



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR EUROPEAN CIVIL PROTECTION AND HUMANITARIAN AID
OPERATIONS (ECHO)
Neighbourhood and Middle East
Humanitarian Aid Thematic Policies

EU Submission to Report on promoting, protecting and fulfilling women's and girls' full enjoyment of human rights in humanitarian situations.

1. Please provide information on the enjoyment of human rights by women and girls in humanitarian situations, which include humanitarian emergencies, forced displacements, armed conflicts and natural disasters, including sudden-onset natural disasters and slow-onset events.

The European Union (EU) is founded on a strong commitment to promote and protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. This is at the heart of our activities, both internally and in our relations with other countries and regions. In line with the 2019-2024 strategic agenda adopted by the European Council and the 2019-2024 political guidelines for the European Commission, the EU has a strategic interest in advancing its global leadership on human rights and democracy with the aim of bringing tangible benefits to people around the world¹.

Furthermore, preserving life, preventing and alleviating suffering and helping to maintain human dignity in the face of natural and human-made disasters are the overriding objectives of EU-funded humanitarian action, as enshrined in the European Consensus for Humanitarian Aid². In the document, the European Union (EU) reaffirms its commitment to the fundamental principles of humanitarian aid – neutrality, humanity, independence, and impartiality – and to the respect of International Humanitarian Law. Based on the Consensus' provisions, EU countries and institutions agree to work in a coordinated and complementary manner, and support the overall coordinating role of the United Nations.

The EU recognizes that natural disasters and human-made crises are not gender neutral — they have a different impact on women, girls, boys and men. Thus, in order to respond effectively to the differentiated needs of various persons of all genders, ages and abilities, humanitarian assistance supported by the European Union must be gender sensitive. The EU furthermore recognises that the active participation of women in humanitarian aid is essential, and commits to promoting that involvement. In EU humanitarian aid, integration of a gender perspective and human rights is pursued in accordance with the humanitarian principles as well as the 'do no harm' concept.

¹ EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024

² https://ec.europa.eu/echo/who/humanitarian-aid-and-civil-protection/european-consensus_en

In March 2021, the European Commission adopted a new Communication on the EU's humanitarian action³. The Communication highlights the EU's commitment to meeting the needs of specific groups, including women and girls. It also emphasizes the continued integration of protection for people caught in crisis situations, including through the prevention, mitigation and response to sexual and gender-based violence and sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, as strong features of the EU's humanitarian aid. Furthermore, it emphasizes the centrality of the promotion of international humanitarian law (IHL) in the EU's external action.

The EU remains committed to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and key Resolutions addressing the situation of women and girls in humanitarian situations (including UNSCR 1325 and its follow-up resolutions on Women, Peace and Security).

2. Please provide information on patterns and structures of discrimination and inequalities exacerbated or created by humanitarian settings, which undermine access to health-care services and information, housing, water, sanitation, education and employment, and disrupt protection systems for women and girls.

Humanitarian crises often provide opportunity for women and girls to reflect upon and collectively challenge gender inequality, discriminatory social norms and prevailing power imbalances. Having a direct influence on vulnerabilities and needs, gender dynamics are at the core of the EU humanitarian aid mandate:

provide a needs-based emergency response aimed at preserving life, preventing and alleviating human suffering and maintaining human dignity wherever the need arises if governments and local actors are overwhelmed, unable or unwilling to act⁴.

Gender-insensitive operations are less effective because they may not reach a large part of the affected population — often the most vulnerable — or may fail to respond adequately to their specific needs. Moreover, they can expose beneficiaries to serious risks (even life-threatening ones), such as sexual and gender-based violence. Ensuring that gender equality is not disregarded is also about being accountable to beneficiaries, complying with assisting those in the most vulnerable situations and acting in accordance with humanitarian principles, particularly humanity and impartiality.

Ensuring equal access to health-care services and information, housing, water and sanitation, education and employment remains critical as part of the EU's operations. The EU supports gender-responsive sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services as part of humanitarian response, in line with global standards. The EU also emphasises that health services are gender-responsive and respond to women's and girls' needs.

In accordance with the EU's Gender Action Plan III, the EU is committed to that its action in humanitarian settings should contribute to combatting discrimination in education, through the following measures:

- promoting gender equality in and through quality, affordable and inclusive education at all levels by maintaining funding for education in emergencies at

³ COM(2021) 110 final

⁴ [European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid | European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations \(europa.eu\)](#)

10% of the humanitarian aid budget and by increasing overall funding for education;

- building stronger gender responsive education systems to promote gender equality and deliver more equitable education results for girls and boys through safe and healthy learning environments, teacher recruitment, training and professional development, curricula and learning materials, work with parents and communities;
- increasing investment in girls' education to achieve equal access to all forms of education and training, including science, technology, engineering and maths, digital literacy and skills, and technical and vocational education and training;
- improving access to comprehensive sexuality education for in-school and out-of-school adolescents;
- adopting robust measures to combat gender stereotypes, discriminatory social norms and school-related gender-based violence in and through education.

