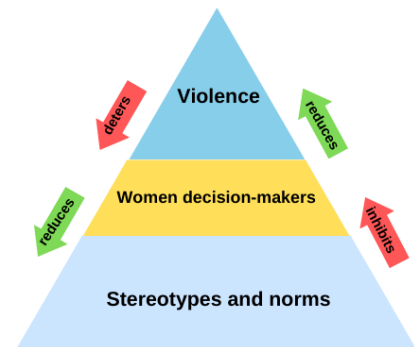


GAP III: supporting women in decision-making

As a democracy support network, the European Partnership for Democracy and its members believe the EU plays an important role globally in the advancement of gender equality. The EU Gender Action Plan II 2016-2020 (GAP II) paved the way for EU action on women's voice and participation, with its focus on political and civic rights. The Gender Action Plan III 2021-2025 (GAP III) will need to build on these efforts and focus on some of the issues overlooked in the GAP II, including the role of women in media, political parties, parliaments and democratic processes.

Changing gender stereotypes and discriminatory social norms is fundamental to any sustained change in favour of gender equality. When people associate leadership with male ideals and don't hold male politicians to the same standards to which they hold women, this undermines women's essential role in decision-making and political processes. This in turn mutes women's voices, experiences and perspectives in policy and legislation and deprioritises initiatives to protect women's basic rights, such as the right to live free from violence and harassment. The EU needs to focus its efforts on all three levels advancing and protecting women's indisputable role in decision-making, the need to dismantle damaging stereotypes and norms, and the urgency of removing violence and harassment from the lives of women and girls.



Social norms & stereotypes

Gender stereotypes and discriminatory social norms form the basis for all limitations on women's equal access to full participation in public life, including political decision-making. Fighting these stereotypes and norms should therefore be fundamental to all objectives the GAP III aims to achieve. Treating gender inequality necessitates extending a hand to men and boys, who are frequently in a privileged position in terms of access to formal authority but who can also be important allies for equality.

Priority areas of action:

- **Collect and publish data on gender stereotypes and discriminatory social norms**, supported by research on gender orders and relations.
- Support gender sensitive public policies, strategies and sector reforms.
- **Work in an inclusive way with communities** in achieving gender equality and in challenging gender stereotypes and social norms at all levels and in all environments
- **Raise awareness about gender stereotypes and discriminatory social norms** through culture and public communication campaigns, and by integrating changes in education systems.
- **Involve political party leaders** to prioritise internal work to address gender norms and stereotypes which excludes women in political parties.
- **Work with media**, including by promoting inclusive spaces for women in social networks, advertisements, pop culture, and involving influential feminist figures; as well as promoting male gender championship.
- Increase support and lobbying for **advocacy campaigns** that champion the disruption of gender roles, gender orders through challenging, re-thinking, and re-branding conventional discourses of traditional masculine and feminine concepts.
- Promote **positive and healthy masculinity** over toxic masculinity by showcasing and marketing alternative male role models that are relatable in the local contexts dealt with.
- Foster a worldwide active **dialogue on different root causes** for why gender roles and patriarchal systems are in place, and the implications of this.

Women's leadership and participation

Women exercise leadership everyday often in informal settings where it is largely unrecognised. When it comes to positions of formal authority, women's representation decreases as the level of office increases. For example, only 24% of parliamentary seats in the world are occupied by women. Yet there is ample evidence of the benefits for the whole of society from women's political leadership. Advancing women's participation in decision-making means that policy and legislation are not only more inclusive and representative but are also more likely to lead to better outcomes for all of society.

Better policy: Women policy-makers are more likely to prioritise investments in health, education and infrastructure – key economic drivers that form the foundation of social infrastructure and determine a society's level of resilience to crises. Extensive research into the 2008 banking crisis and recent peace and security efforts demonstrated that higher levels of gender equality in decision-making lead to better risk management, greater resilience and more stable conflict transformation processes.

