



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
Confederazione Svizzera  
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Agency for Development  
and Cooperation SDC

# Status Report on Gender Equality 2020 **Stepping Up our Efforts**





# Foreword

We were geared up to celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the most comprehensive global agenda for girls and women in all areas of life. We planned to join global events meant to highlight this prominently and to reaffirm our commitment towards accelerating gender equality.

Instead, we have been confronted with a pandemic that has hit directly and with full force many areas of life. Women and men are affected differently, with women bearing a large part of the burden. We have observed a rise in care work, an increase in violence against women and girls, the danger of dropping out of school and the disruption of essential sexual and reproductive health services. Women are facing loss of employment and income and the risk of further feminization of poverty is high. Although the stakes are high for women, they are not sufficiently involved in decision-making processes to address the crisis. In some countries, these challenges have even been exacerbated by government policies that depart from the ambition and commitment of the Beijing Declaration.

Planned activities sometimes had to be delayed or postponed due to the pandemic. Nevertheless, we developed new methods to reach out to our target groups. The year 2020 challenged us to push further in the direction of digitalization. On the one hand, this opened up new opportunities to disseminate information and interact more quickly. On the other hand, it clearly highlighted the limitations of mostly remote and virtual exchange. Moreover, the existing digital gender gap has put further constraints on many women. Questions of unequal access and IT skills are a major issue, especially for those in precarious living conditions. Online harassment is increasingly affecting women in the public sphere.

Fortunately, we were able to react quickly and flexibly. Programmes were adapted or additional measures were introduced, primarily in the critical area of gender-based violence and the continued provision of vital sexual and reproductive health services. These were often coupled with community-based initiatives that also involved men and boys. Substantively, the focus was set on addressing obstructive cultural norms and concepts of masculinity. Our country offices have reached out to their partner organizations to encourage and support them in finding innovative solutions and exchanging experiences. At the global level, it was a priority for the SDC, together with the multilateral system to respond coherently to the crises and make sure that gender-responsive elements were integrated.

The Gender Unit, together with active network members, also had to adapt its activities in light of the current COVID-19 pandemic. We increasingly used online formats to quickly get in touch with the country offices. On our Shareweb we gathered information on gender-specific subjects related to the crisis, and conducted a series of webinars to mutually exchange information and learn from different experiences. It was great to see that, despite the difficult circumstances, the appetite for continued learning and peer exchange did not disappear. We organised workshops on SDC's proven experience with the community-based psychosocial approach in combating sexual and gender-based violence and on ways to address intersecting factors of exclusion. We carried out trainings, for example, on gender and migration and on gender and food security.

As in other years, extra efforts have been invested to provide us with a range of interesting case examples for this report. They show us that achieving results in promoting gender equality was possible. They give us an idea of how we work, what challenges we face and how we try to address them. The situation remains difficult. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, gender inequality was pervasive, and progress was slow. Now, we have to counter the longer-term effects of the pandemic and the risk that achieved progress may be reversed. We need to further tackle the structural deficiencies, power relations and social norms that cause inequalities.

For this reason, we have to work more decisively and systematically towards significant and transformative change. Initiating more gender specific programmes and supporting women's organisations and leadership can give it a further push.

We wish you a good read and inspiration for stepping up our efforts.



Corinne Huser,  
SDC Gender Unit



Selina Haeny



and Nadia Amri



Thomas Gass  
Ambassador, Assistant Director General, SDC

# Main Messages

## 1. The COVID-19 pandemic put in danger progress made on gender equality

2020 was the year of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic as a global crisis, which puts achievements in gender equality at risk of being rolled back. It has amplified and highlighted existing inequalities in all spheres of life. Its impact on both women and men has been tremendous, yet for numerous reasons women are disproportionately affected.

## 2. Responding to the 'shadow pandemic' of sexual and gender-based violence

25 years after the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is still one of the world's most striking contemporary challenges. It has increased tremendously in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The SDC was quick in reacting, building on years of experience. Established multi-stakeholder collaboration and strong grassroots networks helped to disseminate vital information and provide support services to survivors of violence. Strengthening the capacities of domestic institutions has laid important foundations to address this crisis. Finally, engaging men and boys aims at more transformative change. In 2020, in 9 countries, about 216'000 affected persons, including about 127'000 women and girls and 89'000 men and boys received support through SDC interventions.

Sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse are forms of sexual violence that made headlines around the world. The SDC took a series of dedicated measures to provide guidance for action and realize its zero-tolerance policy.

## 3. Tangible results but persistent challenges in the economic field

Despite their rising level of education, women hold less secure jobs, have lower salaries and are more integrated into the informal economy than men. The COVID-19 pandemic has hit them especially hard. Thanks to the SDC's accompaniment, women have been able to maintain their businesses and even generate profits. In 2020, about 52'300 people from nine countries obtained new or better (self)employment through SDC interventions. Of all beneficiaries, 54 percent were women. Good examples of upskilling professional qualification, for example in Laos, are inspiring. Nevertheless, in other fields the gender gap persists. Particularly, women face difficulties in accessing financial services and products. Measures to reduce women's multiple work burden should be pursued. Social protection is an area to further explore.

## 4. Promoting equal voice and influence in politics is an important priority

Women's political participation at local, national, and global levels is crucial for a democracy and a fundamental precondition for gender equality. The fact that women are under-represented in politics and decision-making positions has an impact on the responses to the COVID-19 crisis. The SDC follows a multidimensional approach. It promotes women's effective participation as citizens and as leaders in political bodies at multiple levels. These efforts have shown creditable results. In 2020, for example, about 1'735'346 people from ten countries participated in and influenced public service provision, decision-making and budgets in their localities. Half of the beneficiaries were women and fourteen percent of them belonged to disadvantaged population groups.

## 5. Tackling intersecting inequalities

Various forms of inequality – such as sex, age, caste, ethnicity, or geographical location – can intersect with each other, leading to multiple forms of discrimination. The SDC, together with its implementing partners, is committed to address this challenge and live up to the commitment of "leave no one behind". Several examples in this report describe ways of empowering women and men from disadvantaged population groups, for example through vocational skills development in Laos, skateboarding in Afghanistan or civil society mobilization in Moldova. Sex-disaggregated data for left behind groups were more systematically documented in 2020. Further action based on nuanced understanding and differentiated approaches should be pursued.

## 6. The SDC's financial commitments to gender equality

In 2020, the SDC committed a total of CHF 668'989'550 of all bilateral aid interventions to gender equality. Six percent of the total committed funding (CHF 53'821'213) was awarded to interventions with gender equality as their principle objective, and 65 percent (CHF 615'168'337) to those integrating gender in a transversal way. Compared to last year, this is a considerable increase. But we have not yet reached our target of 10 and 75 percent, respectively. Over the past four years, the period of the strategy of international cooperation 2017–2020, the average percentages were 4.7, and 61.5 respectively.

# Content

<b>1. Gender Equality at a Time of Global Crisis</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2. The SDC's Contribution</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>3. The SDC's Financial Commitments to Gender Equality</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>4. The SDC's Gender Results</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Map of the SDC's Gender Equality-Focused Interventions</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>4.1 Sexual and Gender-Based Violence</b>	<b>20</b>
Example 1: Enabling Bolivian women to live without violence with a multidimensional state-civil society approach	21
Example 2: Strengthening effective State action against domestic violence in Tajikistan	23
Example 3: Empowering women's organisations in addressing sexual and gender-based violence in Iraq	25
<b>4.2 Women's Economic Empowerment</b>	<b>28</b>
Example 4: Promoting women's economic empowerment in the South Caucasus	29
Example 5: Advancing women's career opportunities in the hospitality sector in Lao PDR	31
Example 6: Equitable access to economic and business opportunities as a key for women's employment and increased income in Benin	33
<b>4.3 Women's Political Participation</b>	<b>35</b>
Example 7: Decision-making positions in the political realm through female empowerment in Serbia	37
Example 8: Improving women's decision-making capacities in the watershed management in Nicaragua	39
<b>4.4 Topics of Crosscutting Importance (gender and social equality, policy reforms)</b>	<b>41</b>
Example 9: Empowering girls through skateboarding in Afghanistan	43
Example 10: Supporting gender equality reforms in Burkina Faso	45
Example 11: Advocating for gender transformative policy reforms in Moldova	47
<b>5. Conclusion and Outlook</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Abbreviations and Acronyms</b>	<b>51</b>

# 1. Gender Equality at a Time of Global Crisis

The year 2020 was an extraordinary year. On the one hand, it was a year of important jubilees: the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action – the most comprehensive global policy framework for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls; the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security; and the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of UN Women. In addition, it was the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development. Its SDGs have provided an additional framework for action to support gender equality and empowerment of women and girls – especially SDG 5. On the other hand, the year was marked by the COVID-19 pandemic as a global crisis that aggravated pre-existing inequalities around the world. Those who were already disadvantaged, because of social status, age, sex, ethnicity, or disability, became even more vulnerable. Persistent gender inequalities have been highlighted and further exacerbated.<sup>1</sup>

Although progress towards gender equality is visible, it has been too slow, even before COVID-19. Gender inequality persists everywhere and in all spheres of life – economic, social, and political.<sup>2</sup> According to the World Economic Forum (2020), at this pace of development, it will take the global community nearly 100 years to achieve equality between women and men in all spheres of life. This progress is not only slow, but unequally distributed: Latin America needs 59 years, and Sub-Saharan Africa 95 years, but Eastern Asia and the Pacific will need 163 years to close the gender gap. In 2020, gender disparities have been reduced in the areas of political participation, health, and education. Unfortunately, when it comes to women's participation in the labour market, the gender gap has widened. If sustainable development is to benefit everyone, gender equality must be achieved. It must not be overlooked.<sup>3</sup>

Today, even progress made in gender equality might be reversed. Women and girls confront further risks and difficulties caused by the COVID-19 crisis, simply because of their gender. The economic impact on both women and men has been tremendous: The world's economy is lurching towards a global recession. According to the International Monetary Fund (2020), 2.7 billion workers, or 81 percent of the world's workforce, have been affected by a full or partial lockdown. Moreover, millions of people have lost their jobs and livelihoods.<sup>4</sup> However, as women globally hold less secure jobs, have lower salaries and are more integrated into the informal sector than men, they have been disproportionately affected by the crisis. This is especially true in developing countries, where more than 70 percent of women work in the informal sector.<sup>5</sup>

One example is the very globalized and feminized garment sector. The COVID-19 pandemic hit the garment industry hard by disrupting supply chains. Orders valued at billions of dollars were cancelled. As a result, millions of workers in producing countries have been laid off, often without being paid the wages they already earned.<sup>6</sup>

1 Abou-Habib et al. (2020): Introduction: Gender, Development, and Beijing +25, *Gender & Development*, 28:2, 223–237.

2 World Economic Forum (2020): Global Gender Gap Index 2020. World Economic Forum, Geneva, Switzerland.

3 Leach (2016): *Gender Equality and Sustainable Development. Pathways to Sustainability*. Routledge, New York.

4 International Monetary Fund (2020): *An Early View of the Economic Impact of the Pandemic in 5 Charts*. New York.

5 United Nations (2020): *Policy Brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Women*. United Nations, New York.

6 ILO (2020): *Gendered Impacts of COVID-19 on the Garment Sector*. ILO Brief. International Labour Organization, Geneva.



Furthermore, women hold up to 70 percent of health sector jobs globally, but have little decision-making power in that sector. Women are underrepresented in leadership and decision-making positions in the health care sector, but are over-represented in lower paid jobs at the forefront of the health crisis. Medical and non-medical health professionals have a 60 percent higher risk of a COVID-19 infection. In addition, workers in the service sector, such as shop assistants, have a 20 percent higher risk of becoming infected. This service sector is globally feminised too.<sup>7</sup>

Due to the predominant gender norms and the division of labour, women perform 76 percent of the world's unpaid care work. During the pandemic, the time women spent on child-care increased from 26 to 31 hours per week. The closure of schools, kindergartens, and day-care centres added pressure on and burdened women working without remuneration. Full home-schooling increased the obligations of women in addition to their paid work. Unequal gender relations created additional risks for women in charge of taking care of elderly or ill family members, neighbours, and community members.<sup>8</sup>

As these data show, the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic have a large gender dimension. Therefore, tackling this crisis must emphasize gender-responsiveness. The United Nations (2020) proposed a policy response with three cross-cutting priorities: First, to ensure women's equal representation in all COVID-19 response planning and decision-making. Second, to drive transformative change for equality by addressing the care economy, paid and unpaid. Third, to target women and girls in all efforts to address the socio-economic impact of COVID-19.<sup>9</sup> A useful tool for applying a gender-responsive approach to COVID-19 is the UNDP/ UN Women "COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker".<sup>10</sup> This policy tracker shows how governments around the world respond to the pandemic. Globally, 992 gender-responsive policies have so far been implemented. The biggest share – with 704 gender-sensitive policies – concern violence against women and girls (see Box 1), while only few focus on income security and labour force participation.

### Box I: Violence against women and girls during the COVID-19 pandemic

In the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic, violence against women and girls has increased (VAWG). Reports show that in particular domestic violence has intensified. Explanatory factors are increased social and economic stress levels as well as movement restrictions. Lockdown measures to limit the spread of the pandemic had severe consequences for survivors of domestic violence. As they were confined with their abusers, they often had difficulties to reach out for help. According to UN Women, five action steps for governments and UN agencies are needed to respond to this contemporary issue: 1. Additional resources to address VAWG during the COVID-19 pandemic. 2. Strengthened services for women and girls who suffered violence in this crisis. 3. Capacity building of service providers to prevent impunity and improve quality of response. 4. Putting women at the centre of policy change, solution, and recovery. 5. Collection of sex-disaggregated data during the COVID-19 pandemic. Domestic abuse of boys and men is significantly lower than that of girls and women, also during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, cases of male victims are particularly underreported as feelings of social prejudice and shame restrain boys and men from confiding.

Finally, sexual and gender-based violence does not only affect the psychological, physical, and emotional well-being of the survivors, it also has negative effects on their family and the community. To stop sexual and gender-based violence is the basis for sustainable development.<sup>11</sup>

7 Dengler (2020): Berufe und COVID-19-Pandemie. Wie hoch ist das berufsspezifische Ansteckungsrisiko und sind Frauen mehr davon betroffen? 18. efas-Fachtagung, 4. Dezember 2020.

8 UN Women (2020): The COVID-19 Pandemic Has Increased the Care Burden, But by How Much? UN Women, New York.

9 See 4.

10 UNDP (2020): [COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker](#)  United Nations Development Programme, New York.

11 UN Women (2020): COVID-19 and Ending Violence Against Women and Girls. UN Women, New York.  
UNDP (2020): Gender-Based Violence and COVID-19. United Nations Development Programme, New York.

## 2. The SDC's Contribution

The Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and SDG 5 in particular are the cornerstone of Switzerland's engagement for women's empowerment and gender equality. Based on Switzerland's International Cooperation Strategy 2017–2020, the SDC's contribution to closing the gender gap sets the focus on three strategic areas: combating sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), the economic empowerment, and the political participation and empowerment of women. The ambition is to contribute to substantial improvements and transformative change. This implies paying further attention to social norms and behaviour change and addressing the obstacles imposed by the unequal share of unpaid care and domestic work. Finally, gender equality is a transversal concern that is compulsory for all areas of cooperation.

### 2.1 Support to programmatic work

#### **Information and peer exchange on Gender and COVID-19:**

Programmatic support was greatly marked by the COVID-19 pandemic. In a series of webinars, the gender focal points of the cooperation offices from all geographical divisions were provided with information about important gender considerations and their observations and first response measures were discussed. Reprogramming or new initiatives mostly focused on the response to increased gender-based violence, the maintenance of sexual and reproductive health services, as well as the protection and support of female health care workers. Other actions targeted women's small business activities or helped establish gender-specific data for tailored government and donor response. Good practices were shared on how to follow up with implementing partners, how to promote donor coordination, and on offering psychosocial support to target groups, partners, and SDC staff.

**Multilateral response to Gender and COVID-19:** It is a priority for Switzerland that the UN system responds in a joint, coherent and gender-responsive manner to the COVID-19 crisis. Switzerland was among the first supporters and financing partners of the Secretary-General's UN COVID-19 Response and Recovery Fund, the UN's financing mechanism to help low- and middle-income programme countries respond to the pandemic and its socio-economic impact. Switzerland, as a member of the Advisory Council of the fund, capitalised on this opportunity to prioritise gender equality in the UN response, pushing for a 30 percent financial target for gender-principal projects. The fund created a pipeline of priority projects, with 38 percent of all projects being marked gender-principal and 48 percent being marked gender-significant. For example, the fund supports projects related to sexual and reproductive health services, GBV response and prevention, or investment in social protection and entrepreneurship support.

