

Institutional Framework of the Ministries of Women: Coordinating Efforts to Enhance Impact

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POLICY BRIEF N° IDB-PB-00391

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Cataloging-in-Publication data provided by the Inter-American Development Bank Felipe Herrera Library

Bustelo, Monserrat.

Institutional framework of the ministries of women: coordinating efforts to enhance impact / Monserrat Bustelo, Karen Martinez, Agustina Suaya.

p. cm. — (IDB Policy Brief; 391)

- 1. Gender mainstreaming-Latin America. 2. Gender mainstreaming-Caribbean Area.
- 3. Women-Government policy-Latin America. 4. Women-Government policy-Caribbean Area. I. Martinez, Karen. II. Suaya, Agustina. III. Inter-American Development Bank. Department of Research and Chief Economist. IV. Inter-American Development Bank. Gender and Diversity Division. V. Title. VI. Series.

IDB-PB-391

JEL codes: H10, H59, J16, J18

Keywords: Gender Mainstreaming, Gender Equality, Public Policy, Governance, Gender

Budgeting

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GENDER AND DIVERSITY KNOWLEDGE INITIATIVE



Institutional Framework of the **Ministries of Women: Coordinating** efforts to enhance impact

Unlike in other policy areas, responsibility for gender policy is distributed throughout the entire State structure. To a greater or lesser extent, all government areas involve functions and actions related to closing some gender gap. Therefore, in order to get results and move towards a society with equal opportunities, public actions must be coordinated coherently across all ministries. A lack of clear mechanisms for coordination leads to each ministry working in isolation, with each area establishing their own policies and priorities. This siloed work can lead to a repetition of actions in certain areas while leaving other areas unaddressed, making it impossible to change the structural conditions that produce gender gaps in the first place (OECD, 2021).

In order to break with these dynamics and improve the effectiveness of public action, governments can rely on strategies for mainstreaming gender policy. These strategies make it possible to identify the potential impacts of government actions, improve interministerial coordination, and involve the entire public administration in certain shared objectives. How this mainstreaming strategy is institutionalized can have important impacts on its effective implementation.

In recent years, several countries of the region have established ministerial structures whose central mission is to promote and implement gender mainstreaming policies. This document looks at the importance of this institutionalization process and reviews the discussions taking place regarding the role that the Ministries of Women should play and how they can be strengthened in order to achieve more and better outcomes.















Institutionalization as a channel for advocacy

Mainstreaming policies face three main challenges: first, conceptualizing, diagnosing, and designing the public action; second, coordinated implementation of this strategy; and third, coordination and supervision of the aforementioned activities. Unlike in other policy areas, there is no single person responsible for gender policy. Furthermore, some changes that must be made are beyond the reach of direct government action, such as, for example, the cultural and social transformations that also depend on the actions of civil society organizations, companies, and citizens.

Given this challenge, many countries are moving towards establishing an institutional framework for an entity in charge of leading the discussion and coordinating government actions in this area. The reason is that empowering and establishing someone to take the lead on this issue should at least partially address the above mentioned challenges and help improve coordination within the government.

In terms of functions, the entity charged with leading on the gender agenda has two main focuses of action. Within the government, the structure functions to signal relevance and prioritize the subject. This institutional signal empowers the area vis-à-vis other public actors, thereby facilitating implementation of the coordination and mainstreaming policies. An OECD study (2018) highlights the role of the institutional framework in getting results on gender equality by ensuring effective, coordinated, and sustainable implementation of the mainstreaming strategy.

In operational terms, this institutional framework should contribute to getting results through work on four aspects:















In terms of functions, the entity charged with leading on the gender agenda has two main focuses of action. Within the government, the structure functions to signal relevance and prioritize the subject. Outside the Government, creating an entity answerable to the hierarchy whose mission is to work for gender equality helps promote cultural change on these issues.



