**Internal GAP III Joint Communication Analysis**

WPS integration and mainstreaming

of conflict-sensitivity in other key areas of engagement

January 2021

The EU’s [third Gender Action Plan (GAP III) for 2021-2025](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_2184) was adopted by the European Commission on 25 November 2020, and welcomed by [Presidency Conclusions](https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-13947-2020-INIT/en/pdf) on 16 December.

EPLO welcomes the GAP III as an overall strong document as it fully integrates the EU’s Strategic Approach to WPS for the first time, features a more mainstreamed conflict and fragility perspective, acknowledges the importance of an intersectional approach and the centrality of supporting civil society organisations (especially women’s).

On intersectionality, GAP III is particularly stronger than its Gender Equality Strategy internal EU counterpart with regards to LGBTIQ+ issues, by clearly stating that it should be read in conjunction with the LGBTIQ equality strategy 2020-2025 (p.1).

On civil society engagement, GAP III sets out that dialogue on its implementation should be done in cooperation with civil society, and prescribes that forthcoming country roadmaps for engagement with civil society will integrate a gender perspective (p.6).

**How WPS is integrated**

The intentionality behind the integration of the Strategic Approach to Women, Peace and Security (2018) might be best summed up by the first sentence of GAP III: "Gender equality is [...] imperative to (*inter alia*) [...] peace and security".

The objectives, fulfillment criteria and indicators of the Action Plan on WPS have been copy-pasted into the GAP III so there is nothing new in terms of content, but it has been formatted to be read naturally with the other GAP III areas of engagement.

The section on WPS in the Joint Communication states the main rationale, principles and actions to be undertaken as set out in the Strategic Approach (2018). The COVID-19 pandemic is also highlighted as having demonstrated the centrality of the WPS agenda in addressing increased violence threats.

**Mainstreaming of conflict-sensitivity in non-WPS key areas of engagement**

The section on WPS in GAP III states that “synergies between the WPS agenda and the other thematic priorities will be harnessed” (p.17).

Indeed, while GAP III will be applicable to all the geographical contexts relevant to the EU’s external action, it is noted in the introduction that instability, fragility and conflict are among the “critical factors exacerbating inequalities and threatening hard-won gains” (p.1), and that highly diversified challenges to gender equality therefore require “context-specific responses” (p.1).

However, the specificity of battling intersecting inequalities *in conflicts* (i.e. conflict-sensitivity) is only addressed to varying degrees in the different key areas of engagement set out by GAP III:

Gender-based violence (GBV)

GAP III recognizes that conflicts increase the risk that GBV will occur, but also that GBV is a tool/method leveraged to wage war:

* Conflict-related sexual violence is highlighted as a particular circumstance in which GBV is leveraged as a way to “punish, subjugate and destroy communities” (p.9).
* It is also highlighted that “humanitarian crises, conflict, disasters and pandemics exacerbate the risks of sexual and gender-based violence” (p.9)
* The specific needs of survivors of *conflict-related* sexual violence are alluded to in an action point: “increasing protection of survivors by supporting access to life-saving social and justice services with a survivor-centred approach, particularly in fragile and conflict/post-conflict settings”(p.10)

Male victims of GBV and the economic impacts of GBV on women are not addressed in this section.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)

SRHR is framed as a “right to self-determination” (p.10), and part of women’s ability to “participate in the economy and in social and political life” (p.10), but this section is otherwise ‘conflict-blind’[[1]](#footnote-1).

Economic and social rights

The section on economic and social rights in GAP III addresses conflict contexts only tangentially:

* The section on economic empowerment addresses the specific needs of “migrant women” (p.12), but not those of women in conflict-affected situations.
* The section on gender equality in education only alludes to conflict as part of “crisis-affected contexts” (p.14), and highlights the importance of “education for peace and protection” (p.14).
* The section on promoting universal access to health does not address health-related needs in conflicts, but alludes to “disruptions to access to care” (p.15) in the context of COVID-19.

Equal participation and leadership

The importance of women’s participation and leadership in conflict contexts is recognized, both to reduce the general likelihood of violence and political inequalities which lead to conflicts, but also to increase women’s active participation in peace processes:

* This section notes that women’s increased participation in leadership in the public and private sphere lowers the “incidence of state-perpetrated violence” (p.15), but that “women continue to be under-represented as voters, political leaders and elected officials, as official peace negotiators and mediators (p.15).
* Action points include the promotion of “an enabling and safe environment” for (*inter alia*) “women’s human rights defenders, peacebuilders” (p.16).

Green transition

The section on the green transition in GAP III alludes to the specificities of “fragile situations” and “the specific needs and roles of indigenous women” (p.18), but is otherwise ‘conflict-blind’.

However, this section echoes some language also found in WPS documents:

* While women play an “essential role” for climate change mitigation and adaptation, they are too often “prevented from participating equally in related governance processes” (p.18).
* The action points to strengthen women’s participation in the green transition mirror those often used to support women’s participation in peace processes, such as support to women’s networks, capacity-building, financies and support for investment in gender-responsive programmes (p.19).

Digital transformation

The section on digital transformation in GAP III alludes to the importance of “protecting human rights” through digitalisation, and ensuring a “safe and secure cyberspace” (p.20), but is otherwise ‘conflict-blind’.

It is also highlighted that progress on gender equality and women’s empowerment can be accelerated through improved access to digital technologies in a number of areas, including “education, employment, entrepreneurship and preventing and combatting gender-based violence” (p.19).

1. The lack of explicit awareness of the specific challenges and needs of people living in conflict contexts is what we have called ‘conflict blindness’. The opposite would be a conflict-*sensitive* approach, acknowledging the specific challenges, risks and opportunities presented by working in and on conflict contexts to better promote gender equality. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)