



Soroptimist
International
Great Britain & Ireland

Hope is the belief that equality is not
just a distant dream, but a reality we
can experience in our lifetime

A SIGBI Position Paper

Advancing Integration of
Gender Impact Assessments in
UK Policy Design: A Soroptimist
International Great Britain and
Ireland (SIGBI) Perspective



STANDING UP
for Women and Girls

SIGBI – Who are we?

Soroptimist International Great Britain & Ireland (SIGBI), a registered women's charity founded in 1934, is part of Soroptimist International, a global organisation formed in 1921, born out of the service movement.

The organisation – which has consultancy status at the United Nations – focuses on empowering women and girls to achieve their full potential and works to eliminate barriers and discriminations that hinder women's progress.

The charity does this through its 248 clubs throughout the UK, Ireland, Malta, Asia and the Caribbean – over 200 of which are in the UK – and currently has a total of 5,150 members.

SIGBI club members are part of a global movement, Soroptimist International, and are united by a desire to advance the lives of women and girls.

SIGBI is part of Soroptimist International, a charitable organisation founded in 1921 and born out of the service movement. We are a membership organisation that focuses on empowering women and girls to achieve their full potential and works to eliminate barriers and discriminations that hinder women's progress. We do this through our 248 clubs throughout the UK, Malta, Asia, and the Caribbean – over two hundred of which are in the UK – and have over 5,000 members. The wider Soroptimist International movement has 66,000 members in 122 countries – our combined efforts are truly global. Our organisation has consultancy status at the United Nations – with our members participating in UN meetings, submitting statements, and collaborating on global projects which advance gender equality.

Our members are known as 'Soroptimists' – from a Latin term, 'soror' meaning sister, and 'optima' meaning optimal. We are thus, working toward what's best for women.

Abstract

This paper highlights how the UK's legal frameworks—rooted in the Equality Act 2010 and aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) —can realise gender equality.

We call on the Office for Equality and Opportunity to spearhead a collaborative effort with the Home Office, Ministry of Justice, Department for Housing, Communities and Local Government, HM Treasury, and Department for Education & Ministry for Women and Equalities. This integration will foster shared accountability and ensure coordinated policy responses reflect the complexities of women's lived experiences.

By implementing strategic tools outlined in this paper, we can reduce internal resistance to procedural changes while achieving significant external impacts on gender equality. Establishing joint GIAs as a statutory requirement will move the UK beyond policy rhetoric to actionable gender equality reforms. A

pilot focused on a group of strategically placed departments will establish procedural norms, to create a baseline that refines the application of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) and support the argument for additional government sponsored Statutory Instrument/s (SI) mandating GIAs to be a formal part of a reformed UK Government equality architecture.

While government departments currently conduct Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) under the PSED, gaps remain. We address these gaps by examining critical governance intersections affecting women and girls and offering strategic solutions for broader mandatory GIA application across all new government policy development and evaluation.

For instance, the Home Office's mandate on reducing violence against women and girls (VAWG) aligns with the Ministry of Justice's survivor support initiatives and the Department for Education's equality and safeguarding agenda. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government plays a crucial role in providing GIA guidance to local authorities, where technical capacity is lacking. Additionally, processes within the Minister for Women and Equalities must integrate with the Ministry of Justice's broader human rights obligations, including commitments to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). And the glue is to ensure that HM Treasury include new GIA templates in the Green Book for spending reviews and business case analysis.

We believe that cross-sectoral GIAs will empower women and girls, close gender gaps in poverty, education, urban safety, and justice, and transition our government from ad hoc application of static legal frameworks to dynamic compliance and measurable change.

**This analysis reflects Soroptimist International Great Britain and Ireland's
commitment to transforming the lives of women and girls
through education, empowerment, and enabling environments.**

We stand up for women and girls, will you stand with us?

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1. Introduction

The United Kingdom has made significant strides in promoting gender equality through its legislative and policy frameworks, notably the Equality Act 2010, that strengthens earlier anti-discrimination laws. A cornerstone of this Act is the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), which mandates public authorities to have “*due regard*” to the need to end discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic, including *gender*.

The PSED duty explicitly requires that policymakers assess and consider the potential impact of their decisions on different gender groups, ensuring that public policies do not inadvertently perpetuate unintended negative impacts and inequalities.

Greater Commitment Required

We do recognise that the UK government and its devolved administrations have sometimes integrated gender considerations within Equality Impact Assessments (EqlAs). The UK’s National Action Plan (NAP) on United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) for example, underlines the government’s commitment to integrating gender perspectives in security challenges. This plan reinforces the nexus between SDG 5 and SDG 16 by promoting strong, safe, inclusive institutions and just societies.

Given the growing importance of integrated approaches to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—particularly SDG 5 (Gender Equality) alongside SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 11 (Sustainable [and safe] Cities), and SDG 16 (Justice and Strong Institutions)—it is imperative that the UK government builds on the solid legislative footing of the Equality Act 2010 to institutionalise more systematic, comprehensive, and intersectional GIAs. Such an approach would enhance policy coherence, improve empirical data collection, and ensure that policymakers do not treat gender equality as an isolated aim or a sentence and a checkbox within an EqlA, but as a principle essential to joined up good governance.

SIGBI believes there is substantial room for further improvement, despite partial headway. It is our hope that we will see that change in our lifetimes. This paper explores how to institute the changes needed to ensure application of mandatory GIAs across all Government Departments.

