

**Revised National Gender Equality Policy**

**Royal Government of Bhutan**

**(January 2023)**

**National Commission for Women and Children**

**Royal Government of Bhutan**

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# **Background**

## Context

Since its successful transition to a Democratic Constitutional Monarchy, Bhutan has adopted multiple legal and policy frameworks to provide women and men with the right to full and equal participation in political, civil, economic, social and cultural life at all levels. The Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan 2008 provides an overarching framework and foundation within which gender equality is enshrined. The Parliament also repealed the provision criminalizing unnatural sex in the Penal Code of Bhutan in 2021, enabling the LGBT+ population to exercise their human rights without fear of discrimination. This was a giant leap towards a more inclusive and progressive society.

However, despite guarantees of formal equality, structural and cultural norms continue to pose barriers to the broader realization of gender equality. Bhutan ranks 126 out of 146 countries in the Global Gender Gap Report 2022[[1]](#footnote-1), which uses indicators of political empowerment, health and survival, educational attainment, and economic participation and opportunity to assess the extent of gender parity. There is also no legally binding provision/regulation/policy that guarantees the rights of the LGBT+ population.

The Constitution provides the right to vote and to participate in any lawful profession as a fundamental right of every Bhutanese citizen. The female voter composition in the general elections has been high, but the election results have been less favourable for women. In the 2022 local government elections, only 12.1% of the women candidates were elected although there is 200 percent increase in the female gups elected[[2]](#footnote-2). Likewise in 2018, only 14.9% and 16% of women candidates were elected in the National Assembly and National Council respectively. For the LGBT+ community, the exercise of voting rights by the transgender population, particularly trans women, is comparatively poor. Political participation by the LGBT+ community was also found to be absent at all levels. This can be associated to social and cultural barriers that prevent them from being visible in public sphere and their low education qualifications. 86.6% of the 292 registered members with Pride Bhutan have only high school qualifications or less[[3]](#footnote-3).

The overall Bhutanese unemployment rate stood at 4.8% in 2021, with 6.1% women unemployed against 3.6% men. Women have much lower participation in regular paid employment (20.6% as compared to 35.0% for men) and a more substantial engagement in the agricultural sector (57.5% against 40.6% for men)[[4]](#footnote-4). It is evident that women’s unpaid care work goes largely unrecognized. Women in Bhutan perform 71 percent of unpaid care work, which is 2.5 times more than men, and their share of contribution to the GDP is 11% while men’s is 5%.[[5]](#footnote-5) Further, the General Demography of LGBT+ 2020 reveals that 28.37% of the 180 members are unemployed, with majority working in the entertainment and private sectors.

As of December 2021, women comprised 39.76%[[6]](#footnote-6) of the total civil servants. However, a further disaggregation reveals gaps in executive and decision making positions for women with women accounting for only 18 % at executive level including specialist. As such, continuous efforts to improve women’s representation in decision making in civil service including development of gender equality strategy to enhance women’s leadership and capacity building of women leaders.

Bhutan has witnessed impressive achievements in terms of girls’ participation rates in education, with girls making up to 51.29%[[7]](#footnote-7) of the total enrolment in 2021. The gender parity at the primary level is 0.96, 1.11 at the secondary level, 1.02 at the tertiary level. This is an indication that Bhutan has fulfilled its goal of gender equality in terms of enrolment. However, gender gaps remain in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects, and technical and vocational fields. In addition, as reflected above, very few members of LGBT+ population continue to secondary and tertiary levels, with majority dropping out by high school. This can be attributed to lack of LGBT+-sensitive school policies, infrastructure, facilities and services (including protection) at the schools and institutions, and stereotypical perception against them.

With major investments in facilities and services, health outcomes and indicators have improved significantly over the years. The institutional delivery has increased from 37.7 percent in 2012 to 98.1% in 2021[[8]](#footnote-8) and the Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) per 1000 live births reduced from 40.1 in 2005 to 15.1 in 2017. The Maternal Mortality Ratio has significantly reduced from 560 to 89 between 1990 and 2017. Nevertheless, the issue of high teenage pregnancies, as high as 32%[[9]](#footnote-9) of girls with first pregnancy at the age of 18 years and below continues to exist. The accessibility and quality of health services that cater to women’s specific sexual and reproductive needs requires greater attention as it impacts all aspects of their lives. Women in rural areas, in particular, face vulnerabilities and lack of opportunities to access comprehensive health services. These issues are even more challenging for the LGBT+ population due to lack of awareness on their health needs, specific health services, capacities of the health service providers and prevalence of stigma against them while seeking health services. The Department of Public Health’s mapping and population size estimation of Men who have Sex with Men (MSM), transgender people and high risk women in Bhutan, 2019 revealed that 18.5% of MSM (out of 273 respondents), 55.9% of transgender women (34 respondents) and 47.6% of transgender men (out of 124 respondents) experienced some form of discrimination at health facilities/services.

