



World Customs  
Organization

COMPENDIUM

# Gender Equality and Diversity in Customs

2025

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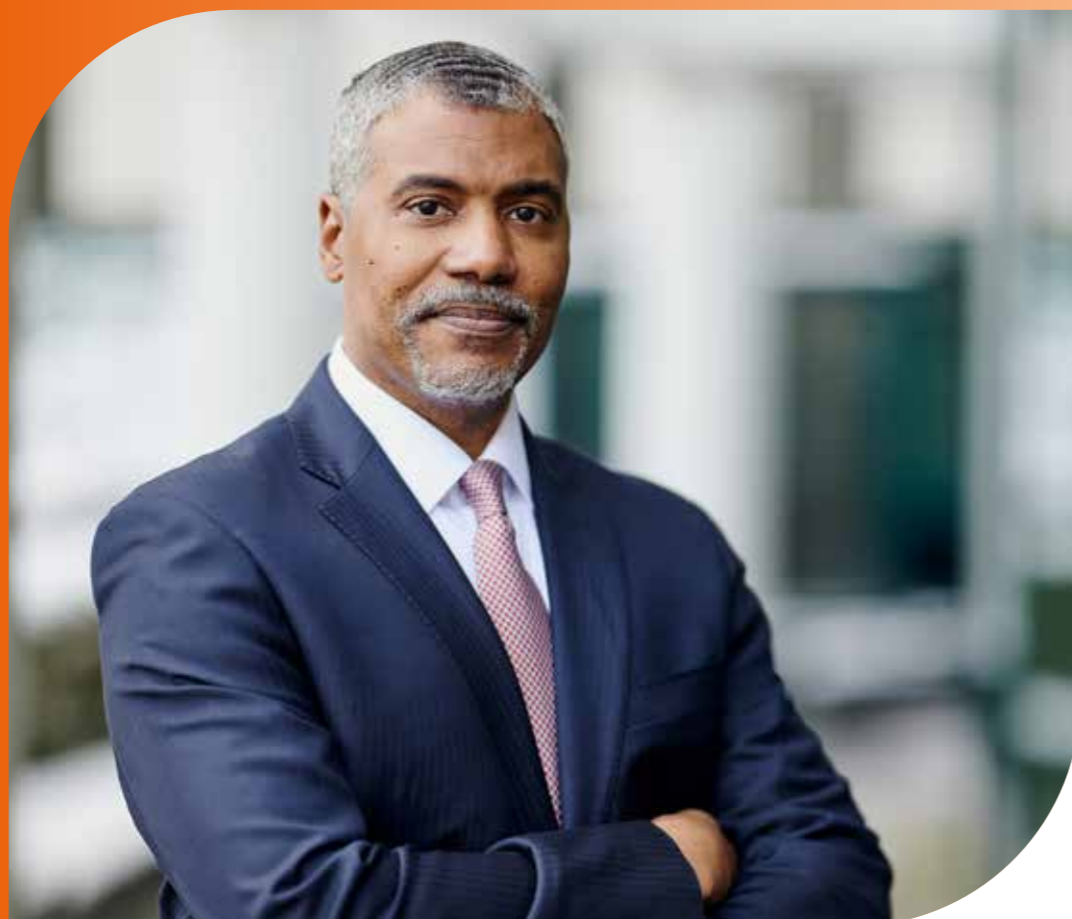
*This Compendium aims at fostering global knowledge exchange while also recognizing that examples need to be understood in their respective contexts.*



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*“We are thrilled to see the wide range of activities and how innovative and enthusiastic our Members are in promoting this crucial cross-cutting agenda.”*



## FOREWORD

*I am delighted to present the third edition of the World Customs Organization (WCO) Compendium on Gender Equality and Diversity in Customs, a testament to the unwavering commitment of the WCO to promoting an exchange of experiences in this field. It is an effort inspired by the Declaration of the Customs Co-Operation Council on Gender Equality and Diversity in Customs adopted by WCO Members in December 2020.*

*Over the past 12 years, the WCO has not only advocated for enhanced efforts to promote gender equality in Customs; it has championed the value of diversity. We recognize that diverse teams, with their mix of perspectives and experiences, are integral to enhancing the performance of our organizations.*

*Gender equality and diversity are human rights matters and prerequisites for modernization, strengthening our organizational capacities and achieving sustainable development.*

*The WCO recommends that Members consider these issues from a holistic perspective by implementing gender-responsive and inclusive policies and practices internally (covering leadership, human resource management and training) and externally (in border operations and in collaboration with stakeholders).*

