

What is gender mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming has been embraced internationally as a strategy towards realising gender equality. It involves the integration of a gender perspective into the preparation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, regulatory measures and spending programmes, with a view to promoting equality between women and men, and combating discrimination.

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Key concepts

Why is it important?

Gender mainstreaming ensures that policy-making and legislative work is of higher quality and has a greater relevance for society, because it makes policies respond more effectively to the needs of all citizens – women and men, girls and boys. Gender mainstreaming makes public interventions more effective and ensures that inequalities are not perpetuated.

Gender mainstreaming does not only aim to avoid the creation or reinforcement of inequalities, which can have adverse effects on both women and men. It also implies analysing the existing situation, with the purpose of identifying inequalities, and developing policies which aim to redress these inequalities and undo the mechanisms that caused them.

Who is responsible for gender mainstreaming?

At European level, the EU Institutions are in charge of implementing gender mainstreaming, whereas at national level, it is up to the governments of Member States. However, it is not only the responsibility of specific individuals working in certain areas or units. While specific structures should be established and persons responsible appointed, the responsibility for implementing gender mainstreaming should be with the entire staff of public institutions, under the leadership of the management.

[Learn more about the responsible structures in the EU institutions](#)

[Learn more about the responsible structures in the EU Member States](#)

How does it work?

A political commitment for gender equality and a compatible legal framework are the basic conditions for the development of a successful gender mainstreaming strategy. In addition to concrete objectives and targets in the strategy, gender mainstreaming requires a clear action plan. Such plan should take into account the context, satisfy the necessary conditions, cover all the relevant dimensions, foresee the use of concrete methods and tools, set out the responsibilities and make sure that the necessary competences exist to achieve the anticipated results within a planned time frame.

Dimensions of gender mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming requires both integrating a gender perspective to the content of the different policies, and addressing the issue of representation of women and men in the given policy area.

Both dimensions – gender representation and gender responsive content - need to be taken into consideration in all phases of the policy-making process.

[Click on the image to see an overview of the different components of gender mainstreaming](#)



Gender representation in policy areas

Addressing the issue of representation means looking at the representation of women and men as policy beneficiaries, as well as their representation in the labour force and in the decision making processes.

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Women are beneficiaries of EU policies to the same extent as men. Yet, compared to men, they are significantly underrepresented in decision-making positions. By collecting information on the representation of both sexes as users/beneficiaries, the policy measures can be better targeted and their effects on different groups better estimated.

The representation of women and men working in different policy areas varies across policy sectors and according to the type of work or functions. For instance, women are underrepresented in the renewable energy sector (22.1 % of the workforce). They are generally employed in lower-skilled jobs (primarily in administration and communication), while more skilled and better paid jobs are primarily held by men. In the field of education, women are overrepresented as teachers at the levels of primary and lower secondary education, but their representation within decision-making positions is rather low, especially in tertiary education.

When there is an unbalanced participation of women and men in the planning and decision-making processes on policy actions, this may affect the outcomes that impact both women and men. Policies benefit from diverse perspectives: a more balanced representation of both sexes would bring in different experiences that may improve the decision-making process and overall results.

Learn more about women's representation in the main EU policy areas

Gender mainstreaming is as much about addressing gender inequalities in society through policies, as it is about the organisations' own ways of working. Addressing the issue of representation within institutions also involves addressing the gender dimension of the organisational structures and the working procedures.

Learn more about Institutional Transformation

Gender responsive content of the policies

Although numbers are important, it is pertinent to also consider how gender relates to the content of policy measures, to gain a better understanding of how women and men would benefit from them. A gender responsive policy ensures that the needs of all citizens, women and men, are equally addressed.

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

However, structural gender inequalities are still embedded in our society. Even if the laws treat women and men as equals, women still do not have equal access to and control over resources and assets.

Policies focused on the general public often impact women and men differently. If these different gender impacts are not taken into account, the policy will be gender-blind. To avoid this, it is necessary to take into account the different needs and interests of women and men, to identify gender inequalities in access to and control of resources, to consider the impact of gender based stereotypes and traditional gender roles, to anticipate different effects on women and men, and to ensure gender equality.

