

# Gender on the Agenda: A Methodological Shift in the G7

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## Executive Summary

Gender typically occupies a peripheral role in multilateral policy discussions such as those that take place at the G7. This policy brief considers the place of gender in the G7, and in particular, the conscious move to mainstream it at the 2018 Canadian presidency of the G7. This was undertaken through the adoption of gender as an approach undercutting all other themes and negotiations.

## What is a Gendered Approach?

Gender is often relegated to the sidelines of policy discussions, particularly in the realms of trade, economic growth and security. These aspects have traditionally been conceived with masculine approaches that implicitly consider the state a homogenous masculine actor. The impacts of these

policy decisions are then conceived in abstract terms, with little consideration given to the variation of experience as differentiated by gender.

Contrastingly, [feminist international relations and security studies](#) emphasise an alternative focus by adopting a gender lens in their analyses. This involves considering the experiences of people of different genders as a way of revealing the uneven human security consequences produced. For instance, the [International Institute for Sustainable Development](#) argues that decisions to enter into international trade agreements are often determined by net economic benefit and market-based criteria, ignoring social balances and the differential impacts that trade would cause on women, such as violence against women in exploitative

work conditions. Similarly, from a political perspective, a gendered analysis reveals that policies dealing with large numbers of displaced peoples often adopt a blanket approach that does not account for gender-specific experiences. Refugee repatriation, for instance, is problematic from a gender perspective because when they are returned to conflict-stricken areas, women are [more at risk](#) of being victims of gender-based violence.

Adopting such an approach has two effects. First, it uncovers the way in which gender plays a critical role in reproducing inequalities and forms of discrimination. This in turn has a second normative function of influencing policy. A method of analysis that generates insight into the disproportionate way in which policy can unevenly affect peoples of different genders facilitates the creation of policies that are not to the detriment of anybody on the basis of gender, but benefit all genders equally. In this way, while rectifying the

symptoms that external circumstances and gender-blind policies have created, conscious attention is also placed on ensuring new policies enacted are conscious of their gendered implications on people, minimising any disproportionate impact. In the long term, this approach provides a more sustainable path towards achieving the human right of gender equality as compared to symptomatic diagnosis.

However, despite its benefits for gender equality, the gender lens has largely been confined to academia, seldom being adopted in policy spheres. Even a more general focus on women and gender has been lacking. This can clearly be observed when considering the G7's treatment of gender in previous years.

### **The G7's Treatment of Gender**

Issues relating to gender have only recently been established as priorities in the agenda of the G7/8 summits. Prior to 2015, there were occasional

mentions of women, picking up on the specific struggles faced by women and girls, such as the issue of [sexual violence](#).

Until 1996, the terms ‘gender’ and ‘women’ only appeared in the communiqués in general reference to ‘men and women’. Between 1996 and 2011, mentions of women occurred sporadically with regards to addressing very specific needs, such as the need to provide for the protection of women in vulnerable post-conflict situations ([1996](#)); to combat trafficking in women and children (1998); to achieve gender equality in education ([2000](#), [2001](#), [2002](#)) and also in development in Africa ([2008](#), [2009](#), [2010](#)). These policies superficially targeted symptomatic issues arising from gender equality, stopping short of considering underlying structural causes. Beginning in 2011, however, this limitation was addressed by expanding the focus beyond the symptomatic, to a recognition of the wider need to empower women with rights and opportunities in the pursuit

of critical aspects of political and social stability, democratic governance and economic growth ([2011](#), [2012](#), [2013](#), [2014](#)). This demonstrates the G7’s growing recognition of the benefits of adopting a gendered analysis in addressing underlying structural causes directly, rather than their symptoms.

2015 marked a [shift](#) in the prioritisation of gender, which became a central theme of the G7 agenda. In 2015, the [German Presidency](#) focused on women’s economic empowerment as one of the key issues on its agenda. The gender lens was also employed in the consideration of other issues, such as post-conflict resolution, global health and food security – reflective of a move towards the adoption of a gender lens as a method to approach policy. The [2016 Japanese Presidency](#) continued this emphasis by prioritising the ‘empowerment of women and girls’ in economic, political and social spheres by emphasising inclusion and equality in STEM fields, and the active

engagement of women in peace and security processes.

Most recently, the [Italian Presidency](#) in 2017 engaged with gender equality as a top priority. This was reflected prominently in the outcomes in two ways. First, the [communiqué](#) declared a commitment to ‘mainstreaming gender equality into all (our) policies’, a move that influenced the Canadian Presidency’s gender approach at this year’s G7. Further, the G7 adopted the [‘G7 Roadmap for a Gender-Responsive Economic Environment’](#), which featured a focus on structural policies that individual member governments ought to adopt in pursuit of gender equality. These two aspects prominently display the shift in the G7’s treatment of gender in its policies. Rather than approaching the disproportionate struggles that women face symptomatically by only picking up on the specific instances where the struggles of women have been particularly prominent and disproportionate such as in human trafficking or sexual health—as was

done prior to 2015 in the G7— this approach recognises that structural changes need to take place to attain gender equality. This move then represents an acknowledgement of the need to consider gender actively in the policy-making process, by adopting a gender lens in policy-making with the goal of reducing inequalities.

### **The 2018 Canadian Presidency**

In this light, the 2018 Canadian Presidency has been explicit in attempting to [mainstream gender](#) throughout the summit.

