

## CTIP M&E Toolkit: Summary Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) in MEL and Research

This document briefly introduces the concept of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion, known as GESI, explains why it is relevant in monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL), provides a brief description of some of the primary characteristics involved, and details about how to go about considering and incorporating GESI when undertaking MEL.

- What do you understand by Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI)?
- Why is GESI relevant for MEL?
- How do you ensure GESI is embedded in your MEL or research process?
- How does GESI relate to the research and MEL workforce?
- How will we know if we are effectively addressing GESI in research and MEL?

### I. What is Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI)?

GESI stands for Gender Equality and Social Inclusion. A GESI approach considers unequal power relations and inequalities experienced by individuals as a result of social identities, and how these intersect to create experiences of vulnerability and marginalization. It focuses on actions to address unequal power relations and inequalities, reduce disparities, and ensure equal rights, responsibilities, opportunities, and respect for everyone connected to a policy or activity.<sup>1</sup>

GESI is a framework for engaging with issues related to gender equality and social inclusion and building these into relevant policies and activities. GESI is one framework for considering these issues. Other common framings include EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion) and DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion), and more recently Ability (A), Belonging (B), and Justice (J) have been added to these frameworks in some contexts.

Embracing GESI considerations ensures that individuals or groups of individuals are treated with fairness, equality of opportunity, respect, inclusivity, and dignity. It ensures that nobody is treated less favorably because of their protected characteristics, bringing together people with different identities, experiences, and backgrounds.

Acknowledging that “social exclusion or discrimination based on gender, caste, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or disability are significant drivers of vulnerability to persons being trafficked”<sup>2</sup>, embedding GESI into a MEL or any counter-trafficking research project seems the right thing to do.

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<sup>1</sup> THET, ‘Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Toolkit for Health Partnerships’ (THET, 2020). Available [here](#).

<sup>2</sup> USAID and Winrock. ‘Integrating Gender and Social Exclusion into Counter-Trafficking Programming Toolkit’ (Winrock, 2020). Available [here](#).

*“Treating people with respect, fairness and dignity in a way that values difference, is authentic and offers opportunity for participation, especially for people with lived experience of modern slavery”<sup>3</sup>.*

## II. Why is GESI relevant for MEL?

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) is a set of processes by which organizations’ projects and programs can be designed, managed, evidenced, and understood. The aim is to “determine the relevance and fulfilment of the objectives as well as the development of efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability”<sup>4</sup>.

Individuals’ experiences of both trafficking and anti-trafficking interventions are often substantially shaped by intersecting identity factors. Therefore, project and program outcomes can only be properly understood when assessed with due consideration for GESI factors.

- GESI-responsive design of interventions and MEL systems and tools can help to ensure the full scope of the intended group are reached by the intervention, that it better serves their needs and wants, and that it’s attainments and impacts are more comprehensively evidenced and understood. All of this should lead to more effective and successful interventions.
- GESI-responsive monitoring can help to identify how different identity factors are impacting people’s experiences of interventions and inform adaptations to maximize the effectiveness of the intervention for different beneficiaries.
- GESI-response evaluation can help to identify factors that impacted on the outcomes of interventions for different beneficiaries and how different experiences impacted the achievement of intervention objectives.

Like counter-trafficking interventions themselves, MEL must “utilize a comprehensive and effective strategy that identifies the unique drivers that impact diverse groups of people differently so that activities that promote prevention, promotion and accountability are more inclusive”<sup>5</sup>. GESI-responsive MEL can help to ensure that interventions are inclusive and that objectives are achieved for people with different characteristics and backgrounds. The credibility and legitimacy of findings are improved by a GESI-responsive approach, which in turn inform improved programming and impacts.

## III. Designing and Delivering GESI-responsive MEL and research

GESI must cut across all stages of MEL and research, including MEL and research design, data collection, data analysis, validation, reporting, and dissemination.<sup>6</sup> MEL must be shaped in a way that integrates gender equality and social inclusion concerns by design from the outset, and carries these considerations through each stage of the MEL process.

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<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Such et al, ‘Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion in Publicly Funded Modern Slavery Research in the UK’ (Modern Slavery & Human Rights Policy & Evidence Centre, July 2023). Available [here](#).

<sup>4</sup> European Commission. Taking a Reflexive approach to Gender Equality for institutional Transformation, 2017. Information about the project [here](#).

<sup>5</sup> USAID and Winrock. *Integrating Gender and Social Exclusion into Counter-Trafficking Programming Toolkit*, 2020. Access Asia CTIP GESI Toolkit [here](#).

<sup>6</sup> Such et al, above n 3.

Integration of GESI in research and MEL should not be a ‘tick box’ exercise—it should be “intentional and strategic”, reflecting a “genuine commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion for the right reasons”<sup>7</sup>.

