



The EU's bilateral cooperation with partner countries: What's REALLY in it for SRHR?

Key findings and recommendations

The EU's commitment to promote Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) is enforced in different policies and legally binding agreements, such as the EU Consensus for Development, the Samoa Agreement between the EU and the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS), various Action Plans such as the Gender Action Plan (GAP III), Youth Action Plan and Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy, and, more recently, the Global Health Strategy.

With this paper, the Countdown 2030 Europe consortium aims to better understand how EU support for SRHR is translated into concrete programmes and activities on the ground. Our paper is based on the analysis of the available Action Documents for the time span between 2021 and 2023 for EU's bilateral cooperation with partner countries in the sub-Saharan, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asian and Neighbourhood regions.

Key findings

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Sub-Saharan Africa is the region in which the EU invests the most in SRHR and its different components. Between 2021 and 2023, the EU allocated **almost 415 million EUR to programmes and projects**, as per the Action Documents, that have the potential to contribute to the advancement of SRHR. This derives from a total of 41 programmes identified during the analysis period. International organisations are the most common channels to advance SRHR in countries of that region. **Only 10%** from the total amounts that can potentially serve SRHR in sub-Saharan Africa **are channelled through Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)**.

When considering the alignment of these different programmes with what could have been expected from the presence (or absence) of SRHR-related references in the multiannual indicative programmes (MIPs) or the country level implementation plans (CLIPs) of GAP III, the following findings are interesting to note:

Programmes include SRHR as expected from the MIP	Burkina Faso, Burundi, Chad, DRC, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritania, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe
Programmes include SRHR despite lack of reference to SRHR in the MIP ... but with a reference in the CLIP	Angola, Benin, CAR, Eswatini, Namibia, Sao Tomé y Príncipe
There is no relevant SRHR programme yet - despite SRHR references in the MIP	Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Togo, Zambia
There is no relevant SRHR programme yet - despite SRHR references in the CLIP	Côte d'Ivoire

LATIN AMERICA AND CARIBBEAN

Between 2021 and 2023, the EU allocated over **20 million EUR to programmes, as per the Action Documents, that have the potential to advance SRHR** in Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) countries. This funding comes from nine EU programmes in the region. The focus in the region has been on the fight against sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

ASIA

The EU approved five programmes amounting to over **15 million EUR that can potentially benefit SRHR**, as per the Action Documents, in four Asian countries, namely Bangladesh, the Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka between 2021 and 2023.

NEIGHBOURHOOD

Between 2021 and 2023, the EU allocated almost **58 million EUR to programmes that have the potential to contribute to the advancement of SRHR** in the Neighbourhood countries, as per the available Action Documents. These funds come from 11 relevant programmes, all identified in 2021 and 2022. CSOs are given more predominance as a channel for implementation, in comparison to any other region: **about 40% of identified EU bilateral funding that have the potential to contribute to SRHR are expected to be delivered through CSOs.**

GLOBALLY

When considering all EU funding decisions already taken under the NDICI, as per the available Action Documents, the approved programmes in the four regions bring the **total amount of funding that has the potential to contribute to SRHR objectives to up to 508 million EUR.** However, contributing to SRHR will only become a reality if the **EU bilateral programmes are loyal to what the Action Documents describe and if the implementing entities safeguard the implementation of the relevant SRHR components.**

SRHR PROMOTED THROUGH SECTORS THAT ARE NOT 'USUAL SUSPECTS'

Our analysis shows that the EU continues to **support SRHR initiatives in traditional areas, such as health or good governance, but is also increasingly innovating by integrating SRHR-relevant components in sectoral priorities that are not 'usual suspects'.** Given the multi-dimensional nature of SRHR, such approaches of integrated programming are of crucial importance not only because they offer different entry points for SRHR but also, importantly, because it reflects a more holistic way of addressing SRHR from different perspectives.

If we refer to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), SDG 5 Gender equality and women's empowerment, 10 Reduced inequalities and 16 Peace, justice and strong institutions are the global Goals the EU refers to the most when reporting on SRHR-relevant projects. SDG 3 Good health and well-being surprisingly only ranks fifth among all selected programmes, again emphasising the **importance of approaching SRHR from different angles and integrating it with all relevant areas of cooperation rather than focusing only on 'usual suspects'.**

Below are some examples of the sectors through which SRHR is being promoted.



Health:

Between 2021 and 2023, the EU confirmed support to different health-focused programmes that include SRH as a sub-priority. Even if some of these projects also address children's health, they are particularly relevant to the overall SRHR agenda.



Good governance and gender equality:

The EU also confirmed new funding to programmes aiming to strengthen national governance towards SGBV survivors or to end harmful social norms that undermine sexual rights.



Green Deal:

Specific programme in Angola to provide education on reproductive health as a way to broaden training opportunities for girls and nurture their self-esteem.



Peace & Stability:

Programme in Gambia for capacity-building of the police force to address SGBV. Strengthen investigation and prosecution services to combat SGBV and to foster community protection from sexual violence in Nigeria.



