that gender equality is the main objective. For humanitarian aid, the Commission applies its own humanitarian Gender-Age Marker: https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/policies/sectoral/gender_age_marker_toolkit.pdf

²¹ Gender analysis should inspire and lead to the development of a country implementation plan, see section 2.

²² See Joint SWD (2020)284 accompanying GAP III.

²³ Responding to the G2 score of the OECD policy marker. See note 21.

²⁴ ILO Convention No 100 on Equal Remuneration; ILO Convention No 111 on Discrimination in Employment and Occupation; UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

remain a requirement under the **new Generalised Scheme of Preferences regulation**, which will take effect in 2024. The EU will also continue to include **dedicated gender analyses** in all ex-ante impact assessments, sustainability impact assessments, and policy reviews linked to trade.

Given the important role women play in the fishery supply chain, including aquaculture, the sectoral support of Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements (SFPAs) is already used for projects in this area.²⁵

With women and girls accounting for approximately half of all international migrants, their contributions to economic and social developments in countries of origin, transit and destination, as well as their specific needs must be recognised. The EU should ensure that the human rights of migrant women and girls are fully realised through **gender-responsive migration policies**, programmes and laws, and gender-responsive migration governance at global, regional and national levels reinforced. The EU will build on lessons learnt, including under the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF).

EU humanitarian aid should continue to be both gender and age-sensitive, and aim to be gender-age-responsive, taking into account specific needs, vulnerabilities, and the capacities of all. The use of the Commission's humanitarian **Gender-Age Marker**²⁶ and targeted actions will contribute to this endeavour.

GAP III implementation will contribute to the **humanitarian-development-peace triple nexus**, and collaboration between actors is strongly encouraged.

Research and Innovation has a pivotal role in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. The **Horizon Europe** programme will, through its international cooperation, contribute to joint solutions for global challenges, by supporting gender studies and intersectional research, women's access to research funding and their participation in research careers, and the integration of a gender perspective in research content.

2. Promoting a strategic EU engagement at country, regional and multilateral levels

A coordinated, strategic and coherent EU engagement at multilateral, regional and country levels should be pursued in the implementation of GAP III.

2.1. Working together at country level

Based on a sound gender **country profile**²⁷, EU Delegations, Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) operations and missions, in coordination with EU Member States' embassies, should prepare a '**country-level implementation plan**', setting the policy

²⁵ According to the World Bank, 47% of 120 million people all over the world work in extractive fishing and subsequent activity areas such as processing or selling, are women, a figure that increases to 70% in the aquaculture industry.

²⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/policies/sectoral/gender_age_marker_toolkit.pdf

²⁷ An updated gender country profile and gender-sector analysis will be produced during the programming process to integrate the gender perspective into the overall programming and in each priority area. If possible, this work should be carried out jointly with EU Member States. In fragile and conflict-affected contexts, this should always form an integral part of the risk, vulnerability and conflict analysis.

priorities and identifying actions and key objectives selected from the thematic policy areas set out in Chapter 3 of this Joint Communication²⁸.

The EU should work in **partnership** with national gender equality networks and ministries. Wherever possible, it will support relevant national and sectoral gender equality strategies, as this is key for the long-term sustainability of EU action. The EU should maintain regular dialogue on the implementation of GAP III and work in cooperation with a broad range of actors, such as **local authorities and civil society organisations, women’s rights activists, human rights defenders, young people, religious and faith-based organisations**.

The **country roadmaps for EU engagement with civil society** will **integrate the gender perspective** and will ensure meaningful participation of women’s and girls’ organisations and grassroots organisations.

The EU should strive for close coordination with country representations of **international organisations**, notably of the UN system. The EU should also cooperate with the **private sector** to promote gender equality and business and human rights standards.

2.2. [Scaling up EU engagement at multi-country and regional levels](#)

The EU should step up its engagement, dialogue and partnership with regional stakeholders by supporting gender equality strategies run by international and regional organisations, ensuring that the gender perspective is mainstreamed in all its regional programmes.

Boosting synergies between regional and country levels has yielded positive results in EU regional cooperation in the **Southern Neighbourhood**, for example by strengthening the EU partnership with the **Council of Europe (CoE)** on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, in line with the standards and objectives of the CoE Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention), and by supporting the **Union for the Mediterranean** in advocating for women’s human rights, and this should be continued

The **EU accession** process has prompted legal reforms promoting gender equality in candidate countries and potential candidates, as they are expected to progressively align with EU gender equality acquis, and have the institutional framework to enforce it.

Similarly, the EU should support initiatives such as the **Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)** Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children, the **Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration** and the **Montevideo Strategy** in Latin America.

In the framework of the **Africa-EU partnership**, the EU should support African Union targeted initiatives, such as the strategy for gender equality and women’s empowerment (2018-2028)²⁹ and the new decade of African women’s financial and economic inclusion (2020-2030)³⁰. It should also advocate for full ratification and implementation of the Maputo

²⁸ These plan will be inspired by the accompanying staff working document ‘Objectives and indicators to frame the Implementation of GAP III’, SWD(2020) 284.

²⁹ https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/36195-doc-au_strategy_for_gender_equality_womens_empowerment_2018-2028_report.pdf

³⁰ <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20200214/promising-projections-new-decade-african-womens-financial-and-economic>

Protocol and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa³¹.

