

Aid Focussed on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment:

A snapshot of current funding and trends over time in support of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

OECD DAC NETWORK ON GENDER EQUALITY (GENDERNET) • 2020

Key messages

- USD 48.7 billion of bilateral aid on average per year focussed on gender equality and women's empowerment in 2017-18. This corresponds to 42% of bilateral aid. This is higher than ever before.
- Out of this, USD 4.6 billion was dedicated to gender equality as the principal objective of the programme, corresponding to 4% of bilateral aid.
- Amongst the priority areas for gender equality identified at the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995, DAC members have over time focussed high shares of aid on gender equality in the areas of human rights, media and education. Donors have placed significantly less focus on gender equality in the areas of environment, and poverty and the economy (Table 2).
- Almost half of aid in the area of health does not yet focus on gender equality and women's empowerment. Particularly relevant given the current Covid-19 emergency is that only 24% of aid in the sub-sector of infectious disease control integrated gender equality and women's empowerment on average per year in 2017-18.

Introduction

Achieving gender equality and women's empowerment outcomes requires robust, sustained financing. In the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, stakeholders committed to working "for a significant increase in investments to close the gender gap".¹ Official development assistance (ODA) allocated by the 30 members of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) is one important contribution to funding gender equality and women's empowerment in developing countries.² In the current Covid-19 crisis, it will be essential to both maintain funding for gender equality and to integrate gender equality aspects throughout crisis response efforts.

Twenty five years since Beijing

The First World Conference on Women celebrated in Mexico in 1975 helped launch a new era in global efforts to promote the advancement of women. The importance of data disaggregated by sex was recognised. During the Fourth World Conference held in Beijing in 1995, the global community agreed to promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes.³ The *Beijing Platform for Action* also highlighted the need for data by sex and age. These were ambitious targets built on feminist principles and the need for accurate information about the population.

¹ Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly on 25 September 2015 (A/RES/70/1)

² Public and private flows from civil society, multilateral organisations, private philanthropy, development finance institutes and private businesses, other official flows beyond ODA from DAC members, as well as developing countries' public spending all contribute financial resources for gender equality in developing countries. See also *Putting finance to work for gender equality and women's empowerment. The way forward* (OECD Development Policy Paper, January 2020)

³ Platform for Action, www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform, from the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995)

A few years later, the *DAC Guidelines for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development Co-operation* (1999) set out a twin-track approach, noting that while mainstreaming is the key strategy in support of gender equality in developing countries, this does not preclude dedicated initiatives specifically directed toward women or targeted directly to men with the objective of promoting gender equality. DAC members have been working within the Beijing framework over the past decades, and are today committed to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which recognise gender equality as a priority. 2020 marks the 25th anniversary of Beijing and the five-year milestone of the SDGs, and provides a good opportunity to take stock of DAC members' funding efforts to implement commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment.

This policy brief presents data on bilateral allocable ODA dedicated to gender equality and women's empowerment as a "principal" policy objective and ODA that integrates gender equality as a "significant" (secondary, mainstreamed) objective, using data collected in the OECD Creditor Reporting System (CRS) screened against the DAC gender equality policy marker.⁴ The analysis explores how ODA to implement the commitments made in Beijing, and gender-focused development programmes and investments have evolved over time, and what the picture looks like today. Even though development funding for gender equality has increased, OECD research indicates that SDG5 might be one of the least financed SDGs. The brief demonstrates the opportunity to further deepen analysis of existing and potential ways to better invest in gender equality, based on OECD data collected through the gender marker.

Trends in overall aid to gender equality

Bilateral aid focussed on gender equality and women's empowerment is steadily increasing and reached **an average of USD 48.7 billion per year in 2017-18, corresponding to 42% of aid**. The bulk of this (USD 44.2 billion) was committed to programmes that integrate gender equality as a significant, or mainstreamed, policy objective.⁵ Support to programmes dedicated to gender equality and women's empowerment as the principal objective amounted to USD 4.6 billion per year, representing 4% of DAC members' total aid.

Table 1. Trends in aid focussed on gender equality⁶



⁴ <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=CRS1>

⁵ For examples of programmes that target gender equality as a "principal" or "significant" objective, see the *Handbook on the OECD-DAC Gender equality Policy Marker* (OECD DAC Network on Gender Equality, December 2016): www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/dac-gender-equality-marker.htm

