



Ministry for Foreign
Affairs of Finland

Evaluation of the Finnish Development Policy Influencing in the European Union

Thematic brief – Gender equality

Introduction

Background on links with Finland's development cooperation on gender equality



The first development policy priority area of Finland is about the rights and status of women and girls, focusing on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), on gender-based violence (GBV)¹ and the right of persons with disabilities.

Gender equality is also an MFA cross-cutting objective². It is implemented via its twin- and triple-track approach, including targeted action, mainstreaming and political advocacy.

EU key events in the context of gender equality



The key events and opportunities for influencing EU development policy and cooperation on gender equality over the evaluation period were:

- The drafting of the 2017 European Consensus on Development
- The preparation and adoption of GAP II (2015) and III (2020)
- The Finnish 2019 EU Presidency (focus on GAP II Annual report)
- The NDICI negotiation, and since 2021, NDICI implementation, and
- The Post-Cotonou negotiations and partnership with Africa.

In addition, key influencing also occurred during work on the Commission Council Conclusions on Team Europe (2021) and the NDICI global programmes. There was also influencing at country level through the work with the EUDs and other Member States (MS).

1 Gender-Based violence refers to harmful acts directed at an individual based on their gender. These can include acts that inflict physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering, threats of such acts and coercion.

2 See MFA (2020b).

Finland's influencing objectives on gender equality



Finland promoted a higher allocation of EU development funding to gender equality and SRHR and aimed to increase the number of likeminded (LM) countries in this aspect.

Finland aimed to strengthen the gender equality / SRHR language wherever and whenever possible (with 2017 European Consensus on Development as a benchmark).

Finland promoted a gender transformative approach to be included in the EU Gender Action Plan (GAP) III, as well as its implementation and promotion as an intersectional approach³ in EU development policy.

Promoting gender equality was also a priority under Finland's Presidency, and, together with the likeminded countries, Finland aimed to advance gender equality and the rights of women and girls in the post-Cotonou negotiations.

Finland advanced in the EU the acknowledgement that COVID-19 has affected women and men differently and advances the COVID-19 related action on GBV.

Finland's influencing activities and achievements

Activities and Outputs



Overall:

Finland has taken full advantage of various influencing channels to reiterate its position on gender equality and SRHR, for which Finland is perceived by other MS as playing a leading and visible role (along with other Nordic countries), describing gender equality as part of Finland's brand. Based on interviews MFA and EU interviews, the key influencing activities during the evaluation period include:

- Working with the **European Commission (EC)**, Finland has sent written gender equality/SRHR comments on various EC proposals, notably on the European Consensus, GAP II and III, post-Cotonou, specific programmes and the technical expert working group on HRBA.
- Finland has actively participated in the informal **gender expert group** led by the Commission, "held the pen" in the development of GAP texts, and recently, led the establishment of the gender transformative approach (GTA) sub-group.
- Finnish delegates have actively promoted the gender equality agenda during **Council discussions** in preparatory working groups. Apart from the GAP, this includes for other Council Conclusions that focus on development cooperation areas, starting with the NDICI and for instance the water conclusions in 2021⁴ (language related to a "transformative approach that addresses the root causes of gender inequalities") and expressing their wish to adopt stronger gender language in the council conclusions on Team Europe.

³ Intersectionality refers to the ways in which systems of inequality based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, class and other forms of discrimination "intersect" to create unique discrimination dynamics and effects.

⁴ Council Conclusions on Water in the EU's External Action, 19 November 2021 (Ref. 14108/21)

- Finland has actively contributed to gender discussions during the **EU development policy LM group**, with additional steps to influence the EU. This includes: the 2017 joint LM states letter to EU Development Commissioner Mimica asking them to allocate additional funding to cover the SRHR funding gap; being part of lobbying for stronger language in the 2017 Consensus that would reflect the level of the UN 1995 Beijing Declaration; the 2018 coordination of the drafting of a joint like-minded states paper on how to include gender equality in the NDICI; and with the other LM States, pushing the Commission to send internal instructions to EUDs on how to integrate GAP in programming.
- The negotiations on gender equality were extensive in the preparatory meetings/ visits to other EU capitals for the **Finnish Presidency of the EU**, notably with Germany. Preparatory visits were also very useful to build a solid partnership with the EC. Equally, during the Finnish Presidency, emphasis was placed on strengthening multi-lateral cooperation (UNFPA, UN Women, etc.) on SRHR.
- Gender equality has also been discussed in high-level dialogue, with Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) Ministers championing the cause. Strategic interpersonal influencing and missions have taken place via both formal and informal channels.

