



# 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 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>

In 2023, the **global gender gap** has been closed by 68.4% (68.1% in 2022). This year’s results leave the progress towards gender parity at a 4.1% gain since 2006. Nevertheless, at the current rate of progress, it will take 131 years to reach full parity. While the global parity score has recovered to pre-pandemic levels, the overall rate of change has slowed down significantly. And compared to other regions, the Middle East and North Africa remain the furthest away from parity, with a 62.6% parity score. This is a 0.9 percentage-point decline in parity since the last edition for this region. There is an advancement from 95.3% to 96.1% in Educational Attainment between 2022 and 2023, moving beyond pre-pandemic levels, and an improvement from 95.7% to 95.9% for the Health and Survival dimension. The Political Empowerment score edges from 22.4% to 22.5%, and Economic Participation and Opportunity regresses from 60.0% in 2022 to 59.8% in 2023. The Political Empowerment subindex registers once again the largest gender gap. Iceland stands out as the best performer, with a 90.1% parity score, which is 13.6 percentage points greater than the country ranking second (Norway) and 69 percentage points above the median global score (21.1%). The lowest parity scores are found for Myanmar (4.7%), Nigeria (4.1%), Iran (3.1%), Lebanon (2.1%), Vanuatu (0.6%) and Afghanistan (0%).



**Family in Senegal – the country closing with 68.0 % represent the global gender gap average (68.1%).**

At the current 2023 rate of progress over the 2006-2023 span, it will take 162 years to close the Political Empowerment gender gap, 169 years for the Economic Participation and Opportunity gender gap, and 16 years for the Educational Attainment gender gap. The time to close the Health and Survival gender gap remains undefined. Devastated health systems have left poorer women without care and (more often) worse physical and mental health.

Between 2015 and 2022, the **gender gap in food insecurity 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. 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. 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. Vulnerability, discrimination, and gender inequality have even

<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.

increased in recent years due to multiple crises, like the COVID-19 pandemic, conflicts, including the wars in South Sudan, Ukraine and Israel/Gaza, economic crises, and climate-related disasters. 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.

**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., 30% of the rural population has no improved drinking water on premises, and women spend up to 3 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 influence on social, political, and economic decision-making processes. In political spheres, there is still a substantial **lack of female participation** in communities and national decision-making bodies.

Devastated health systems have left poorer women without care and (more often) in worse physical and mental health than men. As the world marks the halfway point to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the urgency to end **violence against women and girls** has never been greater. UN Women's Gender Snapshot 2023 report reveals that 245 million women and girls continue to face physical and/or sexual violence from their intimate partners each year. A staggering 86% of women and girls live in countries without robust legal protections against violence or in countries where data are not available. 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. And over 1.2 billion women and girls of reproductive age live in countries with restrictions on access to safe abortion.<sup>3</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>4</sup>

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 (including the criminalisation of abortion and laws against LGBTQI+ people<sup>5</sup>) continue to compound the challenges for women and LGBTQI+ persons. Discrimination and hate-motivated violence against LGBTQI+ people are widespread, brutal, and often perpetrated with impunity.

### How HEKS/EPER Responds – the 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 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

<sup>3</sup> UN Women 2022: SDG – Gender Snapshot. [Publication HQ | UN Women – Headquarters](#)

<sup>4</sup> Human Rights Watch 2023. [The Global Backlash Against Women's Rights | Human Rights Watch \(hrw.org\)](#)

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

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).

### 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.

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'.

The HEKS/EPER Gender and Diversity Policy and HEKS/EPER International Division's Gender Implementation Guidelines outline more details about HEKS/EPER policy principles and guidance for achieving gender equality in projects, programmes, and organisations. See Achievements 2023 and links at the end of this document.



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

## 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. Due to external requirements and concrete and harming SEAH cases within the organisation, staff awareness increased. HEKS/EPER went through a comprehensive organisational learning process about PSEAH.

