

DISCUSSION PAPER No. 371

## The impact of EU gender policy in the NDICI-Global Europe framework

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July 2024

Over recent decades, the EU has taken significant steps to promote gender equality globally through its external action. These efforts are based on key policy documents such as the subsequent Gender Action Plans as well as driven by specific targets on promoting gender equality in the Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI-Global Europe).

This paper examines how the EU mainstreams gender equality in its external actions under NDICI-Global Europe. Firstly, the paper sets the scene on the benefits of gender mainstreaming for women as well as for development outcomes more broadly. Furthermore, it analyses the EU's programming in six partner countries and assesses gender mainstreaming in 56 actions. Clearly the EU has made good efforts in mainstreaming gender in its development cooperation, but there is a large variance in how meaningfully this has been done. While this study found several good practices, there is still a need to ensure relevant inclusion of gender considerations, particularly in addressing structural issues within societies.

Going forward, the EU should mainstream gender in a more comprehensive, politically informed and contextual manner, setting attention on addressing the causes of gender inequalities to improve the lives of girls and women. Furthermore, the EU should consider strengthening the mandate and role of gender focal points and enhancing the whole-of-delegation ownership of gender equality.

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## Table of contents

Acknowledgements .....	iii
Acronyms .....	iii
1. Introduction .....	1
2. Quality gender mainstreaming: What the literature says .....	2
2.1. What is the impact of effective gender mainstreaming on development results? ..	3
2.2. How to effectively mainstream gender? .....	6
3. Gender mainstreaming in EU external action .....	7
3.1. The gender equality policy marker to guide EU action .....	8
3.2. EU programming and the use of the OECD-DAC gender markers .....	8
3.3. A closer look at country level gender mainstreaming .....	9
4. Quality of EU gender mainstreaming .....	11
4.1. Use of gender analysis to formulate the action and discussion of gender in the context and justification of the action .....	12
4.2. Gender in the objectives and goals of the action .....	15
4.3. Gender-sensitive indicators .....	16
4.4. Capacities, ownership and alignment with the partner countries' strategic approaches .....	18
5. Recommendations .....	21
5.1. Gender analysis and context of the action .....	22
5.2. Gender in objectives and goals .....	22
5.3. Gender in targets and indicators .....	23
5.4. Partnership at partner country level .....	23
5.5. More resources and capacities for the EUDs .....	24
6. Conclusions .....	25
Annex 1: Action documents consulted .....	27
Annex 2. OECD-DAC Gender equality policy marker scoring system .....	28
References .....	29

## List of boxes

Box 1: Dimitra Clubs .....	5
Box 2: Example of good practice by implementing partners: GIZ in Cameroon .....	14
Box 3: Green and Smart Cities SASA – Tanzania .....	18

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Box 4: Changes of political context in Tanzania and the opportunities to promote gender equality.....20

## List of tables

Table 1: Minimum requirements for G1 and G2 actions as per OECD-DAC ..... 9  
Table 2: Distribution of G1 and G2 actions among the ADs reviewed..... 10

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## Acknowledgements

This discussion paper was produced under the partnership between ECDPM and the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union 2024. The authors are grateful to individuals at the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and at the Permanent Representation of Belgium to the European Union (EU) for their feedback. This work builds on desk research and a dozen interviews carried out between December 2023 and March 2024 with representatives of the EU institutions, both at the EU headquarters level and in delegations, some member states' representations, as well as civil society organisations (CSOs) in Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Morocco, Mozambique, Senegal, and Tanzania. The authors are grateful to all those who shared views and insights during the interviews. The authors would like to thank ECDPM colleagues Mariella Di Ciommo for her review and suggestions, and Annette Powell, Yaseena van't Hoff and Isabell Wutz for their work on layout and communication. The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not represent those of the Belgian Presidency or ECDPM. Any errors or omissions remain the responsibility of the authors. Comments are welcome and can be sent to Amandine Sabourin ([asa@ecdpm.org](mailto:asa@ecdpm.org)) Sara Giancesello ([sgi@ecdpm.org](mailto:sgi@ecdpm.org)) and Katja Sergejeff ([ks@ecdpm.org](mailto:ks@ecdpm.org)).

## Acronyms

AAP	Annual action plans
ADs	Action documents
AFD	Agence Française de Développement / French development agency
CLIP	Country Level Implementation Plan
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DG INTPA	Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA)
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
ECDPM	European Centre for Development Policy Management
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
EUD	European Union Delegation
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
GAP III	Gender Action Plan III
GBV	Gender-based violence
GCP	Gender country profiles
GDP	Gross domestic product
GESI	Gender equality and social inclusion
GEWE	Gender equality and women empowerment
GIZ	Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GTA	Gender transformative approaches
HQ	Headquarters
IDP	Internally displaced person
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer

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MFF	Multiannual Financial Framework
MIP	Multiannual Indicative Programme
MS	Member states
NCC	National Control Centre
NDC	Nationally Determined Contributions
NDICI	Neighbourhood, Development And International Cooperation Instrument
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OECD-DAC	OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC)
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights
TEIs	Team Europe Initiatives
UN	United Nations
UN Women	United Nations Women
WPS	Women, Peace and Security
WROs	Women's Rights Organisations

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## 1. Introduction

Gender equality is recognised as a fundamental value and principle of the EU and is enshrined in the EU's treaties and legislation. During the last few decades, the EU has been a global front-runner in promoting gender equality as a key political objective of its external action and common foreign and security policy. Key policy documents include the EU Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy (EEAS 2016), the European Consensus on Development (CoEU 2017), and the 2018 first-ever Conclusions on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) (EU 2018). In 2020, the European Commission presented the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025, and in November of that year, the third Gender Action Plan (GAP III) was launched in a Joint Communication (EC 2020a) with specific objectives and indicators articulated in an accompanying Staff Working Document (EC 2020b). **The aim of the GAP III is to accelerate progress towards gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment, by setting objectives and action** in six key thematic policy areas: i) gender-based violence; ii) sexual and reproductive health and rights; iii) economic and social rights and empowerment; iv) equal participation and leadership; v) women, peace and security agenda; and vi) green transition and the digital transformation (more information about the GAP III in Section 3).

Gender is also covered by the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe (NDICI-Global Europe) regulation (OJEU 2021), which states that: “at least 85% of new actions implemented under this Regulation should have gender equality as a principal or a significant objective, as defined by the gender equality policy marker of the Organization for Economic Co-operation Development Assistance Committee” and “at least 5% of these actions should have gender equality and women's and girls' rights and empowerment as a principal objective”. Contrary to the other targets, this one pertains to the number of actions, not to expenditure.

**The so-called mainstreaming of gender equality in international cooperation initiatives increases the effectiveness of actions.** Extensive research proves that it is linked to project productivity, durability and impact. Inserting a gender perspective into projects can therefore be a conscious decision for effectiveness and can help avoid doing harm.<sup>1</sup> It is important to not lose sight of the multitude of well-researched arguments in favour of gender equality and avoid the discussion being framed as solely one of differing societal values, both across EU member states as well as globally. This is especially important since in the last few years the world has seen an uprising in anti-gender language, policies and sentiments (OHCHR n.d.; Seong-Eun Bergsten and Lee 2023).

In this study, complementing and building on past research (Desmidt and Salzinger 2023; Di Ciommo et al. 2023; Sabourin and Jones 2023; Sergejeff and Di Ciommo 2023), ECDPM looks at how the EU institutions are mainstreaming gender equality in external action and on the quality

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<sup>1</sup> According to the human rights-based approach implemented by the EU, a gender and human rights dimension are integrated in the EU programmes, facilities, policies and funds in order to contribute to and advance human rights and gender equality, or at least ensure that they are not going against (for example, do no harm) (EC 2021a).

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of this mainstreaming. Our main question is: **Has gender been included in actions under NDICI–Global Europe in a meaningful and qualitative manner?**

To answer this question we first carried out a literature review of existing academic and policy research. Secondly, we complemented those with a review of action documents (ADs) for the current programming cycle of the NDICI–Global Europe, assessing whether actions that score as significant respond to a set of criteria that speaks to how well gender is enshrined in a given project. For instance, we look at how gender is discussed in the context and problem analysis sections of the ADs, whether there are gender-related project goals and activities (and whether they are meaningful to the overall action), and what types of indicators are used to monitor and measure progress. Thirdly, we conducted interviews to investigate the factors creating an enabling environment for good gender mainstreaming, such as capacities in the EU delegations and alignment with partner countries' priorities. Finally, we concluded this study with recommendations on how to improve the quality of gender mainstreaming when planning EU external action.