1. Mainstreaming the gender approach all throughout the government plan:

One of the most important missions of the Ministries of Women is to work to ensure that the gender approach is coordinated across all ministries. Thus, strengthening the vertical and horizontal coordination mechanisms is a priority for these ministries. Getting results on issues that are by their nature multisectoral requires strong coordination capacity and mechanisms to coordinate not only within the government but with civil society actors. In this sense, gender equality initiatives have a better chance of succeeding if they are supported by an extensive network of actors operating under rules and incentives that promote synergies toward shared goals (OECD, 2018). Identifying points of contact in each government agency is a first step toward easier implementation; however, these persons must operate in coordination to maximize opportunities and get results.



2. Mapping actors and responsibilities:

Gender equality initiatives involve working in a crosscutting manner all throughout the government. These ministries play a key role in clearly establishing the roles, responsibilities, mandates, and lines of accountability of each of the government bodies involved.















3. Building capacities within the government:

A consistent and coordinated response requires a shared outlook on the problem. Ministries of Women play a fundamental role in the processes to raise awareness among officials throughout government structures. Training and raising awareness is key for improving the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of gender programs and policies.



4. Gathering evidence on gaps and program effectiveness:

Ministries of Women also seek to increase the visibility of the problems that gender equality initiatives seek to address. In this regard, the ministries operate on three fronts: fostering cooperation with research centers to close the knowledge gap on certain issues that have been studied little or on the effectiveness of the interventions implemented by the government; improving the collection and openness of data and statistics with a gender approach; and raising awareness or conducting social communication on existing gaps, government programs to close them, and the actions that individuals can take to change cultural patterns in order to improve the social and economic inclusion of women.

Outside the Government, creating an entity answerable to the hierarchy whose mission is to work

for gender equality helps promote cultural change on these issues. First, the makeup of the cabinet matters as a political signal. Making it a cabinet level position is a signal to society that the issue is a priority for this government and for the country's development. The ministry's participation in cabinet meetings and bilateral meetings with the office of the president also gives the issue the greatest possible social and media visibility. In this regard, making it a cabinet level office gives the Ministry of Women more opportunities for social advocacy thanks to greater impacts and access to media spaces and mass-market events.















Second, the ministerial rank itself grants greater autonomy to whoever holds the office. It also enables them to make high-level connections with nongovernmental actors like business chambers, civil society, international organizations, and universities. These actions make it possible to develop mainstreaming policies that reach beyond the government, given that gender equity is a "whole-of-society" effort (OECD, 2019).

Lastly, the literature on the representation of women in legislative and executive bodies indicates the importance of these spaces as social role models (Liu and Banaszak, 2017; Ladam, Hardem and Windett, 2018; Arvate, Galilea, and Todescat, 2018). The presence of women in the cabinet generates positive changes with regard to how the role of women is viewed by society. It also contributes to encouraging more women to participate in public life.

The institutional structure adopted by the governmental gender equality body and its subsequent permanence over time is an important indicator of the country's commitment to this priority. As regards the forms this structure could take, international examples offer two emerging models: ministerial models and models involving independent or semi-independent structures. In the ministerial model, the office leading the gender agenda is a ministry or department within a ministry. In the other model, its functional structure is separate, although it is usually overseen by a ministry or functionally answers to the highest government authority (president or prime minister). According to figures for the European Union—the region that has made the most progress in closing gender gaps—64% of countries adopted the first model, while the other 36% prioritized coordination of the gender agenda by an independent office.













Another relevant variable is analyzing where the office is in the government hierarchy, as it can be expected that the higher up the agency responsible for the mainstreaming strategy, the more power for advocacy it will have. Thus, three categories can be identified: offices that report to the head of government (president or prime minister); offices that report to a ministry or general secretary of the government; and offices with an intermediate rank that report to a secretary within the ministerial structure. According to this classification, 23% of European Union countries use the first model, half (50%) use the second, and the remaining 27% use the third model. An OECD analysis (2018b) finds that for crosscutting issues, it is more likely for the center of government to take the initiative and leadership. It should therefore be expected that, in the coming years, more governments will adopt the first model to encourage closure of the gender gaps.



