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GUIDELINES FOR GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN THE WORKING GROUPS OF THE STATISTICAL CONFERENCE OF THE AMERICAS[1]

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This document has been prepared as a follow-up to the commitment made by the secretariat of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean to develop guidelines on gender mainstreaming in the working groups, as set forth in the agreements adopted at the twentieth meeting of the Executive Committee of the Statistical Conference of the Americas in April 2021.[2]

INTRODUCTION

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes gender equality as a goal in itself and as a cross-cutting principle that is present not only in the declaration, but also in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), their targets and means of implementation, as well as in the indicators proposed for their follow-up and in the partnerships for capacity building, financing and accountability.

At the regional level, in the framework of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, a Regional Gender Agenda has been developed over a period of more than 40 years.[3] This has underscored the importance of States' producing and disseminating gender-sensitive data and statistics for the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of public policies. Information systems have also been singled out as one of the ten fundamental pillars for achieving sustainable development in the region, from the standpoint of gender equality and women's autonomy and human rights.[4]

The Statistical Conference of the Americas has also recognized the importance of the production, dissemination and use of statistics with a gender perspective. This led to the creation of the Working Group on Gender Statistics of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC[5] during the fourth meeting of the Conference in 2007. The group operated until 2019 with the aim of promoting the production, development, systemization and consolidation of the generation of statistics and gender indicators to inform the formulation, monitoring and evaluation of public policies. This working group played a leading role in the conceptual and methodological development and production and dissemination of analytical documents on gender mainstreaming in the production of statistics.

During the eighteenth meeting of the Executive Committee of the Conference in 2019, the countries adopted new operational criteria for the formation of working groups of the Conference for 2020–2021. These aim to address topics that respond to the statistical needs and priorities established by the countries of the region, which are oriented towards the production of clearly defined and feasible outputs within two years. This transformation in the working groups implied a change in the institutionalization of the gender

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[2] See the agreements of the meeting [online] https://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/presentations/cea-ce.20-acuerdos.pdf.

[3] The Regional Gender Agenda represents the commitments made by the member States of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean. It is a broad, deep and comprehensive agenda, which focuses on women's autonomy and rights and gender equality within the framework of sustainable development.

4 The Montevideo Strategy for Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda within the Sustainable Development Framework by 2030 recognizes "Information systems: transforming data into information, information into knowledge and knowledge into political decisions" as one of its implementation pillars.

[5] Since its formation, the Working Group on Gender Statistics has had Mexico as the coordinating country, the ECLAC Division for Gender Affairs as Technical Secretariat and the National Women's Institute (INMUJERES) of Mexico and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) as advisory bodies. It was formed by the following member countries: Argentina, Bahamas, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and the Plurinational State of Bolivia.

perspective in the framework of Conference's work. With all of this background, at the tenth meeting of the Statistical Conference of the Americas, held in Santiago in November 2019, the governments of the region recognized "the cross-cutting nature of gender issues and [asked] that the working groups of the Statistical Conference of the Americas mainstream the gender perspective into their work, along with other cross-cutting elements of statistical work such as classifiers" (ECLAC, 2020a).[6]

Several countries have made efforts to mainstream the gender perspective in the production of official statistics, through actions such as developing statistics that are crucial for gender equality (such as the measurement of the use of time and unpaid work and its accounting in national accounts; statistics on gender-based violence against women; and access to and control of assets, among other issues); creating gender units in national statistical offices; preparing manuals containing guidelines for mainstreaming the gender perspective in statistical operations; expanding the scope of statistical operations to highlight situations that affect men and women differently; and training officials in the production, analysis and use of gender indicators and statistics. However, the region still faces challenges in terms of the quality, periodicity and coverage of statistical production with a gender perspective. Closing these information gaps is thus a common challenge for the statistical community in the region.

With the foregoing a backdrop, this document summarizes basic concepts related to gender mainstreaming in statistical production and proposes elements for achieving this, to be considered in the working groups. These guidelines are addressed to the focal points of each of the Conference's working groups, and are a reference for the authorities and officials of the national statistical offices of the member countries of the Conference.

