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### About this review

This review sets out Plan International EU Office’s progress towards Plan International’s purpose between 1 July 2015 and 30 June 2016. This period is referred to throughout the report as 2015-16. Published 2016.

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Working in the EU Office of an international NGO is never plain sailing – there are changes and challenges to be navigated; choppy waters are encountered. However, it is highly rewarding. And this year has been no exception: we have been responsible for many achievements, contributed to a huge number of inter-agency initiatives and supported Plan International – and in particular our European National Offices – in many ways. But we have also had reason for growing concern regarding the environment in which we operate.

We started the year on a very optimistic note, with the adoption of two major international agreements – the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on climate change – and a number of important, new EU policies in areas of significance for Plan International’s work, such as the revised Gender Action Plan 2016-2020. Internally, we welcomed the arrival of the new CEO of Plan International, Anne-Birgitte Albrectsen, who has taken a bold approach to promoting and realising children’s rights. We adopted a new Purpose Statement for Plan International, reflecting our overarching objective of advancing children’s rights and setting out our intention to contribute to gender equality through making transformative change for and with girls, so that they can learn, lead, decide and thrive no matter where they live.

This has fed directly in to and shaped our new European Strategy for Plan International which we will begin to implement in the autumn of 2016. Basing ourselves on the strong evidence that there is no sustainable development without gender equality and a just future for young people, we will focus on youth economic empowerment and mainstream girls’ rights into all work.

But despite all this good news, our optimism faded as we witnessed an increasing number of situations in which the EU response gave reason for rising concern. Indeed, what had been expected to be an ‘intense’ year, turned into a ‘tense’ year, notably in the realm of asylum and migration and the EU’s increased focus on its own security. The perceived need for heightened security has led to what many see as a worrying shift away from the EU’s founding principles of human dignity, liberty, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights. In its response to the refugee crisis the EU has focused more on limiting migration than reaching out to those in need. This is most vividly apparent in the EU Global Strategy and the Partnership Framework to manage migration. No less significantly, the EU is shifting its development assistance away from tackling the root causes of human rights violations elsewhere to dealing with the cost of absorbing huge numbers of migrants and asylum-seekers in Europe.

It is with this very mixed backdrop that we enter our fiscal year 2017. As Einstein once said, “learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow: the important thing is not to stop questioning.” Plan International EU Office will heed the warning signs and do our utmost, together with our partners, to prevent harmful trends from taking root. We will continue to push for the EU and its Member States to be a force for good in promoting and protecting human rights, not least by questioning EU policy and action when we feel we must.

Alexandra Makaroff
Head of Plan International EU Office

Tanya Barron
CEO of Plan International UK and Chair of Plan Europe
We recognise the power and potential of every single child. But this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. And it’s girls who are most affected.

In line with our purpose, we engage children, young people, supporters and partners to:

• Empower children, young people and communities to make vital changes that tackle the root causes of discrimination against girls, exclusion and vulnerability.

• Drive change in practice and policy at local, national and global levels through our reach, experience and knowledge of the realities children face.

• Work with children and communities to prepare for and respond to crises and to overcome adversity.

• Support the safe and successful progression of children from birth to adulthood.

For over 75 years we have been building powerful partnerships for children, and we are active in over 70 countries.

How we work
We see clear links between fulfilling children’s rights, achieving gender equality and ending child poverty. Every girl and boy has the right to be healthy, educated, protected, valued and respected in their own community and beyond. We support these rights from when children are born to when they reach adulthood. We work to ensure that girls and boys know their rights, and have the skills, knowledge and confidence to fulfil them. This approach inspires and empowers children and communities to create long-lasting change.

Our programmes operate at multiple levels to advance children’s rights and tackle the root causes of discrimination, exclusion and vulnerability across 8 key areas:

- Education
- Child protection
- Disaster risk management
- Early childhood care and development
- Economic security
- Sexual and reproductive health
- Water and sanitation
- Child participation

As part of this ongoing programming, we work during and after natural disasters, emergencies and conflicts to enable children to prepare for and respond to crises and adversity.

Our global advocacy work not only focuses on international policy but also ensures national governments can meaningfully implement and uphold laws that advance children’s rights and gender equality at community level.
PLAN INTERNATIONAL AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

Working to ensure that the promotion and protection of children’s rights, with a focus on gender equality, is a priority in the European Union’s external action.

The European Union (EU) is one of the world’s largest and most influential development and humanitarian actors, and influencing its policies, practice and funding has the potential to positively affect the lives of hundreds of millions of boys and girls in developing countries. As such, we closely work with the EU institutions in order to reach our goal.

How we work
Plan International EU Office represents Plan International to the EU institutions, and acts as a coordination hub on EU issues for Plan International.

Our work to influence EU external policies and programmes takes an integrated approach to advocacy, communications and funding, and is informed by children and young people themselves.

