

Gender equality in European Union development aid: Assessing the dual approach of gender mainstreaming and targeted actions



Author:

Petra DEBUSSCHER

European Parliament coordinator:

External Policies Analysis and Support Unit
Directorate-General for External Policies of the Union
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STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how the European Union (EU) promotes gender equality in development cooperation through gender mainstreaming and targeted gender-equality actions. It asks whether this twin-track approach delivers meaningful results, where its strengths and weaknesses lie and what is at stake in the post-2027 period. The current EU framework is ambitious, and gender mainstreaming has become increasingly visible and routine across EU development cooperation. In many mainstreamed actions, gender is included in diagnostic framing, cross-cutting commitments and some indicators, helping to bring gender equality into sectors where it was previously more marginal. However, the quality and depth of mainstreaming remain uneven. Gender is often better integrated in design and narrative than in implementation, resource allocation, accountability and structural change. Targeted actions are usually clearer and more direct in addressing gender inequality as the central problem, but remain more limited in number, scale and sectoral reach. The paper concludes that mainstreaming and targeted actions are indispensable and complementary. The post-2027 framework should make the twin-track approach more consequential. It is recommended to protect binding gender targets in the Global Europe instrument, use Gender Action Plan IV to set stronger operational standards, improve gender budgeting and reporting, and ensure that EU delegations and implementing partners have the expertise and resources needed to carry gender commitments through implementation.

AUTHOR

Dr. Petra DEBUSSCHER, Guest Professor / Researcher, Ghent University (Ghent, Belgium)

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CONTRIBUTORS

Mariam ARABIDZE and Tomma FIEDLER, Project Assistants, Trans-European Policy Studies Association, contributed to the editing of references and proofreading of the text.

CONTRACTOR

Trans European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA), Belgium (Coordinator: Mathilde CHIGNESSE).

CONTACTS IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Coordination: Malte HERGADEN

Editorial assistance: Adela GUINA

To give feedback or obtain copies, please write to: exas@europarl.europa.eu.

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List of abbreviations

CLIPs	Country level implementation plans
CSOs	Civil society organisations
DEVE	European Parliament's Committee on Development
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
EEAS	European External Action Service
EIB	European Investment Bank
EIF	Environmental Invest Fund
EU	European Union
EU-SDGN	EU Support to Democratic Governance in Nigeria
GAP	Gender Action Plan
GBV	Gender-based violence
GEI	Global Europe instrument
GFPs	Gender focal points
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer
MIP	Multiannual indicative programme
NDICI-Global Europe	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe
ODA	Official development assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OECD – DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development – Development Assistance Committee
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SRHR	Sexual and reproductive health and rights
TEI	Team Europe initiative
TVET	Technical vocational and educational training
UN	United Nations
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
VAWG	Violence against women and girls
WROs	Women's rights organisations

Executive summary

Gender equality is under pressure globally. Progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 5 ('Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls') is too slow and in many countries it is stagnating or moving backwards. Conflict, democratic backsliding, economic insecurity and organised backlash against women's rights are making this worse. In that context, development cooperation remains an important tool for supporting gender equality, but it is also an area where political commitments often exceed actual delivery. This paper examines how the European Union (EU) is trying to address these issues through its current 'twin-track' approach: combining gender mainstreaming across all sectors with targeted actions in which gender equality is the principal objective. It also asks what is at stake as the EU prepares its post-2027 external financing framework.

The paper draws on a structured review of EU law, policy documents, evaluations and aid data, combined with project-level case studies and six semi-structured interviews with EU staff (4) and expert stakeholders (2). It compares projects where gender equality is the main goal with projects where gender equality is integrated into broader interventions, assessing not only what each approach does well and where each falls short, but also what this means for the European Parliament's scrutiny and legislative role.

It is clear that the EU has built one of the more ambitious formal frameworks on gender equality in development cooperation. Under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe, at least 85 % of actions should contribute significantly or principally to gender equality and at least 5 % should have gender equality as their principal objective. This recognises that mainstreaming alone is not enough: gender equality also needs dedicated political attention and dedicated funding. Recent reporting suggests that the EU has broadly reached the 85 % mainstreaming target, but is still falling short on the 5 % target for principal-objective actions, with only around 4.2 % of actions in that category so far.

The broader donor picture points in the same direction. Across the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, almost half of the screened bilateral aid now includes gender equality as an objective, but only a very small share is truly dedicated to gender equality as its principal purpose. This shows that whilst mainstreaming has expanded, targeted and potentially more transformative gender-equality programming remains underfunded. The EU reflects this wider pattern, performing relatively strongly on mainstreaming, whereas the second track remains smaller, more uneven and harder to protect politically.

The paper's central conclusion is that the twin-track approach remains a strong and valuable model for EU gender equality policy, but only if both tracks are taken seriously. Gender mainstreaming is necessary for bringing gender concerns into large sectoral portfolios such as infrastructure, energy, digitalisation, governance, agriculture and climate, without which it risks being confined to a small niche of specialised projects. At the same time, targeted actions are indispensable because some problems require gender equality to be the core objective, for example: violence against women and girls, women's political participation, institutional discrimination, support for women's rights organisations and access to justice. One track cannot replace the other.

The evidence from projects with gender equality as a significant objective (G1) shows both progress and clear limits. Gender is rarely absent, often appearing in the diagnosis, inclusion language and in at least some indicators. In that sense, gender mainstreaming has become a standard expectation in EU programming. However, analysis also shows that gender is usually strongest in the earlier, easier parts of

an intervention cycle, especially in diagnostic framing, and much weaker in implementation, resource allocation, monitoring and accountability. Gender is often visible in indicators related to participation, access, training or service use, but much less visible in the core economic and distributive logic of projects: who controls resources, who benefits from jobs and contracts, who shapes decision-making and whether wider inequalities are actually being transformed. This does not mean that many G1 projects are empty or purely symbolic, but they are often partial. Whilst they do make projects more inclusive and responsive to women's needs, they do not automatically shift power relations or guarantee structural change. The key challenge for Parliament is therefore to move scrutiny from 'presence' – whether gender is mentioned in programming – to 'structural influence': whether gender analysis shapes budgets, indicators, implementation arrangements, access to resources and decision-making power.

By contrast, projects with gender equality as the principal objective (G2) tend to be clearer, more direct and more politically visible. Here, gender inequality itself is treated as the central problem to be addressed. Hence, such projects are better suited to tackling structural barriers, supporting women's rights and building clearer accountability around results. At the same time, G2 actions also have limits. They are still concentrated in a relatively familiar set of themes, especially violence against women and girls, women's economic empowerment, as well as some governance and rights work, with a strong concentration in Africa. However, projects in larger 'hard' sectors are less visible, such as infrastructure, energy, macroeconomic reform or digital policy. As a result, G2 risks becoming a specialist silo rather than reshaping the wider EU development portfolio, unless it is linked more deliberately to multiannual indicative programmes, Team Europe initiatives, policy dialogue, budget support and sector reform.

The paper also raises concerns about the direction of EU development policy under the next Multiannual Financial Framework (2028–2034). The Commission's proposal for a new Global Europe instrument under this framework would substantially increase the overall budget, but would remove the current explicit gender targets and rely instead on a more general mainstreaming approach. The problem is not that mainstreaming is unimportant, but rather that without binding targets, separate reporting and stronger performance requirements, accountability weakens. It becomes much harder for the European Parliament, civil society and EU delegations themselves to show whether gender equality is actually being prioritised in practice. There is a real risk that 'mainstreaming everywhere' becomes 'mainstreaming nowhere in particular', especially when geopolitical and crisis-driven pressures dominate funding decisions. This risk intensifies if smaller or more regionalised EU delegations rely increasingly on implementing partners without ensuring adequate gender expertise, resources, contractual obligations and follow-up mechanisms.

The policy implication is clear: the next EU external financing framework should protect and strengthen rather than dilute the existing twin-track approach. Gender mainstreaming should remain a requirement across the whole portfolio, but this should be matched by protected support for targeted gender-equality action. Parliament could therefore insist that the legal text explicitly confirms both tracks, preserves binding targets and avoids treating mainstreaming as a substitute for dedicated action. As a minimum, the EU should retain the current logic that most official development assistance-eligible commitments contribute to gender equality, while also protecting a minimum share for actions where gender equality is the principal objective. A stronger option would be to increase the latter, within which a dedicated share for women's rights organisations could be guaranteed. These actors are often essential for transformative change but remain under-supported.

Finally, the EU should make gender equality more visible in financial and performance reporting, which should distinguish clearly between the two tracks: how far gender equality is integrated across the portfolio and how much money goes to dedicated gender-equality actions. Annual reporting in euros and percentages would make this visible. A stronger gender-budgeting system and a single coherent results framework would also help Parliament judge whether commitments are credible. In addition, any major reallocations during crises should be accompanied by a gender impact statement so that gender-equality objectives are not quietly sacrificed when pressures mount.

In sum, the main lesson of this paper is straightforward: the EU needs both tracks. Mainstreaming is necessary but not sufficient. Targeted actions are indispensable, but cannot carry the whole agenda on their own. The post-2027 framework should therefore aim for stronger mainstreaming across the board, stronger and better-protected targeted action and clearer accountability for both. That is the best way for the EU to maintain credible leadership on gender equality at a time of global backlash and growing pressure on development priorities.

1 Introduction

The European Union (EU) stands out as a global gender actor and a normative leader in promoting equality, human rights along with women's and girls' empowerment through external action¹. This ambition is anchored in the treaties and has been reaffirmed in the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025, which adopts a dual approach of targeted measures and strengthened gender mainstreaming, with intersectionality as a cross-cutting principle².

In external relations, this agenda is operationalised through the EU Gender Action Plan (GAP) III – an ambitious agenda for gender equality and women's empowerment in EU external action³. GAP III calls for the EU to be a 'global front-runner' and lays out a three-pronged approach: gender mainstreaming across all sectors, targeted actions for gender equality as well as political and policy dialogue.

Within the current Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) – Global Europe (2021–2027), this ambition is translated into concrete spending and mainstreaming targets. At least 85 % of actions financed under NDICI–Global Europe should have gender equality as a principal or significant objective, with at least 5 % having gender equality together with women's and girls' empowerment as their principal objectives, applying the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development – Development Assistance Committee (OECD–DAC) gender equality policy marker. These dual targets reflect a deliberate strategy that combines gender-equality mainstreaming with dedicated gender-equality actions.

Recent Commission reporting for 2021–2024 indicates that the EU has already met the 85 % mainstreaming target, but that only around 4.2 % of actions have gender equality as their principal objective, so far falling short of the 5 % target for the entire 2021–2027 period. At the same time, internal Commission lists of actions with gender equality as a principal objective for 2021–2025 show a rapidly expanding but still relatively small portfolio, regionally concentrated and thematically focused on issues such as women's economic empowerment, violence against women and girls (VAWG), governance and participation⁴. These figures pose immediate questions for the European Parliament's Committee on Development (DEVE) about the balance between mainstreamed and targeted actions as well as their respective contributions to gender-equality outcomes⁵.

In parallel, the EU external financing architecture is under review. The Commission's proposal for a new Global Europe instrument (GEI) after 2027 would substantially increase the overall envelope for external action and international partnerships (to around EUR 200.3 billion⁶), but would no longer include explicit

¹ S. Chaban et al., [Regional organizations, gender equality and the political empowerment of women](#), *International IDEA*, 1 December 2017; P. Debusscher and I. Manners, 'Understanding the European Union as a Global Gender Actor: The Holistic Intersectional and Inclusive Study of Gender+ in External Actions', *Political Studies Review*, Vol 18, No 3, 2020, pp. 410–425; P. Debusscher, 'Gender mainstreaming in international cooperation and development policy', in S. Jacquot et al. (eds), *Research Handbook on Gender Mainstreaming*, Edward Elgar Publishing, 2026, pp. 211–223.

² European Commission, [Communication on A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025](#), COM(2020) 152 final, 5 March 2020.

³ European Commission, [Joint Communication on EU Gender Action Plan \(GAP\) III: An ambitious agenda for gender equality and women's empowerment in EU external action](#), JOIN(2020) 17 final, 25 November 2020.

⁴ European Union, 'List of G2 actions', webpage, nd.

⁵ European Parliament, [Resolution on implementation and delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals in view of the 2025 High-Level Political Forum](#), 2025/2014(INI), 9 July 2025.

⁶ The Commission proposes a EUR 200.3 billion budget, representing a 75 % nominal increase compared to current funding, which translates to a 57 % rise in real terms once adjusted for inflation.

gender-equality spending targets comparable to the current 85 %/5 % NDICI–Global Europe framework⁷. Instead, gender equality would be mainstreamed alongside climate and other horizontal priorities, with only general provisions in the regulation and references to ‘minimum standards of performance’ in recital form. Similarly, the draft 2025 Performance Regulation for the next Multiannual Financial Framework sets explicit targets for climate and environment in its annexes, but does not foresee specific numerical targets for gender equality⁸. This suggests a potential shift towards a mainstreaming-only model, at least at the level of performance indicators and spending targets⁹.

From a scholarly perspective¹⁰, the EU’s approach to gender equality in development cooperation has been extensively analysed, including the evolution from GAP I and II to the more ambitious, intersectional framework of GAP III. Earlier work on EU gender mainstreaming in development and external relations has documented both innovative practices and the persistent risks of technocratisation, depoliticisation and instrumentalisation of gender equality, for example when gender is subordinated to migration or security objectives. The 2023 mid-term and 2025 intermediate evaluations of GAP III commissioned by the European Commission confirm many of these tensions: it finds that GAP III has raised the strategic profile of gender equality and provided a stronger platform for operationalisation, but also reveal uneven implementation, capacity constraints and gaps between ambition and resources¹¹.

Reports from think-tanks, non-governmental organisations and academic analyses point to similar patterns, stressing the need to maintain or even strengthen gender-equality targets in future instruments and deepen support for women’s rights organisations (WROs) and intersectional approaches¹². Independent think-tank, the European Centre for Development Policy Management, for instance, cautions that removing explicit targets, signals, intentionally or not, a downgrading of gender equality on the political agenda¹³. At a time when anti-gender movements and authoritarian regimes are pushing back on women’s rights worldwide, the EU’s retreat from clear gender targets could be read as aligning with a global trend of de-prioritising gender issues. Similarly, a 2025 Overseas Development Institute Europe research report warns that this risks ‘undermining the progress achieved so far’ and makes gender goals more vulnerable to shifting political winds¹⁴. It has also been pointed out that the downgrade affects morale and initiative at the EU delegation level, as EU gender focal points (GFPs) in delegations have cited the institutional targets as giving them leverage to push for gender-sensitive programming in their day-to-day work¹⁵.

⁷ European Commission, [Proposal for a regulation on establishing Global Europe](#), COM(2025) 551 final, 16 July 2025.

⁸ European Commission, [Proposal for a Regulation establishing a budget expenditure tracking and performance framework and other horizontal rules for the Union programmes and activities](#), COM(2025) 545 final, 16 July 2025.

⁹ P. Debusscher, ‘Gender equality objective in the proposal for a regulation establishing ‘Global Europe’ (2028–2034)’, PE 785.604, *European Parliament Directorate-General for Citizens’ Rights, Justice and Institutional Affairs*, 15 March 2026.

¹⁰ See section 3.3 Gender mainstreaming versus targeted actions: debates and evidence below.

¹¹ L. MacKellar et al., [Mid-term evaluation of the implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan III](#), *European Commission*, April 2023; ADE, [Intermediate evaluation of the implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan III \(2021–2027\)](#), *European Commission*, 27 November 2025.

¹² A. Burni and A. Somji, [From GAP III to GAP IV: Rethinking the EU’s global support for gender equality](#), *ODI Europe*, October 2025; M. Reglero and E. L. Maes, [Implementing the EU Gender Action Plan III: Turning ambition into impact?](#), *CONCORD Europe*, 21 June 2023; M. Di Ciommo et al., [Gender equality in EU external action: Leadership from the EU headquarters](#), *ECDPM*, March 2023.

¹³ S. Giancesello et al., [‘From ambition to uncertainty: Gender equality in the EU’s new Global Europe instrument’](#), *ECDPM*, 10 September 2025.

¹⁴ A. Burni and A. Somji, [From GAP III to GAP IV: Rethinking the EU’s global support for gender equality](#), *ODI Europe*, October 2025.

¹⁵ S. Giancesello et al., [‘From ambition to uncertainty: Gender equality in the EU’s new Global Europe instrument’](#), *ECDPM*, 10 September 2025.

This evolving context gives rise to various interlinked knowledge gaps that are directly relevant for DEVE's scrutiny and legislative work. Firstly, there has been little comparative analysis of projects with gender equality as a principal objective versus those where gender equality is a significant objective within broader sector interventions. Secondly, the implications of shifting numerical gender targets out of the GEI and relying mainly on GAP IV and performance tracking have not yet been fully explored from the perspective of accountability, political signalling and Parliament's ability to properly scrutinise the dual approach of targeted measures and mainstreaming.

The paper addresses these gaps by assessing the EU's efforts to promote gender equality through development cooperation, focusing on the effectiveness, opportunities and risks of the twin-track approach under GAP III and NDICI–Global Europe. It also examines what is at stake in the post-2027 framework, including the proposed GEI, the draft Performance Regulation and the forthcoming GAP IV, and identifies options available to the European Parliament in the upcoming negotiations.

The central research questions are:

- How has the EU's combination of gender-equality mainstreaming and dedicated gender-equality actions contributed to measurable progress towards Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 and related objectives in partner countries, relative to other donors?
- What does project-level evidence from principal-objective and significant-objective actions reveal about the opportunities and limitations of each approach, including from an intersectional perspective?
- What are the implications of the post-2027 framework, including the proposed GEI, the draft Performance Regulation and the upcoming GAP IV, for the EU's twin-track approach, and what realistic options does the European Parliament have to influence this trajectory?

1.1 Methodological approach

The paper adopts a theory-informed approach combining a structured desk review, limited quantitative analysis of aid data and in-depth qualitative case studies, complemented by 6 semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders in the European Commission and partner countries.

Initially, a systematic desk review was undertaken featuring: the EU's legal and policy framework on gender equality in external action, including among others, the GAP III Joint Communication and Staff Working Document, the NDICI–Global Europe Regulation and related guidance, the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025 and its implementation reports, the Commission's 2025 Roadmap for Women's Rights and annex, relevant European Parliament resolutions, the latest OECD-DAC and United Nations (UN) data on aid for gender equality as well as SDG 5. This review was complemented by a close reading of, among others, the 2023 GAP III mid-term evaluation (Volumes I–III), the 2025 Intermediate Evaluation of the Implementation of the EU GAP III (2021–2027, all volumes), next to external independent evaluations of GAP III¹⁶, which together provided a rich evidence base for the implementation and early results of GAP III.

