



**Policy
Forum** on
Development

**Annual Structured Dialogue with
Civil Society and Local Authorities on the
Implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan (GAP) III**

November 28, 2023

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Executive Summary

In the third annual GAP III dialogue, high-level EU representatives including Jutta Urpilainen, EU Commissioner for International Partnerships, Stella Ronner Grubacic, the EU Ambassador for Gender and Diversity, and Eva del Hoyo, Director General for Sustainable Development Policies, Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (EU Presidency holder) met with representatives of more than 100 civil society organisations (CSOs) and associations of local authorities (ALAs). The meeting focused on the Joint mid-term report on the implementation of GAP III issued on 20 November, 2023, and featured an interactive discussion on the care economy, a priority of the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU.

In the introductory part, EU representatives highlighted the main conclusions of the Joint mid-term report on the implementation of GAP III:

- GAP III has elevated gender equality as a strategic priority in external action, which means that the EU works to mainstream gender across key EU strategies.
- It has contributed to a more strategic EU vision for a gender-equal world with country level implementation plans (CLIPs) set up in almost all partner countries.
- Funding for gender equality has increased through better gender mainstreaming and gender targeted actions (in 2022, 72% of external actions featuring gender equality as a significant or principal policy objective).
- EU has increased engagement with partner governments, women and youth organisations and national gender equality networks. At country levels, a total of 84% of EU delegations engaged in civil society dialogues on gender equality in 2022.
- Awareness and capacity building on “gender responsive leadership” as a responsibility of leadership was highlighted.

With the mid-term report, the EU recommitted to the GAP III as the political and operational roadmap for gender equality and women’s empowerment, including its key principles and thematic priorities. To align the duration of the GAP III with the 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework, **the EU extended the implementation period until 2027**. Looking ahead, more work should be done in implementing the GAP III key principles, notably intersectionality. As regards funding for grass-root and community-level initiatives, the new Youth Empowerment Fund aims at providing low barrier funding for young people at community grassroots level to support youth-led initiatives, including for gender equality.

CSO views on the implementation of GAP III were shared on behalf of the CONCORD gender equality working group by **Marie Tempesta, Advocacy Advisor at the International Planned Parenthood Federation European Network**. Main points included that the mid-term review should serve as an opportunity to better mainstream the principles of the GAP III, including intersectionality, and ensure the translation of commitments in CLIPs into concrete programming. EU delegations should include CSOs in ongoing and continuous dialogue throughout the implementation of the GAP III / the CLIPs. With respect to funding, the number of gender targeted actions and the achievement of the related targets is still lagging. CSOs, in particular local and grass-root organisations, continue to face difficulties in accessing resources and EU funding, and therefore, the EU is encouraged to continue trying to provide accessible long-term funding to women's rights organisations.

The **interactive discussion on the care economy** was opened by **Giulia Massobrio, Coordinator of the Trade Union Development Cooperation Network - International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)**, who highlighted care economy as a key labour issue. She explained the “5R Framework for Decent Care Work” to recognise, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work; reward care workers; and promote representation of unpaid carers, care workers and care recipients in social dialogue.

Participants then split into breakout groups to discuss promising practices of transformative care policy and the role of the EU and other development actors in promoting decent care work in partner countries. The discussion centred around two main questions: 1. What lessons can be drawn from successful models, policies and strategies of care economy promotion in different regions, and how can these models be adapted to different cultural and socioeconomic contexts? And 2. How do you imagine a care-centred, gender-responsive city, and what services and structures would be in these cities?

On the question of lessons drawn **from successful models of care economy promotion**, participants highlighted that investments in the care economy can create more jobs, whereby the return on investment is better compared to infrastructure projects. In times of austerity, countries are pushed to reduce funding for social services. Consequently, women are the first buffer of an economic crisis, and their unpaid care labour is increased. In general, there is a lack of awareness and few campaigns to spread knowledge regarding the importance of the care economy.