The elaboration of the PSEAH policy was embedded in a comprehensive learning process within the whole organisation and the global cooperation (GC) division. GC installed a PSEAH focal point at the Global Office responsible for PSEAH sensitisation, training, reporting, and tools implementation, and acting as lead investigator handling sensitive SEAH cases.

The rollout of PSEAH in the project countries started with all GC staff at the global office, and all country directors were sensitised about PSEAH in a two-day workshop in 2021. It continued with compulsory online training for all GC staff and with establishing country-based PSEAH focal points in 2023, and mandatory PSEAH online training was introduced for the current and future staff. Specific and context-adapted trainings are being carried out in the country offices, including the partner organisation's staff, since 2022, reaching all countries in 2023. Each office must assess the country-specific SEAH risks and update the assessment documents regularly, including a referral system for affected persons and a plan for how to implement and improve the PSEAH process.

GC staff contracts and partner organisation agreements include both, by default, that HEKS/EPER partner and country staff are obliged to apply either HEKS/EPER's or their board-approved gender policy and PSEAH guidance in accordance with the HEKS/EPER Gender Policy. All partner 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 country office or the partner Organisation must be reported immediately to HEKS/EPER global office and will be handled by the PSEAH compliance officer.

The **PSEAH policy** includes crucial aspects as ...

- 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.
- Ensure periodic training for all staff to keep or increase awareness.
- FCRM: Several analogue and digital reporting channels linking to partner, country office and global office are established, promoted and known and accessible barrier-free to project participants, partner and country staff. FCRM/compliance focal points at global office and in countries elaborate, promote, apply and improve the, reporting mechanisms.
- 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.

**Challenges** to the implementation of PSEAH standards in GC country offices and with partner organisations worldwide may arise due to various factors, including cultural, structural, operational, and resource-related challenges. Here are some common challenges:

- Cultural Sensitivities and Norms
- Power Dynamics and Hierarchies
- Limited Awareness, Skills, and Knowledge
- Resource Constraints
- Resistance to Change and Institutional Resistance

## Promising Practices Worldwide

### Women for Peace - Strengthening local knowledge and skills to address, mitigate and transform conflicts in the Ethiopian-Kenyan border area of Borana–Marsabet

The Women for Peace project promotes women's empowerment and gender transformative programming through the active involvement of women in humanitarian, development, and peace responses in cross-border areas between Ethiopia (Borana Zone) and Kenya (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 will be implemented between December 2021 and May 2024. Until December 2023, the project directly supported over 15,000 community members in improving their skills, knowledge, and attitude regarding prioritising and influencing their humanitarian, development, and peace (HDP) needs.

Through initiatives such as the Participatory Scenario Planning (PSP) workshops, women on both sides of the border actively contributed to weather advisory message production, whose messages reached an estimated 45,000 community members through TV, radio, and community structures. These messages helped to trigger a variety of community responses such as the maintenance of ponds, fencing of enclosures, establishment of fodder-saving areas, as well as improved organisation of grazelands. Additionally, the project supported women-led economic activities. So far, 15 (7 in Ethiopia and 8 in Kenya) women-operated rural saving and credit cooperatives have been created by the project and provided loans to 389 members (339 females) to engage in various small-scale enterprises such as petty trade, goats and small ruminant trading, as well as cross-border business like grain trading and cattle fattening. Additionally, four women-led business groups organised and funded by the project have started new businesses such as goat rearing and the creation of small shops including solar-powered mobile phone charging.

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 facilitated community dialogue forums to promote women's participation in decision-making processes and raise awareness about GBV. As a result, participants agreed to strengthen women's Village Saving and Loan Associations (VSLAs) and establish a one-stop centre for GBV survivors in Moyale Hospital. Additionally, radio listener groups were established to broadcast messages on women's empowerment, peacebuilding, and GBV prevention, reaching a wider audience in remote areas. Local authorities were also engaged in



**Bringing together women across the border to become agents of change towards a peaceful future.**

a campaign to raise awareness about GBV and the importance of prevention efforts. On the Kenyan side, women role models were trained on social behaviour change to promote women's participation in decision-making on issues like FGM, early marriage, and peacebuilding.

