



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

Background Paper

Brussels
August 2026

European Peacebuilding Liaison Office

The European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO) is the largest independent civil society platform of European NGOs, NGO networks and think tanks that are committed to peacebuilding and the prevention of violent conflict. EPLO's mission is to influence European policymakers to take a more active role in securing peace and resolving and preventing conflict through nonviolent means in all regions of the world, and to do so more effectively.

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

AFET	EP Foreign Affairs Committee
AI	Artificial Intelligence
BUDG	EP Budget Committee
CLIPS	Country-level Implementation Plans
CSDN	Civil Society Dialogue Network
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DEVE	EP Development Committee
DG	Directorate-General
DG ECHO	European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
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
EIGE	European Institute for Gender Equality
EP	European Parliament
EPLO	European Peacebuilding Liaison Office
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
GBV	Gender-based violence
GCP	Gender Country Profile
GFP	Gender Focal Person
HR/VP	High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy / Vice-President of the European Commission
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer (or questioning), and asexual +
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MFF	Multiannual Financial Framework
MS	Member State
NAP	National Action Plan
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development – Development Assistance Committee
PAG	Principal Advisor on Gender
PFD	Policy Forum on Development
PSC	Political and Security Committee
SD	Structured Dialogue
SEDE	EP Security and Defence Committee
SD	Structured Dialogue
TF	Task Force
UN	United Nations
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
WPS	Women, Peace and Security

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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.

This paper is frequently updated according to latest developments. The latest update was carried out in August 2026.

EU Policies

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

[Gender Equality Strategy 2026-2030](#) (5 March 2026)

This European Commission (EC) Strategy enlarges the scope of the previous strategy by covering all the principles of the Roadmap for Women's Rights (2025). In addition to ensuring implementation of existing legislation, this strategy tackles new threats such as gender-based cyberviolence, anti-gender narratives and Artificial Intelligence (AI)-related risks, which particularly affect women. The section on 'Gender Equality in external action' recognises that given rising levels of armed conflict, defunding gender equality threatens human development and women's access to SRHR; sets gender-based violence (GBV) as a thematic focus; sets out to integrate WPS into EU Security and Defence Partnerships, commits to continue to include gender considerations in bilateral human rights dialogues; mentions gender equality considerations as central to working with EU candidate countries; wants to continue to "participate in and support the revitalisation of the Commission on the Status of Women" and other UN bodies; and commits to a renewed EU GAP IV and WPS Action Plan. The EC also commits to presenting technical guidance on the tracking of gender equality expenditure under the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). The Strategy upholds the approach of adopting an intersectional perspective and combining gender mainstreaming with targeted actions and engaging men and boys as key actors and beneficiaries of gender equality.

[Integrating gender equality in EU actions : How to apply the OECD-DAC Gender Equality Policy Marker](#) (October 2025)

This guidance was produced by the Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA) for EU external action staff in headquarters and EU Delegations. It translates the

Gender Action Plan (GAP) III into operational instructions for implementation throughout the programming cycle, and reiterates the commitment that 85% of new actions should prioritise gender equality.

LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy 2026 – 2030 (October 2025)

This strategy builds on the 2020-2025 Strategy and is part of the EU's effort to build a Union where diversity is celebrated and where all people, including outside the EU, can be themselves without risk of discrimination, exclusion or violence. It sets out measures (primarily within the EU) to protect LGBTIQ+ people from harmful practices and hate-motivated offences, empowering LGBTIQ+ communities and bodies promoting equality, and engaging civil society as well as Member States and other actors.

Council Conclusions on advancing gender equality in the AI-driven digital age (19 June 2025)

The Conclusions call for targeted efforts to advance gender equality in the digital age, with a focus on the risks and opportunities presented by AI, and propose measures aimed at addressing continued gender inequalities, with specific emphasis on discrimination, bias, and violence towards women and girls in the digital world.

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 Common Security and Defence Policy (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 equality 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. Originally determined to cover the period 2020-2025, its [duration was extended](#) in November 2023 to include rest of the current multiannual financial framework (i.e. to 2027).

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 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.

DG ECHO Thematic Policy Document n° 6 Gender Different Needs, Adapted Assistance (July 2013)

EU Functions and Positions

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

Ambassador for Equality (EEAS)

From August 2025 to June 2026, this position at the EEAS was held by Aude Maio-Coliche. The ambassador reports to the Deputy Secretary General for Geoeconomics and Interinstitutional 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. As of September 2026, the position is still anchored in the [EEAS organigramme](#) but currently vacant.