Mainstreaming gender equality in all work strands of the Africa-EU Partnership, the EU should also enhance women's role as rights-holders, peacebuilders and decision-makers for peace and security, democracy and the rule of law and promote their access to justice and basic services. Support to the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) should benefit women. In the broader context of urban development, business opportunities for women and participation will be promoted through cooperation between EU and African cities under the 100 Intelligent Cities Challenge Initiative³².

EU regional action should address gender-related challenges with a cross-border dimension, such as climate change, migration and forced displacement, including trafficking in human beings and security. A new programme of **capacity-building for military personnel supporting development and security (CBSD)**³³ will be implemented in African countries and will incorporate the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda.

In every region, the European Commission and the High Representative will support **transformative actions for gender equality** based on a regional gender analysis, wherever appropriate. In Sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, support should go to multi-country partnerships, creating synergies between efforts to address sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), education, nutrition and access to finance and business opportunities for women.

2.3. Taking stronger EU leadership at multilateral level

The EU should boost its **leadership role** on gender equality, women's and girls' rights and empowerment at multilateral level, contributing to advancing this agenda in international forums. Building on its **authority and convening power**, the EU should be ready to initiate, sponsor and co-sponsor resolutions and declarations on gender equality and to consistently promote the inclusion of gender-responsive language in all resolutions and declarations. Strengthening and forging partnerships and alliances is key to renewing existing international commitments on gender equality, women's rights and empowerment. This is especially evident in tackling global challenges, such as COVID-19. The **multilateral EU delegations have a special responsibility** to promote political initiatives, while coordinating with EU Member States diplomatic authorities on the ground and with partner countries.

As part of its multilateral engagement, the EU engages actively with the UN system and with all UN bodies and specialised agencies on gender equality. The EU should remain a vocal advocate of women's rights at the Human Rights Council, ensuring full engagement throughout different sessions. The European Commission, alongside some EU Member States, is part of the **Generation Equality Forum**³⁴, a global gathering for gender equality, convened by UN Women and co-hosted by the Mexican and French governments, in partnership with civil society, the private sector and international organisations. The

³¹ This includes the legal prohibition of female genital mutilation FGM and of forced marriage and marriage of girls under 18, eradication of all forms of gender-based violence against women (GVAW), in public and private spheres, and the legal protection of adolescent girls from abuse and sexual harassment.

³² <https://www.intelligentcitieschallenge.eu/>

³³ Commission Implementation Decision Brussels, 30.7.2020, C(2020) 5215 final.

³⁴ <https://forum.generationequality.org/>

European Commission co-leads the **Generation Equality Action Coalition on countering gender-based violence**.

The EU should continue to engage closely with and promote the global humanitarian initiative **Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies and its new road map**³⁵.

The EU should continue to engage **in G7 and G20 forums**, to advance the WPS agenda, women's empowerment and gender equality, including in the labour market. In the context of the G20, the EU and other members are actively working towards the **Brisbane target** (adopted by the G20 in 2014) to reduce the gap in the labour force participation rate between men and women by 25% by 2025.

In the **OECD context**, the European Commission will remain an active member of the DAC Network on Gender Equality³⁶, whose goal is to improve policies and practices to strengthen gender equality in development programmes and to secure girls' and women's rights, contributing to the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development.

3. Towards a gender-equal world: focusing on key thematic areas of engagement

The aim of GAP III is to accelerate progress towards gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment, by setting **objectives and action in six key thematic policy areas**. It builds on the previous GAPS and tackles new challenges and opportunities, while ensuring internal-external policy coherence. The specific objectives and indicators for each of the areas of engagement are set out in the staff working document 'Objectives and indicators to frame the implementation of GAP III.

3.1. Ensuring freedom from all forms of gender-based violence

Every human being has the right to live a life free from all forms of violence. However, this is far from being a reality and multiple forms of gender-based violence against women and girls- or violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately³⁷ persist in every country, constituting one of the most widespread and under-reported forms of human rights violations.³⁸ Women and girls with disabilities, of minority groups, migrant women and girls, LGBTIQ are among the groups particularly at risk³⁹.

³⁵ <https://www.calltoactiongbv.com>; For information on the EU's global chairmanship of the Call to Action in 2017-2018, see: https://ec.europa.eu/echo/sites/echo-site/files/booklet_eu_leadership_c2a.pdf

³⁶ GenderNet <http://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/about-gendernet.htm>

³⁷ Article 3 (d) of the Istanbul Convention.

³⁸ Data: WHO, "Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence" 2013; UNICEF, "What is Female Genital Mutilation?", 2019. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/stories/what-you-need-know-about-female-genital-mutilation>; UNFPA, Child Marriage Overview, Available at: <https://www.unfpa.org/child-marriage>

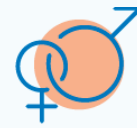
³⁹ In low and middle-income countries, women with disabilities are two to four times more likely to experience intimate partner violence. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures#notes>.