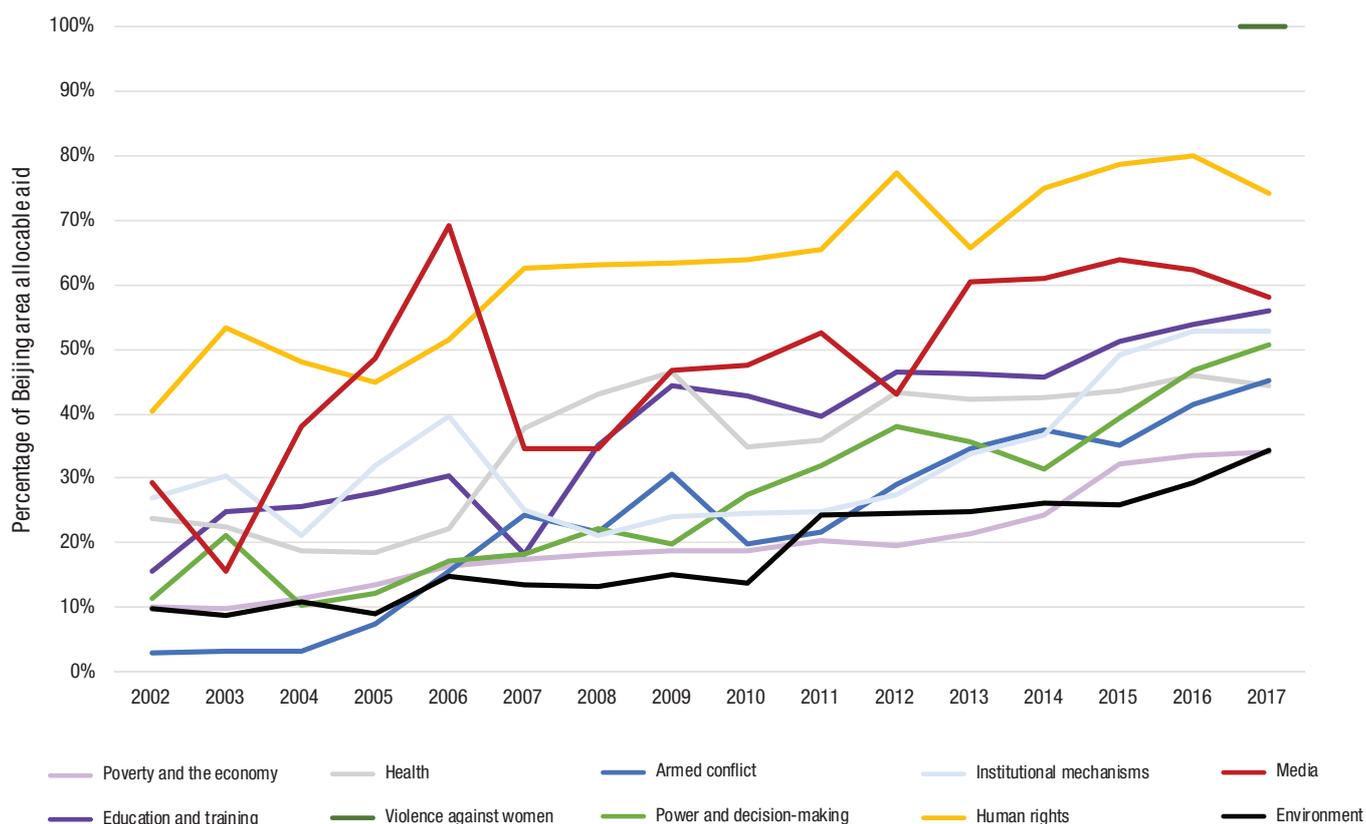
⁶ The definition and eligibility criteria of the marker were revised in 2008, which explains what looks like a slight decrease of ODA for gender equality and women's empowerment in 2010. Large programmes by the EU and Japan explain the 2015 increase of "significant" aid, EU programmes the 2016 increase, and programmes by Japan the 2018 increase. Preliminary data for the United States for 2018.

Trends in aid to gender equality per Beijing priority area

The Beijing Platform for Action flagged twelve key areas where urgent action was needed to ensure greater equality and opportunities for women and men, girls and boys. This section looks at trends in ODA funding mapped against these broad areas.

| | |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Women and poverty | Women in power and decision-making |
| Education and training of women | Institutional mechanisms |
| Women and health | Human rights of women |
| Violence against women | Women and the media |
| Women and armed conflict | Women and the environment |
| Women and the economy | The girl child |

Table 2. Aid focussed on gender equality as share of total aid per Beijing action area



Note: Share of aid focussed on gender equality (significant and principal) in each area of concern identified in Beijing. For the sake of this analysis and due to the way that ODA sectors are tracked the areas “women and poverty” and “women and the economy” have been grouped together and are listed as “poverty and the economy” in the table above. The Beijing area “the girl child” is not indicated as a separate area in this analysis.

Violence against women and girls is perhaps the most obvious manifestation of the deep imbalances in power in our societies, and the vulnerabilities and limitations that follow them, especially for the most marginalised, and especially in crisis contexts. The OECD has been able to track aid focussed on **ending violence against women and girls** as a standalone sector since 2016 (Table 2, dark green line). In 2018, 606 million USD was dedicated to ending VAWG. This also corresponds to aid for SDG indicator 5.2, “Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls”.

DAC members have over time maintained a particularly strong – though over the years somewhat uneven – focus on funding gender equality in the areas of human rights and media (Table 2). The Beijing Platform for Action stresses that governments must not only refrain from violating women’s **human rights**, but also must work actively to promote and protect these rights.

In this context, support for women’s organisations is essential, as evidence shows that women’s rights activism and movements are the key drivers of legal and policy change to address gender equality. Women’s rights organisations and movements are also fundamental to transforming entrenched social norms and practices.⁷

The **media** is essential in shaping our world. The Beijing Platform for Action stressed the need to increase the participation of women in decision making in and through the media and new technologies, and to promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media. This area has a relatively large share of gender focussed aid (Table 2, red line). However, the overall amount of aid going to this area (in USD) is relatively low.

