



# Gender considerations in project design

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A briefing note on the gender coding scales  
and gender equality continuum

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

This briefing note is intended to distinguish between two important concepts when designing new projects and provide some definitions to various terminologies used within each:

- Gender Coding Scales
- Gender Continuum

## 2. GENDER CODING SCALES

Gender Coding scales are used primarily as an accountability tool for donors to indicate how much of their Overseas Development Assistance is dedicated towards advancing gender equality, based on the amount of funding or number of projects that meet certain coding threshold related to gender equality. Globally<sup>1</sup> this is determined on a three-point scale, however, for Canadian funded projects a four-point scale is used by Global Affairs Canada<sup>2</sup>. Donors will use a checklist of criteria, sometimes referred to as a *gender marker* to determine the gender equality (GE) score for a project.

The table below highlights the distinction between the two scales and definitions used.

### Rationale

Part of the impetus to create these scales is linked to a need to monitor the progress on advancing gender equality at a global level and track the financial commitments of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) members to this end. With the release of the Feminist International Assistance Policy in 2017, Canada took one further step and committed that by 2021–22 “no less than 95 percent of Canada’s bilateral international development assistance initiatives will target or integrate gender equality,” with 15% of investments at a GE3 level and 80% at GE1 and GE2.

| GAC (Canada only)          | DAC (Global)     | GAC Definition   | DAC Definition  |
|----------------------------|------------------|--|---|
| GE3 – Targeted             | 2 – Principal    | Gender equality is the principal objective of the initiative: The initiative was designed specifically to address gender inequalities and otherwise would not be undertaken. All outcomes in the logic model are gender equality outcomes. | Gender equality is the main objective of the project/programme and is fundamental in its design and expected results. The project/programme would not have been undertaken without this objective.            |
| GE2 – Fully integrated     | 1 – Significant  | There is at least one <i>intermediate gender equality outcome</i> , which will achieve observable changes in behaviour, practice, or performance that will contribute to gender equality.  | Gender equality is an important and deliberate objective, but not the principal reason for undertaking the project/programme, often explained as gender equality being mainstreamed in the project/programme. |
| GE1 – Partially integrated |                  | There is at least one gender equality outcome at the <i>immediate outcome</i> level, which will achieve a change in skills, awareness, or knowledge that contributes to gender equality.   |   |
| GE0 – None                 | 0 – Not targeted | There are no gender equality outcomes.   | The project/programme has been screened against the gender marker but has not been found to target gender equality.   |



## Additional Considerations

Beyond the logic model and including gender equality outcomes at the relevant level, there are other criteria that influence how a project is graded. These include:

- Being informed by a gender analysis
- Including indicators to measure outcomes/impact on gender equality
- Ensuring sex-disaggregation of data and indicators where appropriate
- Commitment to monitor and report on gender equality results
- Ensuring adequate staffing and budget to deliver on gender equality commitments

## 3. GENDER CONTINUUM

The idea behind a gender continuum in the context of project design, is to suggest there is a scale related to a qualitative assessment of the project or program's potential to promote gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment. It can also be used to describe the degree of change intended within a given activity. Attempts to correlate the definitions within the continuum to the coding scale can lead to confusion and incorrect application of the concepts. It should also be noted that there is not one universally agreed terminology for the different points on the continuum. This note attempts to highlight a few different models and summarize in general terms what the main differences are within each stage.

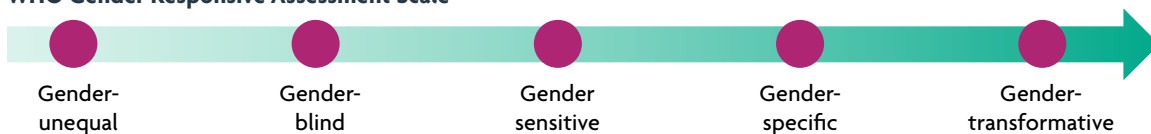
The diagram below highlights three examples of how different organizations have interpreted the notion of a gender continuum.

