

Gender audit



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A gender audit is essentially a “social audit”, and belongs to the category of “quality audits”, which distinguishes it from traditional “financial audits”.

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What is gender audit?

A gender audit is a tool to assess and check the institutionalisation of gender equality into organisations, including in their policies, programmes, projects and/or provision of services, structures, proceedings and budgets [1].

Definition and purpose

Gender audits allow organisations ‘to set their own houses in order, and change aspects of the organisational culture which discriminate against women staff and women “beneficiaries”[2].

As a method for gender mainstreaming, gender audits help organisations identify and understand gender patterns within their composition, structures, processes, organisational culture and management of human resources, and in the design and delivery of policies and services. They also help assess the impact of organisational performance and its management on gender equality within the organisation. Gender audits establish a baseline against which progress can be measured over time, identifying critical gender gaps and challenges, and making recommendations of how they can be addressed through improvements and innovations [3].

Although there is no standard approach for carrying out a gender audit, international organisations use two main approaches: participatory gender audit and the gender integration framework.

Read more about gender audit approaches

The International Labour Organisation, one of the first organisations to carry out gender audits, defines **participatory gender audit** as a tool and process based on a participatory methodology, which aims to promote organisational learning on mainstreaming gender practically. Participatory gender audit assesses to what extent an organisation implements gender mainstreaming effectively in its structures, processes, procedures, policies, programmes, projects and in the services provided. It also assesses to what extent gender mainstreaming is institutionalised in these areas. The key methods used are desk review; semi-structured interviews with staff and a collective workshop [4].

Participatory gender audit differs from other types of audits by its participatory approach in the programming and implementation of the audit. Its main objectives are to:

- produce knowledge and information on the extent to which gender mainstreaming is institutionalised within the organisation and within the development and delivery of policies, programmes, projects, products and services;
- assess the level of resources allocated to and spent on gender mainstreaming and gender equality activities;
- provide information on the extent to which gender is mainstreamed in human resources policies and whether there is a gender balance in staff at different levels of the organisation;
- set up an initial baseline of performance on gender mainstreaming in the respective organisation to be used as a benchmark to measure progress on gender equality across time, departments and with other organisations;
- measure progress on gender mainstreaming plans/strategies and recommend revisions, if necessary;

- identify mechanisms that have contributed to mainstreaming gender within the respective organisation and share them within and outside the organisation;
- provide recommendations to improve the performance of the respective organisation in ensuring gender equality [5].

The **gender integration framework** was developed in 1999 by InterAction [6]. According to this framework, gender unequal organisations can evolve towards gender-sensitive ones only if the gender perspective is mainstreamed in four components of an organisation.

- **Political will and leadership.** The way in which leaders commit to support gender equality within the organisation, and communicate and prove their support through concrete actions.
- **Technical capacity.** The level of institutionalisation of gender-sensitive organisational processes and of staff capacities, abilities, skills and qualifications on gender equality needed for effective mainstreaming in the organisation.
- **Accountability.** The mechanisms by which an organisation integrates and carries through its commitment to gender equality values in its policies, programmes, projects, services and products.
- **Organisational culture.** The norms, beliefs, values and behaviours that enhance or hinder gender equality in an organisation. In practice, organisational culture refers to how staff interact with each other, the ideas that are considered acceptable and expected and rewarded behaviours.

A gender audit usually includes two dimensions.

- 1 An internal audit.** This dimension refers to how much an organisation fosters gender equality internally within its organisational, managerial structure and internal work, and whether these contribute to gender equality in the organisation. An internal gender audit monitors and assesses the relative progress made in gender mainstreaming, contributes to capacity building and collective organisational ownership for gender equality initiatives, and sharpens organisational learning on gender [7]. (Read more on EIGE's Toolkit on Gender Institutional Transformation).
- 2 An external audit.** This dimension aims to assess to what extent an organisation mainstreams gender in its policies, programmes, projects and services in terms of content, delivery and evaluation. External gender audits evaluate to what extent gender integration fosters the inclusion of, and benefits to, women and men involved in or affected by the

organisation's policies, programmes, projects or services provided [8].

When applied to policies, programmes, projects or services, a gender audit starts by exploring to what extent gender equality is mainstreamed in high-level policy objectives and priorities, and further assesses to what extent policy intentions are actually carried out in specific initiatives (e.g. programmes, projects, services). At the planning level, a gender audit analyses whether there are gender-specific objectives or if gender is mainstreamed in the general objectives of the policy in order to guarantee that they contribute to close gender gaps, ensure that women and men benefit equally or in accordance with their gender needs and that inequalities are not perpetuated. Similarly, a gender audit goes on to analyse how gender is mainstreamed into the implementation phase of the policy, programme or project. Finally, a gender audit of the monitoring and evaluation phase investigates whether targets and indicators include a gender perspective both in terms of sex-disaggregated data and progress towards gender equality [9].