Learn more about the importance of gender in the main EU policy areas

A gender impact assessment is the first step towards avoiding policies that fail to take into account a gender perspective. Such an assessment analyses the impact of a new regulation, policy or programme on the advancement of gender equality and in turn foresees implications it might have on women's and men's lives.

Learn how to conduct a Gender Impact Assessment

Enabling conditions for gender mainstreaming

An effective implementation of gender mainstreaming requires preparation and organisation. People in decision-making positions can make a particular difference here, as they have more power to introduce changes.

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Key elements to consider are:

Preparation: set up a plan for the implementation of gender mainstreaming, define steps and milestones, assign tasks and responsibilities, formalise and communicate the plan.

Resources: sufficient resources need to be made available; effective gender

mainstreaming requires budget and time. Think about resources for awareness-raising and capacity-building initiatives. The use of special (external) expertise might also be considered.

Stakeholder involvement: close liaison with all policy stakeholders is essential throughout the policy cycle to take on board the concerns, expectations, and views of the target groups. It is recommended to cement opportunities and structures for stakeholder involvement and consultations into the policy process.

Monitoring and evaluation: set in place accountability mechanisms to ensure an adequate follow-up of implementation and progress. Foresee regular reporting and share results.

Knowledge generation: building up knowledge on gender equality and good practices in gender mainstreaming contributes to making the approach more effective. You can contribute to the institutional learning by collecting data and information on indicators, reporting on progress and facilitating experience exchange.

Gender expertise: this expertise should be internal, but the use of special external expertise might be considered as well.

Gender Mainstreaming Cycle

A practical guide to integrating the gender perspective into a policy/programming cycle

Integrating the gender perspective in a policy means that equality between women and men, as the overarching principle, should be taken into consideration in all decisions, in each phase of the policy-making process, by all the actors involved.

The policy process is understood as a multi-stage cycle, including defining, planning, implementing and checking (monitoring and evaluating). In many cases, these stages are turned into a cycle, with each step being repeated as changes occur. For example, when a policy is evaluated, it may reveal new problems that need to be addressed for re-programming.

The gender mainstreaming cycle presented here can be adjusted to different public policy/programming processes. The chart below refers to the specific stages of the cycle and the necessary elements that need to be given attention within each stage. Specific gender mainstreaming methods and tools that should be used within each of the cycle stages are also included. Some methods and tools, such as consulting with stakeholders or providing gender equality training to the actors involved, can be useful in more than one stage. Moreover, it is important to remember that when dealing with data they should be sex-disaggregated. EIGE's Gender Statistics Database is a useful tool that can be used to find reliable, comparable and up-to-date information on equality between women and men.

EIGE's collection of good practices should also be consulted as it contains examples of proven approaches, policies and practices that have been effective in the implementation of gender mainstreaming strategies in the EU Member States.

For more information on the different stages of the gender mainstreaming cycle, click on each phase.

Define Tools

Gender statistics
Gender analysis
Gender impact assessment
Gender stakeholders consultation

Plan Tools

Gender budgeting
Gender Procurement
Gender indicators

Check Tools

Gender monitoring
Gender evaluation

Act Tools

Gender equality training
Gender-sensitive institutional transformation
Gender awareness-raising

The EU approach to gender mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming is not a policy goal in itself, but a means to achieve gender equality. Equality between women and men is recognised by the EU as a fundamental right, a common value of the EU, and a necessary condition for the achievement of the EU objectives of growth, employment and social cohesion.

Since 1996, the Commission committed itself to a 'dual approach' towards realising gender equality. This approach involves mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies, while also implementing specific measures to eliminate, prevent or remedy gender inequalities. Both approaches go hand in hand, and one cannot replace the other.

Browse through our Timeline to discover the milestones of gender equality in the EU.

Timeline

Treaty of Rome

Treaty of Rome. The Treaty incorporates the principle of equal pay for equal work (Art 119).

