



# Meaningful progress or empty promises?

## An analysis of how gender features in NCD action plans

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are the leading cause of deaths in women globally, responsible for nearly two-thirds of deaths, claiming about 19 million lives annually<sup>1</sup>. Girls and women experience unique exposure to NCD risk factors and encounter systemic barriers to NCD care as a result of structural discrimination and socioeconomic challenges. In recognition of this, the Political Declaration signed at the first United Nations High-Level Meeting (HLM) on NCDs in 2011 highlighted the need for governments to take gender-based approaches to NCD prevention and control; a commitment that was repeated at subsequent HLMs in 2014 and 2018<sup>2-4</sup>.

With the fourth HLM on NCDs approaching in September 2025, we wanted to examine whether these commitments have been translated into policy at the national level. This brief presents our analysis of integrated NCD plans developed by WHO Member States to determine how gender is included. We did not analyse the implementation of these plans or real-world outcomes.

## Approach

We searched multiple sources to identify English-language integrated NCD plans, dated 2014 or beyond. We analysed these plans to gain an accurate picture of the extent to which they formalise a gender approach. We adapted the United Nations Development Programme's Gender Results Effectiveness Scale to assess how gender features in the plans across four domains (objectives, strategies, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework, and budget)<sup>5</sup>. Each domain was independently reviewed by three analysts and awarded a score (-1 to 4) on consensus, using the criteria in Table 1. We aggregated the domain scores to arrive at an overall rating for each plan.






Criteria	Individual domain rating	Overall score
 <b>Gender Negative:</b> Plan aggravates or reinforces gender inequalities	-1	-4 to 0
 <b>Gender Blind:</b> Plan fails to acknowledge gender differences	1	1-4
 <b>Gender Targeted:</b> Plan targets different genders but is not tailored to meet gender-specific needs	2	5-8
 <b>Gender Responsive:</b> Plan is tailored to meet gender-specific needs but does not address root causes of gender inequalities	3	9-12
 <b>Gender Transformative:</b> Plan fosters progressive changes in power relationships between different genders by addressing the root causes of gender inequality	4	13-16
Domain missing in the plan	0	N/A

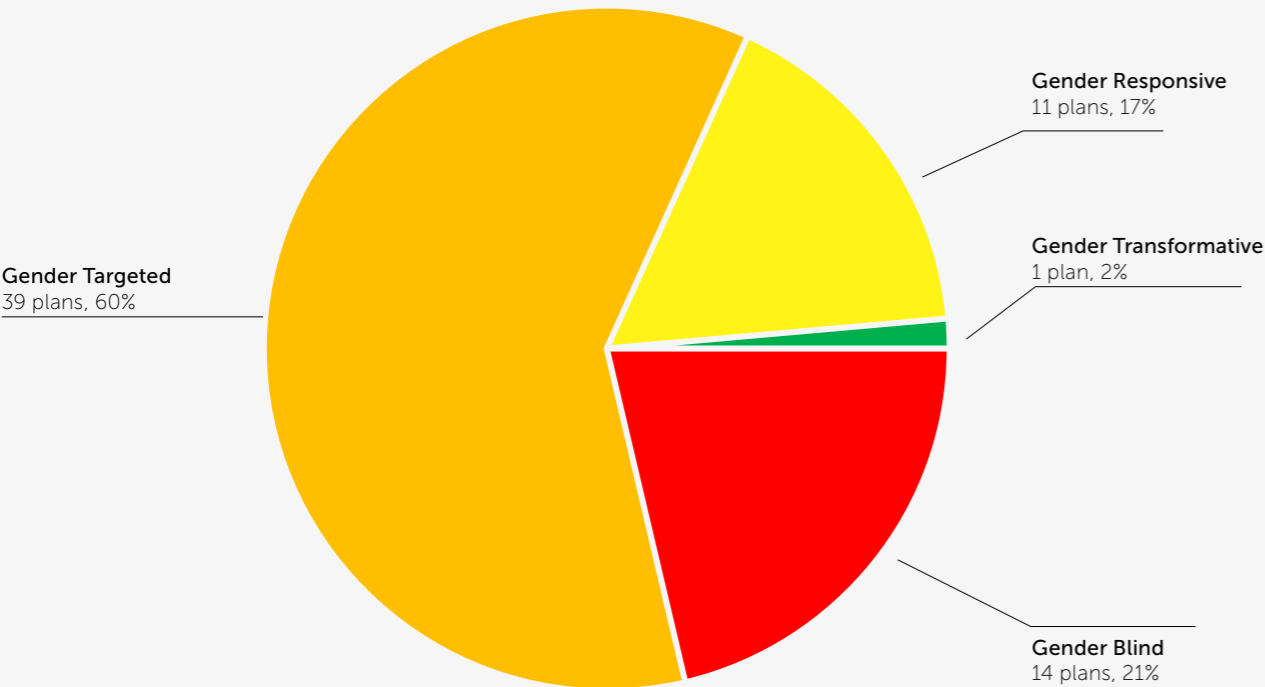
Table 1: Criteria for assessing the four domains of integrated NCD plans

