



# **Gender Matters**

## **Executive Summary Document**

Towards a cross-departmental strategic  
framework to promote gender equality  
for women and men 2005-2015



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# Executive summary

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Gender equality is about providing men and women with “equal conditions for realising their full human rights and their potential to contribute to national, political, economic, social and cultural development and to benefit equally from their results.”<sup>1</sup>

Gender inequalities remain in many areas of life and they impact mainly to the disadvantage of women. It is, however, equally important for our society that situations in which men are disadvantaged should also be identified, and action taken to correct that disadvantage. It is important to recognise that men and boys have a role to play in achieving equality for women by facilitating change.

The Government is committed to tackling gender inequalities and to promoting gender equality by developing policy and service delivery that recognises and takes into account the different needs and experiences of women and men.

It is socially and economically profitable to work for gender equality, as it benefits everyone. Accessing and using the talents and skills of women and men benefits our economy and society as a whole. Recognising and taking into account the different experiences and needs of men and women in our society leads to better policy and decision-making, which better fits the needs and expectations of our diverse citizens.

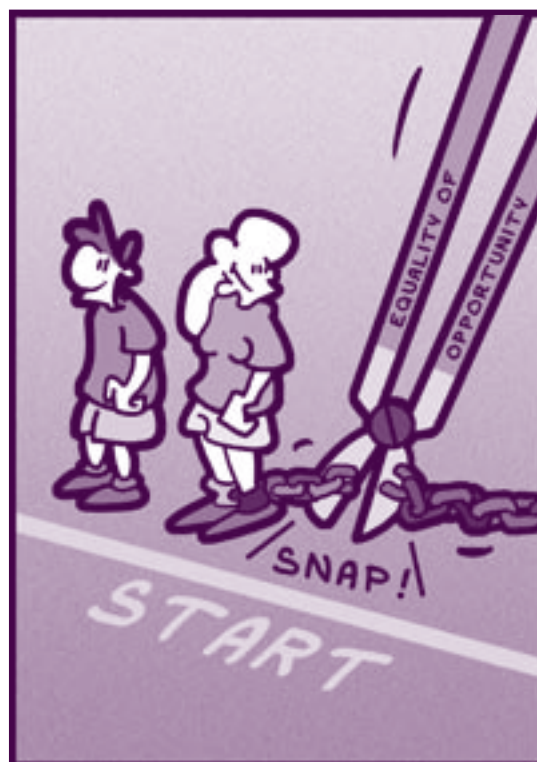
Gender equality is relevant in virtually all of the major policy areas of Government, such as employment, enterprise, education, vocational training, health, welfare, transport, planning and public safety. This Executive Summary outlines a proposed Gender Equality Framework Strategy through which we will co-ordinate our efforts across government and measure progress in promoting gender equality in Northern Ireland.

1 *The Development of Mechanisms to Monitor Progress in Achieving Gender Equality in Ireland*, Dr Yvonne Galligan (2000), Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Dublin.



Our gender equality vision for Northern Ireland is of a society:

- in which women and men, as individuals, are respected and valued, taking into account our gender, marital/relationship status, and whether or not we are parents or carers, or are transgendered; and
- in which we can enjoy and share equality of opportunity, rights and responsibilities in all aspects of our lives, and in which we are able to live, work and participate to our full potential.



This long-term vision will act as a constant reference point for our work on promoting gender equality. We developed it in our workshops with groups and individuals representing women and men, with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) and in bilateral consultations with the departments.



**QUESTION 1: What are your views on this vision?**

**QUESTION 2: Does it cover everything it should?**

The Northern Ireland departments and their agencies have been engaged in tackling gender inequality and promoting gender equality for some years. A wide range of actions has been implemented but still more needs to be done.



To systematically tackle gender inequalities and promote gender equality, we require a framework that sets out our long-term gender vision and goal, and provides a structure under which we can:

- consider the impact of the different experiences and situations of women and men on policy-making and service provision;
- identify inequalities;
- assess what we have already done;



- set out our priorities; and
- measure the impact of our actions.

This strategy will span 10 years and will establish a strategic framework, under which Government will seek to promote equality of opportunity between men and women, and between boys and girls. It is also proposed that the strategy will seek to address the needs of transgendered people.

We propose to carry out a review of the strategy after five years to determine the need for change to the framework and to assess progress made against the longer-term gender equality indicators.

**QUESTION 3: Are you content that this framework strategy covers a 10-year period with a mid-term review?**

We recognise that policy decisions made by departments impact on people as men or women, who may also be mothers/fathers, older/young, carers, disabled, or have a different minority ethnic background, et cetera. Our multiple identities mean that we will each experience government policy decisions and practices differently at different times in our life, and depending on the different circumstances we are in. Throughout our work in promoting gender equality, we will seek to increase our understanding of the impact of multiple identity on the needs and inequalities experienced by women and men.