Furthermore, Switzerland, together with other donors, strongly raised its voice in favour of a standalone objective on gender-based violence in the Global Humanitarian Response Plan. In the end, although no separate GBV objective was included, GBV was strongly emphasized, and the respective requirements gained visibility. The GBV Area of Responsibility, i.e., the global GBV coordination for humanitarian contexts, based in Geneva and co-funded by the SDC, was very quick to support GBV actors all over the world with guidance on how to provide remote GBV response services and with a number of webinars and discussion forums for practitioners to exchange how they worked under COVID-19 restrictions.



**Advice during strategic operational milestones:** In 2020, all geographical units and almost every global programme elaborated new regional guidelines or global programme frameworks. This provided ample opportunity to support the integration of the gender perspective during these strategic moments. Thereby the Gender Unit worked in synergy with the Peace, Governance and Equality (PGE) cluster, (see chapter 2.4), for commenting in 'one voice' and in line with strategic priorities highlighted in Switzerland's new International Cooperation Strategy (2021–2024).

**Initiatives in support of women's financial inclusion:**

Addressing the specific needs of women is key to ensuring access to financial products and services. This was also one of the insights that emerged from the joint learning journey on «women's financial inclusion» of the SDC Gender Network and SDC Employment + Income Network in 2018/19. Based on this learning journey, the Gender Unit initiated two avenues to deepen financial inclusion for women: First, the Gender Unit initiated a feasibility study on the role of FinTechs, (companies in the financial technology sector), in addressing women's needs, and to what extent they are able to foster a trustful relationship and offer convenient and secure services and products for their female customers. In addition, the study extended the spotlight from the financial health of women, to the financial health of such FinTech Companies. Many of them face challenges in finding capital to grow, even though they walk the extra mile to reach women. The feasibility study presents a gender inclusive FinTech fund, which takes into account both the needs of women as customers, and of the service providers (FinTech companies) to make financial inclusion a reality, whilst deploying both private and public capital. Second, the Gender Unit is contributing to the "Access to Insurance Initiative" (A2ii). With the SDC's support, A2ii will analyse the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on women and the role of insurances in their economic recovery, mainstream gender into the activities of A2ii, and conduct a gender-focused training for supervisory authorities in the insurance sector in order to create more gender-sensitive insurance products.

## 2.2 Capacity development and joint learning

**Workshops, trainings:** Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, capacity building and learning initiatives continued in online formats. Several trainings for global programmes have been conducted, namely for migration, climate change and environment, as well as for agriculture and food security. In the case of the latter two, this contributed to a more explicit inclusion of the gender perspective during the elaborating of new programme frameworks. With the global programme and network on migration and development, the collaboration was intensified. In addition to trainings, two newsletters were jointly produced which provided further knowledge and guidance and facilitated the sharing of good practices between the programmes involved. In close collaboration with the gender focal points of the MENA-D and MENA-H divisions, a regional workshop provided insights on how to approach women's economic empowerment and financial inclusion, while aiming for positive and transformative change. Further topics, such as the engagement of men and boys, gender in annual reports and gender action plans were also discussed. Besides knowledge provision, learning among peers and further networking were fostered.

Another important moment was the regional workshop on Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI), organised by the Eastern Cooperation Department, with the participation of the Gender Policy Advisor and the Advisor for Poverty/LNOB. During the workshop, the two overlapping and closely inter-linked concepts were clarified, and concrete experiences were discussed. This helped to establish a common understanding and to bring the 'gender- and social-inclusion communities' closer together: *"A good gender analysis has to consider other relevant dimensions of exclusion and a good social inclusion analysis has to look at gender issues within the excluded groups we want to focus on."* Similar joint training inputs were delivered by the two advisors for several of the SDC's PCM courses over the year.

**Community of Practice (CoP) on SGBV:** A milestone was the launch of the SDC CoP on SGBV, led by the gender focal point of the Humanitarian Aid. The intention is to share acquired knowledge, inform about current trends and learn from direct interaction in order to develop a common SDC approach to work on SGBV. Two sessions on specific topics started in 2020 and more will follow in 2021. The resources are captured on the Gender Shareweb.

**Gender learning day:** The joint learning with Swiss civil society organizations had to be switched to an online format. It focused on the topic of “women’s political leadership”. Concepts of power, female role models and the crucial factors enabling or hindering their political participation were shared. These were illustrated by discussions on concrete practice examples. The exchange was enriching and will also benefit the SDC’s learning process on women’s political participation and empowerment in 2021. Further documentation is available on the Gender Shareweb.

**16 days of activism campaign:** This time, the SDC conducted a dedicated twitter campaign: 16 tweets, providing key facts and links to examples from SDC programmes in 16 different countries, on multiple forms of gender-based violence. These include, for example, abusive practices of female genital mutilation, forced sex, human trafficking, and violence against women politicians. Some examples also touched upon the respective data gaps and the importance to engage men and boys. The tweets generated 21’587 views and 537 interactions. The campaign concluded with a workshop on the SDC’s community-based psychosocial approach to SGBV in the Great Lakes programme. Learnings highlighted the important shift from a survivor centred to a community-based and multi-actor approach. Communities play a central role in the process of healing and in building resistance to SGBV. This example was complemented by other SDC experiences from Bolivia and Nepal, and by the experience of the Feminist Peace Organization in Algeria.

## 2.3 Policy dialogue

**OECD DAC GenderNet:** During the annual meeting, the following key topics were discussed: Gender related COVID-19 challenges and measures taken by the different agencies, ways of implementing the DAC Recommendation on Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Sexual Harassment (SEAH) in Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance, gender financing data (beyond ODA, per regions, per topics and delivery channels etc.), as well as approaches to overcome the gender financing gaps, (e.g., financing women’s grassroots organizations, mainstreaming gender financing in international financial institutions etc.). During subsequent sessions, the knowledge on financing for gender equality and women’s empowerment was further deepened, specifically on different forms of gender lens investing.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, important planned global events, such as the Commission on the Status of Women and the Generation Equality Forum (with a focus on the Beijing +25 anniversary), as well as the UN World Data Forum, have been postponed to 2021.

## 2.4 Institutional priorities and developments

**Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (PSEAH)** has gained visibility and traction within the SDC. To implement the FDFA's commitment to zero tolerance for inaction against sexual exploitation, abuse, and sexual harassment, the PSEAH Focal Point (FP) of the SDC has developed relevant guidance and communication tools, which were all launched by senior management. In order to systematically implement the PSEAH measures up to the field level, the FP has started an exchange and learning process with selected 'Champion Offices'. To support such learning, the FP has produced an interactive video tool that allows teams to reflect together on what sexual misconduct is and how it should be addressed. PSEAH measures will only be effective if they are based on the understanding that sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, and sexual harassment are a form of gender-based violence, anchored in patriarchal norms and attitudes, and in the enormous power imbalances in international cooperation. Efforts for PSEAH need to be linked with a clear organisational commitment against SGBV and for gender equality. The FP has also initiated discussions among male staff on unconscious biases. Additionally, on the International Men's Day, joint reflections on gender norms were initiated. Targeted messaging by senior leadership have supported these efforts. However, culture change is a long process and requires continuous engagement at all levels of the organization.

**Thematic Cluster on Peace, Governance, and Equality (PGE):** This cluster comprises the four thematic units and networks 'Fragility, Conflict and Human Rights', 'Governance', 'Gender Equality' and 'Poverty/Leave no one behind'. The close collaboration in the PGE cluster resulted in the final draft version of a PGE tool for context analysis, and a coordinated set of thematic reference indicators for monitoring the implementation of Switzerland's new international cooperation strategy (2021–2024). Considerable efforts have been made for coordinated joint feedbacks to the multitude of new regional guidelines and global programme frameworks.

### Box II: Institutional Partnership Division's (IPD) contribution

Dialogue on the gender focus of the Swiss institutional partner NGOs received special attention in 2020. Measures to strengthen gender equality, both at the institutional and at the operational level, were systematically discussed with partners of the IPD. PSEAH has become a joint learning journey accompanied by the SDC, in which all partners actively participate, exchange their experiences and improve their compliance mechanisms.

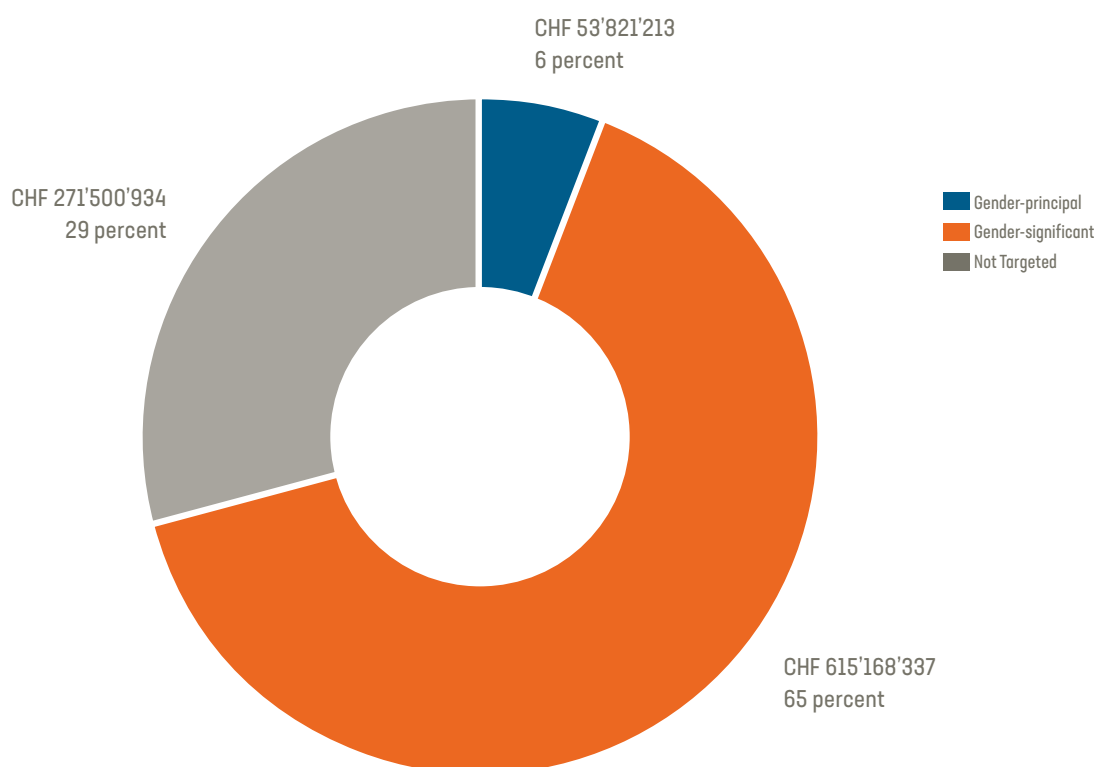
Swiss NGO partners contribute to gender-relevant outcomes in the areas of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence and Engaging Men and Boys, WASH and Menstrual Hygiene at Schools, Women's Rights and Political Participation, Vocational Training and Employment for Women, etc. In this context, particular attention is given to interventions that have a strong potential to transform unequal gender relationships. Good practice examples from Swiss NGOs show interesting results: Engaging men and boys in the prevention of gender-based violence – combined with other activities of involved Men's Clubs – has transformed the predominant understanding of masculinity. Combining psycho-social support in post-conflict settings with a community-based work on domestic violence had similar transformative effects when men and boys were directly included. Similarly, including male students and teachers in the sensitization on menstrual hygiene at schools, combined with the discussion on male-female roles in the households, led to major behaviour changes in the concerned families, especially when the discussion was taken up in parallel in the community-based organizations. It is recommended that more of these gender-transformative activities be identified and taken up in existing projects / programmes in different domains, while the exchange of results and good practices must go on between Swiss NGOs, the SDC and local partners.

### 3. The SDC's Financial Commitments to Gender Equality

In 2020, the **SDC committed** a total of CHF 940'490'484 to bilateral interventions, including humanitarian interventions and the SDC's global programmes (see Figure 1).<sup>12</sup> Of this amount, roughly 71 percent (CHF 668'989'550) were invested in interventions focusing on gender equality. Approximately six percent of the total committed funding, were invested in

gender-principal interventions, where gender equality is the main objective. 65 percent were channelled into gender-significant interventions, where gender equality is a cross-cutting issue. In 2020, 29 percent of the total committed funding went to interventions with no gender component (meaning that gender was not a target).

**Figure 1:** Allocation of the SDC's committed bilateral funds in 2020

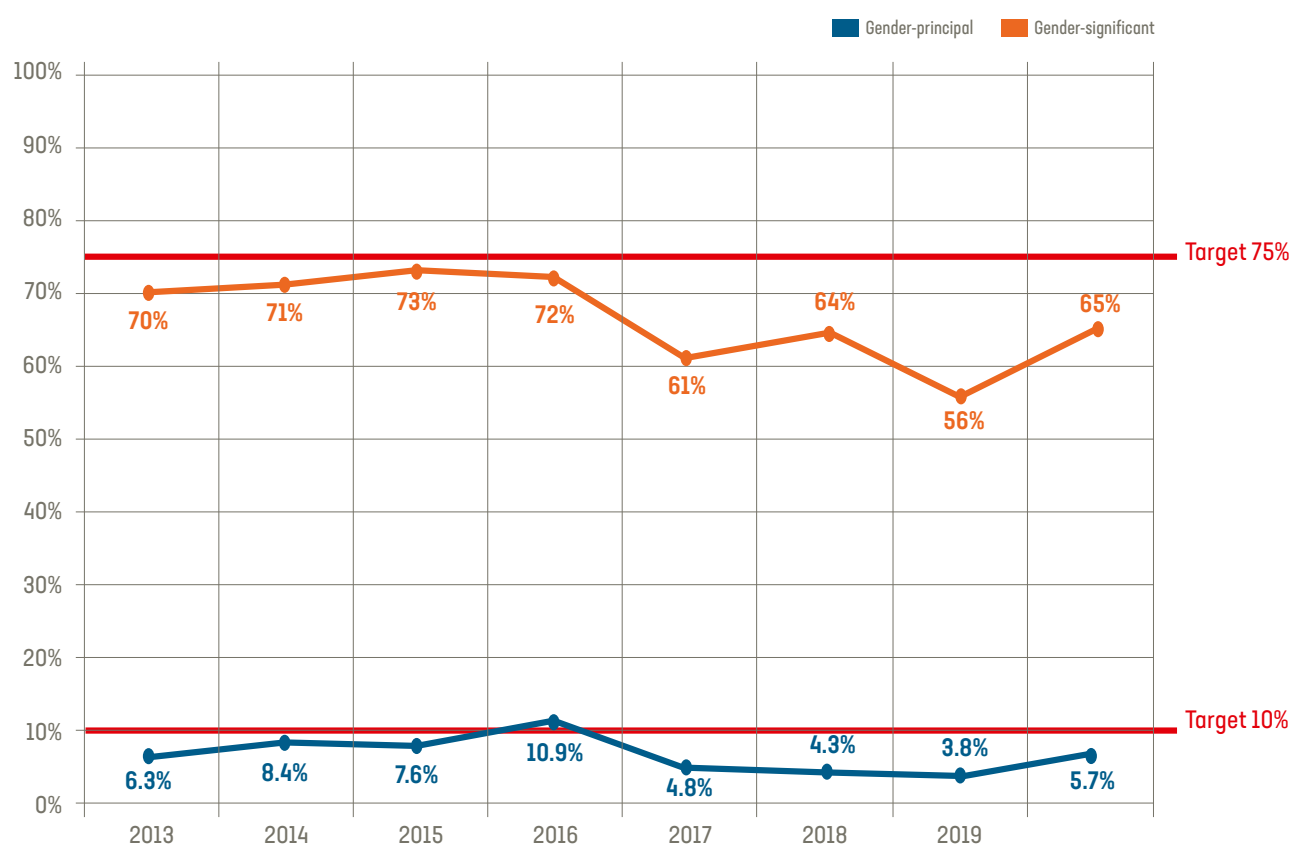


<sup>12</sup> The numbers are based on the SDC's Policy Markers. The Policy Markers record the commitments for total interventions during the first year of the project or programme regardless of timing, even if they are multi-year commitments.

**Figure 2** shows the **trend of the SDC's bilateral allocation of funds** to gender equality from 2013 to 2020. The target for the SDC is to allocate 10 percent of all bilateral funds to gender-principal interventions and 75 percent to gender-significant interventions. An important observation for 2020 is the increase in committed funds compared to 2019, for both gender-principal and gender-significant interventions. Looking at the trends for the overall period of the International Cooperation Strategy (2017–2020), a considerable decrease in committed funds can be observed in 2017. It is assumed that this was related to the introduction of new minimum standards (gender checklist) for defining projects either as gender-principal or gender-significant, or even not gender-targeted. Since then, for three consecutive years (2017–2019), the allocation of funds for gender-principal interventions was in steady decline but showed a notable increase of two percentages in 2020 (from 3.8 percent in 2019 to 5.7 percent). The allocation

for gender-significant interventions over the same period was marked by ups and downs, with a nine-percentage increase in 2020 (from 56 percent in 2019 to 65 percent). Noteworthy is the remarkable decline in committed funds where gender was not targeted – from 40 percent in 2019 to 29 percent in 2020. There are two possible explanations for this positive trend in 2020: First, it has to do with the fact that the databases and calculations were corrected in 2020, excluding multilateral Humanitarian Aid commitments. Second, the Gender Thematic Unit launched a dedicated awareness campaign that may led to first positive results in taking the gender checklist more seriously. In summary, we can observe a positive evolution of the committed funds in the last year of the International Cooperation Strategy (2017–2020). But looking at the average figures of 4.7 percentage for gender-principal and 61.5 percentage for gender-significant over this four-year period, we still have a way to go to reach our targets.