From conducting face-to-face meetings to developing policy recommendations and organising campaign-actions, we work to raise Plan International’s position as an expert and respected voice on children’s rights and gender equality, as well as EU development and humanitarian policy.

The European Commission is one of Plan International’s primary institutional donors, and our office is Plan International’s Global Account Manager for both Development and Humanitarian Aid Directorates. As such, our funding team coordinates the work of our National and Country Offices to ensure high quality project proposals which deliver maximum impact.

We are able to strengthen our voice in support of children’s rights and ensure coordinated action at EU level by working in partnership with other organisations and alliances – both within Plan International and externally. We therefore engage in strategic partnerships and networks at Brussels level, such as the UN Agencies, Concord, Voice, the Human Rights and Democracy Network (HRDN) and the Children’s Rights Action Group (CRAG).

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

We are active members of the following coalitions and networks, often occupying leadership positions:

• CONCORD - the European Confederation of Relief and Development NGOs
• Human Rights and Democracy Network (HRDN)
• Voice - Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies
• Child Rights Action Group (CRAG)

We also support Plan International National and Country Offices to engage with their Foreign Affairs Ministries and EU Delegations respectively on EU-related issues.

OUR WORK IN NUMBERS

8 EUROPEAN NATIONAL OFFICES HOLDING A FRAMEWORK PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT WITH ECHO
48 COUNTRIES IMPLEMENTING EC-FUNDED PROJECTS
85 PROJECTS FUNDED BY THE EC RUNNING IN 2015-16
6 EVENTS ORGANISED OR CO-ORGANISED AT EU-LEVEL
2 VIDEO INTERVIEWS WITH EU POLICY-MAKERS
6 RECOMMENDATION OR POSITION PAPERS PUBLISHED AND SUBMITTED TO THE EU

Plan International and the European Union
2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

In September 2015, we witnessed a milestone for development, with the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in New-York. Ever since, we have been working to influence the EU to implement the 2030 Agenda in a comprehensive manner.

GIRLS’ VOICES: LEAVE NO GIRL BEHIND

Plan International’s Because I am a Girl campaign was completely revamped to adapt to the current context and ambitions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Because I am a Girl is now a global movement driven by Plan International to transform power relations so girls everywhere learn, lead, decide and thrive.

We have brought this new vision to our Brussels audience through our Girls’ Voices initiative, which seeks to enable girls to share their lived realities with a broad public, and to connect them to the policy changes we need so that by 2030, all girls are enabled to reach their full potential.

DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT

We continued to advocate for children’s rights in emergency context, with a focus on adolescent girls, raising Plan International’s profile as an important humanitarian actor. This resulted in a considerable increase of ECHO projects being implemented by Plan International this year, with 19 additional projects awarded compared to the previous year.

I HAVE A VOICE

We continued to ensure children and young people’s voices were heard by EU policy-makers, through attendance at events including the European Week of Action for Girls, the European Development Days and the World Humanitarian Summit. In line with our efforts to make child and youth participation as accessible as possible, we also enabled young people to interact with EU policy-makers through social media, by organising twitter chats and a youth social media takeover.
EU GENDER ACTION PLAN

After submitting extensive recommendations to the EU, we were pleased to see that many of them were reflected in the final document of the EU Gender Action Plan 2016-2020 (GAP), adopted in October 2015. We have now turned all our attention to the implementation of the GAP, and are working closely with our Country Offices to ensure that the EU keeps its promises towards the world’s women and girls.

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AS A DONOR

The European Commission continued to invest in quality projects through Plan International. In 2015-16, Plan International offices were awarded funding for a further 30 development and humanitarian projects in all four regions, worth a combined total of 23,948,108.05 euros. In addition, we continued engaging with the EU to help shape its policies and programming through our programmatic advocacy work.

GOALS FOR GIRLS POST-2015: WIN, LOSE OR DRAW?

This year we co-organised the European Week of Action for Girls with a coalition of child and youth focused civil society organisations and in partnership with the United Nations Brussels. It received the patronage of the European Parliament and of the Luxembourg Presidency of the Council of the EU. It focused on girls and the Sustainable Development Goals, and through various advocacy, media and campaign events, we challenged EU leaders to champion girls’ rights and empowerment by implementing transformative policies and practices and putting girls at the heart of efforts to achieve the post-2015 goals and targets.

A GIRL’S VIEW OF THE 17 SDGs

As part of the European Week of Action for Girls 2015, we launched a photo exhibition portraying how each of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals affect girls. The exhibition has since been a considerable success throughout the year, being displayed notably in the Belgium Parliament and at the European Development Days, which resulted in The Guardian publishing it in its entirety, with more than 15,000 shares on social media.
Our partnership with the EC

Plan International collaborates closely with the European Commission (EC), not only because it is one of our primary institutional donors, providing funds for our projects through both its International Cooperation and Development (DevCo) and Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO) Directorates-General, but also because we draw on our expertise to engage with the EC to help shape its policy and programming.

