

Gender stakeholder consultation



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What is gender stakeholder consultation?

Gender stakeholder consultation promotes the participation of women and men in the policymaking process to ensure that their voices are heard and their priorities are reflected in policies, programmes and projects.

Gender stakeholder consultation is the process of engaging and ensuring the meaningful participation of women and men, including civil society organisations and gender experts, in the policymaking process [1]. Gender stakeholder consultation promotes evidence-based and participatory decision making, which takes into consideration the different priorities and needs of women and men, including the most marginalised groups and those that are traditionally excluded from decision-making processes.

Definition and purpose

Here the term 'stakeholder' refers to those who deliver, influence, are impacted by and benefit from a public policy. Consultation refers to obtaining stakeholders' feedback, views and opinions on gender equality-related issues with a view to informing the scope and content of a specific intervention/issue, decision, a proposed policy or analysis of an issue.

Gender stakeholder consultation aims to engage the diverse perspectives of different groups of women and men affected by a public-policy decision in order to: (a) better define the issues under consideration; (b) select between different types of solutions; and (c) reach a consensus. In this manner, gender stakeholder consultation leads to better-informed decision-making processes, more equitable distribution of resources and improved service delivery.

Gender stakeholder consultation can take two distinct forms:

- 1 | Consultations with stakeholders on the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of gender-equality policies;
- 2 | Consultations with stakeholders with a view to integrating a gender perspective into all general policies in all stages of the policy cycle.

Policy background

Gender stakeholder consultation is closely linked to participatory governance. In recent years, participatory governance has emerged as a new way of making public policies. Participatory governance recognises that both participatory and representative forms of democracy are important to policymaking processes. This form of governance puts citizens at the heart of public-policy planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation [2].

Participatory governance represents one of the main conditions for the advancement of gender equality, as widely recognised at international level. The [Beijing Platform for Action \(BPfA\)](#), adopted in 1995, encourages and promotes the active involvement of public, private and civil society actors to work together for equality between women and men [3]. According to the BPfA, a national structure for the advancement of equality between women and men is effective if there are:

‘institutional mechanisms or processes that facilitate, as appropriate, decentralized planning, implementation and monitoring with a view to involving non-governmental organizations and community organizations from the grass-roots upwards’ [4].

In line with this, the BPfA includes stakeholder consultation as part of the strategic objective on ‘Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women’ as a basis for enhancing women’s equality. This includes the objective to:

‘promote and establish cooperative relationships with relevant branches of government, centres for women’s studies and research, academic and educational institutions, the private sector, the media, non-governmental organizations, especially women’s organizations, and all other actors of civil society’ [5].

Following the 10-year review of the BPfA, the Council of the European Union acknowledged the involvement of civil society organisations in the pursuit of gender equality as one of the conditions that must be ensured for an effective national structure for gender equality. The Council called on Member States to strengthen the involvement of civil society organisations, including social partners and community organisations from the grass roots upwards, in this area [6].

The relevance of stakeholders’ involvement in the pursuit of gender equality was reaffirmed by EIGE’s 2014 report on the [Effectiveness of institutional mechanisms for the advancement of gender equality – Review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the EU Member States](#). The report underlines the importance of the involvement of civil society as a condition for the development and implementation of gender mainstreaming and gender-equality policies. The report acknowledges that since the first BPfA review, Member States have increasingly engaged civil society organisations, especially women’s organisations, in the development of policies, legislation, reporting and evaluations, and that civil society organisations have been supporting the public authorities responsible for gender equality with informational and awareness-raising activities. However, the report highlights that there is still room for improvement [7].

The report recommends that Member States, along with researchers and social partners, should:

‘Establish or strengthen an advisory board on gender equality or another permanent entity involving relevant branches of government; centres for women’s studies and research, academic and educational institutions; the private sector; the media; non-governmental organisations, especially women’s organisations, and other actors of civil society’ [8].

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) also emphasises the importance of involving stakeholders in the achievement of gender equality. According to UNECE, the degree to which women’s organisations are involved in the development, implementation and evaluation of public policies affects their effectiveness. UNECE points out that the ‘active involvement of all interested stakeholders, mainly women’s and human rights organisations is also a factor leading to change’ [9].

