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# Working better together with CSOs to address gender inequality and champion women's and girls' voices and agency



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# ACRONYMS

CLIP	Country Level Implementation Plan
CS	Civil Society
CSO	Civil Society Organisation(s)
CSFP	Civil Society Focal Point
DFI	Development Finance Institutions
EIDHR	European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights
EU	European Union
FBOs	Faith Based Organisations
FPA	Framework Partnership Agreements
FSTP	Financial Support Through Third Parties
GAP	Gender Action Plan
GFP	Gender Focal Point
GBV	Gender-based violence
GEWE	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
GLI	Gender Lens Investing
GTA	Gender Transformative Approach(es)
HoD	Head of Delegation
HQ	Headquarters
HRD	Human Rights Defenders
HRBA	Human Rights Based Approach
IFC	International Finance Corporation
LA	Local Authority (ies)
LGBTQI	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, queer and intersex.
MIP	Multi Annual Indicative Plan
MKS	Methodological and Knowledge Sharing Programme
MS	Member States
RM	Roadmap(s)
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SE	Social Enterprise(s)
SME	Small Medium Enterprise
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
TEI	Team Europe Initiative
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
VAWG	Violence against women and girls

WBT	Working Better Together
WHRD	Women Human Rights Defenders
WOs	Women's Organisations
WROs	Women's Rights Organisations

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. A reaffirmed EU commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment

Gender equality is a core value of the EU and a universally recognised human right, as well as an imperative to well-being, economic growth, prosperity, good governance, peace and security<sup>1</sup>. With the adoption of the EU Gender Action Plan III: An ambitious agenda for gender equality and women's empowerment in EU external action (GAP III) on 25 November 2020, the EU reaffirms the centrality of gender equality and women's empowerment throughout EU external action at all levels and in all sectors. GAP III is articulated around 5 pillars:

1. Making EU engagement on gender equality more effective as a **cross-cutting priority of EU external action in its policy and programming work**<sup>2</sup>.
2. **Promoting, together with EU Member States, strategic EU engagement at the multilateral, regional and country level** and jointly, in close cooperation with all key stakeholders.
3. Focusing on **key areas of engagement**: 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.
4. **Leading by example**, by establishing gender-responsive and gender-balanced leadership at top EU political and management levels.
5. **Reporting and communicating on results and** putting an inclusive monitoring system in place to increase public accountability, ensure transparency and access to information.

In a nutshell, the EU's Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in External Action 2021–2025 (GAP III) aims to accelerate progress on empowering women and girls and safeguard advances in gender equality. With regards to stakeholder involvement, the new GAP emphasis, the need for inclusion of civil society and local authority partners throughout the implementation, notably at the partner country level, in an effort to address some of the shortcomings identified in the "Evaluation of the EU's external action support in the area of gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment (2019-2020)".

Among its findings, the evaluation highlighted how "while the EU's substantial support for civil society organisations active in advancing GEWE has led to many positive experiences, the EU has yet to find an approach to ensure more strategic, comprehensive partnerships on GEWE with these actors at the country level, including the stronger involvement of grassroots organisations in EU external action".

Therefore, GAP III aims to promote a gender transformative approach through, among other ways, supporting and ensuring meaningful participation of women's and girls' organisations and other emerging actors committed to gender equality and women's rights in order to contribute to reach SDG 5 and successfully deliver on its five pillars and six key thematic policy areas. Amongst the key commitments made in GAP III in the engagement with WROs and other civil society actors are: ensuring funding to

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<sup>1</sup> EU Gender Action Plan III, [https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/join-2020-17-final\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/join-2020-17-final_en.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Gender mainstreaming remains the primary means to achieve gender equality as it ensures that all policies and programmes maximise their benefits for all and contribute to stop the perpetuation of inequality.

women's rights organisations and movements to contribute to gender equality; forging strong partnerships and dialogue with them, monitoring and advocating jointly on ending violence against women and girls and promoting their active participation in decision-making processes, including conflict-affected contexts, climate mitigation, adaptation or disaster risk reduction negotiations or gender-responsive ICT policies and plans.

## 1.2. Objectives and scope of the assignment

Against this backdrop, INTPA G1 commissioned a dedicated study in the framework of the Methodological and Knowledge Sharing Programme (MKS)<sup>3</sup> to assist the EU **in developing more strategic and comprehensive partnerships with Civil Society Organisations to advance GEWE and promote gender transformative approaches at the country level.**

More specifically, the study, which was conducted between February and April 2022, aimed to contribute to take stock and promote learning around emerging and innovative approaches in the engagement with CSOs to address the gender gap and promote women's, young women's and girls' voices and agency as an end in itself, and across the different areas around which EU external actions are articulated (i.e. the so-called objective of mainstreaming as outlined by GAP III).

The report that follows is the result of the study, which was undertaken by drawing on a wide range of secondary information (i.e. more than 100 specialised documents were reviewed by the experts), as well as on primary information obtained through an on-line survey to Gender Focal Points and Civil Society Focal points both at EU delegation and headquarters level<sup>4</sup>, and a total of 40 interviews and focus groups with EU staff, key informants and relevant stakeholders<sup>5</sup>. The preliminary conclusions and recommendations of the report were also presented and shared with the Gender Task team of the Policy Forum on development and EUD colleagues during the Civil Society, gender Focal Point seminar organised at the end of June 2022.

The report is structured in 4 thematic chapters, covering all relevant dimensions of the EU engagement with Civil Society, but from a gender lens (i.e. the Enabling Environment; the actors with a particular focus on the emerging actors; consultations and dialogue, and funding with a focus on innovative forms of funding). For the ease of the reader, all chapters are structured similarly, articulated around the issues at stake, a selection of good practices and the call to action. The report also includes a final chapter with the ten key messages and a summary of the main recommendations.

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<sup>3</sup> MKS supports the European Commission, and in particular Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA), to provide a framework for synergic actions in all related areas to acquire, develop, retain, share and apply the knowledge and skills necessary for achieving INTPA's mandate and goals. MKS is currently working with DG INTPA to support and encourage staff at HQ and EUDs to work more strategically with a wide array of CSOs for gender equality (i.e. from identifying the relevant stakeholders -from grassroots organisations to international stakeholders) to engaging with them in the most effective way in all EU areas of action.

<sup>4</sup> The survey was answered by 79 EU colleagues, i.e. 11 from Headquarters and 68 from EUDs. The main outcomes of the survey can be found in Annex 7.2

<sup>5</sup> The complete list of persons interviewed for the assignment can be found in Annex 7.1



## 2. THE ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR CSOS WORKING ON GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

*"What happens without strong women's organisations? Who will continue the fight against violence against women and for women's rights?"<sup>6</sup>*

### 2.1. The issue: "Selective" and "gender sensitive" shrinking space for civil society, amidst increasing attacks on women and gender equality in public life and the prevalence of intersectional forms of discrimination

Recent years have witnessed a significant backlash against women's rights and in the use of the term gender. Twenty-seven years after the Beijing Conference, not only has the term gender been attacked as imposing 'gender ideology,' but many of the hard-won victories for women, particularly in terms of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR, gender-sensitive education and even gender-based violence, appear to be at risk<sup>7</sup>. The COVID pandemic and measures taken by some states in response have only worsened the situation<sup>8</sup>).

On the civic realm, the capacity of citizens to hold decision makers to account has been increasingly compromised worldwide, as civil society **has come under growing pressure and repressive responses to collective mobilizations mounted**<sup>9</sup>. New evidence is also emerging, pointing at a "selective process of closure" of the civic space, whereby **governments attempt to reorganize civic space through a dual process of selective inclusion and exclusion** of CSOs. Whilst CSOs identified as critical or "liberal" (including women organisations) face increasing obstructions and restraints, reportedly the space and state support for certain CSOs identified as pro-government or accepted by the Government, is preserved and even expanded in several countries.

It has also become increasingly clear that recent attacks on the civic space **have distinctive elements, specific to gender equality and women's rights and that they particularly affect women' rights organizations and CSOs advancing GEWE**. To name the most relevant ones:

- The decreased space for civic organizing poses a significant threat for women as **they are more excluded from state institutions and male-dominated formal politics**, and therefore, particularly dependent on civil society organizing. Women carry out a large proportion of grassroots peacebuilding and development activities. However, since formal political processes are often inaccessible to them, **women primarily engage through the civic space**. Political representation and empowerment through civil society participation and your voice is a fundamental component of gender-inclusive democracy. Yet, civil society may intentionally be excluded from certain spaces, e.g. post-conflict peace negotiations, as a way to exclude women and their agendas. Furthermore, yet, women in public life **are increasingly subject to harassment, violence and cyberbullying**, as rapid changes in technology and media are creating new spaces for the perpetration of violence against women and girls<sup>10</sup>, and legislation is either falling behind the digital transformation or actively contributing to further curtailing the digital space.

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<sup>6</sup> The Kvinna Till Kvinna Foundation): Building resilience- Counteracting the shrinking space for women's rights. 2017.

<sup>7</sup> OHCHR (2021). Mandate of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls [Gender equality and gender backlash](#)

<sup>8</sup> WGDWAG, [Responses to the COVID-19 pandemic must not discount women and girls](#), 4 April 2020, available at h

<sup>9</sup> CODESRIA (2021): Shrinking Civic Space and Women's Human Rights.

<sup>10</sup> According to a recent study by OECD, digital technologies are being exploited to silence, survey and manipulate civil society, as well as to express extremist views or hate speech. See OECD (2020): Digital transformation and the futures of civic space to 2030. The gender dimension in international cyber security is also being increasingly researched, considering its relevance in shaping and influencing online behaviour. It

- Women’s rights organizations may be particularly **susceptible to restrictions as they offer important services to groups living in vulnerable situations**. For instance, organizations working on sexual and reproductive health and rights and violence against women comprehensive services are highly dependent on state and donor support and, as such extremely vulnerable to cutting or redirecting funds or to co-optation. Furthermore, they are vulnerable where governments do not recognise their services as essential services – ignoring the unique role of women’s organisations as well as the importance of responding to women’s needs. During COVID-19 movement restrictions, for example, it meant that these service providers had to cease operating.
- **Women’s rights advocates (including Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRD) and journalists) face increasing deteriorating conditions while conducting their work**. This has included heightened government restrictions while covering COVID-19, amidst already amplified physical attacks and online harassment<sup>11</sup>. Particularly, **in fragile settings, women’s political agency is limited in multiple ways by gendered social norms, including at the household level**. Nevertheless, women frequently collectively organise at the frontline, and sometimes emerge as key leaders of the resistance against oppression<sup>12</sup>.
- **Women’s organisations advocating with a strong feminist voice for religious interpretations** that promote gender equality and women’s rights, and/or against conservative, patriarchal religious beliefs, norms and practices, face significant backlash, including verbal resistance and insults, scapegoating as religious deviants, and prosecution within religious law courts.

Documented **targeted restrictions and attacks affecting the space for women and for CSOs working on gender equality** and women’s empowerment include<sup>13</sup>:

- **Stigmatisation, public shaming, defamation and negative labelling campaigns** (both targeting individuals and organisations). The ways in which women actors are labelled by authorities and talked about among the general public has a direct impact on their freedom, safety, and potential to function<sup>14</sup>.
- **Judicial harassment, prosecution, investigation and criminalization** of women organisations and human rights defenders<sup>15</sup>. Giving an organisation the stamp of ‘forbidden political activity’ can delegitimise it in the public eye. Declaring a fatwa against them can lead to their social media, media and public engagements being restricted, impacts the public’s willingness to engage with the organisation, and can tie the organisation up in endless, expensive judicial procedures.
- **Bureaucracy**, burdensome registration and re-registration processes and ad hoc adopted measures by different governments to limit access to international funding, can obstruct and even bring women’s organisations’ activities<sup>16</sup> to a halt.

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determines access and power and is a factor in vulnerability. As a result, malicious cyber operations differently impact people based on their gender identity or expression. See APC (2020): [Why Gender Matters in International Cyber Security](#)

<sup>11</sup> Between 2014 and 2018, the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Defenders issued 181 communications to 60 States on women human rights defenders. See: Human Rights Council A/HRC/40/60: Situation of women human rights defenders.

<sup>12</sup> Anderson, C., J. Gaventa, J. Edwards, A. Joshi, N.J Nampoothiri, and E. Wilson (2022) ‘Against the odds: Action for empowerment and accountability in challenging contexts’, A4EA Policy and Practice Paper, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies

<sup>13</sup> Beijing+25 review process. 2020.

<sup>14</sup> Recent research shows that there is a strong gender dimension in politically motivated disinformation activities. Women are already significantly under- represented in global media coverage of political issues and stories of female politicians and candidates often reinforce highly gendered stereotypes and norms by focusing on the way women are dressed, their body image, and their family life, with much less attention paid to their ideas, policies and proposals. Disinformation activities perpetuate these trends and often in more malicious ways. Ahead of parliamentary elections in Georgia in 2016, for example, several female politicians were targeted by fake videos meant to depict them engaging in sexual activities, and in one case, an extramarital affair. See: Nina Jancowicz (2017): “How Disinformation Became a New Threat to Women,”

<sup>15</sup> This has been documented in a number of countries, including Bahrain, Indonesia, Egypt, Sudan, Thailand, Turkey, etc. See: [OHCHR \(2020\) brief: Women Human Rights defenders. Information series on sexual and reproductive and rights](#).

<sup>16</sup> In Egypt, for instance, several organizations and associations, whether registered or unregistered, report facing an extra layer of bureaucracy that risks bringing their activities to a halt: formal registration prevented organizations from working on the causes and issues they adopt and blocking donor funds has been used since the Mubarak era as a legal form of harassment. See: <https://timep.org/civil-society/under-the-states-gaze-repression-against-womens-rights-organizations-in-egypt/>

- **Physical harassment and intimidation, including threats, injuries and killings, impunity and lack of protection** of women, as well as threats to and attacks on family members, or by family members, because of their activities.
- **Online attacks (the so-called On-line Gender Based violence)**<sup>17</sup> can take a variety of forms. In a 2015 report, UNESCO found that the most frequent forms of online violence against women journalists and media workers include monitoring and stalking, posting personal data, trolling, smearing, defamation or disparagement, and viral hatred.

## 2.2. Learning from experience

Despite the realities of a “shrinking civic space”, and its “gender” ramifications, civil society organisations and women movements across the world continue to resist regime attempts to close civic space. They **employ various strategies** to negotiate and challenge the limited civic space. They can be categorised in three main responses:

### 2.2.1. Strategies to preserve the civic space

**Solidarity between CSOs and international partners and public recognition** are a key strategy to preserve the civic space. In addition to bringing attention to the mistreatment of WHRDs, alliances and platforms (national and international) can facilitate exchanges between civic actors and even facilitate access to funding sources (when they are international) in those cases where the national environment becomes dangerous or is paralysed. The **use of litigation and alliances with lawyers to challenge and resist human rights violations**, is a widespread strategy used by WHRD and women organisations, which has proved to be powerful in not only highlighting governments actions towards specific groups or CSOs as a whole, but also problematising existing laws that infringe on the rights and freedoms of specific groups in society. See for instance the work done by [ARBN with the ROMA community](#). Last but not least, advocating publicly, including with the **use of social media** to navigate shrinking public space remains a tool of resistance despite the state laws introduced in several countries to clamp down on social media activism and to monitor online content.

### 2.2.2. Strategies to engage and amplify the civic space

Rather than sit back, **women and girls across the world are mobilising in solidarity** to challenge the entrenchment of inequality, sexism, militarism, racism and patriarchy at local, national and international levels. These **mass mobilisations of protesters**, featuring women at the forefront, have led to reform of political systems, review on restrictive conditions of loans with international finance institutions, and the protection of sexual and reproductive health rights. See for instance, the work done by [TSK In Nepal](#). Around the world, women of all ages are taking to the streets and occupying virtual spaces to stand up for the human rights of all and demand systemic change. Movements such as [“Ni Una Menos”](#) or [“Marea Verde”](#) in Latin America, the [Czarny Protests in Poland](#), or the protests led by the feminist movement in [Lebanon](#), [Algeria](#) and [Iraq](#) have challenged patriarchal systems, showing that women are a force to be reckoned with. Organisations, like the League of Professional Women in Ukraine, [have led programmes](#) enhancing women’s capacity to step into leadership roles, engage effectively in the labour force and identify the learning needs of women. While those like the African Women’s Development and Communication Network (FEMNET) have [actively equipped and supported women activists](#) to engage with macroeconomic policy and address inequalities<sup>18</sup>.

### 2.2.3. Strategies to “resist” and adapt to the new conditions

WHRDs and women organisations employ various strategies of resistance to negotiate the limited civic space. One “resistance” strategy is that of **starting programmes in existing organisations to provide services denied by the state**. In Tanzania for example, despite homophobic statements from government officials as well as an active crackdown on LGBTIQ people, organisations continue to advocate for human

<sup>17</sup> ICNL (2021): Online Gender Based Violence: Challenges and Responses

<sup>18</sup> CIVICUS news (March 20212): ‘More must be done to ensure women in Civil Society are protected.

rights by providing much needed social services to those in need. They support LGBTIQ people by taking legal action when needed, providing shelter for those who were forced to leave their homes, as well as arranging medical care at private clinics for those who have been denied treatment due to their sexuality<sup>19</sup>.

Another “resistance” strategy is that of choosing a different legal status, which is less challenged by the Government or subject to less scrutiny. In Egypt, for instance, along with public protests, the formation of non-profits has been a tool of resistance used by women and human rights campaigners. By registering as non-profits or law firms<sup>20</sup>, organisations are able to subvert the requirement to register with the Ministry of Social Solidarity thereby facing limited restrictions. In Vietnam, a new form of organisation is gaining momentum, i.e. social enterprises, in a context marked by the continued dominant role of the Communist Party and the reticence in promoting independent associations and NGOs. Almost 50% of these social enterprises have female leadership and at least 20% of them include supporting women and girls/ gender equality amongst their primary objectives<sup>21</sup>.

## 2.3. The call to action

### 2.3.1. Knowledge

- **Invest systematically in better understanding the situation/context in which WROs and CSOs working for gender equality operate** (i.e. the legal frameworks to advance women’s rights and current state of play in their implementation; existing harmful practices and laws; key supporters and blockers; intersectional forms of discrimination, etc). This should be assessed in detail in the Gender Country Profile and/or Gender Sector Analysis conducted in the country (in particular, in countries with a restricted or challenging environment). Civil society mappings (conducted in the framework of the CSO Roadmap or other) and political economy analysis should also include a gender component and/or gender expertise and look into the intersectional forms of discrimination, in order to inform relevant policy and strategic documents at country level, such as the Roadmaps, Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategies; etc. This information will be particularly relevant for the design of gender-informed country interventions within the new MIPs 2021-2027, as well as to conduct more inclusive gender-responsive consultations and dialogue.
- **Carefully think about framing:** due to culture, colonial history, perceptions of the ‘West’, religious interpretations, and a host of other factors, some GEWE terms and/or principles may be sensitive within certain settings. For example, a CSO may be positive about mobilising for girl child education, but not around contraception or a government can show resistance to concepts like gender or support to CSOs working with the LGTBIQ community. It is important to be mindful of this (while acknowledging “the red lines’), recognising that promoting GEWE is a process, and that partners can evolve in how they approach. To this end, an important knowledge of the context and actors<sup>22</sup> is paramount.
- **Mainstream gender aspects in monitoring civil society inclusion and participation:** International monitoring of democracy performance should pay attention not only to the availability of consultation platforms but also to what specific groups (and within them women’s organisations, CSOs working on gender equality and women’s empowerment, etc.) are included in those platforms. Women’s rights groups inclusion in all policy processes (and not just those affecting them directly) should thus be seen as an element of democracy and monitored as such.
- **Prioritize women’s security in fragile and/or restrictive environments.** In addition to providing security and risk management training, donors and partners should work with local activists to evaluate what

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<sup>19</sup> CODESRIA (2021): Shrinking Civic Space and Women’s Human Rights.

<sup>20</sup> Law 149 of 2019 provides for the establishment of civil associations and foundations. Not-for-profit companies can be established according to provisions in the Egyptian Civil Code and Corporate Code, however if these entities practice “civil work” as defined by Law 149, or “any of the activities of associations,” they must comply with Law 149. see ICNL: <https://www.icnl.org/resources/civic-freedom-monitor/egypt#snapshot>

<sup>21</sup> See British Council (2019) : [Social Enterprise in Vietnam](#)

<sup>22</sup> See Section 3 of the report about the actors.

other tools and approaches could further protect them<sup>23</sup> as detention, disappearances, sexual harassment and assault, burglary and even torture have been used to control and intimidate WHRDs and their families.

