

THE NATIONAL GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWERMENT SEAL POLICY



Creating equal opportunities and
an empowered workforce for private
sector.

A POLICY BRIEF AND
PROGRAMME



Policy Brief and Programme:

THE NATIONAL GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWERMENT SEAL

Creating equal opportunities and an empowering Guyanese workplace.

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Summary

Guyanese women and men face gendered issues at work ranging from stereotypes and discrimination, to sexual harassment and exploitation; this proposal is a policy intervention by the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security (MHSSS), in partnership with the Ministry of Labour, and the Ministry of Public Service to mainstream gender equality and empowerment in the workplace, and to raise awareness and develop protective strategies against sexual and gender-based discrimination and harassment, while at the same time creating equal opportunities and empowerment.

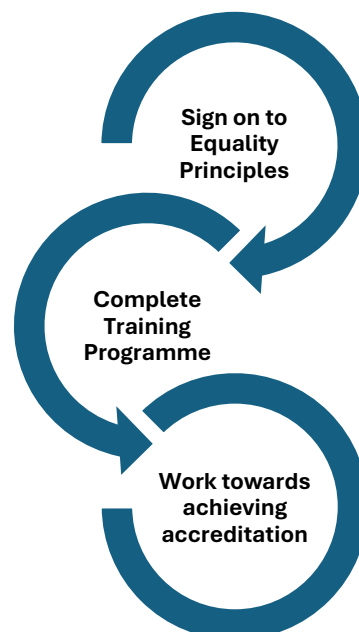
The policy position is framed as the “Women and Gender Equality and Empowerment Principles”, whereas public and private institutions (“organisations”) will be asked to “sign-on” to the principles as a commitment to achieving a gender equal and empowered work environment.

In supporting these principles, organisations will commit to completing a training programme facilitated by MHSSS, covering gender awareness and sensitization, prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment, gender mainstreaming, ensuring equal opportunities and empowerment, and men’s partnership in ending gender inequality.

On completing this training, organisations will be given a “seal” (accreditation) that publicly displays their progress and ranking in achieving gender equality and empowerment in the workplace. The awarding of seal by the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security will illustrate their competence and compliance with this initiative.

The theory of action

2. Organisations become aware and sensitized to gender inequality, sexual harassment and abuse, and are given training and the tools to address gender inequalities and harassment.



1. Organisations agree and publicly commit to working towards gender equality and empowerment in their workplace.

3. Organisations use the training and tools to work towards gender equality and empowerment; they will be awarded a Gender Seal to publicly display their commitment and excellence in achieving a gender equal and empowered workplace.

Introduction

Women and Gender Equality Principles encompass the fundamental idea that women and men should have equal rights, opportunities, and access to resources, regardless of their gender; this includes ensuring equal opportunities in education, employment, and political participation, as well as protecting women from violence and discrimination.^{1 2} The value behind these principles have been codified in Guyanese law through Article 29(I) of the Constitution of Guyana (the equality of women and men), the Equal Rights Act of 1990, and the Prevention of Discrimination Act of 1997; with sex and gender protection from discrimination in the Prevention of Discrimination Act of 1997, and protection from violence enshrined in the Sexual Offences Act of 2010 and the Family Violence Act of 2024. Guyana has ratified the following human rights treaties and incorporated their obligations into national legislation: UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW – ratified in 1980), International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention No. 100 on Equal Remuneration and ILO Convention No. 111 on Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) – both ratified in 1975; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR – ratified in 1977), the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (ratified in 2004), International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (ratified in 2010); and the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women (“Convention of Belem Do Para” – ratified in 1996). In 2003, the revised Constitution established the Women and Gender Equality Commission to monitor, promote and report on human rights and gender equality to the National Assembly of the Parliament of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana.

Despite legal protections, women are disproportionately affected by gender inequalities in all spheres of life due to socio-cultural gender norms, biases and violence which affects their access to resources and opportunities such as education and financing, entrepreneurial skills development, financial literacy, and even consideration for their gendered-needs, wellbeing and protection. This negatively affects women in the job market and in the work force.