Paper Outline

In the next chapter we summarise how the Government has adopted modifications and reforms emanating from evaluations albeit in a piecemeal and uncoordinated manner. In Chapter 3, we will examine how the Government can better integrate and combine SDGs related to gender equality in ways that brings the UK closer to the SDG 5 targets by 2030 through a more thorough GIA process. Chapters 4 and 5 review how measurement of impact both at the beginning of a policy definition process and in reviewing the impact post-implementation is based on incomplete data and an underappreciation of civil society’s role in collecting data and in reviewing policy impact, emphasising the need for a more transparent GIA process involving civil society. In the closing chapters, we

undertake a review of best practices from international models as recommendations to strengthen impact measurement of gender equality in policy planning and implementation. Finally, we outline the steps our government can take now to be effective at all levels of government for women and girls through a cross-sectoral – joined up governance approach to GIAs. The steps we recommend can build a policy culture of mandatory GIAs, while laying the legal foundations for long-term enforceability.

SIGBI urges greater focus on measurable gender outcomes, particularly in consideration of policy development for cost-of-living responses, community safety and security (incl. within the digital domain) and education frameworks. Our collective belief is that such a focus will build a more resilient future for our children and grandchildren.

2. Loss of Momentum: The Gender Equality Landscape

Equality Where?

The Equality Act 2010 is still the foundation of the UK's legal framework for promoting gender equality. Despite this strong legislative framework, including the most recent sections introduced by the Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023, that offers legal recourse for sexual harassment in the workplace. The implementation and enforcement of EqlAs under the Equality Act has been inconsistent. Various evaluations conducted by the Government Equalities Office reveals varying levels of awareness and application across departments. Public bodies seem not to view gender assessments as a strategic planning tool.

“We are seeing a backlash against gender equality in many places. The progress we fought for is being eroded, and we must resist. We cannot afford to go backward—we must push forward with urgency.”

*Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka,
former Executive Director of UN Women*

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has echoed these concerns, citing gaps in enforcement and limited oversight in their reviews of PSED compliance. This resulted in producing a new EHRC eight step guidance document in 2020 on how to integrate gender issues within policy formulation. Furthermore, the House of Lords Select Committee report on the Equality Act 2010 highlighted enforcement challenges and concluded that policy makers needed a more proactive monitoring mechanism for meaningful impact.

The Scorecard

Despite the Equality Act's comprehensive nature, evaluations have highlighted challenges in implementation:

- **Limited Awareness:** A government-commissioned evaluation found that over a year after the Act's enactment, two-thirds of surveyed organisations knew nothing about its contents, and an added 20% knew only a little. Even among organisations that had updated their equality policies recently, only 28% felt well-informed about the Act.
- **Information Seeking:** Among those with limited knowledge of the Act, only 40% had sought information or guidance about it. Larger organisations and those in the public sector were more proactive in seeking information, with government websites being the most common source.
- **Engagement with Provisions:** Only 14% of respondents were aware that their employer had taken steps to recruit under-represented groups, and a mere 10% reported that their employer had experience with positive action in recruitment or promotion.

- **Awareness of Recruitment Limitations:** The Act imposes limits on questions about health and disability during early recruitment stages. Yet only 15% of respondents had detailed knowledge of these provisions. Awareness was higher in larger organisations and public sector bodies.

A UK Parliamentary Library briefing paper noted that while departments must assess the impact of their policies under the PSED, only limited guidance exists on how to measure or report this systematically, leading to inconsistent application across Whitehall. The Women and Equalities Committee has called for more structured processes, including:

- Mandated publication of GIAs.
- Cross-governmental coordination on gender data.
- Expansion of impact tools into economic policy development, e.g. HM Treasury's Green Book revisions.

Briefings also highlight a lack of disaggregated data that prevents effective gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation. Without a strong empirical foundation, assessments risk being superficial or symbolic.

While politicians have spoken often about closing the gender pay gap (GPG), the UK's GPG unexpectedly increased in 2024, with Fawcett Society data showing that it had risen to 11.3 percent, compared to 10.7 percent in 2023. The EHRC (2023) found that while the overall gap had narrowed slightly, there had been minor change for more educated women. The EHRC identified child rearing as one of the key drivers of the gender pay gap.

On average women do about 50 percent more unpaid work per week than men, and those with children are likely to see the income gap between themselves and their male counterparts widen considerably. Despite progress in this area over the last decade, the UK's gender pay gap is not set to close for 45 years.

Limited Local Level Capacity to Absorb Change

A key obstacle is the limited absorptive capacity of local authorities and service providers to operationalise gender-sensitive policies effectively, including assessing policy impact through a gender lens. Austerity-driven reductions in local government resources, coupled with inconsistent guidance and limited gender-equality training, have significantly hindered this ability. The EHRC's 2020 review found that public bodies often did not conduct meaningful EqlAs under the PSED, treating them as "tick-box" exercises. Many local councils lack:

- Dedicated equality officers.
- Access to gender-disaggregated data.
- Clear strategic alignment with SDG implementation

Reports by the Local Government Association (LGA) also note that despite best intentions, councils face 'policy overload' without proper capacity-building to meet statutory gender equity obligations.

