

EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION
AND DEVELOPMENT



The Director-General

EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE



Secretary General

Gender Action Plan III – 2021-2025 Country Level Implementation Plan – CLIP *[Bhutan]*

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

The Kingdom of Bhutan is a small landlocked country located in the ecologically fragile Himalayan ranges with a population of approximately 780,000¹ (2021 estimates - 47% women and 53% men).

As per the Constitution, women enjoy full equality and are protected from any form of discrimination. Importantly in 2020, the Royal Government of Bhutan (RGoB) adopted the National Gender Equality Policy (NGEP), which provides an overall policy direction for the country's gender equality. The purpose of the NGEP is “to provide an effective framework within which legislations, policies, programmes and practices ensure equal rights, opportunities and benefits for women and men in the family, community, workplace and in society at large”. Subsequently, the National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) formulated the National Plan of Action on Gender Equality (NPAGE) to support the implementation of the policy. The plan covers the period 2019 – 2023 and “presents a holistic approach to achieving gender equality by addressing gaps and challenges” in the political and public, social, economic domains. The government's continued commitment and effort to promote gender equality and women's empowerment is also demonstrated in the 12th Five Year Plan (FYP), with the inclusion of a separate National Key Results Area for “Gender Equality” with three specific Key Performance Indicators.

Despite a favourable institutional and legislative framework, the gender equality status of Bhutan shows a mixed picture. Bhutan ranks 130 out of 156 in the Global Gender Gap Report 2021, which uses indicators of political empowerment, health and survival, educational attainment and economic participation and opportunity, to assess the extent of gender parity.

While good progress has been made for women and girls over the years, with gender parity in education (up till the secondary level), decrease in maternal mortality, and increase in women's participation in society and work, there are still areas where gender inequalities persist such as:

1. In the Judiciary, women's representation has increased over the years but the gender gap is wide at the higher positions. Similarly, gender representation in the civil service in Bhutan has improved, however women account to only 11% in the executive level.

¹ <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/bhutan-population>

2. Gender Based Violence persist: Finding from a 2017 national survey² indicates that 44.5% of women report having experienced one or other forms of partner violence in their lifetime. The study also shows that 53.4% of women and girls aged between 14-64 years continue to believe that their partners are justified to hit them under circumstances. There is therefore social acceptance of domestic violence. The COVID-19 crisis and the lockdowns imposed on the population seem to have aggravated the situation with media report indicating that the number of people experiencing gender-based violence increased by 53.5 percent in 2020³.
3. Labour force participation rate for women stands at 49.6% against 73.6% for men⁴, which indicates discriminatory practices in employment and persistence of gender stereotypes. The 2020 labour force survey also reports higher female unemployment rate (6%) than male (4.1%). The COVID 19 pandemic has accentuated this gender discrepancy in particular in the youth segment. The impact of the pandemic on employment was widespread with the overall youth unemployment rate increasing significantly from 11.9% in 2019 to 22.6% (female: 25.4%, male: 19.2%) in 2020⁵.
4. Lack of participation of women in designing and implementing climate actions: the increasing feminisation in the agriculture sector calls for mainstreaming gender in agriculture and allied sectors as well as increasing women's participation in environmental/climate policies and measures as recommended by the 2021 Gender and Climate Change in Bhutan study.

The Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Bhutan, in May 2019, made recommendations mainly covering LGBTIQ+, GBV and gender equality, children rights and trafficking in persons.

The gender coordination mechanism in Bhutan is led by NCWC, which is also responsible to oversee the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). NCWC is assisted by Sector / Agency-wise national Gender Focal Points (GFPs). NCWC has developed a Gender Equality Monitoring System (GEMS) and a gender indicator handbook to manage, monitor and track progress on gender-mainstreaming activities. However, capacity and resources across sectors to support mainstreaming and gender policy implementation still remain limited.

This Country Level Implementation Plan (CLIP) is based on the Bhutan Gender Country Profile, which was finalised in July 2021 by the EU Delegation. The Country Profile was shared with Austria, the only EU Member State present in Bhutan. The priorities for gender actions retained in this document, encompass the work, which the Austrian Development Agency intends to deliver until it phases over its operations in 2023. The CLIP has been shared and discussed with EU Member States, relevant Development Partners as well as representatives of the Royal Government of Bhutan (GHNC) so as to reconfirm the relevance of the strategic priorities for engagement over the period 2021 - 2025. CSOs were consulted on priorities including Gender in the framework of the CSO engagement roadmap.

