

**BRIEFING NOTE No. 141**

# How the women, peace and security agenda is integrated into the EU's gender action plan

**GENDER**

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The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda – which was launched in 2000 with the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 – is one of the focus areas of the latest European Union (EU) Gender Action Plan (GAP III). The inclusion of women, peace and security as a standalone thematic area is expected to allow for a more holistic EU approach to gender equality and complement efforts by some EU member states that have adopted feminist foreign policies. This briefing note looks at the integration of the WPS agenda in GAP III and at how EU delegations have been integrating the WPS agenda in their programming.

Aligning reporting on WPS and GAP III and encouraging joint reporting by the European Commission, EU delegations, the European External Action Service (EEAS) and EU member states has become a priority in GAP III. However, the Commission and the EEAS seem to be developing their own approaches and engaging with different communities of practices separately. In the delegations, there are varying levels of understanding of the WPS agenda, and it does not feature much in most multi-annual indicative programmes (MIPs).

The appointment of the first-ever EU-EEAS Principal Advisor on Gender and the implementation of WPS in 2015 has provided the leadership needed to ensure that gender equality and girls' and women's empowerment are at the centre of the EU's external action. But to improve implementation of GAP III and the WPS agenda and to achieve the ambitions of GAP III, the EU needs to allocate a dedicated budget for the WPS agenda, clarify accountability systems and consider establishing a dedicated Council working party on gender equality.



## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

In November 2020, the European Union (EU) adopted the 'Gender Action Plan (GAP) III: an Ambitious Vision on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in EU External Action'. This document outlines what the EU aims to do to promote gender equality, through its external action, foreign policy and development cooperation. This EU Gender Action Plan (GAP) III is the third of its kind and contains a number of innovations compared to its previous iterations. First, the GAP III has a more comprehensive approach in terms of the thematic areas it covers, including Women, Peace and Security (WPS). It also integrates high-level priorities of EU external action such as digitalisation, green transition and climate change. Second, the GAP III proposes a three-pronged approach and progressive principles, namely endorsing a transformational, intersectional and human rights-based approach to promote gender equality.

This brief takes a closer look at the integration of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda in the new GAP III. It complements/should be read in conjunction with the two other ECDPM briefing notes (Di Ciommo 2021; Teevan 2021) which focus on the GAP III programming, and on the application of intersectional and transformative approaches as part of the GAP III, respectively. As outlined in previous research conducted by ECDPM (Teevan et al. 2021), the absorption of WPS into the GAP III was viewed by many member states as an important step forward. The expectation is that this will allow for a more holistic approach to gender equality, complementing efforts by some EU member states such as Sweden, Luxembourg, Spain and France who have adopted a feminist foreign policy. The inclusion of WPS as a standalone thematic area in the GAP III is a continuation of the EU's long track record of promoting the WPS Agenda. The GAP III closely follows the adoption of two key documents on WPS, namely the 'EU's Strategic Approach to Women, Peace and Security' in 2018, and the 'EU Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2019-2024'.

Many questions remain about how WPS will be integrated into the GAP III, but also into EU programming. In this note, we aim to answer the following questions:

- How is the Women, Peace and Security Agenda being integrated into GAP III conceptually?
- What are some of the current mechanisms to promote this integration? How will the implementation of the country-level implementation plans (CLIPs) promote the integration of WPS in programming?
- How are transformational and intersectional approaches promoted through efforts to implement the EU's Strategic Approach to WPS?
- What are some of the obstacles to integrating the WPS into the GAP III, and what are some promising practices that can be leveraged further?

## 1. The conceptual integration of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda into the GAP III

The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda consists of ten UN Security Council resolutions, the first being UN Security Council Resolution 1325, in 2000. The EU is by no means a newcomer in this field, having adopted a *Comprehensive Approach to the EU Implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 on WPS* in 2008. The comprehensive approach was expected to steer the EU's efforts to implement the first two UN Security Council resolutions on WPS throughout its external action and foreign policy. The text was lauded for its endorsement of these key resolutions, and seen as a commitment of the EU to promote gender mainstreaming in all the EU's security and foreign policy activities. Nevertheless, the text was drafted in general terms, and "failed to specify what exactly was meant by a gender perspective, how it should be accomplished and who would be responsible for its implementation" (Almqvist 2021).

Subsequent efforts were made to ensure progress, by incorporating Women, Peace and Security in a range of other EU policies and strategies. The first EU Gender Action Plan (2010-15, GAP I) for example, reaffirmed the need to strengthen the protection of women and girls from gender-based violence, as well as to increase women's participation in peace efforts, two key pillars of the WPS Agenda.<sup>2</sup> The GAP I also committed to support partner countries to implement the then-four WPS-related UN Security Council resolutions comprising the WPS Agenda (UNSCR 1325, 1820, 1888 and 1889).

