

# TOWARDS AN INCLUSIVE GENDER ACTION PLAN III

**Recommendations to EU institutions on GAP II's evaluation and GAP  
III's preparation.**



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*Although very visible and substantial progress has been made, the EU's ambition to be a leader on feminist foreign policy will not be fully met without the involvement of organisations on the ground which are directly affected by its decisions. In this spirit, EuroMed Rights has developed evidence-based recommendations which reflect the work of its Women's Rights and Gender Justice working group - a network of 30 women's rights organisations with up to forty years experience in the field, located in 20 countries spanning Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. The Gender Action Plan has real implications for their work at national level. With this paper, EuroMed Rights intends to voice their concerns to the EU institutions so that local realities and challenges can be considered during the current evaluation and drafting period of the third GAP. The recommendations put forward are the result of a consultation process with women's rights organisations within the EuroMed Rights' network and draw analysis as well as lessons learnt from other external reports.*

## **Recommendations to EU institutions**

### **Recommendation 1: Address the issue and impact of the growing trend of anti-gender organisations.**

**Anti-gender organisations** are multiform organisations, and their core aim to target all policies related to *gender ideology*. They disseminate **false information** and instigate fear to **prevent the advancement of women and LGBTQI+ persons' rights**. These organisations use **EU fora dedicated to "civil society", hijack feminist and human rights concepts** in order to push their views against women and LGBTQI+ rights. Likewise, the strengthening of **GONGOs** is a visible trend in the MENA region, which further shrinks the space available to women human rights' organisations, while seemingly advocating for gender equality. Some of these organisations receive **EU fundings** and thus contribute to an increased blurring of the lines of "civil society". To counteract these trends, there is a **need for subtlety and analysis when reaching out to partners on the ground.**

### **Actions to be taken:**

- Map the organisations on the ground - their scope, aim and links - with the help of women's human rights organisations.
- Set out clear terms of reference on what "civil society" means and which types of CSOs are called to participate in EU action.
- Prioritise the funding of organisations following a human-rights approach.
- Increase awareness on the phenomenon of anti-gender organisations.
- Prevent the shrinking of civil and political space for women's rights organisations, by reconsidering current fundings' frameworks (limiting short term and project-based funding while giving precedence to sustainable and core funding).

## **Recommendation 2: Improve the lives of all women and girls by following an intersectional and inclusive approach.**

First and foremost, **LGBTQI+ issues** are not tackled in GAP II. This is problematic as we see them as closely **intertwined with women's rights' matters** and a **constituent of the general gender equality objective**. Furthermore, as they stand, GAP II's objectives do not favourise an **intersectional approach**. EU delegations have had difficulties reporting on GAP II in an intersectional manner. These shortcomings should be tackled because providing an intersectional perspective is essential for the EU to have a positive impact on the lives of **all women and girls**.

### **Actions to be taken:**

- Include organisations representative of women and LGBTQI+ people's diversity: organisations of migrant people, rural organisations, anti-racist organisations, organisations led by people with disabilities, unions etc. It is crucial to maintain an age-balance.
- Include trainings for all EU delegations on intersectionality to mainstream support to particularly vulnerable demographics.
- Ensure the physical and psychological integrity of all women and girls by providing more political support on issues related to sexual and reproductive rights of women and LGBTQI+ people.
- Promote economic and social rights by tackling and raising awareness on the underlying elements pertaining to the persistence of a gender pay gap (sexist and gendered education, parental leave, maternity, paternity leave, unpaid care labour...).

## **Recommendation 3: Strengthen the role of the EU in promoting gender equality in third countries.**

EuroMed Rights' women's rights organisations (WROs) find that the EU has played a **positive role** in promoting gender equality since the first GAP. Case in point, in Tunisia and Morocco, the EU is perceived to have had a **determinant impact in supporting recent reforms**. Although there is consensus on the fact that "more could be done", some WROs emphasise that in contexts where conservative movements and political forces are gaining ground, the commitment of the EU<sup>2</sup> to gender equality is **highly valuable**. Indeed, the rights of women and LGBTQI+ people are being increasingly challenged in many countries around the world, including in the EuroMed Region. In this context of participating in the reversal of the **shrinking space for WCSOs**<sup>5</sup>, EU support and advocacy towards local governments is crucial.

