

DT INSIGHTS

# Gender equality: Combatting gender-based violence



OCTOBER 2020

# A life free from fear: Financing to end gender-based violence

BY KALILA JAEGER, ISABELA VERA, AND HUGO PETITJEAN, SEEK DEVELOPMENT

OCTOBER 9, 2020

Of all the plans laid out in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), SDG 5 ("Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls") is one of the most ambitious. Throughout human history, half of the world's population has been counted out, their intellectual and economic contributions disregarded, their bodies abused and commodified. Considerable progress has been made towards empowering women globally to live their lives autonomously. Since the adoption of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, [131 countries have enacted 274 laws and regulations in support of gender equality](#). [More girls than ever before are in school](#), and [maternal mortality rates have fallen by 38% globally](#). Still, massive challenges remain. Nowhere in the world are women born into full equality and, in many places, to be born female is to be born a second-class citizen.

We have already entered the final decade before the SDG's 2030 deadline. However, [progress on SDG 5 lags](#) across a range of indicators, including targets to eliminate violence against women and girls and ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). To level the playing field between men and women globally will require a massive and focused international effort.

This year, in recognition of the importance of SDG 5 in the Decade of Action, the [Donor Tracker](#) has added Gender Equality to our analyses of 14-major Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) donor markets, allowing users to compare donors' commitments and disbursements to gender equality efforts. In addition, the Donor Tracker is publishing a series of three Insights pieces, which will provide readers with a more detailed analysis of three main elements, or 'pillars' of gender equality endeavors: namely, funding for women's economic empowerment; efforts to end gender-based violence; and the fight for sexual and reproductive health and rights. This second piece analyzes existing research and newly released 2018 OECD data to assess how donor countries are approaching and, in many cases, falling short on efforts to combat gender-based violence in their global development programs.

[Gender-based violence](#), or GBV, encompasses any type of threat or violence committed against a person because of their sex or gender identity. GBV can be physical, psychological, emotional, or sexual, and may take the form of deprivation of resources or access to services. Though GBV manifests differently in different regions of the world, no country is immune. There is work to be done in every single locality to elevate the status of women and girls and eradicate the pervasive violence against them.<sup>1</sup>

**Figures** from United Nations (UN) women demonstrate the scale of the problem:

- Approximately [15 million adolescent girls](#) worldwide have experienced rape or another forced sexual act. Data from
- [30 countries in 2017](#) show that only 1% of those affected ever sought help.
- [70% of women](#) studied have experienced physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime.
- Of the 87,000 women intentionally killed in 2017, [58% were murdered](#) by current or former intimate partners or by family members.
- According to data from 2018, girls and women together represent [72% of all human trafficking victims](#). More than 75% of all trafficked girls and 80% of all trafficked women are trafficked for forced sexual labor.
- 2019 data show that at least [200 million girls and women](#) have undergone female genital mutilation (FGM), with the majority of cases performed on girls under five years old.

<sup>1</sup>While men and boys can be victims of GBV, most frequently in cases where they do not conform to traditional cisgender or heterosexual gender norms, the vast majority of the world's GBV is perpetrated by men and boys against women and girls.

As if these figures were not shocking enough, the COVID-19 crisis has [caused an increase](#) in incidences of GBV around the world, as women have had to lock-down with abusers and support services have been forced to shutter their doors.

In addition to the strong moral arguments underpinning the advocacy for combatting GBV, data from the World Bank shows that GBV incurs significant social and economic costs at a national level. In some countries, GBV is estimated to cost states [up to 3.7% of their GDP](#) which is more than twice, the World Bank notes, what most countries spend on education.

In the last few years, tackling GBV has slowly [gained recognition](#) as a priority for donors' and multilateral institutions' global development programs. In 2016, the World Bank launched the [Global Gender-Based Violence Task Force](#) to respond specifically to sexual exploitation occurring in World Bank-supported projects. In 2017 — the same year that the [#MeToo movement took the world by storm](#) — the [Spotlight Initiative](#) launched with €500 million (US\$590 million) in seed funding from the EU Institutions. It became the first targeted, international effort to end all forms of violence against women and girls.

That it took until 2017 to galvanize donors into multilateral action at this scale is a testament to its relative obscurity in the development community when compared to other, longer-standing thematic issues such as malnutrition. By comparison, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) launched its first global campaign against childhood hunger in 1946.

