



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

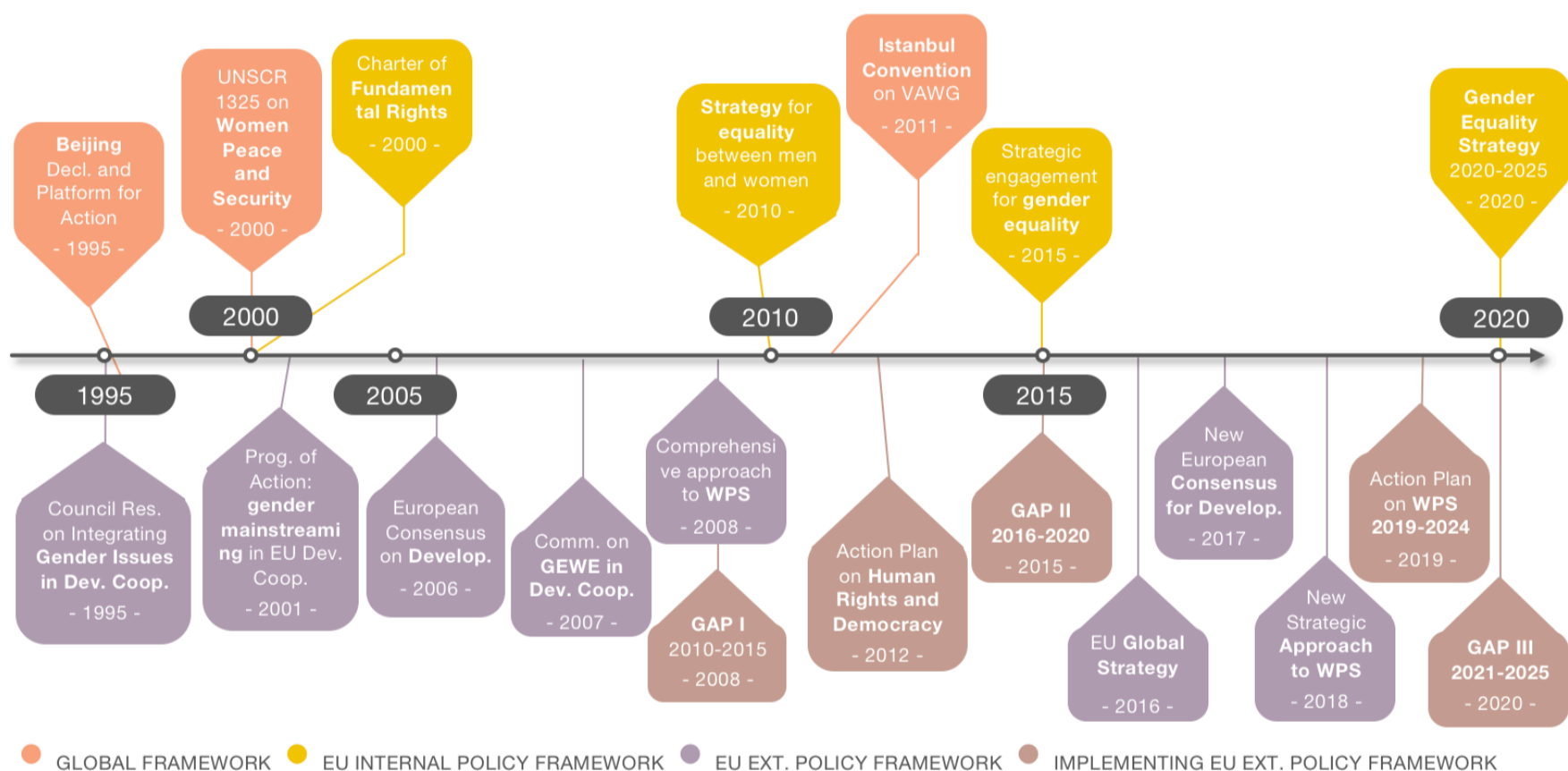
EVALUATION OF THE EU'S EXTERNAL ACTION SUPPORT IN THE AREA OF GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' EMPOWERMENT

PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION

Provide an independent, evidence-based assessment of the contribution of European Union (EU) external action support in the area of Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Empowerment (GEWE).

GEOGRAPHIC SCOPE: All third countries.

TEMPORAL SCOPE: This study covers the period **2010-2018** for the Enlargement region and **2014-2018** for the other regions.



CONTEXT

As a **core value** enshrined in the EU's treaties and legislation, including those of EU Member States (MS), GEWE is central to EU relations with third countries.

The EU's reference framework for external action in the area of GEWE has also built on **global frameworks** such as the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 2000 United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS).

In 2008, the EU launched the first EU Gender Action Plan (GAP I). GAP I was adopted with a view to support gender equality both outside the EU and

inside the Commission services involved in development cooperation. In 2015, the EU adopted a successor action plan, GAP II. GAP II strengthened the emphasis on an EU institutional culture shift related to GEWE, embraced more explicitly all areas of EU external action and outlined the EU's strategic objectives around three thematic pillars: i) women's and girls' physical and psychological integrity; ii) empowerment of women and girls and promoting their socio-economic rights; and iii) strengthening voice and participation of women and girls.