### Understanding a gender continuum

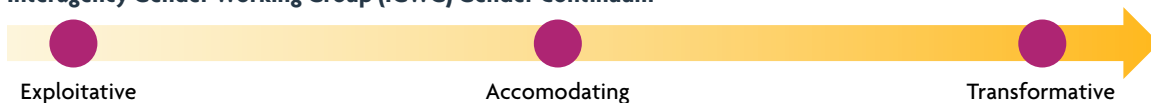
**On the left end** of the continuum is the idea of the potential harm that could be caused by ignoring gender norms and roles or perpetuating inequalities between men and women. Though the phrase "gender-blind" is widely used, its application has been critiqued within disability-rights circles and alternative language should be used (gender unaware, gender neutral etc.). Some examples of what this looks like in practice include:

- Holding a training workshop at a time and in a location that is commonly frequented by men and then assuming that because no women participate, they are not interested in the topic or theme being discussed
- Referring to the needs of a community without recognizing the unique needs of women and men
- Developing a policy based on feedback largely made by men without considering the perspectives of women

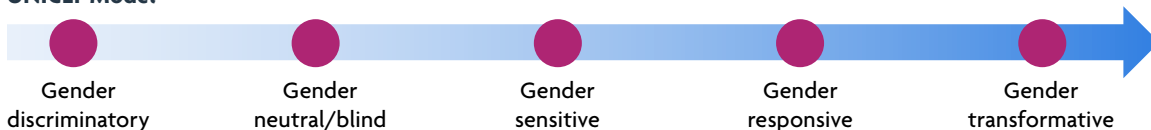
WHO Gender Responsive Assessment Scale<sup>3</sup>



Interagency Gender Working Group (IGWG) Gender Continuum<sup>4</sup>



UNICEF Model<sup>5</sup>







**The middle of the continuum** represents a level of awareness of gender roles, norms and relations and acknowledges some effort to accommodate and work within and around these norms. Those scales which include more points in the middle (e.g. sensitive and responsive/specific) tend to distinguish between knowledge and action. In many cases, a gender-sensitive or responsive approach is effective in reaching larger numbers of women and ensuring policies and programs include appropriate measures to meet the differential needs of women and men. However, these approaches do not challenge any of the roles and norms, nor do they consider root causes and structural inequalities (e.g. inheritance laws which discriminate against women, lack of measures to support care-giving outside of the home, financial or health service processes that require “husband” or male consent).

**At the right end** of the continuum in all models lies the notion of a gender-transformative approach. Implicit within this concept is the notion of challenging or critiquing discriminatory norms and roles, as well as looking at gender through a systems lens and tackling root causes of inequality as opposed to working within the status quo. A gender-transformative approach addresses the issue of power both within systems and in relations by actively working to ensure greater representation, decision-making power and access/control over resources for women. It uses inclusive, intersectional, and participatory methodologies that give space for women’s voices to be heard and their priorities to be acted on.

While these models can be used in evaluation to assess how effective programs have integrated gender equality, the terminologies are often used as adjectives to describe project activities and outputs for example “gender-responsive services” or “gender-sensitive BCI materials.”







## QUICK GUIDE: When to use what term

| What is it being used in reference to? | Gender sensitive  | Gender-responsive  | Gender-transformative   |
|--|---|--|---|
| Knowledge products and messages        | Sensitizes people on gender equality issues, related to broader project   |  |   |
| Training Curricula Services            | Staff are aware of gender barriers and needs                              | Adapted to meet differential needs and overcome inequities between women and men. Supportive supervision to healthcare providers to practice respectful care to pregnant women |   |
| Attitudes/Beliefs Behaviours/BCI       | Sensitizes people on gender equality issues                               | Messages tailored to speak to female and male audiences to address identified inequities and barriers  | Activities intended to shift traditional gender roles, power relations, and promote gender equality (e.g. household division of labour, positive masculinities) |
| Actions/Practice Policies              | Informed by gender analysis (will include data about gender inequalities) | Measures in place to respond to differential gendered needs and inequities between women and men   | Addresses underlying power issues that create inequities between women and men  |
| Social Norms                           | Identifies gender norms   | Works with established gender norms  | Challenges status quo, while taking care to minimize harm   |





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## REFERENCES

- 1 OECD – DAC Gender Equality policy marker <https://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/Minimum-recommended-criteria-for-DAC-gender-marker.pdf>
- 2 Feminist International Assistance Policy toolkit: Tool 9 [https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/funding-financement/gender\\_equality\\_toolkit-trousse\\_outils\\_egalite\\_genres.aspx?lang=eng#tool\\_9](https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/funding-financement/gender_equality_toolkit-trousse_outils_egalite_genres.aspx?lang=eng#tool_9)
- 3 WHO, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK559709/table/ch2.t1/?report=objectonly>
- 4 IGWG, [https://www.igwg.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Gender-Continuum-PowerPoint\\_final.pdf](https://www.igwg.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Gender-Continuum-PowerPoint_final.pdf)
- 5 UNICEF, <https://www.unicef.org/evaluation/media/1221/file/UNICEF%20Guidance%20on%20Gender.pdf>