**Manual for Gender Units of Ministries of Labor**

**“ABC for their creation and operation”**

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This Manual was produced jointly with the Gender Units or areas of the Ministries of Labor of the Americas, through Hemispheric Dialogues of the OAS Inter-American Network for Labor Administration (RIAL) held in 2021. It is a tangible product of the collaboration and solidarity between the gender focal points of said Ministries.

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A special thanks to the directors and staff of the Gender Units and areas for their valuable comments, made both in writing and during the Dialogues, which allowed us to improve and finalize this Manual. We hope that it will be a useful and effective tool to support the creation and strengthen the operation of the Gender Units and areas in the Ministries of Labor of the Americas in order to achieve gender equality in the world of work.

# INTRODUCTION

The Executive Secretariat for Integral Development of the OAS is pleased to present this Manual for Gender Units, which is part of a long journey to support the institutionalization of gender in the Ministries of Labor of the Americas.

**Background**

Since the XII Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labor (IACML) held in 2001, the Ministers of Labor of the Americas have assumed a growing commitment to mainstreaming and institutionalizing gender within the operations, policies, and programs of their Ministries to achieve gender equality in the labor market. The XV IACML of the OAS (2007) consolidated these efforts through the approval of a set of strategic guidelines to move toward gender equality within the framework of decent work.

To comply with the agreements of the 2007 Conference, the Technical Secretariat of the IACML conducted a study on the institutionalization of a gender approach in the Ministries of Labor. This study described the different types of offices, units, or committees that addressed gender within the Ministries. This provided the IACML with a hemispheric overview of the progress pertaining to the institutionalization of a gender approach in the Ministries of Labor of the Americas, while also including the strengths and weaknesses of the processes and the most notable results of their efforts. The purpose was to identify strategic areas of intervention, specifically through the Inter-American Network for Labor Administration (RIAL). Since then, the RIAL and the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) have coordinated different efforts to guide the Ministries in that direction, including technical studies, participatory gender audits, regional and sub-regional workshops, and bilateral cooperation activities, among others.

Recently, and in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the RIAL/OAS and the CIM organized the First Hemispheric Dialogue among gender units or areas from the Ministries of Labor of the Americas. It was a space to exchange experiences and reflect on emerging issues and challenges regarding gender equality in light of the health and economic crisis. Participants identified key topics to continue cooperation and training. One of these was the need to have a manual to guide the work of existing Specialized Gender Units within the Ministries of Labor, as well as for the institutions that were in the process of establishing these units.

As a response to this request, the Technical Secretariat of the IACML is pleased to provide the Ministries of Labor with this Manual. It is intended to be a consultation tool that guides key institutional strengthening actions that support the objectives of gender equality in the world of work.

**How did the Manual come to life?**

To develop this Manual, the Technical Secretariat consulted the results of the studies published in 2009 and 2021 by the IACML,[[1]](#footnote-1) which shed light on the strengths and weaknesses of the gender units and their evolution throughout a decade. Therefore, this Manual takes into account the main needs of these units to continue making progress in institutionalizing and mainstreaming a gender approach in the various institutions of the labor sphere: Ministries, Secretariats, and Departments.

The process of developing this document also included consulting other manuals that specifically address the issue, in particular, decrees and/or ordinances for the creation of gender units from various countries in the region.[[2]](#footnote-2) The Participatory Gender Diagnostics conducted by some Ministries of Labor in the region —which were documented in the RIAL/OAS study on the issue[[3]](#footnote-3)— also provided significant input to develop this Manual.

Finally, the Technical Secretariat consulted the Gender Units of the Ministries of Labor. The Units enriched the Manual through written comments and remarks during the 3rd Virtual Dialogue on gender between the Ministries of Labor, held in November 2021 specifically for this purpose.

**What does the Manual include?**

The Manual consists of different sections that provide arguments in favor of creating gender units where they do not yet exist, while providing guidelines to strengthen the work that has already begun. In this regard, the Manual includes different approaches to institutionalize gender, definitions of the gender units, conditions to ensure that they operate properly, as well as functions, lines of action, and objectives. At the end, the Manual includes a Plan of Action template to mainstream a gender approach in the Ministries of Labor.

# JUSTIFICATION OF THE EXISTENCE AND CREATION OF SPECIALIZED GENDER UNITS

The Beijing Platform for Action (1995) provides a regulatory framework that promotes the creation of institutional mechanisms for gender equality, and it gives “all ministries the mandate to review policies and programmes from a gender perspective and in the light of the Platform for Action; locate the responsibility for the implementation of that mandate at the highest possible level; establish and/or strengthen an inter-ministerial coordination structure to carry out this mandate, to monitor progress and to network with relevant machineries.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

Different international conferences have subsequently stressed the need to support the inclusion of a gender equality perspective in all political spheres and government levels to ensure that they analyze the possible effects of this approach on women and men.[[5]](#footnote-5) The Montevideo Strategy, in turn, includes measures that redefine the State’s role in gender policies insofar as they require the commitment and active participation of the sectoral ministries and the planning and budget entities, among other stakeholders.[[6]](#footnote-6)

In 2015, the 193 UN Member States approved the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a roadmap toward a new development paradigm. The 2030 Agenda has 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), which were envisioned as a universal call to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure peace and prosperity for all by 2030. All of these goals are interrelated, recognizing that actions in one area affect the results in others; and that balancing environmental, economic, and social sustainability is key for development. However, certain goals directly impact gender equality in the labor sphere.

Goal 5, *Gender Equality,* indicates that “although there are more women than ever in the labour market, there are still large inequalities in some regions, with women systematically denied the same work rights as men. Sexual violence and exploitation, the unequal division of unpaid care and domestic work, and discrimination in public office all remain huge barriers.”

The world is facing rising inequalities and a shortage of jobs to absorb the labor force. In light of this, Goal 8, *Decent Work and Economic Growth* warns that slow economic growth will only exacerbate these two aspects. Moreover, the goal is to achieve full and productive employment, and decent work for all women and men by 2030.

At the same time, SDG 10, *Reduce Inequalities,* calls stakeholders to halt the increase of income inequality at the global level by adopting “sound policies to empower lower-income earners, and promote economic inclusion of all regardless of sex, race, or ethnicity”.