**QUESTION 4: The gender strategy aims to cover several aspects of our identity; for example, whether we are male or female, our relationship status, whether we have dependants or are carers, and also whether we are transgendered. Are you content that the strategy covers these aspects?**



This **proposed strategic framework** incorporates a **strategic vision and goal**, supported by three **strategic objectives** and underpinned by four **principles or values** that will influence the steps taken by departments and their agencies to deliver the strategy. These principles were developed in our discussions/workshops with departments and representatives of women's and men's groups in the voluntary and community sector.

**The four principles are set out below and commit** the Northern Ireland departments, agencies and other relevant organisations to:

- adopting a positive and proactive approach to identifying, understanding and responding to the needs and choices of women and men, taking into account the impact of where they live;
- avoiding the influence of stereotypes in policy development and all decision-making processes;
- promoting a partnership approach in developing effective and inclusive policies and service delivery whereby departments, agencies, statutory bodies, non-governmental bodies, and voluntary and community organisations can work productively together and share best practice; and
- recognising multiple identities of women and men (for example, father, mother, carer, et cetera) and taking into account the different impacts that they have on the situations and experiences of women and men.

The Gender Equality Framework Strategy will be followed by a **Gender Equality Action Plan**, which will identify government priorities and bring together the activities of the Northern Ireland departments to give a wider picture of what the Government is doing to tackle gender inequality and to promote gender equality. The action plan will set out departmental objectives and targets that will focus on the **key action areas** detailed overleaf:



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- **access to employment and economic independence;**
  - **childcare/eldercare/caring role;**
  - **gender pay gap;**
  - **enterprise creation/entrepreneurship;**
  - **pensions;**
  - **education and lifelong learning (including vocational training);**
  - **work-life balance;**
  - **stereotypes and prejudices linked with women's and men's gender, marital or relationship status, or caring roles;**
  - **needs of women and men in rural communities, (including transport);**
  - **housing/homelessness;**
  - **social welfare (poverty);**
  - **health and well-being (including suicide);**
  - **family diversity and parenting issues;**
  - **crime and community safety;**
  - **gender-related violence and abuse;**
  - **partnership rights; and**
  - **representation in public life and in senior decision-making roles.**

These action areas reflect the areas of concern in the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action (1995).



**QUESTION 5: Do you agree that these are the key action areas within which government policy should be concentrating efforts to tackle gender inequalities?**

**If not, what other areas should be included as priority action areas and why?**

**QUESTION 6: Please identify specific issues within these key areas on which you would wish to see early action.**

**QUESTION 7: Can you help with information on the issues facing transgendered people?**

## **Equality implications**

The Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) has concluded that it is only possible to carry out a high-level screening of this framework strategy. Each of the policies and actions chosen by the departments to deliver on the objectives of the strategy will be screened for their impact on equality of opportunity among the nine equality categories listed in Section 75, and full equality impact assessments will be carried out where appropriate. At a strategic level, OFMDFM will monitor the equality impact assessments of these policies.

Equality implications have been a central consideration in the development of this strategy. Not only is its central theme equality of opportunity between men and women (including boys and girls), with respect to their gender, marital status, whether or not they have dependants and whether they are transgendered, but the strategy has sought to incorporate the themes of promoting social inclusion, tackling poverty and rural-proofing into its vision, goals, objectives and guiding principles. This commitment was carried through into our informal preliminary consultations, in which we



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engaged with organisations and individuals representing various Section 75 equality categories, and also into the strong emphasis that we placed on inclusive participation in the planned formal consultation process to be carried out on this document. The strategy also will help to secure human rights for men and women (including boys and girls).

## **Resources**

The Gender Equality Strategy is seeking to have the gender perspective taken into account during the whole process of policy development in all of the government functions, and in the subsequent implementation review and evaluation of that policy. The Budget decisions taken on the basis of such gender mainstreamed policy will therefore reflect any adjustments made to that policy to promote gender equality or to tackle gender inequality. Departments may bid for resources necessary for specific gender equality initiatives that they have identified. These bids will be assessed against competing priorities within Government and take into account the Government's commitment and duty to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity among the Section 75 equality categories.

