

**A GUIDE TO  
GENDER IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION.

Policy decisions that appear gender neutral may have a differential impact on women and men, even when such an effect was neither intended nor envisaged. Gender impact assessment is carried out to avoid unintended negative consequences and improve the quality and efficiency of policies.

The Global Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing 1995, requests Governments and other actors *to mainstream a gender perspective into all policies and programmes, so that, before decisions are taken, an analysis is made of the effects on women and men respectively*. Gender impact assessment is a tool for realising this. In February 1996 the Commission adopted a Communication on Mainstreaming<sup>1</sup> as a first step towards implementing the commitment of the EU to gender mainstreaming at the Community level. In the follow-up Strategy Paper, agreed by the Inter-service Group on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men in February 1997, gender impact assessment in the Commission services is mentioned among the core measures.

The Treaty of Amsterdam formalises the mainstreaming commitment at the European level, as it explicitly mentions the *elimination of inequalities and the promotion of equality between women and men* among the tasks and objectives of the Community (Articles 2 and 3).

Gender impact assessment has been widely used in the area of development co-operation, where appropriate training and tools have been applied<sup>2</sup>. In the wake of the Beijing conference gender impact assessment has been adopted by a number of European governments as a tool for implementing mainstreaming. The present guide draws heavily on existing experience, and in particular, on the work of Mieke Verloo, Chair of the Group of Specialists on Mainstreaming of the Council of Europe.

This guide to gender impact assessment is intended for adaptation to the specific needs of each Directorate General and policy area, as appropriate. Relevant examples from all Directorates General and policy areas could in the future be annexed to the guide to improve its utility.

## 2. THE BASIC CONCEPTS

There are some concepts which are at the very core of the gender mainstreaming strategy. These may be defined as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> COM (96) 67 final of 21 February 1996 on: "Incorporating equal opportunities for women and men into all Community policies and activities"

<sup>2</sup> OECD/DAC/WID Gender Impact Assessment Form, used *inter alia* by DG IB, ILO Gender Training Package.

## **Sex and gender**

The existing differences between men and women are of a biological and social nature:

**Sex** refers to the biologically determined differences between men and women, that are universal.

**Gender** refers to the social differences between women and men that are learned, changeable over time and have wide variations both within and between cultures.

**Example:** *While only women can give birth (biologically determined), biology does not determine who will raise the children (gendered behaviour).*

## **Equality between women and men (gender equality)**

By gender equality we mean that all human beings be free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by strict gender roles; that the different behaviour, aspirations and needs of women and men are equally valued and favoured. Formal (*de jure*) equality is only a first step towards material (*de facto*) equality. Unequal treatment and incentive measures (positive action) may be necessary to compensate for past and present discrimination. Gender differences may be influenced by other structural differences, such as race/ethnicity and class. These dimensions (and others, such as age, disability, marital status, sexual orientation) may also be relevant to your assessment.

## **Mainstreaming**

In the Commission Communication on Mainstreaming (COM ((96)67) mainstreaming is defined as “not restricting efforts to promote equality to the implementation of specific measures, but mobilising all general policies and measures specifically for the purpose of achieving equality”.

The gender and equality dimension should be taken into account in all policies and activities; in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation phases

## **3. GENDER RELEVANCE**

It should be borne in mind that gender is a structural difference which affects the entire population. Neither women nor men should be treated like some special interest group among several such groups. On the contrary, gender affects, and indeed often reinforces, differences and vulnerabilities according to other structural differences, such as race/ethnicity, class, age, disability, sexual orientation etc.

Policies which **appear gender neutral** may on closer investigation turn out to affect women and men differently. Why? Because we find substantial **differences in the lives of women and men** in most policy fields; differences which may cause apparently neutral policies to impact differently on women and men and reinforce existing inequalities. Policies which are directed at, or have clear implications for, target

groups/population groups are, consequently, to a larger or lesser degree gender relevant.

### **CHECKING GENDER RELEVANCE**

The first step in a gender mainstreaming process is to establish whether gender is relevant to the policy on which you are working. In order to check gender relevance, you need to obtain and study sex-disaggregated data and to ask the right questions:

- \* Does the proposal concern one or more target groups? Will it affect the daily life of part(s) of the population?
- \* Are there differences between women and men in this policy field (with regard to rights, resources, participation, values and norms related to gender)?

If the answer to any of these two questions is positive, gender is relevant to your issue. An assessment should be made of the potential gender impact of the policy proposal.

## **4. GENDER IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

Gender impact assessment should be carried out once it is established that a certain policy has implications for gender relations. It is most successfully carried out at an early stage of the decision-making process, to allow for changes, and even major reorientation, of policies, when appropriate.

*Gender impact assessment means to compare and assess, according to gender relevant criteria, the current situation and trend with the expected development resulting from the introduction of the proposed policy.*

In order to carry out gender impact assessment you will take into account the existing differences between women and men, which are relevant to your policy area (see **1.** below), in order to ensure that the policy proposal you are working on contributes to eliminate inequalities and promote the Community objective of equality between women and men, embedded in Articles 2 and 3 of the new Treaty of Amsterdam (see **2.** below).

