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Guidelines for promotion and implementation of gender equality and women's empowerment

*Lignes directrices relatives à la promotion et à la mise en œuvre
de l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes et de l'autonomisation
des femmes*

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Foreword

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This document was prepared by Project Committee ISO/PC 337.

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Introduction

Despite the real progress that has been made, gender inequalities and gender-based discrimination still remain widespread throughout the world and in all areas.

Societal gender role expectations towards female and male behaviour are reflected in the very functioning of organizations, including organizational cultures, processes, and hierarchies. Persistent gender inequalities in organizations mirror the structural discrimination women and girls experience in society. By way of example, five out of ten women worldwide are integrated in the labour market, compared with nine out of ten men^[1]. Still, once employed, women, worldwide, only make 77 cents for every dollar earned by men^[2]. Women remain in the minority in governing bodies^[3] and other positions of power. Concurrently, the paid and unpaid labour is unequally distributed, women and girls dedicating more time than men and boys to unpaid care and domestic work^[4]. Finally, according to the estimates of the World Health Organization, almost one out of three women worldwide declares having been the victim of physical or sexual violence during their lives, not to mention the psychological, economic and social forms of violence^[5].

The World Economic Forum publishes annually the Global Gender Gap Report, an analysis that reveals the different situation of the Gender Gap across different geographies^[6].

The purpose of this document is to provide guidelines, definitions, procedures and tools that include the framework, resources, policies, tools and good practices, to public and private organizations that encourage, support and direct them to make sustainable progress in promoting and achieving gender equality and women's empowerment, both internally and externally. It is intended to promote a common understanding on the issue of gender equality, and to complement other instruments and initiatives on this subject. Additionally, the document has been developed in a consistent manner with and is linked to other ISO initiatives and instruments such as ISO 30415. It aims to provide support in the fulfilment of their obligations regarding gender equality and the UN 2030 Agenda (in particular SDG5 on gender equality)^[8], or going beyond, through addressing underlying culture and attitudes and by proposing an approach, operational methods and tools to achieve an organization's stated aims. Recognizing the differences of available resources, the intention of this document is to provide practical support for SMEs and small entities, as well as larger organizations, respecting their specific requirements.

While women are generally more disadvantaged in areas such as the labour market, unpaid care work and sexual and gender-based violence, gender-based discrimination can also affect men and boys in certain aspects of life, particularly when they do not conform to typically recognized gender role perceptions, which can have negative impacts on the lives, health, including mental health, of men and boys. Therefore, in order to address gender inequality, it is important to identify how a particular organizational action or omission affects gender equality. Only once this has been done, can the gender imbalance be identified and the appropriate action to address that imbalance determined. This is an underlying principle of this document.

Gender equality and women's empowerment are not only a women's issue but should concern everyone and every organization. It is seen both as a human rights issue and as a prerequisite for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centred development. As such, addressing gender equality is a core pillar of any organisation's social responsibility, including their environmental, social and governance (ESG) agenda. All organizations are in a position to take measures to promote gender equality, taking into account the organization's maturity, nature, size and objectives.

The positive link between gender equality and economic and social development has been demonstrated. It can be perceived as a lever and a source of better outcomes for the organization, and possibly be integrated in the organization's social responsibility policy when it exists, or any other relevant policies.

Numerous studies^{[9]-[11]} suggest that there are organizational benefits to promoting gender equality: reduced employee turnover, quality recruitment, a stronger and more productive and innovative work environment among the workforce, effective collaboration, ultimately performing better and achieving more accurate results. Equitable leadership improves decision-making, and for-profit organizations can boost profitability (e.g. by expanding the customer base, identify new markets and decrease retention costs).

In this document, the gender equality objectives follow the understanding that gender is a social construct. The inequalities targeted are not based on biological criteria, but are the result of the social norms and constructs learned by or imposed on every individual through socialization processes. However, the

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document also acknowledges and addresses those inequalities that are experienced as a result of biological criteria, such as sexual and reproductive health.

While recognizing the existence of other gender identities, this document specifically focuses on the inequality resulting from the hierarchical organization of the gender-specific roles assigned to women and men, girls and boys, due to their prominently structural character on a society-wide scale.

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Guidelines for promotion and implementation of gender equality and women's empowerment

1 Scope

This document gives guidance on how to promote and implement gender equality and women's empowerment. It provides guidelines for organizations to develop the capabilities to achieve a culture of gender equality and women's empowerment. The guidelines include the framework, resources, policies, tools and good practices enabling contextualization, promotion and implementation of gender equality.