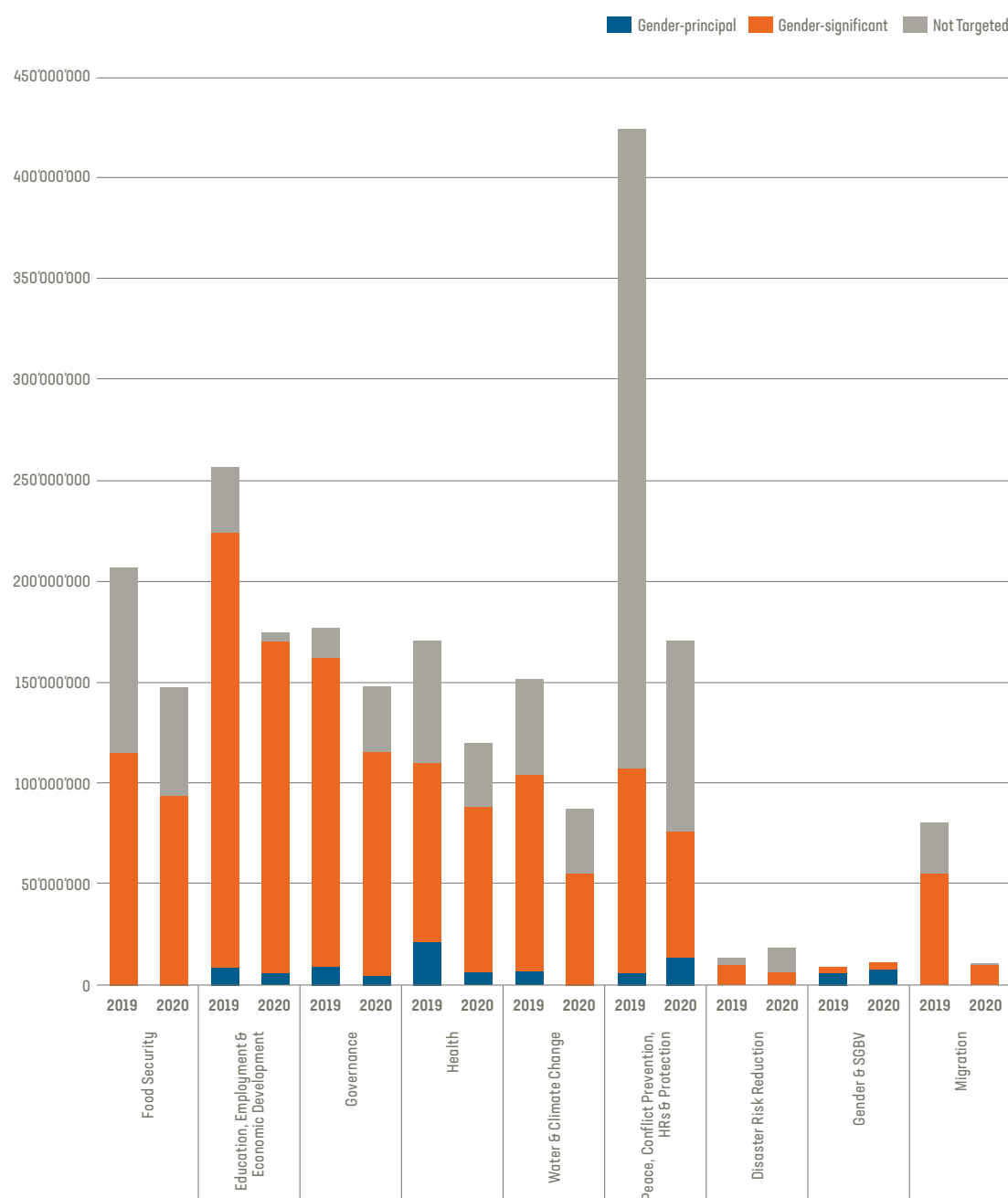
**Figure 2:** Trends in bilateral funds committed to gender equality focused interventions



**Figure 3** provides an in-depth look at the changes in the **thematic distribution of bilateral funds** committed to gender in 2020. The data show that funds for gender equality were committed to interventions in all thematic areas. The three areas that committed the most funds to gender equality in 2020 were Education, Employment & Economic Development (CHF 165'468'600), Governance (CHF 115'306'402), and Food Security (CHF 91'278'550). There was no major shift from

2019 to 2020 in this regard. As for gender-significant interventions, the picture is quite similar. The majority of funds were directed to the thematic area of Education, Employment & Economic Development (CHF 162'260'600), Governance (CHF 109'057'736), and Food Security (CHF 90'051'800). In 2019, the same thematic areas received the majority of funds for gender-significant interventions, thus there is no shift in this regard between 2019 and 2020.

**Figure 3:** Allocation of the SDC's committed bilateral funds (CHF) by thematic area in 2019 and 2020

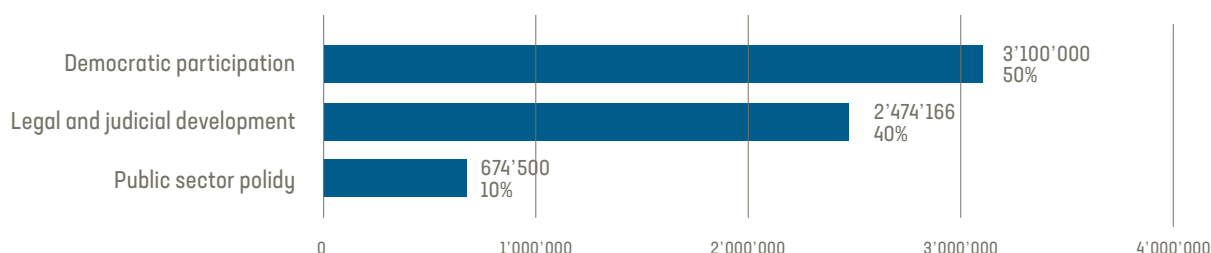




However, the data show a shift between 2019 and 2020 with respect to gender-principal interventions: the majority of funds for gender-principal interventions in 2020 were granted in the areas of Peace, Conflict Prevention, HRs & Protection (CHF 19'080'756), Gender & SGBV (CHF 12'165'059) and Health (CHF 9'719'280). For the area of Peace, Conflict Prevention, HRs & Protection, the allocated funds tripled compared to 2019 (CHF 5'630'100). Funds allocated to the area of Gender & SGBV have increased by one and a half times compared to 2019 (CHF 7'568'200). In 2019 and 2020, no bilateral funds were allocated for gender-principal interventions in the thematic area of Migration.

**Figure 4** presents the details of **gender-principal interventions in the thematic area of Governance**, as this area received the fourth largest contributions among gender-principal and the second largest among gender-significant interventions in 2020. The gender-principal interventions include three different intervention fields. Nearly 50 percent of the funds for gender-principal interventions (CHF 3'100'000) were allocated to Democratic Participation, nearly 40 percent (CHF 2'474'166) were committed to the field of Legal and Judicial Development, and the remaining 10 percent (CHF 674'500) were committed to Public Sector Policy.

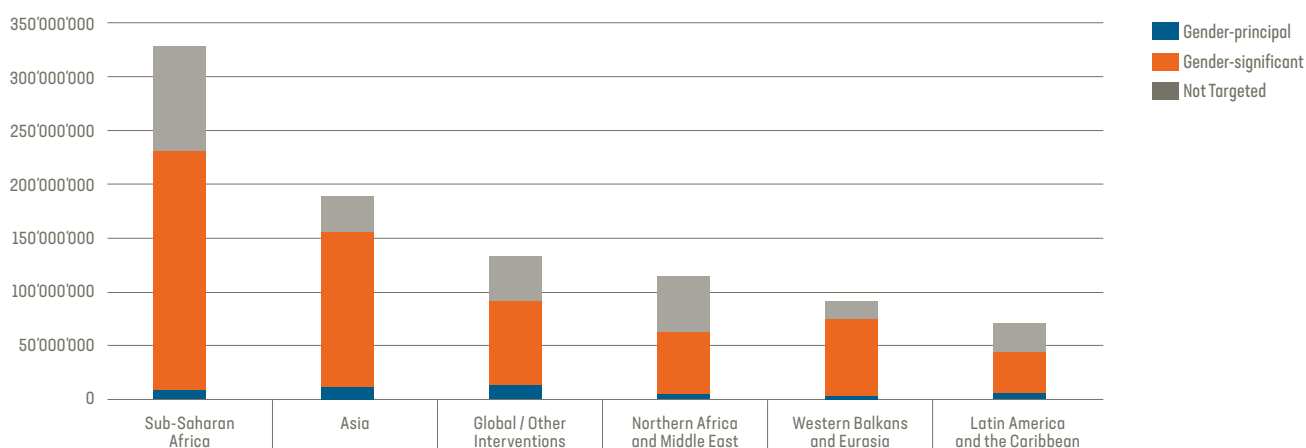
**Figure 4:** Allocation of committed funds (in CHF) for gender-principal interventions in the thematic area of Governance and its subfields in 2020



**Figure 5** shows the **geographical distribution of bilateral funds** in 2020. The highest amounts of bilateral funds for gender equality were committed to Sub-Saharan Africa (CHF 227'055'081), Asia (CHF 54'847'790), and Global/Other Interventions (CHF 89'048'140). In terms of commitments for gender-principal interventions, the situation is the same, albeit with a slightly modified ranking (Global/Other intervention CHF 15'115'310, Asia CHF 14'849'103, and Sub-Saharan Africa CHF 11'101'800). Furthermore, in relative numbers, Global/Other Interventions received 11 percent of the funds, the largest

share of gender-principal interventions, followed by Asia with 8 percent and Latin America and the Caribbean with 6 percent of the committed funds. In terms of gender-significant interventions, Sub-Saharan Africa (CHF 215'953'28), Asia (CHF 139'998'687), and Global/Other interventions (CHF 7'393'830) received the largest share of funds in absolute numbers. In relative numbers, Western Balkans and Eurasia received 80 percent of the funds, most of which went to gender-significant interventions. They were followed by Asia with 75 percent of the funds and Sub-Saharan Africa 66 percent of the funds.

**Figure 5:** Allocation of the SDC's committed bilateral funds (CHF) in 2020 by geographic area  
(The numbers for 2020 do not include European countries, Switzerland, and 'not specified' countries.)



### **Box III: Increased financing for women's and girls' empowerment**

Gender equality is needed to achieve all the SDGs of the 2030 Agenda. To empower all women and girls and to eliminate gender inequalities, especially in developing countries, it is necessary to maximize both the quantity and quality of financing. Current investments in women's empowerment and gender equality are lagging behind. The gender statistics of the OECD "Development Assistance Committee" (DAC) show evidence regarding development financing for gender equality and women's empowerment. In the period 2018–2019, only 5 percent of all bilateral "Official Development Assistance" (ODA) programmes were specifically dedicated (primary objective) to gender equality and women's empowerment. However, it is worth mentioning that this value has never been higher. Furthermore, 40 percent of all ODA funding programmes addressed gender equality and women's empowerment in an integrated way, even as a secondary objective. Overall, 45 percent or 53 billion USD of the total ODA funds were committed to gender equality on average per year. Still, 55 percent of the funding or USD 67.2 billion went to projects without a gender dimension. Switzerland is one of the ten DAC members with a strong focus on gender equality, allocating more than 55 percent of its aid either to gender-significant or gender-principal projects.

According to the OECD, more needs to be done to achieve gender equality. Firstly, the quantity and also the quality of financial support must be increased. Secondly, new sources of financing must be developed. Thirdly, the impact of the funding should be increased. Moreover, in the coming years, the OECD and the DAC Network on Gender Equality will develop a work programme to share good practices and better financing to close the gender gap.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> OECD (2020): Putting Financing to Work for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment – The Way Forward. OECD Development Policy Papers. OECD, Paris, France.

# 4. The SDC's Gender Results

This chapter shows how programmes of the SDC and its partners have contributed to gender equality in 2020. It provides a collection of the results of SDC's reference indicators, complemented by further information from annual reports and a selection of case examples.

Overall, measuring gender results remains challenging, and not only for the SDC. First, the mere aggregation of indicator data across different regions does not allow an adequate understanding of what lies behind these results, nor does it capture particular processes of change. Second, changing attitudes and social norms, practices and customs in a complex environment with different actors and initiatives are hard to measure. In addition, it is not always easy to identify why certain changes have occurred and what factors have contributed positively or negatively to such changes (attribution gap). For this reason, the SDC has decided to further illustrate the gender results through 11 exemplary projects in this chapter. These provide more in-depth information on how the SDC and its implementing partners worked and what they have achieved to promote a more gender-equal world.

The featured projects represent the entire range of the SDC's engagements – thematically, geographically, and with different partners. Some examples address gender equality as the main intervention purpose (gender-principal intervention), while others focus on significant crosscutting measures within their projects (transversal integration or gender-significant intervention).

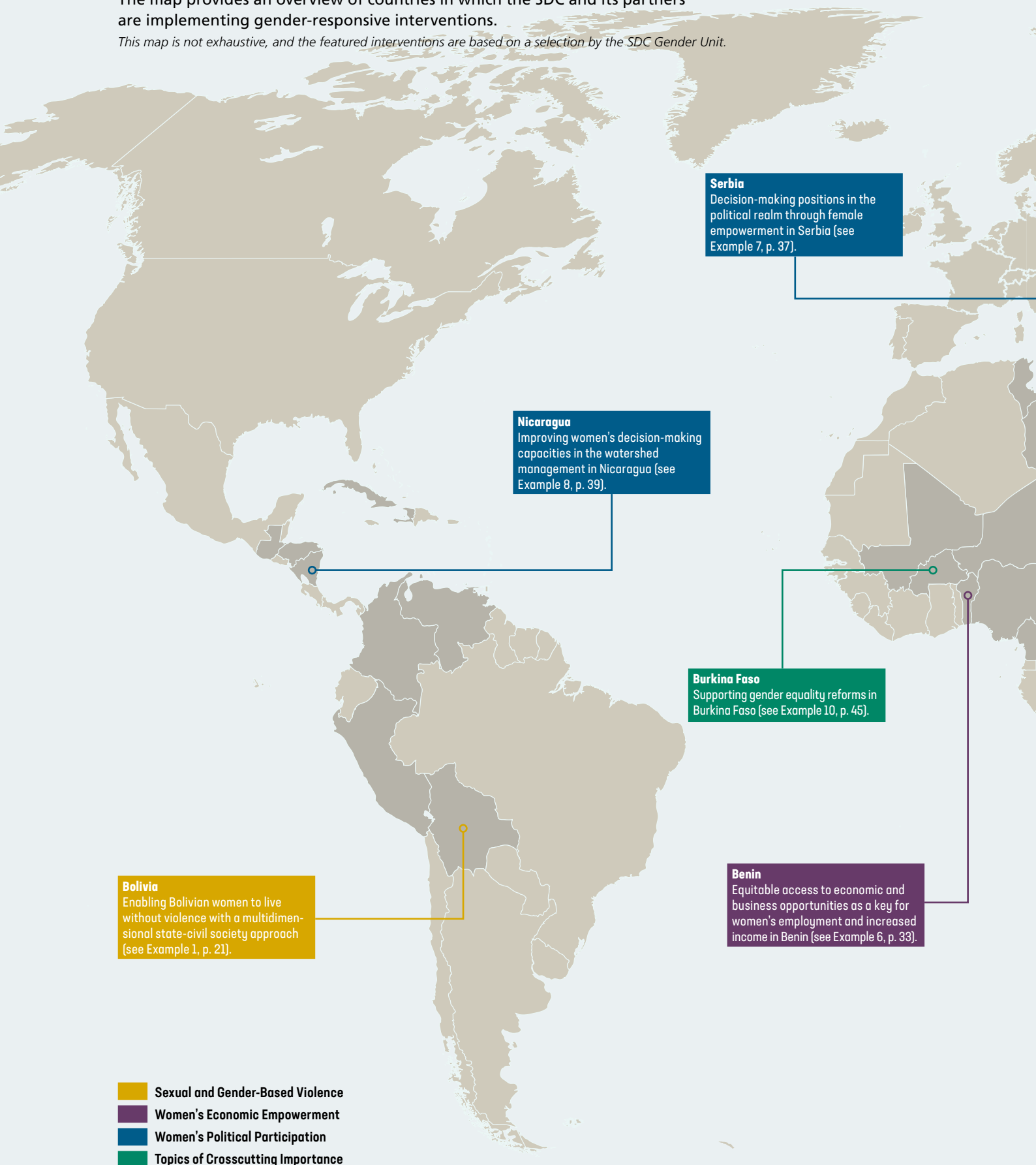
The examples cover all three thematic priorities, including sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), women's economic empowerment (WEE), and women's political participation and empowerment (WPE). This year, a fourth section has been added for two topics of crosscutting importance. It comprises, firstly, gender and social equality (gender and "leave no one behind", LNOB), addressing the intersections with other exclusion factors, and secondly, the aspect of policy reforms, providing important framework conditions for inclusive societies. Both these topics are essential to achieve systemic and inclusive change towards gender equality. In addition, this report introduces further changes compared to last year's edition. New reference indicators have been developed to monitor the implementation of the new International Cooperation Strategy (2021–2024). They are operationalised for the first time in this report. Due to the ongoing introduction of an electronic annual results recording system in the SDC, only a limited selection of indicator data (limited to the aggregated reference indicators) was available for this report.

