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Gender equality in EU external action: Mapping of policies and actors

Background Paper

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European Peacebuilding Liaison Office

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Civil Society Dialogue Network

The Civil Society Dialogue Network (CSDN) is a mechanism for dialogue between civil society and EU policy-makers on issues related to peace and conflict. It is co-financed by the European Union (Neighbourhood Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe). It is managed by the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO), a civil society network, in cooperation with the European Commission (EC) and the European External Action Service (EEAS). The fifth phase of the CSDN will last from 2023 to 2026. For more information, please visit the [EPLO website](#).



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Abbreviations

| | |
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| AFET | EP Foreign Affairs Committee |
| CFSP | Common Foreign and Security Policy |
| CLIPS | Country-level Implementation Plans |
| CPPB | Conflict prevention and peacebuilding |
| CSDP | Common Security and Defence Policy |
| DEVE | EP Development Committee |
| DG | Directorate-General |
| DG ECHO | Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid |
| DG ENEST | Directorate-General for Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood |
| DG INPTA | Directorate-General for International Partnerships |
| DG MENA | Directorate-General for the Middle East, North Africa, Gulf |
| DROI | EP Human Rights Subcommittee |
| EC | European Commission |
| EEAS | European External Action Service |
| EP | European Parliament |
| EU | European Union |
| EUD | European Union Delegation |
| EUTF | EU Task Force |
| FEMM | EP Women's Rights and Gender Equality Committee |
| FPI | Service for Foreign Policy Instruments |
| GAP | Gender Action Plan |
| GCP | Gender Country Profile |
| HR/VP | High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy / Vice-President of the European Commission |
| HQ | Headquarters |
| MEP | Member of the European Parliament |
| MS | Member State |
| SEDE | EP Security and Defence Committee |
| WPS | Women, Peace and Security |

Gender equality in EU external action: Mapping of policies and actors

This Background Paper provides an overview of policies, actors, functions and procedures relating to gender equality in the European Union's (EU) external action. By doing so, it presents key entry points for civil society organisations engaging with EU policymakers on the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda and gender equality in EU external action.

This paper complements the EPLO CSDN '[Mapping of actors: The European Union and peacebuilding](#)' (March 2025) which details the roles and responsibilities of European Union (EU) policy-makers as they relate to conflict and peace in the EU's external action and identifies opportunities for engagement for civil society working on peacebuilding.

The paper was produced for the Civil Society Dialogue Network (CSDN) mechanism.

EU Policies

This section presents key EU policy documents and guidelines linking to women's rights, WPS and gender equality in EU external action.

[Roadmap for Women's Rights](#) (7 March 2025)

The Roadmap for Women's Rights sets the newest impetus of the EU to drive the gender equality agenda forward. Its goal is to set out a political long-term vision to advance on women's rights and reaffirm the EU's commitment to empower women and girls and fully realise a gender-equal society across Europe and the world.

[Updated Civilian Operations Commander Operational Guidelines for Mission Management and Staff on Gender Mainstreaming](#) (31 January 2024)

[Council Conclusions on Women, Peace and Security](#) (14 November 2022)

The Council Conclusions on WPS recall the Conclusions on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) of 10 December 2018, reaffirm the validity of the EU Strategic Approach to WPS, and commit to the full implementation of the EU's Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2019-2024.

[Strategy and Action Plan to Enhance Women's Participation in Civilian CSDP Missions 2021-2024](#) (21 December 2021)

[Gender Action Plan III](#) (25 November 2020)

The GAP III is the main EU policy framework to achieve the full integration of gender and diversity. WPS is a key thematic area of GAP III. GAP III is therefore a main vehicle for the

implementation, reporting and evaluation of the EU's work on WPS. For more information see the information [here](#) and under 'EU Procedures' below.

European Parliament Resolution on Gender Equality in EU's foreign and security policy (23 October 2020)

Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 (5 March 2020)

The Gender Equality Strategy is part of European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's 'Union of equality' framework. It declares to "systematically includ[e] a gender perspective in all stages of policy design in all EU policy areas, internal and external" and to address gender equality and women's empowerment across the world (paragraph 6).

EU Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) 2019-2024 (5 July 2019)

The Action Plan focuses on six prioritized objectives to implement the Council Conclusions on the WPS agenda (2018). It is authored by the Council of the EU and based on a Working document of the European External Action Service (EEAS) of 4 July 2019. The Action Plan has been extended to 2027 by the Political and Security Committee (PSC).

Council Conclusions on Women, Peace and Security (10 December 2018)

Included in the annex to the Council Conclusions is the EU Strategic Approach to WPS, which replaced the 2008 Comprehensive Approach to WPS. The Strategic Approach to WPS and its corresponding **Action Plan** that followed in 2019 are the core documents framing the EU's understanding of Women, Peace and Security.

EU Strategic Approach to Women, Peace and Security (November 2018)

The EU Strategic Approach to WPS was annexed to the 2018 Council Conclusions on Women, Peace and Security.

EU Functions and Positions

This section covers specific gender equality-related functions in EU external action. Next to these, gender equality is also supposed to be mainstreamed across all senior EU positions.