Education is a human right and an essential tool for achieving the goals of equality, development and peace, and girls remain at a disadvantage in education – especially at the secondary level. Much of the aid focussed on gender equality in the area of education was allocated in sub-Saharan Africa. Given the importance of girls’ education to women’s empowerment and sustainable development, it is noteworthy that nearly half of bilateral aid did not address gender equality in the area of education in 2017 (purple line).

Improving **women’s health** is a matter of vital importance for women in developing countries. Too many women are still lacking the health services they need, when they need them. Women are at the forefront of the current battle against the Covid-19 pandemic as they make up almost 70% of the health care workforce according to the World Health Organisation (2020), exposing women to greater risk of infection, while they are under-represented in leadership and decision making processes in the health care sector. Maternal mortality remains unacceptably high. Every day in 2017, approximately 810 women died from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth.¹⁰

Aid to women’s institutions and organisations

Total aid to women’s institutions and organisations (governmental and non-governmental) amounted to USD 459 million on average per year in 2017-2018.⁸

Out of this, USD 198 million on average per year was committed specifically to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working for gender equality.⁹

⁷ Donor support to southern women’s rights organisations. OECD DAC Network on Gender Equality (GENDERNET, November 2016).

⁸ This corresponds to activities reported against Creditor Reporting System (CRS) purpose code 15170, intended to capture “support for institutions and organisations (governmental and non-governmental) working for gender equality and women’s empowerment. All aid reported against this code by default targets gender equality as a principal objective. This figure is part of the aid focussed on gender equality in the area of human rights.

⁹ International, donor-country based or developing country based NGOs working on gender equality.

¹⁰ WHO Maternal Mortality Fact Sheet: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/maternal-mortality>

With this in mind, it is striking how much aid – almost half – in the area of health that does not yet focus on gender equality and women’s empowerment (grey line in Table 2). Sectors in the health area with a particularly low focus on gender equality are: infectious disease control, basic health infrastructure, medical research, medical education and training, and sexually transmitted disease (STD) control and HIV/AIDS. The “STD control and HIV” sector is particularly well-funded, providing ample scope to explore the integration of a gender perspective in the three quarters of aid in this sector that do not currently focus on gender equality. In 2017-18 only 24% of aid in the sub-sector of infectious disease control integrated gender equality and women’s empowerment.

Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his/her country. The Beijing Platform for Action notes that achieving the goal of equal participation of women and men in **power and decision making** will provide a balance that more accurately reflects the composition of society and is needed in order to strengthen democracy and promote its proper functioning.¹¹ This area (Table 2, green line) includes ODA for gender equality in sectors such as public sector policy, public financial management and domestic resources mobilisation, and decentralisation. The United States and the EU have increased programming integrating gender equality in this area, which to a large extent explains the increase over the last years.

The areas of **environment** (Table 2, black line) and **poverty and the economy** (Table 2 purple line, and below) have the lowest– but slowly increasing – shares of gender focussed aid over time.

Support for women in poverty and the economy

When women are poor, their rights are not protected and they face double discrimination, due to their gender and economic situation. Women who belong to poor, marginalised or vulnerable groups face multiple, overlapping forms of inequality over and above gender inequality. A lack of education, limited opportunities for livelihood development and restricted access to land, justice or protection for their fundamental rights all contribute to women and girls suffering disproportionately from poverty.¹² At the same time, whether in businesses, on farms, as entrepreneurs or employees, or through unpaid domestic or care work at home, women make enormous contributions to economies.¹³

The shares of aid focussed on gender equality in the “hard” sectors such as business, banking, energy, transport, trade and employment remain relatively low over the years, though with an increase as of 2015 (Table 3). This increase can to a large extent be explained by a significant jump in amounts and shares of aid focussed on gender equality in the sectors of transport and storage, and agriculture, mainly by Japan.

The **energy** sector stands out as a well-funded sector, but with a particularly low focus on gender equality: around 10% over the past years. There is scope to explore opportunities to better integrate a gender perspective in energy programmes, given that improving access to reliable and affordable modern energy is key to women and girls’ health and well-being.

