



# Gender Equality

HEKS/EPER Global Cooperation's strategy, promising practices, achievements and perspectives on gender equality in its international programme.

# Why Gender Equality Matters

## Global Challenges – Context

Even if globally substantial progress towards gender equality was achieved, such as equal access to primary education, **gender inequality remains a key obstacle to sustainable development**. The latest available Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) report shows that the world is not on track to achieve gender equality by 2030.<sup>1</sup> The SDGs can only be achieved when all human rights – including gender equality – are protected, respected, and fulfilled. Gender equality is a goal (SDG 5) and a means to achieve many other sub-targets of this global development agenda. No society can develop – economically, politically, or socially – when half of its population is marginalised. Worldwide, women and girls continue to suffer discrimination as well as violence.

The UN Women SDG report of 2022 evidences a negative backlash regarding poverty reduction, especially for women and girls: Before the COVID-19 pandemic, from 2013 to 2018, the share of people living on less than \$1.90 a day had fallen from 11 to 8 per cent. Progress in poverty reduction has reversed after 2020, and **extreme poverty is projected to deepen for women and girls globally**. New projections of global poverty by UN Women, UNDP and the Pardee Center for International Futures estimate that 388 million women and girls will live in extreme poverty in 2022 (compared to 372 million men and boys). But the outlook might be far worse. In a “high damage” scenario, this number could balloon to 446 million (427 million for men and boys).<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, the UN Women SDG report states that women are more likely than men to experience food insecurity and that this gender gap is still growing. Between 2015 and 2022, the **gender gap in food insecurity has widened in five out of seven regions**. In 2021, 37.5 per cent of female-headed households in war-affected areas experienced moderate or severe food insecurity, compared to 20.5 per cent of male-headed households. In Latin America and the Caribbean, where disparities are greatest, poor, less educated, and less social capital are key drivers of food insecurity - all characteristics more prevalent among women.

In 2021, 37.5 per cent of female-headed households in war-affected areas experienced moderate or severe food insecurity, compared to 20.5 per cent of male-headed households. The ongoing war in Ukraine is worsening food insecurity, limiting wheat, fertiliser and fuel supplies, and propelling inflation. The full impact of the war is unknown, but rising food prices are likely to exacerbate hunger, especially among women, children and other vulnerable populations.

**Inadequate access to decent work and social protection** perpetuates poverty. On average, women do three times as much unpaid domestic and care work as men, earn less and work more often under precarious, insecure conditions. Women’s ability to participate equally in existing markets is hindered by a lack of access to and control over productive resources, access to decent work, control over their own time, and voice and meaningful participation in economic decision-making at all levels from the household to international institutions. Water stress is also intensifying, e.g. where 30 per cent of the rural population has no improved drinking water on premises, and women spend up to three hours per day collecting water.

**Unequal laws** disadvantaged many women and girls, such as access to land and resources, decision-making positions, and job opportunities. In 36 countries, daughters still do not have equal inheritance rights compared to sons (2021). In Niger and Senegal, for instance, women rarely have access to land titles because of customary inheritance and property rules. In addition to unequal laws, **discriminating social norms** still impinge upon women’s participation and their influence on social, political, and economic decision-making processes. In political spheres, there is still a substantial **lack of female participation** in communities and regional and national decision-making bodies. Female representation in national parliaments at 26.4% (July 2022) remains far from parity.

COVID-19 has exacerbated existing gender inequalities around the globe and increased women’s workload.<sup>3</sup> The ‘Global Gender Gap Report 2021’ estimates that the time for **closing the global gender gap** has increased to 135.6

<sup>1</sup> UN Women 2022: SDG – Gender Snapshot. [Publication HQ | UN Women – Headquarters](#)

<sup>2</sup> UN Women, UNDP and Pardee Center for International Futures using the International Futures modeling platform.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. e.g., the HEKS/EPER country report of Brazil 2020, 3.3. cross-cutting issues, gender, p.12.

years from 99.5 years before<sup>4</sup>. Women's labour force participation 2022 remained below pre-pandemic levels in most countries worldwide. Devastated health systems have left poorer women without care and (more often) worse physical and mental health than men. Since the pandemic, violence against women, especially domestic violence, has increased by 30% or more (with an estimated 40% underreporting). Exacerbating factors include security, health and money worries, cramped and confined living conditions, isolation from abusers, movement restrictions and deserted public spaces. Crises like a pandemic, climate change, or wars amplify gender inequalities. With less access to land, education, information and financial resources, women are most affected by economic shocks, wars and extreme climate events, such as floods, droughts, and other catastrophes. Armed conflict and displacement heighten the risks of trafficking in persons, for example, in Ukraine. Women, young girls, and boys from vulnerable groups are more exposed to sexual violence. The risk of early and forced marriages has also increased drastically. Furthermore, there has been growing evidence of increasing violence, discrimination, exclusion and stigmatisation directed against people because of their gender identity and sexual orientation.

