

# CONCORD input on the external dimension of the EU Gender Equality Strategy

Gender equality is a fundamental value of the EU, enshrined in the European Union Treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights. In March 2020, the European Commission will present a Gender Equality Strategy to promote gender equality in the EU and elsewhere. CONCORD Europe, the confederation of European development and relief NGOs, hereby provides a few guiding principles - with a focus on the external dimension - to help ensure a robust and coherent European Gender Equality Strategy.

## Guiding principles for a successful EU approach to Gender Equality

### Ensure coherence between the Gender Equality Strategy and the Gender Action Plan for external action

- Based on the fact that gender equality is a fundamental value of the EU, enshrined in the European Union Treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights, the EU must ensure coherence between its internal and external policies, actions and funding on gender equality, without lowering its standards on either side. Therefore, the European Commission should ensure that its **Gender Equality Strategy is as ambitious in its approach to gender equality within Europe as it is in its external actions.**
- In its international cooperation and political dialogue with partner countries, the EU should support the fulfillment of the commitments under CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action and the ICPD Programme of Action and the outcomes of their review conferences, as well as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The EU should continue to support relevant UN and regional mechanisms in charge of the promotion and protection of women and girls' rights, including monitoring mechanisms supporting governments to abide by their commitments, as well as civil society participation in those spaces and processes. In doing so, the EU and its Member States must also themselves fulfill the commitments to these international standards on gender equality.
- To achieve the objectives of the international commitments described above, the European Commission should make sure that issues such as sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)<sup>1</sup> are reflected in the Gender Equality Strategy. To do so, the European Commission can build on the successful experience of EU support to gender equality, and in particular to SRHR, reflected in external policy documents, notably in the Gender Action Plan II and the European Consensus on Development.

### Keep the Gender Equality Strategy and the Gender Action Plan separated

- The Gender Equality Strategy should refer to gender in EU external action but must not replace a Gender Action Plan III. The Gender Action Plan II has brought a strong gender equality angle to EU external action, and a dedicated GAP III is needed to pursue the EU efforts to help achieve gender equality globally. As a consequence, it is crucial that **the Gender Equality Strategy does not substitute the GAP III. The GAP III must be adopted**

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<sup>1</sup> As members of CONCORD, Caritas Europa and CIDSE support the collective work of the Confederation, but do not (fully) endorse the SRHR language used in this statement.

after a **robust, consultative and comprehensive evaluation of the GAP II and of ECHO's gender policy**, which are currently ongoing. Therefore, the Gender Equality Strategy should include strong references to a GAP III, the Women in Peace and Security (WPS) Strategy and the need for Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development. The EU should adopt the GAP III as a separate Communication in 2020, including political commitments building on the current GAP II priorities on physical integrity, economic and social rights, voice and participation and the institutional culture shift as well as technical aspects related to monitoring, evaluation and reporting. This will also allow for a proper consultation with all relevant parties, especially women's rights organisations in partner countries, and for taking into account the results of the ongoing GAP II evaluation in view of further improving it and building ownership for its future implementation.

### **Promote an Institutional Culture Shift across Commission Services**

- As stated in the Gender Action Plan II, the single most important factor to make gender equality work more effectively is a significant shift in the institutional culture<sup>2</sup>. We therefore urge the Commission to **take inspiration from GAP II** and include in the Gender Equality Strategy a horizontal approach which aims to shift the Commission services' and the EEAS' institutional culture to more effectively deliver on EU commitments on gender equality. This approach could help reinforce, and measure, the expertise on gender equality in the European Commission beyond DG DEVCO and the EEAS, and potentially also in Member States.

### **Embed the principle of Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development**

- Building on the Council Conclusions from 10 December 2019<sup>3</sup> and Article 208 of the Lisbon Treaty, the EU must ensure its non-development policies do not have a negative impact on sustainable development in partner countries, and in particular on women and girls' rights and gender equality. This can be realised through the effective and systematic **gender mainstreaming** in all policy areas by strengthening **gender-sensitive impact assessment of legislative and policy measures, gender budgeting**, as well as through cross-sectoral cooperation and accountability mechanisms for monitoring gender mainstreaming at both EU and Member State level. **This also includes consistently carrying out gender-sensitive impact assessments of trade and investment deals** to ensure they do not undermine human rights, with particular attention to women's and girls' rights, but rather uphold and promote their respect. Gender-sensitive impact assessments of **macro-economic policies, including fiscal and austerity measures**, should also be carried out prior to issuing country-specific recommendations.

### **Promote responsible business conduct within and outside of Europe**

- The EU should adopt a due diligence regulation allowing to hold European companies liable for human rights violations due to business operations elsewhere. Such regulation would notably impose upon them an obligation to assess the risk of sexual harassment and violence in their supply chains and address it, to clearly state to all business partners that harassment and violence at work are not allowed, and to require their business

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<sup>2</sup> See European Commission Joint Staff Working Document "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Transforming the Lives of Girls and Women through EU External Relations 2016-2020" p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> 14938/19 "[Gender-Equal Economies in the EU: The Way Forward - Council Conclusions](#)" (10 December 2019)

partners to develop a reporting and handling procedure and make it known to all workers, in conformity with ILO Convention 190. In addition, while supporting the finalisation and ratification of a UN Binding Treaty on Human Rights, the EU must ensure a gender-sensitive implementation of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

### **Strengthen consultation and participation (in particular with Civil Society Organisations)**

- The European Commission should set up inclusive mechanisms to ensure that civil society organisations and women's organisations are systematically involved in all stages and at all levels (local, national, regional, global), and are provided with sufficient resources to give valuable input and meaningful contributions to the development and the implementation of the Gender Equality Strategy. In times of shrinking space for civil society, this requires particular efforts and attention. Not only should they be consulted, but also listened to.
- Women and girls are not a homogeneous group and thus it is essential to look at the great diversity of their experiences, backgrounds and the issues they face, as well as at intersectional discrimination.
- The European Commission should ground its work on sound women and girls' rights expertise, including feminist economists.

### **Pursue an EU gender responsive budget**

- The European Commission should take the opportunity of the Gender Equality Strategy to adopt and effectively implement gender budgeting methods to the EU budget and all decisions taken on the basis of the overall budget. This should include the development of a long-term action plan on gender budgeting as a tool of gender mainstreaming.
- To be effective, the implementation of the EU Gender Equality Strategy will need to be adequately funded. In this regard, the EU should increase the share of EU funding in the new Multiannual Financial Framework to achieve gender equality. With regards to external action, GAP II includes the commitment of 85% of new ODA-funded projects to have gender equality as a significant or main objective. Both the EU Gender Equality Strategy for its external dimension and GAP III should reaffirm this objective.