The study conducted by NCWC on the prevalence of violence against women and girls in 2017 revealed that more than half (53.4%) the women agreed that men are justified in hitting their wives under certain circumstances. Furthermore, 44.6% of women and girls experienced one or more forms of partner violence during their lifetime, with 9.3% and 3.7% of them experiencing severe forms of physical and sexual violence respectively. While considerable efforts have been made to prevent and respond to Gender Based Violence (GBV) against women and girls, there is limited specialized services for survivors. Harmful socio-cultural norms and stereotypical practices that justify and sustain GBV continue to prevail. Likewise, Trafficking in Persons (TIP), particularly women and children, is also an emerging issue which is evident through several incidences reported by media. The assessment of “Situation of Trafficking in Persons in Bhutan” reveals the prevalence of human trafficking and recommends concerted efforts by all sectors.

In relation to the LGBT+ population, 35.4% of MSM (out of 273 respondents), 91.2% of transgender women (out of 34 respondents) and 95.2% of transgender men (out of 124 respondents) experienced stigma because of their status as per the mapping and population size estimation of MSM, transgender people and high risk women in Bhutan. The study also found that 6.6% of MSM, 29.4% of transgender women and 10.5% of transgender men experienced at least one form of sexual violence. The Integrated Biological and Behavioral Surveillance (IBBS) Survey conducted by the National HIV/AIDs Control Program (NACP), Ministry of Health in 2016 also showed prevalence of extreme forms of physical and sexual violence against trans women and gay and bisexual men.

## Current policy and legislations

### **Alignment with national policies and frameworks**

The NGEP is aligned with and internalizes the values and principles enshrined in the Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan and other important legal and policy documents.

The **Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan** conveys a powerful message for gender equality through the articles on fundamental rights (Article 7), fundamental duties (Article 8 section 5) and the Principles of State Policy (Article 9, section 17)[[10]](#footnote-10).

The concept of **Gross National Happiness (GNH)** provides a people-centric approach to development.

The 12th FYP strives to achieve “**just, harmonious and sustainable** society through enhanced decentralisation.” The National Key Results Area (NKRA) 10, in particular, intends to promote gender equality and empower women and girls.

The policy is also aligned with the Domestic Violence Prevention Act 2013, the Labour and Employment Act 2007, the Penal Code of Bhutan 2004 (and Amendment 2011), the Child Care and Protection Act 2011 and other relevant legislations.

### **Alignment with international policies and standards**

The NGEP is aligned to the international agreements that the RGoB has agreed to and ratified.

The **Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women** (CEDAW) is an international treaty adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly. Bhutan ratified the CEDAW on 31 August 1981. Article 10 (25) of the Constitution provides that “existing International Conventions, Covenants, Treaties, Protocols and Agreements entered into by Bhutan, shall continue in force.” This recognizes CEDAW as the deemed law of the country.

The **Beijing Platform for Action** (BPfA) was agreed by the governments of the world in 1995 at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China. The document includes 12 critical areas of concern, each with its own strategic objectives and actions. The critical area on i[nstitutional mechanisms for the advancement of women](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/institu.htm) in particular provides for formulation a visible national policy on gender mainstreaming.

**The Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs) were adopted in September 2015 by all countries as a set of goals to end poverty**,**protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all over the next 15 years. Gender equality is a key tenet for all the SDGs, and of particular relevance is goal 5 that focuses exclusively on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls.

