

CONCORD proposals for mainstreaming equality in international cooperation

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Within the field of international cooperation, the European Commission defines mainstreaming as *'the process of systematically integrating a selected value, idea or theme into all domains of EU development cooperation to promote specific as well as general development outcomes'*.¹ With the joint adoption of the 2017 European Consensus on Development, the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council committed to mainstream the reduction of inequality in their development cooperation. A commitment made even more relevant as the current pandemic exposes and exacerbates various forms of inequalities.

Mainstreaming requires an institutional cultural shift. Staff within headquarters and in EU Delegations or embassies in partner countries should not only understand the importance and multidimensional and intersectional nature of the issue. They should also be able to apply this knowledge in their daily work. Providing staff with the necessary guidance, tools and training will thus be key. Only then can equality mainstreaming in EU international cooperation successfully result in the systematic integration of equality throughout programme and project cycles. Mainstreaming equality could help bring together a number of related mainstreaming topics, so as to have a more comprehensive, intersectional and impactful approach. Nevertheless, equality mainstreaming alone does not suffice; it should complement targeted action to address inequalities.

1. Multidimensional and intersectional country analysis of inequalities

Measuring income inequality is useful to identify individuals or groups at risk of poverty, but it is insufficient to understand how deprivation varies across different aspects of their lives. Using a **multidimensional approach to inequality**, on the other hand, takes into account various relevant dimensions to people's lives such as health, security, education and the ability to participate in decision-making.

Intersecting inequalities are the persistent combination of disadvantages linked to a person's characteristics and identity (such as gender, age, disability, race, caste, ethnicity, class, etc.). Groups and individuals facing intersecting inequalities experience magnified discrimination, dramatically diminishing and undermining their potential capabilities with respect to the rest of the population. In this sense, using intersecting inequalities as a category of analysis can help EU Delegations to understand how multiple sources of discrimination combined together work to influence inequality in access to and enjoyment of human rights and capabilities.

The international **Multidimensional Inequality Framework (MIF)**², developed by Oxfam, the Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE) at the London School of Economics and the London School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), provides a systematic approach to measuring and analysing inequalities and to identifying causes and potential solutions. The framework, based on Amartya Sen's human capabilities approach, is designed to measure inequalities in individual well-being and includes 7 domains which are important for human life. Each domain is further divided into more detailed sub-domains to identify specific issues/topics and supported by a number of indicators, measures and variables of disaggregation which provide a picture of vertical, horizontal and spatial inequalities³. The MIF has already been rolled

¹ European Commission, iQSG, 2004. Putting Mainstreaming into Practice.

² <https://www.inequalitytoolkit.org/>

³ Vertical inequalities are measured across populations, horizontal inequalities between groups and spatial inequalities across geographical localities. (source: [How does social assistance address vertical, horizontal and spatial inequalities? Towards achieving the SDGs in South Africa](#))

out in Vietnam, Central America and West Africa, by the EU-AFD Research Facility on inequalities, supported by AFD and AECID and DG DEVCO.

To address multidimensional and intersectional inequalities, the EU should develop terms of reference for the creation of **Country Equality Profiles**, similar to the Country Environmental Profiles templates that have already been developed by DG DEVCO.⁴ The terms of references for developing Country Equality Profiles should include a multidimensional approach, as exemplified by the MIF pilot projects discussed above, and be used as a flexible tool for analysis that can easily be adapted according to context, needs and goals. CONCORD would be available to help develop such terms of reference. Applying an intersectional approach to the multidimensional inequality framework within the profiles, involves recognising that not only can people face inequalities in several domains of life at the same time, but that, in addition, inequalities can be exacerbated or reduced as a result of the multiple discriminations they face or privileges they enjoy by reason of their own identities or social positioning. Furthermore, the adoption of a feminist approach to development cooperation should be encouraged and embedded in these Country Equality Profiles given the urgency of tackling gender inequality.