¹ <https://www.wwf.id/en/prinsip-kesetaraan-gender>,

² <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/countries/china/weps>

A 2024 study by the World Bank has found that the labour force participation rate for women in Guyana was 40%, while the rate for men was 60%³, despite women slightly outnumbering men in the working-age population. The World Bank has noted that compared with labour force participation in the high-income group (which Guyana has been reclassified to in September 2023), the gap between men and women is higher in Guyana. This trend can be traced all the way back to the 2021 Labour Force Survey which found that the unemployment rate for women was higher than for men.⁴ Despite the service sector being the largest employer of women in Guyana, women are still not in equal positions of ownership and leadership, decision-making or empowerment.⁵

Between 2021 and June 2025, the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security through the Gender Affairs Bureau conducted thirty-seven (37) training and sensitisation sessions, reaching a total of 979 persons through forums, trainings, and engagements with the public and private sectors (including a Gender and Development training for the Private Sector in September 2024, and a similar training for Senior Public Servants in July 2024). Between October 2024 and August 2025 UNFPA provided the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security capacity building of the public sector on the Protection against Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (PSEAH) through the following activities: PSEAH awareness raising sessions with some 360 public servants, a training of 23 trainers, the development of a Trainer Manual on PSEAH and the development of a guidelines/standards document on PSEAH. In these interventions the Ministry found:

- Women face gender biases and discrimination at work, especially in male dominated fields such as engineering, manufacturing and trade. In some industries such as healthcare where women are taking more positions by numbers, it is reported that despite investments and comfort by women in entering these spaces, men are still preferred in promotions, and in one intervention, it was reported that despite the women-dominated management structure, the power of the few men in the room often overrode their decisions.
- Women are often overlooked when it comes to management, financial or technical skills development training programmes, but are mostly sent to “soft” trainings such as gender and development, and human resources. With the absence of men in

³ World Bank Gender Data Portal:

<https://liveprod.worldbank.org/en/economies/guyana#:~:text=In%20Guyana%2C%20the%20labor%20force,women%20is%20higher%20in%20Guyana.>

⁴ Guyana Labour Force Survey: https://statisticsguyana.gov.gy/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/GLFS_Bulletin_2021_Third-Quarter.pdf

⁵ <https://tradingeconomics.com/guyana/employees-services-female-percent-of-female-employment-wb-data.html>

these training, gender relations do not improve unless management take concrete action.

- Women are disproportionately affected by sexual harassment, sexual violence citing a lack of awareness, culture of acceptance and defence, and fear of retaliation with no internal protective policies or law to enforce their protection from harassment or retaliation.
- Women face institutional challenges in gendered-considerations for childcare (being late in dropping their children to daycares or to schools or feeling anxious in dropping children earlier so they can be on time for work or asking for time-off to take their children to clinics and/or nursing them back to health), and menstrual care and hygiene. In one intervention it was expressed that there is no labour law for menstrual bins in women's washrooms, so it is not a priority especially if the business is of mostly men.
- Women who experience family violence fear a loss of employment or wages if they request time for reporting, counselling or judicial services; to protect their careers, they endure domestic violence despite poor work performance. Women in the workplace also reported a lack of awareness and sensitization on family violence, sexual offences, and public services for victims, noting that it would be beneficial if more sessions were conducted by their employers to make their workforce more knowledgeable, aware, and supportive.
- Some businesses purposely target vulnerable women (indigenous and rural, migrants, or women who did not complete their education) to exploit their labour (in cleaning services, sales, and wait staff), subjecting them to ill-treatments, sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment, and low wages knowing they would not have the time and resources to seek legal redress, nor do they have many employment options.
- Men working in low wage positions are financially and physically exploited for their labour and ill-treated; often made to work overtime with little to no compensation.
- Men and women, particularly immigrants are being sexually harassed and exploited.
- Single-parent men are not given the same considerations for children and family affairs as women.
- Men feel interventions at work on family violence and sexual violence targets them, with little consideration that men are also victims and need equal support and access to services. Observances such as Women's Day and Mother's Day are given more attention than Men's Day and Father's Day.

While government interventions such as the Guyana Women's Leadership Institute and the Women's Innovation & Investment Network support the employability, career advancement, and entrepreneurship of women, and the work of the Gender Affairs Bureau and Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Policy Unit promotes gender awareness and sensitization in the workplace, women are still finding it difficult to enter and stay in the labour force when they face gender discrimination, exploitation, violence, and institutional challenges due to their gender.

The Women Empowerment Principles (WEPs)

Understanding that equality can only be achieved through equitable practices to address the inequalities of women and vulnerable groups, the *empowerment* principles were developed to mainstream gender equitable practices in businesses that would foster positive gender relations in the workplace.