Academic research offers further insight into this institutional weakness, critiquing the lack of linkage between parliamentary gender equality mandates and local delivery systems, as a "pipeline failure." While Westminster has increased its attention to gender equality at the legislative level (e.g. PSED, 1325 NAP), there is no accompanying resource framework to support implementation at local administrative levels.

The University College London (UCL) Policy Lab Report (2022) examined twelve local authorities in England and Wales and found that, while there were strong internal champions, there was no standardised method for using

or reporting data. The report recommended development of impact evaluation toolkits into local budgeting and policy appraisal processes.

The Combined Manchester's Authority's Gender has setup a Women and Girls Equality Panel to study issues like closing the gender pay gap, increasing women's representation in leadership roles, and supporting female entrepreneurs through grant funding and skills hubs. Likewise, Bristol's One City Plan (2020) explicitly integrates SDG 5 by commissioning women's safety audits of public spaces and funding community-led projects on gender-responsive transport and housing and has a Goals dashboard where data is searchable by local themes and issues.

Despite these frameworks, both city regions struggle with inconsistent data collection. Manchester reports only bi-annual gender-disaggregated employment figures, delaying course-corrections, while Bristol in its 2024 report highlight the challenges of collecting data for gender equality indicators across its One City themes. This fragmentation hampers evaluation and policy refinement.

Neither city mandates independent, published GIAs for major investment decisions, leaving critical blind spots—especially for intersectional groups such as disabled women or women from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Devolved Administrations' Approaches

While the UK Government knows of the innovative approaches being trialled in metro mayoral areas and in the devolved nations, it is important to reiterate what these are to highlight the lack of cohesion across the whole of the UK policy terrain on the issue of measuring gender impacts. For example, Scotland incorporates gender equality outcomes aligned with SDG 5 and has pioneered the use of intersectional, gender-disaggregated data within its budgeting processes within its National Performance Framework (NPF). Wales's Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 establishes an integrated policy architecture that embeds gender equity across its national indicators and public-sector planning mechanisms.

While these devolved administrations have made significant strides—showing a clear commitment to the aims of SDG 5—the practical evaluation of these initiatives is still uneven. Feedback loops are weak or under-resourced, data-informed revisions are infrequent, and opportunities to systematically scale successful pilots often missed. In Northern Ireland, the prolonged absence of an Executive has further impeded momentum, delaying both implementation and the monitoring of gender-focused policies.

Summary

Despite a robust legal foundation in the Equality Act 2010, the UK's progress toward gender equality has been inconsistent, particularly in the implementation of EGIAs and the integration of gender analysis into public decision-making. Fragmentation between national, regional, and local systems, resource constraints, and a lack of data coherence have all undermined the act's transformative potential. However, models from devolved administrations and international examples show that progress is possible when policymakers embed gender equality into institutional practices, budgeting processes, and accountability frameworks. Moving forward, the UK can learn from these approaches by harmonising strategies across governance levels and investing in disaggregated data infrastructure. In

doing so, the UK can shift from symbolic compliance toward meaningful and measurable gender equity outcomes.

Furthermore, the recently published Gender Equality Index-UK (GEIUK-2025) reveals that while no local authority has yet achieved gender parity, those coming closest often exhibit greater local productivity and higher outcomes for all. Julia Gillard, Chair of the Global Institute for Women's Leadership suggests this is a profound opportunity – not just to close gender gaps, but to promote inclusive regional growth and shared prosperity.

3. Horizon 2030 – A Way Forward

A Looming Deadline

UK Governments' National Action Plans (NAPs) have been updated and modified to accommodate evaluations conducted on the implementation of the Equality Act 2010. These changes primarily aimed at addressing identified gaps, improving effectiveness of plans, and integrating SDG targets post 2015. But the UK has much to do to realise these targets by the global SDG review date – 2030.

“Women’s economic empowerment is at the heart of the 2030 Agenda. We will not achieve the Sustainable Development Goals if there is no accelerated action to empower women economically. We know that women’s participation in all spheres of life, including in the economy, is essential to sustainable and durable peace and to the realization of human rights.”

UN Secretary-General António Guterres

Soroptimists have championed women’s education, leadership, and financial independence, for over *one hundred years*, and recognise these areas as foundational to achieving SDG 5 (Gender Equality) to ensure lasting social change. Our advocacy emphasises that gender-responsive policies are critical tools to accelerate action to close gender pay gaps.

Recent studies indicate that the UK is falling behind on most SDG 5 targets, with significant gaps in policy implementation and enforcement. The UCL Measuring Up 2.0 Report (2023) highlights poor progress in gender equality, particularly in workplace protections, economic inclusion, and gender-based violence policies and recommends making GIAs mandatory.

Likewise, the UN’s Global Compact Network UK Review (2022) found that the UK is only performing well on 21% of SDG targets, with regression in at least fourteen areas. Gender equality remains a critical challenge, with limited policy action on gender-responsive budgeting and workplace protections. Finally, the UK’s Office for National Statistics (ONS) SDG Data Update (2021) notes substantial gaps in gender-disaggregated data.