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. Thanks to the Peace Committee's swift action following outbreaks of violence, peace could be restored in several incidents along the Ethiopia-Kenya border. The project facilitated joint peace dialogues involving over 413 participants (including 178 women) from various stakeholders. These dialogues led to the recovery of stolen livestock, arrests of perpetrators (3 individuals), and agreements on resource sharing. Cross-border communication between peace committees was strengthened, and the project actively promoted women's role in peacebuilding efforts. This resulted in a significant decrease in cattle rustling incidents, fostering a more peaceful environment for the border communities. 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'. 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 this end, 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 three results ...

- Increased commitment of women and young people from vulnerable communities to coexistence and peaceful management of conflicts
- Improved capacity for self-protection and care in women leaders and young people from communities in Magdalena Medio.
- Participation in the enforceability of implementing 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

#### 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 2019-23 are 1'200 women, mostly internally displaced from the slums of Barranbermeja and rural communities. 8'000–10'000 people will indirectly benefit.

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-Repitition.

### DR Congo: Peace Building Through Equality - Women's Participation in the Stabilisation

Despite efforts to raise awareness of the need to combat gender-based discrimination, local resources in the DRC continue to be allocated and managed in a way that discriminates against women. For example, land inheritance is exclusively reserved for men, excluding women, persons with disabilities, and marginalised groups.

In the project 'Peacebuilding through (Gender) Equality', which HEKS/EPER has implemented together with its partners, women influence all phases of the stabilisation and peace-building process and are recognised as agents of change in development.



Meeting of a 1325 group.

- The project has involved women in activities and decision-making bodies where they play an active role in implementation to achieve empowerment and economic recovery. Women participate not only as members but also occupy 40% of decision-making positions in the peace and development cells of the local groups; in the local 1325 committees, women already occupy 60% of the decision-making positions; in the socio-economic recovery structures (OP and AVEC), women are represented in more than 80% of decision-making positions.
- In addition, women make up 53% of direct participants in the project so far. To achieve this percentage, the project has implemented capacity-building activities and brought customary and political-administrative authorities closer to women (workshops, forums for popular expression, security forums); dialogues on positive masculinities; activities to disseminate legal instruments on women's rights (convivial activities, radio broadcasts); advocacy activities for the protection of women in rural areas.
- 3 circular letters were initiated by the community and signed by the local authorities (chiefdoms of BWITO, BAMATE and Groupement Ikobo) to reinforce the presence of women in security meetings. Thanks to these initiatives, the participation of women in the above-mentioned bodies is a prerequisite for the validity of any security meeting, an important decision-making forum at the local level.

### Mali – Women Farmers Act for the Right to Land and Seeds and Food Sovereignty

In Mali, COFERSA, the cooperative of rural women farmers, leads two fights simultaneously. One is for their rights to land, seeds, and socio-economic opportunities in this patriarchal society where women are most marginalised. The other engages in food sovereignty by promoting agroecology and local and traditional seed and culinary practices. To this end, in 2023, COFERSA increased its skills and awareness-raising training, policy advocacy activities, and those aimed at boosting the production of local seeds and agricultural products.

To reach a wider public with awareness-raising materials, COFERSA produced four new videos containing practical training and documenting its own experiences in promoting farm-based seeds and food sovereignty. The



video stories were selected by members of the cooperatives through a participatory process. COFERSA has now made over 500 copies of these videos in memory sticks and aims to distribute them to its members and the public in 2024.

COFERSA also continued to play an active role in advocacy at regional and international levels in 2023. Three of its members participated at the regional seed fair in Benin, while another two joined the caravan of CONVERGENCE that visited 5 countries in West Africa demanding national governments and regional authorities to do more to address climate change, protect land and food rights of women and promote genuine food sovereignty based on agroecology. By visiting women's peasant structures such as COFERSA and those in the informal sectors such as food processors and vendors, the caravan highlighted particularly the key role of women in food sovereignty and diversity and called on national governments and community leaders to actively protect and promote women's right to land and seeds and independence. This caravan was attended by 250 participants from 14 mainly West African countries and reached over 17'000 people in the countries they passed through. Similarly, two of its members represented African peasants' voices at the FAO annual Conference on reforming the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resource in 2023 in Rome.

