

GRASSP WORKING PAPER

Applying the Gender Integration Continuum to Social Protection

A Guidance Note for Assessing the Level of Gender
Integration in Social Protection Policies and Programmes

October 2024

Contents

Introduction	3
PART 1: Understanding the Gender Integration Continuum	5
Programmes without any gender equality intention	5
Programmes that intentionally address gender inequality	6
PART 2: Using the Gender Integration Continuum in Practice	9
Conducting the GIC analysis	9
What next? Potential Actions Following the GIC Analysis	13
Further Resources	15
Annex: GIC Case Studies	17
Child Grant – Valor Criança - in Angola	17
Cash plus (WASH and Nutrition) in Burkina Faso	17
Cash plus gender sensitization response to COVID-19 in DRC	18
Productive Safety Net Programme Public Works in Ethiopia	19
Ujama Salama cash-plus programme for adolescents in Tanzania	20
Endnotes	22

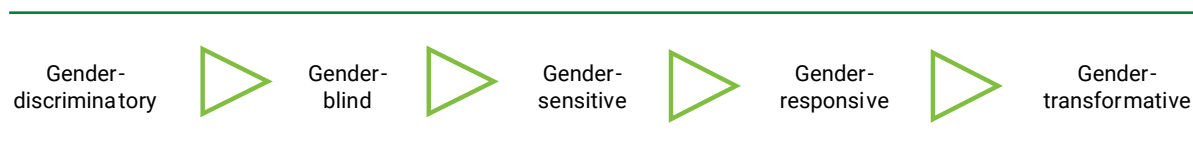
Introduction

In recent years, social protection policies and programmes have expanded across low- and middle-income countries. In many places, these policies and programmes have helped reduce poverty, lessen economic hardship, reduced food insecurity, and promoted positive development outcomes.¹ They have also facilitated improved access to resources and services for women and girls, helping them to survive and thrive.²

However, the full potential of social protection to transform gendered poverty dynamics remains untapped. Unequal gender norms, such as the distribution of economic and care work between women and men, result in women and girls benefiting unequally from the resources and investments made available through social protection policies and programmes. Harmful practices such as child marriage, and gender-discriminatory laws, policies and politics, such as around inheritance or property ownership, further intersect with marginalised social identities and individual characteristics such as age and disability, to create pathways of inequality. This can lead to continued inequalities in outcomes for many women and girls, representing a barrier to sustainable and equitable poverty reduction. When left unaddressed or inadequately addressed, these barriers are often insurmountable for individual women and girls. Sustained and intentional support across development systems, sectors, and institutions are therefore required to both support gender equality and deliver on the potential of social protection to respond to and transform outcomes for women and girls.³

Promoting gender equality necessitates having a broader vision for social protection, one that acknowledges the inherent link between sustainable poverty reduction and gender equality and that intentionally addresses gender inequality. This requires application of clear and sustained gender-responsive policy and programmatic objectives, design and implementation strategies. **To this end, the gender integration continuum (GIC) (Figure 1) is a tool to help assess whether – and to what extent – gender needs and inequalities are considered in social protection policy and programme objectives, design, and implementation features.** The GIC consists of five categories that exist along a continuum from more regressive approaches that ignore gender needs and inequalities (gender-discriminatory and gender-blind), to more progressive approaches that take increasingly far-reaching action to address gender inequality (gender-sensitive, gender-responsive, and gender-transformative).

Figure 1: Gender Integration Continuum



This guidance note has been developed by UNICEF to help policy makers, practitioners, and researchers use the GIC as part of their policy planning, dialogue, and advocacy toolkit to provide a systematic and evidence-based assessment of the extent to which the objectives, design, and implementation features of social protection policies and programmes consider and respond to gendered needs, risks, and inequalities at different levels.

- Policy and programme intervention level (gender-sensitive): ensuring that there is gender-equal access to and benefit from social protection policies and programmes and that social protection does not exacerbate gender inequality.
- Individual and household level (gender-responsive): enhancing gender equality outcomes by addressing practical gender needs across the domains of income and work, education, health and nutrition, bodily integrity, psychosocial well-being, and voice and agency.
- Structural level (gender-transformative): advancing strategic gender interests by changing unequal gender norms, roles, and institutions such as those related to economic and care work, asset ownership, legal rights, marriage and relationships, and violence, and that perpetuate gender unequal outcomes.⁴

The GIC draws on the Gender Responsive and Age-Sensitive Social Protection (GRASSP) [conceptual framework](#) developed by UNICEF Innocenti (2020) which provides an overall approach to thinking strategically about the different elements of programmes, policies and systems that are required to ensure gender-responsive social protection.

A GIC assessment can be used by policy makers, development partners, and civil society actors to support advocacy and dialogue throughout the policy cycle from inception and design to implementation, evaluation, and reform. **Part 1** of this guidance note describes the GIC categories and the distinctions between them. **Part 2** provides direction on how to apply the GIC in practice and the implications of the analysis for policy and programming along with a list of further resources.

PART 1: Understanding the Gender Integration Continuum⁵

The gender integration continuum (GIC) consists of five categories that represent different levels of ambition in terms of gender integration in social protection policy and programme objectives and design and implementation features, broadly distinguished by:

- Designs that intentionally address gender specific needs and inequality: gender-sensitive, gender-responsive, and gender-transformative.
- Designs that do not consider gender specific needs and inequality: gender-discriminatory and gender-blind.⁶

The primary characteristics of each GIC category are summarised in Table 1 at the end of this section.

Programmes without any gender equality intention

At the bottom end of the continuum are social protection policies and programmes with a gender-discriminatory or gender-blind design. These approaches do not have any gender equality intention and tend to reinforce and potentially worsen prevailing gender patterns of inequality and risk.

