



Guidance on Gender Equality Series

ANALYSIS OF DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE COMMITTEE MEMBERS' POLICIES IN SUPPORT OF WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

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Abstract

This paper presents the findings of an examination of OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) members' efforts to advance women's economic empowerment (WEE) within their development co-operation and gender equality policies and strategies. It analyses the variety of definitions and sub-themes that address WEE and the different types of policies within which WEE is incorporated. It also highlights examples of good practices and offers policy options for development co-operation actors to support the advancement of WEE, and ultimately the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and SDG5 in particular.

Foreword

With the support of the OECD DAC Network on Gender Equality (GENDERNET), the OECD Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Team prepared this analysis of DAC members' development-cooperation and gender equality policies and strategies with regard to Women's Economic Empowerment in order to highlight good practices and reveal areas for improvement. It also provides policy options for development actors to help address these findings and strengthen their efforts to advance WEE, and ultimately, gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

An output of the GENDERNET's Programme of Work and Budget 2021-2022, this paper supports the Network's mandate to improve policies and practices that strengthen gender equality in development programmes, and secure girls' and women's rights, contributing to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It also supports efforts to advance Sustainable Development Goal 5 --to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls-- and Target 5.A "equal rights to economic resources, property ownership and financial services".

This paper complements, and contributes a thematic focus to the forthcoming report *Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in development co-operation: Guidance on the fundamentals of being an effective development partner*. This paper is the first in the series of thematic papers.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

AFD	Agence Française de Développement (France)
AI	Artificial intelligence
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSO	Civil society organisation
DAC	Development Assistance Committee (OECD)
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia)
DFI	Development Finance Institution
EU	European Union
FDFA	Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs
GAP	Gender Action Plan
GDP	Gross domestic product
GENDERNET	Network on Gender Equality (OECD-DAC)
GLI	Gender-lens investing
ILO	International Labour Organization
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
MDB	Multilateral Development Bank
Norfund	Norwegian Investment Fund
ODA	Official development assistance
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation

UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WEE	Women's Economic Empowerment
We-Fi	Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative
W-GDP	Women's Global Development and Prosperity
WEPS	Women's Empowerment Principles

Executive summary

The paper examines different aspects of development co-operation policies of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) members with regard to women's economic empowerment (WEE), highlighting promising practices and giving suggestions for policy reform. The paper starts with a detailed analysis of definitions and sub-themes of WEE within these policies. It then looks into the different types of policies that cover WEE and how COVID-19 has impacted policy priorities on WEE. This is followed by a review of the approaches that member policies offer for furthering WEE. The paper also analyses how these policies refer to project cycle approaches in support of WEE. The final part of the paper draws the linkages between members' policy priorities and their financing commitments on WEE. Based on the analysis of this paper, a range of policy options that focus on how members can best address WEE in their development co-operation and gender equality policies, are proposed to DAC members.

The paper finds that DAC members continue to place strong focus on WEE and that there is an increased recognition of the importance of gender equality for creating sustainable and competitive economies. DAC members address WEE in different policy frameworks related to development co-operation. Going forward, members can:

- Increase the focus on gender equality in sectors of particular relevance to economic empowerment. Make sure that these efforts are highlighted in members' development co-operation policies and frameworks as well as in their gender equality policies.
- Continue exchanging experiences on different types of policy frameworks on WEE and what has worked best, bearing in mind global trends that impact WEE such as climate change, pandemics and digitalisation.
- Further explore new policy approaches to WEE such as feminist foreign policies, feminist trade policies and economic diplomacy efforts.
- Align policies, strategies and action plans with the "seven drivers of transformation" for WEE identified by the United Nations (UN) Secretary General's High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment. Link policies and programmes for WEE to other pillars of gender equality, such as ending violence against women and girls, political participation and leadership, and climate action.
- Employ an approach to WEE policies, strategies and programmes that considers and addresses the intersectionality of gender with other, and often multiple, forms of discrimination.

The analysis shows that many members have incorporated components of WEE in their Covid-19 recovery responses, though the levels of commitment and methods of inclusion are varied. Going forward, members can:

- Put WEE considerations at the heart of recovery support that members provide to partner countries.
- Communicate on how members are redirecting/refocusing their efforts on WEE in partner countries.

- Develop a focus on pandemics, disasters and emergencies in member policies and outline proposed actions to improve preparedness and resilience in order to reduce the negative impact of these risks on WEE.

The analysis of members' development co-operation and gender equality policies also points to a range of different approaches of members for furthering WEE. The majority of members' policies refer to the importance of partnerships with the private sector and with civil society organisations (CSOs). Members' policies frequently refer to international (and regional) processes as frameworks that can guide approaches for supporting WEE, such as Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. Most members' policies do not give a clear indication of the geographic focus of members' WEE initiatives. Going forward, members can:

- Share strategic information about partnerships for furthering WEE in members' policies on development co-operation and gender equality. More detailed information on these partnerships such as how the partnership operates, as well as the focus; the main beneficiaries; whether there is a geographical/thematic focus; and the (expected) results of these partnerships can be shared through other channels (e.g. website, internal guidance).
- Refer to the drivers of transformational change for WEE, including on addressing restrictive social norms and stereotypes; the role of men and boys in enhancing WEE; and the benefits of WEE for families and societies overall.
- Refer to international standards and instruments on WEE, such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and selected International Labour Standards that focus on gender equality. In case countries have opted for a regional focus, they could also discuss regional standards and instruments that refer to WEE.
- Include a reference to non-legally binding international/regional frameworks on WEE such as the SDGs and to commitments made in other international fora (e.g. G20 and G7).
- Provide more visibility on the geographic focus of members' work on WEE and explain why these countries/regions have been selected. This information could be provided in members' policies on development co-operation and gender equality for those members who have a stable geographic focus.

The majority of member policies highlight the importance of including a gender equality perspective throughout the project cycle. However, few members that have identified WEE as a priority area of work refer to the importance of including a specific focus on WEE throughout the project cycle. Going forward, members can:

- Refer to the importance of conducting a gender analysis at the outset of a programme design so as to reveal contextual information regarding gender roles and power dynamics and thus an understanding of challenges and opportunities for women's involvement in the economic arena.
- Make reference to the results of members' evaluations on WEE and give examples of successful initiatives on WEE, highlighting the impact and key success factors of these initiatives
- Complement WEE policies with a strong focus on accountability, impact and results and commit to ongoing learning through evaluation.

A separate analysis on financing WEE in developing countries carried out by the OECD indicates that while bilateral allocable aid in support of WEE has been rising steadily, there is room for more (impactful) financing. Going forward, members can:

- Include more information in member policies and strategies on financing for WEE programmes and which financing mechanisms and partnerships have worked well, including on partnerships with the private sector.
- Ensure that aid allocations for WEE align with thematic policy priorities, and members' global and regional commitments.

1 Empowering women as economic actors

While there is no agreed definition of women's economic empowerment (WEE), it is clear that the economic empowerment of women is one of the most fundamental components of achieving gender equality and women's empowerment more broadly. We know that economically empowering women is not only the right thing to do but also the smart thing to do. If women participated in the economy identically to men, it would add up to USD 28 trillion, or 26%, to annual global gross domestic product (GDP) in 2025 compared with a business-as-usual scenario (McKinsey Global Institute, 2015^[1]). The McKinsey Global Institute also estimates that if no action is taken to counter the effects of COVID-19 on gender equality, global GDP growth could be \$1 trillion lower in 2030 than it would be if women's unemployment simply tracked that of men in each sector. Conversely, taking action now to advance gender equality could be valuable, adding \$13 trillion to global GDP in 2030 compared with the gender-regressive scenario (McKinsey, 2020^[2]).

This economic potential is highest in developing countries. However, focusing on WEE alone will not automatically lead to enhanced gender equality: there is a need to also address wider elements of power imbalances in society and look into the root causes of inequalities.

More than twenty-five years ago, the Beijing Platform already outlined a range of priority areas of action on WEE. WEE is mainstreamed throughout Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the United Nations (UN) Secretary General High-level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment was set up to accelerate progress on the topic. The theme was also picked up by the Generation Equality Forum, which includes an action coalition on economic justice. Other international processes such as the G20 and the G7 have regularly pushed commitments on WEE. International legal instruments exist on specific aspects of WEE, such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and International Labour Organization's (ILO) International Labour Standards with a gender equality focus. For many years, development co-operation in support of gender equality has focused quite extensively on WEE, looking into areas such as women's entrepreneurship, value chain approaches and providing better working conditions for vulnerable women.

COVID-19 has highlighted the challenges that women face in participating in the labour market. Women typically engage in the most vulnerable types of jobs so that they are more exposed to lay-offs and pay cuts when crisis hits. In addition, women-owned small and medium-sized businesses have been suffering severely from the crisis. Furthermore, women around the world are taking on the bulk of additional unpaid care burdens which leaves them less time and energy to engage in paid work (OECD, 2019^[3]). This situation is further aggravated in developing countries, with large informal sectors and lack of comprehensive social protection systems. COVID-19 response and recovery measures have been mostly gender-blind. In particular, very few measures have been taken to strengthen women's economic security and address unpaid care work (UNDP and UN Women, n.d.^[4]).