On the question of what a **care-centred, gender-responsive city looks like**, participants noted that the welfare state is being dismantled and privatised in many parts of the world. Furthermore, the burden of care remains unpaid, unrecognised, and largely assumed by women. However, socio-demographic changes in families, with same sex marriages and families with one child/no children, are gradually changing the traditional roles, and will help democratise the care economy in cities.

Civil society and local authorities’ representatives in the steering group will formulate a set of key recommendations on the basis of the discussion in the breakout groups.

Detailed Report

I. Context and Methodology

The EU's Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in External Action 2021–2025 (GAP III) aims to accelerate progress towards gender equality worldwide. It commits the EU to enhance the inclusion of and foster strategic engagement with civil society partners and women's rights organisations throughout its implementation, notably at the local level. In this context, the Directorate General for International Partnerships (INTPA) and the European External Action Service (EEAS) host an annual structured dialogue within the Policy Forum on Development (PFD), to include a diverse range of civil society organisations, including women's rights organisations, and local authorities. The 2023 annual dialogue had the following objectives:

- Take stock of the progress achieved at mid-term of GAP III implementation, in particular regarding engagement with civil society and local authority organisations in partner countries. The discussion was based on the results of the independent mid-term evaluation¹; the Joint Mid-Term Report by the Commission and the High Representative/Vice-President Borrell²; and civil society's and local authorities' own assessments of GAP III implementation.
- Engage in in-depth discussion on the promotion by the EU and development partners of the care economy and decent care work in partner countries as a pivotal aspect for women's and girls' empowerment.
- Contribute to the formulation of recommendations for effective implementation of the GAP III.

II. Opening Remarks

Sara Simon, Policy Forum on Development Team Leader, moderator, welcomed the participants to the meeting, and noted that the Joint mid-term report on the implementation of GAP III³ was released on November 20, 2023. In line with the recommendations of the Independent Evaluation of GAP III for 2023⁴, **Commissioner Jutta Urpilainen** announced that the current GAP will be extended to 2027, to align with the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF).

Erica Gerretsen, Director of Human Development, Migration, Governance & Peace, DG INTPA, underscored that the Joint mid-term report on the implementation of GAP III has taken into account the finding of an independent evaluation and other assessments received through consultations and reports, including the parallel report on GAP III's implementation carried out by CONCORD⁵. The mid-term report is an important accountability exercise, and the Commission hopes to continue to engage in an open, constructive debate with all partners on how to further improve implementation.

¹ [Mid term evaluation of the EU Gender Action Plan III](#)

² [Joint mid-term report on the implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan \(GAP III\)](#)

³ [Joint mid-term report on the implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan \(GAP III\)](#)

⁴ [Evaluation of EU External Action – Response of the EU Services](#)

⁵ [Implementing the EU Gender Action Plan III: Turning ambition into impact?](#)

Jutta Urpilainen, EU Commissioner for International Partnerships, highlighted that GAP III has contributed to a more strategic EU vision for a gender-equal world. The EU and its Member States have engaged in a Team Europe approach to promote gender equality in partner countries with national authorities and other relevant local actors, and country level implementation plans (CLIPs) were set up in almost all partner countries. Such collaboration has achieved tangible progress, including improved political environments, regulatory frameworks and gender equality programmes. Secondly, the number of actions and funding for gender equality has increased through better gender mainstreaming and gender targeted actions, with 72% of external actions featuring gender equality as a significant or principal policy objective in 2022, which is an 8-point increase from 2020. Funding for gender equality has reached over EUR 22 billion in the first two years of implementation, and Team Europe is also integrating gender equality efforts into the EUR 300 billion Global Gateway strategy. Several new flagship Team Europe initiatives have been launched to support women, in areas such as sexual and reproductive health and rights, equal access to quality education and access to finance for young female entrepreneurs. Third, the EU has increased engagement with partner governments and women organisations, with a total of 84% of EU delegations engaging in civil society dialogues on gender equality in 2022. EU delegations have also worked together with CSOs on joint initiatives such as the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative. New programmes, such as the EUR 40 million Women and Youth for Democracy Programme, aim to support civil society initiatives that strengthen the rights and participation of women and girls in civic and political life. The Commissioner noted that there is still a long way to go, and we need to build on efforts, which is why the GAP III has been extended to align its duration with the 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework.

