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The Director-General



Secretary General

Gender Action Plan III – 2021-2025
Region Level Implementation Plan (RLIP), Pacific Region

1. Context for EU action on gender equality and women’s empowerment in the region

The Pacific islands region includes a myriad of cultures, languages, and ethnic groupings. It is diverse in terms of geography, natural resources, social systems and colonial contact experiences. Each country has also had unique experiences transitioning to and integrating political and economic systems that differ from its historical practices. What is common, however, is the prevalence of male dominated systems of decision-making, even in countries with matrilineal systems of lineage and inheritance. This creates a commonality of gender disadvantage across the region, although it may be manifested in diverse ways.

Gender, culture and age are three principles of social organising that have intersected over time to entrench gender roles, stereotypes and expectations. Culture, together with religion, is revered in the Pacific islands region and establishes a rich historical heritage kept alive in ceremonies, arts, and family dynamics. Culture has contributed to social stability and secures access to land for many groups. But culture has also perpetuated harmful discriminatory practices against women and girls.

The remoteness and isolation of the region has historically inhibited information sharing and equitable distribution of services. Urban and rural women in the Pacific have different opportunities to access education, employment and support services. Women and men in remote and rural areas are more likely to be subject to strict gender roles and divisions of labour and have fewer education and employment choices. In addition, women in rural areas are more vulnerable to poverty than men and have limited access to justice if they are subject to violence, harmful traditional practices and discrimination.

Transport infrastructure is expensive and limited, and while communication infrastructure is advancing, many communities and islands still have intermittent access to basic services such as electricity, safe water supplies, sanitation, or adequate housing. Mobile phone ownership varies from country to country but has seen steady increases, and phones are the main method used to access the internet.

Despite multiple challenges, the past 25 years have seen significant progress in gender equality policies and legislation in the region. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as regional commitments¹ have established

¹ The adoption of the 2012 Gender Equality Declaration by Pacific leaders reaffirmed their commitment in the following six key areas: gender responsive government policies and programmes; improving women’s

standards and indicators that are facilitating progress. At the regional level, leaders are committed to addressing gender equality, including through the adoption of the Pacific Leaders' Gender Equality Declaration (PLGED) in 2012 and the Pacific Platform for Action on Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights, endorsed by the Ministers for Women in 2017². These indicators and processes have guided integration of gender equality objectives and measurements into a number of regional and national policies and data systems. At the same time, the region is hampered by a shortage of rigorous and accessible development-oriented research on gender and power relations. Quality, evidence-based research is critical to effective and efficient development planning and implementation of action on critical areas of concern. Collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data is improving but persistent gaps make it difficult to track progress.

National legislation on violence against women has been developed in 13 Pacific island countries and is pending in Niue. Numerous countries have also revised discriminatory legislation on citizenship, divorce and marital property and have restructured business regulatory systems to support gender equity and equality across sectors.

Special measures to support women's participation in politics have been marginally effective, as they remain seriously under-represented in parliament: in the eight smaller Pacific Island Countries, only one in 30 parliamentary seats is held by women. This compares to an average of one in five across all developing countries.

Disability is a cross cutting issue in all of the critical areas of concern. Women with disabilities face greater exclusion and marginalization than men living with disabilities. Eleven Pacific island countries have ratified the UN Convention for Persons with Disabilities and there is increasing attention to gender differentiated experiences of persons with various types of disabilities.

Challenges remain in financing and implementing the gender equality commitments that are now on paper. While most countries have institutionalised 'women's machineries,' they are consistently underfunded and generally marginalised in national planning and budgeting processes. At country and regional levels, stated political will for gender equality is not adequately demonstrated in practice. A continuing lack of accountability mechanisms for gender equality policies means that failure to meet commitments has few consequences for decision-makers.

