



Fact Sheet

# International Women's Day

8th March, 2012

# Facts & figures

Since 2004, thanks to Commission support:

- More than 85,000 new female students have been enrolled in secondary education
- More than 4 million births were attended by health personnel
- 10.8 million consultations on reproductive health

## Putting women at the heart of everything we do

As the world's second largest donor, the Commission has a crucial role to play in helping the development of women and girls. We put women at the heart of everything we do and make sure that every project we carry out; be it in agriculture, education or health, has a clear objective - to enhance women's engagement and empower them.

## Making the Millennium Development Goals work for women

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) initiative was launched with women in mind - a groundbreaking €1 billion project to support maternal health, contribute to the fight against child mortality and hunger and improve the supply of water and sanitation.

It is designed to reward progress of the countries that are most advanced in developing effective strategies to meet the MDGs, and to support efforts of the others to bridge the gap of the most off track MDGs, particularly those related to women.

## EU Gender Action Plan - helping to improve women's lives around the world

The first results of the EU's Gender Action Plan – put in place to improve coordination and reinforce the EU's work on gender to make sure that it had more impact on the ground – show that it is already making a difference.

Figures show that thanks to the plan, EU Delegations and Member States are putting in place new procedures to ensure that gender issues are systematically taken into account; both in their policy making and, frequently, also in their budget support programmes.



### Gender Action Plan in Action

In Mexico, the EU helped the government with the reform of the justice system, including the improvement of legislation on violence against women.

In Guatemala, a donor group was set up to follow up on cases of sexual and gender-based violence and support women's rights defenders in the country.

In India, the EU has provided support to the Government of India on a programme to provide quality education for all children between 6 and 14, and, in particular, to offer free residential schools for girls from marginalised communities. The programme is helping to eliminate the gender gap and India has now in fact achieved gender equality in primary education.

Thanks to an EU-UNICEF programme, four state-wide action plans on child marriage have now been set up, leading to large-scale community-led awareness raising and media coverage about the need to bring an end to child marriage.

As a result of the project, a visit of prominent world leaders from The Elders (an independent group who work together for peace and human rights, chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu) to India was also organised in 2012 to discuss strategies for accelerating the abandonment of child marriage through the 'Girls Not Brides' partnership.

## Stories from the Field – How the EU is making a difference for women around the world

### Saving thousands of girls from Child Marriage in India

In India, 47% of India's women aged 20–24 are currently married before the legal age of 18. Child marriage is illegal, but in poor regions, such as the north-western state of Rajasthan, there is enormous social and economic pressure to defy the law. More than half of girls there are married by age 18 – often setting up a lifetime of health and social problems for these young women and their children.

## PERSONAL STORIES

"I thought my life would be completely ruined," says Bablu who lives in a small village in rural Rajasthan. She was 13 when community pressure led the family to agree to an early marriage. Thanks to the joint EU-UNICEF project, her father was convinced that it was in his family's best interest to let Bablu continue her studies.

### Equal access to education in Bangladesh

Education is a human right but it is not a given all over the world. At least not if you are a girl. In Bangladesh girls are often treated differently right from birth. In practical terms that can mean worse nutrition and less education. With the advent of puberty, differences become even more evident and girls often have little say on their own choices.

In order to help thousands of girls to get an education, the EU, along with UNICEF, supports the Kishori Abhijan-Empowerment of Adolescents project. This project aims to lower school dropout rates, increase girls' economic independence and raise the age at which girls marry. With increasing literacy and numeracy, women can better assert their right to a life of dignity.



## PERSONAL STORIES

Shumi Akhter, a teenager living in the north of the country, had to fight against her parents to continue in school. As Shumi was 13-years-old, her father and uncle arranged a marriage with her cousin. She decided to say no.

Her mother was convinced and stopped the marriage against her husband's will. The Kishori Abhijan-Empowerment of Adolescents Project helped to support them during this difficult time.

«In the Kishori club I learned about early marriage, child rights, HIV/AIDS, etc. I am thankful that I could get away from all this safely. I will take my own decisions when I grow up. No one can force decisions on me», Shumi says.

### Helping former female soldiers to make a living in Indonesia

More than seven years after the tsunami, thousands of former female soldiers sidelined by Aceh's peace process are getting business start-up packages and playing a full part in the region's economic recovery, thanks to an EU project.

2,000 female former fighters have received European Commission aid in the form of a livelihood programme run by the Italian NGO, Terres des Hommes. Former fighters were identified after a door-to-door campaign covering an area larger than Holland and Luxembourg combined. Many women were found living far apart in remote areas.

The women get training in developing their business plans and are linked up with local micro-financing institutions. Among other livelihood projects for former female fighters are training courses for the police – with an emphasis on community policing and human rights.



## PERSONAL STORIES

People like Asmanidar, 32, who is a former female fighter – are benefitting from the project. She became a commander in the resistance ten years ago. Like many former female fighters, she was left out of the initial phase of reintegration. Then, a few years ago, Asmanidar started looking after her neighbour's goats.

Thanks to the EC project Asminder was able to buy her own goats. Today her three children and eight goats spring around her feet. "All three of my children are a handful," she says. "But for their sake I want to be a successful goat trader, maybe next time you come here I will be a goat trading boss and have 80 goats instead of eight."



For further details about the European Commission's work in this area, go to:

[http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/what/gender/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/what/gender/index_en.htm)

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=87qp6265XnM&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=87qp6265XnM&feature=player_embedded)

<http://www.unicef.org/eu/norms.html>

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