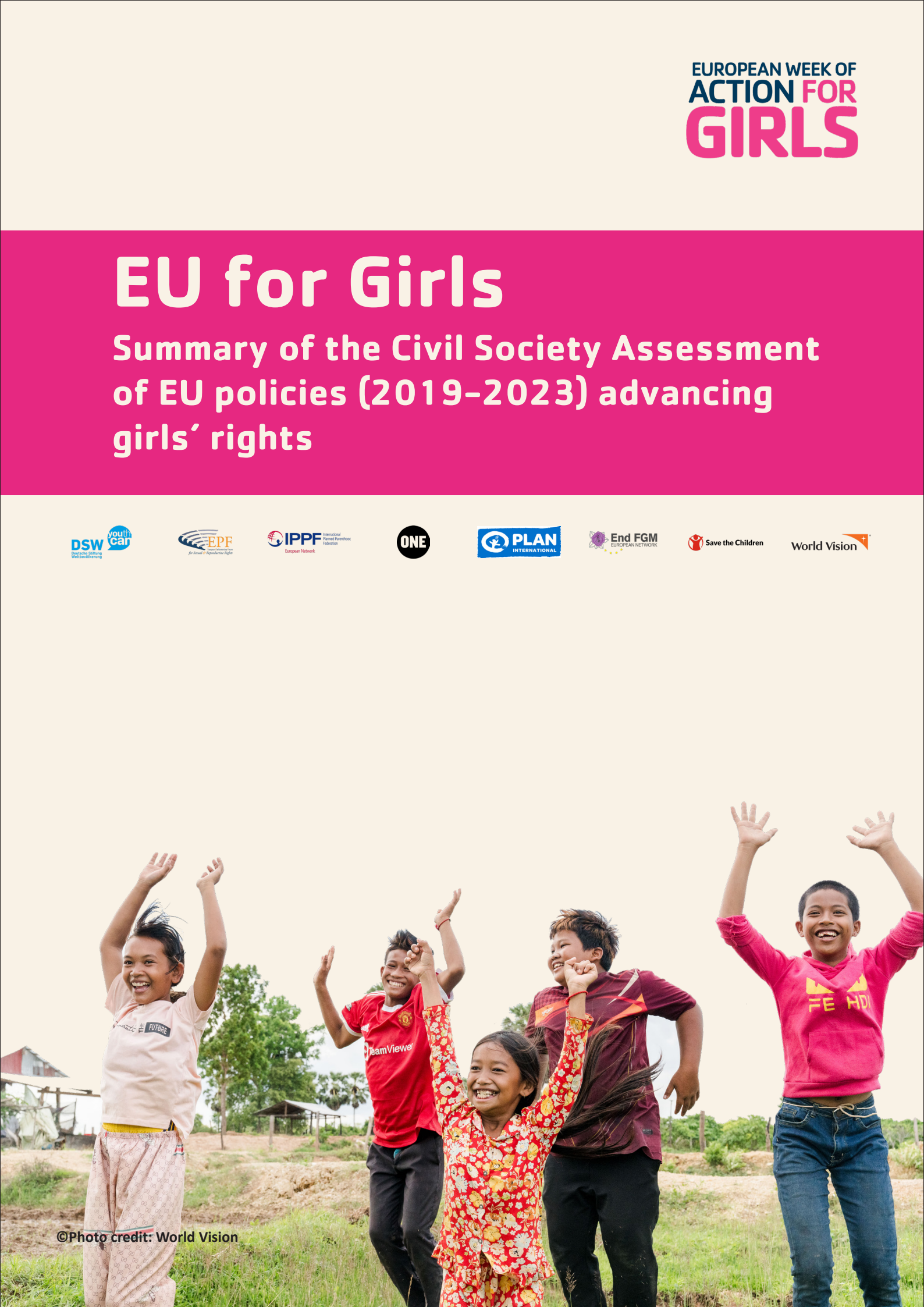
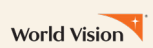
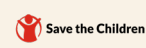


EU for Girls

Summary of the Civil Society Assessment
of EU policies (2019–2023) advancing
girls' rights



What is the European Week of Action for Girls (EWAG)?

The [European Week of Action for Girls](#) is a week-long series of events and activities organised around the International Day of the Girl Child on October 11 by a coalition of civil society organisations. The goal of the EWAG coalition is to ensure that girls' voices and aspirations are heard by the EU institutions, and that girls' rights are at the core of the EU's external action.

With a new political mandate set to begin in 2024 after the EU elections, the new European Parliament and Commission must build on the EU policies and actions from the last mandate and strongly focus the EU's external action on the promotion of girls' rights.

In 2023, EWAG developed a detailed paper, looking back at the past years to assess EU policy frameworks and regional partnerships and evaluate their contribution to promoting girls' rights, highlighting positive advancements, as well as shortcomings, and putting forward a set of recommendations. We analysed the **EU policy frameworks** including the Youth Action Plan (2022-2026); the Gender Action Plan III (2021-2025); the Global Health Strategy (2022-2030); the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child (2022-2027), the EU Gender Equality Strategy (2020-2025) and **EU regional partnerships** with the African Union (AU); the African Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) as well as Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC). You can access the full version of the assessment [here](#).

Is the EU acting upon its commitments to advancing girls' rights?

