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**WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANISATIONS AT THE  
CENTER OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE  
EU GENDER ACTION PLAN III (2021-2025)**

**AUTHOR:** Giulia Pasquinelli

**DESIGN AND LAYOUT:** UrbanGRAF

**PHOTO:** Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation

**Photographer:** Jasna Susha

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The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation has defended women's rights since 1993. For every woman's right to be safe and to be heard.

Today we are one of the world's leading women's rights organisations, working directly in areas affected by war and conflict to strengthen women's influence and power. We work closely together with over 100 local partner organisations across 20 countries to end violence against women, reach lasting peace and close the gender gap once and for all. The future is equal. And together, we are change.

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# INTRODUCTION

On 25th November 2020, the EU published the [Joint Communication on the new Gender Action Plan III – An Ambitious Agenda for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in External Action](#) accompanied by [Objectives and Indicators](#). The new GAP III is the result of a year-long inter-institutional consultation, an independent evaluation of EU’s external action support to gender equality and women’s and girls’ empowerment<sup>1</sup> (hereinafter “independent evaluation on GEWE”) and one global on-line consultation with civil society.

If 2020 was meant to be a crucial year for gender equality world-wide, with key anniversaries to celebrate including the 25 years of the Beijing Platform for Action, the 20 years of UNSCR 1325 and the 5 years of the 2030 Agenda, the global outlook for women’s and girls’ rights actually worsened. The Covid-19 pandemic has not only exposed deeply entrenched inequalities both in the Global North and Global South with women often paying a higher toll for the economic, social and health consequences of the crises, it has also revealed how fragile gains towards gender equality are and how easily they can be rolled back when a crisis occurs.

In Europe, the current backlash against gender equality taking place in the Visegrád Group is a worrying sign that the whole agenda is under threat also within the EU, despite being gender equality a founding value enshrined in the treaties of the EU. Poland and Hungary have been opposing the very notion of gender equality in official texts and no consensus was reached on the draft Council Conclusions on the GAP III. In response to this, on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2020, the Presidency issued [conclusions on the text](#) which were supported by 24 Member States (with the exclusion of Bulgaria, Hungary and Poland). The failure to reach consensus around gender equality language, actions and ambitions among EU Member States weakens the EU’s reputation as a supporter of gender equality world-wide.

The third Gender Action Plan was meant to fix the weaknesses identified during the implementation of GAP II and build on its achievements, as demonstrated by the recently published independent evaluation on GEWE. It was also meant to pave the way for a more transparent, inclusive and results-oriented engagement of the EU on gender equality in partner countries, as civil society organisations across the globe and specifically women’s rights groups clearly demanded.

Kvinna till Kvinna welcomes the adoption of GAP III at such a challenging time for women’s rights globally and commends the EU for its renewed commitments under the plan. In particular, Kvinna till Kvinna welcomes:

- The ambition to tackle the root causes of inequalities and discrimination through the adoption of three guiding principles: the gender-transformative approach, intersectionality in addressing discriminations and the rights-based approach
- The recognition that fragility and conflict are exacerbating inequalities, a greater attention to conflict and post-conflict settings and the inclusion of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda under the umbrella of GAP III
- The expansion of thematic areas of engagement to further include climate change, trade, green transition and digitalization in a vision aimed at addressing the challenges of our time and harnessing the opportunities arising thereafter
- The introduction of the Country-level Implementation Plan, based on a sound Gender Country Profile and Sectoral Gender Analyses, which will lay the foundation for a context-specific response, something missing in GAP II
- A focus on results and strengthening accountability towards EU citizens (but also citizens of partner countries) by reporting on the qualitative and quantitative results of the GAP III and assess its impact at country, regional and international level
- The initial commitment to ensure more actions specifically targeted at contributing to gender equality in partner countries responding to the requirement of the OECD Gender Marker 2 (gender as a principal objective of the action).

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<sup>1</sup> [Evaluation of the EUs External Action Support to gender equality and womens and girls empowerment \(2010-2018\)](#), Particip GmbH (2020).