III. GAP III Implementation: Results and Lesson Learned

Assessments by civil society and local authority representatives

Marie Tempesta, Advocacy Advisor at the International Planned Parenthood Federation European Network, speaking on behalf of CONCORD gender equality working group on the implementation of GAP III, welcomed the extension of the GAP until 2027 in alignment with the MFF. With respect to the midterm evaluation report, there is room for improving CLIPs as part of the revision process. The review should serve as an opportunity to better mainstream the principles of GAP, including intersectionality, and ensure the translation of commitments in CLIPs into concrete programming. It should also be an opportunity to have more gender targeted actions and serve as an opportunity to connect with CSOs in continuous dialogue through the implementation of the GAP. Regarding the implementation of the intersectionality principle, the CONCORD report shows that progress still needs to be made, noting that the extent to which the gender country profiles and CLIPs have integrated intersectionality varied widely across EU delegations. To improve implementation, Marie recommended concrete actions, including through explicit commitment to review the CLIPs from an intersectional perspective. With respect to funding, the number of gender-targeted actions and the achievement of the related targets is still lagging. There is also a challenge to assess how a gender perspective is included in other sector programmes, which have larger budgets and outreach. Furthermore, smaller CSOs still have difficulties in accessing resources and EU funding, and therefore, she encouraged the EU to provide accessible, long-term funding to women's rights organisations and feminist movements.

HE Stella Ronner-Grubačić as Ambassador for Gender and Diversity, European External Action Service (EEAS), stated that GAP III has clearly elevated gender equality as a strategic priority in EU external action. The EU works to mainstreaming gender across key EU strategies. For example, gender equality has found its way into the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence (adopted March 2022) and

the Global Gateway Strategy. Overall, GAP III has helped shape a common and collective vision and also changing external policies by placing the rights of women and their empowerment at the forefront, even in critical and extremely sensitive issues relating to security. In addition, EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy is driven by the principle of unanimity. EU policies as set by council conclusions, such as for the Spotlight Initiative or EU-LAC relations, which were adopted the previous week underlined the EU's determination to continue promoting gender equality. The conclusions emphasise that gender equality and the full enjoyment of all human rights by women are at the core of European values. With regard to GAP III implementation, the importance of "gender responsive leadership" (GRL) cannot be overstated. Therefore, GRL training for EEAS managers was introduced. In recent years, EEAS made progress towards gender parity and 40% of heads of delegations are women. Furthermore, more work needs to be done to include women in matters related to peace and security, hence concerning the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. The extension of GAP III and its alignment with the MFF allows EU to accelerate its implementation.

Chiara Adamo, Head of Unit for Gender Equality, Human Rights and Democratic Governance, DG INTPA, agreed that more work is to be done to address intersecting forms of discrimination, but there is progress. Examples include EU support for women with disabilities in Uganda, and for the protection of LGBTIQ human rights defenders in Costa Rica. In Guatemala, the EU engages very much with Mayan women in environment protection and natural resource management. Funding for women's rights organisations has increased by 155% in 2022 compared to 2020, and new programmes such as the Advocacy, Coalition Building and Transformative Feminist Action (ACT)⁶ programme in support of WROs combating gender-based violence and the Women and Youth for Democracy programme⁷ will provide new funding opportunities. Local calls for proposals including sub-granting and support schemes are being developed to make sure that grassroots organisations are among the beneficiaries. In the framework of the Youth Action Plan, the Youth Empowerment Fund⁸ will make available low barrier funding for young people at community grassroots level. It is available for youth-led initiatives working for gender equality, and the first call will be launched in 2024.