*We are very pleased with the steady increase in interest on the part of our Members, donors and international partners to engage in GED, as evidenced, for instance, by the increase of participants in the WCO's Virtual Working Group for GED meetings and our GED Network conferences.*

*We are also pleased to see the progress achieved by many Members in advancing the GED agenda through different initiatives, whether supporting the career development of women in Customs, preventing harassment or, more broadly, promoting diversity and inclusion. We are also thrilled to see the wide range of activities and how innovative and enthusiastic our Members are in promoting this crucial cross-cutting agenda.*

*We are equally happy to see continuing interest in the WCO's GED instruments and tools. In December 2023, we launched a new edition of the Gender Equality Organizational Assessment Tool (GEOAT), including a new chapter dedicated to Security and Safety. Another important update is a template to assist Members in using the GEOAT in conducting self-assessments. This new template has been incorporated into the WCO's GED training material and has generated a great deal of interest from Members. We are pleased that an increasing number of Members are using this tool and have developed dedicated GED Action plans following WCO capacity-building support.*

*This third edition of the Compendium on Gender Equality and Diversity in Customs aims to provide Members with ideas to advance the GED agenda further. The examples showcased have been gathered with input from Members actively involved in the WCO Virtual Working Group for Gender Equality and Diversity in Customs. We hope that this Compendium will inspire Members to take further action and share their progress in promoting GED with the WCO Secretariat to foster further learning and global knowledge exchange while also recognizing that examples need to be understood in their respective contexts.*

*I want to express my sincere gratitude to all the colleagues worldwide who have contributed by sharing their practices and to the United Kingdom's His Majesty's Revenue & Customs (HMRC) for making this Compendium possible under the framework of the WCO Accelerate Trade Facilitation Programme.*

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ian Saunders', written in a cursive style.

**Ian Saunders**  
Secretary General

## INTRODUCTION

The WCO Secretariat started promoting gender equality in Customs in 2013, with the organization of the international conference “Women in Customs, Trade and Leadership”. As a result of this conference, the WCO developed the Gender Equality Organizational Assessment Tool (GEOAT), which aims to assist Customs administrations in assessing their policies, practices and activities to identify strengths and gaps. This approach also helps them to explore how they can further incorporate gender equality and diversity into their reform and modernization agendas. In the past 12 years, the WCO has stepped up its efforts to launch new initiatives to promote gender equality and broader diversity and inclusion issues in Customs. In 2017, the Virtual Working Group for Gender Equality and Diversity was launched to provide a platform for Members to exchange experiences and good practices and raise awareness of the GEOAT. The Network for Gender Equality and Diversity was launched in 2022 to complement the work of the Virtual Working Group as a high-level strategic platform for promoting inspirational examples and change champions.