Finally, an analysis could be included in the Country Equality Profiles as to whether tackling inequalities is a priority in **partner country national and sectoral strategies, policies and budgets**, and how these have helped to reduce inequalities thus far. This will help inform more effective programmes, projects, budget support, policy dialogue or technical assistance.

Over time, these profiles should be developed in all partner countries and be used in the preparation of the multi-annual indicative programmes and for policy dialogue, in close collaboration with Member States and other like-minded actors in the country or region. Since some key development cooperation processes, such as the 2021-2027 programming for the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument, are already underway, and developing the Country Equality Profiles requires time, a (light) preliminary analysis could be carried out, at least in those countries with high inequality levels, where the pre-programming country analysis provides insufficient information on multidimensional and intersectional inequality. In those instances, the EU could cooperate with other actors in the country or region already working on similar approaches or compile equivalent recent analysis.

2. Inequality impact assessment for policies, programmes and projects

Any EU policy, programme or project can have a significant impact on inequality levels in partner countries. Therefore, the EU should look more thoroughly and consistently at the impact of policy, programme and project options on those inequality levels, when conducting **gender-sensitive, inclusive ex-ante impact assessments to inform decision-making**. Such assessments can help minimise contradictions and build synergies between different EU policies, programmes and projects increasing the effectiveness of development cooperation.

The absolute minimum would be to make sure that all policies, programmes and projects implemented or funded by the EU in its international cooperation **“do no harm”** in terms of inequalities, which mean they do not, even indirectly, increase inequalities.

This is of course not enough: EU-funded projects and programmes, including the NDICI flagship initiatives and multiannual indicative programmes, should also **reduce existing inequalities**: they should, therefore, show how they will contribute to reducing inequalities, which kind of inequalities and by what means. Specific tools should be devised and used to effectively reflect this, such as an equality marker, funding targets (e.g. distributional impact on bottom 40%), used in combination with other existing markers (gender, disability), etc.

⁴ <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/public-environment-climate/wiki/country-environmental-profile>

Importantly, inequality impact assessments must also assess the **impact of programme or project proposals on the most marginalised groups in developing countries and on Least Developed Countries and other countries facing the biggest challenges**. Marginalised groups, as the European Consensus on Development states, include women and girls, people with disabilities, children, older people, LGBTI, and indigenous peoples. This list is by no means exhaustive, and should also include young people, people from rural areas, migrants, refugees and displaced people, minorities.

In order to ensure an evidence-based assessment, inequality assessments should be addressed during the early preparatory stage of any envisaged initiative (**ex-ante**) and during the evaluation (**ex-post**). Stakeholder consultations and studies should also include gathering disaggregated data on any potential inequality aspect.

When identifying and formulating programme or project proposals, not only should the outcomes of these assessments be taken into account, an **equality marker** (or alternative indicator) should be introduced to be able to measure the share of EU development cooperation **funding** that contributes directly or indirectly to reducing inequalities, as proposed in the 2019 Staff Working Document on addressing inequality in partner countries.⁵

3. Tackling inequalities through policy dialogues and technical assistance

Tackling inequalities in policy dialogues and technical assistance is an important tool for the EU and its Member States to raise awareness amongst partner countries of the need to tackle inequalities in their domestic policies. It can **encourage ownership by partner countries, enhance mutual trust and stimulate shared understanding** of country-specific issues, perspectives and approaches.⁶ Equality should be mainstreamed in dialogues in two ways: in the content and in the process of the dialogue. However, research shows there is still room for improvement.⁷

Policy dialogue is most effective when supported politically, backed up by evidence and conducted inclusively by trained and credible negotiators. Tackling inequalities through policy dialogues and technical assistance requires support from the highest level in EU Delegations and appropriately trained staff. The main drivers and consequences of inequalities should be discussed with partner governments, as well as developing equality-transformative national budgets and policies that can address them. And the multidimensional and intersectional country analysis of inequalities, in the Country Equality Profiles, should serve as a basis for such engagement with partner governments, with civil society, the donor community as well as with academic institutions and researchers.