Development co-operation can play an important role in strengthening WEE and in building back differently in response to the crisis. WEE has been an important area of work of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Network on Gender Equality (GENDERNET). The OECD undertook a survey of the members of GENDERNET in 2020, from which the results indicate the continued strong focus that

members place on WEE. The survey results also point to an increased recognition of the importance of gender equality for creating sustainable and competitive economies.

This paper is part of an effort to develop a 'framework on development co-operation in support of women's economic empowerment'. More specifically, the framework will consist of analysis, tools and guidance on financing, policies and programmes for actors engaged in development co-operation on WEE. This paper focuses on the policy dimension, analysing if and how DAC members' support WEE within their development co-operation and gender equality policies (Annex A: Methodology and Annex B: Donor policies on gender equality and women's empowerment).

2 Concepts and definitions

2.1. Overall definitions

Although the international community has seen an increase in discussion surrounding WEE, there remains no universally utilised, or agreed upon, definition of WEE (European Parliament, 2017^[5]; Overseas Development Institute, 2016^[6]). These definitions range from rather narrow to very exhaustive, so that almost all elements of gender equality are included¹.

An analysis of the development co-operation and gender equality policies of GENDERNET members reveals that members take different approaches in defining WEE. Despite these different approaches, the analysis found common themes in the way that WEE is discussed within the various policies of DAC members. Most notably, there is a shared perspective that focuses women's equal access to, and control over, resources such as financial services, assets and capital, technology, property and land, natural resources, and food production. This way of defining WEE (used by members such as Denmark, Germany, Japan, Sweden and the United States (US)) often includes access to skill development and trainings, representation, and leadership within economic arenas and communities, as well as opportunities for business development and entrepreneurship.

Many members (such as Austria, Belgium, Japan, and the Netherlands) build upon this aforementioned type of definition of WEE to also identify it as the ability to both develop capacity and to actively shape one's life, underscoring the importance of 'empowerment' in relation to the WEE agenda. Embedded in these definitions is the need for women to have access to the resources that allow for autonomy, economic decision-making, safety, and ultimately a self-reliant life. For example, France describes WEE as "genuine and sustainable economic independence" (French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, 2018, p. 8^[7]). Within gender equality and development co-operation agendas, it is not uncommon to conflate the principles of 'empowerment' with 'access' or 'participation'. However, for WEE to be fully realised, it is insufficient to solely consider access to economic opportunities and advancement. Women must also have the power and agency to safely exercise control over, and make decisions regarding, resources and profits (Golla et al., 2011^[8]). Furthermore, they must be aware of the option to even engage in economic activities. It is for this reason that both access and opportunities as well as empowerment (agency, power and awareness) are inter-connected and mutually reinforcing. Some development partners (such as Australia, Switzerland, Canada, and the United Kingdom (UK)) define WEE holistically by discussing its multiple components, from what it means, to who it supports, to why it should be an area of focus. These definitions

¹ For example the UN Secretary General High-level Panel on WEE defines WEE as "to succeed and advance economically and to make and act on economic decisions" (UN Secretary General, 2016, p. 1^[27]). The Donor Committee for Enterprise Development defines WEE as follows: 'while WEE is a complex process that can take varying pathways for different individuals, in different contexts, there is increasing consensus within the development community that when women gain greater access to economic resources and opportunities, combined with increased agency to voice and influence important decisions in their homes and communities; make their own strategic life choices; and retain control over resources, substantial and wide-ranging development results ensue (DCED, 2017^[28]).

go beyond the discussion of access to resources and importance of autonomy, and also address the barriers that exist, such as restrictive social norms, that need to be addressed in order for all women to enjoy safe and sustainable economic empowerment. These definitions demonstrate that rather than considering women as a homogeneous group, some DAC members consider the contextual needs of different women based on their realities in their policies and strategies for WEE. However, while some members apply an intersectional analysis or lens to their gender equality strategies more broadly, very few members apply the same consideration to their strategies regarding WEE.

The theoretical framework of intersectionality suggests that social identifiers such as race, cast, ethnicity, faith, religion, socioeconomic status, level of education, class, geographic location, disability, age, migration status, sexual orientation, gender and more come together (or 'intersect' with one another) to inform an individual's lived experiences (Bowleg, 2012^[9]). As WEE is a subjective process, there is a need to understand how policies and programmes can create unintended negative impacts and additional barriers for the most vulnerable and marginalized women and girls (Calder, Rickard and Kalsi, 2020^[10]). An intersectional framework guides approaches to addressing global issues that are underscored by the realisation that gender inequality intersects with other forms of vulnerability to compound the disadvantages experienced by the most marginalized groups. There are significant opportunities for growth in this area, and scope to employ intersectional strategies that respond to the contextual needs, priorities and realities of all women and girls. The analysis of these policies also shows that WEE is sometimes defined by a few members (notably, Ireland and Korea) as women's equal participation in economic life and as being central to realising women's rights and gender equality. A few members draw upon external references in their policies to inform exact definitions. For example, some refer to the SDGs and particularly, SDG5 on gender equality and women's empowerment, as a method of the understanding of what WEE means within the context of their policy. A small number, such as Italy, also refer to SDG8, decent work and economic growth, in their definitions in order to emphasize the importance of the components of WEE that support the full, decent and productive employment of women. As stated by Canada "this means giving women more opportunities to succeed" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Canada, 2017^[11]).

2.2. Sub-themes of Women's Economic Empowerment

Members' definitions of WEE indicate that there are multiple components, and sub-themes, of WEE that can be addressed within policy and programmes in order to further its advancement. Some WEE components act as fundamental promoters, some create opportunities, and some ensure safety and security, while others foster the sustainability of these efforts. All play a role in achieving economic empowerment.

Recognising the importance of the thematic prioritisation of WEE, the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment identified seven primary drivers for transformation, as well as recommendations for each (UN Women, n.d.^[12]). These drivers are: Tackling adverse norms and promoting positive role models; Ensuring legal protection and reforming discriminatory laws and regulations; Recognising, reducing and redistributing unpaid work and care; Building assets – Digital, financial and property; Changing business culture and practice; Improving public sector practices in employment and procurement; Strengthening visibility, collective voice and representation (UN Women, n.d.^[13]).

The sub-themes of WEE in members' policies and programmes that are highlighted in this policy analysis, independently and when integrated, work to advance the economic empowerment of women. Similarly, the "seven drivers" seek to further WEE while also working to foster an enabling environment that renders efforts to advance the sub-themes and more specific interventions, possible. Policies and programmes

should aim to pair the UN’s “seven drivers for transformation” with targeted actions for a holistic and sustainable approach to achieving WEE.

The analysis of DAC members’ policies determined that a range of different **sub-themes and components of WEE²** were found to be addressed with the purpose of supporting the advancement of WEE. This analysis demonstrates that most members approach WEE by addressing many components, while others (either due to targeted action or limited capacity) focus on three or less. Some members (3) did not define any sub-themes or components of WEE in their policies.

Some sub-themes stand out as being commonly prioritised by members in their WEE-specific, gender equality, or development co-operation policies, while others have been identified by a smaller number of members. Among the **most commonly highlighted sub-themes** are entrepreneurship, access to, and control over, resources, decent work, private sector and economic leadership, agriculture and rural development, and unpaid care work/social protection. On the contrary, trade, infrastructure and transportation, and tax are prioritised within these policies less frequently (Box 2.1).

Box 2.1. Gender equality and infrastructure

Japan’s “Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment: JICA Strategies and Actions” has 5 priority areas including Women’s Economic Empowerment and Gender Responsive Infrastructure. This policy highlights the importance of reducing women’s workload and time poverty as well as the need to promote women’s safety, mobility and economic empowerment by supporting rural electrification, road development and other infrastructure and services. What is more, this policy ensures the promotion of women’s leadership and decision-making within these processes. Japan’s strong policy prioritisation is aligned with, and reflected by, its financial commitments. In fact, in 2018-19, the largest annual commitment of aid focused on gender equality to economic and productive sectors was the USD 6,346 million from Japan – the majority of which was allocated to the “transport and storage” sector via programmes such as loans to India and the Philippines to improve their mass transportation systems.

While many sub-themes directly support the access to opportunities and resources, others contribute to the elimination of barriers that currently inhibit the advancement of WEE. A particularly important issue is the link between WEE and violence against women. In some cases, a woman’s economic empowerment may lead her to be the victim of increased violence because male family members may fear losing control over her. To illustrate, Belgium’s policy, “Gender strategy 2019-2023,” indicates that violence against women “...needs to be eliminated as a barrier in order for women to have safe and equal access to, and control over, economic opportunities.” (Enabel Belgian Development Agency, 2018^[14]). Some members have incorporated the sub-theme violence and harassment in their policies while others have implemented components to deal with fragile contexts, peace and security.

Recognising WEE in relation to other pillars of gender equality highlights, and reinforces, that WEE cannot not exist in a vacuum. There are many pillars of gender equality and women’s empowerment more broadly that are mutually reinforcing and without which, women’s full enjoyment of their rights will not be realised.