In 2025, the United Kingdom participated in the global Beijing+30 review, marking three decades since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action—a comprehensive framework for advancing gender equality. The UK’s national assessment acknowledged notable progress, such as achieving the highest-ever proportion of women in Parliament at 40.5% and establishing the most gender-balanced Cabinet in British history, with women holding 46% of ministerial positions. However, challenges persist, including a decline in the UK’s global ranking for economic participation and opportunity, dropping from 43rd to 58th place. Contributing factors include the “motherhood penalty,” characterized by limited access to affordable childcare and a disproportionate burden of unpaid care work on women. The review emphasized the need for accelerated action to address these systemic issues and to fulfil the commitments outlined in the Beijing Platform for Action, particularly in areas such as economic empowerment, political representation, and the elimination of gender-based violence.

Closing the Distance

While the core of the Equality Act 2010 remains intact, recent proposals and initiatives have begun to strengthen enforcement and expand protections. For instance, the introduction of mandatory gender pay gap reporting (updated 2024) for organizations with over 250 employees has increased transparency in both the public and private sectors. Similarly, revisions to the Child Poverty Strategy—now including measures to improve parents’ job quality and support single-parent households through expanded free childcare—address the economic vulnerabilities that disproportionately affect women.

In education, stereotyping programs into school curricula, boosting girls’ participation in STEM, and mandating stringent anti-bullying policy efforts help break down gender stereotypes and gender-based harassment. The Welsh Government has updated its Well-being of Future Generations guidelines to explicitly promote women’s economic empowerment and improve the collection of gender-disaggregated data. Meanwhile, Scotland has reinforced its Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy through increased funding for rural support services, mandatory training for key public service providers, and by classifying domestic violence as a public health emergency.

Despite these advancements, evaluation studies consistently show that without robust, institutionalised GIA processes, policies risk remaining superficial. GIAs—unlike one-off initiatives—ensure that all governments in the UK continually factor women’s experiences, including unpaid care work and emotional labour, into the policy lifecycle. Grassroots efforts, such as the wide range of impactful initiatives by Soroptimist Clubs throughout the UK demonstrate how local, replicable actions can bridge policy gaps. These initiatives remind us that while country NAPs now feature stronger enforcement, monitoring, and data-sharing mechanisms, a systematic, mandatory GIA process is still the best way forward to fully “count what matters” and truly integrate gender equality into public policy.

Summary

The positive changes that we summarise show a clear need for further coordination across different regions and sectors is crucial for implementation of a standardised GIA at the policy initiation phase. The gains made by central governments on a limited number of SDG 5 targets and the different approaches followed by devolved nations, while laudable, only highlight a lack of cohesion in reaching targets by 2030 as per our obligations to the Global SDG Agenda 2030. Furthermore, this lack of cohesion and coordinated effort will make it exceedingly difficult to collect disaggregated data with each region and country employing different methodologies will only substantially skew a report of the national picture.

4. Hidden Figures!

Data – Storytelling and Numbers Paint a Picture

Data quality and availability are critical for effective GIAs. UK Parliamentary briefings identify limitations in gender-disaggregated data and intersectional indicators. Governments often rely on countable metrics such as employment rates and income levels, but these metrics fail to capture the qualitative aspects of individuals' lives. As a result, important dimensions such as freedom to participate, freedom from harm, and freedom to care often escape data metrics. The recent GEIUK for example, shows that without more frequent and disaggregated time-use data—especially on unpaid activities like emotional care, community support or household upkeep—local authorities can't precisely cost interventions or track their impact.

*“Not everything that can be counted counts,
and not everything that counts can be counted.”*

Albert Einstein

To address these limitations, it is crucial to expand the scope of data collection to include qualitative and narrative methods. These methods can provide a richer and more nuanced understanding of individuals lived experiences. Community testimonies, participatory assessments, and lived experience accounts are valuable tools for capturing qualitative data. In addition to expanding data collection methods, it is important to provide concrete recommendations for improving data quality. This includes specific tools and frameworks that policymakers can use to gather qualitative data, such as leveraging technology to improve both collection and analysis of data. Training programs and partnerships with academic institutions can also play a vital role in enhancing data collection efforts.

Both OECD and UNECE now see data gaps on unpaid care and time use not as technical annoyances but as core blockers to designing, costing and evaluating policies that would shift care burdens off women, boost their paid-work participation and enhance their economic empowerment and the national economy.

Real-time monitoring and feedback loops can provide valuable insights and help ensure that data is up-to-date and accurate. Successful technological implementations in other areas, such as Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs), serves as a model for improving gender assessments.

Here we outline the differences of application between EIAs and EqIA's to demonstrate that different standards apply when devising policy.

Compare and Contrast

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) processes have been embedded in UK law since 1999.

Over time, EIA implementation benefited from systematic capacity-building, including:

- Central government guidance from DEFRA and statutory bodies like the Environment Agency.

- Mandatory procedural standards built into planning systems.
- Training of local planning officers and environmental consultants.
- Widespread adoption of methodologies and impact measurement tools.
- Public participation mechanisms that reinforced accountability.

This sustained institutionalisation allowed local authorities to build technical and procedural capacity to apply EIA consistently, even with limited and often reduced resourcing from Central Government.

Gender dimensions within the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) process are:

- Non-prescriptive and poorly standardised, often left to each authority to interpret.
- Suffer from weak enforcement and low visibility in governance culture.
- Lack dedicated funding or national frameworks to support capacity-building.
- Often not linked to performance indicators or policy appraisal cycles.
- Have no central statutory or non-departmental authority (e.g., like the Environment Agency for EIA) ensuring compliance or technical development.

This has led to inconsistent application, especially among smaller or resource-strained local authorities.