## Key findings

We identified and analysed 64 national, integrated NCD plans available in English, and a consolidated European Union (EU) plan covering 25 countries. In total, our analysis includes 65 plans representing 89 countries (of 193 WHO Member States). For the remaining 104 countries, we either did not find an integrated NCD plan dated 2014 or later (74 countries, 38.34%) or the plans identified were not in English (30 countries, 17.62%).

### Distribution of gender focus in 65 plans

- Of the 65 integrated NCD plans covering 89 countries:
  - 1 plan (2%) is gender-transformative,
  - 11 plans (17%) covering 35 countries (39%) are gender-responsive,
  - 39 plans (60%) are gender-targeted,
  - 14 plans (21%) are gender-blind and
  - none of the plans are gender-negative.
- Of 65 plans, 49 plans (75%) cover breast and/or cervical cancer, while only 11 plans (17%) cover prostate cancer. 37 plans (57%) include interventions for gestational diabetes mellitus.
- Many plans that commit to addressing gendered needs are inconsistent in terms of their strategies or budgeting:
  - 2 plans include gender in their objectives but lack a gender focus in the subsequent sections.
  - 3 plans include gender considerations in their M&E frameworks but have no corresponding strategies.
  - 3 plans with budget section, take a gendered approach in their objectives, strategies, and M&E frameworks, but have not allocated funds for this approach in their budget sections.



➔ For a full regional breakdown of the results, see Table 3.