GBV is a violation of women's and girls' human rights and poses an existential threat to their lives and livelihoods. As such, eradicating GBV is a prerequisite to achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 5; 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls') as well as all other sub-goals of gender equality. Donor efforts must rapidly scale up if the global community is going to succeed at ending GBV in time to meet the SDG's 2030 deadline.

This Insights piece takes stock of which OECD DAC donor countries are using official development assistance (ODA) toward eradicating GBV. It asks:

- How much bilateral ODA do donors currently provide for anti-GBV efforts and related civil society and human rights areas?
- Which OECD DAC donor countries prioritize GBV in their development policy and financing?

- Where are the gaps, and what more needs to be done by donors?

This analysis provides evidence for advocates that increasing donor efforts toward ending GBV are more important than ever.

### Using OECD DAC data, donor funding for GBV and gender equality in civil society and rights sectors can be assessed

In 2017, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) introduced a purpose code (a funding label for donor projects) explicitly for anti-GBV activities, titled 'Ending violence against women and girls'. This was an important step towards increasing transparency around donor finance for activities against GBV.

Some donors, however, reported no spending tagged with the anti-GBV purpose code despite having allocated money to relevant projects. According to OECD data, [France](#), for example, appears not to have spent any ODA on anti-GBV initiatives; given that France does engage in known anti-GBV activities, specifically as part of its [Support Fund for Feminist Organisations](#), this suggests uneven uptake of the GBV purpose code by donors. Although the fact that there may be additional spending

#### The OECD DAC gender marker: A quick guide

The DAC gender equality policy marker records development assistance activities that target gender equality as a policy objective.

The marker has three possible scores:

- **Principal:** gender equality is the main objective of the project or program;
- **Significant:** gender equality is an important and deliberate, but not the main, objective of the project or program; or
- **Not targeted:** project or program does not target gender equality.

This Insights piece considers all '**principal**' and '**significant**' funding to be 'gender-related'.

Source: [OECD DAC, Handbook on the OECD-DAC Gender](#)

not pictured here is ultimately positive, accuracy in reporting is crucial to empowering advocates with up-to-date, transparent data on the current state of donor finance for ending GBV.

It is important to note that the purpose code only captures bilateral ODA provided by donors; that means that donors' core contributions to multilateral organizations working on anti-GBV issues, such as UN Women and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), is not included in this analysis.

Additionally, this purpose code cannot sufficiently capture the multifaceted approach that is necessary to eradicate violence because GBV and the structures which en-

able it necessarily permeate every aspect of society, from social to legal. Therefore, six additional [purpose codes](#) are relevant to this analysis:

- 15130: 'Legal and judicial development';
- 15152: 'Legislatures and political parties';
- 15150: 'Democratic participation and civil society';
- 15160: 'Human rights';
- 15170: 'Women's rights organisations and movements, and government institutions'; and
- 16010: 'Social protection'.

### Increasing women's representation in parliamentary, judiciary, and law enforcing institutions strengthens the fight against GBV

SDG 16 calls for 'access to justice for all' and for the establishment of 'effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels'. Target 16.7 requires nations to enhance the inclusiveness and representativeness of their institutions including their legislatures, public services, and judiciaries. Yet even in 2020, the overwhelming dominance of regulatory institutions by men, and the failure of those institutions to take GBV seriously stands in the way of real progress on the issue.

- **GBV is perpetrated with impunity:** In Pakistan's upper Sindh region, just 19 of the [649 criminal honor killing cases](#) brought to courts between 2014 and 2019 received sentences. In Mexico, [fewer than five percent of gender-based murders](#) are officially solved. In Spain, 23 women have been murdered since January of 2020 and [call volume to domestic violence hotlines have spiked 493%](#) since the start COVID-19 lockdowns.
- **Legislative and judicial bodies are dominated by men:** Women [held just 24.6% of the world's parliamentary seats](#) in 2019 and are [vastly outnumbered](#) by their male counterparts in global judiciaries. [Many documented cases](#) have proven that high ranking politicians themselves can be perpetrators of GBV, too. With gender ratios in legal