The Global Strategy for the EU's Foreign and Security Policy, adopted in 2016, was another milestone. It reiterated the importance of implementing the WPS Agenda in conflict-related (peace) settlements, but it also emphasised specifically the need to strengthen women's participation in foreign policymaking, and to mainstream gender issues in all EU activities (Almqvist 2021). A decade after the Comprehensive Approach, the EU adopted an EU Strategic Approach to Women, Peace and Security in 2018, and the EU Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security in 2019.

In the GAP III, adopted in November 2020, WPS is integrated as one of the six thematic areas of engagement, alongside themes such as economic and social rights, and green transition and digital transformation (EC 2020a). According to the GAP III's Joint Staff Working document (EC 2020b)<sup>3</sup> the EU Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2019-2024) has to be read, seen and appreciated in conjunction with the GAP III. Elements relevant to the WPS Agenda, such as protection from sexual and gender-based violence in fragile or crisis situations, involvement of women's rights organisations in the fight against gender-based violence, or (political) participation, are thematic focus areas of the GAP III. The indicators for the GAP III "include selected Sustainable Development Goals indicators as well as the thematic indicators of the WPS action plan" (EC 2020b). The GAP III also includes a selection of indicators taken from regional initiatives such as The Spotlight Initiative, an EU-UN partnership to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls by 2030 (Spotlight Initiative 2016).

The integration of WPS as a standalone and fully fledged thematic area marks an important difference from the previous GAPs. In these, some elements of the WPS Agenda were already integrated, including on sexual and gender-based violence in conflict and fragile situations, or women's participation in governance, mediation or peace negotiations. The integration of WPS as a standalone thematic area in GAP III; however, provides more room to build on the track record of the EU's initiatives in this field, and to promote it more comprehensively as part of the EU's external action. For example, as one interviewee from the EEAS noted, "When I engage with multilateral partners, what I bring to the table is GAP III, all of it – including WPS".<sup>4</sup>

The integration also provides an opportunity to overcome some of the shortcomings of the EU's attempts to implement the WPS Agenda. As Almqvist (2021) notes, "the time and effort dedicated to the production of plans, strategies and approaches should be contrasted with the modest number of concrete initiatives that has been undertaken by the EU to mobilise human resources dedicated to WPS". A 2017 European Parliament study, focused on EU CSDP missions, made some of the frustration explicit (EP 2017). For example, the study noted the continued under-representation of women, including in leadership positions within the EEAS and in the field, as well as within the highest decision-making bodies of the EU. The study also remarked that gender advisers in CSDP missions were working without adequate budgets and resources, hampering gender mainstreaming while also pointing to the lack of transparency of what was actually being done by the missions to promote WPS (Almqvist 2021).

The November 2020 evaluation of the EU's external action support to gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment (2010-2018) (EC 2020c) also looked at the EU's progress to promote and implement the WPS Agenda. The evaluation found no contradiction between policy and the strategic framework related to EU's external action support to gender equality and women's empowerment and, for example, the EU commitments to the WPS agenda or the 2016 EU Global Strategy. WPS was found to have

become a standing item of political and human rights dialogues/sub-committees, as well as a regular topic in ad hoc discussions on gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) issues with regional/intergovernmental bodies such as the African Union (AU). WPS was also chosen as the first priority in the UN-EU Strategic Partnership on peace operations and crisis management for the 2019-2021 period. The evaluation also noted the strong joint efforts of the EU and member states in relation to the development of the WPS Agenda at global level and in multilateral fora.

With regards to implementation, the evaluation found strong commitments to promote the EU's WPS Agenda through the Instrument contribution to Stability and Peace (IcSP). This included several interventions specifically targeting GEWE and efforts towards mainstreaming GEWE in various thematic areas; such as mediation and dialogue, natural resources and conflict, security sector reform, as well as support to civil society in conflict-affected contexts. However, the evaluation concludes that, for WPS specifically, the EU's support in the past decade has "often been more focused on promoting the strengthening of the policy framework and the formulation of strategic guidance than on implementation" (EC 2020c). As a result, the evaluation notes, while there has been progress with regards to equal participation in peace and security in some conflict and post-conflict countries, the evidence on the strengthened role of women as mediators, negotiators and technical experts in formal conflict prevention; peace negotiations and peace-building making was deemed more limited (EC 2020c).

The expectation is that with the inclusion of the WPS Agenda in the GAP III, and thus the 2018 EU Strategic Approach and 2019 Action Plan, some of these shortcomings can be overcome, and the EU's objectives with regards to the WPS Agenda can be reinforced as part of the EU's wider efforts to promote gender equality. The Strategic Approach and related action plan are now expected to be fully implemented through GAP III programming, and results monitored through GAP III reporting. Reporting and monitoring between the GAP III and WPS agendas is expected to

become more aligned, with timelines for reviews of the EU Action Plan on WPS to fall within the GAP III reporting timelines. Despite this, some interviewees raised doubts about how far-reaching this conceptual integration of the WPS into the GAP III will be operationalised in practice, which will be discussed in the following section.

