Gender Responsive Standards

UK International Development

Partnership | Progress | Prosperity

Commonwealth Standards Network

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1. Introduction

The critical and increasingly important role of standards

Standards play a vital role in shaping individual lives, industries, and societies.

Standards serve as a foundational framework, ensuring consistency, quality, safety, and fostering innovation across various domains, encompassing products, services, processes, and management systems.

The impact of standards extends far and wide. Standards influence the way industries function, subsequently affecting the global economy and the everyday experiences of individuals.

As our world becomes increasingly interconnected through international trade, communication, and shared technologies, the role of standards becomes even more critical.

> *There is a substantial difference between integration and inclusion. Integration is the process of making a person adapt to or fit into society, while inclusion refers to the process of changing society to include everyone*

Why standards need to be inclusive

In today's day and age, marked by rapid technological advancements, products, services, processes and systems originating in one corner of the world can have a profound influence on people everywhere.

These innovations may, however, have been designed by a relatively small and culturally homogeneous group, catering to the needs of a similar demographic. This raises concerns about exclusion and, in extreme cases, the possibility of causing harm. The role of standards in ensuring that products, services, processes, and systems are designed with inclusivity in mind is therefore even more critical in our interconnected world.

Standards prevent the mismatch of solutions for diverse audiences and challenges, akin to trying to fit square pegs into round holes. By formulating standards with the broadest spectrum of individuals in consideration, we pave the way for more inclusive experiences and outcomes. Standards can then safeguard against unintentional exclusion, ensuring that the benefits of products, services, processes and systems are accessible to diverse populations.

Supporting inclusive standards development across the Commonwealth

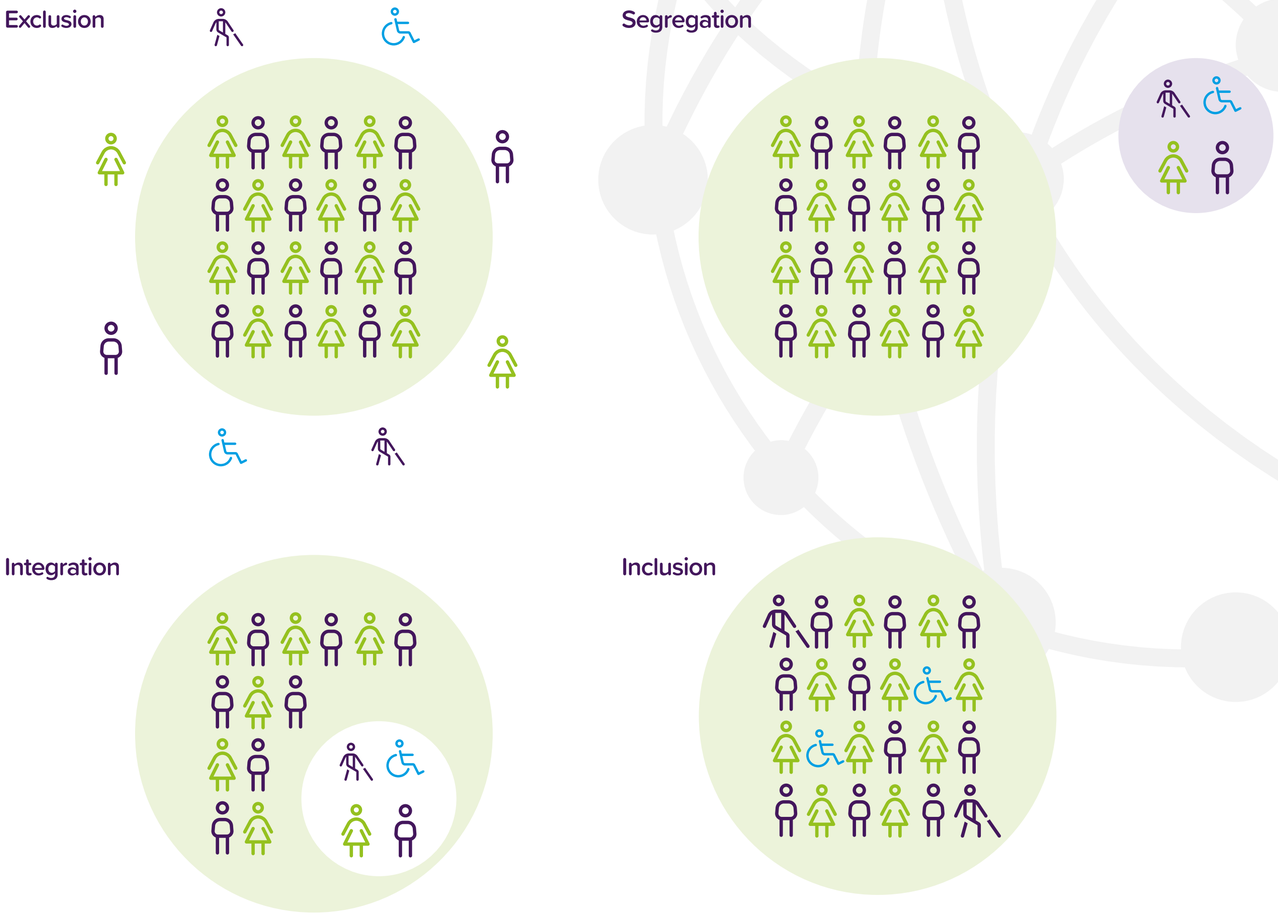
The Commonwealth Standards Network (CSN) plays a pivotal role in fostering robust trade relationships among Commonwealth states.

The CSN actively engages its members in the participation, adoption, and implementation of international standards, enhancing their technical and institutional capacity.

CSN also facilitates collaboration between National Standards Bodies (NSBs) and Standards Development Organizations (SDOs), including the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC). This enables NSBs and SDOs to leverage international standards for heightened productivity, efficiency, and economic growth.

The CSN is committed to supporting its members in driving and achieving inclusivity within standards development.

This document serves as a guide for NSBs and SDOs across the Commonwealth and beyond, helping them align with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe's (UNECE) Gender Responsive Standards Initiative.



