

Gender Impact Assessment

Why use Gender Impact Assessment

Traditionally, government policy and legislation have been viewed as gender-neutral and value-free instruments, on the assumption that the formulation and administration of public policy benefits all members of the public equally.

However, structural gender inequalities are still embedded in our society. Even if laws treat women and men as equals, women still do not have equal access to and control over material and non-material resources and assets. That is why addressing people suffering inequalities in an equal way causes, in practice, the perpetuation of these inequalities. That is actually what happens when existing gender inequalities in women's and men's economic, political and social position are not taken into consideration. That is why policies focused on target groups defined in broad terms (no distinguishing between women and men) are usually not neutral, but gender blind.

Although it may not be intentional, these policies often impact women and men differently and they may even strengthen social, cultural or economic gender inequalities. If these different gender impacts are not taken into account at the design stage, the policy in question will actually be gender blind. To avoid this, it is necessary to put people at the centre of the intervention, to meet the different needs and interests of women and men, to identify gender inequalities in terms of access to and control of resources, to consider the impact of roles and gender-based stereotypes, to anticipate the possible differential effects on women and men and to ensure that the outcomes of policies will support gender equality.

In this context, gender impact assessment is the first step toward avoiding such unintended effects, as it allows policymakers to foresee the impact of a new regulation, policy or programme on the lives of women and men and the impact on gender equality.

A gender impact assessment can provide added value in a number of different ways:

Aid towards gender equality

Knowing how inequality operates, how it is impacted by public policy, how it is present in the different sectors and spheres of life, is key to the elimination of gender inequality. A GIA is perhaps the best first step towards policies that help to realize this objective.

Better policy making

Gender Impact Assessment – contributes to make better policy and legislation. Better policy means reaching the target group, safeguarding against potential pitfalls and maximizing the scope for obtaining the intended objectives.

Better governance

A systematic and published GIA promotes transparency of decision-making and accountability. Performing gender impact assessment ensures that policy-making and legislative work is of higher quality and has a greater relevance for society, because it is responsive to the needs of all citizens - women and men, girls and boys.

A tool for learning

GIA allows policy makers to build up their capacity on gender equality. The exercise of asking questions, accumulating data and other relevant information, contributes toward building up a storehouse of on-the-ground information about gender inequality. Once this capacity is begun, policy makers are better able and more confident when it comes to equipping themselves to produce policies with better gender equality outcomes.