² The policy analysis carried out for the purpose of this paper revealed 20 sub-themes of WEE that are utilised by GENDERNET members in their development co-operation strategies, policies or action plans. The full list, in order from most to least commonly addressed is as follows: Entrepreneurship (21), access to/control over resources (21), decent work (20), private sector engagement (17), agriculture and rural development (15), enhancing women’s voice in decision-making (14), access to technology (12), unpaid care work (11), education/capacity building (11), social security and solidarity economy (8), violence and harassment (8), climate change and environment (8), vocational training (7), economic diplomacy (6), fragile contexts, peace and security (5), infrastructure and transportation (3), control over reproductive health (3), trade (3), data (1), and taxes (1). Three GENDERNET members did not employ any sub-themes to advance WEE in their policies.

Not only is the economic empowerment of women essential to achieving gender equality, it is also deeply connected to other pillars of gender equality, such as ending violence against women and girls, women's political participation and leadership, climate action and more. One cannot be achieved without the other.

To promote the sustainability of efforts in regard to WEE, some members include components such as education and capacity building, while other members incorporate vocational training in their policies. Similarly, several members address access to technology as a component with significant potential to improve equitable access to resources, skills and information.

Five DAC members acknowledge the need to specifically consider digitalisation as a global trend in relation to WEE in the context of the digital gender gap, which limits the equitable and safe participation of women in the digital economy. This in turn creates a barrier to women's ability to control resources, access information, and identify opportunities for growth and participation. It also threatens to widen existing inequalities. Support for digital inclusion within policies and strategies for WEE can advance related objectives by facilitating more gender balanced representation in this industry, broadening access to markets, trainings and knowledge, creating employment opportunities, combatting gender-based violence and building economic resilience in the face of emergencies (Calder, Rickard and Kalsi, 2020^[10]).

However, optimism over increased global trends towards digitalisation is also accompanied by concerns regarding the risks this may pose to the economic empowerment of women. The digital gender gap may in fact continue to limit the safe, inclusive and equitable realisation of digitalisation for women and girls around the world (Wajcman, Young and FitzMaurice, 2020^[15]). The historic and present underrepresentation of women in STEM and technology related fields underpins the reality of gender biases in the development, design, and use of technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning systems (Wajcman, Young and FitzMaurice, 2020^[15]). This, in addition to the persistent skills gap, the precocity of jobs, and online violence against women, demonstrates the need for digitalisation to be addressed within gender equality and development co-operation policies and programmes that seek to advance WEE. Only two DAC members, the European Union (EU) and the US, address the risks and threats that digitalisation poses to WEE. This analysis has determined that not all members support multiple sub-themes that could fall within similar "areas of focus". For example, several members recognise the need to address rural development and agricultural considerations. However, a significantly smaller number of members have identified the environment, climate change and energy as specific areas of focus even though the two sub-themes have overlapping considerations.

Further analysis on sub-themes and in particular on the relation between members' policy priorities and their financial commitments to different sub-themes is provided in subsequent sections.

3 Policy frameworks

3.1. Framing and prioritisation

Similarly to how there is variety in the way WEE is defined within the various policies of DAC members, the extent to which WEE is considered a priority in the overall structure of these policies is diverse.

The most common prioritisation of WEE is to include it as a **thematic priority within an overarching gender equality or development co-operation policy**, an approach utilized by 20 members. However, within each respective members' policies, the sub-themes of WEE and how they are carried out are somewhat varied.

Overarching gender equality policies tend to frame WEE as central to the success of the policy's intended outcomes. Therefore, members go to greater lengths to establish commitments and determine methods, approaches, programmes, activities, outcomes, and indicators in order to advance WEE, and ultimately, gender equality and inclusive sustainable development. What is more, these additional considerations may help members promote and strengthen efforts to advance WEE, thereby increasing accountability.

An example of this practice is found in France's "International Strategy for Gender Equality (2018-2022)" where to "promote access to - and monitoring of - productive and economic resources, and access to decent work", and to "ensure meaningful participation of women in economic, political and social decision-making forums" are two of five sectoral priority areas (French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, 2018^[7]). In addition to highlighting sub-themes, approaches to advancing WEE, commitments to each sectoral priority, and areas for action are outlined and used to guide the process of increasing the economic empowerment of women.

On the other hand, overarching development co-operation policies less commonly identify WEE as a thematic priority. This is likely due to the fact that in these policies, gender equality tends to be addressed as a cross-cutting issue rather than as an intrinsic component, or cornerstone, of the policy. There are some examples of overarching development cooperation policies where WEE is still established as a thematic priority and is also comprehensively addressed. For example, Austria's "Three-Year Programme on Austrian Development Policy 2019-2021" identifies the "economic empowerment of women" as one of the six cornerstones of this Programme.

Distinctively, three DAC members (Canada, Denmark and Iceland) refer to WEE under a **green growth focus area** within their respective policies (Box 3.1). While other development co-operation strategies that aim to advance gender equality frequently discuss the access to resources as being a pillar of WEE, the frameworks used by Canada, Iceland, and Denmark place an additional emphasis on women's access to, and control over, energy and electricity. This method of advancing WEE in the face of climate change is highlighted as it supports the autonomy of women in regard to the control of resources, food security, and opportunities for employment. Additionally, all three members employ an integrated approach that both advances WEE in the renewable energy and green sectors and works to promote the decision-making and leadership of women within climate change adaptation strategies.

Box 3.1. Members' focus on Women's Economic Empowerment and green growth

Canada

Canada identifies Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) as a thematic priority under the policy action area "Environment and Climate Action" within its Feminist International Assistance Policy. Here, targeted interventions that work to mitigate the negative impacts that are experienced by women and girls and that are caused by climate change, are outlined. For example, the creation of employment opportunities for women in the renewable energy sector ensures their involvement in the expansion of this sector, and the implementation of programs that facilitate access to services and technology for women-led businesses promotes their equal access to climate financing.

Iceland

Iceland has identified "Natural Resources and the Environment" as a focus area within its Gender Equality and Development Cooperation Policy, under which elements of WEE are addressed. Here, the development of projects in partner countries that ensure women's equal access to employment (with a focus on the fishing industry) and other income generating initiatives are prioritised.

Denmark

Under the thematic priority "Inclusive Green Growth", Denmark intrinsically links WEE with green and agriculture industries within its Development Co-operation Policy. Like Canada and Iceland, Denmark outlines targeted actions to further WEE and the commitment to women's involvement in, and ability to benefit from, green growth. The example of Uganda's "U-Growth" program is highlighted to demonstrate an initiative that has been implemented under this action area that furthers WEE by engaging the private sector to strengthen the promotion of gender equality agriculture.

Three DAC members have included WEE as a thematic priority within overarching policies in addition to having **separate strategies, action plans or policies that primarily focus on WEE**. Australia and Sweden both have separate policies on trade and economic diplomacy, while the US has created a government Act on WEE. By employing a separate strategy, action plan or policy that places the economic empowerment of women at the forefront of members' international actions, the commitment to WEE within development co-operation is simultaneously strengthened. Additionally, these policies act as measures of accountability and guidance in regard to the international work being done to further gender equality and move towards economic growth and equal societies.

Box 3.2. Members' strategies and policies on Women's Economic Empowerment

Australia

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) of Australia implemented a strategic plan regarding its prioritisation of Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) titled "Australia Advancing Women's Economic Empowerment Through Aid, Trade and Economic Diplomacy." This strategy recognises WEE as a powerful method of advancing gender equality and economic prosperity (and thus a better standard of living) and identifies it as a foundational commitment that is to be "integrated across Australia's foreign policy advocacy, trade negotiations, economic diplomacy and aid investments."

Sweden

To complement and strengthen the objectives of its "Feminist Foreign Policy" and to further WEE within development co-operation, Sweden introduced its "Feminist Trade Policy" in 2019. Through six focus areas and a range of measures and initiatives, this Policy, in its entirety, operates to specifically advance women's market access, economic autonomy, and participation in economic growth strategies.

United States

The United States Agency for International Development's (USAID's) Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy refers to the "Women's Entrepreneurship and Economic Empowerment Act of 2018", which was introduced to improve programmes and activities on WEE that are carried out by USAID. The Policy also refers to the National Security Strategy and its emphasis on the important role that WEE plays in achieving prosperity and peace.

Another strategy regarding the framing and prioritisation of WEE is used by four DAC members who have included WEE as a focus area within their **feminist foreign policies, international assistance policies or feminist diplomacy approaches** (Box 3.3). While the clear prioritisation afforded by unique strategies is advantageous, overarching feminist policies are also beneficial to the advancement of WEE.

Box 3.3. Members' feminist foreign and international assistance policies

Canada

Canada identifies five “Action Area Policies” that individually work to advance “gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls” and collectively support the implementation of Canada’s “Feminist International Assistance Policy”. Under the “Action Area Policy: Growth that Works for Everyone”, Canada identifies the advancement of, and elimination of barriers to, Women’s Economic Empowerment (WEE) as a prioritised objective in its efforts to eradicate poverty and reduce inequality.