The NGEP also upholds the values of the **Universal Declaration on Human Rights**, the **UN Charter** and other regional and international conventions and agreements

## Rationale

Currently, there is uneven mainstreaming of gender issues across legislations, policies, programs and projects. While there are several provisions in place, they remain either ad-hoc, or with inadequate accountability and monitoring approaches. Further, most of the existing policies have minimal reference to gender (gender neutral/gender blind) or seek to address gender issues through the formal approach. There is also absence of LGBT+ mainstreaming. Therefore, NGEP is envisaged to provide an overarching policy directive for the government to promote gender equality and mainstreaming of gender including LGBT+ in legislations, policies, plans and programmes. This policy also aims to address the formal approach to equality[[11]](#footnote-11) as provided in various policies, and guarantee substantive equality by accounting for women and LGBT+ people’s particular needs, address existing inequalities, and ensure their full participation in and benefit from social and economic development of the country. This can be a catalyst for faster recovery from the impact of COVID and a strong engine of growth for a more resilient, sustainable, and inclusive economy. Addressing gender issues such as gender based violence goes hand in hand with macroeconomic and financial stability, and thereby contributes to the country’s long term vision of developed Bhutan. Addressing gender based discrimination and violence will also increase economic efficiency and save huge cost for the government. The economic cost of GBV is estimated at Nu. 1674.69 million annually as per the estimation of economic cost of GBV in Bhutan[[12]](#footnote-12).

**Policy vision and purpose**

## Policy Vision

The NGEP envisions a just, equal and progressive society where all individuals have equal opportunities, benefits and rights to achieve their full potential and contribute to socio-cultural, economic and political development of the country.

## Purpose and objectives

The purpose of the NGEP is to provide an effective framework within which legislations, policies, programmes and practices ensure equal rights, opportunities and benefits all individuals, communities, workplaces and the society at large. The Policy serves as a guiding framework which echoes and reaffirms the commitment of the RGoB to ensure the achievement of substantive equality, and accelerate progress towards inclusive and sustainable socio-economic growth. It will also guide the government to develop and implement interventions to address needs based on individuals’ sexual orientation and sex characteristics.

The key policy objectives of the NGEP are to:

* Provide a coherent strategic framework for the government to facilitate deeper across sectors and stakeholders towards achieving the common vision on gender equality,
* Strengthen accountability and operational strategies to address priority gender issues,
* Recognize LGBT+ people as individuals with equal rights and needs contributing to social, political, and economic development of the country, and
* Ensure allocation of adequate resources for the achievement of policy vision

1. **Framework for key gender issues and policy provisions**

The NGEP is premised on the belief that all individuals, families, communities and society at large will stand to benefit from the ability of all women (and girls), men (and boys) and LGBT+ to develop their capabilities and realize their full potential, without the limitations of gender stereotypes, stigmatization and discrimination. The Policy explores gender equality through the lens of five domains - **political, economic, social, education, and health**. A change in any one of these domains is likely to influence the others, and have positive impacts on broader manifestations of gender equality. The policy will strive to address the gender stereotypical mindsets and practices across all the domains. Removing the barriers to gender equality will require a multi-sectoral approach that is emphasized in the operational strategies of the NGEP. Furthermore, policy statements under this document are inclusive of persons with disabilities and senior citizens.

**4. Gender equality in governance**

Gender equality in the decision-making position in all spheres of governance is a longstanding challenge for the country. Improving women’s and LGBT+ people’s participation and leadership in decision making is aligned with the overall development and good governance principles, wherein all individuals can engage in and be part of the development of the country. Gender equality and diversity at all levels of decision making will improve the functioning of government, strengthen its accountability, enhance quality of service delivery, and promote inclusivity, resulting in increased trust and confidence in the governance system.

The government shall ensure the following policy provisions to create gender equality in decision making and leadership positions across sectors and at all levels:

* 1. Create an enabling environment and provisions for increasing participation and representation of women and LGBT+ with an inclusive lens in decision making and leadership, including in the parliament, local government, private/corporate, boards/committees and in the workforce.
  2. Facilitate, empower and support networks of women and LGBT+ leaders and aspiring leaders across the spectrum of society to promote their participation in political and public offices, and encourage male champions as allies and advocates.
  3. Institute affirmative and targeted interventions to improve women’s and LGBT+ people’s representation in the political and public spheres at the national and local levels.
  4. Continue advocacy and build capacities of women and LGBT+ people to encourage their participation in decision making, and showcase role models that highlight their contributions in society.
  5. Carry out research and assessments on thematic areas of existing and emerging gender equality issues in the political and public spheres.
  6. Ensure and strengthen the collection and analysis of data disaggregated by sex, gender, age, sexual orientation, sex characteristics and disabilities for evidence-based interventions to address gender equality and LGBT+ issues.
  7. Integrate LGBT+ in the national statistics including health, education/religious institutions, violence, political participation and employment.
  8. Recognize transgender people for gender identity change by relevant agencies and make the processes accessible and responsive.
  9. Guarantee non-discrimination in the exercise of rights in electoral process for transgender individuals.
  10. Strengthen policies, infrastructure, facilities and services to ensure participation of women and LGBT+ people in the armed forces.
  11. Advocate against the prevailing perception of women as less capable leaders to break the stereotypical notion.
  12. Enhance women and LGBT+ people’s access to digital information, technology and related skills.

