

Speech (as delivered) by Sascha Gabizon

19th March 2026

Panel discussion "**For a Renewed EU Action Plan for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in EU External Action**"

Panelists:

Ms. Thouraya Triki (EIB) The European Investment Bank

Ambassador Mark Van de Vreken (Belgium)

Julia Jasinska (Nokia), member of the Business Advisory Group of Global Gateway

Kedi Välba (Aktors IT / D4D Hub):

Ambassador Daniel Schaer (Estonia)

Sascha Gabizon (WECF), Women Engage for a Common Future, International

Moderator: CHIARA ADAMO, Deputy to the Director/Head of unit, European Commission, DG International Partnerships, Unit G1 "Gender equality, human rights and democratic governance"

Sascha Gabizon:

Thank you, moderator. It can be a challenge to speak last in a panel. But I will try to keep all awake, as I will be a little bit of a party spoiler in this discussion: I am **not as optimistic** as the others, about the chances of the Global Gateway to advance Gender Equality in International Partnerships.

Who have been fighting for achieving gender equality and women's rights? Well, yes, **the women's rights and feminist movements**. Of course. But with **minimal budgets** of less than 1%¹ of ODA going to WROs. Whereas the **anti-gender** groups were getting 1,18 billion euro last year alone. There is a real risk of regression on gender equality!

We know that, especially in time of crisis, **women** are the last one's standing, they are **the last buffer in failing economies and in conflict situations**, continuing to try and feed and care for their families **and** their communities **when** everything else is falling apart, often in face of exploitation and sexual and gender-based violence.

We have the **facts on the table**, we know that **gender equality benefits everyone AND benefits the economy** - as we heard so from Commissioner Sikela and the Ambassador of Belgium just now. Investing in gender equality is good for our global economy, **the World Bank** speaks of some **5-6 trillion** growth of the global economy **if** women would have **equal rights**.

¹ ODI 2024 <https://odi.org/en/insights/why-donors-must-finance-feminist-movements/> and Rose Luxembourg Foundation 2025

But women **do not** have equal rights. I believe the Global Gateway cannot be successful if we do not **first advance women's equal rights**. We need the laws and they need to be enforced.

Now why are **Women's rights organisations** so important for the **Global Gateway**?

We know from the intermediate **evaluation report of the EU's GAP III**, that the GAP is a **success!** The 85% funding target for gender marker 1 actions, has been very important!

We know that EU funded projects **implemented with Civil society and Women's organisations were especially successful** in achieving **gender** equality outcomes.

Also, we know that **guarantee programmes** under EFSD+, had a very low engagement with civil society, and some sectors like **energy** have **LOW** gender equality outcomes.

To me, this means that the instruments of the **Global Gateway**, - the guarantees and the loans – are **structurally NOT well adapted** to advance human development and **gender equality**.

And there is a **big risk that in the new Multiannual Financial Framework**, that is being negotiated, there will be **even less** thematic grant funding allocated to support the work of civil society and women's rights organisations.

I am part of a project with civil society and the EUD in Kenya, and for those of you who have worked in regions like Africa, you will know about the many **investments that have gone wrong**, because women were overlooked.

For example, this international **dairy investor** that signed contracts with the heads of the farms - all men. And then the milk turned up bad quality, mixed with water. Why? because in many African cultures the farm land, and the farm animals, are owned by the men, but... the milk is managed by the women, to feed their families, and for sales. And the **women were not getting income** from the contract signed by the men with the investor.

In Kenya, investors are now putting money into **Masai-women-only milk-cooperatives** that bring income by expanding their distribution, by investing in cooling vehicles and direct delivery to hotels, all done by women. The important point here is that the cooperative-structure gives the women security over their resource: milk.

We see this in many other cases as well. When international investors come into sectors where traditionally women have been managing resources, **when money comes into play, the men take over**. For example, Shea Butter, and Argan oil, more and more these are taken away from the women and controlled by the men. We want to make sure the Global Gateway does no harm. We need safeguards.

And here, there is a **key role of civil society in the Global Gateway investment** program - feminist civil society knows the local actors, we are already working with informal women workers, - we are already fighting for their rights for decent work conditions.

So, we need to make sure that there is **additional grant funding for civil society organisations** to bring that knowledge to the table when Global Gateway projects are designed, and when implemented, **AND** as CSO **monitors** to ensure we keep to our value-based principles.

We must make sure that GG funds do not only **benefit those who are already more privileged, even** if these beneficiaries are **women entrepreneurs**.

We need an intersectional approach in the Global Gateway. We need to focus on the young women, the rural women, women with a disability, the LGBTQI+ community, for the Global Gateway to reach them as well. Not just the privileged people who already have access to the funding.

We have to be ambitious in **leaving no one behind**, we want truly **gender-transformative** actions.

So let me conclude what this mean, for Europe's gender equality policies - we currently have this gap between what is needed and what is available, so:

1) **We need to increase funding, for women's rights, and women's grassroots organisations - in the form of grant funding**, long-term, flexible, core funding - maybe also through a **European feminist fund** as some Member States already have- or had.

2) We need to ensure that the 3rd Gender Action Plan is followed by an equally or more **ambitious 4th Gender Action Plan**, where we keep that overall target that at least 85% of all funding - **AND** we need to **increase the funding target to at least 20% for gender marker 2 actions** - where gender equality is a priority. (see [CONCORD Brochure on GAPIV](#)).

Our political leaders should **leave no room for regression on gender equality and human rights for all, we need to take bold, ambitious, next steps forward!**

Thank you

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