How does a gender audit work?

A gender audit includes several steps.

- 1 Preparing the gender audit.**
 - **Review the organisational readiness to a gender audit.** The first step is to obtain the commitment of top management and within the organisation itself to gender equality principles, technical capacity and competences on gender equality and gender mainstreaming.
 - **Creation of a gender audit team and definition of a gender audit strategy to be implemented within the organisation.** The team may be composed of internal staff in charge of gender equality, diversity management and human resources, or it may be made up of both internal staff and external consultants contracted to develop and implement the gender audit methodology. The team is responsible for drawing up a gender audit strategy; clarifying the gender equality objectives of internal and external policies and strategies as the starting point for the audit; determining at which level the gender audit will be carried out; and carrying out a mapping of relevant internal actors, always ensuring gender balance [10].
 - **Definition of the conceptual and methodological framework of the gender audit to be implemented.** It is recommended to adopt a participatory approach to ensure that all the relevant gender-specific concerns of actors involved are taken into consideration and to gain their support for the implementation of the audit [11]. The

conceptual framework will depend on the audit's focus and level (for example, policy and organisation, or only one of them) and on the organisational or policy objectives on gender equality against which the audit is conducted. The conceptual framework should also include a set of gender indicators to measure the state of play on gender equality and gender mainstreaming in the organisation, and to document the outcomes of the internal and/ or external initiatives implemented by the organisation. It is important that the auditors' beliefs or attitudes are not gender-biased and that gender-sensitive language is used throughout the audit.

2 Carrying out the audit. The implementation phase consists of the following methods to collect, analyse and formulate the audit's findings.

- **Desk review and analysis of the organisation's key documents.**
- **Consultation** through interviews, focus group discussions, self-assessments, surveys or other channels of consultation. Consultations will aim to complement information collected through the desk review and analysis and to gather further evidence.
- **Tabulation and analysis of the collected data.** Data may be analysed using different gender analysis methodologies.
- **Sharing and discussing the main findings** with the women and men who participated in the audit and the managers of the organisation before the final report is presented.

3 Drafting of gender equality plan and creation of a gender committee. Drawing on the findings gathered in the audit, a gender action plan will be drafted with the aim to improve gender mainstreaming and gender equality in the organisation. It is recommended to create a gender committee involving managers, internal staff and stakeholders, in order to take forward the recommendations from the audit report and for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the gender action plan.

Read more about how a gender audit works

To ensure the effective implementation of gender audits, auditors need to pay particular attention to the following issues.

- **Senior-level commitment** to implement the audit is an important starting point to carry out and follow through the audit's outcomes. If this is weak or absent, auditors need to create a shared understanding of the value of gender audits within senior and middle management and amongst staff.

- **Analysis of benefits and risks** in undertaking the audit is important, particularly to mitigate identified risks. Risks may arise if the audit proves that the organisation does not follow through on its gender commitments, which in turn will affect its reputation. Another risk relates to a lack of commitment to use the audit results to improve gender equality in the organisation.
 - Use of a **participatory approach** in all audit phases.
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Key questions

- How is gender equality perceived in the organisation? Is there broad support or internal resistance to the concept?
- Do staff feel that gender mainstreaming is a priority for them and for the management? Do they have the awareness and knowledge to make gender a priority?
- Do staff feel they have adequate understanding to address gender (in) equalities in programmes/activities?
- Do staff feel supported to design programmes that promote gender equality and/or, where appropriate, programmes that target women?
- Does the organisational culture, policies, procedures and processes favour or hinder gender mainstreaming? Is there accountability within the organisation for gender mainstreaming?
- Are initiatives based on a gender analysis, in order to guarantee that any inequalities between women and men due to their different gender needs and gender roles have been identified and taken into account?
- To what extent is gender included in the objectives of policies, programmes, projects or services provided?
- Are policies, programmes, projects or services provided designed to target women and men equally and in accordance with their gender needs or, where appropriate, target women or men particularly with a view to close gender gaps?
- Are indicators and data collection sex disaggregated? Do policies, programmes, projects or services provided include gender indicators in order to monitor the policy, programme, project or service from a gender perspective? Are there indicators/targets for all gender-related objectives?
- Do indicators address progress towards increased gender equality and change in social and institutional norms?

- Is there a specific budget for activities designed to achieve gender equality?
- Is training on gender analysis included in the initiatives to ensure implementers have the appropriate skills?
- Are gender indicators, gender analysis and gender impact assessments used throughout all policy, programme and project cycles?
- What are the accountability mechanisms to achieve gender equality results? Do staff feel they are accountable for reporting results on gender-related objectives?
- To what extent are gender challenges addressed in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of initiatives?

Further information



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Endnotes

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Other resources

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