Equality Ambassador (EEAS)

As of June 2025, this position at the EEAS is held by Aude Maio-Coliche. The ambassador now reports to the Deputy Secretary General for Economic and Global Issues. Previously titled 'Ambassador for Gender and Diversity', this position at the EEAS was held by ambassador Stella Ronner-Grubačić since July 2021, reporting to the EEAS Secretary General at the time. From 2015-2020, this position was titled 'Principal Advisor on Gender and on the implementation of UNSCR1325 (PAG)' and was held by ambassador Mara Marinaki. The position is anchored in the [EEAS organigramme](#).

EEAS Equality Task Force

The Equality Ambassador is supported by the Equality Task Force. After some recent institutional changes in the EEAS, the Task Force, formerly known as ‘Task Force on Gender and Diversity’ has now been renamed and its position within the EEAS structure has changed. It previously reported to the Secretary General but now falls under the responsibility of the Deputy Secretary General for Economic and Global Issues. The Equality Task Force is headed by Julia Koch de Biolley (as of June 2025). The Task Force is currently supported by several seconded national experts some of which are also covering WPS.

Technical Level Taskforce on WPS

The EUTF on WPS is an ad-hoc working party chaired by the EEAS Equality Task Force, and comprises at least one representative of each Member State, representatives of relevant EU services working on WPS, and a few civil society representatives as observers. The Task Force gathers approximately quarterly and discusses recent issues with relevance to the EU as well as developments in EU member states regarding WPS.

Commissioner on Equality

The position of the Commissioner on Equality at the European Commission is currently held by Hadja Lahbib. Since the second Von der Leyen Commission 2024, the Equality portfolio has been combined with the Commissioner portfolio for Preparedness and Crisis Management. The Equality Commissioner is responsible for

- developing a [Roadmap for Women’s Rights for International Women’s Day 2025](#), setting out the key gender equality policy principles for the years ahead. This, in turn, will frame the work for a new Gender Equality Strategy.
- leading the work on sexual and reproductive health issues
- proposing a renewed LGBTIQ Equality Strategy for post-2025, which will focus on the continued and persisting hate-motivated harassment and violence, including online, and banning the practice of conversion therapy.
- presenting a new Anti-Racism Strategy
- spearheading the implementation of the EU Strategic Framework for Roma equality, inclusion and participation, as well as the full implementation of the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, respectively.

Gender Focal Persons in EU delegations

- Under GAP II, Gender Focal Persons in EU delegations have been established to start an ‘institutional culture shift’. The role of a Gender Focal Person is to bring in technical capacity and knowledge of gender issues, to be responsible for advising and coordinating actions to implement the EU Gender Action Plan in the activities of the EU Delegation, and to support the process of gender mainstreaming. Gender focal points often have multiple roles in the EUD which can limit their ability to focus only on the

gender equality portfolio. The contacts of EU delegation staff including Gender Focal Persons are not public but can be enquired through HQ staff.

The Task Force on Equality of the European Commission

- This Task Force is internal to the Commission and is made up of representatives ('Equality Coordinators') of all Directorates-General and the EEAS. It is chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General in charge of Policy Coordination and supported by a Secretariat based in the Secretariat-General of the Commission. The TF is tasked to mainstream equality in all EU policies, from their design to their implementation.

EU Institutions

European Commission

Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA)

Units relevant to GPS:

- The Unit for **Gender Equality, Human Rights and Democratic Governance (G.1)** is responsible for the implementation of GAP III, integrating gender equality and human rights perspectives into EU development assistance.
- The Unit for **Resilience, Peace and Security (G.5)** is responsible for integrating concerns related to peace and security into EU development assistance. Within DG INTPA, CPPB work will be primarily addressed under this unit.

There are also Gender Focal Points employed in the following parts of the European Commission:

- Directorate-General for Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood (DG ENEST)
- Directorate-General for the Middle East, North Africa, Gulf (DG MENA)¹
- Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid (DG ECHO)
- Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI)

For more information about these institutions and their organisation charts, please see the EPLO CSDN '[Mapping of actors: The European Union and peacebuilding](#)' (March 2025).

European Parliament

The European Parliament (EP) plays a key political and oversight role in advancing gender equality in EU external action. It adopts resolutions, provides scrutiny, and commissions reports on the EU's gender equality and WPS policies. The Committees on Foreign Affairs (AFET), Development (DEVE), and Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) regularly engage on GAP III implementation, and jointly authored the 2022 resolution on GAP III, calling for more concrete actions and stronger accountability mechanisms. The EP also holds the European Commission and EEAS to account through parliamentary questions and budgetary

¹ At the time of writing, information regarding the new DG's mandate, organisational structure, and staff numbers was still limited (last updated: 23 January 2025).

procedures. Individual Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) from DEVE, AFET, FEMM, the Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI), Security and Defence Committee (SEDE) as well as the Intergroup on LGBTI Rights and the Budget Committee (BUDG) may serve as entry points for civil society engagement as they play a role in shaping the EU's external gender equality agenda and funding priorities. While the Parliament was a more promising ally for gender equality advocacy during the 2019–2024 legislature, engaging with the Parliament elected for 2024–2029 may present more challenges, depending on the composition of relevant committees and political groups.

Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions

Full time Gender and Human Rights Advisers are deployed in all civilian CSDP Missions. Since 2018, Civilians CSDP Missions have worked towards a more structured gender mainstreaming approach through the implementation of the [Civilian Operations Commander Operational Guidelines for Mission Management and Staff on Gender Mainstreaming \(updated in 2024, see above\)](#).

Member states and NAPs

EU Member States are responsible for implementing the WPS agenda at national level, primarily through National Action Plans (NAPs). As of 2025, 25 EU Member States have adopted WPS NAPs, with varying scopes, levels of ambition, and implementation mechanisms. These NAPs outline national priorities and commitments on WPS, and can serve as links between EU-level commitments and local action. EU Member States contribute to discussions in the EEAS-led Technical Level Taskforce on WPS, where they often share national-level updates. Some MS have also deployed staff with a focus on WPS in their Permanent Representations to the EU in Brussels. The role of national civil society in both developing and monitoring NAPs varies significantly and remains a critical space for engagement and advocacy.

European Institute for Gender Equality

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), based in Vilnius, is an autonomous EU agency that provides research, data, and tools to support gender mainstreaming in EU policymaking. While EIGE's mandate focuses primarily on internal EU policies, it contributes to external action through data and resources on gender indicators, policy evaluations, and toolkits relevant to GAP III and the WPS agenda. EIGE's Gender Mainstreaming Platform and Gender Statistics Database are key resources for EU institutions and Member States alike. EIGE has also published research on gender in EU external relations, including cooperation and development, and has supported efforts to build institutional capacity on gender equality. EIGE's analytical work is used in evaluations and policy planning at EU level and is accessible to civil society actors engaging with the EU. Click [here](#) to visit EIGE's website.

EU Procedures

CLIPs and Gender Country Profiles (GCPs)

GAP III introduced the Country-level Implementation Plans (CLIPs) and Gender Country Profiles (GCPs) which will guide the implementation of GAP III at the national level to ensure a shared strategic vision and close cooperation with Member States and partners at multilateral, regional and country level. Together with civil society and local authorities this is evaluated yearly in the [GAP III Structured Dialogue](#). Not all CLIPs are publicly available – often staff from the EU delegation, including Gender Focal Points, can provide more information.

Legislation and evaluation of GAP III

- GAP III was endorsed by the Council as [Presidency Conclusions](#) (16 December 2020)
- It is accompanied by a Joint Staff Working Document: [Objectives and Indicators to frame the implementation of the Gender Action Plan III](#) (2021-25)
- European Parliament, DEVE-FEMM Committees [Report on the EU Gender Action Plan III](#) (2021/2003(INI))
- [European Parliament \(EP\) Resolution on GAP III](#) (10 March 2022)
- An independently commissioned [mid term evaluation of GAP III](#) analyses the state of implementation of GAP covering the time frame Jan 2021 - Dec 2022 (8 May 2023)
- [Joint mid-term report on the implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan \(GAP III\)](#) (November 2023)
- The EU [extended](#) the duration of the GAP III from 2025 until 2027 (21 November 2023)
- The EU is commissioning another external intermediate evaluation of GAP III. The thematic focus for this will be on 1) the green and digital transition and 2) support to women's organisations in fragile contexts. The final evaluation will be published at the end of 2025.
- Jozef Síkela, Commissioner for International Partnerships, committed to a follow up action plan on gender equality which shall "[remain ambitious](#)" beyond 2027.
- [Steering Group for the Structured Dialogue of GAP III](#): The Steering Group for the Structured Dialogue (SD) of GAP III is hosted by the unit G.1 Gender Equality, Human Rights and Democratic Governance at DG INTPA. The SD is supposed to be held annually and organised by DG INTPA and the EEAS, in collaboration with the Policy Forum on Development (PFD). It also comprises different civil society organisations engaged in promoting gender equality in the EU's external action. The last SD was held in November 2023 (as of June 2025).

Conclusions

In the last two decades, the EU has made progress in institutionalising gender equality in its external action overall, particularly through frameworks such as the Strategic Approach to WPS, GAP III, and the deployment of gender focal points across missions and delegations. Nonetheless, recent institutional restructuring processes and an increasing emphasis on economic competitiveness and security have weakened some of these achievements. Implementation remains uneven across institutions, geographic contexts, and Member States. Political commitment fluctuates in the face of rising global backlash against gender equality

and increasing securitisation of foreign policy. The extension of the WPS Action Plan and GAP III to 2027, including the ongoing evaluations are critical moments to push for more ambitious, context-sensitive and accountable EU action linking gender, peace and security. For civil society organisations, meaningful engagement depends on dealing with a complex institutional landscape, with thematic and geographic institutional counterparts. Sustained advocacy and partnerships remain key to ensuring that EU commitments translate into outcomes in conflict-affected partner countries.