Next, project-level case studies were selected via a two-step screening process. Firstly, the paper drew on a Commission list of actions with gender equality as a principal objective adopted between 2021 and 2025¹⁷,

¹⁶ Including among others, A. Burni and A. Somji, [From GAP III to GAP IV: Rethinking the EU's global support for gender equality](#), *ODI Europe*, October 2025; M. Reglero and E. L. Maes, [Implementing the EU Gender Action Plan III: Turning ambition into impact?](#), *CONCORD Europe*, June 2023; M. Di Ciommo et al., [Gender equality in EU external action: Leadership from the EU headquarters](#), *ECDPM*, March 2023; K. Sergejeff and M. Di Ciommo, [Gender equality in EU external action: Mainstreaming women's economic empowerment](#), *ECDPM*, May 2023.

¹⁷ European Union, [List of G2 actions](#), webpage, nd.

together with the EU statistical dashboard and Annual Action Programmes, to identify candidate cases for the principal-objective (G2) projects. These candidates were cross-checked not only against the relevant country level implementation plans (CLIPs) and Gender Country Profiles to ensure that they address context-specific priorities, but also against the 'promising practices' and library sections of the GAP III page on 'capacity4dev', where many of these actions are already documented as good practices or stories of change. Secondly, for the significant-objective (G1) projects, interventions were identified in priority sectors including climate, digital, infrastructure, governance, humanitarian action and security, where gender equality is marked as a significant objective. Here too, CLIPs, sector-level gender analyses, promising practices and 'capacity4dev' resources were combined with aid-data queries and input from the Directorate-General for International Partnerships as well as selected EU delegations, aimed at selecting a diversified and analytically meaningful set of cases.

The case-study selection logic was as follows:

- Approach: targeted action (G2) versus mainstreamed action (G1)
- Sector/theme: such as gender-based violence (GBV)/sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), women's economic empowerment, governance/participation, climate/green transition, digital, humanitarian/Women, Peace and Security, infrastructure
- Context: fragile/conflict-affected, climate-vulnerable, shrinking civic space, post-crisis recovery, low-income versus middle-income

For each case, there was an examination of: the quality and use of gender analysis, the integration of gender into actions along with its monitoring and performance indicators, the integration of intersectional considerations and a human rights-based approach, the extent and nature of partnerships with women's rights and feminist organisations, the allocation of financial resources as well as available evidence on results for gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment.

2 EU policies and legislation on gender equality in external action

2.1 Legal basis and policy commitments

Equality between women and men is a founding value and legal commitment for the EU, embedded in the European treaties¹⁸. Article 3 of the Treaty on European Union and Article 8 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU require the Union to promote gender equality in all its activities, including external relations. In practice, this means not only that gender equality must be mainstreamed across EU policies, but also that the EU should proactively advance women's and girls' rights in its foreign and development cooperation. The EU also aligns with international obligations such as the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the SDGs, notably SDG 5 on gender equality. Together, these legal and international commitments provide a strong basis for EU action on gender equality, both internally and externally.

¹⁸ In particular in Arts 2 and 3(3) of European Union, [Treaty on European Union](#), Official Journal of the European Union, C 202; Arts 8, 10, 19, 153 and 157 of European Union, [Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union](#), Official Journal of the European Union, C 202; Arts 21 and 23 of European Union, [Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union](#), Official Journal of the European Union, C 202.

To operationalise these principles, the European Commission first adopted the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025¹⁹. That framework has now been succeeded by the Gender Equality Strategy 2026–2030, adopted on 5 March 2026²⁰. This new strategy builds on the Roadmap for women’s rights adopted in March 2025²¹ and translates its longer-term vision into concrete policy action. It retains the EU’s dual approach, combining targeted measures with systematic gender mainstreaming across policy areas and continues to apply an intersectional perspective. At the same time, it places stronger emphasis on a number of current challenges, including GBV and cyberviolence, women’s health, pay and pension gaps, women’s equal and safe participation in politics as well as the promotion of gender equality on the global stage. This strategy also explicitly states that gender equality should remain at the heart of EU action both within the EU and across the world.

2.2 From commitment to implementation: GAP III, NDICI–Global Europe targets and country-level tools

In external action, this commitment is operationalised most clearly through the EU GAP III, adopted in 2020, which presents gender equality and women’s and girls’ empowerment as a central objective of EU external policy²². Initially conceived for 2021–2025, GAP III has since been extended through 2027 to align with the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe (NDICI-Global Europe), which covers the EU’s external funding for 2021–2027.

GAP III and NDICI-Global Europe²³ perform different but complementary functions in the EU’s external gender-equality architecture. Their relationship is summarised below.

Table 1: How GAP III and NDICI-Global Europe work together

Instrument	Primary function	Operational contribution
GAP III	Provides the EU’s policy and operational framework for gender equality in external action.	Applies a gender-transformative, intersectional and human rights-based approach through three mutually reinforcing strands: mainstreaming, targeted action, and political and policy dialogue ²⁴ . It also calls for at least one G2 action in each partner country and region ²⁵ .
NDICI-Global Europe	Provides the legal and financial framework for EU external action in 2021–2027.	Anchors the twin-track approach in the financing instrument: at least 85 % of actions should have gender equality as a significant or

¹⁹ European Commission, [Communication on A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025](#), COM(2020) 152 final, 5 March 2020.

²⁰ European Commission, [Communication on Gender Equality Strategy 2026–2030](#), COM(2026) 113 final, 5 March 2026.

²¹ European Commission, [‘Roadmap for Women’s Rights’](#), webpage, nd.

²² European Commission, [Joint Communication on EU Gender Action Plan \(GAP\) III: An ambitious agenda for gender equality and women’s empowerment in EU external action](#), JOIN(2020) 17 final, 25 November 2020.

²³ European Parliament and Council, [Regulation on establishing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe](#), Official Journal of the European Union, L 209, 14 June 2021.

²⁴ European Commission, [Joint Communication on EU Gender Action Plan \(GAP\) III: An ambitious agenda for gender equality and women’s empowerment in EU external action](#), JOIN(2020) 17 final, 25 November 2020.

²⁵ European Commission, [Joint document on Objectives and Indicators to frame the implementation of the Gender Action Plan III \(2021–25\)](#), SWD(2020) 284 final, 25 November 2020, p. 3.

Instrument	Primary function	Operational contribution
		principal objective, and at least 5 % should have it as their principal objective ²⁶ .
Combined effect	Links policy direction to regulatory and budgetary leverage.	Turns political commitment into programming expectations and measurable targets that can be used by EU staff, civil society and Parliament to press for implementation and accountability.

Sources: GAP III, EU Regulation 2021/947, Debusscher (2026), pp. 3–4²⁷.

The legal anchoring of GAP III in NDICI-Global Europe has been welcomed by gender experts and stakeholders. Because these targets are embedded in the financing regulation, they do more than signal political ambition: they give EU delegations and headquarters staff a concrete reference point when negotiating programming choices and when reporting back on whether commitments have been met²⁸. Furthermore, the NDICI-targets are important because they reflect a twin-track approach: gender equality should be mainstreamed across the wider portfolio, while targeted actions and dedicated funding are needed to address inequalities directly²⁹.

At the country level, these commitments are translated into practice mainly through CLIPs, country gender profiles, (sectoral) gender analysis and the work of GFPs at the EU delegations who are responsible for coordinating gender mainstreaming. This architecture is meant to ensure that gender equality is not treated as a vague cross-cutting priority, but is translated into concrete country-level choices. CLIPs are the main localisation tool. They identify the gender equality priorities that matter most in a given country, the sectors where EU programming can make a difference and the issues that can be raised in political and policy dialogue. In principle, CLIPs should be based on country gender profiles or other country-level gender analyses. They should then be complemented by more specific gender analysis when individual programmes are designed. Available internal and external studies suggest that where CLIPs and country gender profiles are strong, gender mainstreaming in programming and implementation is also stronger³⁰.

In practice, however, this system works unevenly. Evaluations and Commission reporting point to variation in the quality of CLIPs, the systematic use of gender analysis in action documents and the depth of consultation with WROs, civil society, Member States and partner governments. Institutional capacity is also uneven. GAP III gives GFPs a central role and commits to supporting them through guidance, training, peer learning and stronger networks. Yet GFPs can only make a difference if they have sufficient expertise,

²⁶ European Parliament and Council, [Regulation on establishing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe](#), Official Journal of the European Union, L 209, 14 June 2021.

²⁷ European Commission, [Joint Communication on EU Gender Action Plan \(GAP\) III: An ambitious agenda for gender equality and women's empowerment in EU external action](#), JOIN(2020) 17 final, 25 November 2020; European Commission, [Joint document on Objectives and Indicators to frame the implementation of the Gender Action Plan III \(2021–25\)](#), SWD(2020) 284 final, 25 November 2020; European Parliament and Council, [Regulation on establishing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument](#), Official Journal of the European Union, L 209, 14 June 2021; P. Debusscher, 'Gender equality objective in the proposal for a regulation establishing 'Global Europe' (2028–2034)', PE 785.604, *European Parliament Directorate-General for Citizens' Rights, Justice and Institutional Affairs*, 15 March 2026.

²⁸ A. Burni and A. Somji, [From GAP III to GAP IV: Rethinking the EU's global support for gender equality](#), ODI Europe, October 2025; M. Reglero and E. L. Maes, [Implementing the EU Gender Action Plan III: Turning ambition into impact?](#), CONCORD Europe, 21 June 2023.

²⁹ P. Debusscher, 'Gender equality objective in the proposal for a regulation establishing 'Global Europe' (2028–2034)', PE 785.604, *European Parliament Directorate-General for Citizens' Rights, Justice and Institutional Affairs*, 15 March 2026.

³⁰ European Commission, [Gender country profile and gender sector analysis](#), February 2021.

authority, time and management backing. Where these conditions are missing, gender mainstreaming risks remaining a formal requirement rather than a strategic tool for shaping EU external action. Interview evidence illustrates this capacity problem sharply. As one interviewee put it, 'GAP is seen as the task of the person assigned the gender equality role or the human rights role. And this is on top of the usual portfolio'³¹.

Taken together, this operational framework has made gender equality more visible and measurable in EU external action, but its effects depend on how effectively formal requirements are translated into country programming, implementation, monitoring and results. The evidence points to a broader lesson for GAP IV: operational requirements provide direction and leverage, but become transformative only when matched by high-quality gender analysis, meaningful consultation, adequately empowered GFPs and sufficient funding for gender-principal action.

2.3 The European Parliament's position and tools

The European Parliament has been a consistently strong voice in favour of ambitious gender equality objectives in the EU's external action. Parliament's support has been both political, through resolutions and debates, and practical, using its legislative and budgetary powers to shape the gender equality agenda.

One key role of the Parliament was during the negotiation of the NDICI–GEI (2021–2027), as there was no explicit target in the initial Commission proposal. As a co-legislator, the Parliament, together with some EU Member States, pushed for the inclusion of specific gender targets in the regulation (notably the 85 % benchmark) as indispensable for ambition and accountability³². The final NDICI regulation's 85 % and 5 % targets owe much to this advocacy, translating the EU's GAP III commitments into hard law. The regulation also gives Parliament an important scrutiny tool: the Commission must submit an annual report on implementation, including progress on cross-cutting priorities such as gender mainstreaming and detailing the percentage of new actions marked for gender equality.

Parliament also uses resolutions, budgetary scrutiny and committee oversight to keep pressure on the Commission. In its 10 March 2022 resolution on GAP III, it called for stronger support for WROs, protection for women human rights defenders and continued attention to SHRH³³. In its position on the 2024 EU budget, it urged the Commission to respect the NDICI gender targets and provide more detailed figures on implementation³⁴. More recently, in its 9 July 2025 resolution on SDG implementation, Parliament again called for: full implementation of the 85 % and 5 % targets, more systematic gender analysis, sex-disaggregated data, gender-responsive budgeting and gender impact assessments³⁵. Specifically, the European Parliament has expressed concern that actions with gender equality as a principal objective remain too limited in number and has called on Member States and the Commission to increase substantially the number of EU actions which carry the promotion of gender equality as a principal objective³⁶. In addition, Parliament regularly invites Commission officials (such as the Director General of the Directorate-General for International Partnerships or the EU's Gender Ambassador, if one is appointed)

³¹ Interview with gender expert with experience supporting EU Delegations, 7 April 2026.

³² B. Immenkamp, [A new neighbourhood, development and international cooperation instrument – Global Europe](#), *EPRS*, July 2021.

³³ European Parliament, [Resolution on the EU Gender Action Plan III](#), 2021/2003(INI), 10 March 2022.

³⁴ European Parliament, [Report on the Council position on the draft general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2024](#), A9-0288/2023, 11 October 2023.

³⁵ European Parliament, [Resolution on implementation and delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals in view of the 2025 High-Level Political Forum](#), 2025/2014(INI), 9 July 2025.

³⁶ European Parliament, [Resolution on implementation and delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals in view of the 2025 High-Level Political Forum](#), 2025/2014(INI), 9 July 2025.

to report on GAP III progress and NDICI gender target achievements, allowing the members of the European Parliament to question any shortcomings.

Finally, there is also a lesser-known tool, namely that committees of the European Parliament can ask the European Court of Auditors to examine specific issues through a special report or review, even though the Court ultimately retains control over its audit programme³⁷. For example, Parliament drew on the Court's 2021 special report about gender mainstreaming in the EU budget, which remained highly relevant in follow-up debates on the subject³⁸.

2.4 Post-2027: The accountability gap if gender targets move from Global Europe to GAP IV³⁹

As the EU prepares for the period after 2027, the European Commission presented its proposals for the next Multiannual Financial Framework (2028–2034) in mid-2025, including a draft for a new GEI to replace NDICI⁴⁰. The proposal would substantially increase the external action budget to around EUR 200 billion for 2028–2034, while also simplifying and reorganising the existing funding instruments⁴¹.

The proposed post-2027 GEI does not remove gender equality from EU external action, but it changes the way the commitment is anchored. In the proposed 2028–2034 GEI, gender equality remains included as a general principle and cross-cutting issue, but comparable quantified targets⁴² are absent from the instrument itself⁴³. The proposed GEI does refer to EU GAPs and therefore leaves room for GAP IV to shape programming and implementation. However, such references do not have the same effect as incorporating quantified gender targets directly into the financing regulation. GAP IV can guide priorities, indicators and reporting, but it cannot by itself create a binding spending floor or a legally enforceable benchmark for mainstreamed and gender-principal actions.

This does not mean that targets and indicators will disappear from the EU's external gender equality architecture. They may be included in GAP IV, as suggested in interviews and in the Commission's Call for Evidence for the new GAP⁴⁴. GAP IV can still provide an operational framework, set priorities, guide delegations, organise reporting and create a shared language across EU institutions, Member States and partners. However, the institutional location of targets matters. Quantitative commitments in a financing regulation form part of the legal framework negotiated by the co-legislators and can be used by Parliament, civil society and EU staff to scrutinise whether EU external spending is meeting agreed commitments. Targets in GAP IV would still have policy value, but they would not carry the same legal, budgetary or hierarchical weight.

³⁷ European Court of Auditors, [The European Court of Auditors' role and work as the external auditor of the EU](#), nd.

³⁸ European Court of Auditors, [Gender mainstreaming in the EU budget: time to turn words into action](#), 2021.

³⁹ For a fuller analysis of the gender equality objective in the proposed Global Europe Instrument 2028–2034 and the draft horizontal Tracking and Performance Framework, see P. Debusscher, '[Gender equality objective in the proposal for a regulation establishing 'Global Europe' \(2028–2034\)](#)', PE 785.604, *European Parliament Directorate-General for Citizens' Rights, Justice and Institutional Affairs*, 15 March 2026.

⁴⁰ European Commission, [Regulation on establishing Global Europe](#), COM(2025) 551 final, 16 July 2025.

⁴¹ European Commission, [Regulation on establishing Global Europe](#), COM(2025) 551 final, 16 July 2025.

⁴² Under the current NDICI–Global Europe Regulation, gender equality is supported through a twin-track approach combining mainstreamed and targeted action, backed by quantified targets: at least 85 % of new actions should have gender equality as a principal or significant objective, and at least 5 % should have gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment as a principal objective.

⁴³ European Commission, [Regulation on establishing Global Europe](#), COM(2025) 551 final, 16 July 2025.

⁴⁴ Interview with EU official, DG INTPA, 24 February 2026.

This distinction was also reflected in interviews with GFPs. While GAP is sometimes perceived at the delegation level as one thematic reference document among several, interviewees stressed that formal targets matter because they help translate political commitments into programming leverage. As interviewees put it, ‘...the financial targets have been decisive, removing them will make the work harder. It gives our work so much more gravitas’⁴⁵ ‘because it ...signals to the hierarchy: let’s be real’⁴⁶. In practical terms, quantified targets can help GFPs move gender equality from a specialised issue to a broader, portfolio-level programming requirement. Another interviewee similarly stressed that ‘with these targets we really manage to engage both policy and operationalisation’, adding that these are ‘different parts of the delegation’⁴⁷.

The proposed horizontal Tracking and Performance Framework⁴⁸ may partially compensate for the removal of targets from the Global Europe proposal, because it creates a more standardised method for classifying activities according to their contribution to gender equality across the EU budget. Activities would be scored according to whether they make no substantial contribution to gender equality, make an important but secondary contribution, or have gender equality as their principal objective. This could improve comparability and make gender equality more visible in the EU budget cycle.

Yet tracking is not the same as targeting. The Performance Framework provides a method for classifying and reporting activities, but it does not establish a minimum spending target for gender equality, nor does it set a minimum benchmark – in terms of either actions or expenditure – for gender-principal actions. In addition, unlike the climate methodology, the proposed gender approach does not yet provide a robust coefficient-based method for translating gender scores into euro-visible expenditure⁴⁹. The EU may therefore be able to report on gender more systematically while still allowing the actual level of ambition to vary significantly across regions, sectors and political priorities.

The implication for this paper is that the future of the dual approach in EU development aid depends not only on maintaining both tracks – gender mainstreaming and targeted gender-equality actions – but also on preserving the accountability architecture that makes them operational. GAP IV can and should include clear targets, indicators and reporting obligations, because these remain essential for guiding delegations, structuring programming and sustaining internal pressure for implementation. However, GAP IV targets should not be treated as a substitute for legally anchored commitments in the external financing framework. If quantified benchmarks are located only in a Joint Communication, while the GEI itself contains only broad mainstreaming language, the targeted-action track risks becoming less protected and mainstreaming risks becoming harder to scrutinise.

