

**CONCORD**

European Confederation of NGOs working on  
sustainable development and international cooperation



# Funding local women's rights organisations and feminist movements for transformative change

Recommendations to the EU and Member States

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Women's equal participation and leadership in all aspects of society are essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. CONCORD Europe is a strong advocate of expanding women's participation in policy- and decision-making processes across all sectors. However, there is a notable lack of funding to make this happen. With the Gender Action Plan (GAP III) (2021–2025) and with less than 10 years to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG 5 for gender equality, **CONCORD Europe considers it crucial to address the lack of funding that reaches women's rights organisations, feminist movements and national, local and grassroots organisations working to advance gender equality** (hereafter summarised as local women's rights organisations)<sup>1</sup>.

This paper comes in a broader context of lack of, and barriers to access to funding for civil society organisations (CSOs). CSOs are key agents of change, they amplify the voices of people, defending and ensuring the realisation of their human rights and demanding that people's concerns be addressed. They are critical actors for democracy and inclusive and sustainable development. Based on this important role, CONCORD Europe demands that the EU Institutions and EU Member States increase the long-term, flexible, programme-based or core funding provided for CSOs in EU partner countries.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, research concludes that feminist activism and local women's rights organisations have the biggest impact when it comes to moving the needle on gender equality<sup>3,4</sup> while facing severe underfunding. Women's rights organisations are in a unique position to understand the needs of women in local communities, to serve them

and to enhance their participation in the social, economic and political life of their communities. In addition, local women's rights organisations are more inclined to emphasise intersectionality in their work. They are therefore crucial actors for the European Commission to actually achieve the GAP III's objectives<sup>5</sup>, as well as for the European Union as a whole to contribute to the achievement of SDG 5.

Being at the forefront of actions to achieve gender equality, these groups are not only the most effective, but often also the most excluded and underfunded actors. They face constant attacks from opposition groups, including sexual and gender-based violence and cyberbullying, and are often the first to face and fight against shrinking civic space. Therefore donors should support, promote and fund local women's rights organisations in order to enable and strengthen the work of these groups.

The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) has pointed to the lack of funding earmarked for local women's rights organisations for the last 20 years<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, according to the OECD data published in June 2022, the support to local women's rights organisations and gender equality institutions represented only 1.4 % of all gender-focused aid in 2019 and 2020. This figure is even lower for the EU institutions, as less than 0,5% of its Official Development Assistance (ODA) focusing on gender equality went to women's rights organisations and gender equality institutions.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the evaluation of the EU's external action support in the area of gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment<sup>8</sup> (GEWE) showed that while "the EU's substantial support to CSOs active in

1 For CONCORD, this encompasses many different types of organisations working to advance gender equality, including those working at the intersection of gender and sexual orientation, identity, expression or sex characteristics, race, age, disability, ethnicity, religion or belief, socioeconomic status, nationality and residency, and statehood and migratory status.

2 CONCORD AidWatch (2021) <https://aidwatch.concordeurope.org/2021-report/>

3 OECD (2016) [Donor support to southern women's rights organisations](#)

4 S. Laurel Weldon & Mala Htun (2013), [Feminist mobilisation and progressive policy change: why governments take action to combat violence against women](#)

5 European Commission & High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (2020) [Joint Staff Working Document – Objectives and Indicators to frame the implementation of the Gender Action Plan III \(2021-25\)](#)

6 Awid (2015) [20 years of Shamefully Scarce Funding for Feminists and Women's Rights Movements](#)

7 OECD (2022) [Aid in Support of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment](#)

8 European Commission (2020) [Evaluation of the EU's external action support in the area of gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment \(2010-2018\)](#)



GEWE has led to many positive experiences<sup>9</sup>, it “struggled to respond adequately to the specific needs of grassroots organisations”. Both the financial situation of grassroots organisations active in the area of GEWE and their managerial and operational capacities limit their ability to meet the requirements of EU funding at grant application and implementation/reporting levels.<sup>10</sup>

It is important, however, that local women’s rights organisations be provided with long-term institutional support in order to foster sustainable change, and to allow for a transformative approach. An ECDPM briefing note on GAP III states that “[w]hen organisations are forced to chase after short-term project funding, this often undermines more meaningful long-term efforts to achieve change. These organisations can play an innovative role if there is long-term support for capacity building rather than treating them as contractors.”<sup>11</sup> A recent independent study commissioned by DG INTPA<sup>12</sup> calls on the EU to “explore alternative inclusive and feminist funding modalities that shift money and decision-making power and foster partnerships with grassroots organisations”.

Based on this background and the commitments made in GAP III, **CONCORD Europe urges the European Union and Member States to commit to increase the direct funding to and work with women’s rights organisations, feminist movements and grassroots organisations working to advance gender equality.** The following recommendations build upon the reports published by AWID and the OECD GenderNet.