#### *GESI-responsive research and MEL design*

Research and MEL can be designed in an inclusive way, adopting an integrated GESI approach.

- Ensuring that a range of relevant perspectives inform the development of the MEL framework or research protocol, including affected populations and people with lived experience, particularly those with marginalized identity characteristics.
- Proactively identifying and addressing potential barriers to engagement or participation in the MEL or research, particularly those connected to marginalized identity characteristics.
- Recognizing the potential impacts of power imbalances on people’s participation in, or experiences of, MEL or research processes and adopting mitigating measures to collapse these imbalances.
- Ensuring data gathering methods are selected with GESI-concerns in mind, to minimize barriers to inclusion and include GESI-related factors in data collection and analysis.
- Strategically designing participant sampling approaches that will deliver a diverse participant group that is reflective of the different identity characteristics found in the affected population.

Participatory methodologies can help to address power imbalances and engage affected populations meaningfully in MEL and research, and thus deliver GESI objectives. Incorporating participatory approaches in MEL and research design allows to “shift the power from development professionals to the intended beneficiaries of the intervention”<sup>8</sup>. This can be done in a variety of ways, including through consulting affected populations in establishing the purpose of the MEL or research process, setting research questions, designing methodology, and planning outputs. GESI considerations should be integrated in the design and delivery of participatory methods, ensuring appropriate representation of people with different identity characteristics and backgrounds relevant to the target populations, as well as the accessibility and inclusiveness of participatory activities.

#### *GESI-responsive outcomes*

Intervention outcomes are a crucial element of MEL, specifying the changes that the implementing organization is seeking to bring about through the project or program. Integration of GESI in intervention outcomes should be considered at the outset, identifying whether and how addressing the differentiated experiences of people with different identity characteristics and backgrounds should be an explicit aspect of the interventions aims.

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<sup>7</sup> Modern Slavery & Human Rights Policy & Evidence Centre. *Equality, diversity, and inclusion in publicly funded modern slavery research in the UK*, July 2023. Full research report [here](#).

<sup>8</sup> Participation Research Cluster, ‘Participatory Methods: Plan, Monitor and Evaluate’ (Institute of Development Studies). Available [here](#).

### *GESI-responsive indicators*

Indicators are observable, measurable characteristics that describe an aspect of interest in an intervention, and which can be reliably assessed (whether quantitatively or qualitatively). GESI-responsive indicators may include disaggregation by identity characteristics relevant to the project or program, and the affected population in question. This might specify the inclusion of the characteristic(s) in question and should include relevant disaggregation such as by sex, gender, race, age, nationality, socio-economic background, and/or other factors.

### *GESI-responsive data collection*

Thinking about which methods and approaches are most suitable is crucial when collecting disaggregated data. Particularly, when working with survivors of trafficking in persons, data collection often includes discussion of trauma, gender-based violence, and exploitation. The Asia CTIP GESI Toolkit provides some key questions to consider:<sup>9</sup>

- How can we ensure that quantitative data collection methods will accurately represent target groups?
- What are the right tools to collect qualitative data?
- Are there any religious, cultural, or ethnic sensitivities that may influence who/how data can be collected?
- If data are collected through small group discussions, will women participate if men are present?
- If data are being collected remotely or by a third party, how do we monitor the process?
- How will data be collected from survivors or people with a history of trauma or gender-based violence?
- How can we make sure that data are collected from people living with disabilities?
- Who will collect the data?
- Have the data collection officers (male and female) been trained?
- Where will data be collected?

GESI-responsive data collection should ensure accessibility of participation for people of different backgrounds and provide a platform for people to input meaningfully and comfortably. For instance, this may be achieved by conducting data collection in local languages, in locations that are easily accessible for people from different backgrounds, and at appropriate times for different people. Use of peer researchers may also be appropriate.

### *What disaggregated data are needed?*

Data collection should also provide for an appropriate level of disaggregation based on relevant identity characteristics. However, to reduce the amount of data collected, it is important to identify which data are needed. The Asia CTIP GESI Toolkit provides the following questions to assist in deciding what disaggregated data need to be collected:

- Who does the activity target – men, women, people living with disabilities, religious and/or ethnic minority groups?

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<sup>9</sup> USAID and Winrock, above n 2

- What other information is available in the implementation plan or activity description about the activity and groups likely to be impacted?
- What do the baseline data tell us about the problem the activity is trying to address?
- Are there any groups that face multiple or complex forms of discrimination?