Legal restrictions (incl. criminalisation of abortion and laws against LGBTQI persons<sup>5</sup>) continue to compound the challenges for women and LGBTQI people. Discrimination and hate-motivated violence against LGBTQI people are widespread, brutal, and often perpetrated with impunity. And over 1.2 billion women and girls of reproductive age live in countries with restrictions on access to



safe abortion<sup>6</sup>. In many countries, there have been recent gender backlashes in the legal framework, for example, in Afghanistan, China, Iran, Myanmar, Uganda, Poland, Hungary and Pakistan.<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, there are considerable achievements in strengthening human rights protection for women and LGBTQI people, including laws banning discrimination, penalising LGBTQI hate crimes, and granting recognition of same-sex relationships. Moreover, the world witnessed 2022 the strengths of women, girls and other vulnerable people claiming their rights in public, like women in Iran and anti-abortion activists in Poland.

### How HEKS/EPER responds – Strategy

Given that gender inequality remains one of the most significant obstacles to sustainable development and poverty reduction, HEKS/EPER explicitly focuses on **gender equality as a cross-cutting commitment in all its programmes and projects**. HEKS/EPER believes mainstreaming gender will lead to more efficient, meaningful, and effective programmes and projects.

HEKS/EPER considers gender mainstreaming as a strategy to achieve gender equality by considering gender on the organisational, programme, and project levels. Gender equality not only increases sustainability, efficiency

<sup>4</sup> The Global Gender Gap Index benchmarks the evolution of gender-based gaps among four key dimensions (Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment) and tracks progress towards closing these gaps over time. World Economic Forum (2021): [WEF\\_GGGR\\_2021.pdf \(weforum.org\)](https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-index-2021)

<sup>5</sup> LGBTQI stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex people.

<sup>6</sup> UN Women 2022: SDG – Gender Snapshot. Publication HQ | UN Women – Headquarters

<sup>7</sup> Human Rights Watch 2023. [The Global Backlash Against Women's Rights | Human Rights Watch \(hrw.org\)](https://www.hrw.org/report/2023/01/26/global-backlash-against-womens-rights)

### Gender equality by HEKS/EPER

Women and men, girls and boys have equal conditions, treatment and opportunities for realizing their full potential, human rights and dignity, and for contributing to and benefiting from economic, social, cultural and political development. Equality does not mean women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both sexes are taken into consideration – in theory and practice.

and programme results but is also a **matter of social justice, allowing equal access to rights, resources and opportunities**. According to HEKS/EPER, gender equality is part and parcel of a human rights-based approach to development, including advocacy work, participation and empowerment. However, gender mainstreaming is more than women's empowerment. Thus, **understanding men's roles and needs, gendered relationships, and societal pressure** is integral to gender mainstreaming. **Men and boys are actively integrated into projects** as agents of change and work towards a diverse, broader understanding of masculinities. Therefore, HEKS/EPER supports gender mainstreaming in all projects. Some projects specifically focus on young men and gender equality, for example, in Niger, and some on women and girls, for example, in Colombia or DR Congo (see pages 4-5, promising practices).

In the 2021–24 programme phase, HEKS/EPER is committed to strengthening gender mainstreaming, focussing on the **intersection of gender and other inequalities** (e.g., women from excluded ethnic minorities, expelled and displaced women, women who experience domestic and sexual violence), gender justice, women's economic and political participation, empowerment and agency. In the project cycle management (PCM), HEKS/EPER strives to improve its **gender analysis, gender-responsive planning, and collection of gender-disaggregated data** at the project and programme level. At the institutional level, current work topics include internal gender capacity building, female leadership, and equal job opportunities within HEKS/EPER in Switzerland and abroad.

Another challenge for the ongoing programme phase will be to link gender further **mainstreaming to diversity**. In addition to gender, **diversity** includes nationalities or other origins, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, socio-economic status, religion and beliefs and other specific personal characteristics. Respecting diversity means recognising and valuing those differences and creating a protective, inclusive and non-discriminatory environment where everyone's rights are upheld. In 2022, HEKS/EPER enhanced its safeguarding and equality policy framework. The framework contains a 'Child protection policy', a 'Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Policy', and an updated 'Gender and Diversity Policy'.

