



COORDINATION SUD



EUROPE



GENDER

POSITION PAPER

FOR EUROPEAN FUNDING OF FEMINIST ORGANISATIONS

March 2024

Coordination SUD is the national coordinating body of French NGOs working for international solidarity

Coordination SUD was founded in 1994 and currently comprises 184 NGOs, either as direct members or through six networks of associations (CLONG-Volontariat, Cnajep, Coordination Humanitaire et Développement, CRID, FORIM and Groupe initiatives). These organisations work in the fields of emergency humanitarian and development aid, environmental protection, human rights, advocacy and global citizenship education for international solidarity – with a special focus on helping the most disadvantaged groups of people.

Coordination SUD and its member organisations in the French international NGO sector work in four key areas: promoting and defending an enabling environment for Civil Society Organisations' (CSO); supporting and strengthening CSOs; defining and advocating joint positions on international solidarity policies vis-a-vis public and private institutions in France, Europe and around the world; and finally, monitoring and analysing developments and challenges in the international solidarity space.

Coordination SUD, Bringing Together and Acting for International Solidarity

INTRODUCTION

The past several years have seen a worldwide setback in the rights of women, young and teenage girls, and LGBTQIA+ persons, as well as a rise in anti-rights and anti-choice movements. This phenomenon exists on every continent. Europe is no exception, as it has seen the adoption of several conservative abortion laws and the election and/or rise to power of openly anti-rights conservative figures.

Faced with such backlash around the world, the European Union (EU) must make gender equality its priority. While no real feminist EU foreign policy exists, many individual European countries have, like France, adopted feminist foreign policies. The EU has already developed three major strategies to mainstream gender into all its internal and external policies. Its third gender action plan (GAP III) undertakes that, by 2025, 85% of all new external relations actions should contribute to gender equality and the empowerment of women.

However, at present, these objectives cannot be fully effective without **developing real technical and financial support in EU partner countries for feminist civil society organisations (CSOs), which remain largely underfunded despite being the vanguard on work towards equality**. According to OECD data from June 2022, support for local women's rights organisations and gender equality institutions accounted for just **1.4% of all gender equality aid worldwide**¹.

WHY SET UP A DEDICATED FUNDING MECHANISM FOR FEMINIST ORGANISATIONS?

LOCAL FEMINIST ORGANISATIONS: MORE EFFECTIVE BUT UNDERFUNDED

Because local feminist organisations work on the front line, they are best placed to address gender equality issues. They often have in-depth knowledge – based on realities on the ground – of the social and cultural obstacles to equality. They also play a key role in capacity building as well as in promoting participation in social, economic and political life by women, young and adolescent girls, and more broadly by their community. Feminist activism and local women's rights organisations have the greatest impact in advancing gender equality². Despite this, they remain underfunded.

*For Coordination SUD, the term **local feminist organisations** encompasses many types of formal and informal organisations which work to promote gender equality, including those that work at the interface of gender and sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or characteristics, race, age, disability, ethnicity, religion or belief, socioeconomic status, nationality and residence, country affiliation and migratory status.*

¹ OECD (2023), [Aid in Support of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment](#), March.

² Féministes en action (2022), [Une étude sur les mobilisations et besoins des organisations féministes des pays des Suds](#).

However, according to OECD data from June 2022, support for local women's rights organisations and gender equality institutions accounted for just **1.4% of all gender equality aid worldwide**. This figure is even lower for support from **EU institutions, as less than 0.5% of their official development assistance (ODA) targeting equality went to women's rights organisations** and gender equality institutions³.

EU funding for gender equality

The Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) and GAP III state that 85% of new projects should have gender equality as a principal or significant objective (OECD DAC1 and 2 markers) and that at least 5% of new projects should have gender equality as a primary objective. However, a basic limitation of these targets is that because they are not based on ODA share, there is no indication of the amount of funding actually allocated for gender equality. In addition, the target for DAC2 projects is too low to have real impact on gender inequalities and the lives of women and girls (note that the French Law on international cooperation policy adopted in 2021 puts forward a target of 20%).

The EU should commit to funding targets expressed as a percentage of ODA for gender equality: 85% of ODA allocated to programmes with gender equality as their principal or significant objective and 20% of ODA allocated to DAC2 programmes. Member States should support these additional funding targets.

International funding is often not available, and the way international aid works is not adapted to the needs of local feminist organisations. Above all, these organisations need resources to finance the structural and operating costs related to their actions on the ground. Their ability to act is limited if they lack funds to pay for offices, equipment and wages. In addition, for organisations that lack human resources and are often composed of teams of volunteers, their work on the ground is hampered by accountability requirements imposed by donors and administrative procedures.

From among the feminist and women's rights organisations in the Global South that have applied for funding from the Global Fund for Women, 48% report that their budget for the last financial year was less than or equal to USD 30,000⁴.

In addition to being largely excluded from international funding, feminist CSOs are also the foremost victims of restrictions on civic space. They also often face threats and attacks, including sexual and gender-based violence and cyberbullying.

³ OECD (2023), [Aid in Support of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment](#), March.

⁴ AWID, [Où est l'argent pour l'organisation des mouvements féministes ? Présentation des données et appel à l'action](#), 2021.

FEMINIST FUNDS: FOCUS ON GOOD PRACTICE IN FRANCE

At the 2019 G7 summit, held in Biarritz under French presidency, French civil society made a strong appeal to France to provide funding for feminist organisations in the Global South.