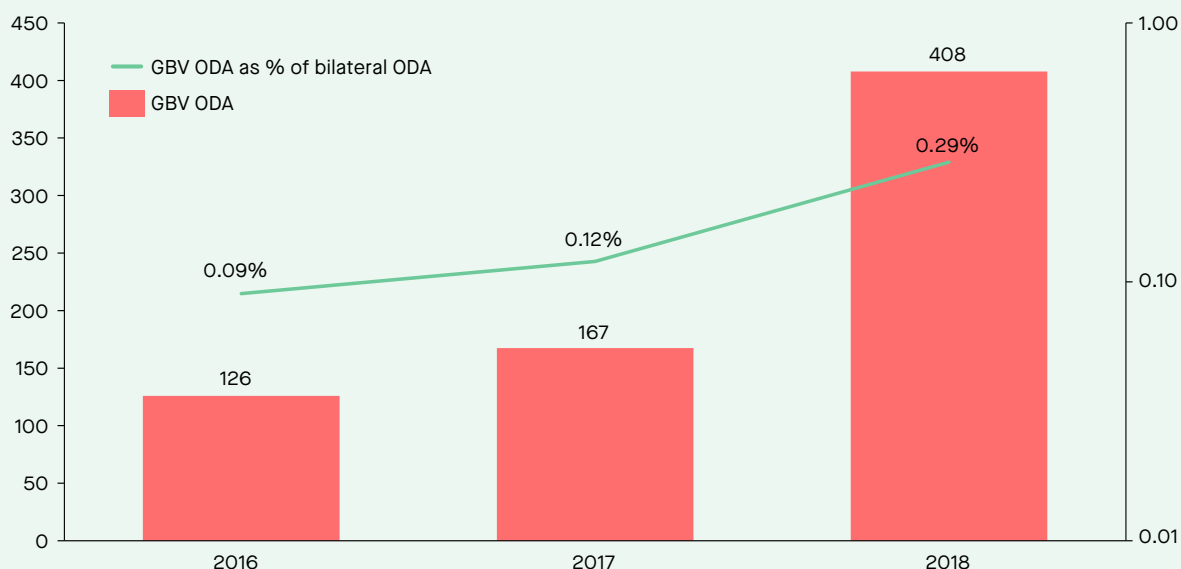
institutions globally [so skewed](#), there is potential for abusers and their enablers to [outnumber](#) those who defend the rights of women, shutting down legal reforms and [covering up allegations](#) of abuse.

- **Law enforcement does not take GBV seriously at an institutional level:** In the United States, multiple studies have shown that [40% of police officer families](#) experience domestic abuse, compared to 10% of the general population. A [2013 US-based investigation](#) showed that nearly 30% of officers accused of domestic violence still worked for the same agency a year later, compared to 1% and 7% of officers who failed drug tests or were accused of theft, respectively.

This lack of gender equality in lawmaking bodies worldwide poses a major obstacle for the passage of legislation with the potential to protect women from GBV, and the gender inequities in the world's judiciaries and law enforcement undermines public faith in courts' willingness and ability to prosecute GBV crimes effectively. Legal reforms that explicitly recognize and penalize femicide as a crime are [effective in helping slow the rates of murder](#). Trainings for judges, lawyers, and police on GBV have also proven useful, as well as the passage of legislation that increases access to women's shelters. The inclusion of women in lawmaking and law enforcing bodies, and their promotion to leadership roles, is a crucial first step to promote the introduction and passage of these important legislative initiatives.

Figure 1: **Bilateral allocable ODA for ending violence against women and girls, 2016-2018**

All DAC donors, US\$ millions



Source: OECD CRS. Gross disbursements; 2018 prices.

### ODA for 'Ending violence against women and girls' has more than tripled since 2016

A 2018 Gender Equality Report from Donor Tracker found that all 14 donors monitored by the platform had a focus on ending GBV explicitly named in their development strategies. ODA for 'Ending violence against women and girls' has risen every year since 2016, when it amounted to US\$126 million. This rose to US\$167 million in 2017, before more than doubling to US\$408 million in 2018.

The dramatic leap in funding for GBV between 2017 and 2018 was driven by a US\$152 million funding package directed by the [EU](#) mainly towards the Spotlight Initiative (see box) that year. GBV-related spending in 2018 represented 0.29% of donors' overall bilateral ODA, only a slight change from the 0.09% and 0.12% share it held in 2016 and 2017 respectively.