This chapter is divided into two parts: First, a 'Results Map' shows all the countries with gender responsive SDC activities. The geographic locations of the eleven selected project examples are presented and the content is briefly described. The second part provides an overview of the overall results achieved along the thematic priority topics and features the eleven case examples. Each example is assigned an indicator that clearly shows the activities and results of each project. The final section of each example is dedicated to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the project. It becomes evident that this global crisis has significantly influenced each project.

# Map of the SDC's Gender Equality-Focused Interventions

The map provides an overview of countries in which the SDC and its partners are implementing gender-responsive interventions.

*This map is not exhaustive, and the featured interventions are based on a selection by the SDC Gender Unit.*





**Moldova**  
Advocating for gender transformative policy reforms in Moldova (see Example 11, p. 47).

**South Caucasus**  
Promoting women's economic empowerment in the South Caucasus (see Example 4, p. 29).

**Tajikistan**  
Strengthening effective State action against domestic violence in Tajikistan (see Example 2, p. 23).

**Lao PDR**  
Advancing women's career opportunities in the hospitality sector in Lao PDR (see Example 5, p. 31).

**Afghanistan**  
Empowering girls through Skateboarding in Afghanistan (see Example 9, p. 43).

**Iraq**  
Empowering women's organisations in addressing sexual and gender-based violence in Iraq (see Example 3, p. 25).





## REFERENCE INDICATOR

**Theme:**  
Gender

**Title:**  
Gender Equality –  
Sexual and  
Gender-Based  
Violence

**Indicator  
(GEN ARI 1):**  
Number of  
persons subjected  
to different forms  
of SGBV having  
received required  
(medical, and/or  
psychosocial, and/  
or legal) support.

## Example 1: Gender-principal intervention

### Enabling Bolivian women to live without violence with a multidimensional state-civil society approach

Since 2016, the SCD has been supporting the “Life Without Violence” project, implemented by Solidar Suisse, which addresses violence against women. The project’s overall aim is to prevent and adequately respond to incidents of gender-based violence in an integrated approach. In 2020, the project used a range of activities to reach the project goals. On the one hand, the project worked through municipalities and the civil society to support survivors and protection mechanisms. On the other hand, representatives of the civil society were trained in violence prevention and reporting incidents of gender-based violence.

#### Implementing partner

The SDC’s implementing partner is Solidar Suisse.

#### Beneficiaries

In 2020, 20’000 women and 17’000 men benefited from this intervention. 60 percent of the beneficiaries were women and men from rural municipalities, and 40 percent were from peri-urban municipalities with high levels of violence.

#### Finances

The project started in 2016 and is currently in its second phase. In 2020, the SDC contributed CHF 1’044’393 to the project.

#### Gender analysis

##### High prevalence of Gender-Based Violence

In Bolivia, gender-based violence is widespread: 90 percent of all violent acts are committed against women, compared to 10 percent against men. In the course of their lives, 75 percent of women experience some form of violence. In 2020 alone, 25’000 incidents of violence against women and 98 feminicides were reported. This high prevalence of gender-based violence is rooted in persistent gender gaps and stereotyped cultural norms that disadvantage women. Most women work in the informal sector, with poor income, low recognition and no social security benefits. This economic disadvantage increases dependence on men, thus exacerbating the risk of gender-based violence. Women who successfully pursue a career in the formal sector, for instance in politics, are often confronted with discrimination, harassment, and additional acts of violence. Moreover, and regardless of their involvement in paid labour, women are expected to assume the caregiving activities within families. This role is not highly valued despite its significance for the economy as a whole.

The Bolivian government has taken important steps forward in national legislation to counteract gender-based violence and promote equal opportunities for women and men. However, violence persists, and adverse social norms need to be continuously tackled. Furthermore, the state needs to improve its responses to incidents of gender-based violence.

#### Activities

##### Supporting integrated public service delivery and challenging adverse gender norms

The “Life without Violence” project works with different public and civil society institutions to improve public support and protection services.



Within the national state-response chain, this includes the police, the public prosecution service, and the judiciary. In 2020, for instance, the national public prosecution service received training on how to improve its responses to incidents of violence. At the subnational level, municipalities and departmental governments were involved, as well as civil society organisations. The first project goal involves the promotion of evidence-based good practices for the prevention and punishment of gender-based violence. Secondly, the project aims at the integration of different state institutions into one coordinated and effective chain of response.

In 2020, the project undertook a range of activities to achieve these two goals. In different regions of the country, good practice examples developed by municipalities and civil society organisations were collected, systematized, and disseminated for replication in other municipalities. These practices concerned local accountability, support of survivors and early warning and protection mechanisms. Additionally, more than 5'000 civil society representatives (60 percent of whom were women) were trained on violence prevention and incident reporting. Over 1'200 community promoters and about 800 men belonging to men's networks in different municipalities were trained to work on masculinities, deconstruction of adverse gender norms and on volunteering to take action against gender-based violence.

Moreover, the online platform "VidaSinViolencia" was launched to promote good practices in order to prevent violence against women, improve public services at the local level and train young replicators. This platform already has over 400 members. It partners with universities that will issue academic certificates for the accomplished training modules. During the pandemic, a range of additional ad-hoc activities were launched.

## Results

### A new national policy, improved local support and increased awareness

The project has been successful at both the national and the municipal level. 70 municipal governments implemented specific policies, programmes and budgets for the prevention of violence against women. In 49 municipalities, agreements were reached with important replicator groups (schools, youth groups, community-based organizations) to carry out sustained local prevention work. As a result, 32 percent of the surveyed people in 80 municipalities reduced their adverse gender norms, such as the perception of women as sexual prop-

erty of men or the fact that childcare is perceived as women's duty. The share of women reporting awareness of institutional and legal mechanisms to uphold their right to a life without violence increased from 28 percent to 73 percent. In 2020 alone, the project contributed to the integrated support and empowerment of approximately 20'000 women and 17'000 men.

At the national level, the project's experiences fed into a policy of creating neighbourhood and community networks for early warning and protection from violence. This policy is now effective in all 327 municipalities of the country.

## Challenges, opportunities, and impact of COVID-19 pandemic in 2020

### Ad-hoc prevention campaigns and emergency response networks

The pandemic has severely increased the risk of domestic gender-based violence. At the same time, the offices of many public institutions had to be closed, exacerbating the situation for survivors of violence. Amidst the pandemic, the project launched the "Violence-free, COVID-free" online prevention campaign, which reached more than 6 million people. A directory of helplines and municipal support services for women was compiled and disseminated. In addition, a national network of "edu-activists" was set up with more than a hundred young people from five universities running campaigns on violence prevention during the pandemic and answering online enquiries. At the institutional level, the project implemented capacity-building sessions to enable staff to use online communication technologies effectively. 300 municipal legal service institutions set up an emergency support network. Finally, the project created a regional exchange platform on COVID-19 and gender-based violence, thus linking stakeholders in Bolivia with colleagues in Argentina and El Salvador.

### Sources

Bolivian National Institute of Statistics (2016): Survey of perceptions and prevalence of violence against women.

Additional information was retrieved from the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, May 2020.

SDC (2020): Questionnaire Annual Report on Gender Equality 2020. SDC Cooperation Office Bolivia.

## REFERENCE INDICATOR

**Theme:**  
Gender

**Title:**  
Gender Equality – Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

**Indicator (GEN ARI 1):**  
Number of persons subjected to different forms of SGBV having received required (medical, and/or psychosocial, and/or legal) support

## Example 2: Gender-principal intervention

### Strengthening effective State action against domestic violence in Tajikistan

The SDC has been supporting Tajikistan's government's efforts towards gender equality since 2000. SGBV has become a priority area of intervention. The SDC supports the Tajik Government through policy and legal reform as well as through the training of professional staff working in the field of domestic violence. Further support is provided through behaviour change activities aimed at deconstructing gender norms that can negatively affect the status and opportunities of women, men, boys and girls. During the reporting period, in the peak of the pandemic, reports of domestic violence increased by 20 percent. Despite the halt of certain face-to-face activities, domestic violence services were able to deliver support to all additionally registered survivors of domestic violence. Part of the project also consisted of awareness-raising on the causes of SGBV.

#### Implementing partner

GOPA Worldwide Consultants

#### Beneficiaries

The current 10<sup>th</sup> phase of the project started in 2019 and will end in 2021. In 2020, around 2'800 women and 460 men benefitted from the prevention services. Additionally, 3'571 professionals received training in the field of domestic violence.

#### Finances

The total amount committed by the SDC for this phase is CHF 2'150'000. In 2020, the SDC contributed CHF 1'200'000 to the project.

#### Gender analysis

##### Inequality in social, economic, and political life increasing women's exposure to pervasive domestic violence

Domestic violence is a pervasive form of SGBV. The majority of the survivors are women or children, but men are not exempt from this type of violence. In Tajikistan, recent reports have pointed out that 50 to 80 percent of children are affected by domestic violence. Despite legal national reforms, implementation is still lagging behind, and survivors lack protection and access to services. Tajik women and girls have very little or less access to economic or educational opportunities than men and boys. They are socially and financially dependent on their families. Thereby, young women are affected by different types of violence and in-home labour exploitation, particularly after marriage. The scale of violence against women in Tajikistan poses a potential threat to the social stability and public safety of the population of Tajikistan.



## Activities

### Building State capacities in the fight against domestic violence

The project was one of the main catalysts for the adoption of the law on family violence in Tajikistan, adopted by the Parliament in 2013. In order to implement the law and further develop the legal framework in line with international obligations and standards, the project looked at the barriers in the implementation of the existing legal framework dealing with gender inequalities and the protection of women and men against domestic violence. The project is currently in its exit phase. To ensure sustainability, the project supported various training programmes for the state agencies (Police Academy, courts, health care workers, social workers, school psychologists) working on the prevention of domestic violence. The project also continued to financially support a shelter for survivors in Khatlon oblast and provided technical support and expertise to the only correctional centre for aggressors in the region.

The project led population awareness-raising and behaviour change campaigns, thus addressing the root causes of domestic violence and preventing its occurrence. It also supported the Ministry of Education to open its first qualification-training centre for school psychologists. Working with schools was a crucial step forward, enabling the project to address the impact of domestic violence on children and to deliver psychological support and preventive mechanisms.

## Results

### Provision of services for the prevention and response to increased domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic

In 2020, the project was able to provide psychological, legal and protection services to around 2'800 women and 460 men. In addition, it delivered trainings to 3'571 professionals from police, health workers, social workers, and civil servants working in the field of domestic violence prevention.

In its exit phase, the project focused significantly on building the capacities of the state agencies to implement the law on domestic violence and strengthen referral services as well as the skills of professionals dealing with domestic violence. There was a rise in the use of domestic violence prevention services, including counselling for the aggressors. This fact indicates that, despite the increase in violence, victims and aggressors were able to continue seeking for help and overcome the taboo surrounding domestic violence, which is deeply rooted in the traditional Tajik society.

### Challenges, opportunities, and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020

#### Continuing to work under difficult conditions

The pandemic posed a challenge to the state services which registered a 20 percent increase in their consultations from April to May in 2020 compared to 2019. The project continued to work despite the COVID-19 pandemic by applying all necessary preventive measures and providing online services for domestic violence survivors in the pilot districts.

Behaviour change campaigns reverted to mass radio programmes, thus mobilising not only experts but also youth through quizzes. The dissemination of the legal framework in order to halt the 'shadow pandemic' of domestic violence was also part of the radio programmes' activities.

#### Sources

GOPA (2020): Annual Operational Report. Tajikistan Prevention of Domestic Violence (PDV), October 2020, Hamburg.

The Norwegian Refugee Council (2015): Women's rights through information sensitization and education (WISE). Final report.

SDC (2020): Questionnaire Annual Report on Gender Equality 2020.

SDC Cooperation Office Tajikistan, 2020.

Human Rights Watch (2019): Tajikistan: Barriers to Aid for Domestic Violence Victims.



## REFERENCE INDICATOR

### Theme:

Fragility,  
Conflict, and  
Human Rights

### Title:

Prevention of All  
Forms of Violence

### Indicator

#### (FCHR TRI 2):

Number of  
processes or  
policies that  
increase societies'  
capacities to  
resist and mitigate  
all forms of  
violence, or that  
strengthen coping  
mechanisms,  
state-society  
relationship, and  
social cohesion.

## Example 3: Gender-principal intervention

### Empowering women's organisations in addressing sexual and gender-based violence in Iraq

This project supports the role of women's rights organizations and women's rights defenders in advocating for women's rights and in combating sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Since 2018, there have been signs that the space for Iraqi civil society activists is shrinking, especially for women's rights activists. Kvinna till Kvinna, the SDC's project partner organization, assists primarily two women's human rights organizations, but also other partners, to strengthen their organisational and thematic capacity. Through this support, they were able to improve their methods, better structure advocacy messages and enhance networking in local, national and international spaces. They also managed to provide services to survivors of SGBV, raise awareness and hold governments accountable, which was particularly important during the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### Implementing partner

The Swedish organization Kvinna till Kvinna implements the project in Iraq.

#### Finances

The project's total cost is CHF 650'000, of which CHF 200'000 are covered by the SDC in the form of a contribution agreement with the local partner Kvinna till Kvinna. The remaining amount is covered by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and SIDA (Swedish International Development Agency).

#### Beneficiaries

1'819 women and 1'312 men, as well as 153 girls and 57 boys, benefitted directly from SGBV prevention activities and response services.



## Gender analysis

### **Conflict's disproportional impact on women and girls living in a patriarchal society**

Iraq's society is a mostly conservative one, in which women have only very limited access to both leadership and community positions. Women's participation in official fora for peacebuilding and national reconciliation is very low. The increasing financial burden on families affected by the political crisis, particularly those with many children or female-led households, is pushing families to marry off their daughters. The fundamental work of women's human rights organizations is to fight against these violations of human rights. They are mostly underfunded, and their employees or activists put their lives at risk for the work they do.

The project is implemented in Divala and Kirkuk. Located on Iraq's Eastern border with Iran, Diyala is one of the most rural governorates in Iraq. It has faced several waves of violence. For an extended period, Diyala was under the control of Al-Qaeda. Since the official end of the war against the so-called "Islamic State in Iraq and Syria" (ISIS) in 2017, Diyala has been under the rule of different armed groups which were mostly supported by Iran. Kirkuk has a more diverse and urban population. For decades now, it has seen a series of dramatic demographic changes. As in many other parts of the country, people are facing market instability, unemployment, poverty, and crime. SGBV continues to impose a heavy toll, especially among women and children. Thousands of Iraqi women are forced into sexual slavery, and young girls are compelled into marriage to ISIS fighters or their families. Moreover, the kidnapping of children has been increasingly reported.

## Activities

### **Strengthening women organisation's ability to perform as main agents for societal change**

Project partner Kvinna till Kvinna supports local women's human rights organisations and women's human rights defenders. They have been supported in organisational capacity building, including, for example, security management, informed and structured advocacy and the development of advocacy strategies, or data management for better monitoring. They have been assisted in developing their competence for responding to SGBV and providing support to survivors. This included technical topics such as psychosocial response and case management. Furthermore, both the role and the capacity of the social workers at the organization's legal and protection centres were enhanced. Finally, the implementing partner of the project played a crucial role in providing much needed, but still scarce, funding to such organisations, and in mentoring them to tap other sources of funding.

## Results

### **Women's organizations have been crucial for SGBV survivors' support**

During the reporting period, 1'819 women and 1'312 men, as well as 153 girls and 57 boys, benefitted from SGBV prevention activities and response services. These included legal, social, and psychological support delivered by women's organizations, and at times economic and health measures through referral pathways. Their target population is mostly vulnerable internally displaced persons, women from displacement settings, returnees and host communities, including men. During the crisis, they adapted their work with increased remote support and consultation services, and they introduced a gender lens into the public discussion, something that was missing from many other actors and the government itself.

Iraqi partners benefitted from the project by accessing national, regional, and international fora to deliver advocacy messages. One of the national partners is now leading the "SDG 2030 Network", which includes over 30 local NGOs and is the first of its kind in Iraq. This network advocates for gender equality in line with the agendas of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Beijing +25 and United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325.