The UNECE Gender Responsive Standards Initiative (GRS)

The UNECE Gender Responsive Standards (GRS) Initiative, established in 2016, represents a critical paradigm shift in inclusivity within standards development.

The GRS Initiative serves as a practical framework to support NSBs and SDOs in making the process and outcome of standards development gender responsive. More specifically, ensuring that standards development acknowledges, understands and addresses the distinct needs of different genders.

The UNECE established a "*Gender Responsive Standards Team of Specialists*" (ToS) in response to a mandate by the Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies (WP.6). This highlighted the underrepresentation of women in standards development and how this leads to gender disparities in societal outcomes.

The Team of Specialists operates as a collaborative endeavor, bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders including representatives from standardization bodies, gender experts, policymakers, NGOs, UN organizations, and academia. This working group engages in ongoing efforts to cultivate expertise and identify best practices, offering tangible guidance to support standards bodies in fostering gender responsiveness in both the standards they develop and the processes they follow.

Broadly, the Gender Responsive Standards Initiative aims to:

- Strengthen the use of standards and technical regulations as powerful tools to attain the UN's SDG 5 (achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls).
- Integrate a gender lens in the development of both standards and technical regulations.
- Elaborate on gender indicators and criteria that could be used in standards development.

The UNECE's efforts resulted in the creation of the *Declaration for Gender Responsive Standards and Standards Development*. This calls upon Standards Development Organizations (SDOs) to design standards with gender responsiveness in mind and to actively pursue gender balance throughout the development processes.

A significant milestone occurred in May 2019 - more than 50 Standards Development Organizations signed the Declaration, showing their commitment to supporting gender equality through standards.

To be compliant with the Declaration, organizations need to develop a *Gender Action Plan (GAP)* which maps out their commitments and milestones in relation to becoming gender responsive.

This document provides guidance for SDOs on how to comply with the UNECE Declaration, including implementing a Gender Action Plan.

What does being gender responsive mean in standards development?

Gender is not a monolithic concept. It is a dynamic interplay of biological, social, and cultural factors that influence individuals' roles and expectations.

Being gender responsive within the context of standards development means:

- Understanding the diverse needs, experiences, and concerns of different genders.
- Establishing the different impacts standards can have on women and men.
- Having mechanisms in place to ensure that women's perspectives are included within standards and also the development process.

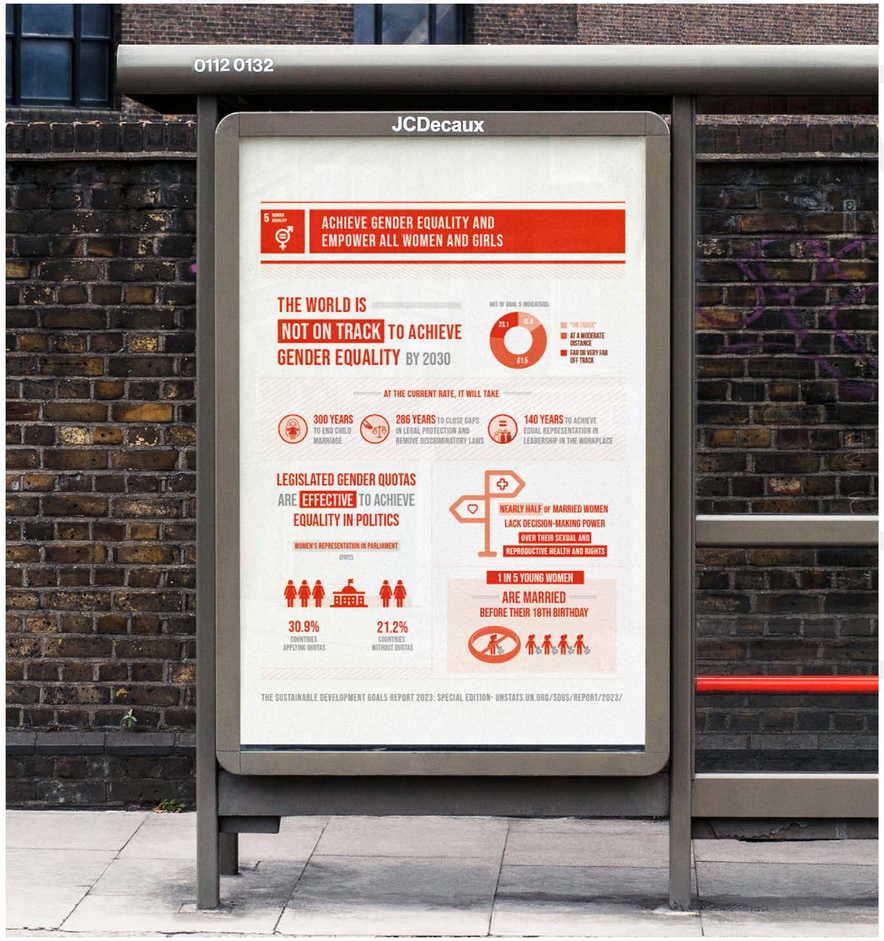
Importantly, being gender responsive does not mean creating separate standards for different genders. It is about striving to design standards that cater to the diverse needs of all genders, fostering more inclusive and equitable outcomes.

The path to gender equality

The Gender Responsive Standards Initiative seeks to strengthen the use of standards and technical regulations in the pursuit of the UN's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 - to "Achieve Gender Equality and Empower all Women and Girls".

SDG 5 includes targets and indicators related to ending direct harm faced by women, such as in the form of discrimination and violence, as well as creating equitable opportunities to thrive, such as in leadership and through products and services. Moreover, gender equality is not just a basic human right for women and girls; it also improves health, education, and economic outcomes for all of society, leading to a better world.

United Nations data on the SDGs shows that the world is not on track to achieve gender equality by 2030. By being gender responsive, Standards Development Organizations can contribute to achieving SDG 5 faster.



UN Women x ISO - CSW 2023

Gender inclusivity within standards was a focal point of UN Women's Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in 2023, which centered around the theme of "Innovation and Technological Change, and Education in the Digital Age for Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of All Women and Girls."