Regional commitments to gender equality and women's human rights³

In the past 20 years, Pacific Island Countries have made commitments to achieving gender equality and have acknowledged how critical it is to sustainable development. The Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration (PLGED)⁴, which was endorsed by Pacific Islands Forum Leaders in 2012, is particularly important. This high-level declaration sets out specific policy actions to progress gender equality 'in the areas of gender-responsive government

participation in decision making; economic empowerment; ending violence against women; and improving health and education outcomes for women and girls (https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNDP_WS_FINAL_UNPS_2018-2022.pdf)

² <https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/First-Quadrennial-P.S.D.R.-Full-Report.pdf>

³ Pacific Platform for Action on Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights 2018–2030, endorsed by the Ministers for Women's on 5th October 2017

⁴ <http://www.forumsec.org/resources/uploads/attachments/documents/2012%20Forum%20Communique,%20Rarotonga,%20Cook%20Islands%2028-30%20Aug1.pdf>

programmes and policies; decision-making; economic empowerment; ending violence against women; and health and education’.

Recognising the legacy of the Pacific Platform for Action (PPA) and the Revised Pacific Platform for Action (RPPA), the new Pacific Platform for Action for Gender Equality and Women’s Human Rights is presented as an extension of the RPPA rather than as a new instrument. The new PPA aligns with international and regional commitments on gender equality made by Pacific Island Countries, especially the PLGED. It is designed to accelerate progress on these commitments, which share a core set of priority areas. The PPA is meant to support the implementation of commitments made in all global, regional and national instruments, and more specifically through the PLGED and Sustainable Development Goal 5 – Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. It will serve as a tool for accelerating the implementation of the PLGED.

Regional commitments to gender equality and women’s human rights:

- Pacific Platform for Action on the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality (PPA) in 1994 and 2004 (review)
- Revised Pacific Platform for Action on Advancement of Women and Gender Equality 2005–2015 (RPPA)
- Triennial Conferences of Pacific Women and Pacific Women’s Ministerial Meetings
- Five-yearly reviews of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action
- Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration (PLGED), 2012
- Moana Declaration, Outcome Statement of Pacific Parliamentarians for Population & Development, 2013
- Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (PFRPD), 2016
- Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration (PLGED) Review, 2012-2016

Analytical basis/Consultations

The Region Level Implementation Plan (RLIP) builds on the recently conceived Pacific Gender Region Profile. The Profile aims to describe Pacific women’s condition and rights, and assess how far Pacific governments have progressed in achieving gender equality through promoting women’s leadership and participation in the political and legislative processes; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women’s economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting and to the full realisation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Pacific.

In line with the recently launched EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024, the EU and its Member States in the Pacific will promote women’s and girls’ full enjoyment of human rights, gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls as a priority across all areas of action. An independent civil society, enabling civic space and the support and protection of human rights defenders are essential elements to achieve these priorities. Under this framework and in line with the application of the new Gender Action Plan III (GAP III), the EU will engage with civil society on the overall implementation of the new CSO Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society in the Pacific 2021-2027.

The Plan – as well as the Gender Region Profile informing this document - benefited from the inputs and consultations with a number of individuals and institutions, at national and regional level, including EU Member States and Civil Society Organizations. Other sources consulted

include online materials, national/regional reports relating to gender equality, sustainable development and human rights as well as virtual archive documentation of the EU Delegation for the Pacific. Special attention was given to the publication of the report for the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BEIJING+25): ‘Review of progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action in Pacific island countries and territories’ (SPC, Suva, Fiji, April 2021).

2. Selected thematic areas of engagement and objectives

Making EU engagement on gender equality more effective is 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. This requires further gender mainstreaming in all external policies and sectors and a gender-transformative, rights-based and cross-sectoral approach 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, focusing on key areas of engagement such as: 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. It will also require leading by example, by establishing gender-responsive and gender-balanced leadership at top EU political and management levels. This requires leadership buy-in, investing in knowledge and resources, and pooling action with EU Member States. It will also be important to report and communicate on results, put 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.