### EU Institutions account for almost 40% of all funding to projects aimed at ending GBV

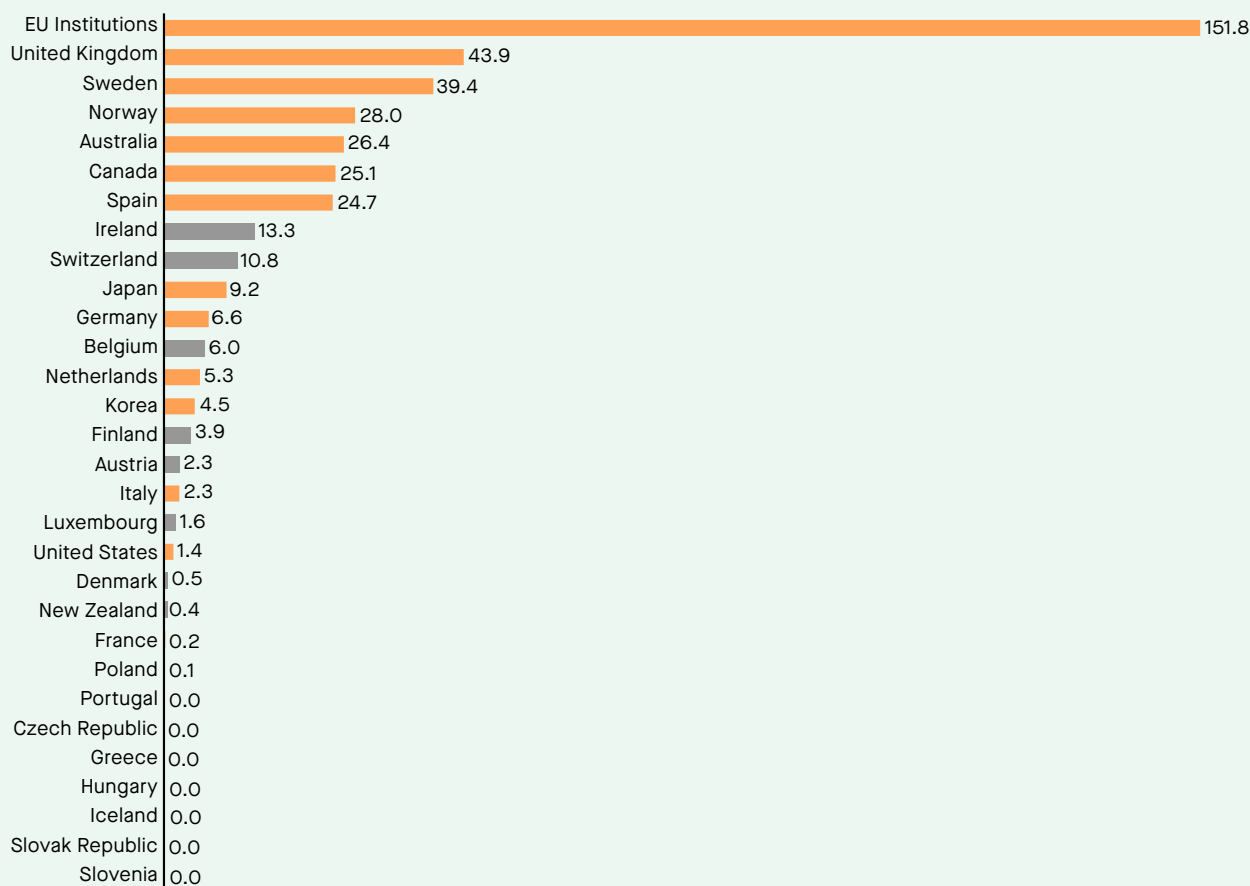
The EU institutions, the [UK](#), and [Sweden](#) were the largest donors for projects aimed at eliminating violence against women and girls in 2018. Their allocations of US\$152 million, US\$44 million, US\$39 million, respectively, reflect the increased policy focus from these donors on this issue in recent years.

The EU easily outspent every other donor by orders of magnitude in funding to the sector. The EU — along with UNFPA the United National Development Programme (UNDP), and UN Women — is a founding donor of the Spotlight Initiative. The EU's €500 (US\$590) in seed funding to Spotlight in 2017, the year it was established, helped propel the EU to first place in spending to end violence against women and girls.