Broader human development:

Supporting education reforms in Mozambique, including by preventing unintended pregnancies and early child marriage, as well as mainstreaming SRHR strategies for inclusive education.



Inclusive growth and jobs creation:

In Benin, creation of a one-stop shop for companies with the objective to prevent sexual harassment and the broader SGBV.

Recommendations

Our analysis shows that there could be a significant number of programmes contributing to SRHR. It also shows that there is room to integrate more SRHR actions in different sectors and, consequently, increase the amount of funds contributing to the SRHR agenda while also addressing SRHR in a more holistic way.

Countdown 2030 Europe calls on the EU and in particular the EU Delegations to:

1. Deliver on commitments made in the MIPs and the Action Documents

- **Focus on the implementation of identified bilateral programmes to ensure they actually deliver against their potential for SRHR.** The SRHR-related commitments in the Action Documents, even if not directly quantified, should be maintained, at a minimum.
- **Identify specific programmes for the foreseen SRHR commitments in the MIPs, especially where this has not been done yet.** Research for this paper shows that some MIPs that prioritise SRHR, or some of its components, do not have an approved SRHR-related programme yet. This should be addressed in the next years of programming, to avoid increased SRHR needs.

2. Allocate more funding to SRHR

Increasing funding is key if the EU is serious about its commitment to protect and promote rights and choice. This study has shown that it is possible to invest in SRHR, even where not prioritised by the MIPs, be it through geographic programmes or thematic funding lines. This is all the more relevant given the impact of recent global challenges on SRHR needs, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or high-scale conflicts. It is urgent to match the political commitment to SRHR with proportionate financial support.

- **Consider developing new actions targeting SRHR as a principal objective.** The mid-term review of the MIPs and the CLIPs offer opportunities to do so.

- **Keep innovating by mainstreaming more SRHR-related actions across relevant priority sectors of bilateral cooperation, including non-traditional sectors for SRHR:** the analysis identifies good practices where EU Delegations have adopted an integrated approach, considering SRHR alongside other non-traditional sectors such as the Green Deal. These innovative examples have the potential to be extremely impactful, thanks to their systemic, more holistic approach and should therefore be replicated in the different regions, as all countries can still improve in their SRHR key indicators.
- **Increased attention should particularly be paid to SRHR in Latin America and Asia,** as these geographic areas received the least support for SRHR in recent years.

3. Review the quality of support

- **Diversify and foster more balance between the chosen channels for EU bilateral programmes** in the next programming stages, given the striking predominance attributed so far to pillar-assessed entities versus, for example, CSOs. **CSOs are unique in their capacity to reach, represent and empower key populations, especially those out-of-reach, and in innovating and having impactful interventions.** Investing in one channel should not be done at the expense of the other. Rather, the EU should ensure a more proportionate allocation between these channels.
- **Ensure that CSOs are always part of the EU programming at all stages.**
- **Ensure consistent reporting:** at a minimum, it would be useful for the EU to systematically track how much of its funding really benefits SRHR and all its different components. Even if this implies disaggregating funds serving one single project into multiple sectorial codes.

4. Recommendations regarding Team Europe Initiatives

These recommendations are based on a case study on the Team Europe Initiative (TEI) on Demography and Social Inclusion in Uganda, which is included in the longer version of this paper.

- **Promote regular learning exchange between country-level and regional TEIs:** given the wide array of programmes promoted by the EU and its Member States, there is an opportunity to promote replicability of successful innovative approaches.
- **Consider a mix of modalities and channels for the implementation of the TEIs.** The ongoing dialogue between the EU actors confirms the complementarity of means and, as described above, there should be a balance between the complementarity of channels, including funding to and through CSOs.
- **Ensure that the TEIs that promote SRHR components include relevant indicators in their result frameworks.**
- **Consider exploring how to translate commitment to SRHR in a more consistent way across EU donors participating in relevant TEIs:** while it is understandable that donors report in different ways, it would be beneficial to consider further alignment of approaches and strategic focuses of ODA reporting for SRHR.
- **Ensure the participation of all stakeholders in the working groups dedicated to the TEIs.** This is all the more relevant for those actors who are also implementers of the Initiatives, going beyond the (compulsory) participation of Development Partners. This should also be extended to actors that are not directly involved in the implementation, in particular CSOs, due to the important role CSOs play in accountability, innovation and reaching the hard-to-reach.
- **All Team Europe actors, including the EU, EU Member States and financial institutions, should leverage the opportunity of the TEI to scale up respective bilateral funding** to the achievement of the Initiative's objectives.



About C2030 Europe

Countdown 2030 Europe is the 'go-to' cross-country sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) expert Consortium in Europe seeking to increase European SRHR funding in international cooperation and strengthen political support for sexual and reproductive freedom worldwide. The Consortium is made up of 15 leading European non-governmental organisations and is coordinated by IPPF European Network.

www.countdown2030europe.org
eninfo@ippf.org

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@C2030Europe