Most recently, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, under its main premise of ‘leaving no one behind’, contains a separate target on ensuring ‘responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels’ (Sustainable Development Goal 16, Target 16.7) and indicators to measure progress:

- Indicator 16.7.1 – ‘Proportions of positions (by sex, age, persons with disabilities and population groups) in public institutions (national and local legislatures, public service, and judiciary) compared to national distributions’;
- Indicator 16.7.2 – ‘Proportion of population who believe decision-making is inclusive and responsive, by sex, age, disability and population group’ [10].

In terms of consulting stakeholders on gender equality policies, it is worth noting that the EU institutions have created several expert groups on gender equality-related issues, such as the following.

- [EIGE’s Experts’ Forum](#) was established as a consultative forum to gain expertise and knowledge from government bodies and organisations working in the field of gender equality. It is made up of members recommended by competent bodies specialising in gender equality from all EU Member States. Each Member State appoints both a member and an alternate and there are two members designated by the European Parliament, as well as three members designated by the European Commission and representing interested parties at the European level, with one representative from non-governmental organisations at community level that have a legitimate interest in contributing to addressing discrimination on grounds of gender and the promotion of gender equality, and one representative both from employers’ and workers’ organisations at Union level [11].

- [The European Equality Law Network](#) was established by the European Commission in 2014, bringing together two former networks (the network of legal experts in gender equality and the network on non-discrimination). The European Equality Law Network aims to provide reliable expert information on gender equality to the Commission [12].
- The Inter-Service Group on Equality between Women and Men, established in 1995, is made up of representatives from European Commission directorates-general. It coordinates the activities of the European Commission regarding the planning and implementation of actions for equality between women and men [13].
- [The High-level Group on Gender Mainstreaming](#) is composed of high-level Member State representatives responsible for gender equality and gender mainstreaming at national level. It plays a key role in shaping the EU's gender-equality agenda [14].

The following are two examples of ways in which a gender perspective has been integrated into consultations with stakeholders in general policies and at all stages of the policy cycle.

- The Standing Working Group on Gender in Research and Innovation of the European Research Area and Innovation Committee (formerly named the Helsinki Group on Gender in Research and Innovation, established in 1999) is made up of representatives of Member States, associated countries and the European Commission. The overall objective of the group is to advise the Council and the European Commission on policies and initiatives on gender equality in research and innovation, for the benefit of scientists, research institutions, universities, businesses and society at large. In particular, it aims to: (i) 'provide support to address policy challenges related to gender in R&I'; (ii) 'promote mutual learning regarding gender equality policies and strategies'; and (iii) 'facilitate the regular collection of sex-disaggregated data for the She Figures' [15].
- The involvement of gender-equality representatives in the programming, implementation and evaluation of European Structural and Investment Funds. It is compulsory for each Member State to organise a partnership for each Partnership Agreement and ESI Fund programme, at all programming stages and at all levels. This partnership must include competent regional and local authorities, economic and social partners, civil society representatives, including non-governmental organisations and bodies responsible for promoting social inclusion, gender equality and non-discrimination [16].

Read more about the types of participatory processes

Based on the intensity of participation, participatory processes can be divided into information, consultation, involvement, collaboration and empowerment [17].

- Information is the lowest form of participation. It aims to engage citizens through continuous information on the decision-making process, to improve and/or change their view on the decision at stake and to increase consensus towards a specific decision.
 - Consultation aims to obtain feedback from those affected by or interested in an intervention (e.g. women and men in local communities, civil society organisations working on gender issues, gender experts) and allows the introduction of relevant knowledge and political, social and economic resources that contribute to shaping the policymaking process. Gender-sensitive consultations pay particular attention to ensuring a gender balance and a reflection of gender-equality issues throughout the entire consultation process.
 - Involvement, collaboration and empowerment are the highest forms of citizens' engagement and participation. These processes ensure that the needs and objectives of citizens are understood and taken into account in policymaking (involvement). Partnering with citizens throughout the entire cycle of public policies makes it possible to identify alternatives and choose potential solutions (collaboration). These processes also make it possible to delegate part of the institutional power to citizens in charge of the final policy decisions and/or their implementation (empowerment). Gender-sensitive empowerment processes pay particular attention to ensuring a gender balance in the engagement processes and involving organisations, experts, etc. that can adequately reflect gender issues in policymaking, delivery and evaluation processes.
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Why is gender stakeholder consultation important?