This document focuses on the inequality resulting from the gender specific roles assigned to women, girls, men and boys and is applicable to all types of organizations (public or private) regardless of their size, location and field of activity.

This document does not address the specific aspects of relations with labour unions or work councils, country-specific compliance and regulations relating to gender diversity.

2 Normative references

There are no normative references in this document.

3 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the following terms and definitions apply.

ISO and IEC maintain terminology databases for use in standardization at the following addresses:

- ISO Online browsing platform: available at <https://www.iso.org/obp>
- IEC Electropedia: available at <https://www.electropedia.org/>

3.1 workforce

people who provide a service or labour to contribute to public and private business or organizational outcomes

Note 1 to entry: Service or labour comprises paid, voluntary, or legally compulsory contributions, irrespective of their contractual status.

Note 2 to entry: Workforce includes people defined as workers in ISO 26000, as well as volunteers and persons in training.

[SOURCE: ISO 30400:2022, 3.8.1, modified — Notes 1 and 2 to entry have been added.]

3.2 gender-based discrimination

intentional or unintentional unfavourable treatment of a person, social group or organization on the basis of their gender and gender stereotypes assigned in a social and cultural context which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise of their rights

Note 1 to entry: Gender based-discrimination can intersect and be cumulative, known as intersectionality, with multiple forms of discrimination

Note 2 to entry: Within organizations, gender-based discrimination can be systemic, meaning that the policies, procedures, practices, routines or organizational culture of any entity, or the combination of these, whether intentionally or not, contributes to less favourable outcomes for the people who are part of them based on gender, more often for women and girls than for men and boys.

3.3

gender-inclusive language

oral and written language not perpetuating gender stereotypes and making women and men in all their diversity visible by proactively and equitably using all available syntactic rules, lexical fields and choices of word enabling the use of feminine and masculine forms when they differ and gender-neutral terms

3.4

gender equality

equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities for women and men and girls and boys

Note 1 to entry: gender equality does not mean that women and men, girls and boys, will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female

Note 2 to entry: gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and girls, men and boys, are taken into consideration, recognizing them in all their diversity

3.5

gender

roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society at a given time considers appropriate for men and women

Note 1 to entry: In addition to social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, gender also refers to the relations between women and those between men.

Note 2 to entry: These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes. They are context or time-specific and changeable. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man in a given context. In most societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities. Gender is part of the broader socio-cultural context, as are other important criteria for socio-cultural analysis include class, race, poverty level, ethnic group, sexual orientation, age and disabilities

Note 3 to entry: Gender in this definition can refer to gender as defined by national legislations or self-identified by individuals.

Note 4 to entry: Gender does not refer to sexual orientation which is another important criteria for socio-cultural analysis.

[SOURCE: UN Women, *Concepts and definitions*^[13], modified — part of the definition moved into a note to entry.]

3.6

women's empowerment

process of enabling social, economic, cultural and political conditions for women to take control of their own lives and voices, development and future

Note 1 to entry: The empowerment of women and girls concerns their gaining power and control over their own lives. It involves awareness-raising, building self-confidence, expansion of choices, increased access to and control over resources and actions to transform the structures and institutions which reinforce and perpetuate gender discrimination and inequality.

Note 2 to entry: This implies that to be empowered they must not only have equal capabilities (such as education and health) and equal access to resources and opportunities (such as land and employment), but they must also have agency and ability and control to use these rights, capabilities, resources and opportunities to make choices and decisions (such as is provided through private life/families, leadership opportunities and participation in political institutions).

[SOURCE: UN Women, *Gender Equality Glossary*^[14], modified — part of the definition moved into a note to entry.]

3.7 organization

person or group of people that has its own functions with responsibilities, authorities and relationships to achieve its objectives

Note 1 to entry: the concept of organization includes, but is not limited to sole-trader, company, corporation, firm, enterprise, authority, partnership, association, charity or institution, or part or combination thereof, whether incorporating or not, public or private

Note 2 to entry: This constitutes one of the common terms and core definitions for ISO management system standards given in Annex SL of the Consolidated ISO Supplement to the ISO/IEC Directives, Part 1. The original definition has been changed by modifying Note 1 to entry.