More details about HEKS/EPER policy principles and guidance to achieve gender equality in projects, programmes and on the organisational level are outlined in the *HEKS/EPER Gender and Diversity Policy 2022* and *HEKS/EPER International Division's Gender Implementation Guidelines* – see achievements 2022 and links at the end of this document.

### Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (PSEAH) within HEKS/EPER

The organisational process to improve PSEAH in HEKS/EPER started a few years ago, with a strange abbreviation that no one understood and a topic that no one wanted to talk about. However, due to concrete and painful SEAH cases within the organisation, increased awareness of staff, pressure from third parties, HEKS/EPER went through a comprehensive organizational learning process about PSEAH.

After this process many things have changed. Involved staff learned how to carry out a PSEAH investigation with professional external support. The complaint and reporting mechanisms of HEKS/EPER were improved. Among other things and in addition to other complaints channels, an electronic whistleblowing tool ([heks.integrityline.org/](https://heks.integrityline.org/)) was introduced, that enables confidential communication with anonymous whistleblowers. All HEKS/EPER staff working for the global cooperation division in Switzerland and all country directors were sensitized and have discussed about PSEAH in a two-day workshop in autumn 2021. A mandatory online training about PSEAH was introduced for all staff. In addition to this introductory training specific and context adapted trainings are carried out in the country offices and partner organisations during 2022 and 2023. After these trainings all country offices are obliged to elaborate or revise their country SEAH risk assessment, their written down referral system for affected persons and a plan how to implement and improve the PSEAH processes in all partner organisations. In April 2022 the Global Cooperation division within HEKS/EPER has appointed a new PSEAH thematic advisor, who is supporting this capacity building and awareness raising process

### Challenging PSEAH standards for partner organisations.

Partner contract includes now, by default, that HEKS/EPER partners are obliged to have and apply their board-approved gender policy and PSEAH guidance (in accordance with the HEKS/EPER Gender Policy). Moreover, all agreements refer to the “zero tolerance approach” and require partners to prevent, detect and respond to SEAH. Any case of allegation of SEAH within the Partner Organisation must be reported immediately to HEKS/EPER headquarters, and will be handled by the PSEAH compliance officer.

To make the commitment for PSEAH more visible on policy level and to anchor the main principles and standards how to prevent SEAH, HEKS/EPER drafted 2021 a stand-alone new PSEAH policy. The PSEAH policy includes the following crucial or new aspects:

Zero tolerance on all SEAH incidents.

Improve prevention, including vetting and background checks of all staff, risk analysis in all projects/programmes including risk of SEAH.

Increase training and awareness with periodic PSEAH training for all staff.

Several reporting channels are established and well-known e.g., compliance officers at headquarters and in all country offices, reporting mechanisms within projects and programmes (hotlines, complaint boxes, monitoring visits, etc.).

Support mechanisms on headquarter and country office level with mapping and pre-identification of support services and referral pathways (incl. legal, social, medical or psychosocial services).

The PSEAH learning process of HEKS/EPER and its partners is not yet complete and never will be. SEAH, unfortunately, can happen in any environment, especially if there are unequal power relations. However, HEKS/EPER wants to prevent cases wherever possible and, if they do occur, to respond effectively and confidentially, focusing on the protection and well-being of the survivor. HEKS/EPER is committed to tackling the issue actively and professionally and thus to increasing transparency, fight taboos and the impunity of SEAH.

## Promising Practices Worldwide

### Women for Peace - Strengthening local capacities to transform conflicts in the border area of Borana (Ethiopia) - Marsabet (Kenya)

The Women for Peace project promotes women’s empowerment and gender transformative programming through active involvement of women in humanitarian, development and peace responses in cross-border areas between Ethiopia and Kenya (Borana Zone – Marsabet County). The project puts into practice an approach that recognises the intersections and mutually supportive strategies linking the humanitarian-development-peace work. Development and peace efforts are supported by humanitarian aid through women-led crisis modifier funds; humanitarian and development work benefit from peacebuilding activities that see a high involvement of women in local peace committees: while humanitarian and peacebuilding are supported by rangeland management activities where women are at the centre of resource mapping, stakeholder planning and community activities.

The project inception phase was completed in December 2022, which included completing the baseline study and an assessment of the role of women in peace.

A “Women For Peace” group (with 25 women as members) in Kenya initiated peace talks in Ethiopia.

In 2022, the project directly supported 1,213 women in improving their skills, knowledge and attitude regarding prioritising and influencing their humanitarian, development, and peace (HDP) needs.

Through the project, women in the Borana Zone and Marsabet County actively participated in preparing local Disaster Risk Management (DRM) plans. One of the needs identified by women was the distribution of dignity kits for schoolgirls (including sanitary pads and underwear), which was included in the DRM plan. As a result, 130 women received cash through Crisis Modifier (CM) funds, and 100 schoolgirls from particularly vulnerable families will receive dignity kits.