- Social protection can be **gender-discriminatory** when it incorporates design features that favour, or discriminate against, one gender in a way that leads to greater gender inequality. Often, discriminatory design features *intentionally* reinforce or ‘instrumentalise’ prevailing gender norms, roles, and stereotypes to achieve programme objectives, for example, public works programmes that only employ men and conditional cash transfers that require mothers, but not fathers, to fulfil the conditions related to their children.
- A **gender-blind** approach is when the design ignores gender differences and thereby *unintentionally* perpetuates and potentially worsens gender inequality. This occurs because the potential for gender unequal outcomes related to or resulting from the policy or programme design and implementation have not been considered, rendering gendered needs invisible. Often, these are policies and programmes that are technically available to both men and women, but women are more likely to be excluded; for example, a contributory pension that does not account for the low concentration of women in formal sector employment or an unconditional cash transfer that requires physical registration in a context where women’s mobility is restricted.

Often, gender-discriminatory and gender-blind designs occur because there has been no assessment or analysis of gender unequal outcomes, norms, roles, and institutions. Even where such analysis is available, policy makers may adopt what they perceive to be a “gender-neutral” approach to policy or programme design based on a preference for equality over equity principles (i.e., non-discrimination between women and men rather than reducing the disadvantage between women and men) or for simplicity of implementation.⁷ However, the resultant policy or programme remains gender-blind because the design has not been informed by an understanding of the drivers of gender inequality.

Programmes that intentionally address gender inequality

At the upper end of the continuum are social protection policies and programmes that recognise gender risks and inequalities and intentionally aim to address them with varying degrees of ambition (illustrated through the imagined story of a family that experiences a cash plus programme with three alternate designs in Box 1).

- At a minimum, social protection policies and programmes should be **gender-sensitive**, meaning that they are designed in a way that acknowledges and mitigates gender differences that may result in unequal access to or benefit from the programme. A gender-sensitive approach may not necessarily seek to address gender unequal outcomes more broadly (the hallmark of a gender-responsive approach), but at least aims to ensure that women and men, girls and boys, can benefit equally from the policy or programme by considering their specific needs and circumstances within existing gender norms and roles. Gender-sensitive policies and programmes may still reinforce certain kinds of inequality if they only address some gender barriers and not others.
- A **gender-responsive** approach explicitly recognizes that specific gender groups, such as women and girls, face unique challenges due to existing gender inequalities and aims to intentionally address their specific needs and vulnerabilities, and thus address gender disparities. This may be done by targeting a policy or programme specifically to women and girls, or men and boys, integrating additional components into the programme, or providing linkages to other services and interventions that address specific gender needs. For example, a programme that aims to enhance women's economic empowerment through provision of cash transfers may also provide access to business training and financial services, as well as childcare to free up women's time for economic activity.
- While gender-responsive approaches aim to directly address gender unequal outcomes, **gender-transformative** social protection has a more ambitious objective, to support changes in social relations and economic and political structures and systems (the harmful and discriminatory gender norms, values, roles, and institutions) that produce and sustain gender inequalities in the first place. To be transformative requires explicit and deliberate effort to change patriarchal social values and power relations that place women and girls at a lower status in society. Without such a focus, social protection policies and programmes may address more immediate gender unequal outcomes, such as enhancing access to income, education, or care services, but miss opportunities to address unequal norms and structures such as women's presumed responsibility for childcare, the acceptability of domestic violence, and limited autonomy in decision making about their lives.

Box 1: Higher Levels of Gender Integration: An Imagined Family Case Study

The family

- A woman in her mid-twenties, married at 17, educated to 5th grade, small landholding subsistence farming, small amount to trade vegetables in weekly market.
- The husband, a casual daily wage labourer, often away on work sites, disconnected from household management; some conflict within the home because of stress.
- Three children, two boys aged 7 and 2 years, and a girl aged 5 years.
- The husband's elderly mother, has limited mobility, cannot work, and needs medication.

The household is eligible for a cash plus intervention designed to improve children's outcomes in terms of nutrition and schooling through enhancing purchasing power for basic needs and services and providing training on care practices.

Gender-sensitive design: Programme designers recognize that the woman is responsible for much of the care work and therefore should have access to the transfer to determine household spending to meet poverty and child well-being objectives. The programme provides the woman with the transfer directly and provides complementary information sessions on early childhood nutrition and care that are optional for the parents. The programme design also takes steps to reduce the woman's time and work burden to enable her to participate in the programme through introducing household visits from implementers and nutrition counsellors at convenient times for the parents. The woman is then expected to invest more time on her children and small farm produce.

Gender-responsive design: The cash plus intervention recognizes that the woman also has other gender specific needs. In addition to the gender-sensitive approach, the programme integrates components to support the woman's economic empowerment such as information on savings and other ways to use her transfer effectively, inputs to manage her land and resources, and community mobilisation to organize childcare and school transportation, thus easing her double burden of care and economic work. As well as enhancing outcomes for her children, the woman can increase her small farm produce and diversify her income through selling at the local market, thus generating more sustainable benefits.

Gender-transformative design: Alongside the "responsive" components, the cash plus programme integrates a range of measures that aim to challenge and change household and community gender norms around the distribution of childcare between men and women, through family workshops for both husband and wife and engagement of women's groups and community leaders over a sustained period. When the husband is home, he starts to take a little more responsibility for child and elderly care, allowing the woman to maintain her productive activities and join the local women's group.

Table 1: Basic Characteristics of Social Protection Policies and Programmes along the Gender Integration Continuum

		Level of gender ambition				
		Discriminatory	Blind	Sensitive	Responsive	Transformative
Basic characteristics	Favours or discriminates against either gender in a way that leads to greater gender inequality by taking advantage of prevailing unequal gender norms and roles to meet policy and programme objectives.					
	Ignores prevailing gender risks and inequalities. May unintentionally exacerbate gender inequality in relation to programme access, benefits, and wider outcomes.					
	Acknowledges prevailing gender risks and inequalities that represent practical barriers to accessing and benefiting from the policy or programme and takes action to mitigate them within the bounds of the programme design and implementation.					
	Recognises that specific gender groups, such as women and girls, face unique challenges due to existing gender inequalities and intentionally aims to address their specific needs and vulnerabilities within the policy or programme and more broadly.					
	Recognises and seeks to change the harmful and discriminatory gender norms, values, roles, and institutions that produce and sustain gender inequalities.					

