



The EU's bilateral cooperation with partner countries

What's REALLY in it for SRHR?



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1

Setting the stage

The EU and SRHR

The EU's commitment to fostering sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in international development and cooperation is not new. **This commitment 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, Youth Action Plan and Action Plan for Human Rights and Democracy, and, more recently, the Global Health Strategy. Such deep roots in the EU acquis are indicative of how the EU integrates SRHR in different, complementary areas of action. In addition to this political backing, **the EU has also made funding commitments in favour of SRHR**. With this study, the Countdown 2030 Europe consortium aims to better understand how EU support for SRHR is translated into concrete programmes and activities on the ground.

How the EU programmes activities and measures for SRHR

For its Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021-2027, the EU merged different previous external action funding instruments into the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), also known as Global Europe. There is a new and stronger emphasis on geographic collaboration, which is also reflected in **most funding available being allocated to geographic programmes**, and less through thematic envelopes. The EU's bilateral strategies with partner countries therefore offer important opportunities to prioritise SRHR initiatives. **The multiannual indicative programmes (MIPs), define what topics EU funding will be allocated to in each partner country** or region between 2021 and 2027, and are usually organised in three key priority areas. But this is merely the beginning of the programming process¹. These bilateral priorities should then be translated into **activities, which are detailed in (annual) Action Documents**, that specify the objectives, modalities, and resources for a project or programme serving those priorities.

Complementing these strategies and funding decisions, EU Delegations in partner countries have also developed a **Country Level Implementation Plan (CLIP) of the Gender Action Plan III (GAP III)**. These CLIPs indicate if SRHR is one of the selected priorities for gender equality and if this prioritisation will imply specific funding (as it can also be translated by political actions, with no funding attached). Funds for the implementation

of the CLIP/ GAP III priorities come mostly, but not exclusively, from the EU bilateral cooperation.

As legally required, the EU is carrying out a **mid-term review of the current MFF**, to validate or adapt the EU's budgetary priorities in line with the changing context. This exercise implies reviewing all EU funding instruments, like the NDICI, and respective MIPs may be amended to improve effectiveness and relevance. The GAP III and its implementation plans are also undergoing such an evaluation process.

Following the [analysis of the MIPs carried out by Countdown 2030 Europe](#) in January 2023, it is now **timely to understand if and how the references to SRHR in those strategies have in fact been translated into new funding opportunities** in the first half of the MFF. This analysis will serve as an accountability exercise that can inform policymakers and SRHR actors for the following programming stage until 2027.

Besides funding from the central EU budget, the current MFF offers new potential to advance the SRHR agenda through the **Team Europe Initiatives (TEIs) crowding in investments and finding synergies with other actors** than the European Commission. This Team Europe approach started as an immediate joint response to the COVID-19 pandemic but has now been mainstreamed as part of the EU's international and development cooperation. By joining efforts from European development actors, the TEIs are flagship initiatives that aim to deliver results within a collective framework for partner countries or regions². As a result, the **TEI 'Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) in Sub-Saharan Africa'** tries to advance this agenda at a regional level. TEIs have also been developed at the national level to, among other objectives, promote and advance SRHR for all. One such case is the TEI on 'Demography and Social Inclusion' in Uganda, which will be examined as a case study for this paper.

1. Programming is a decision-making process that defines strategies for bilateral cooperation, including priorities and funding allocations. It is led by the European External Action Service (EEAS) and its Delegations, together with the partner countries and regions, and in synergies with the relevant Directorates-General of the European Commission, in this case for International Partnerships (DG INTPA) or for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR).
2. The TEIs should not be confused with EU Joint Programming, which is a collective response, framed under a joint strategy, from the EU and its Member States to the national development plan of a given partner country.

Methodology

This paper draws conclusions from a **thorough analysis of the available Action Documents³ for the time span between 2021 and 2023⁴** for EU partner countries, in the sub-Saharan, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asian and Neighbourhood regions. Where possible, the connection is made with how the EU reports its funding under the EU Aid Explorer.

For the sake of this analysis, an **Action Document is assumed to have the potential to contribute to the advancement of SRHR if the description of the project, its objectives, outputs or activities mention so**, and even if there is no disaggregated budget associated with that specific element. However, the analysis excludes projects listing SRHR as non-targeted capacity-building activities, to avoid the risk of inflating key findings.

The analysis allowed to identify the following elements of EU bilateral cooperation in the sub-Saharan, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asian and Neighbourhood regions between 2021 and 2023 :

- **Total funding that could potentially go to SRHR**, and disaggregation of this total amount by different SRHR components (Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH), the right component or both);
- **Main types of funding channels and modalities;**
- **Alignment between SRHR as a priority in the MIPs and in the Action Documents** for EU partner countries;
- **Correlation between SRHR funding and relevant policy markers** identified by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In addition to the analysis described above, this paper also includes a case study dedicated to the TEI on Demography and Social Inclusion in Uganda which relies on key informant interviews.

The new EU programming setting: Friend or foe?

Evaluations of the [EU funding instruments for 2014-2020](#) recommended that it would be crucial for future EU funds to **prioritise the universality of the 2030 Agenda**, as well as the need for integrated approaches to achieve the SDGs and to ensure co-benefits between them.

This change of method implies that **the EU now programmes in a much more integrated way, trying to avoid siloed approaches** to the different themes. To give an example, it is now possible to identify programmes on resilient food systems that simultaneously include efforts on agriculture, capacity-building of civil society organisations (CSOs) and SRHR.

While this approach is very welcome, it also makes it difficult to accurately track the percentage of funds that solely serves SRHR. This is further undermined by the way the EU currently reports its funding against OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) sectorial codes: for example, one Action Document establishing a programme that includes SRHR-related responses to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) may be reported only as public finance management or public sector policy, as observed in Burundi. Or, for example, a programme fully supporting reproductive, maternal and newborn health may be reported only as basic health care, as observed in the Central African Republic.

For these reasons, it is **not possible to accurately ascertain the volume of EU funds serving SRHR, but rather the volume of EU funds that can potentially serve SRHR**, depending on how the programme is operationalised and implemented in practice.

3. Some EU partner countries do not have Action Documents that are publicly available, or these are published only with significant delay. This paper therefore relies only on those that are publicly available.
4. The analysis considers only the EU funding decisions published until October 12, 2023.