## 2. Operationalising the integration of WPS into GAP III

Following the discussion above on the conceptual integration of WPS into the GAP III, and how this is expected to amplify efforts to implement the WPS agenda, this section will discuss a number of (ongoing) processes expected to do so. This includes notably the ongoing programming exercise, the development of the country-level implementation plans (CLIPs) by the EU delegations (and the way in which WPS is included therein), as well as the intention to improve joint monitoring reporting on WPS and GAP III. This section will further discuss the political leadership around WPS and ongoing debate on stronger accountability structures around gender equality, women's empowerment and WPS.

### Current programming cycle: parallel tracks of increasing gender-sensitive analysis

As part of the programming under the new Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI)-Global Europe for the period 2021-2027, GAP III implementation should be informed by a "sound gender profile and framed country-level implementation plans" (Joint SWD 2020). This includes conducting or updating gender country profiles and the development of country-level implementation plans or CLIPs. These plans are intended to present EU Delegations' objectives with regards to gender equality and the process of formulating the CLIP is expected to stimulate delegation-wide ownership of the gender equality agenda and the integration of the GAP III objectives

into EU programming. In addition, the NDICI-Global Europe programming guidelines require conducting sector-specific gender analysis for each priority area identified in the multi-annual indicative programme (MIP), at delegation level. Sector-specific gender analyses are requirements for the 2021-2027 programming cycle under the GAP III.

Based on interviews, there seems to be a significant level of variety in the length, depth, scope and general quality of the CLIPs developed by EU delegations over the past few months. For example, some CLIPs showed a considerable level of cross-delegation involvement, or a higher level of management buy-in, with some being signed off by the head of delegation. Other CLIPs reflected more the stand-alone work of the individual gender focal point. One interviewee noted the outsourcing of gender analysis and CLIP development in some delegations could hamper establishing an institutional body of knowledge and expertise.<sup>5</sup> This is compounded by the rather short-term rotation of delegation staff where contextual knowledge and relationships are lost when staff change within a few years of stay.

However, some emerging experiences, such as in Nepal, show that attempts are made to develop and integrate gender analysis and CLIPs in EU programming in close collaboration between UN Women, EU member states, civil society and the EU delegation.<sup>6</sup> So, while the update of gender country profiles may be 'outsourced' by several delegations, a high number of delegations drafted the CLIPs themselves, even if with varying degrees of collaboration across sections.<sup>7</sup> At the time of writing, it was not possible to collect information yet on the EU's overall evaluation or assessment of the CLIPs (this assessment was only just starting, led by DG INTPA).<sup>8</sup>

## Integration of WPS in CLIPs

There also seemed to be a difference in how the CLIPs were informed by either GAP III thematic areas or priority areas identified in the multi-annual indicative programme (MIP): some CLIPs depart from the MIP, while others in first instances depart from selected thematic areas of the GAP III.<sup>9</sup> Based on this

differentiated approach to developing the CLIPs, it remains to be seen how the CLIPs will contribute to the EU's effort to support the implementation of the WPS agenda, including, for example, the implementation of national action plans on Resolution 1325/WPS. According to several interviewees, the CLIPs should be able to address priorities within a specific country/delegation context, without necessarily covering all aspects or thematic areas of the GAP III. Another option is to integrate aspects of WPS in the priority sectors identified in the MIP, for example, by addressing peace and security issues under 'governance'.<sup>10</sup> In practice however, this remains a challenge, as one interviewee noted that general understanding of the WPS agenda was relatively limited across the delegation.<sup>11</sup> Interviewees noted that there are not many MIPs where WPS features as a priority area.<sup>12</sup>

According to one interviewee, informed by conflict analysis, gender country profiles or other existing analysis, the "main issues in a given country context should [already] be well-known and should inform priority actions".<sup>13</sup> As such, the CLIPs should not be expected to bring surprising new issues to the table, but rather provide an opportunity to tackle long-standing and well-known issues in a more deliberate and holistic manner.<sup>14</sup> To a certain extent, the CLIPs were expected to be heavily informed by the MIPs and detail how to instil a gender lens in the different priority areas, where attention on WPS might not always feature strongly. The emerging picture from CLIPs shows a variety of results. In some cases, EU delegations have also included WPS issues in the CLIPs, which were not identified as priority areas in the MIP. For example, in Mali, women's participation, notably access to elective functions as well as support to Mali's National Action Plan (NAP) on 1325, was included in the CLIP - but not part of the MIP.<sup>15</sup> In South Africa, WPS was part of the MIP for the very first time, and also included in the CLIP, where the delegation departed from the GAP III thematic areas to select priority actions: Ensuring freedom from all forms of gender-based violence; Green transition and the digital transformation; Promoting economic and social rights and empowering girls and women; and Women, Peace and Security.<sup>16</sup>