These findings matter for the rest of this paper because G1 and G2 are not only statistical categories. They depend on institutional incentives, budgetary visibility, delegation capacity and implementation follow-up. Chapters 4 and 5 therefore examine whether actions marked as G1 and G2 show these commitments in practice, and where the twin-track approach needs to be strengthened after 2027.

⁴⁵ Interview with gender expert with experience supporting EU Delegations, 7 April 2026.

⁴⁶ Interview with EU Delegation gender focal point, 23 March 2026

⁴⁷ Interview with gender expert with experience supporting EU Delegations, 7 April 2026.

⁴⁸ European Commission, [Proposal for a Regulation establishing a budget expenditure tracking and performance framework and other horizontal rules for the Union programmes and activities](#), COM(2025) 545 final, 16 July 2025.

⁴⁹ A. Pouwels, [Gender budgeting in the 2021-2027 period and the proposal for the 2028-2034 Multiannual Financial Framework](#), European Parliament BUDG Committee, October 2025.

3 Global evidence and donor approaches to gender equality in development cooperation

3.1 Global progress on SDG 5: Moderate gains amid backlash and stagnation

Despite decades of commitments, the world is not on track to achieve SDG 5 by 2030. The latest UN data show only ‘moderate’ overall progress, with many indicators stagnating or even regressing in low-income and fragile contexts⁵⁰. The ‘Progress on the SDGs: The Gender Snapshot 2025’ report by UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs shows that with five years left to achieve the SDGs, the world is currently on the trajectory to miss every single indicator under SDG 5⁵¹. Discriminatory laws, persistent gender norms, conflict and democratic backsliding continue to undermine women’s and girls’ rights. The 2025 Gender Snapshot warns of ‘an unprecedented backlash on women’s rights’ – evidenced by rollbacks on SRHR and violence against women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer people (LGBTIQ+) – and notes that ‘the world is retreating on gender equality’ in many areas⁵². Conflicts and crises exacerbate these trends, with rising food insecurity and spikes in child marriage as well as GBV in many settings. At the current rate, experts estimate it will take over 280 years to close key gender gaps globally⁵³, with hundreds of millions of women and girls remaining in extreme poverty by 2030⁵⁴. In short, global progress on gender equality remains fragile and insufficient, prompting urgent calls for accelerated action and investment.

Development cooperation is a crucial, albeit contested, lever to support SDG 5. There have been some positive trends in donor support for gender equality. The annual volume of official development assistance (ODA) dedicated to gender equality and women’s empowerment has slightly increased in recent years. In 2022–2023, OECD-DAC members reported that 46 % of their bilateral allocable ODA included gender equality as a policy objective (USD 71.94 billion from USD 156.57 billion screened under the gender marker)⁵⁵. This is a slight increase in total volume compared to the previous period.

However, only a small fraction of aid is truly dedicated to gender equality as a principal objective. In 2022–2023, just under 4 % of total bilateral ODA was focused primarily on gender equality⁵⁶. This figure has remained persistently low (around 4–5 % in recent years) even as donors rhetorically commit to a ‘twin-track’ approach of gender mainstreaming plus targeted programmes. In other words, the twin-track approach is often unbalanced in practice as most gender-tagged aid comes from mainstreaming gender into broader projects, while transformative, stand-alone gender-equality initiatives receive only a sliver of resources. As UN analysts observe, funding for dedicated gender equality programmes remains

⁵⁰ G. Azcona et al., [Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2025](#), UN Women and UN DESA, September 2025.

⁵¹ G. Azcona et al., [Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2025](#), UN Women and UN DESA, September 2025.

⁵² UN Women, ‘[Closing the gender digital divide could boost global GDP by USD 1.5 trillion and lift 30 million women from poverty](#)’, Press release, 15 September 2025.

⁵³ A. Mehrotra, ‘[Financing gender equality: The role of the Gender Equality Marker and financial targets](#)’, Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, September 2023.

⁵⁴ G. Azcona et al., [Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2025](#), UN Women and UN DESA, September 2025.

⁵⁵ OECD, ‘[Development Finance for Gender Equality](#)’, webpage, nd.

⁵⁶ OECD, ‘[Development Finance for Gender Equality](#)’, webpage, nd.

'consistently low'⁵⁷, indicating that donors are failing to implement effectively the dual strategy of making all aid gender-responsive while also investing in targeted gender equality actions.

3.2 Donor trends and EU performance in aid for gender equality

Within the OECD-DAC, there is a wide variation in how strongly donors support gender equality through aid. A few progressive donors have made gender a clear policy priority across their portfolios. For example, in 2021-2022, the Netherlands screened 84 % of its ODA as having a gender equality objective (whether significant or principal), the highest share among DAC members⁵⁸. Ireland and Canada followed closely, with about 78 % and 77 % of their aid respectively addressing gender issues⁵⁹. These high percentages reflect an ambitious mainstreaming of gender, namely, integrating gender equality into the majority of development projects. By contrast, many other donors still fund large volumes of gender-blind activities: globally, more than half of bilateral aid in recent years does not integrate any gender perspective, underscoring the continued gap in donor practice⁶⁰.

Even among leaders, the share of aid dedicated primarily to gender equality (principal objective) remains limited. The Netherlands and Spain stood out in 2021-22 with about 28 % and 20 % of their ODA focused on gender equality as the main goal, the highest such shares in the DAC⁶¹. Most donors fall far below that: for many, only single-digit percentages of aid qualify as principal-purpose gender equality projects. Major aid providers such as Germany and the EU institutions contribute large absolute volumes of gender-marked aid (each around USD 12 billion per year in 2021-22, the top two globally), but this is mostly through gender-mainstreamed programmes⁶². Against the wider international donor landscape (see Table 2 below), the EU stands out for the breadth of its gender mainstreaming, but less clearly for the scale of its dedicated gender-equality action. The table below summarises the author's 2026 analysis 'Gender equality objective in the proposal for a Regulation establishing 'Global Europe' (2028-2034)' requested by the European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality and provides the baseline for examining the EU's particular balance between mainstreamed and principal-objective support.

Table 2: EU performance on aid for gender equality

Dimension	Evidence	Implication for this paper
Mainstreaming trend	Gender equality was an objective in 72 % of new external actions in 2022 ⁶³ and almost 83 % in 2023 ⁶⁴ .	The EU moved close to the 85 % mainstreaming benchmark.

⁵⁷ A. Mehrotra, '[Financing gender equality: The role of the Gender Equality Marker and financial targets](#)', *Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation*, September 2023.

⁵⁸ OECD, [DAC Network on Gender Equality: Latest data on official development assistance \(ODA\) for gender equality and women's empowerment](#), DCD/DAC/GEN(2024)1, 15 February 2024; P. Debusscher, '[Gender equality objective in the proposal for a regulation establishing 'Global Europe' \(2028-2034\)](#)', PE 785.604, *European Parliament Directorate-General for Citizens' Rights, Justice and Institutional Affairs*, 15 March 2026.

⁵⁹ OECD, [DAC Network on Gender Equality: Latest data on official development assistance \(ODA\) for gender equality and women's empowerment](#), DCD/DAC/GEN(2024)1, 15 February 2024.

⁶⁰ OECD, [DAC Network on Gender Equality: Latest data on official development assistance \(ODA\) for gender equality and women's empowerment](#), DCD/DAC/GEN(2024)1, 15 February 2024.

⁶¹ OECD, [DAC Network on Gender Equality: Latest data on official development assistance \(ODA\) for gender equality and women's empowerment](#), DCD/DAC/GEN(2024)1, 15 February 2024.

⁶² OECD, [DAC Network on Gender Equality: Latest data on official development assistance \(ODA\) for gender equality and women's empowerment](#), DCD/DAC/GEN(2024)1, 15 February 2024.

⁶³ European Commission, [Joint report on the implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan \(GAP III\)](#), JOIN(2023) 36 final, 20 November 2023.

⁶⁴ EEAS, '[Gender Action Plan III & its key areas of EU engagement](#)', webpage, 21 January 2025.

Dimension	Evidence	Implication for this paper
Variation by instrument	For actions launched in 2021–2023, the share was 85 % under NDICI–Global Europe, 75 % under IPA III and 28 % under Common Foreign and Security Policy ⁶⁵ .	Aggregated performance conceals major differences between instruments.
EU-wide aggregate	Across all EU institutions, approximately 60 % of bilateral allocable ODA had a gender objective, with little recent growth ⁶⁶ .	Institutional coverage and the unit of measurement affect the reported result ⁶⁷ .
Principal-objective action	In 2022, 3.7 % of new actions were G2 ⁶⁸ . Across all EU institutions, 2 % of bilateral allocable ODA was gender-principal in 2022–2023, compared with a DAC average of about 4 % ⁶⁹ .	Dedicated gender action remained below both the NDICI benchmark and the wider donor average.
Quality and accountability	A gender marker records stated objectives, but does not by itself demonstrate implementation, expenditure or transformative effects.	The analysis must examine what G1 and G2 classifications produce in programme design and implementation.

Source: Debusscher (2026), pp. 4–5⁷⁰.

This baseline reveals a clear asymmetry. The EU has made substantial progress in extending gender mainstreaming across its external portfolio, but dedicated gender-principal action remains below the existing benchmark and performance varies sharply by instrument. The relevant question for this paper is therefore not whether the EU formally uses a twin-track approach, but how its two tracks operate in practice: whether G1 commitments survive implementation and whether G2 actions receive sufficient scale, resources and institutional support to generate transformative effects. Chapters 4 and 5 examine these questions through the selected action documents and interview evidence.

3.3 Gender mainstreaming versus targeted actions: Debates and evidence

The (im)balance between gender mainstreaming and targeted gender-equality actions has been at the centre of both policy and academic debates for years. Mainstreaming refers to integrating gender perspectives and objectives into all development efforts, effectively making gender everyone's business. Targeted actions are dedicated programmes focusing primarily on gender equality (for example, projects to combat GBV, support girls' education or strengthen women's economic rights). A consensus in

⁶⁵ OECD, [OECD Development Co-operation Peer Reviews: European Union 2025](#), 19 December 2025.

⁶⁶ OECD, [OECD Development Co-operation Peer Reviews: European Union 2025](#), 19 December 2025.

⁶⁷ Recent OECD data indicate that Commission-managed disbursements show stronger performance than the aggregate for all EU institutions. There is also a methodological difference: the 85 % target concerns the share of new external actions under NDICI–Global Europe, while the approximately 60 % figure concerns the share of bilateral allocable ODA disbursements for the EU institutional system as a whole, including the EIB.

⁶⁸ European Commission, [Joint report on the implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan \(GAP III\)](#), JOIN(2023) 36 final, 20 November 2023, p. 9.

⁶⁹ OECD, [OECD Development Co-operation Peer Reviews: European Union 2025](#), 19 December 2025, p. 31.

⁷⁰ P. Debusscher, ['Gender equality objective in the proposal for a regulation establishing 'Global Europe' \(2028–2034\)'](#), PE 785.604, European Parliament Directorate-General for Citizens' Rights, Justice and Institutional Affairs, 15 March 2026.

international policy has emerged that a twin-track strategy is needed: namely, robust mainstreaming and specific gender equality initiatives⁷¹. Indeed, the EU, UN and many donors now pursue both mainstreaming and targeted interventions in tandem. In theory, mainstreaming ensures that large investments in sectors such as infrastructure, energy, agriculture or governance also advance gender equality, while targeted projects can directly address structural barriers and innovate in gender-specific areas⁷². Some studies find that mainstreaming needs to be paired with standalone gender-equality projects 'to maximise impact, particularly given the persistent challenge of securing dedicated funding for gender equality and women's empowerment globally'⁷³.

However, in practice, achieving this balance has proved difficult. As previously noted, many donors have heavily emphasised mainstreaming (assigning gender markers widely) but have not sufficiently grown the pool of dedicated gender programmes⁷⁴. This can lead to a situation where gender is 'everywhere and nowhere', being referenced in most project documents, yet with relatively few resources allocated to transformative gender-focused change⁷⁵.

This pattern is also visible in the GAP III implementation. An in-depth assessment by CONCORD finds that GAP III implementation has so far mainly focused on mainstreaming and that more resources are needed for gender-targeted G2 actions to complement mainstreaming and enable gender-transformative change⁷⁶. This concern is echoed in the 2025 intermediate evaluation, which finds that targeted actions can produce tangible Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment results, while gender mainstreaming risks becoming a 'tick-box' exercise when it is not backed by dedicated resources, monitoring and budgeting⁷⁷. Internal and independent assessments also warn of possible 'marker inflation': actions may be classified as having gender equality as a significant objective despite limited gender analysis or substantive programming, meaning that reported figures can overstate the depth of mainstreaming in practice⁷⁸.

These weaknesses reflect broader institutional challenges identified in the literature, including:

resource scarcity, weak accountability mechanisms, staff gender imbalances, organisational culture and non-mandatory gender training [...] (Painter & Ulmer, 2002, p. 6; see also Howard, 2002). Donors and international organisations may 'appear to do much', yet their activity often remains surface-level, with gender initiatives handed off to junior staff or isolated specialist units (Caywood & Darmstadt, 2024, p. 5). Research has also shown how mainstreaming risks being perceived as externally imposed, fuelling resistance and resulting in passive 'tick-box' compliance rather than real change (Bazbauers & Madkour, 2024; Howard, 2002). Feminist institutionalist work further

⁷¹ OECD, [Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls: DAC Guidance for Development Partners](#), 6 May 2022.

⁷² OECD, [Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls: DAC Guidance for Development Partners](#), 6 May 2022.

⁷³ J. Zulver and L. Breimann, '[At risk and underfunded: How funding cuts are threatening efforts to end violence against women and girls](#)', *UN Women*, 2025; S. Giancesello et al., '[From ambition to uncertainty: Gender equality in the EU's new Global Europe instrument](#)', *ECDPM*, 10 September 2025.

⁷⁴ A. Mehrotra, '[Financing gender equality: The role of the Gender Equality Marker and financial targets](#)', *Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation*, September 2023.

⁷⁵ G. Painter and K. Ulmer, '[Everywhere and Nowhere: Assessing Gender Mainstreaming in European Community Development Cooperation](#)', *APRODEV and One World Action*, October 2002; see also P. Howard, '[Beyond the 'grim resisters': towards more effective gender mainstreaming through stakeholder participation](#)', *Development in Practice*, Vol 12, No 2, 2002, pp. 164-176.

⁷⁶ M. Reglero and E. L. Maes, '[Implementing the EU Gender Action Plan III: Turning ambition into impact?](#)', *CONCORD Europe*, 21 June 2023, pp. 22-24.

⁷⁷ ADE, '[Intermediate evaluation of the implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan III \(2021-2027\)](#)', *European Commission Directorate-General for International Partnerships*, 27 November 2025.

⁷⁸ L. MacKellar et al., '[Mid-term evaluation of the implementation of the European Union Gender Action Plan III](#)', *European Commission*, April 2023; A. Burni and A. Somji, '[From GAP III to GAP IV: Rethinking the EU's global support for gender equality](#)', *ODI Europe*, October 2025.

uncovers disconnects between formal headquarters policy and informal practices in the field where gender equality aims are often marginalised or diluted within everyday bureaucratic routines (Debusscher, 2020).⁷⁹

A commonly described risk is that of the ‘technocratisation’ or depolitisation of gender policy: gender equality becomes a procedural checkbox or technical add-on, divorced from its political and feminist roots⁸⁰. Research on EU development policy has documented cases where gender objectives were depoliticised or instrumentalised – for example, included only insofar as they serve other goals such as economic growth or security, rather than treating gender equality as a goal in its own right⁸¹. Such instrumentalisation undermines the transformative potential of gender mainstreaming. If a project, say, trains women entrepreneurs to boost gross domestic product or reduce migration, without empowering women’s rights or voice, the approach can reinforce the notion of women as instruments for achieving other ends. Critics argue that true gender equality work must challenge power relations and patriarchal norms, which a shallow mainstreaming approach often fails to do.

By contrast, dedicated gender-focused programmes – such as those combating GBV or boosting women’s political participation – can directly target structural inequalities and often work in partnership with WROs. These targeted initiatives are generally more likely to achieve transformative change⁸². They can pilot innovative approaches, address sensitive issues such as SRHR, thereby building capacity for local feminist movements. The drawback is that they may remain small in scale or siloed if the wider development portfolio does not buy into their lessons⁸³. Hence, the consensus in recent literature is that mainstreaming and dedicated actions should be mutually reinforcing⁸⁴. Mainstreaming embeds gender across sectors (breadth), while targeted actions drive deeper change in key areas (depth) and support feminist partners – both are needed for lasting impact⁸⁵. Crucially, applying an intersectional lens is recommended in both streams: donors are increasingly urged to recognise how gender inequality intersects with other factors such as race, class, age, disability and conflict. The EU’s GAP III is notable for explicitly embracing intersectionality and transformative change as guiding principles, aiming to address the needs of the most marginalised women and girls across virtually all sectors⁸⁶. This marks an improvement over earlier approaches that treated women as a monolithic category. That said, incorporating intersectionality in practice remains challenging – it demands high-quality context analysis and the inclusion of diverse voices

⁷⁹ P. Debusscher, ‘[Gender mainstreaming in international cooperation and development policy](#)’, in S. Jacquot et al., (eds), *Research Handbook on Gender Mainstreaming*, Edward Elgar Publishing, 2026.

‘[Budget Support Through a Gender Lens: The Case of EU Development Cooperation with Botswana](#)’, *The European Journal of Development Research*, Vol 32, 2020, pp. 718–737.

⁸⁰ F. Beier and G. Çağlar, ‘[Depoliticising Gender Equality in Turbulent Times: The Case of the European Gender Action Plan for External Relations](#)’, *Political Studies Review*, Vol 18, No 3, 2020, pp. 426–443.

⁸¹ P. Debusscher, ‘[Budget Support Through a Gender Lens: The Case of EU Development Cooperation with Botswana](#)’, *The European Journal of Development Research*, Vol 32, 2020, pp. 718–737; P. Debusscher, ‘[Analysing European gender equality policies abroad: A reflection on methodology](#)’, *European Journal of Women’s Studies*, Vol 23, No 3, 2015, pp. 265–280; H. L. Muehlenhoff, ‘[Victims, soldiers, peacemakers and caretakers: the neoliberal constitution of women in the EU’s security policy](#)’, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, Vol 19, No 2, 2017, pp. 153–167.