2

How has the EU been promoting SRHR in its bilateral cooperation?

EU bilateral funding in sub-Saharan Africa

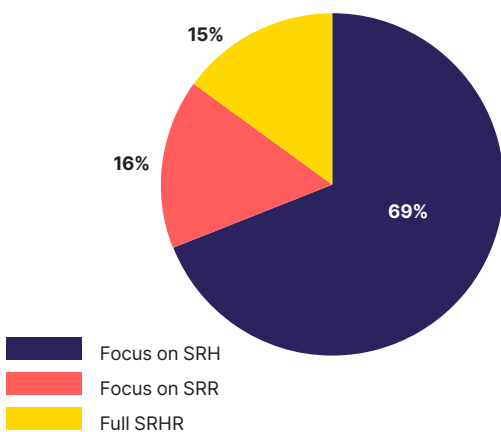
Volume of EU bilateral funding potentially supporting SRHR in sub-Saharan Africa

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** in sub-Saharan Africa⁵. This derives from a total of 41 programmes identified during the analysis period. Most relevant programmes were identified in 2021, the first year of the new financial framework.

Sub-Saharan Africa is the region in which the EU invests the most in SRHR and its different components.

The below graph shows the different focus areas of EU funds allocated to SRHR-relevant projects in these countries. While all identified programmes contribute to the SRHR agenda, some projects, as per the theory of change introduced in the respective Action Document, are 1) mostly about safeguarding access to SRH as a package of services (69%), 2) mostly about protecting and promoting sexual and reproductive rights (SRR) by investing in the change of social norms (16%) or 3) equally focused in both areas without prioritising one or the other (15%). This latter category includes for example projects for both prevention and remedy, namely through medical services, of SGBV.

Distribution of EU commitments to SRHR in sub-Saharan Africa per focus area (2021-2023)



Modalities and channels for EU funding with the potential to contribute to SRHR in sub-Saharan Africa

In addition to assessing the possible levels of EU funding, it is also relevant to understand how this support is being channelled and implemented to advance SRHR in sub-Saharan Africa.

The analysis shows that **international organisations (IOs) are the most common channels to advance SRHR in countries of that region**. In reality, the share of funds going through this type of organisation might increase if unidentified 'pillar assessed entities' are also taken into consideration, as these tend to range from international organisations, development banks, to national agencies of EU Member States⁶. Surprisingly only about 2% of the amounts specifically identified going through IOs are allocated to UNFPA.

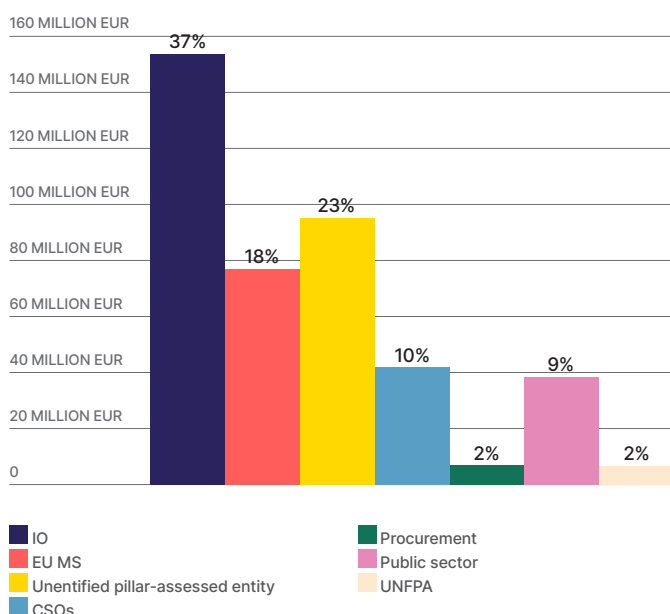
Moreover, the analysis of Action Documents shows that **only 10% from the total amounts that can potentially serve SRHR in sub-Saharan Africa are channelled through CSOs**.

5. Sub-Saharan countries that have relevant EU bilateral programmes for SRHR are Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, CAR, Chad, Comoros, DRC, Ethiopia, Guinea Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mauritania, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, São Tomé and Príncipe, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania, The Gambia, Uganda, and Zimbabwe.
6. Pillar assessed entities refer to the organisations that are audited with the aim to assess their compliance with the EU's requirements for indirect management.

This is problematic because **CSOs play a key role in accessing hard-to-reach populations, thus contributing to the inclusion of groups in marginalised situations.** CSOs are also instrumental in contributing to an accurate needs and rights assessment, in addition to supporting a community-level uptake of programmes. Finally, they also contribute to advancing accountability and empowering community members with the rights they are entitled to. **Decreasing direct support to CSOs, nonetheless, seems to be a general trend of EU Official Development Assistance (ODA) allocations,** as found by the recent [CONCORD Europe report on Funding for civil society organisations in the NDICI](#).

Given the significant focus on channelling funds through IOs or national agencies of EU Member States, it is thus not surprising that the **most common modality for EU support to SRHR is indirect management.** This is followed by direct management, mainly through grants awarded to public administrations in partner countries, budget support, open grants or procurement.

Main channels for EU potential investments on SRHR in sub-Saharan Africa (2021-2023)



Alignment of funding with the EU and partner country priorities in sub-Saharan Africa

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 MIPs for sub-Saharan countries, the following findings are interesting to note⁷:

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

These findings are quite revealing: looking at the first phase of the current EU budget cycle, **significant gaps remain in terms of delivering on SRHR-related commitments made in the MIPs.** This urgently needs to be reversed in the next part of the programming cycle. In particular EU Delegations which have made references to SRHR in their MIPs or CLIPs, should adopt SRHR-relevant programmes in the remaining years of the NDICI implementation.

7. Ethiopia is a country where it is also possible to identify SRHR-relevant programmes, but these are not included in this table, as the country's MIP was only launched in October 2023, to cover the years 2024-27. The strategy includes Human Development (including health, education and social protection) as a priority.