PART 2: Using the Gender Integration Continuum in Practice

The GIC can help policy makers, practitioners, and researchers make a systematic and evidence-based assessment of the extent to which social protection policy and programme objectives, design, and implementation features consider and respond to gendered needs, risks, and inequalities, to support policy planning, dialogue, and advocacy.

The GIC is primarily a tool to understand the **gender intention** of a policy or programme – the extent to which social protection policy and programme objectives, design, and implementation features consider and integrate provisions to tackle gender needs, risks, and inequalities.⁸ This section takes you through the steps and considerations required to conduct a GIC analysis and what to do once you have completed the analysis. Ideally the analysis will be a consultative or deliberative process bringing together different actors including both policy makers as well as community representatives and civil society. The Annex includes case studies from Angola, Burkina Faso, DRC, Ethiopia, and Tanzania developed through the GRASSP research programme that demonstrate the application of the GIC to social protection programmes.⁹

Conducting the GIC analysis

Step 1. Gather the policy documents

Assessing the level of gender integration in a social protection policy or programme relies on analysing the formal policy documents that describe the programme objectives and design and implementation features. Typically, these are the legal documents associated with the policy or programme, such as policies or decrees, and supporting documents such as operations manuals. In some cases, additional details, especially related to the underlying rationale for the programme, are available in background programme documents or proposals.

Step 2. Identify policy or programme objectives and design elements

The second step involves identifying the policy or programme objectives and core design and implementation features. It can be helpful to consider the following core elements of a policy:¹⁰

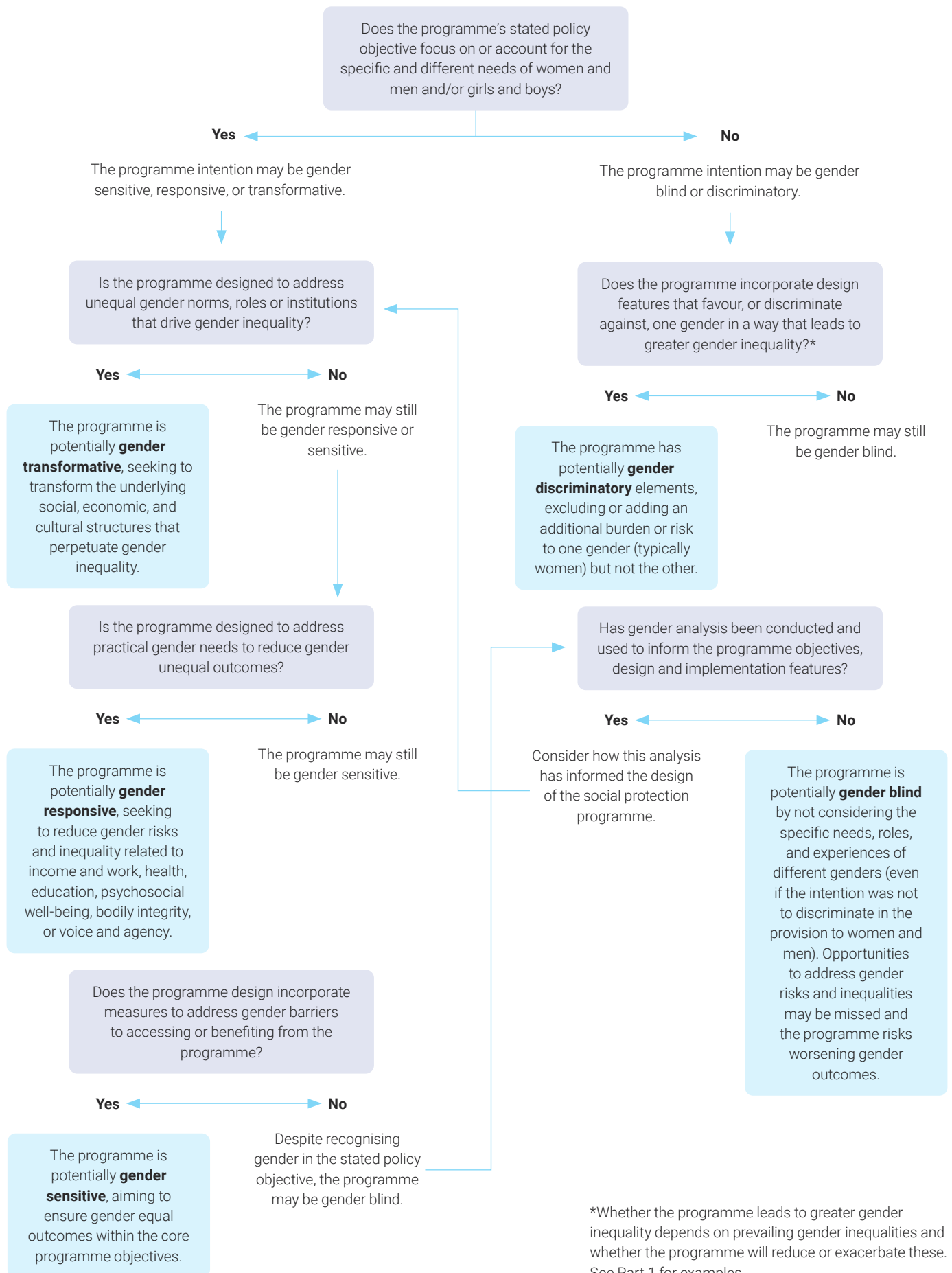
- *Framing and objectives* – Identify the formal policy or programme objectives (high level goals and specific objectives) and note any explicit references to gender equality or gender specific needs. The gender intentions of a policy or programme may also be reflected in the wider framing of the policy including references to international and national gender policies and frameworks.
- *Economic and social vulnerabilities, risks, and inequalities* – More specific details on the gender intention of a policy or programme may be articulated in an analysis of the gendered economic and social vulnerabilities, risks, and inequalities that the policy aims to address across the domains of income and work, education, health and nutrition, bodily integrity, psychosocial well-being, and voice and agency (see also [Mainstreaming Gender into Social Protection Strategies and Programmes: Evidence from 74 Low- and Middle-Income Countries](#) for examples).