The CLIPs are seen as a starting point, preceding the detailed design of programmes and initiatives, which will only be finalised once the envelopes and the MIPs for each delegation are approved. In light of the divergent ‘quality’ of this first generation of CLIPs developed, interviewees suggested a need to look at the development of the CLIPs as a process, to learn from and identify existing gaps (such as a need for more training) and explore synergies (e.g., between efforts at country delegation level and multilateral EU delegations). This was felt relevant, in particular for WPS, given its strong regional (e.g., African Union) and international (UN) anchoring.<sup>17</sup> In addition to the CLIPs, there are a number of other processes to strengthen GAP III implementation, including the EU's WPS agenda. These include the annual implementation plans in CSDP operations and missions; the design of EU actions and programmes funded by the EU; and, of course, monitoring, reporting and evaluation.

### Joint reporting on GAP III and WPS: slowly emerging

Joint reporting on WPS and GAP III has been made a stronger priority in the GAP III. The GAP III Joint Staff Working document notes that joint reporting -- by Commission services, delegations, the EEAS as well as Member States -- will be ensured “to the extent possible in line with the respective timelines and obligations” (EC 2020b). In theory, the mid-term and final review of the EU action plan on Women, Peace and Security should follow the GAP III timeline. Already, the 2019 EU Action Plan on WPS noted that the modalities and timeline for WPS reporting, reviews and assessments would follow those of the previous GAP II. These aligned reviews create an opportunity to refine the indicators of the EU Action Plan, promote joint lesson learning and stimulate joint outcome or impact identification. While exchanges on reporting and indicators are just starting within the Commission and EEAS, interviewees expressed concern that the Commission and EEAS are currently developing their respective approaches to the reporting as opposed to exploring approaches for joint reporting.<sup>18</sup>

Interviews conducted suggest that hefty investments are being made to develop guidance on assessing the GAP III indicators and to make the reporting user-friendly. In principle, the indicators are offered as “a menu” to frame and support different processes and measure results, and the list is not exhaustive (Joint SWD 2020). As mentioned above, however, there are some concerns about the choice of indicators for reporting across EU institutions and the gaps in baseline data for the extensive list of indicators. For example, current exchanges and discussions to prepare first reporting of the GAP III are, at the moment, still somewhat separated, between Commission services and the EEAS (and the Informal Joint Task Force on 1325/WPS) which have held separate meetings on reporting.

More generally, interviews indicate that the EEAS and Commission services and departments each engage with different communities of practices and experts, with limited opportunities to engage across these communities, and without a shared space (for example, joint Commission/EEAS task force) for more regular and systematic exchange. Despite a degree of separation there is a continued exchange between individual staff members of the EEAS and Commission services, and a high level of commitment and dedication to a successful implementation of the GAP III. One EEAS official also noted a growing engagement from ‘other’ Commission departments, such as DG NEAR, DG ECHO and DG Trade<sup>19</sup> - which could present an important step in ensuring policy coherence and more comprehensive efforts across the EU institutions to implement the GAP III in full (i.e., all its thematic areas).

### Ensuring stronger accountability: an enduring battle

More fundamentally, while benchmarks and ambitions of the GAP III are high, and could provide a push for the implementation of the two-decades-old WPS agenda, interviewees noted the lack of a dedicated budget and the absence of clear accountability on the WPS Agenda as key obstacles to improving implementation of the GAP III and WPS.<sup>20</sup>

Since 2009, an Informal Joint Task Force on UNSCR1325/WPS has been in place to support the implementation of the EU's strategies on WPS (including UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and follow-up resolutions). Led by the EEAS, the Task Force brings together the EEAS, Commission services (notably FPI), civil society and member states. The Task Force is generally perceived as having been effective in bringing together member states, discussing best practices and creating some level of accountability with regards to the implementation of the EU's commitments to the WPS Agenda. However, member states have also pushed back on proposals for a system of measuring progress and evaluation whereby they report their efforts to promote WPS at every meeting of the Task Force.<sup>21</sup>

Looking at the limitations of the Informal Joint Task Force, interviewees mentioned that the absence of a dedicated Council working party on gender equality was a considerable impediment to effective accountability and buy-in from member states. For one interviewee, this constituted a far larger obstacle for improved accountability than the development of integrated reporting indicators for GAP III. "Gender is sometimes discussed in the new CODEV-PI [Working Party on Development Cooperation and International Partnerships - former CODEV], but it is very development-oriented. In this situation, gender is a "special guest" now and then, but there is no systematic or comprehensive working agenda."<sup>22</sup>