Likewise, the Gender Units share a broader theoretical framework that provides an understanding of the challenges resulting from the intersection of marginalized identities. Subsequently, including intersectionality as a tool for critical analysis is crucial for assessing and developing policies since it addresses multiple discriminations. This approach sheds light on how different sets of identities affect access to rights and opportunities.

# institutionalizing gender: the different approaches

International regulations and the continuous efforts of women’s movements since the 1990s enabled the integration of a gender approach in the work of the States in the region, thus permeating the political will of the governments. Every country has created mechanisms for women’s advancement, whether these are women’s ministries or offices. The degree of institutionality of these entities differs; however, they all promote mainstreaming a gender approach in public institutions as a strategy to include this perspective in the different levels and stages of the development, execution, and evaluation of public policies to achieve significant equality.

Mainstreaming gender in an institution’s structures and actions requires an appropriate institutional structure. In other words, the institutionalization of a gender approach that makes this a “common” practice that permeates the entire institution. For this to occur, it is important to promote changes by incorporating the gender perspective in the institutions’ policies, programs, and projects. But it goes one step further: this approach must also be integrated into the institution’s organizational culture, everyday social interactions, internal and external communications, and the services provided to citizens.

These intentions have led to the creation of various types of gender entities within the institutions. The different institutional approaches used thus far vary; these include gender equity and/or equality units, specialized departments, focal points, and gender committees or commissions. The goal of these is to coordinate and monitor the actions of the different units and entities to establish internal and external gender equality and equity actions. The hierarchical position of these agencies differs depending on the type of institution they belong to—Ministry, Sub-Secretariat, or Department—and whether they have the necessary professional staff and resources.

Institutionalizing gender is a necessary and complementary step to mainstream a gender equality approach in every State policy, program, and project. This, however, has not been and is not an easy process. Fortunately, the majority of States in the region have some type of agency that addresses the issue in every sector. In this sense, the Ministries of Labor have played a key role in the process.

The aforementioned 2009 study, “The Institutionalization of a Gender Approach in the Ministries of Labor of the Americas”, identified the existing mechanisms to mainstream a gender equality approach in the Ministries of Labor. The study also concluded that the majority of these entities had a gender unit, focal point, commission, or tripartite committee that addressed this issue. Generally speaking, the degree of institutionalization of these mechanisms to mainstream a gender approach diverged. In some cases, they focused more on implementing activities to support women directly, rather than on developing cross-cutting actions in the policies, programs, and projects that could challenge the system and the gender gaps in the labor market.

The second study, published in 2021 by the IACML Technical Secretariat,[[7]](#footnote-7) was an opportunity to analyze the evolution of these mechanisms and confirm that they are stronger and have been growing. Some Ministries have expanded the competencies of the Specialized Gender Units, even improving their place in the organizational structure, which allows them to have greater influence in the processes to develop policies, programs, and projects. All of these actions promote the mainstreaming of the gender approach in the institution.

# specialized gender unitS: how do we define them?

To conduct the above-mentioned studies, the Technical Secretariat sent questionnaires to gather information on the institutionalization of the gender equality approach in the Ministries of Labor of the region. One of the questions pertained to the mission of the Gender Units. In some cases, when explaining the Mission, there was a tendency to list the functions and/or activities of the organization, for example: “Assess and monitor public policies, implement regulations, participate in inter-sectoral committees, awareness-raising, and provide services to foster the compliance of women’s labor rights”. Another tendency was to include a brief description of the main purpose: “Mainstream a gender approach in the policies and programs of the Ministries of Labor”.

Units define their mission in specific ways; these definitions are important because the purpose or raison d'être of the units establishes what they intend to achieve in a specific context. As a result, these become a framework that guides their decisions and a type of roadmap that allows the units to operate in a coherent manner.

The Mission statement is a fundamental compass that sets the stage to make decisions, generate strategies, and designate resources in a coherent way that is relevant to the Unit’s objectives.

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| **Definitions of the mission of the Specialized Gender Units: generic examples**  The “Joint resolution between the Ministry of Public Administration and the Ministry of Women that stipulates the creation of the Gender Equality Units in the public sector” in the Dominican Republic, indicates the following: “The gender equality units are defined as the units that internally advise public entities on incorporating and mainstreaming a gender equality approach in the development, execution, monitoring, and evaluation of institutional policies, plans, programs, projects, and budgets. These units will also provide information disaggregated by gender to measure the progress in meeting indicators of results and impacts pertaining to the institution’s duties and related to the strategic areas of the National Development Strategy and the SDGs.”[[8]](#footnote-8)  Article 2 of the Decree to Create Gender Equality Units and the National Network of Gender Equality Units in Costa Rica establishes that: “The objective of the gender equality units will be to promote the inclusion of a gender equality and equity approach in the institution’s actions, as well as to guide, strengthen, and monitor the actions related to the implementation of the policy on gender equity and equality.”[[9]](#footnote-9)  The Nuevo León Women’s Institute in Mexico indicates the Mission of the Gender Units: “This is the leading authority that creates, fosters, and executes public policies on equal opportunities between men and women. It promotes non-discrimination and equity between genders, decision-making, and affirmative actions to ensure the full exercise of women’s and men’s rights.”[[10]](#footnote-10)  Gender Units: entities created by the Federal Public Administration, also known as Gender Equality Units. These are mechanisms that promote and implement an institutional and organizational culture with a gender equality and non-discrimination approach. They also foster the inclusion of this approach into the design, programming, budget, execution, and evaluation of institutional public policies.[[11]](#footnote-11)  The Manual for the Job Descriptions of the Gender Equality Unit of the Ministry of Labor and Social Security of El Salvador provides a definition for the Unit’s Mission: Support, develop, design, coordinate, accompany, promote, and disseminate policies, strategies, and actions to include a gender approach in the planning, execution, and evaluation of the Ministry’s work. These efforts will take place based on current legal and administrative stipulations and national and international provisions in favor of female workers, and on the National Policy on Women and other policies concerning the protection of women’s rights, especially in the labor sphere, to achieve the mainstreaming of a gender approach in the responsibilities of the Ministry of Labor and Social Security. [[12]](#footnote-12) |

These definitions have common elements, and the variations are a result of the different contexts in which these definitions came to be. This highlights the need to establish a definition of the Mission of the Specialized Gender Unit that reflects each institution’s characteristics and context.

