



TOWARDS GENDER-RESPONSIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION STRATEGIES: A FOUR-STEP CHECKLIST

This checklist provides guidance for mainstreaming gender into national social protection strategies in four steps:

1. Defining the overarching framework for a strategy
2. Identifying gender-specific risks and vulnerabilities
3. Designing programmes and policies with a gender perspective
4. Developing monitoring, evaluation and accountability mechanisms.

Each step provides stakeholders involved in the development or revision of national social protection strategies with considerations that can be applied and adapted to different national contexts. The checklist was derived from an indicator framework developed by UN Women’s Research and Data section and has already been applied to analyse 30 national social strategies in sub-Saharan Africa.¹

STEP 1: Defining the overarching framework

National social protection systems should be designed in light of a country’s commitment to international norms and standards as well as its own legal frameworks. In many cases, this framework is then laid out in a social protection strategy or policy. To assess the values and commitments of an existing social protection strategy or policy, the following guiding questions can be used:

No.	Does the framework ...	Y/N	Additional guiding questions
1	Reference human rights and international standards?	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the social protection strategy, policy or other documentation acknowledge human rights or specific human rights instruments? • Do they reference gender-specific human rights?
2	Express a commitment to universalism?	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the social protection strategy, policy or other documentation discuss universal social protection, the progressive realization of universalism, or social protection “for all”?
3	Commit to progressively providing higher levels of protection?	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a commitment to move beyond social assistance and poverty reduction, to extend access to social insurance mechanisms, cover more contingencies and improve quality of life?
4	Adopt a life course approach?	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the framework include social protection for all stages of life? • Does it acknowledge gender-specific life course vulnerabilities (e.g. related to maternity or old age)?
5	Include gender equality and/or women’s empowerment as an objective of social protection?	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the social protection strategy, policy or other documentation discuss social protection as a means to address gender equality gaps?
6	Acknowledge gender gaps in social protection coverage?	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the social protection strategy, policy or other documentation discuss gender gaps in social protection coverage, access, quality or adequacy?

¹ See UN Women (2021) “Putting gender equality at the center of social protection strategies in Sub-Saharan Africa: How far have we come?” Policy Brief No. 24”. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/07/policy-brief-gender-equality-at-centre-of-social-protection-strategies-in-sub-saharan-africa>

No.	Does the framework ...	Y/N	Additional guiding questions
7	Recognize family diversity as an issue to be considered in social protection?	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the social protection strategy, policy or other documentation recognize that families are diverse in composition, e.g. extended, transnational, single parent, female-headed, LGBTQ+ families, or those where the caregiver is not a parent?
8	Reflect the inputs of a variety of social protection stakeholders?	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Was the social protection strategy, policy or other documentation put together in a consultative process? Did gender equality stakeholders such as national gender equality mechanisms and civil society organizations participate in designing the framework or the system? Did labour representatives (e.g. unions, domestic workers alliances) participate?

STEP 2: Identifying gender-specific risks and vulnerabilities

It is important that the design of national social protection systems be evidence-based, and that the evidence base include consideration of gendered risks and vulnerabilities. The following questions can be asked of social protection strategies and policies, or can help guide the design of new systems or iterations of existing systems.

No.	Does the framework ...	Y/N	Additional guiding questions
1	Identify and assess gendered life course risks, relevant to the national context?	✓	<p>Have evaluations, empirical studies and/or risk assessments been conducted to identify whether any of the following should be addressed through the social protection system?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child/early marriage Barriers to education Maternity-related health risks Maternity-related income risks Teenage pregnancy Single motherhood Widowhood-related risks Old age income risk
2	Identify and assess structural gender inequalities?	✓	<p>Have evaluations, empirical studies, and/or risk assessments been conducted to identify whether any of the following should be addressed through the social protection system?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Violence against women Unpaid care and domestic work Less access and control over resources

STEP 3: Designing programmes and measures with a gender perspective

National social protection systems have a variety of components—policies, programmes and services—which ideally work in tandem to provide comprehensive coverage and protection for all. The following questions can be used to assess the breadth of the social protection system envisioned by a national social protection strategy or policy and the extent to which they consider gender within each of the components covered.