A. THE IMPORTANCE OF MAINSTREAMING THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE IN OFFICIAL STATISTICS

Gender mainstreaming has been established as a central strategy for addressing gender equality in public policies since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995).7 In July 1997, the United Nations Economic and Social Council defined the concept of gender mainstreaming as: "the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality" (United Nations, 1999).

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[6] This regional initiative has inspired the statistical community worldwide to adopt gender mainstreaming in the work of the United Nations Statistical Commission ("Requested that a gender perspective be adopted and integrated into all the agenda items of the Commission, as is, for example, the current practice in the Statistical Conference of the Americas" (United Nations, 2020, decision 51/115, b).

[7] The Beijing Platform for Action stresses the importance of timely gender statistics for policy formulation, and requests national, regional and international statistical services "to ensure that statistics related to individuals are collected, compiled, analysed and presented by sex and age and reflect problems, issues and questions related to women and men in society" (United Nations, 1996, para. 206-206).)

Mainstreaming gender in the production of all official statistics and in all phases of statistical production (specification of needs, and the design, collection, analysis and dissemination of the statistics) makes it possible to highlight the complexities and multidimensional nature of gender relations by producing statistics that adequately reflect the differences and inequalities that exist between the situation of women and men in all areas of life. Gender statistics have a key role to play in eliminating stereotypes, formulating policies and following up agreements related to the achievement of gender equality.

As a structural feature of the Latin America and the Caribbean region, gender inequalities manifest themselves in an unequal distribution of power, resources, wealth, work, time, opportunities and the exercise of rights between women and men. Mainstreaming the gender perspective in statistics means taking into account the differences that exist in the roles, functions, tasks and responsibilities assigned to, and fulfilled by women and men in their diversity.

Mainstreaming the gender perspective in statistical production requires the following:

- The data should be collected and presented in disaggregated form, with sex as the main and general classification. This means that the data must be disaggregated by sex in all stages of the information production process —from design through data collection, validation, processing, application of classification, imputation or estimation methods—[8] in order to avoid the use of assumptions that conceal or neutralize the differences between women and men. It is equally important to present and disseminate all information disaggregated at least by sex,[9] and to estimate the extent of the differences that exist between the two sexes. The results should reveal the key aspects of gender inequalities, using language that recognizes a rights-based approach and is stereotype-free, so that it reaches the general public in a clear and timely manner.
- The data should represent issues that consider the diversity of the various groups of women and men and their specific activities and challenges. Accordingly, it is essential to include other dimensions of inequality that operate alongside sex, from an intersectional approach, such as age, race-ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and others. Moreover, the concepts and definitions used in data collection should be developed so as to ensure such diversity is captured.
- The statistical instruments should capture and record information that represents the diverse reality and needs of women and men. For this purpose, the data collection instruments need to contain response categories that are appropriate to the different realities. For example, longstanding concepts of work and labour force do not adequately capture the activities and contributions that many women make to the economy and societies through their unpaid work.

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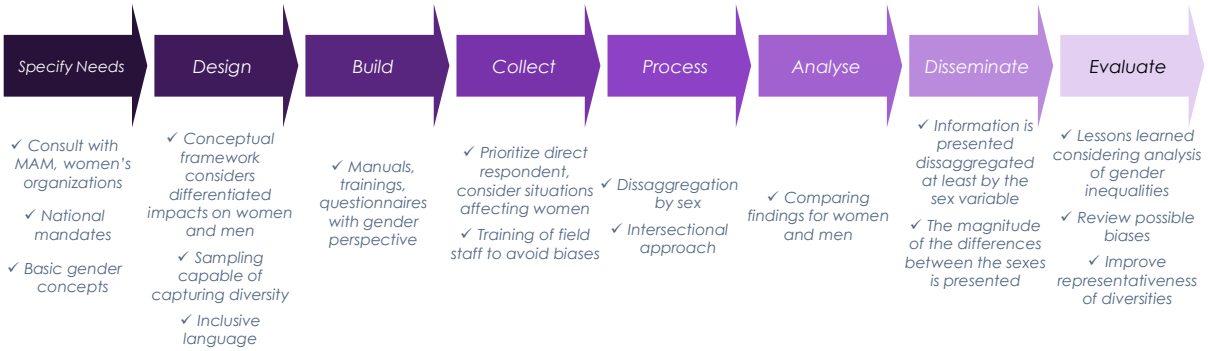
[8] Aspects of structural gender inequalities such as gender-based violence and the overburden of unpaid work should be areas of special attention when developing data collection tools, not only very important topics to include but also as factors affecting women's lives that will be potential units of data collection. For example, for the preparation and design of questionnaires, the phrasing of the questions should be reviewed to avoid introducing gender bias into the survey. On this point, the United Nations (2016) makes a number of suggestions: probing questions should be used to reduce underreporting related to gender issues; Potential answers to questions should be categorized and pre-coded in such a way that answers related mainly to women are given the same importance as those mainly related to men (e.g., in terms of feminized or masculinized work); Questions should not influence answers or be leading. Keywords in the questions should not apply exclusively to just one of the two sexes (for example, "housewife", "head of household", among others (INE, 2019).