⁸² ADE, ‘[Intermediate evaluation of the implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan III \(2021–2027\)](#)’, *European Commission Directorate-General for International Partnerships*, 27 November 2025, p. 67.

⁸³ P. Debusscher, ‘[Development policy](#)’, in G. Abels et al., (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Gender and EU Politics*, Routledge, 2021, pp. 290–301.

⁸⁴ P. Debusscher, ‘[International cooperation and development policy](#)’, in S. Jacquot et al. (eds), *Research Handbook on Gender Mainstreaming*, Edward Elgar Publishing, forthcoming in 2026.

⁸⁵ S. Giancesello et al., ‘[From ambition to uncertainty: Gender equality in the EU’s new Global Europe instrument](#)’, *ECDPM*, 10 September 2025.

⁸⁶ E. L. Maes and P. Debusscher, ‘[The EU as a Global Gender Actor: Tracing Intersectionality in the European Gender Action Plans for External Relations 2010–2025](#)’, *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, Vol 31, No 1, 2024, pp. 49–71.

(for instance, minority and grassroots women) in programme design. Without this, even well-intentioned mainstreaming can overlook important disparities among women⁸⁷.

In sum, the evidence and debates suggest that gender mainstreaming can work when it is backed by political will, resources, expertise and accountability, but it fails when it is reduced to a superficial compliance exercise.

3.4 Strengths and weaknesses of the current EU approach

The EU's current approach to gender equality in its development policy is best understood as comprehensive and ambitious but at times uneven in its operationalisation of the dual approach. Its main strength is that gender equality has been given a clear political, institutional and programming architecture over the past decades and that significant institutional expertise and experience have been built up⁸⁸. GAP III combines mainstreaming, targeted actions and political and policy dialogue, while also requiring an intersectional, human rights-based and gender-transformative approach. Together with the 85 % and 5 % benchmarks in NDICI–Global Europe, this has helped make gender equality more visible across EU development cooperation and has given EU staff a stronger mandate to integrate gender into programming.

This architecture has produced important institutional gains. Interviewees repeatedly stressed that gender equality is now much more embedded in everyday delegation practice than in the past. One delegation interviewee explained that, in the delegations where they had worked, gender was no longer seen as exceptional but as 'a must for every action'⁸⁹. Another interviewee similarly argued that years of training, repetition and institutional investment had paid off: 'People are on board in the delegations'⁹⁰. These comments suggest that GAP III has not only created formal requirements but has also contributed to a gradual normalisation of gender equality as part of EU development practice. One interviewee described this as a long-term process of institutional learning: 'Compared to 15 years ago, so much has changed', adding that 'for a long time I have not seen active resistance anymore on gender equality or women in development'⁹¹.

Gender equality is now more systematically addressed across sectors that were long treated as largely 'gender-neutral', including infrastructure, energy, transport, digitalisation and climate⁹². GAP III has also strengthened the use of programming tools such as Gender Country Profiles, sector gender analyses and country-level implementation plans, which can improve the quality of mainstreaming when they are used rigorously. Interview evidence points to the value of this architecture in concrete programming processes. One interviewee noted that action documents are screened and commented on by headquarters gender expertise, with project officers sometimes asked to justify why an action qualifies as gender-significant and pointed out that this quality control was very helpful for gender focal persons⁹³. This double check by

⁸⁷ E. L. Maes and P. Debusscher, 'The EU as a Global Gender Actor: Tracing Intersectionality in the European Gender Action Plans for External Relations 2010–2025', *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, Vol 31, No 1, 2024, pp. 49–71.

⁸⁸ L. MacKellar et al., [Mid-term evaluation of the implementation of the European Union Gender Action Plan III](#), European Commission, April 2023.

⁸⁹ Interview with EU Delegation official, 3 March 2026.

⁹⁰ Interview with senior gender expert with long-standing experience supporting EU Delegations, 7 April 2026.

⁹¹ Interview with senior gender expert with long-standing experience supporting EU Delegations, 7 April 2026.

⁹² L. MacKellar et al., [Mid-term evaluation of the implementation of the European Union Gender Action Plan III](#), European Commission, April 2023.

⁹³ Interview with EU Delegation gender focal point, 23 March 2026.

headquarters and by the delegation's GFP creates powerful incentives for delegation colleagues to think more seriously about how gender is integrated at the design stage⁹⁴.

At the same time, interviews also confirm that the current approach illustrates the classic weaknesses of gender mainstreaming when it is not matched by sufficient resources, expertise and accountability. Implementation remains uneven across countries, sectors and instruments. Many delegations depend on GFPs who carry the role alongside other responsibilities. As one interviewee put it, the gender focal point role is often taken up by a programme manager whose first responsibility remains contract management: 'it is not at all full time'⁹⁵. Another warned that the combination of reduced human resources at delegation level and the possible removal of financial targets would have 'a tangible effect' on gender equality funding⁹⁶. These findings underline that mainstreaming cannot be sustained by formal commitments alone but depends on staff time, expertise and hierarchy-level incentives.

A second weakness concerns the gap between design and implementation. Several interviewees recognised that gender mainstreaming is now much better integrated at the level of action documents, but also questioned what happens afterwards. One interviewee noted that headquarters may challenge the gender marker at the design stage, but that 'there is no mechanism to control that afterwards' once implementation moves into contracts managed by sector teams⁹⁷. Another observed that GAP reporting has become lighter over the years and that it can be 'very easy to fill it in without concrete evidence', because delegations may simply provide a few good examples⁹⁸. This links up with a key accountability problem: the EU has much improved the *ex ante* integration of gender over the past decade, but has weaker tools to assess whether gender commitments are implemented, funded and monitored in practice. A related concern raised in the interviews is that 'the gender analysis is sometimes rushed, and it can remain isolated from the action documents'⁹⁹.

A third weakness concerns the balance between the two tracks of the dual approach. The EU has made strong progress in expanding gender mainstreaming, but dedicated gender-principal actions remain limited. This matters because targeted actions often address the areas where mainstreaming alone is least likely to be sufficient, such as gender-based violence, SRHR, women's political participation, feminist movement-building, care or support to WROs. Interviewees strongly confirmed this point. One delegation interviewee stated that 'the 85 % we do naturally', but that 'the 5 %' target provided crucial leverage for gender-principal action¹⁰⁰. Another explained that GAP III was extremely ambitious and that 'because of the G2 target in the financial framework we managed to do some of it', despite many competing priorities¹⁰¹. This suggests that the targeted-action track is especially dependent on explicit incentives and safeguards.

The interviews also nuance the assessment of mainstreaming. Some interviewees acknowledged problems of marker inflation and weak measurement. As one put it, 'G1 is inflated: not the entire budget is going to gender equality'¹⁰². Another added that 'it is quite easy to give a G1 score' especially compared to other

⁹⁴ Interview with senior gender expert with long-standing experience supporting EU Delegations, 7 April 2026.

⁹⁵ Interview with EU Delegation gender focal point, 23 March 2026.

⁹⁶ Interview with EU Delegation official, 3 March 2026.

⁹⁷ Interview with EU Delegation gender focal point, 27 February 2026.

⁹⁸ Interview with EU Delegation gender focal point, 23 March 2026.

⁹⁹ Interview with senior gender expert with long-standing experience supporting EU Delegations, 7 April 2026.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with EU Delegation gender focal point, 27 February 2026.

¹⁰¹ Interview with EU Delegation gender focal point, 23 March 2026.

¹⁰² Interview with EU Delegation gender focal point, 27 February 2026.

markers, such as the migration marker, which is 'much more restrictive in what falls under it'¹⁰³. Yet they also cautioned against dismissing mainstreaming as merely symbolic. One interviewee argued that, despite imperfections, 'there is a difference that European support brings' compared to other donors¹⁰⁴. Another interviewee confirmed this and added that EU delegation staff 'will push a little bit harder' to have women at the table, involve boys and men in programmes, and raise awareness of violence¹⁰⁵. This is an important nuance. The problem is not that mainstreaming is meaningless, but that its quality varies and its contribution is difficult to assess without stronger monitoring of implementation and expenditure.

A related concern is that while there is a strong emphasis on civil society engagement and local ownership, funding still does not sufficiently reach WROs and grassroots feminist actors. Interviewees confirmed that delegations consult women's organisations, but also pointed to frustration when consultation is not matched by accessible funding. One interviewee summarised this dynamic from the perspective of women's organisations as: 'you are picking our brain, you are asking us to participate, but then we get nothing out of it'¹⁰⁶. Re-granting schemes can help manage fiduciary risk and reach smaller actors, but interviewees also noted drawbacks: they can reduce EU visibility, weaken direct access to information and create distance between delegations and local feminist movements¹⁰⁷. The issue is therefore not only whether WROs are consulted, but whether they are resourced in ways that are flexible, predictable and politically meaningful.

Finally, the wider political context has become more difficult. Anti-gender mobilisation, shrinking civic space, democratic backsliding and contestation around SRHR and LGBTIQ+ rights all affect how EU gender commitments are implemented in practice. Interviews illustrate how delegations often need to adapt to context. In some settings, interviewees described openings around GBV, girls' education or health, while more politically sensitive areas such as land rights, LGBTIQ+ rights or feminist mobilisation may be difficult or risky¹⁰⁸. As one interviewee put it, in restrictive contexts 'when we see an opportunity we grab it'¹⁰⁹. This pragmatic adaptation can be necessary to protect partners and maintain entry points, but it also carries a risk: the EU may end up prioritising less contested forms of gender equality while more politically sensitive rights-based agendas receive less emphasis¹¹⁰. One interviewee captured this narrowing effect clearly: 'In many countries there are limitations to working on gender equality, for instance when it is linked with the LGBTIQ+ movement. So this is a weakness that we work on safe issues, such as general awareness raising or GBV. Context can limit the scope'¹¹¹.

Overall, the EU's dual approach remains a powerful framework, but its effectiveness depends on the conditions under which it is implemented. Mainstreaming broadens the reach of gender equality across the whole development portfolio, while targeted actions support deeper and more transformative change. However, this only works if both tracks are adequately resourced, monitored and politically protected. The

¹⁰³ Interview with senior gender expert with long-standing experience supporting EU Delegations, 7 April 2026.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with senior gender expert with long-standing experience supporting EU Delegations, 7 April 2026.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with EU Delegation official, 3 March 2026.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with EU Delegation gender focal point, 23 March 2026.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with EU Delegation gender focal point, 23 March 2026.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with gender expert, 27 February 2026.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with EU Delegation gender focal point, 23 March 2026.

¹¹⁰ A. Burni and A. Somji, [From GAP III to GAP IV: Rethinking the EU's global support for gender equality](#), ODI Europe, October 2025.

¹¹¹ Interview with senior gender expert with long-standing experience supporting EU Delegations, 7 April 2026.

interview evidence reinforces the central lesson from internal and external GAP III evaluations¹¹²: the dual approach should not be replaced, but it needs a stronger accountability architecture. This includes robust gender analysis, senior leadership, dedicated expertise, meaningful indicators, better follow-up from design to implementation, predictable funding for gender-principal actions and more accessible support for WROs. These questions are particularly relevant for the post-2027 external financing framework and the forthcoming GAP IV, where the challenge will be to ensure that increased flexibility does not weaken the incentives and safeguards that make the dual approach operational.

The following two chapters will delve deeper into a selection of G2 and G1 development cooperation actions in specific partner countries to better illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of the EU's dual approach and how it can refine its strategy in the face of both internal limitations and external headwinds such as backlash and shrinking civic space.

4 EU projects with gender equality as a principal objective (G2)

Under GAP III, the EU has substantially increased the number of dedicated G2 actions, especially from 2023 onward. However, these gender-specific actions remain predominantly concentrated in a relatively limited set of themes: GBV/VAWG, women's economic empowerment and governance, rights and participation programming. They also show a strong geographic tilt towards Africa.

The current list records 81 G2 actions for the period of 2021 to 2025: 8 in 2021, 14 in 2022, 29 in 2023, 24 in 2024 and 6 in 2025. Roughly half of these actions are in Africa or Africa-regional programmes. Thematically, the strongest cluster is GBV/VAWG with around 23 G2 actions¹¹³. For example, in Kenya, the action *STOP FGM NOW KOMESHA FGM SASA!* focuses directly on ending female genital mutilation, while in Nigeria, the action *EU Support to End Sexual and Gender-based Violence* targets SGBV more broadly. Similar GBV/VAWG-related actions appear in Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Bangladesh, Papua New Guinea, Bolivia, Colombia, Paraguay, Burkina Faso, Liberia, Sudan, Chad, Peru, Myanmar, Djibouti, South Africa and through the Africa-regional *Ending VAWG* action¹¹⁴.

A second major cluster is women's economic empowerment. In Nepal, for instance, the EU delegation supports a G2 action that aims to ensure that women, men, girls and boys, in all their diversity, have equal access to economic, labour and social rights by addressing the formal and informal barriers that women and girls face, acknowledging the intersecting vulnerabilities¹¹⁵. Other economic empowerment actions include the EU for Women's Empowerment in Egypt programme *EU Tamkeen*, the G2 action in Ethiopia, aimed at strengthening women-owned business ecosystems and women's economic empowerment in key value chains, and actions in Zimbabwe, Uzbekistan, Morocco and Somalia.

A smaller but visible third cluster focuses on governance, political participation, rule of law and rights. In Sri Lanka, the EU-funded G2 action *She decides: promoting women's participation in political decision*

¹¹² ADE, [Intermediate evaluation of the implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan III \(2021-2027\)](#), European Commission Directorate-General for International Partnerships, 27 November 2025; L. MacKellar et al., [Mid-term evaluation of the implementation of the European Union Gender Action Plan III](#), European Commission, April 2023; A. Burni and A. Somji, [From GAP III to GAP IV: Rethinking the EU's global support for gender equality](#), ODI Europe, October 2025; M. Reglero and E. L. Maes, [Implementing the EU Gender Action Plan III: Turning ambition into impact?](#), CONCORD Europe, 21 June 2023; S. Giancesello et al., [The impact of EU gender policy in the NDICI-Global Europe framework](#), European Centre for Development Policy Management, July 2024.

¹¹³ European Union, [List of G2 actions](#), webpage, nd.

¹¹⁴ European Union, [List of G2 actions](#), webpage, nd.

¹¹⁵ EEAS, [Empowered Women Prosperous Nepal \(Shashakta Mahila, Sambriddha Nepal\)](#), 9 August 2023.

making is a useful example. Adopted under the 2025 Annual Action Plan for Sri Lanka, the action has an EU contribution of EUR 3 million and is situated within the EU-Sri Lanka priority on good and inclusive governance, where the EU explicitly identifies boosting of women's political participation in leadership and decision-making processes as an area of cooperation¹¹⁶. The action aims to reduce barriers to women's political participation and applies a human rights-based approach, in a context where women's representation in national politics has historically remained very low, despite quota reforms and stronger representation at the local level¹¹⁷. This governance and rights cluster also includes EU-funded G2 actions in Pakistan, West Bank and Gaza, Kyrgyz Republic, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Türkiye, as well as several multi-country rule-of-law or inclusion actions¹¹⁸.

What is more striking is what remains largely absent. For instance, there are fewer G2 titles that sit clearly in 'harder' sectors, such as green transition, agriculture/value chains or labour migration and very few that look like digitalisation, infrastructure, energy or macroeconomic reform. In other words, G2 still seems to be used mainly for explicitly gender-branded or social-sector actions, not broadly across the whole aid portfolio. A notable exception can be found, for instance, in the EU-Vietnam Women-led Green Partnership Programme funded by the EU. The programme aims to empower women to lead the country's transition to a green and circular economy and address the disproportionate impact of climate change on women by combining action on entrepreneurship, sustainable livelihoods and climate policy participation¹¹⁹.

Most EU delegations have one country-specific G2 action. A smaller group has two: Chad, Djibouti, Egypt, El Salvador, Nepal, Senegal and Türkiye. At the same time, several EU partner countries do not yet appear in the country-specific G2 list for 2021–2025¹²⁰. This absence should not be read as evidence that no gender equality work is taking place in these countries, since they may be covered through G1 programming, regional or global actions, or future 2026–2027 allocations. However, it does point to an uneven country-level translation of GAP III's commitment that each country allocation should include at least one action with gender equality as a principal objective.

Most G2 actions rely on partnership-based implementation, involving partner governments, UN agencies, Member States, civil society or regional organisations. This is visible in examples such as the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative in Sierra Leone or the UN Population Fund Supplies Partnership Programme. Importantly, many G2 actions are explicitly connected to partner-government priorities and wider development programming, rather than operating as stand-alone gender projects, including systematic dialogues with partner governments and other national stakeholders. Linking G2 actions to national development plans, sector strategies or reform agendas strengthens ownership, sustainability and policy uptake. However, it also means that the transformative potential of G2 programming depends on the political space and gender-equality priorities of partner governments. In more sensitive contexts, this may create pragmatic entry points, but it can also narrow the agenda towards less contested themes and make issues such as SRHR, feminist civil society, LGBTQI+ rights or structural power inequalities harder to address¹²¹.

¹¹⁶ Directorate-General for International Partnerships, '[Sri Lanka](#)', webpage, nd.

¹¹⁷ P. Peiris, [EU support for women's political participation and leadership under the EU's Gender Action Plan: A case study on Sri Lanka](#), *European Democracy Hub*, 2021.

¹¹⁸ European Union, '[List of G2 actions](#)', webpage, nd.

¹¹⁹ Delegation of the European Union to Vietnam, '[The European Union and Vietnam](#)', webpage, 6 July 2023.

¹²⁰ European Union, '[List of G2 actions](#)', webpage, nd.

¹²¹ Interview with EU Delegation gender focal point, 23 March 2026.

4.1 Cross-case findings: The strengths and limits of G2-specific actions in EU cooperation

Strengths

G2 actions play a distinctive role within the EU's broader GAP III architecture: when gender equality is the principal objective, the intervention logic is usually sharper, more politically explicit and more willing to tackle structural barriers than is often the case in mainstreamed G1 programmes¹²².

A first strength of the EU-funded G2 actions supported through the EU delegations (see Annex 1) is diagnostic clarity: they allow gender inequality itself to become the core problem to be addressed, rather than a secondary consideration within another sector goal. In the strongest examples, the theory of change starts from gendered barriers, institutional failures and unequal power relations, and then links these to concrete public action. This is clear in the EU-funded G2 action in Bangladesh, *Strengthening Prevention and Response to Gender Based Violence at the public and workplace in Bangladesh* (2023) with a total EU budget contribution of EUR 10 million¹²³. The action does not treat GBV only as an individual protection issue. It links prevention and response to safer public spaces, workplaces and tertiary education institutions, policy and institutional reform, harmful social norms, and stronger civil society and WROs¹²⁴. The later EU–UN Women partnership agreement under this agenda confirms this logic: it focuses on SGBV in public spaces, workplaces and tertiary institutions, is aligned with Bangladesh's National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women and Children 2018–2030 and combines enabling policies and systems, norm change and support to WROs¹²⁵.