It also shows that it is possible **to provide support to SRHR in programmes even when the bilateral strategy does not specifically address this agenda as a priority, namely by including SRHR components in other priorities.** 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. Below are some good practices:



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. Examples, not exhaustive, include:

- **Amagara Mu Muryando, in Burundi:** foresees specific focus on improving SRH and will be partially implemented by CSOs and the Belgian development agency, Enabel.
- **PIMI III programme, in Guinea-Bissau:** foresees support to antenatal, postpartum and postnatal consultations, in addition to strengthening some of the pillars of the national health system that serve SRHR. Implemented by a direct award to the Portuguese CSO Instituto Marquês de Valle Flôr (IMVF) and to the World Health Organisation (WHO).



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.

- **PLEAD programme in Kenya:** aims to reinforce the national judicial capacity to manage SGBV, mainly through indirect management by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and an EU Member State.
- **Good Governance and Gender Equality in Namibia:** a programme implemented by UNFPA aiming to eliminate, prevent and protect against all forms of SGBV.



Broader human development

- **Supporting Education Reform in Mozambique:** foresees activities aiming at preventing unintended pregnancies and early child marriage, as well as mainstreaming SRHR strategies for inclusive education. It will be implemented by an international organisation and an EU Member State (still to be determined).



Inclusive growth and jobs creation

- **Support to entrepreneurship in Benin:** will create, among others, a one-stop shop for companies with the objective to prevent sexual harassment and the broader SGBV. To be implemented by the French development agency - Agence française de développement (AFD).



Green Deal

- **Revitalisation of agricultural vocational education and training in Angola:** foresees education on reproductive health as a way to broaden training opportunities for girls and nurture their self-esteem. The Africa Investment Platform will be responsible for the implementation of the project.



Peace & Stability

- **Security Sector Reform in the Gambia:** includes capacity-building of the police force to address SGBV, in addition to a small activity to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA). To be implemented by the German development agency, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ).
- **EU Support for the Disengagement, Review, Reintegration, and Reconciliation (SD3R) of Persons formerly associated with Non State Armed Groups (NSAGs) in Northeast Nigeria:** aims to strengthen investigation and prosecution services to combat SGBV and to foster community protection from sexual violence. UNODC will be the implementer.



Support to Civil Society

- **Support for civil society and its contribution to gender equality, peace and social cohesion in Cameroon:** the programme includes support to CSOs to combat SGBV, given the growing concern over sexual violence in the country. It is aligned with the country's CLIP, which focuses on the fight against Gender Based Violence (GBV) and the promotion of SRHR.
- **Cooperation Facility and Support Measures for Civil Society in Lesotho:** one of the outputs of the programme includes SGBV prevention. The integration of SRHR aspects in this programme is relevant, as all EU partner countries have a cooperation facility and support measures for civil society, even if the latter may adopt different forms. Therefore, there are high chances of replicability.

The inclusion of SRHR projects or elements in sectors that are not the 'usual suspects' is a positive finding of this analysis. This reinforces the relevance of programming in a much more integrated way that can simultaneously serve different sectors.

EU bilateral funding in Latin America and the Caribbean

Volume of EU bilateral funding potentially supporting SRHR in Latin America

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) countries⁸.

This funding comes from nine EU programmes in the region. This amount excludes programmes focusing on LGBTIQ+ groups, among others, or small activities targeting PSEA; due to the difficulty of quantifying these, they are not accounted for. Contrary to sub-Saharan Africa, all decisions occurred in 2022 and 2023.

The focus in the region has been on the fight against SGBV, with most programmes including both prevention and case management, including medical services, while some are focused only on preventing this phenomenon by changing social norms⁹. All EU approved programmes relevant to SRHR will rely on indirect management through an EU Member State agency or international organisation. The exception is a programme in Haiti which includes mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) to survivors of sexual violence that will be delivered by organisations selected through a call for proposals.

Only two LAC countries specifically refer to SRHR as part of their MIPs, namely El Salvador and Nicaragua. While El Salvador puts SRHR in the context of human development, Nicaragua highlights the intersectionality of women's SRHR with climate change. Both have programmes with relevant SRHR components, even though it is not possible to quantify these. All other LAC countries already anticipated SGBV-relevant programmes in their MIPs. The exception being Ecuador, even though the country approved a new EU funding programme that includes prevention and response to SGBV.

Interesting cases of integrating SRHR in other priorities in LAC countries

- Programme on **MHPSS to survivors of sexual violence, in Haiti**, under the education initiative 'Edikasyon pou viv ansanm'.
- **NICALERT programme in Nicaragua**, for disaster risk reduction, includes some activities to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse, as part of improving conditions in shelters. However, those are not included in the amounts above, given the difficulty of quantifying this component.



8. LAC countries with relevant SRHR programmes are Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Haiti, Nicaragua and Paraguay.
9. It is however not possible to quantify how much of these programmes includes case management versus prevention, so this section does not include disaggregation of data per SRHR components.

EU bilateral funding in Asia¹⁰

Volume of EU bilateral funding potentially supporting SRHR in Asia

Between 2021 and 2023, the EU approved five programmes amounting to over 15 million EUR, as outlined in the Action Documents, that have the potential to benefit SRHR in four Asian countries: Bangladesh, the Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. However, none of these programmes specifically target SRH.¹¹ Out of the selected five programmes, only two include both prevention and case-management of SGBV, and thus SRH services.



The reasons behind this relatively small amount are twofold. On the one hand, **bilateral strategies in the region seldomly refer to SRHR** - although they often prioritise gender equality or even highlight the importance of protecting sexual minorities, as it is the case in Indonesia. On the other hand, the **intervention logic included in the Action Documents does not allow to ascertain the volume of funds that could potentially benefit SRHR**. For example, in Bangladesh, the EU will continue to support the 'Promoting justice for all' initiative; previous phases of this programme included village courts that specifically addressed SGBV and the protection of LGBTIQ+ groups. But because the respective Action Document does not include any reference to these topics, it is not accounted for here. Moreover, there are some bilateral programmes in the region that include small components to support menstrual health, as part of a broader package; but only one programme in Nepal seems to promote a targeted SRHR approach to the topic, by advancing the management of 'menstruation in a hygienic way, in privacy, and with dignity', and is thus accounted for.

Once more, in the Asian countries the EU prioritises indirect management, via international organisations or agencies of EU Member States. In this context, none of the identified SRHR-relevant components is channelled via CSOs.

Interesting case of integrating SRHR in other priorities in Asian countries

- **The programme Sustainable WASH for all – SUSWA in Nepal** aims to serve the broader priority of the Green Deal. One of its specific objectives is to promote dignified menstruation practices for women and girls in vulnerable situations.