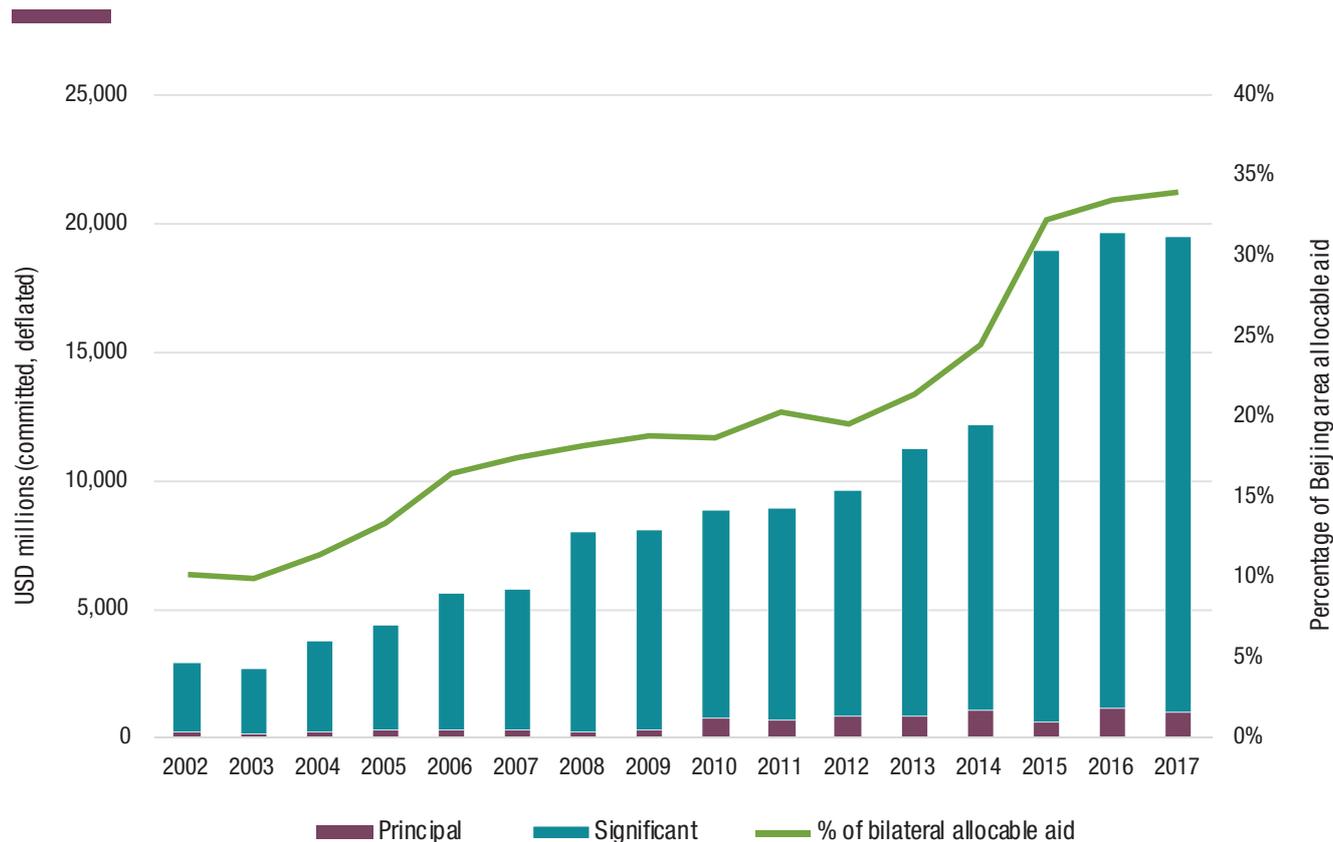
The **agriculture** sector, on the other hand, has a high share of aid focussed on gender equality and women’s empowerment compared to other sectors in the area of poverty and the economy, remaining around 60% over the past years.

¹¹ Platform for Action, www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform, from the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995)

¹² Development Co-operation Report 2018: Joining Forces to Leave No One Behind, <https://www.oecd.org/social/development-co-operation-report-20747721.htm>, (OECD, 2018)

¹³ Platform for Action, www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform, from the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995)

Table 3. Trends in aid focussed on gender equality in the area of poverty and the economy



Note: This table groups together the Beijing action areas of “women and poverty” and “women and the economy”.