## Challenges, opportunities, and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020

### Remote and virtual SGBV services and response as a key

Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the partner organisations explored and implemented alternative methods to continue their programmes, especially with regard to the response and prevention of SGBV. Remote support, consultations and services were adopted and will be further developed in the future. For instance, the project used social media accounts, TV programmes and Webinars to raise awareness on COVID-19 and SGBV.

Furthermore, the support also included awareness-raising on COVID-19 protection, distribution of food items and hygiene kits to more than 100 female-headed households in non-prioritized areas by other actors. Finally, partners raised awareness on COVID-19 through their social media accounts and TV programmes.

#### Sources

SDC (2020): Questionnaire Annual Report on Gender Equality 2020. SDC Cooperation Office Iraq.

Kvinna, Kvinna (2020): Increased Capacity of Women's Rights Organizations to Strengthen the Respect and Advancement of Women's Rights in Iraq, 2019–2020. Interim Report August–December 2019.

UNFPA (2019): The Assessment of the Needs of and The Services Provided to Gender-Based Violence Survivors in Iraq.

### Box IV: Capacity building in the field of gender-based violence at the University of Nairobi

Gender-based violence (GBV) is widely spread in East Africa with almost 50 percent of all women<sup>22</sup> having experienced intimate partner violence. In situations of natural disaster, displacement, conflict settings, and failure of protection systems, the risk of suffering GBV increases.<sup>23</sup> The prevention and response to GBV in emergency settings (GBViE) has caught attention from the global community. Still, the prevention of GBV is rarely prioritized during crises and emergencies. Local experts are often missing. The GBViE Postgraduate Diploma Course at the University of Nairobi is a response to this lack of specialized staff. The overall goal of this course is to raise the number of local GBV experts and to equip them with a multi-disciplinary understanding of GBV prevention and response modalities. This capacity-building programme should lead to a more thoughtful 'localized' response to GBV during emergencies. This one-year distance-learning course is being rolled out at the University of Nairobi, a well-respected and affordable institution of higher learning in East Africa. The curriculum was developed in 2020 with experts from academia, the UN, NGOs, and field-based humanitarian actors. Attention has been paid to work together with experts from the region to shift the narrative towards a context adapted GBV prevention and mitigation. The first edition of the course in Kenya is expected to start in January 2022, and the SDC contributed CHF 83'000 in 2020.<sup>24</sup>

22 Dessalegn et al. (2020): Gender-Based Violence against Women in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Cross-Sectional Studies. *Environmental Research and Public Health*.

23 Martin (2014): Current State of GBV Response Capacity in Humanitarian Settings. *Global Protection Cluster*.

24 SDC (2020): Questionnaire Annual Report on Gender Equality 2020. SDC Cooperation Office Bern.

## 4.2 Women's Economic Empowerment

### Why action is needed

The labour market plays a major role in achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly in developing countries. SDG 8.5 targets an inclusive, sustainable, and decent labour market for both women and men.<sup>25</sup> Despite women's rising level of education, an unequal distribution of women's and men's labour market participation and access to decent work still exists. Women's limited access to decent work is linked to gender stereotypes, social norms, and the division of labour. Women's labour market participation varies globally from over 70 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa to less than 30 percent in Asia.<sup>26</sup> According to the World Economic Forum (WEF), the gender gap in the world of work has even increased in 2020. While women are less integrated than men in the paid labour market, they are three times more engaged in unpaid reproductive work.<sup>27</sup> Gender inequality is also relevant with regard to wages. The global 'unadjusted' gender pay gap shows that women worldwide earn 22 percent less than men.<sup>28</sup> However, in contrast to this development, a positive trend is noticed for senior positions in the private and public sectors. In 2020, 36 percent of senior positions globally were occupied by women; this is an increase of 2 percent compared to the previous year.<sup>29</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic has strongly hit women's labour market outcomes. For example, in Latin America and the Caribbean, approximately 47 million jobs were lost, whereas more women than men lost their employment during the COVID-19 pandemic. Possible reasons involve the fact that women work more often in domestic services, hotels, restaurants, and commercial activities. These sectors were heavily affected by the COVID-19 crisis. The long-term socio-economic consequences of this crisis cannot yet be assessed.<sup>30</sup>

### The SDC's achievements

To empower women economically is one of the SDC's major goals, and the efforts of the SDC and its partners have led to promising achievements. SDC interventions are implemented in the fields of access to economic assets, services and support, income and return on labour, skills training and employment opportunities and decision making. For example, in Myanmar, the "Rural Women's Digital Finance Programme" initiated a collaboration with a local bank to improve rural women's access to digital financial services. The digital financial service includes financial products through smartphones for easy access to payments, savings, and credits. Such SDC interventions can contribute to more resilience of rural women against unseen financial constraints and give them more freedom in the management of their daily cash. In Niger, there is a trend towards more women (70 percent) among the young people trained in the SDC's professional education programme. Furthermore, the girls' growing interest in enrolling in Niger's consumer electronics (supported by Switzerland) is likely to reduce gender disparities in the industrial sector.

Looking at the overall figures in 2020<sup>31</sup>, roughly 6 percent of those benefitting from access to formal financial products and services through the SDC were women, and only 0.3 percent were women from disadvantaged or vulnerable population groups (total male and female beneficiaries: 182'005 in 5 countries). 22 percent of women, compared to 78 percent of men, were newly enrolled in vocational skills development programmes, and 19 percent were women from disadvantaged groups (total beneficiaries: 177'884 in 14 countries). Moreover, 54 percent of those obtaining employment as a result of SDC interventions were women, whereas only 3 percent of all women benefiting from these SDC interventions belonged to disadvantaged population groups (total beneficiaries: 52'340 in 9 countries). In summary, these figures indicate that despite some promising examples, the gender gap to the detriment of women within SDC programmes remains high in terms of access to financial products and services, and even more so for women from disadvantaged population groups. It is also considerably high in terms of women's enrolment in skills development, where however a bigger share of women from disadvantaged population groups could be reached. The programmes have been successful in providing equal employment opportunities for women, although the proportion of women from disadvantaged groups is rather small.

25 United Nation (2015): Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. United Nations, New York.

26 International Labour Organization (2020):

The impact of marriage and children on labour market participation: Spotlight on Goal 8. Collaboration with UN Women. Geneva.

27 UN Women (2019): Families in a changing world. Progress of the World's Women 2019–2020. Edited by UN Women. New York.

28 UNRISD (2020): Gender equality in the workplace.

Measuring what matters for transformative change. United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, Geneva.

29 World Economic Forum (2020): Global Gender Gap Index 2020. World Economic Forum, Geneva, Switzerland.

30 ILO (2020): Employment situation in Latin America and the Caribbean. Employment trends in an unprecedented crisis: Policy challenges. International Labour Organization, Geneva.

31 Based on the SDC's electronic annual results recording in 2020.

## REFERENCE INDICATOR

### Theme:

Inclusive  
Economic  
Development

### Title:

Women's  
Economic  
Empowerment

### Indicator

#### (IED ARI 2):

Number of  
persons having  
new or better  
employment

## Example 4: Gender-principal intervention

### Promoting women's economic empowerment in the South Caucasus

Women's economic empowerment is an important driving force for other dimensions of gender equality. The project "Women's Economic Empowerment in the South Caucasus" by UN Women aims at the economic empowerment of women with a capacity-building approach. To enhance women's entrepreneurial skills, the project offered business skills and sector-specific trainings such as sewing, hairdressing, or sustainable agriculture. The project was very successful, as a big share of the participants were able to start their own business. Moreover, the project strives to facilitate women's participation in relevant decision-making processes in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia.

#### Implementing partner

UN Women

#### Beneficiaries

In the first half of 2020, more than 800 women received training on business skills, and 287 women took up economic activity owing to their improved skills and capacities. 100 men benefited directly from institutional capacity building and similar interventions. The project particularly targets women from Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, who live below national poverty lines and are socially excluded. About one third of the beneficiaries belong to the group of disadvantaged and socially excluded people. Specifically, 178 women from disadvantaged groups improved their skills and capacities and 197 women from disadvantaged groups increased their knowledge on women's rights and policies through advocacy initiatives.

In addition, the number of indirect beneficiaries (men and women) is high: As a result of project interventions, several partner municipalities and public institutions are in the process of implementing gender-responsive budgeting, participatory gender audits and other measures to address gender equality at the policy level.

#### Finances

The project started in August 2017 (with an inception phase) and the first main phase will be completed in July 2021. In 2020, the SDC contributed CHF 1'561'082.

#### Gender analysis

##### Persistent gender gaps in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia

In Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, women's labour force participation is significantly lower than that of men. In all three countries, an average of 80 percent of men (of working age) are actively engaged in the labour market, whereas the share of women is only 63 percent. Among poor people, the employment gap is particularly large: while 86 percent of men in the poorest 20 percent of the households in Armenia and Azerbaijan are employed, only 27 percent of poor women have a job. This is striking, since the vast majority of these women are just as well educated as their male counterparts. Even in the poorest fifth of the population, more than 90 percent have secondary or even higher-level education. Hence, there is a large pool of untapped female talent in the South Caucasus region.

#### Activities

##### Building women's entrepreneurial capacities and advocating for gender-responsive policymaking

In Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, the transformative project supported women to expand their entrepreneurial capacities and to empower them economically. Female beneficiaries received training in transversal business skills such as mar-



keting, IT literacy, and English, as well as in sector-specific skills such as sewing, hairdressing or sustainable agriculture. In the first half of 2020, more than 500 women were trained, mostly online due to the pandemic. In addition, women were provided with grants to start their own businesses, access apprenticeships or participate in vocational education and training. In Armenia and Azerbaijan, private companies were supported to implement women's empowerment principles. In Georgia and Armenia, the project additionally operated at the governmental level, building the capacities of municipalities to incorporate women's needs into planning processes. Furthermore, the project carried out a number of surveys, impact assessments, and participatory gender assessments to assist policymakers in the implementation of gender-responsive principles in their work.

## Results

### Successful inclusion of women in the labour market

Since the beginning of the project, a total of 460 women in the three countries have been employed or self-employed as a result of capacities enhancement through the project interventions. Of these, 349 beneficiaries were employed or successfully running their own businesses for more than six months. A total of 1'150 women enhanced their business skills and employability, 328 of whom also received business development grants from the project. In addition, 101 women received vocational training grants.

In Armenia, 13 women were employed in 2020 and 104 women started or expanded their own businesses. 38 women who had started their own businesses in 2019 continued to expand their businesses in 2020. In Azerbaijan, 57 additional women became economically active in 2020. Of these, 24 women established their own businesses and 33 women found employment. In Georgia, 113 women became economically active in 2020, increasing the total number since the start of the project to 181. Of these women, 105 set up their own businesses and eight were employed. 46 women received business grants and started preparations to launch their businesses.

These figures show that the project has been successful in empowering women economically and has contributed to a sustainable economic growth. Additionally, the female talent pool has been better tapped through the programme's intervention. The project has also enhanced the development of gender-responsive policies. A survey showed

important results in relation to the gender wage gap in Georgia. These data and the related report recommendation were used to advocate for a more gender equal labour market through labour relations and labour legislation.

## Challenges, opportunities, and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020

### Advocacy and support through information sharing, humanitarian aid and business assistance

Women are disproportionately affected by the economic effects of the pandemic, as they often work in sectors that were most severely hit by business closures, such as the tourism industry. In addition, women often hold insecure jobs and earn and save less than men, making them economically more vulnerable. In the South Caucasus region, the pandemic took precedence over all policy level discussions, thus neglecting gender issues as priorities. All the more, the "Women's Economic Empowerment in the South Caucasus" project continued its advocacy work and provided the Gender Equality Council of the Georgian Parliament with recommendations for a gender-responsive post-COVID-19 economic recovery plan. Additionally, a COVID-19 impact study was carried out to inform policy makers on the effects of the pandemic on vulnerable population groups.

The project also provided hands-on assistance. As there was a lot of misinformation circulating in the target municipalities about COVID-19, the project launched an information campaign to make World Health Organization information more accessible to everyone. In addition, 450 food and hygiene kits were distributed to families in need.

Moreover, the project's business trainings were transferred and held online. The project adapted the terms of reference of an already hired business consultant to help 58 female entrepreneurs to navigate through the pandemic. Other beneficiaries were granted a one-time emergency aid to help their business by covering fixed costs, such as rent for premises, while the women adapted their business strategies to the new context.

### Sources

ILOSTAT (2020): Modelled Estimates, Labour force participation rate by sex and age (2016 or latest available data).

SDC (2020): Questionnaire Annual Report on Gender Equality 2020. SDC Cooperation Office Georgia.

UN Women (2020): Fourth Progress Report (January–June 2020).

UN Women: Progress of the World's Women 2015–2016.



## REFERENCE INDICATOR

### Theme:

Inclusive  
Economic  
Development

### Title:

Access to  
Vocational Skills  
Development

### Indicator

#### (IED ARI 1):

Number of  
persons enrolled  
in new or better  
vocational skills  
development

## Example 5: Gender-significant intervention

### Advancing women's career opportunities in the hospitality sector in Lao PDR

The project "Skills Development in the Tourism and Hospitality Sector in Lao PDR – Skills for Tourism" aims at the promotion of the sustainable and inclusive growth of the tourism industry in Laos. This goal is pursued through an improved vocational training and skills development curricula, by linking training institutions with the private sector, and by advocating for a favourable policy environment. The majority of beneficiaries are women, with a high share of women from disadvantaged population groups. The project aims at increasing their career opportunities by supporting high-quality training.

#### Implementing partners

Ministry of Education and Sports of Lao PDR (MoES), Ministry of Information Culture and Tourism (MICT), Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MoLSW)

#### Beneficiaries

In 2020, 1'330 women and 780 men benefitted directly from this project. 1'138 women and 633 men were considered to be from disadvantaged backgrounds.

#### Finances

The project costs are split between the SDC and the Luxembourg Development Cooperation Agency with a total budget of CHF 16'287'000 for the period from August 2016 to August 2021. In 2020, the SDC contributed CHF 2'029'371.

#### Gender analysis

##### Persistent gender gaps in the Lao tourism sector

The "National Green Growth Strategy" of Lao PDR identifies tourism as a priority for stimulating economic growth and employment creation, thus contributing to poverty reduction. One important focus of this strategy is the improvement of the quality of hospitality services by providing training and skills development to the tourism sector staff. Due to cultural norms, women and men tend to choose different professions within the sector, with women mostly working in customer service and housekeeping. Men tend to choose managerial roles, as well as jobs such as driver or gardener. On average, women in the tourism and hospitality sector earn significantly less than their male colleagues, and are strongly underrepresented in managerial positions. This is not only due to gendered stereotypes, but also linked to a different education: enrolment rates of women in tourism-related vocational training and skills development programmes are generally lower than those of men.



## Activities

### Training women for successful careers in the tourism and hospitality sector

The “Skills for Tourism” project strives to promote sustainable and inclusive growth of the tourism sector, mainly through improved technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and skills development programmes. Specifically, the project intends to improve the quality, scale, and variety of available programmes, and to create an enabling institutional framework. Improved training enables graduates of TVET and skills development programmes to find gainful employment in the tourism and hospitality sector. As a high share of people from disadvantaged backgrounds benefit from the trainings, the project makes a tangible contribution to poverty reduction.

The project encourages public and private training providers to enrol more women in existing programmes and to orient future training curricula towards female-dominated occupations within the tourism sector. To increase the rate of women in senior positions, the project launched a tender for an “Executive Training Programme” for women that will reach at least 50 participants for managerial roles starting in 2021. Moreover, the project promotes the use of gender-sensitive language and positive female role models in TVET programmes and training materials, as well as in the tourism outreach campaign “Hosts of Laos”.

At a meta-level, the project advocates for the involvement of women in institutional bodies associated with the tourism and hospitality sector. It also offers capacity-development opportunities for women within target ministries and other key organizations. In addition, the project collects, evaluates, and publishes gender-disaggregated data relevant to tourism and hospitality development. Last but not least, the project mainstreams gender in its own organizational structure, for example when hiring new project staff.

## Results

### Enhanced skills and job openings for women and people from disadvantage groups

Between January and October 2020, 2’110 persons benefitted directly from the project, of which 63 percent were women. Since the beginning of the project in 2016, more than 7’300 people participated in TVET or skills development programmes, 74 percent of whom were women. The project surpassed its defined goal for the inclusion of female

beneficiaries from disadvantaged backgrounds by achieving a cumulative value of 85 percent against the targeted 60 percent. The project was effective in increasing the employability of TVET and skills development graduates: According to a project survey conducted shortly before the pandemic, 86 percent of the training graduates had found employment (figures tentatively indicating similar rates for women and men).

Out of the 116 government officials who participated in capacity building supported by the project, more than half were women. These female participants are employed in a wide range of government organisations, such as ministries or other key public sector organizations. They are hence important resource persons for the future development of the tourism and hospitality sector. With regard to the “Skills for Tourism” itself, gender mainstreaming principles were successfully implemented throughout the project: For instance, two vacant senior positions were filled by women in 2020.