The EEAS proposed the establishment of a separate Council working party on gender equality in the past few years, i.e., the transformation of the Informal Joint Task Force on WPS into a Council working party on gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE). A Council working party could mean a more permanent and more political forum to discuss gender equality and prepare dedicated work on gender equality for the European Council. One EU official found it shocking that of the more than 150 configurations of Council working parties and

Council preparatory bodies, not one was dedicated to gender equality.<sup>23</sup> This stands in contrast to the GAP III's level of ambition and sends a contradictory message that gender equality is more of a technical rather than a political matter.

Support and push-back against this proposal comes from inside the EU institutions, but also from member states, for a variety of reasons. Reportedly, one member state objected to the establishment of a Council working party, because it would be too expensive - which was not felt as a genuine argument in light of 150+ existing Council working parties. Amongst the member states which were against the idea of a Council working party; France, Portugal, Denmark and Finland were mentioned, but it was not specified for which reason precisely. This means that it is not only member states with more conservative positions on gender equality who have resisted the proposal to establish a working party on gender equality. Some member states with strong and quite progressive bilateral agendas have also objected. These member states were seen as wanting to keep some bilateral leverage and ownership, possibly standing to gain more from bilaterally promoting WPS through their foreign policies.<sup>24</sup>

The establishment of such a working party is not deemed viable in the short-term, nor is it actively pursued by the EEAS or certain member states, as interviewees pointed to the current political context and the pushback by some member states on gender diversity issues more generally.<sup>25</sup> The pushback from member states such as Poland and Hungary, against promoting more progressive language and initiatives is not only felt at HQ-level, for example, in Council discussions and exchanges. It is also felt at field level, for example, as CLIPs are being coordinated and shared with member states present in the country.<sup>26</sup> However, the upcoming Swedish presidency, a member state with a dedicated feminist foreign policy, was tentatively mentioned as a possible opportunity to re-launch this proposal.<sup>27</sup>

## Political leadership on GAP III and WPS reinforced

In 2015, Mara Marinaki was appointed as the first-ever EU/EEAS Principal Advisor on Gender (PAG) and on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. According to civil society observers and experts, this position has provided leadership to ensure gender equality and girls' and women's empowerment are at the centre of the EU's external action. Prior to the appointment, the position had remained vacant for a few months, which was criticised by civil society (Plan International 2021) and the European Parliament, while at the same time there were calls to upgrade the position to a Special Representative (Neumann 2021). While the position remains at the level of special advisor, the PAG sits within the office of the EEAS Secretary General, a positive sign of the level of political commitment to gender, according to interviewees.<sup>28</sup>

In July 2021, new EU Special Advisor to the EEAS Secretary General for Gender and Diversity, Stella Ronner-Grubačić, was appointed. The title has been changed to Special Advisor and has come to also include (intersectional) diversity more broadly, stirring concerns among some more conservative member states about how the latter part of her mandate would be developed. Discussions are ongoing about the needs (and modalities)<sup>29</sup> to reinforce the Special Advisor's team on diversity-related matters. In general, Stella Ronner-Grubačić's mandate will include three main aspects: supporting the implementation of the GAP III; continuing the work on WPS; and also promoting gender mainstreaming in programming, EEAS analysis and EU external and internal communication.

Despite some frustration and critique on the delayed appointment, it seems the belated start of the new Special Advisor on Gender and Diversity has had limited negative impact thus far on the GAP III process. The usual strategic level meeting of the Informal Joint Task Force on WPS/1325, customarily co-chaired by the PAG (now Special Advisor) and the rotating presidency did not take place in the first half of 2021. Indeed, the EEAS' Gender and Diversity unit

was able to take some initiatives toward the realisation of the GAP III. Pre-deployment training on the GAP III was provided for new heads of delegations; this training included orientation on the EU's gender diversity and inclusion strategy. This will be expanded next year, where the training and onboarding of incoming EU Special Representatives will include training on GAP III and gender and diversity. The EEAS is in the process of establishing a network of gender focal points within EEAS, building on the experience of gender advisors in the CSDP missions/CSDP structure. This network will differ from the gender focal point structure in EU delegations: while most gender focal points in EU delegations take on gender in addition to other portfolios or topics, the envisaged gender focal points across the EEAS will be at HQ level and, by contrast, will be full-time positions. This process will now be reinforced and sped up with the appointment of the Special Advisor.<sup>30</sup>

## 3. Transformational and intersectional approaches and the EU's promotion of WPS

The transformational and intersectional approaches promoted by the GAP III present an important innovation of the GAP III versus previous GAPs. In principle, given the integration of WPS as a thematic area of engagement for the GAP III, WPS should be promoted in a manner that takes into account transformative and intersectional approaches.