As part of this initiative, *UN Women and ISO* came together to emphasize the detrimental effects of non-gender-inclusive standards in technology and advocate for necessary changes. This included highlighting key statistics that revealed the pressing need to address the digital gender gap: only 17% of IT specialists in Europe were female, and the exclusion of women from the digital sphere had incurred a cost of USD 1 trillion for low and middle-income countries over the past decade.

Special *research was also commissioned* for CSW, to investigate the relationship between standards development and gender equality. It explored the critical role of standards in shaping the experiences of women in relation to education, product design, and legislation. A key finding was that non-inclusive standards could inadvertently perpetuate gender biases at mass through technology, thereby impacting the lives of women globally.

UN Women and ISO's work championed the adoption of gender responsive standards with a human-rights-based "inclusion by design" approach. This approach aligns with Secretary-General António Guterres's call for safeguards and standards to ensure transparency, accountability, and oversight in digital technology design.

The CSW 2023 established that the integration of a gender perspective in technology and innovation is critical to achieving *Sustainable Development Goal 5 'Gender Equality*.

Case Study
Gender bias in motion

In automotive design, there has been a historic reliance on a specific demographic as the standard for safety considerations. This is primarily young, medium-sized, able-bodied males (171 lbs/77.5 kg, 5’9”/175 cm), particularly in the Global North.

The crash test dummies used to test and enhance safety features often represent only these specific body types. However, experiments conducted with these crash test dummies play a significant (global) role in shaping product design, influencing legislative frameworks, and educating engineering students.

This approach has implications - individuals who do not share the same physical profile as the crash test dummies have been shown to experience a higher risk of injuries in accidents.

Studies have shown gender disparities in injury severity. Women often sustain more severe injuries than men in accidents, even when using seat belts.

2. Action

How to implement Gender Responsive Standards - Overview

Being gender responsive requires considering gender in every aspect of standards making.

This includes:

1. The standards development process.
2. The standard itself and its impact.

As a reminder, being gender responsive doesn't mean creating separate standards for different genders. Instead, it is about applying an approach that is informed by an understanding of the relevant physical differences and societal roles of women and men that may impact any given standard. The aim is to ensure that the outcome of the standard is inclusive and equitable for everyone.

This requires deliberate consideration of gender throughout the entire standards making life-cycle:

- Who participates in developing the standard.
- The data used to inform the standard.
- The potential impact of the standard on all genders.

This section will provide guidance on steps to take to become gender responsive in the standards you develop. The guidance looks first at being gender responsive in the way the standard is developed, followed by its impact.

2A. Becoming gender responsive in the standards development process

Biases and blind spots within standards development committees

We all have biases and blind spots. Here we explore their origins and how to minimize harmful effects.

Our brains, remarkable in their capacity, are (reportedly) exposed to an overwhelming 11 billion bits of information every second. However, the conscious brain can only process a fraction (40 to 50 bits) leaving the majority to be managed subconsciously. To cope with this influx, our brains develop shortcuts and frameworks, such as *Schemas* introduced by Cognitive Psychologist Jean Piaget in the 1920s. These help organize vast amounts of information into subcategories, guiding our attitudes, behaviors, and enabling efficient navigation of day-to-day life experiences with low cognitive burden.

Our worldviews about societal groups are subjective, shaped by the type and amount of information we hold about them. These sources include personal interactions, views of those in our sphere of influence, cultural customs, and media. When our exposure is limited, the information is at risk of containing potentially harmful biases, such as stereotypes.

It is important to acknowledge that those involved in standards development will also come with their biases and blind spots in relation to gender.

While no one is entirely free from bias or blind spots, conscious effort can prevent these from negatively influencing standards development.

Here are some actionable tips:

- **Accept bias as a human problem:** Recognize that biases and blind spots stem from the way the brain processes information.
- **Understand worldview limitations:** Consider the limitations of individuals' worldviews and the sources informing them.
- **Identify biases and blind spots:** Actively pinpoint the biases and blind spots within the standards committee related to gender.
- **Seek more information:** Make a deliberate effort to gather additional information about gender relevant to the standard.
- **Be mindful throughout the process:** Constantly consider how biases and blind spots might hinder gender responsiveness at every stage of standards development.

By being aware of their gender-related blind spots and biases, standards committees can take steps to minimize negative impact and to broaden their collective worldview.

The gender imbalance within standards development committees

Research conducted by ISO reveals a notable gender disparity in the participation of men and women in standards development roles.

While participation levels are relatively comparable for Committee Managers globally, a notable discrepancy exists for other roles. Specifically, less than a third of women occupy roles as Expert, Convenor, or Chair.

Furthermore, participation rates vary notably across regions, with some regions achieving a better gender balance than others, particularly in specific roles. Notably, Africa and Arab States stand out as the only region to exceed the global average across all roles. Despite remaining disparities across Expert and Convenor roles, the balance is relatively similar for Chair and higher among women for Committee Manager roles in this region.

The following breakdown illustrates gender participation by role in the standards making process, highlighting regions that either surpass or fall below the global average.

Expert:

- **Higher:** Africa and Arab States; Americas and the Caribbean
- **Global Average:** 30% female vs. 69% male
- **Lower:** Asia and the Pacific; Europe and Central Asia

Committee Managers:

- **Higher:** Africa and Arab State; Europe and Central Asia
- **Global Average:** 44% female vs. 54% male
- **Lower:** Asia and the Pacific; Americas and the Caribbean

Convenor:

- **Higher:** Africa and Arab States; Asia and the Pacific
- **Global Average:** 25% female vs. 74% male
- **Equal or Lower:** Americas and the Caribbean; Europe and Central Asia

Chair:

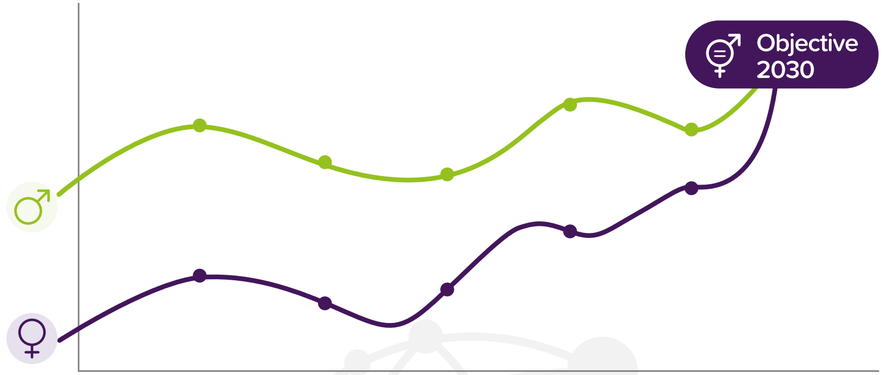
- **Higher:** Africa and Arab State; Asia and the Pacific
- **Global Average:** 27% female vs. 70% male
- **Equal or Lower:** Americas and the Caribbean; Europe and Central Asia

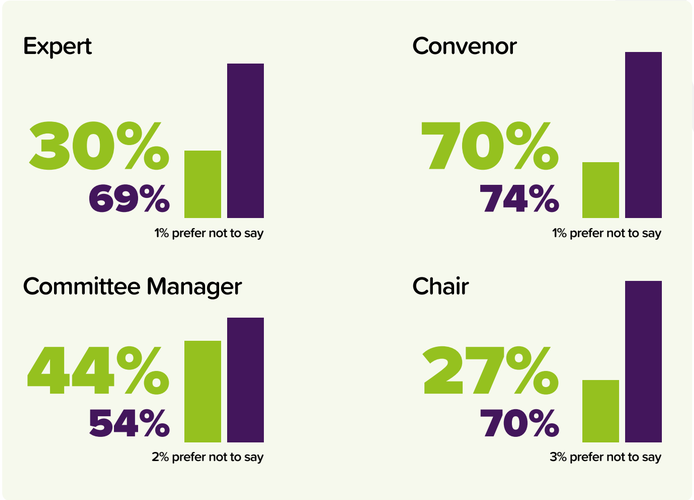
STANDARDS NEED WOMEN

DIVERSTY AND INCLUSION ARE KEY ELEMENTS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF STANDARDS. THEY HELP CREATE A WORLD WHERE EVERYONE IS REPRESENTED REGARDLESS OF RACE OR GENDER. TO REDUCE INEQUALITIES, ISO IS MAKING THE CALL FOR MORE WOMEN'S VOICES IN STANDARDS

Bridging the gap by 2030

In 2020, ISO surveyed its *members* and technical community to build a picture of women's participation in standardization committees. By establishing these benchmarks, we can continue to address gaps in a meaningful way.





Women's representation in standards work by region

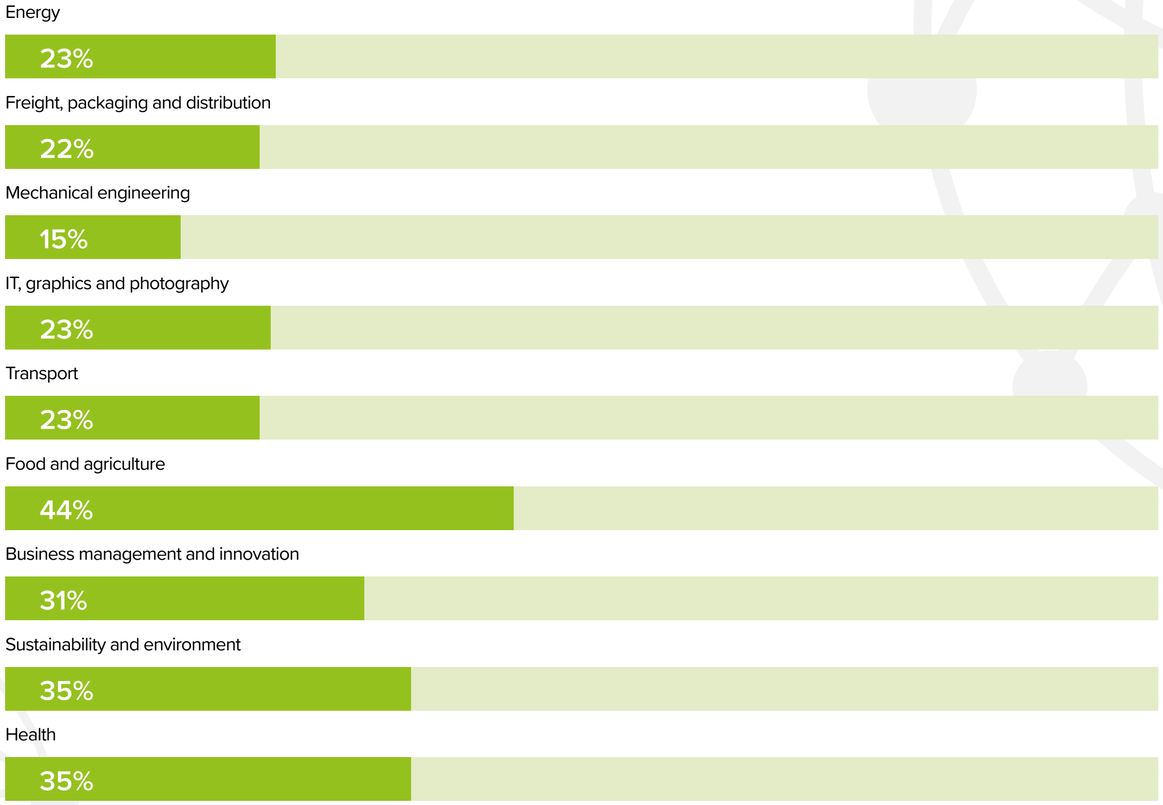
Across all sectors of standards development, men notably outnumber women, often by more than 20%.

This imbalance has particularly concerning implications in sectors undergoing transformative advancements, such as technology, where innovations are swiftly reshaping the world.

Consequently, women are likely to experience even greater challenges and disparities in these sectors, highlighting the urgency of addressing gender imbalances within and through standards development.

Sectors and gender

In all sectors, men outnumber women, in most cases by more than 20%. This figure shows the % that men outnumber women in sectors:



Increasing representation of women in standards development

Now that we are aware of potential gender biases that could creep into standards development, especially given the under-representation of women within the process, it's time to focus on the solutions!

