



**SOLOMON ISLANDS GOVERNMENT
MINISTRY OF PUBLIC SERVICE**

**PUBLIC SERVICE GENDER EQUALITY AND
SOCIAL INCLUSION POLICY 2025-2030**

Advancing Good Governance in the Public Service



Solomon Islands
Public Service Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Policy
2025-2030

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List of Acronyms

AA	Affirmative Action
CoC	Code of Conduct
DFAT	Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia)
FPA	Family Protection Act 2014
GESI	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
GFP	Gender Focal Point
HRM	Human Resources Manager
IPAM	Institute of Public Administration and Management
JLSC	Justice and Legal Service Commission
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
LCC	Leadership Code Commission
MPS	Ministry of Public Service
MWYCFA	Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs
OAG	Office of the Auditor General
OOSI	Office of the Ombudsman of Solomon Islands
PS	Permanent Secretary
PPSC	Police and Prison Service Commission
PSC	Public Service Commission
RSIPF	Royal Solomon Islands Police Force
ASIPS	Australian Solomon Islands Resource Facility (now ASIP)
TOR	Terms of Reference
TSM	Temporary Special Measures
DS MPS	Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Public Service

Definition of Terms

The definition of the key terms used in this policy have been adopted or adapted from United Nations and Solomon Islands Government documents.

Gender	Gender is the culturally specific set of attributes, roles and activities assigned to women and men and the relationship between them in response to those socially constructed roles. Gender, therefore, refers not simply to women or men, but to the relationship between them, and the way this relationship is socially constructed. Since it is socially constructed gender can be different in different contexts and is subject to change depending on the place, time and culture. Because it is a relational term, gender must include women and men. Like the concepts of class, race and ethnicity, gender is an analytical tool for understanding social processes.
Sex	Sex is the biological differences between men and women. It refers to the physical characteristics of the body of a male as differentiated from a female. Unlike 'gender' as explained above, 'sex' differences between women and men are the same everywhere, they are permanent and usually determined at birth.
Gender Equality	Gender Equality is the concept that all human beings (men and women) are of equal value and are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices in all sectors (political, social, legal, economic) without the limitations set by stereotypes, rigid gender roles and prejudices. Gender equality means that the different behaviours, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favoured equally. Gender equality does not mean that women and men have to become the same but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Equality between men and women is both a human right and a precondition for sustainable people-centred development and decent work.

Social Inclusion	Social Inclusion describes the process of making considerations for certain groups that are systematically disadvantaged because they are discriminated against based on their disability, gender, ethnicity, race, religion, caste, descent, age, HIV status, economic status, migrant status or where they live. Discrimination occurs in public institutions, such as the legal systems or education and health services, as well as social institutions like the household and private companies. Social Inclusion involves making conscious efforts to provide for the marginalized and 'disadvantaged' members of the society; giving them access to assets and social justice.
Gender Mainstreaming	Gender mainstreaming is a process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, policy or programme to ensure that it will bring about equitable outcomes for all and will not perpetuate inequality. It is a globally accepted strategy for promoting gender equality. Gender mainstreaming is a means for achieving the goal of gender equality. It involves ensuring that attention to the goal of gender equality is central to all activities, policy development, research, advocacy/dialogue, legislation, resource allocation, planning, implementation and monitoring of programmes and projects.
Gender Analysis	Gender analysis is a systematic tool to examine social and economic differences between women and men. It looks at their specific activities, conditions, needs, access to and control over resources, as well as their access to development benefits and decision-making. Gender analysis identifies the types of gender differences and inequalities that might otherwise be taken for granted – such as how men and women have different access to and control over resources, carry out different social roles, and face different constraints and receive different benefits. Once highlighted, they can be addressed and alleviated by carefully designed policies and programmes

Temporary Special Measures (TSM)	Temporary Special Measures refers to unusual steps taken for a limited period to speed up the achievement of actual equality between men and women. The use of the unusual steps for a limited period will not be considered discriminatory. Such measures may last for as long as inequalities exist, but may not lead to the maintenance of unequal or separate standards, and must be discontinued when equality of both opportunity and treatment have been achieved
Affirmative Action (AA)	Affirmative action is a form of TSM. It is also referred to as positive discrimination - an action or policy favouring those who tend to suffer from discrimination, especially in relation to employment and education. Affirmative action refers to a set of procedures implemented for the purpose of eliminating discrimination in educational and employment opportunities. Amounting to “positive discrimination,” the policy creates favour toward members of disadvantaged groups believed to have suffered discrimination in society
Non-Discrimination	Non-discrimination is related to the principle of equality. The principle of non-discrimination seeks to guarantee that human rights are exercised without discrimination of any kind based on race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status such as disability, age, marital and family status, sexual orientation and gender identity, health status, place of residence, economic and social situation.
Disability	Disability is the interaction between the individual with an impairment (physical, sensory and psychological) with the environment whether it be physical, attitudinal or institutional. The physical refers to public places or offices. The attitudinal is the perceptions of society toward an individual with the impairment and institutional refers to laws and policies.

	Disability is a cross-cutting issue as such a multi sectoral approach is fundamental inclusive of the public sector, private sector, Civil Society Organizations, Donors and People with Disability Organizations.
Accessibility	Accessibility is a pre-condition for inclusion. According to article 9 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Accessibility enables persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life.
Universal Design	Universal Design focus on the key accessibility dimensions such as physical, social, communication and information. This definition is based on the article 2 of CRPD. In its application, it is important to consider the cultural, economic, environmental, gender and social contexts.

Foreword

The Public Service Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Policy is based on the transformative vision that Gender Equality and Social Inclusion themes are catalysts to people centred development. As the central ministry responsible for developing and coordinating public service human resources frameworks for all public servants, the Ministry of Public Service in collaboration with the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs recognised and realised the call for a public service GESI policy that is required to achieve the vision.

In the flagship framework Solomon Islands Solomon Islands Public Transformation Strategy 2023-2033, MPS foresees the need to enhance the equal participation of women and men as well as persons with disabilities in the public service. As data show, there are still inequalities in terms of GESI gaps in both institutional frameworks and practices in the public service. Therefore, this GESI Policy sets the benchmark for mainstreaming of GESI in the public service.

