

Integrating the EU Gender Action Plan 2020-2025 into the EU's renewed partnership with the Southern Neighborhood - A New Agenda for the Mediterranean

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Executive summary:

Considering the intersectionality and diversity of inequalities women face in the southern Mediterranean region, the EU GAP III is a handy plan that adds intersectional and transformative approaches to gender equality through foreign policy. However, integrating the GAP III approaches into the EU's external relations, such as the New Agenda for the Mediterranean, remains a challenge resulting from the deficiency of including CSOs, women's rights and feminist groups from the region in policy dialogue and programming. Thus, this policy brief combines a literature review with participatory interviews with the relevant groups to formulate concrete recommendations for the integration of the GAP III approaches into the New Agenda for the Mediterranean, such as supporting the establishment of residents' assemblies, adapting gender rapid analysis in granting criteria, supporting the establishment of digital platforms for dialogue such as Decidim, integrating the gender indicators from the first report by the Intergovernmental Monitoring Mechanism on Gender Equality for the UFM into the "Economic and Investment Plan for the Southern Neighbours" while adding the impact of gender equality on socio-economic development, supporting social media advocacy that includes diaspora feminist groups, and adding a decolonial approach through concrete practices such as investing in a decolonial participatory research about the history of gender equality and sexual rights in the region and to sensitize the language in international cooperation.

Introduction:

Bringing women's rights and feminist approaches into foreign policies brought controversial views between scepticism and support. Yet, women who face intersectional layers of marginalization in the Mediterranean region must be fully engaged in all aspects of international cooperation, which feminist foreign policies, such as the EU's Gender Action Plan III, 2020-2025 (GAP III), are calling for. According to the factsheets published by EuroMed Rights (2023), women in the Mediterranean region are subjected to intersectional discrimination based on ethnicity, socio-economic background, sexual orientation, disability, and age. These intersectional aspects of discrimination require an intersectional approach to policies. Thus, it is promising to have the third EU action plan on gender, which brings strategies for transformative and intersectional changes towards gender equality through foreign policies in addition to the human-rights-based approach in the previous plan. The newly added approaches, specifically to the policy dialogue and programming, require a transformative approach to evaluation and

monitoring, which is essential for intersectionality. Published research indicates the challenges to implementing feminist foreign policies in practice and the need for more effective, inclusive, and rapid tools for monitoring and evaluation where CSOs, feminist groups and women's rights groups take ownership of the process, which is vital for the implementation of GAP III (Teevan, 2021), yet, the question remains of how to achieve this promising vision in practice?

As part of its external relations, the EU launched the new Agenda for the Mediterranean in 2021, and it emphasized mainstreaming gender across cooperation programmes and target actions in line with the GAP III. The GAP III consists of three approaches: a gender-transformative approach, an approach that addresses intersectionality and an approach based on human rights, while the new Agenda for the Mediterranean focuses on five policy areas: Human development, good governance, and the rule of law; Resilience, prosperity, and digital transition; Peace and security; Migration and mobility; Green transition: Climate resilience, energy, and environment. Thus, through desk research and participatory interviews with CSOs working in the southern Mediterranean region, this policy brief focuses on the three approaches of GAP III and how they should be better integrated into practice through the five policy areas in the EU's renewed partnership with the southern neighbourhood, the new Agenda for the Mediterranean.

Challenges and opportunities for the integration of GAP III into the five policy areas in the EU's New Agenda for the Mediterranean