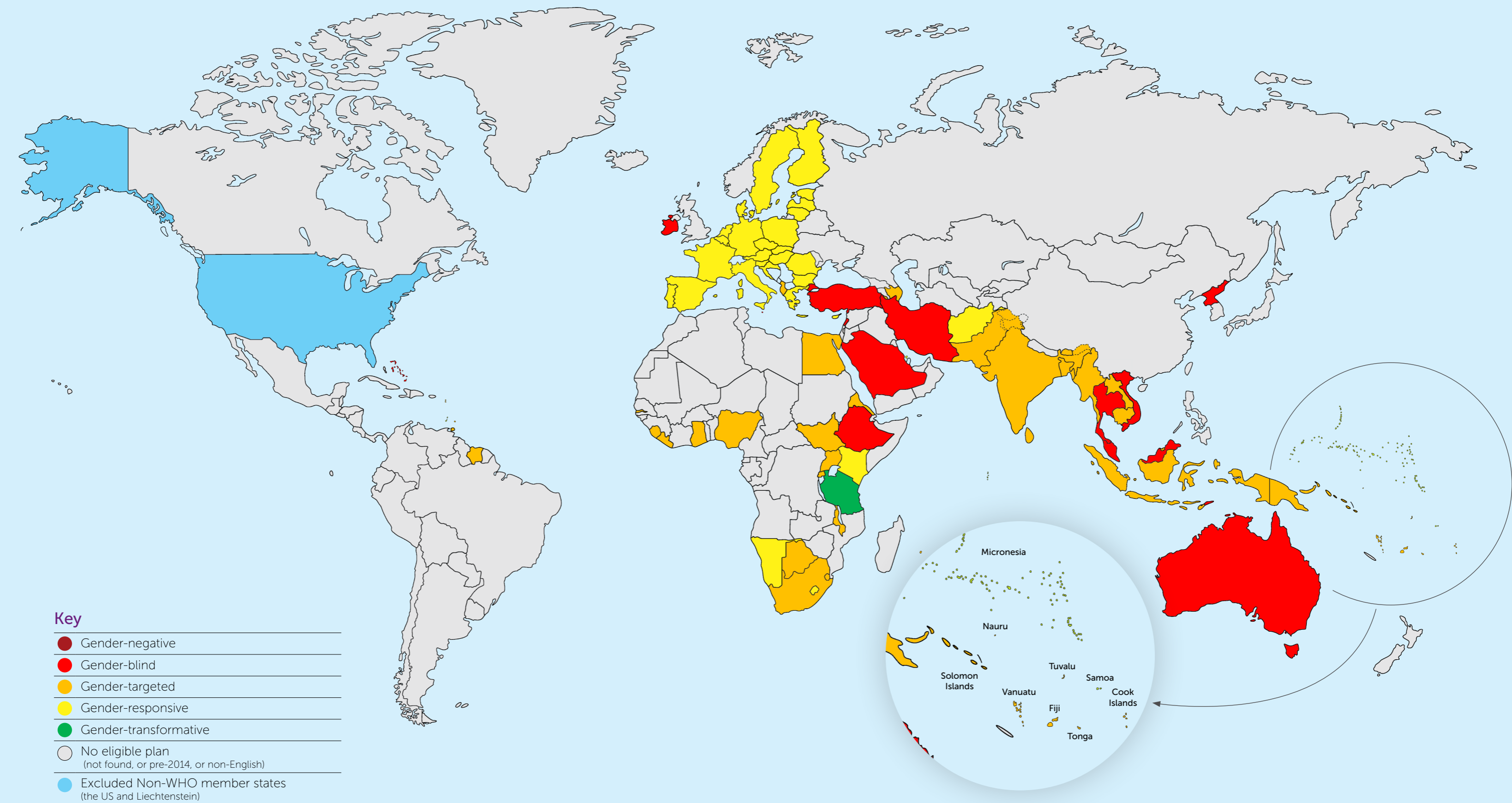
## Gender-transformative elements within NCD plans

A gender-transformative approach goes beyond striving for equity and attempts to address the root causes of gender inequities. While none of the NCD plans consistently demonstrate a gender-transformative approach across all four policy domains, we found that a number of individual domains within the plans offered examples of what this can look like.

The table below highlights gender-transformative approaches from the reviewed integrated NCD plans in different policy domains.

Section	Gender-transformative elements
Objectives	None of the NCD plans reviewed has gender-transformative objectives.
Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>“Work with civil society and women’s groups to enhance the social norms to adopt behaviours that reduce the risk of NCDs” - <b>Antigua &amp; Barbuda</b><sup>6</sup> (p43); <b>Namibia</b><sup>7</sup> (p76); <b>St Vincent &amp; the Grenadine</b><sup>8</sup> (p42)</li><li>“Engaging and involving people specially women by extending collaboration with the Supreme Council of Woman” (p15) - <b>Bahrain</b><sup>9</sup></li><li>“EU-level action to strengthen not only long-term care, but also early childhood education and care, as envisaged under the European pillar of social rights. Envisaged to help strengthen gender equality and social fairness.” “Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programme - Envisaged to help strengthen gender equality and social fairness.” (p136-7) - <b>EU</b><sup>10</sup></li><li>“Women empowerment programs to include business incentives for businesses that promote healthy lifestyles” (p115) - <b>Maldives</b><sup>11</sup></li><li>“Gender equity in micro-finance combined with gender equity training and school-based programmes to address gender norms and attitudes” (p45) - <b>Pakistan</b><sup>12</sup></li><li>“The health sector will enhance gender equality in decision making bodies” (p43) - <b>Tanzania</b><sup>13</sup></li></ul>
M&E Frameworks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>“Social determinants of health, gender equity and the health needs of vulnerable populations who are economically or psychosocially disadvantaged are included in the action plan for prevention and control of NCD” (p12); “Identification, situational analysis and focus of action plans on health needs of gender, assessing number of collaborations and plans with Supreme Council of Woman” (p15) - <b>Bahrain</b><sup>9</sup></li></ul>
Budget	None of the NCD plans reviewed has a gender-transformative budget.

