

Policy Brief on Infrastructure Governance

How can good infrastructure governance advance social inclusion, particularly in terms of gender equality?

Key highlights

- Infrastructure has distinct impacts on women and men as they use and benefit from infrastructure differently. This is due to the distinct challenges that they face in terms of poverty, unemployment and economic empowerment, safety and well-being, and political empowerment.
- A stark challenge faced by governments when mainstreaming gender considerations throughout the infrastructure investment process is the absence of a strategic vision that pays due consideration to gender equality concerns. In Latin America, only Costa Rica, Mexico, and Peru reported plans that consider how to align the strategic vision for infrastructure to gender mainstreaming policies.
- Project assessment and selection processes should be based on evidence and consider gender-specific impacts of infrastructure projects and capital investments, taking into account the full cycle of the assets.

What's the issue?

Infrastructure is central to every country's pursuit of economic growth, wellbeing, and sustainable development. Indeed, infrastructure supports important policy priorities, for instance increasing access to jobs and markets, reducing poverty, closing income inequality gaps, addressing regional disparities, and overall improving quality of life. When poorly conceived, infrastructure can limit access to economic opportunities for certain groups, increase exposure to harmful pollution, and undermine conditions for health and safety.

Infrastructure has distinct impacts on women and men as they use and benefit from infrastructure differently. This is mainly due to the distinct challenges that they face in terms of poverty, unemployment and economic empowerment, safety and well-being, and political empowerment. Incorporating gender considerations into infrastructure governance frameworks and involving more women in decision-making processes, will enable governments to identify the gender impact of infrastructure decisions. Indeed, robust governance frameworks provide governments

with tools to align infrastructure planning, decision making, and implementation with key targets on gender equality and eradication of violence against women. On top of that, infrastructure investments can substantially improve women's economic empowerment by addressing barriers to female economic opportunities and access to labour markets that would otherwise be inaccessible to women.

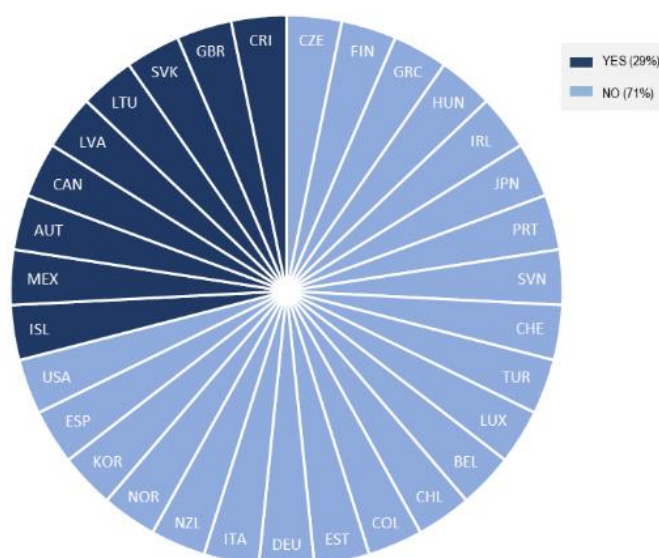
The OECD framework for mainstreaming gender into infrastructure and capital budgeting identifies tools that can be used as part of the planning, selection, and delivery processes to bring a gender lens to capital investment. A life-cycle perspective ensures that public investments are efficient and effective in promoting gender equality, and that women's voices are heard at all stages of the investment and delivery process.

The best opportunity to influence the decision-making process is during the early phases, although input during the evaluation phase can also be useful to help formulate the budget for the following year. In fact, the budget is a central policy document in every government for setting and prioritising resources. Taking gender into account in capital investment decisions is thus a critical dimension of infrastructure planning and sets the stage for the delivery of crosscutting priorities such as gender equality.

A stark challenge faced by governments when mainstreaming gender considerations throughout the infrastructure investment process is the absence of a strategic vision that pays due consideration to gender equality concerns. Only 29% of the OECD countries surveyed in the 2020 Survey on the Governance of Infrastructure reported having an explicit alignment of long-term national infrastructure plans with gender mainstreaming policies (see Figure 1). In Latin America, only three countries (Costa Rica, Mexico, and Peru) reported plans that consider how to align the strategic vision for infrastructure to gender mainstreaming policies.¹

¹ OECD (2024), *Government at a Glance: Latin America and the Caribbean 2024*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/4abdba16-en>.