### Intersectionality in the EU's understanding of gender: some way to go

The EU's Strategic Approach on WPS was welcomed "as representing significant progress in the EU's engagement with WPS", demonstrating that the EU had evolved in its understanding of gender and the transformative potential of WPS. At the same time, gender was seen as still being "strongly associated with women and less on the actual notion of gender relations and (...) power" (Haastrup et al. 2019).

The two key documents relating to WPS, namely the EU's Strategic Approach to Women, Peace and Security (Council Conclusions 2018) and the EU Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2019), which preceded the GAP III (albeit by just a few months), do not mention these concepts explicitly at all. As a result, they do not include guidance on how these concepts should be applied to the WPS Agenda.

As previous research notes, there has been a perceived lack of a true intersectional understanding of gender within WPS strategies and approaches, with a rather narrow understanding of gender (see Davis 2018 quoted in Bernarding and Lunz 2020). For example, the report notes that while the EU's Strategic Approach refers to "the intersecting discrimination many women face, sexual minorities and gender non-conforming people are not mentioned". According to Bernarding and Lunz (2020), the EU's approach to promoting gender equality favours gender equality for the benefit of more effective security, economic growth or development instead of gender equality as a goal itself: "The focus is on adding/including women into existing structures and without transforming these existing structures and policies so that they contribute to equal societies" (Bernarding and Lunz 2020). Now that the EU Strategic Approach, EU action plan on WPS and its indicators are conceptually integrated in the GAP III, this risks replicating this narrow understanding of the transformative changes needed for genuine gender equality.

According to Bernarding and Lunz 2020, who conducted research interviews on the topic, there is "the idea that women from EU partner countries are (subconsciously) seen as 'beneficiaries' of EU conflict prevention while the expertise and perspective they bring to the table are overlooked or not taken seriously". This mirrors a discourse that focuses on a specific type of women within the EU context: "middle-class, European women, often those who serve in masculine, hard-security roles, disregarding women from other parts of the world" (Davis 2018, quoted in Bernarding and Lunz 2020). In addition, there is a pervasive narrow understanding of gender which is based on an exclusive and binary

understanding of gender, anchored on stereotypical ideas of women and men. This binary understanding excludes other gender and socio-economic identities too, with a risk that the needs, perspective, and expertise of LGBTQI+ people and those from other sociocultural backgrounds are insufficiently understood and hence excluded in the EU's efforts to promote WPS (Haastrup et al. 2019). Another example is the risk of perpetuating a stereotypical representation of men in EU partner countries, "who are often portrayed in a highly gendered and racialised manner" – as perpetrators of violence, for example.<sup>31</sup>

In this regard, the lack of diversity within the WPS community of practice was flagged in interviews. While the existence of this 1325/WPS community of practice at EU level was appreciated, it is often "the same voices [which] are heard over and over again" with "few people of colour being represented in these discussions".<sup>32</sup> As such, the European community of practice on WPS the EEAS engaged with, lacks scope and diversity, often inviting the same, known experts; or, as one interviewee noted: "Often, I will be the only person of colour in the meeting".<sup>33</sup> Another interviewee echoed this and noted that very few were able to bring a comprehensive view on gender, development and foreign policy<sup>34</sup> - hampering effectively joining up the WPS agenda and GAP III and its ambitions.

These remarks point out that attention for (gender) diversity seems to be somewhat limited in a number of facets. Not only is a level of diversity missing in terms of how and with whom the EU engages, but also in the extent to which it is able to develop a comprehensive understanding of gender at the intersection of development and foreign policy and security. As such, increased attention for intersectionality and gender diversity will need to be reflected in how the EU develops its understanding of gender and diversity, as well as in its working methods, notably exchanges with external partners, civil society, and experts invited as part of the community of practice. This will, in turn, affect how and to which extent intersectionality and gender diversity are mainstreamed in the EU institutions' work and programming. The fact that the EU Special

Advisor has now an expanded mandate which includes diversity could be read as a sign that the EU recognises this as a clear area for improvement.

### Learning by doing, and vice-versa

Attempts to apply transformative and intersectional approaches, and learning from country/delegation-specific experiences, programming and analysis could further stimulate the application of these GAP III innovations in all thematic areas of the GAP III, including WPS. Some examples show increased attention to intersectionality in conflict analysis screenings, for example in Nepal. In South Africa, the EUD's communication and outreach offered an important tool to promote gender norms, such as harmful masculinities, and touched upon intersectionality. In Mozambique, the EU and other international actors have tried now for several years to get official registration of a LGBTQI+ civil society entity from the national administration, without success and with several practical implications for this entity to operate (e.g., receive funding).