From emergency to recovery

As a child rights and humanitarian organisation with capacities for both relief and development, Plan International supports the emphasis on bridging the divide between humanitarian action and longer-term development work, especially in contexts other than those afflicted by armed conflict.

Linking relief, recovery and development (LRRD) is essential to help children as well as their families and communities survive disasters and rebuild their lives through self-reliance and in dignity. This year we have engaged with the EC on several occasions to show that civil society organisations (CSOs) are crucial actors for working in partnership with governments for closing this gap and eventually supporting public policy implementation. Without compromising commitments to independence and neutrality, and depending on the context, support for local ownership and engagement with state actors is crucial. While in most disaster situations, the assumption should be made that governments are primarily responsible for meeting the needs of affected people, in conflict affected contexts, where the ability of governments to provide neutral and impartial humanitarian assistance and protection is compromised, there is a vital role for independent international humanitarian assistance, which CSOs can provide. Involving CSOs before, during and after an emergency is essential not only to support partner countries in times of crisis, but also to mitigate risks and ensure that the local population becomes the agent of change.
CASE STUDY
Building back better in the aftermath of the earthquake, Nepal
On 25 April 2015, Nepal was hit by the most powerful earthquake in 80 years, claiming more than 8,500 lives and leaving many more injured. Homes and classrooms were destroyed, forcing families to sleep outside. In Dolakha, one of the most severely affected districts, nearly 90% of houses were destroyed or damaged beyond use. With funding from the European Commission, Plan International supported the most vulnerable households with shelter kits, which included corrugated galvanized iron (CGI) roofing sheets and non-food items, to help prepare them for the coming monsoon season. “Right after the earthquake, it was very difficult for us and I felt sorry for the children, especially the girls. There was nothing to cover them, nothing to sleep in,” explained Ganja, one of the beneficiaries of the project. “My three storey house got destroyed by the earthquake. I would have been roofless, if I had not received these CGI sheets” explained one of her neighbours. The project coordinated and collaborated with humanitarian actors in the project districts to reach 5850 households who were in need. The support provided to the affected families helped fulfil their basic and immediate needs, however, more needed to be done to help sustain their lives. More than a year after the earthquake, Plan International is still responding, implementing another project funded by ECHO, this time in the district of Makwanpur, targeting households who already face obstacles on the basis of gender, socio-economic, caste, ethnic and geographic factors and whose houses sustained major damages. The households are provided with safe, covered living spaces, with privacy and dignity, until a permanent shelter solution can be provided. Plan International’s action combines community engagement with technical expertise while building capacity within the community through skills training programmes and by employing skills crafts persons. The project aims to benefit around 3,930 households to help in building back their lives better.

Highlight: EU Trust Funds
We have started working with the LRRD approach especially with EU Trust Funds, a new funding delivery mechanisms of the EC. Through increased flexibility, their aim is to deliver assistance by supporting the continuum of humanitarian and development interventions. This way, EU Trust Funds aim at ensuring public support in EU and potentially other donor countries not only for funding emergency aid, but also for continuing to fund the recovery and further development once the crisis has abated or ended. They offer an opportunity to bring humanitarian and development practitioners closer together at field level and build on the intrinsic relations between acute humanitarian aid and development interventions in a more holistic manner.

DEFFENDING DEVELOPMENT AID
With the global challenges we are facing, the role of civil society is more important than ever in building democratic, just and sustainable societies. The EU has strong policy commitments on the role of civil society in EU external action and should remain a strong donor and partner to CSOs. This support needs to be both financial, providing assistance to CSOs respecting their right of initiative, and political, supporting an enabling environment for the day-to-day, long-term work of CSOs.

CASE STUDY
Economic empowerment gives young people hope for the future, Brazil.
North-eastern Brazil has one of the highest concentrations of people living in extreme poverty in the country as well as one of the highest youth unemployment rates. Young people, women and people of African descent in particular face socio-economic difficulties. With funding from the European Commission, Plan International chose to establish the Bridges for the Future: employment solutions for at-risk youth project to address the situation, providing young people aged 17 to 24 with access to professional education, entrepreneurship and life skills. Partnering with the private sector, the project offers support and mentorship to graduates of the programme as they transition to employment and enter the job market. Joice, a young woman who has already graduated from the programme had once felt hopeless about the future. After becoming pregnant at the age of 16, she had no professional aspirations and received no support. But that was before she heard about Bridges for the Future. Today, having graduated from the programme, Joice is a secretary in a large school in Salvador. “I am very happy to be working in a world renowned school that focuses on education with love, respect and ethics,” Joice proudly states. “Since getting this job, I am able to help my mother and provide better care for my child with dignity. Today, I am proud of myself.” Bridges for the Future hopes to empower 1,200 young women and men who just like Joice once was, are currently in situations of social and economic difficulty, and support them to find decent jobs.