[SOURCE: ISO 9000:2015, 3.2.1]

3.8 gender parity index

numerical concept concerning the relative equality in terms of numbers and proportions of women and men, girls and boys, is often calculated as the ratio of female-to-male values for a given indicator

Note 1 to entry: when ratio is reached, gender parity is synonym of gender balance.

3.9 gender balance

relates to a proportional participation of women and men in all areas of work, programmes, and projects. That participation should be proportional to their share of the population.

Note 1 to entry: In some contexts, such as representation, participation and decision-making bodies, a representation of 40 % to 60 % of both women and men, girls and boys can be considered as gender balance representation. In other contexts, the organization should strive for gender parity [see *gender parity index* (3.8)].

3.10 stakeholder

individual or group that has an interest in any decision or activity of an organization

[SOURCE: ISO 26000:2010, 2.20]

3.11 social responsibility

responsibility of an organization for the impacts of its decisions and activities on society and the environment, through transparent and ethical behaviour that:

- contributes to sustainable development, including inclusiveness, health and the welfare of society;
- takes into account the expectations of stakeholders;
- is in compliance with applicable law and consistent with international norms of behaviour;
- is integrated throughout the organization and practised in its relationships

Note 1 to entry: Activities include products, services and processes.

Note 2 to entry: Relationships refer to an organization's activities within its sphere of influence.

Note 3 to entry: Includes activities on members and workforce of organizations.

Note 4 to entry: Social responsibility includes gender equality.

[SOURCE: ISO 26000:2010, 2.18, modified — Notes 3 and 4 to entry have been added.]

3.12

sexism

any conscious or unconscious act, gesture, body language and representation, spoken or written words, practice or behaviour based upon the idea that a person or a group of persons is inferior because of their sex or gender, which occurs in the public or private sphere, whether in physical or virtual environment, with the purpose or effect of: violating the inherent dignity or rights of a person or a group of persons; or resulting in physical, sexual, psychological or socio-economic harm or suffering to a person or a group of persons; or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment; or constituting a barrier to the autonomy and full realisation of human rights by a person or a group of persons; or maintaining and reinforcing gender stereotypes

Note 1 to entry: Sexism can include forms of indirect violence (hints, jokes, inappropriate and insistent comments or looks, etc.) or forms of exclusion (informal discussions about work that are not accessible to everyone, etc.).

Note 2 to entry: Sexism and sexist behaviour are perpetrated at the individual, institutional and structural levels, and experienced with detrimental effect at all three levels. At the structural level, sexism constitutes a barrier to gender equality and to the empowerment of women and girls; whereas men and boys are also restricted in their capabilities by sexist stereotypes. Gender stereotypes and inherent biases shape norms, behaviour and expectations, and therefore lead to sexist acts.

Note 3 to entry: Sexism is a part of a continuum of violence, it contributes to create a climate which can constitute favourable ground to violence against women or gender-based discrimination.

[SOURCE: Council of Europe^[17], modified — Notes 1, 2 and 3 have been added.]

3.13

stereotype

shared or individual beliefs about personal characteristics, usually pertaining to personality traits and the behaviours of a group of persons

3.14

gender stereotype

socially or culturally preconception ascribing to an individual specific and limited attributes, characteristics or roles by reason only of membership in the social group of women and men or girls and boys

3.15

gender responsiveness

outcomes that reflect an understanding of gender roles and inequalities and which make an effort to encourage equal participation and equal and fair distribution of benefits

Note 1 to entry: Gender responsiveness is accomplished through gender analysis that informs inclusiveness.

[SOURCE: UNDP, *Gender responsive national communications toolkit*^[18], modified — part of the definition moved into a note to entry.]

3.16

gender-responsive budgeting

planning, programming and budgeting of any public or private organization that contributes to the advancement of gender equality and the fulfilment of women's' right

Note 1 to entry: It entails identifying and reflecting needed interventions to address gender gaps in organization's policies, plans and budgets.

[SOURCE: UNICEF, *Gender equality glossary*^[18], modified — part of the definition moved into a note to entry.]

3.17

gender equality-based public funding

attributing public funds with conditionality based on gender equality and actions to promote and achieve gender equality

3.18

remuneration

direct and indirect financial benefits received by a personal financial planner in exchange for providing the service of personal financial planning to a client

[SOURCE: ISO 22222:2005, 3.19]

3.19

equal remuneration

rates of remuneration established without discrimination based on gender, taking into account the skills, effort and responsibilities for equivalent working conditions even when the work is not of the same nature

Note 1 to entry: The term remuneration includes the ordinary, basic or minimum wage or salary and any additional emoluments whatsoever payable directly or indirectly, whether in cash or in kind, by the organization to the worker and arising out of the worker's employment.

[SOURCE: ILO, C100^[21], modified — part of the definition moved into a note to entry.]

3.20

bias

unconscious, conscious or systematic tendency, inclination or opinion that is preconceived or unreasoned that hinders impartial judgement.

Note 1 to entry: Bias can be both explicit and implicit

Note 2 to entry: Gender bias is one of its specific form. According to the UNDP's *Gender social norms index (GSNI)*^[22], globally, 43 % of the population consider men to be better business leaders than women; 28 % think that university is more important for men than for women; 46 % believe that men have more right to a job than women; 25 % of people still think it's okay for a man to beat his wife. It should be noted that gender bias is prevalent among both men and women.

[SOURCE: ISO 30400:2022, 3.7.2, modified — notes 2 and 3 to entry have been replaced with a new note.]

3.21

work-life balance

outcome of organizational processes and practises which promote the satisfaction of, but not limited to, personal needs, unpaid work, domestic work, care work, leisure time and social activities, supporting a healthy lifestyle and balanced participation of all in public and private life

3.22

diversity

characteristics of differences and similarities between people

Note 1 to entry: Diversity includes factors that influence the identities and perspectives that people bring when interacting at work.

Note 2 to entry: Diversity can support the development of in workplace environments and practices that foster learning from others by implementing *inclusiveness* (3.23) measures.

Note 3 to entry: Diversity dimensions include the demographic and other personal characteristics of the workforce, such as, but not limited to, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, religion or belief, as well as characteristics related to socio-economic context. These are often identified and agreed upon dimensions, which can be associated with legal requirements in different jurisdictions.

[SOURCE: ISO 30415:2021, 3.7]

3.23

inclusion

practice of including people in a way that is fair for all, values everyone's differences, and empowers and enables each person to be themselves and achieve their full potential and thrive at work

Note 1 to entry: Organizational policies, processes and practices that are fair and impartially applied can support an inclusive workplace.

Note 2 to entry: This involves the entire workforce having equal and fair access to opportunities and resources to enable their contribution to the organization.

Note 3 to entry: This involves stakeholders from different groups being accepted, welcomed, enabled to use their voice and get involved, and to develop a sense of belonging.

[SOURCE: CIPD^[23], modified — added notes to entry.]

3.24

sexual and gender-based violence

GBV

any harmful act, including sexual harassment, that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life, that is perpetrated against a person's or a group of individuals' consent based on gender

3.25

sexual and reproductive health and rights

state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to all aspects of sexuality and reproduction, not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity

Note 1 to entry: Therefore, a positive approach to sexuality and reproduction should recognize the part played by pleasurable sexual relationships, trust and communication in promoting self-esteem and overall well-being. All individuals have a right to make decisions governing their bodies and to access services that support that right.

[SOURCE: Lancet 2018^[24], modified — part of the definition moved into a note to entry.]

3.26

sexual harassment

any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct or gesture of a sexual nature, with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment

Note 1 to entry: It can include a one-off incident or a series of incidents. Sexual harassment can be deliberate, unsolicited or coercive.

[SOURCE: CETS No. 210^[25], modified — adapted part of the definition and added a note to entry.]

3.27

labour practices

all the policies and practices relating to work performed by or on behalf of the organization, including subcontracted work, that affect the workforce: recruitment hiring, retention, promotion and retirement, remuneration, turnover, disciplinary action, complaint response system, transfers and reassignment, termination of employment, human resources development, occupational safety and health, and working conditions (working hours, discrimination and safety)

3.28

top management

person or group of people who directs and controls an *organization* (3.7) at the highest level

[SOURCE: ISO 9000:2015, modified — Notes to entry have been deleted.]

3.29

gender mainstreaming

process of systematically assessing the implications for women and men, girls and boys and incorporating a gender equality and women's empowerment perspective in the preparation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, regulatory measures and budgets, in all areas and at all levels in order to promote gender equality and women's empowerment

Note 1 to entry: Gender mainstreaming is a process intended to incorporate a gender equality perspective in all policies, which ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality^[26].

