CEN CENELEC

**CEN** – European Committee for Standardization
**CENELEC** – European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardization

# HOW TO BE GENDER-RESPONSIVE
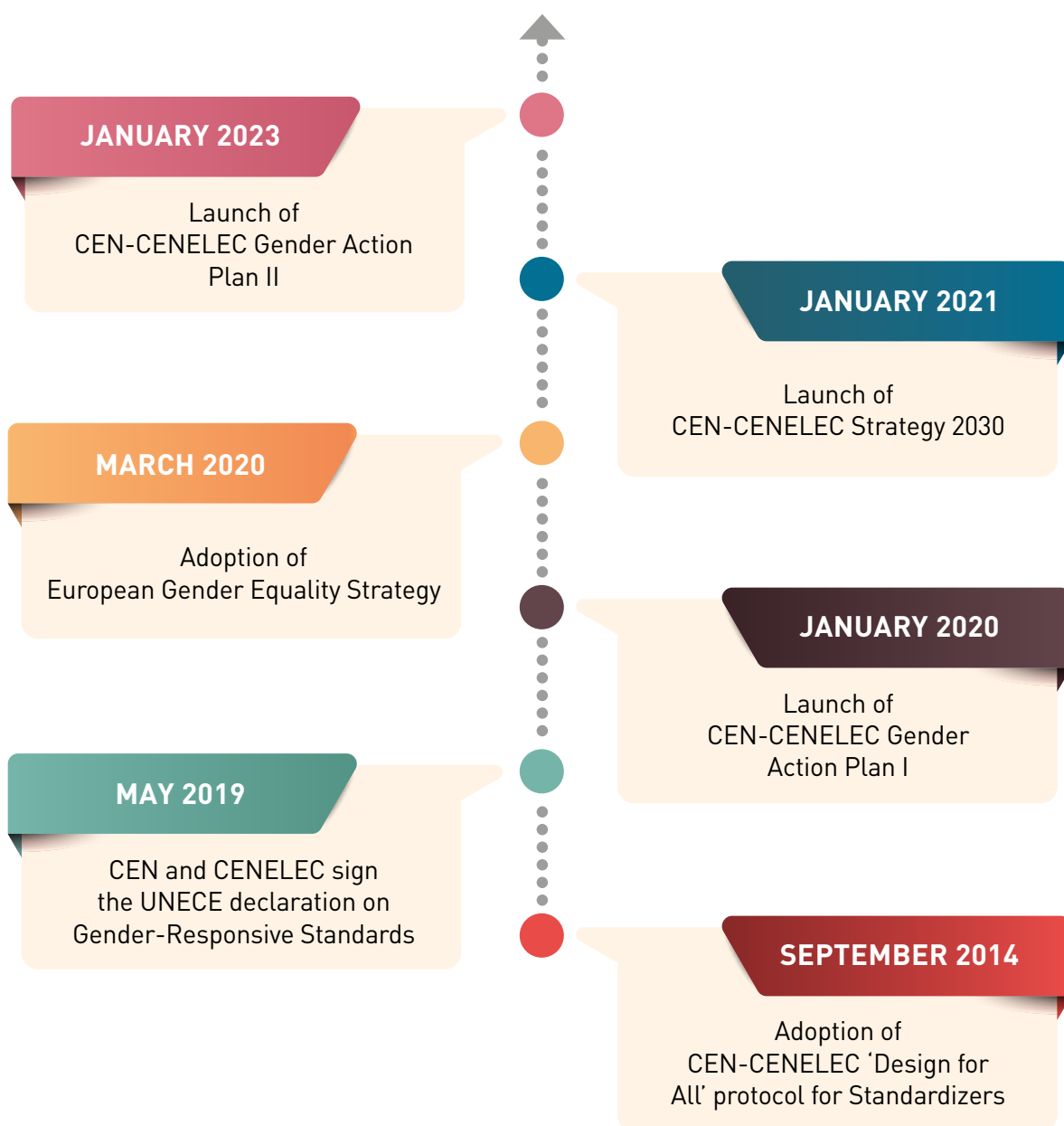# **IN STANDARDIZATION**

# HOW TO BE GENDER-RESPONSIVE
## IN STANDARDIZATION

## Introduction

This information leaflet is produced as an introductory guide for Technical Committees and Working Groups of CEN and CENELEC on how to adopt a gender-responsive approach in standards development work.

This document was developed by the CEN and CENELEC Informal Gender Diversity & Inclusion Coordination Group.