Inequalities should be mainstreamed in **all policy dialogues**. The example of the Gender Action Plan (GAP) has shown that gender equality is mainly included in EU policy dialogues related to human development and social sectors. However, gender inequalities, and inequalities more broadly, are impacted by other sectors and policies too, for example trade, energy or migration. It is therefore crucial that the EU mainstreams inequalities, their causes and consequences, in all relevant policy dialogues it undertakes with partner countries. The experience and lessons learnt from the GAP on policy dialogues, in particular the GAP II evaluation results (planned to be published in the summer of 2020), should be taken into account when mainstreaming equality in policy dialogues.

⁵ https://eudevdays.eu/sites/default/files/swd_inequalities_sw_d_2019_280.pdf

⁶ http://eugender.itcilo.org/toolkit/online/story_content/external_files/GBS_1.1.pdf

⁷ During the interviews they conducted with EU delegation staff, as part of the 2017 evaluation by external consultants to assess the equality-sensitivity of EU development cooperation, only 21% of respondents say that in the framework of political dialogue (including in budget support and blending operations) the issue of inequality is frequently addressed, almost 50% say that it is approached with some regularity and 22.7% say that it is rarely addressed. http://www.eurososocial.eu/files/2018-11/02_EN_%20EUROSOCIAL%20Collection_budget%20support.pdf

To be a **credible dialogue partner**, the EU should also ensure its other policies, such as on trade, investment, security, migration, tax or agriculture, do not increase inequalities in partner countries, and show an openness for feedback from partner countries and critical self-reflection in this regard.

To **mainstream equality also in the process**, EU Delegations should seek to broaden the consultation base beyond their usual suspects and systematically include the views of marginalised groups, creating a safe space where people feel confident to speak.⁸ They should facilitate and support the meaningful involvement of a pluralistic and diverse local civil society with established connections to people living in poverty and exclusion. To this end, EU Delegations should develop a **mapping of stakeholders** - working on a diversity of relevant issues - **and communication channels** to reach them and consult them ahead of policy dialogues. When it comes to engaging with the donor community, the objective should be to ensure **complementarity of approaches across different donors**. This is especially true for EU Member States, for which alignment and complementary should be reached through joint programming, analysis, monitoring and evaluation.

4. Disaggregated data and equality mainstreaming in monitoring and evaluation

In order to understand how different types of inequalities interact, data disaggregation is essential. A complete distribution of inequality can not be captured in a single measure. In isolation, general inequality indicators such as the **Gini coefficient** (calculating the income or wealth distribution over a given population) or the **Palma index** (calculating the distribution of income between the richest 10% and the poorest 40% in society) do not provide a clear and detailed vision. For example, the Gini coefficient is known to be insensitive to high levels of inequality and fails to truly show the magnitude of inequality levels. Furthermore, neither indicator allows one to evaluate or monitor the consequences of specific policies on a given group of people. **Indicators going beyond the simple distribution of wealth** among a population are needed to understand the impact of policies on specific groups. To do so, disaggregated data is primordial.

In order to include disaggregated data in monitoring and evaluation the EU should:

- **Take the necessary measures regarding data anonymity and protection** in order to avoid data misuse. Data profusion needs to be balanced with data protection. Necessary measures need to be taken to prevent the re-identification of individuals through the interconnection of several anonymous data-sets.
- Develop thinking on **which disaggregated data are needed in order to tackle data deprivation** (data deprivation being defined as the blank spaces in the global data map) and include otherwise invisible population groups, taking into account cultural sensitivities and safety issues that can arise from collecting data.
- **Support the strengthening of data collection structures in partner countries** in order to create a network of data, to map out what kind of data is already available and where to find it and to flag where data is missing. Invest in and use country-led results data. Data availability has to go hand-in-hand with data quality.
- **Create indicators based on disaggregated data** (e.g. income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location) taking into account national context.
- Take the necessary steps in order **to avoid a “data graveyard”⁹ by supporting data transformation, use and analysis** along the development data value chain - from collection, to management, to curation, to analysis, to use - and **data sharing and connectedness** to have efficient and trustworthy databases and avoid data duplication.