Following this mobilisation, the **Support Fund for Feminist Organizations (Fonds de soutien aux organisations féministes – FSOF)**⁵ was created as a financing tool to provide funding and technical support to feminist organisations in partner countries. The Support Fund for Feminist Organizations had an initial budget of €120 million over three years and ultimately raised €134 million. It was renewed in 2023 with a budget of €250 million over five years.

While there is room for improvement in the Support Fund for Feminist Organizations, it is an innovative tool. It is deployed through pre-existing financing tools, using intermediated financing⁶ (calls for projects and the CSO Initiatives mechanism) via Agence Française de Développement (AFD), as well as direct funding of local CSOs via French embassies in partner countries.



EXAMPLE OF A SUPPORT FUND FOR FEMINIST ORGANIZATIONS PROJECT: *FEMINISTS IN ACTION (FÉMINISTES EN ACTION)*

The *Feminist in Action* intermediated fund is a project receiving AFD financing of €15 million over four years. It is managed by a consortium of three NGOs (CARE France, Equipop, Oxfam France) and three feminist funds (the Mediterranean Women's Fund, the XOESE Fund for Francophone Women in Togo and the Pananetugri Initiative for Women's Well-being (IPBF) in Burkina Faso).

The project provides funds in 30 countries and has supported more than 230 local feminist organisations. Fifty percent of the *Feminists in Action* budget is directly allocated to local organisations via a system of calls for expression of interest which consortium members evaluate during regional grant-award committee meetings.

Local CSOs have three funding channels available:

- A bolstering fund to finance structural costs (rent, equipment purchase, HR support, etc.)
- An operational fund to support the implementation of activities and projects
- A collective action fund with budget allocations ranging from €50,000 to €250,000 to support the networking of organisations and collective advocacy actions.

An organisation can receive a grant and apply again to continue its activities to help structure the organisation. For some organisations, it is their very first grant. With it, they can meet their immediate structural needs to help them stabilise their operations and to request other, more substantial funding.

⁵ <https://www.afd.fr/en/support-fund-feminist-organizations>

⁶ Funding is intermediated by several CSOs in consortium form, which have the capacity to manage and implement large-scale projects and grant budget allocations of varying amounts to local CSOs in partner countries.

The selection criteria for the funding of organisations are very flexible. For example, organisations do not need to be legally registered to be eligible for a grant. These represent between 10 and 15% of the organisations financed by the *Feminists in Action* project. They are also the organisations with the most limited funding resources, and there are many of them within the feminist ecosystem. Most of them are organisations with a proportionally large number of volunteers.

Feminist organisations work on an extremely wide range of action themes. *Feminists in Action* funds organisations and projects working on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), gender-based violence (GBV), economic empowerment, and access to rights. This diversity enables organisations to use a holistic approach to build ambitious projects adapted to the needs and specificities of each context.

This funding comes with some constraints relating to financial and administrative accountability. However, operating as a consortium means that the larger organisations take charge of these constraints so that they do not wind up being a burden on the local organisations. In this way, the funding is now more flexible and agile, making for better support to these feminist organisations.

The Support Fund for Feminist Organizations as an important tool for promoting SRHR

From among the projects funded by *Feminists in Action*, **50% are dedicated to SRHR projects** run by **114 organisations**. This financing enables them to finance awareness-raising, training and promotion activities for SRHR.

Some examples of actions:

- In Latin America, feminist organisations supported by *Feminists in Action* created a network to carry out joint advocacy for an intersectional approach to SRHR at the Montevideo Consensus conference in November 2023.
- In Guinea, where 90% of women and girls have undergone excision, *Feminists in Action* supports an organisation that has developed a system of dialogue to transform social norms on gender in order to empower women and girls on GBV and SRHR. The aim is to better inform the public about certain legislative texts and to significantly expand knowledge about existing protection services in Guinea. This leads to better care and support for victims, thanks in particular to community awareness-raising campaigns.

WHAT ACTIONS CAN THE EU IMPLEMENT TO SUPPORT LOCAL FEMINIST CSOs?

To respond to these challenges and to the lack of funding for local feminist organisations, the EU must significantly increase and adapt its financial and technical support to these organisations.

Coordination SUD calls on the EU to develop dedicated funding instruments for local feminist CSOs along the lines of the French Support Fund for Feminist Organizations. These funds must:

- be flexible and adapted to the specific needs and priorities of the organisations;
- be multi-year, so that structural and HR costs can be covered;
- target support and capacity building for the organisations, to promote their skills development;
- target the networking of organisations, with a view to creating synergies and fruitful collaborations.

For the EU to fully adapt to the realities of feminist CSOs, it must also:

- adapt accountability requirements to the realities of local feminist organisations, which involves recognising their specific context;
- establish regular consultation and monitoring mechanisms with feminist CSOs, as well as open and inclusive governance of the financing instrument.

En partenariat
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Editorial Coordination

Mélanie Pélascini, Coordination SUD

Nicolas Paris, Coordination SUD

Publication Director

Jérôme Fauré, Coordination SUD

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Bringing together and Acting
for International Solidarity

14, Passage Dubail 75010 Paris

Tel. : + 33 1 44 72 93 72

www.coordinationsud.org

sud@coordinationsud.org