France

France’s prioritisation of, and commitment to, gender equality is carried out by the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs and strengthened by its “Feminist Foreign Policy” and feminist diplomacy approach. “France’s international strategy for gender equality (2018-2022)”, a supporting document to its feminist foreign policy, highlights the promotion and monitoring of WEE as a key focus area and recognises the “economic empowerment of women as a main vector of progress in development”.

Spain

Spain adopted a “Feminist Foreign Policy” to guide the mainstreaming of “the gender perspective into all phases of foreign policy as well as into all its actions.” The Policy identifies lines of action, within which the “Economic justice and the empowerment of women” is a thematic priority. This priority area provides a framework that promotes the economic empowerment of women through a variety of high level and targeted approaches.

Sweden

In order to “systematically integrate a gender perspective” throughout all foreign policy objectives, strengthen women’s and girls’ “rights, representation and resources” all over the world, and raise ambitions in operating policies that increase WEE, Sweden launched its “Feminist Foreign Policy” in 2014, becoming the first country in the world to do so. In this Policy, the “economic rights and empowerment of women and girls” is identified as one of six long-term objective areas.

Policy options:

- Increase the focus on gender equality in sectors of particular relevance to economic empowerment. Make sure that these efforts are highlighted in members’ development co-operation policies and frameworks as well as in their gender equality policies.
- Continue exchanging experiences on different types of policy frameworks on Women’s Economic Empowerment and what has worked best, bearing in mind global trends that impact Women’s Economic Empowerment such as climate change, pandemics and digitalisation.
- Further explore new policy approaches to Women’s Economic Empowerment such as feminist foreign policies, feminist trade policies and economic diplomacy efforts.
- Align policies, strategies and action plans with the “seven drivers of transformation” for Women’s Economic Empowerment identified by the UN Secretary General’s High-Level Panel on Women’s Economic Empowerment. Link policies and programmes for Women’s Economic Empowerment to other pillars of gender equality, such as ending violence against women and girls, political participation and leadership, and climate action.
- Employ an approach to Women’s Economic Empowerment policies, strategies and programmes that considers and addresses the intersectionality of gender with other, and often multiple, forms of discrimination.

3.2. COVID-19 response and recovery

Given current circumstances, and the negatively disproportionate impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on women and girls, the analysis of the incorporation of WEE within development co-operation and gender equality policies included the consideration of whether these policies have been adapted to respond to COVID-19. In order to carry out a comprehensive analysis of COVID-19 recovery efforts, DAC members' strategic announcements, policy adaptations, and responses to a 2020 GENDERNET questionnaire (which contained a question about regarding COVID-19 responses) were considered. This analysis found a wide variety in members' responses to COVID-19.

Eight DAC members have incorporated components of WEE in their COVID-19 recovery responses, though the levels of commitment and methods of inclusion are varied. Some members clearly identify WEE as a thematic priority in their COVID-19 responses as can be seen in Ireland's commitment by addressing women's elevated domestic responsibilities, supporting the care economy, and creating gender-responsive social protection systems. Similarly, Switzerland clearly identifies WEE as a thematic priority and discusses women's access to financial services as an action item of great importance. A key component in Australia's COVID-19 response policy is the stated support for small and medium sized women-owned enterprises³. Spain's response is informed by human rights and women's rights-based approaches. This response identifies the disproportionate impact on women working in health fields and recognises paid and unpaid care, important sub-themes of WEE. The UK is assessing how business that are supported by the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) have responded to COVID-19 and are promoting WEE.

Four DAC members have issued responses to the COVID-19 pandemic that put gender equality and specific gender considerations at the forefront of their recovery efforts. Within these responses, though, WEE is not identified as a thematic priority. However, the approaches are similar in that the four members have made it clear that gender equality is, and will continue to be, a key priority in their development co-operation and international assistance strategies in regard to COVID-19 recovery efforts. For example, Portugal noted that their response will align with the Portuguese Development Cooperation Strategy for Gender Equality and will ensure that all international assistance projects promote gender equality and women's empowerment. Slovenia took the approach of re-programming pre-existing development projects that targeted gender equality to include initiatives that support COVID-19 responses.

Nine DAC members have issued statements acknowledging the impacts of COVID-19 on women and girls and many DAC members have signed onto joint statements at various UN fora. Some have taken this a step farther and have linked these statements to their ministries of foreign affairs or development co-operation strategies, expressing the intention to support international COVID-19 recovery efforts. These, however, are largely expressed in the form of press releases or website updates that highlight vaccination campaigns or sanitization campaigns and do not include any targeted actions in regard to supporting gender equality or WEE.

Policy options:

- Put Women's Economic Empowerment considerations at the heart of recovery support that members provide to partner countries.
- Communicate on how members are redirecting/refocusing their efforts on Women's Economic Empowerment in partner countries.

³ This policy also details women's economic burden of COVID-19, their vulnerability to economic insecurity due to an increase in unpaid domestic labour, and their reliance on the informal economy. At the time of publishing of this policy (mid-2020), the pandemic was only just unfolding. Australia therefore opted not to pin down which elements of WEE would emerge as requiring most support in their immediate region.

- Develop a focus on pandemics, disasters and emergencies in member policies and outline proposed actions to improve preparedness and resilience in order to reduce the negative impact of these risks on Women's Economic Empowerment.

4 Approaches

4.1. Partnerships

While components and sub-themes within policies help to identify *which* elements must be addressed in order to advance WEE, approaches indicate *how* this change will occur. The proposed approaches included in this analysis provide members with the ability to identify entry points to the issues at hand and, thus, the opportunity to establish effective change and the furthering of WEE. The analysis found that within some members' policies, the approaches used are not directly linked to WEE, but they work to bolster gender equality more broadly, which in turn helps to further WEE.

Nearly all DAC members indicate their engagement in partnerships with **multilateral organisations** in their policies as an approach to furthering their broader gender equality or development co-operation objectives. However, several members also recognise partnerships with multilateral organisations to be an approach they employ specifically to further WEE, as they elevate the scale and impact of interventions in this work stream. However, some members do not highlight their partnerships with multilateral organisations as an approach used in their efforts to advance WEE in their policies even though they do engage in multilateral partnerships for this purpose (a practice that is sometimes used to ensure the longevity of a policy and not outdate it with the mention of specific partnerships that may shift or change). To illustrate, the Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative (We-Fi) is a multilateral partnership that aims to unlock financing for women-led/owned businesses in developing countries. Housed at the World Bank, We-Fi's global scope is supported by a strong network of six Implementing Partners (multilateral development banks) and more than 140 executing partners from the public and private sector. We-Fi's holistic approach is policy work and capacity-building through public sector paired with private sector development and blended finance innovations. Of the initiative's 14 founding and contributing members, 10 of which are DAC members, five do not indicate this affiliation in their policies.

Due to the scale and complexity of WEE as a global issue, members note that it is beneficial, if not crucial, to unify the efforts of multiple institutions and form collaborative methods of addressing and advancing WEE. Partnerships with multilateral organisations facilitate the co-ordination of global or regional strategies, foster the development of innovative mechanisms, and maximize opportunities. Partnerships with multilateral development banks in particular are often successful as they are able to use their considerable influence to encourage the participation of the private sector in initiatives designed to advance WEE that are organised by these multilateral institutions. This approach also helps members employ a variety of modalities and financial instruments and to leverage a blend of private sector capital and capacity in order to finance and scale-up interventions.

For example, in Switzerland's "FDFA Strategy on Gender equality and Women's rights", "the World Bank and its institutions, regional development banks, and selected UN organisations" are identified as the member's leading multilateral partnerships that support its efforts to increase WEE within development work (Government of Switzerland, 2017, p. 11_[16]). Norway similarly highlights that Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) such as the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the African Development Bank, and the International Fund for Agricultural Development are not only key sources for

financing and leadership, they also hold considerable influence in partner and donor countries in this area of work.

Partnerships with the **private sector** are established as common approaches utilized by members in their policies in order to scale-up their initiatives on WEE and broaden the scope of their audiences, solutions, and resources. This sector has the potential to play a unique role in creating quality jobs that are accessible to women, addressing structural barriers that inhibit women's full and equal participation in the labour force. Engaging in partnerships with the private sector as an approach to further WEE is carried out in a variety of ways by members within their development co-operation and gender equality strategies (Box 4.1). This paper's section 6 on financing goes into further detail on partnerships with the private sector for financing gender equality. Many DAC members engage with different types of private actors and use financing tools beyond ODA for gender equality, including by partnering with commercial actors and/or private philanthropy, and setting up blended finance vehicles with development banks and development finance institutions (DFIs).

Box 4.1. Members' partnerships with private sector

European Union (EU)

The EU has made a commitment that at least 85% of all new external actions will have gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment as a significant objective or as a principal objective by 2025. In the EU's Gender Action Plan III (GAP III), Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) is identified as a key driver of this strategy. To support some of the components of WEE (e.g. women's access to land), the EU pursues "opportunities for blending private-sector finance also in sustainable, women-managed value chains". The EU is also employing partnerships with the private sector as an approach to further WEE by supporting women entrepreneurs in the digital economy. This support crosses a variety of sectors in order to close the digital gender gap that exists in many tech companies.

