

How to do a meaningful Gender Equality Impact Assessment

One of the main ways in which policy makers can ensure equality is taken into account when policy is made is to carry out an equality impact assessment and take action to amend the policy if necessary before it is implemented. This briefing focuses specifically on gender impact assessments but WBG believes it is necessary to analyse policy for its impact on all equality groups.

Why do a gender impact assessment?

Policy impacts differently on women and men. Women still experience structural inequality throughout their lives. Inequalities based on gender intersect with other forms of inequality based on class, race, disability, and other factors so that some groups of women, particularly poor women, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) women and disabled women face multiple disadvantage.

Women are more likely than men to have responsibility for unpaid work including childcare, care for older or disabled people and domestic work. This reduces their time available for paid work and other activities.

Women on average earn less than men, have lower incomes over a lifetime, accumulate lower levels of wealth and are more likely to be living in poverty. This means that women are less likely to benefit from cuts to income tax than men, and cuts to taxes on business and more likely to benefit from public spending on public services or cash transfers/welfare benefits.

Income may not be shared equally within households, meaning women and girls may not benefit as much as men when household income rises. This means that policies that concentrate on improving household incomes may not benefit women as much as those that target women's incomes specifically.

Violence and abuse of women and girls continues to be widespread and underreported. Domestic violence and abuse often includes financial abuse. This means that funding for specialist services for women who have experienced violence is vital to promoting gender equality and protecting women from further abuse. It also means that women's access to independent income is important; policies that reduce it can increase women's vulnerability to financial and other forms of abuse.

What does the law say?

Under the Public Sector Equality Duty, (PSED), contained in the 2010 Equality Act, all public authorities, including government departments, are obliged to have 'due regard' to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between those who have a characteristic protected under the Act and those who do not. These protected characteristics are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. Impact assessments are the main way in which public bodies can ensure they are meeting their obligations under the PSED.

Principles for Gender Equality Impact Assessments

Consider cumulative impact

A cumulative analysis means looking at the combined impact of a number of measures. The effect of some individual measures may be small but taken together the cumulative impact may be substantial.

Look at impacts on individuals as well as households

Interests within households may differ, so policies that benefit a household's decision-maker may not benefit all household members. It is important to recognise that policy may affect decision-making power within households.

Take a life-time perspective wherever possible

Policies' long-term effects may outweigh current impacts – for example policies that make it easier for women to stay doing unpaid care may have negative impacts on women's life time earnings and pensions in old age.

Take account of effects on unpaid care economy.

It is important to recognise that the fiscal benefits of encouraging women into employment are not 'free' but may have an impact on unpaid care.

Take an intersectional approach

Different structures of inequality intersect so that it is important to look at differences within particular groups of women and men, for example differences by race, income and disability. Impact assessments that consider each 'protected characteristic' in isolation (looking at race, gender, disability and so on separately) can ignore these intersectional impacts.

Quantify gender differences in effects where possible

This means drawing on statistical data to show how policy would impact women and men differently. Where no data is available it is important not to assume that this means that there is no impact.

Consult affected groups

Qualitative research, including consultation with affected groups can highlight unexpected equality impacts and show how the combined effect of different changes can impact on women's lives.

For more detail see [Equality Impact Assessments policy brief](#).

For more information on gender responsive budgeting see our casebook '[Women Count](#)'.

The Women's Budget Group is a network of civil society organisations, academics researchers, activists and policymakers who analyse the impact of economic policy on women and men and, promote alternatives for a more gender equal future.

For more information see: www.wbg.org.uk

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