Research and MEL systems are GESI-blind if they do not capture individual differences due to protected characteristics (race, age, gender, ethnicity, disability, etc.) in access, impacts, methods, and processes. For instance, sampling often under-represents women – i.e., references to the “household head” in surveys is usually defined as male without further information.<sup>10</sup>

### *GESI-responsive data analysis*

GESI-responsive data analysis specifically considers how different and intersecting identity characteristics shape people’s experiences and responses. This can include focused analysis of:

- What differences can be observed between people with different identity characteristics and backgrounds? How can these differences be understood and explained?
- What elements of people’s experiences and responses are shared between people with different identity characteristics and backgrounds? How can these similarities be understood and explained?
- How do intersecting identity characteristics and backgrounds shape people’s experiences and responses?
- How has the intervention shifted power imbalances within affected communities, and between service providers, beneficiaries, and communities?

GESI-responsive analysis should also interrogate the role and positionality of the person responsible for conducting data analysis, and how their identity characteristics and background might shape their approach and interpretation of the data.

- MEL practitioners and analysts should seek to minimize the impacts of their own identity and background in the analysis of the data. This can be achieved through various means, for instance double-blind coding of data by a diverse research team.
- MEL practitioners and analysts should be transparent about their own positionality and how this impacts the analysis, for instance through the inclusion of positionality statements.<sup>11</sup>
- Ensuring a diverse MEL or research team, including affected populations and people with lived experience, can help to ensure that relevant GESI concerns are appropriately addressed in the analysis stage.
- Due consideration should be given to different forms of knowledge. MEL practitioners and analysts should seek to engage with knowledge and approaches in

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<sup>10</sup> International Labor Organization. *Guidance Note 3.1: Integrating gender equality in monitoring and evaluation*, June 2020. Access document [here](#).

<sup>11</sup> See for instance Center for Disability and Health Awareness, ‘Positionality Statements in Brief’ (Michigan Medicine, 2023). Available [here](#).

affected and marginalized communities, and look for ways to promote and integrate these different frameworks in the analysis.

In all data analysis, emphasis must be placed on making sure that data is used well and appropriately and that biases and imbalances in analysis are reduced.

#### *GESI-responsive validation and reporting*

GESI-responsive concerns should carry through the validation and reporting stages of research and MEL projects, seeking to ensure that findings and recommendations reflect and represent a diversity of perspectives. Validation processes with affected populations—including appropriate representation of people with diverse identity characteristics and backgrounds—can provide an additional GESI-relevant review of outputs and mitigate potential biases in interpretation of data in the analysis stage.

GESI concerns must be described comprehensively within MEL and research reports. It is important to report on GESI in research design, methods selection, and research conduct, as well as in research findings.

*“More transparent reporting of modern slavery research will surface inclusive practice, diversity in samples and research limitations, enabling clearer judgement of how EDI has been designed into research studies”<sup>12</sup>*

Information on the nature of decisions made at the design stage must be publicly available, and reports should be explicit and clear regarding GESI.

Outputs should also be made accessible for affected populations, including addressing barriers to access that may be experienced by people with specific characteristics. This may include publishing findings in accessible formats relevant for the different communities connected to the intervention, using non-technical and jargon-free language, considering where and how material is published and disseminated, providing alternative audio and visual outputs, and providing appropriate translations of material.

#### IV. GESI within the MEL and research workforce

GESI cuts across the different organizations and stakeholders involved in MEL—relevant not only for MEL and research participants, but also for those that conduct, fund, advise, guide, and review it.<sup>13</sup>

- The representation of people with diverse characteristics—particularly those relevant for the study, intervention, or target population—in the organization and relevant team.
- How GESI-related issues are embedded in the organization, including through policies, ways of working, and awareness and training for staff.
- How ethical practice is ensured in MEL and research activities within the organization, including through appropriate review, monitoring, and accountability mechanisms.

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<sup>12</sup> Such et al, above n 3.

<sup>13</sup> Such et al, above n 3.

- How power imbalances are being addressed within the organization’s workforce, as well as in interactions between the workforce and affected populations.

V. How will we know if we are effectively addressing GESI in MEL and research?<sup>14</sup>

Projects can assess how effectively they are addressing GESI in research or MEL or research activities by:

- Establishing a GESI plan at the outset.
- Monitoring progress made against the GESI plan in a regular and ongoing manner.
- Working with a GESI expert to conduct a GESI assessment or evaluation.
- Integrating GESI considerations into the terms of reference for mid-term reviews or end-of-project evaluations.

This entails analyzing how multiple identities shape or determine the following:

- What progress has been made against the GESI indicators.
- Additional measures that are needed to increase the effectiveness of activities and their implementation.
- Best practice examples or case studies that can be used to show impact, help replicate activities, or act as learning tools.
- Institutional learning and exchange of promising approaches to enhance GESI.
- How and what project resources are being directed towards different marginalized groups.
- How budget allocations are ensuring GESI-specific data collection efforts.
- Progress in outputs and impact indicators that show changes in behaviors, attitudes, social norms, and practices.
- The likelihood that results will be sustained over time.

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<sup>14</sup> This section draws from the USAID and Winrock GESI in CTIP toolkit, above n 2.