The floor was then opened for comments and questions. Some of the main issues raised were that women organisations are getting only the 1% of the gender budget, and that women's political participation is very limited in many countries owing in part to lack of resources and funding. Notably, women's economic empowerment and lack of inheritance rights in many places are limiting factors. **Women's Rights Center of Montenegro** noted that only a small percent of the EU money is actually targeted and going to grassroots and local organisations, especially in the Western Balkans region. **UCLG ASPAC** noted efforts of local authorities to create cities of care, mainstream gender in planning and implement gender responsive budgeting. **Chiara Adamo** pointed out that the Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI) have been rolling out a couple of interesting programmes, some adopted in 2022, one of which is a global programme called Inclusivity and Peace and Security for EUR 11.1 million, which might be of interest. Furthermore, a new action will be launched in the context of the Women and Youth Democracy initiative, precisely focused on

⁶ https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/news-and-events/news/eu-and-un-women-boost-womens-rights-coalitions-ending-violence-against-women-2023-09-18_en#:~:text=The%20Advocacy%2C%20Coalition%20Building%20and,vio%20against%20women%20and%20girls.

⁷ https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/news-and-events/news/summit-democracy-eu-launches-milestone-programmes-empower-youth-key-actors-democracy-2023-03-31_en

⁸ https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/news-and-events/news/eu-launches-youth-empowerment-fund-new-partnership-worlds-largest-youth-organisations-support-young-2023-10-04_en

supporting women's political participation. She highlighted the importance of measuring impact of the work done in the longer term, which requires everyone to use the newly introduced marker.

IV. Promoting the Care Economy

Background

Women spend a disproportionate amount of time on unpaid care and domestic work. Statistics show that, globally, women spend 3.2 times more hours on unpaid care work than men (UNESCAP, 2022). This gendered division of labour and resulting time poverty of women have far-reaching implications, including unequal participation in the labour market and income poverty for women. The need to combine paid work and care and domestic tasks means that women are often overrepresented in informal, low paid work, flexible work, with no access to social security benefits. In recognition of these gendered challenges, the importance of including care-related policies and services as part of a comprehensive gender-responsive social protection system is increasingly being advocated for by international actors.

Giulia Massobrio, Coordinator of the Trade Union Development Cooperation Network - International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) highlighted that the care economy is a top priority for the trade union movement because it is a key labour issue. With regard to the global workforce, 11.5% of it is made of care workers and of these, two thirds are women. ITUC advocates for the care economy, and calls for the '5R' Framework for Decent Care Work to recognise, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work; reward care workers by generating more and better-quality care work, including pay; and promote the representation of unpaid carers, care workers and care recipients in social dialogue. The intention is to take what is traditionally done by women and make it a public responsibility to fund, organise and deliver. The main areas of focus are investments, policies and decent work. Regarding investments, they call for adequate public investments of GDP to go to the care economy, as studies reveal the huge potential in terms of the number of jobs that can be created. Per the International Labour Organization (ILO), investment in universal childcare and long term can create 280 million jobs by 2030. Regarding policy, they call for gender responsive public policies and active labour market policies to enable women to get paid jobs. This includes family friendly labour market policies such as teleworking agreements, parental leave, and flexible working hours. Regarding decent work, they call for jobs to be formal, to have safe working conditions, to have an adequate wage, and be free from any kind of discrimination. Trade unions have been active in advocating for these policies and making them a reality. There is now a lot of momentum for the right to care: the UN launched the International Day for Care and Support; the UNHRC adopted a resolution on the centrality of care and support; the UN established Global Alliance for Care; and the UN has the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection.

