

Recommendations regarding the EU external action Gender Action Plan (GAP) III 2021-2025

1 May 2020

The Center for Reproductive Rights welcomes the opportunity to provide input and recommendations regarding the EU external action Gender Action Plan (GAP) III for 2021-2025.

The realization of gender equality across the world can only be achieved if sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) are guaranteed to everyone everywhere. The EU should therefore continue to give high priority to advancing SRHR across the world as part of its efforts to promote gender equality globally. The following sets out a number of recommendations for how the EU could strengthen its actions, programmes, and internal capacity on SRHR in the GAP III.

Prioritizing SRHR as essential for achieving gender equality around the world

Across the world challenges and shortcomings in fulfilling SRHR and meeting the Sustainable Development Goals persist. In many countries women face pervasive violations of SRHR including high rates of maternal mortality and morbidity, unsafe abortion, unmet need for contraception, and lack of respect for women's free and informed consent. A large number of countries in the global south continue to criminalize and place severe restrictions on access to safe and legal abortion exposing women to grave risks and increased rates of maternal mortality.

GAP III should support efforts to ensure that laws and policies in the area of SRHR are in line with international human rights standards and public health recommendations. It should continue to give a high priority to full implementation of the SDGs and in particular SDG 5 and SDG 16 and its objectives and indicators on SRHR should reflect human rights law and standards, align with the SDG indicators to ensure that all persons can effectively exercise and enjoy SRHR.

Under GAP III the EU should also increase its financial support to SRHR activities and should provide dedicated funding to civil society organisations working to advance gender equality and SRHR.

Furthermore, the EU should fully integrate and give high priority to gender equality and SRHR in all aspects of its diplomacy with third countries and other entities and address SRHR issues and concerns and acknowledge positive developments, achievements and progress that advance gender equality and SRHR:

- **Country strategies:** The EU's country strategies on human rights and democracy, where relevant, should address SRHR issues and challenges that the third country may be facing. These strategies should be developed in consultation with local civil society working on gender equality and SRHR.
- **Human rights and political dialogues:** The EU should systematically and coherently address gender equality and SRHR issues and concerns during all human rights dialogues with third countries and as relevant also during other political dialogues with third countries and regional organisations.

- **EU delegations** across the world should monitor the status of SRHR in third countries and identify progress as well as regression and the level of respect for international human rights law and standards. EU delegations should raise concerns regarding violations of SRHR with relevant authorities in third countries.
- **Reporting:** The EU's annual reports on human rights and democracy in the world should include a dedicated section addressing SRHR developments and outlining the EU's responses and activities to promote SRHR. Annual implementation reports under GAP III should continue to have annexes on 'Sexual and reproductive health and rights in EU external action', and track how the EU is addressing these issues.

Supporting women human rights defenders and civil society working on SRHR

Women human rights defenders and their organisations, in particular those working to advance SRHR, are increasingly experiencing threats and risks and in many countries the space for civil society activities is shrinking, with women's rights and SRHR organisations increasingly targeted and their situation ever more precarious. In light of this it is critical that GAP III gives a high priority to supporting women human rights defenders and civil society organisations working in the area of SRHR.

GAP III should establish an early warning mechanism to monitor legislative proposals and other state actions that limit the ability of civil society working on gender equality and SRHR to operate freely and effectively. It should also address the growing backlash against gender equality and SRHR and set out a series of strategic actions for strengthened EU responses to attempts to weaken or roll back protections and entitlements in the area of SRHR. Furthermore, the EU should consult regularly with civil society in relation to the development, implementation and evaluation of all its activities related to gender equality and SRHR under GAP III.

Addressing SRHR needs in the context of conflict and crises

Across the world a growing number of women are affected by conflict and humanitarian emergencies. GAP III should ensure that the EU continues to give priority to SRHR in conflict and crisis contexts, in particular ensuring access to timely and quality maternal health care, contraception, safe abortion care, and post-abortion services. It should also support efforts towards ensuring access to justice and redress for sexual and reproductive rights violations and violations stemming from sexual violence

Strengthening internal knowledge and capacity

The EU should ensure that all relevant staff has adequate knowledge, expertise and capacity to address gender equality and SRHR issues. In this regard it should ensure that all relevant staff receive regular training on gender equality and specific training on SRHR issues and relevant developments in human rights law and standards. In particular the EU should increase the capacity within the EEAS and in EU missions to promote gender equality and SRHR under GAP III.

The Center for Reproductive Rights is an international human rights non-governmental organisation working to advance gender equality and women's sexual and reproductive health and rights around the world. The Center conducts fact finding, legal and policy advocacy, litigation, and capacity building and empowerment initiatives.