|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| EUROPEAN COMMISSION  DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT | EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE |
|  |  |
| The Director-General | Secretary General |

**Gender Action Plan III – 2021-2025**

**Country Level Implementation Plan – CLIP Liberia**

1. **Context for EU action gender equality and women’s empowerment in the country**

Liberia has gradually evolved towards peace and stability since the end of the civil war in 2003, with the peaceful elections in 2017 representing a major milestone for democracy in the country. However, despite considerable rebuilding efforts, Liberia remains socioeconomically and politically fragile with high levels of poverty and social exclusion, limited access to basic services and infrastructure, and deep institutional fragility. Liberian women and girls are particularly vulnerable with less access to education, health care services, justice and ownership, and to the formal economy.

With strong patriarchal social norms and a socially accepting environment of violence against women and girls (VAWG) and marginalised groups, the prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) remains alarmingly high in Liberia. SGBV continues to be among the most significant acts of violence in the country, and a majority of the victims are women and children. As a consequence, the levels of SGBV have contributed to destabilising peace and stability, and hamper efforts to enhance human rights and human development. The levels of impunity are high in Liberia, particularly for cases of SGBV and violence on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. According to the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGSP), out of the 2675 reported cases of SGBV in 2019, 68% were rape[[1]](#footnote-1), out of which 77% were girls under 18 years, and only 84 cases were convicted. In 2020, out of the 2240 SGBV cases reported, 80% were rape. Nevertheless, the number of SGBV cases not being reported is still high, due to lack of trust in the security and justice systems, high levels of impunity and also continued stigma –although the latter has improved considerably in recent year as a result of advocacy efforts and awareness raising campaigns with support from, among other, the EU–UN Liberia Spotlight Initiative programme.

In September 2020, President Weah validated a two year ‘Anti-SGBV Roadmap’ and declared rape as a national emergency as a result of public protests against the high levels of rape and other forms of SGBV, alongside the high levels of impunity. Other recent action plans adopted by the government to address SGBV and promote women’s rights include the ‘National Action Plan for the Prevention and Management of Gender-Based Violence in Liberia’ (2018-2023) and the ‘National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security’ (2019-2023), in keeping with the ‘National Gender Policy’ (2018-2022). In the past decade, several other actions have been taken to improve capacities and strengthen efforts to respond to the above-mention challenges, such as increased efforts to utilise a gender-responsive planning and budgeting (GRPB) in the allocation of resources into the public financial management system and national budget, as well as the introduction of a specialised unit, a Women and Children Protection Section (WACPS) in 2009 at the Liberia National Police (LNP) and the introduction of specialised SGBV courts (criminal Court E) in some counties to enable speedy handling of SGBV cases. However, these efforts have proven insufficient, with continued institutional challenges, as well as lack of capacities and resources to efficiently reinforce response services.

Child marriage and teenage pregnancies remains another cause of serious concern in Liberia. The rate of teenage pregnancy, around 30%, is one of the highest in the world, as the maternal mortality ratio, with 661 deaths per 100,000 live births according to UN 2020 data.

Moreover, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) continues to be widely practised and there is presently no legal framework criminalising FGM in Liberia. Liberia is one of the last four FGM countries in the world where FGM is still legally practiced. The Executive Order 92, banning FGM of girls below 18 or of non-consenting adults, expired in January 2019, and it has, to date, not been renewed by President Weah despite his earlier commitments in this regard publically announced at his visit in Brussels in June 2008. In August 2019, President Weah signed into law the Domestic Violence Act (DVA), recognising domestic violence as a serious crime against the individual and society. There were several attempts to introduce FGM in the DVA but without success, and ultimately the FGM clause had to be removed in order to approve the DVA. In 2015 the Government of Liberia (GoL) accepted all recommendations in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) referring to FGM, including those banning FGM, while in the 2020 UPR, the GoL did not accept 41 recommendations on FGM, including 33 to ban FGM.

Women’s political representation continues to be notably low; in the 2017 election women represented only 16% of all candidates, and only 9 were elected to fill the 73 seats in the House of Representatives. Similarly in the mid-term 2020 election, again there were only 16% of female candidates and only 2 were elected to fill 15 seats at the Senate. Overall, women lack opportunities and participation in management and decision-making positions at all levels in society.