Canada and Switzerland

Canada and Switzerland both recognise that partnerships with the private sector (private sector development as well as private sector engagement) are pivotal in the achievement of WEE and gender equality in development co-operation. In Canada's Feminist International Assistance policy, it is stated that "the economic empowerment of women cannot be achieved, nor environmental, social and governance standards raised, and the SDGs met, without private-sector expertise and capital." These two members focus on initiatives that support women-led agribusinesses, agricultural production, and improving farmers' access to markets.

Women's Empowerment Principles

Expanding upon the engagement of private sector partnerships, seven members (Australia, Austria, the EU, France, Germany, Italy and Switzerland) include support for the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPS) in their policies as an approach to advancing WEE around the world. WEPS, established by UN Women and the UN Global Compact, is composed of seven principles designed to "provide a clear framework for companies to understand and address gender gaps" and serve as a point of reference for policy and programme creation and implementation. These seven principles are: high-level corporate leadership; treat all women and men fairly at work without discrimination; employee health, well-being and safety; education and training for career advancement; enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices; community initiatives and advocacy; and measurement and reporting. So far, over 5,600 Companies have signed up to WEPS with mixed results (UN Global Compact & BSR, 2020^[17]).

Like the engagement of the private sector, **partnerships with civil society organisations (CSOs) and women's rights organisations** are being increasingly identified as an instrumental component of processes and strategies to advance WEE within development co-operation. Ten members have identified partnerships with CSOs as an approach to address WEE within their policies. This analysis revealed many ways that DAC members mobilize partnerships with women's rights organisations (Box 4.2). The priority given to partnerships with women's rights organisations in members' policies is however not in line with the funding that is being committed to these organisations. In 2018-19, an average of USD 674 million per year of aid was committed with the end goal of supporting "feminist, women-led and women's rights organisations and movements and institutions". Out of this aid, USD 576 million per year went from a DAC member to some type of women's rights CSO – excluding public sector institutions. Breaking this figure down further, USD 40 million went directly from a DAC member to a local feminist/women's rights CSO based in a partner country (OECD, 2021^[18]).

Box 4.2. Members' partnerships with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)

France

France's Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs and the Agence Française de Développement (AFD) developed a "Support Fund for Feminist Organizations" that operates under the framework of France's feminist foreign policy and "International Strategy for Gender Equality 2018-2022". The purpose of this fund is to "support feminist civil society organizations (CSOs) operating in partner countries. The Fund will scale-up France's pre-existing gender equality initiatives and will contribute, between the years 2020-2022, 120 million euros directly to the activities of local civil society organisations that are working to promote women's rights and gender equality. Around 65% of this funding will be dedicated to thematic initiatives in Africa, one of which is "women's empowerment and economic participation."

Denmark

In Denmark's "Strategic Framework for Gender Equality, Rights and Diversity in Danish Development Cooperation", engaging in partnerships with women's rights organisations is also identified as an approach to advance Women's Economic Empowerment. In this Strategic Framework, the intervention promotes initiatives that support training and networking opportunities for employees and entrepreneurs who operate local women's rights organisations.

Deeply rooted gender norms and entrenched social structures add to the multidimensional complexity of the pursuit of WEE. Attitudes towards women's roles within societal and economic systems as well as social and household expectations create an environment where advancing WEE is as much about **addressing the beliefs, stigmas and stereotypes that are inhibiting meaningful and sustainable change as creating equal access and opportunities**. Gender norms that pertain to social and household expectations such as unpaid care work extend to the market, prohibit equitable engagement, and result in the disenfranchisement of women from many sectors and professions. Therefore, policies and programmes that seek to advance WEE must also address the root causes of gender inequalities that continue to hinder WEE.

Many DAC members address the implications and consideration of gender norms and roles in their broader gender equality and development co-operation policies. However, six DAC members explicitly recognise that challenging both norms specifically related to gender and economic activity and norms pertaining to the social and household expectations and behaviours of women more broadly is central to achieving WEE. For example, as discussed in the US's "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment 2020 Policy", the Women Connect Challenge programme works to both facilitate women's economic empowerment and growth as well as "address the social and cultural norms that keep women offline and under-empowered" (USAID, 2020, p. 4_[19]).

Some members explicitly link the involvement of men and boys as being a crucial component in the achievement of WEE. OECD research also highlights the importance of engaging with men and masculinities for achieving progress on WEE and gender equality more broadly (OECD, 2019_[20]). For example, Austria states the need for men's involvement in household and care work in order to achieve a more equal distribution of unpaid domestic labour. Italy promotes the involvement of men in education and awareness-raising activities as key prevention measures for various forms of discrimination and gender-based violence. Other members incorporate the involvement of men more broadly within GEWE related policies. For example, Iceland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs calls for the strengthened participation of men in all international initiatives that relate to gender equality.

A gender-transformative approach to WEE interrogates and addresses the root causes of gender inequality and seeks to change prevailing norms and imbalances of power, which is essential for long-term and

sustainable change. This can be done by engaging approaches to WEE that engage and partner with drivers of transformational change – institutions and individuals that continue to uphold gender norms as well as harmful attitudes and beliefs towards women.

As indicated in their development co-operation and gender equality strategies, some members work with **faith-based organisations and religious leaders** for furthering WEE. The US’ “Women’s Global Development and Prosperity (W-GDP) Initiative”, established by National Security Presidential Memorandum-16, was established to effectively develop partnerships that would further gender equality. This included the engagement of faith-based organisations with the goal of advancing “the three pillars of W-GDP: women prospering in the workforce, women succeeding as entrepreneurs, and women enabled in the economy” (USAID, 2020^[19]). In a similar vein, Norway and the UK note the engagement of religious leaders as being a part of their Strategies to advance WEE.

Policy options:

- Share strategic information about partnerships for furthering Women’s Economic Empowerment in members’ policies on development co-operation and gender equality. More detailed information on these partnerships such as how the partnership operates, as well as the focus; the main beneficiaries; whether there is a geographical/thematic focus; and the (expected) results of these partnerships can be shared through other channels (e.g. website, internal guidance).
- Refer to the drivers of transformational change for Women’s Economic Empowerment, including on addressing restrictive social norms and stereotypes; the role of men and boys in enhancing Women’s Economic Empowerment; and the benefits of Women’s Economic Empowerment for families and societies overall.

4.2. International processes

More than twenty-five years ago, the Beijing Platform already outlined a range of priority areas of action on WEE. WEE is mainstreamed throughout Agenda 2030 and the SDGs and the UN Secretary General High-level Panel on Women’s Economic Empowerment was set up to accelerate progress on the topic. The theme was also picked up by the Generation Equality Forum, which includes an action coalition on economic justice. Other international processes such as the G20 and the G7 have regularly pushed commitments on WEE. **International legal instruments** exist on specific aspects of WEE, such as CEDAW and ILO’s International Labour Standards⁴ with a gender equality focus⁵. Adherence to these instruments also means that countries have an obligation to align national legislation with their international commitments. These international processes and commitments form the guiding frameworks for development co-operation in support of WEE.

The policies of 15 members⁶ place their work and priorities on WEE in the context of the **SDGs**. Most countries refer to the overall framework of the SDGs and SDG5 on gender equality and women’s

⁴ Eight GENDERNET members refer to the ILO’s International Labour Standards as guiding principles and standards for their overall strategy for gender equality and women’s empowerment. Three members (the UK, Germany and Norway) use these Standards specifically to inform their approach to, and actions for, WEE.

⁵ The ILO key equality Conventions include: Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 ([No. 100](#)), Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 ([No. 111](#)), Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 ([No. 156](#)) and the Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 ([No. 183](#)) and Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 ([No. 190](#)).

⁶ Australia, France, Germany, Austria, Canada, Germany, Korea, Belgium, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Switzerland, UK

empowerment. However, some countries such as Germany and Canada make reference to SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth).

Other **UN-led processes** that are mentioned in members' policies include the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (Germany, Australia and Austria); the UN High Level Panel on WEE (Australia and the UK) and the Generation Equality Forum Action Coalition on Economic Justice and Rights (Spain).

Others (10) have integrated a **human rights-based approach** to GEWE more generally. This promotes the rights and equality of women, which amplifies crucial factors that contribute to the advancement of WEE. Australia, France and the EU refer to **G20** commitments on WEE and to the G20 Brisbane target⁷ in particular. France mentions the role of the **G7** in supporting WEE and Germany makes reference to BMZ's G7 initiative on WEE in developing countries.⁸

A number of countries refer to regional commitments such as the **EU Gender Action Plan**⁹ (Austria, Germany and Greece) and different **regional fora in Asia and the Pacific** (Australia). This approach can be helpful for anchoring the WEE work in regional mechanisms, which strengthens sustainability.

Policy options:

- Refer to international standards and instruments on Women's Economic Empowerment, such as CEDAW and selected ILO International Labour Standards that focus on gender equality. In case countries have opted for a regional focus, they could also discuss regional standards and instruments that refer to Women's Economic Empowerment, such as the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa. This will help anchor Women's Economic Empowerment commitments in international processes and provide more visibility for this agenda.
- Include a reference to non-legally binding international/regional frameworks on Women's Economic Empowerment, such as the SDGs, and to commitments made in other international fora (e.g. G20 and G7).