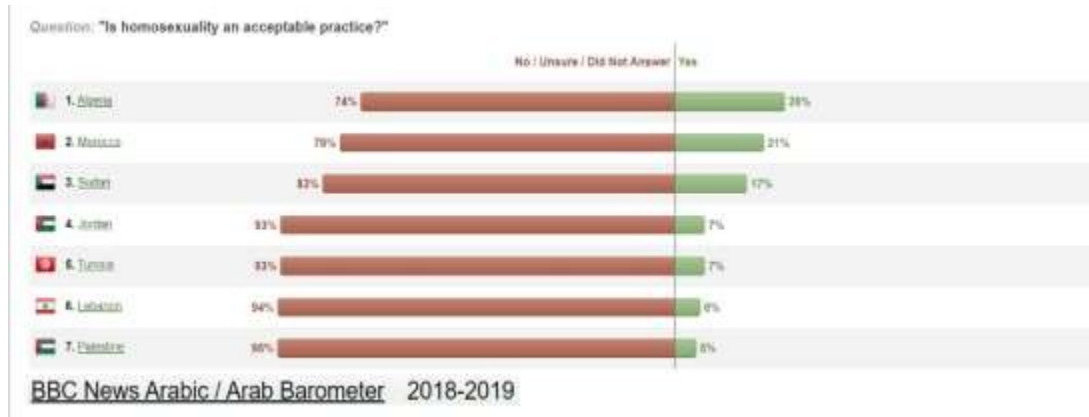
Based on desk research and literature review, the challenges and opportunities of integrating the three approaches of GAP III into the five policy areas of the new Agenda for the Mediterranean are as follows:

- Women's political presence varies between countries and within countries in the Southern Mediterranean region. Yet, for example, in Arab Mediterranean countries, despite the quota systems and the differences between countries, women are still less present in institutional politics than men (Moghadam, 2020). Hence, women are not equally included in green and environmental policy-making. Gender inequality in political representation leads to a gender-blind dialogue. The gender gap in political representation is also linked to social causes. Therefore, focusing only on numeric data on women's presence in politics will dismiss the transformative approach for a long-term change in GAP III.

Further, the demographic diversity within and between countries in the Mediterranean makes it hard to achieve intersectional politics in the green transition. For example, women in rural areas working in precarious agricultural jobs in Tunisia face multilayers of discrimination between social and legal causes (Mubarak, 2022). These intersectional forms of discrimination challenge empowerment programs that aim to link personal empowerment to advocacy in changing legal structures.

- The GAP III emphasizes that it should be read alongside the EU LGBTIQ+ equality strategy. Yet, the new Agenda for the Mediterranean overlooked LGBTIQ+ rights while

addressing mainstreaming gender across cooperation programmes and target actions. In several southern Mediterranean countries, the LGBTIQ+ community and its allies face legal and social discrimination and harassment (EqualDex, 2023). Through the new Agenda for the Mediterranean, the EU offers tools for creating a cross-sectoral dialogue between government, private sectors and CSOs, which is vital to streaming gender into all aspects of policies. Yet, LGBTIQ+ rights are overlooked with the excuse of being a "sensitive topic." Indeed, public opinion on LGBTIQ+ is not supportive in different countries in the southern Mediterranean region, as illustrated in the graph below, yet this should not be an excuse to neglect human rights.



- The history of colonization in the Mediterranean region brings doubts towards feminist foreign policies. The German Feminist Development Policy, which is based on the EU's GAP III, explicitly addressed the legacies of colonization and how they contributed to the current intersectional inequalities, including gender inequalities in former colonies. Yet, in GAP III, colonialization is not addressed. Previous studies showed that addressing the colonial legacies rather than overlooking them will assist in achieving better-integrated societies based on the concept of partnership to break free from the fictitious "clash of civilizations" (Kapazoglou & Goris, 2022). It is not enough to address colonization but to explicitly include a decolonial approach next to the three approaches already included in the GAP III. This decolonial approach should explicitly support concrete decolonial actions such as decolonial research that highlights the effects of colonization that contributed to the build-up of intersectional inequalities in former colonies. This may combat counter-narratives that connect feminist groups and feminist foreign policy to neo-colonialization.
- The type and amount of data to monitor and evaluate the implementation of GAP III are mainly focused on numerical data. Qualitative data is essential to measure and monitor a transformative change. The mid-term report of GAP III will incorporate qualitative data in 2023, and this is essential for tangible monitoring and evaluation. The diverse demography in and between countries in the southern Mediterranean region requires a constant inclusive measure for monitoring and evaluation and to better understand power

dynamics which directly and indirectly impact gender equality in partner countries (Teevan, 2021). GAP III applies the Development Assistance Committee, DAC gender marker, a gender equality scoring system. Significant (marked 1) means that gender equality is an important objective but not the principal reason for undertaking the action, while principal (marked 2) implies that gender equality is the main objective. These indicators should be visually integrated into the programming process of the new Agenda for the Mediterranean to provide accessible knowledge to CSOs who aim to monitor gender mainstreaming in their work for sustainable development.