Women were also trained and actively participated in development activities, such as training in management and leadership skills, business management, and natural resource mapping via the Geographic Information System (GIS) tool. The project supports 359 women with financial assistance to run their micro-business as a means of economic empowerment. This supports the community to run alternative small businesses such as petty trade.

As part of the **triple nexus approach**, women actively participated in conflict management and transformational leadership training and voiced their needs in local and cross-border peace dialogue forums. Recently, women's peace committees facilitated a safe return of stolen properties from the cross-border, positively influencing the peaceful coexistence between the two communities (Borana of Ethiopia and Gabra of Kenya). The Gabra community facilitated the return of 126 stolen camels to the Borana community, and the Borana community returned 86 stolen camels to their owners in the Gabra community. As a result of these peace building efforts, the two communities started sharing communal resources (water and pasture) in a more coordinated manner, increased inter-communal trading activities, shared the same marketplaces, and their children started herding and playing together. The Austrian Development Agency funds Women for Peace.

### Colombia: OFP – Women defenders for the social management of peace

For 2022 and 2023, the project "Women and Youth Guardians of Peace and Life in Magdalena Medio" will be continued by the Organización Femenina Popular (OFP), whose activities will be developed in the region of Magdalena Medio. This region is characterised by its vast natural wealth but also by its history of social, workers' and peasants' struggles that have taken place in the context of a weak state presence, the proliferation of armed actors in constant dispute, the massive psychosocial impact of violence and the almost generalised poverty of its population.

This proposal is built on the lessons learned and results of the previous phase (2019-2021), which succeeded in promoting gender equality in a strategy based on three pillars: 1) economic conditions for food security, which empowered women in decision-making processes in the household, 2) political participation, which sought to raise the voice of women to position their voice in public scenarios and political leadership, and 3) Guarantees to life, which sought to protect life and territory through own and autonomous strategies, such as "Guardians of life".

#### Women for peace in Colombia

The HEKS/EPER project together with the local women organization OFP aims at increasing security /protection, participation in the peace building process and socio-economic support for conflict-affected women.



Participants of the project in 2019-22 are 1'200 women, mostly internally displaced from the slums of Barranbermeja and rural communities. 8'000-10'000 people will indirectly benefit.

In addition, the project is adjusted to and will be implemented at a crucial moment of change in the country, with the commitment of the elected government to promote the implementation of the Peace Agreement and the responsibility of legation of the Final Report of the Truth Commission decisively and consistently.

The project's overall objective is to contribute to the consolidation of complete, stable and lasting peace in the Magdalena Medio region of Colombia. To contribute to this, it is proposed to strengthen the political and social action of women and young people to construct peace in the territory. This proposal will combine the human rights, gender and intersectional approach with the systemic approach, consolidated with the advice of the HEKS/EPER Colombia team, in alliances with national institutions in the peacebuilding and gender equality agenda.

It will be implemented in 3 results: (i) increased commitment of women and young people from vulnerable communities to coexistence and peaceful management of conflicts; (ii) improved capacity for self-protection and care in women leaders and young people from communities in Magdalena Medio; and (iii) participation in the enforceability of the implementation of measures with a gender perspective in peace policies in the municipalities.

Finally, this proposal contributes to the implementation of the Peace Agreement, in point 1, towards a new Colombian countryside, which contemplates, among others: i.) the implementation of development programmes with a territorial approach; v.) the promotion of well-being and good living, as well as the commitment to the promotion, respect and guarantee of human rights; and vi.) gender equality. Likewise, it contributes to the implementation of point 2 of the Agreement: Political participation, specifically in the items: promotion of women's political representation; ii) democratic and participatory planning and point 5, of the System of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Guarantees of Non-Repetition.

### DR Congo – fighting sexual and gender-based violence in a conflict-affected region

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), discrimination against women and girls and the lack of women participation are key challenges in the conflictual region of Kivu, in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Rape is used as a 'weapon of war', and according to *Human Rights Watch*, many perpetrators of sexual violence are members of one of the 140 armed groups or the Congolese army. Violations by civilians and domestic violence have also massively increased in the last few years. Victims of violence experience various difficulties and barriers in accessing justice, for example, the stigma they face in their families and communities, (legal) illiteracy, widespread impunity, security-related fears and economic obstacles. In the face of this ongoing conflict, there is an urgent need for protection and justice for women and girls.