Highlight: CSO Forum
We attended the CSO Forum on EU engagement with civil society and support for human rights, where we were invited to speak at a panel discussion on Funding for Civil Society and Human Rights: up or down? Representing the Human Rights and Democracy Network, we stressed the importance of not only looking into the amount of aid going to CSOs, but also into the quality of aid, ensuring that aid provided supports CSOs in the diversity of their missions and also that funding modalities used by donors are the most amenable to support CSOs. A call was made to DG DEVCO for more support to CSOs’ right of initiative but also more transparency and predictability around funding opportunities.

Yet, the most recent developments in the EU point to the risk of development funding being increasingly diverted to migration, border control and security issues. This year, we started engaging with civil society, organisations and networks, to protect the EU aid budget from going away from its initial purpose, that of addressing poverty reduction and human rights violations. Together with our partners, we will continue our advocacy efforts to ensure that we are heard on this matter.
Our partnership with the EC

DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT

Millions of children are affected by disasters every year. Our approach puts children at the heart of Disaster Risk Management to help them recover, keep them safe, engage them in reducing disaster risks and prepare them to face future shocks and stresses.

Our activities:
While actively contributing to global and national efforts to implement and monitor the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, over the year Plan International played a leading role in the consultative process leading to the World Humanitarian Summit, strongly supporting the Secretary Generals’ call for decisive political action to prevent and end conflicts of the Agenda for Humanity and undertaking bold commitments at the Summit.

Those commitments are embedded in our new Disaster Risk Management Strategy, released earlier this year. The strategy reaffirms a child-centred, rights-based approach to Disaster Risk Management, aiming to support children and youth growing-up in resilient communities and realising their rights in safety and with dignity, before, during and after disasters and conflicts. Our approach aims at the best integration of development and disaster ideas. This entails working across a full spectrum of approaches based on both humanitarian and development mandates, such as inclusion, child and youth participation, accountability, child-centered resilience building, etc.

DID YOU KNOW?
Plan International now holds eight Framework Partnership Agreements with DG ECHO, resulting in a large portfolio of new operations responding to emergencies as well as supporting preparedness and mitigation initiatives at local, national and regional level in Asia, Africa and Central America that position Plan International as a leading humanitarian partner of the EC.
Our priorities:

Our operations reach children and youth of the most vulnerable groups and communities. In particular, we are developing an expertise with early childhood development and adolescent girls.

Over the past year, we further strengthened Child Protection in Emergencies and Education in Emergencies as flagship programmes in our operations and significant part of national and global efforts went to ensuring that girls and boys are safe and that their education is not disrupted by disasters and conflicts.

This year we have continued building our experience on cash-based programming in emergencies. Through emergency responses across different countries, we demonstrated that cash and voucher transfer programmes can increase the enrolment of children in schools. The cash and voucher system has been shown to help the morale of those in need and also prepares the ground for both communities and organisations for linking relief, rehabilitation and development (LRRD) activities.

We are responding to El Nino and la Nina across several affected countries, from Ethiopia to Malawi, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Sudan, providing support to health structures, providing food and safe drinking water, supplementary food and protection for pregnant women and children, as well as building community resilience by enhancing disaster preparedness, early response mechanisms, and supporting long-term development solutions.

Our work with refugees and displaced children, who are among the most vulnerable groups, continued across regions and countries worldwide. Over the past year, Europe has seen a significant increase in the number of people seeking to claim asylum within its borders, on the basis of needing international protection. As a children’s rights organisation, we are concerned about the impact that this situation is having on children, and girls in particular, who constitute a significant proportion of those seeking to enter Europe. In addition to continuing to support the irreplaceable work of local organisations in the countries of origin, this year we started setting-up operations in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. The year also marked the start of our humanitarian work within Europe, with flagship activities launched in support of the refugee children in need of protection in Germany.

DID YOU KNOW?

Plan International was set up in 1937 by British journalist John Langdon-Davies and refugee worker Eric Muggeridge to help children whose lives were disrupted by the Spanish Civil War. During World War II, the organisation became known as 'Foster Parents Plan for War Children' and worked in England, helping displaced children from all over Europe. The aim was to provide food, accommodation and education to children whose lives had been disrupted by wars.