Besides the continued institutional challenges and lack of technical capacities, additional challenges lie in the lack of sufficiently strong political will and commitment towards Gender Equality and Women Empowerment (GEWE). The removal of the FGM clause from the DVA, the non-acceptance of the 2020 UPR recommendations on FGM, contrary to the previous governments’ commitment in the UPR 2015, as well as the resistance towards introducing a gender quota to increase women political participation and representation[[2]](#footnote-2) are some telling examples in this regard.

Building up on the Swedish-funded *SGBV Joint Programme*, the four year EU-UN partnership programme *Liberia Spotlight Initiative* has, since its start in 2019, been reinforcing efforts to reduce the prevalence of SGBV and harmful practises (HP), and increase access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). The Liberia Spotlight Initiative (LSI) is implemented by five UN Agencies[[3]](#footnote-3) in partnership with six line ministries[[4]](#footnote-4) where the MoGCSP is in lead, in collaboration with a number of stakeholders including the LNP WACPS and SGBV Crimes Unit, civil society actors and women groups and the traditional council of elders and leaders. The LSI is implemented in five[[5]](#footnote-5) of the fifteen Liberian counties, at the community, county and national level, and runs until the end of 2022.

* The Country Gender Equality Profile (CGEP) for Liberia and the CLIP

The Gender Country Profile, in Liberia under the denomination of the Country Gender Equality Profile (CGEP), has been developed together with the CLIP. The development of the CGEP for Liberia derives from an initiative initiated in 2020 by the MoGCSP, ultimately rolled out in 2021 as a multi-donor initiative in partnership with core actors working on GEWE in Liberia, namely UN Women, Sweden, African Development Bank (AfDB) and the EU. The EU has contributed to this multi-donor initiative via a budget reallocation from the Liberia Spotlight Initiative (LSI) with all five implementing UN Agencies in agreement with the reallocation of funds to support the development of the CGEP.

The CGEP is partially made on assessments from an extensive desk review of reports as well as on the basis of consultations, focus groups and semi-structured interviews with governmental officials, civil society and women’s organisations, traditional chiefs and elders, private sector representatives and the international community.

Ideally the CGEP should be finalised before the delivery of the CLIP, ensuring the assessment from the CGEP is adequately taken into account in the CLIP. However, as indicated above, the process has been conducted in parallel, as the tentative deadline for submission of the final CGEP for Liberia, to date, has been postponed to 6th of August 2021.

The CLIP has therefore been developed on the basis on preliminary analysis and drafts of the CGEP, in addition to analysis made in the *Human Rights and Democracy Country Strategy* (HRDCS) 2021-2024, the current draft of the *CSO Roadmap beyond 2020*, and on lessons learnt from former and/or ongoing development initiatives, such as the Liberia Spotlight Initiative. While the EUD and EU Member States (MS) represented in Liberia –France, Germany, Ireland and Sweden– recognise the importance of joint approaches, joint programming has previously not been feasible. Coordination and joint efforts have however increased in recent years, including in the GEWE area of engagement. Further emphasise on joint and coordinated response among EU actors will be intensified, also as outlined further below in the CLIP.

1. **Selected thematic areas of engagement and objectives**

The Multiannual Indicative Programme (MIP) for Liberia 2021-2027 will be in line with the GoL’s development strategy (2019-2023), the "Pro-poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development" (PAPD). Being aligned with both the PAPD and the political and strategic priorities set out by the EU, the MIP for Liberia will focus in particular on two priorities: the Green Deal, and Jobs and Growth. In this vein, the Team Europe Initiative’s (TEIs) identified for Liberia - i) Safe and Sustainable Food Systems and ii) Forestry and Biodiversity, indicatively estimated to absorb 70% of the financial envelope - will merge the aspirations set out in both the PAPD and the EU strategic priorities.