Eva del Hoyo, Director General for Sustainable Development Policies, Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (EU Presidency holder), referred to the process of the Spanish Presidency in drawing up the guidelines⁹ on the care economy and stressed on the importance of working in alliance with many different partners in the world. The pandemic was an eye-opening situation and as such the presidency wanted to identify why women had to assume the largest part of the care process. The presidency wanted to address the care economy through public services, new infrastructures, and social protection policies to promote a shared responsibility in the households and families. Of all domestic workers globally, 76% of them are women. The guidelines drawn by the presidency are addressed to Member States, development partners, local governments, CSOs, non-governmental entities, and companies, and are designed to contribute to

⁹ Please see Annex 4

building a transformative care agenda. Key transformations are required in the areas of coherence, governance, participation; for the improvement of planning and management; and for knowledge management, evaluation, and communication.

V. Break-out Sessions' Proposed Recommendations

Participants were split up into breakout groups to discuss promising practices of transformative care policy and the role of the EU and other development actors in promoting decent care work in partner countries. The discussions in each of the breakout groups¹⁰ were guided by two questions:

1. What lessons can be drawn from successful models, policies and strategies of care economy promotion in different regions, and how can these models be adapted to different cultural and socioeconomic contexts?
2. How do you imagine a care-centred, gender-responsive city, and what services and structures would be in these cities?

On the question of **lessons drawn from successful models of care economy promotion**, the main **conclusions** were:

- Investments in the care economy can create more jobs, whereby the return on the investment is actually better compared to infrastructure projects.
- The care economy encompasses care for the environment, such as when women collect waste or recycle, which adds huge value to communities, but is often underpaid or unpaid, and even discriminated against.
- In times of austerity, countries are pushed to reduce funding for social services. Consequently, women are the first buffer of an economic crisis and their unpaid care labour is increased.
- In general, there is a lack of awareness and few campaigns to spread knowledge and awareness regarding the importance of the care economy.
- There is a lack of inter institutional coordination.
- Decision making process at the very basic levels of social protection programmes do not correspond with reality; more female voices should be included in decision making processes.

The proposed **recommendations** were:

On adaptation of models:

- Models must take into account the socio-economic and cultural contexts when implementing strategies for the care economy, respecting specific conditions and diversities.
- Respect indigenous and cultural sensitivities, taking into account the socio-cultural makeup of communities.
- Encourage the exchange of experiences and lessons learned, whilst acknowledging that tools must be adapted to each specific context in a country, and within a country.
- Understand how each community defines its concept of a care economy.

On actors in society:

- Recognise inherent skills of women and connect this to sustainable economic models for circular economy.
- Incorporate the voices of disadvantaged segments of society, such as immigrants and persons with disabilities. Migrants should be encouraged to come together to organise for their labour rights.

¹⁰ Please see Annex 1 for detailed information on the full output from the breakout groups

- Consider different kinds of vulnerability that are not always evident, in order to be as comprehensive as possible.
- Explore the role of religious figures, trade unions, and volunteers as potential actors who could contribute to fostering a care economy that breaks stereotypes and includes men and boys.
- Include informal structures that have proven useful and successful in supporting care economies into formal and structured policies.
- Include social participation mechanisms and community participation in care policies at the territorial level so that key actors can participate in the design and the follow up of care policies.
- Follow a gender transformative approach.
- Support cooperatives and recognise the role they play in the care sector.

On funds:

- Allocate more funds, whether from the state, international organisations, or private sector to support the care economy. Unless there is funding, policy is ineffective.
- Encourage public-private partnerships.
- The private sector, through various industries and corporations, must also explore services to support working mothers and parents in general, such as childcare services or flexible working models.
- Informal grassroot movements that lack a legal status must also be funded in spite of their legal status, as they have proven to be effective in local communities. Several funding donors unfortunately overlook these movements because of their lack of a legal status.
- Encourage donors and institutions to reconsider policies that call for reducing spending on social services during financial crises.

