PLATFORMA
LOCAL & REGIONAL INTERNATIONAL ACTION

Policy Position

October 2026



Local and Regional Governments in the EU Gender Action Plan IV (GAP IV)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Gender equality and feminist policies are experiencing a global backlash amidst a geopolitical context marked by polycrisis, increasing inequalities and a shift of political priorities towards economic competitiveness. In this context, PLATFORMA welcomes the preparation of the EU Gender Action Plan IV (GAP IV), which represents an opportunity to further strengthen the EU's commitment to gender equality and to advance a gender transformative agenda in EU external action.

Local and regional governments (LRGs) are key strategic actors for delivering effective and territorial external action[1]. Through decentralised cooperation, LRGs ensure that development cooperation is anchored in local ownership and delivers sustainable local impact.

Gender inequality is experienced, reproduced and addressed in territories. As the level of government closest to citizens, LRGs are uniquely placed to address local inequalities. Access to public services, care systems, urban/rural planning, mobility and safety in public spaces, housing and land governance, civil registries/documentation, and local economic ecosystems are some of the areas where LRGs' mandate is decisive, mostly within fragile contexts, **making LRGs indispensable actors for feminist transformation.**

Beyond their implementation role, **LRGs are democratic actors and duty-bearers** with the legitimacy, capacity and political mandate to advance women's rights, combat gender-based violence in their territories and strengthen structured dialogue with local civil society and women's rights organisations.

GAP IV represents a critical opportunity to move beyond gender mainstreaming towards an intersectional feminist approach to development cooperation. This requires addressing the structural causes of inequality and power relations, redistributing resources, strengthening local ownership and placing human rights, sustainability and social justice at the centre of EU external action. To do so, **GAP IV must operationalise the recognition of LRGs in GAP III into an institutionalised multilevel governance approach**, scale up proven practice from the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life[2] through decentralised cooperation, and embed a Territorial Approach to Local Development (TALD)[3].

[1] Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament and the European Economic And Social Committee and Committee of the Regions on Local Authorities: Actors for Development (COM(2008)626 final). 08.10.2008
[2] Council of European Municipalities and Regions (2022) The European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life
[3] Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Empowering Local Authorities in Partner Countries for Enhanced Governance and More Effective Development Outcomes. (COM(2013)280 final). 15.05.2013

A TERRITORIAL FEMINIST APPROACH TO EU EXTERNAL ACTION

In a nutshell

LRGs are key drivers of feminist transformation, and they must be recognised as co-decision makers, strategic political partners and institutional anchors of localisation in GAP IV, notably within the Team Europe. **Decentralised cooperation is instrumental to achieving EU development cooperation objectives,** and it strengthens LRG's contribution to gender equality by creating long-term institutional partnerships that support peer exchanges, mutual learning and local ownership.

LRGs are uniquely positioned to translate EU gender equality objectives into context-specific solutions that respond to the local realities of women and girls in all their diversity. With direct competences in areas such as care systems, public service provision, local democracy, urban/rural planning and local economic development, their leadership is pivotal for achieving gender equality outcomes that are sustainable and locally owned.

PLATFORMA asks that GAP IV

- Ensures a whole-of-society and sector-wide approach by establishing **permanent mechanisms for territorial coordination within Team Europe,** systematically involving LRGs and their associations in governance, programming, implementation and monitoring processes.
- Strengthens **structured dialogue among EU Delegations, national governments and LRGs,** and recognises LRG associations as key interlocutors for scaling good practices, facilitating peer learning and ensuring policy coherence across all levels of governance.
- Integrates **a territorial approach in Country-Level Implementation Plans (CLIPs)** so that local priorities and capacities are considered throughout the design and implementation cycle. This would build on the success of GAP III while moving beyond purely adapting the objectives to national contexts.

FRAGILE AND CONFLICT-AFFECTED CONTEXTS

In a nutshell

Fragile and conflict-affected contexts expose and deepen existing gender inequalities while increasing the need for inclusive and accountable local governance. In these settings, LRGs often remain among the most accessible and only functioning public institutions for citizens. Where state institutions are weakened, **the decentralisation of service delivery enables LRGs to ensure continued access to essential services**, uphold rights and support community resilience while fostering local involvement and institutional legitimacy.

Sustainable peace and gender equality are built through inclusive territorial institutions and community-based governance. **LRGs are key actors in supporting the localisation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda.** In their role as mobilisers of stakeholders, LRGs have the capacity to promote mentorship for women's local leadership in peace processes, and to ensure that the crucial role of women and feminist movements in first response actions is respected and secured.

PLATFORMA asks that GAP IV

- Recognises and strengthens the unique contribution of LRGs to resilience, recovery and peacebuilding, particularly through the **provision of gender-responsive public services,** the restoration and expansion of care systems, and the creation of safe and accessible spaces for women and girls.
- Reinforces the role and capacities of LRGs in **protecting women's housing, land and property rights (HLP),** restoring civil registries and personal documentation (birth certificates, marriage certificates), and promoting gender-responsive spatial planning and reconstruction processes that prevent exclusion and discrimination.

WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS

In a nutshell

Women's participation in political life is essential for achieving inclusive and democratic governance. Yet, women continue to face barriers that limit their access to political leadership and constrain their ability to influence decision-making, even once elected.

