

POLICY BRIEF

NEW WORLD BANK GENDER STRATEGY:

# **RECOMMENDATIONS FROM WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANISATIONS**

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## **RECOMMENDATIONS FROM**

Women's rights organisations in conflict-affected regions: Helsinki Citizens' Assembly (BiH), Coalition Margins (North Macedonia), Reactor (North Macedonia), Gender Alliance for Development Centre (Albania), Kosovo Women's Network (Kosovo), Organization for Iraqi Women and Future (Iraq), Egnalegna (Lebanon), CRTD.A (Lebanon), and The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation's programme offices in sub-Saharan Africa, the Western Balkans, the MENA region, and the South Caucasus.

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### **KVINNA TILL KVINNA**

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The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation has defended women's rights since 1993.  
For every woman's right to be safe and to be heard.

Today we are one of the world's leading women's rights organisations, working directly in areas affected by war and conflict to strengthen women's influence and power. We work closely together with more than 100 local partner organisations across 20 countries to end violence against women, reach lasting peace and close the gender gap once and for all.

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## **BACKGROUND**

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When the World Bank (WB) revisits its Gender Strategy for an update, it affects many women across the world. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that women affected by World Bank policies, programmes and loans are heard. This document summarises the main messages gathered by The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation and its partner organisations, including women's rights and feminist organisations from conflict affected areas in the MENA region, the South Caucasus, sub-Saharan Africa and the Western Balkans.

Parallel to updating the Gender Strategy is the process WB reforms. We welcome the improved text in The World Bank Evolution Roadmap where gender equality is spelt out and the critical point of including women in development: "Improving gender equality and investing in women's empowerment generate large development gains: no society can develop sustainably without increasing and improving the distribution of opportunities, resources, and choices for women and men to have equal power to shape their own lives and contribute to their families, communities, and countries." However, we want to ensure that the WB continues to have a focus on gender and intersectionality throughout the whole process of the re-organisation.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

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The current strategy (2016-2023) is limited in its scope and analysis. The existing approach views women's access to jobs and assets in isolation from a range of structural inequalities that limit women's economic empowerment, suggesting that achieving increased formal employment rates for women is inherently "empowering" and will result in greater gender equality. The new strategy needs to take a stronger structural approach, examining and addressing systemic gender inequalities.

The WB continues to support austerity policies and fiscal consolidation. When states implement austerity measures, such as cutting public sector wages, public service provision in areas such as health, care, housing, transport, and universal social protection systems, women shoulder a disproportionate level of burden through loss of jobs, access to basic services, and increased unpaid care work. Civil society has provided extensive evidence to highlight the gendered impact of such reforms.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Gender Strategy should:**

- Have a transformative approach where structural barriers are addressed on a macroeconomic level.
- Shift the narrative from "empowerment" to "gender equality", framing change in terms of human rights and justice. Women's human rights must be at the center of the strategy.
- Have an intersectional perspective that analyses and addresses the needs of diverse women, including by age, rural-urban location, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, indigenusness, ethnicity, disability, and refugee or internally displaced status.
- Ensure WB consultations at all levels are transparent, inclusive and intersectional and that the voices and priorities of women's

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<sup>1</sup> <https://actionaid.org/publications/2022/care-contradiction-imf-gender-and-austerity>, <https://actionaid.org/publications/2022/education-versus-austerity>, <https://actionaid.org/publications/2021/public-versus-austerity-why-public-sector-wage-bill-constraints-must-end>, <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/assault-austerity>

rights activists and vulnerable communities are heard and reflected in all decision-making processes.

- Require that all WB work is based on gender analysis, including risk assessments for harmful gendered effects. The WB risks achieving its gender equality objectives if its macroeconomic policies remain gender neutral, and thus often gender negative by reinforcing pre-existing structural inequalities.
- Strengthen the gender equality culture in the WB and ensure gender mainstreaming is implemented; for this, senior gender advisors are crucial at team and country levels.