35% of women have experienced gender-based violence. In some countries, this rises to **70%**



Each year, over **4 million** girls are at risk of female genital mutilation



In some countries **40%** of girls are married before they turn 18, and **12%** before they are 15

Rooted in **harmful social norms and stereotypes** across cultures and social classes, gender-based violence affects all communities at tremendous cost for victims, their families, societies and economies. The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a heavy toll with a substantial increase in femicide and gender-based violence, including domestic violence, in many parts of the world.⁴⁰



COVID-19 crises is expected to result in an additional total **13 million** child marriages taking place that otherwise would not have occurred between 2020 and 2030

The EU has funded a broad range of initiatives and programmes worldwide aiming to end all forms of gender-based violence, including child, early and forced marriage (CEFM), female genital mutilation (FGM) and gender-biased selection (preferring sons at birth) etc. Special emphasis is placed on the dire effects of conflict-related sexual violence, as it is a crime against humanity and a war crime, usually committed against women of all ages, as well as men and boys, to punish, subjugate and/or destroy whole communities or populations.⁴¹

The **EU-UN Spotlight Initiative**⁴², launched with an initial EU contribution of EUR 500 million, is an unprecedented global programme, investing in prevention and support to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. It focuses on improving laws and policies, institutional capacity building, the quality of essential services delivery, data management and women's movements empowerment, as well as challenging harmful social norms and stereotypes. Lessons learned from the **gender-transformative approach** of the Spotlight Initiative and similar programmes will inform actions.⁴³

Humanitarian crises, conflict, disasters and pandemics exacerbate the risks of sexual- and gender-based violence, which must be prevented and addressed from the very onset.

⁴⁰ <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2020.pdf>; UNFPA Interim Technical Note, "Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Family Planning and Ending Gender-based Violence, Female Genital Mutilation and Child Marriage", 27 April 2020.

⁴¹ The EU supports the Nadia Murad's Sinjar Action Fund, and the Global Fund for Survivors of Conflict-related Sexual Violence (the Mukwege/Murad Fund).

⁴² <https://spotlightinitiative.org/>

⁴³ The results of the mid-term evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative will be available early 2021.

Survivor-centred approaches that take into account intersecting forms of discrimination remain key.

EU humanitarian assistance includes action to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence under its protection and health programme⁴⁴.

EU action should contribute to:

- increasing protection – by supporting legislation criminalising all forms of gender-based violence and capacity building of law enforcement institutions, in line with international legal and policy frameworks⁴⁵;
- promoting prevention – by challenging harmful gender norms, working with all relevant stakeholders to ensure a victim-centred approach and measures that end recidivism by perpetrators, also engaging men and boys, traditional and religious leaders;
- contributing to increasing prosecution of perpetrators including those involved in human trafficking by strengthening a victim-centred approach by the law-enforcement bodies;
- increasing protection of survivors also by supporting access to life-saving social and justice services with a survivor-centred approach, particularly in fragile and conflict/post-conflict settings or when survivors face intersecting discriminations;
- supporting access to psycho-social support services and participation in economic and social life of victims of gender-based violence and victims of trafficking in human beings;
- safe and quality humanitarian actions that support preparedness, prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence and the work of the Call to Action;
- strengthening women's rights organisations and social movements as well as civil society organisations (CSOs) working on the intersectional dimension of gender-based violence and of conflict-related sexual violence.

3.2. Promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights

SRHR are crucial for women's and girls' right to self-determination. The EU remains committed to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of all human rights and to the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the outcomes of their review conferences and remains committed to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), in this context.

Each individual has the right to have full control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters affecting their sexuality and sexual and reproductive health, free from discrimination, coercion and violence, to lead healthy lives, and to participate in the economy and in social and political life. Access to quality and affordable comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information, education, including comprehensive sexuality education, and health-care services is needed⁴⁶.

⁴⁴ During 2018 and 2019, the EU allocated more than EUR 62 million.

⁴⁵ The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) is the benchmark for international standards in this field. All EU Member States have signed the Convention and 21 have already ratified it. The EU signed the Convention in 2017, and concluding the EU's accession is a key priority for the Commission.

⁴⁶ See European Consensus on Development: https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/european-consensus-on-development-final-20170626_en.pdf



In 2017 **295 000** maternal deaths occurred during and following pregnancy and childbirth. 94% occur in low-resource settings. Among adolescent girls aged 15-19 years, pregnancy and childbirth complications are the leading cause of death globally

Harmful gender norms and stereotypes prevent access to family planning, either through legal barriers or community pressure, harassment and abuse, while a backlash against gender equality is threatening hard-won progress and existing laws.

EU action should contribute to:

- An enabling legal, political and societal environment that protects the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girls and increase access to sexual and reproductive health services and information, including HIV&AIDS prevention and treatment;
- The elimination of harmful practices such as FGM, CEFM and gender-biased sex selection, by supporting country, regional and global initiatives⁴⁷;
- Increasing services in humanitarian settings, including obstetric care, the provision of the minimum initial service package⁴⁸, HIV/AIDS prevention, reproductive, maternal and new-borns health, family planning, addressing specific nutrition needs and vulnerabilities.

3.3. Strengthening economic and social rights and empowering girls and women

Women and men in all their diversity should have equal opportunities, equal access to employment, decent work, equal pay for equal work in order to be economically independent. Furthermore, women and men should equally share care responsibilities and have access to adequate social protection, public services, and financial and business opportunities.

In addition, women and girls also need to have access to enabling conditions, such as access to safe, affordable and accessible public transport and other mobility options, both in rural and urban areas.

Empowering women economically is key to reducing poverty and to achieving inclusive and sustainable growth under the 2030 Agenda.⁴⁹



Estimates show advancing gender equality could add about **EUR 11 to 21 trillion** to global GDP by 2025

Economic empowerment

⁴⁷ This includes the UNFPA-led global programme to address the preference of sons at birth, the UNFPA-UNICEF global programme to end FGM, the UNFPA-UNICEF global programme to end CEFM and the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative.

⁴⁸ <https://www.unfpa.org/resources/what-minimum-initial-service-package>

⁴⁹ McKinsey Global Institute report The Power of Parity: How Advancing Women's Equality can add \$12 Trillion to Global Growth, 2015.