Therefore, HEKS/EPER and its partner organisation 'Dynamique des Femmes Juristes' (DFJ), are implementing the project '*Fight against the impunity of sexual and gender-based violence and holistic care for survivors*'. The project focuses on SGBV prevention, care of SGBV survivors and improving the cooperation between authorities and the population in the fight against SGBV. In 2022, the following results were achieved:

- Within the framework of the Prevention of Gender-Based Violence (GBV), 200 people, including 111 women, were reached by capacity building and knowledge-sharing initiatives on national and international laws and texts related to women's rights (R1325, DRC Family Code, 2006 law on sexual violence, etc.).

#### DR Congo – fighting violence against women



To fight sexual and gender-based violence in Kivu the project has in 2020; 181 survivors of SGBV received legal guidance and advice. 30 cases of sexual violence were accompanied to court. 23 court judgements were obtained (including 13 convictions, 9 acquittals and 1 referral to the natural judge).

The project operates three legal clinics that provided 2020 legal assistance, medical and psychological care and socio-economic reintegration to 181 survivors of gender and sexual violence.

- 30 heads of households (30 F and 30 M) participated in the couples' dialogue sessions on positive masculinities to transform socio-cultural norms harmful to women and discuss alternative norms.
- 81 people, all women and GBV survivors, accessed individual counselling services and group therapy was organised for 51 of them. Of these, 28 survivors received legal advice and guidance, and 17 cases were selected for legal action (accompaniment of lawyers before courts and tribunals). Three court judgements have been obtained to date, including two convictions (to penalties of penal servitude with damages) and one acquittal.



### Mali – Women farmers fight for the right to land and seeds and food sovereignty

In Mali, COFERSA, the cooperative of rural women farmers, leads two fights simultaneously. One for their rights to land, seeds, and socio-economic opportunities in this patriarchal society where women are most marginalised. Secondly, it engages in food sovereignty by promoting agroecology and local and traditional seed and culinary practices. The area where most of these cooperatives are based has seen their food security eroded due to the focus on cotton growing for export at the expense of meeting their own food needs, and women have been the most affected.



In 2022, COFERSA worked on both these fronts intensively. It provided members of 5 of its cooperatives with technical and practical trainings in agroecological methods, agroforestry, fisheries and the production, selection, and conservation of traditional seeds. This was followed by training on cooking and preparation of various local cuisines that are on the verge of disappearance. To make these trainings practical and easy to understand and apply, COFERSA prepared demonstration fields as well as video and audio materials and translated them into the vernacular languages. It also spread the message using radio emissions

and posters.

In addition to promoting and valorising the production and consumption of healthy and durable food based on local biodiversity and knowledge, these trainings also sensitised the local public about the dangers of emerging policies that promote certification of hybrid seeds, allow GMOs and harm the public's safety.

During the year under reporting, COFERSA also set up several communal seed reservoirs from which the cooperative members could borrow and exchange seeds. Such institutions provide a strong defence of traditional seed variety and biodiversity in Mali as well as in the West Africa region where COFERSA participates in seed fairs.

Similarly, COFERSA supported its members in adding value to their products and marketing them locally and augmenting their incomes. In addition to conducting quality control of products, COFERSA also set up outlets to distribute the products it collected from its various cooperatives.

In 2022, COFERSA also stepped up its advocacy work for the rights of rural women and peasants in Mali and internationally. First, representatives from COFERSA participated in the FAO conference on the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources (ITPGRFA) held in New Delhi. This conference was a milestone as it agreed to recognise the contributions of farmer-breeders and women as guardians and curators of crop diversity.

The same year, COFERSA also relayed the voice of marginalised rural women on international platforms by participating in the climate caravans during the COP27 Climate conference in Sharm-El-Sheik. Along with its regional partners, COFERSA urged the COP27 organisers to recognise, valorise and support African societies' traditional climate change adaptation practices and for developed countries to honour their financial pledges for developing countries.

Finally, in 2022 COFERSA also trained members from 5 cooperatives in leadership and advocacy skills, which will enhance the sustainability of these advocacy works by trickling the knowledge and experiences down to the village levels.

## Achievements & Perspectives

### Achievements in the past years



**Bangladesh:** Including women in decision-making – on household and community level.

Striving towards gender equality in and through its international programme, HEKS/EPER has achieved significant milestones during the last few years in the following areas: Effective women participation in the communities HEKS/EPER works with; women's economic empowerment and equal access to land; access to justice and peace processes for women; joint decision making at household level; change of cultural norms, attitudes and traditional practices opposed to gender equality; and gender capacity within HEKS/EPER and its partner organisations. HEKS/EPER and its partners have also contributed to equal access to land. In Niger and Senegal, for instance, women rarely have access

to land titles because of discriminatory customary inheritance and property rights. There are many female-headed households in Senegal as men migrate to cities or foreign countries for economic reasons. Through HEKS/EPER projects, collective land use rights were given to women's groups to cultivate and gather medicinal plants and forest fruit. In **Niger**, women obtained land through inheritance, acquisition or rental to grow ground nuts, sorghum, and vegetables, even though they have been neglected or ignored.