Table 2: Examples of gender-transformative approaches across different domains of the plans



## Gender ratings by region

### African region:

- Of 47 AFR countries, national integrated NCD plans of 20 countries were eligible for analysis.
- AFR has 1 (5.0%) gender-transformative, 4 (20.0%) gender-responsive, 14 (70.0%) gender-targeted, and 1 (5.0%) gender-blind plans.

Table 3: Analysis of national NCD plans using UNDP's Gender Results Effectiveness Scale

Country (period covered by plan in brackets)	Objectives	Strategy	M&E Framework	Budget	Overall score
Botswana (2018-2023)					
Eritrea (2019-2023)					
Eswatini (2021-2023)					
Ethiopia (2020-2025)					
Gambia (2022-2027)					
Ghana (2022)					
Kenya (2021-2026)					
Lesotho (2014-2020)					
Liberia (2017-2021)					
Malawi (2017-2022)					
Mauritius (2023-2028)					
Namibia (2017-2022)					
Nigeria (2019-2025)					
Rwanda (2020-2025)					
Seychelles (2016-2025)					
Sierra Leone (2020-2024)					
South Africa (2022-2027)					
South Sudan (2020-2021)					
Tanzania (2021-2026)					
Uganda (2018-2023)					

### Eastern Mediterranean Region:

- Of 21 EMR countries, national integrated NCD plans of 7 countries were eligible for analysis.
- EMR has 2 (28.6%) gender-responsive, 2 (28.6%) gender-targeted and 3 (42.8%) gender-blind plans.

Afghanistan (2015-2020)					
Bahrain (2019-2030)					
Egypt (2018-2022)					
Iran (2015-2025)					
Lebanon (2016-2020)					
Pakistan (2021-2030)					
Saudi Arabia (2014-2025)					

### European region:

- Of 53 EUR countries, national integrated NCD plans for 5 countries, and a joint EU NCD plan which covers 25 countries, were eligible for analysis.
- EUR has 1 (16.7%) gender-responsive plan, which is EU's plan covering 25 countries, 2 (33.3%) gender-targeted and 3 (50.0%) gender-blind plans.

Albania (2016-2020)					
Azerbaijan (2015-2020)					
European Union (2022-2027)*					
Ireland (2020-2025)					
Malta (2025-2035)					
Turkey (2017-2025)					

### Region of the Americas:

- Of 34 AMR countries, national integrated NCD plans of 6 countries were eligible for analysis.
- AMR has 1 (16.7%) gender-responsive, 4 (66.7%) gender-targeted and 1 (16.7%) gender-blind plans.

Antigua & Barbuda (2015-2019)					
Bahamas (2017-2022)					
Barbados (2020-2025)					
St. Vincent & Grenadines (2017-2025)					
Suriname (2015-2020)					
Trinidad and Tobago (2017-2021)					

### South-East Asian Region:

- Of 10 SEAR countries, national integrated NCD plans of 9 countries were eligible for analysis.
- SEAR has 1 (11.1%) gender-responsive, 5 (55.6%) gender-targeted, and 3 (33.3%) gender-blind plans.

Bangladesh (2018-2025)					
Bhutan (2015-2020)					
Democratic People's Republic of Korea (2014-2020)					
India (2023-2030)					
Maldives (2023-2031)					
Myanmar (2017-2021)					
Sri Lanka (2023-2027)					
Thailand (2017-2021)					
Timor-Leste (2018-2021)					

### Western Pacific region:

- Of 28 WPR countries, national integrated NCD plans of 17 countries were eligible for analysis.
- WPR has 2 (11.8%) gender-responsive, 12 (70.6%) gender-targeted, and 3 (17.6%) gender-blind plans.