EEAS Task Force for Equality

The Task Force, formerly known as 'Task Force on Gender and Diversity' when it reported to the Secretary General, is now the Equality Task force under the Ambassador for Equality. The Equality Task Force is headed by Julia Koch-de Biolley and is supported by several seconded national experts some of which are also covering WPS.

EU WPS Taskforce

The EUTF on WPS is an ad-hoc working party and coordination forum chaired by the EEAS Taskforce for Equality, and comprises representatives of Member States, relevant EU services working on WPS, and a few civil society observers. The Taskforce gathers approximately

quarterly and discusses recent issues with relevance to the EU as well as developments in EU member states regarding WPS.

Commissioner for Equality

This position is currently (August 2026) held by Hadja Lahbib. Since 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.

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.

Gender Focal Persons in EU Delegations

- Gender Focal Persons (GFPs) in EU Delegations (EUD) were established under GAP II 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 EUD, 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 EUD staff including Gender Focal Persons are not public but can be enquired about through staff based in headquarters.

EU Institutions

European Commission

Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA)

Units relevant to gender equality and WPS:

- The Unit for **Gender Equality, Human Rights and Democratic Governance (G.1)** is responsible for the implementation of GAP III, for developing GAP IV, and for 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, conflict prevention and peacebuilding work will be primarily addressed under this unit.

There are also Gender Focal Points employed in the following parts of the European Commission, even if (as of August 2026), these posts do not appear in the organisational charts:

- Directorate-General for Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood (DG ENEST)
- Directorate-General for the Middle East, North Africa, Gulf (DG MENA)
- 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 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, Civilian 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 National Action Plans (NAPs)

EU Member States are responsible for implementing the WPS agenda at national level, primarily through NAPs. As of August 2026, all EU Member States bar Romania and Luxembourg 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 WPS Taskforce, 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.

EU Procedures

Preparation of GAP IV

The Commission is currently preparing the EU Action plan for gender equality and women's empowerment in EU external action (GAP IV) as part of the next multiannual financial framework (2028-2034). The GAP IV will set the EU vision for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment as a strategic priority in all external actions, in an increasingly fragile global environment. The Commission [invited evidence](#) during Spring 2026 (you can read EPLO's submission [here](#)). The adoption of the GAP IV action plan is planned for the first quarter of 2027.

CLIPs and Gender Country Profiles (GCPs)

GAP III introduced the Country-level Implementation Plans (CLIPs) and Gender Country Profiles (GCPs) which shall 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. Not all CLIPs are publicly available (this [one for Georgia](#) is. Often staff from the EU Delegation, including Gender Focal Points, can provide more information.

GAP III Structured Dialogue (SD)

GAP III also introduced the annual Structured Dialogue (SD), to bring stakeholders (including civil society and local authorities) together to review progress. More information about the most recent SD meeting, in December 2025, can be found [here](#). Regional sessions focusing on GAP III implementation and priorities for GAP IV from different geographic areas are planned for September 2026 as part of the SD format.

Legislation and evaluation of GAP III

- European Parliament: On 1 September 2026, EP FEMM committee discussed '[Evaluating the Implementation and Impact of GAP III as a Foundation for Designing GAP IV \(Post-2027\)](#)'.

- European Parliament Think Tank Study (Petra DEBUSSCHER, Blerina VILA) [Assessing the third Gender Action Plan \(GAP III\) as a Foundation for Designing GAP IV: Lessons learned for the Post-2027 Framework](#) (5 July 2026)
- [Intermediate Evaluation of GAP III](#) (8 December 2026), Commissioned by DG INTPA, the evaluation covers the period January 2021 to December 2024, and focusses on: Green transition; Digital transformation; and EU support promoting gender equality and women empowerment through engagement with, and support to, women's rights organisations and other civil society organisations, with a specific focus on conflict, post-conflict and other fragile contexts. The geographic scope of the evaluation covers all partner countries and regions under DG INTPA, DG ENEST, DG MENA, FPI and the EEAS.
- 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)
- Jozef Síkela, Commissioner for International Partnerships, committed to a follow up action plan on gender equality which shall "[remain ambitious](#)" beyond 2027.
- [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 September 2025 (as of August 2026).

Conclusion

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.

In light of the extension of the WPS Action Plan and GAP III to 2027 in line with the cycle of the MFF, and the update of both documents as of 2028, civil society organisations can draw on evaluations of EU implementation of WPS and GAP III to date to push for more ambitious, context-sensitive and accountable EU action linking gender, peace and security. This means engaging 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.