In March 2010, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) inaugurated seven principles for businesses in offering guidance on how to advance gender equality and foster empower for women in the workplace, marketplace and community⁶. The seven WEPs are:

1. Establish high-level corporate leadership for gender equality
2. Treat all women and men fairly at work – respect and support human rights and nondiscrimination
3. Ensure the health, safety and well-being of all women and men workers
4. Promote education, training and professional development for women
5. Implement enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices that empower women
6. Promote equality through community initiatives and advocacy
7. Measure and publicly report on progress to achieve gender equality

Guyana, in comprehensively addressing gender gaps and barriers in the workplace, can adopt these principles as a policy position – making them culturally applicable to our labour force – and developing its own framework that competes with global standards that support and protect all workers in a gender inclusive manner.

Policies need commitment, enforcement, and accountability; to this end the Ministry proposes a holistic programme that seeks to support and ensure organisations commit to and realise gender equality in their workplace, and by extension the labour force and Guyanese society. These interventions are:

⁶ <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/countries/china/weps>

- I. The Women and Gender Equality and Empowerment Principles (LESCL) – 5 principles with 15 indicators every organisation must pledge to in working towards a gender-empowered workforce.
- II. Gender Equality in the Workplace Training (GEWT) Programme – A training programme that raises awareness and guides organisations in their development of gender equal policies and programmes.
- III. The National Gender Equality and Empowerment Seal (GEES) – An award accredited to organisations when commitments towards gender equality are met. This is an envisaged to be achieved through the comprehensive intervention programme by the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security.



Chart showing the relationship of each intervention, and the progress and cycle the process of working towards gender equality and empowerment at work will take.

1. Guyana Women and Gender Equality and Empowerment Principles (WGEPs)

Introducing LESCL (pronounced “Lescil”, a common Guyanese female name) – the Women and Gender Equality and Empowerment Principles for the Guyanese workplace.

1. **Leadership** that is committed to ensuring a safe, comfortable, protected and cohesive workplace for everyone.
2. **Equality** being of value in the organisation, with the promotion of gender equality and women’s empowerment in the workplace.
3. **Safety** being a priority for all employees, with dedicated commitment to a work environment free from discrimination, exploitation and abuse, violence and harassment based on sex and gender.
4. **Community** is at the heart of work: everyone feels safe, belonging, and supported, and the organisation makes dedicated support to community initiatives and advocacy for social development.
5. **Learning** is essential for a dynamic, efficient, and sustainable labour force; this means encouraging and investing in training and professional development for women.

Through these principles, the following indicators (commitments) were developed:

1. Leadership

- a. Leadership signs on and commits to these Women and Gender Equality and Empowerment Principles (LESCL)
- b. Leadership dedicates time to being part of and facilitate training under the Gender Equality in the Workplace Training Programme.
- c. Leadership commits to working towards, attaining, and upkeeping the gender equality seal accreditation.

2. Equality

- a. The organisation ends gender discriminatory language in posting of ads, vacancies, branding, posts or statements.
- b. The organisation actively encourages and promotes “equal opportunity” employment.
- c. Women as well as men are given equal opportunities in training, advancements, and decision-making.

3. Safety

- a. Ensure the health, safety and well-being of all workers.
- b. The organisation enacts policies and programmes that empowers workers, and protect employees from all of forms of sexual and gender-based violence including gender discrimination and sexual harassment.

- c. Employees feel safe and secure through infrastructure, equipment, and supplies that consider their gender needs.

4. Community

- a. Actively engage work force on their needs, team building, and creating a healthy work environment.
- b. The provision of services to the Guyanese community do not discriminate against gender and sex.
- c. Support and promote equality through community initiatives and advocacy.

5. Learning

- a. Ensure that men as well as women participate in gender equality workshops and training to promote positive gender relations in the workplace.
- b. Promote education, training and professional development for women.
- c. The workforce is educated on laws, policies and codes of conduct regarding family violence, sexual offences, sexual violence and harassment, and other gender and social interventions for their well-being.

Organisations, public and private will be invited to “sign on” to these principles and publish a call to action or publish a zero-tolerance statement against gender discrimination and sexual harassment, making the first commitment to realise gender equality and women’s empowerment in the workplace, and the Guyanese society.

2. Gender Equality in the Workplace Training (GEWT) Programme

The Gender Equality in the Workplace Training (GEWT) Programme is the first practical step in supporting the WGEPs; it is also the foundation and guiding programme of attaining the Gender Equality Seal – an accreditation awarded to organisations that are actively pursuing gender protection and equality action for professional and social development, measured by a gender equality matrix developed by the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security.

The training programme raises awareness to the intent and purpose of the seal and provide the tools and guidance to eliminate gender-based gaps, increase women’s roles in decision-making, eradicate sexual harassment and violence at work, and promote inclusive and non-sexist communication, policies and programmes for an equal and cohesive work environment. On a national scale, it gives the Guyanese labour force information to achieve behavioral and social change, prevention of sexual and gender-based abuse and violence and access to the law for the protection of individual and labour rights.