This policy demonstrates the commitment of the Solomon Islands Government for National Unity and Transformation (GNUT) towards Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in the public sector. This is the time to further advance good governance in the public service to acknowledge, appreciate, and affirm the significant contributions of male, female and persons with disabilities employees in the public service.

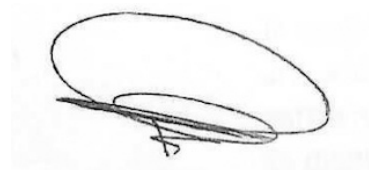
Hon. Freda Rotutafi Rangirei, MP.



Minister

**Ministry of Women, Youth
Children and Family Affairs**

Hon. Francis Sade, MP.



Minister

Ministry of Public Service

Acknowledgements

The Solomon Islands Government for National Unity and Transformation commitment to further advance Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in the public service is demonstrated in the completion of this policy. This GESI policy aims to mainstream gender equality and social inclusion in the public service workplace.

The GESI 2025-2030 is the final product of key consultations and socialisation with key stakeholders in the public service, private sector and NGOs including key provinces.

The Ministry of Public Service (MPS) appreciated the funding support from the Australian Government through the Australian Solomon Islands Resource (ASIRF) Facility for providing the technical assistance and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade for the Accountable Cash Grant for socialisation of the policy and other GESI activities. Also, the MPS conveys its acknowledgement to MWYCFA as the key partner, stakeholders and partners for your invaluable contributions to the development process and finalisation of this policy. The MPS and MWYCFA look forward to continuing working collaboratively with you in the implementation of this policy.

Dr. Cedric Alependava



Permanent Secretary

**Ministry of Women Youth
Children and Family Affairs**

Mr. Luke Cheka



Permanent Secretary

Ministry of Public Service

Executive Summary

Part 1: Context and Rationale

The Ministry of Public Service (MPS) as the central government ministry responsible for the development and oversight of all Human Resource Regulatory Frameworks commits to promoting and advancing Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in the public service. The foundation of this GESI Policy was outlined in the flagship framework Solomon Islands Solomon Islands Public Transformation Strategy (SIPSTS) 2023-2033. In addition to the SIPSTS, the principles of this policy are based on other seven key national instruments: the Solomon Islands National Constitution: Chapter 2; Public Service Act; National Development Strategy 2016-2035, the Government for National Unity and Transformation Policy Document 8.1.7 b) Corporate Services; The National Gender Equality and Women's Development Policy 2021-2027; National Policy to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls Policy 2021-2027 and Solomon Islands National Disability Inclusive Development Policy 2023-2031.

At the regional and international levels, instruments such as the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration, Pacific Framework on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2016-2025 (PFRPD), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) as well as the global 2030 agenda on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The fundamental principles of these instruments call for action on equal participation, protection and partnership in development.

This policy has 7 guiding principles and thematic areas

1. Governance and Corporate planning
2. Recruitment & Induction
3. Terms of employment/ flexible working/ family life balance
4. Promotions/ pay increment/ performance management
5. Women's Leadership

6. Staff training/ Learning
7. Staff discipline/ Code of conduct, including sexual harassment

Part 2: Policy Framework

1. Guiding Principles and Corporate Planning

The core mandate of this GESI policy is to promote gender equality and social inclusion. Since Gender Equality and Social Inclusion vision demands equal opportunities and considerations be given to women, men and persons with disabilities, the policy recognises special measures may be needed to be applied in some areas to achieve gender equality and social inclusion in the public service.

This policy aims to establish a clear guide for developing and revising laws, policies, procedures and practices in the public service.

The policy ensures the principles of non-discrimination, equal treatment and opportunities are practiced for the well-being of women, men and persons with disabilities employed in the public service.

The guiding principles of the policy are grouped under seven thematic areas below:

1. Governance and Corporate Planning
2. Recruitment and Induction
3. Terms of employment. Flexible working/family life balance
4. Promotions/Pay Increments/Performance Management
5. Women Leadership
6. Staff Training and Learning
7. Staff Discipline/ Code of Conduct, including sexual harassment

Part 3: Policy Strategies and Institutional Framework for implementation

As the biggest employer in the country, the public service recognises the inequalities existing across the government machineries. This policy sets the benchmark for proactive gender mainstreaming and disability inclusion in the public service. Denial of equal participation of women, men and persons with disabilities in the workplace leads to detrimental consequences such as poverty.

This policy is designed to be implemented collaboratively across the public service with the MPS leading the coordination role with support from Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs (MWYCFA) and appointed line ministries and agencies Gender Focal Points.

The policy development process was based on ethical and inclusive principles, the participatory method respects the perspectives of the stakeholders from the public sector, NGOs and private sector. The consultative process leads to identification of listed key thematic areas by the stakeholders. This GESI Policy articulates the key themes required for a fair and non-discriminatory public service now and in the future.

PART 1: Context and Rationale

1.1 Introduction and background

The Ministry of Public Service (MPS) is responsible for development and oversight of the human resource management (HRM) regulatory framework which governs all public servants. Within this framework, the MPS identified several priority areas requiring improvement and these are outlined in the Solomon Islands Solomon Islands Public Transformation Strategy 2023-2033. The Strategy outlined series of actions required to improve and strengthen gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) in the public service. It called for a clear policy on GESI.

In addition to the Solomon Islands Public Transformation Strategy, this GESI policy is informed by seven key national instruments: The National Constitution of Solomon Islands; Public Service Act; the National Development Strategy 2016 -2035; Government for National Unity and Transformation Policy Document 8.1.7 b) Corporate Services; the Solomon Islands National Gender Equality and Women's Development policy 2021-2027; and the National Policy to Eliminate violence against Women and Girls 2021-2027 and Solomon Islands National Disability Inclusive Development Policy 2023-2031.

There are also the regional and international commitments such as the Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration, the Pacific Framework on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2016-2025, and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Convention on the Rights of persons with Disabilities and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) All those instruments call for greater attention to and promotion of gender equality and social inclusion. This Public Service Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Policy is therefore designed to enable the public service to make appropriate considerations on issues such as recruitment, leadership, sexual harassment and the establishment of gender and social inclusion targets in the public service.