Figure 1. Explicit alignment of long-term national infrastructure plans with inclusion and gender mainstreaming policies in OECD countries



Note: Data not available for Australia, Denmark, France, Israel, Netherlands, Poland, and Sweden.
Source: OECD Survey on the Governance of Infrastructure (2020).

Examples from LAC countries

Mexico's approach to applying a gender perspective in infrastructure budgeting and performance setting

Gender mainstreaming is a key principle in budgetary policy in Mexico. The country adopted a tagging and monitoring system by which all federal spending, including infrastructure investment, allocated to progress gender equality should be clearly identified and visualised in an annex to the budget bill (*Anexo Erogaciones para la Igualdad entre Mujeres y Hombres*). For example, in the annex to the 2022 budget, the Ministry of Infrastructure, Communications and Transport (SICT) tagged resources to “define, steer, and supervise communications and transport policies”. Likewise, the Federal Electricity Commission (CFE) tagged resources for the “co-ordination of functions and resources for the electric infrastructure” and for the “operation and maintenance of the infrastructure for electricity distribution”, among other items. In addition to the gender tagging system, entities must identify sex-disaggregated indicators to evaluate the impact of spending programmes on gender equality, eradication of gender-based violence, and any form of gender discrimination. The federal budgetary law also establishes that the resource allocations aimed to progress gender equality cannot be reduced or reallocated to different programmes or projects, ensuring that the budget allocations that go towards gender equality are sustainable across time.²

Infrastructure design and technical specification based on gender-differentiated needs

Gender considerations are not always incorporated in the assessment of social impacts and risks during the infrastructure project feasibility and design phases. Failure to incorporate gender-specific needs in the technical specifications of infrastructure projects can lead to gender-blind

² OECD (2023), *Toolkit for Mainstreaming and Implementing Gender Equality 2023*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/3ddef555-en>.

infrastructure. The absence of a comprehensive analysis of gender specific risks that arise from infrastructure investments can also hinder a better distribution and mitigation of such risks by gender. For example, women are disproportionately affected by resettlements due to infrastructure projects and women are more likely to quit their jobs due to long commuting times. In Austria, investment projects at the federal level are required to undergo a mandatory ex ante impact assessment on gender equality for projects that exceed EUR 1 million and meet pre-established criteria. The analysis includes several components: analysis of the problem that requires government intervention or investment; formulation of goals in terms of impacts and outcomes; identification of indicators to measure results; ex ante impact assessment; and ex post evaluation of project effects and results.³

Suggested Policy Actions

- A **strategic long-term vision for infrastructure**, adequately informed by a thorough assessment of gender-differentiated needs and a gender-inclusive stakeholder engagement process, can help to ensure that investment decisions respond to the specific needs of the entire population to prevent one group from disproportionately benefitting at the expense of disadvantaging others. This vision will have an additional value if it presents a whole-of-government plan that is mindful of the gendered impacts of infrastructure in the long-run.
- Adopting an **evidence-based approach** is a necessary condition for mainstreaming gender considerations in strategic planning, delivery, and implementation of infrastructure. Targeted efforts are required to identify gaps in gender-disaggregated data and define strategies to facilitate its collection, sharing and systematic use for infrastructure needs assessment. Data should cover gender gaps in access to infrastructure, different patterns of use and preferences between women and men, as well as measurable benefits and risks that infrastructure poses to women.
- A **rigorous project appraisal and selection process** should consider non-monetised costs and benefits, pay due consideration to gender-specific impacts of infrastructure projects and capital investments, taking into account the full cycle of the assets.

Further reading

- OECD (2021), "Women in infrastructure: Selected stocktaking of good practices for inclusion of women in infrastructure", *OECD Public Governance Policy Papers*, No. 07, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9eab66a8-en>.
- OECD (2023), *Toolkit for Mainstreaming and Implementing Gender Equality 2023*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/3ddef555-en>.

³ OECD (2023), *Toolkit for Mainstreaming and Implementing Gender Equality 2023*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/3ddef555-en>.