

# HIGHLIGHTS OF UNTAPPED POTENTIAL

## European Foundation Funding for Women and Girls

Though the philanthropic sector in Europe is expansive and far-reaching, numbering approximately 110,000 foundations with annual expenditures of €100 billion, surprisingly little is known about the breadth of European foundations, the nature of their work, or the allocation of their funds.<sup>1</sup> Yet data are critical to informed decisionmaking and effective philanthropy. It is in that spirit that Mama Cash, the world's oldest international women's fund, commissioned this research study to understand the scope, distribution and diversity of European-based funding, with a specific focus on women and girls.

Our study shows that European foundations are already working in innovative and proactive ways to support women and girls. It also shows that many foundations are nominally or not at all engaged in this work. Yet, regardless of their current level of involvement, the vast majority of foundations we surveyed—90 percent—expressed some interest in supporting programmes benefiting women and girls, suggesting untapped opportunities to increase foundation engagement in support of women and girls.

*While this study seeks to advance conversations about philanthropic support for women and girls, it also represents the most comprehensive study to date on the philanthropic activities of European foundations, in general.*

The study draws upon a rich mixture of survey, grants, and interview data to understand the range of foundation characteristics and interests, as well as their specific approaches to work related to women and girls. It reveals the top funding priorities of these foundations—nearly three-quarters, for example, are active in education—and identifies the specific population groups foundations are most likely to target in their work. And to the best of our knowledge, it is the first study to examine in detail the grantmaking activities of a broad cross-section of European foundations.

Altogether, 145 foundations from 19 countries, diverse in their missions and size, participated in the study. The vast majority of these foundations were independent or private, though corporate and public fundraising foundations also took part in the study. Foundations were evenly distributed across asset and expenditure groups.

The foundations in this study hold significant resources; we estimate (conservatively) that they control assets of more than €9.2 billion. Forty-two percent hold assets of at least €50 million apiece and the study includes nine of the top 50 foundations in Europe ranked by expenditures.<sup>2</sup>

**37%**  
of European foundations have intentionally focused at least some of their work on women and girls

**5%**  
of total grant monies awarded by 42 European foundations in 2009 benefited women and girls

**90%**  
of European foundations expressed interest in at least one issue related to women and girls

A number of these foundations are using their resources to support women and girls both on the continent and abroad in a variety of ways. They are funding projects that range from empowering women in Turkey to participate in local government, to promoting the financial independence of single mothers in Belgium, to preventing female genital mutilation in rural Kenya.

It's clear that foundations have different reasons for and approaches to supporting women and girls based on their missions, histories, and operating philosophies. For some foundations, supporting women and girls is central to their mission, and they approach their work through the lens of human rights and social justice. For other foundations, explicit support for women and girls is not a part of their foundation's primary mission. Yet they have come to adopt a gender lens in their work, with the understanding that paying attention to the experiences and socially constructed roles of women and girls enhances the effectiveness of their overall grantmaking.

Interviews with foundation executives shed light on some of the challenges foundations face in this work—from political concerns about publicly committing to support for women and girls to difficulties in measuring and articulating the impact of their investments—while also providing information about the practices they have adopted to counter these challenges and to work more creatively and effectively in their support of women and girls.

As foundation leaders, non-profit leaders, and policymakers discuss and debate the key findings from the study, we hope this publication can serve as a catalyst for new conversations across the continent, ultimately encouraging a wider range of actors to support funding for women and girls, while re-energising the work of those already engaged.

## STATUS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS

In its annual ranking of countries based on gender equality, the World Economic Forum reports that no nation has yet achieved gender equality.<sup>1</sup> North American and European/Central Asian countries have made the most progress, but on average, countries in these regions have only closed 70 percent of the gender gap, meaning that women have access to 70 percent of the economic, educational, health, and political resources and opportunities available to men. In other parts of the world, the gender gap is considerably larger—countries in the Middle East and North Africa trail the furthest behind, where only 58 percent of the gender gap has been closed.

1. The World Economic Forum's "Gender Gap Index" measures the extent to which there is a gap between men and women in their access to resources and opportunities in health, economic, education, and political domains.