- *Design and implementation features* – Identify the core policy or programme design elements such as benefit type, targeting and recipients, behavioural conditions, complementary measures, and linkages with other sectors, and note any explicit (or potentially implicit) gender related features. Also identify implementation features and their specific parameters such as registration, payment and service delivery modalities, and grievance mechanisms.
- *Monitoring and evaluation* – Identify the policy or programme monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and whether they explicitly consider the need for sex-disaggregated data and incorporate other gender specific provisions within the indicators, data collection modalities, and other relevant processes.

Step 3: Categorise and consolidate the analysis

Use the questions in the decision tree (Figure 2) and the category descriptions in Part 1 to assess the level of gender integration in the policy or programme objectives and the design and implementation features.

Figure 2: Decision Tree for Assessing the Level of Gender Integration in Social Protection Programmes



In practice, there can be challenges in applying the GIC due to a lack of information, the complexity of programme design, variation between intention and implementation, how the programme or policy interacts with gender norms, and political sensitivities (see Box 2).

Box 2: Challenges in Applying the GIC in Practice

Several challenges can arise when using the GIC to analyse a social protection policy or programme. As such, categorising policy or programme objectives and design and implementation features will not always be immediately obvious and may be contested.

- **Internal inconsistencies:** Ideally, a social protection policy or programme's gender "intent" – the explicit or implicit gender objectives of policy makers – will be reflected in both the stated objectives and the design and implementation features. However, in practice policy objectives can sometimes be inconsistent with programme design or not fully reflect the gender dimensions of a programme. Where there is uncertainty, it is better to state this explicitly than to rely on assumptions about potential impacts.
- **Context:** The same policy or programme design may have different implications for gender equality in different contexts. For example, a vocational training programme provides business training to men while focusing on home-based production for women. In a context where women can also engage in external business activities, this would be discriminatory because it assumes women are confined to the domestic sphere. However, in a context where strict norms around women's mobility largely confine them to the home, the programme is arguably gender sensitive, as it adjusts programme approaches to meet the gender specific needs of both men and women. Drawing on wider evidence about gender norms in the context of the policy or programme can support this interpretation; however, it is important to remember that the GIC analysis is primarily about understanding explicit programme intent.

The following highlights some of the key considerations when conducting and consolidating the GIC analysis.

- **Accounting for multiple levels of gender integration** – Within the same policy or programme, different design elements often fall into different GIC categories. Moreover, there can be inconsistencies between the gender intention of the objectives and the design and implementation features. The aim of applying the GIC is to reveal the level of gender intention within the constituent parts of a policy or programme, not always (or only) the programme in its entirety. While the analysis *may* lead to the conclusion that the programme as a whole falls into a single category, more often, it will reveal a more nuanced picture that should be reflected in the analysis and conclusions.

- **Addressing implicit gender intention** – In many cases, policy documents are not explicit about the gender intention behind the stated objectives and design features. This is often because the policy is gender blind and has simply not considered how the resultant programme interacts with and impacts gendered risks and inequality. Using other gender analysis, it may be possible to conclude that the programme is likely to have gendered impacts. For example, a poverty targeted non-contributory pension with no explicit gender intention within the policy documents may reduce gender inequality in old age poverty in a context where older women are more likely to be poor and poorer than older men. This conclusion should be stated explicitly in the analysis: the programme is gender blind but may nevertheless have (unintended) impacts on gender equality.
- **Supplementary data collection** – When possible, it can be useful to conduct supplementary data collection through rapid key informant interviews with those who were involved in policy formulation. This can help to identify any additional documents for the analysis and to clarify and validate the intentions behind the programme objectives and design features.
- **Political sensitivity** – Interpretations of a policy or programme's gender intention are shaped by underlying gender ideologies and political interests. Gender experts and policy makers may have different interpretations about the intended impacts of a policy or programme design element on gender equality. Categorising a policy or programme design feature as gender blind may not be politically acceptable. As suggested above, this can be addressed through taking a consultative and deliberative approach to the analysis, as well as using nuanced language in the analysis and recognising programme strengths as well as weaknesses.

What next? Potential Actions Following the GIC Analysis

A GIC analysis can inform policy and programme design processes and can be used as part of dialogue and advocacy with policy makers at any stage of the policy cycle. Depending on the outcomes of the analysis, there are several different actions that can be taken.

- **Conduct further gender analysis.** If the GIC analysis concludes that the programme or policy is largely gender-blind or -discriminatory and that the design was not based on any (or adequate) gender analysis, the first step should be to conduct further gender analysis. Depending on what evidence is already available, this may require assessment of the gendered nature of poverty and vulnerability (gender needs assessments), the underlying assumptions about gender norms and roles within the programme design (gender design and implementation assessment), or the actual gendered outcomes and impacts of the programme (gender impact assessment).
- **Reconcile inconsistencies.** The GIC analysis may conclude that the policy or programme has gender-sensitive or gender-responsive design elements, but these are not explicitly recognised in the higher-level objectives. If so, it is recommended to modifying the programme objectives to make the higher-level gender intent clearer. If the stated policy objective has a higher level of gender ambition than the programme design, then consider how to modify and strengthen the programme design, based on sound evidence and analysis.
- **Remove discriminatory design features.** If the GIC analysis concludes that elements of the policy or programme design are gender discriminatory (typically related to targeting or behavioural conditions), this does not mean that the programme brings no benefit to women and girls.