# **Gender equality in the social domain**

To influence changes in society and ensure implementation of gender including LGBT+, responsive policies, sensitization and awareness around gender issues and sexual orientation needs to be strengthened. Changing mindsets and attitudes is a long process. Several aspects in the social domain, if addressed holistically, will also be able to create positive impacts in the other domains. Furthermore, gender based discrimination and GBV are greatest impediments to achieving equality and negatively impact overall health of country’s economy. As such, gender equality in the social sector will contribute towards achievement of Bhutan’s long-term goal of an inclusive and progressive society. The policy seeks to address Gender Based Violence (GBV), gender gaps in access to justice, protection, safe public spaces and participation in sports. It also seeks to address harmful cultural practices, and gender issues through the vulnerability lens.

The government shall ensure the following policy provisions to achieve gender equality objectives under the social domain:

* 1. Create a culture of prevention and zero tolerance to GBV, stigmatization and discrimination against LGBT+ and women.
  2. Enhance access to information on rights, relevant legal provisions and services to ensure full protection from discrimination, stigmatization and GBV against women and LGBT+.
  3. Institute mechanisms including sexual harassment policy and legal provisions to ensure a safe workplace.
  4. Enhance visibility and ensure respectful portrayal of LGBT+ individuals through multimedia and other platforms.
  5. Ensure provision of adequate, appropriate and accessible support services to survivors of GBV, LGBT+ and women in difficult and discriminatory circumstances.
  6. Strengthen institutional mechanisms and capacity of relevant agencies to prevent and respond effectively to cases of GBV and trafficking in persons.
  7. Establish and strengthen a coordinated system for the collection and analysis of GBV related data to develop targeted and evidence-based interventions.
  8. Review the Marriage Act of Bhutan (1980) and other relevant acts, including legal procedures, from gender and LGBT+ perspective.
  9. Create women and LGBT+ inclusive, sensitive and safe infrastructures and facilities to ensure access to justice and protection, in sports and public space.
  10. Mainstream gender in all disaster and climate change related initiatives, recognizing the differential impacts of emergencies, disasters, and climate change on women, men and LGBT+.

1. **Gender equality in health Domain**

While significant progress has been made in enhancing quality health services for all, access to women and LGBT+ reproductive and other health services remains a challenge due to their specific needs and socio-cultural experiences. Achieving gender equality in health is a long-term process and requires the implementation of gender responsive health interventions that takes into consideration the differential needs of women, men and LGBT+ people. It also entails overcoming several challenges, including resistance to change among individuals, institutions, structures, and adequate human and financial resources.

The Royal Government of Bhutan shall ensure the following policy provisions to achieve gender equality objectives under the health domain:

* 1. Integrate LGBT+ needs in the existing health policies, procedures, and guidelines.
  2. Review the penal provision on abortion in the Penal Code of Bhutan (2004) to include the needs of women, girls and LGBT+ people with unintended/unwanted pregnancies.
  3. Implement interventions to prevent and reduce early marriages, HIV, teenage pregnancies and unsafe abortions.
  4. Enhance access to maternal, adolescent, sexual reproductive health and rights services, including post abortion services and information for women, girls and LGBT+.
  5. Institute mechanisms to address discrimination and stigmatization against LGBT+ while availing health services, and violation of confidentiality by health service providers.
  6. Strengthen the curriculum for medical students and trainings for health workers to make services provision and delivery responsive and sensitive to the differential gender and LGBT+ needs.
  7. Introduce health services based on specific needs of LGBT+ such as hormone replacement therapy, breast reduction services, anal pap smear, among others as essential health services.
  8. Strengthen gender responsive and LGBT+ sensitive Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS).