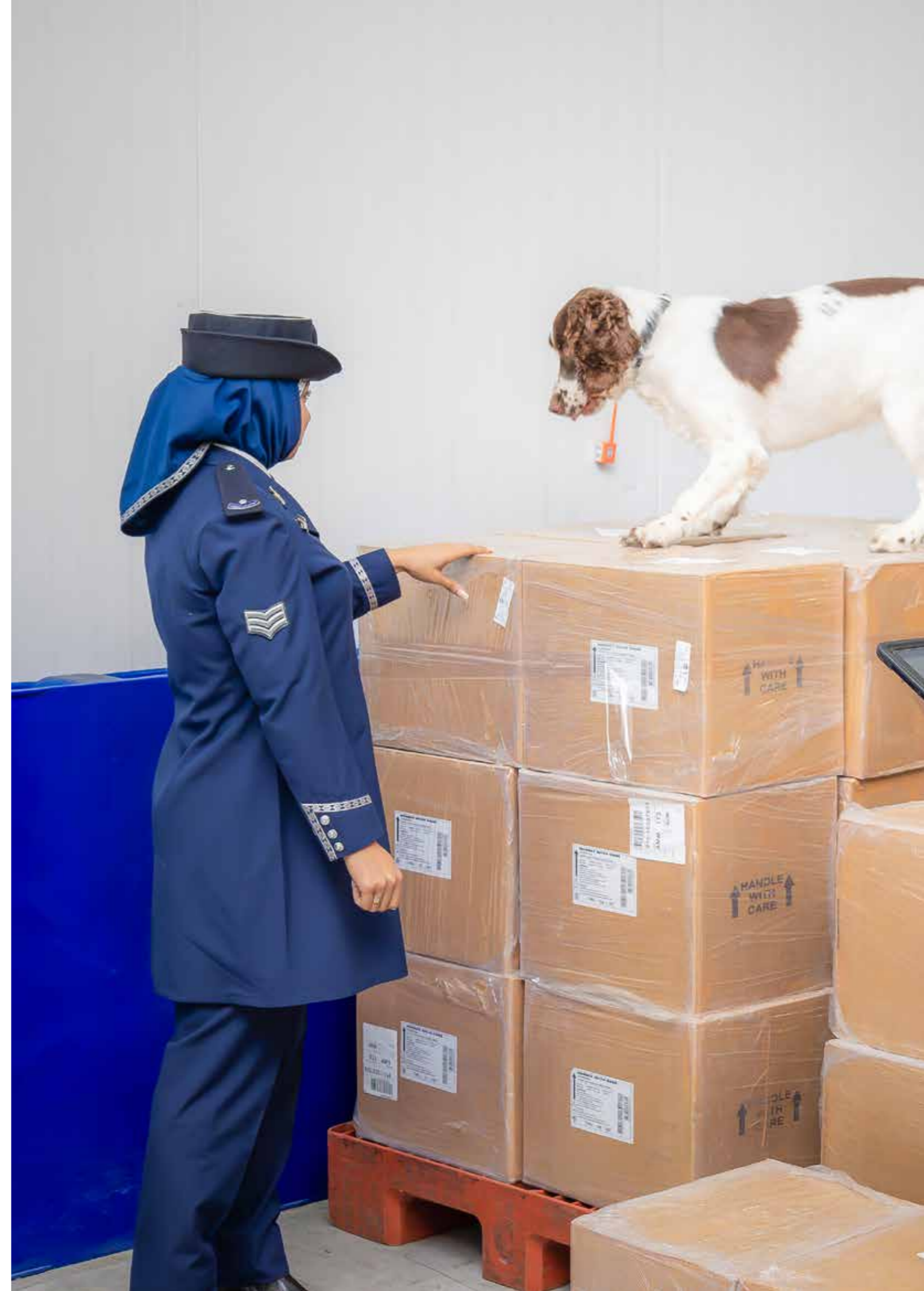
Moreover, the WCO has developed a blended training package, “Advancing Gender Equality in Customs”, composed of a one-week workshop, which has been upgraded several times. This training package also consists of two e-learning modules to raise awareness of gender equality and how this can be promoted and implemented in Customs. The WCO has also disseminated surveys on gender equality and diversity to its Members. Since 2020, questions related to gender equality and diversity, especially the key commitments of the WCO Declaration on GED have been incorporated into the WCO annual survey, allowing the WCO Secretariat to actively monitor Members’ progress in implementing this agenda design needed support activities.

The WCO also encourages its Members to continue reporting on the progress and results achieved in implementing GED initiatives through its working bodies, including the Virtual Working Group and the Capacity Building Committee.

This third edition of the Compendium on Gender Equality and Diversity in Customs aligns with the 2020 Declaration of the Customs Co-Operation Council on Gender Equality and Diversity in Customs and the objectives of the GED Network. It seeks to complement the GEOAT and the first and second editions of the Compendium by providing practical examples of how WCO Members mainstream gender equality and diversity in their respective administrations.

The 17 showcased practices in this edition illustrate several key GEOAT principles and indicators, from cross-cutting policies to concrete initiatives, to address particular issues such as valuing diversity in organizations, supporting women in their career development, and preventing harassment and gender-based violence. These practices are drawn from a diverse range of Customs administrations, demonstrating the adaptability and effectiveness of the GEOAT in different contexts.

The broad scope of examples collected illustrates the diverse Membership of the WCO and demonstrates that there is no “one model that fits all”. Policies and practices are to be adapted to the unique context of each country and Customs administration. They also show that, while implementing gender-responsive and inclusive measures is often linked to the national legislative frameworks, it can also result from proactive initiatives from Customs administrations to drive this agenda forward.





