

Plan International's recommendations for a new EU Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy

Plan International EU Office welcomes the call of the European External Action Service to provide input on the review of the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy and would hereby like to put forward its recommendations for the 2020-2024 Action Plan, focusing on the main areas of work of Plan International.¹

The situation of girls, boys and young people in the world

There are currently 1,266 million young people aged 10-24 in the world, the majority of which live outside of Europe.² Harnessing this demographic dividend and ensuring equal rights for all remains a challenge in many regions, in particular for girls and young women. On one hand, **we observe unprecedented opportunities for women and girls' rights.** Their political, social and economic situation has improved in the last decade and they have greater representation and more decision-making power than ever before. Young women increasingly express their social and political engagement through protest and campaigning, and new means of communication have enabled global movements for women and girls' rights. **Still, no country in the world has achieved gender equality and we are witnessing a backlash against girls and women's rights, and their empowerment worldwide.**

Achievements are under threat from right wing and fundamentalist movements and this new wave seeks to limit girls and women's rights and their decision-making power, by overturning legislation that protects their rights and by challenging and seeing the concept of gender itself as a threat to traditional values and the family.³ In addition, in many countries, girls and women still face particular legal obstacles, which restrict their lives and impact on their ability to develop their full potential and pursue their ambitions. For example, the World Bank finds that in 2019 a 'typical economy gives women only three-fourths the legal rights of men'.⁴ In the political sphere, progress has been slow and women remain underrepresented at all levels of government and in political institutions, with a global average of only 24% of women parliamentarians.⁵ Women human rights defenders face unique challenges and risks of violence for being outspoken women and for defending women's and girl's rights. Finally, at the core of all this, gender norms and stereotypes are still a significant obstacle to gender equality, and influence women and girls' enjoyment of their rights both in the private and public sphere.

In this context, we firmly believe that gender equality will remain a key issue in the future, affecting girls from an early age throughout their life cycle. The EU Human Rights and Democracy Action Plan should continue to protect and promote women and girls' rights and consequently, gender equality.

¹ Plan International is a member of the Human Rights and Democracy Network and CONCORD, the European NGO Confederation for Development and Relief. Both networks are submitting recommendations on different aspects of the future EU Action Plan, which Plan International supports.

² UNFPA World Population [Dashboard](#), 2019.

³ 2018 [Report](#) of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice, A/HRC/38/46.

⁴ [Report](#) Women, Business and the Law 2019, World Bank.

⁵ Interparliamentary Union [data](#), 2019.

With this in mind, Plan International would like to put forward the following recommendations:

1. Mainstream gender throughout the Action Plan: this should be clearly articulated in the text. Given that girls and women make up approximately half the world's population, it is essential to make them visible by properly addressing their particular challenges throughout the different set of actions the Action Plan will address.
2. Non-discrimination on all grounds including age and sex should remain a key principle of the Action Plan.
3. Include a point on intersectionality, recognising that intersecting forms of discrimination might be present and active at the same time. This is true for girls who face discrimination due to both their gender and age. This means they face specific barriers to the full enjoyment of their rights.
4. Encourage the full ratification and implementation by signatory states of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Istanbul Convention to end all forms of violence against women. Support the Programme of Action addressing sexual and reproductive health and rights, adopted by the UN General Assembly at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo 1994.
5. Ensure coherence with other action plans such as the Gender Action Plan II and other documents such as the EU guidelines for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of the Child.
6. Recognise the interdependence of human rights: persistent gender discrimination will affect progress in all areas. For example, violence against women and girls not only leads to long term physical and mental consequences, it also has an impact on their active participation in society.
7. Protect individual rights, in particular sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR). All children and young people have the right 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. SRHR is fundamental to achieving gender equality.
8. Concerning the monitoring and evaluation of the Action Plan, the data collected on its impact must be disaggregated by gender and age.

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