The adoption of NDICI–Global Europe ADs follows the 2020 Gender Action Plan III, as well as the adoption of Country Level Implementation Plans (CLIPs) and Gender Country Profiles (GCPs), when available. Our review focused on a sample of Multiannual Indicative Programmes (MIPs) and ADs covering six African countries: **Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Morocco, Mozambique, Senegal, and Tanzania**. Countries were chosen with the objective of including a large variety of contexts in terms of geographical areas, languages, income levels and fragility. Based on a first round of interviews and review of ADs, **Tanzania and Cameroon were selected as country case studies to dive deeper into their experiences of gender mainstreaming and to highlight good practices and challenges**. Examples from these two countries are included throughout the paper and highlighted in boxes.

## 2. Quality gender mainstreaming: What the literature says

**Gender mainstreaming** is a strategy to advance gender equality through planned actions, including policies, legislation and programmes. Essentially, it **aims to integrate gender equality considerations in all policies and programmes across all political, economic, and societal spheres**. At the roots of gender mainstreaming there is the recognition that policies and programmes are never gender-neutral and that if they do not take into account the needs and differences of the final beneficiaries, resources are inefficiently allocated, resulting in losses and direct costs. Gender equality boosts economic growth, strengthens democracy and enhances social cohesion (OECD 2023). Some organisations have developed guidelines, and provided methodological examples to mainstream gender, either in a very broad sense that can apply to different contexts (OECD 2015), or in specific project areas like water and sanitation at a local level (Cities Alliance 2023). Gender mainstreaming starts from the assessment that women, as well as other social groups with differentiated gender identities, face structural barriers to equal access to power, which translates into their unequal access to resources, services, human rights, and control over decision-making. Gender mainstreaming

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tries to address these inequalities or correct their consequences to achieve policies and programmes able to better serve the needs of the population. At the same time, gender mainstreaming underlines that the differing experiences with the social, economic, and political structures lead to women having valuable knowledge and insight into them. Omitting this insight leads to not only a weaker analysis of the situation and issues at hand but ultimately weaker projects and programmes.

## 2.1. What is the impact of effective gender mainstreaming on development results?

**Mainstreaming gender effectively in development projects and programmes can facilitate the achievement of better development results** in several different ways. Gender mainstreaming can contribute to gender equality, which on the one hand is a valuable development result in itself, and on the other hand, can act as a catalyst for wider development gains in society for all genders. While the literature on project and programme-level results and their link to gender mainstreaming is rare, some indicative evidence pointed out gains, for instance in the relevance and sustainability of the intervention, which was also the view shared by our interviewees. Yet, there is a need for more evidence and an in-depth understanding of how gender mainstreaming can bring better development impact.

First, achieving better gender equality in a country is a significant development goal and result in itself. The evidence on how and to what extent ODA can affect gender equality is somewhat inconclusive, and more research on the impact of ODA on gender equality is needed. When looking at the total volume of ODA (including gender blind ODA), it seems to have no significant impact on gender equality in partner countries, but when a closer look at sectors is taken, effects can be found in decreasing maternal mortality and narrowing the gender gap, for instance, in education (Pickbourn and Ndikumana 2016). Similarly, research suggests that ODA to women's equality organisations and institutions increases women's political empowerment (Baliamoune-Lutz 2016).

Some research has also been carried out linked to gender mainstreaming in particular. While there is a need for more attention, data and research on the effectiveness and results of gender mainstreaming (see Gupta et al. 2023 on humanitarian action), some evidence suggests that **aid which has considered gender as a significant objective over time successfully reduces gender inequality and closes the gender gap** (Su and Yang 2023). The study by Su and Yang continues to argue, that while it is unlikely that aid which mainstreams gender would have an impact on the population's beliefs and behaviours in the short term, gender mainstreaming has transformative potential that needs to be leveraged for gender equal future in the long term (Su and Yang 2023).

In contrast, studies show that when policy and project planning processes take gender considerations into account only superficially, structural issues within a given society and its public institutions system continue to persist. As a consequence, women continue to experience greater disadvantage, underrepresentation, and underemployment compared to



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men, and societies carry the cost and underperform compared to their potential due to these disparities (see [Promoting Gender Equality through Gender Mainstreaming](#)).

For instance, in Tanzania, the interviewees saw that gender inequality is one of the key issues preventing the country from fully reaping the benefits of its demographic dividend. Demographic dividend, if realised, would boost economic growth through increasing productivity, consumer demand, workforce, and investments (UN 2023). When the opportunities for half of the population are restricted, and investments in human capital are not sufficient, the interviewees based in Tanzania saw that leveraging all, or most of, the opportunities brought by a young and growing population is difficult. Interviewees in the country did not shy away from the complexity and recognised that to bring about change, **mainstreaming gender should be consistent, long-term, politically informed, and meaningful.**

Second, inspired by Amartya Sen's capabilities approach, some note that the expansion of women's capabilities not only enhances women's own freedom and well-being but also has many other effects on the lives of all (Goetz 1997). **Indeed, increased gender equality is associated with broader socio-economic impacts.** For instance, research by the IMF suggests that narrowing gender gaps in labour force participation could result in an 8% GDP increase in developing economies (Sayeh et al. 2023). There are many ways in which gender equality, or the lack of it, affects the economy. For instance, violence against women and girls is associated with lower economic development and this negative effect is even higher in countries with weak protective laws against domestic violence (Ouedraogo and Stenzel 2021). Women's exclusion or marginalisation in the labour market means that their full contribution to income and wealth generation is lost: just closing the gender gap in labour force participation could increase economic output by 35% on average globally (Georgieva et al. 2022). According to the OECD, gender-biased discrimination in social institutions, for example, legal discrimination between women and men, costs \$6 billion to the global economy (OECD 2019). Development interventions that tackle gender inequalities through mainstreaming can ultimately also lead to broader positive impacts on society and economic growth.

Third, **mainstreaming gender in projects and programmes by international actors can enhance broader development effectiveness** (Gilles 2015; Allwood 2013). While the literature on the broader development impacts of gender mainstreaming is nascent, research suggests that **gender mainstreaming can have a positive development impact in several ways:**

- **Enhanced relevance and responsiveness to the needs of the local population.** Integrating a gender perspective throughout the intervention is a way to ensure the relevance of the project/programme to the whole population and it increases the chances of the action being responsive to the different needs and priorities of the beneficiaries. This ensures that interventions are relevant and tailored to the specific context, leading ultimately to better outcomes (see, for example, EIGE n.d.). By mainstreaming gender, development efforts can reach a broader segment of the population and have a more significant impact on overall development outcomes (James-Sebro 2005).

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- **Increased sustainability of development results.** Gender mainstreaming promotes the inclusion of women and marginalised groups in decision-making processes and resource management, leading to more sustainable development outcomes. When all members of society are empowered to participate fully, development initiatives are more likely to endure and yield long-term benefits (see, for example, Yumarni and Amaratunga 2018 on gender and sustainable development; Pact 2024).
  - **Enhanced resilience and adaptation.** Gender mainstreaming recognises the different vulnerabilities and capacities of women, men, girls, and boys in the face of environmental, economic, and social challenges. By addressing these differences and building on existing strengths, development interventions can enhance the resilience of communities and societies and support adaptation to changing circumstances (see FAO 2016; FAO 2022).

The literature also points to some examples of where gender mainstreaming has been seen to bring broader development results. James-Sebro's 2005 study examined how five international NGOs operating in four African countries implemented gender mainstreaming and its impact on communities. She found that gender mainstreaming improved programme quality and helped combat poverty, fostering acceptance within communities (James-Sebro 2005). Some gains from gender mainstreaming included economic and health gains, a decrease of reported gender-based violence, as well as improvements in education and literacy, for instance.

#### **Box 1: Dimitra Clubs**

Dimitra Clubs, set up by FAO, is an encouraging example of gender transformative approaches. These are community groups that comprise rural women and men who convene regularly to address the everyday challenges they encounter, collectively make decisions, and implement joint initiatives to tackle community issues using their resources. Since 2006, 1600 FAO-Dimitra Clubs have been established across Burundi, DRC, Ghana, Mali, Niger, and Senegal (FAO n.d.). A 2019 study on Dimitra Clubs in Niger identified effectiveness in promoting inclusive decision-making, improving dialogue for wellbeing, facilitating community action, enhancing food security, and empowering women. Other research highlighted their role in addressing social issues like ethnic tensions and violence against women. Improved spousal relationships reduced domestic violence, with men sharing household chores traditionally done by women (FAO 2022).