### 2.3.2. Political & policy dialogue

- **Integrate women's rights and participation into high-level policy and diplomatic engagement.** The EU has a variety of political tools at its disposal, including trade and association agreements, the General Trade Preferences scheme, regular political and human rights dialogues with partner countries and budget support negotiations. Leading by example also matters: the EU should continuously prioritize greater diversity of CSOs engagement, within its own high-level leadership and within EU Delegations<sup>24</sup>.
- Within the **consultation spaces brokered or supported by EU vis-a-vis national governments**, open them up to women's groups/CSO advancing GEWE<sup>25</sup>, across the spectrum of priorities and sectors (i.e. green deals, sustainable growth and jobs; digitalisation; etc). Acknowledging that in some contexts authorities can be among those behind the threats and repression, it is important to always guarantee safe dialogue spaces, which requires solid gender-informed context analysis.
- **Establish systems to support and protect Women's rights defenders** and other civil society actors championing gender equality and women's rights, who face threats and/or attacks. This can also include protection through diplomatic presence (e.g., in court proceedings).

### 2.3.4. Funding/Operational support

- Continue to make funding available to ensure the 'survival' of women's organisations in highly restricted environments. **Continue to provide funding in a way that partners can easily adapt to rapidly changing conditions on the ground, for instance when transiting towards "service delivery roles" (which are less challenging, as opposed to advocacy).** Smaller donors, with more flexible procedures, can sometimes provide complementary financial support in issue areas not funded by larger donors/donors with more complex procedures, which helps CSOs spread their financial risks.
- **Make long-term adaptative funding (and even core funding where possible) available.** In the absence of state funding for certain groups of civil society, strive to move beyond project funding and allocate long-term adaptative, even comprising institutional funding, for WHRD and critical civil society actors addressing gender and women empowerment. This could be done through the use of core funding (i.e. operating grants) and Framework Partnership Agreements (FPAs) at the country level (if and when available). The current partnership model applied by ECHO could be used as an inspiration to this end.<sup>26</sup>
- **Broaden the scope of support.** Feminist movements don't solely engage with women's issues. Some claim they are in fact stronger when **working on environmental or economic justice**, not least because some of those who may push back on feminism, are willing to work on issues of poverty and planet. By combining their work for gender equality with wider social justice goals, they are thus advocating for a readjustment in social equality which is also fundamental to climate, environmental and economic prosperity<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> Stockholm Forum on peace and development (May 2017): Shrinking civic space. Addressing the gendered threats to peacebuilding and human rights. Session report n. 15

<sup>24</sup> Saskia Brechenmacher with Ruthmarie Henckes and Elisa Iledo (2021): Bolstering Women's Political Power Lessons from the EU's Gender Action Plan II . Carnegie Europe

<sup>25</sup> For more information see the call to Action in section 4, on political and policy dialogue

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.dgecho-partners-helpdesk.eu/ngo/humanitarian-partnership-2021-2027/eu-humanitarian-partnership-certificate-2021-2027>

<sup>27</sup> <https://odi.org/en/publications/global-feminist-experiences-of-mobilising-for-norm-change/>

- **Whenever possible, prioritize local organisations and grassroots movements<sup>28</sup> when providing support.** By using third parties to issue grants, unless special measures are included (e.g. minimum % funds to be managed as sub-grants; specific gender targets; participation of sub-grantees in the governance mechanisms of the FSTP, etc), there is a risk of inadvertently undermining the credibility of local actors and perpetuating power structures that undervalue local expertise. Whenever possible, local CSOs should be empowered to manage their own funds (i.e. through the use of block grants in the framework of funding through third parties – FSTP- schemes) and be treated as partners, rather than sub-contractors. To this end, resources could be invested in WOs and women’s platforms at the national level to strengthen their ability to act as grant makers/intermediary organisations (being very careful not to compromise accountability lines and/or generate new power dynamics).
- **Promote and join forces, establish** alliances, coordination groups, platforms and joint efforts among women’s rights activists and women’s organisations, at the local, national and also international level and **support “a bigger tent”**, by promoting stronger coalitions and consortiums **outside of “the gender movement”** and by promoting multisectoral collaboration.
- **In fragile environments, focus on the grass-roots level and support “context-driven” answers.** Women’s agency can be built in conflict-affected contexts, working in bottom-up ways defined by local actors. Women’s groups at a neighbourhood or village level are important examples, allowing discussion of government performance, and learning how to make more effective demands from their national, provincial, and local representatives in a peace-building process<sup>29</sup>. To this end, specific “localisation” measures need to be included in the Call for proposals, guidelines and resulting FSTP contracts.

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<sup>28</sup> Grassroots organizations and movements are primarily made up of citizens organised at community level, which use collective action from the local level to effect change at the local, regional, national or international level.

<sup>29</sup> Anderson, C., J. Gaventa, J. Edwards, A. Joshi, N.J Nampoothiri, and E. Wilson (2022) ‘Against the odds: Action for empowerment and accountability in challenging contexts’, A4EA Policy and Practice Paper, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies

## 3. THE ACTORS: EMERGING ACTORS VS. TRADITIONAL CSOS WORKING ON GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

*"The beauty is in the number of young women who have seen a future beyond what they had"<sup>30</sup>*

### 3.1. The issue: time to join forces and forge new alliances

Women's rights organisations and movements have been the key civil society actors in achieving transformational change for gender equality and in moving the women's rights agenda forward.

#### Who are Women's (Rights) Organisations?

For the purpose of this note, **women's (rights) organisations** (WO/WRO) are understood as **"those civil society organisations with an overt women's or girls' rights, gender equality or feminist purpose"**<sup>31</sup>. Their official mission/vision statements reflect its commitment to addressing multiple/intersecting forms of discrimination and advancing gender equality and women's rights.

These organizations aim to address the underlying drivers/systems/structures, including patriarchy and gendered power dynamics, those that perpetuate gender-based violence, and work to transform these<sup>32</sup>. WROs are often rooted in the local realities, have detailed knowledge of the social and cultural barriers hindering gender equality and can recognise and address the impact of gender inequalities at local, national and international levels<sup>33</sup>.

However, despite their paramount role, and in a context marked by the backlash against gender equality, a shrinking civic space for women's rights organizations and severe underfunding<sup>34</sup>, it is more important than ever **to join forces and establish alliances and synergies with other civil society actors working for gender equality and women's rights**, from men and boys organisations to youth organisations, religious actors and faith-based organisations (FBOs), social enterprises and cooperatives, amongst other CSOs.

Other key actors like media, academia and think tanks, even if they are not addressed in detail in this note due to space limitations, also play an important role in fostering more equitable and inclusive societies. Their contributions to gender equality can be seen in their research work and advocacy and in how they are making their own organizations more gender-inclusive in policy and practice. For instance, gender emerged as an important area of focus among many of the think tanks receiving core support from the Think Tank Initiative from 2009 to 2019 (see more on IDRC "Think tanks and gender equality"). In addition, considering their important role as funders, foundations are addressed in section 5 of the report.

#### **3.1.1. Men for gender equality organisations as key stakeholders and co-beneficiaries: key players for scaling up efforts to engage men and boys and combat discriminatory gender norms**

##### **3.1.1.1. The actors**

<sup>30</sup> Nobel Laureate Leymah Gbowee

<sup>31</sup> OECD [Donor support to southern women's rights organisations](#)

<sup>32</sup> Extracted from the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative.

<sup>33</sup> FEMNET (2006), *Implementing the Paris Declaration: a Southern Civil Society Experience* and OECD (2008) [Innovative funding for women's organisations](#).

<sup>34</sup> See Chapter 5 for more information regarding funding.

In addition to the key role that men and boys play as gender champions within CSOs, “**Men for gender equality**” organizations<sup>35</sup> are premised on the belief that men and boys, as key stakeholders and co-beneficiaries, must be engaged in efforts to address gender inequalities. Most of these organizations were founded **on feminist principles** and owe their existence to the ground-breaking work of the women’s rights and feminist movement. Many started their work to support the WRO. However, they soon realized **that this was not enough** and started to work with men on their own roles and responsibilities.

Generally trusted and supported by WRO, the field of engaging men and boys has grown rapidly in recent years with many new organizations emerging, which do not necessarily have the same grounding in feminist principles or connection to women’s rights and feminist movements. As a result, some concerns have been raised regarding their strategies and goals and how it relates to the ongoing efforts of WROs<sup>36</sup>. To mention a few:

- **Some interventions with men fail to adequately challenge patriarchy and power imbalances** in relationships between women and men<sup>37</sup> and the work with men and boys risk occurring in silos.
- **Dynamics and sharing of space/limited resources**, in particular regarding the risk of reproducing patterns of men’s power and privilege that can threaten women’s leadership.
- As well as in the case of some WROs, some men’s interventions **reproduce cisgendered and heterosexual stereotypes**<sup>38</sup>.

### *3.1.1.2. Learning from experience*

Much of the work around the role of men and boys on gender equality is done by organizations with often broadly defined missions for gender justice and social change but with the common commitment to highlight and mobilize men’s contributions to gender justice. Organisations like **Promundo**, through its initiatives like Journeys of Transformation, Bolsa Família Companion Program, International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) or Program H and local activism contributes to build community support and advocate for a transformative change. Others such as **Sonke Gender Justice** utilises the ‘spectrum of change’ model drawing on a broad range of social change strategies and stablish synergies with others like **Men Engage Alliance** who actively promote accountability through their Accountability Standards and Guidelines.

### *3.1.2. Youth organisations and young women activists: key positive drivers for advancing to sustainable and inclusive development through meaningful partnerships*

#### *3.1.2.1. The actors*

Meaningful civic engagement is about **connecting with and including youth and women’s rights organisations and movements** as the most powerful drivers of change in many countries. But youth organisations<sup>39</sup> and **activists, and in particular young women activists, face different challenges to participate** (and not to mention to co-lead and co-own) in decision making spaces due to for instance: unequal power dynamics; lack of role clarity for youth; top-down methodologies and timelines; unclear

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<sup>35</sup> Other concepts like “male involvement”, “engaging men and boys” or “men and masculinities work” are also used but all of them distinguish it from anti-feminist men’s organizing related to the rise of the far right.

<sup>36</sup> Men Engage (2014) Men, Masculinities, and Changing Power: A Discussion Paper on Engaging Men in Gender Equality From Beijing 1995 to 2015

<sup>37</sup> For instance, when they just play a role of “gatekeeper” tending to reinforce rather than challenge the patriarchal model.

<sup>38</sup> For instance, they might be addressing violence against women and girls and gender roles that are harmful to women but are still harmful to SOGIESC men and communities.

<sup>39</sup> According to the Council of Europe «Youth organisations are generally understood to be youth-led, non-profit, voluntary non-governmental associations, and under some circumstances, can instead be part of the state apparatus or be youth worker-led. They are mostly established to further the political, social, cultural, or economic goals of their members. This is done by implementing activities for young people and/or engaging in advocacy work to promote their cause. Typically, youth organisations focus on promoting and ensuring young people’s democratic and social rights; encouraging their social and political participation at all levels in community life; and offering opportunities for personal and social development through leisure activities, voluntary engagement and non-formal and informal learning”.

Source :<https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/youth-organisations-and-youth-programmes#:~:text=Youth%20organisations%20are%20generally%20understood,economic%20goals%20of%20their%20members.>



decision-making processes and disregard of youth opinions; lack of resources dedicated to supporting youth activists; lack of an intersectional<sup>40</sup> approach or disconnection between youth constituency bodies.<sup>41</sup>

**Youth movements often operate in the margins, act on a more informal basis (not necessarily organising around a formal structure) and are not so tied to international funding lines.** Even though their informality allows them for significant creativity, it also hampers their sustainability<sup>42</sup>. Regarding **gender equality, for youth activists, advancing feminism is inseparable from advancing social justice.** Furthermore, youth-led feminist movements, particularly in Latin America and Africa, are calling for intersectional feminist approaches that are rooted in the lived experiences and actual needs of communities.

### 3.1.2.2. Learning from experience

Through their activism, young people are demonstrating the potential of youth-led media and cultural initiatives as disseminate tools for social change and a way to elevate the voices of young people in all their diversity. Organisations like [Colectivo Tremendas](#) (Chile) generate actions of social impact through a collaborative platform. Others like [Restless Development](#) (Tanzania) have put in place a youth-led accountability programme monitoring progress against SDG5 and FP2020 commitments accessible to diverse young people and actionable for decision-makers. Some like [International Youth Alliance for Family Planning](#) and [Y-PEER International Network](#) focus on specific issues like SRHRs, [African Queer Youth Initiative](#) supports LGBTIQ youth in Africa or [The Blue Ribbon Movement](#) (India) contributes to empower youth to become leaders of change.

### 3.1.3. Religious actors as influential players in promoting, or hindering, GEWE – their reach and influence should not be ignored

#### 3.1.3.1. The actors

Since the 2000's there has been increasing recognition of the role religious actors<sup>43</sup> can play for human rights and in development issues and practice – including Gender Equality and Women's empowerment (GEWE). INTPA has created several learning opportunities and spaces in this regard, including the development of a series of case studies.

**One religious actor may be a key partner in promoting GEWE, while another one may actively oppose GEWE principles** - even though both actors belong to the same religion. Furthermore, a specific religious actor may support certain GEWE principles (e.g. schooling for girl children, eradication of child marriage), while opposing others (e.g. access to family planning). Identifying religious actors to work with in promoting GEWE can therefore be a complex task.

Significant evidence exists illustrating the role religious actors have played promoting gender equality and women's rights, including partnering with women's organisations to address harmful beliefs and practices related to gender-based violence.<sup>44</sup> At the same time, significant evidence also exists on how religious actors oppose women's rights and promote gender inequality.<sup>45</sup> While the latter may be a deterrent to working with religious actors on GEWE, it does beg the question of how women's equality and empowerment can be achieved without engaging with religious actors. Considering their significant influence on communities of faith, it is arguably not only their positive influence on GEWE that should be engaged with, but also their negative influence that needs to be addressed.

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<sup>40</sup> Intersectionality is the framework that is used to study, understand and respond to the ways in which sex and gender intersect with other personal characteristics/identities, recognizing that these intersections contribute to unique experiences of power and privilege or discrimination and exclusion (adapted from the EIGE definition)

<sup>41</sup> Generation Equality Forum "[Young feminist manifesto, a bold and transformative vision for change](#)".

<sup>42</sup> Oxfam (2020) [Shaking Up to Move Forward: Visions for stronger partnerships between youth movements and social organizations](#).

<sup>43</sup> Religious actors' is a catch-all term that includes faith-based organisations, religious networks, church-based agencies, religious groups, religious associations and charities, interfaith networks and councils, missionary organisations, religious community organisations and religious leaders.

<sup>44</sup> [Adedini S.A., Babalola, S., Ibeawuchi, C., Omosoto, O., Akiode, A., & Odeku, M. 2018;](#) [Anwar, Z., Rumminger, J., Mir-Hosseini, Z, Balchin, C. 2009](#) ; [Beasley, M., Ochieng, D., Muyonga, I., & Kavuo, Y. 2010;](#) [Karam, A. 2015;](#) [Kaviti, L.K. 2015](#) ; [Kaybryn, J. & Nidadavolu, V. 2012.](#) [Latha, R. H. 2010.](#)

<sup>45</sup> [Bayes, J.H. & Tohidi, N. 2001;](#) [Ehrlich, J.S. 2006;](#) [Gish, E. 2016;](#) [Le Roux, E. & Cadavid Valencia, L. 2019](#) ; [Levitt, H.M. & Ware, K. 2006](#) ; [Petersen, E. 2016](#) ;[De Roure, S. & Capraro, C. 2016](#) ; [El-Hage, S.S. 2015](#)

Much of the **existing engagement to date with religious actors have been with religious leaders**, recognising the access, social and spiritual capital that they hold within communities of faith.<sup>46</sup> These leaders of religious communities can influence not only their religious community, but also the wider community.<sup>47</sup> One of the main challenges is that religious leaders are almost always men. Therefore, there needs to be intentional engagement with all levels of the religious hierarchy, including informal<sup>48</sup> leadership, to ensure that women playing Influential roles in religious communities are also included. Otherwise, engagement on GEWE with religious leaders continue to privilege men and male points of view.<sup>49</sup>

It is **important to note that religion and culture are entangled** in complex ways. Religious ideas are often heavily influenced by culture, and in turn influence culture. For example, religious scriptures and beliefs may be used to justify cultural practices harmful to women, while interpretation of sacred texts may influence cultural norms into becoming more unequal.<sup>50,51</sup> Religion, culture and gender socialization has been called the 'unholy trinity'<sup>52</sup> that is driving violence against women and serves to highlight the importance of engaging with religious actors within a specific culture and context.

Engagements and interventions that worked in one setting, will not necessarily work in another, and highlights the importance of religious literacy. Religious literacy emphasises the context-specific nature of religious practices and calls for a process of mutual engagement with religious actors, rooted in an understanding of self, the other's self-understanding, and the objectives at hand in a specific cultural context,<sup>53</sup> allowing for honest engagement with the diverse roles that religious actors can play in promoting or hindering gender equality and women's empowerment.<sup>54</sup>

### 3.1.3.2. Learning form experience

Annex 7.3 offers some insightful examples of ways to go about working with religious actors on GEWE<sup>55</sup> in countries like Lesotho, Uganda, Papua New Guinea or El Salvador. All these examples had EU funding.

Other interesting experiences come from **Episcopal Relief & Development**, that works with religious actors to promote gender justice and address gender-based violence, believing that religious actors allow for sustainable programming.<sup>56</sup>

**Tearfund** in Eastern Congo engages specifically with religious leaders on harmful attitudes, behaviours and social norms which support gender inequality and enable VAWG<sup>57</sup>; In Fiji, **House of Sarah**<sup>58</sup> has identified the need for a comprehensive faith-based community mobilisation intervention to prevent and respond to VAWG.<sup>59</sup>; **ABAAD** has engaged with religious leaders in a series of roundtable dialogues entitled 'ABAAD dialogues with Religious leaders to end GBV in the MENA Region', in 2012-2015 and again in 2018<sup>60</sup>; **Psycho Social Counselling Centre for Women**, a women's organisation in the State of Palestine, worked with women mosque preachers, facilitating interactive discussions that led to a gender-positive framing of the core religious ethos, that was then confidently preached by the women mosque

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<sup>46</sup> Palm, S. & Eyber, C. 2019.

<sup>47</sup> Le Roux, E., Corboz, J., Scott, N., Sandilands, M., Lele, U.B., Bezzolato, E. & Jewkes, R. 2020.

<sup>48</sup> Such informal positions of leadership can be at local level (e.g. as a women mosque preacher or Sunday School teacher) but can also be regional or national and even ecumenical. For example, *Sisters in Islam* was founded in Malaysia by a group of Muslim women, to address the injustice women face under the Shariah system, but they know play a key role in the local and international women's movement.

<sup>49</sup> Dhaliwal, S. & Patel, P. 2017; Le Roux, E. 2019.

<sup>50</sup> Le Roux, E. & Bartelink, B.E. 2017.

<sup>51</sup> Para-Mallam, O.J. 2006.

<sup>52</sup> Maluleke, T.S. & Nadar, S. 2002.

<sup>53</sup> Seiple, C. & Hoover, D.R. 2021.

<sup>54</sup> Moore, D. L. 2015; Moore, D. 2015.

<sup>55</sup> The complete case studies for Lesotho, Uganda, Papua New Guinea and Salvador can be read in Annex 7.3

<sup>56</sup> Partnering to address VAWG in Christian and Muslim communities in Liberia. Compilation of practices: Engaging with religious actors on gender inequality and gender-based violence. European Commission, 2021.

<sup>57</sup> Palm, S., Le Roux, E., Bezzolato, E., Deepan, P., Corboz, J., Lele, U., O'Sullivan, V. & Jewkes, R. 2019.

<sup>58</sup> This intervention was supported financially by the EU.

<sup>59</sup> Interreligious mobilisation for VAWG prevention in Fiji and the Pacific. Compilation of practices: Engaging with religious actors on gender inequality and gender-based violence. European Commission, 2021.