Internal review

Start by assessing the level of gender diversity present within the standards development committee.

Recognizing the varied experiences and outcomes women encounter.

The concept of intersectionality, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, highlights the interconnectedness of social categories. It emphasizes that individuals may face overlapping systems of discrimination and privilege based on various aspects of their identity, including race, gender, class, and more.

Therefore, standards committees should seek to ensure diverse representation of women, across characteristics such as race, ethnicity, and life-stage.

Increasing the number of women involved in standards making is not a silver bullet - women often hold inherent biases against women.

According to the *United Nations*, a striking 86% of women worldwide are reported to harbor some form of gender bias. This is only slightly less than men (90%).

In addition to addressing biases and blind spots held by men, standards committees should also strive to understand and address biases and blind spots held by women within the process.

Almost 90% of men and women globally are biased against women

UNECE guidance suggests that while technical committees should aim for gender parity, a minimum representation of at least 30 per cent is necessary to ensure that women's contributions are not marginalized.

During the internal review, standards committees should consider the following questions:

- How many women are involved in the standards development process?
- What roles/levels do women hold in the standards development process?
- Are there gender biases and blind spots present among women in the standards development committee?

Actions to increase representation of women within standards development

Conducting an internal review of the standards committee will reveal gender bias and blind spots. It's now time to correct these through recruiting more women and developing relationships with relevant organizations.

We know that there are systemic gender imbalances in the make-up of standards committees; these are being sustained by existing recruitment approaches. In other words, recruitment approaches are not actively increasing the representation of women.

We need to be more intentional about recruiting women into the standards development process.

To create sustained change, we need long and short-term solutions:

01

Increasing awareness among women about roles within standards development.

02

Ensuring that eligible women have fair access to opportunities within standards development.

03

Creating inclusive environments within standards development that help women thrive.

04

Tracking progress on gender responsiveness within the standards development process.

Here are some practical steps that SDOs and NSBs can take to increase the short-term and long-term representation of women in standards development.

Increasing awareness among women about roles within standards development.

Innovative recruitment strategies: Using non-traditional channels to disseminate information about opportunities in standards development can effectively broaden outreach. Consider partnering with relevant organizations or leveraging platforms known to reach women (e.g. social media campaigns, engaging with special interest groups such as women in tech, or collaborating with non-profits).

Marketing materials: Position roles inclusively and explicitly address women in recruitment materials. For example, use images and case studies that showcase women in prominent roles within standards development.

Ensuring that eligible women have fair access to opportunities within standards development.

Oversample women: Achieving gender balance may involve identifying a higher proportion of women among qualified candidates for technical committees. By initially selecting a larger pool of candidates, even if some drop-off occurs (e.g. due to availability), the likelihood of achieving a relatively even proportion of men and women will significantly increase.

Prioritize women's participation: When partnering organizations put forward their representatives, emphasize the need to have more women involved in technical committees. Where possible, if they have qualified women who are available to participate, ask for them to be offered relevant opportunities.

Include the input of qualified women outside of the technical committee: In cases where women cannot directly commit to committee participation, representatives from that organization can share relevant information with them for input. This insight can then be fed back to the technical committee. During public consultation, conscious effort should also be made to gain input from women more widely.

Creating inclusive environments within standards development that help women thrive.

Increasing the participation of women in standards development is part of the solution; the next focus should be on ensuring that they feel comfortable and empowered to contribute effectively.

Women find it difficult to contribute in group settings. This was highlighted and also exacerbated by the increase in virtual meetings during the pandemic. *Research found* that 45% of women business leaders said that it's difficult for women to speak up in virtual meetings.

Women face constant interruptions and are made to feel invisible. The earlier mentioned research also found that 20% of women had felt ignored or overlooked by their colleagues during video calls. This can manifest through being ignored or interrupted.

Women are frequently discounted and discredited. *UNECE guidance* highlights a specific challenge in standards development: its male-dominated nature. In such fields, women are frequently perceived as less competent, requiring them to surpass expectations to gain recognition for equal contribution.

Implementing these proactive measures can foster a more inclusive environment within standards development:

- Provide training sessions and materials to educate standards professionals on creating inclusive environments.
- Offer mentorship opportunities for women, especially newcomers to standards development, to navigate the process effectively.
- Establish meeting ground rules to address imbalances in speaking time and actively manage interruptions.
- Offer alternative contribution methods, such as real-time polling or submitting comments outside meetings, to ensure diverse participation.
- Challenge coded language that perpetuates stereotypes and biases.
- Amplify valuable contributions from women and all members by actively recognizing and acknowledging their input.
- Implement a rotation system for administrative tasks to mitigate gender-based disparities and promote equity in responsibilities.

Tracking progress on gender responsiveness within the standards development process.

The Gender Declaration mandates monitoring the implementation of measures to enhance gender responsiveness in the standards development process.

Collecting comprehensive data is fundamental to quantify and showcase advancements in women's participation in standards development.

Data points and approaches that can provide evidence of progress as well as identify gaps in gender responsiveness within standards development include:

1. Participation rates:

- Collecting sex-disaggregated data on participants within standards development.
- Monitoring levels of female participation in standards development (e.g. overall ratio of men to women).
- Collecting data on the gender ratio of participants across different levels and roles within standards development.

2. Assessing retention and inclusivity:

- Monitoring retention rates over time to gauge the inclusivity of standards development environments.
- Conducting yearly research with committee members to understand differences in experiences based on gender.

3. Impact of training initiatives:

- Recording participation in training programs.
- Assessing the impact of training initiatives on gender responsive attitudes and behaviors of participants (e.g. through periodic surveys).

Collaborating with diverse stakeholders for a comprehensive gender perspective

Women are not homogenous - there are many intra-group nuances that impact women's experiences. In alignment with the principles of Radical Empathy, achieving inclusivity requires moving beyond assumptions grounded in broad generalizations about gender. It is essential to engage in active listening and foster a genuine desire to understand the distinct narratives that shape the experiences of women, recognizing that these vary greatly among individuals.