CASE STUDY

Ensuring refugee children stay in school, Uganda

In line with our focus on education in emergencies, Plan International is responding to the influx of South Sudanese refugee children arriving in Uganda since 2013 through the Promoting Education, Protection and Peace for South Sudanese refugee girls and boys (PEPPS) project, with funding from the European Union and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). The project aims to increase access to education in a safe and protected learning environment for South Sudanese refugee girls and boys in the district of Adjumani. Mary, now aged 7, is one of those children. She fled from South Sudan to Uganda together with her parents, three brothers and one sister in December 2014, and enrolled at one of the 15 Early Childhood Care and Development centres implemented under the PEPPS project. There, she was able to learn and have fun in a safe environment. “I had a good time and we learned a lot, both mathematics and songs,” Mary says. At the beginning of 2016, Mary was excited to be promoted to primary school. Now she goes to the same school as her siblings and can continue to learn her favourite subject in school; “I go to school so I can learn to write,” she explains, “I love to write.” The project, which enables children to stay safe, learn and play, consolidates and builds synergies with other existing interventions that Plan International in implementing in the area, including child protection, and gives children the tools to succeed. Mary for example is focused on her future goals: “I want to become a teacher when I grow up,” she explains.
Plan International’s EC-funded projects

Number of EC projects Plan International is implementing: 85
Total value: €79.3 million

Number of EC projects awarded in 2015-16: 30
Total € value of new projects: €23.95 million

Number of countries implementing EC-funded projects: 48

Plan International EC-funded projects
**Programme Countries**

**National Organisations**
Australia Belgium Brazil Canada Colombia Denmark Finland France Germany Hong Kong India Ireland Italy Japan Korea Netherlands Norway Spain Sweden Switzerland United Kingdom United States

**Advocacy Offices**
Addis Ababa Brussels Geneva New York

**Regional Offices**
Bangkok Dakar Nairobi Panama
The unfinished business of girls’ rights

Challenging negative social norms and attitudes to achieve equality for girls.

Our research shows that girls continue to be the single most excluded group in the world. They face discrimination and abuse simply for being young and female. Girls and young women are often denied their right to education, to engage actively and equally in society, to take important decisions about their futures and bodies, to justice and equal opportunities and to protection from gender based violence.

Yet we know that investing in girls has the potential to transform the lives of entire communities and countries. For example, every year of schooling increases a girl’s individual earning power by 10 to 20 percent, while the return on secondary education is even higher. The impact of investing in girls is also intergenerational; a mother with a few years of formal education is considerably more likely to send her children to school, breaking the intergenerational chain of poverty.

We therefore continued to advocate for greater attention to be paid to the specific rights and needs of girls in EU external action in both development and humanitarian interventions.
The unfinished business of girls’ rights

CASE STUDY
Preventing child marriage and FGM, Tanzania.

Harmful practices, such as child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM) are a violation of girls’ human rights and act as root causes for discrimination and violence against girls. Yet in Tanzania 37% of women aged between 20 and 24 are married before their 18th birthday and women and girls still face challenges in accessing sexual and reproductive health. FGM is also a major issue in certain regions where prevalence of the practice stands at 40%. With funding from the European Union, Plan International runs a project preventing child marriage and FGM in high risk communities and supporting girls to realise their rights in Tanzania.

Salome, a 19 year old girl who herself had to face challenges such as early pregnancies, marriage, abuse, and complete ignorance about adolescent and sexual reproductive health, now takes on the role of advocate for girls’ rights. Thanks to Plan International’s project, she got the support and training she needed to become independent, and now works in a hair salon and is able to support her family. “Don’t get married or have a baby when still young and dependent” she advises other girls. Salome insists that if girls are made aware of adolescent and sexual reproductive health information and the effects of child pregnancy and child marriage, then most of them will stay at school and be able to reach their potential.

LEARN:
All girls have the right to quality, safe education and access to lifelong learning. An educated girl is more likely to marry later and have fewer, healthier children. She has a better chance of staying healthy herself.

LEAD:
All girls and young women have the right to take part fully in the political life of their community and country. We’ll support and empower young female leaders to drive social, economic and political change.

DECIDE:
All girls have a right to decide if and when to marry or start a family. Ensuring girls are able to make decisions about their futures is fundamental to achieving gender equality.

THRIVE:
Girls have a right to reach their full potential, to realise their personal ambitions. To do this, they must be able to live free from violence and discrimination and have equal economic opportunities.

Because I am a Girl

Since it was launched on 11 October 2012, Plan International’s Because I am a Girl campaign has aimed to support millions of girls to get the education, skills and support they need to transform their lives and the world around them. It is our commitment to unlocking the astonishing potential of girls around the world by securing girls’ rights and ending gender discrimination.

In line with the current development context and ambitions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Because I am a Girl has seen a shift in vision in the past year. We realised that the Sustainable Development Goals would only be achieved if we can unlock the power of girls. Without a bold new movement that confronts the root causes of discrimination, girls will still be denied their rights and remain unable to reach their full potential.