### **Actions to be taken:**

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<sup>2</sup> At least on the political and legislative level.

<sup>5</sup> Women Civil Society Organisations.

- Increase political support towards governments so as to align their action with their international commitments concerning women's rights and gender equality.
- Create spaces for dialogues with women's rights organisations to address the issue of shrinking space, its implications on their work and the advancement of gender equality.
- Pursue efforts to include a gender analysis of all Action Documents. Similarly, gender-impact assessments should be included for each Country Strategy plan.
- Include and promote the inclusion of women in peace-building processes.

**Recommendation 4: Improve communication on the GAP for civil society organisations and the public.**

A majority of WROs in the network are **not aware of the existence of the Gender Action Plan**. This situation is problematic in a number of different respects. First of all, it means that EU delegations' communication efforts have not adequately addressed beneficiaries and would benefit from being **strengthened**. Secondly, it is indicative of the **lack of involvement of CSOs** in the work of EU delegations with regard to the GAP. Thirdly, and most importantly, the lack of awareness-raising on GAP leads to a situation where grassroots organisations and community-based organisations are unaware of the mechanism and the associated grants they could benefit from, which inevitably undermines its inclusivity principle and **reduces the overall impact that the GAP could have**.

**Actions to be taken:**

- The new GAP should be an official communication, rather than a staff working document. This would both enhance awareness on the GAP and emphasise the importance of EU action for gender equality to the general public.
- Involve civil society organisations from as early as the conception phase, and incentivise them to share information with their own local networks. Particular attention should be paid to reaching out to grassroots organisations, community-based organisations and organisations in rural areas.
- Organise trainings for women's rights organisations on GAP III (when adopted). Such trainings could include sessions on how to respond to EU calls for proposals and information on the EU Country Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society.
- Make documents such as annual reports, gender impact assessments accessible online to improve transparency and accountability.

**Recommendation 5: Increase accountability and coherence in the implementation of GAP's objectives within EU delegations.**

The impact and success of GAP still relies on the **individual commitment of EU staff**. In certain areas, this is coupled with a **lack of coherence** between GAP objectives and the Country Strategy plans, which do not always tackle gender inequalities. There is a need for

**stronger accountability measures**, which could ensure a consistent and liable application of GAP III throughout all EU delegations.

**Actions to be taken:**

- Implement a gender mainstreaming strategy for all EU external action, including policies and programmes.
- Implement gender budgeting to keep track of money spent in the context of GAP: how much is spent, on what projects and by which organisations.
- Align the GAP with other relevant policies to ensure coherence in the EU's work towards gender equality (EU Gender Equality Strategy, the new EU's Action on Human Rights and Democracy, EU's strategic Approach to Women, Peace and Security and the countries' EU partnership priorities).

**Recommendation 6: Reinforce the involvement of civil society organisations in the GAP processes.**

Very few women's rights organisations from EuroMed Rights' network have been contacted by EU institutions regarding **GAP II or GAP III**, during either the evaluation or the drafting phase. Without involving the organisations affected on the ground, policies which aim to promote gender equality cannot be fully effective. This **top-down approach** should be mitigated by **integrating participatory mechanisms directed towards grassroots and local organisations**.

**Actions to be taken:**

- Involve civil society organisations as an objective in and of itself. Ensure meaningful consultation and the reflection of CSO's recommendations in EU actions and documents.
- Prioritise the inclusion of women's rights organisations during the planning, monitoring, evaluation and drafting of the GAP.
- Ensure the inclusion of a wide range of women's rights organisations, CBO<sup>6</sup>s, and grassroots movements to enhance the relevance and diversity of actions planned for groups of women facing multiple forms of discrimination.
- Align GAP's objectives timeline with the regular EU programming cycles, so as to contribute to making EU action more coherent and comprehensible to CSOs.

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<sup>6</sup> Community-based organisations.