

Gender-Based Data and Policy Action

CONTEXT

A gender gap has accompanied the growing access to the internet and global technologies worldwide. This gap is explained by the unequal access, use and impact of technologies on women and men produced by a recognised structural gender imbalance, which reflects, among other effects, the absence of sex-disaggregated data. This may become a self-perpetuating cycle if women cannot see their perspectives, priorities, and needs reflected in data and digital processes.¹

This issue is a growing concern for Local and Regional Governments - LRGs, metropolitan authorities, National Governments, International Organizations, NGOs, and Civil Society Groups. Their commitment to this topic has permeated global agendas such as the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals or the creation of Local Government. It has also spurred the creation of networks such as the **Cities Coalition for Digital Rights**, where a standing principle is transparency, accountability, and non-discrimination of data, content, and algorithms.²

Despite the growing political will and commitment of stakeholders, governments do not mainstream gender in the design of public policies, as the gender perspective is not considered in the process of formulating indicators and data collection.³ This absence of a gender perspective creates a biased view of the realities of women and men and leads to the design of public policies that only respond to the needs and challenges of one part of the population.

Mainstreaming gender perspective and including sex-disaggregated data in public policies formulation help improve their efficiency. However, many LRGs have manifested that they failed to do it because they do not have the capacity or culture to collect sex-disaggregated data that reflects the reality of women in their territories.⁴ This reveals a more pressing challenge regarding closing the gender digital gap, the limits to information, and the consequences of its interpretation. Then, decisive efforts towards unbiased data collection and processing must be made to serve as input for better local policy design.

The experts view

On Tuesday, September 27, 2022, an expert roundtable was carry-out by invitation of Metropolis and the Cities Coalition for Digital Rights with Professor **Catherine D'Ignazio**, [Assistant Professor of Urban Science and Planning](#) at MIT and director of the Data + Feminism Lab.

The purpose of the discussion was to asses how LRGs could identify and correct gender bias in data used for policy design? For Professor D'Ignazio, LRGs and stakeholders need to realize the power data has in decision-making and its effects on public policy. Therefore, it is essential to understand that data is power and to take action to guarantee all stakeholders equally own this power. In designing tailored action to accomplish this purpose, it is essential to question how data is gathered, who collects, stores, and analyse the data, how it is being interpreted, who owns it, and how it shapes local action.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Assess gender-oriented data needs for policy design.** It is critical to learn what information is currently being gathered and what information gaps need to be filled to guarantee the inclusion of the gender perspective in data gathering processes and public policies. This means promoting the collection of sex-disaggregated data and the development of gender-specific indicators.
- 2. Identify biases in the data collection process and algorithms.** As key actor in digitalization, LRGs should conduct detailed algorithm audits and analyses of technological gadgets before generalizing their use to avoid replicating discriminatory actions against an already marginalized and vulnerable population.
- 3. Implement gender policies on metropolitan scale.** The scale at which data is collected and policy is implemented is key to making an impact on people's lives. The compilation of gender-sensitive data and the implementation of public policies at the metropolitan scale entails coordination between administrations, which translates into the use of the most valuable data in decision-making and more effective implementation of public policies.
- 4. Develop gender-oriented training to promote data production.** To increase gender perspective in data gathering and public policies and include it in all social realities, it is necessary to raise awareness among governments and the private sector on the importance of collecting data and developing gender-sensitive indicators.

The data feminism approach

One practice that can be adopted by LRGs and Stakeholders alike is the Data Feminism Approach. The [Data Feminism book](#) provides a clear roadmap for wielding data's power through seven principles:

- 1. Examine power:** Analyzing how power operates in the world.
- 2. Challenge power:** Challenging unequal power structures and working toward justice.
- 3. Elevate emotion and embodiment:** Data feminism teaches us to value multiple forms of knowledge, including the knowledge that comes from people as living, feeling bodies in the world.
- 4. Rethink binaries and hierarchies:** Data feminism requires us to challenge the gender binary, along with other systems of counting and classification that perpetuate oppression.
- 5. Embrace pluralism:** Data feminism insists that the most complete knowledge comes from synthesizing multiple perspectives, with priority given to local, Indigenous, and experiential ways of knowing.
- 6. Consider context.** Data feminism asserts that data are not neutral or objective. They are the products of unequal social relations, and this context is essential for conducting accurate, ethical analysis.
- 7. Make labor visible:** The work of data science, like all work in the world, is the work of many hands. Data feminism makes this labor visible so that it can be recognized and valued".⁵