Several reasons account for the importance of promoting gender stakeholder consultations:

(i) Improving public decisions and policies to reflect gender-specific concerns

Contemporary societies face complex and multidimensional problems. This is particularly pertinent to gender (in)equality (e.g. gender-based violence, social inclusion of migrant women/girls), where there is a need for a deep understanding of the impact of social norms, values, rationality and social behaviours on those potentially affected by the respective intervention.

Stakeholders – women and men – may be affected differently by a public intervention and may have different priorities and perspectives on the allocation of resources. Failing to ensure a gender balance in stakeholders’ engagement is a missed opportunity as only some parts of reality will be captured. This can lead to the perpetuation of existing gender inequalities and backlogs in the planning and implementation of the intervention [18]. The involvement of gender stakeholders from the [planning phase](#) to the [evaluation phase](#) of an intervention makes it possible to identify gender-specific concerns and implications that may not have been considered initially. This facilitates the identification of potential solutions and alternatives to those proposed, levers resources, supports the implementation process and contributes to on-the-ground insights into the evaluation of the respective intervention.

From this perspective, gender stakeholder consultation is crucial not only for understanding gender issues at stake in the respective intervention, but also in signalling possible bottlenecks and undesired effects in the planning and implementation process.

(ii) Fostering awareness raising and capacity development in relation to gender equality

[Awareness raising](#) and capacity development are achieved through creating opportunities for gender-equality stakeholders and policymakers to exchange experiences and information on gender mainstreaming, gender equality and gender inequalities in various policy areas. This favours mutual learning and enrichment and results in stakeholders having increased knowledge of gender-related issues. It can empower women and men to take ownership of the respective intervention and its outcomes and to further commit to advancing gender equality. Continual and meaningful interaction between policymakers and stakeholders creates space for improved transparency and trust, which in turn can lead to an enhanced commitment to the application of gender-equality principles [19].

(iii) Enhancing accountability in relation to gender equality commitments

Gender stakeholders, such as women’s organisations and gender experts, act as ‘control towers’, watching over public-policy processes in order to ensure that governments fulfil their commitments to gender equality objectives and are held accountable for their gender equality commitments. In this process, the focus is on ensuring that the needs and priorities of women and men are heard and reflected in public policies and [budgets](#).

How does gender stakeholder consultation work?

Stakeholder consultation occurs in four steps [20]:

- 1 Planning.** This includes defining the purpose of the consultation and topics to be covered, identifying those that have to be consulted and paying attention to ensuring gender balance and an adequate representation of organisations with gender expertise. At this stage it is important to identify the groups whose voices have been traditionally marginalised in decision-making processes (e.g. migrant women) and who may need tailored support for engagement and to consider specific requirements for participation that need to be met (for instance, providing childcare). It is also important at an early stage to identify responsibilities for engaging stakeholders, resources to be allocated to the process and methodologies to be used.
- 2 Consulting stakeholders.** There are different ways of carrying out a consultation exercise. The chosen format will depend on the context, purpose of the consultation, type of stakeholders to be consulted, time available, skills and budgetary resources available, among other factors. With that in mind, any effective consultation process should:
 - be conducted early enough to scope key issues and have an effect on the decisions to which they relate;
 - disseminate relevant information in advance;
 - be meaningful to those consulted;
 - be localised to reflect appropriate time frames, context and local languages.
- 3 Incorporating feedback** from consultations into the policymaking process to ensure that stakeholders' opinions, needs and concerns on gender equality are reflected adequately in the final decision/intervention.
- 4 Documenting** the consultation process and its results and reporting back to the stakeholders. This includes informing those who have been consulted about the key issues raised as an essential step for maintaining engagement. Reporting back to stakeholders contributes to increasing their confidence in the participatory processes, maintaining their engagement over time, preventing conflicts in case issues expressed by participants have not been considered in the final decision and double checking the information produced, approaches proposed and mitigation measures introduced.