By increasing investments in the agricultural, fishery and forestry sectors, a boost of Liberia’s economy and of job creation opportunities across sectors is foreseen, particularly for Liberia’s women and youth. The agricultural sector in Liberia employs almost 70% of the population, a majority of which are women and youth. While the selected two TEIs do not target gender equality as a (G2) ‘principal objective’, focus on gender equality as a significant (G1) marker is envisioned throughout implementation of the selected priority areas by promoting gender equality and strengthening women economic inclusion and empowerment in these sectors; notably by enabling equal opportunities, equal access to employment, such as Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), supporting women economic entrepreneurship and women-led businesses, addressing patriarchal social norms within household and labour markets, and addressing gender equality through trade policy. The already vital role women have in the agricultural and fishery value chain in Liberia is addressed in the MIP. Cash crops can for instance have the potential of creating additional income streams for subsistence farmers –a majority of whom are women– and allow for more opportunities of value addition and job creation, particularly for women and youth. The MIP likewise foresees to create opportunities of access to finance for women and youth, who currently have few possibilities to access –the already limited– financial sector. The MIP foresees that improved governance and adequate law enforcement in the forest and agriculture sectors could hinder further exploitation of Liberia’s forests and avoid unsustainable agricultural practises with the potential of facilitate green growth and enhance livelihoods. Inclusion of civil society and women participation and representation in these processes will be key.

The identified TEIs and priority areas of engagement will be complemented with continued support –beyond the Liberia Spotlight Initiative– with a G2 action focusing on prevention of, and response to, sexual and gender-based violence. Further details on the G2 action are presented in the following section of the CLIP. In addition, as identified in the MIP, actions for Liberia will also continue to focus on institutional building and promotion of transparent and accountable decision-making processes through continued support in preparing and realising peaceful elections, particularly in view of the General Elections in 2023, and by highlighting gender responsiveness in public financial management (PFM) systems as well as in potential budget support operations. Furthermore, building upon previous interventions in support to civil society and women’s groups, the MIP also foresees to further enhance capacities and strengthen CSOs participation in policy dialogues and visibility in the development process.

While all the six thematic areas of engagement on gender equality and women’s empowerment[[6]](#footnote-6), as set out in the Joint Communication on the GAP III, will continue to be highly important and relevant areas of engagements in the Liberian context, there are particularly three identified thematic areas which will be more in focus in the forthcoming programming and political dialogues of the EUD and EU MS in Liberia. These are the following:

* Ensuring freedom from all forms of gender-based violence**:**building up on the SGBV Joint Programme and the Spotlight Initiative programme, the EU will continue to support efforts aimed at addressing the high levels of SGBV in Liberia, working both on prevention and on response services. Continued efforts will also be put on the social, economic and cultural fronts, particularly at community levels, in order to address and make headway in the fight against FGM.
* Strengthening economic and social rights and empowering girls and women:in keeping with the two priorities set out in the TEIs, the EU will continue to focus on promoting and enabling equal opportunities and access to employment (such as TVET), and to support women’s economic empowerment and equal inclusion in society. Moreover, the EU will also support efforts aimed at addressing the gender gaps in schooling and promote sexuality education and curricula in schools.
* Advancing equal participation and leadership: women representation in public institutions and in decision-making processes remains very low. The EU will support efforts aimed at enhancing women’s political representation, particularly in view of the General Elections in 2023. In keeping with programming efforts, the EUD and EU MS will continue to highlight the need for an enforceable 30% gender quota on candidate listings and the leadership of political parties and coalitions. Alongside the address on enhancing women’s political representation, focus will also be put on prevention of violence against women in elections (VAWIE) to enable women to fully exercise their political rights and political participation.

1. **Targeted action(s) supporting gender equality and women’s empowerment**

In accordance to targets set out in GAP III, the MIP for Liberia foresees at least one spending target with gender equality as principal objective (G2 action). While expected outcomes and results are not yet defined until the end of GAP III implementation in 2025, the indicative outlook builds upon previous and current interventions. As part of MIP allocations, the EUD anticipates to continue to support parts of Liberia Spotlight Initiative activities beyond the end of LSI (implementation ends in 2022). As the EUD, some EU MS are currently also in their programming phase, where targets and outcomes for G2 actions are being fine-tuned. The new actions on GEWE are foreseen to start in 2022/2023. It will be important to ensure coordination and synergies throughout these processes, particularly when setting the specific objectives and expected results, geographical outreach as well as stakeholder engagements in these new actions to avoid duplications. While the EU allocation (indicatively planned EUR 10 million) is being decided, the EU MS estimated budget allocations for forthcoming GEWE interventions are not yet available.