[9] Disaggregation according to sex is feasible in most cases because, in general, it does not represent challenges of representativeness, unlike what happens more frequently with disaggregations for other population categories that are statistically small.

- Language use should be inclusive and avoid expressions that perpetuate gender stereotypes or introduce bias.
- Gender bias should be avoided at all stages of the information production process.[10] This means recognizing stereotypes and social and cultural factors that may cause gender bias in the data.
- The information should reflect commitments to gender equality and prior consultations that identify the needs of those who use the information (machineries for the advancement of women, among others).

Diagram 1
Some considerations for mainstreaming the gender approach in statistical processes following the generic model of the statistical process



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

Statistics produced from a gender perspective are crucial for providing a clear picture of the issues that need to be prioritized on the public agenda, in terms of providing information to monitor progress and setbacks on the road to achieving gender equality, in advocacy work and resource mobilization.

The inclusion of a gender perspective in statistical production generates information that:

- Highlights the magnitude and intensity of the different forms of gender inequality and discrimination in different spheres of life, and makes it possible to develop responses.
- Provides estimates of the magnitude of the contributions made by women and men in specific fields of human activity.
- Serves as an efficient mechanism for supporting political decision-making, evaluating the results of those that have already been implemented and monitoring the progress, setbacks, or stalling of these actions over time to promote equality.

[10] For example, in the data collection process, it is essential to train field workers to avoid introducing biases during the interviews that might prevent them from revealing possible inequalities between men and women.

- Helps to identify the underlying factors that could be influencing the manifestation of certain aspects of inequality, making it possible to act on the structural challenges of inequality to promote change.
- Facilitates evaluation of the progress made toward the targets for improving the situation of women and girls, as agreed upon at various regional and international summits.
- Allows public opinion to be sensitized and made aware of the effects of gender inequalities in the lives of individuals and societies, thereby promoting a change in roles and eliminating stereotypes.
- Aims to avoid measurement biases[11] and thus make it possible to produce better quality statistics.
- Provides an important source of feedback for the generation of other statistics that highlight inequalities that are not yet being measured.
- Shows the need to improve the methods and classifications required to reflect reality adequately.

