

EU Gender Equality Action - 2021-2025

United Nations in New York

This non-paper is intended to serve as a practical guide on possible actions that the EU and its Member States may consider to take in order to promote gender equality, the full enjoyment of all human rights by all women and girls and their empowerment at the UN in New York.

1. Context for EU action on gender equality and women and girls' empowerment at the United Nations in New York

In line with the EU Council Conclusions on EU priorities at the UN¹, the EU advocates for the integration of a gender perspective and for gender-responsive policies throughout UN fora. The objective is to place gender equality, the full enjoyment of all human rights by all women and girls and their empowerment at the centre of UN action and decisions.

The adoption of ambitious guidelines and commitments on gender equality and women and girls' empowerment is a priority of the EU and its Member States at the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council, including the Commission on the Status of Women. The EU and its Member States also actively promote a gender perspective in the executive boards of UN agencies, funds and programmes, and are a major contributor to UN Women, UNFPA and UNICEF. EU coordination and unity, coalition building with other regions and Member States and close cooperation with civil society are strategic tools to achieve these objectives.

A vast majority of UN Member States remain committed to the international *acquis* on women's rights, as exemplified by successful votes on resolutions on the human rights of women and girls in recent years. There is however an increased tendency by a small but active minority to question hard-won gains, challenge long-established objectives by weakening agreed language, and limit the participation of feminist and women's rights organisations at the UN. The COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated these challenges and posed risks to women's rights, but it also represents an opportunity to build back better and more equal.

2. Selected thematic areas of engagement and objectives

The EU is the most organised group at the UN and its main financial contributor. It is committed to use its authority and convening power to act as an ambitious leader for gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment at the multilateral level.

The EU engages across all areas of work of the UN, with the following objectives:

2.1. Gender mainstreaming: all actions and decisions across the three pillars of the UN (development, human rights, peace and security), and other relevant areas, must take into account and promote a gender perspective. The EU's objective is to ensure the full, equal, and meaningful participation of all women and girls, the elaboration of gender analyses and the use of gender-sensitive and sex-disaggregated indicators and data in

¹ EU priorities at the United Nations during the 76th United Nations General Assembly, September 2021 - September 2022, 12 July 2021, 10393/21

all UN strands of work, and to promote a gender-transformative implementation of the 2030 Agenda, as well as applying a rights-based and intersectional approach.

2.2. Protecting the EU and international framework on the human rights of women and girls: the EU's action is guided by the respect for and promotion of international and EU gender equality norms and obligations. The EU's objective is to protect these standards and oppose any attempts to undermine them.

2.3. Accelerating progress: specific thematic areas of engagement require enhanced efforts in order to achieve gender equality. The EU's objective is to advance these priorities at the UN by promoting targeted initiatives and building consensus among UN Member States, in line with the relevant EU Council Conclusions.

2.4. Promoting a more inclusive and diverse UN: The UN System-Wide gender parity strategy has led to significant progress in the equal representation of women in leadership positions. The EU's objective is to promote a more inclusive UN by supporting gender parity at all levels and ensuring the free, meaningful and open participation of civil society, including feminist, women, youth and girls-led organisations, LGBTI rights groups, women with disabilities, indigenous women, women human rights defenders, journalists, peacebuilders and mediators, academia, the private sector, and other relevant actors.

2.5. Gender budgeting: SDG 5 is one of the three least financed SDGs globally. The EU's objective is to protect and increase financial support for gender equality action at the UN, including through active involvement in relevant discussions of executive boards, and to ensure in the Fifth Committee that adequate staffing and sustainable resources are allocated for the full implementation of all gender-focussed mandates.

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

The following actions will be considered by the EU and its Member States to advance gender equality at the UN, guided by the principles of unity and complementarity:

3.1. Promoting gender equality and women's and girls' rights in all discussions and negotiations:

- The EU will address multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination faced by women and girls, as well as their diverse situations and conditions. The EU will remain committed to sexual and reproductive health and rights, as per the New European Consensus on Development².

² European Consensus on Development, art 34 - The EU remains committed to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of all human rights and to the full and effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and the outcomes of their review conferences and remains committed to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), in this context. Having that in mind, the EU reaffirms its commitment to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of the right of every individual to have full control over, and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality and sexual and reproductive health, free from discrimination, coercion and violence. The EU further stresses the need for universal access to quality and affordable comprehensive sexual and reproductive health information, education, including comprehensive sexuality education, and health-care services.

- The EU and its Member States will strive to include references to women and girls' rights, resources and representation and to gender equality in all relevant statements at the UN, including at the UN Security Council,.
- EU negotiators will assess, where relevant, the gender impact of resolutions or decisions under discussion, and will ensure that a gender equality dimension is taken into account, on the basis of a transformative and intersectional approach promoting non-discrimination and equality. Any attempts to question the EU position, including on terms like gender equality or human rights of women and girls, or to promote harmful social norms and gender stereotypes, will be opposed. The EU will also continue to stress the role of men and boys in discussions regarding gender equality.
- The EU and its Member States will strive to ensure the full, equal and meaningful participation of women and girls in all discussions, including by refusing to sit in panels where women are not represented.