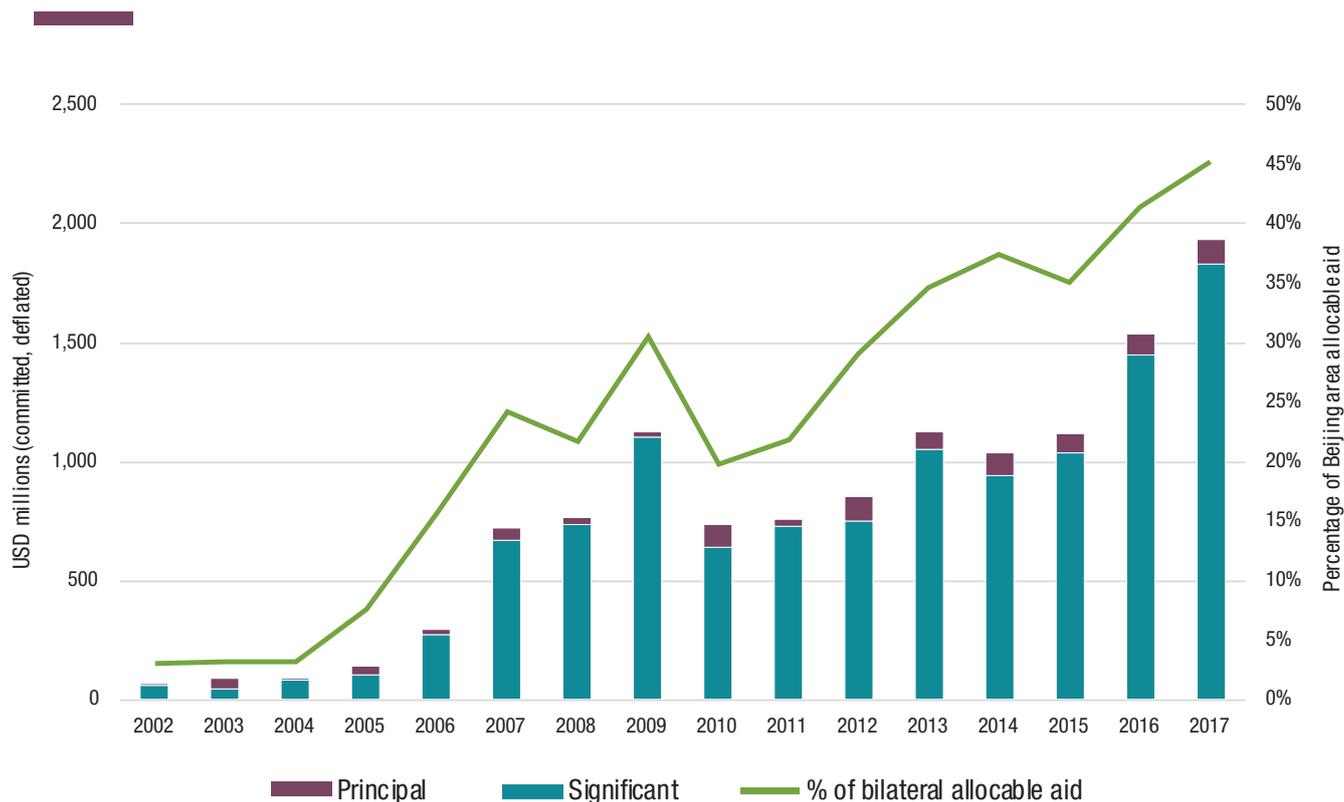
Support for women and armed conflict

The Beijing Platform for Action notes that, while entire communities suffer the consequences of armed conflict and terrorism, women and girls are particularly affected because of their status in society and their sex. Gender inequality, conflict and fragility are key challenges to sustainable development and they are inextricably linked: women’s active participation in conflict resolution contributes to peace and resilience, while unequal gender relations can drive conflict and violence.¹⁴ The landmark UN Security Council Resolution on Women, Peace and Security in 2000 (Resolution 1325) and ensuing resolutions recognised women’s role in conflict prevention and resolution.

¹⁴ OECD Development Policy Paper Gender equality and women’s empowerment in fragile and conflict-affected situations: A review of donor support (October 2017)

Table 4 shows gender-equality focussed ODA in the sectors of conflict prevention, peace and security, including security system management, civilian peace building and peacekeeping operations. The focus on gender equality in these areas has consistently increased over time. The increases in 2016 and 2017 can be partly explained by the increase in aid focussed on gender equality in this area by Germany in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Colombia, and by the EU in Colombia, Lebanon and Ukraine.

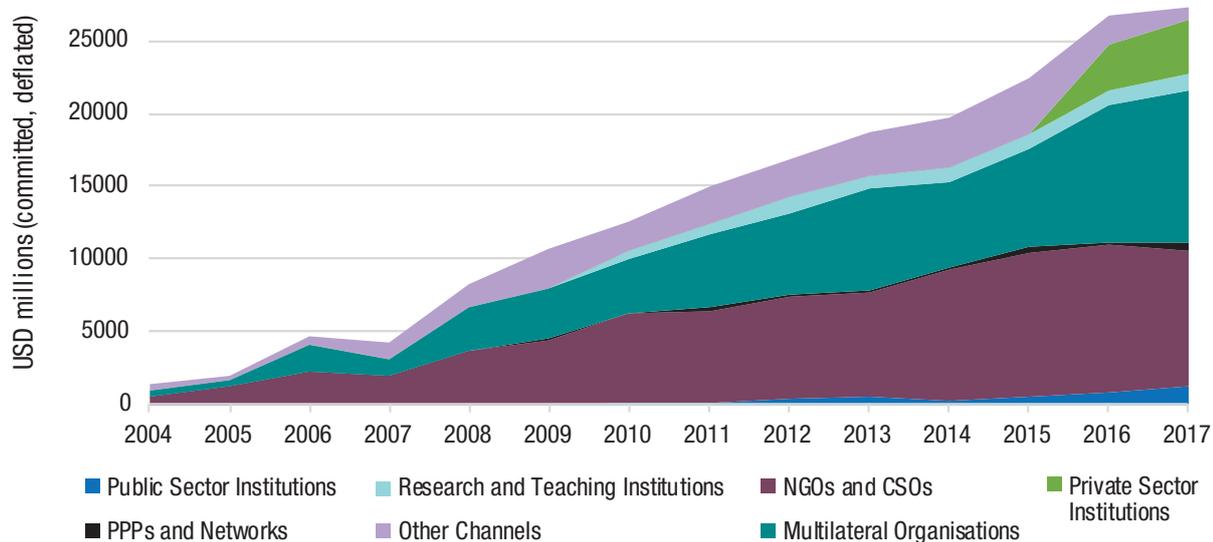
Table 4. Trends in aid focussed on gender equality in the area of armed conflict



Trends in aid to gender equality by delivery channel

Bilateral donors channel their aid focussed on gender equality in various ways. A lot goes through and to civil society and multilateral organisations as either project/programme support or core funding. Only little aid for gender equality is channelled through public sector institutions.