INTERNATIONAL EXAMPLES OF MANAGING THE GENDER AGENDA FROM THE GOVERNMENT

Iceland

The Directorate of Equality is a national office that, since 2019, reports directly to the Prime Minister's Office. It is in charge of managing everything related to equality and is the office responsible for monitoring implementation of a broad range of laws (including: Act on the Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men 150/2020, Act on Equal Treatment of Individuals Regardless of Race and Ethnic Origin 85/2018, and the Act on Equal Treatment in the Labor Market Irrespective of Race, Ethnic Origin, Religion, Life Stance, Disability, Reduced Working Capacity, Age, Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Sexual Characteristics or Gender Expression 86/2018. In addition to monitoring these laws, the office's functions include providing advice to the prime minister and the sector ministers on issues of equality and promoting public policy aimed at reducing gender-based violence and stereotypes and closing gaps in salaries and opportunities in the labor market. According to the OECD (2021) this new office at the center of government has improved coordination between the ministries in the area of gender equality.













United Kingdom:

In the United Kingdom, the Government Equalities Office (GEO) is within the Cabinet Office. Like in Iceland, this office works across all policies related to gender equality and other diverse populations. The office works in coordination with the rest of the government, facilitating information exchange and policy coordination. In addition to working on mainstreaming within the government, it cooperates with a variety of external actors, including companies, organizations, and academics.

United States

In the United States, following an Executive Order from the President in March 2021, the White House Gender Policy Council was established within the Executive Office of the President. The Council is in charge of coordinating the policies and programs of the federal government in terms of equity and gender equality. It is also in charge of mainstreaming this agenda throughout the government to ensure that the work of all federal agencies promotes gender equality and equity.

Source: OECD (2021): 27, and Icelandic and UK government websites.



Institutional Framework in Latin America and the Caribbean

According to 2021 data, 44% of the countries in the region have a ministry dedicated to women, with the remaining countries having other lower-ranking institutional structures (see Figure 1). A longitudinal analysis of these offices in the region finds that, between 1990 and 2016, the vast majority of countries kept the office dedicated to this issue at the same level of the hierarchy or moved it up (UN Women, 2016). The only exception was Argentina, a country that dropped the office handling gender issues to a lower institutional rank during that period. However, even in this case, this trend was reversed in 2019 with the creation of the Ministry of Women, Gender, and Diversity.













Figure 1 • Map of the current situation as of May 2021



COUNTRY	BODY NAME
Argentina	Ministry of Women, Gender, and Diversity
Bolivia	Vice Ministry of Equal Opportunities, Ministry of Justice
Brazil	Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights
Chile	Ministry of Women and Gender Equity
Colombia	Presidential Council on Women's Equity
Costa Rica	Ministry on the Status of Women
Ecuador	Secretariat of Human Rights
El Salvador	Salvadoran Institute for Women's Development
Guatemala	Presidential Office on Women
Honduras	National Institute for Women
Mexico	National Institute for Women
Nicaragua	Private Secretariat for National Policies
Panama	National Institute for Women
Paraguay	Ministry of Women
Peru	Ministry of Women and Vulnerable People
Dominican Republic	Ministry of Women
Uruguay	National Institute for Women
Venezuela	Ministry of the People's Power for Women and Gender Equality

Source: Prepared by the authors using UN Women database (2021).

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The move toward creating specific ministries could be in line with the OECD's recommendation (2018) to place the institutions promoting gender equality at the highest rank possible within the government. However, the structures in the ministries of the region are quite weak, which could limit the fulfillment of the functions described in the previous section. The 2022 budget data for four countries of the region with ministries of women (Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, and Peru) show that these ministries account for only 0.18% of the total national executive branch budget. In Argentina and Paraguay—which have human resources figures available for each ministry—it is clear that the ministries of women not only have lower budgets but small staffs compared to the rest of the government. In these countries, the workforce of the Ministry of Women accounts for only 0.05% of total executive branch staffing.