2. Selected thematic areas of engagement and objectives

² National Survey on Women's Health and Life Experiences 2017, A Study on Violence Against Women and Girls in Bhutan

³ <https://kuenselonline.com/gender-based-violence-spikes-53-5-percent-in-2020/>

⁴ NAPGE 2019-2023, May 2021

⁵ <https://www.nsb.gov.bt/>

With regards to the new European Commission priorities, the EU engagement in Bhutan under the MIP 2021-2027 will aim at supporting the country in its carbon neutral development, strengthening gender and women's empowerment, democratic institutions, supporting small and medium enterprises, CSOs and promoting private sector led green growth and digital opportunities in the country. The aforementioned are well aligned with the Commission's priorities of "Green deal alliances", "Alliances for growth and jobs", as well as gender equality, digitalisation, governance, peace, security and human development. Concretely, the EU Delegation has identified three priorities in the 2021-2027 Multi Annual Indicative Programme (MIP) for Bhutan, namely:

- Priority 1 Climate Change, Green Growth for Resilient Bhutan
- Priority 2 Good Governance for inclusive socio-economic development
- Priority 3 Digital Transition: a driver for change in education and public services delivery

The EU Delegation will ensure that at least 85% of all new actions programmed under this MIP have gender equality as a significant (Gender Marker 1) or principal objective (Gender marker 2). Throughout each foreseen priority, specific gender objectives/results will be pursued.

In Bhutan, Austria Development Cooperation (ADC) focuses on promoting good governance, with a particular focus on strengthening the PFM and justice sector and supporting sustainable development, in particular, the promotion of energy efficiency and clean energy development.

As foreseen in the Bhutan Country Strategy 2019-2023 and in alignment with the NKRA 10 (Gender Equality) of the 12th Five Year Plan, ADC in Bhutan supported the development of the Leadership Mentoring Framework for mentoring 30 senior women civil servants under the project "Competency-Based Human Resource Development Programme" implemented by the Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC). The National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC), as one of the Justice Sector Implementing Partners, is implementing capacity building activities for Gender and Child Focal Points (GCFP) and members of the Women and Child Welfare Committees at the grassroots level, and is developing the gender mainstreaming manual with a checklist for selected sectors. For all Implementing Partners of the Austrian Development Agency (ADA), it is mandatory to report sex disaggregated data on trainings and workshops in the annual reports. Under the EU/ADA jointly financed PFM-MDTF project, Gender-Responsive Budgeting has been included as a separate sub-section to implement activities, such as programmes on breast and cervical cancers as well as gender-related activities to be implemented by the NCWC.

The overall objective of EU action for gender equality and women's empowerment is to support the National Gender Equality Policy of the Royal Government of Bhutan in providing equal opportunities for women and men, boys and girls to achieve their full potential and benefit equitably from the social, economic and political development in the country. Keeping into account the cooperation instruments at the disposal of the EU, the following "key thematic areas of engagement" and possible thematic objectives are currently envisaged:

Key Thematic areas of engagement	Specific thematic objectives	Indicators (indicative)	Source of funding/instruments (indicative)
1. Ensuring freedom from all forms of gender-based violence	Women, men, girls and boys, in all their diversity, are agents of change regarding discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prevalence of violence against women and girls (12th FYP, NKRA, 3rd KPI) - Proportion of people who think it is justifiable for a person to subject an intimate partner to violence 	Civil Society Organisation (CSO) Country allocation
	Women, men, girls and boys, in all their diversity, trafficked for all forms of exploitation have improved access to adequate and quality services for socio-economic integration and psycho-social support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of victims/survivors of trafficking rescued (disaggregated by sex). - Number of victims/survivors of human trafficking who access support services for socio-economic integration and psycho-social support, disaggregated at least by sex - Number of measures taken by government (i.e. protection, prevention, prosecution of traffickers, coordination and cooperation among key actors, knowledge) to combat trafficking in human beings 	European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) Country allocations
	Women's right organisation, social movements and other civil society organisations are influential in ending gender-based violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of actions by women's right organisation and CSOs in partner country to advocate jointly on ending violence against women and girls - Number of CSOs benefitting from EU Support 	CSO Country allocations
2. Promoting economic and social rights	Increased access for women to financial services and products	Number of beneficiaries (disaggregated by sex) with access	Multiannual Indicative Programme