Stronger democratic institutions & processes: Women's political leadership also improves the credibility of democratic institutions and levels of citizen trust in government, which is perceived to be more responsive to constituency needs when

women are present. This can also result in better avenues for engagement with underrepresented groups and communities, who feel that elected women representatives are often better placed to handle their concerns. These gains also require regular engagement with civil society organisations, community groups and grassroots organisations, which often comes with women's political leadership.

Political parties hold a unique position in the functioning of democratic systems and therefore have an inherent responsibility to ensure their **internal structures are inclusive and representative**. This goes beyond the use of quota systems or women-only shortlists and requires parties to intervene in controlling the costs of competing in elections, to reform internal decision-making processes that are exclusive or unnecessarily combative, and to dismantle practices built around biases that favour men's economic activities and schedules. Political parties also have a responsibility to integrate women's voices in all policies areas, including those in which women are less likely to be represented such as finance, defence and security.

In the survey we identified a number of priority areas, including support to women CSOs, working with and through media, working through civic education, supporting legislation and strategies in the private sector, and creating spaces and networks for women. In addition to that, we recommend supporting political parties in the following 3 ways:

Priority areas of action for political parties:

- **Capacity-building and internal party reforms:** Combining technical support for institutional reforms in the parties, like party bylaws, quotas and women's wings, with direct support to women through training sessions and mentoring.
- **Gender audits:** The EU should support parties to carry out gender audits in order to improve party by-laws and increase the participation of women in the party structures and decide whether this is best done through women's wings, earmarked funding, or quotas.
- **Policy-development:** The EU should support political parties - in a non-partisan way - in capacity-building on developing policies for an enabling environment for gender equality and improvement of the women's living conditions, as well as their representation and influence in society. Such support may also raise awareness on the advantages of women's inclusion for political parties.

Ending gender-based violence & harassment

Access to justice: Victims of gender-based violence require special support and protection measures that help ensure their access to justice. It is critical that the EU ensures that measures to protect the fundamental rights of women and girls, such as the Victim's Rights Directive, are implemented fully throughout the EU. In addition to ensuring access to justice, it is critical the EU puts in place mechanisms to support victims and survivors from gender-based violence and their children with shelters, financial aid mechanisms, education and work.

Violence against women and girls in politics: In the last decade, there has been a marked increase in levels of political activity among women. While this is good news, it has also been met with higher levels of violence and backlash against this activism. As women's participation in politics grows, it is essential that steps are taken to ensure their right to effective representation and activism takes place in a safe and enabling environment.

In addition to considering legislation that criminalises acts or threats of violence, abuse and harassment against women in politics, political parties must take action to remove hostile and even violent practices from their political playbooks that go beyond the 'rough and tumble of politics'. Politics is meant to be an arena in which disagreement can and should take place, but democracies are designed to remove violence from this calculus, not foster it. Legislative and policy responses must consider violence and abuse in all its forms, including online violence.

Priority areas of action:

- Support **legislative measures** to penalise all sexual and gender-based violence and to protect victims;
- Develop **data collection and research** aimed at identifying the root causes, prevalence, consequences or costs of sexual and gender-based violence in different contexts;
- Support information and **awareness-raising** campaigns;
- Strengthen **access to justice and quality support services** for victims / survivors of violence;
- Address **violence and harassment in the world of work**, including politics as a place of work. In this context, cooperate and work closely with political parties to address barriers to accessing and moving up the ladder of politics.

Increasing the impact of EU action

We believe the following principles should guide GAP III in both its conception and implementation stages:

- **Contextualisation:** All EU action should be context-specific and adapted to the reality and needs of the partners. The EU should allow for flexible and adaptive programmes, so that project partners can improve and amend the suggested actions to respond to local needs and circumstances in a timely manner.
- **Localisation:** Harness local expertise through liaising with national and local organisations that are representative and inclusive of all possible hidden and formal relevant stakeholder dynamics.
- **Mutual learning:** Place honesty on the EU's own mixed track record on gender equality at the centre. The EU could develop a playbook with strategies used in Europe and the way they have worked out in practice – positively and negatively.