4.3. Geographic focus

Most members' policies on development co-operation and gender equality do not give a clear indication of the geographic focus of members' WEE work and if they do, there is often no explanation as to why there is a focus on these particular countries/regions. This information may not be included in policies since geographical focus can shift over time in line with members' evolving political priorities. OECD analysis shows that Asia and the Pacific is the region that receives the highest volumes of aid in support of WEE, followed by sub-Saharan Africa (OECD, 2021^[21]).

However, the policies of 7 members (Australia, Sweden, Switzerland, Spain, Denmark and Finland and Ireland) make reference to **specific initiatives on WEE** in certain geographic locations as anecdotes or to give context to their work being done on WEE. The majority of these members' policies mention WEE initiatives that cover various countries across different regions. However, there are also members'

⁷ At the 2014 Brisbane Summit, leaders committed to reduce the gender gap in labour force participation by 25 per cent by the year 2025 compared to 2012 (the 25x25 goal).

⁸ Canada also refer to G7 in its Feminist International Assistance Policy but it is referred to regarding work that is done to champion gender equality more broadly and not directly in regard to work to further WEE.

⁹ Members' policies refer to the EU Gender Action Plan II (2016-2020) or to the EU Gender Action Plan III. The EU Gender Action Plan III (GAP III) 2021-2025 is a Joint Communication of the European Commission and the European External Action Service. It is thus the new EU gender-equality policy framework externally, to be implemented by the Commission and the Action Service in all EU external action, in a Team Europe approach with relevant EU Member States.

strategies which mention WEE initiatives that only cover one particular region (e.g. Australia's WEE work focuses on Asia and the Pacific; Denmark's WEE work focuses on the Middle East and North Africa).

The policies of 6 members (Austria, Belgium, the EU, Italy, Slovak Republic, and the US) make reference to a geographical focus when it comes to their initiatives on **gender equality and women's empowerment more broadly**.

Policy options:

- Provide more visibility on the geographic focus of members' work on Women's Economic Empowerment and explain why these countries/regions have been selected. This information could be provided in members' policies on development co-operation and gender equality for those members who have a stable geographic focus. This information can stimulate further co-ordination between members on the geographic focus of their initiatives on Women's Economic Empowerment to avoid overlap and create additional synergies.

5 Project cycle: design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation

The rise of the results agenda and the increased emphasis placed on monitoring and evaluation of development efforts has strengthened the intent of DAC members to focus increasingly on the planning stage of development programmes, on identifying gender equality indicators and results targeted, and monitor and evaluate outcomes related to their investments. However, DAC members' policies contain limited considerations specific to WEE within the various stages of the project cycle (design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation).

The majority of DAC member policies highlight the importance of well-designed programming for effective programme delivery. In regard to **programme design** at the start of the project cycle, conducting gender equality analysis is often mentioned as a tool to strengthen the design of a programme and ensure that it responds to the contextual realities of the needs of women and informs effective implementation strategies. The policies of DAC members do not address WEE in regard to the design stage of a programme or the gender equality analysis.

In regard to **programme implementation** and ensuring that what is decided upon at the design stage is actually put into practice, many members indicate the use of mainstreaming a gender equality perspective throughout the project cycle as an effective approach to enable the ongoing tracking and adjusting of programmes. This practice helps ensure the realisations of the project's intended outcomes. However, few members refer to the importance of mainstreaming, or incorporating specific considerations regarding, WEE throughout the project cycle. This is important to note as the consideration of how a project could further, or hinder, WEE can be paramount to the holistic and sustainable advancement of this issue (DCED, 2014^[22]). Belgium and the US refer to the need to include a gender equality perspective in projects across different sectors (including the economic sectors). Denmark has developed guidance on integrating gender equality into sector programmes that are relevant to WEE. Switzerland produced a series of guidance sheets on how to integrate thematic areas of WEE, such as unpaid care work, into the project cycle of broader interventions in support of gender equality.

Thirteen members make reference to the need to **monitor and evaluate** their work on gender equality and women's empowerment more broadly (Austria, Canada, the EU, France, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Ireland, Japan, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden). The policies of six members (Australia, Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the UK, and the US) make reference to the need to evaluate their work on WEE. The EU Gender Action Plan III gives examples of thematic outcome indicators including in the area of gainful employment and economic empowerment. Germany has made reference to these EU thematic outcome indicators. Some members are publishing extensive information on the results of their WEE initiatives (Box 5.1).

Identifying indicators and intended outcomes and results targeted for in the design stage of a project cycle, and monitoring, evaluating and reporting on WEE can help ensure the success and sustainability of a

project. As demonstrated above, DAC members are including various components of the results agenda in their gender equality and development co-operation work. However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to provide analysis on the specifics of members' results agenda for WEE.

Box 5.1. Members' policies that make reference to evaluation on Women's Economic Empowerment

Australia

In "Partnerships for Recovery – Australia's COVID-19 Development Response", Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) is included as an indicator that track results of Australia's interventions to respond to COVID-19 and its impacts.

Belgium

Belgium has published an evaluation of its work on gender and development which includes detailed findings on its WEE programmes (see examples below).

European Union

The European Union (EU) has issued an evaluation of its results on gender equality and women's empowerment and this includes information about how the EU's initiatives have contributed to economically empowering women.

Netherlands

The Netherlands has identified three indicators for measuring results on women's economic rights and has published progress against these indicators on their website. These indicators include: (1) number of laws, policies and strategies blocked, adopted or improved to promote women's economic rights, empowerment and entrepreneurship; (2) number of times that CSOs succeed in creating space for CSO demands and positions on women's economic rights, empowerment, and entrepreneurship through agenda setting, influencing the debate and/or movement building; and (3) number of individuals (disaggregated by type, age and gender) with improved attitudes and practises on women's economic rights, empowerment and entrepreneurship.

Switzerland

Switzerland has developed annual status reports on gender equality, which provide annual results achieved in relation to specific quantitative indicators with gender as disaggregation unit (e.g. number of women with access to financial services, or to skills development, or obtaining employment). These reports also give illustrative examples of the specific gender related interventions, results, and lessons of selected programmes on WEE.

Additionally, Switzerland had an external evaluation conducted of its entire gender portfolio, including policy and programme focus on WEE, covering the years 2006-2016, the results from which are published in the 2018 "Report on Effectiveness of SDC's engagement in the field of gender equality". Gender thematic results from this evaluation show that approximately 30% of Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation's (SDC's) engagements have been successful in contributing to WEE and that the sub-theme of unpaid care work had gained significant importance in policy dialogues and interventions over the 10 year period (SDC, 2018^[23]).

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom (UK) has released a guidance note on best practices for the measurement of WEE. The note provides recommendations to the UK's development actors on how they can improve the measurement of their WEE initiatives

United States

The 2018 US Entrepreneurship and Economic Empowerment Act mandates regular progress reporting on the implementation of the Act, including on the impact of the work on WEE. These progress reports are available online but given the recent adoption of the Act, these reports do not yet include information on impact.

Examples of impact of projects on Women's Economic Empowerment

Australia conducted an independent evaluation of its Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development (Pacific Women) programme, which operates in 14 Pacific Island countries and is “designed to improve opportunities for the political, economic and social advancement of women in the Pacific” (DFAT, 2020^[24]). The evaluation was completed six years after the establishment and delivery of the Pacific Women programme and examined the effectiveness, impact and sustainability of the programme, and explored its achievements, outcomes, and areas for improvement. Results published in the 2020 “**Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development Six-Year Evaluation Report**” found that the number of projects focused on WEE since the programme’s first Three-Year Evaluation had increased. It also highlights areas where focus on WEE has been effective and provides recommendations on areas for improvement.

An **evaluation of Belgium’s work on gender and development** indicates that ‘economic projects appear to possess the greatest potential for changing gender relations’. The evaluation finds that women who improved their economic situation, developed enhanced self-confidence, upgraded their position in the household and society more broadly and show greater power of initiative. Furthermore, the evaluation suggests that lack of attention to gender issues in economic projects, leads to additional challenges such as increased workloads for women.

Policy options:

- Refer to the importance of mainstreaming Women’s Economic Empowerment throughout all aspects of the project cycle (project design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation) for members that have identified Women’s Economic Empowerment as a priority. Provide guidance and tools on how to do this, including on gender analysis, politically informed approaches and integrating Women’s Economic Empowerment into the operations of implementing organisations and partners. This is particularly relevant for projects in sectors that are not gender-specific (e.g. in sectors such as agriculture, banking, and infrastructure).
- Refer to the importance of conducting a gender analysis at the outset of a programme design so as to reveal contextual information regarding gender roles and power dynamics and thus an understanding of challenges and opportunities for women’s involvement in the economic arena.
- Make reference to the results of members’ evaluations on Women’s Economic Empowerment and give examples of successful initiatives on Women’s Economic Empowerment, highlighting the impact and key success factors of these initiatives
- Complement Women’s Economic Empowerment policies with a strong focus on accountability, impact and results and commit to ongoing learning through evaluation.