The ongoing programming exercise in the Pacific Region will notably contribute to Priority Area 3 of the Pacific Multi-Country MIP, ‘Fundamental Values, Human Development, Peace and Security’, Sector 3.2 Mainstreaming Gender and Addressing Violence against Women and Children (Gender marker; DAC 151 - Government & Civil Society-general). It will also contribute to the following Expected Result: ‘Supported Pacific Island Countries eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and children.’

*EU and Civil Society*⁵

A strong and robust civil society plays a critical role in ensuring that nations adhere to principles of equality, good governance, transparency and democracy. Equally, a strong civil society contributes to improved social norms and values through advocacy on equality, discrimination and fulfilment of human rights at-large. In the Pacific, almost every country or territory has CSOs dedicated to promoting gender equality, with many of these also serving as either advocacy groups or service providers that address VAWG.

⁵ EU Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society in the Pacific 2021-2027

The commitment to support Civil Society was emphasised in the ‘EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024’, launched in December 2020 and also recently reiterated in the ‘European Consensus on Development’, adopted in November 2016 by the European Union. The new Consensus updates the EU's development's response to current global challenges and promotes the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda in partnership with developing countries.

More specifically, the ‘European Consensus on Development’ mentions that 'the EU and its Member States value the participation of civil society organisations (CSOs) in development and encourage all parts of society to actively engage. They recognise the multiple roles that CSOs play as promoters of democracy, defenders of rights holders and of the rule of law, social justice and human rights. The EU and its Member States will promote the civil society space in both the Pacific island countries and the region more broadly, and enhance their support for building the capacity of CSOs to strengthen their voice in the development process and to advance political, social and economic dialogue'.

3. Targeted action(s) supporting gender equality and women’s empowerment

Under the new MIP’s Priority Area 3, *Fundamental Values, Human Development, Peace and Security*, the EU will build upon the results of past programmes on gender equality and ending violence against women and girls, while paying particular attention to addressing intersecting dimensions of discrimination. Women and girls with disabilities, minority groups, migrant women and girls, LGBTIQ are among the groups particularly at risk. The EU will systematically include gender elements as a high-priority cross-cutting issue in all future actions in the Pacific, including from the perspective of the climate change and gender nexus.

More specifically, the newly formulated Action ‘**Pacific Transformative Gender Equality Programme**’ (a four-year programme with an estimated budget of 8 million euros) intends to contribute to the MIP Priority Area 3 ‘Fundamental Values, Human Development, Peace and Security’, Sector 3.2 Mainstreaming Gender and Addressing Violence against Women and Children (Gender marker; DAC 151 - Government & Civil Society-general). In line with the ambitions set out in the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024 and the Gender Action Plan III (GAP III) (2021–2025), this multi-country action is relevant for the 2030 Agenda and the 2017 European Consensus on Development. It contributes mainly to SDG 5 ‘Gender Equality’, while also contributing to SDG 4 ‘Education’, SDG 10 ‘Reduced inequalities’, SDG 13 ‘Climate Action’ and SDG 16 ‘Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions’.

The overall objective of the proposed action is to promote gender equality and eradication of violence against women and girls (VAWG) in the Pacific Island Countries. The action will build on the positive achievements of the Pacific Partnership to end VAWG (2018-2022) and of the Spotlight Initiative’s Pacific Regional Programme (2020-2023).

Promoting human rights and gender equality, including combating violence against girls and women, are at the heart of the programme. Indeed, improvements in women’s human rights, especially relating to health, safety, education and livelihoods, are a critical objective of this action, in order to ensure that women and girls are confronted with fewer barriers to truly achieve gender equality across sectors.

Through a human rights-based approach, the programme will promote gender equality with particular attention for ensuring that survivors of violence have access to the essential services which are part of their rights to justice, health and safety. Improvement of gender equality and

reduction of VAWG benefit society as a whole, since they contribute to empowering women, safer and more peaceful communities, which have been shown to benefit economic development in general as well.