3.30

governing body

person or group of persons who have ultimate accountability for the whole organization

Note 1 to entry: Every organization has one governing body, whether explicitly established or not

Note 2 to entry: A governing body can be explicitly established in a number of formats including, but not limited to, a board of direction, supervisory board, board of trustees.

Note 3 to entry: Top management plays a role that, depending on the context, reports to and is held accountable by the governing body.

[SOURCE: ISO 37000:2021, 3.3.4]

3.31

intersectionality

combination of one or more diversity dimensions and other personal characteristics that are part of a person's identity

Note 1 to entry: In the context of gender equality and women's empowerment intersectionality is used to describe the interaction of multiple forms of discrimination based on gender, disability, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, age and others. Intersectionality expresses the idea that different personal characteristics / forms of discrimination do not simply add up, but intersect and therefore influence each other, thus creating new forms of discrimination and privilege.

3.32

discrimination

intentional or accomplished less favourable treatment of a person, social group or an organization on ground of gender than another is, has been or would be treated in a comparable situation

Note 1 to entry: Indirect discrimination: an apparently neutral provision, criterion or practice putting a person, social group or an organization at a particular disadvantage on grounds of gender than another is, unless that provision, criterion or practice is objectively justified by a legitimate aim, and the means of achieving that aim are appropriate and necessary.

[SOURCE: Eurofound 2019^[28], modified — adapted part of the definition and added a note to entry.]

3.33

equality

state of being equal, especially in status, rights or opportunities

[SOURCE: ISO 30415:2021, 3.9, modified — Removed "outcome" from definition.]

3.34

social group

group where members share an innate characteristic, or a common background that cannot be changed, or share a characteristic or belief that is so fundamental to identity or conscience that a person should not be forced to renounce it

3.35

sexual abuse

actual, attempted or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions

Note 1 to entry: Sexual abuse includes for example unwanted kissing, touching, grabbing or rubbing, threats of unwanted sexual act, rape or attempted rape.

Note 2 to entry: This abuse can take place in real life or virtually and include the recording and dissemination of private images without consent. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by technology-facilitated gender-based violence.

Note 3 to entry: All sexual relationships should be based on free, affirmative and reversible consent.

Note 4 to entry: All sexual activity with a child is considered as sexual abuse. A child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier^[29].

3.36

sexual exploitation

any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to threatening or profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another (e.g. transactional sex, solicitation of transactional sex and exploitative relationship)

Note 1 to entry: This can be offering money, gifts, or a job in exchange for sex, withholding due services or blackmailing for sex, or threats of sexual exploitation, and sextortion.

Note 2 to entry: This exploitation can take place in real life or on line.

Note 3 to entry: Sexual extortion (sextortion) is sexual corruption a form of both gender-based violence and corruption. It occurs when people in positions of authority seek to extort sexual favours in exchange for something within their power to grant or withhold.

4 Methodology

4.1 Overview of the methodology

This document provides guidelines on how to address gender equality and women's empowerment in organizations in the following areas:

- the organization internal dimension: governance, labour practices, raising awareness among internal stakeholders and support for internal stakeholders;
- activity and investments of the organization: sustainable procurement and gender budgeting;
- external relations of the organization: involvement of stakeholders and setting up of partnerships;
- internal and external communication: editorial content and communication action.

Working on the four areas of the organization with the guidelines proposed in this document it is possible to attain the following goals, which are inspired from the UN Sustainable Development Goal number 5^[8]:

- raising awareness for as well as preventing and ending all forms of gender-based discrimination and promoting women's and girls' rights,
- abolishing gender stereotypes and gender bias in the organization,
- preventing and ending sexual and gender-based violence,
- educating and improving access to education and training, including vocational training,
- protecting health and especially mental health as well as sexual and reproductive health and rights,
- enhancing women's empowerment, especially economic empowerment,
- increasing participation and equal opportunities for leadership in political and institutional, professional and corporate life.

For each area, several issues are proposed that organizations should take into consideration when striving to further promote gender equality and women's empowerment. Also, each area and issue have a varying degree of relevance to each organization.

The guidance on each issue includes actions that an organization should take into account and expectations of the way in which an organization should behave. When an organization attempts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment, it should identify each one of the issues in relation to its key areas.

The actions recommended in this document should be considered in the context of the maturity or how advanced an organization is in terms of gender equality. The recommended actions can be utilized by an