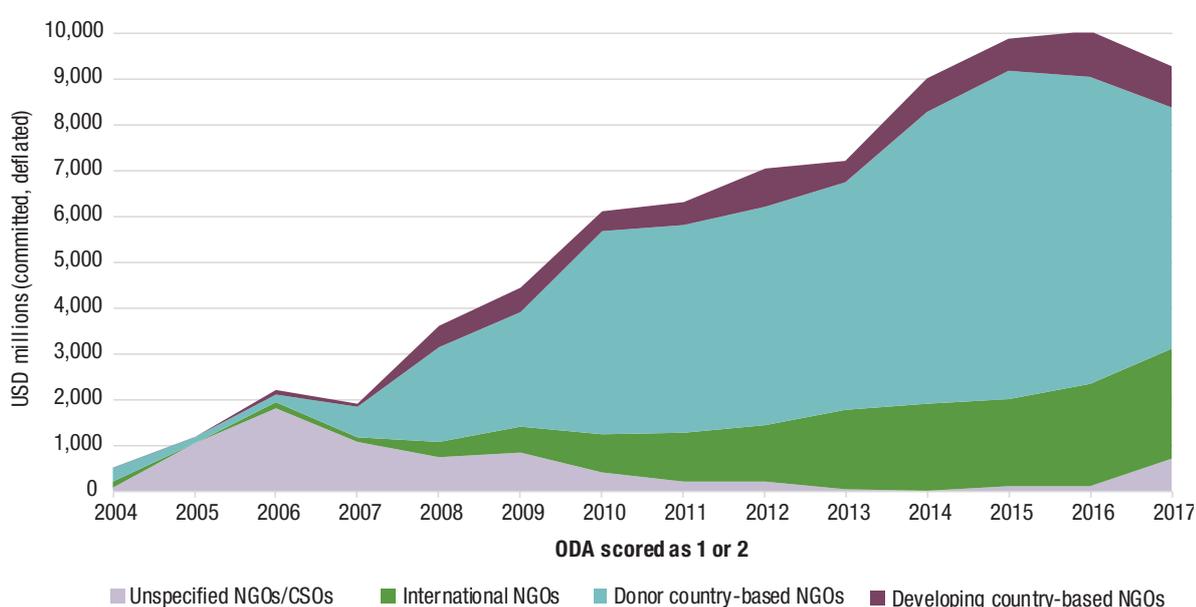
Table 5. Trends in aid focussed on gender equality by delivery channel



Amongst multilateral organisations, United Nations agencies remain by far the largest channel for gender equality focussed aid, and is significantly increasing. In 2016 and 2017, the largest single grants for gender equality went through UNICEF, the World Food Programme, and UNDP.

Aid focussed on gender equality channelled through CSOs is largely allocated through organisations based in donor countries.

Table 6. Trends in aid focussed on gender equality delivered through civil society organisations