Key findings

▶ The overall policy framework for EU external action in the area of GEWE significantly improved during the period under review. However, at the country level, a clear strategic vision on GEWE was often lacking among European actors (EU and EU Member States – EU MS).

▶ Previous evaluations of EU external action on gender (2003, 2015) called for fundamental changes in EU institutional culture. This has not yet occurred. Important capacity building needs persist and improvements in leadership and internal accountability have been slow and uneven across European actors.

▶ Even after several decades of efforts to strengthen gender mainstreaming in EU external action, successes remained limited during the period under review. This reflects the slow changes in institutional culture highlighted above.

▶ Although the full potential of joint EU programming and implementation is still to be harnessed, EU external action has added value to what EU MS could have achieved on their own related to GEWE. This applies especially to joint work in international fora; less so, and with high variability, to cooperation at the country level.

▶ While European actors have forged partnerships and joint initiatives with relevant international organisations such as UN agencies, coordination with these organisations at country level, especially to strengthen policy dialogue and the role played by national women’s machineries in national policy processes, has remained insufficient.

▶ Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) have often been a cornerstone for implementation of EU support; but, the quality of partnerships has been uneven, and the challenge of adequately responding to needs of grass-roots organisations remains unresolved.

▶ There have been advantages in the various financing instruments and modalities available to the EU to support GEWE. However, weaknesses in gender mainstreaming have led to an inadequate use of the mix of modalities and instruments available to support GEWE in an integrated and strategic way.

▶ There were positive achievements in all thematic areas where the EU has provided substantial support. In particular, EU made notable contributions to the strengthening of normative frameworks, including through actions promoting the Women Peace and Security (WPS) agenda and the specific interventions focussing on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). The EU has also enhanced CSO actions in the area of VAWG in many countries.

▶ A lack of strategic and integrated approach as well as difficulties in scaling up efforts based on successful experiences hampered the effectiveness of EU support to GEWE, particularly in the work done with CSOs.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The evaluation followed a **theory-based** approach that relied on **mixed methods** to assess EU support in the area of GEWE. The design chosen revolved around multiple case studies, with data collection activities being carried out during an extensive desk phase and a (partially remote due in part to the COVID-19 pandemic) field phase. To guide data collection and analysis, the team prepared a detailed evaluation matrix, structured around **nine evaluation questions (EQs)**:

- Six EQs focused on the EU strategic framework, EU approaches to implementation and the EU’s institutional culture shift on GEWE.
- Three EQs focused on the GAP II key thematic areas:
 - i) physical and psychological integrity of women,
 - ii) economic and social women’s empowerment and
 - iii) women’s voice and participation.

The combination of tools and methods used for data collection and analysis varied according to the different EQs, but multiple sources were systematically used to triangulate the information collected. These activities included an extensive documentary review, a financial analysis on EU external action, phone and face-to-face interviews and three online surveys.

The main challenges encountered were coping with gathering data on outcomes and impacts, the inconsistency of some datasets at EU level, obtaining documentation on non-sponsoring activities (e.g., policy dialogue), and coping with the field phase in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

18 CASE STUDIES

Comprising twelve country case studies, two regional case studies, one thematic case study on gender mainstreaming in budget support, and three EU MS action case studies.



9 FIELD VISITS

A total of nine extensive missions were held (four took place in-country and the rest were done remotely with, in several cases, support from experts based in the partner country). The team also carried out seven “lighter” remote missions (with a more limited number of interviews).



2.000 DOCUMENTS

Over 2.000 documents consulted on a range of GEWE-related issues (including an average of roughly 80 documents per case study).



290 INTERLOCUTORS

More than 290 interlocutors were interviewed (both remotely and face-to-face in Brussels or during the field and remote missions).



3 E-SURVEYS

Implemented, at both the global and country level, which provided responses from over 600 respondents (officials from EU Delegations, governments, EU MS Embassies, donors and international partners, CSOs)



Conclusions

Based on the findings presented in the answers to the evaluation questions, the team identified 11 conclusions grouped in three clusters.

POLICY LEVEL

1 Policy ambition

The high policy ambition of the EU in the area of GEWE has translated into increased attention to GEWE in most dimensions of EU external action, but no quantum leap has been observed during the period under review.

2 Overarching strategic framework

From 2015 on, GAP II has served as a useful tool for providing overarching strategic directions and for demonstrating the EU's commitment to GEWE; however, tailoring this 'open architecture' to specific contexts and translating it into a coherent strategic framework at country level have turned out to be challenging.

INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

3 Leadership and accountability

Despite unambiguous political messages at the highest level of the EU, the EU GEWE agenda has been pushed more by a few highly committed staff than by strong senior management engagement.