Progress in closing the global gender gap in labour force participation rates has stalled⁵⁰. Pay and **income gaps**⁵¹ put women at a further disadvantage.⁵² Regulations and practices on **property ownership, access to bank credit, inheritance rights and access to identification** often discriminate against women and limit their access to resources and finance.⁵³ Supporting the economic empowerment of migrant women in the EU is also important in this context. The EU action plan on integration and inclusion includes action to support women's economic empowerment.



In 2020, less than **50%** of women are in the labour market, compared to **76%** of men, resulting in a gender gap of 27 percentage points globally



Women bear **76.2%** of total hours of unpaid care and domestic work globally, which undermines their prospects in education and in the labour market

The **consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic** are affecting women, as they are disproportionately represented in sectors negatively affected by the crisis, in precarious and informal employment⁵⁴, as well as in the care workforce (in the fields of education, social work and health among other sectors, and domestic workers)⁵⁵. In addition they are also carrying the increasing burden of unpaid care work.⁵⁶ This underscores the urgent need to adopt non-discriminatory and inclusive social protection schemes, formal employment, to extend labour rights and entitlements to informal and precarious workers and have a particular focus on improving the working conditions and pay of care workers.

EU action should contribute to:

- Promoting decent work, equal pay and labour rights, and women's transition to the formal economy, among other by reducing labour market segregation, boosting women's leadership and increasing their bargaining power in economic and household decision-making and social dialogue, in sectors with a majority of women workers, including domestic work, as well as in non-traditional sectors;
- Creating an enabling environment for women's economic activities and access to productive resources and eco-system services, including women's access to land⁵⁷, seas and oceans activities, remittances, technology, finance, as well as to identification and control over mobility, including access to safe and affordable

⁵⁰ World Economic Forum's Global Gender Report 2020 and World's Women 2020 (UN Department of Economic and Social Statistics).

⁵¹ *Ibidem*. Bonnet, Florence, Joann Vanek and Martha Chen. 2019. *Women and Men in the Informal Economy – A Statistical Brief*. Manchester, UK: WIEGO.

⁵² Bonnet, Florence, Joann Vanek and Martha Chen. 2019. *Women and Men in the Informal Economy – A Statistical Brief*. Manchester, UK: WIEGO.

⁵³ World Bank Women, Business and the Law 2020.

⁵⁴ https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_755910.pdf

⁵⁵ Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work, International Labor Office – Geneva: ILO 2018.

⁵⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/info/news/impact-sex-and-gender-current-covid-19-pandemic-2020-may-28_en; <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/covid-19-and-gender-equality-counteracting-the-regressive-effects>

⁵⁷ By promoting women's access to land resources, there are opportunities for blending private-sector finance also in sustainable, women-managed value chains from sustainable farming and land management.

transport options;

- Supporting universal social protection systems, and recognising, reducing and redistributing unpaid care and domestic work by providing more support for gender-responsive budgeting;
- challenging gender norms within the household and the labour market, recognising men and boys' responsibilities and fostering legislative developments, such as the introduction of paid paternity leave;
- Supporting women entrepreneurship and women-led businesses, including social entrepreneurship, and their access to finance by providing innovative investments schemes through the EIP⁵⁸, addressing the market's failure to reach women and promoting the creation of SMEs. Additional targeted action will include business development services and support for employment, including for women in recovery contexts and in forced displacement;
- Supporting and empowering migrant women contribute to the sustainable development of countries of origin, transit and destination through remittances, skills and knowledge;
- Promoting gender equality through trade policy, including through the EU's engagement in the World Trade Organisation and its work on Aid for Trade, and ensuring robust use of sustainability impact assessments of trade initiatives and policy reviews.

Promoting gender equality in education

Global progress in gender parity in primary and secondary school enrolment have not yet eliminated **gender gaps in schooling and learning**.⁵⁹



2 in 3 of the 740 million illiterate adults in the world are women



In 2016, **335 million** girls went to primary and secondary schools without water and soap



Only around **30%** of female students in higher education choose STEM fields of study

Girls' access to education is limited by the **lack of progress on ensuring their SRHR**, by **unsafe learning environments** and by the **lack of appropriate sanitation facilities**.⁶⁰ A UN estimate from 2016 showed that 246 million children worldwide experience school-related gender-based violence, disadvantaged girls and children being particularly affected.⁶¹ CEFM and early pregnancy affect girls' secondary level completion rates (36.9% below that of

⁵⁸ Such as the NASIRA Guarantee with the FMO and the blending Women's Financial Inclusion Facility with Women's World Banking.

⁵⁹ Education for All Global Monitoring Report (June 2015), *Policy Paper 21: Humanitarian Aid For Education: Why It Matters and Why More Is Needed*, p. 3 <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002335/233557E.pdf>; **UNICEF (2017) Education Uprooted: For every migrant, refugee and displaced child, education**

⁶⁰ UNESCO, #HerEducationOurFuture: The latest facts on gender equality in education, 2020 (1/3, 1/4, 1/2) UNICEF, Guidance on Menstrual Health and Hygiene, 2019 other data in the box:

United Nations. The World's Women 2015: Trends and Statistics. New York: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Statistics Division, 2015.