In 2016, the EU's framework '[Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: Transforming the Lives of Girls and Women through EU External Relations 2016-20](#)' (known as the Gender Action Plan or GAP II) came into force. GAP II aims to promote, protect, and fulfill the human rights of girls and women through EU external relations and is mandatory for the EU and its member states. The first thematic area given in GAP II is 'Ensuring girls' and women's physical and psychological integrity', illustrating the EU's attention to the issue.

### The UK is a leader in gender mainstreaming for development policy

In second place, with just about a third of the EU's total funding, the UK allocated US\$44 million in 2018 to projects ending violence against women and girls. The UK passed the [International Development \(Gender Equality\)](#)

Figure 2: **Bilateral ODA for ending violence against women and girls, 2018***All DAC donors, US\$ millions**Source: OECD CRS. Gross disbursements; 2018 prices.*

Act in 2014, requiring all UK development projects to target poverty reduction while also promoting gender equality. Its '2030 Strategic Vision on Gender Equality' also made 'eliminating gender-based violence' one of five explicit policy priorities. However, since the Department for International Development (DFID; which was originally responsible for the policy) has since been merged with the UK Foreign Office, the future of the policy framework is unclear.

The UK is also a topline donor to multilateral organizations including UNFPA and UN Women, both of which are majority funders of the Spotlight Initiative.

### **Sweden frames women's rights in a human rights policy framework**

With US\$39 million in bilateral ODA for projects for ending violence against women and girls, Sweden takes third

place in terms of absolute spending. Sweden's 'feminist foreign policy' has been in place since 2014, when the government committed to mainstreaming gender into every arm of its foreign policy initiatives. The policy incorporates 'freedom from physical, psychological, and sexual violence' as one of its six priorities for achieving global gender equality. Sweden also adopted an additional strategy in 2018 for gender equality and women's empowerment focusing on human rights protections for women, which explicitly includes combatting gender-based violence as a top focus.

### **Ireland and Spain lead on anti-GBV spending when accounting for donors' overall global development project portfolio**

As Figure 3 illustrates, spending on ending violence against women and girls makes up only a small proportion of donors' overall bilateral ODA.



### Major multilateral initiatives like Spotlight are paving the way

The Spotlight Initiative focuses specifically on ending domestic violence, femicide, human trafficking, and sexual exploitation. Launched in 2017 by the EU and UN Institutions with seed funding over €500 million (US\$590), Spotlight represented the first major coordinated international effort to address GBV as a systemic, transnational problem.

Spotlight focuses on six programmatic pillars: 1) promoting laws and policies to prevent violence and discrimination and to address impunity; 2) strengthening national governments and regional institutions; 3) promoting gender-equitable social norms, attitudes, and behaviors; 4) making high quality essential services available for survivors of violence; 5) improving the quality, accuracy, and availability of data on GBV; and 6) promoting strong and empowered civil society and autonomous women's movements.

Spotlight is coordinated by the Executive Office of the UN Secretary-General and operated by three core UN agencies: UN Women, UNFPA, and UNDP, with additional support from UNICEF. While many organizations have existed for decades doing important work to fight against specific aspects of GBV on a smaller scale, the establishment of the Spotlight Initiative not only represents a chance to unify and align existing efforts but also sends a powerful message to the world: GBV is a global problem and its solution must be a global priority.

According to the anti-GBV purpose code, Ireland and Spain outrank the other DAC donors by a significant margin in terms of relative spending or spending on ending GBV as a proportion of total bilateral ODA (see Figure 3).

Ireland spent more of its bilateral ODA (2.5%) on ending violence against women and girls than any other DAC donor. Ireland is currently implementing its third National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security (2019-2024), which prioritizes efforts to include women in conflict resolution initiatives and, within its portfolio of anti-GBV activities, places a high priority specifically on ending

FGM. Ireland's disbursements across the African continent to projects such as 'She Leads Africa', an empowerment initiative for female entrepreneurs which also prioritizes ending GBV, and to the UNFPA 'Zero Tolerance for GBV' program, account for its spot at the top.

With 2.3% of bilateral ODA allocated to ending violence against women and girls, Spain takes a close second place in the relative ranking. 'Ending violence against women and girls' is an explicit priority named in Spain's 'Master Plan for Spanish Cooperation 2018-2020'. Spain's funding is mostly targeted towards Latin America and the Caribbean and directed towards projects to end domestic violence.