The definition of the Mission is crucial because it communicates the responsibilities of the Specialized Gender Unit, while explaining and directing its work to the people that are part of the Unit and for the rest of the institution.[[13]](#footnote-13)

To facilitate the process of defining the Mission of the Specialized Gender Unit, the Technical Secretariat proposes a set of questions; the responses will help establish it.[[14]](#footnote-14)

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| ***QUESTION*** | **ELEMENTS FOR RESPONSE** |
| ***What is the scope of action of the gender unit?*** | Within and outside the institution. |
| ***How does it relate to the institution?*** | It looks for commitment and coordination with all departments and units that are part of the institution, while integrating the gender equality and equity criteria in institutional actions. |
| ***How is it included in the structure of the institution?*** | It has high-level political recognition in decision-making, and designated technical and financial resources. |
| ***What issues must be addressed using gender criteria?*** | Gender criteria must be included in the substantial aspects of every unit that is part of the institution (including Administration and Finances). It must be an integral part of every institutional process and procedure. |
| ***What is the goal of mainstreaming a gender approach?*** | Evaluate the implications for women and men of any planned activity, including legislation, policies, or programs in any area and at all levels.  Eliminate gender gaps in the labor sphere.  Promote a new culture based on gender equality.  Promote new institutional values. |

# ASPECTS to consider WHEN ESTABLISHING a specialized gender unit: conditions for the unit to operatE properly

Certain aspects are key for the Specialized Gender Units to operate properly: commitment, political will, and conviction at the h ighest-level within the Ministries of Labor regarding the importance of having a permanent internal structure that facilitates gender mainstreaming.

It is also important to consider what type of structure the unit acquires. In general, this depends on different factors, for example, if the institution that it is part of has the rank of Ministry, Secretariat, Department, or any other entity, and if it has the necessary staff and resources.

The Specialized Gender Unit must establish an organizational chart that serves the different units of the Ministry. For example, an area that is in charge of internal matters and that promotes the development of changes in the organizational culture of the Ministry; that ensures that internal hiring, promotion, training, and salary regulations include a gender approach; and that establishes measures that foster joint responsibility. Another area should focus on the target population by introducing a gender approach in the development, execution, and evaluation of policies and programs, and advocating for the generation of gender statistics, all with the goal of eliminating gender gaps in the labor sphere.

If the institution is small, an option is to establish a gender unit that is equivalent in size. However, in these cases, it is important to build ties with representatives from the different areas of the institution. This will lead to the development of activities through an inter-institutional partnership that, in turn, promotes gender equality within the organization and outside of it. Having a gender advisor at the highest decision-making level also fosters mainstreaming gender in the institution.

Another strategy to facilitate gender mainstreaming is to create Gender Committees or Commissions consisting of representatives from the various areas of the institution. These committees or commissions can either be, in and of themselves, the very body that institutionalizes gender or play an advisory role to the Specialized Gender Unit. Examples of Ministries that have implemented these entities demonstrate that these intra-institutional commissions act as the “arms” or “tentacles” of the Gender Units, since the areas that integrate them are experts in their subjects which, along with the advisory role of the Gender Unites, enables diagnostics and identifying actions to close specific gaps.

Whatever structure these take, the Specialized Gender Units need to maintain a constant relationship with the National Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women (MNAM), adjusting their planned actions to the gender policy established for the labor sphere, as well as participating in the inter-institutional gender committees convened by the Mechanism. At the same time, this fosters mutual enrichment since the Gender Units monitor the fulfillment of the national gender plans and provide reports related to labor and employment.

The creation and implementation of tripartite commissions demonstrates the importance of the State joining efforts with organizations of workers and employers, enterprises, and even civil society organizations. This allows gender mainstreaming to transcend the institutional sphere to produce a collective synergy between the different parts and achieve results.

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| **Conditions for the unit to operate properly**  The following are key conditions for the Specialized Gender Unit to operate properly:   * **Organizational structure:** the Unit must be in the top tier of the organizational structure, which enables mainstreaming a gender approach in all units of the institution. Ideally, it should be part of the administrative structure and within the Ministry’s regulations (internal regulations, organizational manual). * **Staff:** depending on the organizational structure established for the Gender Unit, it should consist of a team that is sensitized and trained, and that performs administrative and operational functions to ensure and promote a gender and rights-based approach in the institution’s policies, programs, and budgets. The staff must be qualified, full-time, and work exclusively on the issue that is inherent to the Unit. * **Scope:** establish regular and systematic communication with the institution head and key areas. In other words, planning, programming and budget, human resources, and operational areas to impact institutional planning. * **Budget:** the Unit must have a dedicated budget that is appropriate for the planned activities. * **Physical space:** it must have a work area and facilities that are equal to those established for other Ministry units. |

# What are the functions of a specialized gender unit?

The context of each institution will affect the functions of the Specialized Gender Unit. However, there are some generic functions:[[15]](#footnote-15)

* Provide technical assistance to the different Ministry units regarding the strategies to establish, implement, and monitor policies with a gender approach.
* Influence legislative actions promoted by the Ministry to ensure women’s equal and non-discriminatory access to the labor market.
* Plan internal strategies and lines of action to establish an institutional culture that fosters an environment that is free from harassment, discrimination, and violence, and with equal opportunities and treatment for all workers.
* Design and implement processes to develop the gender and human rights expertise of the Ministry staff. These efforts provide them with practical and necessary knowledge to identify gender inequities, gaps, and obstacles, and facilitate mainstreaming the gender approach.
* Advise the Ministry’s competent authorities in responding to reports or accusations of any type of gender-based harassment, discrimination, and/or violence at work both in the internal actions and the services it provides.
* Ensure that all statistical data and processes on employment, inspection, labor relations, and other areas of the Ministry’s scope include a gender approach.
* Execute and monitor the compliance of obligations acquired in international women’s rights agreements and conventions—including all types of exclusion and discrimination, such as race, ethnicity, sexual diversity, etc.—in the labor sphere.
* Promote efforts to enter into conventions and agreements to incorporate the gender approach in plans, programs, and projects related to work and employment.
* Work with the unit (Direction, Department, or another) in charge of budget planning to ensure that the Ministry budget is developed with a gender approach. Also, monitor the resources assigned to the institution for gender equality and that were included in the budget.
* Promote, disseminate, and share information regarding equality and non-discrimination in the labor sphere, ensuring that all institutional communication includes a gender approach and that it uses inclusive and non-sexist language.
* Coordinate actions that the institution organizes on labor-related public policies with the National Mechanism for the Advancement of Women.
* Include the mainstreaming of gender and human rights into social dialogue.
* Lead and coordinate institutional gender diagnostics and their inclusion in the respective national and operational plans.
* Issue periodic evaluation reports that include results regarding compliance with objectives, strategies, and policies.