10. This chapter includes only countries from Asia and Pacific, thus excluding the Middle East and Neighbourhood.

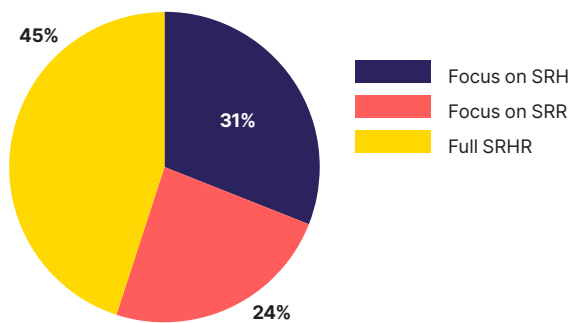
11. Out of the selected five programmes, only two include both prevention and case-management of SGBV, and thus SRH services, while the fifth one refers to promote dignified menstruation practices, as mentioned above. The other programmes are about SGBV prevention only.

EU bilateral funding in the Neighbourhood countries

Volume of EU bilateral funding potentially supporting SRHR in the Neighbourhood countries

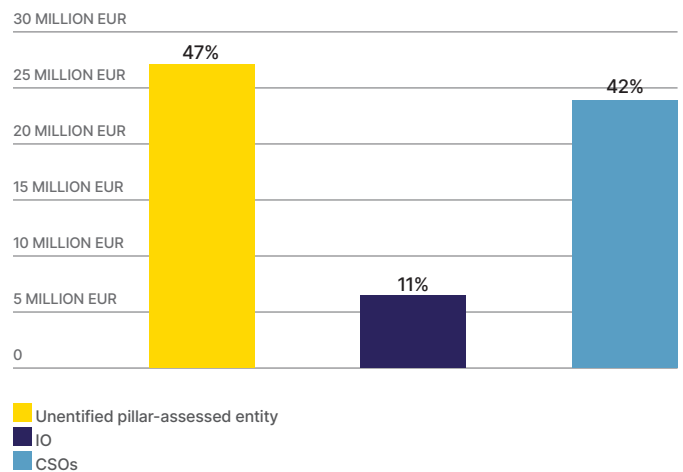
Between 2021 and 2023, the EU allocated almost **58 million EUR to programmes that have the potential to contribute to the advancement of SRHR** in the Neighbourhood countries, as per the available Action Documents¹². These funds come from 11 relevant programmes, all identified in 2021 and 2022. The below graph shows that the focus of EU bilateral programmes in the region is also diversified, contrarily to what happens in the Latin America and Caribbean or Asia regions. Once more, all identified initiatives can advance SRHR, although it is now possible to ascertain a bigger percentage of investments going towards the health sector, with a focus on SRH, only surpassed by programmes in sub-Saharan Africa.

Distribution of EU commitments to SRHR in the Neighbourhood countries per focus area (2021-2023)



Another novelty observed in the Neighbourhood countries is the fact that **CSOs are given more predominance as a channel, 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.

Main channels for possible EU investment on SRHR in the Neighbourhood countries (2021-2023)



Examples of the EU working with CSOs to advance SRHR in the Neighbourhood countries

- The 'EU Response to the Syrian Crisis' in Lebanon will work with CSOs to implement the Ministry of Public Health's Long Term Primary Health Care Subsidisation, including on reproductive and maternal health.
- The programme 'Towards a resilient health system in Libya' will also work with CSOs to strengthen the delivery of a quality Essential Service Package at primary health care level, that includes SRH.

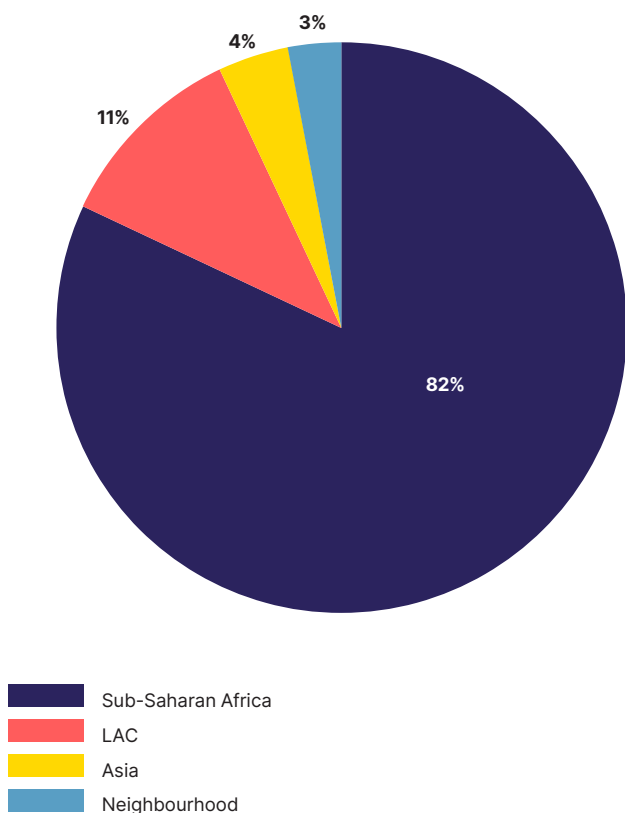
12. These countries are Azerbaijan, Egypt, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, and Palestine. Other countries analysed, but not here included due to the lack of programmes, were Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, Algeria, Israel, Jordan, Morocco, Syria and Tunisia.

Summary of EU bilateral funding to SRHR

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 EU bilateral 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.

EU bilateral funding that can serve SRHR in the four regions (2021-2023)



Thematic programmes contributing to SRHR

As this paper focuses on analysing bilateral geographic priorities and programmes, **these amounts exclude possible support coming from NDICI regional programmes or thematic funding lines**, such as those dedicated to Global Challenges, to CSOs or to Human Rights and Democracy. **Calls for proposals (CfPs) under these lines tend to complement EU bilateral cooperation and may also offer targeted outlets to advance SRHR.** This is particularly the case for the latter two, which tend to complement the bilateral priorities already identified in the MIPs. The decision-making processes for priority setting, however differ from the geographic programmes. Specific examples of funding opportunities coming from these thematic funding lines between 2021 and 2023 and that can potentially benefit SRHR are included in the maps in the next page.

