

PLAN INTERNATIONAL CONTRIBUTION TO EU GENDER ACTION PLAN III CONSULTATION

April 2020



As the EU and its Member States are renewing their commitment to gender equality and setting their vision for the successor of the [Gender Action Plan II](#) (GAP), we observe simultaneously unprecedented opportunities for women and girls and a backlash against their rights. **The GAP III is an opportunity for the EU to take a stand for girls and young women in all their diversity around the world** and to promote the achievement of SDG5 on gender equality, building on the priorities of the GAP II and strengthening its gender transformative approach. This paper aims to provide recommendations to strengthen key areas of the future GAP III, focusing on the main areas of work of Plan International¹.

Plan International welcomed the approach of the GAP II which recognises social norms, gender-based discrimination, intersectionality, and structural inequalities as significant factors that affect girls and women's economic, social and political life, and the necessity to support their agency in all areas.

¹ Plan International is an international development and humanitarian NGO. The EU hub strives to advance children's rights and gender equality for girls in the EU's external action. This paper was written with inputs from 11 national offices and the collaboration of [Equal Measures 2030](#).

Plan International stresses the need to apply a **cross-cutting gender transformative approach** in all GAP actions. Implementing a gender transformative approach means:

- identifying and addressing social and gender norms throughout the life course;
- strengthening girls' agency, including through knowledge and equal access to resources;
- working with boys and men to embrace positive masculinities and promote gender equality;
- considering girls, boys, young women and young men in all their diversity when identifying and responding to their needs, including those with disabilities or who identify as LGTBIQ+;
- seeking to improve the social position (value or status) of girls and young women in society;
- fostering enabling policy, budgetary and institutional frameworks to support girls, boys, young women and young men towards gender equality.

In addition, as an organisation working with and for children and youth with a focus on girls, we believe that it is essential to consider age as well as gender in all interventions and efforts targeting girls. Girls have specific needs that are distinct from those of adult women, yet when they are seen as part of wider groups such as 'children' or 'women of all ages', there is often a failure to recognise the unique challenges they face. **A life-cycle approach should be better integrated into all pillars and actions of the future GAP.** This goes beyond simply adding “girls” where “women” are mentioned: whenever referring to girls, the barriers and challenges they face as well as the proposed actions to overcome them should be made explicit. Moreover, **the GAP III should integrate and reflect in its actions the principle of intersectionality:** girls and women are not a homogeneous group and the inequality and discrimination they experience differ according to the combination of gender, age and other factors.

Themes and priorities

In addition to the three cross-cutting elements outlined above, for the GAP III to truly unlock the potential of girls and young women, we recommend the EU to focus on the following:

1. **Ensure that girls thrive and grow up equally valued and cared for, free from discrimination, violence and fear:** Challenging discriminatory social norms and unequal power dynamics between girls and boys and women and men is critical to ending all forms of gender-based violence in both development and emergency settings. The age factor is also critical: objectives and activities related to ending discrimination and violence against girls (including access to justice and the strengthening of child protection systems) need to respect the principles and rights contained in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In addition, specific contexts or places where girls may be subject to violence, such as online, at school and in the city (in public transportation) should receive attention. This can improve girls' mobility and their opportunities and have a positive impact on their freedom of expression, their participation and their education. In conflicts and emergency settings, sexual and gender-based violence increases due to the breakdown of protection structures within communities. Girls and women can become systematic targets in conflict situations. Concerns regarding their safety can restrict their social roles and their free movement, create further barriers to accessing services and rights, and can lead displaced communities to resort to negative coping mechanisms such as child, early and forced marriage and child labour.
2. **Ensure the right of all girls and young women to make their own free and informed choices and to have control over their sexual and reproductive health and lives, free from coercion, violence, discrimination and abuse.** This covers different topics, such as the discrimination girls and women face from menstruation taboos, adolescent pregnancy, information about and access to sexual and reproductive services, and fighting female genital mutilation/cutting and child, early and forced marriage.

