

Handbook on
GENDER MAINSTREAMING
for Gender Equality Results

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FOREWORD

In 1995, Member States endorsed gender mainstreaming as a critical strategy for achieving gender equality. Since then, Member States have regularly reiterated their commitment to its full implementation, including for Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on gender equality and all the other SDGs. The 25-year review of the status of implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action also highlighted efforts on gender mainstreaming across a wide range of issues, from poverty eradication, education, health, employment and agriculture, to disaster risk reduction, migration and combating violent extremism. Most recently, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has further underlined the centrality and urgency of mainstreaming gender considerations in all pandemic response and recovery policies and programmes to benefit women and girls, who have been greatly affected.

At UN Women, we strive to support the mainstreaming of gender equality perspectives in the programmes and policies of the UN system through interagency mechanisms, as well as at global, regional and country levels. We know that when gender equality is systematically integrated in support of UN efforts at national level, the contributions, needs and priorities of women and girls become more visible. This, in turn, facilitates gender-responsive policies and actions that are more targeted and effective, including in the context of [Our Common Agenda](#) where the emphasis is on a new social contract that is inclusive of women and girls, and a strong UN architecture that delivers on gender equality as a core priority of all entities. UN Women's support for gender mainstreaming in these contexts is critical.

This Handbook is therefore timely and will enhance the existing body of knowledge on gender mainstreaming. It has benefitted from the input of gender experts in the UN, including members from the UN Inter-Agency Network of Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE) and UN Women staff. The Handbook identifies the key concepts, principles and approaches underlying a gender mainstreaming strategy. It outlines opportunities and ways to apply gender analysis across different contexts and manage for gender equality results. It also shows how to identify opportunities for organizational change, enhance financing for gender equality, and strengthen monitoring and evaluation for the oversight of the results of gender mainstreaming.

I encourage all development practitioners and policy makers to apply the Handbook's practical approaches and to disseminate it widely to further advance collective efforts. I hope that it will create new opportunities for further development of capacity on gender mainstreaming and support coordinated efforts to ensure the accelerated and full achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women everywhere.



Sima Bahous

UN Women Executive Director

INTRODUCTION

Member States of the United Nations endorsed gender mainstreaming as the global strategy for gender equality and women's rights and empowerment at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in September 1995 and called for its implementation in all areas of development.¹ In the 25-plus years since the Beijing Conference (Beijing +25), Member States of the United Nations have consistently reaffirmed the importance of the strategy and have noted the need for

accelerated implementation of the gender mainstreaming strategy. Most notably, the transformative potential of gender mainstreaming was reaffirmed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its call for accelerated implementation.² This was complemented by an explicit acknowledgement by Member States that sustainable development cannot be achieved in any area without gender equality and women's rights and empowerment.³

Beijing Declaration 1995

*...We hereby adopt and commit ourselves as Governments to... **ensuring that a gender perspective is reflected in all our policies and programmes.***

*...Commitment at the **highest political level** is essential for its implementation, and Governments should take a **leading role in coordinating, monitoring and assessing progress...***

There were great expectations for the potential of gender mainstreaming to achieve the goals of gender equality and women's rights and empowerment when the strategy was globally endorsed at the Beijing Conference. This new strategy was perceived as a way to move beyond the earlier, fragmented "women in development" project-based approach towards a deeper and more sustained impact on development policy and practice.⁴ Since Beijing, assessments of the status of implementation indicate that some progress has indeed been made. There have been significant efforts to implement gender mainstreaming in many sectors and policy areas by Member States and organizations at national, regional, and global levels. And there have been notable improvements in promoting and protecting the rights of women and girls, in facilitating their empowerment and attaining substantive equality between women and men.⁵

This Handbook on Gender Mainstreaming for Gender Equality Results has been developed with the aim to encourage and support more systematic and effective mainstreaming implementation for the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment throughout the United Nations system and within all sectors. It is intended for use by practitioners, policymakers, gender focal points and technical managers with varying

levels of awareness and knowledge of gender mainstreaming. It is also a resource for gender specialists and advisors, who play a critical role in guiding and mainstreaming for gender equality results. By consolidating knowledge on gender mainstreaming and by identifying promising practices and positive trends to strengthen its implementation, this publication can provide a powerful incentive to build on the gains that have been made in the Beijing+25 period.

THE RATIONALE AND PURPOSE OF THE HANDBOOK

Gender mainstreaming continues to be the core strategy for accelerating progress on gender equality. States have worked on mainstreaming gender in policies and programmes for such issues as poverty eradication, education, health, employment, agriculture, disaster risk reduction, migration and combating violent extremism. Many have also worked to bolster cooperation between national machineries and ministries. In some countries, intersectoral coordinating structures have been established to spearhead and coordinate gender mainstreaming in ministries, departments and agencies.⁶

The United Nations has also shown commitment to gender mainstreaming in policies and programmes and has developed key accountability and reporting frameworks for the corporate and country levels – the UN-SWAP and the UNCT-SWAP. In 2020 a total of 70 entities participated in the System-wide Action Plan 2.0, of which 62 percent were recorded as either meeting or exceeding the requirements.⁷ This was a two-percentage-point increase from the 2019 reporting data. For the United Nations Country Team System-wide Action Plan, gender equality scorecard assessment increased to 38 country teams in 2020, up from 33 in 2019.⁸ The increased uptake of UNCT-SWAP reporting reflects further validation of the acceptance and usefulness of the standardized system-wide accountability mechanisms for gender mainstreaming.⁹

Whilst many successful efforts have been made since 1995, opportunities remain for the gender mainstreaming strategy to better support the achievement of gender equality. The possibilities for organizations to benefit from the full transformative potential of gender mainstreaming remain to be fulfilled in many areas of development policy and practice.¹⁰

Like many other strategies, gender mainstreaming is only as good as the efforts made to implement it.¹¹ There have been clear challenges in commitment to the strategy; in understanding the principles, approaches, and methodologies required; and in investing resources and developing institutional capacity to support implementation. As a result, the situation of many women and girls around the world remains precarious and, in many areas, including in the context of COVID-19, their rights are under increasing threat.

The impact of COVID-19 has brought increased maternal mortality, gender-based violence, burdens of unpaid care work and

in the COVID-19 recovery therefore requires dedicated effort.^{14, 15}

Moreover, the increasing importance of gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda provides significant impetus for developing further knowledge, capacity and focus on effective gender mainstreaming. Member States have, over the past two decades, specifically requested greater clarity on entry-points in workstreams, on training and capacity-building activities, and on how to develop guidelines and tools.¹⁶ More specifically, five years after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, Member States at the 2019 High Level Political Forum expressed concern that vulnerabilities and deprivations were becoming more entrenched, stating that “Progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of all women is too slow.”¹⁷ With less than 10 years to go to deliver on the 2030 promise of gender equality, the “Decade of Action” requires global action, strengthened leadership, and ambitious efforts to achieve Goal 5 and gender equality.¹⁸ Calls for accelerated actions towards gender equality emphasize the importance of gender mainstreaming and strengthened understanding of the strategy and the ways it can support gender equality and women’s rights and empowerment.

The year 2022 is also the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Economic and Social Agreed Conclusions on gender mainstreaming, an opportune moment to reflect on the gender mainstreaming strategy, and offer guidance on its effective implementation at national, regional, and global levels. This Handbook on Gender Mainstreaming for Gender Equality Results directly links to calls for greater capacity and further guidance on systematic and effective gender mainstreaming implementation.

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