Several eco-feminist critiques highlight how environmental concerns were “normalised” in local government, yet gender considerations remain secondary, treated as an optional rather than a structural necessity. Governments both local and national have fully integrated environmental policies into policy and process structures, while gender-focused reforms continue to face institutional resistance. The OSCE (2024) review emphasises that governments must embed gender equality into core policy frameworks, rather than keeping it as a token commitment. Senior decision-makers (who still tend to be men) rarely build enforcement or accountability mechanisms into governance according to Caywood’s & Darmstadt’s 25-year review of research in this area (2024).

The same study shows that while gender equality research has expanded, implementation has stalled due to political resistance, lack of intersectional analysis, and inconsistent policymaker engagement. Partnerships with on-the-ground implementers (local councils, NGOs, community groups) remain weak.

Institutional resistance to gender assessments is therefore another significant barrier that UK governments need to grapple with. Understanding the reasons behind this resistance and developing strategies to overcome it is crucial. Advocacy strategies, such as this paper, can help build support for GIAs to enable policymakers to integrate them into the policy formulation process.

SIGBI calls for urgent action to break this cycle. Gender equality policies must move from isolated initiatives to system-wide integration. Mandatory GIAs and strong accountability structures are essential to ensuring women’s lived experiences shape governance—not just in rhetoric, but in measurable outcomes. The time for piecemeal approaches is over—only systemic reform will deliver gender equality. Something we as Soroptimists continue to fight for—for as long as it takes. One hundred years of experience should count.

Summary

Current legislation does not impede implementation of gender-informed policy, but institutional inertia, underinvestment, and the lack of technical tools at the local and legislation level does. Without deliberate effort to build this capacity—particularly through training, funding, and data infrastructure—the UK’s progress on implementing the Equality Act in full and realising the full extent of SDG 5 through a consistent, cross-government GIA process, and the intersection with SDGs 1, 4, 11, and 16, will remain fragmented. To manifest equality, we must change what we count and who counts in the process of making knowledge that informs policy. Governments must realise that without full political-bodied participatory methodologies, their policies will continue to reflect only partial realities—often the realities of only those making policy.

Poverty and violence against women are not merely social failures—they are policy failures rooted in what governments choose to measure, and who they choose to listen to. Current decision-making structures prioritise economic indicators over lived realities, producing partial solutions that ignore the intersecting burdens women face in daily life.

5. Civil Society Matters

From Voice to Action and Back Again

A truly democratic society does more than invite discussion—it ensures that every voice shapes decisions. Citizens’ assemblies and GIAs are not just procedural tools; they are micro-arenas for justice, where people can hold power accountable and policies reflect lived realities. When women’s experiences are absent from lawmaking, society is not just unfair—it is incomplete.

*If we want any significant development,
we must co-opt civil society.*

Nelson Mandela

Civil society organisations like SIGBI play a vital role in holding governments accountable, bridging policy and lived experience, and championing gender equality through advocacy, insight, and action. Their participation in NAP forums has drawn vital attention to the gaps in formal policymaking. Yet, collaboration often recedes once the discussions are over. Without embedding GIAs—from assessment and formulation to evaluation and feedback—we as society squander the transformative potential of inclusive governance.

SIGBI calls for a transformative approach: one that centres women’s voices at every level of governance and every step of the policy cycle and recognises that what counts as equality must include what has not yet been counted—the unpaid care work, emotional labour, community safety gaps, and systemic erasure of those living in poverty or violence. This means embedding GIAs into local planning forums as dynamic tools to bridge ministries, incorporate civil society familiarity, and reshape data to reflect the full scope of women’s lives.

Eastville, Bristol’s Pioneering Approach

Take Eastville, an urban project inspired by the real-life dynamics. Here, local authorities teamed up with community groups and Soroptimist International to integrate a comprehensive GIA into a public transport overhaul. Initially, criticisms arose over safety and accessibility issues, particularly voiced by women. By establishing a continuous feedback loop, the city not only revised its policy with concrete measures—like improved lighting and security—but also ensured that local leaders monitored and adapted changes over time. Eastville’s case demonstrates how infusing civil society insights at every step turns well-meaning policies into effective, adaptive governance. This Eastville trial was an early (2010s) catalyst, influencing the Government to integrate the initiative nationally as the Safer Streets strategy and fund that spans from 2021 onward.

Learning from ‘Ask for Angela’

The ‘Ask for Angela’ campaign, conceived to protect vulnerable individuals in nightlife settings, offers another compelling lesson. Although the ‘Ask for Angela’ campaign originated as a beacon for safety, a lack of inconsistent training and implementation undermined the initiative’s promise. Investigations have revealed that over half of participating venues sometimes faltered in responding appropriately, leaving those who needed support at risk. This disconnect starkly illustrates that even carefully designed schemes can fail without robust, mandated

practices and ongoing civil oversight. The ‘Ask for Angela’ experience is a vivid reminder: if we are to count what truly matters, we must ensure that every safety and justice mechanism not only sounds good on paper but operates seamlessly in practice.

A UCL Policy Lab report emphasises the need to mobilise the talents and efforts of everyone, and every place, as an essential counterbalance to the central state and big business power to realise the change we want to see. There are simply not enough people in power to do the work needed to ensure equality from the smallest council area to our largest city metropolises. The power of people’s places and communities matter, and their own sense of agency, and their ability to draw in and depend on the support of others around them too is empowering. Our future as women is being created by collaboration, as much as by state action. Social, political and economic change cannot be just a product of clever planning, technical insights, or new technological innovations. It is the result of actual human beings, in all their differences, learning to work with each other on an equal basis.