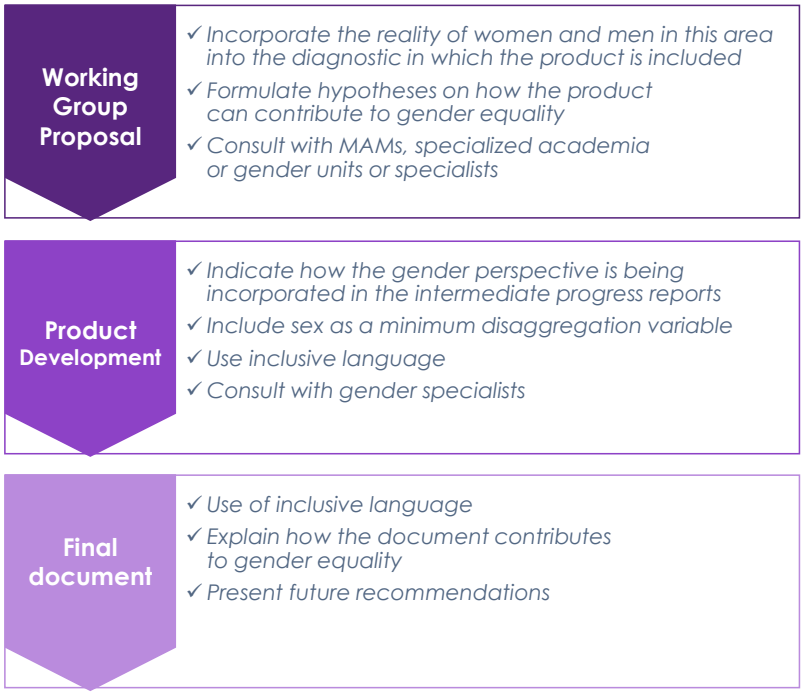
B. GUIDELINES FOR MAINSTREAMING THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE IN THE WORKING GROUPS OF THE ECLAC STATISTICAL CONFERENCE OF THE AMERICAS

Preparation of the proposals of the working groups

- The gender perspective should be considered from the stage of preparation of the proposals for the creation of the working groups. To this end, when providing the diagnosis or status of the problem to which the output relates and which justifies its execution, it is recommended that the groups include the gaps and potential impacts of the topic for men and women.
- The working groups are also invited to consider, in their proposals, how the output can contribute to gender equality.
- To contribute to this end, it is recommended that when preparing proposals, consultations be held with the machineries for the advancement of women (ministries, secretariats or gender institutes), the specialized academic sector, or the gender units or specialists of the national statistical offices, with a view to identifying potential links between the proposed topic and the gender equality agenda.

[11] The biases can be varied; examples include: ignoring the fact that the objectives of the study do not consider how each group is affected; biases in the phrasing of the questions, where the relevance of the question is doubted, or biases that can result in the question being misunderstood by either sex; biases in the sample and in the key informant (disadvantaging one of the groups); analysis without disaggregating by sex; wrongly assuming that all people are affected in the same way, among others (INE, 2015).

Diagram 2
Guidelines for mainstreaming the gender perspective into the work of the Working Groups of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

Types of output produced by the working groups

- All of the outputs produced by the working groups can contribute to gender equality. The gender approach is relevant not only in social, health, education or labour issues, for example, but also in the economic and environmental sphere, and in areas such as transportation, mobility, information and communication technologies, fiscal policies, environmental or migration policies, among others.
- If the output is a diagnostic document, an in-depth review of a specific topic, manuals, recommendations or compilations and systematizations of experiences and good practices, it must take account of the heterogeneous reality of men and women and the gender inequalities that exist in the topic in question, as well as the power asymmetries, based on available studies or indicators.
- If the output is an adaptation of standards, classifications and methodologies, it is important to consider that these instruments are not gender-neutral, but may unintentionally introduce biases that make women's realities invisible.[12] For this reason, with any methodological instrument it is always necessary to consider whether it takes into account the positions of women and men in society and their different experiences. It is important to review the corresponding international standards and how they have evolved conceptually.

[12] An example of this is the definition of the production frontier of the System of National Accounts (SNA), which does not include work that provides services for household members. This has traditionally rendered invisible the economic contribution made by women through unpaid domestic and care work.

- When developing virtual resources, such as computer platforms for accessing shared resources or for dissemination, it is important to gauge how accessible they are to women in the region. It is also important to analyse the type of images or language that these resources use, to ensure that they are gender inclusive and do not reproduce stereotypes in icons or ways of naming or presenting the information provided.
- On the other hand, if the group's objective is focused on the production of methodological tools such as databases, quality assessment tools, standardized questionnaires, among others, the gender variable should be included as a minimum recommendation whenever the data refer to individuals,[13] together with the use of inclusive language that makes women and their different realities more visible.