No.	Does the framework ...	Y/N	Additional guiding questions
1	Include specific actions to address gender equality in social insurance programmes?	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do existing contributory programmes or policies include a gender-specific component, such as care credits in pensions, or sexual and reproductive health coverage in the healthcare system? Is an existing contributory scheme targeted to women and girls?
2	Include specific actions to address gender equality in social assistance programmes?	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does a policy, programme or action increase women's access to social assistance or to a specific non-contributory mechanism, such as a cash transfer programme, asset transfer programme, social pension, or school grants, subsidies and scholarships?
3	Include specific actions to address gender equality in public service programmes?	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does a specific policy, programme or action address gender risk and vulnerabilities in relation to, or gender gaps in access to, public services in general or a specific public service such as healthcare or education?
4	Include specific actions to address gender equality in infrastructure programmes?	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the system include investments, improvements or action relating to improving women's access to at least one specific element of infrastructure, such as roads, transportation, potable water or energy?
5	Include specific actions to address violence against women?	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do specific actions address any form of sexual or gender-based violence against women, including but not limited to: sex-selective abortion, child marriage and early unions, female genital mutilation and cutting, intimate partner violence, domestic violence, femicide, trafficking and sexual harassment?
6	Include specific actions to address women's income-earning capacity?	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do specific measures aim to increase women's access to income or employment/paid work? (e.g. job generation or investments in conditions that support women's livelihoods, such as land rights and tenure security for women, equal pay legislation, literacy, training and skills for work programmes, or credits?)
7	Include specific actions to reduce and redistribute unpaid care?	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are there policies and programmes in the area of work–family reconciliation (e.g. child or elderly care services, income support for unpaid caregivers support such as maternity leave and care credits, and redistribution of responsibilities from women to men such as paternity leave and daddy quotas in parental leave)?
8	Include specific actions to close coverage gaps between women and men?	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do specific measures expressly aim to close gender gaps in coverage or benefits levels, such as introducing care credits in contributory pension schemes, expanding social pensions, waving contributory requirements for minimum pensions, or automatic enrolment in social health insurance schemes?
9	Put forth specific measures to extend social protection to informal workers?	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do specific programmes reference gender while extending protection to informal workers broadly or specific categories of workers, such as domestic workers? Do measures reference gender while supporting the formalization of workers into contributory schemes?

STEP 4: Developing monitoring, evaluation and accountability mechanisms

Mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation and accountability are important for ensuring that a national social protection system functions to realize human rights, including women's human rights. The following questions help ascertain whether key accountability mechanisms are in place.

No.	Does the framework ...	Y/N	Additional guiding questions
1	Have a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework or mechanisms that include gender-specific indicators?	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the framework explicitly call for disaggregation by sex; refer to gender equality as the underlying objective (e.g. in budget proportion); and specify women and girls as the targeted population within indicators (e.g. access to a skilled birth attendant)?
2	Have an M&E framework that includes participatory mechanisms?	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the M&E framework include one or more of the following: social or gender audits; community score cards; qualitative impact evaluations or qualitative process evaluations (which may or may not include explicit mention of interviews and/or focus groups)?
3	Embed national legislation into the social protection system?	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the system of policies, programmes and measures refer to social protection in relation to a specific article of the constitution, or is there is a legal framework through which a claim to social protection can be made?
4	Include grievance, feedback and complaint mechanisms that inform policy assessment and reform?	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there a mechanism for grievance, feedback, complaints or appeal whether in general terms or a specific mechanism (e.g. a hotline, community audit or scorecard)? Is action taken on information received (is there a mention of the process and time limits on responses)?