



**COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS ON THE
GENDER ACTION PLAN 2016-2020
PLAN INTERNATIONAL EU OFFICE RESPONSE**

PLAN INTERNATIONAL EU OFFICE RESPONSE TO THE COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS ON THE GENDER ACTION PLAN 2016-2020

Plan International welcomes the adoption of Council Conclusions on the Gender Action Plan 2016-2020.

We note that the Gender Action Plan (GAP) is comprehensive and will guide the work of the whole EU, including relevant European Commission services¹, the European External Action Service (EEAS) and Member States, from 2016-2020. Together with the Council Conclusions, the GAP reconfirms the EU's commitment to putting gender equality and girls' and women's rights and empowerment at the heart of development cooperation and humanitarian assistance.

Key recommendations for the Implementation of the GAP

In order to achieve gender equality and girls' and women's empowerment it is clear that all EU actors must take a comprehensive and cross-sectoral approach, which the GAP currently comprises. Therefore, while we recognise the need for focus, we do not feel that it is sufficiently ambitious or comprehensive for any EU actor work on just one objective under the three thematic pillars of the Plan.

Gender-based discrimination is the single most important root cause of all forms of gender inequality which the Action Plan seeks to address. And the successful realisation of many of the activities and objectives in the Plan depends on discriminatory social norms being addressed. Yet most regrettably, tackling discrimination is relegated to one objective (D.19) towards the end of the Plan.

We would also question whether the Action Plan is truly results oriented, given the general nature of the activities proposed in most areas. It will be hard to track real progress if expected results are not more specific.

To ensure the failures of the previous GAP are not repeated, a step change is required in levels of funding specifically dedicated to gender equality. We reiterate and welcome the Council's call for greater financial resources to be committed to gender equality work as an essential requirement. The EU must meet the ambitions of the GAP by increasing the finance committed to gender equality in external action and by accurately tracking all spending on gender activities.

Human resources and technical expertise are also required to implement the GAP. EU Delegations must receive adequate support and gender focal points must have the authority to lead on implementing the GAP as a key priority area and to advise their colleagues on how better to incorporate gender transformative actions in other areas of the Delegation's work. This requires greater investment in training and support to EU Delegations on gender, buy-in from the highest levels and evaluations of all staff to incorporate gender equality knowledge and capacity.

The Council's call for yearly mandatory and systematic reporting by all EU actors on the GAP is key to its implementation. As is the request for Commission services and the EEAS to inform the Council on an annual basis regarding implementation of the GAP. However, in themselves they do not constitute an accountability framework, as the Council Conclusions suggest. Both sets of reporting information must be publically available and a regular discussion both with civil society and in the European Parliament must be guaranteed to ensure accountability and transparency on progress on gender equality.

The engagement of civil society throughout the full cycle of planning and implementation of the GAP is critical, and we welcome the Council's recognition of this. In particular EU Delegations must include local women's rights groups and grassroots civil society in consultations to determine their priorities in each national context as well as to monitor implementation of the Plan.

We are pleased to see that the indicators of the GAP will be modified in order to align with the final SDG indicators of Agenda 2030 – however it is unclear how these will be developed, and we call for more information on how civil society can engage in this process.

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¹ Specifically, the Directorate Generals for International Cooperation and Development, Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiation, and Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection, as well as the service for Foreign Policy Instruments