That is why today, Because I am a Girl is dedicated to ensuring gender equality and upholding the rights of all girls and young women by 2030. It is a global movement driven by Plan International to create a world that values girls, promotes girls’ rights and ends injustice. The Because I am Girl movement is committed to transforming power relations so that girls everywhere can learn, lead, decide and thrive.

We strive to achieve this by collaborating with children, communities, civil society, governments and other partners to implement long-term programmes that target the root causes of inequality.
European Week of Action for Girls

We once again brought Because I am a Girl to Brussels through our European Week of Action for Girls, organised every year around the International Day of the Girl Child. In 2015, it was co-organised by a wide coalition of child, youth and gender focused civil society organisations, and supported by a number of Brussels-based UN agencies. It once again took place under the patronage of the European Parliament, and this year we also obtained patronage from the Luxembourg Presidency of the Council of the EU, further strengthening our partnership with the EU.

The week of Action focused on girls and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with the overall objective of challenging EU leaders to champion girls’ rights and empowerment by implementing transformative policies and practices and putting girls at the heart of efforts to achieve the post-2015 goals and targets.

During the week, we organised the first ever takeover of the European Commission’s Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development’s social media channels.

The takeover featured five girls from around the world, covering a range of issues of interest and importance to them, including youth economic empowerment, education, gender equality and protection from violence. It also highlighted the key role girls have to play in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and holding governments to account.

Together with our partners, we also launched a photo exhibition where each photograph represents the importance of girls’ equal participation in the context of each of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Throughout the year, the exhibition was displayed on several occasions, most notably at the Belgium Parliament and during the European Development Days in June 2016. This culminated in a request from The Guardian to publish our exhibition in its entirety on their website, which received more than 15,000 shares on social media.

Finally, our flagship publication, the Girls’ Rights Gazette, counted articles from EU and UN figures, civil society experts as well as girls themselves, and once again reached a large global audience.

Girls’ Voices: Leave no girl behind

As part of our efforts to make Because I am a Girl resonate to a Brussels-based audience, we started an initiative called “Girls’ Voices”. It was partly inspired by the takeover that took place during the Week of Action, which received a lot of attention from our partners and supporters in Brussels and beyond.

By providing a platform for girls around the world to share their stories and ideas on the issues which matter to them, the objective of Girls’ Voices is to help connect girls’ lived realities with the policy changes we seek so that girls everywhere can learn, lead, decide and thrive.

Since January 2016, we have received contributions from girls from all four regions, showing readers that their voices are worth hearing and taking into account through insightful blogs and stories.

EU policy-makers also took part in the initiative, with op-eds or interviews addressing the challenges faced by those girls.

Highlight: Engaging EU Commissioners

Both EU Commissioners for Humanitarian Aid and International Cooperation and Development have contributed to the initiative by writing opinion editorials relating to the specific needs and rights of girls.
EU GENDER ACTION PLAN: FROM WORDS TO ACTION

In October 2015, the EU took an important step forward for achieving gender equality and girls’ and women’s empowerment in partner countries by adopting the EU Gender Action Plan 2016-2020 (GAP). We welcomed the fact that it is a more ambitious, robust and results-oriented successor to the EU Gender Action Plan 2010-2015, which truly has the potential to transform girls’ lives, and we have now turned all our attention to ensuring its effective implementation.

Our activities

The GAP is a very important tool for our engagement with the EU on gender equality. In order to build on this opportunity, we developed an advocacy guidance note for our staff in Country Offices. This guidance note is intended to support our Country Offices in engaging with the EU Delegations (EUDs) in their countries to ensure the effective implementation of the GAP and the realisation of transformative change for girls and their communities.

It was circulated to gender experts in 17 Country Offices across Africa, Asia and Latin America whom we continually support in their engagement with the EUDs on this matter.

In our response to the Council Conclusions on the GAP, we noted our disappointment that only the first pillar of the Action Plan, relating to the institutional shift, is mandatory for EUDs and that EUDs may choose to focus on just one objective in each of the other pillars of focus. One of our suggestions to our Country Offices is therefore to push the EUD to take on at least a couple of activities in each thematic area and that one of these should be to combat gender discrimination in legislation and in social norms and traditions as one of the root causes of all forms of gender inequality.

Our calls to the EU

• Not only must the EU provide adequate resources to implement the GAP, but accurate tracking of all spending on gender activities must be carried out, if progress is to be monitored.
• The EU must invest in collecting disaggregated data - by age, gender, location, (dis)ability – and measure its impact particularly for marginalised groups if it is to contribute to global efforts to leave no one behind.
• A thorough, participatory and transparent process must be put in place for the first performance reports due in October 2016. Reporting information must be made publically available and discussion both with civil society locally and in Brussels must be guaranteed to ensure genuine accountability and transparency.
• While we are pleased that the GAP indicators will be brought in line with the final indicators used in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the EU must be as ambitious as possible with their indicators. Where EU indicators are more ambitious or complete than those for the SDGs, or where equivalent SDG indicators do not exist, the EU indicators should be maintained. Where the SDG indicators are more ambitious or more complete, the EU should adopt those.