Thematic Programme for Civil Society Organisations

Assuming CSOs did apply to the specific objectives listed in the map below, **these CfPs could offer up to 15 million EUR to potentially advance SRHR.**



In addition, many of the open calls for proposals aim to increase youth and/or women's voice and agency, thus **offering space to include SRHR in the proposed programmes, even if the guidelines do not specifically mention so.** As the CSO thematic programme also tends to be aligned with the CSO roadmaps¹³, calls for proposals often aim to strengthen the capacity of local CSOs and to increase capacity to engage in or contribute to 'Gender equality and youth, women's and girl's empowerment' or 'improving access to quality and affordable State services', including for health, among others – all of which can **offer additional entry points to advance SRHR**, if applicants decide to focus on this angle.

Thematic programme for Human Rights and Democracy

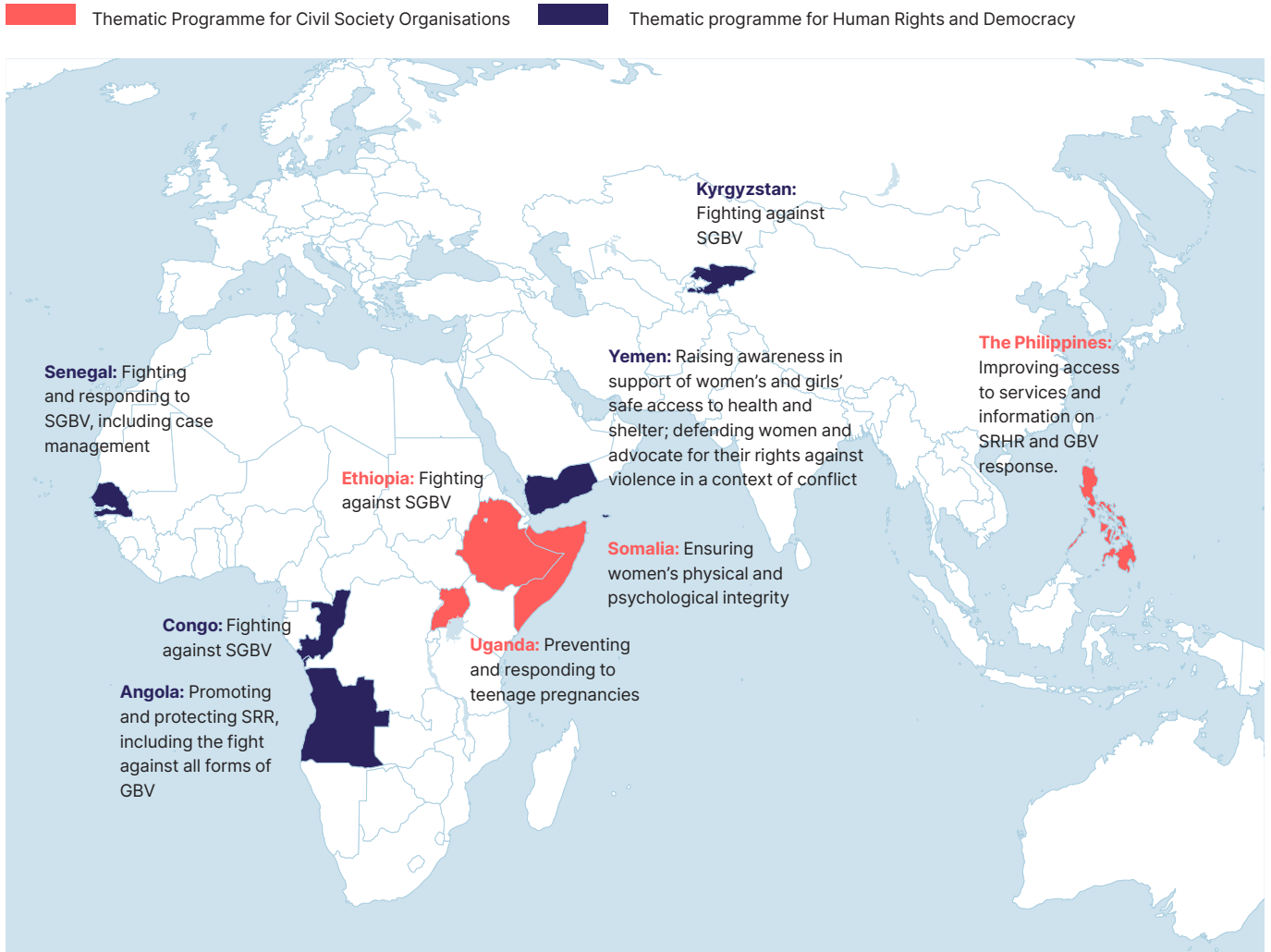
As above, assuming organisations did respond to the specific objectives in the maps in the next page, **these CfPs could bring in over additional 7 million EUR to potentially advance SRHR.**

Moreover, as this thematic programme aims to protect and promote the rights of the most vulnerable, several of the projects resulting from this budget line may benefit SRHR, if they focus on LGBTIQ+ or GBV survivor groups. The same is applicable to the work of human rights defenders, promoted by this programme: even if not specifically directed to SRHR, applicants may decide to target these areas.

In short, even though the objective of these thematic programmes is not specifically related to SRHR, **the way respective calls for proposals are defined may lead to greater opportunities to advance SRHR** in EU bilateral cooperation. This is all the more relevant, considering that both funding lines mostly benefit CSOs, who are instrumental in protecting and promoting this agenda, and can do so through innovative and replicable models.

13. The EU Country Roadmaps for Engagement with Civil Society offer a common strategic framework for the engagement of EU Delegations and EU Member States with civil society in partner countries. These roadmaps often include components for capacity-building.