### Spending on other key areas of the fight against GBV does not yet adequately mainstream gender

To comprehensively assess donors efforts to combat GBV, it is also important to analyze donor spending for other types of projects which target areas closely linked to ending violence against women. By working to change cultural narratives about women's place in society and by directly empowering women to participate in democratic activity, gender-focused spending in the following areas helps tackle the root causes of GBV:

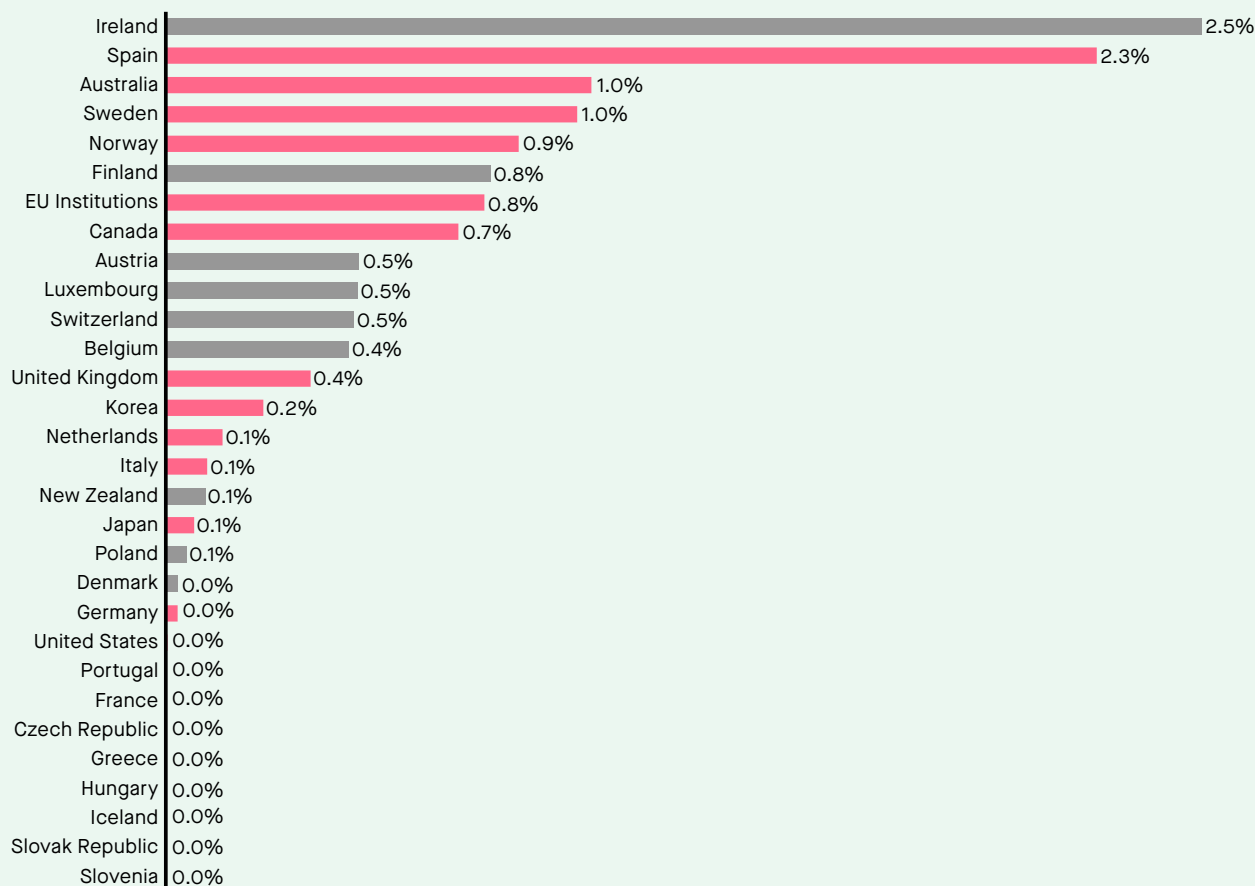
- 'Legal and judicial development';
- 'Human rights';
- 'Women's rights organisations and movements, and government institutions';
- 'Social protection';
- 'Legislatures and political parties'; and
- 'Democratic participation and civil society'.

It is well known that when women hold diversified leadership positions in government and law enforcement institutions, and when their voices are sought out and heard, the organizations operate more fairly and more effectively overall. The achievement of gender equality in these other areas of civil society can elevate the status and legitimacy of women as equal citizens, and act as an accelerator for the eradication of GBV.

