

Gender Factsheet

Why does gender matter in the sound management of chemicals and waste?



Physiological susceptibility and social contexts can influence the impact of chemical exposure on men and women.



Physiological factors

While exposure to harmful chemicals poses a health risk to everyone, studies have shown that males and females are affected differently:

- ▶ Women are more likely to store more environmental pollutants in their bodies, due to their higher proportion of body fat compared to men.
- ▶ Pregnancy, lactation, and menopause cause women to undergo physiological changes that can increase their and their fetus' vulnerability to toxic chemicals.



Occupational exposures

The type and level of chemical exposure are influenced by a person's occupation, which often differs by gender.

- ▶ Women generally represent the majority of the workers in the healthcare industry, which increases their exposure to chemicals used in medical procedures.
- ▶ Men typically perform physically demanding jobs such as firefighting, mining, or construction that expose them to different classes of chemicals hazards and particulate matter.



Domestic exposures

Men and women often have different household responsibilities and use different products in the home, which influences their exposure to toxic chemicals.

- ▶ Women and girls are often responsible for household management and cleaning, increasing their exposure to toxic chemicals in cleaning products.
- ▶ Women and girls use more personal care products, cosmetics, and jewelry than men, which may contain dangerous ingredients.

Gender mainstreaming

According to the UNDP guidance series on chemicals and gender, 'gender mainstreaming' is a practice that supports the societal contributions of men and women equally by integrating their unique experiences and concerns into programmes and policies in all societal, economic, and political spheres.

Gender mainstreaming is an integral aspect of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which sets out 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) that aim to address inequities among different population groups, particularly women, children, and the impoverished.



What is being done to address gender disparities in environmental issues?

Efforts to mainstream gender into environmental policies and programmes are already underway. The chemicals and waste related instruments well as other multilateral environmental agreements have been increasingly focusing on the nexus between gender and the environment through the development of gender action plans and adopting gender specific resolutions and decisions to address areas of concern.

Examples of how the Special Programme is supporting the implementation of gender focused activities through its projects



In **Angola**, a Gender Action Plan is being developed to address gender-differentiated issues regarding chemicals and waste. This includes:

- ▶ Creating a communication campaign—including an interactive gender equality webpage— that addresses women’s unique exposure risks, and empowers women to adopt behaviors that safeguard health; and
- ▶ Reviewing project stakeholder involvement processes and teams to ensure an equal balance of male-to-female participation, including among key decision makers.



In **Peru**, efforts are being made to better understand the impacts of chemicals on women in children. The project will also:

- ▶ Collect data around women’s roles in hazardous chemicals management; and
- ▶ Implement a regional program that works with artisanal and small-scale gold miners, many of whom are women, to protect them from harmful toxins like mercury.



In **Armenia**, gender mainstreaming will be facilitated through involvement of the NGO “Armenian Women for Health and Healthy Environment” as a project partner. The project will:

- ▶ Use a multi-stakeholder approach to ensure the participation of women and vulnerable populations in policy development and the decision-making processes; and
- ▶ Conduct awareness-raising activities that will inform people of the links between gender and chemical exposure, human health and environmental impacts.

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