Australia (2021-2030)					
Brunei Darussalam (2021-2025)					
Cambodia (2018-2027)					
Cook Islands (2021-2025)					
Fiji (2015-2019)					
Indonesia (2016-2019)					
Laos (2014-2020)					
Malaysia (2016-2025)					
Micronesia (2019-2024)					
Nauru (2015-2020)					
Papua New Guinea (2015-2020)					
Samoa (2018-2023)					
Solomon Islands (2019-2023)					
Tonga (2021-2025)					
Tuvalu (2022-2026)					
Vanuatu (2021-2030)					
Vietnam (2015-2025)					

\* Covers 25 EU member countries: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Republic of Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden. Malta and Ireland had independent plans and are therefore considered separately



# Moving from promises to progress

Our analysis shows that 14 years after governments first committed to pursue and promote gender-based approaches to preventing and controlling NCDs, they have for the most part failed to translate this promise into their national action plans in a meaningful way.

In light of the findings presented in this brief, we urge governments to ensure the Political Declaration to be signed at the UN High-Level Meeting on NCDs in September 2025 not only reiterates the urgency of mainstreaming a gender perspective in NCD plans, but includes concrete, actionable measures and accountability mechanisms to ensure commitments are translated into meaningful improvements in the health and wellbeing of people of all genders.

## We're calling for governments to take five key actions to address the gendered nature of NCDs:

1. Accelerate implementation of comprehensive, gender-responsive plans.
2. Break down silos by integrating NCD control into other health services, such as those addressing maternal and child health and HIV/AIDS.
3. Mobilise investments with clearly defined gender-disaggregated expenditure.
4. Prioritise routine collection and analysis of data disaggregated by sex, gender, and other intersecting characteristics to support the design, implementation, and monitoring of effective, tailored interventions.
5. Uphold women's health and human rights in line with the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

### Read the position statement in full

[www.georgeinstitute.org/our-impact/policy-statements-and-recommendations](http://www.georgeinstitute.org/our-impact/policy-statements-and-recommendations)

## References:

1. NCD Alliance. *Women and NCDs*. 2017; Available from: <https://ncdalliance.org/why-ncds/ncds-and-sustainable-development/women-and-ncds>.
2. United Nations General Assembly. *Political declaration of the High-level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases- Draft resolution submitted by the President of the General Assembly*. New York; 2011. Available from: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/710899?v=pdf>
3. United Nations General Assembly. *Outcome document of the High-Level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Comprehensive Review and Assessment of the Progress Achieved in the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases : draft resolution / submitted by the President of the General Assembly*. New York; 2014. Available from: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/774662?v=pdf>
4. United Nations General Assembly. *Political declaration of the 3rd High-Level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases : resolution / adopted by the General Assembly*. New York 2018. Available from: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1648984?v=pdf>
5. United Nations Development Program Independent Evaluation Office *The Gender Results Effectiveness Scale (GRES): A Methodology Guidance Note*. Evaluation Guidelines.
6. Ministry of Health and Environment, *National Policy and Multisectoral Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases in Antigua and Barbuda*. 2015.
7. Ministry of Health and Social Services, *National Multisectoral Strategic Plan for Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) in Namibia 2017/18 – 2021/22*. 2017.
8. Ministry of Health Wellness & the Environment, *National Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases 2017-2025*. 2017.
9. Ministry of Health Community development, Gender, Elderly and Children, *National Action Plan for control and prevention of Non communicable diseases (2019-2030)*. 2019.
10. European commission, *Healthier Together EU Non-Communicable Diseases Initiative*. 2022.
11. Ministry of Health Republic of Maldives, *National Multi-sectoral Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases in Maldives (2023-2031)*. 2023.
12. Provincial/ Federating Area Health Departments and Ministry of National Health Services Regulations & Coordination, *Non-Communicable Diseases & Mental Health National Action Framework 2021-30*. 2021.
13. Ministry of Health Community development, Gender, Elderly and Children, *National Strategic Plan for Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases 2021-2026*. 2021.

Cite as: Soni B, Sharma I, Tyagi J, Bhaumik S. Meaningful progress or empty promises?

An analysis of how gender features in NCD action plans. The George Institute for Global Health. 2025. [Working paper]