4 Expertise

While genuine efforts have been made to strengthen gender expertise within the EU, overall gender capacity has remained too weak to ensure an effective implementation of the EU's policy commitments in the area of GEWE.

5 Intra-EU coordination

Despite some challenges, there has been good communication within EU services and among European actors; overall, there has been strong EU added value in EU external action in the area of GEWE.

PROGRAMMING AND IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL

6 Strategic vision at country level

At the country level, EU external action in the area of GEWE often did not reflect a strong strategic vision based on clear priorities and a sound analysis of, e.g., the most pressing needs, the most effective entry points, and the most appropriate sequencing.

7 Gender mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming has remained weak with three general aspects largely explaining the limited improvement in this area: i) the lack of EU strategic vision on GEWE at country level; ii) the lack of understanding of the concept of 'gender mainstreaming', in particular its strategic nature; and iii) the mismatch between the EU policy ambitions in GEWE and the resources mobilised to achieve them. However, significant gender-targeted funding in bilateral cooperation has had strong positive effects on gender mainstreaming.

8 Partnerships: national government & international organisations

The EU has substantially strengthened its partnerships with international organisations (esp. UN agencies and the Council of Europe).

and this has enhanced EU external action in the area of GEWE at various levels; however, coordination with these organisations at country level, especially to strengthen the role played by national women machineries in national policy processes, has remained insufficient

9 Partnerships with CSOs

While the EU's substantial support to CSOs active in GEWE has led to many positive experiences, the EU has yet to find an approach to ensure a more strategic and more comprehensive partnership on GEWE with these actors at country level, including a stronger involvement of grass-root organisations in EU external action.

10 Monitoring & Evaluation

There has been a lack of monitoring and evaluation at both local and national levels, which has significantly hampered accountability and learning.

11 Results

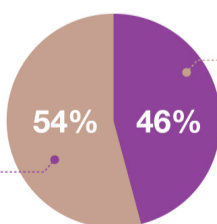
Despite the broad relevance of EU external action in the area of GEWE, visible results at the macro-level have been limited; achieving them has been hampered by weaknesses in the design of EU support to GEWE, but also by adverse contextual factors as well as challenges that are beyond the capacity of one single actor like the EU to address.



EUR 1.106 billion

were contracted for gender-targeted interventions, during the period 2014-2018

EUR 596 million allocated to country-level support



EUR 509 million allocated to regional/-multi-country interventions

Targeted GEWE support reached a peak in 2018

with EUR 424 million of contracted amount in this area that year

Most of the committed amounts went to Africa

Sub-Saharan Africa received 52% of the total gender targeted support, and the Enlargement region 3% of the total



66%

of the targeted interventions treated Physical and Psychological Integrity (including VAWG)



EUR 507 million

Support channelled via UN agencies, mainly UN Women, UNDP and UNICEF



EUR 432 million

Support channelled via CSOs, represented by 15% Women's organisations

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions, the team developed nine recommendations, each underpinned by a limited set of concrete actions to be taken to enhance EU external action in the area of GEWE.

POLICY LEVEL	R1	Continue with the Gender Action Plan, while improving it	The EU and EU MS should develop a successor strategy to GAP II capitalising on the experience gained under GAP II (and before), while clarifying some concepts and better presenting the interlinkages between the dimensions underpinning the framework.
	R2	Ensure stronger leadership on GEWE	The EU should step up efforts to ensure strong leadership on GEWE of EU's top management at Headquarters (HQ) and country level.

INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL	R3	Place gender nearer to the top within the EU institutional environment	The EU should ensure that, at HQ and country level, decision-making processes (incl. on programming) systematically involve staff or structures with a clear mandate related to GEWE.
	R4	Improve EU gender expertise, especially at the country level	The EU should improve gender expertise at all levels, but special efforts should be made at the country level, including allocation of resources for systematic mobilisation of project-based gender experts.

PROGRAMMING AND IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL	R5	Develop a shared strategic vision at country level	The EU should develop a strategic vision of what to do, and how, with regard to GEWE at country level which supports policy dialogue and is shared by all main European actors.
	R6	Step up efforts for continuous gender analysis and application	The EU should sustain recent efforts made in developing gender analysis, while stepping up efforts to ensure their ownership by EU staff and national stakeholders and strengthen national statistical capacity in partner countries.
	R7	Introduce stringent rules for gender mainstreaming	The EU should implement more stringent measures to ensure the integration of a gender perspective in new interventions and monitor gender mainstreaming in implementation.
	R8	Consolidate partnerships with international organisations, specially at country level	The EU should consolidate partnerships with international organisations at country level, including through increased staff awareness of existing joint initiatives and better linkages of EU support with international processes led by UN agencies.
	R9	Enhance the involvement of CSOs in EU support to GEWE	The EU should enhance the involvement of CSOs, including women's organisations, in EU support to GEWE, including through better integrating them in initiatives on GEWE at country level and more adapted support to grass-root organisations.