<sup>60</sup> Negotiating for interreligious opposition to VAWG in Lebanon. Compilation of practices: Engaging with religious actors on gender inequality and gender-based violence. European Commission, 2021.

preachers to religious women<sup>61</sup>; in Malaysia, [Sisters in Islam](#) focuses on Islam in relation to women's rights by using religious, health and international law to draw attention to where women's rights are being violated<sup>62</sup>; in Pakistan, [Sind Community Foundation](#), a local youth organisation, worked with Hindu and Muslim religious leaders to end child marriage, recognising the practice was being understood as a religious ritual<sup>63</sup>; and finally, [SAfAIDS](#), operating across the Southern African region and aiming to promote SRHR, invested in training and supporting Religious Leader Champions who speak-out on SRHR, and sanction GBV and harmful religious norms and practices.<sup>64</sup>

### **3.1.4. Social entrepreneurs and a fight for gender equality from the social impact environment: how to shift from being "another source of funding" to becoming a key player on gender equality**<sup>65</sup>

#### **3.1.4.1. The actors**

Even though **there is no universal definition for social entrepreneurship**, according to the European Research Network on Social and Economic Policy, Social Enterprises (SEs) "are non-profit private organisations dealing with the producing of goods and rendering of services, which is directly linked to their clear objective that the community should benefit from their activity. They rely on collective dynamics, while involving different types of stakeholders into their management bodies; they highly value their autonomy and take the economic risk associated with their activities"<sup>66</sup>. Social enterprises, apart from being a means to create economic empowerment, they are a **source of funding for women's rights**, even if, so far, only 29 per cent of WROs take advantage of SEs resources<sup>67</sup>.

SEs face many of the **same structural inequalities present in other areas of the economy**: women are less able to access funding, whether that is from invested capital or government grants; they command less attention from governments, donors and NGOs in social entrepreneurship, just as they struggle for attention throughout the private sector<sup>68</sup>; very few "micro-social-entrepreneurship" and "self-help groups" at community level become formal social enterprises; and even the formally constituted SEs, often lack access to donor funding due to an absence of specific legislation for this type of organisations<sup>69</sup>.

#### **3.1.4.2. Learning from experience**

There are multiple and interesting initiatives promoted by diverse SEs to empower women in different sectors around the world. [Mulher em Construção](#) (Woman in Construction) supports low-income women or those fleeing domestic violence to get access to jobs in Brazil's construction sector. It started out as an NGO and is now working with Womanity Foundation to move towards a social enterprise model. The example of [Mann Deshi Bank](#) in India shows how social enterprises are part of the solution to women's empowerment but there is a stringent need to address the legal framework, practices and cultural norms to ensure a positive impact. In other countries like Pakistan, initiatives like [Circle Women](#) provide leadership development for women entrepreneurs, [Women's Digital League](#) helps empower women by building their capacities in the electronic and online sector or the [SEWEGAP Women's Hub](#) provides a platform for professional women and female entrepreneurs to network, learn and connect with each other<sup>70</sup>. In ASEAN countries, [Angels of Impact](#) (a social enterprise in itself) provides support to women-

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<sup>61</sup> [Le Roux & Palm, 2021](#).

<sup>62</sup> [Le Roux, E., and Palm, S. 2018](#).

<sup>63</sup> [Le Roux & Palm, 2021](#).

<sup>64</sup> Mobilising religious leaders as advocates for sexual and reproductive health and rights policy transformation in the SADC region. Compilation of practices: Engaging with religious actors on gender inequality and gender-based violence. European Commission, 2021.

<sup>65</sup> This section has been mainly adapted from British Council (2017) [Activist to entrepreneur: the role of social enterprise in supporting women's empowerment](#)

<sup>66</sup> Through non-profit, for-profit and hybrid enterprises, social entrepreneurs promote a broad range of solutions focused on sustainable development. Extracted from [Financier Worldwide Magazine \(2020\)](#). [The impact of social entrepreneurship on economic growth](#).

<sup>67</sup> [Ibid 65](#).

<sup>68</sup> [Ibid 1](#)

<sup>69</sup> SEs need to register either as private companies or non-profits. When registering as private companies, despite their common good orientation, they do not have access to grant mechanisms which are reserved for non-profits.

<sup>70</sup> Since 2020, Sewegap Women Hub has now become the Seplaa Hub Women to come under a larger umbrella of empowerment and action through partnerships with several women centred networks across Pakistan and South Asia.

led and indigenous-led social enterprises of the region through capacity development, market expansion and financial investment.

### **3.1.5. Cooperatives, a tool for women empowerment: how to ensure that being structured as a cooperative enterprise contributes to gender equality**

#### **3.1.5.1. The actors**

**Co-operatives have been existing since the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century and were amongst the first to give women the right to vote, enabling women to fulfil their potential**<sup>71</sup>. A cooperative is defined by the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) as “an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise.”

In many countries, women workers in rural and informal economies set up cooperatives composed entirely of women to improve their access to inputs and markets and to have more negotiation power with public authorities. In particular, cooperatives offer a legally recognized way of providing protection for what may begin as unincorporated associations of workers in the informal economy where women are overrepresented. Also, cooperatives increase women’s decision-making in the household and improve their participation and empowerment within their communities.<sup>72</sup>

#### **3.1.5.2. Learning from experience**

There are many inspiring examples<sup>73</sup> from around the world of women using the cooperative business model to support themselves, their households and their communities. In particular, the ICA<sup>74</sup> Gender Equality Committee publication Women in leadership: achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world showcases several cooperative best-case examples of women co-operators in leadership in COVID-19 response and recovery, the Argentine Confederation of Cooperatives (Cooperar) promotes the implementation of a Protocol of Prevention of Gender Violence within each entity, and in the government and the cooperative movement has registered the Nigeria Cooperative Women Alliance (NICOWA) to advocate for women participation in governance of all cooperative organizations and development of women cooperatives.

### **3.1.6. Artists, cultural actors and the media, as powerful channels to combat gender stereotypes and promote gender equality.**

#### **3.1.6.1. The actors**

The Presidency Conclusions on gender equality in the field of culture, adopted in December 2020, emphasises the potential of culture to advance gender equality through self-empowerment, awareness-raising and combating prevailing stereotypes through active participation in the creative process and cultural life, in the entire value chain, from artists to the audience. In particular, artists, cultural and media actors -through their creative expressions and representations- can influence the public’s perception of gender roles and relations within society and thereby have a direct and indirect impact on fostering gender equality.

Furthermore, the 2019-2022 Work Plan for Culture recognizes that gender equality is a pillar of cultural diversity and has a key role to play in challenging stereotypes and promoting societal change.

In particular, national and local media actors have an enormous potential to reflect, produce and reinforce social patterns, norms and stereotypes. A non-gender-balanced representation of society in the media reinforces and perpetuates harmful gender stereotypes that make women invisible as key contributors in

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<sup>71</sup> When the Rochdale Pioneers Equitable Co-operative Society was founded in 1844, women had the right to be full members. And for instance, the Women’s Co-operative Guild, which was set up in the UK in 1883, was actively involved in lobbying on a number of crucial issues such as introducing the minimum wage, equal pay, divorce laws, maternity benefits and initiating the white poppies campaign. Source: ICA COOP

<sup>72</sup> Co-ops and Gender Equality

<sup>73</sup> Extracted from How are cooperatives fostering gender equality?

<sup>74</sup> In March 2016, the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) entered into the Partnership #coops4dev74 with the EC ushering in a new phase of collaboration on strengthening the cooperative movement as a key actor in international development.

all spheres of public life. For instance, if journalists do not appreciate the importance of gender equality in exercising political rights, they may reproduce messages and rhetoric or make choices that exclude women as leading protagonists of political processes (i.e., women politicians are quite often under-represented in the news before and after elections).<sup>75</sup> Therefore, it is key to rely on cultural and media actors to increase the visibility of women in all their diversity in leadership roles, create gender-transformative content and break gender stereotypes, challenge traditional social and cultural norms and attitudes, support alternative forms of media, including social media and community radio, to facilitate inspiring conversations about women's and girls' experiences, views, activism and resistance in politics and on fighting against gender-based violence.

### 3.1.6.2. Learning from experience

The [UN Women Media Compact](#) aims to be a mutually beneficial agreement through which valued media partners are invited to scale up their focus on women's rights and gender equality issues through high-quality coverage and editorial decisions, complemented by gender-sensitive corporate practices. Spotlight Initiative has partnered with [The Social Good Club](#) to invite content creators to contribute to build a world that is safe for women and girls - both online and offline.

## 3.2. The call to action

### 3.2.1. Knowledge

- **Go beyond the "usual suspects"** and include the whole range of CSOs advancing GEWE in the analyses, with a particular emphasis on those whose voices are not usually heard. When resources are available (e.g. using the EIDHR or CSO&LA thematic programme support measures/ bilateral funds), apart from the gender country/sectoral analysis, use **Civil Society mappings and political economy** analyses to this end, by including a gender component and/or gender expertise. Also consider, **partnering with other actors** like academic institutions and think tanks, journalists, cultural actors, etc. to expand the knowledge on how the work is being done by these emerging actors and how to strengthen the synergies with WROs.
- When developing knowledge on CSOs advancing GEWE, pay particular attention to:
  - **Consider intersectionality and use adapted intersectionality tools<sup>76</sup>** in the analysis of CSOs advancing GEWE.
  - **Build religious literacy and map the religious landscape**, to identify not only the various religions active within a setting, but also the different religious actors and their potential individually for mobilising around GEWE.
  - **Deepen the knowledge of the social enterprises and cooperative landscape and eco-system** by gathering and promoting examples of good practices to showcase their added value as an actor promoting GEWE.

### 3.2.2. Policy and Political dialogue

- **Avoid silos and, whenever possible, adopt a multi-sectoral approach.** In general, engaging with specific CSOs advancing GEWE (e.g. religious leaders, men and boys organisations, youth, social enterprises, etc) should not be done in an exclusive way as they are part of a multi-sectoral approach and are one stakeholder among other Civil Society actors in a wider system. It is therefore important, when engaging in dialogue, to support and **encourage alliances across WROs and the different emerging actors** by brokering spaces and facilitating collaboration across the different EU processes. In some contexts, particularly restrictive environments, it might also be necessary to promote

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<sup>75</sup> Unseeing eyes: Media coverage and gender in Latin American elections (UN WOMEN, 2011)

<sup>76</sup> See for instance: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Intersectionality-resource-guide-and-toolkit-en.pdf>

dedicated spaces for women's organisations to dialogue, in order to create a safe space for them to exchange.

- **Ensure that different CSOs advancing GEWE** have equal access to data and information (using adequate channels and tools) to ensure and better facilitate their participation in the consultations. This applies to youth in particular, and to vulnerable groups/ groups in the periphery, which might not have equal access to information. Also, when engaging with religious actors, a gradual process is usually needed. They cannot simply “be condemned” from the outset. **Relationships and trust need to be built.**

### 3.2.3. Funding and operational support

- **Make sure the commitments of the GAP III are met, with regards to ensuring funding to local WROs, CSOs and movements that contribute to gender equality.** This can be done by earmarking budgets towards southern women’s rights organisations, by adding eligibility criteria in the guidelines to call for proposals that require applicant organisations to be explicit about partnerships, and by assigning extra points (i.e. added value elements) to projects that favour partnerships when evaluating proposals, with leadership by local women’s rights organisations <sup>77</sup>.
- **Encourage alliances** between WROs and INGOs, as well as with emerging actors, to ensure that the different actors championing gender equality and women’s rights **are not competing** over the same resources, but rather that collaboration is promoted. Also, make sure that all interventions **promote transparency and cooperation** to ensure that the work with emerging actors does not undermine feminist principles but strengthens such approaches instead.
- **Promote partnerships as an effective framework for reaching out to smaller/grass roots organisations** and addressing gender inequalities more effectively, and consider including, in the call for proposals, a mandatory criteria for big organisations, to establish effective partnerships and alliances with WROs and emerging actors from an early stage and during the whole implementation.
- In the framework of the calls for proposals or bilateral cooperation, **support networks between local, national and regional across actors** (i.e. WROs, men’s organisations, youth and religious leaders) and make synergies between the private sector, social enterprises and cooperatives (i.e. in the framework of gender-lens investing) to increase knowledge and resource sharing and create spaces, both online and offline, to exchange best practices and lessons learned.
- **Target and nourish the new generation of women leaders:**
  - **Support platforms to link feminists and young activists to each other**, online and in physical spaces, so they can quickly and safely talk to and learn from each other about which strategies work.
  - **Support ‘young and/or feminist activist laboratories’** to incubate youth-led cooperatives and spaces to learn, co-create and campaign together to gender equality and women’s empowerment.
  - **Support youth and marginalised voices campaigns** and/or policy proposals, especially in contexts where ingrained political structures “delegitimize” youth and the most left behind’s voices.
- **Provide support to women-led income generating activities that embrace an HRBA.** Encourage mentoring, targeted leadership programmes and facilitated peer-support addressed to female social enterprise leaders and **facilitate networking at all levels** between gender focussed social enterprises & cooperatives and WROs with a view to sharing best practice and replicating successful models.

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<sup>77</sup> idem

## 4. INCLUSIVE AND GENDER-RESPONSIVE CONSULTATIONS AND DIALOGUE

*“There is no way that anything is going to be done for us, without us... because that’s just doing it against us... We’re not going to be beneficiaries. That’s not happening anymore... it’s 2019. So, give us power”<sup>78</sup>*

### 4.1. The issue: Substantial progress on the implementation of right-based and multi-stakeholder approaches but more efforts required to shift towards more inclusive and gender-responsive consultations and dialogue.

The EU has assigned more and more important roles to CSOs as it has progressively developed its right-based and multi-stakeholder approaches. Engaging more strategically with CSOs constitutes a key pillar in these approaches and the **EU commitment to enhanced dialogue with CSOs** is enshrined in several relevant policy documents<sup>79</sup>.

Over the past years, echoing these commitments, EUDs appear to be making significant progress in organising more systematic consultations with CSOs (i.e. for the elaboration of the GAP III CLIPs; for the new MIP 2021-2027; for the Roadmap for engagement with CSOs; etc.) and in brokering spaces for CSOs involvement in relevant national dialogues (i.e. periodic review of CEDAW) and shadow reporting of UN Treaties. A number of EU Delegations are shifting towards more structured forms of dialogue. There is also evidence of EU Delegations **reaching out beyond their usual interlocutors to consider a wider representation of Civil Society actors**, and of EU Delegations **increasingly integrating a gender lens in the consultations**.

Despite these improvements, additional efforts to **promote inclusiveness** are still needed, **particularly at sectoral level**<sup>80</sup>, and a broad and all-encompassing notion of Civil Society needs to be adopted<sup>81</sup>. In particular, efforts are required to **reach out to women and underrepresented communities and groups** (i.e., youth, marginalised groups; etc), **whose voices are often not heard because of existing barriers and challenges**.

The **barriers and challenges which hinder women’s involvement in policy consultations and dialogue** are manifold and addressing them effectively requires a more in-depth understanding of how they operate. Building on existing research and literature on engagement, they can broadly be categorised in four groups:

Challenge	Mobilisation challenge	Access challenge	Influence challenge	Implementation challenge
	Pre-condition for voice <sup>82</sup>	Amplification of voice	Receptivity to voice	Influence of voice

<sup>78</sup> Natasha Wang Mwansa, young feminist activist at Women Deliver Global Conference Extract from Emily Brown (2021): Women, voice and power. How transformative feminist leadership is challenging inequalities and the root causes of extreme vulnerability. Oxfam. See Natasha Wang Mwansa’s profile at:

[https://twitter.com/TashaWangMwansa?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Euser-p%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor](https://twitter.com/TashaWangMwansa?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Euser-p%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor)

<sup>79</sup> From the 2012 Communication “The roots of democracy and sustainable development” to the new EU Consensus on Development, which calls for stronger and more inclusive multi-stakeholder partnerships and reaffirms EU commitment to right-based approaches<sup>79</sup>, in line with Agenda 2030. More recently, Commissioner Jutta Urpilainen has reaffirmed the EU commitment towards an enhanced engagement with Civil Society as part of the inclusive and equitable partnerships which are necessary to reduce global poverty and support sustainable development.

<sup>80</sup> According to the responses to the survey which was launched during the course of the assignment (a summary of the responses can be found in Annex 7.2), consultations take place mostly within the CLIP, RM and MIP. They are less frequent in sectoral policy dialogue and in spaces facilitated by MS and other partners.

<sup>81</sup> Considering the changes that are taking place cross the world in the civic space also with regards to actors advancing GEWE, as evidenced in the previous section, about the actors.

<sup>82</sup> Adaptation of Gaventa’s terms when analysing voice.

Key issues	<p><b>"Awareness"</b> of voice by women (i.e. whether women are aware of alternatives and organise to challenge the status quo).</p> <p><b>Capacity of women groups/CSOs advancing GEWE to organise collectively</b> (beyond the individuals), understand the policies and formulate the needs, demands and advocacy requests.</p>	<p><b>Access to information</b> and to the <b>available space of dialogue</b>.</p> <p>In other words, whether women groups/ CSOs advancing GEWE <b>are invited and "have a set" in the table</b>.</p>	<p><b>Capacity of women groups/CSOs advancing GEWE to effectively engage</b> in the consultations and dialogue and have "their voices heard"</p>	<p><b>Capacity of women groups/CSOs advancing GEWE to effectively monitor</b> and follow up the policy resolutions.</p>
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It is also important to stress that in any given context, **civil society is not a homogenous group** representing one set of interests. On the contrary, the civic space is constantly evolving and CSOs are multiple, changing, pursuing distinct and even sometimes opposing agendas and interests, as they are not exempt from the political and power dynamics that shape the rest of the social, economic and political context. **The same applies to women groups and CSOs advancing GEWE.** A closer consideration is therefore required, to better understand their agendas and how the fore-mentioned barriers might affect them differently (e.g. rural women vs. urban women; women with special needs; women issued from under-represented or excluded segments of the local population; etc. As a recent study on women's social movements reports<sup>83</sup> **there is a tendency amongst feminist movements and goals to atomise, or sub-divide**, and it is often due to the difficulties faced by the more marginalised groups of women in having their experiences and demands heard or recognised within broader feminist movements<sup>84</sup>.

## 4.2. Learning from experience

Since 2020, during the course of the preparation of the new Roadmaps for engagement with CSOs for the period post 2020, not only were the template and drafting guidance documents for the Roadmaps reviewed from a gender lens and considered the structure of the CLIPs, but also practical gender guidance was offered to EUDs during the course of the regional seminars organised by INTPA G.2 in 2021. What's more, the preliminary assessment of the Roadmap documents conducted by the Roadmap Facility<sup>85</sup> **evidences a number of emerging good practices in mainstreaming gender, at different levels**<sup>86</sup>:

- In the way RM consultations have been undertaken, **in close articulation (or even merged) with the consultations for the CLIP/GAP** and/or being more inclusive towards women organisations and other CSOs advancing GEWE. (e.g., Lao PDR, Philippines, Pakistan, Mongolia, South Sudan, Sri Lanka; Paraguay, Indonesia, etc)
- In the **stronger acknowledgement of the key roles played by women and the specific challenges faced by women organisations** and CSOs addressing GEWE in the analytical parts of the

<sup>83</sup> Jiménez Thomas Rodríguez, D., Harper, C. and George, R. (2021) Mobilising for change: how women's social movements are transforming gender norms. ALIGN Report. London: ODI (<https://www.alignplatform.org/resources/report-mobilising-for-change>)

<sup>84</sup> A recent study on CSOs using intersectional approaches to Violence against women and girls (VAWG) prevention, highlighted the importance of 'with and for' organisations that represent a specific group of women with intersecting vulnerabilities to discrimination and violence. At the same time, partnerships between organisations representing different groups of women with intersecting vulnerabilities to discrimination and violence are valuable, as it builds synergy and shared learning and momentum that can be used to the benefit of all the different groups and their agendas. See: Palm, S. and Le Roux, E (2021), Learning from Practice: Exploring Intersectional Approaches to Preventing Violence Against Women and Girls (New York, United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women).

<sup>85</sup> See Annex 7.4: Gender mainstreaming in the Roadmap process: a preliminary state of play. An internal note drafted by the Roadmap Facility. November 2021.

<sup>86</sup> It is however important to keep in mind that this is a preliminary analysis, and that is still premature to draw conclusions on the effectiveness of the afore-mentioned gender mainstreaming commitments and provisions included in the new generation of Roadmaps for the period post 2020, considering that several RMs are still being updated and that, for those finalised, their implementation has only recently started. Once implementation of the RMs is more advanced, it is advised to deepen the assessment of these emerging good practices, and more generally, to conduct a more thorough analysis of how gender is mainstreamed in the RMs design and implementation, within the framework of the stock-taking exercise of the RMs Post 2021 which will be conducted in the future.



documents. Several EUDs organised dedicated consultation sessions (in the form of specific workshops, etc.) with representatives from women organisations (e.g., Chad, Botswana, Comoros, El Salvador, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe, etc).