# LINES OF ACTION

The lines of action are understood as strategies that guide and organize the different activities of the Specialized Gender Unit, while ensuring the inclusion, coordination, and continuity of efforts in an orderly, coherent, and systematic manner.

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| The following Lines of Action are proposed:   1. Strengthen the institutionalization and mainstreaming of a gender approach in the institution. 2. Mainstream a gender approach in policies, programs, and projects. 3. Promote an institutional culture that aims for gender equality and equity. 4. Strengthen the skills of officials on gender to consolidate the inclusion of a gender approach in their daily work. 5. Communication with a gender approach. |

## LINE OF ACTION 1: STRENGTHEN THE INSTITUTIONalization and mainstreaming of a gender approach in the institution

The institutionalization of a gender approach refers to the organization’s objectives and activities, as well as to the set of formal and informal rules and their mechanisms of execution. Therefore, it implies including actions related to decreasing the identified inequalities as a common and institutionalized trend with a cross-cutting and intersectoral characteristic that extends to the entire organizational structure. This includes the planning, administrative, and financial units.

Genuine institutionalization—understood as the first step to incorporate a gender approach—is an effort that institutional authorities must commit to. As such, they must envision the integration of this approach into policies, programs, and projects, and in the organizational culture, as an efficient and effective mechanism to advance toward equal opportunities and its inclusion within the organization’s internal and external actions.

Institutionalization is a prerequisite to achieving gender mainstreaming in all of the institution’s structures. This is true because gender content is mainstreamed when the institutional structure is suitable and it becomes a common practice. This, in turn, strengthens the institutions that were created.

## LINE OF ACTION 2: Mainstream a gender approach in policies, programs, and projects

One of the objectives of mainstreaming is to integrate issues related to gender equality in every policy, program, and project of the institution. It is evident when the interests, concerns, and experiences of women and men—in all their diversity—become an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies and programs, to the extent that they move forward in eliminating inequalities.

This line of action should be extended to all Ministry actions. It corresponds to the work directed at the public in general, and refers to the actions that target the population. Consequently, generating and using data disaggregated by sex, and the inclusion of a gender analysis in every stage of the development of policies, programs and projects, are key to obtaining diagnostics that consider gender gaps and move forward in achieving equality and equity in the labor sphere.

This Line of Action will be the result of the intersection of other lines of action.

## LINE OF ACTION 3: Promote an institutional culture that aims for gender equality and equity

Gender inequalities are manifested as the unequal access and control over resources, understood as the goods or services available to people. These resources include access to information and to economic and financial resources; decision-making processes; the knowledge and use of technology; protection in the face of violence and harassment; access to social media; the recognition of needs and interests; and the full enjoyment of labor rights.

The existence of cultural and organizational biases and barriers does not allow the institution to fully take advantage of the skills it has at its disposal. It also affects men’s and women’s ability to develop those skills. Gender gaps are evident in the existence of unequal opportunities for men and women regarding professional development; in the existence of horizontal and vertical spaces of segregation; gender stereotypes in skills, tasks, salaries, and roles; inequalities associated to family responsibilities; and the lack of attention provided to workplace and sexual harassment and any other type of gender-based violence, and its consequences.

As a result of this scenario, conducting a continuous gender analysis among the Ministry’s personnel is key. The purpose is to ensure that there is no discrimination in salaries, in the hiring processes, and in the selection of staff. Also, the institution should provide equal opportunities to all staff in terms of access to vacancies, to opportunities for professional development and career advancement. All of these situations are crucial pieces of an effective policy of equal opportunities.

## LINE OF ACTION 4: Strengthen the skills of officials on gender to consolidate the inclusion of a gender approach in their daily work

Awareness-raising and training are essential aspects to incorporate a gender approach. This is true to the extent that they look to create a change in attitudes, modify workers’ wills, and foster an inclusive culture, all through reflection and the participation of various stakeholders.

Training on gender equality is a transformative process that aims to provide knowledge, techniques, and tools to develop skills and changes in attitudes and behaviors to interpret and transform reality. The need to train staff varies based on their location and roles, their personal and professional experience, and their on-the-job learning. Consequently, it is important to identify different levels of training so that officials multiply the knowledge acquired and use the category of gender as an analysis tool at work.

Awareness-raising allows people to become aware of the collective cultural, political, and social problems, and it fosters the understanding of some social practices. It is also the first step to understanding power, social, race, nationality, and ethnicity relations that take place within and outside of the organization.

Training and raising awareness among staff strengthen and enable efforts related to the second line of action regarding gender mainstreaming in institutional policies, programs, and projects. These practices facilitate this line of action by providing the necessary tools to deepen the mainstreaming process.

## LINE OF ACTION 5: Communication with a gender approach

The communication strategy carries a significant weight in the process of institutionalizing and mainstreaming gender. In reality, equal opportunities between men and women in organizations is not achieved solely in job positions, decision-making, or even in the development of policies. Rather, it also takes place in the generation of opinions and in the different ways of communicating a reality.

Every institution is characterized by its communication style, which is in turn, determined by specific guidelines, rules, positions, and values that correspond to the particular institution’s roles. Institutions have different levels of expression; the most evident one is the definition of their dissemination materials, their internal newsletters, language style, and other forms of internal and external communication.