Summary

In the end, the path from voice to action to voice again is not a linear journey but a continuous democratic loop—one that demands embedded accountability, real-time responsiveness, and shared power. The examples of Eastville and Ask Angela show both the promise and the pitfalls of policy without connecting with people. The government consultation process must not treat civil society as a supplementary voice, but as a co-architect of the public good. When women and marginalised communities shape the design, implementation, and evaluation of policy—through tools like GIAs and participatory forums—democracy deepens, justice sharpens, and society moves closer to one where safety, dignity, and equality are not ideals but guarantees. The Eastville case outlined above also illustrates how qualitative data can successfully influence policy decisions.

It is time to institutionalise inclusion—not as a gesture, but as the foundation of how we govern. Women's poverty and exposure to violence will persist as long as their realities remain invisible to the systems designed to serve them. A society cannot achieve equality without participation, and freedom cannot flourish without justice. It is time to count what matters.

6. What Does Success Look Like?

A Blueprint for Gender-Transformative Policy

A future where government takes equality seriously, demands that public policy move beyond mere discussion to active, measurable change. Achieving this transformation requires policymakers take a robust, systematic approach at every stage (from policy formulation to evaluation), informed by gender analysis and deep civic engagement. The evidence is clear: a blueprint for achieving gender equality through participatory processes, cross-departmental coordination, and institutional accountability is essential to address enduring issues like gender-based violence, safeguarding, and structural poverty through a mandatory GIA. Success in gender-transformative policy requires a clear understanding of the core principles that drive effective change. Following we explore these principles and provide practical recommendations for their implementation.

*For our own success to be real, it must
contribute to the success of others.*

Eleanor Roosevelt

Core Principals for Success

Inclusive Participation is fundamental to gender-transformative policy. Government agencies should conduct regular, structured consultations via participatory gender audits and citizens' assemblies to ensure inclusion of diverse voices that planners consider in policymaking. These processes create micro-arenas for justice, where local actors hold power accountable and policies reflect lived realities.

Integrated Coordination across departments is a bedrock for gender-transformative policy. Collaboration and alignment of objectives using unified frameworks ensure that policymakers embed gender considerations are in all aspects of policy design. This approach fosters a holistic understanding of gender issues and promotes cohesive action.

Institutional Accountability is essential for achieving gender equality. Leveraging the oversight might of the Office for Equality and Opportunity within the Cabinet Office ensures that gender assessments are conducted systematically and rigorously. This body can monitor progress, provide feedback, and hold institutions accountable for their commitments to gender equality.

Capacity Building is crucial for empowering individuals and institutions to effectively address gender issues. Training gender equality officers and planners enhances their ability to conduct gender assessments and implement gender-transformative policies. Partnerships with academic institutions and training programs can support these efforts.

International Best Practices Learning from international best practices can provide valuable insights and benchmarks for gender-transformative policy. Examples such as Canada's Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+), Australia's "Working for Women" Strategy, and Finland's Comprehensive Action Plan illustrate effective approaches to gender equality. The UK Government could arrange reciprocal secondment posts to boost capacity at the central level with mirror government entities in Canada and Australia as well as others, like that in place for example in defence and foreign affairs.

Case Studies: Effective benchmarks to replicate

Canada: A case study by MenEngage Global Alliance and FemJust highlights Canada's efforts to engage men and boys in advancing gender equality. This initiative aims to dismantle harmful and oppressive social and gender norms, create new norms that affirm people of all gender identities and expressions, and redistribute gendered and other intersecting forms of power and privilege. The policy process involves intersectional feminist analysis, a human rights-based approach, and the socio-ecological model.

Australia: The Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) in Australia has documented several case studies highlighting efforts to improve gender equality in workplaces. For instance, Laing O'Rourke (private entity) undertook a significant review to transform their promotions process and accelerate the progression of women into senior roles. They introduced a sponsorship program that matched executive and senior leaders with high-potential women, focusing on those progressing through project delivery and engineering streams.

Finland: For the past thirty years, researchers and policymakers in Finland have used data from Time Use Surveys (TUS) to understand the gendered division of unpaid work. This data has informed a wide range of family policies aimed at reducing inequalities in women's economic and social participation, including supporting parental leave and childcare. These policies have contributed to a more equitable distribution of unpaid work and improved gender equality in Finland.

Call to Action

A coordinated reform led by the Government's Equality and Opportunities Office and the Ministry of Women and Equalities, with early pilot collaborations between the Ministry of Justice, Department of Education, Home Office and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government is needed to create a scalable foundation for introducing a Statutory Instrument to meet the UK's international obligations under the 2030 SDG Agenda, CEDAW—and to deliver on the promises of the Equality Act 2010. It is time to move from voluntary compliance and fragmented practices to a systematic, institutionalised GIA. This will be a crucial starting point for a modernised UK equality architecture.

This framing shows:

- Minimal legislative disruption (via SI not primary law),
- Strategic targeting (not all departments at once),
- Stronger outcomes (backed by policy logic and SDG links),
- Immediate gains (via pilot deployment in active departments).