To develop the GESI policy, the MPS collaborated with the Ministry of Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs (MWYCFA), consulted widely and drew on broad-based expertise from within and outside the public service. The methodology involved iterative consultative meetings and workshops along with desk research and document reviews. In collaboration with key public service and donor community stakeholders, the MPS agreed the processes and parameters for the wider consultative meetings and workshops. Two whole -of- government consultations were held, with the second one involving civil society groups and donors.

Each of the 24 ministries of the Solomon Islands public service was represented by at least one staff member who is the gender focal point (GFP) or Human Resources Manager at the two wider levels of consultative workshops. The initial meeting held was to gather the input of stakeholders to form the core of the draft GESI policy. Following an internal review of the draft GESI policy by the leadership of the collaborating ministries, the latter wider stakeholder consultation served as a validation workshop to agree the proposed actions and targets and participation included NGOs, church groups and the media.

The seven thematic areas of the GESI policy were agreed on based on the areas covered by the MPS mandate and literature review that pin-pointed those themes as impacting most on GESI. Working under those thematic areas, representatives of public service ministries, members of donor communities and civil society groups agreed on the principles, priority objectives, actions and targets for the policy. The thematic areas are:

1. Governance & Corporate planning
2. Recruitment & Induction
3. Terms of employment/ flexible working/ family life balance
4. Promotions/ pay increment/ performance management
5. Women's Leadership
6. Staff training/ Learning

7. Staff discipline/ Code of conduct, including sexual harassment

1.2 Status of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in Solomon Islands

The Solomon Islands census in 2019 puts the total population at 720,956 (351,560 females and 369,396 males). That is, 49% (females) and 51% (males). Persons with various forms of disability make up 11 per cent of the total population (15% are females and 13% males). Persons with severe forms of disabilities is close to one percent of the population and nearly evenly split between males and females.

Solomon Islands literacy rates are 88.5% for males and 82.5% for females. The gaps between males and females widen at the higher levels of education, with women making up just 38% of tertiary school enrolment as of 2012 (ADB 2015). Educational opportunities for persons with disabilities is limited as there is just one special development centre in Solomon Islands and no education pathway framework in mainstream schools. The educational disparities have implications for other areas of life, including formal and paid employment.

Among the total population, 92.1% of persons aged over 12 are engaged in some work but much of that is subsistence level and/or unpaid work. Women make up just over half (55.9%) of all unpaid workers. There are 119,342 women compared to 139,041 men who are in paid employment. So, women are less than half as likely as men to be in paid work. In rural areas, the nature of women's unpaid work is particularly significant as 50.4% of women (as opposed to 49.6% of men) are engaged in subsistence work for family consumption. Women are also saddled with the bulk of family care giving, diminishing their ability to engage in paid work. Within paid work, men are much more likely than women to hold a wage job, particularly in the private sector. Women hold only one-quarter (25%) of private sector wage jobs and 36% of public sector wage jobs and they are paid less than men for doing similar or same type of work (ADB 2015). At the level of business ownership, there are 285 women compared to 1126 men who have the 'Employer' status.

The *Solomon Islands Family Health and Safety Study* in 2009 found that 64% of women in intimate relations had experienced partner physical and/or sexual

abuse. 73% of women believe that a man is justified in beating his wife under some circumstances. Of women who had experienced physical or sexual partner violence, or both, 70% reported that they had not told anyone about the violence. The rate of violence is among the highest in the Pacific region (ADB 2015). The 2018 United Nations Human Development report positions Solomon Islands at 152 out of 189 countries behind Kiribati and Vanuatu – countries of similar size and resources in the region which are ranked 134 and 138 respectively.

In recognition of the gender and social inclusion inequalities and high rate of sexual harassment and violence, the Solomon Islands Government has adopted various policies to address them, including the National Policy to Eliminate violence against Women and Girls 2021-2027, Solomon Islands National Disability Inclusive Development Policy 2023-2031; the Family Protection Act 2014 which criminalizes domestic violence; and the National Gender Equality and Women's Development policy 2021-2027. The Solomon Islands is also a signatory to key United Nations Human Rights and gender equality and disability instruments, including the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

1.3 Gender Equality and Social Inclusion challenges in the Public Service

The Solomon Islands Public Service has over 8,000 employees. Women represent 35% of the Public Service workforce but they occupy only 13% of senior (SS1-5) management positions. There are 24 permanent secretary positions in government, but only 3 are females and of 48 Deputy Secretaries, only 10 are female. Of the 24 constitutional posts representing the highest levels of decision-making in the country, there are only three females, one of which is a recently appointed Puisne Judge.

The Public Service Commission Satisfaction Survey 2016 shows public service employees do have some form of difficulty with sight, hearing, mobility and cognitive. The percentage of employees with sight difficulty is 10.5%, employees experiencing hearing difficulty is at 4.5%, employees having mobility difficulty at 8.7% and employees with cognitive difficulty is 14.3%. However, there is no support services framework to establish mechanism to meaningfully engage persons with disabilities and employees experiencing some form of impairment to perform effectively.

The facilities in public offices are hardly supportive of work/life balance as there are no care-giving rooms in any of the ministries. While newer office buildings have reasonably good toilet facilities, this is not the case with most of the public service offices located in older buildings. Nearly all the buildings, including the newer ones do not have elevators, making them inaccessible to persons with mobility challenges.

The Public Service Code of Conduct (section 2.5) prohibits sexual harassment in the public service, but the reporting systems are weak and offer no real confidentiality. The Family Protection Act (FPA) 2014 criminalizes the “sexual abuse” of a person, (defined as ‘conduct of a sexual nature that abuses, humiliates, degrades or otherwise violates the dignity of the person’) but it is confined within the family setting. Therefore, the need to link aspects of the FPA to sexual harassment legislation in the public service space to provide the required protection to women employees. Given the risks and inadequate protection of victims, sexual harassment in the workplace is largely unreported

and unaddressed. For instance, a member of the Public Service Commission noted during our consultations that in a four -year period (2014-2018) only one case of sexual harassment was reported to the Commission while anecdotal evidence suggest that sexual harassment and abuse are high among employees, making the work place a hostile environment, particularly for women. The *Prevalence Study on Sexual Harassment in the Public Service 2022* reports that 72 (14 males and 58 females) officers of 540 officers experience forms of sexual harassment in the workplace. In addition, 186 (89 males and 97 females) of 540 officers witnessed sexual harassment in the workplace. The two common forms of sexual harassment experienced and witnessed are suggestive comments/jokes and unwelcome touching and physical contact.