### Challenges, opportunities, and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020

#### Planning ahead for the recovery of the sector in 2021

Globally, the pandemic brought the tourism sector to a standstill. In Lao PDR, international travel was suspended with the announcement of the national lockdown on 30 March 2020. Even inter-provincial mobility was forbidden until May 2020. According to an Asian Development Bank survey, 70 percent of the tourism and hospitality enterprises in Laos laid off employees after the lockdown. Project data indicate that for those employees who continued to be employed, salaries were negatively affected. Before the pandemic, more than 80 percent of the training beneficiaries had found a job shortly after graduation. Among those who graduated after the pandemic, more than 60 percent remained unemployed.

As a response, the project shifted its focus from shorter courses for newcomers to upskilling training for those already employed. Moreover, the project developed technology-enhanced learning and teaching initiatives to be implemented in 2021. In addition, a “Health and Hygiene Programme” was launched to regain customers’ trust and support the recovery of the sector.

#### Sources

Skills for Tourism Project (2020):

Results-based annual progress report 2020: focus on results.

SDC (2020): Questionnaire Annual Report on Gender Equality 2020. SDC Cooperation Office Lao PDR.



## REFERENCE INDICATOR

### Theme:

Inclusive  
Economic  
Development

### Title:

Net Additional  
Income

### Indicator

#### (IED TRI 1):

Change in yearly  
net income

## Example 6: Gender-significant intervention

### Equitable access to economic and business opportunities as a key for women's employment and increased income in Benin

The SDC has been supporting Benin's economic empowerment programme since 2017. The main objective is to support different types of women-led companies to enhance women's economic empowerment, whether they are business owners, employees, or suppliers in the agro-alimentary sector. This involves targeting new start-ups, Small and Medium Enterprises (SME), larger and better established companies and sales service providers. Participating companies partake in and benefit from a training and coaching programme which helps them to improve their strategies in the areas of gender equality and climate change risk management, among other hazards. Ultimately, by supporting specific measures and opportunities for female entrepreneurs and business owners, the SDC programme has so far been quite successful in improving women's incomes and the annual turnover of participating companies by an average of 30 percent.

#### Implementing partners

Technoserve (TNS) and Bopinc

#### Beneficiaries

During this first phase (2017–2022), 1'043 women and 1'039 men benefitted from the programme. In 2020, the programme's training and advice activities directly reached 691 women and 430 men.

#### Finances

The total support of the programme amounts to CHF 12 million. Thereof, the Netherlands finances CHF 9 million and the SDC CHF 3 million. In 2020, the SDC contributed CHF 690'000 and added CHF 695'000 for COVID-19 relief.

#### Gender analysis

##### Inequality of opportunities in accessing professional opportunities and employment

Benin has made some progress in relation to gender equality. However, Beninese women have limited access to professional opportunities and employment, and inequality remains high between women and men in terms of access to resources. This discrimination is mainly due to a gender role distribution which remains firmly rooted in patriarchal tradition. Thus, men occupy the roles of guarantors of household welfare and maintenance, decision-makers and main breadwinners.

In this context, the government of Benin has adopted specific measures to increase employment and income-generating opportunities for women by facilitating access to entrepreneurship. However, men still retain decision-making power over the use of household financial resources. Women also often lack the confidence to unlock their full potential as entrepreneurs, given patriarchal norms, unpaid care responsibilities, lack of opportunities and the absence of female role models. Increased female economic opportunities not only benefit women, but society as a whole. Societies gain from the contribution of women's incomes to economic growth and family well-being. However, when women enter the paid labour market, their workload often increases as they still continue perform the unpaid care and domestic work. This can lead to women's time poverty.



## Activities

### Committing authorities and efforts to secure women's participation and gender equality

In order to attract women entrepreneurs, the programme conducted several public campaigns and engaged with different stakeholders. Among the less obvious, the programme cooperated with religious leaders and local elected officials, recognizing these male leaders as influential and potential agents of change. Their support for women's outreach and participation proved to be crucial to women having the confidence to join the training programme and being accepted by others in doing so. The programme also took affirmative actions, including the provision of safe and reserved training spaces for women, with dedicated female trainers or man/woman training teams. These activities were successful in increasing the number of women participants in the project on SME start-ups and sales agents for agro-alimentary products. Women received trainings on how to keep cash books up to date, payment of salaries, stock register, and leadership. Subsidies for transport and meal were granted to the female entrepreneurs who needed to bring their children to the training. This was necessary due to the unavailability of child-care. The overall activities comprised: training and counselling on business strategies; management and financial management skills for entrepreneurs; leadership to raise female confidence in engaging in economic activities; and identification of risks related to climate change. Finally, an intensive communication strategy was deployed through national and international events, live sessions on social media highlighting women entrepreneurs and the perceptions of women's role in business activities.

## Results

### Higher economic growth for women-led SMEs and their families

691 women and 430 men profited from the training and counselling programme in 2020. This same year, the project increased the recruitment of women micro-entrepreneurs (49 percent) and women SME leaders (35 percent) compared to 37 percent and 31 percent, respectively, in 2019. Women micro-entrepreneurs generated a positive growth of 129 percent, while their male counterparts generated a growth of 142 percent. As for SMEs, women generated a positive growth of 123 percent, compared to their male counterparts who generated a positive growth of 68 percent. This

was due, in particular, to some large contracts in the construction sector for one of the women. The strong growth observed in turnover is the result of the adoption of good management practices, such as keeping cash books up to date, payment of salaries or stock register, which were acquired during the technical support of the project by the beneficiaries, and also from obtaining market contracts in Benin and Nigeria. The registered growth in income has contributed to improved working conditions and entailed a better care for their families' needs and well-being.

### Challenges, opportunities, and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020

#### Double effort to reach the desired results and new opportunities

The limited number of people allowed to gather was a major constraint for the group training sessions and the planning of the after-care technical support. Teams had to split their portfolios into two groups, thus working twice as hard as usually. Some support had to be postponed to the second half of 2020. COVID-19 measures, such as the closure of neighbouring and European borders, not only limited the movement of contractors, suppliers and customers, but also forced many contractors to reposition themselves in the market or diversify their activities to make up for the losses.

However, measures against COVID-19 also allowed for an adaptation and the development of new sales strategies with entrepreneurs in the hotel and restaurant sectors. This involved, for instance, home delivery for orders and the rapid combination of other activities identified to maintain the increasing business productivity. In 2021, the programme will continue to explore alternative ways to develop the local market and to enhance its resilience.

#### Sources

IOE (2018): "Women and Economic Empowerment, Best Practices", International Organisation of Employers.

Buvinic and Megan (2016): *Revisiting What Works: Women, Economic Empowerment and Smart Design*, Center for Global Development, 2016, 1–41.

UN Women, Benin Country Profile, Country Fact Sheet, UN Women Data Hub (2020).

SDC (2020): *Questionnaire Annual Report on Gender Equality 2020*. SDC Cooperation Office Burkina Faso.

## 4.3 Women's Political Participation

### Why action is needed

Women's political participation at local, national, and global levels is crucial for democracy and a fundamental precondition for gender equality.<sup>32</sup> Political Empowerment is the sphere where women are heavily under-represented. Globally, women held only 25 percent of seats in the lower and upper chambers in 2020.<sup>33</sup> It is important to note, however, that this distribution is not even. On the one hand, there are countries such as Rwanda, Cuba, and Bolivia where more than 50 percent of parliamentary members in the lower (or single) chambers are women. On the other hand, there are 25 countries with a proportion of women below 10 percent in the lower (or single) houses. Finally, countries such as Latvia, Spain, and Thailand have taken a major step forward by substantially increasing the number of women in parliament by 2020.<sup>34</sup>

There are male barriers that prevent women from entering male-dominated political systems, but where these barriers are overcome, women political leaders have a substantial impact on democracy. Women in politics tend to perform more constituency work, to lower the level of corruption, and to exhibit a leadership style that is more cooperative and less hierarchical. Female political leaders prioritize women's interests more than male leaders do, such as reproductive and sexual rights and childcare.<sup>35</sup>

Though women's stakes in the COVID-19 crisis are high, they are not the ones taking decisions about official response plans and resource allocation. Recent studies reveal that of 334 identified national COVID-19 task forces in 187 countries worldwide, 84 percent comprise a majority of men and only 4 percent achieve gender parity.<sup>36</sup> Only 24 percent of task force members and only 19 percent of task force leaders are women.<sup>37</sup> In global task forces men are overrepresented to a similar extent. During the pandemic only 25 percent of the health ministers were female, which is particularly worrying in the midst of a health crisis. Besides, only 7 percent of heads of States were female.<sup>38</sup>

Women's underrepresentation in politics and in decision-making positions impacts the responses to this worldwide crisis. Female perspectives to handle the crisis are not taken into account. Current research shows that women leaders were more conservative with regard to closing schools as a measure against COVID-19. This could indicate that they were adopting a more holistic perspective by considering both the economic and social costs of shutting down schools as well as potential impacts on learners' development.<sup>39</sup>

32 Sawyer & Tremblay (2020): Political Representation: The Gendered Effects of Voting System. In: How Gender Can Transform the Social Sciences. Innovation and Impact. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.

33 Inter-Parliamentary Union Open Data (2020): Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments

34 World Economic Forum (2020): Global Gender Gap Report 2020: World Economic Forum, Geneva.

35 King's College London (2020): Women political leaders: the impact of gender on democracy. The Global Institute for Women's Leadership.

36 Equal Measures 2030: Newsletter 5.2.2021

37 Based on sex-disaggregated composition data of 225 task forces and leadership data of 334 task forces.

38 UNDP/UN Women COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker, in partnership with the Gender Inequality Research Lab (GIRL) at the University of Pittsburgh (2021): COVID-19 Task Force Participation.

39 UNDP (2020): UNDP and UN Women launch COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker. UNDP and UN Women, New York.

And: Aldrich & Lotito (2020): Pandemic Performance: Women's Leader in the Covid-19 Crisis. Politics & Gender.

## The SDC's achievements

The SDC's efforts in supporting and strengthening women's political participation have yielded creditable results. The SDC and its partners support women with gender-responsive approaches in local and national governance and in peace and state-building processes. In 2020, half of the SDC target groups that participated in and influenced public service provision, decision-making, and budgets in their localities were women, with 14 percent of women from disadvantaged or vulnerable population groups (total male and female target group: 1'735'346 in ten countries). For example, in Kyrgyzstan, since 2015 over 100'000 citizens, roughly half of them women, were involved in the municipal decision-making process. This resulted in tangible improvements in local service provision in 16 percent of the country's municipalities for more than 500'000 people, 50 percent of them women. Several other programmes show promising results in strengthening women's leadership in political bodies. For example, in Mongolia, where the SDC supports improved urban governance, nearly 80

percent of the trained officials in urban municipalities were women (total number of male and female trainees: 2'350). Most of them (98 percent) reported that this helped them to improve their competencies in delivering public services to urban residents. In Bangladesh, notable improvements in women's empowerment and service delivery capacities in several underperforming sub-districts were observed. For instance, 17 percent of development schemes were led by women vice chairs, a figure that was previously almost zero. In addition, four out of eighteen targeted underperforming sub-districts improved their overall performance and secured CHF 235'000 performance-based block grants from the government. This helped to improve the capacities of the sub-districts to provide better services to their citizens. In Tunisia, with the support of the SDC, a study was conducted during the post-election period to identify the obstacles women face as candidates and political actors. The rich research results led to a set of recommendations for policy makers.

## REFERENCE INDICATOR

**Theme:**  
Gender

**Title:**  
Gender Equality – Women's Influence on Political Decision-Making

**Indicator (GEN TRI 3):**  
Proportion of women with a positive perception on their influence in exercising their political functions

## Example 7: Gender-significant intervention

### Decision-making positions in the political realm through female empowerment in Serbia

Since 2018, the SDC has been supporting a programme in Serbia that contributes to strengthen women's political participation. The programme is currently in its third and final phase. It addresses gaps in policy and implementation of gender equality in the legal framework, while strengthening the capacities of women at the local level to increase their participation in municipal decision-making processes.

#### Implementing partner

The United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) is responsible for the implementation of the programme.

#### Beneficiaries

In 2020, a total of 2'733 beneficiaries (1'299 women, 1'434 men) were reached by 21 social inclusion projects. Furthermore, a total of 305 local representatives (213 women, 92 men) enhanced their knowledge on the implementation of good governance principles. This involved open data and legislative frameworks in the field of gender equality.

#### Finances

The current third programme phase covers the period between 2018 and 2021 with a total cost of CHF 6.9 million. The SDC's contribution in 2020 was CHF 1.2 million.

#### Gender analysis

##### Legal frameworks and protecting women from discrimination

Under the law, men and women in Serbia enjoy equal rights. Gender equality mechanisms (GEMs) are in place to ensure local implementation of the law. There are quotas to strengthen female participation in the administrative structures, as recommended by international good practices. However, implementation of social and gender equality policies lags behind. There is a noticeable lack of gender-disaggregated data, and women are under-represented in decision-making positions. As an example, only 5 percent of municipal presidents or mayors are women. Participation in decision-making is very limited, and there is no adequate coordination and implementation of the legislative and strategic framework for action related to gender equality. Vulnerable groups, such as older and rural women, women with disability or Roma women, continue to be among the most discriminated against. Moreover, gender-based violence remains a major problem. The importance of gender equality and gender related issues and their impact on society is generally misjudged. Challenging stereotypes about the roles and contributions of women and girls requires a long-term commitment at all levels.



## Activities

### Implementing gender equality policies and strengthening local capacity

The programme works on three different levels: First, it supports the capacity building on gender equality mechanisms (GEMs) in 31 selected local governments. Second, it challenges existing perceptions of women's role in society by fighting stereotypes. To this effect, the programme issued a call for proposals under the slogan "Let's Make Equality a Reality". Up to 30 local self-governments (LSGs) will be encouraged to contribute to the promotion and advocacy of gender equality in local communities and to support women's participation in decision-making processes, among others. Third, the programme supports vulnerable groups, mainly through social inclusion projects focused on access to education, health, social protection, communal services, employment and access to rights and entitlements.

## Results

### Women's increased ability to shape local policy change

A total of 261 female representatives of LSGs have enhanced their knowledge on good governance principles, on the application of a new Law on Public Procurement and resources and on the collection, enter and use of open data. A total of 44 participants (39 women, 5 men) have increased their knowledge on the legislative framework in the field of gender equality, as well as on the mechanisms that contribute to greater participation of women in local decision-making processes. Gender sensitive goals and indicators have been developed in nine LSGs. Nine gender equality mechanisms and three "Local Women Councillors Networks" were established. In addition, three LSGs adopted the "European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life". The training for vulnerable groups, designed and piloted within the project, was included as a standard active labour measure in local policies. These interventions have reached 234 individuals with disabilities (167 women, 67 men), 430 Roma people (188 women, 242 men) and 535 elderly persons (262 women, 273 men), who have benefitted from the social inclusion projects.

## Challenges, opportunities, and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020

### Vulnerable people disproportionately affected by emergency measures

The government of Serbia declared a state of emergency on 15 March 2020 and adopted measures that inevitably had an impact on the programme as it was unable to implement all the activities. Instead, it conducted a survey on the effects of COVID-19 on programme beneficiaries, especially on vulnerable groups. The survey pointed to the lack of affirmative action measures to support women, both economically and politically, which resulted in existing inequalities being exacerbated, namely the burden of unpaid care work and the vulnerability to domestic violence continued to disproportionately affect women. Furthermore, it stressed the non-involvement of women's organisations in decision-making processes, partly linked to biases and negative perceptions towards women in politics. The strengthening of local GEMs and the establishment of more "Local Women Councillors Networks" is expected to directly affect the way such issues are addressed.

### Sources

SDC (2020): Questionnaire Annual Report on Gender Equality 2020. SDC Cooperation Office Serbia.

Cickaric (2017): Invisibility of women in Serbian politics, University of Lausanne, 5<sup>th</sup> ECPG Conference.

SwissPro (2020): Semi-Annual Report, Jan. - June 2020, enhancing good governance and social inclusion.



## REFERENCE INDICATOR

**Theme:**  
Governance

**Title:**  
Citizen's Participation

**Indicator (GOV ARI 1):**  
Number of people participating in and influencing public service provision, decision-making, and budgets in their localities

## Example 8: Gender-significant intervention

### Improving women's decision-making capacities in the watershed management in Nicaragua

The community management programme of the Dipilto River Watershed aims to contribute to increasing the capacities of the target population in the municipalities of Dipilto and Ocotal to adapt to climate change. The communities are supported in the sustainable management of the watershed and in the sustainable use and management of soils and forests - through concerted approaches and the adoption of agro-ecological productive practices, among others. Strengthening the dialogue between stakeholders and empowering communities in an inclusive manner, are further aims of this programme. In 2020, the programme was in a transition from the first to the second phase, in which a dedicated gender equality approach has been integrated, building on the initial selective activities and results. It promotes the integration of women into the community structures, such as watershed committees, and aims to enhance their knowledge to engage in decision-making around environmental restoration. Throughout the project, women not only benefit from the conveyed skills, but also gain equal access to water and decision-making. Additionally, women can optimise their capacity to act as agents of change and climate adaptation.