**JANUARY 2023**

Launch of
CEN-CENELEC Gender Action
Plan II

**JANUARY 2021**

Launch of
CEN-CENELEC Strategy 2030

**MARCH 2020**

Adoption of
European Gender Equality Strategy

**JANUARY 2020**

Launch of
CEN-CENELEC Gender
Action Plan I

**MAY 2019**

CEN and CENELEC sign
the UNECE declaration on
Gender-Responsive Standards

**SEPTEMBER 2014**

Adoption of
CEN-CENELEC 'Design for
All' protocol for Standardizers

Inclusiveness and Diversity are core values of the CEN and CENELEC system, a system that is open to all interested stakeholders who develop standards that equally benefit everyone, taking into account the full diversity of the European population. The ⊕ CEN and CENELEC Strategy 2030 (Goal 4) outlines a common vision for an inclusive system ensuring that all stakeholders are appropriately represented, informed, and empowered to participate in and contribute to European standards.

In May 2019, CEN and CENELEC and several of our Members officially signed ⊕ UNECE's Declaration on Gender-Responsive Standards and Standards Development committing to making the standard development process, environment and deliverables more gender-responsive, and helping to achieve the ⊕ SDG 5 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls'.

At the European policy level, the European Commission's ⊕ Gender Equality Strategy (2020-2025) presents policy objectives and actions to make significant progress on gender equality in the European Union by 2025.

> "Gender equality is a core principle of the European Union, but it is not yet a reality. In business, politics and society as a whole, we can only reach our full potential if we use all of our talent and diversity. Using only half of the population, half of the ideas or half of the energy is not good enough."
>
> *Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission* ⊕ Source

To support this commitment, CEN and CENELEC developed a first **Gender Action Plan (2020-2022)** which led to the establishment of the *Informal Coordination Group on Gender Diversity and Inclusion.* This group steers the activities of collecting best practices and promoting gender-responsive and more inclusive standardization in the CEN and CENELEC system.

The second ⊕ CEN-CENELEC Gender Action Plan (2023-2025) aims to further raise awareness on Gender-Responsive Standards (GRS), review internal policies and regulations, and provide supporting tools for European standard-makers.

## What are Gender-Responsive Standards?

A gender-responsive standard:

- Reflects an understanding of physical differences and gender roles of women and men;

- Integrates these diverse physical and social / cultural dimensions within the design and performance of the product, process, or service being standardized;

- Equally addresses the needs, experiences, and concerns of all users, including women, men, girls, and boys;

- Ensures the standard provides the same outcomes for and equal benefit to all.

*Gender-responsive vs Gender-neutral:* a Gender-responsive approach to standardization recognizes that standards have different impacts on different individuals depending on their gender. Gender-responsiveness requires **explicit consideration** of gender differences to ensure that standards and standards development are equally inclusive of men and women. As opposed to this, a Gender-neutral approach tries to establish a generic or one-size-fits-all approach to gender.

Standards designed to be gender neutral could be in fact missing gender implications, which require explicit consideration to ensure that men and women benefit equally. In standardization, as in other fields, a gender-neutral approach all too often results in men's traits, attributes, roles, etc. being used as the default. Such gender neutrality, or gender blindness, therefore, leads to things intended to be designed for "everyone and anyone" being, in reality, designed mostly for men.

Beyond the content itself, a gender-responsive deliverable also means a document drafted in **inclusive language** that reflects different aspects of diversity and avoids stereotyped assumptions. This refers to terminology perceived or likely to be perceived as unbiased and respectful by everyone, regardless of their age, ability, sex, gender, ethnicity, cultural background, religion, or any other characteristics. Check out these ⊕ Guidelines for more information.

## Why do Gender-Responsive Standards matter?

- Standards are an important contributor to economic growth playing an influential role in society (source ➔ ISO research ; ➔ UNECE).

- Women represent half the world's population and contribute to 37% of the global GDP. Studies show gender equality positively impacts GDP. (Source ➔ Worldbank).

- However, standards are not protecting women as well as they benefit men. In some cases, standards further disadvantage, or even harm, women (Source ➔ SCC study).

- Therefore, understanding how standardization may differently impact different genders is essential to ensure that European standards equally protect everyone, and indeed positively contribute to European economy and society as a whole, therefore making for better standards for all.

    - Ensure that standards do not reinforce gender inequalities
    - Equally protect and respond to the needs of all consumers and product and service users
    - Maximize the number of people that benefit from standards
    - Strengthen the competitiveness of European products and services, by making them more inclusive.

