

EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS



The Director-General

EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE



Secretary General

Gender Action Plan III – 2021-2025

Country Level Implementation Plan (CLIP) – The Maldives

1. Context for EU action gender equality and women's empowerment in the country

The Maldives as an upper middle-income country in South Asia had a HDI value of 0.734 with a rank of 95 in 2019. The GDI is 0.923 with high life expectancy among females (80.8) compared to males (77.5). The indicators of education sector did not show much disparity and mean years of schooling stood 7.0 for both sexes. However, there were disparities in gender equality in the areas of economic empowerment and political participation. The share of parliamentary seats held by females dropped by 1.3% in 2019 which is a concern when reflecting on the already low performance in this indicator (5.9% in 2018). The low level of labour force participation by females continued in 2019 (41.6%) in comparison to 84.2% of males and the income differences is also significant. GNI per capita females PPP \$ is 7908 whereas for males it was 22,931 in 2019.¹ Maldives Female Headed Household (FHH) percentage is also high, 42% in 2019 and in Atoll's it is 46% compared to 38% in Male.² In addition, there are critical areas of systemic inequalities such as the unequal standing in social relations, for instance family law implementation where systems are designed to enforce male authority. Furthermore, Maldives lacks a coherent social protection system where women and girls continue to suffer and are further victimized due to fragmented support systems addressing gender-based violence. Further, the neglect of rural women continues to be a huge concern. The quality of the education system (in particular information about sexual and reproductive health) and the influence of radicalization influence in some subjects are a concern as well.

The Maldives has ratified key international conventions relevant to gender equality and have been regularly submitting CEDAW reports. In the recent past Maldives has formulated a number of milestone domestic legislation, policies and plans to ensure gender equality: Gender Equality Act 2016, Sexual Harassment and Abuse Prevention Act 2016, The Maldives Domestic Violence Prevention Strategic Plan 2017 -2021, to name a few. Under the present Government, the 8th amendment was introduced to the Decentralization Act (Act no. 07/2010) in 2019 enabling local councils with more fiscal and legal autonomy and allocating a third of council seats for female councilors. The bill ensures more dynamic role for the Women Development Committees at atoll levels. Maldives Strategic Action Plan (2019-2023) outlines five sectors for intervention and programming. Gender equality is included under Good Governance that focuses on judicial reform, security, eliminating corruption, state accountability, and gender equality. The key strategies that will have a direct impact on gender equality status in Maldives are: strategy to increase accountability of the judges and judicial actors, and the strategy to eliminate religious extremism through awareness and dialogue. The enforcement of such laws and policies still need sufficient allocation of resources and in the atolls the implementation of these policies have many gaps.

¹ Human Development Reports 2019 and 2020

² HIES 2019 National Bureau of Statistics of Maldives.

The Maldives has managed to attain upper middle-income status and reduce poverty mainly through the successful development of its tourism and fishing industries. However, as revealed by the 2019 Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) inequality has worsened over the years while urban poverty is increasing. There is a high degree of income inequality in the country, with only 5% share of income in the hands of the poorest 20%. The situation will likely exacerbate due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.. The Maldives' economy is estimated to have contracted by 28 percent in 2020 as tourism and construction activity slumped.³ The informal sector workers engaged in MSMEs were severely impacted by the pandemic and women workers are concentrated in the service sector and in the informal sector. "Data shows economic inequality is one of the most pronounced forms of gender inequality in the Maldives. While policies and laws supporting employment rights exist, system-wide implementation is lacking hindering de facto changes to the lives of women in the workplace."⁴

The space for civil society operations is reducing and it has impacted on the work to advance GEWE in Maldives. Women organizations find it increasingly difficult to push gender progressive agendas amidst growing fundamentalism and gender based violence. "Maldives has been affected by the global phenomenon of radicalization and ideologies driving increasingly socially destabilizing narratives of discrimination and violence against women, based on salafi wahabbi interpretations of Shari'ah"⁵ Despite the progressive policies and plans to address SGBV are in place, GBV data is not maintained and anecdotally it is evident to be a menace with sexual harassment at work place going unreported & unpunished despite strong legal provisions.

The MIP and CLIP of Maldives were developed with comprehensive input generated through a Country Gender Analysis conducted in 2021. Further to the gender analysis, virtual consultations were held with Human Rights Activists, Women's Rights Organizations and other key informants from CSOs as part of CLIP development.

2. Selected thematic areas of engagement and objectives

This section will link the objectives of the EU on gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) with the priority areas of the MIP for Maldives. The EU will pursue these objectives through dialogues, activities and programs in the next 5 years.