In the year under reporting, COFERSA also focused on tackling the lack of good quality and quantity of vegetable seeds that can be cultivated in gardens, one of the main challenges for securing food in Mali. As such it secured and prepared an extra 2 hectares of land in five cooperatives to boost their production capacities for this purpose. It also puts new varieties of maize (red, white and yellow), sorghum, vegetables, manioc, tomatoes and eggplants at their disposal, which is expected to significantly improve access to these special varieties.

Finally, in 2023 COFERSA also focused on strengthening its organizational capacity and making itself financially more sustainable. In addition to revamping its personnel and administration, it sought to improve the financial sustainability of its cooperatives to become less dependent on external aid. This was mainly done through expanding its production, processing and marketing capacities. In this regard, COFERSA managed to improve its packaging techniques by adding bio-degradable packages, which enhanced its marketing capacity. It also trained two women from each of the 5 cooperatives in selecting, preserving, processing and marketing local agricultural products.

## 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, boys and girls have been equally involved 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.

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

### Achievements 2023

In 2022 and 2023 HEKS/EPER elaborated and started an **Online Course on Gender Equality and Diversity**. 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 gender training E-course consists of chapters on ...

- Introduction to gender concepts and a gender-inclusive HRBA (ACT Alliance)
- Gender mainstreaming in projects, programmes, and across the organisation / Gender mainstreaming in all PCM phases
- HEKS/EPER policy framework on equality and safeguarding
- Gender stereotypes
- How to carry out a gender analysis/gender analytical framework

In 2023 also started a reconvened **Community of Practice (CoP) on gender and diversity** with gender focal points and gender interested staff from nearly all HEKS/EPER countries. One of its first objectives was the reviewing and evaluation of the gender E-course as well as providing gender inputs for the new HEKS/EPER strategy. Regular CoP meetings and consultations for gender knowledge exchange are being planned. Using a written consultation, the CoP was also explicitly involved in the gender chapter of the new HEKS/EPER global strategy 2025-2028.

In the upcoming **Global Strategy 2025-2028**, HEKS/EPER emphasises implementing diversity, intersectional approaches, and multiple discrimination. This strategic phase is dedicated to the implementation of all institutional gender policy and diversity commitments across all divisions and programmes. To contribute to this roll-out, the HEKS/EPER Global Cooperation division pursues elaborating concrete gender and diversity targets adapted to country contexts to enhance diversity at all management and staff tiers. Diverse and female leadership will be promoted. Concrete gender-transformative and diversity targets shall also be set in programmes and projects. Being aware that positive changes towards gender equality and diversity always require in-depth dialogue and a shift of mindsets and values, HEKS/EPER will further invest in sensitization, training, and dialogue with its team but also with partner organisations and other stakeholders and allies, e.g., to learn to be aware of blind spots and unconscious biases and to reflect on own privileges.

At the overall organisational level, HEKS/EPER took a major step towards gender equality in 2023: **for the first time in the history of HEKS/EPER, a woman was elected as Director**. Karolina Frischkopf took up her position in February 2024.

The Latin American and Caribbean team held a workshop on masculinities and another training session, and new forms of collaboration and projects in Latin America were explored. There will be a stronger focus on masculinities and the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ persons in this region.

In Myanmar, Cambodia, and Ethiopia, among others, **cross-sectional gender trainings** were carried out, such as climate resilient agriculture training with a focus on Gender Equality, Diversity, and Social Inclusion (GEDSI tool)

in Cambodia in 2023 (Nurture project). In these contexts, thorough gender analyses were made and documented (e.g. in Borana, Ethiopia), and detailed gender strategies and gender action plans on the programme or project level were elaborated (e.g. in Myanmar). These action plans led to concrete measures 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.