You will need sex-disaggregated data for your analysis. A certain expertise on the dynamics of gender relations and of Community policy on equality is needed. If not available, steps should be taken to acquire the necessary information and expertise (Eurostat, the officially appointed Gender Mainstreaming Official of your DG, the Equal Opportunities Unit V/D/5, or external experts, as appropriate.)

### **CRITERIA FOR GENDER IMPACT ASSESSMENT:**

- 1. Differences between women and men** in the policy field, such as:
  - \* **participation** (sex-composition of the target/population group(s), representation of women and men in decision-making positions)
  - \* **resources** (distribution of crucial resources such as time, space, information and money, political and economic power, education and training, job and professional career, new technologies, health care services, housing, means of transport, leisure)
  - \* **norms and values** which influence gender roles, division of labour by gender, the attitudes and behaviour of women and men respectively, and inequalities in the value attached to men and women or to masculine and feminine characteristics
  - \* **rights** pertaining to direct or indirect sex-discrimination, human rights (including freedom from sexual violence and degradation), and access to justice, in the legal, political or socio-economic environment
  
- 2. How can European policies** contribute to the *elimination of existing inequalities and promote equality between women and men* (in compliance with Articles 2 and 3 of the Treaty of Amsterdam); in participation rates, in the distribution of resources, benefits, tasks and responsibilities in private and public life, in the value and attention accorded to male and female, to masculine and feminine characteristics, behaviour and priorities?

## GENDER RELEVANCE – SOME EXAMPLES

In the following examples the references to the main criteria for assessment, namely **participation, resources, rights, norms and values**, are set out in **bold**.

**Example:** *Looking at an apparently neutral policy sector, such as **transport**, closer scrutiny will reveal substantial differences between women and men in the patterns of use and access to public and private means of transport. While women less frequently than men have access to a private car, they are more frequent users of public transport. Women consequently stand most to gain from improvements in the availability and cost profile of public transport. These inequalities have implications for the **participation** of women and men respectively among various target groups of the transport sector. They are influenced by the lack of gender balance among decision-makers in the field. They reflect gender differences in the distribution of **resources** (such as a private car) and reinforce existing inequalities with regard to time constraints (to the extent that a private car represents time efficiency). The decision-making process within the family regarding the use of a limited resource, such as the family car, is likely to be influenced by social **norms and values** as to the relative importance attributed to the needs of the husband and wife respectively.*

**Example:** *When regulating **working time**, or the rights and constraints pertaining to **part-time** work, the gender differences in time spent in paid and unpaid work should be taken into account. The large majority of part-time workers are female. Women spend on average two thirds of their working time in unpaid activities; men only one third. These are differences which impact on the **participation** by gender (level of economic activity), and on the distribution of **resources** (time, income, career opportunities). **Norms and values** contribute to gendered choices in education and career and in the internal distribution in households of tasks and responsibilities. Differences in **rights** pertaining to full-time and part-time workers will impact differently on women and men. Gender impact assessment will help prevent “your” policy proposal from further reinforcing existing differences; in participation, distribution of resources, discriminatory norms and values and structural direct or indirect discrimination.*

It should be borne in mind that both women and men are bearers of gender roles. Policies are gender-sensitive if they take into account the particularities pertaining to the lives of both women and men, while aiming at eliminating inequalities and promoting an equal distribution of resources. Not only women, but also men and society at large stand to gain from gender equality and an equal distribution by gender of benefits, tasks and responsibilities. Art. 119.4 of the Treaty of Amsterdam explicitly allows positive action in the field of employment and vocational activities in favour of **the under-represented sex**.

**Example:**

*In the framework of the **Action Plan for the Single Market**, employment desegregation will need to be seriously addressed as one approach to **eliminating labour market***

*rigidities*<sup>3</sup>. Employment desegregation policies have traditionally aimed at widening the occupational choices of women. While these efforts need to be maintained, they need to be complemented by positive action aimed at promoting the **participation** of men in “female” professions (horizontal gender segregation). The current division of labour by gender is a barrier to labour market flexibility and restricts the number of potential candidates for any vacancy. The “glass ceiling” remains a barrier to female access to high level posts (vertical gender segregation). With the current demographic trend towards an ageing of the population and increased work force participation by women, employment opportunities in the care sector (child, elderly and other dependant care) are likely to increase. Incentives measures (**rights**) to promote male participation in the care sector could help in meeting an increasing demand for labour in this sector. This could offer new job opportunities for unskilled and semi-skilled men, while at the same time promoting a more equal pattern of work distribution between women and men. Positive action in favour of men to a careful selection professions related to child care (child care, child welfare, primary school), has been initiated in Norway. The idea is that new male role models will impact positively on the gender socialisation of boys and girls. It might also contribute to modifying existing **norms and values** regarding men’s and women’s work. The problem of low pay in the “female” professions (**resources**) is an additional barrier to the successful recruitment of men to these occupations. A better representation of men in these professions would, however, be likely to impact positively on the wage levels.

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<sup>3</sup> See the report of the OECD: “Shaping structural change. The role of women”, Paris 1992 for an exposition of the relation between employment segregation and labour market rigidities.