- Cultures are fluid and change over time, as well as gender inequalities and power dynamics. Therefore, bureaucratic slow institutional reporting and monitoring remains challenging for a transformative change where by the time a report is published, it may become inaccurate to the current situation. Therefore the GAP III and the new Agenda should employ rapid tools for monitoring and evaluation. For example, gender rapid analysis is a tool that humanitarian organizations have developed, and it manifests a potential as a time- efficient tool that produces accessible knowledge not only in programming but also as a prerequisite in the granting criteria. The gender rapid analysis mechanism is valuable because it mainly focuses on qualitative data and is led by grassroots and local groups; therefore, it is based on intersectionality and in-depth analysis beyond statistical data (Quay, 2019).
- The "Economic and Investment Plan for the Southern Neighbors," which is part of the EU's Agenda for the Mediterranean, can integrate the gender indicators which were used in the first report by the Intergovernmental Monitoring Mechanism on Gender Equality for the Union for the Mediterranean released in March 2022 (UFM, 2022). As illustrated in the graph from UFM below, these accessible monitoring reports and tools may benefit CSOs working on socio-economic development and with limited access to quantitative and qualitative sex and gender-segregated data.



Source, UFM 2022

- Statelessness is an essential gendered issue in several countries in the southern Mediterranean region. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2022), by the end of 2022, the Middle East and North Africa hosted 370,300 stateless persons. Stateless women and girls experience gender-related barriers such as domestic violence, social repressive norms, and child marriage. At the same time, gender discrimination in nationality laws is a root cause of childhood statelessness (UNHCR, 2019). Policy dialogue is an important element in the new Agenda for the Mediterranean with tools that support intersectional dialogue between governments, CSOs and private sectors for inclusive policy making. Citizens' assemblies are important tools for policy dialogue across the Mediterranean region as well as within countries. Yet, the concept of citizenship is discriminatory and connects to different gender and socio-economic forms of discrimination.

Reflections on challenges and problems of integrating the GAP III in the new Agenda for the Mediterranean from the perspective of CSOs:

The interviewed CSOs that benefited from programs under the framework of the Neighborhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe (NDICI) addressed the following challenges and problems for integrating the GAP III into the new Agenda for the Mediterranean:

- The EU streamed gender-responsive budgeting in partner countries' profiles in a joint action with local groups and local authorities, which is important in bridging the gender gaps within the partner country. Yet, CSOs working in the southern Mediterranean region addressed the challenge that women's rights groups are usually referred to in Arab southern Mediterranean countries by counter groups as a "Western agenda." This can be linked to the history of colonization. The GAP III and the new Agenda for the Mediterranean do not address a decolonial approach, which contributes to the problem.
- Language is essential in re-balancing the power dynamics in international cooperation, and it needs further sensitization. For example, different scholars proposed using the expression "reparations" instead of "development" in international development cooperation to achieve efficacy in the discourse on inequalities (Lukka, 2020). Women's rights and feminist movements in the southern Mediterranean region need a decolonial language in international cooperation.
- International cooperation to exchange good practices between the north and south of the Mediterranean is beneficial to CSOs working on gender mainstreaming in the southern Mediterranean region. Yet, inequalities between the North and South regarding visa procedures and freedom of movement remain challenging for this cooperation.
- Non-governmental organizations that benefited from EU-funded programs address the challenges of finding sex and gender-segregated data that are intersectional to integrate into their proposals. They also addressed the challenges of following up with bureaucratic procedures and requirements of evaluation and procedures by the EU institutions.