# **Gender equality in the economic domain**

The persistence of gender stereotypes continues to permeate the economic domain of the types of sectors that men and women are employed within. These stereotypes and discriminatory practices have more impact on the LGBT+ community, limiting their participation in the formal labour market. With greater engagement and contribution of women and LGBT+ people in the economic domain, it will directly contribute to the development and productivity of the country, thereby aligning with the vision of developed Bhutan. Furthermore, as women continue to shoulder the burden of home, care-work and employment, there needs to be an ecosystem that allows for their meaningful participation in the formal economy, and a greater recognition of their contribution in the informal segment of the economy.

The government shall ensure the following policy provisions to address gender gaps in the economic domain:

* 1. Create a conducive environment to ease the triple burden of working parents and enable them to participate meaningfully in formal employment.
  2. Provide and enhance access to finance, market opportunities, and provide entrepreneurship and skills development support for women and LGBT+ people.
  3. Mainstream the needs of women and LGBT+ people in the national employment and workplace polices.
  4. Review economic related policies and plans to be more inclusive of the LGBT+ community.
  5. Implement targeted interventions to increase employment of LGBT+ and women across all sectors.
  6. Recognize the value of women’s care and domestic responsibilities (which remains invisible) in the national accounting system and economic indicators.
  7. Allocate adequate budget for interventions to reduce burden of women’s care and domestic responsibilities, and encourage sharing of these responsibilities within the family.

1. **Gender equality in education domain**

Improving the participation of girls (and young women) and LGBT+ people at all levels of education is essential for realizing gender equality goals and protecting their human rights. Education enables all individuals (women, girls and LGBT+ people) to participate equally and meaningfully in their social, economic and political lives. Gender transformative education is crucial to changing harmful gender stereotypical attitudes and norms, and recognizing gender equality as a fundamental social value.

While there is parity between girls and boys (men and women) in enrollment at the secondary and tertiary levels, there are few women and girls represented in STEM education. In addition, the majority of LGBT+ people are dropping out at the secondary level.

The government shall ensure the following policy provisions to address gender gaps in education:

* 1. Mainstream the needs of women, girls and LGBT+ in education related policies to improve their participation in schools and tertiary, technical and religious institutions.
  2. Strengthen the infrastructure, facilities and services of schools, tertiary, technical and religious institutions to create an enabling, safe and inclusive environment for active participation of women , girls and LGBT+, at all levels.
  3. Review and eliminate harmful stereotypical gender norms and practices in teaching and learning through progressive curricula at all levels of education, armed force training centres, religious, technical, and civil services and other training institutes.
  4. Develop and implement affirmative actions to overcome social barriers and improve participation and retention of girls and LGBT+ people in schools, institutes and colleges including through non-formal education.
  5. Strengthen the existing standard operating procedures and referral mechanisms to ensure prevention and, timely and appropriate response to GBV, including sexual abuse and exploitation against children and young adults (LGBT+ in particular), in schools, religious, training and other institutions.
  6. Create awareness amongst students, teachers, parent and community on LGBT+ issues and gender equality to transform harmful social and cultural practices, attitudes and norms.

# **Implementation procedures and operational strategies**

* 1. **National Plan of Action for Gender Equality and LGBT+**

To support the effective implementation of the NGEP, the government will develop a new National Plan of Action for Gender Equality (NPAGE) and LGBT+ for the period coinciding with the 13th Five Year Plan. The Plans will be guided by the overall policy statements and supported with outcomes, outputs and activities as well as indicators and targets.

* 1. **National Development Plan and Planning Processes**

The government shall strengthen coordination across ministries to integrate gender and LGBT+ into the national development planning process and the development plans of the respective sectors. The dual approach to address gender and LGBT+ issues, through stand-alone and specific interventions, as well as gender and LGBT+ mainstreaming efforts, will continue as per the NGEP.

**9.3. Protocol for policy formulation**

There shall be continued efforts to integrate gender and LGBT+ concerns in all government policies through the RGoB’s protocol for policy formulation and policy screening tool. The implementation of these efforts will be further strengthened through trainings on gender and LGBT+ analysis, identifying gaps, and mainstreaming.

**9.4. Financial and Human Resource**

The government shall provide adequate financial and human resources to implement this policy and achieve gender and LGBT+ equality.

* 1. **Strengthening the national capacity on gender and LGBT+**

The government shall endeavour to invest in building specialised capacities on gender and LGBT+ related issues for all government and non-government stakeholders to ensure the effective realisation of the policy objectives.