- In the **integration of a Rights Based Approach and mainstreaming of gender across the priorities and actions of the Roadmap**, with a particular emphasis on women participation in public debates and policies, as well as in entrepreneurship, and in the integration of gender-disaggregated actions and indicators.

With regards to the 2021-2027 MIP programming<sup>87</sup>, improvements are also to be noted. CSOs engaged on gender equality and women's rights have been reported to be systematically included in consultations (in all but one country, Iran). Reportedly, EU Delegations have reached a wide array of women's organisations, ranging from women's rights organisations and feminist movements; and NGOs working on gender issues, to young women activists, women entrepreneurs and women business associations; women farmers and cooperatives; women lawyers' organisations and women think tanks within universities.

### 4.3. The call to action

#### 4.3.1. Knowledge

- Experience shows that **identifying the right actors** continues to be one of the most fundamental questions when engaging with CSOs in consultations and dialogue, to ensure that the process is effective and inclusive. Too often only 'the usual suspects' are heard, resulting in missed opportunities. With regards to GEWE, it is important to make sure **the "list" of CSOs is wide and inclusive**. Important Civil Society actors in the dialogue include "traditional" women's organisations **but also men for gender-equality organisations, youth activists, cooperatives, social enterprises, religious actors, etc. as highlighted in the previous section**.
- Deepen the knowledge around the "agency" that women's organisations and CSOs addressing GEWE actually have, and the challenges (i.e. mobilisation, access, influence, etc) they face to engage in relevant national processes, around domestic policies as well as in monitoring International Conventions and Treaties (e.g. CEDAW)
- **Consider intersectionality** and use adapted intersectionality tools<sup>88</sup> in the analysis. CSOs that represent the women being discriminated against, or that experience violence, because of intersecting aspects of their identities or circumstances and advocate and mobilise around their needs, need to be intentionally sought out and partnered with.
- Make **Civil Society mappings<sup>89</sup> and political economy analyses gender sensitive**. These analyses can be instrumental to better understand CSOs' interactions amongst themselves as well as with other actors (public and private) as well as the environment in which CSOs operate, and to do so, also from a gender perspective, as analysed in the section of this note about the enabling environment. They can also be instrumental to purposely identify underrepresented communities and groups.

#### 4.3.2. Political & policy dialogue

- **Integrate the issue of gender equality and women's political rights and participation into all high-level policies and diplomatic engagement**. The EU has a variety of political tools at its disposal, including **trade and association agreements, the General Trade Preferences scheme, and regular political and human rights dialogues with partner countries**. Leading by example also matters: the EU should

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<sup>87</sup> Overview of the consultations organised with civil society organisations and local authorities in the framework of the Programming exercise 2021-2027. Roadmap Facility. October 2021.

<sup>88</sup> See for instance: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Intersectionality-resource-guide-and-toolkit-en.pdf>

<sup>89</sup> Please see section "Who" in the Note about mainstreaming Civil Society into the EU cooperation and external relations in the post 2020 phase. For more information about mappings you may want to also consult the reference document: Mappings and civil society assessments. A study of past, present and future trends. Tools and Methods Series. Reference Document. 2012.

continuously prioritize greater diversity within its own high-level leadership and within EU delegations<sup>90</sup>.

- **Ensure that information is available and accessible** (also language wise) and be mindful of the timing of the meetings to allow for women's groups/CSO advancing GEWE's to participate in policy consultations and dialogues at the programmatic and sectoral level. When necessary, provide/support access to specific services to allow women's participation (i.e. childcare services, chaperon services for women whose movements are restricted at certain hours, etc).
- Within the **consultation spaces facilitated or supported by EU at different levels**, open them up to women groups/CSO advancing GEWE. To mention some examples of how this could be done<sup>91</sup>:
  - During the identification phase of the sectoral programmes within the new MIP 2021-2027 and the design of the **TEIs, implement participatory approaches and consult CSOs, including those advancing GEWE** throughout the identification & formulation studies and research work and when discussing the proposed Actions/TEIs.
  - Involve CSOs advancing GEWE (amongst the CSOs invited) in the **debates with IFIs and other donors, around the use of budget support and the discussions around the criteria and indicators** of the policy matrix related to the disbursement of EU funds. Many budget support programmes include civil society related indicators, which could be further elaborated from a gender lens.
  - Involve CSOs advancing GEWE (amongst the CSOs invited) **in the discussions on transparency and oversight of sectoral budgets, performance monitoring processes** and systems and the undertaking of social or financial audits, to ensure that a gender perspective is included.
  - Play a **brokering role**, to ensure that different actors and groups involved in GEWE are invited to the existing multi-stakeholder fora to contribute to the formulation of sectoral strategies, policies, budgets and action plans. Request, if necessary, the use of **affirmative action** (e.g. quotas for women /GEWE CSOs to ensure a meaningful participation).

#### 4.3.3. Funding/Operational support

- Support CSOs efforts to **address mobilisation challenges**:
  - **Provide resources for spaces where women can network**, engage communities and mount wider social action. Funding and capacity-building initiatives to support the creation of women's organisations and groups (even self-help groups) and sustain their work by helping to provide such spaces, which can ultimately support shifts in norms around women's engagement in politics. They can also enable women's voices to be heard in areas that affect politics, such as media, law and cultural life<sup>92</sup>.
  - **Support the exposure of women organisations** (especially at grass roots level) **to regional and international agendas and their networking with relevant** women and GEWE organisations, movements and platforms, who might support their cause and create alliances/ from whom they can learn, etc. This is particularly relevant in highly restricted environments, where women organisations and groups might be isolated.
  - **Support the capacity development of women groups and CSOs advancing GEWE to improve their internal governance and accountability systems**, to enhance their legitimacy vis-a-vis the authorities and other key stakeholders.

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<sup>90</sup> Saskia Brechenmacher with Ruthmarie Henckes and Elisa Iledo (2021): Bolstering Women's Political Power Lessons from the EU's Gender Action Plan II . Carnegie Europe

<sup>91</sup> Please check the guidance note "Mainstreaming Civil Society engagement into European Union cooperation and external relations in the post 2020 phase" drafted by the EU Roadmap Facility in September 2020 for more detailed information on how to mainstream CSOs into the different areas of EU sectoral work.

<sup>92</sup> Jiménez Thomas Rodríguez, D., Harper, C. and George, R. (2021) Mobilising for change: how women's social movements are transforming gender norms. ALIGN Report. London: ODI (<https://www.alignplatform.org/resources/report- mobilising-for-change>).

- Support CSOs efforts to address **access and influence challenges**:
  - Support **capacity development of women groups and CSOs advancing GEWE to engage in policy debates** via technical, advocacy and language skills and skills in negotiation, lobbying, and communication. It is however important to underline that this needs to be combined with other initiatives addressing structural and institutional barriers. Indeed, capacity development programs are not set up to address such barriers to women’s participation (i.e. lack of financing, gender-targeted violence, etc). In fact, they tend to shift the focus of change onto women, while leaving exclusionary systems intact.<sup>93</sup>
  - Support women’s groups and CSOs advancing GEWE’s access to information and work with the media, **to make female voices heard**.
- Support CSOs efforts to **address implementation challenges**:
  - Support the capacity development of women’s groups and CSOs advancing GEWE to engage in **monitoring and evaluation of policy implementation** (both EU policies and national policies). With regards to EU policies, the monitoring of GAP III/CLIP implementation at country level; the monitoring of the implementation of the Roadmap for engagement with CSOs and the mid-term review of the MIPs 2021-2027 are of particular relevance. With regards to domestic policies, women’s groups and CSOs advancing gender should particularly be involved in monitoring international agreements taken by national states. Globally, there is also a need for stronger involvement of women’s organisations and CSOs advancing GEWE in the governance of relevant initiatives. (e.g. in the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative, civil society is systematically engaged at the national, regional and global level through their partnership with Civil Society Reference Groups)<sup>94</sup>.

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<sup>93</sup> Saskia Brechenmacher with Ruthmarie Henckes and Elisa Iledo (2021): Bolstering Women’s Political Power Lessons from the EU’s Gender Action Plan II . Carnegie Europe

<sup>94</sup> See Annex 7.5

## 5. TOWARDS MORE GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE AND INNOVATIVE SUPPORT MODALITIES FOR CSOS

*“Newly committed resources are not reaching feminist movements at the breadth and depth necessary, especially in the Global South”<sup>95</sup>*

### 5.1. The issue: CSOs addressing gender inequality remain severely under-funded

#### 5.1.1. Data on bilateral and philanthropic funding for CSOs advancing GEWE

Notwithstanding the gender rhetoric and political and policy commitments, **CSOs advancing GEWE, particularly at local level, remain severely underfunded<sup>96</sup>**. This situation has worsened over the past years since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. In several countries, funding for women’s rights and the capacity to fulfil them has receded as forces **opposed to gender equality have gained visibility and political influence. Over 99 percent of Official Development Assistance (ODA) and foundation grants do not directly reach WROs as they** receive only 0.13% of the total (ODA) and 0.4% of all gender-related aid<sup>97</sup>.

This **trend is also confirmed in the case of philanthropy**, where only \$1.14 billion USD of the massive \$1.5 trillion USD in foundation assets and \$99 billion USD in total foundation grants in 2017 are human rights grants<sup>98</sup>. And of this number, a recent study indicates that women’s rights grants only amount to 0.42 percent of the total foundation grants in 2017<sup>99</sup>.

#### 5.1.2. Funding challenges and barriers faced by CSOs advancing GEWE

Some of the **key systematic and institutional barriers to directly fund CSOs working on gender, in particular WROs, in partner countries include<sup>100</sup>**:

- **Donor management capacities:** Managing grants to a number of smaller and mid-size organisations is more demanding and labour-intensive than contributing to multilateral funding programmes or funding large INGOs<sup>101</sup>.
- **Resistance to re-granting**, working with other funders, and/or collectively pooling funds due to visibility and branding concerns or/and a limited experience of working across sectors with other donors from the funding ecosystem (i.e. private philanthropy or women’s funds).
- **Funding thresholds are either too high or too low.** Pressure to move significant budgets quickly drives a preference to fund a smaller number of organisations that can absorb larger pots of funding, excluding small- and medium-sized WROs. However, the reverse is also problematic: allocating only small pots of funding plays into the myth that WROs can’t absorb larger amounts of funding.
- **Donors tend to concentrate their support on the same organisations.** As a result, a number of WROs have become solid and reliable donors’ partners. However, they have to respond to the often demanding different donors’ management requests and reporting procedures.

<sup>95</sup> Taszewka, K., Dolker, T., and Miller, K. 2019. Only 1% of gender equality funding is going to women’s organizations—why? The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/jul/02/gender-equality-support-1bn-boost-how-to-spend-it>

<sup>96</sup> OECD. DAC Network on Gender Equality (2020): Donor support to southern women’s rights organizations. and UN-Women.

<sup>97</sup> AWID (2021) [Where is the money for women organising?](#)

<sup>98</sup> Out of the private foundations that report their financing flows to the OECD, 31 foundations reported their financing for gender equality using the DAC gender marker. Out of the total of USD 7.6 billion provided by these 31 foundations, only USD 1.9 billion integrated or were dedicated to gender equality, corresponding to 25% of financial flows. BBVA Microfinance Foundation contributed USD 595 million to gender equality, making it the foundation with the largest amount of funding for gender equality, followed by the Gates foundation with USD 558 million on average in 2018-19. Ibid 109

<sup>99</sup> AWID (2021) [Where is the money for women organising?](#)

<sup>100</sup> Extracted from AWID and Mama Cash (2020), Moving More Money to the Drivers of Change: How Bilateral and Multilateral Funders Can Resource Feminist Movements. <https://www.mamacash.org/en/report-moving-more-money-to-the-drivers-of-change>

<sup>101</sup> European Journal of Politics and Gender (2019), Development funding and the occlusion of feminist expertise.

- **Short and strict policy cycles and budget timeframes** as funding may depend on changes in political and management decisions (e.g. in response to evolving issues like in the case of the COVID-19 response), which can shift priorities and divert funding, posing a threat to sustainability in the medium to long term.
- **Transformative grant making** requires much more than shifting resources, it **implies shifting power from big organisations by avoiding** short-term competition and heavily restricted funding, and assuming expertise and vision come from outside WROs, rather than from within<sup>102</sup>.
- **Lack of experience and/or knowledge in working with the so-called in chapter 4 “emerging actors”** and the need to invest time and resources in building new relationships and networks to reach out to all these actors.
- **Isolated advocates for change within institutions.** For colleagues or interventions seeking to advance funding for WROs and “emerging gender actors”, bringing management on board often requires extensive internal advocacy in a quite often “competing priorities” context.
- **Formulaic approaches to due diligence<sup>103</sup> and mitigating risk.** Like the EC, most donors approach risk mitigation and accountability in a way that seems to presume bigger and older is better and safer. Funding is often predicated on requirements around budget size, proof of financial audits, legal registration, short-term measurable impact, and other factors that may miss the reality of how WROs and grassroots organisations work.
- **Increase of funding driven against the human rights of women and LGBTIQ people** in the service of ultraconservative, fundamentalist, and patriarchal agendas.<sup>104</sup>

### 5.1.3. The emergence of innovative ways of funding and support

Despite the afore-mentioned trends, recent years have seen the emergence of **Women’s Funds, multi-donor funding models for gender equality and other innovative funding instruments**, such as gender lens investing. They aim to address the gender funding gap and represent a window of opportunity to leverage resources to support the work of CSO on gender equality, and in particular WROs.

**Women’s funds<sup>105</sup>** are often the first source of funding for groups that are disregarded by the broader philanthropic and donor community, as they are in a better position to reach local women’s organisations and feminist movements with limited absorption capacity. Women’s funds are funded by governments, private companies, and philanthropy, as well as individuals. Their primary purpose is to mobilise resources to distribute to WROs and help other donors, peer-foundations, corporations and governments, understand and value WRO’s and their contribution to social change.

**Multi-donor or stakeholder models** for gender equality imply pooling multiple donor resources and offer several benefits, namely: (i) sharing the responsibility in funding a programme which might be considered too sensitive by the partner-country government or one donor; (ii) reaching out to small organisations, which donors you normally might not be able to reach, as they are often managed at the local level and; (iii) reducing transaction costs, as funds are managed centrally and often by one consolidated team. They also create opportunities to influence the international system and to improve the coordination with donors and wider international efforts to support gender equality<sup>106</sup>.

Last but not least, a number of foundations, donors and governments, are currently (although still quite limited) **exploring new financial tools** (i.e. loans, guarantees and equity investments), and **providing longer**

<sup>102</sup> Equality Fund “How we fund”. <https://equalityfund.ca/what-we-do/grantmaking/>

<sup>103</sup> Due diligence systems manage perceived risk, rather than addressing real risk or recognising that ‘safe’ interventions may maintain the status quo and, as such, increase the risk that inequality will not be challenged or changed

<sup>104</sup> Between 2013 and 2017, the “anti-gender” movement received over \$3.7 billion USD in funding – more than triple the funding for LGBTIQ groups globally in those years. Global Philanthropy Project. 2020. [Meet the Moment: A Call for Progressive Philanthropic Response to the Anti-Gender Movement](#).

<sup>105</sup> OECD (2020) [Putting finance to work for gender equality and women’s empowerment](#)

<sup>106</sup> OECD (2016) Donor support to southern women’s rights organisations. <https://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/OECD-report-on-womens-rights-organisations.pdf>

**term and non-financial support** (i.e. access to networks and strategic consulting creative media and digital tools) to local organisations, particularly Social Enterprises.

## 5.2. Learning from experience

Global Affairs Canada is one of the donors that is spearheading **direct funding**<sup>107</sup> to WROs. The **Women's Voice and Leadership Programme** improves WROs' management and sustainability by strengthening their capacity to program and advocate. One of its successes is its focus on research which allows the sector to build an evidence base on the effectiveness of WROs<sup>108</sup>.

A number of donors have joint efforts under **multi-donor or multi-stakeholder initiatives** like the World Bank Group's **Umbrella Facility for Gender Equality**, which finances research, impact evaluations and data to help policy makers and practitioners close gender gaps in countries and sectors. The **EU-UN Spotlight Initiative** is another interesting example, promoting strong and empowered civil society and autonomous women's movements, through building their capacity, deploying innovative financing mechanisms and strengthening partnership and networking opportunities<sup>109</sup>. Others, like the **UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women**<sup>110</sup> or the **Fund for Gender Equality** are committed to advocating for adequate, sustainable funding for efforts to end violence against women and girls and gender equality. In particular, the latter is currently experimenting with alternative grant-making approaches involving upscaling and social innovation.

Together with multi-stakeholders' donors, **Women's Funds** play a key role in the funding of WROs. They include **Mama Cash**, the first international women's fund, and other Funds addressing specific target groups such as the **Global Fund Addressing Key Issues Facing Black Women**, or the **African Women's Development Fund**. Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice<sup>111</sup> invests in LGBTQI activists, artists and organizations with limited access to funding but well positioned to make transformative change like joining forces through consortiums like **Leading from the South**<sup>112</sup> supported by the Dutch government or the Latin American and Caribbean Women's Funds Alliance. Others such as **The Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action**<sup>113</sup> provide technical and legal support, thematic expertise and enhance connections with gender-just environmental movements. **FRIDA** is the only fund run by young feminists to support and establish other emerging feminist organizations, collectives and movements<sup>114</sup>. The Canadian **Equality Fund** is also an interesting experience, which aims at bringing the philanthropic and investment worlds together, to mobilize resources under the **Principles for Feminist Funding**. In addition, networks like **Prospera** strengthen, support, and connect member women's funds, and leverage opportunities to transform the funding landscape and initiatives like **Women Win** invest in and support a diverse global portfolio of re-grantees (including non-traditional actors). Other very interesting examples of Women's Funds are for instance **Fondo Lunaria**, **Calala**, **Fondo Semillas**, **Women Win**, **Fondo de Mujeres Bolivia Apathi Jopueti** or **Gender Founders Co-lab**.

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<sup>107</sup> It can be delivered in a number of forms, but fundamentally provides money through grants and partnerships to WROs allowing them to determine their own priorities. For an expanded discussion on types of funding—including those that impede direct funding—see AWID (2019).

<sup>108</sup> Women's Rights Policy Group and Canadian Council for International Co-operation. (2020) An Analysis of Civil Society Organizations' Experiences with the Women's Voice and Leadership Program. <https://cooperation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/WVL-report.pdf>

<sup>109</sup> In 2019, 50 per cent of programme funds globally were budgeted for civil society organizations in an effort to address the lack of funding for activists and women's organizations working on the front lines with those directly impacted by violence. Ten per cent of overall Spotlight Initiative regional funding envelopes was earmarked to directly support and strengthen grassroots women's organizations, many of whom are facing financial challenges due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. See more info on: Spotlight Initiative: <https://www.spotlightinitiative.org/press/eu-un-spotlight-initiative-shows-promising-results-ending-violence-against-women-and-girls>

<sup>110</sup> Donors: Mostly bilateral donors with some contributions from philanthropic foundations, corporate sector and individual givers.

<sup>111</sup> In particular, Astraea's Global Arts Fund supports, showcases and connects impactful art by LGBTQI people and organizations that are using art as a tool for social transformation and have limited access to resources for this critical work. More info available at <https://www.astraeafoundation.org/apply/global-arts-fund/>

<sup>112</sup> Consortium of four women's funds: **Fondo de Mujeres del Sur** (Women's Fund from the South), **African Women's Development Fund**, **Women's Fund Asia** and the **International Indigenous Women's Forum**. The Netherlands also supports women's rights and gender equality through the SDG 5 Fund.

<sup>113</sup> It is funded and managed by the Central American Women's Fund, Mama Cash and Both ENDS.

<sup>114</sup> In addition to the money, grantee partners get access to a global community and network of 200+ young feminist activists from all over the world, special grants like travel grants and collaborative grants to help strengthen group's work.

On the philanthropy side, very interesting initiatives have been launched that rely on the innovation provided by the ICTs. For instance, the [B100RagI](#)<sup>115</sup> is an online series that combines the use of new media with ground workshops to give women platforms to be heard in spheres where they would normally be silenced, provides youth with new tools to communicate and advocate and engage men on the topics of masculinity in the Arab World. Others like, [MyAgro](#) an award-winning social enterprise / non-profit, empowers women female farmers through a comprehensive services mobile platform<sup>116</sup>.

