

What Is Gender Mainstreaming?

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“Gender mainstreaming” is a term that came into widespread use with the adoption of the Beijing *Platform for Action*, which emphasized the importance of integrating a gender perspective into all policies and programs to ensure that all decision-making processes include an analysis of the effects on women and men respectively.

What is Canada’s approach to gender mainstreaming?

While not using the term “gender mainstreaming” until recently, the Canadian government has had a long-standing commitment to analyzing the impacts on women early in the policy and decision-making process. The commitments made by Canada in *Setting the Stage for the Next Century: The Federal Plan for Gender Equality* (1995) are built on lessons learned over two decades. Steps taken since have also helped to establish an enabling environment for implementing Gender-based Analysis. Several aspects facilitate implementation, including:

- A clear legal foundation for the development of policies supporting gender equality, as outlined in sections 15 and 28 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*;
- A commitment, through the Government of Canada’s gender-based analysis policy, to a systematic and cross-sectoral approach;

- The existence of institutional infrastructures, including a national machinery (Status of Women Canada) with a clearly defined role;
- The increased availability of analytic inputs for policy decision-making that support gender equality (such as guidelines and analytic frameworks for gender-based policy analysis);
- Mechanisms to support gender equality, and:
- Intergovernmental collaborative mechanisms and mechanisms for information exchange and collaboration among federal, provincial and territorial governments, in addition to constructive partnerships with actors outside government.

The Federal Plan for Gender Equality clearly states departments’ and agencies’ responsibility for implementing gender-based analysis. Several federal departments and agencies undertook such initiatives. As a result, departmental policies on gender equality, institutional infrastructures (such as an office or unit to handle women’s issues), analytic tools and methodologies, training approaches and data for undertaking gender-based analysis (such as gender-based research and indicators) have been developed.

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Provincial and territorial governments have also developed policies and established mechanisms to promote consideration of gender equality issues in policy formulation. Some provinces and territories have created action plans to implement the Beijing *Platform for Action* within their jurisdictions. Many have made commitments to integrate Gender-based Analysis into their policies and programs.

- Maintaining political commitment; and
- Demonstrating results to Canadians.

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What are the main challenges and future directions?

Considerable progress has been made in establishing a positive environment for Gender-based Analysis and in increasing understanding and debate, both within and outside government, of a broader range of policy options. There are, however, challenges that lie ahead, including:

- Adapting to a changing government and economic environment;
- Making effective use of limited resources for stimulating Gender-based Analysis;
- Promoting exchanges and understanding among stakeholders;
- Accomplishing systematic application of Gender-based Analysis;
- Progressing with the development of analytic resources for Gender-based Analysis;
- Promoting further policy links and mutual respect between governments and non-governmental organizations;