EU thematic programmes contributing to the promotion of SRHR

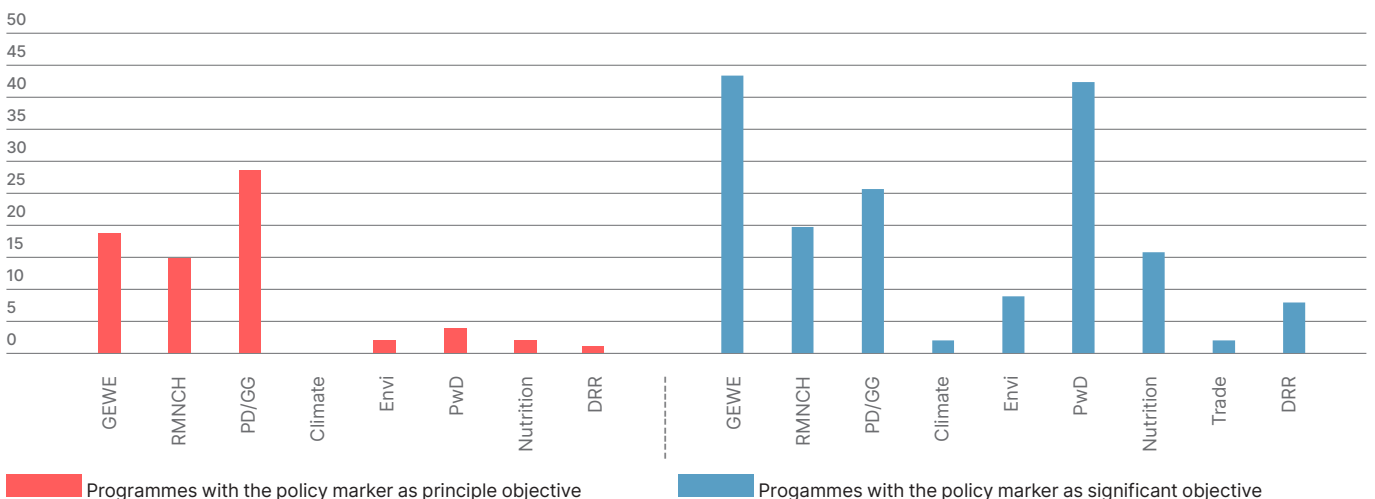


How is EU bilateral funding for SRHR aligned with other development priorities?

The protection and promotion of SRHR is in itself an objective that also significantly contributes to other major development goals with numerous positive ripple effects across gender equality, health, education and economic development objectives. When considering how the EU reports its programmes that have the potential to advance SRHR in line with the **OECD DAC policy marker system**,¹⁴ it is interesting to observe that the biggest number of identified projects target **'Participatory Democracy / Good Governance' (PD/GG) as a principal objective**.

This is followed by **Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE)**, and only then by **Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (RMNCH)**. Unsurprisingly, **most relevant EU bilateral funding with the potential to advance SRHR has gender equality as at least a significant objective (G1)**. Furthermore there is an equally high number of EU programmes for SRHR that target the inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities (PwD) as a significant aim, which is part of the 2030 Agenda overall commitment to 'leave no one behind'. RMNCH is only the fourth significant policy area for EU programmes with the potential to advance SRHR.

Number of EU programmes that have the potential to advance SRHR, filtered by OECD DAC policy markers used (2021-2023)



14. Relevant policy markers that related to SRHR are 'Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn and Child Health', 'Participatory Democracy / Good Governance' (PD/GG) and 'Gender equality'. These are marked according to a 2-1-0 scoring system: Marker 2: the identified policy marker is the principal objective of the development project, i.e. it is the main reason for its implementation; Marker 1: the identified policy marker is a significant objective, but is not in itself critical to the implementation of the project; and Marker 0: The development measure does not target the policy objective.

It is also revealing to observe how **several of the identified EU programmes that have the potential to advance SRHR under bilateral funds target policy objectives that are not usually at first sight related to SRHR, such as trade, aid to environment or even disaster risk reduction (DDR)**. Such associations confirm the integrated approach of EU programming and emphasise the possibility of integrating key components in many different sectors, which is welcome and important given the multidimensional character of SRHR and its impact on all spheres of life.

Also, for a more comprehensive financial overview of the 2030 Agenda, in 2018 the OECD DAC put forward a voluntary reporting field for the SDGs for its members. This measure tends to be qualitative in nature, and as such is not expected to be associated with shares of funding or monetary values. As the world has passed the halfway point of its journey towards 2030, it is relevant to assess how the EU aligns its possible bilateral support to SRHR with the SDGs.

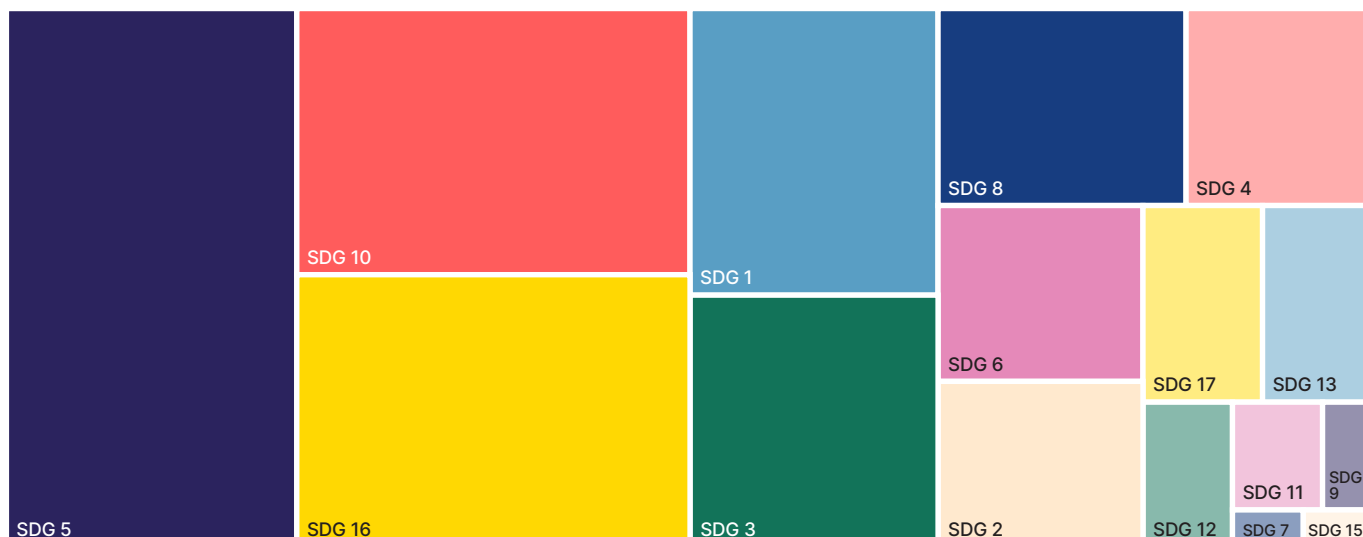
The graph below shows that, similarly to the policy markers, the EU is advancing support to SRHR through different lenses.