## Gender-responsive standards and standards development are better for everyone:
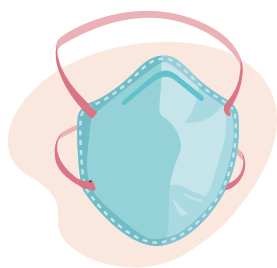
Take a standard for a Personal Protective Equipment like a mask, gloves, or eye protection. Such products must be designed to adequately fit all users to ensure their equal performance and protection. The underlying standards should consider a **vast range of anthropometric and physiological differences of users** to ensure any potential user's or wearer's safety: men and women of all ages, backgrounds, sizes, etc.

Standards for handheld tools should consider the **whole spectrum of anthropometric variances** and include a broad range of body sizes, heights, posture, grip strength, etc., including considering how some of these might differ based on gender. This will ensure the products can be used equally effectively and safely by all potential end-users.
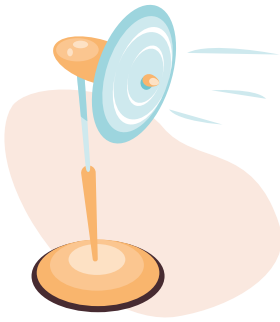
The ventilation temperature in office spaces is another example of how **gender differences have implications for standards.** Gender differences in metabolisms lead to differences in thermal comfort, which needs to be considered to ensure a comfortable environment for all employees. In this instance, considering gender differences would not only benefit women in the workplace but also employees with chronic diseases, *and* research shows that **colder temperatures lead to lower cognitive abilities and productivity.**

*Beyond gender - intersectional approach:* Gender can serve as a great starting point for consideration of other human characteristics which may be linked to gender (such as bodily proportions, menstruation, gendered roles, etc.) and also those which may be independent of gender (such as ethnic background, age, accessibility, etc.). Some of these **other characteristics may interact with gender** in specific ways (for example, the topic of menopause where both age and gender consideration come into play) **to create specific implications in standards.** These interacting characteristics may also have **different implications for enabling inclusion in standards development** (such as women from less represented ethnic backgrounds, etc.).

## How can you ensure European Standards are gender-responsive?

**1** Assess the **diversity of knowledge, experience and stakeholders** in your technical body and consider the **different needs** within your working group

> **Ask yourself:** Are all relevant stakeholders and interests represented? Does the group represent a balance of all parties who may be impacted by the standard?

**TIPS FOR ACTION:**

- Assess the diversity and representativeness of the group's composition
- Identify missing knowledge and experience
- Seek participation of diverse expertise and profiles: proactively reach out to organizations representing specific stakeholders, relying on national and CEN-CENELEC network (Partners, Liaisons, etc.)
- Provide support and guidance for experts that are new to standardization - Share information on how the European Standardization System works, with support from CEN and CENELEC Management Centre.

**2** Increase **representation of women,** by encouraging women with relevant knowledge and experience to become TC/WG members, and proactively seek women's input

> **Ask yourself:** Did you know a gender-balanced TC composition has shown to increase the TC's performance? Check this ➔ SCC Study to learn more.

**TIPS FOR ACTION:**

- Share documentation with women within your organization/company during consultation stages
- Proactively reach out to national or European women's organizations in your sector to address knowledge gaps.

**3** Understand that reaching a gender-balanced composition of your TC or WG does not necessarily equal to having **gender expertise** at the table, nor does it automatically ensure that the deliverables will be gender-responsive. Both men and women can have unconscious gender biases, and both men and women can have knowledge about the implications of gender differences.

**Ask yourself:** Are the experts around the table aware that gender differences may have an impact on the standard's quality? Is there an expert present with experience in drafting gender-responsive standards?

**TIPS FOR ACTION:**

- Contact your national Standardization Body and/or CEN-CENELEC Gender Focal Point for support, advice, and relevant material

- Share and use the tools and protocols available at your disposal with your TC experts ➡ (see the useful resources).

**4** Promote an inclusive environment that allows equal participation of all interested parties

**Ask yourself:** Is everyone given the same opportunities to participate in the discussions? Do all experts feel equally comfortable to have their say in the process?

**TIPS FOR ACTION:**

• Nurture inclusive meetings, using the tools at your disposal such as the Code of Conduct for delegates, experts and observers participating in the technical work of CEN and/or CENELEC or other available guidelines

• Ensure equal opportunities for participation; for instance, offer alternating meeting timings, hybrid options, accessibility arrangements, allow sufficient breaks (e.g. breastfeeding) etc.