What's more, the distribution of gender policy spending within the different bodies of Argenti-

na's executive branch confirms that the Ministry of Women has little impact on direct execution of these funds. In 2021, the Ministry of Women, Gender, and Diversity was in charge of executing only 0.5% of all spending earmarked for gender. In contrast, the Ministry of Labor, Employment, and Social Security was responsible for executing 86% of that budget.1

The relative size of the ministries of women could explain why case studies find that these offices have not been very effective at promoting gender policy (Díaz-García, 2019). Without a greater impact on the budget, it is hard for the policies promoted by this portfolio to substantially change the outcome indicators. Instead, programs implemented by these ministries should be expected to only impact small parts of the population.

^{1.} Execution of such a large part of the budget earmarked for gender policies by this ministry is explained by the significant Social Security component, given the large number of women beneficiaries served by the current programs.













Given that the ministries of women do not have the resources to push for sweeping public policies, in order for these offices to be the catalysts of social change, they must have the capacity to horizontally and vertically coordinate the government's actions. This capacity depends fundamentally on empowerment and visibility that the office of the president grants to this **ministry.** The experience of the ministries that aim for crosscutting coordination on an issue is that they are only able to bring the different ministries into line if they have the backing of the presidency (Alessandro, Lafuente, and Santiso, 2014). Without this support, these ministries may have a difficult time formulating a plan of action that is coherent enough to get results (OECD,

2021). Also, even when they are able to establish a plan of action, they must be politically and institutionally empowered to establish mechanisms for effective coordination and monitoring of outcome trajectories, especially in policy areas executed from other portfolios or through multiple ministries acting together.



How to strengthen the actions of the **Ministry of Women**



Improving the strategy design process

For mainstreaming to be successful, there must be a shared vision for how it is to be carried out. Arriving at a vision shared by the entire government is critical for identifying the actors involved and setting priorities (OECD, 2019b)













Following the example of other more developed crosscutting efforts in the region, like early childhood development plans, the integrated strategy is a first step toward establishing a shared vision of the issue. This action plan also serves to establish goals and trajectories for compliance, providing clarity as to the contributions of each area to securing outcomes. Well-documented cases like Chile Crece Contigo show how crosscutting and interministerial coordination can prove successful.

Countries with a longer history developing institutions working toward gender equity and mainstreaming this issue throughout the government

For mainstreaming to be successful, there must be a shared vision for how it is to be carried out. Arriving at a vision shared by the entire government is critical for identifying the actors involved and setting priorities (OECD, 2019b).

often have strategic plans in place. These plans include details on working logic, action plans, priorities, timeframes, objectives, and expected outcomes or goals (OECD, 2016). These plans serve as an umbrella to guide mainstreaming actions and prioritized policies to achieve measurable goals. However, even European countries that have taken substantial steps toward closing gender gaps report that implementation of these strategies can be affected by the absence of political support or if there are no effective mechanisms to ensure compliance with the plans made (OECD, 2019b).



Guaranteeing the political empowerment of the area doing the coordination

As observed in other experiences of coordinating ministries, the capacity of a Ministry of Women to be able to effectively coordinate the actions to be carried out by other ministries with larger budgets is not automatic. The mainstreaming strategy is an initial important step, but it is not enough to guarantee the plan will be followed.

Political empowerment from the center of government (the presidency) is critical for the gender area to be able to influence the actions that must be taken by other departments (Alessandro, Lafuente, and Santiso, 2014; OECD, 2021; Goetz, 2003; McBride and Mazur, 2012). In turn, this empowerment is neces-













sary for monitoring progress toward compliance with the commitments made and to streamline potential implementation problems or conflicts of interests between the areas playing a role in the chain of compliance (Alessandro, Lafuente, and Santiso, 2014). Without political support from the most senior government authorities, it can be hard to get all the offices involved to internalize the gender strategy and feel pressure to demonstrate they have achieved results (OECD, 2019b).