The local and regional levels often act as an entry point for women's political participation, acting as a stepping stone towards national and international levels**. LRGs have a unique responsibility in creating the conditions that enable women to participate, lead and shape local public policies**. In this regard, violence against women in politics, including online harassment, constitutes one of the main impediments to women's long-term participation in politics[4]. LRGs can play an important role in preventing, documenting and responding to such violence.

PLATFORMA asks that GAP IV

- Strengthens support for local initiatives that promote women's political leadership, increase their representation in local decision-making bodies and **address the structural barriers that discourage women from entering or remaining in political life.** This includes measures that recognise the unequal distribution of care responsibilities, support networks and mentorship opportunities for women leaders, and actions aimed at transforming discriminatory social norms that include men and boys; their engagement is crucial for changing gender power relations.
- Supports local mechanisms to **identify, prevent, record and respond to political gender-based violence, including dedicated municipal procedures** and support structures. Through decentralised cooperation[5] municipalities and regions can also exchange experience, strengthen women's leadership networks and promote local governance models that foster safer, more inclusive and representative democratic institutions.

[4] UN Women Guidance Note on Preventing Violence against Women in Politics. July 2021
[5] For a practical example, see Les Elegides, a project by the Majorcan Fund of Solidarity and Cooperation, and the Council of Mallorca

GLOBAL GATEWAY

In a nutshell

The involvement of LRGs in Global Gateway is crucial to ensure the delivery of its 360-degree approach while guaranteeing that investments achieve local impact and respond to local contexts. **The principles of subsidiarity, multilevel governance and partnerships** are among EU core values that are relevant to the EU's external action as part of the Global Gateway's values-based offer.[6]

Through their responsibilities for territorial planning, public services and local development, **LRGs are well positioned to connect large-scale investments with local needs** and generate tangible benefits for local communities whilst facilitating coordination among all relevant stakeholders.

Global Gateway and other EU investment instruments can contribute to gender equality by making the **entire investment cycle gender-sensitive**, from project identification and design to financing, implementation and evaluation. Notably**, care systems and services underpin women's economic participation, social inclusion and community resilience.** Investments in areas such as energy, transport, digitalisation, health and education can truly have an inclusive and sustainable impact if they respond to the realities of women and girls in all their diversity.

PLATFORMA asks that GAP IV

- Ensures the gender equality dimension of Global Gateway by requiring **robust Gender Impact Assessments (ex-ante and ex-post)** with indicators at local and regional levels and embedded directly into investment strategies, initiatives and projects.
- Supports **gender-responsive local economic ecosystems**, supply chains and territorial development strategies by creating opportunities for women-led enterprises, cooperatives and local businesses to benefit from investment projects.
- Acknowledges **care as a fundamental component of gender-responsive investments** and fosters its integration across Global Gateway priorities, particularly through the systematic assessment of their contribution to care systems, care infrastructure and the reduction of unpaid care work.

[6] PLATFORMA Policy Position on Local and Regional Governments in Global Europe 2028-2034. February 2026

GENDER TARGETS AND MONITORING SYSTEMS

In a nutshell

Gender transformative change requires **binding targets, accountability mechanisms and localised indicators that measures change in gendered power relations and access to rights at local level.**

GAP III increased the commitments to gender equality in EU external action through dedicated targets, using the OECD DAC Gender Marker[7] as its main tracking tool. This commitment was subsequently reflected in the NDICI-Global Europe Regulation[8]. Yet, the current European Commission's proposal for the Global Europe Instrument 2028–2034 has raised concerns regarding the continuity of existing gender-related targets, which risks weakening accountability.

In parallel, localised data, qualitative indicators and territorial monitoring tools remain essential for understanding how women and girls experience change in practice.

By linking territorial data, local accountability mechanisms and predictable funding, GAP IV can better **demonstrate its impact on the lives of women and girls in all their diversity, while strengthening the role of LRGs as partners delivering and monitoring gender-transformative change.**

PLATFORMA asks that GAP IV

- Maintains gender equality targets and introduces a dedicated benchmark whereby **at least 20% of all external actions with gender equality as a significant or principal objective are implemented in partnership with, or channelled through, LRGs.**
- Fosters the collection and use of sex-disaggregated and gender-relevant data at local and regional levels, while **complementing quantitative data with qualitative indicators** that assess women's actual influence in decision-making, perceptions of agency, barriers linked to care responsibilities, the prevalence of violence against women in politics and changes in social norms, among others.
- Promotes the development of **territorial dashboards aligned with local gender equality frameworks** to support participatory monitoring and enable local actors to track progress over time.

[7] Actions with gender equality as a principal (G2) or significant (G1) objective.
[8] At least 85% of actions implemented under the Instrument should have gender equality as a principal or a significant objective, and at least 5% of those actions should have gender equality and women's and girls' rights and empowerment as a principal objective. (Article 44)

PLATFORMA is the pan-European coalition of cities, regions, and their associations, active in the field of decentralised development cooperation. It was established in 2008 and is a strategic partner of the European Union since 2015. PLATFORMA gathers 26 partners: global and European networks, associations, and local and regional governments. It is a flagship initiative of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR).



Co-funded by the European Union

The publication was co-funded by the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of PLATFORMA and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.