Mechanisms should be put in place to ensure knowledge sharing and that all voices are heard. Standards making committees should be aware of the intersectionality of different characteristics and how these impact the contributions of participants. It's crucial not to place an overreliance on single individuals to cover all aspects of diversity. The lived experiences that inform the input in standards making of a woman from the Caribbean may differ significantly from those of a woman from South Asia.

The Declaration encourages connecting with organizations and informal networks within industries and professions to improve the gender balance of technical committees. Standards makers and organizations that develop these should encourage a diverse range of stakeholders to offer feedback, particularly during public comment phases.

When seeking feedback, standards development committees should consider consulting the following:

- Relevant civil society organizations.
- Employee Resource Groups within relevant sectors.
- NGOs that champion specific causes related to women.
- Individuals or groups with detailed knowledge of the needs of those potentially affected by the standard, especially where a high risk of negative impacts has been identified, or where a standard relates explicitly to the provision of goods or services for a given group.

It's important to acknowledge that these stakeholders may also have biases based on their areas of focus. Therefore, it's essential to identify a broad range of stakeholders and be mindful of the potential limitations of each.

> *"Radical empathy means putting in the work to educate oneself and to listen with a humble heart to understand another's experience from their perspective, not as we imagine we would feel."*
>
> Isabel Wilkerson, Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents (2020)

2B. Ensuring the impact of standards is gender responsive

Analyzing the gender impacts of the standard being developed

When crafting standards, the default assumption often revolves around males as the universal representation of humanity. This inherent bias leads to the creation of standards that appear gender-neutral on the surface but, in reality, carry underlying gender biases.

Addressing biases requires a fundamental shift in perspective, urging standards developers to explicitly acknowledge and consider gender differences from the outset. This involves conducting a thorough analysis of the standard's impact across various gender identities, including men, women, boys, girls, and those who identify differently.

During this analysis, several key questions must be addressed:

- How do different genders **directly or indirectly experience the effects** of the standard? Are there variations in benefits based on gender?
- What **assumptions underlie the standard**, and how do these assumptions limit its ability to address gender differences? For example, does the standard cater to a specific body type?
- Does the standard anticipate and adequately address any potential negative impacts on women, such as physical harm?
- How will men and women use the product, process, or service outlined in the standard? **Are there distinct user needs based on gender?**
- If the standard involves a process, are the steps **flexible enough to accommodate differences**, such as in user size, strength, or stature? For instance, is gym equipment accessible and safe for individuals of all genders?

This comprehensive review enables standards makers to understand gender implications and determine the necessary level of action required to ensure gender responsiveness.

To facilitate this process, the use of a traffic light system, as established by the ISO and IEC, can be invaluable. This system categorizes the level of gender responsiveness required into three statuses: significant action, some action, and minimal action.

ICO and ICE categorization:

Level of Action	Description	Examples
High: Significant action is required to ensure the standard under development is gender responsive.	Significant gender differences may have relevance and implications for the standard under development. Considerable action is needed to ensure equitable outcomes for women and men.	Personal protective equipment; voice recognition software.
Medium: Some action is required to ensure the standard under development is gender responsive.	Some gender differences may have relevance and implications for the standard under development. Some action is needed to ensure equitable outcomes for women and men.	Machine safety; financial services.
Low: Minimal action is required to ensure the standard under development is gender responsive.	Limited gender differences may have relevance and implications for the standard under development. Minimal action is required to ensure equitable outcomes for women and men.	Laboratory equipment; plastics.

ISO and ICE guidance emphasizes the importance of accounting for gender differences throughout the entire standards development process. More specifically, from the proposal stage to the working draft, committee deliberations, and enquiry stages.

The role of data in creating gender responsive standards

Data plays an important role in standards and the industries they inform.

Key uses of data in standards development include:

- Understanding the **needs and experiences of populations** impacted by standards (e.g. using survey data, population statistics, and research).
- Testing the **effectiveness and safety** of standards (e.g. car safety checks and similar assessments).

Data offers critical benefits for marginalized and underrepresented groups.

Data facilitates more equitable decision-making by addressing the specific needs of marginalized and underrepresented groups, empowering them with a platform to voice their perspectives and ensuring their inclusion in the process. Additionally, data provides holistic insight into communities, highlighting their nuances and complexities. However, narratives based on limited data, primarily focused on subgroups, or shaped by external sources can lead to knowledge gaps, misunderstandings, and the perpetuation of harmful biases.

Biases in data and their implications for standards development.

Standards developers must recognize that data can contain biases and gaps, which can perpetuate inequities if not addressed. It is crucial for committee members to thoroughly understand the data they use and its inherent limitations.

The book "Invisible Women" by Caroline Criado Perez offers valuable insights into the gender data gap and its profound impact on women's lives. Here are some key themes, which highlight the consequences of inadequate data on women:

- **Healthcare Disparities:** The absence of gender-disaggregated data leads to a lack of understanding of diverse health needs and responses among men and women. Consequently, healthcare systems are primarily designed around male bodies, neglecting the specific requirements of women.
- **Transportation Planning:** Transportation systems, including public transit, are often designed based on data that predominantly reflects male experiences, resulting in less safe and convenient transport options for women.
- **Workplace Safety:** Occupational safety standards, primarily informed by male bodies and experiences, may inadequately protect women in the workplace, where they face different risks or hazards.
- **Urban Planning:** Cities and public spaces are often planned with a male-centric perspective, impacting the location of public facilities and the design of public transportation, leading to environments that are less safe and accessible for women.

Making data used in standards making inclusive.

The importance of inclusive data in standards development is covered in the *Flex 236* Webinar, available to watch here. This section focuses on key points raised in the Flex 236 v2.

Data is indispensable in modern industries and societies, especially given its central role in technological and societal advancements. Its importance is underscored by its integration into various processes and technologies such as AI, robotics, and machine learning. As such, data is integral to the digitally enabled economy.

But all data have context, including why, when and how they were collected. Context is what gives data both meaning and purpose, but it can also introduce bias.

There are two board types of bias that the Flex covers:

- **Bias, social:** tendency, inclination or opinion that is preconceived or unreasoned that hinders impartial judgment.
- **Bias, technical:** deviation from the truth in the collection, analysis, interpretation and publication of data which can cause false conclusions.