A similar logic is visible in the EU-funded G2 action in Paraguay, *VAWG in Paraguay: improving prevention and attention services* (2023). Here, VAWG is framed as a multidimensional problem requiring work on prevention, protection, care services, institutional coordination and social norms. The programme strengthens the technical, budgetary and inter-institutional capacities of Paraguay's Ministry of Women and is implemented with Spanish Cooperation, the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation/ the International and Ibero-American Foundation for Administration and Public Policies and a wider group of public, private, civil society and international cooperation actors. This matters because the action does not simply fund services but tries to improve the institutional conditions under which prevention and response to violence are delivered to survivors¹²⁶.

The EU-funded G2 action in Pakistan, *Women participation and leadership in governance and democratic processes in Pakistan* (2023), extends this structural logic into the political sphere. Rather than treating women's participation as a question of numbers alone, the action addresses the wider ecosystem that enables or blocks women's political voice: civic and voter education, women's leadership and mentorship, legislative and policy reform, prevention of violence in political and electoral processes, and engagement

¹²² ADE, [Intermediate evaluation of the implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan III \(2021–2027\)](#), European Commission Directorate-General for International Partnerships, 27 November 2025; L. MacKellar et al., [Mid-term evaluation of the implementation of the European Union Gender Action Plan III](#), European Commission, April 2023.

¹²³ European Commission, [Action Document for Strengthening Prevention and Response to Gender Based Violence \(GBV\) at the public and workplace in Bangladesh](#), 2023.

¹²⁴ European Commission, [Action Document for Strengthening Prevention and Response to Gender Based Violence \(GBV\) at the public and workplace in Bangladesh](#), 2023.

¹²⁵ UN Bangladesh, [‘European Union and UN Women Sign €4.8 Million Agreement to Advance Gender Equality in Bangladesh’](#), Press release, 21 January 2025.

¹²⁶ Directorate-General for International Partnerships, [Paraguay](#), webpage, nd; European Commission, [Action Document for Violence against women and girls in Paraguay: improving prevention and attention services](#), 2023; FIIAPP, [‘Prevention of and attention to violence against women: Spanish Cooperation launches project in Paraguay’](#), 25 February 2025.

with electoral institutions, political parties and civil society¹²⁷. The later EU-funded Pakistan *Women Leaders Project*, implemented by UN Women and UN Development Programme, confirms this comprehensive approach, combining capacity-building, mentorship, policy reform and multi-stakeholder collaboration to create a more inclusive political environment for women¹²⁸.

Taken together, these examples show the added value of G2 actions compared with broader G1 programming. Because gender equality is the principal objective, the intervention can begin with the problem itself: unsafe public and work spaces, weak institutional response to GBV, discriminatory norms, underfunded WROs, barriers to women's political participation and violence in democratic spaces. G2 actions, therefore, do more than 'add women' to existing programmes but offer diagnostic focus as they identify gendered power relations centrally and early on.

A second strength is that several EU-funded G2 actions go beyond a narrow 'women's project' model by placing gender equality inside wider systems and sectors. Tanzania's *Gender Transformative Action: Breaking the Glass Ceiling*¹²⁹ is the clearest example and is discussed in more detail below. The G2 action combines budget support, policy dialogue and complementary interventions across several GAP III priorities, including GBV, SRHR, economic empowerment, leadership, and green and digital transformation. More important for the cross-case comparison here is that this broader G2 logic is not limited to GBV or women's rights programming narrowly understood.

The EU-funded G2 action in Rwanda, *Agricultural Transformation through skills upgrading of women and youth in Rwanda*, is a strong sector-bridging example. It places gender equality inside agricultural transformation, technical vocational and educational training (TVET) and skills upgrading, rather than treating it as a separate empowerment project¹³⁰. The action is a EUR 16 million G2 intervention financed under NDICI–Global Europe and part of the Team Europe initiative (TEI) on sustainable and inclusive agricultural transformation¹³¹. It links women's and youth skills to jobs, livelihoods, climate-resilient agriculture, inclusive growth and reduced vulnerability, while recognising that women's high participation in agriculture does not automatically translate into stronger labour-market outcomes or resilience to climate shocks.

Malawi's EU-funded G2 action *Gender Responsive Social Protection – Kutukula Amai* similarly goes beyond a stand-alone women's empowerment logic by working through the social protection system itself¹³². The related *Social Protection for Gender Empowerment and Resilience / Amai Titukuke* programme supports the Malawi National Social Protection Strategy, the Social Cash Transfer Programme and targeted socio-economic empowerment activities. It is expected to reach more than 500 000 people between 2024 and 2026 and combines cash transfers with social services, nutrition, early childhood development, SRHR and GBV prevention¹³³. This makes it a good example of G2 programming that links gender equality to poverty reduction, resilience, social protection delivery and institutional capacity, rather

¹²⁷ Directorate-General for International Partnerships, [Pakistan](#), webpage, nd; European Commission, [Action Document for Women participation and leadership in governance and democratic processes in Pakistan](#), 2023.

¹²⁸ EEAS, ['European Union-Funded Women Leaders Project launched by UN Women and UNDP'](#), Press release, 12 February 2025.

¹²⁹ European Union, ['Towards a Gender Equal World: the EU Gender Action Plan III'](#), webpage, 18 May 2026.

¹³⁰ European Commission and EEAS, ['Gender Action Plan III \(2021-2025\) – Update of the Country Level Implementation Plan – Rwanda'](#), November 2023.

¹³¹ European Union, ['Rwanda – Agricultural Transformation'](#), webpage, nd.

¹³² European Commission, [Annual Action Plan 2023 for Malawi, Action Document: Gender Responsive Social Protection Programme – Kutukula Amai](#), 1 August 2023.

¹³³ UNICEF Malawi, ['Malawi embarks on a new programme to address poverty among women and girls'](#), Press release, 23 April 2024.

than to individual empowerment alone. It also includes a research and learning dimension aimed at generating policy recommendations for institutionalisation.

These examples show that G2 can be used to place gender equality inside wider development systems: agriculture, TVET, green economy, social protection, public institutions, labour markets and climate resilience. This is analytically important because it challenges the idea that G2 actions are necessarily small, stand-alone or 'soft' gender projects. At their strongest, they can help make gender equality part of sector reform and economic transition agendas.

A third strength is that several EU-funded G2 actions use a more explicit rights-based and intersectional framing, compared to the G1 projects reviewed, although this remains uneven. The strongest examples do not treat 'women' as a homogeneous group, but identify different rights-holders, duty-bearers and intersecting barriers. The EU-funded *Empowered Women, Prosperous Nepal* programme is particularly clear in this respect. It aims to address the formal and informal barriers faced by women and girls in Nepal, while acknowledging intersecting vulnerabilities and seeking equal access to economic, labour and social rights for women, men, girls and boys 'in all their diversity'¹³⁴. The Nepal programme also works with men and boys, families and communities to shift gender norms, addresses unpaid care, supports GBV prevention, strengthens women's agency and voice, and works with institutions to deliver gender equality outcomes in line with national and international frameworks. It is implemented by four UN agencies – International Labour Organization, UN Population Fund, UN Children's Fund and UN Women – under the overall coordination of the UN Resident Coordinator's Office, with an EU contribution of EUR 15 million¹³⁵.

The EU-funded action *Empowering Women as Business Actors in Tajikistan* also contains important intersectional elements, even if its main analytical value lies in its green economy and TVET focus. It targets women from economically disadvantaged regions, rural and disadvantaged communities, women affected by low income, limited mobility, unpaid care responsibilities and digital access gaps, and it requires TVET providers to deliver inclusive and accessible green skills training. It also integrates a human rights-based approach and refers to persons in vulnerable situations, including those left behind due to labour migration and persons with disabilities. Importantly, the action recognises that social norms and family attitudes may prevent women from entering non-traditional green professions and therefore foresees family-level interventions involving men¹³⁶.

The EU-funded action in Malawi, *Gender Responsive Social Protection – Kutukula Amai*, also has a rights-based and intersectional dimension, combining gender equality with disability inclusion, SRHR, sexual and GBV prevention and response, as well as a rights-holders/duty bearers logic linking communities, civil society and state institutions. Its social protection approach targets women and girls in extreme poverty, links poverty reduction to access to services and resilience, and recognises that women and girls face specific barriers linked to poverty, discrimination, exclusion, violence and harmful practices¹³⁷.

The conclusion should be careful: these actions are not always intersectional in a deep or systematic sense. However, several of the stronger G2 files are clearly more developed compared to the average G1 action in identifying intersecting forms of inequality and paying attention to rural women, young women, women

¹³⁴ European Commission, Annual Action Plan 2022 for Nepal, Action Document: Empowered Women for Prosperous Nepal – Shashakta Mahilharu, Sambriddha Nepal, 6 December 2022.

¹³⁵ EEAS, '[Empowered Women Prosperous Nepal \(Shashakta Mahila, Sambriddha Nepal\)](#)', 9 August 2023.

¹³⁶ European Commission, Action Document for Empowering Women as Business Actors in Tajikistan, 2025.

¹³⁷ European Commission, [Annual Action Plan 2023 for Malawi, Action Document: Gender Responsive Social Protection Programme – Kutukula Amai](#), 1 August 2023.

and girls with disabilities, unpaid care, poverty, migration-related vulnerability, social norms, men and boys and the responsibilities of public institutions. While these are not perfect intersectional designs, they are clearly more developed in this respect than the average G1 file.

Limits

There are also clear shortcomings in the sample of G2 actions. A first concern is the gap between transformative ambition and operational scale, as some G2 actions are very ambitious in narrative, but less so in terms of operationalisation, measurement, accountability and, importantly, budget assigned. The EU-funded action *Empowering Women as Business Actors in Tajikistan*, for example, is innovative because it places gender equality inside the green economy, TVET, women-led businesses, renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, circular economy and climate-smart skills¹³⁸. However, the action has a total EU contribution of only EUR 5 million and is to be implemented through indirect management with a Member State organisation. Its ambitious design combines multiple objectives: green entrepreneurship, TVET reform, labour-market access, public perception change, private-sector partnerships, gender-sensitive training, access to finance and institutional capacity-building. This creates a real risk of dilution during implementation and in the results achieved. The action is analytically ambitious, but may be stretched too thinly across too many objectives, sectors and actors to generate systemic change at scale.

A second limitation is that transformative language is often operationalised through a familiar repertoire of training, awareness-raising, coordination, capacity-building and mentoring. These are necessary, but they do not automatically shift power relations. The EU-funded action in Tajikistan, for example, includes useful measures such as business training, financial literacy, digital marketing, start-up support, green credit lines, TVET reform, career guidance, scholarships, transport vouchers, flexible learning formats, internships, mentoring and awareness campaigns¹³⁹. These are relevant entry points, but the transformative effect will depend on whether they also change recruitment practices, unpaid care constraints, mobility barriers, access to finance, stereotypes and the regulatory environment for women entrepreneurs. The same caution applies to the EU-funded G2 action in Rwanda that aims to address structural barriers such as land, finance and market access in its narrative, but much of the operational apparatus still revolves around skills, certification, centres of excellence and labour-market insertion¹⁴⁰. That could be transformative, but it could also slide into a more instrumental 'make women more productive and employable' logic if the structural redistribution side remains weak. The GAP III mid-term evaluation makes a similar broader point for women's economic empowerment: gender is still often integrated into existing economic actions only to a limited degree, while stronger transformative change requires dedicated funding, clear activities, better evidence and closer collaboration with WROs¹⁴¹.

A third limitation concerns institutional and political dependency. Many of the stronger G2 actions are ambitious precisely because they are anchored in partner countries' public systems: ministries, national policies, budgets, social protection systems, TVET institutions, electoral bodies or gender machineries. This gives them potential leverage, but it also makes success dependent on political will, administrative capacity, inter-institutional coordination and continuity across electoral or governmental change in partner

¹³⁸ European Commission, Action Document for Empowering Women as Business Actors in Tajikistan, 2025.

¹³⁹ European Commission, Action Document for Empowering Women as Business Actors in Tajikistan, 2025.

¹⁴⁰ European Commission, [Action Document for Agricultural transformation through skills upgrading of women and youth in Rwanda](#), 18 March 2024.

¹⁴¹ L. MacKellar et al., [Mid-term evaluation of the implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan III](#), European Commission, April 2023.

countries. Government turnover, changes in ministerial leadership or shifting political priorities can weaken implementation, delay reforms or reduce ownership, especially where gender equality is politically sensitive or where gender institutions have limited authority and resources. The G2 action funded in Tajikistan, for instance, explicitly identifies insufficient political will, merely declarative commitments, weak ministerial action and resistant social norms as risks, and proposes to mitigate these by framing gender equality through economic development, labour-market needs and family well-being¹⁴². The same dependency is visible in other actions, although the risks differ by context. Across the sample, action fiches and evaluations point to vulnerabilities such as political instability, electoral turnover, weak institutional capacity, underreporting, anti-rights backlash, limited budgets and difficulties in inter-institutional coordination.

This risk is not only hypothetical. In Tanzania, the EU-funded G2 action *Gender Transformative Action: Breaking the Glass Ceiling* illustrates both the leverage and the vulnerability of state-anchored G2 programming. The G2 action encountered teething problems in developing a working relationship between the Ministry of Finance, the newly created Ministry of Gender and other line ministries such as Education, Health and Justice. The evaluation also noted that the newly created Ministry of Gender found it difficult to cope with the novelty of the programme and the rising expectations attached to Tanzania's international commitments¹⁴³.

Fourthly, a recurring limit is that the role of civil society is often important in rhetoric but less central in financing and power. Implementation power still sits mainly with entrusted entities, UN entities, ministries or delegated cooperation agencies. Tajikistan, for instance, foregrounds government bodies, TVET institutions, the Chamber of Commerce and private-sector actors, but civil society is not especially visible in the core design¹⁴⁴. This is significant because one recurrent weakness of G2 action is that women's organisations are often treated as stakeholders rather than as principal agents of implementation and ownership. The European Court of Auditors confirmed this concern in its spotlight report, finding that the Commission relied heavily on UN implementation despite higher costs and insufficient value-for-money analysis, with the effective involvement of WROs and grassroots gender actors not always being ensured¹⁴⁵.

Fifthly, an important limit is the risk that G2 becomes siloed away from mainstream programmes. The sample's weaker end is made up of G2 actions that remain closer to stand-alone, local mobilisation or short-cycle empowerment work and do not clearly reshape a wider mainstream sector. G2 is most convincing when it is not left on the margins of the country portfolio, but instead re-enters mainstream policy, services, budgets and sector reform.

Overall, the screened actions suggest that the strongest G2 actions are those that combine a structural diagnosis of gender inequality, institutional anchoring, cross-sector ambition and the meaningful involvement of civil society. Tanzania, Malawi and Rwanda stand out in that respect. Bangladesh, Pakistan and Paraguay are particularly strong on rights, participation and anti-violence architecture, while the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) show how ambitious G2 design enters fragile settings. The policy implication is not that all G2 actions are equally transformative, but that

¹⁴² European Commission, Action Document for Empowering Women as Business Actors in Tajikistan, 2025.

¹⁴³ L. MacKellar et al., [Mid-term evaluation of the implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan III](#), European Commission, April 2023.

¹⁴⁴ European Commission, Action Document for Empowering Women as Business Actors in Tajikistan, 2025.

¹⁴⁵ European Court of Auditors, [The Spotlight Initiative to end violence against women and girls: Ambitious but so far with limited impact](#), 2023.

G2 provides the EU with a space to make gender equality politically visible and operationally central in ways that are much harder to achieve through mainstreaming alone.

4.2 Zooming in on a transformative G2 programme: Breaking the glass ceiling in Tanzania

Tanzania's *Breaking the Glass Ceiling* is one of the EU's most ambitious G2 programmes under GAP III and NDICI–Global Europe. Approved in 2021 and later amended in 2024, it is a country-level programme in Tanzania with gender equality as its principal objective, focusing on: (1) addressing all forms of GBV, (2) promoting women's economic empowerment and (3) enhancing gender equality in participation, leadership and decision-making¹⁴⁶. Apart from the three main objectives, the programme is designed to address all six GAP III thematic priorities in an integrated framework and puts girls' education central as a key lever supporting all three main objectives, linking school safety and protection from violence to labour-market participation and future leadership¹⁴⁷.

The original programme envelope was EUR 70 million, split into EUR 28 million in budget support and EUR 42 million in complementary support, while the amended version increased this envelope to EUR 90 million, split evenly between EUR 45 million in budget support and EUR 45 million in complementary support. The original indicative implementation period was 48 months, later extended to 72 months, which points both to the intervention's scale and the EU's decision to deepen rather than narrow the programme over time¹⁴⁸.

This programme is unusually well anchored in the wider Tanzania 2021–2027 multiannual indicative programme (MIP). Formally, it sits in both Priority Area 2 (human capital and employment) and Priority Area 3 (Governance). It is directly linked to MIP objectives on skills development, social protection, women's economic empowerment, small and medium enterprises development and stronger government systems¹⁴⁹. This is significant because the programme does not sit at the margins of EU cooperation as a stand-alone gender project, but rather uses gender equality as a way of operationalising wider MIP goals on human development, employment, institutional reform and inclusive growth. In that sense, it is a strong example of how a targeted G2 action can still be structurally connected to broader programming rather than remaining siloed¹⁵⁰.

This programme stands out because it combines a macro-, meso- and micro-level approach, uses budget support as a strategic lever for structural change and embeds an intersectional approach in the indicators to track inclusion at the individual level. Instead of relying only on grants or stand-alone projects, the programme uses a mixed architecture: direct management through sector reform, budget support grants and procurement, combined with indirect management through selected Member State agencies, international organisations and a lead financial institution under the regional blending facility. Its key implementing partners include the Government of Tanzania and the Revolutionary Government of

¹⁴⁶ European Commission, '[Gender Transformative Action in Tanzania](#)', webpage, nd.

¹⁴⁷ European Union, '[G2_Gender-transformative action in Tanzania: "Breaking the Glass Ceiling"](#)', webpage, nd.

¹⁴⁸ European Union, '[G2_Gender-transformative action in Tanzania: "Breaking the Glass Ceiling"](#)', webpage, nd; EEAS, '[EU Ambassador to Tanzania's Keynote at 2025 Accelerate Women Summit](#)', 15 March 2025.