As expected, and considering the level of adherence of SRHR projects to the OECD key policy markers, **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**. Although this is not cumulative, as each EU funding decision may choose up to nine relevant SDGs, about half of total selected projects are linked to these three Goals. **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’.

It is once again revealing to observe that **several of the EU bilateral programmes which include key SRHR elements are reported as contributing to other areas, such as SDG 8 Decent work and economic growth, SDG 2 Zero hunger, SDG 13 Climate action, or even SDG 11 Sustainable cities and communities**.

While this transversality of SRHR investments is welcome, it seems that there is significant room for further mainstreaming support to this agenda. For example, even though SRHR and digitalisation can strengthen one another, only one of the selected projects was reported as contributing to SDG 9 Industry, innovation and infrastructure.

SRHR-relevant programmes and the SDGs (2021-2023)





3

Case study: Joint EU efforts for SRHR in Uganda

About the Team Europe Initiative on Demography and Social Inclusion in Uganda

The TEI in Uganda is an example of how these Initiatives can contribute to aligning and pooling resources towards the SRHR agenda. The TEI is supporting critical sectors such as health, which includes access to quality SRHR services in addition to education and social protection. As the MIP states, the TEI aims to contribute to a 'more inclusive and more accountable delivery of basic social services in Uganda, in particular in the areas of SRHR and school completion rates of girls', while strengthening the humanitarian-development nexus. The TEI also promotes other areas, such as education and social protection, which are not further detailed below.

To achieve these objectives, the TEI counts on the support of several actors, such as the EU, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Sweden, L'Agence Française de Développement (AFD), the European Investment Bank (EIB), the Dutch Entrepreneurial Development Bank (FMO), and Germany's KfW Development Bank.

Examples of what the TEI already achieved for SRHR:

- 2.600 victims of SGBV accessed legal aid clinics and essential services,
- 430 traditional leaders committed to ending SGBV,
- 2.000 adolescent girls benefited from SRHR services and safety in refugee centres was improved.

What it still wants to achieve:

- 2.000 additional adolescent girls will benefit from access to SRHR services,
- Policy implementation and awareness raising on SGBV.



Can the whole be greater than the sum of the parts?

Albeit a relatively new process, the TEIs have been mostly put together as a combination of the EU's and EU Member States' bilateral cooperation tools in a given country or region. Uganda is no exception, and the above-listed European actors all contribute to the TEI through their individual bilateral strategy for the country.

Focusing on the contribution of the TEI specifically to SRHR, it is possible to assess what some of the key EU actors are doing in the field¹⁵ :

The EU



As the leader of the TEI, the EU's main programme is the **Gender for Development Uganda (G4DU) programme**, approved in 2022 with 20 million EUR under the MIP priority 'Increased inclusive delivery of basic social services'.

The most relevant objective of the programme for this analysis aims 'to enhance SGBV prevention and response and increase access to integrated SRHR and SGBV services for women and adolescent girls in schools and communities.' It will do so by improving access to crucial services, by creating demand and safeguarding supply, in addition to reinforcing the country's legislative framework. This line of action of the G4DU is in fact a follow-up of programmes implemented in the country in the context of the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative (initiated prior to the current MFF) and will thus rely on indirect management with UN agencies, namely UN Women, UNFPA, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). To safeguard effective management, each agency is responsible for an area of action that coincides with its own mandate.

In addition to specific objectives on SRHR and SGBV, the **G4DU also aims to 'improve inclusive access and participation in schools for adolescent girls, including their transition to secondary level or other learning pathways'**, to be implemented by Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW) , and to 'improve opportunities for adolescent girls and boys to learn in safe, well managed and gender-responsive schools', to be implemented by Belgian agency Enabel; all of which are relevant to the TEI.

Belgium



The country's bilateral strategy for Uganda 2023-2028 includes as a main objective the improvement of maternal and child health. For this, Belgium will invest in six different districts through a comprehensive approach, which comprises the **promotion of community-based health-seeking behaviour, the improvement of emergency and referral levels, the strengthening of equipment of healthcare facilities, the reinforcement of service supply of local authorities and structures, and the enhancement of citizens' feedback for the continuum of service provision.** Enabel will be the main implementer of this financial envelope. In addition, the country's bilateral strategy also includes interventions in education, which will contribute to the objectives of the EU G4DU programme. Such setting makes Belgian actors both donors and implementers of the TEI, which allows for better alignment of interventions. Enabel may subgrant part of the Belgian bilateral cooperation to third actors, such as CSOs.

15. The overview is based on key informant interviews, originally identified taking into consideration the focus of each of the EU Member States in the context of the TEI. The case study consequently excludes what other EU actors are developing to contribute to other areas, such as education and social protection.

The Netherlands

In its Public Multi-Annual Country Strategy 2023-2026, **the Netherlands commits to continue to advance SRHR in the country, with a key focus on increasing access to SRH, HIV and SGBV services through a rights-based approach.** It will do so by **promoting youth-friendly services (YFS) and comprehensive sexuality education (CSE)**, in addition to strengthening health systems, also through the supply chain of commodities, and the fight against SGBV, including, but not exclusively, in migrant communities. Dutch priorities will be implemented through a range of channels, including CSOs, and those who are part of the SRHR strategic partnerships, the multilateral system, Ugandan national institutions, or even the private sector, in an effort to reinforce the commodity supply chain. Through this comprehensive approach, the Netherlands is contributing to the different areas of the TEI, although the country is not co-funding or involved in the EU's G4DU programme.