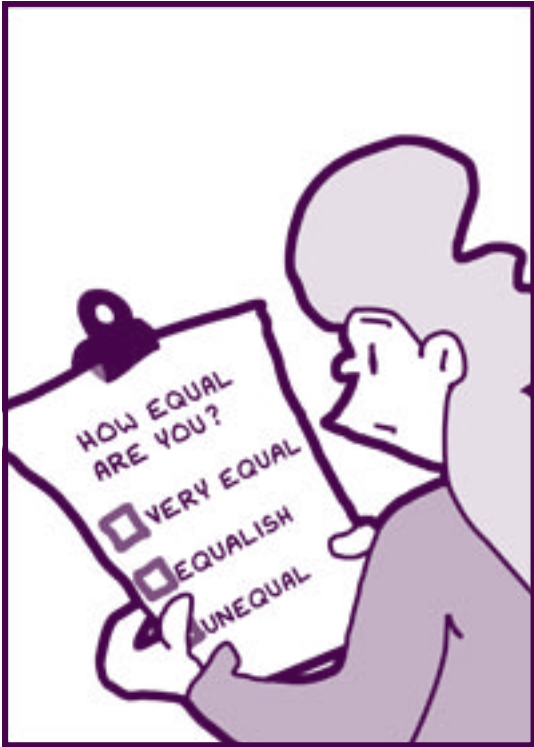
## **Implementation of the strategy**

In order to ensure that the strategy is translated into action, there must be clear lines of responsibility and appropriate structures in place to achieve a joined-up, targeted approach to tackling gender inequalities. While devolved government is suspended, Ministers in the Northern Ireland Office have responsibility for the framework strategy and its action plan within their departments and agencies. The Gender Equality Unit in OFMDFM has a central role in taking forward the implementation of the strategy and its action plan. This includes working with departments and their agencies to raise awareness and understanding of gender issues within their policy areas and promoting the development and maintenance of a



database of the qualitative and quantitative information on gender issues. Individual departments and agencies will be responsible for mainstreaming the gender perspective into all of their policy areas.

The Gender Equality Unit proposes to continue working together with organisations and groups representing the views of men and women (including boys and girls) and to facilitate communication with the departments to develop the action plan to implement the strategy. The Gender Equality Unit will also be responsible for taking forward a mid-term review of the strategy.



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## Freedom of Information Act 2000 – confidentiality of consultations

The Department will publish a summary of responses following completion of the consultation process. Your response, and all other responses to the consultation, may be disclosed on request. The Department can only refuse to disclose information in exceptional circumstances. **Before** you submit your response, please read the paragraphs below on the confidentiality of consultations: they will give you guidance on the legal position about any information given by you in response to this consultation.

The Freedom of Information Act gives the public a right of access to any information held by a public authority; namely, the Department in this case. This right of access to information includes information provided in response to a consultation. The Department cannot automatically consider information supplied to it in response to a consultation as confidential. However, it does have the responsibility to decide whether any information provided by you in response to this consultation, including information about your identity, should be made public or treated as confidential.

This means that information provided by you in response to the consultation is unlikely to be treated as confidential, except in very particular circumstances. The Lord Chancellor’s Code of Practice on the Freedom of Information Act provides that:

The Department should only accept information from third parties in confidence if it is necessary to obtain that information in connection with the exercise of any of the Department’s functions and if it would not otherwise be provided.

The Department should not agree to hold information received from third parties “in confidence” that is not confidential in nature.



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Acceptance by the Department of confidentiality provisions must be for good reasons, capable of being justified to the Information Commissioner.

For further information about confidentiality of responses, please contact the Information Commissioner's Office or see website at: **[www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk](http://www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk)**

We would welcome your views on the draft strategy and its equality implications. For further information, copies of the consultation document 'Gender Matters' and/or to respond to this particular consultation, please contact the consulting branch at:

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Castle Buildings  
Belfast BT4 3SR

or

Email: [admin.gender@ofmdfmi.gov.uk](mailto:admin.gender@ofmdfmi.gov.uk)

Telephone: 028 9052 3422

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This Executive Summary and the consultation document '**Gender Matters**' are available on our website: **[www.genderequalityni.gov.uk](http://www.genderequalityni.gov.uk)**, at the Central Consultation Register: **[www.consultationni.gov.uk](http://www.consultationni.gov.uk)** and from public libraries in Northern Ireland. Copies of the consultation document '**Gender Matters**' are being sent to MPs, MLAs, district councillors, community representatives within Northern Ireland, and key groups representing men and women, boys and girls, as well as to other statutory bodies in Northern Ireland.



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**THE CLOSING DATE FOR COMMENTS IS  
28 FEBRUARY 2005.**

In order to ensure full participation, the Gender Equality Unit will arrange a number of local seminars. These seminars will be advertised widely in local newspapers. All comments will be considered, and a summary of responses will be placed on the Gender Equality Unit website.

**We look forward to receiving your comments.**





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