* 1. **Gender Responsive Planning and Budgeting**

The government shall implement the Gender Responsive Planning and Budgeting (GRPB) through the introduction of mandatory gender analysis and encouraging a minimum percentage of budget allocation to ensure the integration of gender and LGBT+ at the time of submission of budgetary proposals. The Ministry of Finance shall be a key proponent of the GRPB and develop training programmes and guidelines for the same in close consultation with the NCWC.

* 1. **Legislation**

The government shall encourage provisions in the national legislation that explicitly recognize women and LGBT+ specific needs. It shall also address all forms of discrimination by broadening the approach to include substantive equality, through inclusion of terms such as “equal benefits,” “equal opportunities,” “equal access” or “equality in practice” beyond just “equality before the law” and/or “the equal protection of the law.”

* 1. **Partnerships**

Since gender and LGBT+ are cross-cutting issues, partnerships and engagement will be a key tenet for the implementation of the NGEP.

**9.9.1 Multi-stakeholder partnerships**

The government shall create multi-stakeholder platforms that encourage open dialogue and discussion on gender and LGBT+ issues within and across sectors. Such a multi-stakeholder platform will also help to build a collective agenda, support resource sharing for gender and LGBT+ responsive plans and programs, and allow for opportunities to discuss new emerging areas.

### **Community engagement**

The government shall support the provisions for enabling active community participation during the implementation of the NGEP. Additionally, measures will be introduced to ensure that local and disadvantaged populations are better informed about the provisions of the policy, and are able to voice their issues.

* 1. **Communications**

The government shall develop a range of communications and messages for a diverse audience that will help create awareness on the NGEP to government agencies, civil society organizations, local communities and direct beneficiaries through various mediums. In addition, all key terminologies and concepts related to gender and LGBT+ shall be made available in the national language.

# **Institutional structures**

# **National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC)[[13]](#footnote-13)**

The government shall strengthen the technical capacity and allocate adequate human and financial resources to the NCWC as the nodal agency for the sound implementation of the policy.

The government shall continue its role to advocate and lobby for addressing gender and LGBT+ issues, and will benefit from increased capacity to generate new research and use this data to highlight existing gender and LGBT+ gaps for informed policy decisions.

# **Gender Focal Points**

The government shall institutionalize and strengthen the Gender Focal Points (GFPs) network across sectors and organizations by ensuring that this function is integrated in their job description, as well as reflected in the Individual Work Plan. The mandates of the GFPs shall be enhanced to include LGBT+.

Respective agencies shall support the institutionalization of capacity efforts by anchoring gender and LGBT+ sensitization modules within existing institutes. Trainings for GFPs will be strengthened and monitored through the introduction of experiential and adult learning methodologies.

## The Gender Expert Group

The government shall provide additional provisions to strengthen the technical and advisory capacity of the Gender Experts Group (GEG) through the introduction of quality assurance measures such as certification processes for the completion of courses and trainings. The GEGs shall also provide technical support on LGBT+ related issues.

The government shall strengthen the relationship between the GFPs and GEG through a twinning or mentoring process, to provide the GFPs with the necessary support.

* 1. **Civil Society Organization working on gender and LGBT+ issues**

The relevant CSOs shall support the implementation of the policy through advocacy, networking, outreach programmes and empowering communities. The government shall facilitate close collaboration between the relevant CSOs to ensure effective implementation of the policy.

1. **Monitoring and accountability**

## Gender Equality Monitoring System

The government shall enhance the use of the Gender Equality Monitoring System (GEMS) to consolidate the reporting of each ministry’s gender and LGBT+ related initiatives. The GEMS will be used to effectively coordinate monitoring of indicators, as well as reporting on results across sectors.

## Government Performance Management System

The government shall strengthen the monitoring and accountability of gender and LGBT+ mainstreaming interventions through the Annual Performance Agreements. The heads of agencies shall be assigned annual targets and held accountable for meeting the targets outlined under the respective domains in the policy.

## Five-Year Plan Evaluation

The government shall evaluate the implementation progress of gender and LGBT+ mainstreaming initiatives during the planned mid-term and terminal evaluations.

## Reporting at the International and Regional Levels

The government shall continue to report regularly on its progress on national initiatives on gender equality and implementation of articles of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and its general recommendations to the CEDAW Committee. The CEDAW reporting will continue to ensure accountability of the State on its commitments on gender equality. The government will strengthen its coordination across sectors, ministries and organizations to implement the committee’s recommendations and consolidate reporting of progress towards gender equality in the country. Similarly, the government shall report to various regional and international bodies in keeping with its commitments.