What’s next?

As part of our ongoing advocacy efforts, we will call for adequate financial allocations being made in the Mid-Term Review of the Multi-Annual Financial Framework, which is taking place over the course of 2016-17, in order to ensure that the commitments of the GAP can be fully implemented.

We will continue to advocate for gender to be mainstreamed throughout the EU’s budget in line with its commitments on gender equality both within and outside the EU’s borders.

Our office will be following up with our Country Offices on the progress of implementation by EUDs on an ongoing basis. We will also follow with interest the monitoring process of the GAP, particularly the first reports due in October 2016 and encourage our Country Offices to engage in the evaluation and reporting efforts.

CASE STUDY

Empowering girls to speak-up, Timor Leste

While many young people around the world blog, tweet and change their status updates to communicate their thoughts to the world, it’s not so easy for young people in Aileu District, Timor-Leste. Although internet is available in the capital, Dili, rural communities often lack electricity and technology, making it hard for young people to have their views heard. To address this, Plan International, with funding from the European Commission, is running public speaking and debating trainings for young people. Seventeen-year-old Rozita is a girl from Aileu who has strong opinions about the development of her community and Timor-Leste as a whole. However, she found that there were limited opportunities for young people in her town to speak up in community meetings, as these are dominated by adults, mainly males, and she was too shy to give her opinion.

When staff from Plan International Timor-Leste visited her school and told her about the opportunity to participate in public speaking training, Rozita was happy to join. Since she has joined, she has been improving her speech writing and public speaking skills and has completed a two-week training session with facilitators from our partner organisation Forum Tau Matan (FTM). “At first, I was very nervous and shy speaking in front of many people,” she said. “But I’m happy to have this opportunity to express my opinion. Now I have finished my training I still get nervous, but only just before I have to make a speech. It has increased my self-confidence.”

Over the last 6 months Rozita has changed from being a shy student to being a public speaking champion at her school. She is a member of the school debating club where she has learned to express her thoughts about issues that affect her community.

Review of the Multi-Annual Financial Framework, which is taking place over the course of 2016-17, in order to ensure that the commitments of the GAP can be fully implemented.
Working to ensure the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development enables all children to reach their full potential.

With the UN General Assembly adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development now well behind us, Member States are having to turn their promises into action. The EU Office has been working to influence the EU to implement the Agenda in a comprehensive manner. Given the 2030 Agenda’s focus on all three dimensions of sustainable development (social, economic and environmental), it has real potential to address some of the global challenges which undermine progress, such as growing inequality and climate change.

Our activities

Working in coalition with partner organisations, we drew up a list of components that we consider to be essential for a successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda. High on the list is the need for the EU to develop an overarching, ambitious strategy which would then be detailed out into action plans by the different Directorates-General of the European Commission (or ministries in a country context). Facing a lack of action from the EU, this became the central plank of our advocacy work.

The EU Office met with a wide variety of policy-makers and advisers in the EU institutions to press for this much needed vision and action. DG DevCo launched a consultation with a view to revising the 2005 European Consensus on Development, and we have worked closely with our European national offices to be able to submit detailed recommendations to the EU for this process.
We have, as last year, been invited to speak at a number of events relating to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, which has given us the opportunity to discuss our concerns, the role of global partnerships and the need for strong monitoring and accountability mechanisms.

We also fed in to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe on behalf of CONCORD regarding ‘follow up and review’, as the 2030 Agenda terms it. This allowed us to focus on the importance of policy coherence for sustainable development as a key accountability tool, as well as a key means to ensure that the poor and marginalised are not affected in a negative manner by the policies and practices of other countries.

Highlight:

We once again attended the European Development Days, which this year focused on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, and worked in partnership with UN Women, The World Bank Group and UNIDO to organise a high-level panel on “Building win-win partnerships for women’s and girls’ economic empowerment”. The panel was an opportunity for us to once again engage with the EU on this important issue. We were able to reiterate that the full inclusion of girls and women in the world’s economic system is inextricably linked to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, and that working in partnership might just be the answer to make this happen.

Our Calls to the EU:

- Draw up an ambitious, comprehensive implementation plan covering all internal and external policies.
- Show leadership at the highest levels to ensure an integrated response;
- Ensure participatory processes which will enable the public and organised civil society alike to contribute to and influence the design and implementation of the 2030 Agenda and to engage in a systematic way in monitoring, review and accountability processes.
- Establish robust, independent accountability mechanisms and develop a means to differentiate between the parts of the 2030 Agenda for which Member States are primarily responsible versus those for which an EU lead is necessary.
- Set aside adequate financial resources both to achieve the 2030 Agenda within the EU and also to support partner countries to reach the Goals and targets.