⁶¹ <https://en.unesco.org/news/gender-based-violence-schools-significant-barrier-right-education>

boys), compromising their earning potential and their decision-making power⁶². Every additional year of primary school increases girls' eventual wages by 10-20%⁶³. Lack of access to schools further increases the gaps for girls with disabilities. Gender stereotypes limit girls' aspirations for science and engineering careers and discourage boys from pursuing jobs in the care sector. They also prevent women from advancing to leadership positions, including in education, even though most teachers are women.

In crisis-affected contexts, including the global **COVID-19 pandemic**, school closures have increased the risk of child labour, domestic violence, sexual exploitation, early pregnancy and CEFM.⁶⁴ Girls receive less distance education, as they have less access than boys to the internet (17% less access globally) and to mobile phone technology (26%).⁶⁵ Half of all refugee girls in secondary school will not return to school after COVID-19⁶⁶.

In humanitarian settings, the EU budget for education in emergencies significantly increased from 1% in 2015 to 10% as of 2019, which means more than EUR 450 million benefiting over 8.5 million girls and boys in 59 countries around the world, leading by example and championing education for peace and protection.⁶⁷

A shift is needed to move beyond gender parity in numbers, and focus on how the education system can advance gender equality.

EU action should contribute to:

- promoting gender equality in and through quality, affordable and inclusive education at all levels by maintaining funding for education in emergencies at 10% of the humanitarian aid budget and by increasing overall funding for education;
- building stronger gender responsive education systems to promote gender equality and deliver more equitable education results for girls and boys through safe and healthy learning environments, teacher recruitment, training and professional development, curricula and learning materials, work with parents and communities;
- increasing investment in girls' education to achieve equal access to all forms of education and training, including science, technology, engineering and maths, digital literacy and skills, and technical and vocational education and training;
- improving access to comprehensive sexuality education for in-school and out-of-school adolescents;
- adopting robust measures to combat gender stereotypes, discriminatory social norms and school-related gender-based violence in and through education.

⁶² “*The cost of gender inequality notes series. How large is the gender dividend? Measuring impacts and costs for gender inequality*”, World Bank February 2020, pp. 5, 26-27, 46.

⁶³ UNESCO, #HerEducationOurFuture: The latest facts on gender equality in education, 2020.

⁶⁴ UNFPA Interim Technical Note, “Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Family Planning and Ending Gender-based Violence, Female Genital Mutilation and Child Marriage”, 27 April 2020.

⁶⁵ <https://itu.foleon.com/itu/measuring-digital-development/gender-gap/>

⁶⁵ OECD (2018), Bridging the Digital Gender Divide, p. 13. <http://www.oecd.org/internet/bridging-the-digital-gender-divide.pdf>

⁶⁶ UNHCR (2020), Coming Together for Refugee Education, p. 5.

⁶⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/echo/sites/echo-site/files/eie_mapping_report.pdf

Promoting universal access to health

Public health systems receive insufficient funding, strongly affecting the services provided to girls and women.⁶⁸



At least 50% of the world's population does not have access to the health services they need, whereas around **1 in 3** of married women in developing countries report having little or no say over their own healthcare

The **COVID-19 crisis** has further compromised essential healthcare services and access to safe medicines and vaccines, leading to an increase in maternal deaths and unintended pregnancies⁶⁹. As frontline workers and caretakers, women often face a higher risk to their health in the context of the pandemic. The shift of health systems resources to focus on COVID19 has severely affected HIV treatment and prevention services, as well as increased stigma and discrimination of people living with HIV, particularly affecting women.⁷⁰

Women and girls with disabilities are at heightened risk due to inaccessible information on prevention and assistance and acute barriers to accessing health or basic water, sanitation and hygiene services. Sustained funding of universal health coverage, including SRHR services, is more important than ever.

EU action should contribute to:

- promoting universal health coverage through sustainable and resilient health systems and equitable access to essential services and information, including sexual and reproductive health, maternal care and capacity to address communicable and non-communicable diseases, with a particular attention to women and girls with disabilities; taking into account the disruptions to access to care that were caused by the COVID-19 pandemic;
- ensuring availability and equal access for women to diagnostics, vaccines and treatments for COVID-19;
- increasing access to water and decent sanitation facilities and responding to inadequate menstrual hygiene management by awareness raising, promoting school sanitation programmes and by providing sanitary facilities in schools;
- nutrition programmes, including in humanitarian settings, in particular for pregnant and lactating women and for children under five years of age.

3.4. Advancing equal participation and leadership

Women and girls should participate equally in the public and private sphere, to achieve a functioning democracy and economy, and to fulfil human rights for all. This has major benefits for society as a whole, ranging from the enhanced credibility of democratic institutions to a lower incidence of state-perpetrated violence.⁷¹

Nevertheless, **women continue to be under-represented as voters, political leaders and elected officials, as official peace negotiators and mediators. Change is slow in elected**

⁶⁸ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/progress-of-the-worlds-women>

⁶⁹ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/in-focus-gender-equality-in-covid-19-response>

⁷⁰ https://www.theglobalfund.org/media/9819/covid19_mitigatingimpact_report_en.pdf; UNAIDS, Start Free Stay Free AIDS 2019 Report.

⁷¹ Foreign Affairs, volume 99, number 1 “Women under Attack. The backlash against female politicians”.

positions and decision-making bodies at all levels.⁷² Although some 39% of countries have brought in quotas for women representation in parliaments or political parties, implementation is hampered by factors, such as gender stereotypes, political party structures and the lack of political financing.