The GEWT Programme assists public and private institutions to ensure that their workplaces are fair and equitable, for a productive and innovative workforce, while enhancing efficiency and promoting accountability –with higher rates of women in non-traditional sectors and leadership roles. GEWT also supports organisations every step of the way, offering tailored guidance through assessments, training, and partnerships with the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security and non-government organisations.

We understand that gender interventions are only successful if there is a buy-in on the decision-making and policy level, so that it truly supports the work in planning and programmes throughout the organisation; in this respect, the GEWT Programme will target all levels of management, Boards of Directors, Senior Managers and Supervisors of organisations.

The training programme will involve four sensitivity training courses, i.e. a psychological technique that uses intensive group discussions and interactions to increase sensitivity to others as well as self-awareness of an individual's own prejudices (known or unknown) that can cause harm.

The training courses for the seal will be:

1. Gender Sensitivity Training – for Directors and Managers
2. Gender Mainstreaming Training – for Gender Focal Points and Working Group on Gender and Social Inclusion
3. Seminar on the Protection against Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Sexual Harassment – for Working Group on Gender and Social Inclusion, Managers, Supervisors, and Team Leads
4. BRAVE – an introductory session to create an equitable space for reflection and healing for men in the workplace. This session introduces how men can be partners in ending gender inequalities and violence.

3. Gender Equality and Empowerment Seal (GEES)

The GEES is an innovative assessment and accreditation tool that helps organisations increase employee satisfaction, take advantage of all workers' potential (regardless of gender) and have a fair, inclusive, healthier and equal work environment. Together with the GWEPs and GEWT, the GEES are instruments to promote equitable practices and hard evidence to demonstrate results to employees, shareholders and other stakeholders in line

with sustainable corporate practices on gender and social development. Thus, it fosters companies' reputation and accountability.⁷

As public institutions and private organisations embark on a journey towards gender equality excellence⁸, the GEES measures their progress against internationally validated standards with local needs as assessed by the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security. For the Guyanese public sector, a minimum of 3 gender indicators must be met to be accredited a Seal, and 5 indicators for the private sector.

The GEES is founded on a solid framework based on internationally accepted principles regarding human rights and gender equality that Guyana has agreed to, this includes the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the 1994 Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Conventions, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Agenda 2030 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the UNWomen Women's Empowerment Principles.

Upon completion of the accreditation programme, participating organisations will be recognised locally and internationally as dynamic and enterprising organisations that demonstrate progress towards gender equality.

Benefits of the Gender Equality and Empowerment Seal

- A More Just and Equitable Work Environment.
- A cohesive and collaborative workplace.
- A workplace free from sexual violence and harassment.
- Greater Efficiency and Staff Performance.
- Enhanced Public Image and Brand Loyalty.
- Enhanced Employee Competence and Commitment.
- Reduced Staff Turnover.
- Greater Accountability and Transparency in Institutions.
- Greater opportunities for partnerships and networking with organisation (locally and especially internationally) with similar values for gender equality.

⁷ UNDP Gender Equality Seal Programme for the Private Sector

<https://www.gendersealprivatesector.org/programme/>

⁸ Gender Equality Seal for Public Institutions "A journey towards excellence"

<https://www.gendersealpublicinstitutions.org/the-seal/>

Development impact

The Gender Seal aims to transform gender inequalities. With a methodology rooted in learning and improving, organisations are supported in advancing results and impact that transform the lives of men and women for the better.

The Gender Equality and Empowerment Index (GEEI) is a performance indicator tool developed to measure the progress and attainment of Organisations seeking the GEES accreditation in Guyana. The GEEI not only grades and awards Organisations committed to gender equality and empowerment, but serves as a tool for accountability, assessing the impact of the gender seal, and measuring transformation in workplace relations.

Indicators of Status:

PRIVATE SECTOR		
Gender Bronze	Gender Silver	Gender Gold
After signing the Equality and Empowerment Principles, leadership makes a zero-tolerance statement on all forms of sexual and gender-based violence and misconduct including gender discrimination and sexual harassment at work.	After signing the Equality and Empowerment Principles, leadership makes a zero-tolerance statement on all forms of sexual and gender-based violence and misconduct including gender discrimination and sexual harassment at work.	After signing the Equality and Empowerment Principles, leadership makes a zero-tolerance statement on all forms of sexual and gender-based violence and misconduct including gender discrimination and sexual harassment at work.
Have a human resource person (to liaison as a Gender Focal Point with the accreditation team) responsible for recommending, coordinating, monitoring and evaluating the key performance indicators in attaining the Seal.	Establish a Gender and social inclusion working group that would be responsible for recommending, coordinating, monitoring and evaluating the key performance indicators in attaining the Seal.	Establish a Gender and social inclusion working group that would be responsible for recommending, coordinating, monitoring and evaluating the key performance indicators in attaining the Seal.
Develop and monitor an inclusion metric to ensure equitable internal power structure, this includes women as well as men have equal opportunity for employment (hiring), upward mobility, decision	Develop and monitor an inclusion metric to ensure equitable internal power structure, this includes women as well as men have equal opportunity for employment (hiring), upward mobility, decision	Develop and monitor an inclusion metric to ensure equitable internal power structure, this includes women as well as men have equal opportunity for employment (hiring), upward mobility, decision

making, and leadership roles at the highest levels of leadership (directorate, management, and team leads).	making, and leadership roles at the highest levels of leadership (directorate, management, and team leads).	making, and leadership roles at the highest levels of leadership (directorate, management, and team leads).
Have quarterly sessions on Sexual and Gender-based Violence, Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment, Gender Equality, or any information/ education session for employees to promote gender inclusivity, equality, protection, and justice in the organisation.	Have quarterly sessions on Sexual and Gender-based Violence, Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment, Gender Equality, or any information/ education session for employees to promote gender inclusivity, equality, protection, and justice in the organisation.	Have quarterly sessions on Sexual and Gender-based Violence, Prevention of Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment, Gender Equality, or any information/ education session for employees to promote gender inclusivity, equality, protection, and justice in the organisation.
Have a code of conduct that guides the behaviours, attitudes, and values of employees in the workplace and the execution of their duties that promotes positive gender relations, zero tolerance for gender discrimination and sexual harassment.	Have an anti-discrimination, sexual harassment, protection against sexual exploitation and abuse or any other policy or/and code of conduct that promotes and/or supports gender inclusivity, equality and protection, and justice in the organisation.	Have an anti-discrimination, sexual harassment, protection against sexual exploitation and abuse or any other policy or/and code of conduct that promotes and/or supports gender inclusivity, equality and protection, and justice in the organisation.
Report on and monitor the results of the inclusion metric, and assess the accountability of management (to staff) in achieving the goals, and assess how transformative the goals and policies have been in creating an equal and empowering work environment for all staff.	Have programmes and/or infrastructure to enhance, improve, protect and/or empower women, include men as advocates, and protect gender minorities from harassment in the workplace.	Have programmes and/or infrastructure to enhance, improve, protect and/or empower women, include men as advocates, and protect gender minorities from harassment in the workplace.
	Report on and monitor the results of the inclusion metric, and assess the accountability of management (to staff) in	Has invested in corporate social partnerships and/or sponsorships to Guyanese gender and development

	achieving the goals, and assess how transformative the goals and policies have been in creating an equal and empowering work environment for all staff.	programmes in communities.
		Report on and monitor the results of the inclusion metric, and assess the accountability of management (to staff) in achieving the goals, and assess how transformative the goals and policies have been in creating an equal and empowering work environment for all staff.
		Gender Platinum (Bonus): Facilitates a Care and Early Childhood Development Centre in the organisation for the benefit of employees and/or neighbouring organisations.

5 Steps to Accreditation

1. **Call to Action and the Creation of an Action Plan for Gender Equality**
Organisations will need to “sign on” to the Women and Gender Equality and Empowerment Principles, stating their support for the accreditation process, and the creation of a Gender Focal Point Committee or Working Group on Gender and Social Inclusion to work towards achieving indicators on the Gender Equality and Empowerment Index. Leadership will also make and publish a zero-tolerance statement on all forms of sexual and gender-based violence and misconduct including gender discrimination and sexual harassment at work.
2. **Application and self-assessment**
Organisations will first apply to the accreditation programme, and in their digital application, perform a self-assessment so that the results can assess the organisation’s preparedness and make recommendations on what is needed to meet the standards they are applying for.
3. **Completion of all four training courses in the GEWT Programme**
The organisation will have to complete the mandatory training under the GEWT Programme, requiring policy leaders and decision-makers, senior programme staff, and organisational support, to (re)commit to the purpose and needs of the Gender Equality Seal.
4. **Assessment**
Within one year of the call to action, an accreditation team made up of the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security, Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Public Service (for government institutions), assess the work and progress made by the organisation.
5. **Awards Ceremony and Certification**
If successful, the organisations will be invited to an awards ceremony, where they receive their certification, valid for two years.



Government of Guyana



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