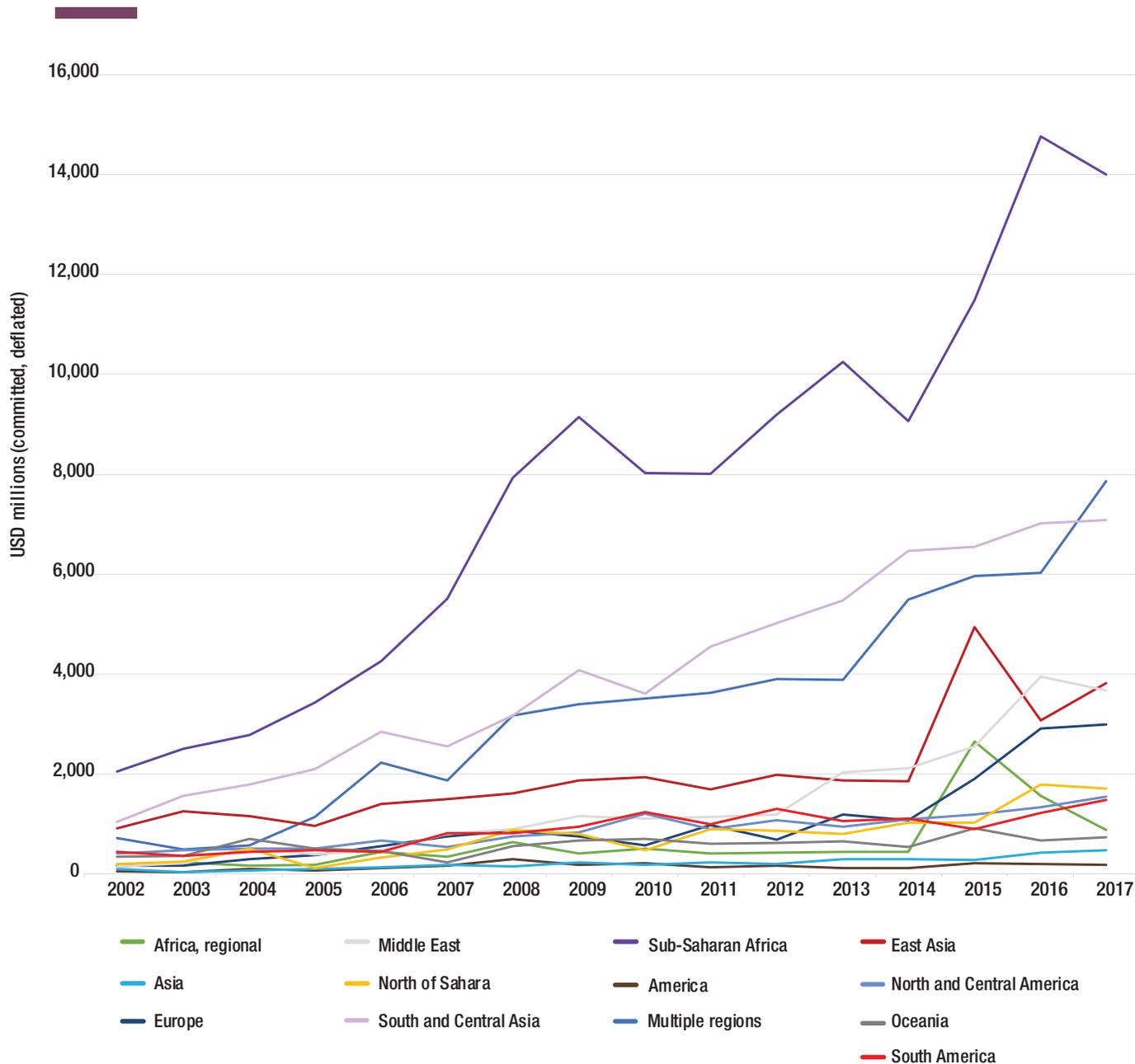


Trends in aid to gender equality by region

Looking at the amount of gender equality focussed bilateral aid allocated to different regions, sub-Saharan Africa is the region receiving the highest amounts of aid in USD over time.

In Asia, more than half of the aid delivered is focussed on gender equality. This is a higher share than in any other region.

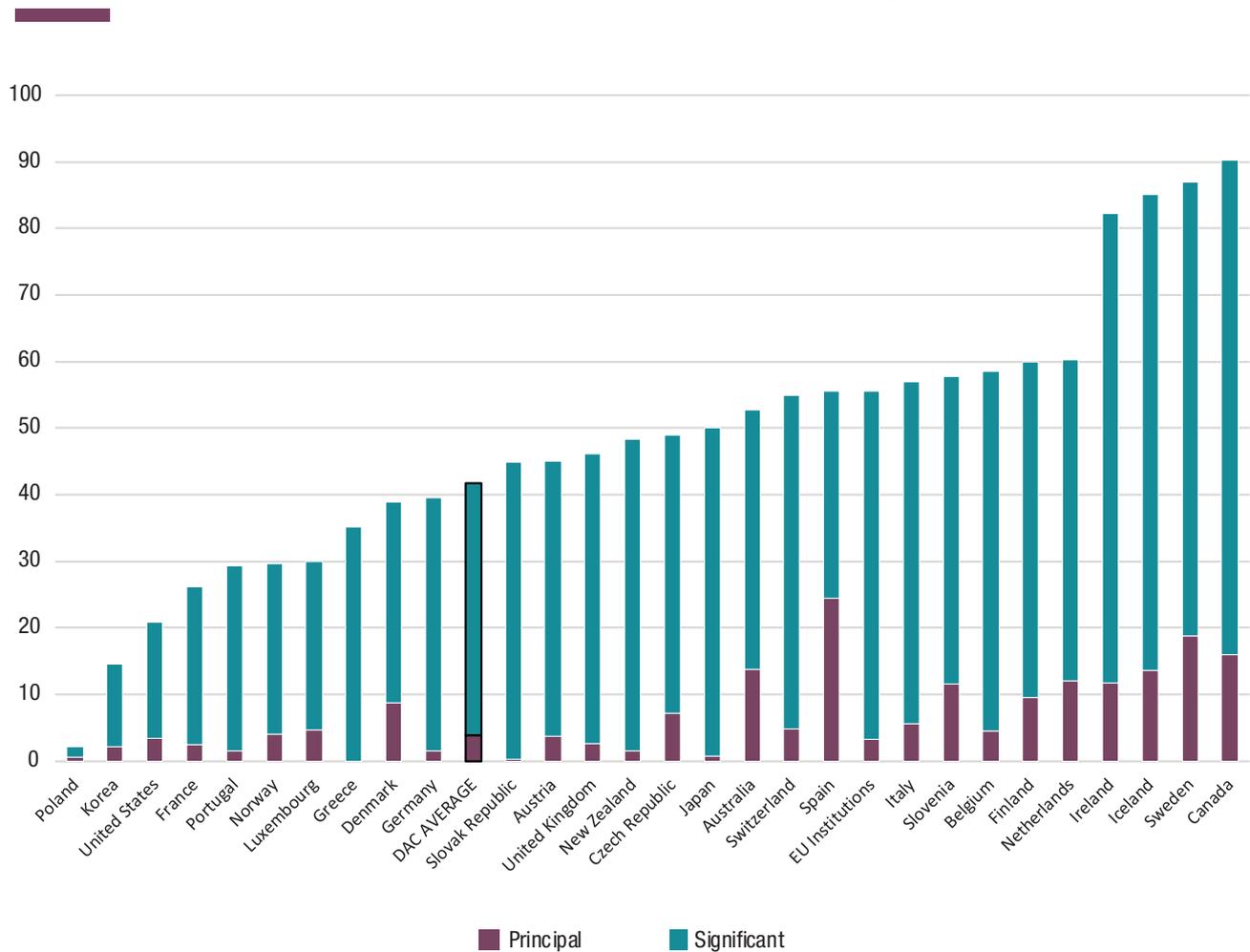
Table 7. Trends in aid focussed on gender equality by region