In recent years, the EU has adopted a range of external policy frameworks that contribute to advancing girls' rights while increasingly employing a much-needed intersectional approach. However, the lack of policy coherence tends to reduce the effectiveness of the EU action for girls. Moreover, funding for implementation and meaningful youth inclusion and participation are crucial for the Commission to meet the ambitions it has laid out.

Youth participation

Meaningful youth participation and empowerment lie at the heart of the first-ever Youth Action Plan, adopted in 2022. In addition to the Youth Action Plan, the European Commission's Department for International Partnerships (DG INTPA) has initiated efforts to strengthen the meaningful engagement of young people in the policymaking process, including the establishment of a Youth Sounding Board, a Youth Dialogue Platform, the appointment of a Special Adviser on Youth to Commissioner Urpilainen, as well as the set up of youth advisory bodies for EU Delegations in partner countries. While the EU recognises youth as agents of positive change in some of its partnership agreements¹, in many cases, the EU failed to meaningfully consult youth — either not involving them throughout the entire process, engaging them too late, or involving them in siloed dialogues.



Some of the EWAG 2023 young advocates during an event at the European Parliament

1. With the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS) notably.

Funding

Without adequate, long-term and flexible funding from the EU, civil society organisations, including grassroots and youth-serving organisations, might struggle to provide essential services and uphold girls' rights, especially in fragile contexts and at times of crisis. Currently, there is no mechanism to effectively track the amount of funding invested in promoting girls' rights. Most of the policy frameworks that the EU adopted in the past years do not have a dedicated funding envelope for their implementation². Although the EU committed to dedicate 85% of all new external actions to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment by 2025, this goal fails to provide a clear picture of the amount of funding dedicated to gender equality. Moreover, direct support to Women's Rights Organisations and gender equality institutions — key partners in advancing girls' rights — represents less than 0.5% of EU institutions' total Official Development Aid (ODA) focusing on gender equality. Finally, EU investments in sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) merely represent 1.76% of the total ODA spending of EU institutions, despite being critical for girls and young women to lead healthy and self-determined lives.



Ehitemedhin, 18,
Ethiopia, at EWAG 2023

Ending gender-based violence

Tackling gender-based violence and harmful practices has been a cornerstone of the past mandate of EU institutions, with the adoption of the Gender Action Plan III, the directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence, and the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, while also being identified as a priority in several partnership agreements, including the EU-OACPS partnership and the partnership with CELAC. However, the EU fails to address violence against intersex children and survivors of Female Genital Mutilation in its Rights of the Child Strategy.

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, along with Comprehensive Sexual Education, are recognised as essential for youth and girls to lead safe and healthy lives in several policy frameworks, including the Youth Action Plan, the Gender Action Plan III, the Global Health Strategy, with important commitments to promote access to youth-friendly services. Importantly, a clear commitment to promote SRHR has been included in the partnership agreement between the EU and OACPS. However, in this context, the EU failed to identify sexual orientation and gender identity as important factors, often intersecting with other vulnerabilities and exacerbating discrimination and inequalities, including for youth.



Shamsa, 23, Tanzania,
at EWAG 2023

Education

Promoting education, with specific attention to girls' education, is one of the key priorities of the Youth Action Plan. Through the implementation of the Gender Action Plan III, the EU promotes gender equality in education by increasing investment in girls' education and improving access to Comprehensive Sexual Education for in-school and out-of-school adolescents. Education is also an integral part of the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the EU-AU partnership, however, it fails to be recognised for its transformative power in the CELAC agreement.

2. Including the Youth Action Plan, the Gender Action Plan III and the Global Health Strategy.

Our recommendations

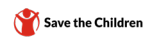
EUROPEAN WEEK OF
ACTION FOR
GIRLS

The EWAG coalition calls on the new EU leadership to:

- 1 **Mobilise adequate financial resources to make sure commitments are translated into concrete programmes and actions.** The EU should commit to funding targets rather than project-related targets: 85% of the EU's ODA should go to programmes where gender equality is a significant component and 20% of ODA should go to programmes where gender equality is a principal component. The EU should also increase direct, core flexible and long-term funding for Women's Rights Organisations, prioritise investments in SRHR as part of its external action, and ensure the next Multiannual Financial Framework has budget lines dedicated to girls' rights.
- 2 **Meaningfully involve youth and girls around concrete policy processes that have an impact on their lives,** by leveraging the Youth Dialogue Platform and the Youth Sounding Board, especially ensuring they are represented in all their diversity (hard-to-reach youth; intersectionality; age-specific measures).
- 3 **Continue championing girls' rights on the global stage,** especially at a time of backlash against women's and girls' rights around the world. The EU should keep girls' rights as a priority of the policy and political dialogue with partner countries and regions and should not shy away from potentially sensitive areas of the girls' rights agenda, such as SRHR and tackling harmful gender norms and stereotypes.

“I want you all to strongly and proudly commit to being a champion of girls’s rights”

Dameli, 19 years old, SRHR activist, Kazakhstan



Publication is the intellectual property of European Week of Action for Girls Coalition members 2024.

<https://europeanweekofactionforgirls.org>

Publication: September 2024.

©Photo credits in pages 2-3: European Week of Action for Girls Coalition members 2024



Scan the QR code to access the full version of the report.