The current anti-liberal discourse in **Hungary**, where HEKS/EPER is active with church cooperation projects, affects gender equality and the human rights-based approach. For instance, some congregations were reluctant to apply these concepts. HEKS/EPER enabled seminars and training for women and gender sensitisation among partner churches and other partner organisations.

Within Roma communities in **Romania, Kosovo, Serbia** and **Hungary**, equal participation of boys and girls has been achieved in after-school programmes, scholarships and tutoring. In Kosovo, a partner organisation initiated a successful awareness-raising campaign on education's importance, especially for girls, through a parenting-at-home programme.

In **Colombia**, the long-term investment in women's capacity (e.g., regarding women's rights and political and economic participation) shows results. Agricultural production and sales could be increased thanks to more efficient networking and women's empowerment. Women are trained and now dare to apply for leadership positions and effectively contribute to the peace process.

To give staff and partner organisations concrete guidance on how to work towards gender equality, in 2016, HEKS/EPER elaborated a **practical Gender Implementation Guideline** and promoted its use through capacity building. However, transformations need time, commitment, resources, and perseverance. Below, the current achievements towards gender equality are specified.

## Achievements 2022

In 2021 and the **beginning of 2022**, HEKS/EPER strongly advanced its **safeguarding and equality policy framework**: HEKS/EPER endorsed a new PSEAH policy, a new child safeguarding policy, and extended its gender policy to a gender and diversity policy. With the revision of the gender policy, HEKS/EPER committed itself to concrete diversity principles on the organisational and programme level. This includes preventing discrimination based on gender or sex, sexual orientation, age, dis(ability), national or other origin (incl. racial or ethnic discrimination), language, religion, socio-economic background, or any other status. However, the commitment goes beyond prevention; HEKS/EPER wants to address unjust power relations within the organisation and achieve a more diverse representation of HEKS/EPER staff, including management positions. With the new policy, diversity shall become a relevant factor at the strategic and operational level. HEKS/EPER obliges itself ...

- to enhance diversity at all management tiers (abroad and in CH).
- to enhance diverse, effective participation, to consider multiple discrimination ('intersectionality') and to 'leave no one behind' in all projects.
- to include concrete measures in partner agreements to increase diversity in partner organisations.
- and to address gender and diversity in public communication.

The gender and diversity policy was broadly consulted with the staff in the country offices for a real buy-in and with external experts for a broader view.

As outlined above, the safeguarding and equality framework includes a new stand-alone PSEAH policy. The elaboration of the PSEAH policy was embedded in a comprehensive learning process within the whole organisation and the global cooperation division (see the box about PSEAH). The Code of Conduct will be adapted to align with all safeguarding and equality policies. However, gender-relevant achievements were made on more than just the policy level.

The **Gender Action Plan 2021-24 (GAP)** defines concrete objectives, measures and responsibilities to promote gender mainstreaming within the HEKS/EPER global division and its programme, viz., in the following areas:

- Gender balance in participation, decision-making, representation, and staffing at all organisational levels
- Gender equality in programming and programme cycle management in Switzerland and globally
- Strive towards gender mainstreaming in all HEKS/EPER's partner organisations
- Training and capacity development for all HEKS/EPER staff
- Protection from Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Sexual Abuse and Harassment (PSEAH), including complaint mechanisms.

The gender balance at the management level in the global cooperation division improved in 2022: 4 out of 7 management members were women. With the reorganisation and new structure, the ratio changed (and the hierarchy became flatter), with 8 women out of 14 management members.

To advance the implementation of this GAP and gender skills and awareness among staff, several **gender and PSEAH training** was carried out, for example, in Ethiopia, Kosovo, Myanmar, and Cambodia.

A **Gender Online Training course** was elaborated in 2022. The training course is mandatory for all global cooperation staff and helps ensure that all HEKS/EPER staff get a basic introduction to gender mainstreaming within HEKS/EPER.

The share of gender-relevant projects within the HEKS/EPER project portfolio has increased. New and interesting projects with a relevant focus on gender in conflicts/peacebuilding and also in GBV were, for example, initiated in DR Congo, in Niger, in Colombia, in the Ukraine response and in Ethiopia (see the chapter about promising practices).