Something as simple as establishing routines for periodic reporting to the president on the progress toward achieving the objectives can provide sufficient incentives to enhance horizontal collaboration among the areas of government Another alternative is to develop the strategy within the office of the center of government and then transfer implementation and monitoring to the ministry. Lastly, having compliance units within the Ministry of Women can help make the mainstreaming work more systematic, encouraging a more efficient use of existing resources and better reporting of the progress made and challenges involved.

Aligning the other governance processes

The mainstreaming strategy can only be effective when integrated into existing government accountability routines and mechanisms (OECD, 2019b). In other words, in addition to political backing and to structures specifically intended to promote gender equity, the mainstreaming strategies need network support and horizontal collaboration (Goldsmith and Eggers, 2004).

Additionally, all the coordination structures must also be reflected in the planning and budgeting processes. Without this clear underpinning, the mechanisms available to the Ministry of Women (or the office in charge of gender mainstreaming) are weak, not only for incentivizing its peers in other offices to take action but also for monitoring the progress of projects implemented by the portfolios.

The Ministries of Women could further expand their capacity for action by using results-based budgeting methodologies. The results-based budget means rethinking State action based on theories of change that go beyond the formal competencies of each area of government. If the procedures that define how public resources are allocated and spent change, the incentives of government officials also change.

Furthermore, these entities' efforts to mainstream gender can be strengthened by incorporating gender budgeting (GB).2 Recognizing that fiscal

2. Also known as "gender-responsive budgeting."











policy and public budgets are not neutral when it comes to gender, GB emerges from a strategy to explicitly commit governments to addressing gender inequality in their public policies by incorporating a gender approach into how they analyze, draft, execute, and evaluate public budgets. Globally, GB practices are increasingly common (see some experiences highlighted in Box 2). However, there are considerable opportunities to promote the more effective use of resources by incorporating and institutionalizing GBs, regardless of an economy's level of income. In turn, existing practices must be documented to evaluate their effectiveness in terms of the outcomes attained on gender equality (Alonso-Albarran et al., 2021).



Improving available information and data interoperability

Lastly, the capacity for coordination of the Ministries of Women can be strengthened if they have more and better information. Lack of coordination of programs with a gender approach means that the information collected regarding the beneficiaries is also scattered. An integrated information system can contribute to providing a multisectoral view of the needs of women and their families. This information is key when it comes to defining policies with a gender approach and designing specific programs (OECD, 2021). Lastly, regularly updating the information improves monitoring of the implementation of mainstreaming actions and securing outcomes.















Highlighted Experiences with Gender Budgeting

There is no single model of gender budgeting (GB). The different GB practices can vary depending on their origin, scope, objectives, institutional agreements, points of entry of the budgeting process, legal grounding, analytical tools, and actors involved, among other things (Coello, 2016). In fact, globally, different efforts have been identified to incorporate GB practices into budgeting systems by adding the gender approach to budgeting regulations; by integrating the gender approach into one or more phases of the budgeting cycle; or both. The following is an overview of the experiences of Argentina, Canada, Spain, and Mexico, which stand out in their efforts to incorporate and institutionalize GB initiatives.

Argentina stands out in the region for its efforts to place State actions in terms of public policies to close the gender gap at the forefront. During the formulation of GB, starting in 2018, the National Budgeting Office took action to promote review and identification of budget programs associated with gender issues by issuing circulars 3 that give general instructions and guidelines for formulating expenditure projects. Also standing out is implementation of the methodology for identifying or "tagging" public budget programs that contribute to closing gender gaps. In 2019, this methodology was included by the Ministry of Economy and Finance in the National Budget to monitor public spending in general. The 2021 budget broadens the focus of this methodology to include criteria for classifying budget activities based on their impact on four separate pillars: fiscal, economic, decision-making, and cultural transformation. In addition to providing guidelines for planning and assigning resources, the National Budgeting Office has since 2019 published reports and monitoring expenditures related to gender policy in the National Budget to improve transparency and accountability (Almeida, 2020). Both the Ministry of the Economy—through the Office on Economy and Gender—and the Ministry of Women, Genders, and Diversity lead the GB initiatives (Alonso-Albarran et al., 2021).