The image and representation of an organization refers to the materials that provide information regarding its products and services. Through these materials, the institution expresses its values, beliefs, and attitudes, reflecting the most evident dynamics, norms, behaviors, and practices. Therefore, it is the institution’s responsibility to dismantle or counteract prejudice and stereotypes, and propose changes through the use of language and its power to build awareness and shape the identity of its target population.

# STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES FOR EVERY LINE OF ACTION

Once the Specialized Gender Unit establishes the Lines of Action it will address, it can then set the Strategic Objectives that correspond to each line of action. These objectives refer to the goals or targets that the unit expects to achieve in a specific period of time, while also determining the actions and the means to accomplish them.

The strategic objectives transform the planning into something operational. They are concrete, respond to short-term goals, and their execution and achievement are measured with indicators. Through the activities, the planning becomes a clear guide to achieving the strategic objectives by designating financial and human resources, infrastructure, timeframes for their execution, and the entities in charge of their implementation.

Although each institution has specific characteristics, there are objectives that respond to a common denominator: advancing toward gender equality within the institution as well as in the established policies and programs.

The table below illustrates examples of the strategic objectives of a Specialized Gender Unit. These are, in general, common across the Ministries of Labor (Secretariats, Counseling, or other areas).

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| **LINE OF ACTION** | **STRATEGIC GENDER OBJECTIVES** |
| 1. Strengthen the institutionalization and mainstreaming of a gender approach in the institution | * Ensure that the institution’s organizational structure includes a gender approach. * Strengthen the Specialized Gender Unit. |
| 2. Mainstream a gender approach in policies, programs, and projects | * Promote the inclusion of the gender approach across all stages (design, planning, monitoring and evaluation) of the policies, programs, actions, and guidelines of every unit in the institution. * Ensure that sex-disaggregated sources and data regarding the labor sphere are available. |
| 3. Promote an institutional culture that aims for gender equality and equity | * Promote changes in the organizational culture that facilitate the incorporation of a gender equality approach in the entire institutional structure, thus including the gender approach in the management tools and internal processes. * Implement measures that ensure women’s inclusion—on equal terms—in the institution’s management and decision-making positions. * Promote measures to prevent, address, and sanction workplace and sexual harassment in the institution. * Promote the adoption of a joint responsibility and work-life balance policy. |
| 4. Strengthen the skills of officials on gender | * Strengthen the skills of staff on gender to consolidate the gender approach at work and in their daily life. * Strengthen the technical skills and abilities of the officials to incorporate a gender approach in their work. |
| 5. Communication with a gender approach | * Include a gender approach in the institution’s internal and external communication strategy. |

# PLAN OF ACTION OF A SPECIALIZED GENDER UNIT: A GUIDE

Developing, implementing, and monitoring a Plan of Action are essential to achieve the strategic objectives formulated in the lines of action. The Plan is included in a matrix that incorporates the objectives, timeframes, responsible entities, necessary resources, indicators, and verification methods. Its structure represents a permanent support to monitor the achievement of identified objectives.

The objective of the Plan of Action is to provide a tool that facilitates and guides the monitoring of actions that lead to mainstreaming and institutionalizing a gender approach in the Ministries (Secretariat, Department, or others) based on the commitments undertaken by the stakeholders involved in their compliance. It also aims to guide institutional actions targeting this objective in an integrated manner and, at the same time, move toward achieving the established strategic gender objectives.

The Plan of Action to mainstream the gender approach in the Ministry of Labor (Secretariat, Department, or others) is the result of a participatory effort with the Specialized Gender Units involved in its fulfillment. This gives the Plan legitimacy and recognition as a product that includes the participation of staff, allowing them to provide feedback and consent to the proposed actions. As long as the process includes the participation of representatives of all the sectors involved of the institution, and the planning considers all steps, resources, and activities, each stakeholder will be responsible—from their own area—for the realization of the expected result. This also means that they take responsibility for the problem and its solution.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Below is a matrix of a Plan of Action that serves as a guide for its development. This does not mean that the lines of action and objectives must be exactly as included in this example; every institution has its own characteristics, needs, and expectations. At the same time, the timeframes (short, medium, and long-term) depend on each institution’s priorities and resources. However, this Plan brings together the lines, objectives, and activities proposed by the different Ministries of Labor where the Participatory Gender Audits took place.[[17]](#footnote-17)

| Line of action 1: Strengthen the institutionalization and mainstreaming of a gender approach in the institution | | | | | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Strategic objective | Activities | Entities in charge and providing support[[18]](#footnote-18) | Resources | Timeframe[[19]](#footnote-19) | Indicators | Verification methods |
| * 1. Ensure that the institution’s organizational structure includes a gender approach | 1.1.1 Incorporate gender equity into the institution’s stated values. | * Executive Department and offices * Every department, advisory units, and consultative bodies * Specialized Gender Unit | * Political will | Short | Gender equality has been included as one of the institution’s values in the Mission and Vision. | * Institutional web page * Institutional Strategic Plan * Annual Operational Plans |
| 1.1.2 Establish an institutional Gender Committee (commission, board, or another) that includes a focal point from each department and advisory unit, coordinated by the Specialized Gender Unit. | * Executive Department and offices * Every department, advisory units, and consultative bodies * Specialized Gender Unit | * Political will | Short | The institutional Gender Committee (commission, board, or another) has been created as a result of an administrative decision. | Administrative decision with the creation of the institutional Gender Committee |
| * 1. Strengthen the Specialized Gender Unit | 1.2.1 Ensure that the Specialized Gender Unit is properly staffed, that it has full-time specialists, and that it has a budget assigned. | * Executive Department * Human Resource Unit * Budget units | * Human Resource Unit | Short | * The Specialized Gender Unit has the appropriate and enough staff to perform its functions. | * Process of selection and appointment of qualified professionals for the Specialized Gender Unit. |
| 1.2.2 Evaluate, approve, and execute the instruments to support the Specialized Gender Unit (Operational Manual and Administrative Manual). | * Competent administrative unit * Specialized Gender Unit | * Human Resources of the Administrative Unit | Short | * Evaluate the Manuals of the Specialized Gender Unit. * Approval of the Manuals of the Specialized Gender Unit. | * Report from the evaluation of Manuals * Approval of the Manuals |
| 1.2.3 Review and adapt the budget of the Specialized Gender Unit | * Financial Unit * Specialized Gender Unit | * Human Resources of the Financial Unit | Short (before developing the next budget) | * A budget item based on the needs, designated for the Specialized Gender Unit | * Budget item |