# THEMATIC AREAS



## **Gender-based violence**

Kvinna till Kvinna welcomes the renewed focus on gender-based violence and the attention paid also to gender-based violence against men and boys. It is also positive that the objectives and indicators allude to the role of women's organisations and social movements in ending gender-based violence and that there is specific attention to conflict-related sexual violence and the specific needs of survivors. However, the objectives in this thematic area fail to include gender-based violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer persons (LGBTIQ) who are also absent from the other thematic areas of engagement.



## **Sexual and reproductive health rights**

Kvinna till Kvinna welcomes the increased focus on sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) which is now a self-standing thematic area of engagement. The reference to men and young boys as targets of EU actions in the area of access to sexual and reproductive health rights is a positive step forward. While there is an attention paid to “women and girls in all their diversity”, actions will have to ensure attention to women from minority groups, migrant women, refugees and IDPs and LGBTIQ persons, who are not explicitly included.



## **Promoting economic and social rights**

Kvinna till Kvinna welcomes the focus on economic and social rights while noting that this thematic area does not specifically take into account how these rights are affected and violated in conflict and post-conflict situations. A specific objective to ensure women's Housing, Land and Property (HLP) rights are respected, particularly in post-conflict situations where women are often forced to renounce these rights in favour of their male-relatives<sup>2</sup>, should have been included. HLP is often a pre-condition for access to decent work, access to financial services and entrepreneurship opportunities.



## **Equal participation and leadership**

Kvinna till Kvinna welcomes the ongoing focus on participation and, in particular, objective 3 “women's rights organisations, other CSOs and women human rights defenders working for gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment and rights work more freely and are protected by the law” and the accompanying indicators. However, it notes that GAP III does not sufficiently acknowledge how shrinking civic space, on-line and off-line violence and restrictive legislation and practices aimed at limiting civil society space are specifically affecting women's rights organisations and activists. It further recommends the EU to go beyond the adoption of quantitative indicators currently in place to measure also the quality and type of support provided both to women's rights organisations and women activists and the extent to which they are contributing to shaping EU policies and strategies in the partner countries.



## **Women, Peace and Security**

Kvinna till Kvinna welcomes the integration of the Women, Peace and Security agenda under the umbrella of the GAP III and the fact that conflict sensitivity is mainstreamed across the other thematic areas (including GBV and equal participation and leadership). Under this thematic area it notes that gender-sensitive conflict analysis, including an understanding of the gender drivers of conflict, should always inform EU's engagement in conflict affected and post-conflict countries, therefore, the commitment to develop sectoral gender analysis should also include gender-sensitive conflict analysis.

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<sup>2</sup> [A Right not a Gift. \(2020\)](#)

# THEMATIC AREAS



## **Climate change, environment and digitalization**

Kvinna till Kvinna welcomes the introduction of a new thematic area of engagement encompassing the green transition and digitalization. In particular, the GAP III places emphasis on the involvement of women and girls in decision-making on environmental and climate change issues and on the need to include gender equality objectives in strategies in climate change adaptation strategies and environmental protection strategies (which are however missing from the EU Green Deal). The attention paid to the digital world and how to harness the opportunities emerging from it is also crucial, as demonstrated by the acceleration of the process by the Covid-19 pandemic. Yet, specific attention is required to ensure protection and access to justice for women human rights defenders and activists dealing with sensitive issues, including LGBTQI rights, often victims of online violence.



