

POSITION PAPER

EU GENDER ACTION PLAN IV – BRIDGING THE WPS GAP

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CLIP	Country Level Implementation Plan
EU	European Union
FIMI	Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference
GAPIII	EU Gender Action Plan III
GAPIV	EU Gender Action Plan IV
GBV	Gender-based violence
GRB	Gender-Responsive Budgeting
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex ("+" denotes everything on the gender and sexuality spectrum that letters and words cannot yet describe)
MIP	Multi-annual Indicative Programme
NAP	National Action Plan
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
WCSO	Women's Civil Society Organisation
WHRD	Women Human Rights Defender
WPS	Women, Peace and Security

KVINNA TILL KVINNA

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 more than 100 local partner organisations across 20 countries to end violence against women, reach lasting peace and close the gender gap once and for all.

SUMMARY: RECOMMENDATIONS

The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation recommends that GAP IV retain and build on the full scope and ambition of GAP III, while placing stronger emphasis on effective implementation, expanding its partnerships with women's civil society organisations (WCSOs) and continuing to be firmly grounded in an intersectional, gender-transformative, climate-responsive and human rights-based approach.

WE ASK THAT THE EU:

1. Set, implement, and monitor binding funding targets within both the Global Europe Instrument, the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), and GAP IV, as well as in line with the country-specific Multiannual Indicative Programmes (MIPs): 85% of all EU ODA should be dedicated to programmes that have gender equality as one of their objectives (OECD marker G1 or G2), with 20% of ODA dedicated to gender-targeted projects (OECD marker G2), and 5% target of ODA dedicated specifically to supporting local WCSOs.
2. Earmark dedicated, long-term, flexible, core funding for local and intersectional WCSOs engaged in peacebuilding and WPS implementation, including WCSOs working in the intersection of peacebuilding, gender equality, climate adaptation and environmental protection, to strengthen organisational stability, moving away from short-term project-based financing.
3. Actively engage local and diverse WCSOs in the design process of funding instruments, including in the calls for proposals, eligibility criteria, and reporting frameworks, to ensure accessibility, relevance and conflict-sensitivity.
4. Adapt urgent funding models to ensure predictable and flexible support in times of crisis and conflict, including simplified funding mechanisms that enable local actors, including women human rights defenders (WHRDs), to respond quickly and effectively in fragile contexts.
5. Support partner governments to institutionalise gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) and transparent budget tracking¹ for WPS commitments, including National Action Plans (NAPs), while enabling oversight and participation by WCSOs in budget planning, monitoring and accountability processes.
6. Include measures to support the wellbeing, safety and security of women peacebuilders and WHRDs¹, including mental health, psychosocial support, and protection from both physical- and technology-facilitated gender-based violence, as standard components of all funding and programming, including rapid response mechanisms.
7. Ensure sustainable financing for WCSOs and other specialised service providers¹ that deliver this protection and support, particularly where state services are absent or inadequate.

8. Institutionalise and resource dialogue mechanisms with WCSOs on all levels of EU engagement that are formal, regular, and participatory (e.g. Women's Civil Society Soundboard mechanism) to inform decision-making processes on EU policy and frameworks, including WPS and the CLIPs/MIPs.
9. Ensure that these structured consultations are intersectional and inclusive of marginalised groups (including conflict-affected, displaced, indigenous, ethnic minorities, LGBTQI+, persons with disabilities, rural and youth) by earmarking resources (for transport, interpretation, accessibility, security) to enable meaningful participation. In addition, assess the EU delegations' capacity to institutionalise these dialogues and their effectiveness with regular feedback from WCSOs.
10. Institutionalise meaningful, safe, and sustained inclusion of the most marginalised groups, particularly conflict-affected populations, including displaced persons and those living in frontline communities, across all stages of WPS engagement, including programme design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
11. Ensure the meaningful participation of diverse women and LGBTQI+ persons at all levels of EU engagement, not only as implementers but as decision-makers and strategic partners, in conflict prevention, multi-track diplomacy, management, mediation, and resolution mechanisms, as well as in humanitarian crisis response, recovery, and reconstruction.
12. Institutionalise gender-sensitive conflict analysis and risk assessments as a standard requirement for all EU external action, including programmes and investments under Global Gateway and EFSD+, and establish mechanisms to monitor and mitigate potential unintended harm and escalation of conflict.
13. Systematically integrate hybrid threats, including anti-gender disinformation, in risk assessments across EU external action, particularly where they undermine women's participation in public and political life.
14. Recognise and adequately support women's civil society organisations as key actors in countering FIMI and disinformation, strengthening democratic resilience and safeguarding inclusive civic space, in coordination with initiatives such as the European Democracy Shield.
15. Adopt gender-responsive participatory monitoring approaches, focusing on narrative-based impact assessment and exchange of best practices, alongside quantitative and qualitative indicators. Additionally, allocate resources for the systematic collection and analysis of gender-disaggregated data to inform the design, implementation, and monitoring across all EU external policy and programming, in line with GRB principles and OECD DAC gender policy markers.
16. Strengthen coherence across WPS National Action Plans, Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), National Adaptation Plans and GAP IV implementation, ensuring that conflict, climate and gender risks are addressed through coordinated planning, monitoring and reporting mechanisms.