Transform, Revise and Rethink GIAs

Dimension	Current Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)	Proposed Gender Impact Assessment (GIA)
Legal Basis	Equality Act 2010 – Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED); duties framed as having "due regard"	Introduced through statutory instrument or ministerial direction pending primary legislation; framed as a mandatory and standalone assessment
Scope	Considers all protected characteristics under the Equality Act (e.g., race, disability, gender) equally and generally	Focuses specifically on gender-based impacts, with disaggregation by sex and intersectional identities (e.g. ethnicity, disability, socioeconomic status) i.e. gender is not a sub-category
Mandate	Non-prescriptive; treated as a guidance-led compliance mechanism	Compulsory process for all new policies, programs, and major public spending proposals, with sector-specific application guidance through the Treasury Green and Aqua Books.
Timing in Policy Cycle	Often post hoc or reactive; minimal integration at early stages of policymaking	Embedded at the earliest policy conception stage, with follow-up at implementation and post-implementation evaluation
Data Requirements	Vague; not consistently enforced; lack of disaggregated data a common barrier	Requires gender-disaggregated data collection, intersectional analysis, and qualitative input (e.g. lived experience, stakeholder consultation)
Transparency	Results often unpublished or poorly documented	Mandatory publication of GIA findings with policy papers or Whitehall submissions; independent audits encouraged
Capacity/Training	Limited equality officer resources in many departments; low awareness outside of core teams	Nationally supported training and resourcing strategy; guidance hubs to support departmental and local authority implementation
Accountability	Weak enforcement by EHRC; often treated as tick-box exercise	Subject to independent oversight, possibly through Cabinet Office Gender Equality Unit, National Audit Office, or EHRC; performance metrics tied to SDGs
Policy Integration	Siloed; equality often appended to policy rather than embedded	Structured to align with SDG 5, SDG 1, 4, 11, and 16; integral to cross-governmental planning, impact appraisal and budgeting
Public Engagement	Minimal stakeholder involvement: civil society often excluded	Civil society and lived experience input a core part of the process; could include gender panels /forums

Draft GIA Dashboard for Foundational Reform

Objective: Embed gender as the core analytical lens across all public policies, capturing not just surface statistics but the nuanced reality that shapes the lives of a diverse population.

Centralised Real-Time Input

- A secure, web-based dashboard where all departments input GIA data during pre-policy formulation, pilot phases, full implementation, and evaluation.
- Mandatory, standardised entries that facilitate shared learning across agencies.

Gender-First Categorization

Every dataset begins with gender disaggregation, followed by layered metrics (age, race, disability, income, etc.) to ensure intersectional insights.

Department-Specific Modules (limited edit access to ensure departmental integrity of data):

- Home Office: Monitor gender-specific outcomes in policies on violence, immigration, and online safety.
- Ministry of Justice: Track disparities in sentencing, legal aid access, and court proceedings, ensuring procedural fairness across genders.
- Department for Education: Measure how exclusion rates, academic performance, and safeguarding protocols evolve through a gender lens.
- Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government: Assess the gendered impact of local governance funding, community development programs, and housing access. Track how place-based policies affect women and marginalised genders in terms of social mobility, access to services, and housing stability, particularly in deprived or rural regions. Evaluate how devolution and levelling-up strategies amplify or mitigate existing gender inequalities, including through local authority GIA reporting and resource allocation

Feedback and Longitudinal Tracking

- Built-in tools enable civil society organizations (CSOs), like SIGBI, to submit supplementary evidence and contextual data. *Note: This is a crucial penultimate step before policy initiation sign-off.*
- Annual "Policy Reality Checks" compare government assessments with community-reported outcomes, with alerts flagging areas where disparities are worsening.

Legal & Policy Alignment

- Automated compliance checks against national legislation (Equality Act 2010, PSED) and international obligations (CEDAW, SDG 5, and other aligned SDGs such as 1, 4, 11, 16), generating compliance scores and corrective recommendations.
- HM Treasury: Conducts spending agreement checks via the new Green Book GIA guidelines and dashboard-integrated compliance template.
- Final sign-off administered by the Cabinet Office's Office for Equality and Opportunity.

Summary

While recent initiatives in the UK—such as enhanced equality reporting and updated Child Poverty and VAWG strategies—indicate progress, without an institutionalised, data-driven GIA process, gender equality remains incomplete. The international examples and the proposed GIA dashboard demonstrate that success requires both innovative public engagement and rigorous accountability mechanisms. By adopting these practices, the UK can move decisively from rhetoric to results—ensuring that every policy not only counts what matters but also transforms the everyday lives of women, their families, and communities.

7. Conclusion

The current operational logic of the Equality Act 2010 treats gender as one characteristic among many, rather than recognising it as the primary lens through which most other inequalities are experienced and compounded. Gender is the structural foundation through which other experiences of inequality—race, class, disability, faith, geography, or socioeconomic status, manifest differently. The UK’s population is evenly balanced between women and men (approx. 51% women and 49% men). Therefore, gender is not a subset nor a subsidiary category. When we begin with gender, we illuminate the layered and intersecting challenges individuals face, making policy more precise, responsive, and just.