¹⁴⁹ European Commission, *The United Republic of Tanzania: Multiannual Indicative Programme 2021–2027*, 2021.

¹⁵⁰ L. MacKellar et al., [Mid-term evaluation of the implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan III](#), European Commission, April 2023.

Zanzibar, alongside UN Women, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, European Investment Bank (EIB), Enabel and civil society organisations (CSOs)¹⁵¹.

Another strength of the programme is that it makes gender equality visible in public budgets, thereby providing real institutional weight. Working closely with Tanzania's Ministry of Finance and the Gender Ministry, a central pillar of the programme is gender-responsive budgeting, which aims to make sure that gender equality commitments are reflected in how public money is planned, allocated and spent. Through EU sector budget support, ministries receive funding to implement agreed policy priorities, with further payments linked to the results they achieve¹⁵². As explained by the EU delegation programme manager, this funding is not intended to 'replace public financing' but to help shift it towards 'priority gender equality investments'¹⁵³. The action document specifies that these variable tranches are tied to issues such as: girls' completion of education, specialised services to prevent violence against women and children in public spaces as well as support for survivors through the health and justice chain¹⁵⁴. It also states that 75 % of the budget-support amount is linked to variable tranches, which is significant because it connects a substantial share of funding to demonstrated policy performance rather than general commitments alone¹⁵⁵. In parallel, the programme seeks to strengthen the capacity of the Gender Ministry, together with agencies in the health, education and justice sectors, so they can implement gender policy more effectively. Support focuses on better aligning planning and spending with gender equality priorities, thereby improving the monitoring of implementation and strengthening coordination across the different actors involved. Importantly, the programme aligns with the Republic of Tanzania's development vision for 2050, where it lays out its aspirations to become a 'nation where all individuals, particularly women, people with and sustainable social protection that upholds dignity and promotes well-being'¹⁵⁶.

Publicly reported implementation results suggest that the programme has already generated institutional outputs. According to the Danish-based international consulting company NIRAS technical-assistance update, this has involved 17 ministries, departments and agencies in the budget-support process, trained more than 59 000 national and local officials on gender-responsive budgeting and helped improve the quality after initial weaknesses in 2022 by introducing clearer guidance, stronger monitoring and a reporting tool across agencies¹⁵⁷. NIRAS also reports that the budget of the ministry responsible for gender increased from TZS 47 billion (EUR 15.7 million) in 2021 to TZS 76 billion (EUR 25 million) in 2024, enabling expanded spending on GBV response, legal aid and women's empowerment¹⁵⁸. These are important signs of institutionalisation as the programme is changing how the state budgets, reports and organises gender policy.

The strongest publicly visible outputs are in GBV response, legal aid and awareness raising. NIRAS reports that the programme has: supported the expansion of 1 600 gender desks and 8 666 child protection desks, reached 10.7 million people, helped 500 000 survivors and enabled legal aid for 1.85 million victims. Furthermore, the conviction rate for offenders reportedly rose from 32 % in 2021 to 60 % in 2024. The same source reports that the programme's communication had reached over 12 million Tanzanians through print,

¹⁵¹ European Union, '[G2_Gender-transformative action in Tanzania: "Breaking the Glass Ceiling"](#)', webpage, nd.

¹⁵² NIRAS, '[Building government capacity to break the glass ceiling in Tanzania](#)', 30 March 2026.

¹⁵³ NIRAS, '[Building government capacity to break the glass ceiling in Tanzania](#)', 30 March 2026.

¹⁵⁴ European Union, '[G2_Gender-transformative action in Tanzania: "Breaking the Glass Ceiling"](#)', webpage, nd.

¹⁵⁵ European Union, '[G2_Gender-transformative action in Tanzania: "Breaking the Glass Ceiling"](#)', webpage, nd.

¹⁵⁶ United Republic of Tanzania, [Tanzania Development Vision 2050 \(Dira 2050\)](#), 2025.

¹⁵⁷ NIRAS, '[Building government capacity to break the glass ceiling in Tanzania](#)', 30 March 2026.

¹⁵⁸ NIRAS, '[Building government capacity to break the glass ceiling in Tanzania](#)', 30 March 2026.

radio, video and podcasts¹⁵⁹. In addition, the Improved Access for Women on Legal Aid project, which sits under the Breaking the Glass Ceiling programme, started in January 2024 with a budget of about EUR 4.67 million, runs to March 2026 and works directly with more than 4 000 paralegals through 184 registered paralegal units across the country. This project helps strengthen access to justice for women, girls and marginalised groups by reducing the inequalities they too often face in accessing justice services and legal aid¹⁶⁰. While these figures should be treated carefully because they come from programming and implementation reporting rather than an independent impact evaluation, they nonetheless suggest that the programme is not only reforming state systems on paper but also expanding service infrastructure and public visibility around gender equality.

On women's economic empowerment, the available evidence points less to immediate end results for individual women than to efforts to strengthen the wider financial system that supports them. The European Commission identifies as an important milestone a grant agreement with Financial Sector Deepening Tanzania, a donor-funded organisation that works to improve access to finance, in order to support women and youth entrepreneurs¹⁶¹. In addition, the EIB reports that in July 2024, the EU and EIB combined a EUR 15 million EU grant with up to EUR 350 million in EIB credit lines for local banks. In practice, this means that a relatively limited EU grant is being used to unlock much larger volumes of lending that Tanzanian banks can then channel to businesses, including women-led firms. According to the EIB, this wider package had already reached more than 10 000 beneficiaries, including more than 3 000 women-led enterprises. This is substantial because it shows that the programme is not limited to training or small local activities, but also tries to improve women's access to finance through larger financial instruments. At the same time, these figures should also be interpreted with some caution, since part of this support comes from the wider EU/Global Gateway investment architecture around Tanzania and cannot be attributed only to the core budget-support component of Breaking the Glass Ceiling. Even so, this connection to a wider investment architecture is one reason why the programme appears more sustainable than many smaller G2 files.

Overall, *Breaking the Glass Ceiling* stands out as a strong case of targeted gender action because it combines clear political ambition, institutional anchoring, financial scale, cross-sector policy dialogue and numerous delivery channels. Its main strength is that it treats gender equality not as a marginal social issue but as contributing to a broader agenda of state reform and development performance, linked to budgeting, education, justice, social protection, access to finance and leadership. The main caution is evidentiary: the strongest public evidence so far concerns outputs, institutional reforms and outreach, while independently verified long-term impact evidence remains limited. The 2023 GAP III mid-term evaluation described the programme as 'pathbreaking' and highlighted the EU's innovative use of both budget support and blending. However, it also noted that the first year of using budget support was difficult as gender equality cuts across several ministries and policy areas and that the fine-tuning of such an ambitious design required substantial discussion and adjustment¹⁶². The Tanzania case is therefore best understood as one of the most advanced and credible examples of transformative G2 design and systems-

¹⁵⁹ NIRAS, '[Building government capacity to break the glass ceiling in Tanzania](#)', 30 March 2026.

¹⁶⁰ Enabel, '[Improved access to Justice for Women through Legal Aid](#)', webpage, nd; Enabel, '[Tanzania](#)', webpage, nd.

¹⁶¹ European Commission, '[Gender Transformative Action in Tanzania](#)', webpage, nd; FSDT, '[Inclusive Finance for Growth of Women and Youth MSMEs](#)', webpage, nd.

¹⁶² L. MacKellar et al., '[Mid-term evaluation of the implementation of the European Union Gender Action Plan III](#)', *European Commission*, April 2023.

level implementation, even if its longer-term social impact cannot yet be judged conclusively from public sources alone.

5 EU projects with gender equality as a significant objective (G1)

5.1 Cross-case findings: The strengths and limits of G1 mainstreaming in EU development cooperation

G1 mainstreaming has become standard in programming

Across the cases reviewed (see Annex 2), the first striking finding is that gender is very much present in the MIPs and the action documents. In all of the actions, gender appears in the project logic: in the diagnostic narrative, in cross-cutting commitments, in at least some indicators or in the broader language of inclusion, participation and rights. In that sense, G1 mainstreaming had become a standard practice in programming and operationalisation. At the same time, analysis shows that gender is integrated unevenly across the intervention cycle. It is usually strongest at the level of broad design framing, but much less consistent in the harder parts of implementation logic, resource distribution and accountability. This means that gender mainstreaming is institutionalised, but is often strongest at the front end of the intervention cycle: in the diagnostic narrative, the design framing, the gender marker justification and access- or participation-oriented indicators. This does not mean that the diagnosis is always strong. The GAP III mid-term evaluation found that gender analyses are not systematically applied in EU action documents and are sometimes carried out too late in the project cycle to shape design meaningfully. However, where the files are stronger, they do show serious sector-specific gender diagnosis. The EU-funded G1 action *Kigali Urban Mobility Programme*, for example, states plainly that ‘urban mobility is not gender neutral’, linking women’s transport experience to care work, safety, affordability, weak agency and under-representation in the sector¹⁶³. The EU-funded G1 action in Pakistan, *Energy and Natural Environment Resilience in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa*, likewise recognises that lack of electricity affects women and girls disproportionately by constraining access to information, employment and safety. These are not generic references to women as a vulnerable group but examples of context-sensitive diagnoses that acknowledge the gendered nature of infrastructure and energy systems¹⁶⁴. The broader pattern, though, is that this strength at the diagnostic stage is not always matched by equally strong operational follow-through.

Gender is most visible in access, training and participation indicators

A second important finding is that gender tends to be strongest in access, training and participation indicators, but weakest in the intervention’s core distributive indicators. The most common gender-sensitive indicators relate to the number of women trained, women’s access to services, women’s use of public transport or women’s participation in mobility, digital or skills schemes. These indicators are important and meaningful, but they capture only one layer of mainstreaming. They say relatively little about who controls land, jobs, contracts, value chains, public resources, finance, infrastructure or the economic gains generated by intervention. In other words, gender is often visible in the project’s social-access layer, but much less visible in the political economy of the project itself. That is precisely where the limits of G1 mainstreaming become most apparent.

¹⁶³ Directorate-General for International Partnerships, ‘[Republic of Rwanda](#)’, webpage, nd.

¹⁶⁴ European Commission, [Action Document for Energy and Natural Environment Resilience in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa](#), 3 November 2025.

The EU-funded G1 action *Accelerating the energy transition in Namibia*¹⁶⁵ illustrates this pattern particularly clearly. On the one hand, the file contains relatively strong disaggregated indicators on electricity access, green jobs and skills, broken down by sex, age, disability status and rural/urban location. On the other hand, the central economic indicators of the intervention remain focused on the volume of foreign direct investment mobilised, tons of green hydrogen produced and projects reaching financial closure. These are clearly central indicators of success for the action, but they do not reveal whether women gain a fair share of the economic benefits, whether they shape the governance of the transition or whether the intervention changes who controls the new opportunities being created. The mainstreaming is therefore real and tangible, but it is also partial. For instance, where the Namibian energy portfolio becomes more tangible is in household and community electrification. According to Environmental Invest Fund (EIF) reporting on the *Towards an Inclusive Design of Renewable Energy Transition* project, by September 2024, 182 households had already been electrified across Erongo, Otjozondjupa and Kunene South, against a target of 300 households¹⁶⁶. Of these 182 households, 70 % are women-headed. EIF also reports that the Swakopmund/Olutweni campaign connected 32 homes of Shack Dwellers households, while the wider electrification drive targeted households of which 50 % were women-headed¹⁶⁷. Many of the beneficiaries are low-income working homeowners who, although in legal possession of their houses and land, could not afford the high cost of electrical installations needed for connection to the grid¹⁶⁸. In addition, the project electrified a kindergarten by extending power from one of the connected homes. This allows parents to leave their children in a safe, powered space while they earn a living. As stated by project manager Cosmos Shaduka, the project has already improved the community's quality of life: 'Children can study at night, families can cook indoors and crime levels have gone down. People are also able to engage in socio-economic activities that uplift them. As a young Namibian, this project means the world to me'¹⁶⁹. In addition, a 2024 EIF-Northern Regional Electricity Distributor release states that the project includes a 300kW solar mini-grid intended to serve 164 households and around 500 people in Puros, alongside maintenance, mentoring, capacity building and technical training for micro, small and medium enterprises. This is significant because it shows that at least one part of the green-transition portfolio is already generating visible access and inclusion benefits on the ground, rather than operating only at the level of regulatory reform or investment planning. At the same time, while these results mainly capture improved access and targeted inclusion, they tell us less about whether women also gain lasting influence over the governance of the transition, the distribution of its economic benefits or the control of new green opportunities.

Implementation and accountability remain the weak points

A third common finding concerns implementation and accountability. In many files, gender is formally integrated across project phases, but key baselines, targets and indicator definitions are left to the inception phase or allowed to evolve during implementation, thus weakening *ex ante* accountability. In practice, gender mainstreaming may therefore appear stronger in the action document than in the performance framework that will later determine what is actually measured, reported and acted upon. The quality of gender mainstreaming will then depend very much on the implementing partners. This risk may become more important under GAP IV. As one interviewee warned, 'as of GAP IV we will be relying more

¹⁶⁵ European Commission, [Action Document: Accelerating the energy transition in Namibia](#), 14 November 2023.

¹⁶⁶ Environmental Investment Fund of Namibia, '[Media Release EU TIDRET Site Visit](#)', Press release, 7 September 2024.

¹⁶⁷ Environmental Investment Fund of Namibia, '[Media Release EU TIDRET Site Visit](#)', Press release, 7 September 2024.

¹⁶⁸ Marketwatch, '[Sunlight empowers informal electrification](#)', 23 September 2025.

¹⁶⁹ Marketwatch, '[Sunlight empowers informal electrification](#)', 23 September 2025.

on the implementing partners, so they will need to be up to speed and this varies quite a lot'. The same interviewee added that 'gender mainstreaming, gender analysis, human rights-based approach and an intersectional approach are more costly' and that, in competitive framework contracts, 'less money often will mean less expertise'¹⁷⁰.

Interviews conducted at the delegation level confirm this conclusion. Various respondents explained that gender mainstreaming is often taken seriously during action-document preparation and internal review. Project officers are expected to consult GFPs and headquarters scrutiny may challenge proposed markers when the gender rationale is considered insufficient. Interviews with delegation staff indicated that this two-level gender check – at the delegation and at headquarters – has been very helpful. The 85 % target has become part of routine programming practice, and in some delegations, even a *de facto* 100 % ambition has emerged. However, interviews suggest that this institutionalisation is much stronger at the front end than during implementation. Once framework contracts move into execution, there is often no equally robust mechanism to verify whether gender commitments are actually carried through in practice by implementing partners. As one GFP at an EU delegation level commented: 'I can give input on the action documents, that is feasible, but I don't really know what happens afterwards. The people responsible for the contracts are working for other sectors and there is no mechanism to control that. It is impossible for the GFP to go through all these contracts and review them, so in the next phase we don't really know because there is no clear mechanism to follow up later'¹⁷¹.

Respondents also noted that GAP III reporting has become lighter over time and can more easily be completed without systematic evidence. This helps explain why gender may appear relatively robust in diagnosis, design and marker allocation, yet remain weaker in monitoring, follow-up and accountability¹⁷². Interviewees also pointed to structural causes for this gap: reduced human resources in delegations, GFP functions added on top of contract-management roles rather than resourced as dedicated responsibilities, the absence of specific budget lines for GAP commitments and a marker system that tracks commitments rather than disbursements¹⁷³.

WROs and grassroots gender actors are consulted, but not consistently made central to implementation or financing

A fourth finding is that key institutional actors are usually very well identified, but WROs and grassroots gender actors are not consistently central to the implementation logic. Ministries, public agencies, sector bodies and implementing partners are generally well integrated into project design. The EU-funded G1 action in Rwanda *Kigali Urban Mobility Programme*¹⁷⁴ is one of the stronger examples here, as it identifies CSOs, disability bodies and the Gender Monitoring Office among the key stakeholders. Yet the broader pattern remains more limited: WROs are not often embedded as central actors or recipients of dedicated support. Actions often mention consultation or vulnerable groups, but rarely show a real strategy to fund, strengthen or co-design with WROs and grassroots gender actors. While CSOs and WROs appreciate being consulted and, in some cases, feel their perspectives have shaped programme design, they also stressed that they were often not informed about what happened afterwards and did not see their

¹⁷⁰ Interview with senior gender expert with long-standing experience supporting EU Delegations, 7 April 2026.

¹⁷¹ Interview with EU Delegation gender focal point, 23 March 2026.

¹⁷² Interview with EU Delegation gender focal point, 27 February 2026.

¹⁷³ Interview with gender expert, 27 February 2026; Interview with EU Delegation official, 3 March 2026; Interview with gender expert with experience supporting EU Delegations, 7 April 2026.

¹⁷⁴ European Commission, [Annual Action Plan 2024 for Rwanda, Action Document: Kigali Urban Mobility Programme](#), 18 March 2024.

recommendations translated into visible support or implementation. This was confirmed by the interviews conducted at the delegation level, with one respondent saying that when women's organisations are consulted, they may feel 'you are picking our brain ... but then get nothing out of it'¹⁷⁵. The broader lesson is that consultation does not in itself amount to meaningful partnership. Another interviewee offered a more nuanced view: 'Working with CSOs has been a stronghold for gender equality. Otherwise it is too difficult'. At the same time, they warned that EU procedures can concentrate support within 'a limited number of organisations' that have the necessary capacity, are 'responsive to our way of working' and are often 'capital-based'¹⁷⁶.

G1 actions are often gender-responsive rather than gender-transformative

This leads to the fifth finding: most of the cases are better described as gender-responsive than genuinely gender-transformative. They usually do three things reasonably well. Firstly, they recognise that women and some marginalised groups face specific barriers. Secondly, they include gender or inclusion language in the action design. Thirdly, they use high-quality sex-disaggregated indicators, participation targets or access measures. However, only a few go much further toward changing who makes decisions, who controls resources, how institutions distribute benefits or which norms govern participation and leadership. The gender-transformative guidance is explicit that transformation requires more than access and participation, instead requiring work on deep-seated social norms and systems, on rigid gender norms and imbalances of power and on many dimensions of change at once: resources, attitudes and practices, rules and policies as well as sociocultural norms and beliefs. This was confirmed by the interviews, with respondents associating the most successful interventions not with generic participation measures, but with actions that target 'real structural changes and behavioural change'¹⁷⁷. This can include, for example, land reform or sustained work with men to shift norms around women's participation, while also emphasising how difficult such approaches can be in contexts with limited civic space or strong political sensitivities.