3.2. Initiating, sponsoring and co-sponsoring forward-looking gender resolutions:

- The EU will continue to present resolutions aimed at advancing the enjoyment of all human rights by all women and girls and to include ambitious gender equality language in all its resolutions, in line with the objectives included in section 2 of this document, including as regards the Third Committee EU-GRULAC resolution on the Rights of the Child.
- EU Member States will continue to take national initiatives to uphold gender equality standards at the UN, such as the FR/NL resolution on violence against women and girls, the DE/ES resolution on Water and Sanitation, and the PT Youth resolution.
- The EU will pay special attention to all relevant gender negotiations, including on the Second Committee resolution on women in development, the Third Committee resolutions on Female Genital Mutilation, Child, Early and Forced Marriage, Obstetric Fistula, Violence against Women Migrant Workers, Rural Women, Implementation of the Beijing Declaration, Girl Child, the rights of Widows, Trafficking in Women and Girls and the International Year of the Family, and the ECOSOC resolution on gender mainstreaming, in the Commission on the Status of Women and the Commission on Population and Development.
- The EU and its Member States, especially those sitting on the Security Council, will continue to champion and mainstream the Women, Peace and Security agenda. This includes working to ensure that the agenda, particularly the full, equal and meaningful participation of women, is raised in all relevant discussions, including mandate renewals and negotiations, and that women peacebuilders are invited to participate in or inform such discussions. Particular attention will be given to ensuring an effective response to conflict-related sexual violence, including supporting a survivor-centered approach to justice, ensuring accountability and inclusion in relevant sanction regimes. EU Member States that are members of the Security Council will continue to prioritize the inclusion of civil society briefers in the monthly programme of work, in particular those who can bring a gender perspective to situations on the agenda of the Security Council. In parallel, access to Council Members can be facilitated through informal briefings and contacts. Particular attention will also be given to Women, Peace and Security in the context of the guidelines on the implementation of UN Peacekeeping (the C34 report).

3.3. Continuing to take a leading role at the Commission on the Status of Women:

- The Commission on the Status of Women is the global norm setting body on gender equality and the second most attended event at the UN after High-Level Week. The EU and its Member States will continue to take a leading role in the work of the Commission by promoting ambitious outcomes, combatting the pushback on women's and girls' rights and ensuring high-level participation in each session.
- In addition to taking part in the EU negotiating team, EU Member States will strive to ensure constant representation in the CSW Bureau.
- Negotiations of the agreed conclusions will be used to make progress on the EU's key thematic areas of engagement, in particular as regards addressing the challenges and harnessing the opportunities offered by the green transition and the digital transformation when it comes to gender equality. These issues will be addressed by the Commission at its 66th and 67th sessions respectively.

3.4. Using the EU's leverage to combat gender-based violence:

- The EU will continue to use its unique position to build an international movement for the elimination of sexual and gender-based violence, including through the promotion of the EU-UN Spotlight initiative's results in ending violence against women and girls, and by leading the UN Group of Friends for the elimination of violence against women and girls.
- With 93 members, representing all regions, the UN Group of Friends for the elimination of violence against women and girls is one of the biggest and most active alliances for gender equality at the UN. The EU will use the Group to promote multi-stakeholder action on the ground and to coordinate joint statements and initiatives at the UN.
- The EU will continue to strongly oppose all forms of violence and discrimination, including on grounds of sex, race, ethnic or social origin, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, disability, age, sexual orientation, and gender identity. The EU Delegation is a member of the UN LGBTI core group. Also in this context, the EU will continue to oppose negative social norms and gender stereotypes that are at the root of gender discrimination and gender-based violence.
- The EU will continue to engage closely with and promote the global humanitarian initiative Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies and its new road map, of which Denmark holds the chairmanship 2021-22
- The EU will continue to support the Children and Armed Conflict agenda.
- The EU Delegation and all Member States will uphold a zero-tolerance policy regarding sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment (SEA/SH) in the UN. Member states will consider joining the OECD-DAC recommendation on ending sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment and the CHS Alliance where protection from sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (PSEAH) is woven throughout the nine commitments of the core humanitarian standard.

3.5. Expanding partnerships and building wide coalitions of Member States:

- Following the model of the UN Group of Friends for the elimination of violence against women and girls, the EU will continue to reach out to traditional and non-traditional partners in order to build bridges on the basis of ambitious and progressive positions.

- The EU will promote joint statements, in cooperation with like-minded partners, in support of women's rights issues. The EU will remain committed to sexual and reproductive health and rights, as per the New European Consensus on Development³.
- The EU and its Member States will work towards the implementation of their commitments under the Generation Equality Forum. Participants to the Forum will promote the Forum's outcomes at the UN.
- The EU and its Member States will develop and strengthen bilateral contacts and partnerships on gender equality with all UN Member States both in New York and in capitals, including through the annual global demarches ahead of the Third Committee and the Commission on the Status of Women.