### **ENSURE ENGAGEMENT OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANISATIONS**

In many contexts, formal decision-making arenas exclude women. Yet, research has shown that feminist movements are the single most important factor to advance legislation and its implementation, such as on gender-based violence.<sup>2</sup> When civic space shrinks, women's rights activists' influence on policies and practices is undermined, thereby negatively affecting progress towards gender equality overall. The WB has remained very quiet on the issue of shrinking civic space and increasing authoritarianism. We believe the new Gender Strategy must recognise the WB's role in countering shrinking space.

#### **The Gender Strategy should:**

- Establish new modalities for funding women's rights organisations as partners in change, recognising their expertise. This includes through quality, core support and long-term funding of key partnerships in collaborating to further gender equality.<sup>3</sup>
- Increase civic space by insisting on meaningful and effective consultations with independent civil society actors, including women's rights activists, by all WB personnel, experts and by government counterparts.
- Ensure that women are meaningfully included in economic decision-making processes at community, national and regional levels, as well as in economic reforms, post-conflict recovery plans and infrastructure reconstruction. Failing to include a gender-transformative approach in the design of recovery plans,

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<sup>2</sup> Htun and Weldon (2012): [The Civic Origins of Progressive Policy Change: Combating Violence against Women in Global Perspective, 1975–2005 | American Political Science Review | Cambridge Core](#)

<sup>3</sup> <https://womensnetwork.org/publications/wheres-the-money-for-womens-rights/>

programmes, loans, and policies will cement old injustices and lock women into continued economic marginalisation for decades to come.

- Make sure that gender analysis, contextual knowledge and recommendations by women's rights organisations are included in country partnership frameworks.
- Establish formal channels with women's rights organisations for a continuous dialogue.

### **INCLUDE A FEMINIST ECONOMIC APPROACH**

The WB is focused on closing “gender gaps” in the labour market, integrating women into the market economy and raising incomes of individual women. The emphasis is on what this could mean for productivity gains rather than on gender equality in and of itself. The WB continues to refer to women almost exclusively in economic terms, rather than using a feminist economic approach focused on furthering gender equality.

#### **The Gender Strategy should:**

- Recognise that most women are employed in the unregulated and highly insecure informal sector and that this should be regulated according to the International Labour Organization’s (ILO) labour standards and address workplace sexual harassment and violence. Conduct and distribute additional gender analysis about informality.
- Push for a universal social protection floor in programmes and projects. Social protection systems must be designed based on gender analysis to further gender equality, counteract underlying drivers of inequality and strengthen the position of women.
- Recognise that unpaid care work is performed mainly by women and must be shared within the household. To increase female participation in the labour market, push for states to provide childcare. The care economy should be considered an essential part of the national economy as production and reproduction are interdependent.
- Support governments to abolish legal provisions that hinder women's equal rights to housing, land and property (HLP); work on local and national levels to change norms obstructing women's access to HLP.

- Strengthen measures to prevent and combat all forms of corruption (administrative, financial, political) that hinder women's equal participation, deprive women's access to economic security, deprive women of their rights to housing, land and property rights, and expose women to sextortion.
- Require that gender analysis informs all WB funding and is obligatory for states prior to receiving WB funding. Ensure any structural adjustment policies are informed by thorough gender and risk analysis, assessing how they may impact women and men differently and ensuring, at minimum, a gender responsive, do no harm, approach.
- Strongly consider applying gender responsive budgeting, based on gender analysis, in all the WB's programmes and funding allocations.
- Continue encouraging and supporting states to institutionalise gender responsive budgeting based on the Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (PEFA) Gender Framework.

### **ADDRESS GENDER ASPECTS OF CONFLICT AND CLIMATE CRISES**

A high correlation exists between gender equality and peaceful societies. We cannot work on stability and security without prioritising work on gender equality. Conflict and fragility also impact women's and girls' rights disproportionately and exacerbate gender inequalities, while gender-based violence increases. Forced displacement further aggravates gender inequalities.