However, the literature only very rarely focuses on the very impacts of gender mainstreaming on development results. This is a crucial gap, which is potentially linked to difficulties in finding evidence on the impact level. In the humanitarian sector, for instance, research has found that successes in gender mainstreaming are often assessed by monitoring processes rather than results: the focus remains on the number of women as beneficiaries rather than the differences the programme has managed to make in the life of women and girls (Gupta et al. 2023).

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Further work thus should be done in examining the link between gender mainstreaming and broader development results in the future.

## 2.2. How to effectively mainstream gender?

The literature presents different criteria on how to effectively mainstream gender equality in policy and programme-making.

**First, a gender analysis and impact assessment are considered tools to practically implement gender mainstreaming** (UN WOMEN 2014), to be undertaken before designing development programmes and policies (UN WOMEN 2015). The caveat to their effectiveness is that gender analysis and impact assessments have to be systematically updated and used to inform programming decisions. (Kessler 2008).

Then, a further step is to **make sure that gender perspectives are integrated into all the phases of policy and programme-making, namely the preparation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation** (EIGE n.d.; ECA 2021). In practice, this looks like:

- Making sure that all the actors involved in these different processes integrate gender equality concerns;
- Making sure that gender-disaggregated data are used, alongside other context-specific disaggregated data (for example, age, disability, ethnicity et cetera);
- Ensuring that women's and men's voices and contributions alike feature in the process;
- Integrating gender expertise into policymaking; and
- Ensuring the allocation of necessary funds and human resources to the process of integrating gender in various sectors (Council of Europe 2016).

There are other factors that the literature recognises as necessary to mainstream gender in a qualitative manner that go beyond the processes required to frame specific actions. **They regard more broadly the way the political institutions and administrations that run those actions deal with gender equality.** These factors include:

- **The involvement of local Women's Rights Organisations (WROs)**, feminist movements and Civil society organisations (CSOs) that work to advance gender equality. They should be invited as stakeholders to consultations on all EU external action sectors of programming and should be given enough time and space to make suggestions and recommendations;
- **High-level political commitment and support**, for example, from senior managers, who in the case of EUDs could be head of delegation, head of sections and/or the ambassador. This can take the form of encouraging staff to mainstream gender and undertake training, boost the political buy-in of the staff, and monitor the mainstreaming (CONCORD 2023);
- **In-house understanding at different programme levels of gender mainstreaming and how to do it.** This implies having access to adequate resources for gender analysis and mainstreaming training; and
- **Monitoring and evaluation** of how gender is mainstreamed (Kessler 2008).

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An important point for effective gender mainstreaming is that all the actors involved at the different levels and areas of policy and action-making should be clear that **mainstreaming gender is a shared responsibility**. All actors should feel a sense of ownership of the mainstreaming process and be aware that mainstreaming gender is crucial for fostering sustainable change. Organisations and institutions have generally the option to rely on external experts and/or have built in-house gender expertise by appointing gender focal points to ensure that gender is mainstreamed. Whatever the staffing choices are, evidence suggests that gender mainstreaming is carried out effectively when all those involved take the gender equality perspective into account throughout their policy measures, documents or programmes. For example, excessive emphasis on short-term outcomes and reliance on technical planning processes as a fixer of wider, more political issues can erode ownership and the sense of shared responsibility (Derbyshire et al. 2015).

There has been growing attention in the last decade to **gender transformational approaches which has been fuelled by the slow progress of gender mainstreaming in addressing the root causes of gender inequalities** (NIPN n.d.). Broadly gender transformative approaches (GTA) seek to go beyond individual self-improvement among women and instead focus on reshaping power dynamics and structures that perpetuate gender inequalities (Hillenbrand et al. 2015). Some large international organisations, including USAID, Plan International, and the Government of Ireland have also started to use a continuum – going from gender blind towards gender transformative – to classify approaches to gender inequality in the context of mainstreaming and beyond (see, Plan International n.d.; Michalko and Somji with Hawke 2023). The EU has also come up with a learning material to facilitate the use of GTA in programming, and to encourage tackling gender inequalities in a more meaningful manner (EU 2023a).

### 3. Gender mainstreaming in EU external action

Mainstreaming gender equality is a **political priority for the Commission within the EU, as well as outside its borders**. The GAP III (EC 2020a) is the principal strategic document guiding the EU's promotion of gender equality and women empowerment (GEWE) in its external action, including the Women, Peace and Security Agenda (WPS). The GAP III is the general framework that guides the EU's geographic and thematic programmes implemented under the NDICI-Global Europe to mainstream gender equality throughout its sectoral components at the country and regional levels, as well as globally. Recent ECDPM research questions the effectiveness of the EU's gender mainstreaming, highlighting the risk of dilution of the ambition for gender mainstreaming as the action moves from design to implementation (Sabourin and Jones 2023; Teevan et al. 2021). EDCPM research also suggests that more efforts are needed to make the GAP III a document of reference for the whole of EU external action, beyond its development cooperation, and to strengthen its uptake by EU member states (Di Ciommo et al. 2023). This includes also building better synergies between the GAP III and the WPS agenda (Salzinger and Desmidt 2023).

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This section looks at **how the EU applies the international guidelines on gender mainstreaming, and what resources are available for it to mainstream gender equality throughout its programmes.**

### 3.1. The gender equality policy marker to guide EU action

Studies have shown that GEWE takes place more effectively if actions where gender is mainstreamed (therefore marked G1) are complemented and/or supported by actions in which GEWE is a principal objective (G2). Many organisations favour 'multiple-track' approaches that combine mainstreaming with dedicated actions (see for example, UN WOMEN 2020). The GAP III has adopted the so-called **three-prong approach to gender equality**, which consists of 1) mainstreaming; 2) dedicated actions; and 3) inclusion of gender in political and policy dialogues.

**Together, the GAP III and the NDICI-Global Europe provide a set of ambitious targets related to gender equality and its mainstreaming more specifically** (ECA 2023). The GAP III requires that at least 85% of all new EU external actions should contribute to GEWE by 2025. The NDICI-Global Europe takes a step forward compared to the targets that GAP III sets out as, in addition, it requires that at least 5% of these external actions that contribute to GEWE should have gender equality as a principal objective (therefore are screened G2). The NDICI-Global Europe programming guidelines also require EU delegations to come up with at least one action dedicated to promoting gender equality for each country.

### 3.2. EU programming and the use of the OECD-DAC gender markers

The EU has adopted the OECD-DAC Gender Equality Policy Marker, which has 3 score points (see Annex 2), to screen its actions and funding. The marker assesses whether gender is the main objective (G2), a significant objective (G1) of the action or is gender-blind or has not been screened against the marker (G0).

The OECD gender marker criteria set clear guidelines on when a project or a programme can be marked with G1 or G2. There is a **minimum criteria that the action should fulfil in order to meet the G1 (gender as a significant objective) and G2 (principal objective) markers**, which are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Minimum requirements for G1 and G2 actions as per OECD-DAC

Gender as a significant objective (G1)	Gender as a principal objective (G2)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A gender analysis of the project/programme has been conducted.</li> <li>• Findings from this gender analysis have informed the design of the project/programme and the intervention adopts a 'do no harm' approach.</li> <li>• Presence of at least one explicit gender equality objective backed by at least one gender-specific indicator (or a firm commitment to do this if the results framework has not been elaborated at the time of marking the project).</li> <li>• Data and indicators are disaggregated by sex where applicable.</li> <li>• Commitment to monitor and report on the gender equality results achieved by the project in the evaluation phase.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A gender analysis of the project/programme has been conducted.</li> <li>• Findings from this gender analysis have informed the design of the project/programme and the intervention adopts a 'do no harm' approach.</li> <li>• The top-level ambition of the project/programme is to advance gender equality and/or women's empowerment.</li> <li>• The results framework measures progress towards the project/ programme's gender equality objectives through gender-specific indicators to track outcomes/impact.</li> <li>• Data and indicators are disaggregated by sex where applicable.</li> <li>• Commitment to monitor and report on the gender equality results achieved by the project in the evaluation phase.</li> </ul>

Source: OECD 2016. Table reproduced by ECDPM.

The EU follows the OECD marker, having made **small adaptations to suit the EU's project design framework**. Beyond using the OECD gender marker, the DG INTPA has come up with an internal guidance note on gender mainstreaming, and good practices to inform project formulation, and is currently working on a guidance on gender mainstreaming in the Team Europe Initiatives (TEIs) to be released in 2024. A **knowledge hub with gender experts in Brussels** can also give their comments on concepts and action documents prepared by the EU delegations, but essentially it is up to the delegations to take the feedback into account and decide how to score a project against the marker.