As the sector with the highest number of employees in the country, the Public Service needs to set an example for other employers on making the work place a gender friendly and socially inclusive environment for all, thereby enhancing national productivity and well- being. As evidenced by the Solomon Islands Public Transformation Strategy 2023-2033, there is political will to put systems in place towards GESI in the Public Service. Already, gender mainstreaming performance indicators have been agreed and included in the contracts of permanent secretaries across government ministries. Although the performance management and reporting on those indicators are yet to be fully implemented, the agreement is a good start point to build on. Gender focal points are also being established across all ministries with clear terms of reference.

Taking those initiatives forward requires a GESI policy to provide the impetus and guide for action. There are many other issues for which a policy mandate is needed. One is the design of a strategic and coordinated response to the gender inequalities in leadership and decision-making positions in the public service. Given that special measures will be required to address the systemic issues that produced the inequalities, a policy legitimating such action is required. A second issue is that some existing policies and practices constitute de facto discrimination in hiring and employment. For example, the Labour Act bars women from working in mines, except in management positions. An excellent Solomon Islands example of how such de facto barriers against women may be removed is the revision of

the old Prison Act in 2007, enabling women to rise to the highest levels in the Correctional Services. Currently, the language of most existing policies assumes the employee is male. Employees in flexi and part-time work arrangements are excluded from the Performance Management Process (PMP) effectively leaving them out of considerations for pay increment and promotions. A GESI policy will need to set out principles to guide the review of policies and the formulation of future ones to ensure appropriate considerations.

Thirdly, technical capacity to integrate gender and disability analysis into planning, programming, monitoring, and evaluation is low across the government. Linked to capacity is the inconsistency in availability of sex-disaggregated data across the government and the lack of technical capacity to undertake gender and disability analysis of existing data. Relatedly, there are no systems in place within the government to track the allocation or expenditures of financial resources associated with gender and disability mainstreaming in government. This GESI policy aims to address the gaps identified above.

1.4 Imperatives and Rationale for advancing gender equality and social inclusion

Gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) continue to be central themes in global treaties, covenants, and declarations because they are acknowledged as catalysts to people-centred development. When properly implemented GESI strategies bring about result in poverty reduction, improved standard of living, and good governance. By ensuring that men and women and persons with disabilities participate and have equal voices in decision-making and policy implementation, GESI strategies promote the full use of the nation's potentials to address its challenges. On the other hand, failure to address the discriminatory aspects of policies and processes in all sectors will impede efforts to realize the National Development Strategy (NDS) objectives and international development goals, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

At the level of the Public Service, a GESI policy is required to build the system that will result in a workplace that promotes equality and values individual differences. This is a core aspect of building a positive workplace which creates a high-performance environment and encourages innovation and creativity. A gender

equitable and socially inclusive workforce will be able to better understand and support the various needs of everyone in the community and nation, leading to improved service delivery. Embracing GESI ethics, leadership and values provides public officers with a unique foundation from which to role model these values back to the community influencing family, homes, schools and social and sporting environments.

1.5 Scope and Application of the GESI Policy

The Solomon Islands Public Service is the focus of this GESI policy and as such its scope and application will be confined to all employees of the Solomon Islands Government at all levels and in all cadres (including advisers and consultants). This policy is not intended to replace other key SIG national policies and strategies on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment and Disability Inclusion, but rather to complement and work alongside them to achieve Gender Equality and Social Inclusion within the Solomon Islands Public Service, as a means to deliver services to citizens in more holistic and effective manner.

PART 2: Policy Framework

Purpose, Principles, Objectives, Priority Actions and Targets

2.1 Purpose and principles

The overall purpose of the policy is to promote gender equality and social inclusion. Since GESI demands that equal opportunities and considerations be given to men, women and persons with disabilities, the policy recognizes that special measures may need to be adopted for the achievement of gender equality and social inclusion.

The Solomon Islands Public Service GESI Policy aims to establish a clear guide for developing and revising laws, policies, procedures and practices in the public service. The guidance is to ensure non-discrimination, equal rights, opportunities

and well-being of women, men and persons with disabilities in all ministries and structures of the nation's workforce.

The guiding principles of the policy are grouped under seven thematic areas below:

As an organization the Public Service commits to:

Gender Equality & Social Inclusion Responsive Governance and Corporate Planning

Ensuring all governing public service frameworks are fair, non-discriminatory and gender equitable and socially inclusive.

Recruitment and Induction

Ensuring that recruitment and selection processes are done in a gender fair, non-discriminatory and unbiased manner that guarantees a diverse workforce

Terms of Employment /Flexible working /family life balance

Ensuring equitable employment terms, conditions and remuneration for all employees, a safe working environment, and flexible arrangements that promote work and family life balance.

Promotions/ pay increment/performance management

Conducting performance management, promotion and incremental awards fairly, transparently and without discrimination.

Women's Leadership

Achieving gender balance (50/50) in the appointment of Permanent Secretaries, Deputy Secretaries and HRMs and other senior executive positions across the Public Service.

Adopting special measures and programmes to increase women's representation, especially in positions and sectors dominated by men in the public service

Staff Training and Learning

Providing equal training and learning opportunities that is accessible for all employees, whether males, females and persons with disabilities.

Staff discipline/Code of Conduct, including sexual harassment

Promoting a culture of respect for all (male and females, persons with disabilities), establishing effective and confidential systems for reporting, protecting victims and responding to abuses of any type; and ensuring zero tolerance of sexual and other forms of harassment, violence and intimidation in the workplace.

2.2 GESI ISSUES, OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS IN THEMATIC AREAS

The key GESI issues in the public service have been considered under seven thematic areas outlined below, yielding the related objectives and actions.

2. 2.1 Governance and Corporate Planning

A public service that is well represented by the population it serves is crucial for a people centred development service delivery and outcomes. The governance and corporate planning frameworks that shape this thematic area are the Public Service Act, Public Service Commission Regulations, Public Service Orders, Solomon Islands Public Transformation Strategy, subsidiary Acts of Parliament mandated by line ministries and government sectoral Corporate Plans/National Strategic Plans. Most of the governance and Corporate Planning Frameworks are not Gender responsive and Socially Inclusive. When such institutional frameworks are not responsive to gender and social inclusion, the meaningful engagements of women and men and persons with disabilities are not prioritised.