On policies:

- Follow a more structured approach towards care, especially care for children and the elderly, which are the main reasons why some women are left out of the job market.
- Incorporate suggestions to improve policies related to care services in the context of CLIPs' revision.
- Unpaid work should be accounted for in the national GDP, which is the first step for recognition of what the care economy entails.
- Focus on mainstreaming of legislative frameworks on anti-discrimination and gender equality, as well as equal opportunities to education.
- Address intersectionality when addressing inequality and discrimination. A multi-dimensional and intersectional approach is highly recommended.
- Care models, policies, and related services must be inclusive of persons with disabilities.
- Establish and use relevant and updated statistical data to draw effective policies based on accurate data that reflect realities.
- A successful care model pays attention to the issue of domestic violence against women, as healing and self-care are also dimensions of a care economy.
- Concerted efforts on local, national, regional and international levels are required for gender sensitive policies in all sectors.
- Social protection systems, including social security schemes, must take into account the care economy.

On the question of how a **care centred, gender responsive city looks like**, the **general conclusions** were:

- Services in a care centred city must be designed according to importance or priority, whilst also considering which of those are transversal and transnational. For instance, cities are big and growing, and thus, transportation should be more gender sensitive.
- Socio-demographic changes are taking place worldwide in families, with same sex marriages and families with one child/no children, which is changing the traditional roles, and will subsequently help democratise the care economy in cities.
- In European countries, as in many of countries elsewhere, the welfare state is being dismantled and privatised, even with regard to the very basic social protection programmes, and therefore, cities must reconsider these services and adapt them to the realities and needs of each city.
- The burden of care remains unpaid, unrecognised, and largely assumed by women.
- Women play an important role in the circular economy and responsible consumerism and are more willing to change their daily patterns for the sake of environmental protection.

The proposed **recommendations** were:

On services:

- Invest in effective infrastructure and design accessible and quality care services to encourage women to make use of them, including through private sector initiatives.
- Design infrastructure in a manner that would facilitate key services, particularly transport, with consideration of people with disabilities and their caregivers.
- Consider the multicultural dimension in a cosmopolitan city with linguistic variety. Certain services, such as the translation service, could add great value to a large segment of the care economy society.
- Establish and facilitate intergenerational spaces, where young people and older women take care of each other and share experiences.
- Create formal and informal enabling spaces for dialogue and exchanges of view to shed light on the sectors and services of priority.
- Consider the issue of security in cities and the risk factors that women and girls face within a care ecosystem.
- Ease access to financial resources, especially for young people, such as through village savings and loans associations.
- Realize that each city has its specific requirements, challenges, and services of priority that should be adapted to the setting in question.
- Ensure that cities include safe public areas and streets for women who provide care services.
- Introduce enabler services to support women engage in public life and the labour market.
- Recognise that women's access to productive services includes land and financial services such as bank cards.

On identifying needs and budgeting:

- Promote effective use of gender responsive budgeting by local governments for effective services and policies.
- The European Commission is encouraged to consider gender responsive budgeting as an effective tool in the care economies and how cities are designed.
- Use databases and statistics to understand women's needs in cities, and consider the reality of each city and the specific needs in that regard.
- Cultural contexts should be taken into account in large cities with caregivers from different cultural backgrounds. For instance, medical attention by providers from the same gender is key to certain conservative demographics.

On awareness:

- Use and employ the education system and awareness building activities, as this will lead socio-cultural change and recognise the legitimacy of this work.
- Organise dialogue with schools to raise awareness of youth regarding equal gender care in order to enshrine the concept with future generations.
- Raise the awareness of the society and policymakers alike that care economy is not for women only, as it incorporates society as a whole and should therefore be a political issue of interest to the community at large.
- Use movies to promote community's structures that are focused on care economy.

On the environment:

- Protect the environment, whereby cities are facing climate change and environmental degradation, which will affect care systems.
- Consider waste collection and subsequent recycling tasks as caregiving tasks, owing to the impact they have on cities and the wellbeing of the society.

VI. Closing Remarks

Chiara Adamo concluded that the EU wants to promote gender-responsive social protection systems, and one way of going about that is supporting gender-responsive budgeting and the promotion of decent care work. The EU is also looking at business environment reforms to achieve equal opportunities and women's participation in the labour market. She thanked participants for their active participation and closed the meeting.