Read more about how gender stakeholder consultation works

Women's involvement in stakeholder consultation processes is often more limited in comparison to men's. In order to foster women's engagement and participation, the following should be taken into consideration.

- Team composition and sensitivity. To be able to ensure the meaningful participation of both women and men, the team tasked with carrying out the consultations should be gender balanced and gender sensitive. For instance, women may feel more comfortable speaking with other women. Similarly, some women may need more encouragement to speak out in mixed settings. The team should be also sensitive to the local culture and customs. In some cultures it may be necessary to hold separate meetings for women and men.
- Practical and logistical arrangements. Meetings should be held at accessible, well-connected and well-lit locations considered safe for women. For women to be able to participate, ensuring childcare arrangements and facilities is of the utmost importance. If possible, transportation to the meeting place should be provided.
- Using active facilitation and participatory exercises. This can include discussions in single-sex groups, asking for women's opinions, using games, drama, drawing, etc. Holding alternative plenary sessions for wider community issues and small working groups (e.g. women, young people, elderly people, migrant people) will help to explore specific and intersecting issues relating to different groups of women and men.
- Raising priorities that are relevant for women. This means identifying key priority issues for women, ensuring that they are put on the consultation agenda, raising them during the consultation process and giving them equal weight with respect to other issues.
- Taking into account that women are not a homogeneous group and ensuring an equal representation of women from different age, social, ethnic, economic, cultural, occupational, etc. groups.

Methodologies for gender stakeholder consultations

Gender stakeholder consultations can be applied to legislation, policies, programmes, projects, services and specific measures. Different methodologies can be used to ensure relevant consultation processes. In large and complex processes (e.g. policy design/making, legislation) the number of gender stakeholders to be involved may need to be higher than that needed for a smaller project or a specific measure. For instance, for large consultations online surveys, town-hall meetings, deliberative polls or a citizen's jury may be used, whereas for smaller interventions (e.g. projects, specific measures) focus groups or interviews may be more suitable.

Read more about gender stakeholder consultations: some examples of tools for stakeholder involvement

- Survey – to collect information on the respondents' opinions. It may include closed questions only or a combination of closed and open-ended questions.
 - Delphi survey – to estimate the expected impact. It mobilises and analyses data through the intervention of experts. It sheds light on the evolution of a situation, identifying priorities and drawing up prospective scenarios.
 - Nominal group technique – to consult groups of different sizes. It encompasses the participation of each single member of the group in the discussion and results in a set of prioritised solutions or recommendations.
 - Individual interviews – to gather qualitative and quantitative information and the opinions of the different groups and stakeholders consulted with on a particular intervention, its context, implementation, results and impacts.
 - Focus group discussion – to discuss an issue in more depth and reveal actors' perceptions and suggestions on a specific issue. It makes it possible to bring several actors together, simultaneously or sequentially, and to collect qualitative information in a relatively short time.
 - World café – to promote collaborative dialogue and the sharing of knowledge and ideas on a specific issue among large and small groups of stakeholders. Participatory workshop – to bring together a group of women and men with the aim of understanding their opinions, sharing knowledge on a specific issue and finding solutions to public problems.
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Further information





Endnotes

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- [7] European Institute for Gender Equality, [Effectiveness of institutional mechanisms for the advancement of gender equality – Review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the EU Member States](#), 2014.
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- [11] European Institute for Gender Equality, [Experts’ Forum](#).
- [12] [European Equality Law Network website](#).

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[14] [High-level Group on Gender Mainstreaming](#).

[15] [Working Group on Gender in Research and Innovation](#) (former Helsinki Group).

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Other resources

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Pestoff, V., Brandsen, T. and Verschuere, B. (eds), *The new public governance, the third sector and co-production*, Routledge, London, 2012.

European Commission – [Consultation platform](#).

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