However, consider modifying the design to remove conditions so that the burden of meeting programme requirements does not fall unequally to women and any other discriminatory design features.

- **Enhance the level of gender ambition.** If the GIC analysis concludes that the programme has no or limited gender sensitive elements, consider other modifications that can mitigate any gender barriers to access or benefit from the programme. If the analysis concludes that the programme is largely gender-sensitive or gender-responsive, consider whether the programme design can be modified to support a higher level of gender ambition including the transformation of unequal gender norms, roles, or institutions. This should be based on gender analysis (see point 1).

Further Resources

PUBLICATION	RELEVANCE
Promoting Gender-Transformative Change through Social Protection: An Analytical Approach , Camilletti, E., Nesbitt-Ahmed, Z. and Subrahmanian, R., UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti, Florence, 2022.	Presents an analytical approach based on the socioecological model for understanding the pathways through which social protection can lead to gender transformative outcomes. Includes multiple examples of gender responsive and gender transformative programme design.
Towards Gender-Responsive Social Protection: Evidence on Policy-Making, Programme Implementation, and Impacts for Women and Girls , Kuss, M.K., Subrahmanian, R., Mathers, N. et al., UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, Florence, 2024.	Presents the findings from 10 case studies on what works, how, and why to harness social protection in the pursuit of gender equality. Provides insights into the impacts, design and implementation processes of social protection policies and programmes and how they enable, transform, or constrain the lives of women and girls. Includes detailed analyses of five programmes using the GIC.
Institutionalising Gender in Social Protection Policy , Research Brief, Mathers, N., Kuss, M.K., and Subrahmanian, R., UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, Florence, 2024.	Presents the findings from five political economy analyses from GRASSP research programme examining how gender was considered within social protection reforms in Angola, Ethiopia, Mexico, Uruguay, and Viet Nam, with lessons for enhancing gender integration in policy formulation processes.
Mainstreaming Gender into Social Protection Strategies and Programmes: Evidence from 74 Low- and Middle-Income Countries , Camilletti, E., Cookson, T.P., Nesbitt-Ahmed, Z., Sandoval, R., Staab, S. and Tabbush, C., UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, Florence and UN Women, New York, 2021.	A review of 50 national social protection strategies and 40 social protection programmes across a total of 74 low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) to assess the extent to which they incorporate gender equality concerns in their framing and objectives, risk and vulnerability analysis, design features, and monitoring, evaluation, and accountability mechanisms.
Social Protection and Its Effects on Gender Equality: A Literature Review , Innocenti Working Paper 2020-06, Camilletti, E., UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, Florence, 2020.	Provides an overview of the evidence on the effects of social protection on gender equality. Includes a review and discussion of the evidence on the design features of four main types of social protection programmes and their effects on gender equality, unpacking which design features matter the most to achieve gender equality.
Gender-Responsive Age-Sensitive Social Protection: A Conceptual Framework , Innocenti Working Paper WP-2020-10, Banati, P., Camilletti, E., Gavrilovic, M., Kapungu, R., Palermo, T., Peterman, A., & Valli, E., UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, Florence, 2020.	Provides a concise narrative behind the graphic representation of the GRASSP conceptual framework. The framework proposes a systematic, holistic and integrated approach for conceptualising the intersections between gender and social protection through careful planning, design, implementation and evaluation of a gender-responsive social protection system.
Increasing gender-responsiveness and transformation through social protection programs: lessons from a gender review from six countries in Africa , Gavrilovic, M. 2024.	Offers a rapid review of six social protection systems in Burundi, Ghana, Ethiopia, Sudan, Madagascar, and Sierra Leone. Shows that even when social protection programmes are not designed to be explicitly gender-responsive or gender transformative, they can include a variety of gender-responsive design provisions and actions to promote positive outcomes for women and girls. It articulates the bottlenecks and challenges that persist to promote gender-responsive programming.

PUBLICATION	RELEVANCE
Age Sensitive, Disability Inclusive, and Gender Responsive Care and Support Systems Evidence Note, Barrantes, A., Cretney, M., Social Protection Technical Assistance, Advice and Resources (STAAR) Facility, DAI Global UK Ltd, United Kingdom, 2024.	Looks into how governments in low- and middle-income countries can develop high quality care and support systems for children, persons with disabilities and older persons, and their families that are rights abiding, gender responsive, disability inclusive, fiscally sustainable, and contextually relevant. Proposes a needed shift on how care and support systems are being discussed in low and middle-income countries. It defines what inclusive and comprehensive care and support systems entail – including some of the key building blocks - from a human rights and life course perspective that is gender equal and disability inclusive.

Annex: GIC Case Studies

Child Grant – Valor Criança - in Angola

In 2019, the Government of Angola, in collaboration with UNICEF Angola and with financial backing from the EU, piloted *Valor Criança*, a geographic-targeted universal child-sensitive unconditional *cash transfer*, designed to support households with children under 5 years old in food-insecure municipalities. *Valor Criança* was one of the pillars of the programme *Apoio à Protecção Social – APROSOC*, which started in 2014 as a first step towards establishing a national social protection system in Angola. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the programme provided a monthly cash transfer of about 10 USD¹¹ (AOA 3,000) per child, which increased to 13 USD (AOA 5,000) in 2020, with payments initially scheduled quarterly. Each household was eligible to receive support for up to three children. The programme was piloted in selected villages across six municipalities within the provinces of Bié, Moxico, and Uíge. By the end of 2022, it had reached 19,590 caregivers.

Looking at all the formal programme objectives and design features together, we can classify Angola's Child Grant as gender-sensitive because it aimed at supporting women to take care of their children, thereby addressing child vulnerability. To elaborate, the stated objective of the programme was "to address the vulnerabilities of children in the poorest households"¹² by providing support to their primary caregivers. In terms of design features, the main mechanism for achieving this was designating the caregiver of the children (typically female) as the recipient of the transfer - rather than the (typically male) household head. As such it was designed in a way that acknowledges unequal access to financial resources at the household level and provided women with the resources and support needed to better take care of their children. This was geared at "fostering a greater role for women in the household" and thereby "guarantee greater effectiveness of the social transfer to the families."