**Gender analyses** were carried out for new programme phases (e.g., in Brazil and Ethiopia). There are still not enough comprehensive gender analyses on the project level. However, there are a few good examples (e.g., the gender analyses of the nurturing project in Cambodia) to learn from.

In Cambodia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Kosovo, DRC and Ethiopia, staff from the country office and partner organisations elaborated detailed **gender strategies and action plans** on the programme or project level. These action plans led to concrete measures taken and results, e.g. to increase the number of female staff in the projects, to fight negative gender stereotypes, and to enhance the effective participation of girls and women in the projects.

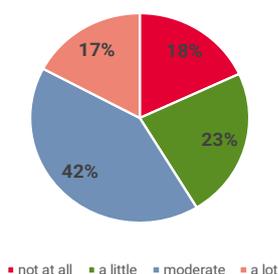
## Gender-disaggregated data

At programme and project level, the **fully gender-disaggregated HEKS/EPER key indicators (HKI)** show further progress towards gender equality within HEKS/EPER projects. On average, 40% of the addressed female population across all projects (and all key indicators) belong to discriminated groups – mainly discriminated because belonging to specific ethnic, indigenous, linguistic or social groups. Analysis of HKI data shows that the addressed discriminated women (also men) have equal access to HEKS/EPER project activities and can benefit on the same or even better level as some projects focus on including women.

## Effective participation of women, and influence on decision-making

To follow up on women's effective participation in decision-making bodies at the community level, 1946 women were interviewed in 2022<sup>8</sup>. Of them, 93% (1813) participate in organisations and bodies relevant to community decision-making.<sup>9</sup> 50% of interviewed women report participating in an organisation relevant to overarching or

### Influence on decision making

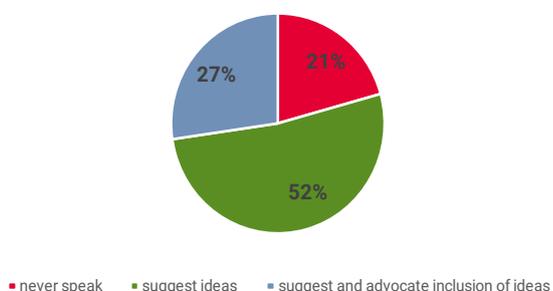


specific resources and topic communal decision-making. At the same time, other 42% engage in advocacy or interest groups and 8% in voluntary work or self-help groups.

42% of women report moderate, and 17% of women report high **influence on decision-making** in community bodies in which they participate. So, 59% of women have influence, yet the overall 'influence ratio' is 63.2%, indicating that men still have a bigger say. 52% of women are encouraged to suggest ideas, and 27% even advocate for adopting their ideas.

**Effective women participation 2022 in decision-making bodies** at community level (data from 18 projects in 8 countries). Above: Degree of influence on decisions. Below: Degree of activity of participants in community bodies.

### Activeness of participation



However, the results vary greatly. 21% of women never speak out. 41% of women feeling they have little or no influence are afraid to speak.

The ratio of discriminated women with little or no influence being afraid to speak is higher than 70%. 45% of women participating in organisations belong to discriminated groups. The same or even higher share of discriminated women take part in organisations truly relevant for decision-making and say that they have moderate and high level of influence. This observation means that the discriminated female project participants take equal chances to participate in organisations and influence community decision-making compared with non-discriminated women.

## HEKS/EPER Key Indicator Income

Looking at the **perceived change of income**, 58% (2021: 56%) of respondents stated medium or massive income increase, almost half being women (as in 2021). 26% of women stated income increase, and 14% stated the same or decreased income belonged to discriminated groups. A higher share of discriminated people benefiting from improved income demonstrates positive results of HEKS/EPER efforts supporting and empowering discriminated people.

## Gender-disaggregated data for the HKIs 'basic services', 'access to land', and 'training.'

Most HEKS/EPER key indicators (HKI) are disaggregated by sex and reveal interesting results: For instance, 62% of people who got **access to basic services** due to HEKS/EPER projects in 2022 were women. They received 59% of the provided services, mainly on social assistance and healthcare. 60% of women addressed belong to different discriminated groups.

<sup>8</sup> HKI: % of (vulnerable) people that report effective participation in decision-making organisations/bodies at community level.

<sup>9</sup> The proportion male vs female in the global sample of effective participation was 39% male vs 61% female as HEKS/EPER does focus on enhancing the participation of women in decision-making processes.

## People benefitting

20,013

326 individual, 19687 collective

## Women

10,757

121 individual, 10636 collective

**Land rights:** 54% of all persons benefitting from land rights in 2022 were women.

54% of project participants benefitting from access to **individual and collective land plots/rights** are women.