| Line of action 2: Mainstream a gender approach in policies, programs, and projects. | | | | | | |
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| Strategic objective | Activities | Entity in charge and support | Resources | Timeframe | Indicators | Verification methods |
| * 1. Promote the inclusion of the gender approach across all stages of the policies, programs, actions (design, planning, monitoring, and evaluation), and guidelines of every unit in the institution | 2.1.1. Establish instruments to incorporate a gender approach throughout the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the policies, programs, and projects. | * Planning Unit * Specialized Gender Unit * Cooperating entities * State and private training entities | * Human resources from the Planning Unit who received prior training on integrating a gender approach in policies, programs, and projects. | Short | * The creation of a standardized guide to integrate a gender approach in policies, programs, and projects. * Each unit of the institution has at least one person with training on the use of the Guide to integrate a gender approach in policies, programs, and projects. | * Guide to integrate a gender approach in policies, programs, and projects. * Trainings on the use of the Guide. |
| 2.1.2 Include the gender variable as an enforceable criterion of assessment, pertinence, relevance, and evaluation of results in the policies, programs, and projects that the institution approves and implements. | * Planning Unit * Specialized Gender Unit * Cooperating entities * State and private training entities | * Human resources who received prior training on integrating a gender approach in policies, programs, and projects. | Medium and long-term | * The gender variable is an enforceable criterion in the evaluation of new policies, programs, and projects of the institution. * All data used in the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies, programs, and projects are—at the very least—disaggregated by sex and age. * Gender indicators have been included to evaluate and monitor policies, programs, and projects. | * Protocol to evaluate policies, programs, and projects of the institution. |
| 2.1.3 Develop the necessary technical instructions to establish gender indicators in the Annual Work Plans of every unit in the institution. | * Planning Unit * Specialized Gender Unit * National Mechanism for the Advancement of Women * Cooperating entities | * Human resources with training on developing gender indicators. | Before the development of the next Annual Work Plans. | * The Annual Work Plans from the entire institution include gender indicators. * Gender indicators are included in monthly monitoring reports and quarterly evaluations. | * Approved Annual Work Plans * Minutes from meetings * Gender-sensitive indicators included in Annual Work Plans |
| 2.1.4 Work with departments and offices to identify gender-sensitive indicators to be included in the Annual Work Plans. |
| 2.1.5 Incorporate the gender approach in the monitoring and evaluation system of institutional programs and projects. | * Human resources from the competent unit with prior training on Strategic Planning and Gender Indicators. |  | Monitored and evaluated projects by a gender monitoring and evaluation system, which measures progress in its practical implementation and the results on the matter. |  |
| * 1. Ensure that sex-disaggregated sources and data regarding the labor sphere are available | 2.2.1 Prepare a list of sources of data and resources on gender to support the development of projects. | * National Mechanism for the Advancement of Women * National Statistics Office * Specialized Gender Unit | * Human resources from the National Statistics Office. * Human resources from the Institution’s Statistics Office. |  |  | * Disaggregated data and necessary resources to design projects available on the Intranet. |
| 2.2.2 Develop an annual statistics plan that incorporates the collection, analysis, and dissemination of statistical information with a gender approach. | * National Statistics Office * Institution’s Statistics Office (or a similar office) * Cooperating entities | * Human resources from the National Statistics Office. * Human resources from the Institution’s Statistics Office. * Financial resources | Continuous | * Indicators on the labor market to monitor the situation of men and women. * Biannual and annual monitoring of gender indicators of the labor market. | * Work Plan of the Institution’s Statistics Office. * Set of indicators. * Bi-annual and annual newsletters from the Statistics Office. |

| Line of action 3: Promote an institutional culture that aims for gender equality and equity | | | | | | |
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| Strategic objective | Activities | Entity in charge and support | Resources | Timeframe | Indicators | Verification methods |
| * 1. Promote changes in the organizational culture that facilitate the incorporation of a gender equality approach in the entire institutional structure, such as including the gender approach in the management tools and internal processes | 3.1.1 Work with every institutional department and office to review the quality standards and processes for the incorporation of the gender approach into these instruments. | -Competent unit | * Competent unit | Medium | Staff composition is equitable between men and women.  Manuals, processes, and procedures for recruitment, selection, training, promotion, and retention on equal terms, free from discrimination, and that foster joint responsibility and a work-life balance. | * Institutional payroll |
| 3.1.2 Use a participatory methodology to propose and develop a manual of procedures with a gender approach to select and promote staff and that fosters equality at all levels. | * Administrative Unit (or a similar office) * Human Resource Unit * Specialized Gender Unit | * Human resources | Medium | * Administrative records, measures to make schedules flexible, and control measures. * Report of the results from the review of current instruments to hire and select staff. |
| 3.1.3 Review questionnaires to gather data using a gender approach. | * Institution’s Statistics Unit with all units * Specialized Gender Unit | * Human resources from the Statistics Unit with training on gender analysis. | Medium | Questionnaires to gather data ensure disaggregation by sex and the presence of other variables to obtain data that facilitate monitoring gender gaps in the labor market. | * Paper or electronic questionnaires |
|  | 3.1.4. Use a gender approach to review the services provided by the institution and propose the corresponding modifications. | * Legal Unit | * Human resources of the Legal Unit with training on gender. | Medium | * Services provided by the institution consider their differentiated impact on women and men. * Users are satisfied with the care and products they receive. | * Report containing the proposed modifications to the procedures of services provided by the institution. * Satisfaction questionnaire for users. |
| 3.2 Implement measures that ensure women’s inclusion—on equal terms—in the institution’s management and decision-making positions | 3.2.1 Promote training of women and men in areas with lower female or masculine presence. | * Administrative Unit * Human Resource Unit * Specialized Gender Unit | * Human resources from the Unit of Human Resources | Short, medium, and long-term | * Change in the percentage of women that access management positions. | * Report with proposals of measures to ensure that women participate—on equal terms—in the institution’s management and leadership positions. |
| 3.3. Promote measures to prevent and sanction workplace and sexual harassment in the institution | 3.3.1 Include a chapter on workplace and sexual harassment and the procedure for actions (prevent, address, and sanction) in the institution’s internal regulations. | * Human Resource Unit * Legal Unit | * Human resources from the Unit of Human Resources and the Legal Unit | Short | Change in the percentage of reports of harassment in the institution.  Administrative, labor, and criminal sanction procedures. | * Internal regulations of the institution that include administrative, labor, and criminal sanction procedures. |
| 3.4. Promote the adoption of a joint responsibility and work-life balance policy | 3.4.1 Ensure that the gender indicators of the Human Resource Informational System incorporate indicators that specifically address the situation of workers with family responsibilities that, consequently, allow the Institution to identify their needs on the matter. | * Administrative Unit * Human Resource Unit | * Human resources from the Unit of Human Resources | Short | * Indicators that measure the situation of workers with family responsibilities as a result of the implementation of compatibility measures have been included in the Human Resource Informational System. * The indicators are monitored on a biannual basis. | Information System from the Department of Human Resources. |
|  | 3.4.2 Include a chapter on the joint responsibility and work-life balance policy for the institution’s officials in the Staff Regulations, regardless of the type of contract, sex, sexual orientation and identity, and marital status. | * Human Resource Unit * Legal Unit | Short |  | * The staff of the institution uses joint responsibility and work-life balance measures equally. | * Staff Regulations. |

