

How to mainstream gender into national waste management policy

Case study from Uruguay

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When the process to develop the [National Waste Management Plan 2022-2032](#) (NWMP 2021) began in Uruguay, gender mainstreaming on national waste management was not high on the agenda. However, with the consultations with a wide range of stakeholders (social organisations, private and public sectors, etc.), of whom 73% were women, the importance of gender issues in waste management became evident. In particular, from the perspective of a just ecological transition, the social inclusion of women working as informal waste pickers was identified as a crucial issue. The working group of the Ministry of the Environment thus sought support from relevant gender experts (gender expert within the Ministry of the Environment and Women of Waste (WOW), a working group of the International Solid Waste Association - ISWA) and also integrated the National Institute of Women (INMUJERES) of the Ministry of Social Development, which is responsible for gender policies in Uruguay, in the working group. The working group further did a survey on local government workforce dedicated to waste management to understand the gender issues, such as the gender division of labour, which proved helpful to put gender on the table.

Based on these initiatives, gender perspectives were successfully integrated into the NWMP 2021, which includes the following:

- The **National Strategy and Public Policies for Gender Equality** is integrated as part of the regulatory and institutional framework.
- “Gender and Generations”, which is defined as ‘incorporating the gender perspective in a transversal manner, considering the persistent inequalities between men and women and promoting the full exercise of their rights under equal contributions’, is set as one of the **strategic axes of the plan**.
- **Follow-up indicators** include criteria disaggregated by sex, age, and ethnicity. These indicators emphasize the role and contribution of women in waste management and help identify asymmetries and biases between women and men in the sector. Examples of asymmetries are wage gaps (women may earn less than men for similar tasks), unequal access to resources and training (women often face barriers to obtaining professional development opportunities) and job segregation (certain waste management tasks may be divided along gender lines, with women relegated to less lucrative roles). Moreover, cultural and social biases may perceive women as less suited for physically demanding tasks in waste management.
- NWMP 2021 is written in **inclusive language** to avoid terms, phrases or expressions that may be sexist or exclude women to avoid generating gender bias.
- **Key interventions** reflected in the plan include the following:
 - Improve the working and living conditions of women working in the informal sector, through a socio-productive inclusion process;
 - Avoid further inequalities in the distribution of domestic work in terms of minimizing waste generation, segregating waste for recycling and composting at home;
 - Collect gender-segregated data for monitoring processes; and
 - Ensure that communication and education materials are not gender-biased.

Despite the successful integration of gender into the NWMP 2021, there remain some challenges that respond to an implementation gap, such as the lack of capacity to execute some strategic lines and to

monitor the real gender impact of the NWMP 2021, and the difficulty of incorporating gender equality criteria in the composition of roundtables and panels.

(Edited by Junko Fujioka, Gender Focal Point, UNEP-IETC)

For more details, please watch the recording of UNEP-IETC's webinar, '[Gender and Waste: How to mainstream gender into national waste management policy](#)', organized on 28 November 2023.

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