The forthcoming G2 actions are predicted to focus on prevention and response of SGBV, as well as on enhanced access to SRHR. Women rights organisations and civil society are expected to play an important role in the implementation and ownership of these actions. In joint implementation and overview with relevant EU MS, the G2 actions will address:

* Ensuring freedom from all forms of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)

Continued support to address the high rates of SGBV and harmful practises, particularly FGM and child marriage, is essential. Interventions will focus on both the prevention and response aspects of SGBV.

The Liberia Spotlight Initiative focus to a large extent on the prevention side of SGBV, via engagements and interactive dialogues to address and raise awareness on patriarchal social norms and behaviours. These efforts are principally done at the community levels, through engagements with community leaders, traditional chiefs and elders, and practitioners of FGM. The LSI also provides skills trainings and alternative sources of livelihoods to practitioners of harmful traditional customs. Continued support is envisioned to promote gender-equitable social norms in communities, particularly with male community members, and with traditional leaders and practitioners with an expansion of outreach beyond the current five LSI counties. Focus should also include addressing social norms and gender stereotypes at household levels and in schools. A positive impact from the LSI hitherto has for instance been the change in education curricula promoting gender equality. Additionally, EU MS are looking into actions addressing patriarchal social norms via media and cultural activities.

In view of the weak security and justice systems, support is envisaged to strengthen access to justice and the rule of law. More specifically, this support may likely seek to strengthen capacities and resources of Court E, Judges and Magistrates and CSOs to harmonize court proceedings and speed up adjudication of SGBV cases in a legal time-frame, the latter also to avoid prolonged pre-trial detention, which is of major concern in Liberia. To strengthen and deploy “Alternative Dispute Resolution” (ADR) mechanisms may also be considered to solve local and community-based disputes before they potentially escalate, and to reduce the pressure on an overwhelmed justice system.

* Promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)

Building on previous and ongoing interventions on SRHR, principally the Swedish funded support and partially the LSI, support in this sector is foreseen throughout the GAP III implementation. While the implementation of the LSI runs until the end of 2022, the Swedish funded interventions goes up until 2023/2024, canalised via UNFPA, with focus in the southeast counties, and via DKT International, among others. In view of the alarmingly high teenage pregnancy and maternal mortality ratios in Liberia, the interventions promote increased availability and access to reproductive health supplies and services, and increased access to quality sexuality education. Continued support to family planning facilities and youth-friendly sexual health services will be important to decrease unintended pregnancies, along with sexuality education curriculum, and address of gender gaps in education. In addition, support is also foreseen to sexually/gender marginalised populations; to increase their access to essential services as well as increase awareness on rights and promotion of a law that protect and recognise all regardless of their gender identity and sexual orientation.

Continued work to enhance capacities and social accountability mechanisms of women rights organisations and civil society actors will be vital in these efforts to raise awareness, inform about law and policies, and to monitor, fast-track and ensure access to response and health services. Their role is particularly important in hard-to-reach counties and communities, where basic and response services may not be available, and information on rights and laws not commonly accessible. While both G2 actions foresees engagement with women rights organisations and civil society, also in accordance with the CSO Roadmap, the G2 action on SGBV is additionally well interlinked to objectives set out in the HRDCS 2021-2024.

As mentioned in the previous section of the CLIP, G1 actions with gender equality as a significant objective include interventions focusing on women’s economic empowerment and women’s representation and political participation.

1. **Engage in dialogue for gender equality and women empowerment**

The EUD and EU MS will continue to support and acknowledge the GoL, CSOs and other stakeholders for their commitments and efforts to combat SGBV in the complex and difficult Liberian context, while at the same time promote and encourage actions in accordance with the fundamental human rights. With regard to GEWE, it is foreseen to continue to:

* Address and make greater efforts to prevent SGBV and promote gender equality, and to take immediate action to issue an Executive Order banning FGM while working with the legislature to deliver a law and permanent ban of FGM. Discussions with, and outreach towards, line Ministries will continue, in particular with the Ministries of Gender, Finance, Justice and Internal Affairs, and other relevant state institutions for enhanced action and coordination. In this regard, the EU will also encourage the GoL towards enhanced coordination and dialogues with traditional leaders, and socioeconomic measures (aimed at creating alternative livelihoods) at community level for longer-term change in perceptions, attitudes and behaviours.
* Continued support and promotion of a gender-responsive planning and budgeting (GRPB) in the allocation of resources –both at the national and county levels– contributing to equitable service delivery and opportunities for all.
* Strengthen capacities and resources of the security and justice bodies to increase access to justice and fight the high levels of impunity.
* Promote and increase women’s political participation and representation, including institution of an enforceable 30% gender quota on candidate listing and the leadership of political parties and coalitions.
* Increase awareness and promote dialogues to address and prevent violence against women in elections (VAWIE).
* Liaise regularly with women rights organisations, CSOs and human rights defenders, particularly before the political dialogues with the GoL. Organise at least once a year a meeting with civil society, human rights defenders and EU actors to discuss the gender equality and human rights situation and challenges.

1. **Outreach and other communication / public diplomacy activities**

Communication and public diplomacy activities will be carried out throughout the implementation of the GAP III, with a twofold purpose. At the one hand, to enforce outreach of positive actions and developments in the GEWE sector by highlighting positive advances and work done by inspiring role-models, and at the other, to address issues of concern, raise awareness and provide a space for engagement and open discussions. Communication and public diplomacy activities will aim to increase the awareness and impact on GEWE, build trust and provide inspiring examples, and to improve the understanding of TEIs work and position on GEWE. Outreach and communication work is foreseen to continue to promote positive masculinity and male role models, address SGBV and FGM, and promote women’s economic empowerment and political participation via activities such as events, roundtables, workshops, radio campaigns, media and social media outreach. Furthermore, outreach activities will continue to involve political statements, such as the EUD and EU MS joint statement in August 2020 expressing concern over the alarming rates of rape[[7]](#footnote-7), and can additionally include sharing of results and findings of gender analysis and reports where available.

1. **Technical Facility and/or financial resources allocated to support GAP III implementation**

The final allocation of the MIP for Liberia is still not available, however, the overall allocation for the TCF (studies, workshops etc.) is estimated around 6%. In this regard, if need be, funds are envisioned under the TCF in the preparation of the G2 action, or in other activities to ensure implementation of the GAP III. The estimated funding envelope for the G2 action is currently set at 10 MEUR, although this may still be subject to change.

Developing a country gender profile is part of GAP III commitments, as mentioned in the first section, and the development of the Country Gender Equality Profile (CGEP) for Liberia is ongoing. The CGEP was initiated by the MoGCSP in 2020 and rolled out this year as a multi-donor initiative with UN Women, AfDB, EU and Sweden. The EU and Sweden have contributed with approximately USD 50,000 respectively to the development of the CGEP. The EU contribution has been channelled via a budget reallocation from the Liberia Spotlight Initiative programme.

*Date:30 July 2021*

*Signed-off by Chargé d’Affaires a. i. Juan Antonio Frutos Goldaratz*

1. In addition to rape, other forms of reported SGBV cases include domestic violence, and physical and sexual assault. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. A compulsory 30% gender quota on candidate lists and the leadership of parties and coalitions, included in an electoral reform bill, was removed from the bill during discussions at the Legislature. The EU, EU MS and other partners have strongly called on the Legislature and Executive to support this amendment, which represents a unique opportunity to address the longstanding issue of political underrepresentation of Liberian women. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. UN Women, UNFPA, UNDP, UNICEF, OHCHR. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. MoGSCP, MIA; MoE, MoH, MoFDP, MoJ. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Montserrado, Grand Cape Mount, Grand Gedeh, Lofa, Nimba. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The six thematic areas of engagement on GEWE: i) ensuring freedom from all forms of gender-based violence; ii) promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights; iii) strengthening economic and social rights and empowering girls and women; iv) advancing equal participation and leadership; v) integrating the women, peace and security agenda; vi) addressing the challenges and harnessing the opportunities offered by the green transition and digital transformations. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. https://frontpageafricaonline.com/front-slider/liberia-european-union-expresses-deep-concerns-over-alarming-rate-of-rape-cases/ [↑](#footnote-ref-7)