### 3.3. A closer look at country level gender mainstreaming

For this research, ECDPM reviewed the **56 action documents adopted for Cameroon, DRC, Morocco, Mozambique, Senegal, and Tanzania**, as part of the annual or pluri-annual action plans for the implementation of the NDICI-Global Europe<sup>2</sup> in 2021, 2022 and 2023. Over the 56 actions reviewed, **51 are marked as having gender as a significant objective (G1)**, distributed by country as Table 2 indicates.

<sup>2</sup> 1 action document adopted as part of the 2023 action plan for Cameroon was not reviewed as it has programming funds from the European Development Funds.

Table 2: Distribution of G1 and G2 actions among the ADs reviewed

Country	Action documents reviewed	Number of actions marked G1	Number of actions marked G2
Cameroon	4	3	1
DRC	12	11	1
Morocco	9	9	/ <sup>3</sup>
Mozambique	14	13	1
Senegal	11	10	1
Tanzania	6	5	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>5</b>

Source: Authors, based on action documents available at [EC action plans](#).

As the aim of this paper is to assess the quality of gender mainstreaming in the EU programming documents, ADs that have been marked G2 have not been included. However, we reviewed G2 actions more lightly than actions marked as G1. We considered actions marked as G2 to the extent they contribute to G1 actions and more broadly gender mainstreaming in the country.

There were interesting G2 actions (5) in the focus countries. For instance, the **'Breaking the Glass Ceiling' programme in Tanzania** brings together multilevel actions on women's economic empowerment, women's access to services and their leadership and participation, as well as actions against Gender-Based Violence (GBV). The programme will utilise budget support, which is expected to bring EU leverage in the promotion of its values. A small part of the budget - €2 million of €70 million - will be used to support CSO engagement (EC 2021b; EU 2022). While we have lightly reviewed the ADs also for G2 actions, the following sections draw mainly from our analysis of the G1 actions (see Annex 2).

As part of their description of the actions, the ADs present the modalities that the EU will use to implement a given action, especially if EUDs would manage the action directly or indirectly. In the six countries analysed, the ADs review shows that gender is mainstreamed through a variety of modalities: budget support, project approach (including through contribution agreements, grants, financing agreements), investments, high-level policy dialogue, and support measures and/or facility for technical cooperation and communication.

<sup>3</sup> No G2 action was adopted for Morocco yet, but G2 action may come later - by 2027, as provided by the programming guidelines.



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## 4. Quality of EU gender mainstreaming

This section goes deeper into the analysis of the ADs in our six focus countries. It presents our findings in some key areas of gender mainstreaming, drawing from the literature (see Section 2), the OECD gender marker, our review of the ADs and country-level interviews. While there are many other aspects of gender mainstreaming beyond those mentioned below, we focused on three main aspects that are highly relevant in the ADs, and more broadly have the potential to ensure good quality mainstreaming in EU external action. These are:

- The **use of gender analysis** to formulate the action and discussion of gender in the context and justification of the action;
- The incorporation of gender in the objectives or expected results of the action in a relevant and meaningful manner; and
- Gender-sensitive indicators.

We identified two other aspects that are important for effective gender mainstreaming but are more related to the context in which the EUDs operate, rather than being intrinsic to the ADs. These two aspects are the **capacities of the EUDs and their ownership of the mainstreaming process**, and the **alignment with the partner countries' policies, approaches and prioritisation of gender equality**.

Based on our review of the documents and interviews with EU delegations, **gender mainstreaming has become a real priority for programming**. None of the ADs reviewed were completely gender-blind, which signals a high level of commitment in the EUDs and the HQ to reach the 85% target. Overall, the document review of 56 ADs in the six focus countries brought up several good examples of good, even gender transformative mainstreaming, for instance in Mozambique, Tanzania, Morocco, and Senegal. As an example, the action Resilience in the north - ResiNorte (see Section 4.2) in Mozambique demonstrates thorough and meaningful integration of gender dynamics in the action.

At the same time, our review also pointed to a **high variance in the quality of mainstreaming**. Common gaps in the actions were, for instance, linked to **shallow analysis of the context** as it comes to **gender dynamics and power relations in society** and very little thought given to the intersection between gender and other vulnerabilities (for example, disabilities). **Mainstreaming of gender in the overall objective, expected results and planned activities was found to be limited** or ambiguous at times, for instance by mentioning the 'gender-sensitive approach' without elaborating how it will be done and what it means in practice. Another gap lies in a **lack of gender-sensitive targets for indicators** (albeit the target values for indicators will likely be added when the programme design progresses).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> By target, in this context, we mean the target value that the activity should reach in order to be considered successful. Every indicator should have a target value, that is, a number of people benefitting from a training, against which the success is measured. A step to monitoring the quality of gender mainstreaming, would also be to make these target values gender-sensitive, for instance, setting a target according to which 50% of people benefitting from the training should be women.



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## 4.1. Use of gender analysis to formulate the action and discussion of gender in the context and justification of the action

As mentioned in the previous section, **gender analysis is a crucial tool to assess gender inequalities and power imbalances in the given contexts and/or sectors**. Broadly, gender analysis can provide a plethora of information aiding programming, including information on gender-specific issues, power imbalances, unequal access to resources, key barriers for girls and women to exercise their rights, societal and cultural norms, needs of women and girls, as well their capacities in the given context or sector (see Oxfam 2014; NZAID 2006).

Ideally, **gender analysis feeds into the context analysis of the EU's ADs and is used to inform the design of the actions in a meaningful manner, bringing up the power dynamics at the country level** (see the OECD gender marker in Annex 2). While the mid-term evaluation of GAP III recognises that, in order to scale up analytical backup for GEWE programming, a strong gender analysis should be carried out before any programming takes place, even in the case gender analyses exist, they do not necessarily feed into the programming. This is because of a lack of time to do so and/or a lack of in-house expertise.

Our documental analysis sheds little light on the extent to which gender analyses have informed the actions. While there are examples of ADs that mention gender analysis or assessment as either informing the action or as part of the proposed future activities, such as 2 ADs out of 6 in Tanzania, 2 ADs out of 14 in Mozambique and 1 AD out of 12 in DRC, 1 AD in Cameroon,<sup>5</sup> **the majority of reviewed ADs do not clearly indicate the extent to which the formulation of the action has benefited from gender analysis or whether gender analysis will be carried out in the course of implementation**. There are some welcomed exceptions. For instance in **Tanzania**, the Action Document for Finance for Growth mentions “research, surveys, regulatory impact assessments in the area of access to finance, mainstreaming gender equality and social inclusion approach (GESI) (systematic analysis of power relations between genders)” as part of the planned activities. In 3 ADs in **Senegal**, the gender analysis allows for a comprehensive assessment of the situation of women and girls in the society, bringing up figures from different sectors, including political leadership and governance, education, and agriculture, as well as security.<sup>6</sup> It is also to note that the cooperation facilities in Tanzania, Mozambique and Senegal explicitly mention the opportunity to **contract a pool of experts to fund gender analyses, or other research on mainstreaming gender equality**, which is a good step to ensure that the actions carried out in the country pay adequate attention to gender dynamics.

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<sup>5</sup> **Tanzania “Finance for growth” (2022)** mentions “Research, surveys, regulatory impact assessments in the area of access to finance, mainstreaming gender equality and social inclusion approach (GESI) (systematic analysis of power relations between genders)” as one of the activities, and AD “Blue economy for job creation and climate change adaptation” (2022) points out that “gender perspective is taken into account through a preliminary gender analysis”. **Mozambique “Skills for Employment” (2023)** plans to “develop and implementing Active Labour Market Instruments and policies [...] informed by the results of a sector-specific gender analysis” and AD “AguaNorte – Access to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in Northern Mozambique” (2022) will conduct social impact assessment with gender and human rights approach in the context of constructing water supply systems. **DRC AD “Unis pour l'éducation et l'emploi” (2023–2025)** says that the action is in line with the Country Gender Profile adopted in 2022.

<sup>6</sup> « Sénégal 2022 Appui à la stabilité et la sécurité intérieure au Sénégal », Sénégal 2022 « Formation professionnelle et emploi – Horizon JOJ 2026 », « Sénégal 2021 Appui à la reprise économique post-COVID, en particulier pour la jeunesse ».

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Although the action documents only rarely explicitly refer to gender analyses or other research on mainstreaming gender considerations, it does not necessarily mean that the actions are not backed by any gender analysis. **GCPs and sectoral gender analyses** – that according to GAP III “will be produced during the programming process to integrate the gender perspective into the overall programming and in each priority area” – are a significant resource to facilitate meaningful gender mainstreaming (EC 2020a: 7), if used as part of the programming, planning and implementation processes. The GCPs provide an assessment of the current state of gender equality in the country, offering recommendations for crucial areas in need of improvement. However, to be usable, the GCPs should be updated regularly to respond to emerging challenges and changing contexts. For instance, in Tanzania, the most recent GCP is from 2019, but the EU is in the process of updating the document.

