



The Director-General



Secretary General

## **Gender Action Plan III – 2021-2025 Country Level Implementation Plan – CLIP for Turkmenistan**

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

The second National Action Plan for Gender Equality (NAPGE 2), together with the existing legislation, is to a considerable extent compliant with international standards and provides good basis for advancing the rights of women in Turkmenistan. Changing the situation on the ground will however require much more time and efforts, as gender based bias and discrimination still prevail and not even women themselves are fully aware of what constitutes a violation of their rights. The EU action on gender equality in Turkmenistan should also be based on the country's obligations resulting from the membership in international instruments like the CEDAW and the relevant ILO conventions.

One of the main challenges with the implementation of the CLIP in Turkmenistan is linked to the inaccessibility of data, including gender-disaggregated statistics. The results of the survey on the health and situation of women in the family, co-financed by the EU and published in 2023, constitute a first attempt to remedy this situation. Social taboo surrounding such issues like domestic violence is however likely causing underreporting. There is also a lack of effective monitoring mechanisms of progress achieved under international and domestic instruments, with the membership to relevant Conventions and the existence of relevant laws on paper often presented as a deliverable in itself, despite little or no impact on the situation of women on the ground.

Additional difficulty constitutes the existence of unwritten rules that regulate women's appearance and activities, often denied by the authorities, despite numerous examples of their application. One example is the situation of women-drivers, who are frequently harassed by the traffic police on any pretext. Unjustifiable restrictions like age or marital status are placed on women who wish to own a car, apply for or extend their driving licence. Some women driving cars can occasionally be seen in the capital. In some rural areas, there are no female drivers at all.

In Turkmenistan, women are formally not restricted from holding political office (see: the President of the Parliament, the Ombudsperson for Human Rights, the Deputy Foreign Minister, 25.6% of women in parliament) or establishing a business, but stereotypes and deeply entrenched bias limit achieving their full potential. Women in rural areas are more exposed to gender discrimination and harmful practices like child marriage or polygamy (officially banned but tolerated in some traditional communities). There is a need to strengthen legal anti-discrimination provisions as well as to introduce a specific law against gender based violence, including violence in the family.

The CLIP was prepared on the basis of the Gender Study for Central Asia, prepared in 2018 by EuroPlus Consulting & Management and financed by the EU. It is in line with a new priority of the Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategy added in 2021: gender equality and women's rights. In preparation for the CLIP, the views of the government were taken into consideration, as outlined in a second National Action Plan on Gender Equality (NAPGE) 2021-2025. The Reports of the Ombudsperson were also consulted. During consultations with the MFA on the programming of assistance 2021-2027, the EU Delegation presented its intention to mainstream gender equality into all future projects and actions; support to women-entrepreneurs was mentioned as an example. The MFA was in favour of this approach as it will contribute to the implementation of the NAPGE 2.

In the absence of UN Women in Turkmenistan, the main interlocutor on gender equality and the rights of women is the UNFPA which was consulted on several occasions, in particular as regards the assessment of the implementation of the first Turkmen NAPGE (2015-2020) and the results of the Study on the health and situation of women in the family. Most recent concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on the fifth periodic report of Turkmenistan in 2018 were also taken into consideration, as well as reports of international NGOs on the situation of women in Central Asia, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Local civil society organisations dealing with gender related issues (trafficking in human beings, violence against women, domestic violence) were consulted between December 2020 and March 2021. Women-entrepreneurs and other women-representatives of different professions were consulted on 9 March 2021.

MS present locally were consulted during a HoMs meeting on 30 April 2021 and expressed broad support for the future CLIP. MS approved the 2023 revision of CLIP by silence procedure with the deadline on 31 October 2023.

The UNDP and EBRD contributed with their experience in working with women-entrepreneurs. The experience resulting from EU funded regional projects implemented in Turkmenistan, that mainstream gender issues into their interventions, was also taken into account.

## **2. Selected thematic areas of engagement and objectives**

The EU action on gender equality in Turkmenistan should focus on strengthening and effective implementation of domestic and international laws to which the country is a party on the one hand, and on the other hand, working towards increasing the understanding of the principles of equality between men and women among policy makers, public officials as well as throughout the deeply traditionalistic society.