The ODA analysis of the extent to which projects in these six areas prioritize gender equality as a principal or significant project goal shows that, unfortunately, gender is not yet sufficiently mainstreamed into projects within these six thematic areas. Figure 4 shows a strikingly small amount of movement in funding levels over the last five years.

Figure 3: **Bilateral ODA for ending violence against women and girls as percent of total bilateral ODA, 2018**

All DAC donors, US\$ millions



Source: OECD CRS. Gross disbursements; 2018 prices.

- All projects marked as **'Women's rights organizations and movements'** are fully gender-focused, the same is not true for funding to the other purpose codes.
- Of the sectors examined, **'Democratic participation and civil society'** saw the highest level of gender mainstreaming, with 70% of funding in 2018 going to projects which included gender equality as either a principal or significant goal. The percentage is encouraging, but funding has been higher in the past.
- That **'Social protection'** is seeing increasing gender mainstreaming is a promising sign. Nevertheless, given that projects in this sector should improve institutional, programmatic protections for "vulnerable groups" in society, just under 60% of funding went to projects that included gender equality as a principal or significant goal is insufficient. All projects in this sector should at least include gender as a significant goal.
- Alarmingly, less than two-thirds of funding for **'Human rights'** projects appears to be mainstreaming gender;

this in a project sector which should by any definition include a focus on the rights of women and girls. Projects in this sector are specifically designed to protect the basic rights of the most endangered in society, those on the margins of society who are at risk of being abused and physically harmed. It is understandable that not every single project in the category has gender as its principal focus, but integrating gender objectives into project spending in this category is imperative given what is known about the pervasiveness and perilousness of gender-based discrimination and violence.

- Gender-focused funding for projects on **'Legislatures and political parties'**, already the sector with the second-lowest level of gender mainstreaming, appears to be on the decline. This is a worrying development given how significantly the functionality of legal and judicial systems affects the propensity of survivors of GBV to come forward and press charges.



- **'Legal and judicial development'** took last place, with just 30% of funding targeting projects with gender equality objectives. Like 'Legislatures and political parties', funding to this sector is crucial to improve the responses of and trust in legal institutions.

GBV has deep roots in the systemic inequality between men and women that has persisted throughout modern history. Projects which provide direct support to survivors of GBV and which operate to penalize perpetrators are imperative, but a sustained effort to promote women's full citizenship, in the broadest possible sense, is critical to proactive prevention. By mainstreaming gender across democratic civil society and human rights sector projects, donors can increase the impact of their direct anti-GBV work and help to raise a new generation with a modern conception of women's place in society. The next decade must, therefore, see a massive push by the advocacy community to introduce gender equality elements to every project in these crucial sectors.

## Recommendations

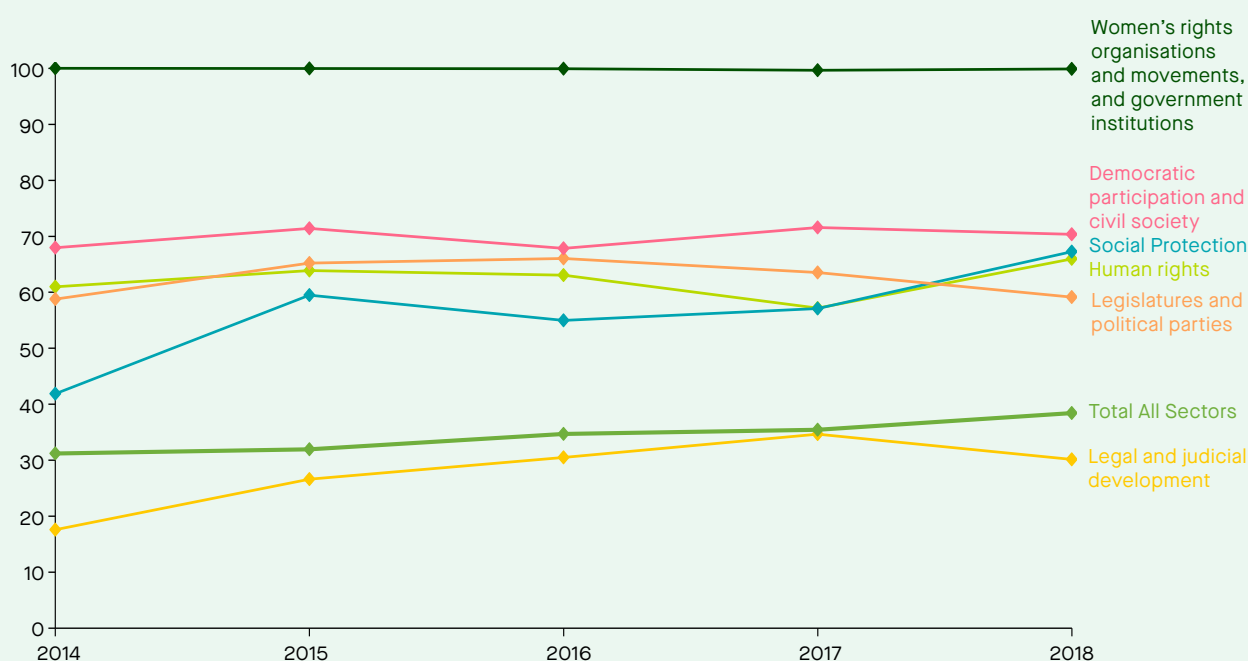
Ending GBV is both a moral and an economic imperative. Studies have shown again and again that children raised experiencing or witnessing violence are at high-

