OUR AIM

Recognising that empowering women can significantly reduce poverty through increased production, rising household incomes, and improved child health and education levels, the European Union firmly supports gender equality and empowerment of women worldwide.

The EU formally committed to promote these values in 2000 when it joined 189 world leaders in a pledge to achieve the eight Millennium Development Goals by 2015 at the United Nations Millennium Summit.

The third Millennium Development Goal is: Promote gender equality and empower women. By integrating this goal into its development policy and practice, the EU has made significant advances in achieving its global gender equality objectives since 2000.

Gender equality policies are vital for economic growth, prosperity and competitiveness. Gender equality, human rights and the empowerment of women and girls are essential preconditions for equitable and inclusive sustainable development, as well as important values and objectives in themselves.

The EU is striving to meet its gender equality targets by 2015 but, in recognition that further advances still need to be made after 2015, is currently involved in global discussions on a new development agenda. The fruit of these discussions will be a globally-agreed, ambitious framework that addresses poverty eradication and sustainable development, and ensures a decent life for all by 2030.

In the post 2015 global agenda, the EU supports a stand-alone goal to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.
Gender

Fact sheet

HOW WE WORK

The EU delivers aid to fulfil the third Millennium Development Goal through various programmes which include support to:

- women’s political participation, for example, in facilitating their contribution in peace- and state-building processes.

- Improving the economic and social status of women, by promoting equal rights for women and men – for instance, inheritance and property rights – and by ensuring that women have control over and access to resources.

Gender equality is financed by the EU through:

- Geographical instruments: for example, the European Development Fund, the Development Cooperation Instrument and the European Neighbourhood & Partnership Instrument at national and regional levels.

EU SUPPORT ON GENDER EQUALITY: CHANGING PEOPLE’S LIVES

India

In India, child marriage is illegal. Nevertheless, 47% of India’s women currently aged 20–24 were married before the legal age of 18. In poor regions, such as the north-western state of Rajasthan, the problem is particularly acute with families put under enormous social and economic pressure to defy the law. More than half of girls there are married by age 18.

With EU support, four state-wide action plans on child marriage have been established, leading to community-led awareness raising and large-scale media coverage in favour of ending child marriage.

Shumi Akhter is a teenage girl living in the north of India. Aged 13 she was told by her father and uncle that she would be married to her cousin. Bravely, she decided to say ‘no’ to the arranged marriage.

Her mother supported her and stopped the marriage against her husband’s will. The EU-funded Kishori Abhijan-Empowerment of Adolescents Project helped to support them during this difficult time.

“In the Kishori club I learned about early marriage, child rights, HIV/Aids, etc. I am thankful that I could get away from all this safely. I will take my own decisions when I grow up. No one can force decisions on me,” said Shumi.

One action saw UNICEF take part in a visit in 2012 of prominent world leaders from The Elders to India to discuss strategies for accelerating child marriage abandonment through the ‘Girls Not Brides’ partnership. The project also supported formative research in India, carried out by the International Center for Research on Women, on the social norms that uphold child marriage and pre-natal sex selection in India.

Four states in India have also combined state action plans for the application of the Child Prohibition Act with significant community-led awareness raising and mobilisation, and media coverage in favour of ending child marriage.

Burkina Faso

In recent years, with rising poverty levels and the subsequent breakdown of intergenerational solidarity that poverty can bring, many women – most of them elderly – have been accused of practising witchcraft by their communities in Burkina Faso and excluded from them.

A common pretext for banishing women who are considered biologically and economically non-productive within the community is to blame them for deaths within the community. Women who stand accused of witchcraft receive no support – either legal or psychological – in Burkina Faso and have no option but to leave their community.

In the town and district of Bokin in north-central Burkina Faso, an EU-funded project spent three years working on lifting the taboo surrounding witchcraft by encouraging debates on the matter between villagers and local authorities.
As a result, many now recognise that those who stand accused of witchcraft are always women, never men, and understand better the link between poor hygiene and sanitation with deaths in the community. More than 450 women excluded from their communities received psychosocial support from the project and 72 women who stood accused of witchcraft were followed up individually by the project. Four women were even successfully reintegrated into their community.

Ethiopia

Violence against women and girls is often encountered among communities where women have limited economic resources; are traditionally viewed as having a social status that is inferior to their male counterparts’ and are uninformed about their legal rights in relation to protection from and the penalisation of acts of violence committed against them. These acts most commonly take the form of rape, abduction and domestic violence.

In certain parts of Ethiopia, gender-based violence is commonplace. As a result, the EU funded an innovative action by Ethiopia’s Fekat Circus to promote awareness of the consequences of gender-based violence through the medium of its colourful, interactive circus and theatre performance in the central squares and open markets of Debre Markos, Gondar, Bahar Dar, Axum, Adwa, Maychew and Lalibela.

An estimated 10,000 people enjoyed and took part in the Fekat Circus troupe’s performances, which transmitted its gender-based violence message through a provocative play that invited members of the audience on stage to comment and discuss how the story should end.

Indonesia

After the 2004 tsunami, thousands of female former soldiers sidelined by Aceh’s peace process received business start-up packages and played a full part in the region’s economic recovery, thanks to an EU project.

Some 2,000 female former fighters received EU aid in the form of an NGO-run livelihood programme. Former fighters were identified after a door-to-door campaign covering an area larger than the Netherlands and Luxembourg combined. Many women were found living far apart in remote areas.

Asmanidar, 32, is a former female fighter who benefitted from an EU-funded project in her area. She became a commander in the resistance ten years ago. Like many former female fighters, she was left out of the initial phase of reintegration. Then, a few years ago, Asmanidar started looking after her neighbour’s goats.

Thanks to the EU project, Asmindar was able to buy her own goats. Today her three children and eight goats spring around her feet. “All three of my children are a handful,” she said. “But for their sake I want to be a successful goat trader, maybe next time you come here I will be a goat trading boss and have 80 goats instead of eight.”
Female genital mutilation

An innovative EU and UNICEF project helped thousands of families, communities and countries to change attitudes and end harmful traditional practices like female genital mutilation/cutting in Africa. As a result of education and awareness-raising undertaken by the project, girls in thousands of communities in Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Senegal and Sudan are no longer subjected to this practice.

In Senegal, where 28% of women aged 15-49 have undergone female genital mutilation/cutting, astonishing progress was made. In just under a decade, more than 5,300 communities abandoned the practice, bringing the country close to becoming the first in the world to declare total abandonment, expected by 2015.

In Egypt, where 91% of women are affected by the practice, the project also made some progress, with female genital mutilation/cutting becoming less common amongst younger age groups. The number of families signing up to the abandonment of the practice also increased substantially: from 3,000 in 2007 to 17,772 in 2011. In Ethiopia, despite high prevalence rates, the practice is similarly declining - between 2000 and 2005 rates dropped from 80% to 74%.

The project helped to raise awareness of the dangers of female genital mutilation/cutting, by encouraging large-scale community discussions and national debate on issues of human rights, as well as collective decision-making through extended social networks about gender norms. This method resulted in communities coming together for district-wide public declarations of the abandonment of these practices.