Content of working group documents

- Where relevant, explain how the subject matter addressed in the document furthers knowledge of the real situation of women and men in society or contributes to obtaining information to guide gender equality policies.
- Inclusion of the gender variable is a basic element for mainstreaming the gender perspective. This not only refers to the moment when data are collected, but should permeate the entire process, including the possibility of allowing for the production of sex-disaggregated indicators.[14] Along the same lines, when the working groups discuss the use and integration of multiple data sources, it is important that these criteria be maintained.
- The use of inclusive language refers not only to written language but also to images and infographics. These should not reproduce gender stereotypes, or stereotypes of any other kind, such as those that are racist, classist or ageist, or those that discriminate against persons with disabilities. Thus, all documents prepared by the working groups must avoid using discriminatory expressions, or expressions that perpetuate gender stereotypes. They should make gender visible when required by the situation, by using feminine and masculine pairs, such "women and men" to make both groups explicit; or using the word "person", or collective nouns and other generic structures. For a more in-depth analysis of this point, a number of specific manuals on the incorporation of inclusive language in statistical production are listed in the appendix.

Follow-up to the preparation of outputs

- The progress reports prepared by the working groups should indicate how gender mainstreaming is being implemented.
- To support this process, and in order to overcome potential difficulties, the working groups are encouraged to consult or request support from specialized entities, either in the group's member countries or from organizations specializing in gender issues at the regional or global level.

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[13] In certain operations the main unit is different from the population (for example, agricultural unit or economic establishment), but complementary variables can be generated at the individual level that provide valuable information (such as owners, producers, or workers).

[14] This is related to sample design, the use of data from administrative records that present aggregate information for the total number of people, and the use of big data capture techniques which introduce biases and do not allow for disaggregated analysis.

C. MINIMUM ELEMENTS TO BE INCLUDED FOR MAINSTREAMING THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE IN OUTPUTS PREPARED BY THE WORKING GROUPS OF THE STATISTICAL CONFERENCE OF THE AMERICAS OF ECLAC

- Clear diagnosis of how the working group's output could contribute to gender equality.
  - Review of global, regional and national normative frameworks in relation to the group's theme and gender equality.
  - Consultations with gender institutions and experts (machineries for the advancement of women, feminist and women's organizations, specialized academia, specialized agencies, experts and gender focal points in sectoral ministries and statistical offices).
  - Analysis of the situation and how the output can contribute to gender equality.
- Use of inclusive language, avoiding gender bias in the presentation of the working group's proposal, the preparation of intermediate documents, progress reports, presentations and dissemination documents.
  - Avoid expressions, icons or images that are discriminatory or that perpetuate stereotypes.
  - Include nouns, articles, adjectives, participles and pronouns in such a way as to include the feminine and masculine genders, or use expressions that cover both genders.
- Disaggregation by sex throughout the process of production and dissemination of information on people.
  - Include sex as a minimum variable in all data collection tools (questionnaires, sample designs, indicator proposals, dissemination tools).
  - Maintain the sex variable when integrating different information sources.
  - When the unit of analysis is not at the individual level, generate complementary variables at that level to support disaggregation by sex.
  - Make efforts to also prioritize other variables that are relevant for intersectional gender analysis, such as age, territory, income level, race and ethnicity.
- Explain the contribution to gender equality of all the outputs produced in the framework of the Statistical Conference of the Americas of ECLAC.
  - Standards, classifications and methodologies must not obscure or disregard the roles assigned to men and women and the inequalities existing in society.
  - Methodological tools such as databases, quality assessment tools or standardized questionnaires should take into account factors such as the revision of conceptual bases and the use of coding and classification terminologies, as well as training on gender issues for staff involved in the process.
  - Documents with recommendations for data collection processes and instruments should consider the differences between men and women and the power relations and inequalities that exist. For example, survey design should prioritize responses from direct informants, take into account the barriers that women may face in responding (situations of violence, overburden of care work, and so forth), avoid wording of questions in a way that introduces bias, consider the organization of media campaigns that include awareness-raising messages, and the selection of field staff, among others.
  - The organization of workshop and consultation mechanisms should include gender experts.
  - The output of the group's work should explicitly show the value of mainstreaming and the contribution to gender equality.
  - Online outreach resources should be accessible to women and people working on gender issues.

Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

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Annex 1

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