

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 **India**, the project collected sex-disaggregated data via surveys of women working in chemical, fertilizer, domestic waste, and treatment, storage, and disposal facilities. A workshop on gender mainstreaming in chemicals and waste management aimed to provide a clear understanding of the impact of hazardous waste chemicals from a gender perspective and identify gender issues in hazardous chemicals and waste management. A report on gender mainstreaming included observations and recommendations for action, and a further report explored how men and women are differently exposed to toxic chemicals, with further recommendations for action.



The project in **Mongolia** involves a comprehensive review of hazardous waste management, encompassing definitions, types, disposal, and treatment technologies. As part of this review, the project has conducted an initial gender analysis looking at the engagement of women in industry sectors that generate and handle hazardous waste. The project will also:
In addition, based on training and awareness raising under the project, a participatory management mechanism will be piloted in order to facilitate the engagement of the community groups including women and youth in proper management of the hazardous wastes.



In **Lesotho**, one of the projects outputs will be a gender mainstreaming action plan to integrate gender considerations into the policies and programmes, and to promote gender equality. This plan ensures that both men and women equally contribute to and benefit from chemicals management initiatives. The project will engage with the Ministry of Gender, Youth, Sports, and Recreation, and the Women in Science Association to develop the action plan and will involve a wide range of stakeholders through consultations and workshops. Awareness raising and capacity building will ensure adoption and effective implementation of the gender action plan.

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