In the realm of financial investments, the [Asia Women Impact Fund](#)<sup>117</sup> raises awareness on how gender impact metrics can be applied throughout the investment process, develops women-focused investment pipelines and convenes collaborative forums for gender-lens investment practitioners.

The [Women's Financial Inclusion Facility](#)<sup>118</sup> (funded by the EU as one of its anchor investors<sup>119</sup>) provides gender-lens investing. Each portfolio company undergoes an in-depth, data-driven gender assessment resulting in customized, strategic gender action plans. The Facility also applies gender advocacy as an investor (i.e. voting shares, board and committee roles, review of corporate policies, practices and resource allocation or technical assistance).

Other relevant **global initiatives** include [Gender Smart Investing](#), which integrates the gender analysis in the investment process for better social and financial outcomes and by fostering shared learning and dialogue in order to amplify successes and innovations<sup>120</sup>.

Also the [CARE–She Trades Impact Fund](#) represents a very interesting initiative as it targets early- to growth-stage companies that benefit women as consumers, founders or employees, and economic agents in supply chains in Asia and across some African countries.

### 5.3. The call to action

#### 5.3.1. Knowledge

- **Encourage an active exchange of information between DG INTPA's unit** (i.e. G1, G2, E2, R6 and geographic units) and other relevant EC DGs, if necessary, **to have a better understanding on the funding ecosystem framework**. This will help the EU, as a donor, to locate their own resources and advocacy power in the broader landscape of funding for social change and assess which critical gender equality gaps.
- **Invest in knowledge and in monitoring** which funding sources reach whom and how as well, in an effort to better map out where funding is going, and whether it is actually reaching movements and communities or fails to do so. For instance, it is key to have a better understanding of Women's Funds in order to explore: their potential role: (i) as intermediaries to support WROs and particularly grassroots organisations and (ii) as advocacy actors or partners to be consulted due to their close relation with WROs.
- **Support the collection of data on foundations and other key actors like women's funds and their networks to establish alliances and leverage collective support**. This will allow us to make informed decisions, better allocate funds, avoid duplication of efforts and engage in more effective partnerships in those geographies and/or sectors where support is most needed.
- Tap into the opportunity offered by new investment processes/instruments led by other Units like E2 (e.g. the working group linked to the Team Europe initiative on investing in young business in Africa)

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<sup>115</sup> Arabic for Worth 100 Men. Contributed by the Womanity Foundation.

<sup>116</sup> Contributed by Channel Foundation, it provides access to fertilizer and seed packages on layaway, on-time delivery and technical training and on-farm follow up.

<sup>117</sup> Supported by the Sasakawa Peace Foundation's uses the financial returns to provide women entrepreneurs in Southeast Asia with access to resources such as early-stage investments, technical assistance and mentoring.

<sup>118</sup> See more info at: [EU External Investment Plan](#)

<sup>119</sup> The EU has provided catalytic investment capital and a grant to the Fund's technical assistance facility. Extracted from the presentation "Investing with a gender lens" that took place at the EC Info Point Virtual Conference (March 18, 2021).

<sup>120</sup> Also [The Global Impact Investing Network Gender Lens Investing Initiative](#) has supported impact investors who are actively integrating, or interested in integrating, a gender lens strategy in their investment portfolio.

to explore opportunities on how to advance jointly on engaging better with WROs and the emerging actors (i.e. through the enabling environment, the collection of good practices, peer learning, technical assistance, etc.).

### 5.3.2. Policy and political dialogue

- **Continue to engage in regular dialogue and establish alliances with key donors**, DFIs/IFIs, multilateral organisations and Women's Funds and their networks to address large-scale problems, share information and achieve collective impact. For instance, the Gender Finance Collaborative<sup>121</sup> can be a good platform to raise the issue on how to engage better with WROs, youth organisations and other actors like cooperatives and social enterprises working on gender in the framework of financial investments.
- **Consider establishing, including an alliance with other donors, long-term partnerships with Women's Funds** and their networks to ensure that there are mechanisms in place for reaching local CSOs and women's rights organisations.
- **Involve women's organisations and emerging actors to ensure the gender lens on decisions about funding, through inclusive and participatory consultations.**

### 5.3.3. Funding and operational support

- **Leverage political commitments to start new funding programmes or review the ones already in place** in order to provide more substantial, predictable, multi-year funding to address GEWE at the country level, to meet the commitments made in GAP III. One of the recurrent recommendations made by Gender Focal Points at EU Delegation was that of developing a specific dedicated instrument/programme to support CSOs addressing GEWE. At the global level, this could be done by investing in scaling up existing Women's Funds or multilateral initiatives (e.g. UN Women) and fostering the possibility of **providing long term "operating grants"** in order to reduce the administrative burden for both CSOs and the EU. Also, initiatives like the Canadian Equality Fund can serve as good inspiration.
- **Design the calls so that local women's organizations and networks, as well as the so-called "emerging actors" in this note, can access funding directly and not exclusively through Northern-based organisations.** To this end, grants application, monitoring and reporting processes could be simplified and a number of eligibility criteria could be introduced in the guidelines, to ensure that, beyond regranting and sub-grating, mandatory partnerships with grassroots organisations are effective from the early identification of the interventions.
- **In the calls, allocate sufficient resources for activities such as institutional capacity building, leadership development or exchange of knowledge** of those CSO actors working on gender equality at the grassroots level and in more innovative ways. A particular emphasis should also be placed on the capacity of women's organizations to explore innovative and non-traditional sources of funding to ensure long-term sustainability.
- **For financial actors, ensure that the gender lens applies to every phase of their investments** from the identification by applying a gender screen and gender assessment to monitoring and reporting by tracking gender performance and measuring it against Key Performance Indicators.

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<sup>121</sup> It groups 14 DFIs and the European Investment Bank to leverage their combined capital, capacity, networks and knowledge to advance gender lens investing. It has developed shared financing principles, definitions and methodologies that promote the integration of "gender-smart" decision making.



## 6. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

### 6.1. Ten key messages emerging from the study

#### *About the enabling environment for CSOs advancing GEWE:*

1. **Women's rights organisations and movements have been the key civil society actors in achieving transformational change for gender equality** and in moving forward the **women's rights agenda**. However, recent years have witnessed a significant backlash against women's rights and in the use of the term gender. Twenty-seven years after the Beijing Conference, not only has the term gender been attacked as imposing 'gender ideology,' but many of the hard-won victories for women, particularly in the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), gender-sensitive education and even gender-based violence, appear to be at risk<sup>122</sup>. The COVID pandemic and measures taken by some states in response, have only worsened the situation<sup>123</sup>. Many women also face **intersectional forms of discrimination** based on harmful norms and practices relating to their race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, migratory or socio-economic status or disability, which further impedes their full participation in public life.

#### **Key Recommendations:**

- At the country level (EUD): Invest systematically in better understanding the situation/context of how WROs and CSOs working for gender equality operate (i.e. the legal frameworks to advance women's rights and current state of play in their implementation; existing harmful practices and laws; key supporters and blockers; intersectional forms of discrimination, etc). This should be assessed in detail in the Gender Country Profile and/or Gender Sector Analysis conducted in the country. Civil society mappings (conducted in the framework of the CSO Roadmap or other) and political economy analysis should also include a gender component and/or gender expertise and look into the intersectional forms of discrimination, in order to inform relevant policy and strategic documents at the country level, such as the Roadmaps, Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategies; etc. This information will be particularly relevant for the design of gender-informed country interventions within the new MIPs 2021-2027, as well as to conduct more inclusive gender-responsive consultations and dialogue.
- At the country and regional level (EUD): build alliances (i.e. to share knowledge; monitor the context; launch joint campaigns; etc) with relevant CS actors and other key stakeholders championing gender equality and women's rights (including religious leaders, social entrepreneurs, cooperatives, climate change activists, etc.)
- At the global level (Units G2 and G1): Mainstream gender in the upcoming 'Monitoring and Engagement System' (MES) led by G2 in order to address the specific gender implications of an Enabling Environment for CSOs.

2. The ongoing global backlash against democracy has led to a crisis for CSOs and civic movements in many states. Civil society faces increasing pressure and repressive responses to collective mobilization, by authoritarian and other leaders, with severe implications for the capacity of people to hold decision-makers to account and organise for change. There is also **evidence that recent attacks on the civic space have elements specific to gender equality and women's rights and particularly affect women's rights organizations and movements**. Documented targeted restrictions and attacks affecting the space for women and for CSOs addressing GEWE are manifold and include, amongst others, stigmatisation, public shaming, defamation and negative labelling campaigns; judicial harassment, prosecution, investigation and criminalization of women organisations and of women's human rights defenders; administrative restrictions such as restrictive bills on CSOs'

<sup>122</sup> OHCHR (2021). Mandate of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls [Gender equality and gender backlash](#)

<sup>123</sup> WGDAGW, [Responses to the COVID-19 pandemic must not discount women and girls](#), 4 April 2020, available at h

registration and operations; burdensome registration and re-registration processes; physical harassment and intimidation, including threats, injuries and killings, impunity and lack of protection of women and more recently, online attacks (the so-called Online Gender Based Violence).

**Key recommendations:**

- At the country level (EUD): Establish systems to support and protect Women's rights defenders and other civil society actors championing gender equality and women's rights, who face threats and/or attacks. This can also include protection through diplomatic presence (e.g. in court proceedings).
- At the country level (EUD): Support exchanges and partnerships between WROs and CSOs working on gender equality and women's rights and "gender champions" & "like-minded" line ministries (e.g. Ministry of women affairs /Gender Equality, Education/ Health, etc. depending on the national context) to reinforce the complementarity and synergies between the work done with the government at policy level (to promote GEWE) and the support to CSOs.
- At the country level (EUD): Open-up and support safe spaces for dialogue between the authorities (beyond the "like-minded line ministries) and WROs and CSOs working on gender equality and women's rights in EU funded interventions across the spectrum of priorities and sectors (i.e. green deals, sustainable growth and jobs; digitalisation; etc). Acknowledging that in some contexts authorities can be among those behind the threats and repression, it is important to always guarantee safe dialogue spaces, which requires solid gender-informed context analysis.
- At the country (EUD) and global level (Units G1 and G2): Support the exchange of experiences and promote alliances and networking between WROs and CSOs addressing GEWE at the national level and those operating at the regional and global levels.

3. The sustainability of WROs and CSOs addressing GEWE (which constitutes one of the key dimensions of an Enabling Environment) is also increasingly compromised as **women's organisations continue to be underfunded<sup>124</sup> and the situation has worsened over the past years and more so, since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.** In several countries, funding for women's rights and the capacity to fulfil them has receded as ultraconservative, fundamentalist, and patriarchal agendas and forces opposed to gender equality have gained visibility and political influence.

**Key recommendations:**

- At the global level (G1, G2 and regional units at EQ): Ensure that EU funding mechanisms (not directly targeting women) are gender-responsive and can be accessed by local WROs and other CSOs championing gender equality and women's rights. In particular, influence large EU funds such as the EFSD+ to adopt a gender policy and a gender action plan and require from implementing entities that they have a gender policy or action plan<sup>125</sup>.
- At the country level (EUD): Make sure the commitments of the GAP III are met, with regards to ensuring funding to organisations and movements that contribute to gender equality. This can be done by earmarking budget towards southern women's rights organisations, by adding eligibility criteria in the guidelines for the call for proposals that require applicant organisations to be explicit about partnerships with local women's rights organisations, and by assigning extra points (i.e. added value elements) when evaluating proposals to projects that favour partnerships, with and leadership by local women's rights organisations. Situations in which INGOs and local women's organisations have to compete with each other for funding should also be avoided (i.e. by expressively promoting partnerships and./or creating separate funding windows)<sup>126</sup>.
- At the global level (Units G1, G2 and regional units at HQ): Invest in existing multilateral and women's funds dedicated to gender equality with established track records in effectively reaching local women's rights organisations in partner countries with funding that is flexible and responsive to their needs<sup>127</sup>.

<sup>124</sup> OECD. DAC Network on Gender Equality (2020): Donor support to southern women's rights organizations. and UN-Women.

<sup>125</sup> idem

<sup>126</sup> idem

<sup>127</sup> CONCORD (2022): Funding local women's rights organisations for transformational change: recommendations to the EU and Member States.

4. Notwithstanding the ongoing restrictions and attacks on civic space, and their gender ramifications, **CSOs and WROs across the world continue to resist regime attempts to close civic space.** They employ various strategies to negotiate and challenge the limited civic space. They range from strategies to preserve the existing civic space using solidarity across CSOs and also with international partners and public recognition; and making use of litigation and alliances with lawyers to challenge and resist human rights violations; to strategies that challenge the entrenchment of inequality, sexism, militarism, racism and patriarchy at local, national and international levels through mass mobilisations and protests; and strategies to resist and adapt to the new conditions, through the provision of services denied by the State; adopting a different legal status or addressing less sensitive causes and adapting their mandates.

**Key recommendations:**

- At the country level (EUD): Advocate to systematically include into the political dialogue with the authorities the importance of the civic space for democracy, and its gender ramifications.
- At the country level (EUD): Provide support to context-driven approaches and strategies developed by WROs and CSOs advancing GEWE to address the Enabling Environment (i.e. to preserve the space/ challenge the space and adapt) and establish systems and routines to maintain a consistent dialogue with WROs; ensuring that all relevant sections of the EUD support such context-driven approaches and strategies and that sectoral multi stakeholder governance structures are inclusive of local WROs.
- At the country level (EUD): Provide political and financial support for the protection of WRO and CSO leaders who are threatened and persecuted for their work to advance women’s rights and GEW (e.g. by linking this support to the HRD programme funds that support human rights defenders; etc).

***About the actors working on gender equality and women’s rights:***

5. In a context marked by the backlash against gender equality, a shrinking civic space and severe underfunding of women’s organisations, it is **more important than ever for WROs to join forces and establish alliances and synergies with other CSOs working for gender equality and women’s rights**, from men and boys organisations to youth organisations, religious actors, social enterprises and cooperatives, amongst other CSOs. The added value these organisations can bring can be summarised as follows and there is plenty of evidence of good practices worldwide:

- a) Men for gender equality organisations can be key players for scaling up efforts to engage men and boys and combat discriminatory gender norms.
- b) Youth organisations and activists are key in forming a gender equality agenda that respects the rights of children and young people to meaningfully influence political and social change.
- c) Religious actors can promote, or hinder, GEWE – their reach and influence should not be ignored.
- d) Social enterprises have the potential to shift from being “another source of funding” to becoming a growingly important and key player on gender equality, as well as on the agenda on sustainable growth and jobs
- e) The same applies to cooperatives, one of the oldest forms of civic engagement and one of the first to embrace gender goals. In many countries, they are key economic actors who should be at the forefront of moving towards greater gender balance in leadership and senior management positions.
- f) Artists, cultural actors and the media, as powerful channels to combat gender stereotypes and promote gender equality.

**Key recommendations:**

- At the country level (EUD): Support alliances across WROs, between WROs and other CS actors advancing GEWE (i.e. religious leaders, men’s and boys’ organisations, youth groups, etc) and with other relevant movements (i.e. LGBTIQ+ movements, climate justice; etc)
- At the country level (EUD): From an intersectionality approach, pay special attention to young women’s organisations and other organisations representing vulnerable groups.
- At the country level (EUD): Consider, partnering with other actors like media, academic institutions and think tanks to expand the knowledge on how to better work with these emerging actors and how to strengthen synergies with WROs.

**About consultations and dialogue with CSOs working on gender and women’s rights:**

6. As a result of the EU commitment to engage more strategically with CSOs and GAP III recommendations and forge a stronger partnership with them for gender equality, **most EU Delegations appear to be making significant progress in organising more systematic consultations with CSOs**, across the EU portfolio of engagement in partner countries (not just with regards to Civil Society and gender matters). A number of EU Delegations are even shifting towards more structured and institutionalised forms of dialogue with CSOs. There is also emerging evidence of EU Delegations reaching out beyond their usual interlocutors to consider a wider representation of Civil Society actors, and of EU Delegations increasingly **integrating a gender lens in their consultations** (e.g. in the MIP and RM consultations).

**Key recommendations:**

- At the country level (EUD): Sustain the consultations momentum created in 2020-2021 by the elaboration of the GAP III /CLIP, the Roadmap for Engagement with CSOs and the MIP 2021-2027, by ensuring the systematic and meaningful involvement of WROs in the follow-up of their implementation.
- At the global level (G1 and G2): Develop clear standards and guidelines to ensure the quality of the consultations and dialogue undertaken by EUDs with CSOs, including WROs, across the spectrum of levels and sectors of EU engagement in partner countries.

7. Despite these improvements, **additional efforts to promote inclusiveness are still needed, particularly at sectoral level**, and a **broad and all-encompassing notion of Civil Society** needs to be adopted, in light of the changes that are taking place cross the world in the civic space also with regards to

multiple actors which are or have the potential to advance GEWE. In particular, efforts are required to **reach out to underrepresented communities and groups** (i.e. women, youth, marginalised groups; etc), whose voices are often not heard because of existing barriers and challenges, hampering their mobilisation, access and influence over public policies. **A closer consideration and understanding of such barriers is required, and intersectionality analyses are needed.** Evidence shows how certain women are at increased risk of being discriminated against, or experience violence, because of intersecting aspects of their identities (e.g. age, race, nationality) or circumstances (e.g. occupation, armed conflict, migration status).

**Key recommendations:**

- At country level (EUD): Enlarge the scope of dialogue with women’s organisation/CSOs working for gender equality, particularly : (i) on the GAP III/ CLIP implementation (i.e. organise a yearly dialogue to monitor progress); (ii) on the follow-up of the Roadmap for engagement with CSOs and (iii) on the wide range of consultations and dialogues in which women’s voices are still rarely heard (i.e. climate change, trade , sustainable growth and jobs, etc).
- At the country (EUD) and global level (G1 and G2): Provide support and funding to enable local WROs and other CSOs working on gender to actively participate in political and policy dialogues and consultations at the national, regional and multilateral level. This can include financial compensations, capacity development; etc.
- At the global level (G1 and G2 with thematic and regional units): Tap into the opportunity offered by processes led by other Units (e.g. TEI/WBT) to explore opportunities on how to advance jointly on engaging better with WROs and the emerging actors within these processes.

**About gender transformative and innovative support modalities for CSOs:**

8. When it comes to funding, and despite notable advances, as briefly described above, **CSOs addressing gender inequality remain severely under-funded and the shares of aid focused on gender equality in the hard sectors** (e.g. energy, infrastructure) **remains low.** Notwithstanding the gender rhetoric and political and policy commitments, the figures speak for themselves. Over 99 percent of Official Development Assistance (ODA) does not directly reach women’s rights, gender justice, and feminist movements. This trend is also confirmed in the case of philanthropy, where only \$1.14 billion USD of the massive \$1.5 trillion USD in foundation assets and \$99 billion USD in total foundation grants in 2017 are human rights grants. And of this number, a recent study indicates that women’s rights grants only amount to 0.42 percent of the total foundation grants in 2017. Therefore, it is key to provide CSOs with long-term, sustainable and core institutional funding in order to foster the required transformative change.

**Key recommendations:**

- At the global level (G1, G2 and regional units at HQ): Invest in existing multilateral and women’s funds dedicated to gender equality with established track records in effectively reaching local women’s rights organisations in partner countries with funding that is flexible and responsive to their needs<sup>128</sup>.
- At the country (EUD) and global level (HQ): Explore new inclusive, human rights-based and feminist funding modalities (e.g. in the framework of FSTP and re-granting mechanisms; in the form of core long term support; etc) that shift money and decision-making power and foster partnerships with grassroots organisations from the early identification of the interventions to better reach groups, especially marginalized women and girls and those facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, who are otherwise excluded from traditional funding and programming. Special attention should be placed in adapting administrative and reporting requirements to prevent them from becoming a burden and access barrier for local WROs.

<sup>128</sup> CONCORD (2022): Funding local women’s rights organisations for transformational change: recommendations to the EU and Member States.

9. **This reality, coupled with the current backlash against gender justice in many countries<sup>129</sup> and the COVID pandemic context might be increasingly putting feminist achievements at risk.** The UN warns that all of the global progress made towards gender equality over a generation could be wiped out with a deepening crisis catalysed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Even before COVID-19, the UN Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, emerged as one of the least financed SDGs<sup>130</sup>. Some of the key systematic and institutional barriers to directly fund feminist movements in partner countries include limited donor capacities to manage small grants with funding thresholds being too high; short and strict policy cycles and budget timeframes; resistance to re-granting and, lack of experience and/or knowledge on working with the so-called “emerging” actors and formulaic approaches to due diligence and mitigating risk.