*Blaga Human right defender holds hand of human right holder  
Photographer: Maja Janeska Ilieva*

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## KEY ELEMENTS FOR A MORE IMPACTFUL GAP III

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- a Stronger partnership with women's rights organisations**  
Women's rights organisations, especially grass-root organisations, are the main actors advancing the gender equality agenda in their own countries. To do so, they face a number of institutional, cultural, social and religious barriers upheld by traditional and government actors. The EC-commissioned independent evaluation found that “the EU has yet to find an approach to ensure a more strategic and comprehensive partnership on GEWE with these actors [civil society organisations] at country level including a stronger involvement of grass-root organisations in EU external action”.<sup>3</sup> It is, therefore, crucial for the new GAP III to be impactful that a clear strategic partnership at country level with women's organisations and feminist movements is honed by the EU Delegations and that the Country-level Implementation Plans, which will set priorities for EU action, are informed by their analysis of the needs of women and girls.
- b Ensuring funding for GAP III and specifically for women's organisations in partner countries**  
Financial resources are crucial for GAP III implementation. Yet, as the new Neighbourhood, Development and International Development Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) and the Instrument for Pre-Accession III (IPA III) are being finalised, there are no specific funding targets for gender equality. GAP III reconfirmed the target of 85% of all new actions having gender either as a substantial (GM 1) or as a principal objective (GM 2) and introduced a new commitment to have at least one action per country and one per region with gender as a principal objective (GM2) in the course of the duration of GAP III. We welcome the new objective to increase funding to women's rights organisations and movements to contribute to gender equality (Objective 1.4), but we call on the EU to establish a baseline and a clear target by the first quarter of 2021 (currently missing from the plan).
- c Programming for gender equality based on gender mainstreaming and analysis**  
The adoption of GAP III comes at an opportune time as it coincides with the beginning of programming of the new external funding instruments. This is a golden opportunity for the EU to make sure that the policy priorities identified in GAP III are included in the programming exercise of NDICI and IPA III, among others, from the very start. As GAP III recognises that gender mainstreaming continues to be the primary strategy to achieve gender equality,<sup>4</sup> the EU needs to develop a clear EU-wide definition of gender mainstreaming and specific guidelines to apply it at policy and programming level, something currently missing. Gender analysis, also needs to be more systematically included in the programming and policy cycle both in Brussels and in EU Delegations and it should inform the planned Country-level Implementation Plans.

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<sup>3</sup> Conclusion 9, Page 5, [Evaluation of the EUs External Action Support to gender equality and womens and girls empowerment \(2010-2018\)](#), Particip GmbH (2020).

<sup>4</sup> Page 3, Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council – EU Gender Action Plan III.

# NEXT STEPS

We call on the DG INTPA, the EEAS and EU Delegations to:

- 1** Establish a strategic partnership with a wide range of women's rights organisations, including grass-root organisations, and feminist movements in partner countries as key actors to support the implementation of GAP III
- 2** Meaningfully consult with women's rights organisations and feminist movements on key priorities, objectives and actions for the Country-level Implementation Plans to better respond to the priorities and needs of women and girls
- 3** Map out women's rights organisations and feminist movements in partner countries, their expertise, areas of engagement and geographic location and include them in the EU Roadmaps for Engagement with Civil Society
- 4** Include an analysis of how shrinking civic space affects civil society organisations, including women's rights organisations, in the EU Roadmaps for Engagement with Civil Society and in the Gender Country Profiles
- 5** Listen to the requests and needs of women's rights organisations, including with regards to funding, security and other challenges arising from national legislation and practices aimed at restricting civic space
- 6** Establish a clear target to fund women's rights organisations (pursuant to Objective 1.4) by the first quarter of 2021 and aim at 1/3 of all new actions to be channeled to civil society
- 7** Revise funding mechanisms and practices to allow smaller, grass-root organisations to access EU funding for gender equality through, for instance, established networks of women's rights organisations in partner countries who are able to manage and redistribute funds to their members
- 8** Track the amount of EU-funding for gender equality per beneficiary:
  - a. National gender equality machineries
  - b. International women's rights organisations
  - c. National and grass-root women's organisations
  - d. UN and other international bodies
- 9** Establish a yearly dialogue with women's rights organisations and other civil society organisations to discuss and assess progress towards established objectives, both in Brussels and in partner countries
- 10** Involve women's rights organisations in monitoring and evaluating the implementation of GAP III in partner countries