BACKGROUND

The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation and our partner organisations have extensive experience of engaging with, and monitoring of, the implementation of the EU's Gender Action Plans¹² and the Country Level Implementation Plans (CLIPs). The recommendations in this paper draw on this experience, as well as the analysis, programmes and reports of the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation and our local partner organisations, alongside joint work with other civil society organisations and networks. The priorities outlined are rooted in Kvinna till Kvinna's role as one of the world's leading organisations on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and our expert work advising states and international institutions.

In the current global context with record-high levels of armed conflict and democratic backsliding (that disproportionately affect women and girls), persistent gender inequality as a driver of conflict and fragility, and accelerating climate change and environmental degradation that deepen inequalities and increase the risk of violence, WPS is more relevant than ever for the next EU Gender Action Plan (2028-2034). Despite these challenges, women remain key actors in peacebuilding, democratic resilience, and humanitarian action. Evidence consistently show that the meaningful participation of women in peace and conflict transformation processes increases the likelihood of successful and sustainable outcomes.³ Women's protection, participation, and leadership in conflict settings are therefore not only matters of rights and representation, but are also central to the effectiveness, legitimacy, and long-term impact of EU external action.

The previous EU Gender Action Plan (GAP III) marked an important step by integrating WPS as a dedicated thematic area for the first time. Building on this progress, GAP IV should ensure that WPS is systematically and meaningfully embedded in the action plan while recognising and addressing its interlinkages with gender equality, climate resilience and environmental justice. To further advance gender equality in EU external action, it is necessary to identify WPS opportunities, overcome challenges to implementation, and draw on the lessons learned from diverse women human rights defenders (WHRDs), women peacebuilders, women environmental human rights defenders and women's civil society organisations (WCSOs) working in conflict affected contexts.

¹ [Mind the GAP – An independent evaluation of the implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan II in Western Balkan countries](#)

² [EU's Gender Action Plan III: Halfway there? Observations at the mid-term of the EU GAP III](#)

³ O'Reilly, M., Ó Súilleabháin, A., & Paffenholz, T. (2015). [Reimagining Peacemaking: Women's Roles in Peace Processes](#). International Peace Institute.

INTRODUCTION

The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation recommends that GAP IV retain and build on the full scope and ambition of GAP III, while placing stronger emphasis on effective implementation, expanding its partnerships with WCSOs and continuing to be firmly grounded in an intersectional, gender-transformative, climate-responsive and human rights-based approach.

This position paper should be viewed in addition to the issues and recommendations brought forward in the policy brief [EU Gender Action Plan III - Halfway there? Observations at the mid-term of the EU GAP III](#).

FUNDING FOR WOMEN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

The EU's political commitment to gender equality in external action should be matched by adequate and long-term financial commitments. The sustained efforts of WCSOs and the broader feminist movement have been instrumental in advancing gender equality in the contexts in which EU external action operates. Despite this, in 2026, the funding situation for WCSOs remains critical. As WPS sits at the intersection of gender equality and peacebuilding, cuts in dedicated funding⁴ to both sectors have disproportionately affected WPS actors and WCSOs working in conflict-affected and fragile contexts.

Even in contexts that are large recipients of Official Development Assistance (ODA), funding rarely reaches the local WCSOs, and donor priorities are often misaligned with the needs on the ground.⁵ The limited funds that do reach local actors are often short-term, rigid, humanitarian-focused and administratively burdensome. In addition, this support is increasingly channelled through consultancy contracts, which only fund specific deliverables or short-term services, rather than through meaningful institutional support that strengthens organisations' long-term capacity. The funding crisis and these rigid grant structures silence the community voices and initiatives that are fundamental for the successes of EU external actions.