**Key recommendations:**

- At the country level (EUD): Make sure the commitments of the GAP III are met, with regards to ensuring funding to organisations and movements that contribute to gender equality and consider alternative funding modalities to the call for proposal such as making smart use of the FSTP to ensure better outreach and/or using operating grants.
- At the country level (EUD) and global level (Units G1, G2 and contracts and finance): Review the current funding modalities and procedures (i.e. reporting and administrative requirements) in order to provide more flexible and sustainable support (i.e. earmarked budget allocated in calls for proposals, eligibility and evaluation criteria favourable to leadership and meaningful partnerships with local CSOs working on gender, etc.)
- At the country level (EUD) and global level (Unit G1): Leverage political commitments to start new funding programmes or review the ones already in place in order to provide more substantial, predictable, multi-year funding to address GEWE.

10. Despite the afore-mentioned trends, recent years have seen the emergence of a number of innovative funding schemes, including **women’s funds, multi-donor funding models for gender equality and other innovative funding instruments**, such as gender-lens investing. They aim to address the gender funding gap and, even though still they are still quite limited in their use, **represent a unique window of opportunity to leverage resources to support the work of CSOs on gender equality, and in particular WROs.**

**Key recommendations:**

- At the global level (HQ-Units G1 and G2): Engage in dialogue and establish alliances with key donors, including foundations, financial institutions, women funds, etc. to establish synergies and complementarities in funding and address large scale issues.
- At the global level (HQ-Units G1 and G2): Explore alternative and more flexible funding modalities in order to maximize, evidence-based, the work done at the country level and connect/join forces between local interventions and regional level (i.e. Women’s Funds, UN Women, etc).
- At the country level (EUD) and global level (Units G1 and G2): Increase the knowledge, deepen the dialogue and explore establishing long-term partnerships with Women’s Funds and global alliances (e.g. the Global Alliance for Sustainable Feminist Movements) to improve financial and political support for women’s rights and feminist organizations and movements.

<sup>129</sup> Please refer to chapter 3 on the enabling environment for CSOs working on gender equality and women’s empowerment.

<sup>130</sup> OECD. 2020. Aid Focused on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment.

## 6.2. Summary of detailed recommendations per topic and dimension of engagement:

	About the Enabling Environment	About the actors	About consultations and dialogue	About funding
Knowledge	<p>To EUDs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Invest in “gender-sensitive knowledge” around the civic space and civil society dynamics (i.e. in mappings/ PEAs/ sectoral analyses/ etc), in particular, in countries with a restricted environment.</li> <li>Prioritize women’s security in fragile and/or restrictive environments.</li> </ul> <p>To HQ (G1 and G2):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mainstream gender aspects in monitoring civil society inclusion and participation (e.g. in the framework of the new ‘Monitoring and Engagement System’ (MES) led by G2)</li> </ul>	<p>To EUDs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make sure the “list” of CSOs invited to consultations is wide and inclusive. Important GEWE Civil Society actors in the dialogue include “traditional” women’s organisations but also men for gender equality organisations, youth activists, cooperatives, social enterprises, religious actors, etc.</li> <li>Mainstream gender in Civil Society mappings and political economy analyses by including gender expertise and consider intersectionality and use adapted intersectionality tools in the analysis of CSOs advancing GEWE</li> <li>Support network-building between local, national and regional actors advancing GEWE to increase knowledge and resource sharing and create spaces, both online and offline, to exchange best practices and lessons learned.</li> <li>Build religious literacy by understanding religious belief systems and how it impacts GEWE in a particular setting.</li> </ul> <p>To EUD and HQ (G1 and G2):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deepen the knowledge around the new emerging actors advancing GEWE (e.g. youth; social enterprises; religious actors; gender equality in cooperative enterprises; etc) and, in particular, of the groups representing marginalized women and girls and those facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, who are otherwise excluded from traditional programming.</li> </ul>	<p>To HQ:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage an active exchange of information between across DG INTPA’s units and other relevant EC DGs, to gain a better understanding on the funding ecosystem framework and how to be aligned with the feminist principles.</li> <li>Invest in knowledge and in monitoring which funding sources reach whom and how as well, in an effort to better map out where funding is going, and whether it is actually reaching movements and communities (in particular marginalized women and girls and those facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination) or fails to do so.</li> <li>Support collection of data on foundations and other key actors like women’s funds and their networks to leverage collective support.</li> <li>Tap into the opportunity offered by processes led by other Units (e.g. the working group linked to the Team Europe initiative on investing in young business in Africa) to explore opportunities on how to advance jointly on engaging better with WROs and the emerging actors.</li> </ul>	
Policy and political dialogue	<p>To EUDs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Request the integration of women’s political rights and participation into high-level policy and diplomatic engagement at the country level (e.g. HR dialogue; Trade agreements; etc).</li> <li>Avoid silos and adopt a multi-sectoral approach: Engaging with specific CSOs advancing GEWE shouldn’t be done in an exclusive way; they are part of a multi-sectoral approach and are one stakeholder among other Civil Society actors in a wider system. Yet, in some contexts, separate spaces might be required to create and preserve a safe space for women.</li> </ul>			<p>To G1 and G2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage in dialogue and establish alliances with key donors such as foundations, financial institutions, women’s funds, multilateral organisations, etc. to fund and address large-scale problems.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that different CSOs advancing GEWE have equal access to data and information (using adequate channels and tools) to ensure and better facilitate their participation in the consultations.</li> <li>• Present and discuss GAP III implementation at country level (monitoring of CLIP)</li> </ul> <p>To EUDs and HQ (G1 and G2):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within the consultation spaces facilitated or supported by EU at different levels, open them up to women groups/CSO advancing GEWE: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– During the identification phase of the sectoral programmes within the new MIP 2021-2027, implement participatory approaches and consult CSOs, including those advancing GEWE during the commissioned identification &amp; formulation studies and research work and when discussing the proposed Actions.</li> <li>– Involve CSOs advancing GEWE (amongst the CSOs invited) in the debates around the use of budget support and the discussions around the criteria and indicators of the policy matrix related to the disbursement of EU funds. Many budget support programmes already include civil society related conditionality and indicators, which could be further elaborated from a gender lens.</li> <li>– Involve CSOs advancing GEWE (amongst the CSOs invited) in the discussions on transparency and oversight of sectoral budgets, performance monitoring processes and systems and the undertaking of social or financial audits, to ensure that a gender perspective is included.</li> <li>– Play a brokering role, to ensure that different actors and groups involved in GEWE are invited to the existing multi-stakeholder so that they can contribute to the formulation of sectoral strategies, policies, budgets and action plans. Request, if necessary, the use of affirmative action (e.g. quotas for women /GEWE CSOs participation).</li> <li>– When engaging with CSOs, and especially religious actors, a gradual process of accompaniment is usually needed. Relationships and trust need to be built.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote partnerships as an effective framework for reaching small organisations and addressing gender inequalities more effectively and for testing innovative approaches and use new funding instruments such as gender-lens investing. Priority should be given to establishing long-term partnerships with Women’s Funds to ensure that there are mechanisms in place for reaching local CSOs and women’s organisations.</li> </ul> <p>To EUDs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support the consultation &amp; dialogue spaces created and led by women’s rights organisations and networks at a regional and local level.</li> <li>• Involve women’s organisations and emerging actors in decisions about funding earmarking, through inclusive and participatory consultations.</li> </ul>
Operational support	<p>To EUDs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to make funding available even to ensure the ‘survival’ of women’s organisations in highly restricted environments.</li> <li>• Find context appropriated ways to engage on discriminatory or harmful social norms.</li> </ul>	<p>To EUDs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a good balance in the earmarking of funding instruments (i.e. the use of lots in Calls for proposals) to ensure that support to traditional women’s organisations and emerging actors is not assessed as if competing over the same resources</li> </ul>	<p>To EUDs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support CSOs efforts to address mobilisation challenges: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Provide resources for spaces where women can network, engage across communities and mount wider social action. Funding and capacity building initiatives to support the creation of women’s organisations and</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>To EUDs and HQ (G1):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leverage political commitments to start new funding programmes or review the ones already in place in order to provide different funding thresholds, more substantial, predictable, multi-year funding to address GEWE at the country level, to meet the commitments made in GAP III. One of the recurrent recommendations made by Gender Focal Points at EU Delegation was that of developing a dedicated</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Broaden the scope of support as feminist movements don't always and solely engage with women's issues. Some claim they are in fact stronger when working on environmental or economic justice.</li> <li>• Invest in grassroots movements and prioritize local organisations whenever possible. This could be done by investing resources in WOs and women platforms at national or regional level to strengthen their ability to act as grant makers/intermediary organisations (being very careful not to compromise accountability lines and/or generate new power dynamics).</li> <li>• Promote and encourage solidarity -by supporting alliances, coordination groups, platforms and joint efforts among women's rights activists and women's organisations at the local, national and also international level- and support "a bigger tent"</li> <li>• Make long-term adaptative funding (and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support alliances between emerging actors' work for gender equality and the women's rights fields and other social justice movements.</li> <li>• Promote accountability to women's rights groups to ensure that the work with emerging actors does not undermine feminist principles and instead strengthens such approaches.</li> <li>• Fund grass roots, feminist and youth movements directly and use simplified funding mechanisms (e.g. through sub-granting within FSTP/ dedicated support facilities) to adapt to the more informal structures of youth activist groups. The example of support to individual and young activists through fellowships in the framework of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Facility can be an example to look for inspiration.</li> <li>• Support youth and marginalized groups facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination campaigns and/or policy proposals, especially in contexts where ingrained political structures "delegitimizes" youth or marginalised voices.</li> <li>• Support platforms to link feminist activists to each other and online and physical spaces so they can quickly and safely talk to and learn from each other about what strategies work.</li> </ul>	<p>groups (even self-help groups) and sustain their work can help to provide such spaces.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support awareness raising and exposure to international discourses of women groups and CSOs advancing GEWE.</li> <li>- Support the capacity development of women groups and CSOs advancing GEWE to improve their internal governance and accountability systems, to enhance their legitimacy vis-a-vis the authorities and other key stakeholders.</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support CSOs efforts to address access and influence challenges : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support capacity development of women groups and CSOs advancing GEWE to engage in policy debates via technical, advocacy and language skills and skills in negotiation, lobbying, and communication. It is however important to underline that unless they are combined with other initiatives, capacity development programs are not set up to address the structural and institutional barriers to women's participation, such as a lack of financing</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>instrument/programme to support CSOs addressing GEWE.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In coordination with the Contract and Finance's Unit revise the funding modalities and procedures (i.e. reporting and administrative requirements) in order to provide more flexible and sustainable support (i.e. earmarked budget allocated in calls for proposals, eligibility and evaluation criteria favourable to leadership and meaningful partnerships with local CSOs working on gender, etc.)</li> </ul> <p>To EUD:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design the Calls so that local women's organizations and networks as well as the so-called "emerging actors" in this note can access funding directly and not exclusively through Northern-based organisations. To this end, grant applications, monitoring and reporting processes should be simplified and a number of eligibility and evaluation criteria could be introduced in the guidelines, to ensure that, beyond subgrating, mandatory partnerships with grassroots organisations are effective from the early identification of the interventions.</li> <li>• Allocate sufficient resources in the calls for activities such as institutional capacity building, leadership development, transition planning or inter-generational organizing of CSO actors working on gender equality. A particular emphasis should also be placed in the capacity of women's organizations to explore innovative and non-traditional sources of funding to ensure long-term sustainability and to strengthen women's coalitions at the regional level keeping a strong link with constituencies at country level.</li> </ul>
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	<p>even institutional funding where possible) available</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In fragile environments, focus on the grass-roots level and support “context-driven” answers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support ‘young and/or feminist activist laboratories’ to incubate youth-led cooperatives and spaces to learn, co-create and campaign together to gender equality and women’s empowerment.</li> <li>• Support the number of female social enterprise leaders through mentoring, targeted leadership programmes and facilitated peer-support.</li> <li>• Facilitate networking between gender focussed social enterprises and women’s organisations, at the local, national and regional level with a view to sharing best practice and replicating successful models.</li> </ul>	<p>or gender-targeted violence. In fact, they tend to shift the onus of change onto women, while leaving exclusionary systems intact.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Support the availability to women’s groups and CSOs advancing GEWE of means of communication to make female voices heard, and to network with other stakeholders, including the media or artists.</li> <li>– Provide more core support for feminist movements and organizations, rather than just short-term project support. This could be done by partnering with regional feminist funds, multilateral organisations or other intermediaries which can then pass on EU funding to grassroots actors.</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support CSOs efforts to address implementation challenges: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Support the capacity development of women groups and CSOs advancing GEWE to engage in monitoring and evaluation of policy implementation (both EU policies and national policies). This is particularly relevant at the</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For financial actors, ensure a gender-responsive investment cycle, from due-diligence to exit (i.e. use of safeguards and performance standards, corporate guidelines, and international standards, more transparency and better reporting).</li> <li>• When working with private sector partners to achieve gender equality and women’s empowerment, ensure that investments are managed appropriately for gender responsive development impact (for instance, referring to joint platforms for dialogue, such as the OECD Impact Standards for Financing Sustainable Investment).</li> </ul>
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			local level, vis-a-vis local governments.	
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## 7. ANNEXES

### 7.1. List of persons interviewed

1. Roula ABBAS, EUD Lebanon
2. Madev Ballow, EUD Mauritius
3. Evangelina Blanco, EUD Gambia
4. Franca Berthomier, EUD Afghanistan
5. Carolyn Boyd Tomasovic, Ecumenical Women's Initiative
6. Delphine Brissonneau, EUD India and Bhutan
7. Barbara Engelstoft, EUD Jordan
8. June Da Silva, EUD Guyana
9. Karen del Biondo, HQ
10. Nadejda Dermendjieva, Bulgarian Fund for Women
11. Julius Ibrahim Kalilu Foday Esq, EUD Sierra Leone
12. Paola Gessi, HQ
13. Maurizio Giachero, EUD Egypt
14. Laura Gualdi, HQ
15. Chiara Guidetti, EUD Tanzania
16. Saiti Gusrini, EUD Indonesia
17. Lola Gutiérrez León , Fondo de Mujeres Bolivia Apathapi Jopueti
18. Yvonne Henry, Women Win
19. Annie Hillar, Gender Funders CoLab
20. Thomas Kamusiime, EUD Uganda
21. Nikki-Lynne Hunter, EUD Australia
22. Laura Mascagna, EUD Angola
23. Zohra Moosa, Mamacash Fund
24. Fiona Montagud, Calala Fund
25. Brian Nakrakundi, EUD Papua New Guinea
26. Elizabeth Ongom, EUD Uganda
27. Monica Paul-McLean, EUD Trinidad & Tobago
28. Ana Pecova, Prospera
29. Chiara Raffaele, INTPA. A2
30. Laina Raveendran. Angels of Impact
31. Elena Rey Maquieira Palmer, *Fondo Lunaria* Graziella Rizza, EUD Egypt
32. Baya Sharkaeva, Mamacash Fund
33. Marco Sioli. INTPA. A2
34. Zena Spinelli. EUD Burundi
35. Mathe Tau, EUD Lesotho
36. Paola Trevisan , HQ

37. Ana Torres Fraile, HQ
38. Tania Tuner, Fondo Semillas
39. Giuseppe Vasques, EUD Libya
40. Melinda Wells, Equality Fund

## 7.2. Summary of the survey results

### “WORKING ON INNOVATIVE WAYS OF ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT”

#### ENGAGING BETTER WITH CSOS TO ADVANCE GEWE

**Impressive participation** (79 answers; with 11 from HQ and 68 from EUDs) and **manifest interest** (i.e. almost half of the participants available to share their experience, best practices and/or specific needs).

**Substantive engagement with CSOs with an overt in GEWE.** In more than 80% of the countries, **they are grantees** (supported through EU financial instruments) and in almost 80% of the cases are invited to regular consultations. **They are less engaged in sectoral programme policy discussions.**

#### 6. How do you engage with them? (please mark all responses that are relevant)

	Answers	Ratio
We invite them to our consultation sessions /engage in policy dialogue	63	79.75 %
They are grantees and we support them with our CSO& LA/ EIDHR programmes.	65	82.28 %
They are involved in our sectoral/bilateral programmes	42	53.16 %
Others	9	11.39 %
No Answer	0	0 %

EUDs are also **reaching out to other CSOs**, namely **youth groups**. The CSOs EUDs engage less on GEWE with our **cooperatives, foundations & philanthropies and others** (INGOs, etc).

#### 7. Are you engaging with other Civil Society actors to advance GEWE? (please, select the three most significant)

	Answers	Ratio
Youth organisations	51	64.56 %
Men and boys organisations and networks	15	18.99 %
Cooperatives	5	6.33 %
Social entrepreneurs	14	17.72 %
Research institutes/think tanks	31	39.24 %
Professional associations	15	18.99 %
Faith Based Organisations and religious leaders	20	25.32 %
Foundations and philanthropies	7	8.86 %
Others	12	15.19 %
No Answer	0	0 %

Mixed results when it comes to regular consultations and dialogue to address GEWE.

**8. Do you organise regular consultations with CSOs to address gender equality and women empowerment ?**

	Answers	Ratio
Yes, we have regular consultations/dialogue on these issues, even with dedicated sessions.	28	35.44 %
Not really. We organise them occasionally.	41	51.9 %
No	10	12.66 %
No Answer	0	0 %

Consultations/dialogue takes place mostly within the CLIP, RM and MIP. They are less frequent in sectoral policy dialogue and in spaces facilitated by MS and other partners.

Not everyone believes there is a need to deepen consultations and dialogue (only 50%)

**10. Do you believe consultations with CSOs to address gender equality and women empowerment should be deepened?**

	Answers	Ratio
Yes	42	53.16 %
No, we already do enough in the framework of our consultations with CSOs	25	31.65 %
I don't have an opinion	12	15.19 %
No Answer	0	0 %

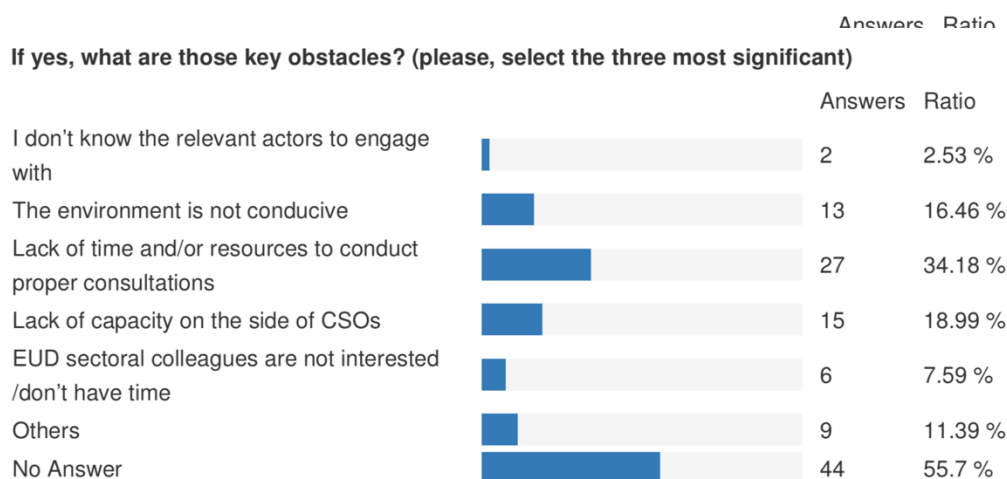
Most of the comments and recommendations formulated to deepen consultations and dialogue point out at deepening them at sectoral level, as well as at highest political level. A dedicated budget line is also stressed, as well as the need to better coordinate consultations to avoid 'consultation fatigue" and to be more accountable.