3. Please provide examples of concrete measures taken by your Government or organization to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of women and girls in humanitarian settings. In the context of the humanitarian programme cycle, please provide examples of measures taken to ensure protection of the human rights of women and girls in the different stages of programming (design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation).

Strengthening human rights and gender equality in accordance with international law, including international humanitarian law, human rights law and refugee law within the European Union's humanitarian aid is a commitment made in the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, which highlights the need to integrate gender considerations, to promote the active participation of women in humanitarian aid, and to incorporate protection strategies against sexual and gender-based violence.

Relief and protection should be provided in accordance with respect for human dignity, humanitarian principles and human rights, as established in international law. The systematic integration of a gender approach into humanitarian aid is an operational requirement for effective quality programming, as well as a matter of compliance with the EU humanitarian mandate and international law and commitments. The European Union has a number of relevant policy documents available to ensure that EU-funded humanitarian aid ensures the protection of the human rights of women and girls.

The European Commission's gender policy 'Gender in Humanitarian Aid: Different Needs, Adapted Assistance', of July 2013, outlines a reinforced policy approach to gender and gender-based violence in humanitarian settings. To ensure that the Gender policy is effectively implemented, the European Commission introduced a Gender-Age Marker in 2014. This is a quality and accountability tool that measures the extent to which EU-funded humanitarian actions integrate gender and age considerations. The humanitarian Gender-Age Marker uses four criteria to assess how strongly EU-funded humanitarian actions integrate gender and age considerations: (1) Gender and age analysis, (2) Adapted assistance, (3) Negative effects and (4) Adequate participation.

In 2016, the European Commission issued a new policy on protection '*Humanitarian Protection: Improving protection outcomes to reduce risks for people in humanitarian*

crises' that includes further guidance for programming of protection activities, including on gender-based violence.

The Council Conclusions on Women, Peace and Security (2018) clearly states that gender equality is a principle that flows through the engagements of all EU Institutions in all their internal and external activities, including humanitarian aid. A gender perspective is to be systematically integrated as a core element of the planning and implementation of humanitarian responses (and of common security and defence policy missions and operations) around four pillars: prevention, protection, participation and relief/recovery.

Ensuring that a gender perspective, built on gender analysis, is systemically integrated in the EU's humanitarian aid is also included in the 'European Union Gender Action Plan 2021-2025, which sets out the framework for action for all activities on gender equality and women's empowerment in the EU's external action, including for EU Member States.

In addition to its own policies and documents, the European Union has been an active member of the Call to Action for Protection from Gender-Based Violence since its start in 2013, and led the initiative from July 2017-December 2018. The initiative, currently led by Denmark, has 89 partners representing UN Agencies, INGOs, national/local NGOs as well as states and donors. In September 2020, the Call to Action published a new road map covering the period 2021-2025. In January 2021, the EU renewed its commitments to the Call to Action. The European Union's commitments to the new roadmap for the period 2021-2025 include the following:

1. Implementation of relevant policies (i.e. humanitarian policies on Gender, Protection, Gender-Age Marker, as well as EU policies such as the third EU Gender Action Plan (GAP III) and the Strategic Approach on Women, Peace and Security)
2. Capacity building of staff and partners (for instance through the e-learning on the DG ECHO Gender-Age Marker);
3. Advocacy on GBV in emergencies and the Call to Action;
4. Support to survivors of gender-based violence (i.e. humanitarian GBV projects from protection and health programming);
5. Annual tracking and reporting on funding to GBV;
6. Integration of GBV risk mitigation in all aspects of humanitarian assistance (i.e. through the DG ECHO Gender-Age Marker, and work on protection mainstreaming);
7. Promotion of participation of gender and age groups in all aspects of humanitarian assistance (i.e. through the DG ECHO Gender-Age Marker, and work on protection mainstreaming);
8. Strengthen the nexus approach in preventing and responding to GBV.

In terms of funding, the EU funded efforts to prevent and respond to GBV with approximately EUR 56 million in 2019-2020 from its humanitarian health and protection funding. Furthermore, in the same period, the European Union provided approximately EUR 44.8 million to sexual and reproductive services in humanitarian crises, usually delivered within a broad comprehensive healthcare package, rather than through a stand-alone service.

4. What challenges does your Government or organization face in promoting, protecting and respecting women's and girls' full enjoyment of human rights in humanitarian situations? Please elaborate on the nature of these challenges and steps taken to address them.

The still gaps between short, medium, and long-term responses negatively affects the promotion and protection of women and girls' rights in fragile and conflict-affected situations. This challenge is by no means exclusive to the EU. The Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) nexus approach, which is being progressively implemented by the EU in its actions on the ground, aims at reducing those gaps. This approach is being widely used in health and food security, but its huge potential to reinforce women's and girl's rights in fragile situations remains untapped.