Recommendations:

1. Set, implement, and monitor binding funding targets within both the Global Europe Instrument, the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), and GAP IV, as well as in line with the country-specific Multiannual Indicative Programmes (MIPs): 85% of all EU ODA should be dedicated to programmes that have gender equality

⁴ The cuts in dedicated funding to gender equality and peacebuilding includes the withdrawal of USAID, the reduction of ODA across institutions including the EU and the shifts in donor priorities and funding from member states who used to be on the forefront of gender equality and peacebuilding.

⁵ <https://kvinnatillkvinna.org/publications/wheres-the-money-for-womens-rights-in-ukraine/>

as one of their objectives (OECD marker G1 or G2), with 20% of ODA dedicated to gender-targeted projects (OECD marker G2), and 5% target of ODA dedicated specifically to supporting local WCSOs.

2. Earmark dedicated, long-term, flexible, core funding for local and intersectional WCSOs engaged in peacebuilding and WPS implementation, including WCSOs working in the intersection of peacebuilding, gender equality, climate adaptation and environmental protection, to strengthen organisational stability, moving away from short-term project-based financing.
3. Actively engage local and diverse WCSOs in the design process of funding instruments, including in the calls for proposals, eligibility criteria, and reporting frameworks, to ensure accessibility, relevance and conflict-sensitivity.
4. Adapt urgent funding models to ensure predictable and flexible support in times of crisis and conflict, including simplified funding mechanisms that enable local actors, including women human rights defenders (WHRDs), to respond quickly and effectively in fragile contexts.
5. Support partner governments to institutionalise gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) and transparent budget tracking⁶ for WPS commitments, including National Action Plans (NAPs), while enabling oversight and participation by WCSOs in budget planning, monitoring and accountability processes.

The rising global backlash against gender equality and its ultraconservative policies are subjecting WHRDs and women peacebuilders to escalating risks, including threats and harassment.⁷ WHRDs and women peacebuilders are instrumental to the effectiveness and impact of EU external action, yet they lack sufficient support and protection to continue their work and participation in civic space in a safe and sustainable manner. With the increase of financial restrictions amongst WCSOs, security and psychosocial support are often the first component that organisations are forced to cut back on in order to survive. This, combined with the systemic barriers and escalating risks, especially in fragile and conflict-affected states (FCAS), causes activists and WCSOs to self-censor, lower the public visibility or limit their engagement in gender equality or peacebuilding matters. Some are forced to withdraw from activism entirely.

Recommendation:

6. Include measures to support the wellbeing, safety and security of women peacebuilders and WHRDs⁸, including mental health, psychosocial support, and protection from both physical- and technology-facilitated gender-based violence, as standard components of all funding and programming, including rapid response mechanisms.

⁶ For example, through the application of international standards such as the PEFA Gender Framework and SDG Indicator 5.c.1

⁷ [State of Women Human Rights Defenders 2026](#)

⁸ In line with [EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2027](#)

7. Ensure sustainable financing for WCSOs and other specialised service providers⁹ that deliver this protection and support, particularly where state services are absent or inadequate.

INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION AND PARTNERSHIPS WITH WCSOS AND FEMINIST MOVEMENTS

Strategic and comprehensive partnerships with local, women-led and intersectional feminist organisations are essential for the EU to be able to support the realisation of gender equality and the human rights of women, girls and LGBTQI+ people in its external action. However, the meaningful inclusion of these actors in peacebuilding, WPS, and EU decision-making processes remains uneven, and many marginalised groups face participation barriers despite their essential role in conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and democratic resilience.

Regular, institutionalised consultation and advisory mechanisms, such as the Women's Civil Society Soundboards¹⁰, are key to ensuring the meaningful participation of WCSOs, women peacebuilders and WHRDs. These mechanisms systematically gather diverse WCSOs and WHRDs, ensuring that their expertise informs the implementation and monitoring of the GAP, CLIPs, and MIPs. Women's Civil Society Soundboards represent a best practice on how to engage WCSOs in all their diversity beyond CLIP consultations and throughout all stages of the GAP IV implementation and monitoring cycle, including context analysis, which is particularly important in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.