## KEY FINDINGS

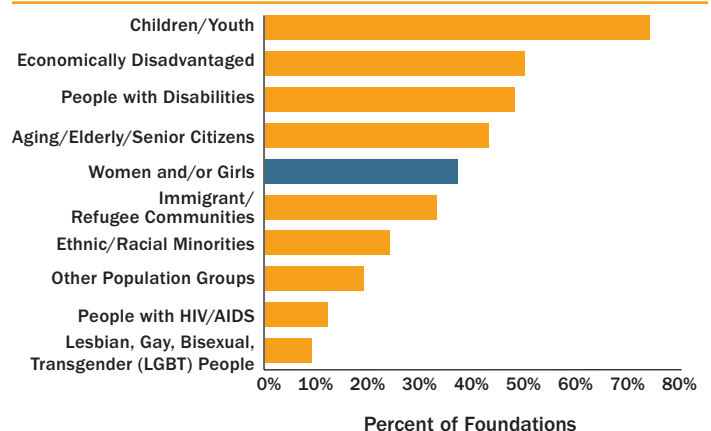
### Foundation Giving in General

- ◆ **Nearly three-quarters of European foundations surveyed (73 percent) are active in the area of education.** In addition, about half of all foundations work in health (50 percent), arts and culture (49 percent) and community development (46 percent). Lower priority areas are religion (8 percent), public affairs (9 percent), and peace (11 percent).
- ◆ **Children and youth are the top beneficiary population (74 percent) designated by European foundations.** Significant numbers of foundations also work to benefit the economically disadvantaged (50 percent) and people with disabilities (48 percent). Lesbian, bisexual, and transgender populations were the least likely to be the beneficiaries of foundation activities (9 percent), followed by people with HIV/AIDS (12 percent).

### Foundation Giving to Women and Girls

- ◆ **About a third of the foundations in the survey sample (37 percent) reported that they engaged in at least some grantmaking or programmatic activities that were specifically intended to benefit women and girls.**<sup>3</sup> Nearly one in five foundations (19 percent) said that they explicitly named women or girls in their mission statement or grantmaking guidelines as a population group they seek to support.

## Population Groups Benefiting from European Foundations' Grantmaking/Programmatic Activities



Source: The Foundation Center, *Untapped Potential: European Foundation Funding For Women & Girls*, 2011. Based on a survey of 136 European independent, corporate, and public/fundraising foundations. Responses were to the following question: "Thinking specifically about the activities of your foundation that are intentionally targeted to serve the needs of specific population groups, please indicate which of the following population groups your foundation has specifically targeted. Note: "Other population groups" included a range of groups, including victims of crime, rural populations, and people with dementia. A quarter of "other population groups" specified were prisoners.

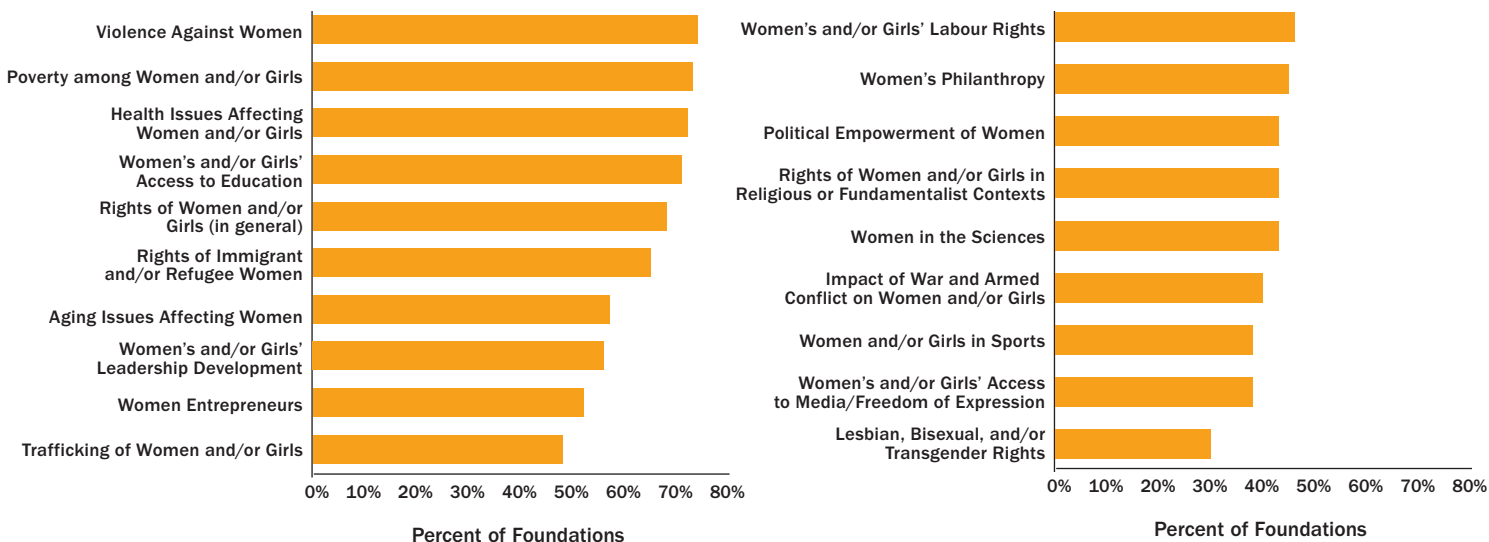
- ◆ *The majority of foundations surveyed (58 percent) allocated less than ten percent of their expenditures to programmes benefiting women and girls in 2009.* This includes one-quarter that did not designate any funds to programmes intended to benefit women and girls.
- ◆ *In 2009, the median percentage of total grant monies allocated by foundations in support of women and girls was 4.8 percent.*<sup>4</sup> The median percentage of the *total number of grants* allocated by foundations was 4.1 percent. These findings are based on analyses of more than 9,100 grants awarded by 42 foundations.
- ◆ *Although only a third of foundations surveyed said they specifically intended some of their programmatic activities to reach women and girls, substantially higher numbers of foundations expressed interest in various issues affecting women and girls.* Ninety percent of foundations expressed interest in at least one issue related to women and girls. On average, foundations endorsed eight issues of interest. Particularly high levels of interest were noted for violence against women (74 percent), poverty among women and/or girls (73 percent), and women and/or girls' access to education (71 percent).
- ◆ *Lesbian, bisexual, and transgender rights generated the least interest among foundations surveyed (30 percent).*
- ◆ *Nearly half of all grants identified as benefiting women and girls were in the area of human services (45 percent).* The second largest share of grants focused on human rights (21 percent).