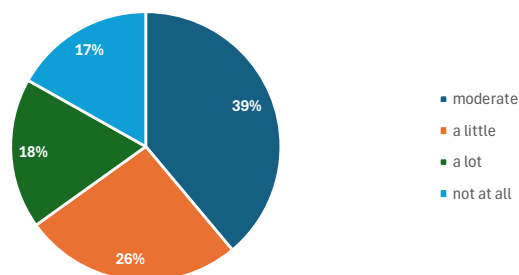
HEKS/EPER is increasingly running more projects with a gender-relevant focus. Interesting projects are going on with a relevant focus on **gender in conflicts/peacebuilding and in GBV**, for example in DR Congo, Niger, Colombia, Ethiopia, and in the Ukraine response.

## Gender-Disaggregated Data 2023

At programme and project level, the **fully gender-disaggregated HEKS/EPER key indicators system** – enabling gender analysis linked to all data collected on project, country and global level –, shows further progress towards gender equality within HEKS/EPER projects. On average, 50% 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.

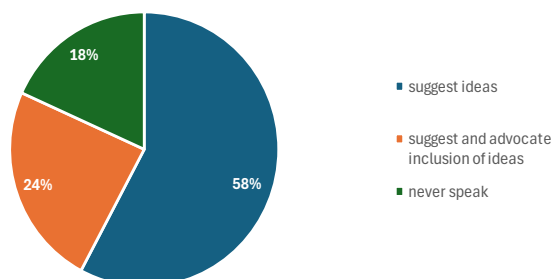
### Effective participation of women, and influence on decision-making

Influence on decision-making



**Effective women participation 2023 in decision-making bodies** at community level (data from 11 projects in 7 countries). Above: Degree of influence on decisions. Below: Degree of activity of participants in communities.

Activeness of participation



To follow up on women's effective participation in decision-making bodies at the community level, 1273 women were interviewed in 2023<sup>6</sup>. Of them, 88% (1123) participate in organisations and bodies relevant to community decision-making.<sup>7</sup> 53% of interviewed women report participating in advocacy or interest groups. At the same time, another 42% engage in organisations relevant to overarching or specific resources and topic communal decision-making and 5% in voluntary work or self-help groups.

39% of women report moderate, and 18% of women report high **influence on decision-making** in community bodies in which they participate. So, 57% of women have influence, yet the overall 'influence ratio' is 65.3%, indicating that men still have a bigger say. 58% of women are encouraged to suggest ideas, and 24% even advocate for adopting their ideas.

However, the results vary greatly. 18% of women never speak out, and 43% feel they have little or no influence and are afraid to speak.

The ratio of discriminated women with little or no influence who are afraid to speak is higher than 62%. 40% of women participating in organisations belong to discriminated groups. An equal or higher proportion of these women participate in organizations that are truly relevant for decision-making, reporting moderate to high levels of influence. This observation indicates that discriminated female project participants have

equal opportunities to participate in organizations and influence community decision-making compared to non-discriminated women.

### HEKS/EPER Key Indicator Income

<sup>6</sup> HKI: % of (vulnerable) people that report effective participation in decision-making organisations/bodies at a community level.

<sup>7</sup> The proportion of males vs females in the global sample of effective participation was 31% male vs 69% female, as HEKS/EPER does focus on enhancing the participation of women in decision-making processes.

Looking at the **perceived change of income**, 55% (2022: 58%) of respondents stated medium or massive income increase, 63% being women (46% in 2022). 28% 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 the positive results of GC's efforts in supporting and empowering discriminated people.