Recommendations:

8. Institutionalise and resource dialogue mechanisms with WCSOs on all levels of EU engagement that are formal, regular, and participatory (e.g. Women's Civil Society Soundboard mechanism) to inform decision-making processes on EU policy and frameworks, including WPS and the CLIPs/MIPs.
9. Ensure that these structured consultations are intersectional and inclusive of marginalised groups (including conflict-affected, displaced, indigenous, ethnic minorities, LGBTQI+, persons with disabilities, rural and youth) by earmarking resources (for transport, interpretation, accessibility, security) to enable meaningful participation. In addition, assess the EU delegations' capacity to institutionalise these dialogues and their effectiveness with regular feedback from WCSOs.

⁹ For example, women's shelters and safe houses, legal aid organisations, trauma counselling and mental health services, organisations providing digital security support, emergency protection programmes for human rights defenders, GBV response services and survivor support organisations.

¹⁰ [Country Assessment Report](#), Serbia (2022) p.9.

10. Institutionalise meaningful, safe, and sustained inclusion of the most marginalised groups, particularly conflict-affected populations, including displaced persons and those living in frontline communities, across all stages of WPS engagement, including programme design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
11. Ensure the meaningful participation of diverse women and LGBTQI+ persons at all levels of EU engagement, not only as implementers but as decision-makers and strategic partners, in conflict prevention, multi-track diplomacy, management, mediation, and resolution mechanisms, as well as in humanitarian crisis response, recovery, and reconstruction.

GENDER-RESPONSIVE ANALYSIS AND MONITORING

Without consistent risk assessment, gender-sensitive conflict analysis, and a 'do no harm' approach across all EU external programmes, investments and geopolitical engagement, the EU runs the risk of unintentionally reinforcing gender inequalities and worsening conflict dynamics. Additionally, growing hybrid threats including anti-gender disinformation, are not yet systematically integrated into risk assessments. This limits the EU's ability to anticipate and mitigate emerging security and societal risks. Here, local WCSOs can serve as early warning systems¹¹ and can help identify risks of democratic backsliding and Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI).

Recommendations:

12. Institutionalise gender-sensitive conflict analysis and risk assessments as a standard requirement for all EU external action, including programmes and investments under Global Gateway and EFSD+, and establish mechanisms to monitor and mitigate potential unintended harm and escalation of conflict.
13. Systematically integrate hybrid threats, including anti-gender disinformation, in risk assessments across EU external action, particularly where they undermine women's participation in public and political life.
14. Recognise and adequately support women's civil society organisations as key actors in countering FIMI and disinformation, strengthening democratic resilience

¹¹ Gender-responsive early warning systems (GREWS) are a community-based approach to conflict prevention that integrates gender perspectives throughout the early warning and response cycle. Drawing on the expertise of local communities, women leaders and WCSOs, GREWS strengthens the identification, analysis and mitigation of emerging risks, enabling more effective and inclusive response to conflicts, community tensions and GBV, e.g. see: [Gender and Early Warning Systems: An Introduction](#), OSCE ODIHR, 2009.

and safeguarding inclusive civic space, in coordination with initiatives such as the European Democracy Shield¹².

Ensuring that monitoring and evaluation systems in EU external action fully capture the realities and experiences of the women and communities most affected by conflict, inequality and climate-related risks remains a challenge. Monitoring frameworks often place greater emphasis on outputs and indicators than qualitative change and lived experiences. At the same time, the meaningful inclusion of affected communities and WCSOs in monitoring and learning processes continues to be uneven. Challenges also remain in the systemic collection and use of gender-disaggregated data, as well as in consistent integration of gender perspectives across all stages of the programme cycle.

Recommendation:

15. Adopt gender-responsive participatory monitoring approaches, focusing on narrative-based impact assessment and exchange of best practices, alongside quantitative and qualitative indicators. Additionally, allocate resources for the systematic collection and analysis of gender-disaggregated data to inform the design, implementation, and monitoring across all EU external policy and programming, in line with GRB principles and OECD DAC gender policy markers.
16. Strengthen coherence across WPS National Action Plans, Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), National Adaptation Plans and GAP IV implementation, ensuring that conflict, climate and gender risks are addressed through coordinated planning, monitoring and reporting mechanisms.

¹² https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/democracy-eu-citizenship-anti-corruption/democracy-and-electoral-rights_en#european-democracy-shield

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