The programme also included design features that aimed at supporting caregivers including pay points near the recipient's residence to accommodate women's time constraints as well as facilitating the financial inclusion of women through support for bank account openings and official documentation. Moreover, the programme provided opportunities for economic inclusion of women. Arguably this feature goes beyond the gender-sensitive objective of supporting caregivers to provide better care to children. Yet it does not fully take account of the pre-existing work burden of women in the domestic sphere and risks overburdening women with paid and unpaid work duties. As such we may describe this feature as only partially gender-responsive.

Cash plus (WASH and Nutrition) in Burkina Faso

Burkina Faso's Government, with support from UNICEF Burkina Faso and funding by the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida), piloted a cash-plus programme known as the Child Sensitive Social Protection Programme, which was implemented from 2020 to 2023. The programme had four main components: 1) Cash-only transfers; 2) Cash paired with preventive nutrition measures for pregnant and lactating women; 3) Cash combined with nutrition and Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) programmes, focusing on menstrual hygiene management for adolescent girls and

Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS); and 4) Cash paired with nutrition and WASH programmes, emphasizing on the provision of water supply points to communities in the designated area. Regardless of household size, each household received about 30 USD (16,000 FCFA) monthly, distributed electronically every three months. The programme was implemented in 11 municipalities across four regions with the highest multidimensional poverty levels: Centre-North, East, Boucle du Mouhoun, and North. The cash transfer reached about 3,700 households in total.

Overall, the gender intention of the cash plus programme in Burkina Faso can be seen as gender-sensitive as its plus components aimed to enhance and support women's caregiving responsibilities, increase their financial decision making capacity, and alleviate time poverty, as part of the broader objective to reduce child multidimensional poverty.¹³ Yet, this gender intention is not baked into the formal programme objective which only states the aim of enhancing household consumption and promote investment in economic activities in order to alleviate poverty and vulnerabilities among children living in these households. In contrast to the case of Angola, the formulation of the programme objective firmly focuses on poverty reduction and child poverty in general and does not acknowledge the crucial role of the caregivers.

While the stated objective did not explicitly focus on care and domestic work, intrahousehold decision making and adjunct gender inequalities, some of the programme design features did integrate gender, particularly within the plus components. Importantly, this included gender-sensitive design features that aimed at supporting women and girls in their domestic and caregiving roles. The objective was to reduce child poverty and multidimensional poverty through these programme initiatives. For example, 1) nutrition programmes primarily targeted pregnant and lactating women and mothers of children under two years old; 2) the construction of water supply points aimed to reduce the primary burden of water collection, which is mostly undertaken by women and girls; 3) sensitization on family budgeting and practices to improve the engagement of female caregivers in decision-making at the household level. Moreover, some of the design features were also of gender-responsive nature, thus going beyond the immediate objective of reducing child poverty, such as menstrual hygiene management programmes for adolescent girls.

Cash plus gender sensitization response to COVID-19 in DRC

In early 2021, UNICEF, WFP, and FAO collaborated to launch a cash-plus programme in DRC to mitigate the immediate socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on vulnerable households in Nsélé, a peri-urban commune near Kinshasa. The programme was implemented in the six most vulnerable health areas in the commune, and was implemented in two phases: 1) A humanitarian phase covering the initial three months, 23,111 during which households received varied amounts of cash transfers depending on household size: 23 USD (CDF 45,000) per month for single-member households, 54 USD (CDF 100,000) for average-sized families of six, and up to 75 USD (CDF 150,000) for larger families of 12 or more members. 2) A social protection phase lasting six months during which 16,000 of the most vulnerable and poor households from the initial caseload received a fixed monthly payment of 40 USD (CDF 80,000), irrespective of household size.

Transfers were predominantly made via mobile money, except in areas without mobile phone network coverage. The cash transfers were complemented with several additional programmes. This included COVID-19 awareness and prevention efforts, and training of trainers on women's rights, financial management (operations, marketing), gender-based violence prevention for authorities

and community relays and representatives of local women's associations. In agricultural areas, FAO also distributed gardening kits - consisting of agricultural equipment, watering cans, and seeds - and technical training.

While the formal objective of the cash plus programme in DRC can be described as gender-responsive, the programme design reflects a gender-sensitive approach.¹⁴ Specifically, the programme pursued two main objectives: first, it aimed to assist the government in creating a shock-responsive social protection system. Second, it sought to mitigate the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and adjunct measures (e.g. border closures, curfews, school shutdowns, and social distancing) on households and individuals, and especially on women and children. The second part of the policy objective explicitly recognized the amplified vulnerabilities of women and girls who were disproportionately affected by the health and socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 prevention measures, as they had to care for the sick, lost informal employment, and experienced psychological distress and gender-based violence. More specifically, "over its four-year span, the project has bigger goals: to give people here the tools to build businesses and sustainable futures – and to put especially women in the driver's seat of change".¹⁵ This objective can be considered as gender-responsive as the intention was to meet the wider practical needs and vulnerabilities of women arising from the pandemic.

The objective was predominantly operationalised through the "plus" component, the financial management of income-generating activities programme, in order to boost the productive capacities of women. However, similar to the economic inclusion feature in Burkina Faso this design component also ignores the practical care responsibilities expected of women, which means the programme only partially responds to women's practical gender needs in the economic domain.

The programme also incorporated training of local associations and communities in gender-based violence, women's leadership, rights, and positive masculinity, geared towards addressing both practical and strategic needs of women, thus entailing gender-responsive and transformative elements in design, though operational aspects of this component were not studied.