#### Implementing partners

Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MARENA), National Authority of Water (ANA), Nicaraguan Institute of Territorial Studies (INETER), National Company of Aqueducts and Sewers (ENACAL), Social Emergency Fund (Nuevo FISE), and GOPA Consulting.

#### Finances

The SDC's financial contribution for the second phase (2020–2023) consists of CHF 3'150'000. For the year 2020, the SDC has contributed CHF 256'977.

#### Gender analysis

##### A patriarchal system that limits the role of women as protagonists of sustainable ecosystems

Nicaragua is one of the countries most vulnerable to climate change and climate variability. In recent years, extreme and irregular rainfall, as well as longer and more extensive droughts, have aggravated pre-existing conditions of environmental degradation in the watersheds, thus increasing the population's vulnerability to climate change. Rural areas, where extreme poverty is prevalent, are particularly affected. About 6'000 families (27'000 persons) live in the Dipilto River watershed.

The region is characterised by highly patriarchal structures. Households are predominantly under male leadership and control. Agricultural extension and training activities take place in spaces where women are not integrated and are not part of the related decision making. Women are burdened with heavy domestic and care work and lack the financial means to travel to training sites. Hence, it is difficult for them to benefit from available resources and to participate in community activities. Moreover, women are not perceived as protagonists in development activities and lack the self-confidence and the required knowhow and capacities to shape decision-making and take on management positions.

#### Beneficiaries

During the first phase, from 2017 to June 2020, a total of 26'200 people benefitted from the project. In 2020, 11'250 people benefitted, including 6'250 children and youth. Gender-disaggregated data are not available, but some figures on results for women are listed (see results chapter).



## Activities

### Dedicated measures to integrate women in community-driven activities

Over the years, the programme developed a combination of strategic interventions to enable women's participation in community-driven activities for climate change adaptation and environment restoration. Through systematic and personalised accompaniment, women have been encouraged to engage in community organisations around a specific resource, such as watershed committees or potable water and sanitation committees. Special attention was given to women's participation in capacity development activities for committee members, (e.g., on the protection of water sources and recharge zones, and on concerted and efficient watershed management), but also in training on other community-led processes (e.g., river and household waste management, eco forest coffee, multi-hazard brigades etc.). In this regard, the respective trainings have been scheduled in the evenings and the logistics for their transportation and the suitability of the meeting points have been facilitated. Further, a competitive environmental protection fund has been set up for small projects in the water basin, reaching out to women's groups and finally investing a considerable percentage for their initiatives. This will help them develop experience in proposal submission and project management. In 2020, initiated processes continued, although most of the project activities focused on consultation with women and men to draft the second phase of the program, and on the necessary awareness raising and training of stakeholders, including project technicians.

## Results

### Women's increased participation, leadership and livelihood benefits

During the first phase, a total of 26'200 people benefitted from the project. 418 women developed their capacities in risk management and 68 out of 148 were engaged as promoters with watershed monitoring networks. 35 women diversified their livelihoods and 820 exchanged knowledge on watershed resource management, climate change and risk management.

In 2020, a woman under the age of 30 years was elected president of the Watershed Committee. With her leadership qualities she contributed to the programme's implementation and was finally acknowledged by the community organisations. More than half of the seven Micro-Watershed

Committees were led by women. Further, three projects supported by the competitive environmental protection fund promoted the participation of women or included women in their associations.

By means of adaptation practices, project activities have contributed to improving women's livelihoods, as well as those of men, in terms of food security, increased income and access to water and sanitation. Women in particular benefitted from eco-friendly stoves and ovens that produce less smoke, which has a positive impact on their health. The programme also contributed to strengthening the resilience of the target population, for example through capacity building on land management. Finally, and very importantly, the project had an influence on changing gender roles. Women took and continue to take leadership roles in different community committees for the sustainable development of their communities, or volunteer in other activities, such as the provision of sexual and reproductive health services. Women promote values related to conservation and sustainable management of natural resources, as well as respect for nature.

### Challenges, opportunities, and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020

#### Slowdown of activities due to the COVID-19 pandemic and project transition to the second phase

Despite some successes, integrating women into community activities remains a challenge, due to the contextual factor mentioned above. The health crisis affected and will continue to affect training and other face-to-face activities. The six-month period between the end of the first phase of the project and the actual start of the second phase also slowed down activities. It means that an extra effort has to be made to re-engage actors based in and around the water basin. However, the explicit integration of a gender focus has the potential to drive significant change.

#### Sources

Romano, (2016): Democratizing Discourses. Conceptions of Ownership, Autonomy, and 'the State' in Nicaragua's Rural Water Governance. *Water Int.* 2016, 41, 74–90.

SDC (2020): Questionnaire Annual Report on Gender Equality 2020. SDC Cooperation Office Nicaragua.

Simbiosis (2019): Evaluación Final Externa de la Primera Fase Del Programa Gestión Comunitaria de la Cuenca del Río Dipilto en Nicaragua, Nicaragua.

Simbiosis (2020): Informe de Evaluación Final Externa de la Primera Fase del Programa Gestión Comunitaria de la Cuenca del Río Dipilto en Nicaragua, Nicaragua.

## 4.4 Topics of Crosscutting Importance

### Gender and social equality

“Leaving no one behind” (LNOB) is the guiding principle of the UN 2030 Agenda with its 17 SDGs. Every human being has equal rights. This means that discrimination, inequality, and social exclusion of any person, and of marginalized people in particular, must be eliminated. Critical issues such as climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, migration, digitalisation or persistent poverty are cross-cutting challenges that influence all 17 SDGs. However, they affect some countries and regions with their diverse groups and sub-groups of people differently.<sup>40</sup> Various forms of inequality arising from differences in sex, gender identity, nationality, disability, age, caste, ethnicity, or geographical location may intersect with each other. An intersectional approach is thus necessary to address this multiple discrimination. Various forms of social stratification do not exist separately but are intertwined. Possible solutions must consider the social, political, economic, and legal environment that may contribute to discrimination or favouritism with respect to the power structure in the family, community, society, etc.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlights that intersecting factors of discrimination have a negative impact on people’s social and economic well-being. Gender is a central factor that always must be taken into account, nevertheless, women and men are not homogeneous categories either. Poor women from ethnic minorities or elderly women living in remote areas, for example, suffer double or triple discrimination.

To respond to this global crisis, intersecting forms of inequality, discrimination, and marginalisation have to be taken into consideration. Women and men, and in particular, women and men with disabilities, from ethnic minorities, female and male migrants and refugees, the employed and the unemployed, the elderly, children and youth are all affected differently by the pandemic. This has to be considered in order to formulate effective and evidence-based policies to find promising solutions and sustainable pathways<sup>41</sup>.

### The SDC’s achievements

The SDC is committed to consistently implementing the goal of ‘Leave no one behind’. Therefore, for this report the Gender Unit has explicitly included this aspect in the case study questionnaires. About half of the submitted cases collected gender-disaggregated data on beneficiaries from disadvantaged and vulnerable groups (e.g., ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, etc.). For example, in Serbia, the “Enhancing Good Governance and Social Inclusion for Municipal Development” programme contributes to the improvement of social inclusion policies. In 2020, 1’299 women and 1’434 men from left behind population groups benefitted from the SDC’s intervention. This group comprises beneficiaries with disabilities, Roma and elderly people. In Laos, the “Lao Upland Advisory Services” project supported 3’749 women and 3’818 men with a demand-driven extension system that improves food security and income opportunities for smallholder farmers in 2020. A total of 600 women and 572 men from ethnic minorities were included in this project. This is very important, as women from ethnic minorities often have less access to services but are vital actors in ensuring food security and key agents in improving nutrition.

The majority of the new reference indicators for monitoring the implementation of the new international cooperation strategy (2021–2024) define disaggregation units for gender and left behind groups, emphasizing the importance of these cross-cutting aspects. In 2020, a first batch of electronically processed indicators already collected LNOB/gender-disaggregated data in an effort to make women and men from marginalized groups more visible, as shown in chapters 4.1 to 4.3. Additionally, a specific poverty indicator has been defined, measuring the number of people from left behind groups benefitting from projects to reduce discrimination, exclusion, and inequality. In 2020, a total of 147’192 people in Kosovo, Laos, Moldova, and Myanmar benefitted from such projects, of which 75’905 (52 percent) were women and 71’287 (48 percent) were men. In Nepal, SDC interventions empowered women and men from discriminated groups to participate in relevant peace, development, and political processes. 10’822 people benefitted from this intervention, 84 percent of whom were women.

<sup>40</sup> Messerli et al. (2019): Global Sustainable Development Report 2019.

The future is now: Science for achieving sustainable development, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, New York.

<sup>41</sup> United Nations (2020): The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020.

United Nations, New York.

Pinilla-Roncancio & Alkire (2020): How poor are people with disabilities?

Evidence based on the Global Multidimensional Poverty Index.

Journal of Disability Policy Studies.

## Policy reforms

Policies are important instruments for closing the gender gap. Global indicators such as the OECD Development Centre's Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) and the Global Gender Index show the effectiveness of policy changes. The SIGI measures discrimination against women by social institutions in 180 countries. These include formal and informal laws and social norms and practices, hence also considering the underlying drivers for gender inequality. The 2019 SIGI report points out that gender-discriminatory laws and social practices and norms have a negative impact not only at the individual and household level, but also on the society as a whole. The data show, for example, that such discrimination reduces women's labour market participation by 12 percent and women's average years of schooling by 16 percent. Additionally, the report indicates that gender equality in social institutions could contribute to increasing global GDP growth. However, economic growth does not automatically lead to a more gender-equal world. Closing the gender gap requires political and social actions and commitments through gender-responsive policies. On the other hand, the SIGI report shows some progress in terms of abolishing gender-discriminatory laws: From 2014 to 2019, 15 countries have criminalized child marriage for persons under the age of 18. Additionally, 15 countries have passed a law and made domestic violence a punishable offence. This shows some advancement, but progress towards a gender-equal world is still slow and needs more efforts.<sup>42</sup>

The SDC is actively involved in gender-related policy-making processes at global and national levels. To monitor the contribution of its programmes to policy and legislative reforms, it has introduced a new corresponding gender reference indicator. In this report, the project examples from Burkina Faso and Moldavia show how the SDC contributes to gender-transformative policy changes.

<sup>42</sup> OECD (2019): SIGI 2019 Global Report: Transforming Challenges into Opportunities, Social Institutions and Gender Index, OECD Publishing, Paris.



## REFERENCE INDICATOR

### Theme:

Poverty

### Title:

Leave No  
One Behind

### Indicator

#### (POV ARI 1):

Number of  
persons from left  
behind groups  
benefitting  
from projects to  
reduce exclusion,  
discrimination,  
and inequality

## Example 9: Gender-significant intervention

# Empowering girls through skateboarding in Afghanistan

This inclusive project, supported by the SDC, promotes the empowerment of girls and boys through skateboarding in Afghanistan. In a patriarchal and crisis-ridden state, the “Skateistan” project is a glimpse on the horizon to raise the educational status and life skills of Afghan girls in order to narrow the gender gap and promote positive societal development. More than 90 percent of the project’s beneficiaries are out-of-school children or children from disadvantaged groups. The project enables them to enter or stay in school and provides access to sport, especially for girls. Through sport, education and life skills building, the beneficiaries build their social and human capital to become future agents of change. The year 2020 was exceptional in many ways: Despite the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic represented a challenge to the project, the documentary “Learning Skateboarding in a Warzone” was awarded an Oscar by the Academy. This short film presents an inside view of the project and shows how Afghan girls can develop life skills.

## Implementing partner

The SDC’s implementing partner is the Skateistan GmbH/ASTO.

## Beneficiaries

In 2020, 769 girls and 1’024 boys benefitted directly from this intervention. Of the total 1’793 beneficiaries, 93 percent belonged to disadvantaged groups, of which 43 percent were female and 57 percent male.

## Finances

The project began in 2017 and ended in December 2020. During this period, the SDC contributed a total amount of CHF 990’000.

## Gender analysis

### Highly patriarchal society in a fragile context

Afghanistan remains a conflict-ridden country, full of complexity, with different ethnicities and extensive gender inconsistencies. According to the Social Institutions & Gender Index (SIGI), a very high level of gender inequality can be observed in all spheres of life. The strong patriarchal system keeps women subordinated in many ways, and men are the household heads who control women’s economic participation, reproduction and mobility, as well as girls’ education. In Afghanistan, 3.7 million children are out of school, representing 42 percent of the school-age population. Girls comprise 60 percent of the out-of-school children. On average, men and boys spend four more years in school than women and girls. This gap is also mirrored in literacy rates and labour market participation rates. The liter-



acy rate is twice as high for men (52 percent) as for women (24 percent). Less than 20 percent of women participate in the labour market, compared to more than 80 percent of men who are active in the workforce. Furthermore, violence against women is currently widespread: 53 percent of married women have experienced violence. Most sports in the country are considered male domains, and sports and athletic opportunities for girls are limited: for instance, girls are not allowed to practice sports in public areas. Additionally, the majority of sports fields in Afghan cities are privately owned and are not accessible to resource-poor families.

## Activities

### Using innovative ways to empower girls and boys from disadvantaged groups

“Skateistan” was founded in 2006 and provides skateboarding tuition and educational opportunities for disadvantaged groups which are often excluded from sports. Children between the ages of 5 and 17 learn how to skate on ramps and quarter pipes. The project focuses on girls, children living with disability, and those from low-income backgrounds. Skateboarding is new in Afghanistan and opens a door to girls’ participation. In the Afghan society, skateboarding is often associated with playing with toys. This makes it easier for local people to accept girls’ participation in the project. The overall goal of the project is to provide safe access to high-quality and relevant learning and sporting opportunities, especially for girls. Marginalized and out-of-school children and teens gain new life skills and access to education in a safe space. In 2020, the project focused on a range of activities in addition to its core actions: The project increased its female staff and created a female-led management position, thus providing real-life role models. The staff developed menstrual health education curricula and conducted a leadership programme to enhance female empowerment. Additionally, the project acquired vehicles to ensure safe transportation, allowing for more girls to become part of “Skateistan”.

## Results

### Enhancing girls and boys life skills and potential for change

In 2020, 1’793 girls and boys benefitted from regular sports and educational activities at “Skateistan”. All beneficiaries set the goal to either enter or stay in school. Moreover, they developed key life skills and increased their confidence. Many girls

became role models in the skatepark and in the classrooms. 62 out-of-school girls graduated from the back-to-school programme, and 18 teenagers graduated from high school. The project raised the educational status of girls and boys in order to help them become agents of change in the Afghan civil society.

The documentary “Learning Skateboarding in a Warzone” won an Oscar award. This short film documents a group of girls at “Skateistan” in Kabul. It shows, in an empathic way, how the girls develop their educational and skateboarding skills in the course of a year.

## Challenges, opportunities, and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020

### Keeping up the good work during difficult times

The COVID-19 pandemic also hit Afghanistan, and the skate school had to close temporarily. Still, during this difficult time, “Skateistan” was one of the only organisations that was able to continue working with girls and boys remotely. The project worked with 462 girls via remote programming during the six months of lockdown. Furthermore, this challenging year showed that it is important to work even more closely with the families of the beneficiaries’. The COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on the well-being of the participants. From the beginning, the project kept in touch with families to provide them with accurate information on virus prevention and mental health during the lockdowns, and to address issues such as food insecurity and stress. The staff needed additional training to support the mental health of the children and their parents.

### Sources

Salm Mundie et al. (2018): Inclusive education in a fragile context: redesigning the Agricultural High School curriculum in Afghanistan with gender in mind (2018): Gender and Education.

OECD (2019): Social Institutions and Gender Index. Afghanistan. OECD Publishing, Paris.

Thorpe and Chawansky (2016): The ‘Girl Effect’ in Action Sports for Development: The Case of the Female Practitioners of Skateistan. In: Women in Action Sport Cultures, 133–152.

SDC (2020): Questionnaire Annual Report on Gender Equality 2020. SDC Cooperation Office Afghanistan.



## REFERENCE INDICATOR

### Theme:

Gender

### Title:

Gender Equality –  
Reforms Pro-  
moting Gender  
Equality

### Indicator

#### (GEN TRI 1):

Number of  
gender transform-  
ative policy and  
legislative reforms  
in place

## Example 10: Gender-principal intervention

# Supporting gender equality reforms in Burkina Faso

The SDC has been supporting the “Fond Commun Genre” since its establishment in 2005. It is a mechanism set up by Burkina Faso’s financial technical partners to support the efforts of national partners to reduce gender inequalities. One of the objectives is to promote and develop gender-transformative legal reforms and policies in the country. The SDC’s partners work with innovative approaches at both national and local levels to achieve a more gender-equal society. The COVID-19 pandemic and the security situation in Burkina Faso have had a negative impact on project activities, which will hopefully resume in 2021.