⁸ https://concordeurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/CONCORDs-recommendation-on-EU-Programing-process-for-external-instrument_Feb2020.pdf

⁹ Custer, S. & Sethi, T. (Eds.) (2017). Avoiding Data Graveyards: Insights from Data Producers & Users in Three Countries. Williamsburg, VA: AidData at William & Mary.

5. Equality mainstreaming staff, training and facility

Senior-level **equality leads** should be appointed in the cabinet of the Commissioner for International Partnerships, DG DEVCO and the European External Action Service to guide and coordinate the targeted and mainstreaming work to address inequalities through international cooperation and partnerships, making a strong link with the Commission-wide Equality Task Force and developing a dedicated annual work programme.

Within EU Delegations, **equality focal points** could be nominated to be first-responders and advise their colleagues in the Delegation on this issue. The implementation and evaluation of the Joint Staff Working Document *EU Gender Action Plan II - Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Transforming the Lives of Girls and Women through EU External Relations 2016-2020* could serve as a source of inspiration.

At headquarters level, a **basic training of all staff** should allow for an increased and shared understanding. At EU Delegation level, political buy-in for staff training on equality mainstreaming by senior managers is crucial. Once approved, equality focal points could be trained first, before broadening the scope to include many others in the Delegation to enable a cross-sectoral and cross-departmental approach. Trainings should be held both face-to-face as well as online, and include the engagement of target groups and civil society.

An **equality mainstreaming facility**, new or added to the mandate of the EU-AFD inequalities research facility, should support awareness-raising, technical assistance, assessment of proposals and plans, training of staff, tracking of financial commitments and preparation of guidance materials.

6. Equality mainstreaming guidelines

Equality mainstreaming guidelines would be a first step to support staff in their efforts. Similar to DEVCO's guidelines to integrate the environment and climate change into EU international cooperation and development, equality mainstreaming guidelines should explain the purpose and importance of tackling inequalities and mainstreaming equality.¹⁰ They should set out UN and EU commitments made in this regard and help to explain the multidimensional and intersectional nature of inequalities. Because of this multidimensional nature, they should also explain how they link up with existing related mainstreaming guidelines such as on gender equality, governance, social protection, decent work, the human rights-based approach, the environment and climate change, etc, clustering and interlinking them instead of just adding to the list of guidelines, reference documents, concept notes and other methodological documents of DG DEVCO and the EEAS.¹¹

In addition, a list of **concrete tools** should be added to support the mainstreaming, some of which have already been referred to before:

- Terms of reference for equality country profiles (to conduct multidimensional and intersectional country analysis of inequalities)
- Guidance for integrating equality-related aspects in identification and formulation studies and equality screening templates (to integrate the findings of the analysis into programmes and projects)
- Inequality impact assessments guidance (to develop ex-ante inequality impact assessments)
- Guidelines on how to conduct policy dialogue on the drivers and consequences of inequalities (in general, and for budget support and blending operations in particular) and on how to map key stakeholders to be consulted (to prepare and support policy dialogue and provide technical assistance to tackle inequalities)

¹⁰ <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/public-environment-climate/wiki/new-guidelines-integrating-environment-and-climate-change-eu-international-cooperation>

¹¹ <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/t-and-m-series/wiki/list-available-publications>

- Guidance on the development of a framework to monitor equality results and impacts of actions, equality marker guidance, etc. (to collect disaggregated data and mainstream equality in monitoring and evaluation)
- Job descriptions for equality focal points, equality mainstreaming online and offline training modules, etc. (to appoint and train staff)

Ideally, these guidelines should be shared with EU Delegations before the multi-annual programming process begins, to ensure that tackling inequalities is mainstreamed by EU Delegations in the EU's country and regional programmes. However, these guidelines would be broader than the programming process and should be a way for EU Delegations to mainstream equality in all aspects of their work. To ensure adherence to the guidelines, they should regularly be referred to, such as when sending out the programming instructions.