3. **Continue working on quality, inclusive education at all levels.** Quality, inclusive education with a crosscutting gender transformative approach should aim to eradicate gender stereotypes and generate positive references for girls that inspire them to access technical careers and management positions. Moreover, education is a fundamental right that must be guaranteed in times of conflict and disaster.
4. **Better reflect the life-cycle approach in actions supporting social and economic rights and empowerment.** In childhood and adolescence this entails equal access to inheritance, birth registration, a reduced burden of unpaid care work through the promotion of shared responsibilities and investment in care services, access to financial and digital literacy, to technical and vocational education and training, and protection from child labour and all forms of exploitation. In young adulthood (age 18-24), young women need access to financial assets and services; skills for business and entrepreneurship; and access to decent work and labour standards, including most recent standards from the International Labour Organisation on sexual harassment in the world of work. In addition, the GAP III needs challenge gender norms and expectations about girls and young women's future role in the world of work, including by encouraging and enabling them to learn Science, Technology, Engineering and Math and Information, Communication and Technology skills.
5. **For everyone to equally benefit from the digital transformation, it is important to recognise and address the digital gender gap.** Actions may include developing digital skills and challenging discriminatory norms about girls' access to and use of the internet. Moreover, girls and young women use digital technology and online platforms to express themselves, including as a form of political participation. Online abuse and harassment, which predominantly affects girls and women, silences them and makes them withdraw from these spaces. Digital literacy and skills, as well as protection from online violence and harassment are key to support their empowerment and their participation in a digitalised world.
6. **The next GAP III should seek, in collaboration with partner countries, to better reach out to girls and young women in all their diversity and support their agency, as well as their role as active drivers of change in formal processes, in order to successfully promote their political empowerment on the long term.** Recognising that nowadays girls and young women are increasingly involved in informal structures and forms of political participation, it is important to support movements and activism in addition to youth organisation working on gender equality. Equally, the GAP III should collaborate with partner countries to promote and strengthen formal mechanisms for girls and young women's participation in decision-making processes, and continue supporting the engagement of youth-led, grassroots organisations as well as girls human rights defenders, taking into account their specific vulnerabilities being both young and female. In line with an intersectional approach, the EU should also take into consideration that participation is far from equal for girls and young women living in poor and vulnerable contexts, in rural and remote areas, with lower levels of education, who are less engaged in any form of participation. Finally, the next GAP should support the EU's Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2019-2024. In particular, it should recognise and facilitate the key role and added-value of girls and young women, by ensuring conflict prevention and peacebuilding initiatives include strategies to build their capacity in fragile and conflict-affected States, and by addressing the distinct barriers to their participation in formal and informal decision-making processes in these contexts. This will also contribute to ensure that the challenges and rights-violations they face in crises and conflicts are recognised.

7. **Reaffirm the commitment of 85% of new programmes having gender equality as a principal or significant objective (scores G-1 and G-2 on the OECD-DAC Gender marker).** Within this target, 20% of programmes should have gender equality as a principal objective, to ensure that specific actions are properly resourced, complementing gender mainstreaming. It is crucial that these commitments are included in the Neighbourhood, International and Development Cooperation Instrument under Heading 6 of the proposed MFF 2021-2027. As highlighted in [Council Conclusions on the GAP II](#), the commitment of financial resources to gender equality is essential for the effective implementation of the GAP. In addition, Plan International calls for accurate tracking of all spending on gender-related activities, with indicators to assess the impact.
8. **Invest in human resources and technical expertise to lead and support the implementation of the GAP III.** EU Delegations need adequate support and gender focal points who are trained and equipped with the authority and tools to lead on implementing the GAP as a key priority, and to advise their colleagues on how to better incorporate gender transformative actions in other areas of the Delegation's work.
9. **Strengthen data collection, indicators, monitoring and evaluation.** Significant data gaps remain on the issues highlighted above. Gender data collection should be considered a cross-cutting strategy throughout the EU GAP III, recognising that concerted effort and investment are still needed to be able to analyse and act on the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination faced by girls and women. Moreover, the GAP III should contain clear, measurable, time-bound indicators, in line with the SDGs and including an allocation of responsibility for different actors – such as the European Commission and Member States. In order to integrate an evidence-based life-cycle approach, we recommend adding specific indicators on girls and to collect data disaggregated by age, not only by sex, in initiatives and programmes implemented by the EU.

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