According to 2021-2027 MIP for Turkmenistan and the priority areas of the Cooperation Facility for Turkmenistan, EU intervention will focus on two sectors where the EU support will have the potential for achieving a transformational impact. The areas identified are: (i) *green aspects of the economy* and; (ii) *improving the business climate with a focus on agriculture/rural development and support to trade development*. Emphasis will be put on micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises with a particular focus on women- and youth-led enterprises. The improvement of the business climate in other sectors of the economy, particularly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, will be supported as well. Private sector and rural development can further promote women and youth empowerment and entrepreneurship, ensuring their better access to labour markets, finances and know-how. This would complement the EU's general human rights policy in the country, contributing

to the implementation of the EU Human Rights and Democracy Action Plan and of the EU Gender Action Plan III.

Gender equality and women's rights will be mainstreamed through policy dialogues, activities organised by the EU Delegation and EU funded programmes.

The selected thematic areas of engagement and objectives will be as follows:

### **2.1. Ensuring freedom from all forms of gender based violence:**

- adoption and effective implementation of a law on violence against women,
- participation of Turkmenistan in the Spotlight initiative.

### **2.2. Strengthening economic and social rights and empowering girls and women**

- effective implementation of existing laws and action plans in the field of gender equality and women's rights,
- raised awareness about rights of women among stakeholders (central and local authorities, Ombudsperson's office, relevant NGOs, women-entrepreneurs, women organisations),
- reduced prejudice against women entrenched in societal attitudes,
- strengthened participation of women in business and political life,
- ensured right of woman to possess a car and a driving licence, as a mean of strengthening their independence and ability to conduct business.

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

As Turkmenistan will not benefit from any dedicated to gender aspect bilateral envelope, support to gender equality will be provided through the country specific calls for proposals under the EIDHR and CSO-LA. Gender will be a priority area in the thematic national calls from 2021 until 2025.

The national gender institutions and networks in Turkmenistan will be supported through the ongoing EU Spotlight Initiative Regional Programme, tailored to address specific legislative and policy gaps, strengthen institutions and promote gender-equitable attitudes, provide quality services for survivors and empower women's movements, leaving no one behind. It is the most comprehensive global policy frameworks for the rights of women with innovative approaches and modalities. Challenges resulting from its implementation in Turkmenistan will need to be addressed.

## **4. Engage in dialogue for gender equality and women empowerment**

The EU will continue discussions on gender equality within the framework of the political and EU-Turkmenistan Human Rights Dialogues, in line with the GAP III, with relevant State Ministries and bodies, including the Office of the Ombudsperson. The EU will actively participate in the meetings of the Interagency Commission on the implementation of Turkmenistan's obligations in the field of human rights. In the dialogue, the EU will refer to Turkmenistan's membership of the Executive Board in the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) for 2020-2024.

The EU will engage with civil society, business community and other relevant stakeholders to promote gender equality and to counter gender-based discrimination. The EU Delegation will aim at establishing a structured dialogue with professionally active Turkmen women, following on the encouraging results of first such meeting held on 9 March 2021. The EU Delegation will encourage the Turkmen government to establish a regular practice

of consulting civil society organisations (local, and possible based in exile) on all issues relating to the rights of women and gender equality, building on the experience of such consultations held for the first time in 2020.

The EU will provide support to fighting violence against women, drafting relevant legislation, and implementing the NAPGE 2.

The EU will follow discussions in the platform of Central Asian Women Leaders, launched by the Central Asian states and the United Nations in 2020.

## **5. Outreach and other communication / public diplomacy activities**

The EU Delegation will organise public diplomacy events to increase the visibility of EU-funded activities regarding women's rights, including around the International Women's Day, International Day of the Girl Child and the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. The principle of gender equality and imperative of the women's right protection will be an essential component of the implementation of the EU-Turkmenistan Cooperation Facility.

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

Gender equality will be mainstreamed in new actions and ongoing political dialogues. More specifically, gender equality will be addressed in future CSO and EIDHR projects.

*Date: 8 November 2023*

*Signature by Head of Delegation  
Beata PEKSA*

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