Women in public life, including politicians, journalists and activists are often subject to gender-based violence, including different forms of online violence and even femicide, amid shrinking civic space. **Politically motivated attacks** on women have been on the rise in nearly every region, reaching a record high in 2019. A 2016 survey of female politicians from 39 countries found that 82% percent had experienced psychological violence, with 44% percent facing violent threats.⁷³

At the same time, a **new vocal generation of young women and girl activists** has taken up a wide range of causes including girl and women empowerment. They should be given a platform to speak up and engage.

EU action should contribute to:

- increasing the level of women participation, representation and leadership in politics, governance and electoral processes at all levels, via support for democracy and governance programmes and public administration reforms;
- enhancing women’s capacity as political leaders in governments and parliaments through training, women’s caucuses, and promoting gender-responsive legislative processes and budgeting⁷⁴ and promoting young leaders programmes;
- Encouraging young women and adolescent girls’ civic engagement, also in partnership with youth organisations, scaling up support to parliamentary monitoring organisations run by and engaging young people and bringing together EU and partner country representatives;
- reducing gender stereotypes in media content, in cooperation with the audio-visual sector and the media, and empowering and supporting women’s rights as users and producers of information, and as entrepreneurs and decision-makers in the sector⁷⁵;
- enhancing equal legal capacity and access for women to justice through support to grassroots efforts and to legal and justice systems reforms;
- Promoting an enabling and safe environment, including online, for civil society, girls and women’s rights organisations, women’s human rights defenders, peacebuilders, women journalists and representatives of indigenous people. Strengthen protection mechanisms and to support women’s leadership roles will include global and regional

⁷² Data in the box: Inter-Parliamentary Union. “Women in national parliaments,” as of 1 February 2019 Council on Foreign Relations, Women’s Participation in Peace Processes, 2019.

⁷³ <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/issue-briefs/2016-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-parliamentarians>

⁷⁴ See the peer-to-peer project “INTER PARES | Parliaments in Partnership” and the ‘iKNOW Politics’ platform. <https://www.iknowpolitics.org/en>

⁷⁵ See e.g. the Media4Democracy initiative and the EU supported TV production addressing gender roles as in Burkina Faso, Kenya and in the MENA Region ‘One Woman Show’.

hubs, and advocacy and actions that document violations against defenders of women's human rights.

3.5. Integrating the women, peace and security agenda

In the 21st century, **disasters and human-made crises, including conflict, have become more complex, protracted, and increasingly linked to global challenges**, such as climate change, environmental degradation, displacement, and more recently, - pandemics. The COVID-19 pandemic effect has demonstrated the centrality of the WPS agenda in addressing increased violence threats and including women through the security/gender equality nexus.

Conflict, crisis and fragility hamper progress towards sustainable peace and security and to achieving the SDGs. The WPS agenda focuses on the links between gender inequality and conflict, how they are mutually reinforcing, and **emphasises the need to understand gender inequality as a root cause and driver of conflict and fragility**. Inequalities coupled with exclusion of women from power, opportunities, services and security create a fertile ground for conflict and gender-based violence, especially when linked to weak state capacity or legitimacy. **Preventive action should adopt a risk-, needs- and rights-based approach**.

Women are often victims in these situations but not always; they play multiple and diverse roles as combatants, peacebuilders, mediators, politicians, business women and activists. **The number of women involved in peace processes remains low**, despite global, regional and national commitments⁷⁶ and **many peace agreements do not even include gender provisions** that adequately address women's needs. **Increasing the participation of women in all matters related to peace and security is a priority for the EU**.

Based on the EU's Strategic Approach to WPS, the EU will implement its Action Plan on WPS⁷⁷ which identifies clear objectives and fulfilment criteria, under the key priority areas of: (i) prevention; (ii) protection; (iii) relief and recovery, and the three overarching and cross-cutting principles of (iv) participation; (v) gender mainstreaming and (vi) leading by example.

The EU objectives on WPS should be achieved, among others, through **political and diplomatic engagement** of EU leadership and by **integrating a gender perspective** and ensuring women's participation and leadership **in all peace and security-related contexts**. It is also necessary to take **specific measures**, including targeted training for the military, justice and security forces.

Synergies between the WPS agenda and the other thematic priorities will be harnessed. WPS monitoring and reporting will be aligned with the GAP III, also to fully integrate the EU policy framework on WPS in the EU's overall gender equality policy framework.

EU action should contribute to⁷⁸:

⁷⁶ There are some good practices that can be built upon, such as women participation in peacebuilding in the relation to the conflict in Syria, both through civil society and the UN-led political process. As a result largely of EU pressure, the intra Syrian Constitutional Committee set up by the UN consists of 30% women.

⁷⁷ The EU's strategic approach to WPS is annexed to the FAC Conclusions on WPS adopted on 10 December 2018, (Council document 15086/18), the EU Action Plan on WPS (EEAS 2019/747- Council document 11031/19). Responsibility for implementing the EU policy framework on the WPS Agenda lies with the EU Member States and with all relevant Commission services. The EU's WPS action plan is annexed to the GAP III SWD. Its reporting follows the GAP III reporting, while the EU Task Force on WPS provides monitoring.

⁷⁸ As already agreed in the EU Action Plan on WPS.