5. Please provide information on international cooperation, technical assistance and humanitarian support provided by the international community, including Member States, and by relevant United Nations agencies and humanitarian actors, to address the human rights of women and girls in humanitarian situations, with a focus on good practices, challenges and lessons learned.

The European Union ensures dialogue on mainstreaming of gender-related needs in EU-funded humanitarian aid with its partners to, through the gender and age marker among other measures. The European Union has furthermore been an active member of the Call to Action for Protection from Gender-Based Violence since its start in 2013, and led the initiative from July 2017-December 2018.

In addition, the European Union continuously supports global capacity building and research to address the needs of women and girls in humanitarian aid.

6. Please provide information on the barriers women and girls face in reporting and seeking justice, as well as protection for violations of their human rights in humanitarian settings, including women and girls who face intersecting forms of discrimination?

Women and girls face multiple barriers in access to justice in humanitarian settings. The EU emphasizes that humanitarian crises, conflict, disasters and pandemics exacerbate the risks of sexual and gender-based violence, which must be prevented and addressed from the very onset. A survivor-centred approach that take into account intersecting forms of discrimination remain key.

Please also provide information on mechanisms that operate in your context to ensure access to justice and remedies for human rights violations and abuses that women and girls may experience, thus ensuring accountability. (E.g. judicial and non-judicial mechanisms; truth-seeking initiatives; community-based initiatives; investigative and independent monitoring and/or reporting bodies, community complaint mechanisms; parliamentary-led oversight etc.).

The European Union remains engaged in promoting compliance with international humanitarian law (IHL) and the protection of civilians in armed conflicts. The EU fosters respect for IHL as well as human rights law across the various areas covered in the 'EU

Guidelines on promoting compliance with International Humanitarian Law’, including with respect to the prohibition of rape and other forms of sexual violence.

In its capacity as an active member or observer in a range of international organisations, bodies and processes, in New York the EU has co-sponsored events on addressing gender-based violence in armed conflicts in DRC and South Sudan. For example, in April 2020, the EU delivered a statement at the UN Security Council annual open debate on Sexual Violence in Conflict. Furthermore, at the UN in New York, the EU, alongside with Argentina, Morocco, Mongolia, Namibia, New Zealand, and Turkey, established the Group of Friends for the Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls in December 2020. The group aims to coordinate efforts at the UN to eliminate sexual and gender-based violence in all settings. The Group has been joined by close to a hundred States, highlighting the strong international commitment to tackle this issue together.

In terms of funding, the EU's Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP) funds several projects on IHL with strong gender components. In Serbia, the EU has funded a project implemented by the OSCE on war crimes trial monitoring, where judges, prosecutors and defence attorneys benefitted from the training on topics ranging from the processing of Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) crimes in Armed Conflict, to deal with witnesses and victims in war crimes cases with special focus on SGBV crimes. In Nigeria, IcSP has supported Nigerian civil society to collectively advocate for better protection of civilians policies and practices by the military, including through a media campaign on “Gender in conflict”, as part of a larger project aiming at strengthening the military’s civilian protection policies and practices. In South Sudan, IcSP has supported the reintegration of sexual violence survivors including former female abductees by pro Riek Machar SPLA in opposition in Western Equatoria. The project, implemented by UNOPS, responded to the specific needs of a group of fifty women who had been abducted and held against their will by an armed opposition group and facilitated the kick-start of their transition from a military environment towards reintegration into civilian life, through the provision of a safe space, survivor-centred services. It also helped to allow for a stigma-free reintegration if the women decided to return to their communities. The action was designed to be fully in line with the EU Strategic Approach to Women, Peace and Security.

In Syria, the EU’s humanitarian aid budget provided the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), together with Geneva Call, with EUR 729 000 for a project entitled ‘Providing Lifesaving Assistance and Protection to Vulnerable Conflict and Displacement-affected Persons in Syria’. The project aims to strengthen the compliance of actions of armed non-State actors (ANSAs) with international humanitarian norms and contribute to the protection of civilians from the effects of the armed conflict across Syria. This included the production and dissemination of advocacy material, with a focus on sexual violence, gender discrimination and displacement in situations of armed conflict, the delivery of trainings, awareness raising sessions and communication campaigns targeting ANSAs members, local CSOs and key community stakeholders, the youth and internal security forces.

The European Union furthermore maintains support to UN agencies, including OHCHR, ICRC and INGOs working on protection, promotion of women’s and children’s rights and reduction of gender-based violence in Yemen. Moreover, in 2020 the European Union funded a EUR 2 million UNICEF action aiming at providing protection against grave child rights violations for children and pregnant and lactating women, including

IDPs and host communities, (in addition to a nutrition response), as well as IOM's project for direct Multi-sectorial Protection Assistance to Vulnerable Migrants of about EUR 3 million.

