Gender equality and women's empowerment: transforming the lives of girls and women through EU external relations 2016-2020

2017/2012(INI) - 07/05/2018 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Development Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality adopted the own-initiative report by Linda McAVAN (S&D, UK) and Dubravka ŠUICA (EPP, HR) on the implementation of the Joint Staff Working Document (SWD(2015)0182 - Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Transforming the Lives of Girls and Women through EU External Relations 2016-2020.

The fifth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG5) is to achieve gender equality and to empower all women and girls worldwide. SDG5 must be mainstreamed into the entire 2030 agenda so as to achieve progress across all SDGs and targets.

The original Gender Action Plan I (2010-2015) (GAP I) brought some progress, but was also marked by a number of shortcomings.

The new Gender Action Plan II 2016-2020 (GAP II) focuses on shifting EU institutional culture at headquarters and delegation levels in order to create a systemic change in how the EU approaches gender, as well as on transforming women's and girls' lives.

One year on since the adoption of GAP II, a number of positive trends have been noted. However, a number of challenges have been noted as regards the reporting and implementation of key priorities and gender-related SDGs and the monitoring of progress on all objectives, as well as in terms of mainstreaming gender into sector policy dialogue.

The GAP II has been produced in the form of a Joint Staff Working Document. The Commission is called on to demonstrate its firm commitment by **upgrading it into a future communication on gender equality**.

GAP II provides a comprehensive agenda that spans the entire EU foreign policy agenda, and welcomes in this regard the choice of **three thematic pillars**, namely:

- ensuring girls' and women's physical and psychological integrity,
- promoting the economic and social rights and the empowerment of girls and women, and
- strengthening girls' and women's voice and participation.

These pillars are intended to tackle the main factors and causes involved in discrimination and marginalisation. Members also noted the horizontal pillar consisting of shifting the institutional culture of the Commission’s services and the EEAS in order to more effectively deliver on the EU’s commitments to gender equality and women’s empowerment through the Union’s external relations.

The report pointed out that the chief contributory factors and causes leading to discrimination and marginalisation include: sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls, including harmful traditions such as child marriage and female genital mutilation.

Achievements of GAP II: Members welcomed the expansion of the gender action plan to all EU external services and to the Member States, and noted the progress in shifting EU institutional culture at

headquarters and delegation levels, which is key to strengthening the effectiveness of EU initiatives and their impact on gender equality.

Key recommendations for the Commission/EEAS: Members called for:

- further steps to facilitate **exchange of best practice** in improving gender equality and gender mainstreaming between delegations and units;
- the strengthening of the **human resource** capacity dedicated to gender mainstreaming within the Commission's services, through tailored **training** and reorganisation of existing structures and by taking on additional staff;
- the promotion and **mainstreaming** of the principle of equality between women and men by the EU in its external relations;
- the strengthening of EU Member State and international action through the UN in order to more effectively address the impact of conflict and post-conflict situations on women and girls;
- for a mechanism to be set up expressly for the purpose of monitoring and strengthening gender policy under trade agreements;
- efficiently implement targeted policies to facilitate women's access to leadership and managerial posts;

Funding: Members noted that adequate funding for gender equality in external relations will be necessary to sustain political commitment to this goal. They stressed that current funding for gender equality and women's empowerment actions remains inadequate and urged that this situation be reversed in the next MFF.

In particular, they called for a dedicated budget line on gender equality to be established in order to address in a more prominent way the level of political participation and representation of women, in the EU's neighbouring countries and within the EU.

Future reporting: Members underlined the need for a simplified method of reporting which keeps bureaucracy to a minimum. They called for future implementation reports to be finalised and released within a shorter timeframe and for the development of on-line reporting, clear templates and the issuing of a guidebook to facilitate the work of the delegations. Increased support should be given to local SMEs, especially to female entrepreneurs, via micro-loans, so as to enable them to gain from private sector-led growth. Members called for the improvement of data collection in order to enable a qualitative analysis of women's situation, for example regarding working conditions.