empowering girls and women	productive resources		1 ACSIIS programme ⁷
	Improved women access to entrepreneurship and participation in the green and circular economy	Number of women headed enterprise receiving credit, micro-credit/financial services	SWITCH programme ⁸ /ACSIIS programme Regional multiannual Indicative Programme (RIP)/ EFSD+/Guarantees
	Rice self-sufficiency and nutrition security enhanced	Number of women of reproductive age, adolescent girls and children under 5 reached by nutrition related interventions supported by the EU/ Number of children – boys and girls reached by nutrition related interventions	MIP/Priority 1
	Gender Responsive Planning and Budgeting (GRPB) addressing gender gaps and inequality	Two GRB analysis (2022 and 2025) undertaken ⁹	MIP/Priority 2 Ongoing EU and Austrian ¹⁰ Development Cooperation through support to PFM

⁷ Accelerating Climate-Smart and Inclusive Infrastructure in South Asia (ACSIIS) is a regional intervention which will foster the access of people and businesses to inclusive and climate smart infrastructure services in the South Asia region, initially across six countries – Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka – in line with the Agenda for Sustainable Development 2030. In Bhutan it could possibly focus on fostering access to finance for clean technologies and supporting climate resilience of selected agro value chains. The programme will develop a Gender Action Plan.

⁸ SWITCH is a flagship regional programme of the European Union addressing Sustainable Consumption and Production. Through this programme, grants are awarded to local and European organisation towards the implementation of SCP relevant activities.

⁹ The timeline for the GRB analysis will have to be confirmed depending on the schedule for the PEFA assessment

¹⁰ Austrian Development Cooperation support will be ongoing until 2023

			Austrian ¹⁰ Development Cooperation through support to PFM programme
3. Promoting equal participation and leadership	Women participation, gender-sensitive policies /plans/ programmes mainstreamed in LGs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Proportion of seats held by women in local governments - Number of LGs mainstreaming gender into LG policies and actions 	MIP/Priority 2
	Gender stereotypes, social norms and discriminatory practices are addressed through education, media, culture and sports	Extent to which local and national leaders and influencers, including traditional, religious and community leaders, engage in initiatives to challenge and change social norms and discriminatory gender stereotypes	MIP (Priority 2)/CSO Country allocations
	Gender and Child Focal Points (GCFPs) and members of the Women and Child Welfare Committees at the grassroots level are strengthened through capacity building for ensuring effective and sustainable protection system for women and children.	NCWC bill drafted providing a strong legal basis for the implementation of the relevant legal and policy framework and streamlining the approach towards promoting and protecting the rights of women and children.	Ongoing Austrian ¹¹ Development Cooperation

¹⁰ Austrian Development Cooperation support will be ongoing until 2023

¹¹ Austrian Development Cooperation support will be ongoing until 2023

4. Addressing the challenges and harnessing the opportunities offered by the green transition	Increased participation of women and girls in decision making process on environment and climate changes issues	Extent to which women, men, girls and boys and their civil society organisations and activists are able to influence strategies on climate mitigation, adaptation, disaster risk reduction and sustainable management of natural resources and biodiversity, on local, national and regional levels, disaggregated at least by sex	MIP/Priority 1 SWITCH programme/CSO Country allocations
	Climate resilient practices, technologies and infrastructure promoted	No of men and women leaders / master trainers / gender focal points trained on climate resilient agri-food systems	MIP/Priority 1 RIP (EFSD+/Blending) ACSIIS programme
5. Addressing the challenges and harnessing the opportunities offered by the digital transformation	Digital solutions designed, developed and deployed enabling inclusive access to education and ICT skills, with a particular focus on women and girls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of students having access to online schools disaggregated by sex and age - Number of people who have benefited from institution or workplace based VET/skills development for digitalisation supported by the EU (disaggregated by sex and age) (EU RF Level 2) - Number of women's organisation and network with increased capacity to participate in discussions on gender responsive ICT policies and plans 	MIP/priority 3 EFSD+/Blending EFSD+/Blending or CSO Country roadmap

The EU roadmap for engagement with civil society in Bhutan foresees effective CSO advocacy and participation in development policy debate and oversight, including for SDG implementation.

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

The GAP III aims at increasing the number and effectiveness of actions having gender equality as principal objective¹² with a target of a least one G2 action implemented in each country by 2025.