To illustrate, consider how gendered poverty disproportionately affects disabled women or how racial disparities in maternal health outcomes stem from both gender and ethnicity, not separately but simultaneously. This misalignment is particularly problematic across core government functions like justice, security, education and local government service delivery. A gender-first interpretation would not only reflect demographic reality but improve the design and evaluation of policy interventions across departments. Reversing this hierarchy is not just a semantic correction—it is a strategic necessity for smarter governance.

In the Home Office, violence against women and girls (VAWG) strategies and online safety legislation often miss the intersectional experiences of Black, disabled, or migrant women because policymakers often treat gender as a standalone factor rather than a foundational category. The Ministry of Justice similarly grapples with the compounding effects of gender and poverty in the experiences of female prisoners or survivors navigating family and criminal courts. Meanwhile, the Department for Education—where safeguarding, gender identity, and attainment gaps are deeply gendered—could better address systemic inequalities by embedding GIAs that account for how race, social status, and special needs are mediated differently through gender in classroom, disciplinary, and curriculum structures. This reframing would improve application of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), where current approaches often fail to capture compounded disadvantage.

Achieving SDG 5 and realising gender equality in the UK is possible—but only with political will, institutional reform, and strategic investment. GIAs are essential instruments to ensure that the voices, needs, and experiences of women and girls—particularly those facing intersecting forms of discrimination—are not invisible in public policy. SIGBI believes that embedding GIAs into the policymaking process will bring us closer to a future where gender equality is not a goal to aspire to, but a lived reality for all. The road to 2030 is narrowing. Now is the time to act with ambition, cohesion, and accountability.

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ANNEXES

Green Book Supplementary Guidance on Gender Impact Assessments (GIA) - Incorporating Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis (MCDA) from the Aqua Book

1. Purpose of this Supplementary Guidance This document aims to strengthen the application of the Green Book's appraisal and evaluation framework by integrating gender-specific considerations through the systematic use of Gender Impact Assessments (GIA). It outlines how to utilise Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis (MCDA) outlined in the Aqua Book to capture gender-related dimensions of policy, project, or programme decisions, enhancing the effectiveness, inclusivity, and accountability of public investment.

2. Strategic Context In alignment with the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), the Equality Act 2010, and the UK's international obligations (e.g. CEDAW, SDG 5), the Treasury recognises the importance of ensuring that public spending and policy decisions do not inadvertently reinforce gender inequality. The integration of GIAs within appraisal aligns with commitments in the Green Book to deliver value for money that reflects broader social outcomes.

3. Definition and Scope of GIA A Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) is a structured tool to examine how proposed policies, programmes, or projects affect people differently based on gender and intersecting factors such as age, disability, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. It applies both during early-stage options appraisal and throughout the policy cycle.

4. Embedding GIA Using the Aqua Book MCDA Framework MCDA provides a structured approach for integrating multiple, often qualitative criteria into decision-making. The following steps should guide analysts and policymakers conducting GIAs:

Step 1: Define Objectives and Gender-Relevant Criteria

- Align objectives with gender equality outcomes, as defined in SDG 5, CEDAW recommendations, and national frameworks.
- Establish criteria relevant to gender equality (e.g., differential access, safety, time poverty, representation, income inequality).

Step 2: Develop and Weight Criteria

- Engage diverse stakeholders, including women's organisations, civil society, and impacted communities.
- Use participatory methods to determine the relative importance of each criterion.
- Assign weights that reflect policy priorities and distributional equity.

Step 3: Score Policy Options Against Criteria

- Use available disaggregated data (quantitative and qualitative).
- Apply a consistent scoring method (e.g., 0–10 scale) across all criteria.
- Acknowledge uncertainty and limitations, as per Aqua Book best practices.

Step 4: Aggregate Results and Interpret Findings

- Combine weighted scores to evaluate how well each option meets gender equality objectives.
- Use visual aids (e.g. radar charts, score matrices) to support transparency.
- Include a narrative synthesis to explain trade-offs and residual risks.

Step 5: Document and Communicate Outcomes

- Ensure GIA findings are included in the business case (particularly Strategic and Public Value Cases).
- Maintain audit trails, peer review records, and quality assurance logs.
- Flag areas where mitigation, additional evidence, or monitoring is required.

5. GIA Dashboard Integration

- Departments are encouraged to adopt a web-based GIA dashboard aligned with the MCDA framework.
- Real-time input from departments will enable cross-agency learning and longitudinal tracking.
- Annual 'Policy Reality Checks' should compare GIA predictions with real-world gendered impacts.

6. Evaluation and Feedback Loops

- Post-implementation review should reapply MCDA scoring to assess realised impacts.
- Identify unintended gendered consequences and areas for future reform.

7. Alignment with Spending Review and Budgeting Processes

- GIA-informed MCDA results must be integrated into Spending Review bids and Treasury submissions.
- Treasury will assess compliance with gender appraisal guidance in Green Book assessments.

8. Legal and Ethical Considerations

- Analysts must be aware of legal obligations under PSED.
- MCDA criteria must be defined to avoid indirect discrimination and promote substantive equality.

9. Capacity Building and Training

- Analysts should receive training in MCDA techniques and gender-sensitive appraisal.
- Templates, checklists, and sector-specific examples will be available via the Government Analysis Function.

10. Conclusion This Supplementary Guidance ensures that gender is treated as a foundational analytical category within the Green Book framework. By using MCDA as a transparent, participatory, and evidence-based tool, departments can make more equitable decisions, better fulfil legal obligations, and deliver inclusive outcomes.

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