- supporting and conducting capacity-building and mentoring on women’s leadership, for women negotiators and mediators, to improve their effectiveness and the quality of their participation in peace processes;
- working towards reaching at least 33% of women participating in all EU activities and projects related to peace processes;
- establishing and institutionalising consultative mechanisms on all conflict-related issues with grassroots women activists and CSOs, both in Member States and in conflict-related settings, where there are CSDP missions and operations;
- rolling out mandatory training on mainstreaming gender perspectives for all staff at HQ, EU delegations, CSDP missions and operations, etc.;
- promoting and supporting inclusive policies/activities across the whole WPS agenda with full and equitable participation, also by men and boys;
- promoting the strengthening of the rule of law, the criminal justice system through transitional and restorative justice, and Security Sector Reform (SSR), to end impunity for perpetrators of SGBV crimes;
- promoting the provision of medical, psycho-social, legal and safety support to all victims/survivors of conflict-related sexual and/or gender-based violence/SGBV.

3.6. Addressing the challenges and harnessing the opportunities offered by the green transition and the digital transformation

Promoting a fair and inclusive green transition

Women and girls in developing countries are particularly affected by the impact of climate change and environmental degradation, such as ecosystem loss, loss of access to key natural resources, malnutrition and respiratory, water-related and vector-borne diseases.⁷⁹



Women account for **80%** of the people displaced by the impacts of climate change



Poor women and children are up to **14** times more likely to be killed than men by a climate-fueled disaster, such as a hurricane or flood



On average, women account for **43%** of the agricultural labour force in developing countries, but present less than **15%** of all agricultural landholders

As primary users and managers of natural resources, women play an essential role for climate change mitigation and adaptation and environmental protection. However, they are prevented from **participating equally in related governance processes** for multiple reasons, including harmful gender norms, inadequate legal frameworks, low access to education and land ownership. However, women activists all over the world are championing environmental rights and young women are taking the lead to advocate for change.

⁷⁹ Data in box: UNDP, Gender and Climate Change, 2016; UNDP, Gender, climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction, 2016; The State of Food and Agriculture: Women in Agriculture. FAO, 2011
FAO, The Gender Gap in Land Rights, 2018.

The EU is determined to act on the gender dimension of environmental degradation and climate change also with regard to fragile situations, and mindful of the **specific needs and roles of indigenous women** directly relying on natural resources.

EU action should contribute to:

- promoting girls' and women's participation and leadership in order to ensure gender-responsive strategies to climate mitigation and adaptation, disaster risk reduction, and the inclusive and sustainable management of natural resources;
- supporting women networks in green transition sectors such as sustainable forest management, agriculture and energy;
- capacity-building, financing and support for investment in gender-responsive national climate, environment and disaster risk reduction strategies and action plans;
- supporting women's entrepreneurship and employment in the green, blue and circular economy, including clean cooking and sustainable energy, sustainable fishing activities, by promoting a gender-transformative approach to agriculture, fishing and aquaculture and food systems, based on (i) capacity building for rural women; (ii) policy reforms to regulate more fairly land tenure and to manage natural resources and (iii) economic empowerment and access to finance;
- improving data collection on the gender-differentiated impacts of climate change and environmental degradation to inform gender-responsive policies and action.

Grasp opportunities for women empowerment through digitalisation

Promoting women's equal access to the untapped potential of digital technologies is central to the **EU's digital strategy**⁸⁰ and to **sustainable growth**.⁸¹



Bringing an additional **600 million** women online worldwide would result in a GDP increase of up to about **EUR 13 billion**, bringing benefits to public health, education, women's employment, entrepreneurship, community welfare and social life

Digital technologies and solutions can accelerate progress on gender equality and women's empowerment in areas such as education, employment and entrepreneurship and preventing and combating gender-based violence. They can help women cope with emergencies, as demonstrated in the **COVID-19 pandemic**, mitigating the social and economic consequence and building resilience. E-services, such as digital finance can create opportunities for women economic empowerment by improving their access to and usage of financial services.

The **digital divide**, i.e. the gap between those having access to digital technologies and connectivity and those who don't, affects people's abilities to participate and grasp the opportunities of the digital age. It varies hugely across geography regions and between women and men.⁸²

⁸⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication-shaping-europes-digital-future-feb2020_en_4.pdf

⁸¹ Intel, Dalberg Global Development Advisors, GlobeScan, "Women and the Web", 2015.

⁸² Data in box: GSMA, Connected Women The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2019; OECD, Bridging The Digital Gender Divide, 2018. GSMA, The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2019.

Women located in rural or remote areas experience a triple (digital, gender and rural) discrimination, facing huge barriers in access and use of digital technologies, due to unaffordability, low digital literacy and social norms. Moreover, digitalisation also brings new risks and challenges for gender equality related, for instance, to possible **gender biases** through Artificial Intelligence or to an increase of gender-based violence.



165 million fewer women than men own a mobile phone in low- and middle-income countries. **48%** of women use internet compared to **58%** of men



Women are under-represented in ICT careers: men are **4** times more likely to be ICT specialists.



52% of young women and girls have experienced online abuse, including threatening messages, sexual harassment and the sharing of private images without consent

The EU should continue to address the structural barriers that underpin the digital gender divide and support an inclusive and fair digital transformation. This includes promoting a gender-responsive participatory approach in development policies, projects and programmes that support partner countries' digital transformation.

EU action should contribute to:

- Promoting policy and regulatory reform in partner countries, ensuring that digital transformation aligns with the EU's human-centric approach, bringing benefits to all, while protecting human rights, both online and offline, and ensuring a safe and secure cyber space, where data are protected in line with EU standards (e.g. GDPR);
- Improving access of girls and women to affordable, accessible, safe and secure digital connectivity, reaching out to the rural and remote areas;
- Promoting digital literacy for girls in education, as well as digital skills for jobs and entrepreneurship while addressing the gender norms and stereotypes that steer women and girls away from technology;
- Supporting women digital innovators and entrepreneurs across multiple industrial ecosystems to build an inclusive digital economy, for example via public-private partnerships such as the International Finance Corporation, with the aim of closing the digital gender gap in big tech companies;
- Supporting the provision of public and private services through gender-responsive digital channels, technologies and services (e.g. e-government, digital financial services) that will enhance women and girls' inclusion and participation in the society.