| Line of action 4: Strengthen the skills of officials on gender | | | | | | |
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| Strategic objective | Activities | Entity in charge and support | Resources | Timeframe | Indicators | Verification methods |
| 4.1. Strengthen the skills of staff on gender to consolidate the gender approach at work and in their daily life | 4.1.1 Develop a Program for Continuous Training and Awareness-Raising on Gender used since induction. | * Training Unit * National Mechanism for the Advancement of Women | * Human resources | Short | * Staff of the institution increases their perceptions and knowledge on gender equality. | * Survey to measure knowledge, perceptions, and attitudes. |
| 4.1.2 Ensure that the Program for Continuous Training and Awareness-raising includes modules with different objectives targeting the different sectors (Management, professional, technical, services), and a required gender curriculum. |
| 4.1.3 Incorporate the fact that staff must pass the modules —according to their curriculum— of the Program for Continuous Training on Gender into the objectives of staff performance evaluations. | * Training Unit * Human Resource Unit | * Human resources | Medium | * Percentage of staff that obtain positive results in the gender objectives of their performance evaluations. | * Results from performance evaluations. |
| 4.2. Strengthen the technical skills and abilities of the official to incorporate a gender approach in their work | 4.2.1 Identify each area’s specific objectives and technical needs to incorporate a gender approach. | * Training Unit * Specialized Gender Unit | * Human resources | Short | * Identified training needs based on the specific needs of the areas. | * Training report. * Selection criteria for the institution’s programs. |
| 4.2.2 Establish criteria to select the programs of the institution that will receive training in stages in the framework of the Training Program. | * Training Unit * Specialized Gender Unit | * Human resources | Short | * Programs (areas) that will receive training have been selected. | * Training report. |
| 4.2.3 Implement the class to strengthen the sectoral and technical gender skills of the officials from the priority programs that were identified. | * Training Unit * Specialized Gender Unit * State or private training entities * Cooperating entities | * Financial resources * State or private training entities | Medium | * Based on the established timeframe, at least 50% of priority areas or programs have received training (Human Resources, Planning, Policy Development, etc.) | * Training report * Participant lists |
|  | 4.2.4 Establish an annual training program for members of the Gender Units, human resource staff, and members of the committee or commission. The topics include gender, human rights, gender approach, sexual diversity, and masculinities. | * Training Unit * Specialized Gender Unit * State or private training entities * Cooperating entities * Areas targeted by the Gender Unit, Human Resources, and gender committees or commissions | * Financial resources * State or private training entities | Medium | * The format of the training class has been established (in-person, virtual, self-administered). * The content of the classes has been established, based on the agreed-upon format. * Staff received training according to the timeframe established in the annual training program. | * Training report * Participant list disaggregated by sex |

| Line of action 5: Communication with a gender approach | | | | | | |
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| Strategic objective | Activities | Entity in charge and support | Resources | Timeframe | Indicators | Verification methods |
| 5.1 Include a gender approach in the institution’s internal and external communication strategy | 5.1.1 Develop/adapt a guide on non-sexist inclusive language and non-discriminatory images to be employed throughout the institution’s written and graphic documents, including the web page, social media, internal communication, and audio-visual products. | * Communication Unit | * Financial resources * Consultancy to develop the Guide on Inclusive Language. * Consultancy to incorporate a gender approach in graphic and audio-visual products. | Short | * Institutional communications use inclusive language with non-sexist or discriminatory images. | * Inclusive Language Manual. * Institutional web page. * Internal and external communication and newsletters. |
| 5.1.2 The institution permanently disseminates progress on gender in the labor sphere within and outside of the organization. | * Communication Unit * Specialized Gender Unit | * Trained and sensitized human resources from the Communication Unit. | Medium | * Percentage of change in the stories related to progress on gender in the labor sphere, which are included in newspapers, magazines, social media, and TV. | * Records from the Training Unit |
| 5.1.3 Organize campaigns that shed light on the inequalities and discrimination that women face in the labor market. | * Training Unit * National Mechanism for the Advancement of Women * Specialized Gender Unit | * Trained human resources from the Communication Unit. * Financial resources | Short, medium, and long-term | * A plan has been developed for campaigns that shed light on the inequalities and discrimination that women face in the labor market. This is a joint effort with Departments and Offices of the Specialized Gender Unit and the National Mechanism for the Advancement of Women. * Every campaign that was included in the Plan for every year has taken place. | * Campaign plan that considers the needs of every Department and Office of the institution, including the Annual Plan of the Unit. * Record of communications with a gender approach. * Printed material, visual or audio-visual products, publications, and website. |