Gender equality is a core value of the EU and the overall objective of the EU is, through external actions, to confirm its role as a global front-runner in promoting gender equality. With that background, overall gender equality and women empowerment objective for Maldives is that **EU and Member States will promote gender equality and women empowerment through promotion of transformative women leadership and political participation, facilitation of economic empowerment women in selected areas and enabling a non-discriminatory and gender sensitive socio-cultural environment through civil society action.**

Specific Thematic areas of Engagement:

a. **Green Recovery (climate change mitigation/adaptation and circular economy), given that climate change poses an existential threat to the low-lying island nation, and could have a devastating impact on the Maldives' two-sector economy, namely tourism and fisheries.**

Under the green recovery area, EU will work with relevant authorities to integrate gender equality in the Maldives Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) to the Paris Agreement on climate change, and waste management, with particular focus on marine litter to reduce environmental degradation. Gender

³ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/maldives/overview>

⁴ NGO shadow report on CEDAW, Uthema 2020.

⁵ ibid

specific analysis and space for engagement of women in the aforesaid programmatic area will be led by the government and facilitated or promoted through civil society engagement ~~action~~.

EU action in the areas of water supply and sewerage, waste management and promotion of sustainable production and consumption, support to increase connectivity of administrative islands and improve mobility of individuals, goods and services will have positive impact on the lives of women and girls and opportunities for their participation and contribution will be explored and facilitated.

GAP III Specific Thematic Objectives under green recovery:

Thematic Area of Engagement: Climate change and environment

- **Objective 02:** Strategies and agreements on climate mitigation, adaptation, disaster risk reduction and sustainable management of natural resources and biodiversity are more gender-responsive, at local, national, and regional and international level, taking into account the role of women in managing these natural resources
- **Objective 03:** Women, men, girls and boys, in all their diversity, addressing climate change in their daily lives and preserving the natural environment are supported
- **Objective 04:** Women in all their diversity increasingly participate in and have improved access to jobs, entrepreneurship opportunities in the green economy and the circular economy

Thematic Area of Engagement: Digitalization

- **Objective 04:** Women, men, girls and boys in all their diversity participate fully and equally in the digital economy

b. Governance, Rule of Law and Security, as there is both an opportunity and a necessity to address structural challenges (such as weak public institutions and lack of accountability, endemic corruption, gender inequality, politicized judiciary, radicalization and violent extremism etc.) in order to consolidate democratic governance, security and the rule of law in the country.

Within the broader thematic area of Governance, Rule of Law and Security, EU will make gender equality action possible in following areas:

- i. Improving local governance and the decentralization process, with a focus notably on women political representation and participation at the local level. The interventions will include capacity development of councilors with prioritized input to women councilors to fulfil their broadened mandate and manage public resources efficiently. Affirmative action is possible for capacitating female candidates, the Women Development Committees and their staff, to enhance women councilors' leadership and management skills and to encourage the participation of women in local politics and societal issues.
- ii. Strengthen the rule of law, institutional accountability and anti-corruption reforms that include gender equitable action on improving access to justice for vulnerable groups such as women, girls and children who have been victims of sexual, gender-based and other forms of violence. Under the specific objective of counter terrorism and prevent violent extremism and radicalization, gender specific concerns of radicalization and violent extremism will be analyzed and included in the broader strategies to address the same.

The interventions under the MIP thematic area of Governance, Rule of Law and Security intersects with the following GAP thematic priority areas for engagement for Maldives:

I. Ensuring freedom from all forms of gender-based violence: Interventions to address gender based violence within radicalization and violent extremism, pandemics and disasters and in situations

of unequal power play that discriminate and subordinate girls and women. Investigating and addressing radicalization and violent extremism and their impact on girls and women, supporting civil society action to break through gender stereotyping and socio-cultural discriminations are part of this thematic area.

GAP III Specific Thematic Objectives:

Thematic Area of Engagement: Ensuring freedom from all forms of gender-based violence

- **Objective 01:** Women, men, girls and boys, in all their diversity, are better protected from all forms of gender-based violence in the public and private spheres, in the work place and online through legislation and effective enforcement
- **Objective 02:** Women, men, girls and boys, in all their diversity, are agents of change regarding discriminatory social norms, gender stereotypes, and gender-drivers of conflict
- **Objective 03:** Women, men, girls and boys in all their diversity, who experience sexual and gender-based violence have increased access to essential services and protection
- **Objective 06:** Women, men, girls and boys, in all their diversity, are better protected from sexual and gender-based violence in fragile and humanitarian crisis situations.
- **Objective 07:** Women's rights organizations, social movements and other civil society organizations are influential in ending gender-based violence

II. Advancing Equal Participation and leadership:

EU interventions will include support the newly elected female councilors in their role and responsibility in local councils through capacity development and facilitation of building alliances with women led alliances and NGOs. Economic and entrepreneur assistance to women in the remote islands can be channeled through Women Development Committees (WDCs). The members of WDCs can be provided with skills in gender sensitive planning, Gender Responsive Budgeting and monitoring so that their role in the council planning processes will be enhanced. Young female leaders can be groomed to become political leaders in years to come.