As highlighted under §2, participation of CSOs is critical to the implementation of key strategic priorities to advance gender equality. Currently it is envisaged that specific calls for proposals under the CSO programme will allow the EU Delegation to partner with civil society stakeholders with a view of addressing Gender Based Violence in Bhutan (c.f. thematic areas of engagement 1 in the table above) and/or gender norms and stereotypes. This is nevertheless dependant on the availability of funds from the CSO and/or EIDHR instruments, both never having been used previously in the context of Bhutan.

In addition, the EU Delegation will assess the feasibility in engaging the National Commission for Women and Children through relevant UN organisations with regards to addressing women's participation and contributing to ensuring gender-sensitive policies /plans/ programmes are mainstreamed in Local Governments as well as more broadly addressing gender stereotypes, social norms and discriminatory practices (c.f. thematic areas of engagement 2 in the table above). It is tentatively envisaged that EUR 500,000 from the MIP allocation for the priority 2, will be utilised for such initiative.

4. Engage in dialogue for gender equality and women empowerment

The pursuit of GEWE ambitions by both the RGoB and the EU will be discussed regularly within a number of fora:

- High level discussions organised at the time of the regular/annual EU Heads of Mission visit to Bhutan organised by the EU Ambassador
- The EU-Bhutan annual consultations (led by the EEAS)
- Human Rights discussed as part of the Bilateral Annual Consultations.
- Annual Reviews/Policy dialogue as part of the implementation of the Budget Support Programmes implementation in the Renewable and Natural Resources Sector, Local Governance Sector, and Public Finance Management Reform programme.
- Engagement with UN agencies present in the country, particularly UNICEF and UN Women
- NCWC, as one Justice Sector Implementing Partner, meets with the Austrian Coordination Office bi-annually in the Project Management Unit meeting of the Justice Sector Programme.

A new roadmap for the EU to engage with civil society in Bhutan for the period of 2021 – 2025 has been developed. A consultation with CSOs was organised to that effect in May 2021 to gain

¹² Defined as G2 actions in line with OECD gender marker G2. These actions should aim at achieving a long-lasting change tackling harmful gender norms and stereotypes, by implementing a comprehensive and gender-transformative approach.

CSOs' inputs on the new Roadmap and EU priorities. A broad spectrum of civil society organisations participated in the exercise. The exercise highlighted that CSOs suffer from limited capacity on issues pertaining to analysis, advocacy and to some extent internal governance. This limited capacity is particularly tangible in the field of gender among others and impacts their ability to partake in higher level policy-based discussions and subsequent contributions. There is a need to increase the engagement with CSOs on EU priorities in the country and mainstreaming gender. To that effect the CSO roadmap envisages structured dialogues with CSOs including the one working on gender issues (one formal consultation/year). This will provide an opportunity to discuss the implementation of the CLIP, possible contributions by CSOs actors as well as identifying specific capacity building needs.

5. Outreach and other communication / public diplomacy activities

The physical absence of an EU Delegation/Office or MS Missions in Bhutan (with the exception of the Austrian Coordination Office for development cooperation) de facto puts limits on any public diplomacy activities in the gender equality and women empowerment area. Nevertheless, EU-Bhutan Annual dialogues and regular visits of the Head of the EU Delegation or EU high officials can provide opportunities to this end. EU and MS will interact with civil society, the United Nations and other stakeholders engaged in GEWE themes, especially when they visit the country.

The EU Delegation will scale up its engagement with UN present in the country on gender issues particularly through visibility and advocacy actions during world international days. For instance Public Diplomacy efforts will focused on the 8th of March, the International Day of the Girl (11 October) and the International Day for the elimination of violence against women (25th of November). Additional activities could be envisaged when reporting or publicising on specific cooperation programme achievements.

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

An estimated EUR 100,000 have been identified under the cooperation facility to support the implementation of GAP III at country level through technical assistance for developing or updating Gender country profiles or Gender sector analyses, gender mainstreaming, reporting and communication for example. The Asia Partnership Facility could also be mobilised for specific purposes such as training of national implementing partners/MS partners, who are directly or likely to be involved in EU/ADA interventions areas so as to create awareness on the GAP III and its implementation's ambitions (with focus on what is it, what lessons have we learned, what would GAP III entails and what are the expectations).

As indicated under 2, a significant amount of funds will be allocated from the MIP priority areas towards pursuing gender specific thematic areas of engagement within the sector budget support programmes, which are currently envisaged, as well as through regional and thematic programmes which Bhutan are likely to benefit from.

Date: 31/08/2021

Signature by Head of Delegation: 