Productive Safety Net Programme Public Works in Ethiopia

Initiated in 2005 by the Ethiopian Government with support from various development partners, Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) has evolved into a fairly comprehensive social protection programme. It encompasses conditional and unconditional cash transfers, asset creation activities, and social services, benefiting nearly 8 million people across nine regions. The core component of the PSNP is the public works programme, which is designed to support poor, food-insecure households that have at least one abled-bodied adult. Participants receive a conditional transfer, either in cash or kind, contingent upon their engagement in public work activities. Each eligible adult from these households is required to work for five days per month, earning a daily wage equivalent to the market value of 3 kgs of wheat. On average, households participating in public works receive a transfer of 31 USD (ETB 881).

The gender intention of Ethiopia's PSNP's Public Works programme, as outlined in the programme documents, is two-fold, encompassing both a gender-sensitive and potentially transformative intention. The overall programme objective specified "gender equity" as a formal cross-cutting principle geared towards responding "to the unique needs, interests and capabilities of men and

women to ensure that they benefit equally from the Programme”¹⁶. To some extent reflecting the gender commitment, the public works component set two key gender objectives: 1) a gender-sensitive objective focused on enhancing access to resources for both men and women and ensuring the more equal access to the programme for women through specific gender design features; and 2) a potentially gender-transformative objective of increasing women’s participation in PSNP decision-making structures at the grassroots.

To achieve these objectives, a variety of gender design features were developed. In terms of gender-sensitive features, female-headed and polygamous households were preferentially targeted; both spouses were given access to the payments; and women had tailored work conditions which were designed to facilitate their engagement in paid work while continuing to comply with their domestic work responsibilities. These conditions included shorter working hours, lighter tasks, ensuring shorter distances to public work sites, provision of childcare facilities, and maternity leave for pregnant and lactating women. Because these measures aimed at addressing specific barriers to women’s participation in the programme rather than addressing rights more broadly, they can be seen as gender-sensitive rather than gender-responsive. In terms of potentially gender-transformative measures, the programme mandated that either the team leader or co-team leader in public works be a woman thereby shifting gender norms in management by male team leaders exclusively. Furthermore, a 50% female participation quota was established for PSNP governance and community-level decision-making.

Ujana Salama cash-plus programme for adolescents in Tanzania

Tanzania’s Productive Social Safety Net (PSSN) was initiated in 2012 and gradually expanded its coverage and benefits, supporting approximately 1.3 million poor and food-insecure households through cash transfers, public works, and livelihood programmes (WB 2023). By 2018, an additional component, known as the Ujana Salama (‘Safe Youth’ in Swahili) adolescent cash-plus programme, was introduced to promote safe, healthy and productive transitions to adulthood. This programme targeted adolescents in PSSN households, offering livelihood and sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and HIV life-skills training, mentoring on livelihood options and life skills, productive grants for schooling, vocational training or business plans, and linkages to strengthened, adolescent-friendly government health services (SRH and HIV). Ujana Salama was first piloted in the regions of Mbeya and Iringa and later upscaled to the Kigoma and Songwe regions. It was spearheaded by the Government of Tanzania through the Tanzania Social Action Fund (TASAF) and supported by the Tanzania Commission for AIDS (TACAIDS), the Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children, and UNICEF Tanzania.

Overall, the programme documents of the cash-plus programme in Tanzania suggest that its gender intention can be classified as largely gender-responsive, with some transformative elements as it aimed to facilitate a safe and healthy transition to adulthood by addressing gendered risks, vulnerabilities, and harmful norms. However, this intention is not explicitly articulated into the formal programme objective, which merely states that the aim was to support a safe, healthy and productive transition to adulthood by empowering adolescents across the economic as well as social/health domains.

The gender intention becomes clearer when examining the programme's design features. The programme included a set of well-designed communication and behavioural change strategies at the micro level - consisting of 12-week life-skills training, peer support groups, and mentorship - geared towards promoting the livelihood skills of both boys and girls and addressing the gendered risks and vulnerabilities associated with gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health (SRH). Beyond this it also aimed at changing harmful gender attitudes between adolescent girls and boys at the individual level, thus also incorporating a gender-transformative ambition to some extent. Additionally, the programme facilitated linkages for adolescent participants from PSSN households to HIV and SRH services tailored to and suitable for their needs.