The gender perspective of a given programme can be assessed also on the basis of how AD sections on context analysis and programme rationale take gender into account. Our analysis shows that **these sections offer sometimes a piecemeal assessment, driven mostly by the need to meet administrative targets, rather than by a careful assessment of how existing barriers to gender equality can be addressed by the programme**. This is despite the fact that, according to our interviews, **EU programme managers are encouraged to meet gender-responsive targets in line with GAP III and HQ provides comments to push the programme to be gender transformative before it becomes an adopted AD**. While the push for meeting gender mainstreaming targets is crucial, **it might paradoxically lead to an incentive for ‘tick boxing’** where gender is mainstreamed only very superficially without reflection in order to fill the target. This is why the push for meeting the target must be coupled with a quality assessment of mainstreaming and adequate resources for the EU delegations.

In the six countries analysed there are examples of positive practices regarding the inclusion of a gender perspective in the context analysis and programme rationale sections of ADs. For instance, the action document for EU support for financial inclusion in Morocco (2021) recognises that women are particularly vulnerable to socio-economic exclusion due to cultural and/or societal norms, and provides data on the difference that exists in Morocco between women and men regarding financial inclusion. The same goes for the action document to support the energy transition in Morocco (“Appui à la transition énergétique au Maroc- Energie verte”, 2022), where, in the context section (Section D of problem analysis), a dedicated paragraph provides gender-disaggregated data and acknowledges that women are scarcely employed in the energy sector. Good examples also emerge from DRC. The AD for the action united for peace and security (“Unis pour la paix et la sécurité”, 2021), the AD for food and agriculture (“Unis pour l’agriculture et l’alimentation”, 2022) and the AD for education (“Unis pour l’éducation”, 2022) all present the main issues that women face in these sectors. The same goes for Senegal where the gender analysis section of the ADs for the ‘Support to governance, inclusion and innovation in digitalisation’ (“Appui à la gouvernance, inclusion et innovation dans la digitalisation – GOIN’digital 2023”), on ‘Programme of restructuration of collective transportation in Dakar’ (“Programme de restructuration du transport collectif de Dakar 2022”) and on ‘vocational training and jobs’ (“Formation professionnelle et emploi – Horizon JOJ 2026, 2022”) respectively integrate disaggregated indicators and data, context analysis of the professional sector, and a detail state of play of the access to, the role and the place of girls and women in the vocational and educational trainings.

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The mid-term evaluation of GAP III points out that in many delegations, despite the commitment to gender equality and mainstreaming, there are still differences in sectoral teams on the capacity and expertise on gender. At the same time, gender focal points may have limited capacity (EC 2023a, see Section 4.4 for more information). **Our interviews confirmed that the lack of internal capacity and expertise means that conducting gender analysis is a challenging task that risks deprioritisation.** One pragmatic solution that EUDs adopt is **relying on implementing partners**, or on the **expertise of local organisations**, which may make the exercise lighter. For instance in **Tanzania**, the action on Blue Economy utilised a gender analysis carried out by the UN WOMEN<sup>7</sup> and in Mozambique the EU drafted its Gender Country Profile (GCP) with the UN (Di Ciommo and Cumbi 2022). In **Cameroon**, the 2022–2023 AD on ‘Green landscape in South and South–East of Cameroon’ (“Paysage vert Sud-Sud-Est Cameroun”) refers to the gender country profile realised by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO). Furthermore, some delegations have **contracted some external expertise in drafting key documents like CLIPs**. While including external consultants may help the delegations in the shorter term, in the longer term it puts at risk the development of the staff’s own capacity to mainstream/work on gender.

#### **Box 2: Example of good practice by implementing partners: GIZ in Cameroon**

Gender mainstreaming in project development entails a **multifaceted approach aimed at integrating gender considerations at every stage of the project lifecycle**. The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) ensures that during the different phases of project development, such as design, implementation and monitoring/evaluation, key aspects are taken into account to mainstream gender. In particular:

- **Design and project development.** A gender analysis is carried out to understand the content and potential negative impacts of projects on gender equality at both national and sectoral levels. It provides an overview that feeds into the projects to make them sensitive to gender dynamics. When a gender analysis is not carried out, GIZ requires, as a minimum standard, a gender scan for all projects. While this doesn’t necessarily mandate the involvement of an external consultant, it’s common practice to engage expertise to ensure thoroughness. Indeed, the involvement of gender experts throughout the project development process ensures that the gender analysis is dynamic and adaptive to evolving circumstances, thus enhancing the project’s responsiveness to gender considerations. Moreover, GIZ makes an effort to engage with CSOs directly. Depending on their areas of expertise, CSOs are involved through individual discussions or bilateral talks. This engagement facilitates a nuanced understanding of gender-related issues within specific contexts.
- **Implementation.** Gender considerations are integrated into the implementation phase, with the gender focal point tasked with ensuring that gender perspectives are consistently considered. GIZ considers it essential for all staff members to possess a minimum level of knowledge on gender mainstreaming. This is achieved through targeted training, ensuring that even if not all staff members read gender analyses, they possess a basic understanding of gender mainstreaming principles and standards.

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<sup>7</sup> Action Document for Blue economy for job creation and climate change adaptation.

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- **Evaluation.** Meaningful evaluation of gender mainstreaming efforts requires the establishment of clear objectives and indicators. These indicators should accurately measure progress towards gender equality goals and inform subsequent evaluations to track outcomes effectively.

In essence, meaningful gender mainstreaming involves a holistic approach that encompasses thorough gender analysis, stakeholder engagement, expertise integration, and evaluation to ensure projects are responsive to gender dynamics and contribute to advancing gender equality objectives.

Source: Interviews and for further reference see [Gender Mainstreaming Checklist, GIZ](#)

## 4.2. Gender in the objectives and goals of the action

One of the key aspects of gender mainstreaming at the action level is that **gender should be incorporated into the objectives or expected results of the action in a relevant and meaningful manner**. Our sample shows that this requirement is fulfilled with variable quality by the EU under the NDICI-Global Europe. In some actions undertaken in **Cameroon, Morocco, and Mozambique**, women are merely considered as a target group alongside other vulnerable populations, rather than as a group with differential needs that shape the programme's goals or objectives. **ADs often lack analysis of inequalities or key barriers women or girls face**. The document review also brought up some indicative evidence of the link between the absence of reflection on gender dynamics in context and the absence or only shallow inclusion of gender dynamics in the goals and activities of the action. For instance, the AD *National Control Centre (NCC) for Energy* in **Mozambique** mentions only very briefly that the lack of access to energy has an impact on gender equality but without providing substantial analysis on the topic. Similarly, the specific objectives of the action do not refer to a gender-sensitive approach and only two of the foreseen activities - including training and exchange visits - mention women as a specific focus group. In addition, the action will include "supervision of all works and equipment activities for the development of the NCC with a human rights and gender-based approach", albeit it does not elaborate on what this means in practice.<sup>8</sup>

More broadly, **ADs tend to describe the problem or the barriers rather than provide an analysis of the root causes of the problem and/or a response to the obstacles they recognise** (EC 2023a). Yet, while actions should be based on robust and in-depth gender analysis, the ADs may not in all cases be the best place for that, due to the fact that they are public documents from an external partner. Therefore, analysing and addressing the root causes of problems may be more useful to do in more in-depth documents, such as gender country profiles, or in internal guidance documents, depending on the context.

Our review shows that there are **good examples of including meaningful and gender-transformative objectives in the action**. For instance, in **Mozambique** the action 'ResiNorte – Resilience for the North'. The action, aimed at addressing issues of fragility in the North of the

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<sup>8</sup> Action Document for National Control Centre (NCC) for Energy, AAP 2022, part 1 Mozambique.

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country, includes three components from which one is explicitly targeting gender equality. The objective to ‘establish a protective environment and resilience of girls, women, and youth (IDP and host communities)’ mainly focuses on GBV and Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR), as key security and humanitarian challenges in the conflict area. It recognises that particularly women and children have been exposed to sexual and gender-based violence, including forced marriages and links the vulnerability of women and children also to poor access to health services. While women and girls are identified as a target group of the action – the action goes further than that to address the issues in the conflict-affected environment for increased resilience.