• Recognize that unconscious biases can influence meeting dynamics

• Ensure equal speaking opportunities and time for all participants, e.g. by systematically organizing Tour de Table

• Avoid the discounting of women's contributions

• Avoid interruptions that can erode perceptions of women's expertise and undermine their ability to influence

• Take conscious actions to mitigate the negative effects of problematic behaviours

**5** Highlight the need to **consider the implications of gender differences,** related to physical or physiological as well as socially constructed differences between men and women (such as gender roles and expectations)

> **Ask yourself:** Have you considered which gender differences are most relevant to the standard you are currently working on? Have you considered what might need to be included in the standard to ensure men and women are getting the same outcomes and benefits intended by the standard? Do the anthropometric differences between men and women impact the effective use of the product/service? Do social gender roles impact who might use the product or service?

**TIPS FOR ACTION:**

- Challenge social norms and gender stereotypes about women's and men's skills and roles, since they may further increase gender inequality

- Discuss and report any physical or social gender difference affecting or relevant to the standard

- Make the necessary research and modifications to ensure those differences are being taken into account in the drafting of the standard

- Apply the ➔ methodology developed by the European Commission to assess the inclusiveness of your deliverable and its possible unbalanced impacts on the EU population

**6** Assume that, if the standard will be used by people and / or have an impact on people, **there ARE gender differences that will have implications** and should be considered in the development of the standard. Even in cases where gender implications might not be identified or require specific actions, the analysis will help improve the standard by improving the understanding of how it will impact people.

> **Ask yourself:** How are diverse men, women, boys, and girls affected by the standard? Are there any direct, indirect or unintended effects unequally impacting different genders? Is the standard equally benefitting everyone?

**TIPS FOR ACTION:**

- Adopt a gender-responsive approach as the default to any work item (new or revision)
- Make the standards flexible enough to suit the needs of women and men
- Communicate and be transparent: when there are gender implications, be explicit in the deliverable and address them through clear definitions and accurate descriptions

**7** Gather evidence and use representative data, if available: data are critical in the standard development process. However, they can have limitations, contain gaps and biases. Sex-disaggregated data allow for the measurement of differences between women and men. Sex-disaggregated data and/or data representative of both men and women is sometimes not available. Other knowledge inputs (such as lived experience, articles, informal data from appropriate sources) may need to be considered as well to ensure the gender-responsiveness of the deliverable.

**Ask yourself:** What is the quality of the data? Do they reflect both men and women in the impacted population? Who might have relevant knowledge or experience that can help fill gaps or mitigate for biases in the available data? Are there any articles that talk about inequalities relevant to the area of standardization?

**TIPS FOR ACTION:**
- Assess the quality (validity, representativity and reliability) of the available data. This is impacted by how it was collected, measured, and presented (e.g. source, validity, sample size, representativeness, timeliness)
- Consider the possibility to collect additional inclusive data
- Look for alternative knowledge inputs to fill data gaps and mitigate for data biases
- Acknowledge data limitations and clearly explain assumptions in your deliverable

# Useful resources

- CEN-CENELEC ⊕ SDG 5 page on Gender Equality
- CEN-CENELEC ⊕ Webinar recording 'Gender-Responsive Standardization: supporting gender equality through standards' (2023)
- CEN BOSS – Inclusive Language ⊕ Guidelines
- ⊕ CEN and ⊕ CENELEC Code of Conduct for delegates, experts and observers participating in the technical work of CEN and/or CENELEC
- CEN-CENELEC ⊕ Design for All protocol for Standardizers
- European Commission ⊕ Study on the inclusiveness of anthropometrics in European harmonised standards (2023)
- ISO-IEC ⊕ Guidance and ⊕ Assessment Form on Gender-Responsive Standards in Technical Committees (2022)
- ISO-IEC ⊕ eLearning tool on Gender Responsive Standards - Guidance for ISO and IEC Technical Committees (2023)
- UNECE ⊕ eLearning Tool on Gender-Responsive Standards (2022)
- UNECE ⊕ Guidelines on Developing Gender-Responsive Standards (2022)
- UNECE ⊕ Publication on Why Gender-Responsive Standards are better for everyone (2023)
- Standard Council of Canada ⊕ Study - When One Size Does Not Protect All: Understanding Why Gender Matters for Standardization (2020)
- Standard Council of Canada ⊕ Study - Understanding the Relationship Between the Gender Composition of Technical Committees and Performance (2024).

## For more information

Support for the Technical Committee's or the Working Group's efforts towards gender-responsive standards can be brought to the CEN and CENELEC Secretariat, contact person: Ms Deborah Wautier, E-mail: dwautier@cencenelec.eu ; amartins@cencenelec.eu.