Relatedly, intersectionality and the human rights-based approach are increasingly present in framing, but less consistently in operationalisation. Various files refer to women 'in all their diversity', mentioning disability, age, ethnicity, refugee status or rural marginality, using the language of rights-holders and duty-bearers. Yet in many cases, the operational follow-through is weaker than the narrative. Groups are named, but not always linked to targeted resources, clear accountability measures or strong indicators. In practice, this means that intersectionality and a human rights-based approach often function more as a normative frame than as fully embedded implementation logic. The result is not that these principles are missing, but that they are unevenly translated into action.

The EU-DRC NDICI action documents signal good practice in this respect and move beyond generic gender-sensitive monitoring towards more differentiated and partly intersectional indicators, especially in health, education and employment as well as transitional justice. Even so, much of that progress still relies on disaggregation and beneficiary counting rather than on tracking bigger changes in power, representation, control over resources or structural inequality.

¹⁷⁵ Interview with EU Delegation gender focal point, 23 March 2026.

¹⁷⁶ Interview with senior gender expert with long-standing experience supporting EU Delegations, 7 April 2026.

¹⁷⁷ Interview, EU Delegation official, 3 March 2026.

The *EU-Namibia Early Childhood Development Sector Reform*, a G1 budget-support action, is one of the stronger examples¹⁷⁸. It links early childhood development reform not only to gender, but also to poverty, disability, regional and rural exclusion, nutrition as well as broader inequality. The action explicitly targets disadvantaged households, children with disabilities, poor and remote communities and unequal access to services and even gives the reduction of inequalities a principal internal marker. As noted above, the action also includes a target to reduce the Gini coefficient as an indicative policy impact by 2027¹⁷⁹. This shows that G1 mainstreaming can, in some cases, go beyond generic inclusion language and aim to tackle wider structures of intersectional inequality.

The geopolitical turn expands gender mainstreaming into strategic sectors, but risks instrumentalising it

A final cross-case finding concerns the strategic or geopolitical reframing of EU development cooperation. This refers to the growing tendency to present EU external action not only as development or rights-based cooperation, but also as a tool for advancing EU strategic interests: energy security, access to critical raw materials, resilient value chains, connectivity, migration management, stability and geopolitical visibility through Global Gateway. This reflects a wider shift in development cooperation: as the European Centre for Development Policy Management notes, geopolitics is changing not only where aid goes, but also how remaining ODA is framed and used, with growing pressure for aid to deliver ‘mutual benefits’ to donor countries¹⁸⁰. The Commission and High Representative’s Joint Communication on Global Gateway is explicit in this respect: it states that Global Gateway will adapt to the ‘needs and strategic interests’ of different regions, focus on digital, transport and energy infrastructure, and contribute to the EU’s own interests by strengthening supply-chain resilience and opening trade opportunities for the EU economy¹⁸¹. This shift does not necessarily remove gender equality from EU cooperation. In some cases, it has expanded gender mainstreaming into sectors where gender had previously been less visible, such as energy, infrastructure, digitalisation, raw materials and industrial policy. However, it also changes how gender equality is justified. Gender goals can become easier to frame in instrumental terms — as supporting employability, skills, social acceptance, resilience or inclusive investment — and less visible as objectives about rights, power, redistribution, leadership and structural change. For instance, in EU-DRC cooperation, a geopolitical turn did not remove gender equality from programming content, but it shifted it from being primarily framed as a rights-and-inequality objective toward being increasingly embedded in the language of strategic investment, resilient value chains, connectivity, environmental, social and governance and stability. This broadened mainstreaming into new sectors, but also risks making gender goals more instrumental and less transformative.

In EU-Namibia cooperation, the dynamics are similar. What changes over time is that the strategic partnership narrative becomes much more dominated by green industrialisation. By 2023–2025, the EU’s Namibia partnership is publicly presented above all through green hydrogen, renewable energy, critical raw materials, transport and strategic investment, with the TEI on inclusive green growth and the 2023–2025 roadmap for green hydrogen and raw materials at its centre. The positive effect for gender equality goals

¹⁷⁸ European Commission, [Annual Action Plan 2022 for Namibia, Action Document: EU-Namibia Early Childhood Development Sector Reform Contract](#), 12 December 2022.

¹⁷⁹ European Commission, [Annual Action Plan 2022 for Namibia, Action Document: EU-Namibia Early Childhood Development Sector Reform Contract](#), 12 December 2022.

¹⁸⁰ A. Sherriff, ‘[The consequences of international aid cuts](#)’, *ECDPM*, 10 April 2026.

¹⁸¹ European Commission and High Representative, [Joint Communication on The Global Gateway](#), JOIN(2021) 30 final, 1 December 2021.

is that it brought gender into sectors where it might otherwise have remained marginal: energy, hydrogen, raw materials, logistics and industrial policy. However, it also had a clear political cost. As cooperation became more tied to strategic interests – energy security, raw materials, investment, industrial value chains and Team Europe visibility – gender equality goals became easier to justify in instrumental terms as improving inclusion, skills, employability or social acceptance of transition. They became less visible as goals about power, redistribution, institutional change, along with women’s autonomous rights and leadership. In EU-Nigeria cooperation, the conclusion is similar: the geopolitical turn has expanded the reach of gender mainstreaming across strategic sectors, but it has also made gender equality more vulnerable to being instrumentalised by larger goals of stability, migration management, digital transition and investment.

Taken together, these cross-case findings suggest that the central risk in G1 mainstreaming is not the absence of gender, but its dilution. Gender is present, but often in ways that are easier to accommodate than to contest, for instance: in participation targets, in access measures, in sex-disaggregation and in broad inclusion language. It is much less consistently present where it would be most politically and economically consequential, namely in who captures value, who holds authority, how institutions behave and whether norms and power structures are changing. This is why the distinction between mainstreaming as presence and mainstreaming as structural influence is so important.

Overall, the cases reviewed show that G1 mainstreaming has real added value and has become standard programming practice in EU delegations. It pushes gender into sectors such as infrastructure, migration, digitalisation and green transition where it might otherwise remain invisible. However, the cases also show limitations. Where gender is not built into the core governance and distributive architecture of the intervention, mainstreaming can slide towards procedural compliance, box-ticking or instrumentalisation. Generally speaking, in cases analysed, G1 mainstreaming in programming is serious in intent and often of high quality. It is strongest where it improves visibility, access and inclusion. However, it is weakest where it would need to confront the harder questions of power, control and redistribution.

5.2 Zooming in on a promising G1 practice on political inclusion: EU Support to Democratic Governance II/III in Nigeria

EU Support to Democratic Governance in Nigeria (EU-SDGN) is the EU’s main democracy-support programme in Nigeria, designed to help Nigeria run better elections and make politics more open and inclusive. It works with the election commission, the National Assembly, the judiciary, political parties, the media, civil society and a specific component on the participation of women, young people and persons with disabilities. Set up as a broader governance programme, it goes beyond traditional voter-awareness campaigns and instead tries to improve how elections are run, how parties choose candidates, how parliament and courts handle electoral reform, how the media covers politics and whether excluded groups can actually enter political life. Phase II is a EUR 39 million EU programme running from 2022 to 2027, with a public tender listing for Phase III indicating a further EUR 10 million¹⁸².

¹⁸² European Commission, ‘[Nigeria](#)’, webpage, nd; European Commission, [Decision on the financing of the 2021 Annual Action Plan in favour of the Federal Republic of Nigeria](#), C(2021) 9675 final, 16 December 2021; European Commission, [Commission Implementing Decision on the financing of the annual action plan in favour of the Federal Republic of Nigeria for 2025](#), C(2025) 5792 final, 20 August 2025; DAI, ‘[Nigeria—EU Support to Democratic Governance in Nigeria \(EUSDGN\) Programme, Phase II](#)’, webpage, nd.

EU-SDGN is a promising G1-type case because women's political participation is built into the programme's core architecture, alongside youth and disability inclusion. The EU-SDGN website presents this as part of the programme's six-component model and the site's publication record shows that the inclusion agenda runs through case studies, reports, bill analysis, impact stories and election-related material, not just a single women's activity¹⁸³.

The programme builds on qualitative and quantitative contextual analysis showing that Nigeria's record on women's political representation remains very weak. The EU Election Observation Mission found that ahead of the 2023 general elections in Nigeria, women made up barely 10 % of candidates¹⁸⁴. By April 2023, less than 5 % of all women candidates had been elected. Only 3 women senators and 14 women members of the House of Representatives were returned and 15 State Houses of Assembly had no women members at all¹⁸⁵. The Mission, therefore, called for urgent and robust affirmative action. An EU-funded female candidacy report points in the same direction: ElectHER analysed that women accounted for only 10.1 % of candidates in 2023, down from 12.9 % in 2019, linking the decline to money politics, gender-biased party primaries, discrimination, low literacy and violence against women in politics¹⁸⁶.

From a gender equality perspective, the main strength of EU-SDGN is that it treats women's exclusion as a system problem. It not only tries to 'fix' women through training, but also works on the institutions and rules that shape who enters politics: electoral administration, party processes, legislative reform, judicial handling of electoral disputes, media practice and civil society pressure. That is a stronger form of mainstreaming than adding a small women's sub-project to a generic governance action. EU-SDGN-supported material aimed at the National Assembly makes the same point very directly: exclusion of women, youth and persons with disabilities is framed as a problem of political equality, public participation, fair decision-making, legislation, budgets and oversight.

A second strength is that the programme has a broader and more intersectional inclusion profile than many democracy actions. It does not focus only on women in a narrow sense. Across its public material, EU-SDGN repeatedly brings together women, young people and persons with disabilities, with some of its legislative and election-related work explicitly aimed at improving participation and visibility for these groups together¹⁸⁷. This does not amount to a full intersectional strategy in the academic sense, but it is more substantial than routine 'women and youth' language as the programme aims to work on political inclusion across more than one axis of exclusion. So far, Development Alternative Incorporated reports that Phase II trained 300 judges on electoral litigation, helped drive the Youth Vote Count initiative that led to 25 000 young people registering for permanent voter cards, mobilised more than 1 800 persons with disabilities to participate in the electoral process and trained 80 female journalists on election reporting¹⁸⁸.

The programme website also shows that this inclusion agenda did not stop after the 2023 elections. In 2025 and 2026, EU-SDGN reported continued advocacy around women's political representation¹⁸⁹ and the Special Seats Bill¹⁹⁰, a proposed constitutional amendment that would create additional women-only legislative seats in the National Assembly and State Houses of Assembly, to be contested by women as a

¹⁸³ EU-SDGN, '[Who we are](#)', webpage, nd.

¹⁸⁴ European Union Election Observation Mission, [Nigeria: General Elections 25 February and 18 March](#), EEAS, 2023.

¹⁸⁵ European Union Election Observation Mission, [Nigeria: General Elections 25 February and 18 March](#), EEAS, 2023.

¹⁸⁶ ElectHER, [Nigeria 2023 Female Candidacy Analysis: Where Are the Women?](#), EU-SDGN, 2023.

¹⁸⁷ DAI, '[Nigeria—EU Support to Democratic Governance in Nigeria \(EUSDGN\) Programme, Phase II](#)', webpage, nd.

¹⁸⁸ DAI, '[Nigeria—EU Support to Democratic Governance in Nigeria \(EUSDGN\) Programme, Phase II](#)', webpage, nd.

¹⁸⁹ Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre, '[What is the Special Seats Bill?](#)', webpage, nd.

¹⁹⁰ EU-SDGN, '[Power belongs to the people. But where are the women?](#)', nd.

temporary special measure rather than by removing existing seats. The Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre describes the bill as a response to Nigeria's persistently low women's representation and notes that it would be reviewed after four general election cycles, or 16 years¹⁹¹. Other EU-SDGN-supported activities included: public advocacy for the bill, a high-level strategy meeting ahead of the 2027 elections, a pre-election briefing, gender analysis of women's political participation and systemic barriers ahead of the 2025 Anambra governorship election¹⁹² and a workshop for the Independent National Electoral Commission officers on gender and disability-inclusive elections. While these are still mostly output and process indicators, they go beyond paper design and might have a transformative impact when sustained and combined with other actions.

That said, the G1 programme also has its limitations. Firstly, most of the positive evidence available online is still about activities, advocacy and intermediate results. One can point to training, reports, mobilisation, pre-election assessments, gender analysis of legislation, media tools and reform advocacy. However, it is not yet possible to show that political party gatekeeping women out of politics, money politics, violence against women in politics or candidate-selection rules have been decisively changed. Secondly, key reforms remain politically contested, and to date, direct outcomes for women have been poor. If the question is whether women's representation in elected office has improved, the answer is still no. Even as late as February 2026, advocates from the EU-SDGN-supported campaign coalition were still lobbying the parliament to pass the Special Seats Bill, urging that the 'moment for reform is now' as 'the electoral clock is ticking'¹⁹³. In that sense, EU-SDGN has so far been stronger on opening political space than on institutionally locking in durable change.

Hence, the most accurate conclusion is one based on caution. EU-SDGN II/III is a promising G1 practice in Nigeria and probably one of the strongest examples in the file. Its strength is that it mainstreams women's political inclusion across the democratic system rather than confining gender to a stand-alone women's activity. It also has some real implementation evidence, albeit this should not be overstated. This is not yet a fully transformative success story. Rather, it should be referred to as a strong and evolving practice with some structural and potentially transformative elements, but with results that are still much clearer on programme design, advocacy and intermediate outputs than on final representation outcomes.

5.3 Overall assessment

The G1 files reviewed are generally serious in intent and often of high quality at the level of programming. They show that gender mainstreaming has become institutionalised in EU development cooperation and can bring gender into sectors where it was previously marginal. However, G1 mainstreaming remains uneven in depth. It is strongest where it improves visibility, access and inclusion, and weakest where it would need to reshape power, control over resources, institutional behaviour and the distribution of economic and political benefits. Box 1 below summarises the strengths and limits of the gender mainstreaming approach.

¹⁹¹ Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre, '[What is the Special Seats Bill?](#)', webpage, nd.

¹⁹² EU-SDGN [#AnambraDecides: EU supports increase in women's participation quota](#), 6 November 2025; EU-SDGN, [Anambra Pre-election Assessment Report](#), nd.

¹⁹³ S. Eboesomi, '[2027 Election Timetable: Women's coalition urges NASS to pass reserved seats bill before polls](#)', *Premium Times*, 15 February 2026; EU-SDGN, '[Pass the Special Seats Bill Now – Nigerian Women in Politics Urge the National Assembly](#)', 4 December 2025.

Box 1: Strengths and limits of G1 mainstreaming

- Gender mainstreaming has become a **standard programming expectation**. Across the G1 actions reviewed, gender is rarely absent. It is usually visible in the diagnostic narrative, cross-cutting commitments, action logic and at least some parts of the log-frame. This is a significant achievement and suggests that repeated investment in GAP I-III implementation, training, internal review and reporting has changed programming practice in EU delegations.
- Mainstreaming is **strong at the front-end of the intervention cycle**. Gender tends to be better integrated in problem diagnosis, project design and marker justification than in later stages of implementation, monitoring, follow-up and accountability.
- Gender is **most visible in access, training and participation indicators**. The most common gender indicators concern numbers of women trained, women's access to services, women's use of infrastructure, women's participation in schemes, electricity access, public transport safety, jobs or skills. These indicators are meaningful, but tend to measure inclusion at the edges of the intervention rather than control over its core benefits.
- Gender is **weakest in the core distributive and governance indicators**. The actions are less likely to measure who controls land, jobs, contracts, finance, value chains or decision-making power. In that sense, gender is better mainstreamed in the social-access layer than in the political economy of the action itself.
- **Implementation and accountability remain weak points**. Baselines, targets and indicator definitions are often left to the inception phase or adapted during implementation. This weakens *ex ante* accountability. Interviews suggest that gender commitments are more closely scrutinised during action-document preparation than during implementation, especially once activities move to framework contracts or implementing partners.
- **The marker system gives visibility, but it can also overstate the depth of change**. G1 marking signals that gender is a significant objective, but it does not mean that the full project budget is directed to gender equality. As interviewees noted, G1 reporting needs to be interpreted carefully and complemented by better budget tracking and results evidence.
- **WROs and grassroots gender actors are recognised, but not consistently central**. Ministries, public agencies, sector institutions and implementing partners are generally well identified. Civil society is often consulted. However, WROs and grassroots organisations are less systematically funded, embedded in implementation or treated as co-owners of the intervention. EU procedures can favour larger, capital-based organisations with strong reporting capacity, while smaller or more locally rooted organisations remain harder to reach.
- **Most G1 actions are better described as gender-responsive than gender-transformative**. They usually recognise barriers, include gender or inclusion language and use sex-disaggregated indicators. Fewer go further by changing who makes decisions, who controls resources, how institutions distribute benefits or which norms structure participation and leadership.
- Intersectional and human rights-based language is increasingly present, but often stronger in framing than in operationalisation. Many actions refer to women 'in all their diversity', mention disability, age or other forms of exclusion. However, these references are not always translated into equally strong activities, indicators or accountability mechanisms.
- The **geopolitical turn** has not removed gender equality from EU cooperation, but it has changed how it is framed and justified. The cases of DRC, Namibia and Nigeria all illustrate this pattern in different ways.

6 Synthesis and recommendations

6.1 Synthesis

This paper shows that the EU's twin-track approach to gender equality in development cooperation remains necessary, but that the two tracks perform different functions and require different forms of accountability. The evidence reviewed does not support a shift towards a mainstreaming-only model. On the contrary, the central lesson is that gender mainstreaming and targeted gender-equality actions are complementary, not interchangeable.

Across the G1 cases reviewed, gender equality is rarely absent from EU development cooperation. It appears in diagnostic narratives, action documents, cross-cutting commitments, stakeholder mappings and at least some indicators. This is an important achievement. It suggests that investments in GAP I-III, NDICI-Global Europe targets, repeated training, internal review and the work of GFPs in the delegations and gender experts in the Directorate-General for International Partnerships have helped make gender mainstreaming part of routine programming practice.

This pattern is most visible in projects with gender equality as a significant objective (G1). The actions reviewed show that gender mainstreaming has become a routine expectation in EU programming, including in those sectors where gender was previously more marginal. That is an important achievement. At the same time, many of these projects remain better described as gender-responsive than genuinely gender-transformative. They often recognise barriers facing women and girls, include sex-disaggregated indicators and sometimes use intersectional or rights-based language. However, they less often show strong strategies for shifting power relations, embedding WROs, addressing backlash or tracking structural change over time. Interviews conducted for this paper indicate that, compared with earlier programming periods, gender equality is now much more widely accepted and embedded in delegation routines. Continuous investment, training and repetition have contributed to an important cultural and institutional shift. This change should not be underestimated.