## Implementing partners

Permanent Secretariat of the National Council for the Catholic Organisation for Development and Solidarity, Fight against the Practice of Excision, Association for the Promotion and Development of Gulmu, (OCADES) Banfora, OCADES Nouna, Permanent Secretariat of the National Council for the Promotion of Gender, The Centre for Information, Training and Budget Studies, Association Burkina Camp de l’Espoir, Centre for Democratic Governance, African Union of NGO Development, National Federation of Wend Yam Groups, Superior Authority for State Control and the Fight against Corruption.

## Beneficiaries

Gender equality legal reforms and their implementation benefit the entire population of Burkina Faso but would especially improve the opportunities and lives of women and girls.

## Finances

The overall programme contribution consists of CHF 1 million between 2019 and 2021. In 2020, the SDC committed CHF 400’000 to this project.

## Gender analysis

### Customary law and social norms obstructing women’s legal protection from discrimination

The lacking effectiveness of the legal framework, due to the pre-eminence of customary law, is an obstacle to achieving gender equality in Burkina Faso. Indeed, many discriminatory perceptions and practices continue to undermine women’s rights, civil liberties and reproductive health.

Discrimination within the family is widespread. Early marriage, for instance, is extensive and persistent. It particularly discriminates against girls.



About 44 percent of female spouses were married before the age of 18, compared to 3 percent of men. More than one third of women have suffered domestic violence in their lifetime. Burkina Faso law prohibits all forms of violence against women and girls, but domestic violence is not effectively criminalised, and marital rape is to some extent culturally accepted. Female genital mutilation is widespread: two thirds of women aged 15 to 45 are excised. Secure access to land remains a challenge for women. Their access to land ownership is widely discriminated against and depends on marital status and decision-making power. Only 14 percent of female landowners are able to sell the land they own. Women and girls are less likely than men and boys to have identity documents. Moreover, their access to economic and vocational training opportunities is limited. To make matters worse, some ministerial institutions responsible for gender equality policies and reforms still lack the knowledge on how to effectively implement transformative changes.

## Activities

### Outreach and awareness raising activities at different levels

The project activities in 2020 took place at different levels: At the national level, the SDC participated in the evaluation of the national gender policy and in the drafting of the new gender strategy. Advocacy efforts continued to mobilise resources for the operationalisation of the government's annual gender equality plans. Additionally, SDC's commitment enabled national partners to support women's participation in the elections held in 2020 and to publish important policy documents.

At the local level, the SDC's partners continued to carry out activities against gender-based violence, namely the implementation of a policy against female genital mutilation (FGM) in eight regions of the country. The partners provided FGM repair kits and organised diverse outreach activities in rural communities. Furthermore, SDC partners were also able to strengthen the participation of women and girls in the promotion of peace, security, and resilience facing COVID-19. Some project activities also aimed to strengthen the resilience of women and young people in the face of rising terrorism and violent extremism in the province of Kossi.

## Results

### Road map to gender equality and available statistical data

The project achieved several results in 2020: First, the National Gender Strategy 2020–2024 and its Operational Action Plan 2020–2022 were finalized with the support of the SDC-funded programme. Second, the project supported the elaboration of a booklet that informs users of statistical data on gender-related inequalities and disparities in various fields such as education, health, poverty alleviation, justice, governance, violence, etc. It is a user-friendly synthesis document, designed to be transportable and essentially presents disaggregated data at the national level on various topics. Third, 18 out of 28 ministries committed to adopt gender-responsive budget reforms. Fourth, 3'000 women got hold of personal identity cards which enabled them to vote in the 2020 elections.

### Challenges, opportunities, and impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020

#### Impact of COVID-19 and the security situation on project activities in Burkina Faso

The COVID-19 pandemic forced some partner structures to close and cease their activities, particularly in the period between March and May 2020. As a consequence, the planned implementation of most projects was strongly slowed down. Implementing partners noted an increase in gender-based violence and a deterioration of the economic status of women compared to men. In 2021, the programme will help to address the new arisen vulnerabilities, especially linked to the humanitarian and security crisis.

#### Sources

SDC (2020): Questionnaire Annual Report on Gender Equality 2020. SDC Cooperation Office Burkina Faso.

Scholastique et al. (2007): La quête de l'égalité au Burkina Faso: La charge de travail féminin, l'éducation et l'autonomisation des femmes, UNESCO.

OECD (2020): Social Institution and Gender. Burkina Faso. OECD Publishing, Paris.

UN Women (2020): Burkina Faso Country Fact Sheet, in Country Fact Sheet, UN Women Data Hub. UN Women New York.

## REFERENCE INDICATOR

**Theme:**  
Gender

**Title:**  
Gender Equality –  
Reforms Pro-  
moting Gender  
Equality

**Indicator  
(GEN TRI 1):**  
Number of  
gender transform-  
ative policy and  
legislative reforms  
in place

## Example 11: Gender-significant intervention

### Advocating for gender transformative policy reforms in Moldova

In Moldova, women's employment rates are low and a large segment of socially disadvantaged groups, including women, are excluded from political participation. Working with the East Europe Foundation Moldova (EEF) and the Centre Partnership for Development (CPD), the SDC supports civil society organisations representing women and socially excluded groups to advocate for more inclusive and gender-transformative policy reforms. Furthermore, the SDC works with grassroots organizations to address gender-related issues and promote social inclusion at the community level.

#### Implementing partners

East Europe Foundation Moldova (EEF) and Centre Partnership for Development (CPD)

#### Beneficiaries

In the reporting period from July 2019 to June 2020, 4'708 women and 2'534 men were involved in public decision-making. Additionally, 6'513 women and 3'752 men from disadvantaged groups were involved. The number of indirect beneficiaries who benefitted from the implementation of improved public policies is much higher.

#### Finances

This 10-year project runs from 2015 to 2025 and has a total funding volume of CHF 5 Million. In the year from July 2019 to June 2020, the project was in full swing compared to the pilot phase (2015–2017) and the early years of the first phase (2017–2021). During the period from July 2019 to June 2020, the SDC contributed CHF 729'181.

#### Gender analysis

##### Unequal representation of women in politics and the labour market

In Moldova, female representation in the labour market and in the political process is low. Only a quarter of the members of parliament are women and over the last years this rate has not changed. Most politicians are men who do not always pay due attention to women's concerns in policymaking. This problem is best addressed in conjunction with broader issues of social inclusion: Putting the problems faced by women and other underrepresented groups on the political agenda will benefit society as a whole. Furthermore, only 40 percent of women with a pre-school child are employed. Many of these women would like to work, but find it difficult to reconcile care work with employment. This is related to the fact that childcare facilities are scarce and fathers are barely involved in caregiving. The national economy loses between 10 and 20 percent of its GDP value every year due to female economic inactivity. The rate of young women who are neither in education nor in employment or training has been rising in the past years, reaching 36 percent in 2019. Hence, the female employment rate, if no measures are taken, is expected to further decrease.

#### Activities

##### Advocacy for gender-transformative and social inclusive policymaking

The goal of the project is to work towards a more gender-responsive and socially inclusive civil society, which advocates for gender-transformative and socially inclusive policy reforms. The project was engaged to promoting women's labour market participation. It applied a strategy that addresses the high female unemployment rates through advocacy with ministries, members of parliament,



labour unions, and employers. This intensive advocacy work started back in 2019 and paved the way for comprehensive policy reforms. It targeted, in particular, childcare services and parental leave to disburden mothers and to engage more fathers in caregiving. Another important concern involved the reform of the retirement pension schemes. Thereby, women should be encouraged to remain in the workforce for a longer period of time.

Furthermore, the project supported four national networks comprising 175 civil society organizations (CSOs) in promoting socially inclusive policymaking. They represent the interests of youth, the elderly, the Roma minority and persons with disabilities. Owing to the project's activities, the 175 CSOs were able to speak with one voice in the interest of socially excluded groups. They jointly requested the government, for instance, to publish poverty data and to hold hearings on the impact of COVID-19 on the represented groups. In addition, they asked to annul the planned budget cuts in the draft state budget for 2021, which would have had a negative effect on excluded groups. Moreover, the project supported the four CSO networks through trainings, coaching, and expert consultations. Last but not least, the project continued to support community groups in their mobilization and advocacy work for identified community issues – even during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Results

### Monitoring and tangible improvements in public policies

The project's advocacy work contributed to more gender-responsive policies. For example, policies on childcare leave were improved, amendments were introduced to increase the funding for pre-school childcare services, and legal changes were implemented to reduce gender discrimination in the calculation of pension schemes. Furthermore, the four national CSO networks monitored the implementation of twelve policies and programmes from a gender equality and inclusion perspective, such as the National Employment Plan, the National Policy on Fighting Domestic Violence or the National Development Agenda 2030 (gender equality reports). The monitoring reports were presented at public press conferences and informed about the CSOs' future advocacy plans. In the reporting period from mid-2019 to mid-2020, the CSO networks produced 53 policy analyses and influenced 17 public policies. One of these concerned inclusive social security benefits, for instance. At the local level, the CSO networks together with local CSOs managed to solve gender-related issues, especially

in the area of service provision for the most vulnerable people. For example, district budget allocations and personal assistants (as a rule mothers or close female relatives) for the support of persons with disabilities were increased. And the Roma CSO network successfully prevented the closure of a local school in a Roma village.

## Challenges, opportunities, and impact of COVID-19 pandemic in 2020

### New opportunities, a care crisis and solution-oriented advocacy

At the national level, the pandemic induced a care crisis in Moldova. As schools and childcare facilities were either closed or compelled to operate at minimum capacity, women's childcare responsibilities increased significantly, inhibiting their economic activities. Therefore, the project engaged with the authorities to ensure that safe school-openings were a policy priority and that care services became an essential part of the economic recovery plan.

Owing to the project, and despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, all CSO groups were able to continue their work. The project supported the CSOs to assess the immediate needs of their beneficiaries and adapt their activities accordingly. The elderly CSO network, for instance, mobilised youth to help the elderly handle digital devices. At the district level, new opportunities for social inclusion emerged: District authorities started using online participation platforms and currently broadcast council meetings over the Internet. This allows for a greater number of CSOs to participate in the debates, including those in remote areas that previously could not attend meetings due to the distance.

### Sources

- East Europe Foundation Moldova (2020): Joint Equal Opportunity Initiative Operational Report 01.07.2019 – 30.06.2020.
- SDC (2020): Questionnaire Annual Report on Gender Equality 2020. SDC Cooperation Office Moldova.
- Țurcan et al. (2020): Economic Cost of Gender Inequalities in the Republic of Moldova. Centrul de Drept al Femeilor, Expert-Grup, Centru Analitic Independent.

# 5. Conclusion and Outlook

Despite the COVID-19 crisis, the SDC was able to achieve tangible results in its ambition to promote gender equality. Certainly, outreach and interaction with the target population was difficult and several activities had to be put on hold. But at the same time, new ways of working with digital means or working in smaller groups and with personalized accompaniment have been tested. Using media campaigns was a means for raising awareness and information. Some programmes also invested in surveys on the effects of the pandemic in the respective countries or submitted recommendations for gender-responsive recovery measures.

In the thematic field of women's political participation and empowerment, programmes contributed to stronger female participation in community-driven initiatives, such as in water management committees in Nicaragua, or in grassroots initiatives in Moldova. Others contributed to strengthening women's leadership capacities and the implementation of concrete measures for gender-responsive management in local governments, for example in Serbia, Bangladesh, and Mongolia. Overall, the SDC is doing quite well in terms of women's equal participation in programmes, supporting citizen's inclusion in public decision-making and budgeting in their localities. Nevertheless, social attitudes and patriarchal structures still pose an obstacle to women's equal representation in political bodies and decision-making processes, as well as to their ability to exercise influence. Considering the large gender gap in politics, further efforts are needed, particularly to ensure that women's priorities are adequately integrated into COVID-19 recovery measures. In 2021, the Gender Unit and network will capitalize and share the SDC experience in promoting women's political empowerment and participation, complemented by current insights from literature.

The SDC has also succeeded in advancing women's economic positions and benefits, as the examples from the countries of the Southern Caucasus, Laos and Benin show. The participation of women in trainings has increased, thanks to the collaboration with political and religious communal leaders and the adaptation of the trainings to the needs of women in Benin. Entrepreneurial and vocational skills training, counselling and coaching have not only resulted in more employment or more women running their own businesses but have also generated substantially higher profits for these female entrepreneurs. Of particular interest is the newly launched initiative in Laos, which aims at upskilling women in the tourism sector to take up managerial positions. In order to achieve this, gender is mainstreamed at all levels of the initiative, including the project team. A gender-sensitive language is emphasised throughout the initiative. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic many of these endeavours might be at

risk. In addition, the number of men benefitting from SDC supported programme results remains significantly higher, especially in terms of vocational skills development and access to financial services and products. In 2021, the Gender Unit, together with the Inclusive Economic Development cluster, will raise awareness on the importance of addressing women's needs in such programmes to curtail harmful practices. Furthermore, we aim at inspirational examples and stories to nudge colleagues into more transformative actions on women's economic empowerment within programmes.

Achievements and tangible benefits for SDC's target groups have been reported on the sensitive issue of combatting sexual and gender-based violence and providing adequate response services. In this field, the SDC draws on years of experience and the examples illustrate the variety of approaches available. In Bolivia, for example, the SDC promotes a multi-stakeholder collaboration, linking civil society, universities and state actors, and working at both subnational and central policy levels. Promising steps can be observed in building a solid protection and response system and scaling up proven practices. The work to challenge male chauvinist cultural norms is interesting as well. In Tajikistan, the SDC contributes to the implementation of the law on family violence, having contributed to its adoption several years ago. It supported training programmes for a wide range of responsible state agencies and helped develop a comprehensive communication strategy endorsed by the government. A new avenue is the support for the qualification of school psychologists and work on the potential impacts on children. Iraq is an interesting example of supporting domestic women's rights organisations in their lead to protect women from gender-based violence, provide response services and advocate for change. In 2021, the Gender Unit and network will continue to share and further consolidate the accumulated knowhow and experience in the established community of practice. It will further explore ways of supporting women's rights and grassroots organizations.

Two of the case examples highlight the SDC's contribution to promoting policy change. In Burkina Faso, the programme for gender legal reforms and policies supported the design of the new national gender strategy and its operational plan. Moreover, it provided synthesized information on gender-disaggregated statistical data in various fields. This is essential, particularly at this point in the pandemic, and requires further efforts. In this regard, the SDC will engage in the series of global events on gender statistics and data to be held in Switzerland in 2021. In Moldova, the support for the advocacy work of civil society organisations has contributed to important reforms in the care sector (childcare services and parental leave) and in gender-just social protection. Again, two areas



that will require further attention in the future. The Gender Unit will actively participate in the SDC's internal learning journey on social protection to be launched in 2021.

The SDC's commitment to do more work on the intersections between gender inequality and other forms of discrimination will need to be continued. For this report, a specific focus has been placed on obtaining information on the respective measures and data. Approximately half of the case examples showed results regarding their inclusion of vulnerable and disadvantaged population groups and provided gender-disaggregated data for this category. The "Skateistan" programme in Afghanistan is an inspiring example of using innovative means to empower young girls, mostly from disadvantaged, vulnerable population groups, even in a highly patriarchal and conflict-affected society. A more nuanced understanding on related approaches and challenges should be further developed in the future.

The Gender Unit has continued its efforts to facilitate thematic learning and strengthen methodological capacities. Also in 2021, it will provide training and advice on how to integrate gender equality in operational work and aim for substantial and transformative change. It will conduct an online version of the gender training of trainers. Together with the NADEL Centre for Development and Cooperation of the University of Zurich, a course on Gender Economics will be organized. Gender and conflict sensitive programme management, as well as gender, LNOB and disaster risk reduction (DRR) will be addressed in workshops led by the Latin America and the Caribbean Division and the DRR network respectively.

We are committed to contribute to the global measures to rebuild 'more gender equal' after the COVID-19 pandemic, and to continuously learn and intensify our efforts in this regard.



# Abbreviations and Acronyms

ARI	Aggregated Reference Indicator
DAC	OECD Development Assistance Committee
FDFA	Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs
GESI	Gender equality and social inclusion
LNOB	Leave no one behind
NGOs	Non-governmental organizations
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PGE	Peace, Governance and Equality
PSEAH	Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
SIGI	OECD Development Centre's Social Institutions and Gender Index
TRI	Thematic Reference Indicator
TVET	Technical and vocational education and training
UN	United Nations
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
VAWG	Violence against women and girls
WEF	World Economic Forum

## **Imprint**

Published by:

Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA

**Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC 3003 Berne**

[www.sdc.admin.ch](http://www.sdc.admin.ch)

Authorship:

Interdisciplinary Centre for Gender Studies of the University of Bern

HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation

Design and layout:

FDFA Audiovisual Team, FDFA Communication, Bern

Cover image:

© SDC Cooperation Office Burkina Faso

This publication can be downloaded at: [www.eda.admin.ch/publikationen](http://www.eda.admin.ch/publikationen).

Bern, May 2021 © SDC