Capturing and sharing these experiences will require some level of comprehensive and systematic exchanges between EU institutions and services at headquarters, between sections in delegations, and between member states, both in the field and at HQs. In this regard, one interviewee noted there was a need for a better understanding, between EU delegations and headquarters, of the realities faced by delegation staff in terms of designing programmes and working with under-funded gender departments in a given country context.<sup>35</sup> This is relevant for working with national actors and line ministries on WPS issues (for example on National Action Plans on 1325) or with regards to reforms to family or civil codes. Most National Action Plans on 1325 in Africa are developed by Ministries of Gender and Development, Women and Children's Affairs, or Social Affairs. These Ministries are often under-funded and under-resourced, compared to Ministries of Foreign Affairs or Finance Ministries.

Furthermore, delegation staff interviewed felt they might have more tangible opportunities to apply the

principles of intersectionality and transformative approaches, including with regards to WPS, in the programme design stage. This stage will follow the development of CLIPs and approval of MIPs in the coming weeks and months. One interviewee, while acknowledging the importance of addressing intersectionality and a more fine-grained understanding of gender, also pointed to a need for more "realism". This interviewee noted that there is a tendency within EU institutions to think that the EU has advanced much more than it has in reality in its understanding of gender issues.<sup>36</sup> Another delegation-based interviewee contrasted this assumption with the reality, notably for gender focal points, where key concepts of gender, women's empowerment or WPS are not well understood within the delegation, creating gaps in the CLIP formulation.<sup>37</sup> According to these interviewees, considerable knowledge gaps still remain with regards to "rather basic" issues such as conducting proper gender mainstreaming, or a good understanding of gender across different sectors.

Similarly, others echoed that an assessment of potential unintended consequences of any type of EU programming or initiatives on gender relations is far from being implemented systematically, for example as part of Impact Assessments of the EU's policies, or prior to programme design. For example, an interviewee shared her experience where EU programming on access to education in rural areas in Afghanistan did not address pre-existing barriers to girls' enrolment in schools. As a result, it primarily benefited boys already attending schools and thus widened the educational gap between girls and boys in this region.<sup>38</sup> In this case, the EU could have paid more attention to girls' experiences on access to education and addressed them as part of the programme design, informed by a sectoral and/or gender country analysis.

A thorough understanding and implementation of the GAP III principles influences EU action directly, for example, with regards to gender mainstreaming. The GAP III acknowledges the room for improvement with regards to gender mainstreaming, although not explicitly, through its institutional objectives. According to the GAP III, the design of all external EU-

funded programmes will have to apply three minimum standards, including:

1. conducting and using updated gender analyses to inform decision-making on future action and integrating these into all relevant dialogues, policies, strategies, programmes and operations;
2. applying gender-sensitive and sex-disaggregated indicators and statistics to monitoring and evaluation; and
3. giving robust reasons, based on the findings of the gender analysis, to substantiate any action deemed not to contribute to gender equality.

Our research and interviews suggest that continued efforts will be needed to make sure these minimum standards are applied, for example, with regards to using gender-sensitive data and statistics (as some baselines information seems to be absent at this stage), combined with further training. Several interviewees confirmed that many questions remain on how to apply the intersectionality and transformative approaches, especially in the design phase of new programming under the NDICI-Global. Finally, the EU's new Special Advisor on Gender and Diversity has made gender mainstreaming a key priority for her mandate, acknowledging the need for further improvement in this regard.<sup>39</sup>

## 4. Conclusion

This briefing note has aimed to shed light on what the integration of the WPS Agenda in the EU's GAP III could mean in theory and in practice, and points to a number of obstacles as well as promising practices.

The GAP III is relatively young, while its first milestones for implementation and reporting are approaching fast. Important processes to implement the GAP III, such as the CLIPs and development or update of gender country profiles, are well underway, while other initiatives, such as the establishment of a gender focal point network within the EEAS, have been launched, and a new Special Advisor on Gender and Diversity has been appointed. Within this context, this section looks at some possible obstacles identified so far on integrating WPS in the GAP III, as well as several promising practices.

**The lack of a clearer accountability structure to monitor progress and secure commitments from Member States and EU Institutions in implementing the GAP III, including WPS, was flagged as an obstacle.** This included the absence of a Council Working Party on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (which would include WPS). Positions on the added value of a Council Working Party are currently split, even amongst those member states which have rather progressive domestic and foreign policies on gender; such as Sweden, Finland and Germany.<sup>40</sup> The accountability question on WPS is not new, as Almqvist (2021) notes: "Indeed, due to its intergovernmental nature, EU foreign and security policy has no hard incentives to compel relevant actors to fulfil the WPS demands [and] there are no EU mechanisms in place to monitor progress or setbacks on the ground".