There is also the need to build gender and social inclusion capacity and awareness across the public service to enable employees' mainstream gender and disability effectively. The low capacity for gender and disability mainstreaming, gender and disability data collection and governance and financial management are issues that need to be addressed at the governance and corporate planning level.

Objective 1: Establish Gender Responsive and Socially Inclusive Governance and Corporate Planning Frameworks

Actions:

- i. Amendments in the Public Service Bill to be GESI responsive.
- ii. Review the Public Service Orders with inclusion of circulars to be gender responsive and socially inclusive.
- iii. Ministries and agencies to review and incorporate gender equality and social inclusion components in their governance and corporate planning frameworks.
- vi. Ministries and agencies to develop own GESI Strategy with budget.
- v. The MPS to strengthen the capacity of gender focal points in all ministries to enable them to support and build staff capacity in gender and social inclusive technical skills.
- vi. Set up a system for consistent data collection and management for gender and Social Inclusion analysis, monitoring and evaluation
- vii. MPS to establish human resources management disability support services
- viii. MPS to make specific budgetary provision for the Gender Focal Point Network activities

2.2.2 Recruitment & Induction

The recruitment and induction process in the public service is the gateway for entry and familiarization of employees. Among the policies and laws that impact this thematic area are the General Orders, the Public Service Commission Regulations, the Recruitment and Selection Guidelines, the Employment Act, the Labour Act and the National Constitution as well as the Solomon Islands National Disability Inclusive Development (SINDID) Policy 2023-2031. The SINDIDP objective 14 (b) promotes the employment persons with disabilities across sectors and provide reasonable accommodation. Women and persons with disabilities are often discriminated against in the recruitment process. For instance, the wording of job advertisements, the composition of interview panels and their prejudiced

attitudes often make it more difficult for women and persons with disabilities to be hired. Pregnant women face additional recruitment challenges as they are often passed over in the selection process. The experiences of older workers are also being missed out due to the early retirement age of 55.

Objective 2: Achieve gender equitable and socially inclusive recruitment and Induction process

Actions:

- i. Reflect the principles for non-discrimination against women and persons with disabilities through clear statements in job adverts, encouraging them to apply.
- ii. Create gender responsive and socially inclusive waiting areas for candidates.
- iii. Use new technology and appropriate networks to ensure that advertisements and other recruitment processes can reach and are accessible to persons with disabilities, and explicitly encourage them to apply.
- iv. Membership of all recruitment panels to be gender- balanced and at the minimum, a ratio of 60:40 of either gender.
- v. Institute (temporary) Affirmative Action in favour of females in previously male dominated roles. (E.g. Correctional services, Lands surveyors, Civil Engineers, middle management and leadership roles).
- vi. Induction framework for every employee must include GESI awareness training (Code of conduct on discrimination and sexual harassment; Complaints mechanism for any GESI issues; Disciplinary mechanism and punishment for breach of rules and regulations).
- vii. Review upward the age of retirement from 55 to 60 years to tap more from the experience and institutional knowledge of older workers.

2.2.3. Terms of employment/ flexible working/ family life balance

The following are existing legislations and policies within the Public Service that provide guides for this thematic area: General Orders; Employment Act; Labour

Act; Public Service Act; the Family Protection Act; and the Child and Family Welfare Act. The Labour Act makes some good considerations related to maternity. It provides for a paid maternity leave of 12 weeks and prohibits the worker's dismissal during that period. If medically indicated, there is the possibility of a paid extension of maternity leave, the length of which is based on a doctor's advice. Upon resumption from maternity leave, there is a provision of two one- hour nursing periods for new mothers during the workday.

However, there are other GESI issues that need to be addressed under this thematic area. Among them is that the Labour Act (Cap 73) Section 40 prohibits women from working in mines, unless they are in management positions. Pregnant women who are still on probation have their salaries ceased during maternity leave. New fathers do not get leave time to bond with their babies and support their spouses after childbirth. Adoptive parents do not get any parental leave to settle in their new babies. Compassionate leave is deducted from annual leave which is unfair since annual leave is a different kind of leave earned by officers to go on vacation and rest from the stress of work. Infrastructure, buildings Office space and facilities and conventional working hours do not accommodate the needs of persons with disabilities and care-giving responsibilities.

Objective 3: Achieve gender equitable and socially inclusive terms of employment and work/life balance

Actions:

- i. Review the Labour Act to give women equal opportunity for employment in all sectors and levels, remove discrimination against pregnant women and protect them from dismissal.
- ii. Establish paternity leave of two weeks to enable fathers' bond with their new babies and support their spouses after childbirth.
- iii. Grant adoptive parents a one month paid leave to settle in their new baby
- iv. Set a requirement in accordance with universal design principles that new office spaces and facilities be wheel-chair accessible and provide support services considerate of other forms of disability. For old buildings, consider

reasonable accommodation ways to remodel them to ensure disability access.

- v. Encourage use of new technology to enhance access and the recruitment of more persons with disabilities.
- vi. Set up care rooms and nursery spaces (for breastfeeding mothers and care-giving fathers) in all ministries and public buildings.
- vii. Set out compassionate leave and specify 'care givers leave' as a sub-component of sick leave, calculated separately from the annual leave.
- viii. Adopt flexible working hours for women and men and persons with disabilities.

2.2.4 Promotions/ pay increment/ performance management

The policies governing this thematic area include the Performance Management Process (PMP); the Code of Conduct; and the Attendance Management Policy (AMP).

Issues:

The implementation of the PMP is patchy and promotion and increments are not adequately tied to performance. The PMP does not capture employees on part time and flexi work arrangements which means that those on non-standard employment are often missed out on key considerations for promotions and pay increment.

The Permanent Secretaries' performance contract has a requirement for gender mainstreaming as a key result area but those are yet to be implemented and reported on. Senior managers, including Human Resources managers do not have GESI KPIs to enable appropriate gender mainstreaming and support to the PSs.