4. The EU leads by example

The 'institutional cultural shift' initiated by GAP II has brought significant but uneven progress. With GAP III, the EU is determined to make a leap forward, strengthening its own capacity to deliver on issues of gender equality and women's empowerment as **a collective**

responsibility for all its staff. This transformation requires **gender-responsive leadership**⁸³ and **sufficient institutional capacity.**

EU leadership, including heads of EU delegations, must promote gender equality and women's empowerment as an integral part of their appointment and performance assessment, continuing to reinforce an institutional 'gender equality culture'.

Institutional capacity and ownership needs to be improved in all Commission's external directorates-general, the European External Action Service, the EU Delegations and CSDP Missions and Operations. Gender expertise must be available, and positioned to report to the highest decision-making bodies. Under GAP II, **gender focal persons/points**⁸⁴ have been pivotal in setting in motion the 'institutional culture shift' and this has contributed to genuine progress. **Their capacity and role will be strengthened, including by offering knowledge opportunities and tools, and their network increased.** It is also encouraged to appoint senior gender advisers to support leadership and staff, ensuring that gender equality is high on the agenda and promoting key initiatives⁸⁵.

All relevant services will **report annually** on raising awareness of gender equality in the annual activity reports and as part of their respective equality work plans.

The EU is also committed to making substantial progress on **gender parity in management positions**, in line with the EU gender equality strategy. As announced in the political guidelines by President von der Leyen, by the end of the Commission's mandate the gender balance for managers will be 50/50.

The EEAS is also actively pursuing its efforts to enhance gender-balance at management level. A key priority has been to encourage Member States to nominate female candidates for all posts in the EEAS, including for senior management positions and as Heads of the CSDP missions and operations. In addition, a series of actions have been implemented in-house to improve gender balance at all levels.

Management will receive **mandatory training on gender equality and on implementing GAP III.** Promotion of gender equality should be incorporated in the list of core competences and responsibilities of all leadership and management positions.

Improving **gender knowledge and expertise** within all sectors and at all levels, notably for EU delegations and Member States' embassies at country level, is key. This will include:

- (a) a comprehensive training programme, building on a training needs analysis, and other capacity-building measures;
- (b) resources for research, analysis and expertise, including technical assistance in programmes for gender mainstreaming and GAP III implementation;

⁸³ Gender responsive: aiming to increase accountability and accelerate implementation of commitments to gender equality with a rights-based approach at international, national and community level. The gender-responsive leader: (i) leads by example both in the workplace and when directing implementation of the mandate; (ii) mainstreams gender equality; (iii) motivates and enable staff to deliver on gender equality; (iv) consults and strategically involves gender advisers, gender focal points and other gender equality experts and (v) holds staff and mission to account for implementing gender equality commitments.

⁸⁴ A Gender Focal Person should have technical capacity and sound knowledge of gender issues, is responsible for advising and coordinating actions to implement the EU Gender Action Plan in the activities of the EU Delegation/Unit/Directorate, supports the process of gender mainstreaming, which is a shared responsibility.

⁸⁵ This function can be fulfilled by the equality coordinator in each external DG or by dedicated senior managers in EU delegations and CFSP missions.

- (c) pooling resources and knowledge sharing with EU Member States and international organisations.

5. Reporting and communicating on results

The Commission services, in cooperation with the EEAS, will monitor progress each year on implementing GAP III, tracking the “EU institutional and strategic objectives and indicators” presented in Part 1 of the staff working document on ‘Objectives and Indicators to frame the implementation of GAP III.

Moreover, the Annual Report on the implementation of the European Union’s instruments for financing external actions will report comprehensively on gender equality actions and results.

A report looking at the quantitative and qualitative results of EU, including WPS, will be published at the mid-term point and at the end of GAP III implementation. It will assess the impact of EU action, in line with the EU Results Framework, selected SDG and other indicators and other reporting commitments. It will include good practices, stories of change, and the results of ad hoc evaluations. Progress will be reported by thematic area at country, regional and international level.

To this end, Part II of the staff working document entitled ‘Objectives and indicators to frame the implementation of GAP III contains a menu of “key thematic outcome indicators” to be integrated in the design of each ‘country-level implementation plan’ and of new actions. Thematic indicators will be integrated in the corporate monitoring system, with guidance available for support. Member States are encouraged to use these indicators to build aggregate reporting on results. The indicators in the EU’s WPS action plan are integrated in parts I and II of the staff working document.

Renewed strategic communication efforts will stimulate an informed dialogue with stakeholders. At country level, EU delegations, in collaboration with Member States and with CSDP missions and operations, are encouraged to organise exchanges on gender equality and on implementing GAP III to discuss progress, catalyse the support of national stakeholders involving civil society. In Brussels, in addition to discussions at inter-institutional level with the European Parliament and the Council, the Commission and the High Representative will annually discuss progress with civil society organisations.

The Commission will launch an end-of-term evaluation of GAP III no later than in 2024.

The Commission invites the European Parliament and the Council to endorse GAP III and to work with the Commission and the High Representative to implement this Joint Communication.