

International organizations

Council of Europe

Since the 1980s, the Council of Europe has provided help and assistance to its Members in the achievement of gender equality. Its commitment to gender equality has resulted in a strong legal and policy framework in particular, most important treaties like the Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (CETS No. 197) and the on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (CETS No. 210). The Steering Committee for Equality between Women and Men (CDEG) had been the internal structure of the Council of Europe responsible for ensuring the implementation of legal provisions and other developments in the areas of gender equality.

This approach was changed in 2012, when the Council of Europe Transversal Programme on Gender Equality was launched. Its aim is increasing the visibility and the impact of gender equality standards and supporting their implementation in Member States, including gender mainstreaming. In this regard, the Gender Equality Commission was established to help ensure the mainstreaming of gender equality into all Council of Europe policies and to bridge the gap between commitments made at international level and the reality of women in Europe. The priority areas are: combating gender stereotypes, especially in the media; equal access to justice, combating violence against women; participation and decision-making; and gender mainstreaming.

All 28 EU Member States belong to the 47 state members of the Council of Europe and some of them have representatives on the elected Gender Equality Commission, on which the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) has observer status.

United Nations

The UN Mandate on gender mainstreaming

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After the Nairobi and Vienna conferences, the 1995 UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing clearly established gender mainstreaming as the major global strategy for ensuring the incorporation of gender perspectives in all areas of societal development and the promotion of gender equality (United Nations, 1995).

In 1996, the UN General Assembly stressed the importance of gender mainstreaming calling upon the United Nations to promote an 'active and visible policy' of mainstreaming of gender perspectives (United Nations, 1996). The 1997 UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) report further elaborated on the definition and relevance of gender mainstreaming (United Nations Economic and Social Council, 1997b).

The Beijing Platform for Action, ECOSOC Agreed Conclusions 1997/2 on 'Mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system' and all other intergovernmental mandates called for all entities within the United Nations to take gender perspectives into account in their work programmes. Subsequent resolutions of the General Assembly recalled the same principle and other UN bodies have provided explicit mandates for gender mainstreaming in specific areas of work of the UN.

In 2006, the UN Secretary-General asked the high level committees for programme and management of the Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) to develop, in cooperation with his Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, a system-wide gender mainstreaming policy to accelerate implementation of ECOSOC Conclusions 1997/2. After being endowed with the mandate to promote enhanced coordination, coherence and accountability of the system in its work on gender equality, UN Women took up the subject in 2011 and presented the system-wide action plan to the CEB in 2012. The CEB adopted the System-wide Action Plan (UN-SWAP) on gender equality and women's empowerment, to be applied throughout the UN system. For the first time, the UN has a set of common measures with which to measure progress in its gender-related work, including the mainstreaming of the gender perspective across all its operations.

On 24 July 2013, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) adopted a resolution on mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system (E/2013/L.14), making the UN accountable for gender equality and women's empowerment.

UN Women

The UN General Assembly created UN Women in July 2010 and decided to transfer to the new entity the mandates and functions of the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI), the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the International Research and Training

Development and for Women (DPAW) and the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) - with the additional role of leading, coordinating and promoting accountability of the United Nations system in its work on gender equality and the empowerment of women. The General Assembly also decided that support of gender mainstreaming across the United Nations system would be an integral part of the work of the new entity. Additionally, in its founding resolution 64/289, the General Assembly also decided that UN Women should provide - through its normative support functions and operational activities – guidance and technical support to all Member States at their request, on gender mainstreaming, gender equality and the empowerment and rights of women and girls.

Since the creation of UN Women in 2010, standards of gender mainstreaming within the United Nations system have increased at the global, regional and national levels (e.g. through adoption of UN SWAP).

UN-SWAP

The United Nations System-wide Action Plan (UN-SWAP) on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women was a landmark action plan that created the first set of common metrics for the United Nations system to evaluate progress in its gender-related work. The UN-SWAP is a unified gender equality framework designed to promote accountability, common understanding, enhanced coherence, systematic self-assessment, and a steady targeted and progressive approach to which the UN system entities can aspire and adhere in their work on gender equality and the empowerment of women at the corporate level. Reporting on the SWAP commenced in 2013, setting a baseline for the UN system. The 2013 report, which included data from 55 United Nations entities on progress made on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, emphasises that UN entities recognise that gender equality and the empowerment of women contribute strongly to development and that gender mainstreaming remains a most viable means of advancing the goal of gender equality and the empowerment of women. Despite the availability of some capacity to carry out the work on gender equality, the focus of this work is mostly on process rather than on impact and results. The different practices, tools and methodologies for implementing the UN's strategy on gender mainstreaming also constrain system-wide comparability, assessment and planning.