Objective 4: Achieve gender equitable and socially inclusive promotions and pay increment based on fair performance management process

Actions:

- i. Performance Management Policy (PMP) to have a clear and documented process through which performance is assessed and promotion and pay increments awarded.
- ii. Incorporate flexi, short term attachments, job rotations, part time jobs, casual jobs in the PMP so that employees in those arrangements can have salary increments and promotion.
- iii. Implement the agreed GESI Key Performance Indicators of Permanent Secretaries and ensure there are clearly defined targets.
- iv. Develop GESI KPIs for Senior Managers (including the Human Resource Managers) with objectives from the main thematic areas in this Policy, with clearly defined targets.
- v. Review the PMP template to include GESI objectives.

2.2.5 Women's Leadership and decision-making positions

Some of the key instruments governing this thematic area include the National Development Strategy 2016-2035, the National Gender Equality and Women's Development Policy 2021 -2027 and CEDAW as well as CRPD.

The issues under this thematic area are underlined by there being only less than 40 per cent women compared to more than 50 per cent men in leadership level positions in the public service, such as Permanent Secretary, Deputy Secretary, and middle management. There is a wide gap in income between men and women in similar roles in the public service, due to unequal training opportunities and entrenched gender bias including in the use of the PMP. This is in addition to the cultural bias (which places men as decision-makers) and other inequalities that subordinate women. Policies, budgets and programme are not gender responsive in many sectors and ministries, and implementation is dependent on the attitude of implementing officers. Sexual harassment is high in the workplace, affecting women's career prospects and their share of decision-making positions as suggested by Anecdotal evidence. Such situation results in Privileges and promotions are skewed in favour of men.

Objective 5: Promote women’s leadership and decision-making positions in the public service

Actions:

- i. Provide enhanced access to training for women for at all levels and cadres and for persons with disabilities to fast-track higher qualification.
- ii. Create temporary special measures (TSM) to increase the numbers of women leaders, for example, providing access for emerging women supervisors and leaders (through acting and supervising positions) to get into top positions; and have gender balance in the top two positions in each ministry (when PS is male, the DS will be female and vice versa). The TSM is to lapse when parity has been achieved.
- iii. Ensure budget to create awareness of TSM and the support required for dedicated programs.
- iv. Focus the HR succession planning process on developing a pipeline of women to take on leadership roles.
- v. Institute gender balance in all decision- making panels and boards.
- vi. Strengthen the PMP for regular performance appraisal & competence assessment and use it to capture and reward the competencies of women and persons with disabilities.

2.2.6 Staff training/ Learning

Some of the instruments currently governing staff training and learning include: the Public Service Act; General Orders Chapter N; Human Resource Development Plan; Public Service in- Service Training Policy; Education Act; Solomon Islands Tertiary Education Scholarship Authority; and the various Ministerial In-house training guidelines/policies.

Among the key GESI issues under this thematic area is unequal training opportunities for male and female workers in the public service. Statistics from the MPS training unit show that between 2013 and 2017, women received a total average of 30% of all training slots, with 70% going to men. This has consequences for career progression for women. Even in the phrasing of training

needs, the language of the General Orders (chapter N, section 204, subsection 2) assumes that the worker is a male. Also, some training facilities are gender insensitive. For example, the training arrangements by the Ministry of Infrastructure Development (MID) expect male and female officers to share same sleeping spaces when on internship in big boats.

Objective 6: Institute gender and social inclusion-responsive equal opportunity and access to staff training and development

Actions:

- i. All SIG Ministries to develop a Human Resource Development Plan that are gender- responsive and socially inclusive and ensures equal and accessible opportunities are given to men and women and persons with disabilities. HRMs to be trained on how to develop and implement the HRD plans.
- ii. Selections for trainings to adopt affirmative action, especially in sectors with wide gender disparities.
- iii. MPS to collaborate with IPAM to develop a training plan to accelerate the progression of women, especially female employees in middle management by filling any gaps in required competencies for leadership positions.
- iv. Incorporate GESI principles in MPS training policy.

2.2.7 Staff discipline/ Code of conduct, including sexual harassment

The existing policies and laws that govern discipline, conduct and sexual harassment in the public service include but are not limited to the following: Public Service Code of Conduct; the Family Protection Act 2014; and the Penal Code Amendment (Sexual Offences).

Issues: The existing instruments have to some extent supported the management of gender equality and social inclusion on matters of discipline and conduct such as elimination of discrimination in disciplinary proceedings. However, the Public Service General Orders and the Public Service Commission Regulation do not have a provision on sexual harassment. The Code of Conduct (section 2.5) recognizes sexual harassment as serious misconduct but does not provide appropriate response and reporting protocols such as confidentiality. In its current state, the

CoC is therefore not an effective instrument to guide conduct, address sexual harassment and protect victims.

Another level of challenge is that sexual harassment cases are rarely reported due to stigma and fear of further intimidation and job loss. This is especially a concern where those involved are officers holding decision making positions at the top level. Moreover, cultural barriers such as 'wantok' ¹system is often a force that challenges effecting appropriate disciplinary actions and decisions in the public service.

Under the current disciplinary process, the timeframe between when a misconduct is reported, and the delivery of the final disciplinary decision is outrageously long. This is challenging for both the victim and the accused. For the victim, the long wait for justice represents additional torture. For the accused, the suspension pending investigations and decision is without pay so, they may suffer unduly.

The Code of Conduct and General Orders need to draw down from the provisions of the Family Protection Act and be strengthened to make them effective in combating sexual harassment and abuse at all levels.

Objective 7: Establish gender-responsive and social inclusive response to and zero tolerance of sexual harassment in the workplace

Actions:

- i. Adopt clear definition of Sexual Harassment and set out disciplinary procedures and penalties in the Code of Conduct.
- ii. Set up gender-responsive and social inclusive reporting procedures, systems and committee for sexual harassment cases (confidentiality, protection of victims, timeframes for decisions not exceeding two weeks, whistleblowing policy etc).

¹ The 'wantok' is a cultural requirement that people favour members of the clan group irrespective of the situation.