3.6. Ensuring a continuity between the EU's bilateral and multilateral action:

- With 85% of all new EU assistance contributing to gender equality and 5% of new projects specifically targeting gender equality, the EU is stepping up its gender equality action. Synergies will be drawn between the EU's bilateral and multilateral gender cooperation, with a view to informing debates in New York on the basis of concrete developments and results and ensuring more active support from recipient countries.
- The EU will continue to co-chair with the African Union and Niger the UN Group of Friends of women of the Sahel and will work in close coordination with EU Delegations in the region to promote the participation of Sahelian women in the work of the UN, including by supporting workshops in the concerned countries and visits to the UN Headquarters.
- Continue to express its support for the Secretary General's Call to Action for Human Rights, not least regarding gender equality and equal rights for women and girls.

3.7. Supporting the UN women's and girls' rights system and civil society:

- The EU and its Member States will continue to support all actors in the UN system in charge of gender equality and the human rights of all women and girls, including UN Women, UNFPA and UNICEF, the UN women's rights mandate holders and mandates of the Special Representatives of the Secretary-General for Sexual Violence in Conflict and Children and Armed Conflict. Ensuring adequate staffing and sustainable resources for all gender mandates will remain an EU priority in the Fifth Committee.
- The EU and its Member States will continue to engage with civil society, including feminist, women, youth and girls-led organisations, women with disabilities, women human rights defenders and women peacebuilders, including by organising regular coordination meetings and advocating for their protection, participation and accreditation at the UN, including at the Security Council and by supporting their accreditation at the NGO Committee. The EU will also continue to underline the need to provide sustainable funding for these organisations.
- The EU will continue to put public diplomacy tools at the service of gender equality by organising events and campaigns with and for civil society.

3.8. Leading by example:

- The EU and its Member States commit to lead by example by safeguarding and promoting EU unity on gender equality at the UN, ensuring balanced representation of

³ European Consensus on Development, art 34.

women in their missions, possibility conduct joint training on gender equality for EU and MS staff, ensuring adequate gender expertise staffing at EU and MS missions, financing and increasing support for UN gender actions, and advocating for the effective implementation of commitments taken at the UN, including at home.

- The EU Delegation and all EU Member States' missions will promote and implement the UN System Code of Conduct to Prevent Harassment, including Sexual Harassment and the UN system wide SGB. Furthermore, the EU Delegation and all EU Member States' missions will promote an organisational culture in which complaints are taken seriously and acted upon and where protection from retaliation is offered.
- The EU should support special procedures and mandate holders who wish to adopt a gender-sensitive approach or highlight specific issues related to women's and girls' rights in their fields of expertise.
- The EU Delegation and all EU Member States' will take note of the agency specific guidelines that prevent sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment.
- EU Ambassadors will consider joining the network of Gender Champions at the UN.

4. Engage in dialogue for gender equality and women and girls' empowerment

The EU and its Member States are committed to:

- Make gender equality a standing agenda item of EU Heads of Mission's outreach dialogues with third partners;
- Continue the practice of holding an annual EU HoMs meeting with the Executive Director of UN Women;
- Ensure the full engagement of Heads and Deputy Heads of Mission in outreach efforts ahead of the Third Committee and the Commission on the Status of Women;
- Organise regular consultations with civil society representatives on gender equality;
- Promote cooperation with like-minded partners through national and EU initiatives;
- Continue to coordinate extensively on gender equality issues through regular expert meetings organised by the EU Delegation.

5. Outreach and other communication / public diplomacy activities

The EU will continue to focus, among other, on the following annual events to promote gender equality, including through outreach and public diplomacy efforts:

- The high-level week of the UN General Assembly – September
- The Committees of the UN General Assembly – October to November
- Relevant UN Security Council meetings and discussions, including but not limited to the annual open debate on Women, Peace and Security as well as the annual open debate on the Conflict-Related Sexual Violence – October and April
- International Day of the Girl Child – 11 October
- The 16 days of activism against gender-based violence - November
- International Human Rights Day – 10 December
- International Day of zero tolerance against Female Genital Mutilation – 6 February
- International Day of Women and Girls in Science, 11 February
- International Women's Day – 8 March
- The Commission on the Status of Women - March
- The Commission on Population and Development – March

- The UN Security Council annual open debate on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence – April
- International Day for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict, 19 June
- The High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development – July

6. Technical Facility and/or financial resources allocated to gender equality

The EU Delegation mobilises a significant part (approx. 30%) of its Press, Public and Information Budget for events and initiatives related to gender equality.

Evaluation/Follow-up: the action plan will be reviewed in June every year on the basis of lessons learnt.

Date: 4 October 2021

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Olof Skoog". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized 'O' at the beginning.

Signature by Head of Delegation: Olof Skoog