1957 - 1957

European Commission's Communication on Incorporating Equal Opportunities for Women and Men into all Community Policies and Activities

Incorporating Equal Opportunities for Women and Men into all Community Policies and Activities: The Commission committed itself to gender mainstreaming as a strategy for the promotion of gender equality in all its policies and activities, alongside the implementation of specific measures. It thus committed itself to a 'dual approach' towards realising gender equality that "...involves not restricting efforts to promote equality to the implementation of specific measures to help women, but mobilising all general policies and measures specifically for the purpose of achieving equality"

1996 - 1996

Treaty of Amsterdam

Treaty of Amsterdam. The Treaty substantially strengthened the legal basis for Community action in favour of equality between women and men. Articles 2 and 3 of the Treaty formalise the Community commitment to gender mainstreaming by establishing equality between women and men as a specific task of the Community as well as a horizontal objective affecting all Community policies and programmes.

1999 - 1999

European Pact for Gender Equality 2011-2020

https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/lisa/119628.pdf

2011 - 2020

European Parliament resolution on gender mainstreaming in the European Parliament

European Parliament resolution on gender mainstreaming in the European Parliament: The Parliament adopted its first [Resolution](#) on gender mainstreaming, which contains a commitment to regularly adopting and implementing a policy plan for gender mainstreaming, and suggests some guidelines for implementing gender mainstreaming in the committees' and delegations' policy work.

2003 - 2003

First European Pact for Gender Equality

First European Pact for Gender Equality.

2006 - 2006

EU Roadmap for Equality between Women and Men for 2006-2010

[EU Roadmap for Equality between Women and Men for 2006-2010](#): The Roadmap outlines the following priorities: Equal economic independence for women and men; Reconciliation of private and professional life; Equal representation in decision-making; Eradication of all forms of gender-based violence; Elimination of gender stereotypes; Promotion of gender equality in external and development policies.

2006 - 2010

TFEU - Treaty on the functioning of the European Union

TFEU - Treaty on the functioning of the European Union. Article 19 of the TFEU provides the legal base for EU legislation combatting discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. The Treaty also takes gender into account in the following fields: Principle of gender mainstreaming: 'In all its activities, the Union shall aim to eliminate inequalities, and to promote equality between women and men' (Article 8); Social exclusion and discrimination (Article 9); Principle of equality between man and woman with regard to labour market opportunities and treatment (Article 157); Prevention and action against all kinds of trafficking and sexual abuse of women (Article 79); The fight against domestic violence (Declaration on Article 8 of TEU).

2007 - 2007

Communication "Non-discrimination and equal opportunities: A renewed commitment"

Communication "Non-discrimination and equal opportunities: A renewed commitment". The Communication establishes the framework for the Commission to carry out [different activities aiming to fight against discrimination](#)

2008 - 2008

Treaty of Lisbon

[Treaty of Lisbon](#). The Treaty includes enhancements to the social dimension of the European Union. It adds the non-discrimination principle and equality between women and men to the values of the European Union (Article 2 TEU) and mandates that the Union shall combat discrimination and promote equality between women and men (Article 3 TEU).

2009 - 2009

Charter of Fundamental Rights

[Charter of Fundamental Rights](#). Article 21 Article 21 affirms the principle of non-discrimination based on any ground, including sex. Article 23 relates to women's rights and gender equality, affirming that 'equality between women and men must be ensured in all areas, including employment, work and pay'

2010 - 2010

Strategy for Equality between Women and Men for 2010-2015

Strategy for Equality between Women and Men for 2010-2015: The Strategy identifies the following priority areas for action: Equal economic independence; Equal pay for equal work and work of equal value; Equality in decision-making; Dignity, integrity and an end to gender-based violence; Gender equality in external actions (including the EU plan of action); Horizontal issues. In this Strategy, the Commission has specified gender equality goals for each priority field. Furthermore, all Directorates-General are invited to set gender equality objectives in the Commission's yearly programming cycle and work programme. Monitoring of the Strategy is ensured through the publication of annual reports, as well as through a [Mid-Term Review](#) and final evaluation. In addition, all Directorates-General have to assess the impact of gender equality: 1) as part of the social impact of the Impact Assessment exercise, 2) in evaluation, and 3) in the budget, where relevant. For the implementation of the Strategy, a [Commission staff working document](#) was approved on actions to be implemented by the different Directorates-General as their contribution to the strategy. The actions demonstrate the commitment of these Directorates-General concerning gender equality in their policy field.

Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016-2019

The [Strategy](#) identified five priority areas for actions: Equal economic independence for women and men; Equal pay for work of equal value; Equality in decision-making; Dignity, integrity and ending gender-based violence; Promoting gender equality beyond the EU.

Want to know more?

European Commission policy documents

European Commission (2010). Communication From The Commission To The European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic And Social Committee And The Committee Of The Regions. [Strategy For Equality Between Women And Men 2010-2015](#) (SEC(2010) 1079 / SEC(2010) 1080)

European Commission. (2010). [Actions to implement the Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2010-2015](#). Commission Staff Working Document accompanying the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. (SEC(2010) 1079/2)

European Commission. (2011). [Strategy for equality between women and men 2010-2015: Publications Office of the European Union](#).

European Commission. (2015). [Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality 2016-2019: Publications Office of the European Union](#).

Gender Mainstreaming Resources from the European Commission

European Commission – DG Human Resources and Security (n.d.). Gender mainstreaming[1].

European Commission – DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities (2008). [Manual for gender mainstreaming – employment, social inclusion and social protection policies](#)

European Commission – DG Employment and Social Affairs (2005). [EQUAL Guide on Gender Mainstreaming](#)

European Commission. (1998). [A Guide to Gender Impact Assessment](#).

European Commission – DG Development and Cooperation (2004). [Toolkit on mainstreaming gender equality in EC Development cooperation](#).

Gender Mainstreaming Resources from other institutions / governments

United Nations Development Programme (2007). [Gender mainstreaming in practice: a toolkit](#). Edited by Nadja Dolata and prepared by Astrida Niemanis, Dono Abdurazakova, Shannon Brooker, Anneli Gustafsson, Mamura Nasirova, Jafar Javan and Louise Sperl Council of Europe (2009). [Gender budgeting: practical implementation handbook](#).

Prepared by Sheila Quinn

Council of Europe (2004). [Gender mainstreaming: Conceptual framework, methodology and presentation of good practices. Final report of activities of the Group of Specialists on Mainstreaming \(EG-S-MS\)](#)

Gender mainstreaming tools, films and other resources available at [Includegender.org](#)

Swedish Government Official Reports (2007). [Gender Mainstreaming Manual](#) – A book of practical methods from the Swedish Gender Mainstreaming Support Committee (JämStöd).

National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (2012). [Gender Mainstreaming in Practice – Step-by-Step Guide for Gender Impact Assessment](#).

Belgian Institute for the Equality of Women and Men (2007). [Equal Opportunities for men and women in public procurement contracts – A few recommendations](#).

Other resources

European Commission (1998). [100 words for equality](#).

European Commission – DG Employment (2008). [EU Gender Equality Law](#). Prepared by Susanne Burri and Sacha Prechal

European Commission – DG Justice (2011). [Compendium of practice on Non-Discrimination/Equality Mainstreaming](#)

About this Platform

The European Institute for Gender Equality created this Platform on Gender Mainstreaming to support the EU institutions and governmental bodies with the integration of a gender perspective in their work.

This online Platform provides insights on the relevance of gender in a variety of policy areas. It also suggests what EU officials and civil servants in the EU countries can practically do to take account of gender aspects in their daily tasks and responsibilities.

This online Platform helps to improve individual competences to mainstream gender throughout the different stages of the process of policy/programme/project development and implementation. Understanding how to design, plan, implement, monitor and evaluate policies from a gender perspective will strengthen EU policies, increase their societal relevance and responsiveness.

The focus of this online Platform is on gender as a social category. Gender as a social concept is always linked to and interwoven with other social categories like ethnicity, age, religion, sexual orientation, disability, or health status.