### 4.3. Gender-sensitive indicators

Adequate indicators are fundamental to assessing the quality and implementation of gender mainstreaming. **Gender disaggregated data, both as baselines and at project end, and (when applicable) specific indicators for girls and women help track progress, build awareness and provide administrative incentives for gender-sensitive actions.** Gender-sensitive indicators are one criterion making a project a G1 (where gender is mainstreamed) according to the OECD-DAC guidelines, and to which the GAP III, as well as the CLIPs, pay particular attention.

Our review shows that there is a **large variance in how the EU’s ADs have chosen indicators and how gender sensitive they can be considered.** For example, the action document for the strategic support program for civil society in **Morocco** (“Document d’action relatif au Programme d’appui stratégique à la société civile au Maroc”, 2021) delineates throughout the document the challenges and obstacles faced by women. This AD recognises GAP III’s strategic intervention framework, which provides guidelines for greater support to WROs, as the added value of the EU in the Moroccan civil society support action, and therefore proposes indicators in line with GAP III’s guidelines for support to WROs. The action envisions three results.<sup>9</sup> Each of these results has at least one indicator that directly links back to GAP III (“Indicateurs du GAP III” section). A step forward is taken for the indicators of result 1 (Improved working environment for civil society), as in addition to the GAP III indicator, **there are two others (out of six) that track the strengthening of a culture of gender equality within CSOs.**<sup>10</sup>

In Cameroon, the action on “inclusive, green and sustainable cities” (2021) aims at integrating gender in different areas of the action document (governance, decentralisation, waste management, and policy dialogue), and also presents some indicators related to gender. However, this case also illustrates that, while sex-disaggregated data will be collected to inform the monitoring of the majority of the actions, it is less common to set gender-specific

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<sup>9</sup> These results are (1) Improved working environment for civil society; (2) Increased dialogue and trust between civil society and government; and increased involvement of civil society in the governance of public action; and (3) Capacity of strategic players in priority areas of EU-Morocco cooperation areas is strengthened.

<sup>10</sup> (1) % participation of women in representative and decision-making bodies of supported CSOs; and (2) Number of CSOs that have included respect for and promotion of equality between women and men in their statutes or code of conduct.

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targets. **This means that while there will be information on how the actions are supporting different genders, the targets as such do not require gender balance.**

Overall, the **document analysis brings good practices but also shows some gaps.** One of the **good practices is the widespread use of sex-disaggregated data.** In most ADs, the EUDs have included sex-disaggregated indicators and are thus acknowledging the potential gender gaps. In some instances, data is also disaggregated by, for instance, age and disability, or urban-rural divide. Yet, **overall intersectional analysis and reflection are lacking in the ADs as well as meaningful inclusion of many vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities.** Each AD includes a small section on mainstreaming disability, but ADs tend to not go beyond that. Thus, while sex-disaggregated data is collected, there is in fact often no target related to marginalised groups. Furthermore, the indicators tend to focus on the number of women benefitting from the action, rather than the impact that the action has had on the lives of women and girls.

Broadly speaking, the indicators in ADs tend to be relevant to the actions foreseen in the ADs. EUDs have consistently included at least one gender-specific indicator to monitor the actions of every ADs we reviewed. Despite this being a good practice, the use of only one indicator specific to women or girls risks leaving gaps in the monitoring of gender mainstreaming. In addition, in a handful of ADs, the choice of gender-specific indicators did not seem meaningful.

Our review raises a question on whether the choice of an indicator is always meaningfully measuring the gender responsiveness of the action. Some studies showed that measuring transformative approaches to gender equality is arduous, and requires a change in the kind of indicators that are currently used to measure progress. In particular, addressing and quantifying cultural dimensions of empowerment (and disempowerment) is especially challenging within projects and programmes constrained by short timelines and the need to demonstrate social progress through quantitative indicators (Teevan 2021).

This is also a point raised by the mid-term evaluation of the GAP III, which noted that **there are gaps in monitoring actions with meaningful indicators, particularly when gender mainstreaming has not been considered thoroughly throughout the design phase** (EU 2023b). This has also been confirmed by the stakeholders interviewed from the EU and the member states. However, the review of ADs also brought in good examples of the use of gender-specific indicators. In Mozambique, the action ResiNorte - Resilience for the north thoroughly mainstreams gender in the context of its aim to enhance social cohesion and to reinforce peace and stability through the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. It brings in key elements of addressing GBV and SRHR and includes several meaningful indicators to measure progress.

Furthermore, a major challenge in ADs is in **setting targets for the indicators**, let alone gender-specific targets. However, interviewees recognised that having **gender-specific targets in the indicators would help to strengthen the ADs, ensure a common approach to gender, and make sure that implementing partners are held accountable for their gender commitments.**

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Interviewees have raised the point that without gender-sensitive targets in the indicators, there is a risk of having a fragmented approach to gender, in particular during the implementation phase. In this phase, a meaningful mainstreaming of gender depends on the sensitivity of the implementing partner(s). Reflecting on how to include gender issues in evaluation and monitoring would already be a significant step forward because it would force actors to look at the program through specific indicators and targets.

### Box 3: Green and Smart Cities SASA – Tanzania

The Green and Smart Cities SASA programme (marked G1) is a **Team Europe** Initiative<sup>11</sup> whose overall objective is to implement strategies to make Tanga, Mwanza and Pemba green and smart cities. **This Initiative has a strong focus on gender**, in particular on creating economic opportunities for women and youth. This was also clear in the Call for Proposals (Community-based urban transformation in deprived urban neighbourhoods of Pemba Island, Zanzibar).<sup>12</sup> For its implementation, the EUD is collaborating with GIZ (Germany's development agency), AFD (Agence Française de Développement, France's development agency) and ENABEL (Belgium's development agency). Research has found that **gender is prioritised by all stakeholders involved in the programme** and figures as a strong component in the project. The successful realisation of **gender mainstreaming now relies to a large extent on implementing agencies**. Available research shows that there is a need to strengthen synergies among the implementing partners and focus on **collaborative and systematic efforts**. The research suggests that the project could benefit from "from a more strategic implementation of gender mainstreaming. This could be achieved through a strengthening of leadership, accountability-mechanisms as well as more tangible project objectives and indicators (Van der Post and Lundin 2023)".

#### 4.4. Capacities, ownership and alignment with the partner countries' strategic approaches

As illustrated by the literature review (see Section 2), **effective gender mainstreaming takes place at different levels of the programming process and requires the commitment of the different actors involved**. While the three aspects of gender mainstreaming presented above relate to the structure of ADs, country-level interviews and some ADs pointed out that the capacities and ownership of the EUDs, as well as their alignment with the partner countries' strategic approaches, are contextual aspects of gender mainstreaming that play a substantive role in its effectiveness.

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<sup>11</sup> EU countries involved are Belgium, Finland, France, The Netherlands and Sweden. Source: EU, [Tanzania – Green and Smart Cities SASA](#).

<sup>12</sup> One of the specific objectives of this Call for Proposal is "Improve and empower the life of women, girls and target vulnerable groups in the urban poor communities targeting gender-related issues and applying gender-responsive approach in the design and implementation of interventions." The call is available in the EU Delegation in Tanzania's [website](#).

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### **Capacities and ownership of EUDs**

As the literature explains, **high-level political commitment and support can foster meaningful gender mainstreaming, enhance political buy-in among staff and ensure effective monitoring of mainstreaming efforts.** Within the EUDs, this commitment needs to come from key figures, such as the ambassador, and head of cooperation. For instance, some EUD ambassadors have prioritised the eradication of child marriage in Senegal. This endorsement has significantly contributed to fostering a gender-sensitive agenda within the delegation. Similarly, in other EUDs, **the support and endorsement in the leadership of the delegation have proven pivotal in encouraging programme colleagues to adopt a gender perspective in their initiatives.**

In **Cameroon**, for instance, the political section has initiated a political dialogue with the Minister for the promotion of women and family (Ministre de la Promotion de la Femme et de la Famille), which provides a key frame of discussion for the whole EUD when it comes to exchanging with Cameroon on creating a political committee on gender equality, or a coordination instance for gender-related activities.

Some EUDs have invested in **building in-house expertise on gender, by often providing training to its staff and programme drafters, and by making sure that gender is seen as a shared responsibility by the different sectors.** In some countries, the framework of the CLIPs is used to organise different capacity buildings for the staff of the delegations. However, some interviewees pointed out that to increase the ownership of the whole delegation and to increase technical expertise of gender dynamics in each sector, specific trainings on how gender interacts with key topics, for instance, blue economy, or urban development could be sought. The use of technical assistance has also been sought to make sure that gender is taken into account throughout the programme phases and that in-house capacity is built. Moreover, in **Senegal, Morocco** and **DRC**, GAP III serves as an entry point to raise awareness on mainstreaming gender for programme sustainability. In some EUDs, GAP III is used as an internal platform for dialogue and provides tools and resources to advance a more robust EU gender agenda within partner countries. Within this framework, training sessions and capacity-building initiatives are conducted by the EUD gender focal points to confront biases and clarify the gender agenda. Furthermore, it instils a sense of purpose by encouraging colleagues to prioritise the gender indicators of the GAP III, thus fostering a concerted effort towards gender mainstreaming (EC 2020b).