The EEAS (through the Informal Joint Task Force) and Commission services are currently holding separate discussions on which indicators to use and the necessary data and baselines. Yet, generally, exchanges are continuous and intense, with a shared commitment to implement the GAP III successfully. It could be **worthwhile to explore the options for a fully joined up inter-service task force on GAP III and WPS.** This could also help bring together different communities of practice and expertise, and stimulate discussions on how to mainstream transformative approaches and intersectionality across all thematic areas, including WPS. This could also stimulate more intensive exchanges and joint work on promoting gender mainstreaming, steered by the new Special Advisor on Gender and Diversity.

Some promising practices are emerging too. In theory, **the development of the CLIPs has offered an opportunity and a space for integrating WPS more strongly within delegation-wide efforts with regards to gender equality and women's empowerment.** It remains too early to give a full appreciation of how the CLIPs have been able to bridge between the cooperation section and political section and CSDP/missions (where WPS has generally featured more prominently) within a given country. **There is considerable variation in terms of how the CLIPs have**

**been developed as well as the extent to which WPS has been integrated.** An assessment is underway, as are efforts to continue training and capacity support for field level staff, in addition to efforts to roll out a gender focal point network across the EEAS.

The centrality of intersectionality and transformative approaches as key innovations in the GAP III offers more entry points to adopt this lens in a number of processes, not just those linked directly to the GAP III itself. **Selected examples of Conflict Analysis**

**Screenings, gender country analysis and sector-specific gender analysis, are showing increased attention for these crucial innovations stimulated by the GAP III. These could be leveraged further, for example, through annual action plans. There is also some time left to review MIPs before they are formally signed and approved before the end of the year.** Also, our research points to room for increased training and support to staff -- particularly at delegation level -- in the design of future programmes.

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## Endnotes

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- <sup>2</sup> The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda is often described in terms of four pillars: participation and representation, prevention, protection, as well as relief and recovery.
- <sup>3</sup> Which outlines the objectives and indicators of the GAP III further: European Union, Objectives and Indicators to frame the implementation of the Gender Action Plan III (2021-25) Accompanying the document Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council, Gender Action Plan III: An Ambitious vision on gender equality and women's empowerment for EU external Action, November 2020.
- <sup>4</sup> Interview, 5 July 2021.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>6</sup> Indeed, the GAP III indicator on strategic engagement notes that these CLIPs should ideally be developed "in consultation with national stakeholders and other actors" as well as with member states (Joint SWD 2020). In South Africa and Mozambique for example, the CLIP was circulated to member states, some of which provided extensive comments and suggestions. Also, Interview, 14 September 2021.
- <sup>7</sup> Interview, 8 September 2021.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>9</sup> Interview, 14 September 2021.
- <sup>10</sup> As is the case in the draft CLIPs developed by the delegations of Nepal and Mozambique, confidential.
- <sup>11</sup> Interview, 14 September 2021.
- <sup>12</sup> This was also observed at the time of writing with regards to the Team Europe Initiatives – where all but one (from Afghanistan) included WPS. Interview, 8 September 2021.
- <sup>13</sup> Interview, 5 July 2021.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>15</sup> Based on our interviews, priority areas in Mali's multiannual indicative programme mentioned were: functioning of the state, sustainable economic growth and human capital (pending final approval).
- <sup>16</sup> Interview, 14 September 2021.
- <sup>17</sup> Interview, 17 September 2021.
- <sup>18</sup> Interview, 5 July 2021.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>20</sup> Interviews, 5 and 14 July 2021.
- <sup>21</sup> Interviews, 5 and 6 July 2021.
- <sup>22</sup> Interview, 5 July 2021.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>24</sup> Interview, 5 July 2021.
- <sup>25</sup> Interview, 14 September 2021.
- <sup>26</sup> Interview, 17 September 2021.
- <sup>27</sup> Interview, 5 July 2021.
- <sup>28</sup> Interviews, 5 and 14 July 2021.
- <sup>29</sup> For example through national secondments.
- <sup>30</sup> Interview, 5 July 2021.
- <sup>31</sup> Bernarding and Lunz (2020) quote an example from Hoijtink and Muehlenhoff (2019), referring to a promotional video where the authors suggest the EU Global Strategy is presented by portraying insecurity as brown men.
- <sup>32</sup> Interview, 6 July 2021.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>34</sup> Interview, 5 July 2021.
- <sup>35</sup> Interview, 14 September 2021.
- <sup>36</sup> Interview, 5 July 2021.
- <sup>37</sup> Interview, 14 September 2021.
- <sup>38</sup> Interview, 14 July 2021.
- <sup>39</sup> Interview, 17 September 2021.
- <sup>40</sup> Interview, 5 July 2021.

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