- ◆ *Foundations that engage in grantmaking or programmatic activities specifically intended to benefit women and girls were significantly more likely than other foundations to be involved in human rights and social justice-oriented grantmaking.*

#### Foundation Approaches to Supporting Women and Girls

- ◆ *There are multiple points of entry for foundations in this work, as foundations have different reasons for and approaches to supporting women and girls depending upon their missions, histories, and operating philosophies.*
- ◆ *Foundations take diverse approaches in their support of women and girls.* Some foundations are directly engaged at the mission level and/or have a dedicated programme that focuses on women and girls. Others may not have a specific focus on women and girls, but integrate gender perspectives into their work nonetheless.
- ◆ *Though there are challenges inherent in this work, foundations that have successfully supported women and girls have identified key practices that have contributed to effective engagement.* These practices include: 1) developing strong board and executive staff leadership who understand the importance of giving to women and girls, 2) providing ongoing professional development for staff to build organisational capacity related to women and girls, 3) creating foundation practices, policies, and strategies that are flexible and adapted to fit the unique needs of organisations serving women and girls, and 4) paying close attention to the importance of data and impact.

#### Foundation Interest in Issues Affecting Women and Girls



Source: The Foundation Center, *Untapped Potential: European Foundation Funding For Women & Girls*, 2011. Based on a survey of 136 European independent, corporate, and public/fundraising foundations.

## MOVING FORWARD

- ♦ **Opportunities to expand foundation support for women and girls exist.** Our research revealed that the median percentage of foundation giving to women and girls was 4.8 percent. Our research also showed a wide gap in the number of foundations funding women and girls (62 percent) and the number of foundations interested in at least one issue area related to women and girls (90 percent). Although this research did not explore the reasons for this gap, one possible reason might be that foundations, despite their interest, have not found a tangible point of entry into this work. Efforts to tap into these interests might involve convening foundations based on issue areas garnering high levels of interest, such as violence against women, access to education, and poverty. Likewise, issue areas generating lower levels of interest, such as lesbian, bisexual, and transgender rights, might warrant awareness and outreach efforts to foster foundation interest and engagement.
- ♦ **Opportunities to deepen foundation support for women and girls exist.** While 62 percent of foundations said they allocated at least some of their expenditures in support of women and girls, only 37 percent indicated that they were doing this in an intentional way. Efforts to further articulate and communicate the value of consciously applying a gender lens to grantmaking and other programmatic activities could increase the percentage of foundations taking an intentional approach to funding women and girls, while improving programme effectiveness at the same time.

As for those foundations already intentionally engaged in this work, survey findings indicate that they have high levels of interest in a wide range of issues affecting women and girls, and are likely to be receptive to pursuing new areas of work. There are also opportunities for these foundations to become more deeply engaged by creating novel and effective ways to leverage their existing work, whether through building the capacity of grassroots women's organisations or raising the profile of their work through strategic partnerships. They can also serve as resources for foundations that are just beginning to explore the possibilities of funding women and girls in a more strategic way.

## ENDNOTES

1. Koele, I. (2010). 'How will international philanthropy be freed from landlocked tax barriers?' *European Taxation*, pp. 409–418.
2. As ranked by Philanthropy in Europe, "Crisis, what Crisis? European foundation giving soars over the last three years." [www.philanthropyineurope.com/articles/crisis\\_what\\_crisis.html](http://www.philanthropyineurope.com/articles/crisis_what_crisis.html), accessed on January 25, 2011.
3. Of note, the European Foundation Centre's survey of its membership, conducted in 2009, indicated that 13 percent of their member foundations focused on women and girls in their work, suggesting the present study overstates European foundation commitment to women and girls.
4. An October 2010 study of 127 women's rights organisations in Southeast Europe, Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States by the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) also noted the limited number of donors engaged in rights-based funding in support of women and girls.



This report was commissioned by Mama Cash and produced by the Foundation Center and Weisblatt & associés, in cooperation with the European Foundation Centre.

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The full report can be downloaded, free of charge, at [mamacash.org](http://mamacash.org) or [foundationcenter.org/gainknowledge/research/internationaltrends.html](http://foundationcenter.org/gainknowledge/research/internationaltrends.html).

This study was made possible in part by support from the Ford Foundation.