**Integrating gender in the programmes does not only require knowledge and know-how but also time and resources.** Gender focal points perform their gender-related tasks on top of their actual roles. They are, for example, programme managers or communication officers. Monitoring gender usually comes in addition to an already heavy portfolio with the management of several programmes and tasks. This can lead to making gender mainstreaming a lesser priority when it comes to actually promoting some change internally and in the country on such a sensitive political matter. Moreover, the role of the gender focal points in the programming phase is not always the same, depending on the EUDs. Some are



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consulted before the ADs are adopted, and review them to make sure they are meeting the expectations of the GAP III locally, although others are not – either because they don't have the time to do it, or because there is no internal process for that.

### ***Alignment with partner countries***

The review of action documents of our six sample countries also shows **various levels of alignment with the partner countries' strategies and policies regarding gender equality**. Still, the interviews conducted at the country level confirmed that awareness and adaptation to the political economy of the country is key to better align the EU's programmes to the national priorities, opportunities and constraints.

A good understanding as well as the capacity to operate within the political environment in which the programming takes place is key to harnessing the opportunities for meaningful gender mainstreaming. Countries that welcome gender equality actions allow for bolder programmes, indicators and targets to be carried out by the external actions of the EU.

For example, the openness of the head of state in **Morocco**, King Mohammed VI, to improve gender equality (Latrech 2022) presents a favourable environment for the EU to pursue bolder actions on GEWE. While climate and energy transition, along with trade and digitalisation, are often gender-blind sectors (CONCORD 2023), the AD on the energy transition for Morocco recognises the different impacts of climate change on women and men. While it does not present action indicators to directly address this difference at the project level, it envisions actions and indicators for the better integration of gender dynamics in the implementation of the Moroccan Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) (UNFCCC 2021). This illustrates the positive collaboration happening at the policy and political dialogue level between the EUD and the government, as the EU is the leading partner on GEWE in Morocco.

#### **Box 4: Changes of political context in Tanzania and the opportunities to promote gender equality**

In 2021, Tanzania saw a historic moment with the election of its first female president, Samia Suluhu Hassan. The commitments of the President to advance gender equality presented a great occasion for the EU to push for more attention to gender equality in the country, and raised a lot of initial optimism. In particular, the EUD supported CSOs that advocated for the government to adopt important changes to allow for stronger gender considerations in legislation such as the Political Parties Act (Shekighenda 2024). However, despite the initial optimism linked to the current administration, and changes in political rhetoric towards a more favourable one to promote gender equality, the progress is slow and implementation of the reforms has been lacking. Interviewees point out that Tanzania remains socially conservative, with key reforms such as Marriage act facing strong headwinds by conservative and religious communities (Kapama 2023). Therefore, one of the interviewees calls for a more politically informed approach to work on gender equality, that would go beyond seeing gender equality as a technical topic to fully leveraging the insights of the EU machinery in the country to gain better understanding what is feasible in the political context.

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In Senegal, DRC, Morocco, and Tanzania, **governments showed their commitment to gender equality by appointing a gender focal point in their ministries to make sure that gender is integrated into the ministries' policies.** The EU works with these focal points to different extents, providing assistance and training when welcomed by the partner countries. However, some interviews highlighted that sometimes this appointment of gender focal points is just a ticking box exercise to comply with the EU/external partners' requests, as the focal points have little real influence or it is not completely clear what their role is. Plus, while it is true that governments are open to dialogue on gender equality, societal prejudices remain strongly rooted, limiting the real impact that policies might have.

**Cultural sensitivity and political alignment are key aspects that play a role in the extent to which gender can be mainstreamed and tackled in EU actions.** Other aspects envisioned by GAP III like gender-transformative actions and/or intersectionality, for example, are met with more resistance because the political environment of some countries does not allow for such actions yet. **Private talks between the EUDs and civil society actors might be held, but these actors are scared to take public stances for fear of governmental repercussions.** A general trend observed in the countries analysed is that governments tend to be more open to dialogue and policies that concern GEWE and gender-based violence – but strictly speaking the focus tends to be on women, and to some extent on children. **This is the point of entry of the EUDs' actions on gender, as other aspects, especially concerning LGBTQ+ rights and to some extent sexual rights, are still considered taboo in many cases.**

## 5. Recommendations

The review of ADs brought up several good practices and interesting actions where gender has been meaningfully mainstreamed throughout the action, but it also showed some gaps and indicated that there is a large variance in the quality of mainstreaming between and within our focus countries. In our review of the ADs, we paid specific attention to **three key aspects of mainstreaming that are crucial to its quality:**

- Whether and how gender was integrated into the **context analysis and justification of the action. The drafting of the gender analysis**, and whether it has been used in a meaningful way to justify the action, describe the context, and formulate the action;
- The integration of gender equality in the **objectives and goals of the action to a detailed extent**, precisely mentioning how the action will impact women and girls;
- Use of sex-disaggregated data in indicators, and relevant, meaningful, precise gender-sensitive indicators that ought to be more than a tick-the-box reflex.

These three parts reflect the willingness of the EU to mainstream gender in a meaningful way in actions and should be looked at carefully while reviewing further action documents.

Moreover, to strengthen those documents and to prepare their implementation in a qualitative and meaningful manner, two macro factors are crucial.

- On the one hand, alignment with partner countries' contexts and adaptability to navigate those are essential. In particular, the relationship with the partner countries'

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government and civil society, including at local level, is essential to build up partnerships that will build on existing mechanisms, structures, policies, and sensitivities to allow for more ownership at country level.

- On the other hand, **the capacity and resources of the EU delegations and more broadly of the EU family at the country level need to be strengthened**, in order to ensure a stronger EU voice and a more political commitment of the EU and MS leadership, which the Team Europe approach and mechanisms allow and encourage.

### 5.1. Gender analysis and context of the action

As already mentioned in previous sections, gender analysis is an essential instrument to assess disparities and power inequalities in a specific context or sector. In an ideal scenario, gender analysis contributes to contextual analysis, informing action design in a meaningful way by highlighting power dynamics at the national level. Nevertheless, most of the reviewed ADs lack clarity regarding the extent to which a gender analysis has influenced the formulation of the action or if gender analysis will be conducted during the implementation phase.

**A more systematic use of the already existing (or the intention to conduct) gender analysis could enhance the ADs during the programming phase**, which would especially benefit from direct insights derived from such analysis. Including a gender lens and mainstreaming gender since the inception and design phase saves time and resources, allowing for a meaningful inclusion of historical marginal actors rather than “adding and stirring.”

**Gender country profiles (GCP) and/or sectoral gender analyses can also be used as sources to facilitate a meaningful gender mainstreaming.** Since internal resources are limited, in the short term, EUDs can rely more on technical (external) expertise to ensure that a good gender analysis is carried out, updated, and can be applied in the different programming sectors. Another option is for EUDs to rely on the implementing agencies or local organisations that already carry out their own gender assessments. In the long term, however, EUDs should focus on developing in-house experience and their staff’s own capacity (more on this below).

EUDs should also make sure that a **genuine reflection of gender mainstreaming is carried out when meeting gender mainstreaming targets in order to avoid a superficial “checkbox” approach**, which might inadvertently be created by the drive to meet such targets. This means that the pursuit of targets must be accompanied by an assessment of the quality of mainstreaming efforts and the provision of adequate resources to EUDs.

### 5.2. Gender in objectives and goals

Our review of ADs shows that the **meaningful inclusion of gender in the objective or expected results of the action happens to a variable extent**. ADs often outline the problem or barriers without delving into the analysis of underlying root causes or presenting responses to the acknowledged obstacles. However, those actions that meaningfully take into account gender

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in the objectives and goals, such as Mozambique's action 'ResiNorte – Resilience for the North' (see Section 4.2), are more inclusive and expected to have more lasting results.

### 5.3. Gender in targets and indicators

Our research confirmed that there is a need to **ensure that indicators have a gender component and/or gender-sensitive targets also related to marginalised groups (not just women)**.