- Social division regarding LGBTIQ+ rights across the Mediterranean is challenging, yet it may also create an opportunity for dialogue. To include cultural and religious leaders in dialogue is essential but not feasible due to the lack of safe spaces for dialogue.
- Endorsing tools that empower social dialogue through existing entities, such as the Citizens Assembly of the Mediterranean or the Maydan Association of Mediterranean Citizens, is essential in advocating for women and gender equality in the southern Mediterranean region. Yet, the word citizen is an exclusionary word by itself, considering stateless persons with limited citizenship rights due to their ethnicity or gender.
- Limitations on freedom of speech and the lack of free media advocacy tools challenge dialogue on human rights and gender equality in the region.

Policy recommendations

- Integrate the DAC gender marker as a monitoring mechanism in all five policy areas in the EU's renewed partnership with the Southern Neighborhood - A new agenda for the Mediterranean.
- Support the establishment of residents' assemblies as efficient tools for policy dialogue where stateless people can participate democratically in policy dialogue regardless of their citizenship status.
- Integrate the gender indicators from the first report by the Intergovernmental Monitoring Mechanism on Gender Equality for the UFM into the "Economic and Investment Plan for the Southern Neighbours", which is part of the EU's Agenda for the Mediterranean. And add indicators about the impact of gender equality on economic development; this will help to generate intersectional and rapid data that are helpful for CSOs to mainstream gender equality in the work on socio-economic development in the region.
- Integrate a decolonial approach along with the gender-transformative and intersectional approaches in GAP III and integrate it further into the new Agenda for the Mediterranean by:
 1. Address and acknowledge the impact of colonization on the accumulation of intersectional inequalities, including gender inequalities in former colonies. **The GAP III should address colonization as the German Feminist Development Policy did.**
 2. Revise language in international development cooperation through decolonial linguistic research, which includes feminist and women's rights groups. For example, replacing development with "reparations" can assist women's rights and feminist groups combating inequalities in the southern Mediterranean region.
 3. Invest in research that decolonizes the history of gender and sexual rights in the southern Mediterranean region. Going through colonization legacies in policy dialogue is essential to address the power dynamics between countries and within the partner country. Adapting a decolonial approach into GAP III and integrating this into the new Agenda for the Mediterranean should support decolonial research about

gender and sexual minorities' rights in the southern Mediterranean region. For example, a decolonial approach should support research on the history of gender and sexual minority rights in Egypt and how colonization enabled the accumulation of social stigmas and legal discrimination against female belly dancers and homosexuality (Shadeedi, 2021).

- Include the tool of gender rapid analysis as part of granting criteria, which is beneficial as both an initiating and monitoring tool for gender mainstreaming in programming. The tool assists with the transformative approach in GAP III due to its accessibility and reliance on qualitative data, engagement of local organizations and rapidity considering cultures as fluid and changing constantly and contextually. Considering that socio-cultural structures are both fluid and the leading cause of reproducing inequalities, the gender rapid analysis may also be employed as an up-to-date monitoring system to ensure the no-harm principles in international cooperation in the Mediterranean region¹.
- Support social media advocacy for dialogue that acknowledges and delivers the voice of LGBTIQ+ organizations and advocacy groups in the southern Mediterranean region, including diaspora LGBTIQ+ organizations. Social dialogue and awareness play a critical role in ending the exclusion of LGBTIQ+ rights under the excuse of "sensitivity". Media advocacy such as the "*Shababtalk*", which is a youth-oriented talk show produced by Deutsche Welle, is an example where the Arab LGBTIQ+ diaspora plays a crucial role in awareness raising with an impact which social media interactions can measure.
- Support the creation of digital platforms such as Decidim for democratic dialogue to channel the voices of feminist and LGBTIQ+ diaspora groups from the southern Mediterranean region in the policy dialogue of Human development, good governance, and the rule of law. Including religious liberal leaders in policy dialogue is essential to advocate for LGBTIQ+ rights in the region. Action plans for policy dialogue on democracy and the role of law in the new Agenda for the Mediterranean should employ tools that create spaces for engaging regional and local LGBTIQ+ organizations in active and safe dialogue.

¹ The do no harm principle is being aware of how our actions in international cooperation may reproduce or reinforce existing gender inequalities.

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