It will contribute to the following Expected Results: (i) Supported Pacific Island Countries eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and children; (ii) Service providers (duty bearers), namely health, police, justice and social services have strengthened capacity and budget to provide timely, quality, coordinated services, to hold perpetrators to account in line with due diligence standards and to collect and use data in an ethical manner.

The overall objective of the proposed Action is to promote gender equality and prevent violence against women and girls, by reducing rates and acceptance of VAWG at country and regional level.

The specific objectives are: i) strengthening institutions and the implementation of laws and policies that promote gender equality and prevention and response to gender-based violence; ii) promoting evidence-based primary prevention and change of social norms that are root causes of VAWG and gender inequality; iii) increasing access to and provision of multisector services to narrow gender inequalities and give access to basic service to women and girls; and iv) supporting the strengthening of civil society/women's organisations and advocacy to promote gender equality and prevention of violence against women and girls.

The main lesson learned from previous programmes (Pacific Partnership programme and the Spotlight Initiative) is that in order to effectively address VAWG, a comprehensive, transformative approach towards gender equality and women's empowerment is required. Drawing upon lessons learned and best practices from the abovementioned programmes, this Action seeks to contribute to addressing root causes of gender inequality and VAWG through interrelated approaches (i.e. developing and implementing National Action Plans to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls, following the model already established in Fiji, increasing provision and access to – and quality of - essential services for women and girls).

This Action will continue to advance priorities started under the previous Pacific Partnership and the Spotlight Initiative, in particular the following:

- Strengthening laws and policies promoting gender equality and eradication of Violence against Women and Girls, for example through National Action Plans;
- Ensuring continued progress on gender-responsive budgeting;
- Strengthening institutional capacity to monitor and advocate for elimination of violence against women and girls and gender inequality, with a focus on national authorities (ministries such as Education, Health and Internal Affairs, administrations dealing with women such as Ministries for Women or women's departments within line ministries, Human Rights Commissions and Ombudsman institutions);
- Preventing violence and changing social norms, that are root causes of VAWG and gender inequality, through key sectors including education (e.g. social citizenship and family, health and life skills education), faith-based organisations, sports organisations, and traditional leaders;
- Strengthening provision of and access to essential services and supporting overall national multisector systems for responding to violence against women and girls as well as broader gender equality aspects, including continued rollout of national service delivery protocols to areas that are difficult to reach, and development of national gender-based violence administrative data systems and possible other platforms;

- Based on the recently revised Pacific CSO Roadmap, developing a clear and transparent strategy as well as supporting institutional capacity and monitoring/advocacy roles of CSOs, with a focus on women's rights organizations, sports and faith-based organizations, and other community-based organizations.

Overall, it is expected that this Action will result in reduced rates of gender-based violence at country and regional levels and improved gender equality; improved implementation of relevant legal and policy frameworks; increased access to – and quality of – essential services for victims of gender-based violence; strengthened civil society advocacy; increased efforts to prevent violence against women and girls through changing social norms, especially through education, sports, faith and traditional entities; and improved capacity of stakeholders to prevent and respond to gender-based violence, including before, during and after emergencies.

4. Engage in dialogue for gender equality and women empowerment

The EU consistently promotes gender equality, empowerment of women and their increased participation in decision-making in the region through Political Dialogues with the Governments of the Pacific Islands Countries, including at highest level. Article 8 of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement (soon to be replaced by the successor ACP-EU Partnership Agreement) is the legal basis for holding the Political Dialogues. Gender is systematically included in the agenda of each Political Dialogue meeting and priority is given to address gender-based violence, gender equality, women's and girls' rights (employment and equal pay, land property and inheritance rights where relevant), as well as empowerment in decision-making at local and state levels - representation in decision-making bodies, national development planning and resource allocation. Some of the EU's Political Dialogue platforms include extensive policy dialogue, where gender-oriented reforms are discussed in detail.