Progress on gender equality and climate change also are inextricably linked—not only because of the disproportionate impact climate change has on women and girls but because women and girls are invaluable changemakers in climate action.<sup>4</sup> Since women carry most care responsibilities, a care-centred approach to climate mitigation, adaptation and transformative action requires robust, diverse women's participation and leadership, especially the most marginalised, so as not to exacerbate increases in direct and indirect care work. The WB must ensure that development finance, especially climate finance, works to lessen and in no way exacerbate underlying inequities, including care

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<sup>4</sup> The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation (2022): <https://kvinnatillkvinna.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Womens-Rights-Gender-ECC-Kvinna-till-Kvinna-Rwanda-2021.pdf> and <https://kvinnatillkvinna.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Feminist-Movements-and-Climate-Justice-in-Middle-East-and-North-Africa.pdf>

work, that make certain groups more vulnerable to shocks and stressors.

**The Gender Strategy should:**

- Strengthen the understanding of the nexus of gender, conflict and environment and climate crises and contribute to undoing work in silos.
- Address the disproportionate harm of environmental and climate change on women and marginalised groups, especially in conflict-affected countries and push for an intersectional approach to climate change and environmental degradation in policy development, programming, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
- Support feminist activists to be visible and meaningfully engaged in peace processes throughout conflict and post-conflict situations and in climate (adaptation and mitigation) decision-making. Demand governments listen to their recommendations and utilise their expertise.
- Ensure linkages with the WB Strategy on Fragility, Conflict, Violence and the UN's Women, Peace, and Security Agenda.
- Make sure that gender analyses are part of every conflict analysis, as well as post-conflict reforms and recovery programmes.

**STRENGTHEN KNOWLEDGE AND CAPACITIES FOR INTERSECTIONAL GENDER ANALYSES AND MAINSTREAMING WITHIN THE WB**

Globally, the WB sets the discourse on development cooperation and finance. The WB is also an influential research hub on international relations and development. However, the disbursement of knowledge within the WB is not strong, particularly on gender, as the mid-term review (MTR) of the current gender strategy highlighted. For successful implementation of the new Gender Strategy, the WB needs stronger knowledge, personal resources and tools.

**The Gender Strategy should:**

- Require that every country and regional office employ a senior gender advisor responsible for gender analysis, gender mainstreaming programming and dialogue with women's rights organisations in that context.



- Build capacities among WB senior staff on how to conduct gender analysis and to mainstream a gender and intersectional perspective in programmes and operations.
- Ensure guidance notes on the Gender Strategy are clear and consistent to enable the strategy's operationalisation and sufficient financing.
- Ensure that WB financing extends to the local level (municipalities) and that the approval of investments requires a local gender analysis, including an analysis of the implementation of the countries' gender policy and legal framework on local levels.

### **MONITOR AND EVALUATE**

Monitoring and evaluation of projects/programmes are key for a successful implementation. Therefore, we welcome the MTR that was conducted by the Independent Evaluation Group. However, it is unfortunate that the final evaluation of the current strategy will be carried out only after the updated Gender Strategy is approved, particularly since the MTR had significant critiques of the implementation of the current gender strategy.

#### **The Gender Strategy should:**

- Include follow-up mechanisms and action plans. A robust, multi-dimensional results framework with clear anticipated results, indicators, and targets, which also addresses macro-economic policies, should be in place at country and global levels.
- Monitor and evaluate the strategy's implementation on a national level, including women's rights activists' input.
- Ensure that the WB Independent Evaluation Group puts more emphasis on research and evaluation that involves gender analysis and women's rights, as well as on the nexus of climate crises, gender and conflict. These should be part of the terms of reference of all WB evaluations.
- Push for the Independent Evaluation Group to include in its team a senior gender advisor.
- Include a mid-term review and a final evaluation. Relevant recommendations should be implemented.

For all women's rights, in every corner of the world.  
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