## Review of the NGEP

The government shall conduct periodic reviews of the implementation of the NGEP to assess the changes in gender equality and LGBT+ issue trends, and to review new emerging areas that may need consideration.

# **Key Definitions**

# **Armed forces** refers to the Royal Bhutan Army, Royal Body Guard and Royal Bhutan Police.

**Active Participation** refers to meaningful and complete participation in schools at all levels.

**Gender** refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female, and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes. They are context/time-specific and changeable. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man in a given context. In most societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities. Gender is part of the broader socio-cultural context.

**Gender Equality** implies that the interests, needs and priorities of women, men and LGBT+ are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups. Gender equality is not a women’s issue but should concern and fully engage all genders. Equality between the different genders is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centered development.

**Formal Equality** is also known as legal equality. This implies that one law should be applied to all people, wherein social and personal characteristics do not play a role. Formal equality treats people the same and does not account for factors of race, ethnicity, sex, age, etc., which often fails to recognize diversity and is insufficient for promoting social inclusiveness.

**Inclusive** implies the process of taking into consideration the needs of diverse groups of population and ensuring that every man and woman, boy and girl benefits equally from the interventions and services.

**Gender Parity** in decision making refers to equal representation of men (and boys), women (and girls), and LGBT+ people in decision making.

**Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)** refers to form of therapy where sex hormones and/or other hormonal medications are administered for the purpose of aligning an individual’s sex characteristics with their gender identity.

**LGBT+** refers to all individualswhose gender identities is not based on a traditional gender binary. It refers to those who decide to identify themselves using other categories to describe their gender identity or their own understanding of their sexuality, including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

**Other training institutes** refers to private and public training institutes offering both long term and short term training programmes (structured and ad-hoc).

**Respectful portrayal** refers to portraying women and LGBT+ in a respectful, non-discriminatory and non-stereotypical manner in media and/or through any other forums.

**Substantive Equality** takes into account fairness and equity in providing a broader framework of equality, which recognizes differences and disadvantages. Substantive equality looks at the root causes of inequality, and focuses on removing barriers, thereby giving individuals the equality of opportunity.

**Social barriers** are inequalities that exist between individuals and societies, and are created by the culture of the communities. These barriers are influenced by the behaviour of people, and it impacts a particular group of individuals (for example PWD, LGBT+). It impairs an individual’s ability to enjoy or exercise their rights and freedom.

**Triple burden** refers to the burden/workload faced by women as a result of their engagement in reproductive, productive and community managing roles.

**Underprivileged women and LGBT+** refers to women and LGBT+ who are from low socio-economic backgrounds with no or minimal means of livelihood and financial capacity to start new businesses.

Visibility (request pride to define based on the context in the text)

**Discriminatory circumstances refers** to situations where an individual is discriminated against based on their sexual orientation, identity, status, race, etc.

1. https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\_GGGR\_2022.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Head of Block [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Pride Bhutan Information Management System [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. https://www.nsb.gov.bt/publications/labour-force-survey-report/ [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Valuation of Unpaid Household Work and Care Services in Bhutan, NCWC [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. https://www.rcsc.gov.bt/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/CSS\_2021\_finalupload.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. http://www.education.gov.bt/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/AES-2021-Final-Version.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. https://www.moh.gov.bt/wp-content/uploads/ict-files/2022/07/Annual-Health-Bulleti-2022\_Link-3.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. http://www.nsb.gov.bt/publication/files/pub10cy1467vt.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Sources: Constitution of the Kingdom of Bhutan, 2008 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Under the formal approach to equality, biological, social and cultural differences between men and women including social perceptions and their impact on women are ignored. Men and women are seen as similar or the same, and therefore provided with the same treatment. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Estimation of economic cost of GBV in Bhutan 2021, NCWC & ADB [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The NCWC has the status of an autonomous agency, with its capacity and mandate strengthening over the years. The Women’s Division is responsible for initiatives related to women’s equality and gender mainstreaming, with the issues related to children being addressed by the Children’s Division. The NCWC within its ambit coordinates action and monitors implementation of the following Acts: Child Care and Protection Act of Bhutan 2011 (CCPA); Child Adoption Act of Bhutan 2012 (CAA); Domestic Violence Prevention Act of Bhutan 2013 (DVPA). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)