6 Financing for women's economic empowerment

6.1. OECD analysis on financing Women's Economic Empowerment

The OECD collects and analyses data on development finance for gender equality and women's empowerment using the DAC gender equality policy marker to support countries to more strategically target their aid to gender equality. To measure funding for WEE, the OECD looks at bilateral Official Development Assistance (ODA) in a selected number of economic and productive sectors and sub-sectors that are particularly relevant for WEE. They have been grouped into 11 categories: agriculture and rural development; industry; mining, construction and tourism; transport; energy; communication; banking and business services; trade; public finance management; employment policy; urban development (OECD, 2021^[21]).

That total aid integrating or dedicated to gender equality and women's empowerment objectives in economic and productive sectors reached USD 17.5 billion on average per year in 2018-19, representing 47% of DAC members' aid in these sectors. However, only USD 603 million, representing 2% of aid in the economic and productive sectors was dedicated to gender equality as a principal objective. There are opportunities to increase dedicated support to gender equality in these sectors.

In 2018-19, the largest volumes of aid for gender equality were committed in the transportation and storage sectors (USD 6.3 billion), and agriculture and rural development sectors (USD 5.4 billion). Three DAC members together (Japan, the EU and Germany) accounted for more than half of the total volume of aid for gender equality in economic and productive sectors in 2018-19 (on average per year) (OECD, 2021^[21]). There is scope to increase aid for gender equality in particular in the sectors of energy, and banking and business where only 14% and 38% of aid respectively focused on gender equality (Figure 6.1).

The past few years have seen an overall increase and interest in **development finance beyond ODA** that addresses gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. DFIs and banks, private investors, commercial actors, and private philanthropy are intensifying investments with a "gender lens", recognising that gender-lens investing (GLI) can both help increase return on investments and contribute to leaving no one behind in developing countries. Most definitions and criteria for GLI are closely linked to WEE and revolve around investing in women-owned or women-led enterprises, investing in enterprises that promote equal opportunities in the workplace (in staffing, management, boardroom representation, and along their supply chains), and/or investing in enterprises that offer products or services that substantially improve the lives of women and girls (Global Impact Investing Network, n.d.^[25]).

Many DAC members engage with different types of private actors and use financing tools beyond ODA for gender equality, including by partnering with commercial actors and/or private philanthropy, and setting up blended finance vehicles with development banks and development finance institutions. DAC members' domestic DFIs are playing an increasingly important role in financing for gender equality (Box 6.1).

Initiatives such as the “2X Challenge”, founded by the DFIs of the G7 member countries¹⁰, have provided significant impetus for DFIs to develop shared financing principles, definitions and methodologies for providing women in developing country markets with improved access to support, leadership opportunities, finance, and products and services that enhance economic participation and access.

Box 6.1. Development Finance Institutions and gender equality

Norway

In Norway, the establishment of Norfund (the Norwegian Investment Fund for developing countries) has been an instrumental mechanism in the approach to engage the private sector and reduce poverty by stimulating job creation in partner countries. Funded by the Norwegian Government, Norfund works to ensure that the advancement of Women’s Economic Empowerment (WEE) is intrinsically linked to private-sector partnerships by investing in profitable enterprises in developing countries. These arrangements involve securing provisions surrounding non-discrimination and commitments from the companies to support women employees to engage in Norway’s training and entrepreneurship programs. In addition, Norway’s Action Plan for Women’s Rights and Gender Equality in Foreign and Development Policy 2016-2020 discusses the role that Development Banks can play in promoting WEE.

6.2. Women’s Economic Empowerment policies and financing

Even though the development co-operation policies and gender equality policies of members identify WEE as a priority, these policies do not give much information about the financing of WEE initiatives. For example, none of the member policies refer to the amount of ODA that targets WEE. Spending amounts and percentages of aid going to WEE fluctuate over time and cannot easily be captured in development co-operation and gender equality policies that are meant to last several years.

However, the policies of some members mention funds that focus on WEE. Australia makes reference to its Gender Equality Fund to strengthen WEE in the Indo-Pacific Region. The US mentions the Women’s Global Development and Prosperity (W-GDP) Fund that focuses on advancing WEE.

Some DAC members have set quantitative targets for their ODA for gender equality,¹¹ and some are considering establishing targets. These targets are also referenced in the policies of some members.

6.3. Financing of sub-themes

In addition to members’ overall statements and commitments on financing for WEE within their policies, analysis has also been carried out on members’ financial commitments to sub-themes of WEE. Figure 6.1 below gives a detailed overview of members’ aid in support of gender equality in the economic and

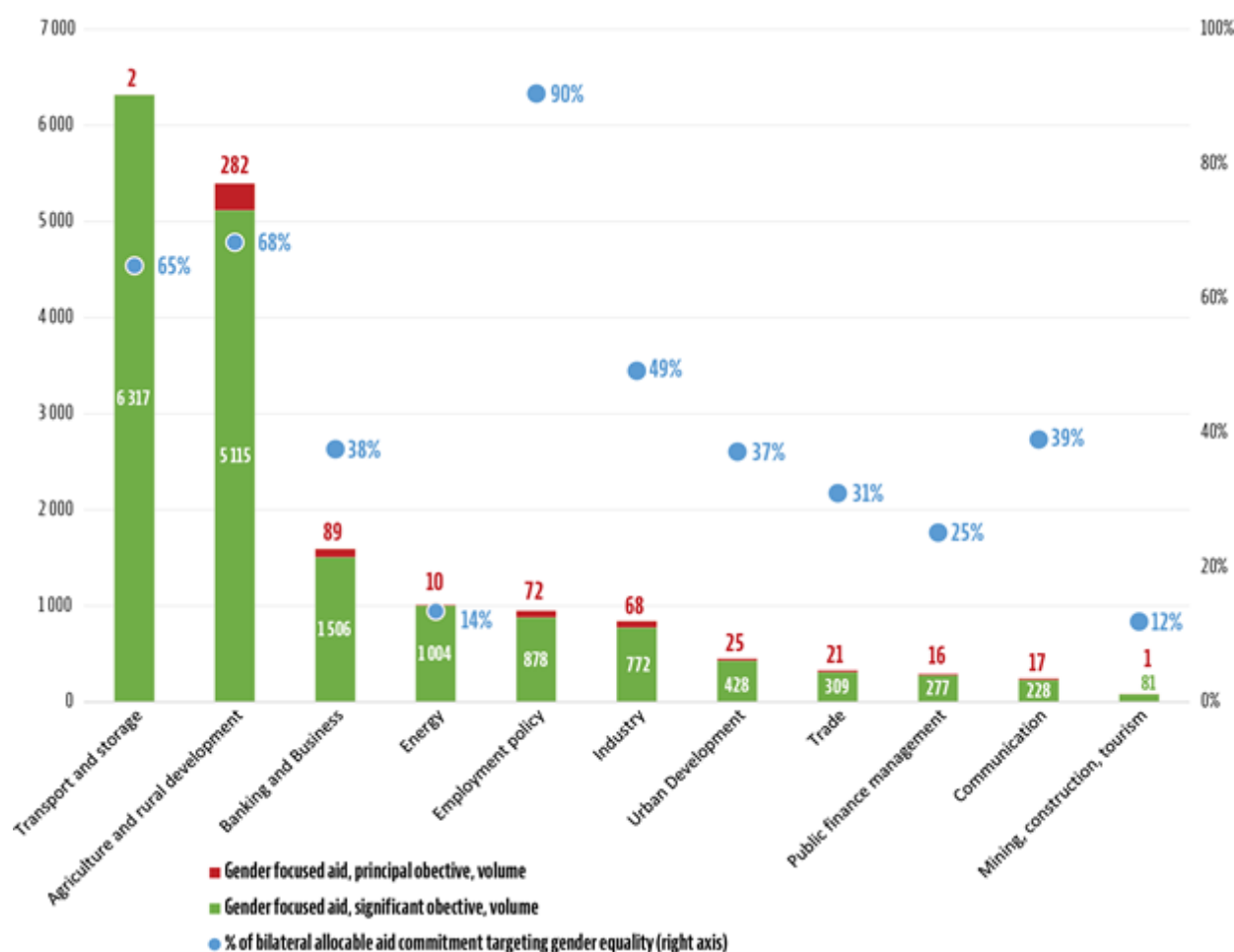
¹⁰ <https://www.2xchallenge.org>

¹¹ DAC members that have financial targets for gender equality in the GENDERNET survey were: Austria (42.5% of aid in Africa to score 2 against the marker), Canada (80% to score 1 and 15% to score 2), EU (85% of new programmes to score 1 or 2), France (50% of programmable aid to score 1 or 2 by 2022, with the *Agence Française de Développement* (AFD), France’s development agency, aiming for USD 700 million to score 2 by 2022), Italy (10% of score 2), Japan (JICA aiming for 40% of aid to score 1 or 2), Korea (the Korea International Co-operation Agency intends to double the number of projects that score 1 or 2), Slovenia (60% to score 1 or 2 by 2030), Switzerland (85% in total, out of which 8% to score 2).

productive sectors. This section analyses whether members' financial commitments to these sub-themes (Figure 6.1) match the commitments that they have made at policy level (Section 2.2).¹²

Figure 6.1. Aid in support of gender equality in economic and productive sectors

Annual average 2018-19, USD million, 2019 constant prices



Source: Authors calculations based on OECD DAC Creditor Reporting System (2021_[26]). Full dataset available here: <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?ThemeTreeId=3>.