People benefitting

186,170

716 individual, 185454 collective

Women

87,184

559 individual, 86625 collective

**Land rights:** 47% of all persons benefitting from land rights in 2023 were women.

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

- **Services:** Most HEKS/EPER key indicators (HKI) are disaggregated by sex and reveal interesting results: For instance, 69% of people who got access to basic services due to HEKS/EPER projects in 2023 were women. They received 72% of the provided services, mainly on social assistance, education, and healthcare. 90% of women addressed belong to different discriminated groups.
- **Land:** 47% of project participants benefiting from *access to individual and collective land plots/rights* are women. 41% of individual and 87% of collective plots are assured by *legally binding rights*, assigned by legal authority, and de facto utilised. 72% of women associated with individual land plots/rights belong to *discriminated groups*. Women almost equally benefit from *collective land rights* (47% 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 (37% of the land plots in HEKS/EPER projects are documented in the names of women or as joint ownership). Collective land use rights usually contain smaller lots per person but come along often with collective cultivation and peer-to-peer support. Globally, women own on average less than 20% of the world's land.
- **Training:** In 2023, 337,195 people participated in trainings and knowledge-sharing events supported by HEKS/EPER. Of those, 75% were women. This reflects the programme's ambitions to strengthen women of vulnerable communities in fragile contexts as they drive development and peacebuilding.

### Perspectives

The follow-up of the gender action plans will be a focus in 2024. Sensitisation and training of staff at the global office, for country and partner staff, are part of it and will continue.

A challenge for the ongoing programme phase will be to link gender 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.

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

- HEKS/EPER (2019). Gender Policy and Guidelines. Zurich. Online: [1f-C\\_304.e\\_Gender and Diversity Policy.pdf](#)
- HEKS/EPER (2016). Gender Implementation Guidelines. Zurich. Online: [Gender guideline\\_En.pdf](#)
- ACT Alliance (2015). Gender-inclusive rights-based development. Online: <https://actalliance.org/capacity-building/gender-inclusive-rights-based-manual/>

## This is HEKS/EPER

HEKS/EPER is the aid organisation of the Swiss Protestant Churches. It operates in four fields – Climate Justice, Inclusion, Right to Land & Food, Displacement & Migration – towards a more just, equitable and peaceful world with resilient communities.

In 2023, HEKS/EPER Switzerland supported with 45 programmes in 15 Swiss cantons the inclusion of 133'000 people. HEKS/EPER Global Cooperation (GC) assisted in 37 countries with 235 projects, 7.13 million people directly in economic, social or humanitarian need, and 9.5 million indirectly.

The operating corporate income of the whole organisation has risen to 137.28 M CHF and expenditure to 138.49 M CHF – of which 75.03 M CHF (2022: 54.54 M CHF) were net costs spent for the global programme.

GC spent 28.09 M CHF (net costs) on Development Cooperation, ameliorating the lives of 3.688.478 people directly. It promoted politics and practices enabling sustainable systems change and implemented 98 development projects, focusing on right/access to land and resources, fostering sustainable agricultural production, climate mitigation and adaptation, peaceful societies, and socio-economic inclusion. 7.774.356 people benefited indirectly, e.g., through successful advocacy for introducing or securing rights and supportive policies.

In 2023, HEKS/EPER reached 3.391.213 people directly with its 89 humanitarian projects in 21 countries and net expenses of 44.88 M CHF, and 1.153.096 individuals were reached indirectly.

In the frame of Church Cooperation, with 21 projects and 2.06 M CHF, GC supported the social and humanitarian work of Reformed Churches and organisations in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, reaching 47'232 people directly and another 522'048 indirectly.

HEKS/EPER sensitises the needs and rights of people and communities worldwide, addressing causes of global inequalities and possible solutions. To inform 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 5.26 M CHF on advocacy and policy work, coordinated through 25 projects. To ensure outreach, GC maintains links to partners, alliances and networks in Switzerland and worldwide.

Global Cooperation strives towards a systems change with its human rights-based approach, promoting locally-led solutions, the communities' ownership, innovation, and the nexus between humanitarian aid, development activities and peacebuilding endeavours. Jointly with proficient partners and well-connected alliances, HEKS/EPER fosters constant dialogue between civil society, the private sector, and Government actors. It enables people and communities to participate and advocate for their needs and rights.

GC applies risk-informed, evidence-based, environment-, conflict- and gender-sensitive, results-oriented, adaptive programming. A transparent governance and compliance framework with high safeguarding and management standards ensures accountability and monitors and evaluates whether our projects have an effective impact and add value for the people we collaborate with.

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


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

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