Emerging from the country case studies:

Gender equality and SRHR is a **high priority influencing objective for Finland also at country level**, as shown in the case study countries and broader Finland cooperation agenda. Finland is actively advancing the matter with EUDs at strategic, project and partner levels. Finland is particularly recognised for its specific focus areas on gender equality as well as its advanced methodology on the gender transformative approach.

Following the adoption of the GAP III in 2020, Finnish Embassies in case study countries have been actively involved in the **country-level strategies (CLIPs) and Multi-Annual Indicative Programmes (MIPs)**, pushing for gender transformative language.

The prioritisation of gender equality in **Finland's Presidency** was also evident at country level through activities and the influencing documented in the case study countries.

Outcomes



Overall:

Due to these efforts, the main outcomes during the evaluation period on gender equality and SRHR to which Finland contributed are:

- The language for gender equality / SRHR was strengthened in the 2017 European Consensus for Development and, prior to this, albeit to a more limited extent, in GAP II (2015).
- The language on gender transformative approach has been significantly strengthened under GAP III (2020).
- Council Conclusions on Gender Action Plan II annual report (with some reference to SRHR) were adopted by consensus during the Finnish Presidency (see Presidency Brief Section 4.3).
- Gender mainstreaming and funding targets are included in NDICI (see section 5 – Process brief on the NDICI negotiations).
- An EU gender transformative working group has been set up, due to Finland's influencing and coordination. The first meeting was held in April 2022.

- In contrast, Finland's objective to strengthen gender equality / SRHR language in post-Cotonou was not achieved, due to a hardening of some MS positions. A compromise solution was nonetheless found, by adding a reference to other international agreements (notably Cairo-Beijing agreements), which included similar SRHR commitments.

Due to these efforts, Finland is also perceived as having a transparent stance on gender equality, combined with a strong expertise, which makes it a high reputation partner on gender equality for the EU.

Emerging from the country case studies:

- EU and MS in case study countries acknowledge Finland's leading role in gender equality and social inclusion (GESI), particularly in some core areas and methodologies of it.
- Finland has successfully influenced EUDs to initiate activities on gender equality, based on Finland's success and long cooperation activities on the matter in particular countries. This is evident, for example, in the RVWRMP water project in Nepal (which benefitted mainly women) which the EUD joined as a co-donor thereby doubling the budget, as well as its facilitation of the partnership of the EUD in Tanzania with the Uongozi Institute that focuses on gender equality to initiate joint activities. Both outcomes were influenced by a long-standing Finnish in-country cooperation on the topic and with relevant partners. These successes have also led to further scale-up of opportunities within the same country and in other country cooperation programmes.
- Finland's significant role in the gender transformative approach of RVWRMP in Nepal was also recognised in Brussels. Finland's 'storytelling methodology' for monitoring attitudinal change has been used in a subsequent UN Women project to measure a transformative (behavioural and norm) change reflected in GAP III.

Conclusions on Finland's effective influencing

Significance of verified outcomes



Finland's success and reputation on gender equality make it a high-quality partner on the topic for the EU. This enables Finland to use further influencing opportunities in the future.

Finland has become the go-to partner also for country-level EUDs on the topic. Finland's examples of gender transformative approach in Nepal will form part of the guidance for the EU gender equality approach from the global level and provide indicators and evidence to support the EU's long-term operational efficiency in the gender transformative approach.

Contribution of external factors



Finland's influencing has benefited from its broad alignment with EC positions that include a similar thematic interest on gender equality. Gender equality was a priority under former DG DEVCO Commissioner Mimica and there is also an active push by other LM's MS (Sweden, Denmark). The existence of international agreements in line with Finland's priorities is also a supportive factor.

As a hindering factor, Council decisions require consensus or unanimous votes and some MS are opposed to wording in relation to gender identity and SRHR.

Conclusions on Finland's contribution



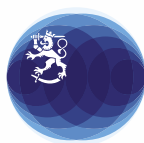
With their common gender equality focus on development cooperation, Finland and EU are good partners and both seek to advance GESI. Influencing, therefore, goes both ways, with one reinforcing the other and vice versa.

Finland's added value comes in the more ambitious gender transformative methodology to implement gender equality, as well as in certain specific parts of the GESI and its intersectional approach.

Coalition building / working with LM states has been a key part of Finland's overall approach. As has its ability to devote staff time and expertise to play a proactive role at the EU level. Facilitating an EU-level expert group takes time and a sustained effort.

Finland can influence through both HQ dialogue and country-level operations.

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For the full report, see [MFA's website](#).