ly increased risk of becoming perpetrators or victims of violence themselves. By investing in interventions now, donors can save the lives of women and children today, and build a brighter, more peaceful future. Over the next few years, as donors grapple with the fallout from the COVID-19 crisis, it will be crucial that funding for recovery not be taken from the already meager allocations for combatting GBV. On the contrary, spending to eradicate gender inequality is more critical now than ever.

With just ten years remaining to meet the ambitious goals of the SDGs, a rapid infusion of donor funding into the projects and the sectors known to be effective in the fight against GBV, is essential. Considering the findings of this ODA analysis, advocates should consider the following points in their advocacy to donors for GBV-related development activities.

1. **Donors need to increase spending on activities that directly target GBV.** Although donors have increased absolute spending in recent years on efforts to combat GBV, total funding is still a drop in the bucket compared to the scale of the issue. The problem transcends borders and permeates every society across ethnic, cultural, and class divides. Funding to combat a problem of this scale must match its

Figure 4: **Gender-marked funding as % of all bilateral ODA to secondary civil society sectors**  
All DAC donors, 2014-2018



Source: OECD CRS. Aid projects targeting gender equality and women's empowerment. Gross disbursements.

proportions and projects to directly target the root causes of GBV (among them the persistent cultural devaluation of women's rights as citizens) must be prioritized. The EU's leadership with the Spotlight Initiative is a good starting point; more donors should join the Initiative (so far the EU is the only contributor), and continue to fund at a high level the UN organizations which form the project's backbone.

**2. Donors should consistently make use of the 'Ending violence against women and girls' purpose code.** The introduction of the OECD purpose code in 2017 was an excellent first step towards focusing donor efforts on the range of problems it encompasses. To begin effectively tracking spending towards ending GBV, donors need to start using the code consistently in their reporting. Donors, like France, which are already making efforts towards ending GBV but not yet reporting it as such, deserve to be recognized for their work, and those donors that have not yet committed to work in this area should be held accountable. In either case, advocates need accurate, up-to-date information to press for smarter policy.

**3. Donors should also ensure that projects in related areas such as 'Human rights'; 'Legal and judicial development'; and 'Legislatures and political parties' increasingly mainstream gender issues.** In addition to funding that directly targets GBV, there is an urgent need to increase complementary funding to civil society and 'Human rights' sectors that specifically targets gender equality, to ensure that the conditions which enable and perpetuate GBV are addressed in a holistic and impactful way. As this analysis shows, currently only between 30 and 70% of all projects in legal, judicial, and law enforcement sectors, which have the potential to strengthen systems that prevent and prosecute GBV, include gender equality as a significant or principal goal. Nowhere is mainstreaming more important than in the 'Human rights' sector, where 100% of projects should at least include gender as a significant focus, and where gender should be the principal focus of many. Instead, the percent of gender-tagged funding across these crucial sectors is lagging. Donors must use the next decade to drive these levels up across the board, imbuing every initiative with smart, targeted gender benchmarks.