- They are actors on the ground who can implement and effectively monitor our EU actions, and with a feminist approach at heart. They should be more actively, broadly and regularly involved in all phases of programming and policy dialogue, as well as in advancing our EU GEWE agenda in external action.
- They **should be mainstreamed in all sectors and not only be separate and concern CSOs. We should have dedicated GEWE sessions in the framework of our sectoral consultations and in the general consultation with CSOs**
- It is clear that the new emphasis on blending, guarantees and working with the private sector **has marginalised CSOs to their own realm. CSOs should be part of other dialogue frameworks** to ensure they can advocate for gender equality to be practiced in all areas.
- **It is difficult as we do not have a specific fund for GEWE.**
- Political dialogue at HoD level should also encompass GEWE
- It is fundamental to keep discussing and consulting CSOs on real problems/situations. As programme managers we don't have enough time to do this, as we are too taken up by project management procedures, OPSYS, etc...
- We shall find a format to engage other (sectoral) CSOs to the gender dialogue. It proved to be very difficult as their own gender awareness is low. There is a double task: to have a meaningful discussion on gender in their respective sectors and to mainstream gender in their own activities.

- Consultations with CSOs can be deepened especially avoiding fatigue/overload (which was the case in 2021 with consultations in preparation of the MIP, HRDCS, CLIP, and CSO Roadmap). We also need to make sure that consultations contribute to specific outcomes and workable follow up.
- Consultation fatigue as we always consult but then we don't do much, so the CSO are tired of repeating themselves. The Government also puts pressure on our Delegation not to host such meetings.

Less than 45% face challenges and obstacles when consulting with CSOs on GEWE

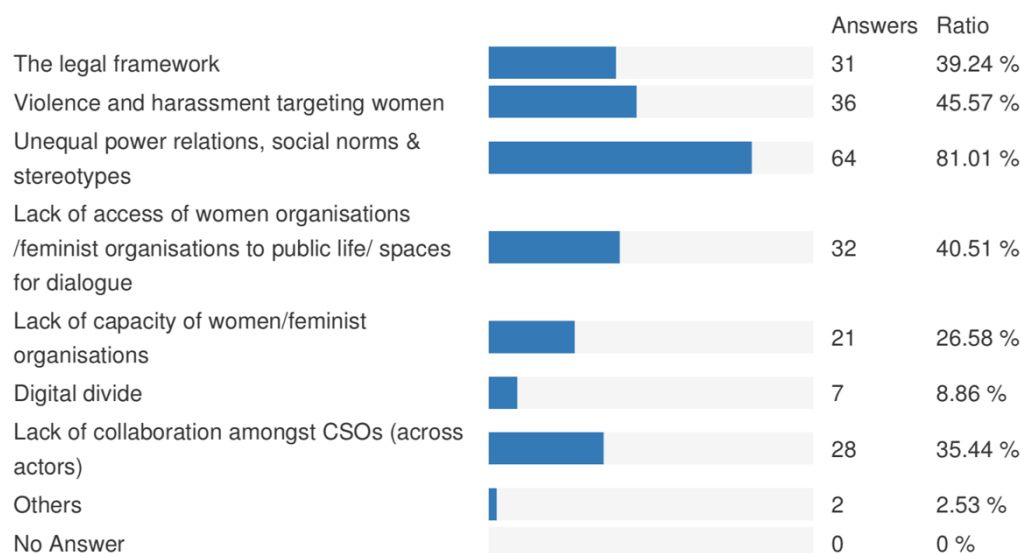
### 11. Do you face any obstacles to carry out inclusive and gender responsive CS consultations and dialogue?



The lack of time and/or of resources to conduct proper consultations and dialogue is the key challenge (more than 30%). Capacity constraints and the environment are also highlighted.

Unequal power relations, social norms and stereotypes is the key concern in the quality of the EE affecting women's organisations and gender (80%). Violence and harassment targeting women is the second followed by the lack of access to spaces of dialogue and the legal framework.

### 12. What are the key factors that in your opinion affect specifically the quality of the enabling environment for women organisations & gender? (please, select the three most significant)





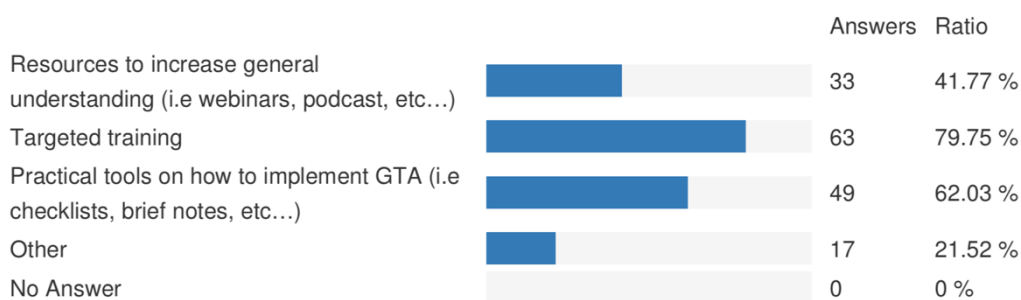
According to EUDs some of the most relevant donor partners supporting new forms of civic and inclusive engagement to advance GEWE (including innovative funding modalities, etc) include:

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- EU through the EU/UN Spotlight initiative UE
- UN WOMEN, UNDP and UNFPA (but resource constraints)
- ILO
- Sweden
- Denmark
- Finland
- AECID
- GIZ
- Canada
- USAID (innovative approach)
- Australian and South Korean government.
- UK International NGOs, such as CARE International, PLAN, ILGA Europe.
- The private sector, for example Loreal Paris.
- International NGO, several EU MS
- Foundations & philanthropy: Ford, Kvinna till Kvinna,
- Cultural institutes, such as Goethe Institute
- etc

Targeted training is the type of support mostly needed.

**14. What kind of support would you need to work better with CSOs to address gender equality and women empowerment?**



### 7.3. Case studies about engagement with religious actors

#### Lesotho

In Lesotho, the civil society space is quite small and funding opportunities for these actors are scarce due to the decreasing number of development partners. Over the years, the Lesotho EUD supported several CSOs, under various budget lines through different thematic areas such as human rights, gender equality, youth empowerment and entrepreneurship (e.g. under the Development Cooperation Instrument, European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, and the European Development Fund).

The EUD have chosen to engage with religious actors as they are a crucial part of the civil society landscape in Lesotho. Religious actors have played, and are playing, a prominent role in promoting human rights and democracy in the country. That is why the Lesotho EUD have a long history of engaging with and also funding religious actors in their human rights and democracy-building work. For example, they supported a project on democracy implemented by the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace and are constantly engaging with the Christian Council of Lesotho, who are very active and vocal in addressing political instability and the ongoing national-level reforms.

The Lesotho EUD is also supporting religious actors specifically on GEWE. In 2019, they funded a 4-year project entitled 'Socio Economic Empowerment through Gender-Responsive Policies, Legislation and Action' (funded under the EDF 11) that covers the 10 districts of Lesotho and is aimed at increasing the promotion of gender equality, empowerment of women and gender transformative activities. One of the affiliates in this project is Young Christian Students, a religious organisation that is collaborating with the lead applicant, Women and Law in Southern Africa.

In working with religious actors, this EUD has come to realise that it is important to respect religious actors for what they are and do. For example, while certain religious actors have been at the forefront of promoting democracy, they may not be equally vocal and active in promoting gender equality, shying away from sensitive issues that they feel compromise their religious beliefs. Lesotho EUD has learnt that it is important to work with religious actors on issues that they are willing and able to work on, and not simply reject partnerships because these religious actors are not willing to work on issues such as abortion or the use of contraception:

*We have to applaud (religious actors) for the stance they have taken, in terms of addressing human rights in general and being open while some actors have been very silent... But when it comes to other issues that they say are sensitive issues to them, which they say they are not comfortable speaking on in public – I would rather allow someone else who is open to discuss that. So, we are not putting pressure on anybody to discuss a particular issue. We know that with gender-based violence (religious actors) will support an initiative, we know that with early and forced marriage (they will support an initiative), we know that with issues of inheritance, especially where women and children are victims (they will support an initiative). But we know there are other issues that we cannot consult (these religious actors) on. While it is a very uncomfortable position, it is the truth. (Mathe Tau, Civil Society Focal Point, EUD Lesotho)*

In future, Lesotho EUD is planning on working with smaller CSOs they have not worked with before, including religious ones. They have realised that there are many smaller CSOs that do not have the capacity to manage a large grant yet can make important contributions. Therefore, the EUD wants to launch calls for proposals with a focus on sub-granting, as this modality of funding will ensure that the EUD is able to partner with and support these smaller organisations.

#### Uganda

Uganda EUD has a history of engaging with religious actors. With Uganda being a highly religious country – with an estimated 98% adhering to a religion – the EUD recognised the potential of religious actors to reach and influence the entire country:

*It was important that if we have to talk about Ugandan culture, beliefs, about the traditions, about the practices, about changing attitudes, then there's no other institution better placed than working with the faith-based organisations. (Uganda EUD staff member)*

The EUD has been engaging with religious actors in various dialogues relating to a variety of development issues. Through direct programme intervention, they are currently funding two projects (through civil society partners) that work with religious actors on GEWE. They have been partnering with Dan Church Aid, a faith-based organisation, in working with the Anglican Church of Uganda on interfaith action for gender justice. They are also supporting Spotlight Initiative programming, where one of the partners is the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (IRCU), a body bringing together all religious faiths in Uganda.

Uganda EUD staff acknowledge that engaging with religious actors can be a double-edged sword, for religious beliefs can counter GEWE. But this is why they see it is as so important to work with religious actors. As these actors are so influential, it is important not only to support them in promoting GEWE, but also ensure that they are not facilitating beliefs and practices that drive gender inequality: "If you think religion is opposed to gender equality, then you can't run away. You have to engage" (Uganda EUD staff member).

Uganda EUD will continue engaging with religious actors, as their reach and influence, especially in terms of attitude change, is so impactful. The EUD is planning for an extension of the Spotlight Initiative, which will continue their partnership with UN Agencies and other partners, including religious actors. For other EUDs considering engaging with religious actors on GEWE, they offer the following advice: "(You) need to have an open approach. The people you might consider your enemies, can actually be your co-operators."

## Papua New Guinea

PNG is a highly religious country, with over 90% of the population identifying as Christian. It is therefore not surprising that religious actors are a key component of civil society – and that the PNG EUD has a long history of working with them. In the words of a PNG EUD staff member: "If we want to engage in any actions with civil society – projects or political dialogue – then we consider religious actors." The EUD both fund projects implemented by religious actors and engage with religious actors on political dialogue around key policy issues – including on GEWE.

One topical example is sorcery accusation related violence (SARV), which is a major issue in PNG. SARV is when a family member – usually a woman or girl – is accused of using sorcery to cause the death of a family member. The accused is then attacked and often tortured. Many accused die. Responding to the alarming increase in SARV, PNG EUD recently provided funding to the PNG Tribal Foundation, a CSO that is closely linked to the Lutheran Church. Through this funding they are supporting PNG Tribal Foundation's anti-SARV advocacy initiatives in Lutheran congregations and in the public sphere, as well as their support for victims and survivors of SARV.

PNG EUD has also funded World Vision, a Christian faith-based organisation, in their implementation of Channels of Hope Gender programming. Through this programme, World Vision worked with religious leaders. They addressed GBV by sensitising men through the leadership of the churches:

*Through this project we tried to sensitise religious leaders about GBV, by bringing to their attention the criminality of the issue. For example, wife beating is illegal. The project sensitised the religious leaders on how they can address GBV. For example, if a couple is arguing, then the religious leader can address it. But if there is physical abuse, then they have to go to the police... The response was very good, although it is a work in progress. Some churches acknowledge that GBV is a problem that must be condemned, but other churches still believe these (violences against women) are internal issues that have to be addressed through forgiveness and other Christian principles. (PNG EUD staff member)*

Drawing not only on this project with World Vision, but also from what the EUD has learnt from their various engagements with religious actors, a representative of PNG EUD emphasised the importance of working with the leadership of churches and faith-based organisations, in recognition of their considerable influence and reach.

Furthermore, the representative advises EUDs considering working with religious actors on GEWE to first carefully consider and define the GEWE issues they want to work on (e.g. GBV or girl child education). The particular issue must be approached using the right entry point and cannot directly conflict with church beliefs and values.

PNG EUD, while having had considerable success in working with religious actors on GEWE, have also faced obstacles. One such challenge has been facilitating dialogue around LGBTI issues. While they have convened dialogues with different religious actors on LGBTI issues, and also issued funding calls that would support of LGBTI

communities, there is consistent resistance from all religious actors. Even other civil society actors, recognising the religious and cultural sensitivity of LGBTI-related matters, have refused to respond to such funding calls. This remains a challenge:

*If the church becomes okay with LGBTI, and advocate for the rights of LGBTI people, then it will have a big positive influence across the country. But at the moment it is one of the very sensitive issues in this country.*  
(PNG EUD staff member)

### **Spotlight Initiative: El Salvador**

The Spotlight Initiative is a global initiative of the UN, launched with a seed funding commitment of €500 million from the EU. Its aim is to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls. The Spotlight Initiative supports various projects globally. This includes El Salvador, where it engages with religious actors to address femicide and early pregnancy. Partnering with the Evangelical University of El Salvador, it developed a diploma course entitled "Pastoral action against femicidal violence and pregnancies in girls and adolescents". The course works to transform the attitudes and beliefs of religious leaders that normalise violence against women, and to motivate them to develop care routes to assist survivors in their churches. This course is for religious leaders from different denominations and has been completed by 360 religious leaders from the three prioritised municipalities.

Focus groups were held with course participants, where one such participant explained the value of attendance as follows:

*We as a church already had cases of counselling of battered women, but when I began to study, to specialize in the diploma, because obviously I began to see things in a clearer way, in what way to be able to attend them, because without a doubt we had been doing it but maybe not in the right way, but sometimes only guiding him in prayer, giving words, messages, but when we went to the diploma because it took away from me all that that is not only praying, not everything is advising, but we must also act.*

The Spotlight Initiative has now extended this work to the Catholic and Lutheran community, through the Central American University José Simeón Cañas and the Salvadoran Lutheran University.

## 7.4. Gender mainstreaming in the Roadmap process: a preliminary state of play

An internal note drafted by the Roadmap Facility

November 2021

### Introduction

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Roadmaps were first mentioned in the 2012 Communication. Welcomed by other key European institutions, namely the Council and the European Parliament (EP), they were designed as a tool to improve the impact, predictability and visibility of EU actions, and to ensure consistency and synergy of support to Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). They were also intended to progressively trigger coordination and sharing of good practices with EU Member States (MS) and possibly with other international actors active in the support to CSOs such as non-European donors, UNDP, the WB, USAID, etc.

In line with the markedly “country focus” of the 2012 Communication, and with a view to ensure local ownership (by EU Delegations, MS and EU partners), Roadmaps were conceived as country-specific and context-driven processes which were to be designed, implemented and followed-up at country level, with EUDs and MS remaining “in the driving seat”.

To date the EU has engaged in **three generations of Roadmaps** (i.e. covering the periods 2014-2017; 2018-2020 and Post 2021).

### 2014-2020: Initiating efforts to overcome an originally gender-blind process

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The first generation of Roadmaps for the EU engagement with CSOs for the period 2014-2017 didn't generally integrate a gender dimension. Considering the novelty of the process, most EUDs focused their efforts on generating the required knowledge to draft the Roadmap and on launching initial consultations with CSOs. Women's organisations were considered together with other forms and types of CSOs, without a specific lens. It is worth recalling that in many countries (particularly those outside the ACP zone) the drafting of the Roadmap represented the first solid attempt to go beyond the ad-hoc and often instrument-driven approach that characterised EU relations with CSOs and to obtain an accurate and updated picture of the state of CS, upon which to draw a set of priorities to guide the engagement. Articulations with other EU-driven country processes, including the Gender Action Plan (GAP) but also Joint programming (JP) and the Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategy (HRDCS) were, for the most, occasional.

From 2016 onwards, building on the momentum gained with the launch of the Gender Action Plan II, a stronger emphasis was placed in the mainstreaming of gender throughout the updating, and ulterior implementation of the Roadmaps for the period 2018-2020. Yet efforts were still uneven across countries and regions, and no specific guidance was issued to assist EUDs in the articulation of the two processes and in the mainstreaming of gender in the engagement with CSOs.

In a number of countries, specific consultations were organised with women's organisations. Special efforts were also made to ensure a minimum participation of women's groups in the consultations held with CSOs (i.e. Guatemala, Thailand, Indonesia, India, Timor Leste, etc.). Several RM also considered the Gender Action Plan II as one of the key background documents to consider when drafting the RM. In fragile environments, even if a proper Roadmap was not drafted due to the instability and unpredictability of the context, a number of EU Delegations (e.g. Libya, Iraq, Yemen, etc) initiated knowledge and consultation processes to reflect upon their engagement strategies with local CS actors in an effort to localise the assistance provided. Special efforts were made to include women in the consultations and to discuss the question of women's roles in coping with the crises.

Also, several RM documents for the period 2018-2020 highlighted gender inequality as one of the key issues which required attention and included a strong reference to women's participation in the efforts to enhance Civil Society participation in domestic policies (e.g. Pacific region, Somalia, Kenya, Cambodia, Ivory Coast, Timor Leste, Central African Republic, etc). A number of RM documents also included specific actions to address the gender gap, targeting women and women's groups either individually or as part of the “so-called vulnerable groups” (e.g. Colombia, Honduras, Regional Pacific RM, Timor Leste, etc.)

### 2021 and beyond: a new generation of gender-sensitive Roadmaps for the engagement with CSOs

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The ‘Evaluation of the EU's external action support in the area of gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment (2019-2020)’ highlighted, among its findings, how “*while the EU's substantial support for CSOs active*

*in advancing GEWE has led to many positive experiences, the EU has yet to find an approach to ensure more strategic, comprehensive partnerships on GEWE with these actors at the country level, including the stronger involvement of grassroots organisations in EU external action”.*

With the adoption by the College of the EU Gender Action Plan III: An ambitious agenda for gender equality and women’s empowerment in EU external action (GAP III) on 25 November 2020, the EU reaffirmed the centrality of gender equality and women’s empowerment throughout EU external action at all levels and in all sectors. **GAP III aims to promote a gender transformative approach** through, among other ways, supporting and ensuring meaningful participation of women’s and girls’ organisations and other emerging actors committed to gender equality and women’s rights in order to contribute to reach SDG 5 and successfully deliver on its five pillars and six key thematic policy areas. This **commitment also permeated the Roadmap process**.

Also, and building on the findings of the afore-mentioned evaluation, GAP III envisions the development of Country Actions Plans (the so-called CLIPs) in an effort to establish better strategic visions on GEWE at the country level.

In 2020, in the course of the preparation of the relaunch of the Roadmaps, not only **the template and drafting guidance document for the RMs were reviewed also from a gender lens** and taking into account the structure of the CLIPs (with annotated sections and specific commitments as further developed below), but also practical guidance was offered to EUDs in the course of the 4 regional seminars organised by INTPA G.2, in March 2021 with EU Delegations in French speaking Africa, English speaking Africa, Asia/Pacific and Latin America/Caribbean. A session co-facilitated with INTPA G1 was organised in each one of the 4 seminars to address the linkages between the RM and the CLIPs.

The key gender **mainstreaming commitments and provisions** included in the updated RM template and guidance include the following:

- **Part I: The context and past EU engagement with CSOs:**
  - Specific attention should be paid to women’s organisations and CSOs promoting gender equality and women’s rights when assessing the legal and institutional environment in which CSOs operate, when assessing CSO involvement in domestic policies and when addressing CSO capacities.
  - Request for gender disaggregation of data on sex and age when possible (as per requests of GAP III).
- **Part II: The strategy and action plan:**
  - A number of priorities (i.e. objectives) shall target specifically gender equality and women empowerment in close coordination with GAP III priorities related to CSOs.
  - On policy dialogue: At least one dialogue per year planned with women’s organisations/CSOs should concern gender equality/women’s rights and empowerment.
- **Part III: The follow-up of the RM:**
  - RM indicators should include indicators targeting gender equality specifically (i.e. use GAP indicators).
  - Request for gender disaggregation of selected RM indicators when possible.