Endnotes

- 1 Heintz, James, Shahra Razavi, Papa Seck, Silke Staab, Laura Turquet. "Progress of the World's Women 2015-2016: Transforming Economies, Realizing Rights", UN Women report, 2015.; Bastagli, Francesca, Jessica Hagen-Zanker, Luke Harman, Valentina Barca, Georgina Sturge and Tanja Schmidt, and Luca Pellerano. "Cash transfers: what does the evidence say. A rigorous review of programme impact and the role of design and implementation features", London, ODI, 1.7, 2016.
- 2 Perera, Camila, Shivit Bakrania, Alessandra Ipince, Zahrah Nesbitt-Ahmed, Oluwaseun Obasola, Dominic Richardson, Jorinde Van de Scheur and Ruichuan Yu. "Impact of social protection on gender equality in low- and middle-income countries: A systematic review of reviews", *Campbell systematic reviews*, 18, 2, e1240, 2022.
- 3 For insights into the pathways through which social protection can lead to gender transformative change, see: Promoting Gender-Transformative Change through Social Protection: An analytical approach, Camilletti, E., Nesbitt-Ahmed, Z. and Subrahmanian, R., UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti, Florence, 2022
- 4 Individual/household level and structural level are similar to how Molyneux (1985) distinguishes between "practical gender interests", which are urgent and do not entail immediate emancipation or gender equality, and "strategic gender interests", which aim to alleviate the subordinate status of women.
- 5 This section of the guidance draws largely on Chapter 1 of the GRASSP synthesis report "Towards Gender-Responsive Social Protection: Evidence on Policy-Making, Programme Implementation, and Impacts for Women and Girls," Kuss, M.K. et al., UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, Florence, 2024.
- 6 The GIC builds upon a diverse body of literature that aims to categorise the extent of gender integration in social protection and other policy areas such as Gelb and Palley's (1982) "role equity" and "role change" objectives; Htun's (2003; also see Htun and Weldon, 2018) typology that discerns the extent to which policies challenge long-standing norms and values; and Kabeer's (1994; see also Kabeer and Subrahmanian, 1996) distinction between gender blind and gender aware approaches. Variants on the GIC categories have also been articulated by different organisations such as the Interagency Gender Working Group (available here, accessed 14 March 2024) and Oxfam (Parvez Butt, Anam, Namalie Jayasinghe and Mayssam Zaaroura. "Integrating gender in research planning", 2019).
- 7 From a public policy perspective, equality focuses on giving the same resources or opportunities to all individuals or groups of people. Equity recognizes that each person has different circumstances and allocates the exact resources and opportunities needed to reach an equal outcome.
- 8 The GIC can also be used to categorise the outcomes and impacts of a programme. However, these are empirical questions and requires additional data such as process and impact assessments. Evidence from the GRASSP research programme has shown that gender equality outcomes and impacts depend not only on programme design, but on the fidelity and quality of implementation relative to the intended objectives and design, as well as other contextual factors. Moreover, unintended effects, both positive and negative, can occur. Thus, programme impacts may fall into a different GIC category to the intended objectives and design
- 9 The case studies are taken from "Towards Gender-Responsive Social Protection: Evidence on Policy-Making, Programme Implementation, and Impacts for Women and Girls," Kuss, M.K. et al., UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, Florence, 2024 – an output of the Gender Responsive and Age Sensitive Social Protection (GRASSP) research programme.
- 10 Following: Mainstreaming Gender into Social Protection Strategies and Programmes: Evidence from 74 Low- and Middle-Income Countries, Camilletti, E., Cookson, T.P., Nesbitt-Ahmed, Z., Sandoval, R., Staab, S. and Tabbush, C., UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, Florence and UN Women, New York, 2021.
- 11 The dollar equivalent is the value at the time the decision was made. However, the time of actual payment, the dollar equivalent had significantly decreased due to local currency depreciation.
- 12 Damoah, Kaku Attah, Thibault Uytterhaegen, Nyasha Tirivayi and Jessica Daminelli. "The Impact of Social Cash Transfer Pilot Programme in Angola", Innocenti Research Report, UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti, Florence, 2023, p. 8
- 13 The country report for Burkina Faso classified the programme as gender-neutral based on an assessment of the stated objective only. However, here, we classify the overall programme intent as gender-sensitive considering both the objectives and the design features together.
- 14 The country report for DRC classified the programme as gender-sensitive – an assessment that did not purely consider the programme intentions and the design 'on paper', but was rather based on the consideration that this intention was likely not to be implemented due to severe underfunding.
- 15 Bryant, Elizabeth. "Cash support in DRC points people towards self-reliance", WFP 2022, available here <https://www.wfp.org/stories/cash-support-drc-points-people-towards-self-reliance>.
- 16 MoA. "Productive Safety Net Programme IV: Programme Implementation Manual", Ministry of Agriculture, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 2014.; UNICEF Innocenti. "Impact Evaluation of the Integrated Safety Net Programme in the Amhara Region of Ethiopia: Baseline Report", UNICEF Innocenti Report, UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, Florence, 2020.; The World Bank. "Development Projects: Tanzania Productive Social Safety Net Project II - P169165", The World Bank Group, 2023.

Acknowledgements

This guidance note draws on the multi-year Gender-Responsive and Age-Sensitive Social Protection (GRASSP) research programme undertaken by UNICEF Innocenti - Global Office of Research and Foresight and funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO). The guidance was written by Nicholas Mathers, Maria Klara Kuss, and Ramya Subrahmanian, UNICEF Innocenti. The authors would like to acknowledge Mathilde Van Drooghenbroeck (UNICEF Innocenti) and Natalia Winder-Rossi, Jennifer Yablonski, and Lauren Whitehead (UNICEF Social Policy and Social Protection) for their valuable inputs.

This is a working document. It has been prepared to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and to stimulate discussion. The text has not been edited to official publication standards and UNICEF accepts no responsibility for errors. The statements in this publication are the views of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the policies or the views of UNICEF. The designations in this publication do not imply an opinion on legal status of any country or territory, or of its authorities, or the delimitation of frontiers.

About us

UNICEF works in the world's toughest places to reach the most disadvantaged children and adolescents — and to protect the rights of every child, everywhere. Across 190 countries and territories, we do whatever it takes to help children survive, thrive and fulfill their potential, from early childhood through adolescence. And we never give up.

UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight tackles the questions of greatest importance for children, both current and emerging. It drives change through research and foresight on a wide range of child rights issues, sparking global discourse and actively engaging young people in its work.

UNICEF Innocenti equips thought leaders and decision-makers with the evidence they need to build a better, safer world for children. The office undertakes research on unresolved and emerging issues, using primary and secondary data that represents the voices of children and families themselves. It uses foresight to set the agenda for children, including horizon scanning, trends analysis and scenario development. The office produces a diverse and dynamic library of high-level reports, analyses and policy papers, and provides a platform for debate and advocacy on a wide range of child rights issues.

UNICEF Innocenti provides, for every child, answers to their most pressing concerns.

Published by

UNICEF Innocenti – Global office of Research and Foresight

Via degli Alfani, 58
50121, Florence, Italy

Tel: (+39) 055 20 330

Email: innocenti@unicef.org

Social media: @UNICEFInnocenti on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn,
YouTube, and X (Twitter)

Suggested citation

Mathers, Nicholas, Maria Klara Kuss and Ramya Subrahmanian, *Applying the Gender Integration Continuum to Social Protection*, UNICEF Innocenti, Florence, October 2024.

© United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), October 2024

for every child, answers