GAP III Specific Thematic Objectives:

Thematic Area of Engagement: Promoting equal participation and leadership

- **Objective 01:** Enabling conditions created for equal participation of women, men, girls and boys, in all their diversity, in decision-making.
- **Objective 02:** Women and girls, in all their diversity, have improved access to justice to safeguard their civil and political rights
- **Objective 03:** Women's organizations, other CSOs and women human rights defenders working for gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment and rights work more freely and are better protected by law
- **Objective 04:** Equitable social norms, attitudes and behaviours promoting equal participation and leadership fostered at community and individual levels – through civic education, media, education and culture at all levels
- **Objective 05:** Improved systems for collecting quality, disaggregated and globally comparable data on women's political participation and leadership

Civil Society Engagement in the above EU Action:

Green Recovery: Relevant EU partner organizations and like-minded alliances can be brought into policy advocacy platforms to negotiate to engender Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) adopted by Maldives under the Paris Agreement of United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Governance, Rule of Law and Security: CSOs, particularly the women rights organizations will work closely with relevant authorities to ensure good governance through the analysis and investigation on the root causes of issues such as corruption, radicalization and access to justice and develop strategies to address these causes at individual, community and society levels. Further, the CSOs will advocate for structural changes and policy changes to address their impacts on access to ensure gender justice. EU will facilitate digital platforms to mobilize CSO support and dialogue.

3. Targeted Actions supporting gender equality and women empowerment (G2 Action)

Strengthen the decentralized Women Development Committee mechanism to effectively function at local council level and provide transformatory leadership to advance gender equality.

Thematic Areas: Promoting equal participation and leadership

Rationale: 8th amendment to the Decentralization Act (Act no. 07/2010) was passed by the Parliament in December 2019. A significant measure to ensure equal participation of women in the political arena has been implemented through the amendment, which seeks to allocate 33% of all local council seats exclusively for women councilors. This measure incentivizes women to contest for elected office, and allow a platform for women to emerge as leaders. The amendment also clearly defines roles and responsibilities of WDCs, mandates the councils to allocate at least 5% of the grant budget to WDCs, and obligates the Ministry of Finance to provide a suitable allowance for WDC members. As a result, WDCs will once again be revived as an active party in local governance and development. Assistance to women in the remote islands can be channeled through WDCs. The members of WDCs have to be provided with skills in gender sensitive planning, Gender Responsive Budgeting and monitoring so that their role in the council planning processes will be enhanced.

While strengthening the awareness programs on the value of female political participation, it is necessary to support the newly elected female councilors in their role and responsibility through capacity development and facilitation of building alliances with women led alliances and NGOs. Young female leaders can be supported to become political leaders in years to come.

Expected Results:

- WDCs will function as effective mechanisms to operationalize gender equality action in the atolls and ensure gender equitable benefits to women and girls at the local level.
- WDC members increasingly capacitated to engage in planning and budgeting processes of local councils and make necessary changes to engender the planning processes.
- WDCs have built alliances with wider CSOs and have capacity to raise a collective voice for gender equality.
- Women councilors have increased capacity to perform the duties as council members.
- Increased % of women in political leadership.

GAP III Indicators:

- Enabling conditions created for equal participation of women, men, girls and boys, in all their diversity, in decision-making

- Women and girls, in all their diversity, have improved access to justice to safeguard their civil and political rights
- Improved systems for collecting quality, disaggregated and globally comparable data on women's political participation and leadership
- Proportion of seats held by women in (a) national parliaments and (b) local governments (SDG 5.5.1, EURF 1.8)

Collaboration: The EU and Member States continued to work closely with civil society actors and human rights defenders working on women's issues by having regular meetings with them during visits, and funding activities. Noting the higher rate of unemployment among women, which therefore increases their economic vulnerability, on-going and pipeline international partnership programmes actively seek to increase female employment, entrepreneurship, access to information and education and channel such action through WDCs, thereby enhancing the quality of life.

4. Engage in Dialogue for gender equality and women empowerment

Policy dialogues such as the annual Maldives-EU Policy Dialogue at the level of EU Heads of Missions or the Senior Officials Meeting at the level of EEAS senior management; Regular consultations with government, bilateral partners, and other stakeholders working on women's rights issues; Regular dialogues with CSOs foreseen. Women's Rights and gender equality concerns will be raised at these consultations and dialogues.

5. Outreach and other communication/public diplomacy activities:

Public diplomacy: Strategic communication/high level events on gender equality foreseen on key dates, such as International Women's Day (8 March), 16 days of Activism against GBV, and International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (25 Nov)

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

Some funding will be made available from the allocation of cooperation facility to support the implementation of GAP III at country level. In particular, the facility will support the gender aspects on political and policy dialogues, public diplomacy in Sri Lanka also will provide technical assistance.

Date:

Signature by Head of Delegation: