



Gender Equity in Integrated Urban Development

*Gender-equitable development, planning and
construction processes*

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1. Introduction

Integrating gender aspects into urban planning, development, architecture and construction promotes an equitable and democratic society. Gender-specific approaches reveal hidden discriminations such as poverty, stigmatization and exclusion. Feminist urban planners, architects, sociologists and other professionals have been working on initially *women-friendly* and later *gender-responsive* urban planning, development and architecture for over 40 years. Despite existing expertise and guidelines in "*gender mainstreaming*" and *gender planning*, the topic is not embedded in mainstream planning. Although the desire for equality is widespread and partially anchored in political and institutional documents, laws and regulations, there are still fundamental gender equality deficits in urban spaces worldwide.

Women worldwide perform most of the unpaid labor, such as care work, and have more complex mobility patterns than men, requiring specific spatial structures. Safety aspects in public spaces, transport and buildings are often inadequate, affecting usage by women, girls and marginalized groups. Violence against women incurs significant global costs, which would be better invested in gender-responsive urban development. Moreover, considering the needs of women and girls often benefits other marginalized

groups, even if they are not specifically mentioned as the main target.

International institutions and development cooperation projects have developed approaches to promote gender-responsive cities. The New Urban Agenda, adopted in 2016, calls for *cities for all* specifically including all gender. The BMZ underlines this in their position paper on → [Sustainable Urban Development](#)¹ (July 2023), reaffirming their vision of a livable city for all, by

- providing basic services, employment and healthy living conditions;
- enabling all people to participate in social and political life and promoting diversity and inclusion;
- actively working to reduce poverty, minimize inequalities and promote equality.

This text offers a concise set of criteria for creating gender-equitable cities, neighbourhoods, green spaces, housing, public spaces, municipal buildings and services. It outlines key principles, processes and tools for gender-responsive urban planning and development. It aims to support staff and partners of GIZ in all phases of urban development projects in applying and implementing gender-responsive approaches.

¹ Positionspapier: Nachhaltige Stadtentwicklung



Key Messages

- Systematically address inequalities in the built environment, including safety and protection from climate-related impacts and access to mobility and health facilities.
- Current urban planning and existing master plans often inadequately consider the realities of women, girls and marginalized groups.
- Actively promote participation of women, girls and marginalized groups in decision-making.
- Planning processes largely rely on assumptions and projections rather than systematic data collection and ongoing adjustment.
- Gender-responsive planning and data collection can uncover hidden disadvantages.
- To plan comprehensively with gender equity, projects must be consistently gender-budgeted and political will is required at all levels.
- Gender equity in urban planning and development creates an inclusive and fair urban environment that benefits everyone without disadvantaging anyone.
- Evidence-based planning through data collection and monitoring is crucial for making informed gender-responsive decisions.

2. Gender-Responsive Conception, Planning and Construction in the Context of German Development Cooperation

In the context of development cooperation, it is essential to consider how urban planning and construction processes impact different groups, particularly women, girls and marginalized groups, whose needs are often overlooked.

The design of public spaces (outdoor and indoor) and urban structures significantly influences many aspects of our lives, such as working, playing, mobility patterns and leisure activities. However, the built environment is predominantly planned by heterosexual, physically healthy (white) men, resulting in their needs being overrepresented. Meanwhile women, who make up half of the world's population and form part of urban life, are underrepresented in planning and construction. In addition to the structural marginalization of women, girls and marginalized groups, further reasons for this

issue include the lack or absence of user data and the insufficient representation and active participation of women and minorities in planning and construction processes.

The central question arising is: How can we design, build and maintain cities, green spaces, neighborhoods, living spaces, municipal buildings, public spaces, infrastructure and services which work well for everyone? How would such plans, buildings and infrastructures look like, and how would we conceptualize, construct and evaluate them?

This text largely follows the aim of establishing "Gender Mainstreaming" in planning and construction. "Gender Mainstreaming" refers to the commitment to consider the different impacts on men and women in all decision-making processes. It is based on the understanding that there is no gender-neutral reality, and consequently, there are no gender-neutral cities or buildings. This means that planning and construction must be rethought and implemented with this understanding in mind.

3. Fundamentals

This chapter outlines key definitions and principles that guide gender-responsive urban development, emphasizing inclusivity and equality. It explores the importance of recognizing and addressing the needs of women, girls and marginalized groups throughout urban planning processes, aiming to create cities that serve all genders and social groups fairly.

3.1. Definition of Terms

The term "gender" describes the social and cultural attributes, behaviors, expectations and norms associated with different genders. Gender equality in urban development means promoting a city for all. This involves considering the needs of women, girls and marginalized groups in all phases of urban planning, development and architectural projects. The BMZ's feminist development policy recognizes the diversity of societies and advocates for an inclusive, non-binary understanding of gender. In this document, as in the BMZ's ²⁰⁰⁸ identities and life realities of societies in all their diversity. "Gender mainstreaming," "gender diversity," and "gender planning" mean that the needs of all social groups and genders are equally considered. "Gender Budgeting,"

which translates to gender-equitable budget policy, is the application of "Gender Mainstreaming" in the budgeting process. Gender-equitable urban planning, development and construction can only be implemented if the necessary funds are allocated by government coalitions and parliaments in Germany, as well as in partner countries and municipalities. Intersectionality describes the multiple marginalization based on gender, age, disabilities and other factors.

3.2. Principles of Gender-Responsive Urban Planning and Development

Gender-responsive urban planning addresses historical inadequacies in urban development shaped by heterosexual cis-men by aiming to improve the representation of women and marginalized groups. Gender-responsive urban development is emancipatory as it allows women, girls and marginalized groups to democratically participate in city and society. The goal is to explore and articulate the needs of different groups to ensure diverse perspectives are considered in urban planning. Addressing these usage conflicts through appropriate planning and construction promotes not only gender responsiveness but also inclusivity and democracy.

Gender Inequality in Numbers

- In 17 countries worldwide, married women are not allowed to move freely outside the home or use public spaces and transportation as married men are permitted (World Bank, 2016);
- 104 economies globally impose restrictions on women's employment, with approximately 2.75 billion women denied the same opportunities and access that men enjoy (Iqbal, 2018);
- In Europe, 50% of LGBTQ+ individuals avoid using public transportation due to fear of harassment (FRA, 2013).

² Dritter entwicklungspolitischer Aktionsplan zur Gleichstellung der Geschlechter (2023–27)



The Concept “Cities for all”

The concept of “Cities for all” is comprehensive, gender-responsive, inclusive and democratic. It aims to create fair cities for all gender groups by resolving conflicts in urban space through gender-responsive planning and fiscal policies. It should consider not only gender but also factors such as ethnicity, class and religion, expanding planning to include different life stages and social backgrounds. Such a city is based on participatory planning processes, knowledge and information exchange, financial balancing mechanisms and sustainable resource use.

3.3. Gender-Responsive Daily Practice and Usability

Cities in the Global South have largely developed informally, with estimates indicating that between 50% to nearly 100% of urban management occurs outside formal structures. This informality encompasses urban services like water supply, health and education facilities and transportation in both formal and informal neighbourhoods.

These factors contribute to systemic and individual male-dominated power dynamics, disproportionately affecting women, particularly those from poorer, less educated backgrounds and sexual minorities (intersectionality). For successful project implementation, it is crucial to analytically understand these dynamics to establish reliable baseline data. While gender analyses during project design can offer insights, detailed local studies are essential for making evidence-based decisions.

Furthermore, urban development frequently relies on assumptions rather than active inquiries, solving issues through technical means without considering social, ecological, or digital components. A comprehensive, qualitative data collection focusing on the specific needs of women, girls and marginalized groups is vital for integrating these needs into project execution and empowering them to participate equally in urban life.

3.4. Legal frameworks and their application: Gender-Responsive Land Policy

Land policy, which includes state and municipal measures for the use and distribution of land, has a decisive influence on the type and scope of land use, for example through land-use planning. It is often male-dominated. A gender-responsive land policy, as demanded in SDG 5, considers the needs of women, girls and marginalized groups. Many women do not own land and are excluded from inheritances, and consequently lack access to credit. Not being owners of land or real estate is also limiting their participation in urban development processes. An inclusive land policy should therefore address the needs of these groups and ensure a fair distribution of resources.

3.5. Gender-Responsive Public Space

Public spaces are places where different interests and needs must be negotiated. The absence of inadequacy of public spaces particularly affects women, girls and marginalized groups. These groups require specially designed public areas that meet their needs. Attractive public open spaces and well-planned transport links are essential to make these spaces accessible and safe. Maintaining and managing these spaces is an important aspect to keep them usable and safe.

4. Recommendations for Gender-Responsive Implementation Processes and Data Collection

In urban planning, development and construction, measures are distinguished between gender-inequitable, gender-neutral, gender-sensitive, gender-responsive and gender-transformative. Urban development traditionally dominated by cis-men is often considered universal, frequently neglecting gender aspects. Gender-responsive measures aim to promote gender equality. While some large cities implement gender-responsive measures, smaller towns and municipalities are less active in this regard.

Projects of German development cooperation should promote at least gender-sensitive, better though gender-responsive or gender-transformative approaches. Gender-transformative measures aim to change underlying structures that cause gender inequality, such as gender norms, roles, ideals and laws to achieve a fair distribution of power, resources and services. However, a gender-transformative approach is very complex and ambitious and cannot always be implemented in project reality. It requires long-term projects and measures that address different levels of change.

All gender-sensitive, gender-responsive and gender-transformative measures are referred to and described as gender-responsive in this text.

| The Gender Continuum in Urban Development | | | |
|--|---|---|---|
| Gender-neutral | Gender-sensitive | Gender-responsive | Gender-transformative |
| Gender has no relevance in project design. Today's urban development and planning, urban design, infrastructure planning, architecture and construction processes and projects." | Gender-differentiated measures, but no targeted promotion of gender equality. For example, women, girls and marginalized groups are invited to events for participatory planning. | Targeted measures to promote gender equality are being implemented. Measures could include the following: Implementation of gender-equitable real-world laboratories (urban living labs), gender-equitable pop-up interventions, gender-equitable redesign of street space; gender-equitable design of public spaces and gender-equitable design of buildings | Underlying laws, norms and values, as well as the causes of gender inequality, are being changed. |

Plans can move along the gender continuum, depending on the level of ambition, both in planning and implementation, between gender-sensitive and gender-transformative measures. Such plans could include, for example: gender-responsive integrated urban development plans and master plans for urban (district) areas; gender-responsive neighbourhood and development plans; gender-responsive upgrading of informal neighbourhoods; gender-responsive climate action plans; gender-responsive disaster management plans.

The "3 R's" of Feminist Development Policy and their Implementation in Urban Development

1. **Rights:** Strengthening rights or dismantling discriminatory laws and norms by reviewing the planning framework, ensuring balanced representation and promoting participatory planning and design strategies.
2. **Resources:** Equal access to resources through gender-responsive budgeting, advisory bodies, data collection, monitoring and evaluation.
3. **Representation:** Equal representation and increased influence through gender-responsive representation and inclusive planning strategies.

Effective/successful implementation processes of gender-responsive urban planning requires comprehensive strategies that ensure inclusivity and equality across all project stages. This includes the development of gender-responsive principles, fair budgeting, establishment of advisory boards and frameworks, data collection, representation and participation that prioritize gender equity. These aspects will be elaborated upon in the following section.

Development of Gender-Responsive Principles:

In the pre-planning phase, gender-specific principles should be developed to promote the vision of a city for all. Examples include providing necessary financial resources, incorporating gender-responsive design as an integral part of the planning process and involving women and underrepresented groups in decision-making processes.

Gender-Responsive Budgeting in

Municipalities, in Planning and Construction:

Municipal budgets and project budgets should be consciously and fairly distributed across all genders. Only projects that are gender-responsive or eliminate existing injustices should be financed. Recommendations include involving women in budgeting, analyzing project budgets and wages for gender equity.

Gender-Responsive Advisory Board:

Every project should have an advisory board with at least 50% women, consisting of residents, users and gender experts.

Gender-Responsive Data Collection:

Data should be disaggregated by gender groups to uncover inequalities. This includes examining the legal, social and economic status of women and marginalized groups.

Gender-Responsive Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Knowledge Gain:

A long-term framework for monitoring, evaluation, accountability and knowledge gain from projects is essential. Indicators of gender equality include accessibility, connectivity, safety, health, climate resilience and development prospects.

Gender-Responsive Review of the Planning Framework:

Master plans, building codes and other regulations should be reviewed for their gender responsiveness. Strategies include involving local experts and organizing workshops with local expertise, aiming for a 50% female participation rate.

Gender-Responsive Representation:

Participating groups in project activities should reflect the (gender) composition of the population. A 50/50 representation of men, women and representation of other marginalized groups should be aimed for, considering intersectionality. Strategies to create balanced and appropriate representation of all gender groups include sufficient meetings at various times and locations, reimbursement of travel expenses, childcare, provision of food and translation, and separate meetings for different groups, i.e. for women and for youth. Meetings should be thematically divided and led by independent professional facilitators.

Gender-Responsive, Participatory, Inclusive and Democratic Planning and Design Strategies:

Women, girls and marginalized groups should be involved as partners in the planning process with shared decision-making power. Men should be inspired to act as agents of change and actively contribute to reducing gender disparities. Possible measures to promote the participation of women include involving local female professionals in competition juries, as well as architects and engineers in the project team and integrating female craftsmen and female construction workers.

5. Recommendations for Gender-Responsive Urban Planning

Recommendations for gender-responsive urban planning address the gender-equitable design and implementation of common urban planning instruments such as urban development guidelines, integrated urban development concepts and master plans. These instruments aim to consider the needs of various population groups, especially women, girls and marginalized groups. Urban planning instruments are neither clearly defined within a country nor across countries or world regions and their legal binding varies. Before introducing new instruments, an inventory of existing instruments should be considered to build on them.

5.1. Gender-Responsive Integrated Urban Development Plans and Master Plans for City (District) Areas

Integrated urban development plans and city master plans create a vision for the future of a city or district, promoting spatial integration and balancing sectoral as well as spatial development requirements. They aim for sustainable land and resource use. These plans must ensure spatial integration and connectivity within and between neighborhoods, considering issues such as building density, mobility and safety.

Gender-responsive guidelines and master plans should avoid traditional urban planning principles, that usually disadvantage or endanger women, girls and marginalized groups, such as prioritizing cars or separating functions and uses. Instead, new principles in land policy and development rights to support the poor and prevent gentrification should be introduced. Creating polycentric urban centers, integrated planning of transport, recreation and housing areas, promoting jobs and a dense public transport network with safe stops are crucial.

5.2. Gender-Responsive Neighborhood Development and Zoning Plans

Neighborhood development and zoning plans should provide detailed guidelines for land use, housing, infrastructure, local economic and environmental development. These plans determine the size of plots and formulate requirements for the design of public and private open spaces, public and private transport, social and public infrastructure. Since these plans define important functional conditions for housing, streets, public and private spaces, the advisory and active participation of women, girls and marginalized groups is essential.

Recommendations for gender-responsive neighborhood and zoning plans include creating centrally located, well-connected neighborhoods with high density and diverse uses, ensuring all essential services are within walking distance. A balance between private and public spaces should be created, focusing on accessible buildings, safe and shaded sidewalks and well-lit streets and bus stops. Public spaces and recreational areas should be varied and accessible.

5.3. Gender-responsive Living Labs, Temporary Pop-Up Interventions and Interim Uses

Living labs and temporary pop-up interventions provide opportunities to test and evaluate gender-responsive urban planning measures. These measures allow for innovative solutions to be tested and potentially permanently implemented. Careful data collection and evaluation are necessary to assess the success of such interventions and make informed future decisions.

Recommendations for gender-responsive living labs and temporary pop-up interventions include measures such as designing gender-responsive streetscapes through greening and widening of spaces or paths and traffic-calmed zones. Interim uses like gardens and sports facilities for girls, as well as centers in vacant buildings, should be promoted.

5.4. Gender-Responsive Upgrading of Informal Neighborhoods

Upgrading informal settlements is a comprehensive planning process aimed at gradually improving living conditions and integrating them into formal cities. It is essential to preserve the social networks of residents, avoid relocations and secure residents' formal ownership rights. Work should be done on the city level, using new approaches tailored to local needs that do not necessarily adhere to formal Western planning principles. Well-planned upgrading plans improve access to land and employment and the quality of essential infrastructure, services and ecological sustainability.

For gender-responsive upgrading of informal neighborhoods which supports the strengthening of local communities, it is recommended to secure existing houses, avoid relocations and provide simple manuals for "do-it-yourself" upgrades. Property rights must be formalized. Improving infrastructure, including safe walkways, sanitary facilities, renewable energy and community facilities, is central, as is integrating these measures into overarching urban development plans.

5.5. Gender-Responsive Climate Action Plans

Climate action plans aim to strengthen resilience to the impacts of climate change while considering socio-economic and ecological goals. A climate action plan typically includes both adaptation and mitigation measures, as well as strategies for monitoring, evaluation, communication, information, education, capacity building and training. Effective plans should consider physical, economic and social vulnerabilities and their interdependency.

Recommendations for gender-responsive climate action plans include greening and unsealing urban areas as well as promoting integrated green and water spaces to strengthen environmental resilience. Integrating food-growing strategies and improved waste management should improve living conditions. Additionally, promoting safe mobility and raising

awareness of renewable energies and sustainable technologies are highlighted to ensure comprehensive and equitable urban development.

5.6. Gender-Responsive Disaster Protection

Disaster protection plans involve the development and implementation of strategies for disaster preparedness and response to ensure the resilience and well-being of all gender groups. It is essential to consider the different socio-cultural roles, norms and values related to gender to strengthen community resilience and reduce the number of injuries and fatalities during disasters. Special attention should be given to the protection and safety of women, girls and gender minorities, especially in shelters.

Recommendations for gender-responsive disaster protection plans include collaboration between state disaster protection organizations as well as women's and minority organizations, creating safe and protected (communication) spaces for women, girls and marginalized groups, and proactive financing through microfinance and savings groups. Additionally, shelters should meet safety standards, property of emergency and replacement buildings should be registered in the names of women and their partners, and infrastructure used by women, girls and marginalized groups should be prioritized. An effective warning system, along with culturally appropriate dissemination of information that is understandable to all, is also crucial.

6. Recommendations for Gender-Responsive Urban Development, Buildings and Infrastructure

This chapter outlines key recommendations for integrating gender responsive principles into urban development, focusing on housing, public buildings infrastructure and mobility. Most urban planning and infrastructure investments are not gender-specific

and thus gender-blind. The aim is to recognize and meet the needs of women, girls and marginalized groups, ultimately creating more equitable and inclusive urban spaces. The following recommendations address specific planning and construction measures across various sectors, including housing, public buildings and spaces, water and waste management infrastructure and mobility.

6.1. Gender-Responsive Housing

The right to adequate housing is internationally recognized, but current housing systems often favor men, disadvantaging women, girls and marginalized groups.

Recommendations for gender-responsive housing:

- **Duration, Financing and Costs:** Housing developments should offer various ownership forms such as cooperatives and rental apartments to enable women to access housing. Community-based savings and loan programs and non-discriminatory financing programs should be established. Housing should be affordable and environmentally friendly.
- **Location and Connectivity:** Public transportation stops should be within a 10-minute walk and services such as markets, public spaces and childcare should be integrated into housing development.
- **Air Quality and Environmental Comfort:** Houses should be well-ventilated and have natural light to promote health, well-being, quality of life and save energy.
- **Housing Types and Floor Plans:** Floor plans should be flexible and barrier-free, considering daily life requirements (Gender-Plus concept) to meet diverse needs.
- **Service Design:** Mechanical, sanitary and electrical services should be optimized to reduce costs and promote the use of renewable energies.

- **Economic Activities:** Housing developments should allow mixed uses to support economic activities on-site.

6.2. Gender-Responsive Mobility and Streetscapes

Streets, transportation and mobility infrastructures are crucial for accessing urban services, public spaces and workplaces. Infrastructure and transport projects must consider the diverse needs of all genders and age groups.

Recommendations for Gender-Responsive Mobility and Streetscapes:

- **Streets and Sidewalks:** Footpaths should be wide, well-connected and regularly maintained. Lighting and seating are important for safety and comfort. Intersections should be safely designed and separated from cars by bollards or greenery.
- **Bicycle Infrastructures:** A safe and continuous network of bike paths is necessary to promote cycling. This should not come at the expense of pedestrians.
- **Public Transport Systems:** Fare structures should be affordable and schedules should provide regular connections even outside peak hours. Stops and terminals should be well-lit and safe, providing seating as well as protection from sun and rain.

6.3. Gender-Responsive Public Spaces

Public spaces such as parks and squares should be planned as a cohesive network of open spaces. The planning of public spaces is the essence of urban planning and development and can promote equality for all when planned and built with gender in mind.

Recommendations for Gender-Responsive Public Spaces:

- **Networking and Accessibility:** Public spaces should be within 250 meters of residential areas and accessible to all.

- **Diversity and Infrastructure:** Public spaces should offer diverse uses and be equipped with safe flooring, lighting and ample seating. Adequate, well-lit and maintained public toilets are essential.
- **Protection and Safety:** Public spaces should be visible, observable and well-lit to ensure safety. Regular cleaning and maintenance is important.

6.4. Gender-Responsive Public and Municipal Buildings

Public and municipal buildings, such as schools and hospitals, serve important functional and symbolic roles and are ideal for demonstrating gender-responsive planning and construction.

Recommendations for gender-responsive public municipal buildings:

- **Location and Connectivity:** Buildings should be easily accessible on foot and by public transport, ensuring accessibility for all, especially the visually and physically impaired. Social infrastructure such as educational institutions should be planned near markets to avoid long and complicated travel routes.
- **Access Areas:** Entrance areas should be visible and welcoming, with sufficient storage for strollers and bicycles. Wayfinding systems in entrance areas should provide an overview of rooms and services and include symbols for illiterates.
- **Community Areas:** Meeting and break rooms should be easily accessible, spacious and naturally lit. Toilets should be gender-segregated, well-lit and plentiful.
- **Workspaces:** Office spaces should be equally equipped for all genders, with natural ventilation and lighting. Room structures should be flexible and adaptable to users.

6.5. Gender-Responsive Municipal Infrastructure and Services

- **Waste Management:** Waste management systems, such as garbage collection, should be extended to poor and informal neighborhoods.
- **Water Supply and Sanitation:** Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) are crucial for public health and enable access to economic opportunities, education and full participation in public life. Water systems should be planned and implemented in an

integrated manner. Toilets should be located in or near (within 2 minutes' walk) public buildings and homes. Adequate representation of women in water management committees should be ensured.

- **Energy Supply:** Energy supply should be safe and reliable to support women and girls in their daily tasks, such as working, reading, doing homework and furthering their education at home. Renewable energy should be promoted and affordable financing options for women should be developed.

7. Concluding Remarks

Proposed Measures for Urban Projects in Development Cooperation

- Analyses and detailed studies in the project area are necessary to make evidence-based decisions and consider the needs of women, girls and marginalized groups.
- Developing a gender action plan and integrated strategies to promote gender equity across various urban sectors is essential.
- A permanent advisory body should review projects and their impacts.
- Cross-sectoral exchange on planning and implementing gender-responsive urban development projects are needed.
- Projects should consistently implement gender budgeting and promote gender equity at all levels of cooperation.
- Minimum gender equity requirements for project partners and a context-adapted definition of vulnerable groups are crucial.

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