



# Guidelines: Adopting a Gender Action Plan

European Disability Forum  
June 2025

Guidelines on how to mainstream gender across leadership and operations of organisations of persons with disabilities and allies

## Table of Contents

About this document .....	2
Introduction .....	3
Developing a Gender Action Plan .....	4
Understanding gender equality and gender mainstreaming: baseline definitions .....	4
Mainstreaming gender through actions .....	7
Step 1: Seek approval and commitment from your leadership.....	7
Step 2: Assess what already exists in your organisation.....	7
Step 3: Set your actions .....	9
Step 4: Ensure your actions align with international human rights treaties .....	14
Step 5: Mainstream gender equality and women’s rights.....	15
Step 6: Monitor, evaluate, and learn from your Gender Action Plan.	15
Conclusions .....	16

## About this document

This is a guideline on the **preparation and adoption of a Gender Action Plan**. It is for organisations of persons with disabilities and organisations working for the rights of persons with disabilities.

It is part of **EDF’s Gender Mainstreaming Package** aimed at increasing gender mainstreaming and women’s rights in organisations of persons with disabilities. More information and other tools can be found [on EDFs website](#).

## Introduction

Women and girls with disabilities constitute 29,2% of the total population of women in the European Union (EU)<sup>1</sup> and around 60% of the overall population of 100 million persons with disabilities in Europe<sup>2</sup>. Yet, they continue to face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination – from exclusion in decision-making to barriers in accessing education, employment, healthcare, justice, and protection from gender-based violence.

A gender perspective is essential so that no one is left behind and so that policies, laws, and actions reflect the realities and rights of women and girls with disabilities.

Many organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) lack the tools, experience, or resources to address gender equality effectively. This Gender Action Plan is designed to fill that gap.

It offers practical guidance to help OPDs embed gender equality and the rights of women and girls with disabilities into their activities, policies, and advocacy. Starting with key definitions, it then outlines clear, step-by-step actions to support your organisation in developing its own Gender Action Plan.

Our goal is to strengthen your capacity to build a more inclusive and gender-equal disability movement, and to empower women and girls with disabilities to lead the way.

---

<sup>1</sup> [Eurostat, Level of disability \(activity limitation\) by sex, age and income quintile \(2025\)](#).

<sup>2</sup> [European Disability Forum, Third EDF Manifesto on the Rights of Women and Girls with Disabilities \(2024\)](#).

## Developing a Gender Action Plan

Your organisation, as well as your members and partners have the responsibility to develop actions, policies, projects, programmes, and strategies that mainstream gender equality and reach women and girls with disabilities. This should start with a clear commitment towards gender equality and women's rights within your' mission, vision and values.

Then, there are many additional actions that your organisation can take to better mainstream gender equality in its structure and advocacy work – ranging from guaranteeing gender equality in your leadership and governing structure, offering staff training and promoting gender-sensitive communication and funding. In order to do so in a sustainable and structured way, it is recommended to develop an internal Gender Action Plan describing those actions with clear goals, timeline and budget.

But first, it is essential to understand what gender equality is, and assess how your organisation is currently doing.

### Understanding gender equality and gender mainstreaming: baseline definitions

Below is a glossary of key definitions that you can take into account before and while developing your Gender Action Plan:

#### 1. Gender Equality

- **Definition:** The state in which access to rights or opportunities is unaffected by gender. Gender equality requires equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities for all individuals, regardless of gender.

#### 2. Gender Mainstreaming

- **Definition:** The process of assessing the implications for people of different genders in all areas of policy and decision-making. It aims

to ensure that gender equality is considered and integrated into all aspects of an organisation's activities.

### 3. Gender Stereotypes

- **Definition:** Preconceived ideas and societal beliefs about the characteristics, roles, and behaviours deemed appropriate for individuals based on their gender. These often limit personal choices and perpetuate inequality.

EDF has developed a position paper including the main [gender stereotypes against women and girls with disabilities](#).

### 4. Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

- **Definition:** Any harmful act directed at an individual based on their gender. This includes physical, sexual, psychological, or economic harm inflicted on individuals, most commonly women and girls, due to their gender.

### 5. Sex and Gender

- **Sex:** Refers to the biological characteristics which define humans as female or male. These sets of biological characteristics are not mutually exclusive as there are individuals who possess both, but these characteristics tend to differentiate humans as males and females.
- **Gender:** Refers to the roles, behaviours, activities, and expectations that society deems appropriate for men, women, and gender-diverse individuals.

### 6. Intersectionality

- **Definition:** A framework for understanding how various aspects of a person's identity (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, class) intersect and contribute to unique experiences of discrimination or privilege.

## 7. Sexual Harassment

- **Definition:** Unwanted and inappropriate behaviour of a sexual nature that creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment. It can occur in various settings, including workplaces, educational institutions, or public spaces.

## 8. Women's Empowerment

- **Definition:** The process by which women gain control over their lives and the ability to make choices, often by gaining access to resources, education, decision-making power, and equal opportunities in all spheres of life.

For more information on the glossary, you can consult the [European Institute for Gender Equality \(EIGE\)](#), and its [gender mainstreaming glossary](#).

Other important resources can be found consulting the [glossary and thesaurus](#) of EIGE, as well its [Gender Equality in Academia and Research toolkit \(GEAR\)](#).

To assess if the language you use is gender sensitive and non-sexist, you can consult the [UNESCO guidelines](#) and the [European Parliament's guidelines](#) on gender neutral language.

Finally, EIGE [Gender Equality Index](#) is a tool to measure the progress of gender equality in the EU. It gives more visibility to areas that need improvement and ultimately supports policy makers to design more effective gender equality measures. The index maps all EU member states and provides useful information on disability, as it is possible to filter indicators by selecting "disability" between other intersecting inequality factors.

## Mainstreaming gender through actions

There are many reasons why putting in place gender equality actions that aim at ensuring gender equality and women's rights are spread throughout your organisational culture, policy strategies, functioning of your governing bodies, external representation, human resource strategy, economic and financial management, communication strategy, and training.

When gender equality is well reflected within your organisation's policies and structure, this helps advancing the broader gender equality agenda and strengthens the leadership of women and girls with disabilities.

This involves a multi-step process that ensures inclusivity, accountability, and effectiveness.

### **Step 1: Seek approval and commitment from your leadership**

Your leadership must demonstrate a clear commitment to gender equality and women's rights. This can involve statements from your organisations' Women's Committee (if existent) or governing bodies. Gender equality and women's rights must be embedded in the core mission, vision and values of your organisations' work.

**Note:** In order to achieve this commitment described in Step 1, the assessment described in Sept 2 might be needed. You can decide which steps come first, depending on your own situation!

### **Step 2: Assess what already exists in your organisation**

This can be done through an initial assessment of your organisation's existing internal policies, strategies, programmes, and projects. It is crucial to start mapping the situation and identifying any gaps where gender equality and women's rights are not being sufficiently addressed. The very first step is to assess the gender balance in all your organisation structure and areas of work, starting from your organisation's governing bodies such as your Executive Committee, Board, etc., to the gender equality within your secretariat/staff.

You need to understand the full picture and ask yourself (example of questions):

- What is in place?
- What is not in place?
- What is the current status in terms of promotion of equal opportunities for men and women, and for achieving gender balance in all areas of work? What are the numbers (composition of secretariat workforce, governing bodies, etc)?
- Is gender equality and women's right part of my organisation's goals?
- Does the organisation's budget explicitly carries out gender equality and women's rights actions?
- Does my organisation's communications strategy and tools include women and girls with disabilities?

There are several tools to help your assessment of gender equality.

A very useful and handy tool that can support you in finding out where your organisation stands in terms of gender equality and women's rights, is the [Self-assessment test](#) we have developed as part of the Gender Mainstreaming Package.

In addition, several other tools are available. One is the "[Gender Equality Capacity Assessment Tool](#)" developed by UN women. This tool helps to assess the understanding, knowledge and skills that a given organisation and its staff have on gender equality, and on the organisation's gender architecture and gender policy. It includes an easy-to-implement questionnaire and guidelines. The information gathered through this tool can be complemented by surveys, interviews, focused groups, etc.

You can also consult the "[Gender Mainstreaming in Practice: a Handbook](#)" prepared by the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme).

### Step 3: Set your actions

You can now set your actions, which are measurable, and can lead you to achieve your goals. All the actions can be described in a Gender Action Plan to be adopted by your organisation for a specific period of time.

When planning your goals, first ask: What do you want to achieve? Make sure gender is part of the issue, and that your goal reflects that.

You can look at this in two ways<sup>3</sup>:

1. Does the goal consider differences between men and women with disabilities?

If men and women with disabilities have different needs or face unequal situations, your goal should aim to fix that. This is called a *corrective* goal—it helps meet the needs of both men and women with disabilities fairly.

2. Does the goal help improve overall gender equality?

Sometimes, deeper issues—like unfair systems or rules—make gender inequality worse. Your goal should also try to change those systems. This is called a *transformative* goal—it helps create long-term equality between men and women.

You can find some examples of actions below<sup>4</sup>. To structure them, you can divide the actions depending on their nature. For example, some actions may be related to the advocacy work of your organisations, and other to the structure of your organisations or to the human resources.

You can follow this basic template:

#### **Name of the Action:**

- Goal:
- Process:
- People responsible in your organisation:

---

<sup>3</sup> [UNDP, Gender Mainstreaming in Practice: a Handbook \(2024\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> [European Disability Forum, Gender Equality Plan 2015-2017](#)

- Timelines:
- Budget:
- Indicators/monitoring:

**Example Action 1: Include gender equality and women’s rights perspective in all your organisation’s policy and advocacy work.**

- Goal: The situation of women and girls with disabilities is visible in your policy and advocacy work, and it includes specific recommendations to ensure their rights.
- Process: Include a section on women with disabilities in your policy and advocacy documents, such as position papers, policy recommendations, and statements. Another idea can be to develop your own Manifesto for the rights of women and girls with disabilities (if you do not have one already). As example, you can consult [“EDF Third Manifesto on the Rights of Women and Girls with Disabilities”](#).
- People responsible: Governing body members, management and staff.
- Timelines: (x)
- Budget: (x)
- Indicators/monitoring: you can monitor your actions by looking at the number of policy documents including the gender perspective/total number of actions performed.

**Example Action 2: Advocate for the rights of women and girls with disabilities in gender equality and women’s rights policies**

- Goal: Mainstream disability rights and the perspective of women with disabilities in gender equality and women’s rights policies.
- Process: Develop the capacity, knowledge, skills and partnerships of your organisation to work on policies related to gender equality and women’s rights.

- People responsible: Governing bodies, staff – there should be a focal point on gender equality and women’s rights policy in your organisation’s body and staff, you can also consider hiring someone specifically to work on the topic as Women’s Rights Officer.
- Timelines: (x)
- Budget: (x)
- Indicators/monitoring: number of measures put forward, number of policies studied, number and type of policy actions performed.

**Example Action 3: Preventing and combating violence against women and girls with disabilities**

- Goal: Advocating to end violence against women and girls with disabilities
- Process: This can be adopting a report, position paper, manual, participating in advocacy of law in your country, etc.
- People involved: (x)
- Timelines: (x)
- Budget: (x)
- Indicators/monitoring: (x)

**Example Action 4: Setting up a Women’s Committees in your organisation, and/or if you are an umbrella organisation, strengthening the development of women’s committees within your membership**

- Goal: Enhance empowerment among women with disabilities within the disability movement.
- Process: (x)
- People involved: (x)
- Timelines: (x)
- Budget: (x)
- Indicators/monitoring: Number of new Women’s Committee or women’s group set up.

**Example Action 5: Include a permanent agenda item on gender and disability in your annual general assembly/annual conference**

- Goal: Raise the profile of gender issues and awareness of gender equality and women's rights
- Process: (x)
- People involved: (x)
- Timelines: (x)
- Budget: (x)
- Indicators/monitoring: Inclusion in your conferences' agenda

**Example Action 6: Review your organisations' statutes to include gender perspective**

- Goal: Enhance representation and political participation of women in governing bodies and when representing your organisation. Apply principle of democratic parity.
- Process: (x)
- People involved: (x)
- Timelines: (x)
- Budget: (x)
- Indicators/monitoring: Changes introduced in your statutes/official documents of your organisation

**Example Action 7: Introduce measures to increase flexible working arrangements when necessary, due to family or personal responsibilities**

- Goal: Enhance personal, family and professional life balance among your organisations' staff members.
- Process: (x)
- People involved: (x)
- Timelines: (x)
- Budget: (x)

- Indicators/monitoring: Change in internal policies for staff, number of staff members benefiting from measure, number of requests and number of requests granted.

**Example Action 8: Introduce a protocol to prevent and report any form of harassment for both staff and elected positions**

- Goal: Prevent and address situations involving any form of harassment<sup>5</sup> among staff and in representative bodies.
- Process: (x)
- People involved: (x)
- Timelines: (x)
- Budget: (x)
- Indicators/monitoring: Adoption of protocol, number of people benefiting from measure, delivery of protocol, dissemination of protocol.

**Example Action 9: Training course on gender equality and women's rights for the staff**

- Goal: Raise awareness on gender equality and women's rights for all staff, and ensuring they feel empowered and accountable to promote the rights of women with disabilities in their work.
- Process: (x) Training to be provided in consultation with women's rights organisations. You can decide to make this a yearly training or mandatory training for new staff.
- People involved: (x)
- Timelines: (x)
- Budget: (x)
- Indicators/monitoring: Number of people trained.

---

<sup>5</sup> For example, the Belgian Law recognises moral harassment (art. 32ter, 2°, Law of 4 August 1996 on Well-being) and sexual harassment (art. 32ter, 3°, Law of 4 August 1996 on Well-being). Consult [EDF Anti-Harassment Policy](#) for definitions.

## **Example Action 10: Mainstreaming gender equality and women's rights in fundraising**

- Goal: Mainstream gender equality and women's rights in all project applications, and fundraising activities.
- Process: (x)
- People involved: (x)
- Timelines: (x)
- Budget: (x)
- Indicators/monitoring: numbers of projects and activities that include the gender perspective. For example: project applications should include the objective of collecting data about women and girls with disabilities directly reached by the project, or reasonable accommodations used to enable women's participation in the activities.

### **Step 4: Ensure your actions align with international human rights treaties**

You need to make sure that your actions fully align and refer to international human rights treaties, such as:

- [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (especially article 6 and article 7)
- [UN Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW)
- [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) and other UN Human Rights Conventions
- [Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence](#) (Istanbul Convention)

In developing them, you might also want to consult other stakeholders, such as women's rights and LGBTIQ+ organisations.

## **Step 5: Mainstream gender equality and women's rights**

When key actions are in place, the next crucial step is to mainstream gender equality and women's rights them in all areas and fields in which your organisation is working.

To tailor your approach, it is useful to create a personalised checklist based on the portfolios you are working on. This will allow to identify and address the specific requirements of women and girls with disabilities in your fields of work. Over time, this checklist can evolve into a valuable toolkit for your work.

Additionally, it is important to consult with the Women's Committee of your organisation, if any. The expertise of members and observers of the Women's Committee will provide further guidance and ensure you're your mainstreaming efforts are effective across all areas of life.<sup>6</sup>

To help you in your gender mainstreaming effort, we have created a gender mainstreaming toolkit!

## **Step 6: Monitor, evaluate, and learn from your Gender Action Plan**

Monitor and evaluate your Gender Action Plan is crucial to ensure you are going in the right direction. You can observe the results of your actions by examining the indicators you have set, and track your progresses.

Periodic evaluations, for example annual evaluations, are also opportunities for you to assess what's working and what isn't.

Finally, you can always ask feedback from your organisations' staff, Women's Committee, representatives, stakeholders and learn about challenges they are facing in implementing the Gender Action Plan.

---

<sup>6</sup> [European Disability Forum, Gender Mainstreaming Toolkit \(2024\)](#)

## Conclusions

Gender equality doesn't happen by chance – it requires conscious effort, clear structures, and shared responsibility. These guidelines on developing a Gender Action Plan are a practical tool to support your organisation in building that foundation.

By embedding gender equality into your organisation's values, daily work, and long-term policies, you are taking a necessary step toward more inclusive, effective, and representative advocacy. From staff training and commitment from the leadership to gender-sensitive policies and communication, every part of your organisation can contribute to a culture of gender equality.

This plan is not about doing everything at once but about starting with what's possible and building from there. For more actions, you can consult the other tools available in our Gender Mainstreaming Package.