- iii. Set up support systems and protection for victims of sexual harassment.
- iv. Include modules on sexual harassment in any GESI training or HR related training.
- v. Inclusion of Sexual Harassment in the Public Service Bill as an offence with serious penalties – not impacted by customary (traditional) reconciliation.
- vi. Incorporate modules on gender and social inclusion and sexual harassment in IPAM trainings.
- vii. Design a computer based, and self-phased/self-completed/online course on gender and social inclusion awareness and code of conduct to serve as refreshers for public service employees every two years.
- viii. Use and communicate strong messaging and images across the public service and general public to reinforce the goal of zero tolerance of sexual harassment in the Public Service. To affect this message a target is proposed that by 2026 there is a 100% rate of cases of sexual harassment reported and disciplined.
- ix. Offer paid leave to victims of sexual harassment and domestic violence (in alignment with the FPA 2014) to support their recovery.

2.3 Priority Actions and Targets

The priority actions and targets for the GESI Policy tie in with the Solomon Islands Public Transformation Strategy (2023-2033). The mid-point review of the GESI policy will be in 2027. The GFP Network annual learning meetings recommendations will serve as additional push to measure progress towards achievement of the goals of this policy.

2.3.1 GESI Responsive Governance and Corporate Plan Reviews and Approvals

The main priority target undergirding this policy is that key legislations, policies and plans governing public service procedures, processes and practices will be reviewed by 2025 to ensure compliance with the GESI policy and principles (outlined in section 2.1 of this policy document).

By 2026, approval of all ministries' corporate plans and programmes will be contingent upon evidence of considerations made for gender equality and social inclusion.

By 2026, all ministries must have GESI action plans with budgets attached to them

2.3.2 Recruitment & Induction

Temporary Affirmative Action in favour of females will be instituted in previously male dominated roles. (e.g. Correctional services, Lands surveyors, civil engineers, middle management and leadership roles) with the sign-off of this policy in 2025 until gender parity (50:50) is achieved in the public service.

By 2026, the induction framework for every officer must include GESI awareness training (which comprise the Code of conduct on discrimination and sexual harassment; Complaints and Disciplinary mechanism for breach of rules and other regulations).

2.3.3 Terms of employment/ flexible working/ family life balance

Paternity leave of two weeks will be established by 2025.

Flexible hours and arrangements will be adopted and offered on request to both women and men and persons with disabilities by 2025.

2.3.4 Promotions/ pay increment/ performance management

By 2025, the Performance Management Policy will be the key performance measure for promotions and pay increment.

By 2025, staff promotion will be contingent upon an agreed minimum level of GESI awareness and analysis.

2.3.5 Women's Leadership

From the sign-off of this policy in 2025, the public service will use the PMP to promote at least 20% women to upper segments of level and increment annually.

The Ministry of Public service will collaborate with IPAM and other stakeholders to design a programme and provide enhanced access to training to fast-track higher qualification for women and persons with disabilities by 2025.

2.3.6 Staff training/ Learning

By 2026, IPAM will incorporate gender, Social Inclusion, TSM and sexual harassment modules in its trainings.

By 2026, all SIG Ministries must have a Human Resource Development Plan that is gender & socially inclusive and a well-resourced gender focal person capable of supporting the ministry's sectoral gender analysis and capacity building.

2.3.7 Staff discipline/ Code of conduct, including sexual harassment

By 2024, the MPS will complete a study on sexual harassment in the public service and use the results to develop a policy of zero tolerance to ensure prevention, protection and appropriate response.

By 2025, the MPS will issue a Sexual Harassment Policy with clear definition of sexual harassment, protection for victims, disciplinary procedures and penalties and consistent with relevant legislations.

PART 3: Policy Strategies and Institutional Framework for implementation

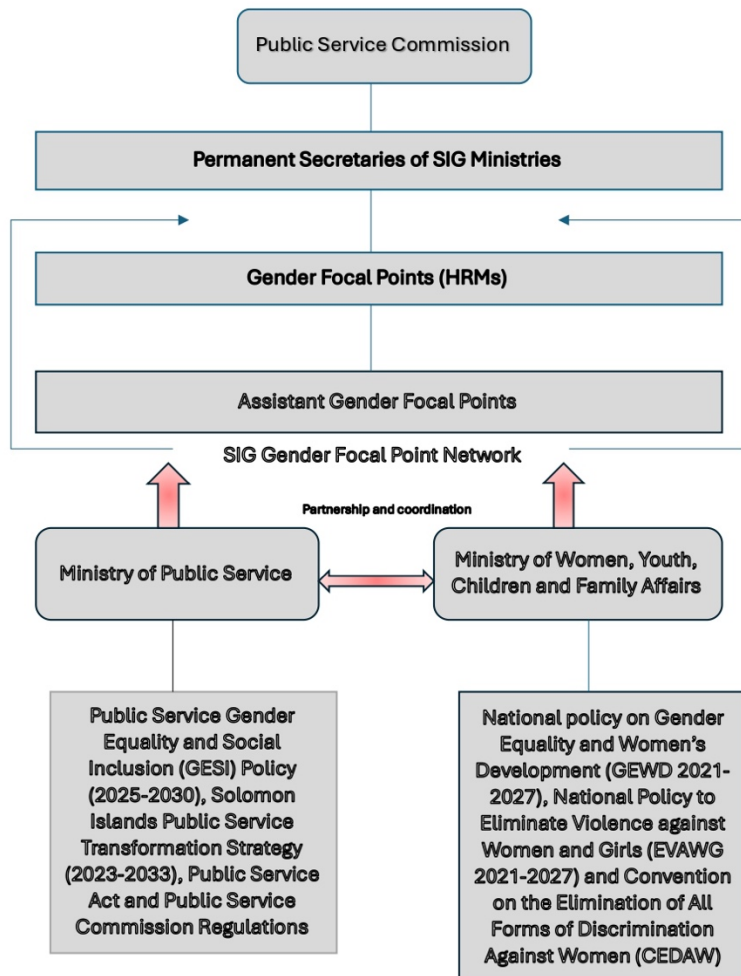
3.1 Broad Strategies, Operational Mechanisms and Institutional Arrangements

Actualizing the GESI policy will require a twin-track approach of gender mainstreaming and focus on special measures. The broad strategies for implementing the GESI policy include policy and programme reviews and reforms; gender capacity building; affirmative action; networks and partnership strengthening; research, monitoring and learning.