At the same time, the evidence also shows that mainstreaming remains uneven. Gender tends to be strongest in the earlier and more visible parts of the intervention cycle: the diagnosis, design narrative, marker justification and indicators on participation, access or training. It is weaker in implementation, resource allocation, monitoring, accountability and the harder distributive questions of who controls resources, who captures value and who shapes decision-making. In this sense, the main risk is not the absence of gender, but its dilution. Gender is present, but often in forms that are easier to accommodate than to contest.

The G1 findings therefore point to a distinction between mainstreaming as presence and mainstreaming as structural influence. Presence means that women and girls are mentioned, indicators are sex-disaggregated and participation is encouraged. Structural influence means that the intervention changes institutional incentives, budget allocations, access to finance, land, contracts, value chains, public services, decision-making power or social norms. Many G1 actions reviewed make a real contribution to presence and inclusion. Fewer can yet demonstrate structural influence.

Projects with gender equality as a principal objective, or G2 actions, perform a different role. In these actions, gender inequality itself becomes the central problem to be addressed. This gives the intervention greater diagnostic clarity, political visibility and accountability. The strongest G2 actions reviewed are not simply women's projects. They treat gender inequality as a structural problem linked to public institutions,

budgets, social protection systems, agricultural transformation, political participation, GBV response, access to justice, social norms and WROs. Tanzania's *Breaking the Glass Ceiling* is the clearest example of this more ambitious model because it links gender equality to budget support, policy dialogue, institutional reform and wider development performance.

Yet G2 actions also have limits. They remain fewer in number, concentrated in a limited set of themes and unevenly distributed geographically. They are strongest in areas such as GBV/VAWG, women's economic empowerment and governance or rights programming, while they are less visible in harder sectors such as infrastructure, energy, macroeconomic reform, digital policy and large-scale investment. This creates a risk that G2 becomes a specialised silo, rather than a route for reshaping the wider EU development portfolio.

The strongest model is therefore not one where G1 replaces G2, or where G2 is expected to carry the whole gender agenda. Rather, G1 and G2 need to be connected more strategically. G1 mainstreaming is needed for breadth: it brings gender equality into the wider portfolio, including infrastructure, energy, agriculture, digitalisation, migration, democracy support and green transition. G2 targeted action is needed for depth: it protects funding and political space for work that directly addresses structural inequality, women's rights, GBV, discrimination, backlash, civic space and women's leadership. The two tracks should reinforce each other.

The interview findings also show why quantified targets and their institutional location matter. Targets do not automatically guarantee quality and they can encourage marker inflation if reporting is weak. However, they give GFPs and programme staff leverage within delegations. They help connect the policy and operational sides of delegation work and make gender equality a management issue rather than only a specialist concern. Interviews also suggest that targets give gender equality work additional institutional weight and help bring senior management into the conversation. This is particularly important because GAP implementation is still too often associated with the gender equality or human rights focal point, even though these roles are usually added on top of an already full portfolio. While GAP IV can and should contain clear targets, indicators and operational guidance, interviews suggest that this would not be equivalent to anchoring targets in the GEI itself. GAP IV has important policy and steering value, but it does not have the same legal, budgetary or hierarchical weight as a financing regulation. In practice, targets in the financial framework provide a stronger mandate for delegation staff, create clearer accountability for Parliament and make it harder for gender equality to be displaced by competing priorities¹⁹⁴. In such a context, moving targets from the GEI to GAP IV alone, especially while reducing human resources in delegations, would likely weaken gender equality in practice. The strongest option would therefore be to include binding minimum targets in the GEI and use GAP IV to specify the operational indicators, reporting requirements and quality standards needed to implement them.

Finally, delegation reform and the increasing reliance on implementing partners create additional risks for the twin-track strategy. If delegations become smaller, more regionalised or more administrative, much of the responsibility for gender mainstreaming will shift to implementing partners, framework contractors, UN agencies, Member State agencies or private-sector actors. This may work where partners have strong gender expertise. However, it becomes risky when gender analysis, intersectionality, human rights-based approaches and meaningful WROs engagement are treated as optional or low-cost add-ons. Interviews

¹⁹⁴ For a fuller analysis of the gender equality objective in the proposed Global Europe Instrument 2028–2034 and the draft horizontal Tracking and Performance Framework, see P. Debusscher, '[Gender equality objective in the proposal for a regulation establishing 'Global Europe' \(2028–2034\)](#)', PE 785.604, *European Parliament Directorate-General for Citizens' Rights, Justice and Institutional Affairs*, 15 March 2026.

suggest that the quality of implementation will increasingly depend on whether implementing partners have the necessary gender expertise, resources and incentives. This cannot be assumed, especially in competitive procurement contexts where implementers are under pressure to offer extensive services at the lowest possible cost.

Accordingly, the EU should preserve the twin-track approach but strengthen the accountability architecture around both tracks. Gender mainstreaming should become more consequential, moving beyond inclusion indicators towards core distributive and governance indicators. Targeted actions should be protected, scaled up and better linked to wider sectoral, budgetary and policy choices. WROs and grassroots feminist actors should be treated not only as consultees but as essential partners and implementers. The post-2027 framework should retain binding targets, euro-visible reporting and parliamentary scrutiny. Without this, there is a real risk that mainstreaming everywhere becomes mainstreaming nowhere in particular.

6.2 Recommendations for the European Parliament

The European Parliament could use the post-2027 negotiations to defend the EU's gender equality commitments, but also to sharpen the way these commitments are implemented, monitored and scrutinised. The evidence in this paper suggests that the main challenge is no longer simply whether gender equality is included in EU development cooperation. In most actions reviewed, gender is present. The harder question is whether gender equality shapes the core of the intervention: its budget, implementing arrangements, indicators, partnerships, political dialogue and expected structural effects.

The recommendations below therefore distinguish between two levels of action. First, Parliament could continue to defend the legal and budgetary architecture of the twin-track approach in the GEI¹⁹⁵. Second, Parliament could use this paper's project-level findings to push for a more operational, accountable and transformative use of both G1 mainstreaming and G2 targeted actions. The Parliament could therefore call on the Commission, the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the Council to take the following steps.

1. Anchor the twin-track approach in the GEI and use GAP IV to operationalise it

Parliament could continue to insist that the post-2027 framework contains binding gender equality targets in the GEI itself. GAP IV can and should set priorities, indicators, guidance and reporting obligations, but it should not become the only place where quantitative gender commitments are located. The central point is not only whether targets exist, but where they are anchored. Targets in a financing regulation give Parliament, civil society and EU staff a stronger basis for scrutiny than targets contained only in a policy framework.

The strongest architecture would therefore combine:

- binding minimum benchmarks in the GEI¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ For a fuller analysis of the gender equality objective in the proposed Global Europe Instrument 2028–2034 and the draft horizontal Tracking and Performance Framework, see P. Debusscher, '[Gender equality objective in the proposal for a regulation establishing 'Global Europe' \(2028–2034\)](#)', PE 785.604, *European Parliament Directorate-General for Citizens' Rights, Justice and Institutional Affairs*, 15 March 2026.

¹⁹⁶ At a minimum, the new instrument should preserve the current NDICI logic by ensuring:

- at least 85 % of ODA-eligible commitments contribute significantly or principally to gender equality; and

- detailed operational standards in GAP IV
- euro-visible reporting through the Performance Framework.

2. Make clear that mainstreaming is not enough on its own

The new framework should avoid treating gender mainstreaming as a substitute for targeted action. Mainstreaming often improves project design, participation and indicators, but on its own it rarely delivers the deeper institutional and structural change needed to transform gender relations. Dedicated funding for gender equality must therefore remain a central pillar of the policy and financing instrument. In addition, the commitment to the twin-track approach should be stated more clearly in the legal text of the GEI, not left to political declarations or guidance alone.

3. Improve the quality of gender mainstreaming

Parliament could push for stronger minimum standards for mainstreaming across the whole instrument. The G1 actions reviewed show that gender equality is often present in action documents, but this presence does not always translate into structural influence. For G1 actions, the key question should be whether gender analysis changes the intervention itself: its objectives, activities, budget, implementation arrangements, indicators and expected results.

The paper shows that gender mainstreaming is often strongest in gender-disaggregated access, training and participation indicators, but weaker in indicators that capture power, resources and distribution. Parliament could therefore ask that G1 actions, especially in infrastructure, energy, digitalisation, agriculture, migration, governance and green transition, include at least some indicators that go beyond beneficiary counting.

Where relevant, indicators should track women's access to and control over finance, land, jobs, procurement opportunities, value chains, infrastructure benefits, public services, political voice and decision-making. This would make it easier to assess whether mainstreaming is changing the political economy of an intervention, rather than only improving participation at its margins.

4. Close the gap between programming and implementation

A central finding of the paper is that gender mainstreaming is often scrutinised during action-document preparation, but much less systematically during implementation. Parliament could therefore ask the Commission to introduce a clearer 'gender continuity' requirement across the project cycle. This would mean moving from largely testing 'presence in programming' to testing 'structural influence'.

Gender commitments made in action documents should be traceable in terms of reference, contracts, inception reports, annual reports, mid-term reviews and evaluations. A mandatory gender implementation note for all G1 and G2 actions could explain how commitments made at the design stage are being carried through in delivery. This would reduce the risk that gender equality looks strong in programming but becomes weaker once implementation is delegated.

This could also apply to implementing partners and framework contractors, with explicit requirements for gender expertise, adequate budgets for gender analysis and follow-up, and accountability for carrying

-
- a 5 % minimum share supports actions where gender equality is the principal objective.

A stronger option would be to increase the share of principal-objective actions (e.g. to 20 %) and to include a dedicated minimum share for WROs within that amount (e.g. 5 %).

gender commitments through implementation. This would help reduce the gap between rhetorical mainstreaming and actual results.

5. Make implementing partners and EU delegations jointly accountable for gender results

Delegation capacity and implementation capacity should be treated together. If EU delegations become smaller, more regionalised or more administrative, implementing partners will increasingly carry the practical responsibility for gender mainstreaming. Parliament could therefore ask the Commission and EEAS to report on whether delegations have sufficient gender expertise, time allocation and management follow this up and support the implementation of GAP IV. Gender equality should be a management responsibility across the portfolio, not the task of one overburdened focal point.

At the same time, gender expertise should be built more systematically into procurement, framework contracts, contribution agreements and delegated cooperation arrangements. Terms of reference should allow for substantive gender analysis, high-quality human rights-based approaches, intersectional analysis and meaningful WRO engagement where relevant. This requires adequate time, expertise and resources. These elements should therefore not be treated as superficial tick-box add-ons that can be squeezed out by low-cost competition.

6. Use G2 actions as strategic levers for wider portfolio change

Parliament could encourage the Commission to protect and expand G2 actions, but also to use them more strategically. G2 actions are most convincing when they do not remain at the margins of the country portfolio. The strongest examples reviewed in this paper link gender equality to public budgets, social protection, agricultural transformation, justice, access to finance, political participation and institutional reform.

Parliament could therefore ask the Commission to show how G2 actions are connected to MIPs, TEIs, policy dialogue, budget support and sector reform. This would shift the purpose of G2 from 'having at least one gender project' towards 'using G2 as a lever for wider portfolio change'.

7. Expand gender-principal action into strategic and harder sectors

The G2 portfolio remains concentrated in familiar areas such as GBV/VAWG, women's economic empowerment and governance or rights programming. These areas remain essential, but Parliament could encourage the Commission to pilot more gender-principal actions in sectors where gender equality is still less visible: energy, transport, digitalisation, critical raw materials, green industrialisation, agriculture, macroeconomic governance, social protection and large-scale investment.

This would help prevent a division of labour in which G2 carries the rights-based and transformative agenda, while the largest and most strategic parts of EU external action are only lightly mainstreamed. The Tanzania case shows that G2 can be linked to budget support, public financial management and broader development performance. This model could inspire more ambitious G2 actions in other sectors.

8. Treat WROs as partners in implementation and accountability

WROs and grassroots gender actors should not only be consulted, but they should be funded, embedded and involved in monitoring where appropriate. Parliament could frame WRO support not only as civil-society funding, but as part of the EU's accountability infrastructure for gender equality.

This means reporting on how much EU funding actually reaches WROs, what kinds of organisations receive it, whether smaller and local organisations outside capitals are reached, and whether WROs are involved in implementation and monitoring. Parliament could call for smaller grant windows, re-granting mechanisms, core funding where possible, simplified procedures, support for reporting and safeguards for organisations working in politically sensitive contexts. A ring-fenced share for WROs within G2 gender-targeted spending would also be recommended.

9. Strengthen gender budgeting, reporting and parliamentary scrutiny

Parliament could ask the Commission to report annually on the twin-track approach in a way that distinguishes clearly between G1 and G2 actions, between commitments and disbursements and between the number of actions and actual financial volumes. This is necessary because G1 marking does not mean that the whole budget of a programme supports gender equality.

The same reporting should also address whether gender commitments survive implementation, whether WRO funding is improving, which sectors and regions lag behind, and whether gender equality is being framed only instrumentally in Global Gateway and strategic partnerships. Parliament could create a regular annual scrutiny moment on the twin-track approach, involving the Commission, EEAS and relevant delegation or regional representatives. It could also consider asking the European Court of Auditors to examine the quality of gender mainstreaming and the effectiveness of gender-principal funding under the next external financing framework.

Core message

The post-2027 priority should be to make the twin-track approach more consequential. Gender mainstreaming should not be assessed only by whether gender is present in action documents, but by whether it shapes resources, institutions, implementation and power. Targeted G2 actions should not only be protected but also used more strategically to influence wider programming and sector reform. Parliament can play a central role by defending binding targets in the GEI, ensuring that GAP IV contains strong implementation standards, and scrutinising whether both tracks produce measurable, funded and politically meaningful results.

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Annex 1: G2 projects screened

The analysis screened the following EU-funded G2 actions:

1. Tanzania (2021/2024) – Gender Transformative Action in Tanzania: Breaking the Glass Ceiling.
2. Nepal (2022) – Empowered Women for Prosperous Nepal – Shashakta Mahilaharu, Sambriddha Nepal.
3. Uganda (2022–2024) – Gender for Development Uganda.
4. Malawi (2023) – Gender Responsive Social Protection Programme – Kutukula Amai.
5. Democratic Republic of the Congo (2021) – Unis pour l'égalité des genres.
6. Central African Republic (2023) – Programme de promotion de l'égalité de genre et l'autonomisation des femmes en République centrafricaine.
7. Senegal (2023) – JOOGJEEF – Se lever et agir contre les inégalités de genre.
8. Bangladesh (2023) – Strengthening Prevention and Response to GBV at the public and workplace in Bangladesh.
9. Pakistan (2023) – Women participation and leadership in governance and democratic processes in Pakistan.
10. Paraguay (2023) – Violence against women and girls in Paraguay: improving prevention and attention services.
11. Rwanda (2024) – Agricultural transformation through skills upgrading of women and youth in Rwanda.
12. Tajikistan (2025) – Empowering Women as Business Actors in Tajikistan.
13. Nigeria (2025) – EU Support to End Sexual and GBV in Nigeria.
14. Overall inventory used as frame – list of actions with gender equality as a principal objective adopted in 2021–2025.

Annex 2: G1 projects screened

The analysis screened the following EU-funded G1 actions:

10. Democratic Republic of the Congo (2021) – Unis pour la paix et la sécurité.
11. Democratic Republic of the Congo (2021) – Unis pour la prospérité.
12. Democratic Republic of the Congo (2021) – Unis pour la santé et l'éducation.
13. Democratic Republic of the Congo (2021) – Unis pour le développement durable.
14. Democratic Republic of the Congo (2024) – Finalisation de réhabilitation de la Route Nationale 1 entre Kamuesha et Kananga en République démocratique du Congo.
15. Democratic Republic of the Congo (2024) – Des chaînes de valeur agricoles pour la souveraineté alimentaire, le développement rural intégré et la restauration écologique dans le Sud-Est de la RD Congo.
16. Democratic Republic of the Congo (2025) – Lancement opérationnel du Couloir Vert Kivu-Kinshasa: appui à la mise en place de chaînes de valeur agro-alimentaires intégrées articulées aux objectifs écologiques et environnementaux en RD Congo.
17. Namibia (2022) – EU-Namibia Cooperation Facility.
18. Namibia (2022) – EU-Namibia Early Childhood Development Sector Reform Contract.
19. Namibia (2023) – Accelerating the energy transition in Namibia.
20. Namibia (2023) – Support Measures for Civil Society.
21. Nigeria (2021) – Cooperation Facility (CF).
22. Nigeria (2021) – EU Support to Democratic Governance in Nigeria (EU-SDGN) Phase II.
23. Nigeria (2021) – EU Support to Innovation and Jobs for Youth in Nigeria (INN-JOBS).
24. Nigeria (2022) – Education and Youth Empowerment in North-Western Nigeria.
25. Nigeria (2022) – EU Programme on Climate-Smart Agriculture for Development.
26. Nigeria (2023) – Education and Youth Empowerment in Nigeria – Phase 2: Expand, Integrate and Sustain Support.
27. Nigeria (2023) – EU Support to the Rule of Law and Anti-Corruption in Nigeria Phase II (RoLAC II).
28. Nigeria (2023) – EU-Nigeria Cooperation Programme for Sustainable Energy Sector – Phase 1.
29. Nigeria (2023) – Strengthening Access to Reproductive and Adolescent Health (SARAH) in Nigeria.
30. Nigeria (2023) – Support for the Disengagement, Review, Reintegration and Reconciliation of Persons Associated with Non-State Armed Groups (SD3R).
31. Nigeria (2023) – Support to Migration Governance in Nigeria.
32. Nigeria (2023) – Supporting Sustainable and Innovative Social Protection Programmes (SUSI).
33. Nigeria (2023) – To Support Climate-Smart Agriculture for Development (Agri-CADE) Phase 2.
34. Nigeria (2025) – Completing Nigeria Digital Economy Package.

35. Nigeria (2025) – European Union Support to Democratic Governance in Nigeria Phase III (EU-SDGN III).
36. Pakistan (2025) – EU Support to the Rule of Law and the Business Environment in Pakistan.
37. Pakistan (2025) – Global Gateway development facilitation for Pakistan: Investment Management and financial enabling environment.
38. Pakistan (2025) – Energy and Natural Environment Resilience in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (ENER-KP) ACT-62898.
39. Rwanda (2022) – Flood prevention and informal settlements upgrading in the City of Kigali.
40. Rwanda (2024) – Kigali Urban Mobility Programme.

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