Along with discussion with the Governments, the EU also engages in exchanges with CSOs, human rights activists and other relevant stakeholders on the gender-related challenges and the ways to address those. At national level for example, an ad hoc "Women's Dialogue" in Fiji linking community leaders to local and political decision-makers emerged from a past project on participatory democracy. The latest of such dialogues took place in late 2020, with the involvement the Fiji Minister of Women, and could be repeated in the future.

The EU also facilitates dialogue and cooperation of the region's governments with non-state actors (NSA) and Civil Society Organisations (CSO) as well as NSA-CSO cooperation through various financial instruments. The elaboration of the new CSO Roadmap also provided an opportunity to establish a platform and launch a series of consultations with the civil society at national and regional level.

EU also encourages partner countries to implement Universal Periodic Review (UPR) recommendations through reforming legislation and strengthening institutional capacities. EU support those partner countries, which have not yet ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), to progress on its accession.

5. Outreach and other communication / public diplomacy activities

In the past few years, the EU Delegation for the Pacific has engaged in extensive communication activities . Meetings with multiple stakeholders, activities and campaigns at

various levels, broadly covered in the regional media and social networks - such as events under the regional programme Pacific Partnership to End Violence against Girls and Women, women's day celebration (for instance in 2019, Fiji women's rugby team visit with EUDEL to share their experience of promoting gender equality through sports; in 2021 a regional art competition dedicated to gender equality and prevention of gender based violence), the annual campaign '16 days of activism against gender-based violence' and annual Human Rights Films Festival - have been used as a platform to promote gender equality and empowerment of women as a cross-cutting policy, as well as to sensitize partner countries on EU's key policies, developments and flagship initiatives in the respective area, such as the global Spotlight Initiative on eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls.

Some of these actions can be replicated and possibly extended in the years to come.

The EU will ensure involvement and representation in relevant UN events, such as:

- The PIF Women's Ministers' Meeting in advance of the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders meeting – to be held tentatively in August 2021 (date TBC);
- International Day for Rural Women – October 15th 2021;
- Virtual Pacific Feminist Forum in 2021 (TBC);
- Regional preparatory meetings ahead of the Commission on the Status of Women in New York (held annually between February and March) (TBC);
- International Women's Day – March 8th ;
- 16 Days of Activism to EVAWG– Nov 25th to Dec 10th each year.

6. Technical Facility and/or financial resources allocated to support GAP III implementation

In addition to the three priority areas identified in this programme, a specific allocation will also be foreseen for a Cooperation Facility that will support and complement the other avenues of the EU-Pacific Transformative Gender Equality Programme. This facility may be used to benefit national or regional stakeholders, as appropriate.

The Cooperation Facility will be used in particular to:

- Support general capacity development and institution building, including through technical assistance and exchange of public expertise, such as TAIEX and Twinning.
- Support policy and political dialogues: regional and national meetings, events, conferences, studies, fellowships, exchange platforms to support sector dialogues and donor coordination leading to structural reforms and engagement with governments and other stakeholders, including in the context of the implementation of the post-Cotonou Pacific Regional Protocol.
- Support the implementation of EU public diplomacy initiatives that advance EU values and priorities and are aligned with the objectives of this programme. This will include engaging with existing and future leaders, multipliers and influencers through recurrent people-to-people activities and through the organisation of regular fora involving media, politicians, youth leaders, think tanks, civil society, business organisations or academia. In addition, it will be important to ensure EU presence and visibility at national, regional or international events organised by other parties on topics relevant to this programme.
- Facilitate Team Europe coordination at country and regional level.

- Support the implementation of the EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, including the conceptualisation and realisation of gender aspects of cooperation on maritime security in line with the European Union Maritime Security Strategy.
- Support the preparation, implementation and evaluation of the Union's cooperation, including through technical assistance for training and assistance in managing EU financing.
- Finance strategic communication and visibility of EU cooperation and public diplomacy in the Pacific.

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