A whole- of- government approach to gender mainstreaming and social inclusion shall be pursued. The Public Service Commission will assume overall responsibility for the implementation of this policy. Each ministry, led by the Permanent Secretary and supported by its Gender Focal Persons/Team, will be expected to take ownership in ensuring actions and resources for policy implementation within its mandate area. The MPS will collaborate with the MWYCFA to build the capacity of the GFPs at the initial stage. Subsequently, engendering sector policies, redefining partnership arrangements and re-designing service delivery and other programmes will be expected to be undertaken by each ministry and its partners, with reports to the Public Service Commission.

The MPS and MWYCFA will collaborate to build a strong Gender Focal Point Network to ensure mutual support and additional resources for the GFPs. A manager with the primary role of supporting the coordination of the Network and GESI activities, will be based in the MPS. The Network will coordinate GESI activities across ministries and be a learning and sharing hub for the GFPs. The Network will organize half-yearly meetings for GFPs and ministries to share and learn from their achievements and challenges. The Network will create and implement an annual GESI scorecard for evaluating all ministries on set criteria and agreed targets. Based on the evaluation, good performers will be recognized and rewarded accordingly, thereby incentivizing and promoting good practices.

Structure of the Institutional Framework for Implementation



Strategies and expected outcomes

Strategies	Expected outcomes
Policy and programme reviews and reforms	Mainstreaming of gender concerns across sectors and at all levels
GESI capacity building	Technical expertise and appropriate tools and instruments for sectoral analysis and sustained GESI responsive development
Affirmative action and other (temporary) measures	Acceleration of gender parity at all levels of the public service, especially at high decision-making positions
Communication, networks and partnerships strengthening	Information, resources and support for on-going learning and sharing
Research, monitoring and learning	Knowledge and reliable sex disaggregated data and indicators

Policy and programme reviews and Reforms

The aim of the policy and programme reviews is to achieve alignment with the principles and objectives of the GESI policy. The outcome will be the mainstreaming of gender and social inclusion concerns across sectors and at all levels. The MWYCFA is the lead agency for supporting gender mainstreaming in SIG and it has already produced a Gender Mainstreaming Strategy to guide all ministries. The Ministry of Health Medical Services (MHMS) is the lead ministry co-ordinating disability mainstreaming in SIG with the SINDIDP. Each ministry has the primary responsibility to ensure that it complies in a timely manner to effect the reviews. This will be part of the reporting for each ministry.

Gender Equality and Social Inclusion capacity building

GESI capacity building is a core strategy to provide the technical expertise and appropriate tools and instruments for sectoral analysis and sustained gender responsive and social inclusive development. The GESI policy requires every public service employee to have at least a basic gender and social inclusion awareness capacity. Depending on their levels and roles, a higher capacity will be required

and will be the basis for promotion. Managers and employees in senior positions would be expected to have adequate GESI capacity to enable them to analyse, design and implement programmes that meet the highest standards of GESI responsiveness.

Building GESI capacity will follow the MWYCFA Gender Mainstreaming Strategy. In line with that strategy, the GFPs in ministries will be a core to build from. The GFPs will then support the ministries in building staff capacity, especially in relation to the basic gender and social inclusive awareness and Code of Conduct training and on-going induction of new hires. IPAM will coordinate and deliver the more structured and higher-level modules such as sectoral analysis and GESI budgeting.

Communication, networks and partnerships strengthening

Strategic communication, building and strengthening networks and partnerships are important strategies for the policy. Internal and external communications will be geared towards building broad based understanding and support for the principles of the GESI. The Public Service Commission and the MPS will network and collaborate with other institutions such as the Police and Prison Services Commission (PPSC), Justice and Legal Service Commission (JLSC), Leadership Code Commission (LCC), Office of the Ombudsman of Solomon Islands (OOSI), and the Office of the Auditor- General (OAG). Male participation in advocacy, design and implementation of activities related to this policy is critical for success.

Communication is key to building the requisite alliances with men across the public service, especially with those in top decision-making positions. Networks, especially the GFPs across ministries, will be equipped and strengthened to enable them to be a source of mutual support for GFPs while providing sustained support to other team members. Partnerships with local, national and international groups and donors will also be strengthened and built for additional resources, learning and sharing related to GESI and development.

Research, monitoring, evaluation and learning

Research, monitoring, evaluation and learning will produce knowledge, reliable sex disaggregated data and indicators for progress. Research outcomes help to demystify the norms and practices that sustain inequality and exclusion. The policy recognises research as an important source of data for validating and providing more context to the data gathered from more regular and routine procedures. The GFPs will be important hubs for data collection within ministries. Some basic systems for monitoring and evaluation of implementation already exist such as the Annual Reports. Using those systems consistently to generate data and turning the data into action and learning are critical for achieving the goals of this policy. It is envisaged that existing Annual reporting systems can add the progress of the GESI policy targets to its monitoring and evaluation. The GFP Network will have half-yearly learning meetings to review activities and share learning on GESI across the whole of government. The Network will also provide the forum for agreeing on areas that need further research.

In sum, the core strategies for achieving the objectives of the Public Service GESI Policy include:

- I. Review of existing legislations, policies, orders and processes to ensure the mainstreaming of gender and social inclusion concerns at all levels;
- II. Gender and Social Inclusion awareness and capacity building across the public service to enhance necessary technical expertise and positive gender and social inclusive culture;
- III. Strengthening the gender focal points structure across all ministries to ensure support and compliance for gender and disability mainstreaming and implementation;
- IV. Affirmative action and (temporary) measures to promote women's leadership and participation in the public service.

3.2 Policy Performance and Impact Assessment

The effective performance of this policy is dependent on the level of financial and human resources allocated to its implementation and the monitoring and evaluation process. An annual scorecard evaluation of the performance of each ministry will be the initial policy performance measure. The scorecard will be developed and implemented by the Gender Focal Point Network. The first scorecard measure will be at the end of 2025.

The targets set in this policy are among the key performance measures for the mid-point review. One of the key measures will be the GFP Network annual learning meetings recommendations. The mid-point assessment of this GESI policy progress will therefore be in 2027. Based on the 2027 mid-point assessment, new targets will be set for the next years until 2030. The major review for this policy will be 2030 at its fifth-year mark.

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