Considerations for bias mitigation:

It is crucial to recognize how bias influences data representativeness and its impact on gender equity within industries and society.

The level of bias in data is influenced by how data is:

- Collected
- Processed
- Interpreted

Standards makers should investigate the inclusivity and biases within each data source used, considering the following factors:

- **Funding:** who commissioned the data and why;
- **Historical:** how old or recent the data are;
- **Measurement:** what was measured and the validity and reliability of the data points;
- **Observer:** who has been involved in the data collection process;

- **Population:** the target audience, who it includes and excludes;
- **Representation:** how reflective the data are of the wider target audience;
- **Sampling:** methods used to identify and reach the target audience;
- **Sample Size:** recognizing that drawing conclusions from small sample sizes is risky;
- **Self-selection;** the subset of the population that had the opportunity to take part.

Gender responsive standards making should involve collecting and analyzing **sex-disaggregated data** to measure gender differences across various dimensions (e.g. social, economic, and physical characteristics). Given the heterogeneous nature of gender, further disaggregation is also advised to investigate intersectional differences among women and also men. For example, comparing the needs of women from one racial group to those from another. Obtaining robust sex-disaggregated data can be challenging (e.g. it may not be available through sources such as the World Bank) so a range of sources should be considered.

Documenting the gender responsiveness of data:

Once the characteristics of the data have been assessed, standards makers can then:

- 1. Determine the **overall gender responsiveness** of the data being used in the standard.
- 2. Identify a**dditional data sources needed** to improve the gender responsiveness of the standard.

The following questions should be considered and documented where possible:

- How **gender inclusive** is the data used in an existing standard?
- Is there adequate data to **understand gender differences** among end users of the standard being developed?
- What **biases or blind spots** exist in the data concerning gender?
- What is the **rationale for selecting each data source** and why are competing sources not used?
- Are there **additional data sources available** to increase the gender responsiveness of the standard?
- Is there a need to **commission or gather more primary or secondary data** to support the development of the standard?

3. Next steps and inspiration

Signing the UNECE Declaration

After reading this guidance, we hope you now feel empowered to develop standards that are gender responsive.

If you haven't taken this step already, we encourage you to start by signing the *UNECE Declaration for Gender Responsive Standards and Standards Development.*

Broadly, signing the declaration means adhering to the following:

- Supporting the attainment of **SDG 5** - achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls.
- Acknowledging the pervasive and **influential role of standards** in society.
- Acknowledging that **representation of women** in standards development is often below parity, and **gender outcomes** are not explicitly addressed during the standards development process.
- Recognizing that the content of standards and participation in the standards development process present **opportunities for women's empowerment**.
- Recognizing **variations in the operations** of different NSBs and SDOs within different infrastructures.

The Declaration requires organizations to actively work towards:

- Becoming gender inclusive SDOs.
- Developing gender responsive standards.
- Addressing gender balance at all levels within their wider infrastructure, including governing bodies.
- Enhancing relevant expertise within the standards development process to create and deliver gender inclusivity.

Organizations must pledge to take the following specific actions:

- Affirming the Gender Responsive Standards and Standards Development Declaration.
- Creating and proactively implementing a Gender Action Plan.
- Tracking progress; collecting and sharing data, success stories, and good practices.

Gender Action Plan

Committing to the UNECE Declaration for Gender Responsive Standards and Standards Development involves creating a Gender Action Plan tailored to the organization and country specific context.

This Plan should draw insights from the information provided in the *UNECE Declaration*. The guidance covered in this document aims to assist organizations in fulfilling the Declaration's recommended criteria.

Gender Action Plan - Knowledge sharing

The Declaration urges organizations to commit to sharing success stories and best practices. To facilitate this exchange of knowledge, organizations are encouraged to share insights and lessons learned from their Gender Action Plans (GAPs).

To facilitate this sharing process, organizations can use the provided template available at: *GAP Repository.*

This template encompasses various aspects of GAP implementation and monitoring.

An overview of the information covered in the template is provided here:

1. GAP Creation

- Outline objectives, approach, and testing methods.
- Describe the development process and any pilot phases.

2. Institutional Buy-in

- Identify stakeholders and challenges in gaining support.
- Highlight successful strategies for fostering buy-in.

3. Planned Activities

- List actions to enhance women's participation in standards development.
- Include initiatives for gender responsive standards.

4. Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E)

- Describe monitoring tools and data analysis.
- Explain feedback utilization for plan improvement.

5. Technical Committee Data

- Detailed efforts to track gender diversity.
- Share strategies for achieving inclusivity.

6. Gender Focal Point

- Identify champions and their roles.
- Highlight advocacy initiatives.

7. Financing

- Specify budget allocations and sources.
- Discuss sustainability measures.

8. National Context

- Align with national gender strategies.
- Share experiences adapting to the context.

9. Key Lessons

- Offer advice and lessons learned.
- Highlight achievements and challenges.

Gender Action Plan - Key insights

Once organizations have filled out the GAP template, they submit it to UNECE, where it is then published and made *accessible to all*.

This section provides a summary of insights and best practices shared by the organizations that have completed this process so far. These lessons offer valuable guidance based on real-world implementation and highlight effective strategies for promoting gender responsive standards and inclusive practices.

Gender Action Plan (GAP) Creation:

- Organizations align their GAPs with **national and international commitments**, such as UN Agenda 2030 and SDGs.
- Some organizations conduct **pilot projects or gender equality assessments** before launching GAPs.
- GAPs generally align with **broader sustainability or Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)** strategies of organizations.
- Common **focus areas** include awareness raising, knowledge development, institutional capacity building, and inclusiveness.

Institutional Buy-in:

- GAPs are reviewed and approved by **organizational leadership.**
- They are **initiated** by technical teams, management, or external consultants.
- A **participatory approach** involving key stakeholders is commonly used.

Planned Activities:

- **Objectives** focus on activities such as policy adjustments, intervention strategies, and stakeholder engagement.
- GAPs set **realistic step-by-step targets** relevant to their objectives.
- The importance of staff **training** on gender equality is highlighted.
- Gender sensitive **internal procedures**, documents, and forms are developed.

Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E):

- All organizations include monitoring and evaluation in their GAPs.
- Some organizations plan **external evaluations** during the mid-term and final stages.
- Common **indicators** include tracking the proportion of women-owned establishments and using external assessments to score accountability.
- Organizations implement **tracking and reporting systems** for gender equality outputs and outcomes.

Technical Committee Data:

- Most organizations **track gender representation** on technical committees and set targets for women's representation.
- There is **variability in the percentage of women** in technical committees across organizations.

Gender Focal Point:

- Organizations appoint a gender focal point with a focus on coordination and monitoring, contributing to GAP development and progress reporting.

Financing:

- Common **challenges** include budget constraints, with funding primarily through government support, UNDP, or regular budget funds.
- **long-term** financing efforts are ongoing in some organizations.

National Context:

- GAPs are tailored to the **precise needs of women in each country**, aligning with national gender strategies.

Key Lessons:

- Common advice includes conducting a comprehensive **gender gap assessment** before developing an Action Plan.
- Budget **constraints and a lack of commitment** are common challenges.

Organization	Submission year
Australia SA	2023
Austria ASI	2022
Canada SCC	2023
Ecuador INEN	2022
Europe CEN-CENELEC	2023
ISO	2023
New Zealand SNZ	2023
Rwanda RSB	2023

4. Case studies

Case Study
Gender Responsive Standards for Clean Cookstoves

Millions face health risks from indoor pollution caused by traditional cookstoves, leading to approximately four million premature deaths annually. Women, often primary cooks, face disproportionate health risks due to indoor pollution from cookstoves. Unsafe cooking practices worsen health disparities, especially in less secure environments.

In response, the United Nations Foundation launched the Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves, which collaborates with ISO to develop relevant gender responsive standards. These standards prioritize safer cooking solutions, focusing on improved ventilation, emission control, and alternative fuels.

This intervention demonstrates the impact of gender responsive standards in promoting equity in relation to health and environmental sustainability.

Case Study
Rwanda's National Gender Standards

Rwanda, in collaboration with key stakeholders such as the Rwanda Standards Board (RSB) and the Private Sector Federation (PSF), has initiated the National Gender Standards in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme and UN Women. This initiative aims to provide guidelines for organizations to adopt gender sensitive policies, promoting inclusivity and equity in the workplace.

The National Gender Standards, overseen by the Rwanda Standards Board, serve as a supplementary framework to existing initiatives, fostering gender mainstreaming strategies. Implementation of these standards is expected to enhance employee engagement, productivity, and institutional reputation by aligning organizational practices with diverse employee and consumer needs.

During the launch event, the Gender Equality Seal Certification Awards were presented to nine companies and public institutions. Accredited by the Gender Monitoring Office, these institutions received a Gold certification for their commitment to gender equality through policies and practices.

Rwanda's introduction of the National Gender Standards is a significant step towards establishing standardized gender policies in workplaces. With collaboration among governmental bodies, private sectors, and international partners, Rwanda demonstrates its commitment to creating an environment where every individual, regardless of gender, is able to thrive in the workplace.

A Roadmap to becoming gender responsive in standards development

While the journey toward gender responsiveness may vary for each organization and must be tailored to fit its specific country context, the following roadmap offers guidance for navigating this process:

01
Sign the UNECE Declaration for Gender Responsive Standards and Standards Development.

02
Use this document and other relevant resources to help fulfill the recommended criteria of the Declaration

03
Create your Gender Action Plan

04
Put your Gender Action Plan into practice:

04a Becoming gender responsive in the standards development process
- Identify biases and blind spots within standards development committees
- Increase representation of women in standards development

04b Ensuring the impact of standards is gender responsive
- Investigate the gender impacts of the standard being developed
- Use data to make standards more gender responsive

05
Identify standards that could be updated to make them more gender responsive

06
Ensure that new standards are developed with gender responsiveness in mind

07
Share your learnings from your Gender Action Plan

5. Supporting and reference documents

This guide has been developed based on the principles and recommendations outlined in the following key documents addressing gender responsive standards.

International Organization for Standardization (ISO) & International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC). Gender responsive standards guidance for ISO and IEC technical committees. https://www.iso.org/files/live/sites/isoorg/files/store/en/PUB100474.pdf

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). (2022, January). Guidelines on developing gender-responsive standards v0.1. https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/Guidelines%20on%20developing%20gender%20responsive%20standards%20Advanced%20Copy%20v0_1%20220119.pdf

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). Declaration for gender responsive standards and standards development. https://unece.org/DAM/trade/wp6/AreasOfWork/GenderInitiative/UNECEGenderDeclaration_English.pdf

International Organization for Standardization (ISO) & International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC). Gender responsive standards guidance for ISO and IEC technical committees. https://www.iso.org/files/live/sites/isoorg/files/store/en/PUB100474.pdf

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). (2022, January). Guidelines on developing gender-responsive standards v0.1. https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/Guidelines%20on%20developing%20gender%20responsive%20standards%20Advanced%20Copy%20v0_1%20220119.pdf

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). Declaration for gender responsive standards and standards development. https://unece.org/DAM/trade/wp6/AreasOfWork/GenderInitiative/UNECEGenderDeclaration_English.pdf

United Nations. (n.d.). Disability-Inclusive Language Guidelines. https://www.ungeneva.org/sites/default/files/2021-01/Disability-Inclusive-Language-Guidelines.pdf

United Nations. (2023). The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023: Special Edition. https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2023/

UN Women, Londa Schiebinger, Stanford University. (2022, October). Harnessing Technology and Innovation to Achieve Gender Equity and Empower all Women and Girls. https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/BP.2_Londa%20Schiebinger.pdf

Wilkerson, I. (2020). Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents.

About the Commonwealth Standards Network (CSN)

The CSN is a collaborative network that supports trade, economic growth and prosperity throughout the Commonwealth by promoting increased awareness, development and use of international standards.

To find out more about the network please see **www.commonwealthstandards.net** or contact the CSN Senior Programme Manager, Ben Hedley **ben.hedley@bsigroup.com**

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