1. “*The Institutionalization of a Gender Approach in the Ministries of Labor of the Americas”* was published in 2009 after an extensive process of consultation with the Ministries of Labor and the National Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women (MNM). Later, in 2021, a new study was published: “*The Institutionalization of a Gender Approach in the Ministries of Labor: Balance of a Decade”.* Itdetails the progress made on the issue. Both studies are available on: <http://www.rialnet.org/?q=en/estudios> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Model for the creation of gender units in the Public State Administration for the Government of the State of Sonora. November 2021 (<http://cedoc.inmujeres.gob.mx/ftpg/Sonora/SON_MB15_Unidades_genero_2012.pdf>)

   Creation of Gender Equality Units and the National Network of Gender Equality Units # 37906-MP-MCM Costa Rica (<http://www.pgrweb.go.cr/scij/Busqueda/Normativa/Normas/nrm_texto_completo.aspx?param1=NRTC&nValor1=1&nValor2=75718&nValor3=94023&strTipM=TC>);

   Functions related to Labor Equity with a Gender Approach. Ministry of Labor of Colombia. (<https://www.mintrabajo.gov.co/el-ministerio/grupo-interno-de-trabajo-para-las-victimas-y-la-equidad-laboral-con-enfoque-de-genero/equidad-laboral-con-enfoque-de-genero>);

   AGREEMENT that constitutes the Gender Equality Unit in the Secretariat of Labor and Social Welfare (<http://www.dof.gob.mx/nota_detalle.php?codigo=5590606&fecha=27/03/2020>);

   Manual for the Job Descriptions of the Gender Equality Unit. Office of Institutional Coordination and Development. Ministry of Labor and Social Security, El Salvador (<file:///C:/Users/Usuario/Downloads/manual-puestos-unidad-equidad-generos-2012......pdf>)

   Joint resolution between the Ministry of Public Administration and the Ministry of Women that stipulates the creation of the Gender Equality Units in the public sector. The Dominican Republic, September 11, 2019 (<https://mujer.gob.do/transparencia/phocadownload/BaseLegal/Resoluciones/Resolucion%20Conjunta%20MMUJER%20Y%20MAP%20Res%20Unidades%20de%20Igualdad%20de%20Genero%20Sector%20Publico.pdf>)

   Exempt Resolution DAF #33 Ref: Creates the Gender Equity Committee SUSESO February 14, 2019, Santiago de Chile. Sub-Secretariat of Social Security, Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare. <https://www.suseso.cl/601/articles-578130_recurso_000.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. “Advancing in the institutionalization of a gender approach in the Ministries of Labor of the Americas: lessons learned, findings and recommendations from three Participatory Gender Audits” published by RIAL/OAS in 2013 and available in: [www.rialnet.org/?q=en/estudios](http://www.rialnet.org/?q=en/estudios) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Strategic Objective H. © United Nations 1995. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Regional Conferences on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean: Mexico Consensus; Quito Consensus. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The Montevideo Strategy for the Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda within the Sustainable Development Framework by 2030 was approved in the XIII Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean. It was organized by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the Government of Uruguay, and held in Montevideo from October 25 to 28, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. “The Institutionalization of a Gender Approach in the Ministries of Labor of the Americas: Balance of a Decade” ([www.rialnet.org/?q=en/estudios](http://www.rialnet.org/?q=en/estudios)) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Joint resolution between the Ministry of Public Administration and the Ministry of Women that stipulates the creation of the Gender Equality Units in the public sector. The Dominican Republic, September 11, 2019 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Creation of Gender Equality Units and the National Network of Gender Equality Units # 37906-MP-MCM President of the Republic, Minister of the Presidency, and the Minister for Women. June 20, 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Gender Unit. Women’s Institute, Nuevo León, Mexico. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. AGREEMENT that constitutes the Gender Equity Unit in the Secretariat of Labor and Social Welfare, Mexico, March 27, 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. file:///C:/Users/Usuario/Downloads/manual-puestos-unidad-equidad-generos-2012......pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Training Guide “Participatory Strategic Planning with a Gender Perspective”, CIM/OAS, Washington D.C. 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Based on the work with delegations of the Ministries of Labor: Workshop on Gender Mainstreaming in the Ministries of Labor of the Americas. Inter-American Network for Labor Administration (RIAL). Buenos Aires, July 21, 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Some functions have been adapted from: a) Model for the creation of gender units in the Public State Administration for the Government of the State of Sonora. November 2021; b) Creation of Gender Equality Units and the National Network of Gender Equality Units # 37906-MP-MCM Costa Rica (http://www.pgrweb.go.cr/scij/Busqueda/Normativa/Normas/nrm\_texto\_completo.aspx?param1=NRTC&nValor1=1&nValor2=75718&nValor3=94023&strTipM=TC); c) Functions related to Labor Equity with a Gender Approach. Ministry of Labor of Colombia. (https://www.mintrabajo.gov.co/el-ministerio/grupo-interno-de-trabajo-para-las-victimas-y-la-equidad-laboral-con-enfoque-de-genero/equidad-laboral-con-enfoque-de-genero); d) AGREEMENT that constitutes the Gender Equality Unit in the Secretariat of Labor and Social Welfare. Mexico. (http://www.dof.gob.mx/nota\_detalle.php?codigo=5590606&fecha=27/03/2020); e) Manual for the Job Descriptions of the Gender Equality Unit. Office of Institutional Coordination and Development. Ministry of Labor and Social Security, El Salvador (file:///C:/Users/Usuario/Downloads/manual-puestos-unidad-equidad-generos-2012......pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Training Guide “Participatory Strategic Planning with a Gender Perspective”, CIM/OAS, Washington D.C. 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Participatory Gender Audits were conducted in the framework of the Program for Institutional Strengthening of the Ministries of Labor of the America, undertaken by the Department of Social Development and Employment of the OAS (DSDE) and the RIAL, the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM), with the support of the Canadian government and in partnership with the International Labour Organization (ILO). These took place in the Ministries of Labor of the El Salvador, Barbados, and Peru between 2012 and 2013. The results included Plans of Action to improve the incorporation of a gender approach in the policies, programs, and public opinion. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Each Gender Unit and Ministry must define which entities are in charge of and which ones provide support to each activity. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Short term refers to one year; medium term between two or three years; and long term refers to three or more years. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)