What’s Next?

Two processes which are either underway or about to begin are key to realising the 2030 Agenda. Firstly, the consultation on the revision of the European Consensus on Development and secondly the mid-term review of the Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF). Plan International is contributing to the consultation, bringing the perspective of young people and most particularly of young women and girls. And we will work with others to try to persuade the EC to do more than a ‘tick box’ exercise when reviewing the MFF. Our focus will most particularly be on how the EU can do more to support girls and women in partner countries to realise their human rights through political and economic empowerment.

Plan International intends to drive and track progress on the SDGs for girls and women through our recently launched SDG Tracker. This tool will facilitate our holding decision-makers to account for their commitments. By collecting disaggregated data on girls and women and how they are benefitting from the SDGs, we will be able to highlight areas that are getting stuck, or being overlooked. We will use existing and new quantitative and qualitative data to monitor specific gender-related SDG targets. And we will complement official data with innovative perceptions-based data, primary qualitative research and first-hand interviews and thereby bring the voices of girls and women themselves to the fore.

CASE STUDY

Tackling discrimination in the workplace, India

Plan International is tackling gender wage disparity and discrimination in the workplace in India by organising working women, especially young women, into collectives where they can discuss grievances and act together to seek change and achieve equality in the workplace. The project, funded by the European Commission, focuses on building women’s negotiation skills and provides information on human rights and workplace laws, so that they can negotiate equal work opportunities and wage parity with employers. In the district of Ambedkar Nagar, women in unorganised sectors are often paid significantly less than their male counterparts. A lack of uniformity between different workplace laws mean that women are often discriminated against. Geeta for example, works as an agricultural labourer. She used to earn INR 70 a day whereas her male counterparts earned INR 120. She would work 12 hours a day with no breaks and payment of her wages was often delayed. Due to a lack of support and reliance on wages, she felt compelled to agree to the employers’ terms. When she joined the project, Geeta received valuable information on workplace law and along with other women from the collective, felt empowered to raise issues with her employer. In response, their employer initially decided he would only employ men, but the women’s collective then approached the community and had the men question the employer. On seeing the determination of those young women, the employer eventually agreed to equal pay, leaving Geeta and her friends proud and empowered by their accomplishment. “Now I receive timely wages in parity with men and the employer also treats women in a respectable manner”, she states proudly.
Engaging our audience

New look, stronger voice

A new brand for Plan International was launched and implemented this year, giving us more consistency and a stronger sense of identity. Our brand provides a springboard to guide our thinking, actions and communications and be clear, single-minded and aligned in everything we do. Our visual and verbal identity brings out our point of difference: our ability to create lasting change for children and the world. One key objective we aim to achieve with our new brand is to ensure consistency among the various Plan International Offices across the globe, to ensure we talk in one, stronger voice.

With the new brand also came a completely new website. With its modern design and bold colours, we easily catch the attention of our partners and supporters and hope to leave a lasting impression on a new audience not yet familiar with our work.
Twitter chats are a perfect occasion to engage a wide range of stakeholders in a conversation that matters to us and children. In 2015-16, we have used them as a way to engage with the European Institutions on various topics, from lessons learned and best practices from our recovery project in Nepal to girls’ and women’s empowerment and education in emergencies.

#NepalChat
@eu_echo: Promoting disaster preparedness through #education is crucial. Children are at risk, but can also be effective agents of change.#NepalChat
@PlanNepal: After #NepalQuake, child protection mechanisms were completely disrupted. Had to re-establish and help communities to strengthen. #NepalChat

#IWDChat
@PlanEU: What kind of initiatives and partnerships work well for girls’ & women’s economic empowerment and why? #IWDchat
@unwomenEU: UN High-Level Panel on Women’s Economic Empowerment works for implementation of #GlobalGoals @PlanEU #IWDChat

#EiEChat
Total reach: 8,297,302!
@PlanEU: Q5: How can prioritising education in emergencies contribute to sustainable development? #EiEChat
@eu_echo: A5: Without #education children do not learn to cope in a crisis and are not able to contribute to recovery of their countries#EiEChat
@PlanPakistan: A5: Lack of access to education leads to poverty & unemployment. This can lead to increased crime rate and/or extremism/militancy#EiEChat
The work of Plan International EU Office is overseen by the Plan Europe Board, which is composed of the National Directors and Chief Executive Officers (or their delegates) of the members of Plan Europe (see below). The board meets twice a year, and is responsible for approving the budget and workplan of the office.

Plan International EU Office receives funding from Plan International’s European Offices and our International Headquarters, in proportion to their annual income. In 2015-16, this amounted to €638,126.

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