7. What steps has your Government or organization taken to ensure women's and girls' meaningful participation, empowerment and leadership, including that of survivors and victims, in efforts to prevent, reduce the risk of, prepare for, resolve and rebuild from humanitarian emergencies. Please elaborate on any lessons learned, good practices as well as challenges faced.

Through the implementation of the EU Strategic Approach to Women, Peace and Security (WPS), the EU is striving to further embed gender equality and women's empowerment in all EU external action, including, but not limited to, conflict prevention; development assistance; humanitarian aid; trafficking in human beings; migration; conflict resolution; disaster risk reduction; preventing and countering of radicalisation; as well as violent extremism and terrorism.

The EU Strategic Approach to WPS identifies objectives as already defined in UNSCR 1325 and its follow up resolutions on WPS, under the key priority areas of prevention, protection, relief and recovery, and the overarching and cross-cutting principles of **participation and gender mainstreaming**.

The implementation of the EU Strategic Approach to WPS is guided by its EU Action Plan (2019-2024) which was in 2020 embedded into the broader framework of gender equality and women's empowerment through becoming part of the new Gender Action Plan 2021-2025. The EU's External Action Service (EEAS) and EU Member States meet regularly both at technical and strategic levels, in the EU Task Force on WPS, that was set up to monitor and follow on the implementation of relevant activities, as well as to exchange of best practices. The EU reports on a yearly basis on activities to implement the framework of Women, Peace and Security through the United Nations reporting system, as well as in the EU Gender Action Plan.

The Spotlight Initiative also represents an unprecedented global effort to invest in human rights and gender equality as a precondition and driver for the achievement of the SDGs. In Central Asia and Afghanistan, the Spotlight Initiative focuses on employing innovative approaches to understand, prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence and harmful practices. Afghanistan has the second largest country programme within the initiative, funded entirely by the EU mainly focusing on prevention and services (survivors access to services). Together with UN partners (UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN Women), the programme was designed through a collaborative process with government, civil society partners, and other key actors.

The European Commission is part of the Generation Equality Forum, a global gathering for gender equality, and co-leads the Action Coalition on gender-based violence. The drafting of tangible Action Coalition blueprints on gender-based violence are established by targeted sets of actions and aims to accelerate progress towards gender equality "in the UN Decade of Action." This Acceleration agenda, drafted by the action coalition leaders, addresses sexual violence in conflict situations within the theme of gender-based violence, which is an example of that WPS. This action coalition stresses the disproportionate vulnerability of women and girls in conflict context and therefore calls

for increased awareness of and access to survivor-centred police, justice, health, and social services.

Another example is the cooperation with the OSCE where the EU is active on human rights of women and girls and was among the principal donors of the OSCE-led Survey on the Well-Being and Safety of Women). The project provided high-quality research and data collection in order to increase the understanding of women's experience of violence in conflict and non-conflict situations in South East Europe, Eastern Europe and South Caucasus. The findings will help us improve to design the assistance provided to victims/survivors of violence; improve national and international policy-making; and to support national authorities, where relevant, to report on progress related to the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and commitments made under international human rights treaties, such as the Istanbul Convention

At the international fora, the EU continues to condemn violations and abuses of women and girls' rights and to strongly support civil society, as well as women and men working for gender equality and women's empowerment, including women human rights defenders. The European Commission will issue a renewed tool box for applying a human rights-based approach (HRBA) placing rights-holders at the centre of all EU external action. This approach includes gender mainstreaming, and working methods that reinforce each other and enhance gender equality.

During 2020, the EU supported the Global Survivors Fund established by Dr Denis Mukwege and Nadia Murad in October 2019. The overall objective is to enhance survivors of conflict-related sexual violence access to reparations and other forms of redress globally, including where the states or other parties responsible for the violence are unwilling or unable to provide reparations. Specific objectives include successful reintegration of survivors of sexual violence into their communities, proven survivor centric, community-based model supported internationally by multiple stakeholders and global acceptance of the moral imperative to provide survivors of sexual violence with holistic reparations

Specifically for its humanitarian funding, the EU places high emphasis on involving crisis-affected communities in humanitarian action. This protects the dignity of affected populations and promotes resilience. Listening to the views of affected populations, including women and girls, and giving them a chance to shape actions enhances the quality of assistance, as it will be better adapted to their specific needs. As per response to question 3, the European Union's humanitarian gender-age marker is an important tool to ensure participation as adequate participation is one of the four aspects the Marker assesses. Furthermore, since 2017, the European Union has piloted a protection mainstreaming key outcome indicator, and in 2020, a guidance was issued on this, ensuring that partners correctly take into consideration adequate participation of beneficiaries, including women and girls.