56% of individual and 97% of collective plots are assured by **legally binding rights**, assigned by legal authority, and de facto utilised.

71% of women associated with individual land plots/rights and 79% with collective land plots/rights belong to discriminated groups.

Women equally benefit from **collective land rights** (54% women) in HEKS/EPER projects. This result is astonishing, as access to land is still a highly gendered issue, and women rarely hold land titles (only 7% of land plots are documented in the name of women). Collective land use rights usually contain smaller lots per person but come along often with collective cultivation and peer-to-peer support.

In 2022, **10'253 people participated in trainings and knowledge-sharing events** supported by HEKS/EPER. Of those, **53% were women**.

### Other HEKS/EPER publications related to 'gender equality.'

- HEKS/EPER (2019). Gender Policy and Guidelines. Zurich. Online: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1YgqRk-ZfYS9NZOhkTMZi2Pq1H7dfgXtl/view>
- HEKS/EPER (2016). Gender Implementation Guidelines. Zurich. Online: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1dJdjACOFw4rLHnGqXzH\\_fX5a1N4xm4Zz/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1dJdjACOFw4rLHnGqXzH_fX5a1N4xm4Zz/view)
- ACT Alliance (2015). Gender-inclusive rights-based development. Online: <https://actalliance.org/capacity-building/gender-inclusive-rights-based-manual/>



**Niger:** Empowering women in rural production, manufacturing and decision-making on community level is key to ensure sustainable development and income-generating.

## This is HEKS/EPER



HEKS/EPER is the aid organisation of the Swiss protestant churches. It operates towards a more equitable and peaceful world (and Switzerland) with resilient communities, focusing on four topics: **Climate Justice, Inclusion, Right to Land & Food, and Refugee & Migration.**

In 2022, HEKS/EPER supported more than 60 projects in Switzerland, the inclusion of 98'000 people, and with 232 projects in 30 countries, 2.5 million people directly in economic, social or humanitarian need. The operating income of the whole organisation has risen to 114 M CHF and expenditure to 108.13 M CHF – of which 54.54 M CHF were net costs spent for the international programme.

In the Global Cooperation division, HEKS/EPER ameliorated with 17.8 M CHF (net costs) spent on 96 **development projects** for the life of 946'267 people focusing on access to land and resources, securing basic services, fostering sustainable production and inclusive market systems. It also promoted the social inclusion of marginalised, inclusive governance structures and conflict transformation. 23.4 M benefitted indirectly – e.g., through successful advocacy for new rights or policies (e.g., right to land, water, education, health, market access).

HEKS/EPER's **humanitarian aid** spent more than 29 M CHF (net costs) in 72 projects in 18 countries, directly reaching 1.522 M people affected by conflicts and disasters; another 2.4 M were indirectly reached with health prevention campaigns or rebuilt public sanitation, road or health infrastructures.

In the frame of **Church Cooperation**, HEKS/EPER enabled with 2.26 M CHF social work of Reformed Churches in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, reaching out to almost 35'000 people through 29 projects; another 30'500 were reached indirectly.

HEKS/EPER sensitises on the needs and rights of people and communities worldwide, addressing causes of global inequalities. To **influence the public, media, politics and other stakeholders in Switzerland** to achieve a transition to a more equitable, peaceful world, preserving the limited natural resources, HEKS/EPER spent 4.5 M CHF on advocacy and policy work.

HEKS/EPER Global Cooperation strives towards systemic change with its human rights-based approach, promoting ownership, innovation, and the nexus between humanitarian aid and development activities. Together with competent partners and well-interconnected alliances, HEKS/EPER fosters constant dialogue between civil society, the private sector, and Government actors enabling people and communities to advocate for their needs and rights. The international divisions' conflict- and gender-sensitive programming is risk-informed and evidence-based. A proficient institutional governance framework allows effectiveness and transparency.

In Switzerland, HEKS/EPER supported with 34.2 M CHF net costs of more than 60 projects in 15 cantons disadvantaged people in becoming socially and economically integrated by promoting equal opportunity and assisting jobless people, refugees, and other individuals by providing day structures, legal advice, vocational training, language courses, dialogue platforms, etc.

**The nine core values of HEKS/EPER:** Justice / Self-Determination / Participation / Respect / Solidarity / Support without Borders / Close to People / Effectiveness, / Accountability.

Strategies, policies, guidelines, and reports published on ID's Governance Website: [https://en.heks.ch/Institutional\\_Governance](https://en.heks.ch/Institutional_Governance)

Published by HEKS/EPER thematic advisory and MEAL units, May 2023, Zürich (Switzerland)

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