Aid by donor

Looking at ODA by DAC member in 2017-18, members with the highest shares of aid focussed on gender equality were Canada, Sweden, Iceland and Ireland.

Table 8. Share of ODA focussed on gender equality by DAC member (average 2017-18)¹⁵



In 2018, **33 private foundations** also provided information about their funding focussed on gender equality, using the DAC gender equality policy marker. Approximately 23% of their total financing focussed on gender equality and women's empowerment, corresponding to USD 1.7 billion of gender-focussed funding. These funds were allocated mainly in the sectors of health and reproductive health.

¹⁵ The use of the GENDERNET minimum recommended criteria for the marker by some members in recent years can result in stagnant or lower levels of aid reported as focussed on gender equality.

Methodology

The OECD tracks bilateral allocable aid in support of gender equality and women's empowerment using the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) gender equality policy marker – a qualitative statistical tool to record ODA activities that target gender equality and women's empowerment as a policy objective. The gender equality policy marker is used by DAC members as part of the annual reporting of their aid activities to the OECD. Today, all 30 DAC members report their ODA flows against the gender marker.

The DAC Gender Equality Policy Marker

DAC members as well as some other development actors report their development financing focussed on gender equality and women's empowerment to the OECD, using the DAC Gender Equality Policy Marker. This remains the most established form of measuring development finance for gender equality. The data generated by the marker provides an estimate of funding for gender equality rather than an exact quantification. It is a qualitative instrument. The gender marker is based on a three-point scoring system:

- Score 2: “Principal” objective means that gender equality is the dedicated and primary objective and is fundamental to its design and expected results. The project/programme would not have been undertaken without this objective.
- Score 1: “Significant” objective means that gender equality is an important but secondary – mainstreamed - objective. It is possible that only a portion of the budget targets gender equality objectives, but the amount recorded in the database relates to the entire budget of the programme/project.
- Score 0: “Not targeted” means that the project/programme has been screened against the gender marker but has been found to not target gender equality.

In 2016, the DAC Network on Gender Equality (GENDERNET) developed a *Handbook on the OECD-DAC Gender Equality Policy Marker*, which includes minimum recommended criteria as well as examples for scoring development activities to ensure a common understanding for reporting against the marker. DAC members screen and report nearly all of their ODA against the gender marker.

Bilateral allocable aid screened against the marker includes sector budget support, support to NGOs, support to specific funds managed by international organisations, pooled funding, projects, donor country personnel and other technical assistance, and scholarships in donor countries. It excludes core contributions to multilateral organisations, general budget support, imputed student costs, debt relief, administrative costs, development awareness and refugee costs in the donor country.

The data generated by the DAC gender equality policy marker provide an estimate of aid in support of gender equality but is not an exact quantification. They are published in the OECD Creditor Reporting System (CRS). The gender equality policy marker is based on a three-point scoring system (see box above).¹⁶

The marker cannot and does not intend to measure the outcome and impact of a development programme or project. Monitoring and evaluation instruments are needed for this.

¹⁶ *Handbook on the OECD-DAC Gender Equality Policy Marker* (OECD DAC Network on Gender Equality, December 2016)

Beijing areas mapped against CRS codes

This paper tracks ODA for gender equality against the Beijing areas for urgent action. The following sector (purpose) code in the CRS data-based have been selected for each area:

- **Poverty and the economy:** This groups together the two Beijing areas of Women and Poverty and Women and the Economy. CRS sector codes: employment policy, water and sanitation, social services, housing, basic services, transport, communications, energy generation and distribution, banking and business, agriculture, forestry and fishing, industry and mining, construction, trade, tourism, multisector including rural development, food aid.
- **Education and training:** All sector codes relating to all levels of education (basic, secondary, post-secondary) and training
- **Women and health:** All sector codes relating to health, and to population and maternal health.
- **Violence against women:** Dedicated sector code
- **Women and armed conflict:** All sector codes relating to conflict prevention, peace and security, including the sectors of security system management, civilian peace building and peacekeeping operations
- **Women in power and decision making:** Public sector policy, public financing management and domestic resource mobilisation, decentralisation
- **Institutional mechanisms:** Anti-corruption, legal and judicial development, democratic participation, elections, legislatures
- **Human rights of women:** Human rights, and women's organisations and institutions
- **Women and the media:** Sector code on the media
- **Women and the environment:** Environmental policy, bio diversity etc.
- **The girl child** is not a separate ODA category in the analysis.

Prepared by the OECD Development Co-operation Directorate based on data reported to the Creditor Reporting System (CRS), March 2020.