## ↑↑↑ How could the European Union and Member States increase their funding to local women’s rights organisations?

Propose new funding programmes and/or grant schemes that directly fund local women’s rights organisations, enabling them to take full leadership and power, and preventing the dependence on larger intermediary organisations.

- **Invest in existing multilateral and women’s funds dedicated to gender equality** with established track records in effectively reaching local women’s rights organisations in partner countries with funding that is flexible and responsive to their needs.<sup>13</sup>
- Ensure that **all funding mechanisms are gender-responsive** and accessible to local women’s rights organisations.
  - Influence large EU funds such as the EFSD+ to adopt a gender policy and a gender action plan and require from implementing entities that they have a gender policy or action plan.
- **Review the structure of the EU’s and Member States’ own funding mechanisms** in order to support local women’s rights organisations:
  - The European Union and Member States should earmark or mainstream budget allocation toward local women’s rights organisations across all sectors and grant modalities.
  - Ensure that partnerships between applicants and local women’s rights organisations are part of the criteria included in guidelines for call for proposals.
  - When evaluating proposals, assign extra points to projects that favour partnerships with, and leadership by, local women’s rights organisations.

9 European Commission (2020) Evaluation of the EU’s external action support to gender equality and women’s and girls’ empowerment (2010-2018) - Final Report - Volume I, p.82

10 Ibidem

11 ECDPM (2021) Briefing note No. 139 The EU’s gender action plan: principles and practice, p. 6

12 European Commission Infographic (2022): Working better together with CSOs to address gender inequality and champion women’s and girls’ voices and agency

13 For in-depth analyses of multilateral and women’s funds, see AWID’s [How Bilateral and Multilateral Funders Can Resource Feminist Movements](#) and GenderNet’s [Donor support to southern women’s rights organisations](#)

- When funding larger projects or consortia that involve leadership by and/or meaningful partnerships with local civil society or women's rights organisations, ensure sufficient funding is available for partner costs as well as the cost of support to partners (these are often the budget lines that are cut first in budget negotiations, but they are essential to ensuring partners are adequately supported).
- The European Commission and the EEAS should **commit to funding targets for gender equality**: 85% of ODA going to programmes where gender equality is a significant component (G1/G2) and 20% of ODA going to programmes where gender equality is a principal component. EU Member States should endorse these additional funding targets<sup>14</sup>.
- **Credible and effective Feminist Foreign Policy initiatives** should go hand in hand with an **increased commitment to resourcing local women's rights organisations**<sup>15</sup>. This requires a feminist approach to funding<sup>16</sup>, based on the principles outlined below.
  - aim at strengthening networking and cooperation between local women's rights organisations, as well as other social movements as a way to strengthen collective voice, impact and sustainability.
- **Provide core, long-term and flexible funding** that allows local women's rights organisations to follow their own priorities, adapt to changing conditions, emerging issues and opportunities, as well as cover their essential operating costs.
  - Provide for different funding thresholds, with a range from small to large, to reach local women's rights organisations of different sizes and capacities.
- **Establish clear governance structures inclusive of local women's rights organisations** in order to inform the strategies, priorities, and mechanisms for resourcing gender equality.
- **Keep the reporting and administrative burden to a minimum** taking into account the capacities and specifics of local women's rights organisations. Ensure that organisations funded by the EU and Member States have the flexibility in the reporting structures for partnering with local women's rights organisations.
- **Provide financial compensation**<sup>17</sup> for local women's rights organisations to be able to participate in political dialogues and consultations in national and multilateral spaces, in order to recognize their expertise, encourage their engagement and increase the time they are able to spend on these processes.



## Conditions of success in adopting a new approach to supporting local women's rights organisations

- **Avoid creating situations in which INGOs and local women's rights organisations have to compete with each other for the same funding pot.**
  - Establish separate funding windows or streams including those that:
    - aim at leadership by women's rights organisations, feminist movements and grassroots organisations

<sup>14</sup> CONCORD Europe fact sheet (2022): How much funding could go to gender equality in a year?

<sup>15</sup> Mama Cash Policy Brief (2022): Feminist Foreign Policy: Stronger Action Needed to Resource Feminist Movements

<sup>16</sup> Papagioti, F., Thompson, L. and Ahmed, S. (2022). Feminist Foreign Policy and Development Finance for Gender Equality: An Assessment of Commitments. Washington, DC. International Center for Research on Women.

<sup>17</sup> In addition to reimbursement of travel costs if the consultation is in person.



## List of resources

AWID's analyses and reports : [Resourcing Feminist Movements | AWID](#)

OECD GenderNet report (2016): [Donor support to southern women's rights organisations](#)

ECDPM briefing note No. 139 (2021): [The EU's gender action plan: principles and practice](#)



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