Sweden

Sweden has been contributing to the TEI through its bilateral development cooperation strategy 2018–2023, which includes an objective on 'Equitable health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights'. **This strategy includes basic health and medical care, in addition to normative work, to further promote the 'access to and respect for SRHR'.** It is grounded in different initiatives, namely a CSOs programme focused on access to SRHR services to key populations, by fostering demand through a peer-to-peer model, and decades-old support to the Naguru Teenage Information and Health Centre, located in Kampala. Since 2020, Sweden also reinforced investments in shaping policy and building movements for social justice and health rights, by working with the Center for Health, Human Rights and Development. Moreover, **the country is also supporting a GBV programme with UNFPA and UN Women in Uganda;** albeit programmed in a similar way to the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative, this is a separate initiative – though complementary, as it operates in different districts -, with distinct governance bodies.

As the country's development cooperation strategy is coming to an end in 2023, and some of the above-listed programmes already finished, Sweden's contribution to the TEI may change in the future. But, as the government of Sweden remains committed to prioritise SRHR, it is possible to expect continuous support to SRHR in the next phase.

Others

Two other Member States are contributing to the advancement of SRHR in Uganda, and in the context of this TEI: Ireland and Germany. For the recent years, **Ireland has prioritised equal rights for women and girls and the fight against gender-based violence, including in humanitarian settings.** While **Germany's bilateral cooperation with Uganda** does not explicitly focus on SRHR, it **focuses on CSOs strengthening**, namely through the Civil Society in Uganda Support programme (CUSP II), also co-funded by the EU, and which aims to advance the SDGs in the country¹⁶.

Most of the above-mentioned initiatives that are integrated in the TEI are a buildout of what the EU and its Member States have been doing prior to this MFF, and may be complemented by other programmes considered to be independent from the Initiative, such as, for example, those deriving from CSO thematic funding lines or from support to earmarked multilateral support to UN agencies.

The TEI is also subject to discussions between the involved EU actors through dedicated working groups between the Heads of Cooperation and possibly at a more technical level. These discussions aim to **further debate alignment and avoid the duplication of efforts.**

The existence of this targeted dialogue, although not subject to a formal governance mechanism (such as those created between all Development Partners in the country), allows the EU to speak with one voice. This reinforces the possible replicability of messages that EU actors can convey both in the existing working groups at the national level, such as those dedicated to SRHR or health¹⁷. Moreover, the EU roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society is not yet used as a tool in the context of the TEIs. But all of the above-mentioned EU donors consult CSOs for their own bilateral strategy, so there seems to be an open channel for this dialogue, even if not yet formally included in TEI-targeted discussions.

16. These EU Member States were not interviewed, so it is not possible to provide further detail on their work in Uganda.

17. In line with the development effectiveness agenda, Development Partners present in a given partner country, which can range from international donors to international organisations, try to coordinate their work around thematic sectors in the shape of working groups. In Uganda, there are working groups dedicated to health (in addition to the Health Policy Advisory Committee, which is a joint forum with the Government), SRHR and gender equality.

Conclusion

As a recent creation, the TEI is a ‘learning by doing’ process. This has proven to be successful in bringing together different actors towards a single cause - in this case, advancing SRHR in Uganda -, as well as in consolidating previous efforts. Importantly, **the TEI has enabled participant actors to speak with one voice** with the Ugandan government and in the context of other working groups, including with non-EU Development Partners.

The TEI also has a specific results framework, which helps to present joint results of the different initiatives. Although this is not public, it does allow to aggregate key findings in terms of impact of the different EU initiatives advancing SRHR and, ultimately, inform following stages of programming through the identification of possible gaps and strengths.

Although it is not possible to assess if it is the TEI that informs new bilateral strategies or vice versa, there seems to be an implicit level of (mutual) influence between both, and the involved actors seem to agree that such collaborative efforts can only be beneficial to their effectiveness and efficiency of their own work and to the country’s sustainable development. This may also become the case for non-EU Development Partners

whose bilateral agenda may target SRHR, thus allowing (and calling) for concerted efforts. Nonetheless, because the TEI remains a sum – albeit valuable - of bilateral programmes, participant actors still plan their interventions in a relatively independent way¹⁸, except when there is a funding relation between them. Even though the initiative is at an early stage, even more coordination would be welcome to ensure streamlining of approaches and, more than avoiding duplication of efforts, to bring EU programmes together for a larger outreach and impact.

The lack of a more predominant role of CSOs in the design and governance of the TEI, however, shows that Team Europe actors should increase efforts to better include this stakeholder in the Initiative’s mechanisms, be it for implementation or follow-up. Given that the CSO roadmap for Uganda specifically aims to ‘enhance social inclusion of vulnerable categories like women, youth and PwDs at all governance levels’, this could be used as a tool to reinforce overall engagement of CSOs in the next phases of the TEI. Moreover, the fact that some EU actors invest in CSOs as a channel more than others may also allow for some replicability of innovative models.



18. This does not come as a surprise, given the reluctance from several EU Member States – and often even from partner countries – to engage in more structured Joint Programming of development cooperation and develop one joint response. The TEI may become, nonetheless, a positive step towards that direction.



4

Conclusions and recommendations

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'**.

Although this analysis is based on commitments expressed in the EU Action Documents which still need to be fulfilled - and thus may lead to very different outcomes if we were to track how the EU officially reports on these initiatives (as explained in the methodology section), it 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**.

Based on the above analysis and findings, 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. This is all the more important considering that these regions still have high unintended pregnancy rates and laws that ban or severely restrict abortion, leading to unsafe and harmful practices, in addition to high prevalence of SGBV. It would be relevant to increase EU support to advance SRHR in those regions, be it through earmarked funds or integration of SRHR in different priority sectors, such as the Green Deal.

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:** this includes broad consultation processes (when possible, going beyond the mechanisms of structured dialogue of EU Delegations) and that allow to integrate CSOs as part of the learning process deriving from the implementation of programmes.
- **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

- **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. The TEI in Uganda could become such an example, given its commendable multidimensional scope that could be adaptable to different contexts.

- **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.** While it may be difficult to identify one result framework that includes all relevant indicators, it is crucial to ensure that at least the most relevant are included, as a way to measure contributions to the global agenda.
- **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. This would be useful to assess overall levels of support, without diluting the overview of financial efforts, and consequently better assess existing SRHR needs and potential gaps in support.
- **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 above described important role CSOs play in accountability, innovation and reaching the hard-to-reach. The EU roadmap for engagement with Civil Society could be used as a tool to further structure this dialogue. Structuring discussions in such a concerted way would enable the EU and partners to speak even more with one voice.
- **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.

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