With regards to the RM updating process, and more specifically around the consultations to be organised for the update of the RM inside the EUD and with key stakeholders, specific guidance was also provided to EUDs, identifying the main entry points for enhanced gender mainstreaming. Such entry points include:

- **During the research and desk review conducted for the update of the RM:**
  - EUDs were encouraged to focus on the situation and presence of women's organisations in public and political dialogue and on the general environment and treatment in the public debate of issues related to women's rights and gender equality.
- **With regards to consultations with colleagues in the operational and political sections inside EUD:**
  - Civil Society Focal points were invited to ensure close coordination with the Gender Focal Point and were encouraged to undertake joint consultations (where possible), both for the RM and the CLIP/GAP III and even occasionally for the MIP 2021-2027.
- **In the consultations with CSOs:**

- Civil Society Focal points were encouraged to map out and invite women's organisations as well as CSOs advancing GEWE in the consultations organised for the update of the RM (i.e. in-depth interviews, surveys addressed at CSOs and workshops)
- Civil Society Focal Points were also encouraged to integrate questions around women's and girls' rights and gender equality in the consultations, both in the surveys that were launched as well as in the workshops that were organised.
- As aforementioned, and when possible, Civil Society Focal Points were encouraged to organise integrated consultations (i.e. both for the RM and CLIP/GAP III)
- **In the consultations with Member States, +EU and other like-minded partners:**
  - Civil Society Focal points were encouraged to integrate questions around women's and girls' rights and gender equality in the country and to further understand partner efforts to advance GEWE.

All in all, **Roadmaps have progressively become more gender-sensitive processes** and resulting documents, particularly the third generation (i.e. 2021 and beyond) currently underway.

### Emerging good practices

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In line with the provisions above, throughout the process of updating the Roadmaps for the period 2021 and beyond, a number of emerging good practices of mainstreaming gender start to emerge, at different levels:

- In the way RM consultations have been undertaken, in close articulation (or even merged) with the consultations for the CLIP/GAP and/or being more inclusive towards women's organisations and other CSOs advancing GEWE.
- In the stronger acknowledgement of key roles played by women and the specific challenges faced by women's organisations in the analytical parts of the documents.
- In the integration of a Rights Based Approach and mainstreaming of gender across the priorities and actions of the Roadmap, with a particular emphasis on women's participation in public debates and policies, as well as in entrepreneurship.
- In the integration of gender disaggregated actions and indicators.

It is however important to keep in mind that this is a preliminary analysis, and that it is still premature to draw conclusions on the effectiveness of the afore-mentioned gender **mainstreaming commitments and provisions** included in the new generation of Roadmaps for the period post 2021, considering that several RMs are still being updated and that, for those finalised, their implementation has only recently started.

Once implementation of the RMs is more advanced, it is advised to deepen the assessment of these emerging good practices, and more generally, to conduct a more thorough analysis of how gender is mainstreamed in the RMs design and implementation, within the framework of the stock-taking exercise of the RMs Post 2021 which will be conducted in the future.

#### *Inclusive coordinated consultations organised in Vietnam*

Between January and May 2021 the EUD in Vietnam, together with Member States, engaged in a very comprehensive and integrated consultation process to review its Roadmap for the engagement with CSOs and prepare its CLIP/GAP, as well as its HRDCS. A total of 27 in-depth interviews were conducted with CSOs (including women's organisations, also considering mass organisations such as the Vietnam Women's Union, which has the mandate to represent the rights and interests of all Vietnamese women) and 5 in-depth interviews with Member States. In-depth interviews, both for CSOs and MS, included a dedicated set of questions about gender, and the answers were then used to feed both the RM as well as the CLIP/GAP. A workshop with CSOs (also gathering women's organisations) was then organised, as well as an internal session with EUD colleagues, including the Gender Focal point. The resulting RM document, which covers the period 2021-2025, includes specific provisions to promote women's voices, as part of the commitment to promote a stronger participation of CSOs in domestic policies as well as in the framework of a more structured dialogue between CSOs and the EU, two of the key objectives of the Roadmap.

#### *Integrated consultations for the MIP, RM and CLIP/GAP III in Botswana*

The EU Delegation in Botswana launched the process of updating the RM for the engagement with CSOs in close articulation with the consultations organised for the MIP 2021-2027 and the preparation of the CLIP/GAP III. Two additional meetings focusing on GAP III were held in July 2021 with 20 representatives from eight CSO working on

gender issues. The first meeting took place with 'Gender Elders', comprising directors of the main gender implementing CSO.

#### ***Integrating a wide range of women's organisations in the consultations in Comoros***

For the preparation of the RM for engagement with CSOs in Comoros, in line with the new sectors of the MIP, the EU Delegation integrated into its consultations representatives from the private sector, including representatives from EFOI-COM), which is the leading organisation representing female entrepreneurs, and is already targeted by current EU projects on vocational training and support for trade. Community women's associations which play a crucial role in local development were also consulted, as well as those fighting against GBV and early marriages (e.g. HIFADHU, French Red Cross).

#### ***Inclusiveness at the forefront of the RM in Nicaragua***

For the preparation of the RM for the engagement with CSOs in Nicaragua for the period 2021-2020, women were systematically included across all consulted groups. One of the lessons learnt from past EU engagement upon which the new Roadmap is built is that the effectiveness and legitimacy of the strategy put forward by the Roadmap needs to draw upon the participation of all sectors of Civil society, mirroring the diverse range of both formal and informal actors and social movements active in the country (i.e. from academia, media and the churches to women's movements, indigenous groups, farmers, cooperatives, etc.) Under priority 2 (which revolves around the strengthening of capacities), the Roadmap places a special emphasis on the support to women's organizations for the defence and full exercise of their rights (i.e. fight against gender violence, support to women's Human Rights defenders, documentation of cases and filing of complains, national and international advocacy, political participation, economic empowerment, etc.)

#### ***Acknowledging and supporting the key role played by women in Uganda***

The new Roadmap for the engagement with CSOs in Uganda for the period 2021-2027 includes an acknowledgement of the key roles played by CSOs to advance GEWE, and to shift public awareness and political discourse to be more mindful of gender inequalities and other forms of discrimination and exclusion. Even though gender equality is explicitly recognized and upheld in the Constitution of Uganda, relevant challenges prevail. In particular, sexual and gender -based violence (SGBV) persists and women and girls continue to be denied access to means of production like land and capital. In line with this assessment, the Roadmap places a particular emphasis in the enhancement of social inclusion of vulnerable categories including women, but also youth and persons with disabilities at all governance levels. A number of targeted actions are considered, including the development of a better understanding of faith-based institutions to support their development and advocacy work (also in GEWE), the empowerment of women to be more actively involved in policy dialogue, and the exploration of sub-granting support mechanisms to ensure a better outreach to the community level, where women are active parts of their communities.

#### ***Focus on promoting women leadership and women political participation in Indonesia***

The Roadmap for engagement with CSOs in Indonesia includes a short, dedicated assessment on the gender situation in the country and the key roles played by CSOs to advance GEWE. The need for more women leadership and enhanced women political participation is particularly stressed in the analysis. Gender is then mainstreamed in all priorities, with dedicated actions both at the level of political and policy dialogue and operational support, in line with the dispositions of the CLIP/CAP III Indonesia 2021-2025. Examples of actions to deepen participation (with a focus on women participation) include: the support to Civil Society led bottom-up green deal initiatives to address climate change, energy transition, protection of biodiversity, green and smart cities; the support to Public-private partnerships and alliances to promote a resilient economy and social inclusion; the support to Social Accountability mechanisms to monitor the provision of basic services at the local level (particularly with regards to women and other vulnerable groups) and the support to strengthening CSO' capacities to conduct evidence-based advocacy and engage constructively and effectively with the authorities at the local and national level to promote an Open Government, etc. It is also worth stressing that the RM was elaborated in close consultation with CSOs, namely through the launch of a survey answered by 215 organisations (including women's organisations) and which included questions around gender.

#### ***Inclusiveness and gender-focus in the Structured Dialogue launched in Timor Leste***

The EU Delegation in Timor has been implementing a more structured dialogue with CSOs, around key strategic and programmatic issues on governance, human rights, overall development cooperation, and engagement with civil society. Gender equality and women's rights and empowerment have been a recurrent topic of dialogue, considering the Timorese context, CSOs action on the topic, and the implementation of the Spotlight Initiative. The Spotlight



Initiative's work is rooted in research that amplifies the belief that the leadership and deep engagement of civil society is at the core of transformative and sustainable change in the elimination of violence against women and girls. Civil society, in particular women's rights and feminist activists and movements, are therefore a central and paramount partner of it. This includes those representing groups facing intersecting forms of discrimination.

The EU Delegation has also made efforts to ensure inclusiveness in the group of CSOs which are part of the Structured Dialogue, placing a particular emphasis on CSOs working with youth, women, people with disabilities, farmers, LGBTI, children, advocacy, research, faith-based organisations, youth and culture groups, among others. The Delegation is starting from what is known and is progressively building the case for a wider spectrum of actors to engage with.

Finally, it is also worth mentioning that the new RM for engagement with CSOs in Timor Leste for the period 2021-2023 includes a set of gender-sensitive indicators, particularly around the second priority which aims at promoting civil society efforts to promote sustainable development, human rights, gender equality, and peace building.

#### ***A right-based approach embedded in the new RM for engagement with CSOs in Burkina Faso***

The new Roadmap for the engagement with CSOs in Burkina Faso for the period 2021-2024 is strongly underpinned by a rights-based approach, shifting away from a needs-based development cooperation paradigm. The new Roadmap is designed upon the premise that developing the capacity of CSOs to apply a rights-based approach will enable the realization of these rights in sectoral dialogues and the representation of more marginalized and less represented voices (including women, youth, people with disabilities and internally displaced people). Accordingly, the Roadmap has been developed in close articulation with the CLIP/GAP III, which emphasizes equality between women and men as (i) a human rights issue, (ii) the basic foundation of societies democratic principles and good governance, and (iii) the basis for sustainable and inclusive development. Acknowledging the key role played by CSOs in Burkina Faso in advancing human rights (including the fight against gender-based violence) and in promoting women's empowerment and leadership, the document places a strong emphasis on women participation in public debates and policies at local and national level (under priority 2) and includes a set of gender-sensitive indicators.

#### ***CSOs and gender being mainstreamed across EU cooperation and trade in the Kyrgyz Republic***

Engagement with CSOs and gender is mainstreamed across EU sectors of cooperation and trade in the Kyrgyz Republic. Regular dialogues are held between the EU Delegation and relevant CSOs to discuss policy and programme strategies. The annual EU-Kyrgyz Republic Civil Society Seminars on the Rule of Law, Human Rights and Corruption issues and the Gender Workshop provide a high level of participation of regional CSOs, including women, media and youth organisations. This ensures participatory policymaking by enabling them to understand the policy issues, challenges and opportunities. For the preparation of the MIP 2021-2027, a specific consultation was held exclusively with CSO representatives, including women and youth organisations to discuss the programming priorities and also the new EU Roadmap for engagement with CSOs. CSOs emphasized in particular the relevance of MIP priority area 2 "Human development on Gender equality, youth engagement and human rights." With regards to CSOs and GEWE, and in line with the CLIP/GAP 2021-2025, the EU intends to empower women, girls and young people to fully use their rights and increase their participation in political, economic, social, and cultural life. The Spotlight Initiative focuses on addressing gender-based violence, promoting the economic, social and political empowerment and participation of women and girls, and on enhancing capacities of the women and CSO organisations. These priorities are also reflected in the Roadmap for engagement with CSO, with dedicated actions and indicators.

#### ***Focus on women entrepreneurial skills and participation in Gambia***

As part of the 2021-2027 programming period in the Gambia, specific measures in favour of civil society will be adopted, namely with a view of reinforcing the capacities of the CSO umbrella organisations and their involvement in public debates in the country (including on migration) as well as on the EU supported initiatives on sustainable growth and jobs. Special attention is accorded to women organisations, particularly with regards to their involvement in dialogue, as well with regards to their entrepreneurial skills and technology. Finally it is also worth mentioning that the Roadmap, which echoes the aforementioned commitments, was drafted simultaneously with the CLIP/Gender Action Plan and the Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategy as these Strategies are feeding each other.

## 7.5 EU-UN Spotlight Initiative: a key commitment on reinforcing women's movement and CSOs

Evidence shows that **transformative change happens from the ground up, over time, and is driven by organizations and progressive social movements** closest to those directly impacted by violence<sup>131</sup>.

Most of the progress in ending gender-based violence to date has been due to the sustained demands and organized actions of local women's rights activists so its elimination cannot be achieved without strong and empowered civil society and autonomous women's movements.

Therefore, recognizing their expertise and reach, **a diverse range of civil society organizations has been a critical partner at all levels and phases of Spotlight Initiative (SI) programmes.**

SI's partnership with civil society is guided by a Rights Based Approach, the "Leaving No One Behind" principle and national ownership. A fundamental goal under its Pillar 6 "Women's Movement and CSOs" has been to **shift the balance of power from international CSOs/non-governmental organisations to national and, in particular, local and grassroots organisations.** The provision of core support to strengthen national and, in particular, local and grassroots CSOs' institutional and organizational capacities is one of the highest priorities of work under Pillar 6. And in this regard, transferring resources directly to national and, in particular, local and grassroots organisations is also a key priority of Spotlight programmes. It is critical also under this Pillar to partner with and support important actors and activists who are defining new and dynamic ways of organizing and are part of and contributing to a broader women's movement or civil society alliance<sup>132</sup>.

In 2019, the Spotlight Initiative Secretariat launched the Grassroots Action Plan, which includes concrete recommendations on how programmes can simplify partnership processes and make them more inclusive, to be able to go beyond the "usual suspects" and reach new partners. As the 2021 annual report highlights<sup>133</sup>, cumulatively Spotlight Initiative programmes allocated 49 per cent, or about USD 179 million, of activity funds to civil society organizations, achieving its commitment to delivering 30-50 per cent of Spotlight Initiative programme funds through civil society organizations. This is an increase of approximately USD 33 million from the previous year. All five regions in which the Initiative works are exceeding the minimum target of 30 per cent, with Central Asia<sup>20</sup> leading at 60 per cent. Of the allocated civil society funds, a total of USD 144.5 million was already awarded to civil society organizations, an increase of close to USD 48 million from 2020. This means that programmes have now delivered about 81 per cent of the total allocated funding for civil society organizations.

In 2021, to address the chronic underfunding, the Initiative delivered 72 per cent (USD 104 million) of the awarded funds to civil society organizations that are led by women, feminist and women's rights organizations.<sup>27</sup> This is an additional USD 28 million compared to the end of 2020 and ranges from 61 per cent in Africa to 81 per cent in the Caribbean, and 94 per cent by the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) and the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women.

But apart from this important funding channelled through civil society partners, CSOs have also made key decisions and provided **strategic guidance at the highest levels of Spotlight Initiative's governing bodies**<sup>134</sup>. Regional, National and Global Civil Society Reference Groups have been established engaging diverse women's rights and feminist activists as well as subject-matter experts and marginalized groups. These reference groups advise on and monitor the implementation of the Initiative's programmes, recommend changes and hold the Spotlight Initiative accountable to its commitments. In addition, the Initiative ensures a full role in decision-making and representation of civil society within its governance structures: on National and Regional Steering Committees as the highest decision-making body at the programme level – and, at the global level, the Global Operational Steering Committee and the Governing Body. In 2021, as a result, civil society partners were engaged in key decision-making related to programme and

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<sup>131</sup> S. Laurel Weldon & Mala Htun, [Feminist mobilisation and progressive policy change: why governments take action to combat violence against women](#).

<sup>132</sup> Extracted from "Technical guidance note on the six pillars of Spotlight Theory of change" and the SI "Guidance Note Achieving meaningful engagement and partnership with the Civil Society Reference Groups"

<sup>133</sup> Extracted from Spotlight Initiative Civil Society Report 2021 (<https://www.spotlightinitiative.org/publications/spotlight-initiative-civil-society-report-2021>)

<sup>134</sup> Impact report 2019-2020 "Universal rights, global action".

budget revisions, Phase II planning, COVID-19 response plans and annual workplans, which helped to improve the responsiveness of these plans to local contexts and to serve civil society's needs<sup>135</sup>.

Specifically, civil society is systematically engaged at **national, regional and global** levels through the partnership with **Civil Society Reference Groups** (CS-RG). Their aim is to advise the Initiative, to advocate for the realization of its objectives and to hold the Initiative accountable for its commitments.

At the Global level, the Civil Society Reference Group is comprised of 20 diverse members, selected by a civil society-led selection committee in April 2020. The CS-RGs consist of around 15 diverse global/regional/national/local experts on eliminating violence against women and girls, and on gender equality and women's rights more broadly<sup>136</sup>.

They have been established as an **institutional mechanism** to facilitate systematic civil society engagement throughout the Spotlight Initiative Programme cycle and represent civil society at the governance and decision-making bodies of the Initiative. **They harness civil society expertise and strengthen SI's effectiveness and accountability to women's movements at national, regional and global levels.**

In particular, they serve a triple function: to advise the Initiative, to advocate and partner for the realization of its objectives and to hold the Initiative accountable for its commitments.

To achieve this, the CS-RG:

- *Is adequately represented in Spotlight Initiative's decision-making mechanisms (Steering Committee) with at least 20% full voting representation.*
- *Is invited and allowed to fully engage in multi-stakeholder consultations and meetings.*
- *has clearly allocated resources and support to meaningfully participate (e.g. budgeting CS-RGs' workplans (including transportation and travel costs); providing adequate notice time for meetings and technical review of documents; allowing virtual meeting participation; selecting disability-friendly venues; arranging interpretation for sign language and minority languages (when needed).*
- *Is given feedback and timely information on how its inputs may have been considered for the programme, including justifications when those may have not been considered.*
- *Has established mechanisms to hold Spotlight Initiative accountable for its commitments.*

As independent monitoring and reporting by civil society on the Initiative's contributions are critical to the legitimacy and relevance of the Initiative, in 2020, the Count Me In! Consortium and several members of Civil Society Reference Groups collectively developed the Civil Society Monitoring Toolkit. This toolkit includes a set of 26 indicators that Reference Groups can use to monitor the implementation of the SI at country, regional and global levels. Also, the Global Civil Society Reference Group has developed a scorecard covering the period 2019– 2020 and focused on assessing the participation, funding, protection and involvement of women's movements at and from the global level. Fully finalized in 2021 a series of recommendations for future action have been put forward: adding an additional civil society representative in the Operational Steering Committee; simplifying procedures and systems that impede grassroots organizations and women's movements from accessing and receiving funding; additional grant-based, demand-driven and flexible funding mechanisms; partnering with regional women's funds and other grant-making women's organizations; and additional resources and efforts for training in, and the full implementation of, the Spotlight Initiative's Specific Integrated Protection Approach in Spotlight Initiative countries and regions.<sup>137</sup>

Furthermore, to amplify its wealth of knowledge, scale up the adoption of a comprehensive approach to ending violence, share lessons learned and effectively promote new partnerships, Spotlight Initiative has created the Global Platform as a global hub for knowledge, engagement and impact to end violence against women and girls. As a virtual exchange and convening ecosystem it offers the combined power of an online knowledge hub, a community of practice, and an advocacy channel, founded in the practical experience of Spotlight Initiative's investments across more than 25 countries. As highlighted in the 2021 report<sup>138</sup>, this Platform has already produced a series of knowledge

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<sup>135</sup> Extracted from Spotlight Initiative Civil Society Report 2021 (<https://www.spotlightinitiative.org/publications/spotlight-initiative-civil-society-report-2021>)

<sup>136</sup> For more info on the biographies of the Global, Regional and National Reference Groups members check [here](#).

<sup>137</sup> Ibid 4

<sup>138</sup> Annual Narrative Progress Report Global 01 January 2021 – 31 December 2021

products on areas such as on embracing healthy masculinities in Latin America and the Caribbean, addressing harmful practices and sexual and reproductive health and rights in Africa and Asia, innovative adaptations to COVID-19 and other emergency contexts in the Pacific, coalition-building by advocating for women's rights, advancing peace and EVAWG and participatory monitoring and evaluation. This platform enables access to the latest tools and resources to model comprehensive programmes on violence against women and girls.

In addition, the Spotlight Initiative Secretariat has formed and fostered a partnership with the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women for SHINE, the online hub for knowledge exchange on ending violence against women and girls hub of the Global Platform. As of early July 2022, over 900 users have registered to SHINE, and three communities of practice on prevention, women's movements and services have been opened. Global and regional platforms across Africa, Latin America, Asia, the Pacific and Caribbean have been linked to SHINE for increased accessibility to knowledge on ending violence against women and girls and to sustain the efforts of the Global Platform.

Also, a series of multi-stakeholder global and regional knowledge exchanges have been held for over 767 participants and hundreds of civil society organizations in 2021. In 2022, global knowledge exchanges have been held on engaging the private sector and highlighting lessons from civil society for ensuring resiliency to crises. Online discussions on these topics and on sustainability of efforts to end violence against women and girls have been conducted. All these efforts have resulted in enhanced knowledge, quality and evidence-based programme implementation and have strengthened connections beyond the Spotlight Initiative global community."