This is also crucial to **avoid a fragmented approach by implementing partners** during the implementation phase and ensure the coherence of the European approach, as well as the sustainability of the project. **While EUDs stress their own gender commitments in the ADs, it is then up to the implementing partners to ensure that gender is mainstreamed and gender-responsive actions are undertaken.** However, agreeing on clear gender-related indicators at the beginning of the interventions allows for effective gender-responsive implementation, monitoring and evaluation phases, aligning priorities and strategies between the stakeholders and therefore potentially strengthening the sustainability of the project.

A step further can be taken by ensuring that the calls for proposals issued by the EUDs in the context of their bilateral programmes include a strong gender mainstreaming component and assess the capacity to deliver on the gender objectives of the implementers. This would allow the EUDs to set the tone on what is expected from the partners in terms of gender-responsive actions.

### 5.4. Partnership at partner country level

The **level of implication and engagement of the government** is crucial. The alignment of the EU activities and programmes with the partner countries' strategies and policies is key. To enhance the partnership on this, the political dialogue between EUDs and partner governments needs to more systematically include gender equality. In addition to technical assistance provided by the EU, some organisational changes can be encouraged, like assigning gender focal points in line ministries (CONCORD 2023).

A structured dialogue led by the EC at the global level, now in the framework of the Policy forum on development (PFD), aims to involve civil society and local authorities in monitoring the implementation of GAP III. The **partnership with CSOs (especially local ones and local WROs) and local leaders, including religious leaders, men's groups, and business associations**, is essential to ensure ownership at country level, as well as contribute to strengthening their capacity to monitor the situation of gender equality. This type of multi-stakeholder platform could also be encouraged at partner country level to follow the implementation of the CLIPs, for instance. In some countries, this is already included in the roadmaps for the EU's engagement with civil society.

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## 5.5. More resources and capacities for the EUDs

The **political buy-in and commitment from the EUD leadership** are key, as reflected in the GAP III. The Team Europe approach provides a space for more engagement of the EU family and has the potential to raise a stronger political voice at country level. The personal ownership and commitment of the EU head of delegation, as well as the heads of political and cooperation sections will show a strong commitment from top-level management and will provide an incentive for the teams to be more engaged (CONCORD 2023).

The commitment at the country level of EU member states and other actors part of Team Europe is also a contextual factor that can 'make or break' the success of gender mainstreaming in TEIs (Sergejeff and Di Ciommo 2023). This is reflected within the programming of actions and then at the implementation point. The CLIPs could be used as a joint effort of Team Europe as a core document to guide the implementation for MS, the EU, and the MS development agencies & banks when relevant. In principle, the TEIs create a space for the EU and the MS to have a broader and more systematic approach towards gender mainstreaming.

The **training of EUD staff** is key to integrating gender equality in the programmes, not only through indicators but more broadly as a general approach. Hence, building in-house expertise in the EUDs beyond the gender focal points helps them lead and better the process of elaboration of CLIPs and mainstreaming in the programmes. It contributes to building a whole-of-delegation approach and also helps them to integrate gender equality into the action documents, even when the time is limited.

The **role of EUD gender focal points** should be clarified and benefit from more resources and a clearer mandate. In particular, having a clear mandate would serve as an example of good practice and would back the EUDs when they request for a clear gender focal point's mandate to the partner countries' line ministries. Having more time to dedicate to their role as a coordinator of gender-related activities, but also gender mainstreaming in the programmes is crucial to ensure that the EUD's gender focal point's mandate can be fulfilled. Potentially, depending on the resources and commitment in the delegations, the EUDs could think about appointing more gender focal points to ensure the different topics, issues and sectors are thoroughly covered. One person might not be knowledgeable of all the different thematics that the EUDs deal with and might therefore struggle to be of support. One step further would be to elevate the role of the focal points to that of advisors to the EUDs, in order to have dedicated staff that tackle this very complex topic. Finally, ensuring that the gender focal points are also fully supported by the management and the political section is also key to foster a real change of the mindsets within the organisation.

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## 6. Conclusions

Effectively integrating gender equality considerations into development projects and programmes has the potential to enhance development outcomes in various ways. Gender mainstreaming not only fosters gender equality, which is a significant developmental goal in itself but also serves as a catalyst for broader societal benefits for all genders. While there is limited literature on the specific results of gender mainstreaming at the project and programme levels, some preliminary evidence suggests improvements in the relevance and sustainability of interventions, as echoed by insights from interviews conducted during this research. Nevertheless, there remains a pressing need for further evidence and deeper comprehension of how gender mainstreaming can yield enhanced development impacts.

To be effective and to bring the desired impacts, gender mainstreaming has to be carried out meaningfully. The literature underscores various criteria for effectively mainstreaming gender equality in projects and programmes. Gender analysis and impact assessments, integrated across all stages of policymaking, are essential in good quality mainstreaming, together with high-level political commitment, in-house understanding of gender mainstreaming, and continuous monitoring and evaluation.

This study took a look at how gender is mainstreamed in the EU's programming in 6 partner countries, namely DRC, Senegal, Cameroon, Morocco, Mozambique and Tanzania. Analysing 56 action documents (ADs), and carrying out a dozen interviews, the study found that there is evident progress in integrating gender equality considerations into EU external actions. Our review indicates a high level of commitment within EUDs to achieve gender mainstreaming targets, with none of the ADs reviewed being completely gender-blind.

This progress is notable, but the study also found a great variance in the quality in which gender considerations are integrated into actions. Common gaps include limited use of gender analyses when they exist and limited internal capacity and expertise to conduct such an analysis, which then becomes a challenge and risks deprioritisation; limited incorporation of gender considerations into the objectives and expected results of actions; there is variability in how indicators are chosen and the extent to which they are gender-sensitive, with gaps in setting targets for indicators, particularly gender-specific targets. This may even risk the benefits that gender mainstreaming can offer, such as the responsiveness to needs and sustainability of the results. Furthermore, if mainstreaming has not been carried out with good quality, there is a risk that the action doesn't reach its potential in contributing to gender equality and therefore misses the opportunities to better impact.

Our study also points out examples of good practices and ways forward on how to ensure a good quality of gender mainstreaming. These examples should serve as a starting point for further strengthening gender mainstreaming in the EU external actions. This means that while examples of good practices are welcomed, there is still room for improvement.

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Considering the current progress and challenges, steps should be taken to ensure further improvement in gender mainstreaming efforts. These steps include addressing the gaps identified in the analysis, enhancing the quality of mainstreaming, and strengthening capacity and expertise within EU delegations. Moreover, Key learnings from the current initiatives should inform future strategies and feed into relevant policy processes, considering how to progress further, enhance effectiveness, and maximise impact on gender equality and societal development. Concrete opportunities to do so exist already, for example as part of any potential follow-up to the GAP III and as part of the future Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) of the EU, that should be in place from 2028.

## Annex 1: Action documents consulted

<b>Cameroon</b>	MIP AAPs 2021 AAPs 2022–2023	CLIP's factsheet (CLIP under review)
<b>DRC</b>	MIP AAPs 2021 AAPs 2022 AAPs 2023–2025	CLIP 2022 (latest version not publicly available)
<b>Morocco</b>	AAPs 2021 AAPs 2022 AAP 2023	CLIP (not publicly available)
<b>Mozambique</b>	MIP AAP 2022 part 1 and 2 AAP 2023	CLIP
<b>Senegal</b>	MIP (joint strategy, 2018–2023) AAPs 2021 AAPs 2022 AAPs 2023	CLIP Gender profile, 2021
<b>Tanzania</b>	MIP AAP 2021 AAP 2022	CLIP GCP, 2019

Sources: *Multiannual indicative programmes for 2021–2027*; *Annual action plans for 2021–2027*; EU Gender Action Plan III (GAPIII): *Country Level Implementation Plans (CLIPs) and Gender Country Profiles (GCPs)*



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## Annex 2. OECD–DAC Gender equality policy marker scoring system

<b>Gender is Not Targeted (Score 0)</b>	The project/programme does not target gender equality (not included programmes that have not been screened against the marker). The action is considered to be gender-blind.
<b>Gender is Significant Target (Score 1)</b>	Gender equality is an important and deliberate <i>objective</i> , but not the principal reason for undertaking the project/programme. Programmes that are marked G1 or 1 have mainstreamed gender.
<b>Gender is Principal Target (Score 2)</b>	Gender equality is the main objective of the project/programme and is the main reason why the programme is undertaken. Actions deliberately focused on advancing gender equality are marked G2 or 2.

Source: [OECD 2016](#). Table reproduced by ECDPM.

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This publication benefited from the structural support by ECDPM’s institutional partners: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Luxembourg, The Netherlands and Sweden.



ISSN1571-7577

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