Community data and analytics

It is essential to promote citizen-generated data because it contributes to community empowerment and to the enrichment of the data and its analyses. The International Institute for Sustainable Development has reviewed several successful cases where citizen participation in data generation has been successful such as [Everyone Counts](#), [Making Voices Heard and Count](#) or [IDEA MAPS](#).⁶ The underlying argument, as stated by professor João Porto de Albuquerque,⁷ is that the fact the affected community is actively involved in generating data has a more significant impact in inclusion, empowerment, and further policy success.

Closing the gap

The digital gap and data misrepresentation experienced by women is only one dimension of the gender gap. Therefore generating gender-based data and sex-disaggregated data to have fairer and more equitable policies is related to more than just data and digital strategies. It is essential not to lose sight of the overarching approach inclusion, and representativeness in gender needs to have. To monitor progress toward this goal, the World Bank has put together the [World Bank Gender Data Portal](#), where there are more than 900 gender-related indicators.

The OECD tries to understand the broader causes of the digital gender divide in its [Bridging the digital gender divide](#) Report. Where it found that boosting digital tools and skills is particularly enabling for women. Guidelines about fostering education and removing obstacles, increasing participation in inventive activities, software development and entrepreneurship and start-ups can be found and pave the way to more structural policies need it to close the gap.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

5. Promote data gathering through coalition building.

Increase the target community's engagement by making them not only the subject of indicators but also a leading partner in collecting data. Also, identify and potentiate the role community organizations and the private sector have to play. There is a concurrent process of gender base data gathering; then the challenge is around articulation and purpose.

6. Increase technological sovereignty.

LRG and communities should have clarity about where their data comes from and how it is being processed and analyzed. In addition, accessing these data should be guaranteed through clear investment in public digital infrastructure. Private companies can invest in and own digital infrastructure but should not be in control of the majority of it.

One significant city experience is Reykjavik, where public and community efforts have come together to close the gender gap in several dimensions. One project worth mentioning is the [Reykjavik Global Forum](#) which not only contributes to keeping the gender gap debate up to date but also has become a space for benchmarking good practices to advance society toward gender equality.

Other significant experiences have been carried forward by LRG in the global south. Bogotá for example, has created the [OMEG](#), the observatory for Women and Gender Equality. This monitoring system allows the local government to have updated data on violence against women, coverage and efficiency of support programs for women, and their socio-economic characteristics. The Government of Buenos Aires (Argentina) has made another significant effort in this same direction. The [BA Gender Indicators system](#) is a grouping of statistical and management data with a systemic perspective of gender autonomy (according to the guidelines of the Division of Gender Affairs of ECLAC). These data facilitate the decision-making process and actions by making evident the different situations and conditions experienced by men and women in the city.⁸

Mexico City has also made progress in creating gender-based indicators as the two cities mentioned above. The [SINGE](#), a system of gender indicators, is a platform that centralized gender-related data to understand how women are and the state of improvement towards closing the gender gap in the city. In addition, the city has understood the overarching scope of gender policies. It has created a program to train local officials and stakeholders on using and potentiating indicators for gender gap awareness and solutions. The program was initially called [Statistical Thursdays](#) but has now evolved into a certificate training program. Complementary to the advancement around data, Mexico City has also made significant progress towards including the gender perspective in its public budget.⁹

References

¹[The digital transformation of metropolises](#). Issue Paper #8. Metropolis. Available

²[Metropolitan policies to reduce the digital divide and promote digital inclusion](#). Comparative Metropolitan Studies Series. Metropolis

³Cities Coalition for Digital Rights.

⁴[Metropolitan policies to reduce the digital divide and promote digital inclusion](#). Comparative Metropolitan Studies Series. Metropolis

⁵[Data Feminism](#)

⁶Citizen generated data By [IISD](#)

⁷[Waterproofing Data: Engaging Stakeholders in Sustainable Flood Risk](#)

[Governance for Urban Resilience](#). University of Glasgow

⁸[Sistema de Indicadores de Género de Buenos Aires](#)

⁹[Presupuesto Público con Perspectiva de Género](#)