As with the previous year’s Italian presidency, the theme of gender equality and women’s empowerment was a [top priority](#) for the the 2018 G7 summit. More significantly, however, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced the creation of the [Gender Equality Advisory Council](#) to play a central role in this year’s G7 summit. This Council, formed by gender equality activists from diverse backgrounds, was to function as a

mechanism to '[ensure] that gender equality and gender-based analysis are integrated across all themes, activities and outcomes of Canada's G7 presidency'. This ambitious change in the method of policy-making represents a formalised adoption of the gendered lens into the realm of policy-making.

Despite being an ambitious ideal applied to a traditionally masculine domain, the final Communiqué initially endorsed by the G7 members (though at moment of writing, it is uncertain whether the US will endorse it) also reflected an unprecedented consideration of gendered analysis throughout all sections.

Aside from the substantive section of the [Communiqué](#) dedicated directly to commitments of 'Advancing Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment', the themes of 'Working Together on Climate Change, Oceans and Clean Energy' and 'Preparing for Jobs of the Future' made explicit acknowledgement to the need to focus

on gender. In the former, the participation and leadership of girls and women was acknowledged in promoting sustainable development. Such engagement is a result of a gendered analysis highlighting that women and girls experience climate insecurity differently, and should be included in consultations on this topic. In the latter, specific mention was made towards the need to boost skills and education, and remove barriers to facilitate the participation of women and girls in jobs for the future, thereby addressing the inequality that economic shifts would have on women and girls.

While the above analysis creates an optimistic outlook, what would be most telling of the extent to which a gender lens has been adopted in policy formation would be to consider the two predominantly masculine spheres of the economy and security.

In 'Investing in Growth that Works For Everyone', by nature of the theme's focus, the Communiqué heavily

emphasised measures to reduce inequalities resulting from economic growth. Even in considering the necessity for 'free, fair and mutually beneficial trade and investment', the traditionally disproportionate focus on the means to encourage growth of the economy was considered in relation to growth and job creation, as well as alongside 'equal participation that benefits everyone' – putting significant focus on addressing the inequalities that this causes on a human level. While at some points gender is not explicitly mentioned, a focus on the implications of economic growth on individuals is a rather gendered approach to take, by considering and responding to the disproportionate way that economic growth affects people and breeds inequalities.

Similarly, under the theme of 'Building a More Peaceful and Secure World', the recognition of gender emerged immediately in the theme's second point. In reflecting that countries that are more equal are more stable, peaceful and democratic, the G7

reinforced prioritising the Women, Peace and Security agenda. Similar to the previous section, acknowledging the need to include women in security-making processes demonstrates an operation of a gender approach that recognises the gender-related vulnerabilities emerging from conflict situations that need to be addressed. Women are therefore included in security decision-making processes to minimise these gendered impacts. However, the optimism of this inclusion needs to be balanced by a reality check: the rest of the security theme retains a traditional focus on a masculine realist worldview that conceives of state actors as both homogenous and male – giving little acknowledgement to the variations of experiences in security. Nonetheless, it should be remembered that the attempt to mainstream gender in G7 policy is an ambitious attempt, especially in a realm so predominantly coded masculine as security. To expect a ground-breaking Communiqué on the first attempt of mainstreaming a gender approach is highly unlikely. The previously

mentioned acknowledgement of the Women, Peace and Security agenda should already be heralded as a significant shift in this area.

Overall, then, the shift towards adopting a gender approach is optimistically evident throughout this year's G7. Prime Minister Trudeau's active attempt to mainstream gender and incorporate a gender lens across all negotiations and decision-making processes has certainly paid off. This Canadian Presidency will definitely go down as a milestone in the G7 timeline as gender is starting to play a central methodological role in the process of negotiation, moving away from being considered only through specific symptoms that need to be addressed.

In this light, moving forward to the French Presidency in 2019, the methods adopted—specifically the active involvement of the Gender Equality Advisory Council to guide negotiation and policy processes—should be retained. French President Emmanuel Macron has [confirmed](#) that

he will continue to prioritise gender equality, a promising continuation of the centralisation of gender issues throughout the G7. However, there has been no word yet of whether a Council will be convened like this year to guide the incorporation of a gender lens in policy negotiations. Further, there is room for expansion in the way that the Council can guide policy processes in two ways.

First, by focusing more actively on the aspects relating to security. Priority should be placed on considering the ways in which the traditional realist view of security can simultaneously be married with a gendered analysis of the impacts of any security decisions. Second, consideration made to expand the notion of gender within the G7. The adoption of a gendered lens serves to highlight the disproportionate impacts on individuals on the basis of gender, a notion wider than the binary of men and women. While the [definition](#) of gender adopted by the Gender Equality Advisory Council is a broad one: 'all who self-identify as

women including trans and cis women, two-spirit, intersex; and the word man to include all who self-identify as men including trans and cis men, two-spirit, intersex', the Communiqué does not appear to reflect the same understanding. To successfully utilise a gendered lens of analysis within the G7 therefore, policy considerations as well as the language in the Communiqué should reflect this wide range of genders and [more](#), many of whom experience [gender-based inequality and discrimination](#) as significantly, or even more, than binary-gendered women do.

Nonetheless, Trudeau's G7 will definitely go down in history as a milestone for the employment of a gendered lens in policy-making. Not only has he set a precedent for future G7 summits, but also more broadly. Considering the influence of G7 countries globally, this methodological shift towards considering gender could have an impact in the processes of other conferences, summits, and even state-level policy and decision-making processes.

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