The comparison of members' statements and funding data shows mixed results. While on some sub-themes, there is clear **alignment between policy priorities and financial commitments**, on other sub-themes there is a large gap. An interesting example of alignment can be spotted in the agriculture and rural development sectors. Many members highlight the importance of agriculture and rural development in their policies and this sub-theme also receives among the highest volumes of ODA that target gender equality and highest shares of aid that integrate gender equality (as compared to other economic and

¹² In section 2.2 of this paper, 20 sub-themes of WEE, informed by the development co-operation and gender equality policies of GENDERNET members, were considered. In Figure 6.1, 11 economic and productive sectors that are essential to the advancement of WEE are used. This Figure is extracted from an OECD paper on "Financing women's economic empowerment", which provides an overview of the integration of gender equality and women's empowerment into DAC members' bilateral ODA in 2018-2019. While the sub-themes and sectors differ, parallels can be found between the two reports.

productive sectors). Alternatively, only few members refer to trade or energy in their policies and this is aligned with low levels of financial commitments on these sub-themes.

Examples also exist of **gaps** between the level of policy support for the advancement of WEE and the bilateral aid that is mobilized for the same purpose. Over 20 members addressed issues related to 'banking and business/employment policies' in their policies (e.g. access to/control over resources such as bank accounts and financing; and entrepreneurship) while there is significant scope to increase financial commitments in these sectors. This contrast indicates a gap between the identification of WEE as a priority within development co-operation policy and the actual allocation of ODA. It also demonstrates an area of opportunity for growth and more cohesive action between policy development and funding allocation with the purpose of advancing WEE going forward.

Policy options:

- Include more information in member policies and strategies on financing for Women's Economic Empowerment programmes and which financing mechanisms and partnerships have worked well, including on partnerships with the private sector.
- Ensure that aid allocations for Women's Economic Empowerment align with thematic policy priorities and members' global and regional commitments

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Annex A. Methodology

A policy analysis was conducted with the objective of extracting information about how DAC members are discussing, and methods they are using to address, WEE globally. This policy analysis facilitated a systematic approach to examining the current body of development co-operation, gender equality, foreign affairs policies adopted by DAC members. The information gleaned, in turn, provided a heightened understanding of, and ability to evaluate, members' respective commitments to WEE, and informed policy options for growth in this area.

The OECD DAC Network on Gender (GENDERNET) is comprised of thirty (30) members, all of which have adopted at least one policy related to development co-operation or gender equality that was available online to include in the analysis. However, these policies varied in a multitude of ways, from length, to detail, depth, scope, and currency. As many members have expanded upon their historic work in development co-operation and gender equality and therefore have multiple policies related to these areas under their purview, only each members' most recent policies were taken into consideration.

This analysis revealed that of the considered policies, many include the years for which it is identified targets, approaches, budgets, priority regions and more, apply. For example, Slovak Republic's "Medium-Term Strategy for Development Cooperation of the Slovak Republic for 2019-2023" clearly states the dates for which the Strategy will be enacted. Other policies, such as Canada's "Feminist International Assistance Policy" do not identify exact dates for which the Policy applies, but it is updated and added-to as needs change and as new issues and solutions emerge. For the purpose of this analysis, policies that specify their duration of application as being up until, or beyond, 2021, or policies that have been comprehensively updated to account for recent developments and information, are considered "current". Out of the thirty (30) DAC member countries, fifteen (15) have current and up-to-date policies and fifteen (15) members do not have policies that are current, some of which have identified that they are actively working to update them.

Furthermore, external reports published by leading international organizations and internal data collected and analysed by the OECD pertaining to the topics of WEE and gender equality were consulted in the formulation of this discussion.

For the purpose of addressing the COVID-19 pandemic and its global relevance to the issue of WEE, responses from a GENDERNET questionnaire for members, were considered. These responses enabled the analysis to provide a current reflection of the state of members' development co-operation and gender equality policies and their ability to pivot to support WEE in circumstances that disproportionately impact women negatively.

Annex B. Donor policies on gender equality and women's empowerment

Table B.1. List of donor policies

Donor	Donor Policies	COVID-19 Policies
Australia	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy Australia Advancing Women's Economic Empowerment Through Aid, Trade and Economic Diplomacy Women's Economic Empowerment – Practice and Policy Implications from the Enterprise Challenge Fund	Partnerships for Recovery: Australia's Covid-19 Development Response
Austria	Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls: Implementing the EU Gender Action Plan II 2016-2020 Working together. For our world. Three-Year Programme on Austrian Development Policy 2019-2021	
Belgium	2019-2023 Gender Strategy Paper A difficult path towards equality Gender and Development in Belgian Cooperation	
Canada	Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy Policy on Gender Equality Action Area Policy: Growth that Works for Everyone	Canada's support for international efforts to fight the COVID-19 pandemic
Czech Republic	Development Cooperation Strategy of the Czech Republic: 2018-2030	
Denmark	Strategic Framework for Gender Equality, Rights and Diversity in Danish Development Cooperation The World 2030: Denmark's strategy for development cooperation and humanitarian action	Denmark's efforts against COVID-19 in developing countries
European Union	EU Gender Action Plan III: An Ambitious Agenda for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in EU External Action A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025	EU global response to COVID-19
Finland	The Rights of Women and Girls: At the core of Finland's development policy Reinforcing Developing Countries' Economies: More jobs, livelihoods and wellbeing	
France	Feminist Diplomacy France's International Strategy on Gender Equality (2018-2022)	
Germany	Gender Equality in German Development Policy: Cross-sectoral strategy Development Policy Action Plan on Gender Equality 2016 – 2020	Emergency COVID-19 Support Programme
Greece	Annual Report of the Greek Bilateral and Multilateral Official Development Co-operation and Assistance (2018)	
Hungary	Hungary's International Development Cooperation Strategy: For the period 2020-2025 International Development Cooperation Strategy and Strategic Concept for International Humanitarian Aid of Hungary 2014-2020	
Iceland	Gender Equality in Iceland's International Development Co-Operation	
Italy	International Development Cooperation: Three-Year Programming and Policy Planning document 2016-2018 Italy's Third National Action Plan, in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), 2016-2019 Guidelines for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (in Italian)	
Ireland	A Better World: Ireland's Policy for International Development Gender Equality Policy Irish Aid	Minister announces Irish Aid support for rural communities and farmers in developing countries Girls' Education
Japan	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: JICA Strategies and Actions Development Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (2016)	JICA: Way Forward, Working Together Against COVID-19

Korea	KOICA's Gender Equality Mid-Term Strategy 2016-2020	
Luxembourg	Luxembourg's General Development Cooperation Strategy: The road to 2030 Genre: Stratégies et Orientations (2012) Lux Dev: Our activities	
Netherlands	Development Cooperation: Dutch Policy Funding Leadership and Opportunities for Women (FLOW 2016-2020) Theory of Change Development Cooperation	
New Zealand	Gender Action Plan 2021-25 New Zealand's International Development Cooperation 2019-2020 New Zealand's International Cooperation for Effective Sustainable Development (ICESD) New Zealand's International Development Principles	
Norway	Freedom, empowerment and opportunities: Action Plan for Women's Rights and Gender Equality in Foreign and Development Policy 2016-2020	Responding to the Covid-19 Pandemic – Early Norwegian Development Aid Support
Portugal	Development Cooperation Estratégia Da Cooperação Portuguesa Para A Igualdade De Género	
Poland	Multiannual Development Cooperation Programme 2016-2020 (link on page) Development Cooperation Plan for 2019 (link on page)	
Slovak Republic	Medium-Term Strategy for Development Cooperation of the Slovak Republic for 2019-2023 National Strategy For Gender Equality in the Slovak Republic 2014-2019	
Slovenia	Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid Strategy of the Republic of Slovenia until 2030	
Spain	Spain's Feminist Foreign Policy: Promoting Gender Equality in Spain's External Action Estrategia de Acción Humanitaria de la Cooperación Española 2019-2026 Estrategia de "Género en Desarrollo" de la Cooperación Española V Plan Director de la Cooperación Española 2018-2021	Spanish Cooperation's Joint COVID Response Strategy (p. 17)
Sweden	Feminist Trade Policy Handbook: Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy Strategy for Sweden's global development cooperation in sustainable social development 2018-2022	Sweden's response in the global fight against the COVID-19 virus
Switzerland	FDFA Strategy on Gender Equality and Women's Rights Status Report on Gender Equality 2019: Striving for Transformative Change Status Report on Gender Equality 2020: Stepping Up our Efforts Dispatch on Switzerland's International Cooperation 2017-2020: Key points in brief	International cooperation: the FDFA is mitigating the impact of COVID-19 around the world
UK	DFID Strategic Vision for Gender Equality Measurement of Women's Economic Empowerment	
US	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment 2020 Policy Women's Economic Empowerment Women's Entrepreneurship and Economic Empowerment Act of 2018 Women's Global Development and Prosperity (W-GDP) Fund	USAID's COVID-19 Response