^{3.} The first circular was implemented in 2018 (Circular 1/2018). In it, all entities of the national government were urged to identify the line items relevant for addressing gender issues.











Canada is a world leader in the adoption of public finance regulations and tools to integrate the gender perspective into the budget process. Under the Gender Budgeting Act,4 the Canadian government uses two GB tools to guide analysis, design, and evaluation of the annual government budget: Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA+)⁵ and the gender results framework⁶ (GRF). The first is an analytical process that provides a rigorous methodology for evaluating the legislation, policies, and government programs in terms of gender and their intersection with other identity factors (like race, sexual orientation, disability, age, and religion). The second is a tool that guides policy decisions and enables monitoring of trends in gender equality and diversity through different gender equality policy priorities, which are themselves associated with specific objectives and indicators. Throughout the budgeting process, the Department of Women and Gender Equality⁸ plays an important role as the leader for implementation of GBA+ in the government's decisions.9

Spain stands out for the significant progress it has made toward incorporating GB tools as a strategy to coordinate and enhance efforts to promote gender equality. Its most notable GB practices include the Gender Impact Report for General State Budget Bills, incorporated in 2008.10 The report includes a summary of the results of the gender impact evaluation carried out during the budgeting process and explains how the budgetary projects contribute to equality objectives. The drafting of the report is coordinated by the Office of the Secretary of State for Budgets and Expenditures, in close collaboration with the Ministry of Equality and the competent ministries doing the gender impact evaluations. Since 2021, the "three R's" method has been used in the report to enhance gender mainstreaming all across public policy via analysis from three angles: "reality," "representation," and "resources—results." Also worth highlighting are the GB initiatives adopted in some of the autonomous communities, such as and Andalucía, which in 2007

- 4. See "Canadian Gender Budgeting Act" (2018).
- 5. Translation of the English term "Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA+)".
- 6. Translation of the term "Gender Results Framework (GRF)"
- 7. See the priorities, objectives, and indicators of the 2022 Budget included in the "Statement and Impacts Report on Gender. Diversity, and Quality of Life."
- 8. Translation of the term "Department of Women and Gender Equality (WAGE)"
- 9. See the "2019-2020 Women and Gender Equality Canada departmental progress report."
- 10. However, the first gender impact report published on the website of the Office of the Secretary of State for Budgets and Expenditures dates from 2011.
- 11. The study of the first "R" consists of reviewing the gender situation in the Spanish context; the second "R" involves examining representation of women and men in the organizational structures of the public sector and the government; and the third "R" looks at budgetary expenditure programs from a gender perspective for categorization based on pertinence and relevance to gender.













introduced a methodology for identifying the fiscal policies with the greatest impact on gender equality, in addition to gender audits since 2013 (Jubeto y O'Hagan, 2010).

Mexico was the first country in Latin America to promote GB initiatives in the late 1990s (Coello, 2016) and currently has one of the most complete GB models. As far as tools integrating gender considerations in the budgetary cycle, one thing worth highlighting is the inclusion of a crosscutting programmatic line item in the public budget to assign resources to programs that contribute to equality. Since 2006, these allocations have taken the form of an annex to the Budget Decree of Expenditures of the Federation, which includes expenditures on gender equality; pillars of action for classifying public spending (for example, actions on gender-based violence); and classifiers that disaggregate allocations by sex (Office of the Secretary General, 2020). GB practices also include the following: (i) preparation of reports on budgetary execution; (ii) ex post evaluation of the impact of the programs executed; (iii) incorporation of financial audits and accountability; and (iv) supervision of the budgetary process through the Special Committee on Gender Equality (Alonso-Albarran et al., 2021). Like in previous experiences, the entity in charge of promoting gender equality—the National Institute of Women—plays a key role in GB development and analysis.













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