# CUSTOMS COLLECTION AND CONTROL AGENCY OF ARGENTINA

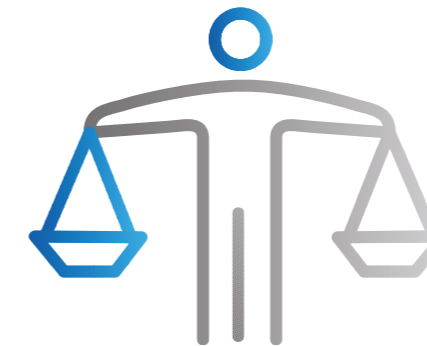
The Federal Administration of Public Revenue (AFIP) of Argentina, under which the Customs Collection and Control Agency (ARCA) belongs, has a Division on Gender Policy Coordination and Human Rights, part of the General Sub Directorate of Human Resources (DI DDRH). This Division is responsible for applying the existing gender legislation, namely: “To understand the coordination, design and implementation of policies, programmes and projects related to gender equality, equal opportunities and workforce development in the organization”.

As part of this work, there is a specific ‘Protocol for Prevention, Approach and Intervention in Response to Situations of Gender-Based Violence’. Its objective is to standardize procedures for action in specific situations, in determined environments in accordance with

current legal frameworks. It applies to all AFIP employees, irrespective of their position, role, type of contract, seniority or employment status. It also covers suppliers and taxpayers in general, as long as any case of gender-based violence involves an employee from the Agency.

One of the main duties of the DI DDRH is to facilitate ‘conversations on gender-based violence’ for staff, aimed at addressing and disseminating internal tools to eliminate gender-based violence in the workplace. Given the fact that the AFIP has offices in every Argentine province, such conversations are planned with a federal perspective and active participation. These efforts are aimed at expanding the presence and visibility of the DI DDRH, to understand the perspective of the problems arising. They also monitor the progress made in terms of achieving gender equality, including





preventing and addressing gender-based violence and identify existing gaps as well as proposing projects for the future. Improving workers job opportunities by preventing and addressing potential situations of workplace violence is essential in order to promote a good workplace environment and prevent any types of conflict which may have huge impacts both for individuals and organizations as a whole if left unaddressed. [The main objective is to generate space for reflection, share experiences of violence and build awareness of the importance of this issue, together with the staff.](#) The methodology of organizing meetings in which people can engage in conversations, reflect and enquire about the problems affecting the work environment, while also providing strategies that can be used in different scenarios, has tuned out very effective.

In line with the AFIP Protocol, a DI DDRH team travelled to the province of Salta to give a gender-based violence awareness conversation to Customs officers. Meetings were held in Oran Customs, the Regional Directorate of Salta and

also at the Aguas Blancas and Puerto Chalanas border crossings next to the border with Bolivia. These are work locations where agents spend many hours together; on the days they are based at the site, they sleep in containers located next to their workplace. The Gender Division members felt that the teams of customs officers that they visited put a lot of effort into their work and have a clear understanding of the importance of their strategic role. One notable quote was: [“Doing a good job at the border means that less drugs enter the country, and that is a way to protect our youth”.](#)

There were around 100 attendees, and the reception was generally positive, and a number of issues were raised. One early conclusion is that such activities by AFIP are helping to raise awareness on gender-based violence and the actions to prevent and identify it, including institutional communication channels for reporting.

The agents were enthusiastic, despite being tired from having worked all night, and they remained engaged throughout. An interesting generational detail was that many of the older workers - with an average age of 60 - were the most receptive and participative during the discussions. During the meetings, there was a brief presentation on the regulatory framework at institutional, national and international levels. An exchange of opinions between the trainers and participants on the Protocol followed and explanations on how to implement it as a working tool. Finally, different scenarios were presented in order to understand how to apply the tool.

Meanwhile, there were [surveys undertaken to uncover possible domestic/workplace violence situations.](#) [There were questions such as, “Have you ever been a victim of any type of violence?”.](#) If the answer was yes, responders were asked to specify the type, such as: “workload or no assignment of tasks/psychological violence/ physical violence/ harassment/social isolation”, among others. The anonymous surveys asked whether participants had experienced situations

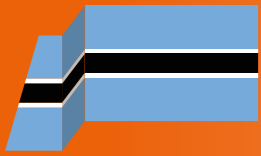
of violence, such as being excluded from tasks, psychological abuse or isolation by management. The frequency of these experiences, and the period in which they occurred, was also captured. Last, the individual concerned could provide their contact information if they wished. There was also a space in the survey for any suggestions or comments on the session. As a result of the sessions, the DI DDRH has already received requests for two consultations, on which it is currently working.

Next steps will see measures taken to ensure the safest and most appropriate work for officers. [There will be places within ARCA where officers can reach help related to workplace/ domestic violence.](#) All these efforts are aimed at eliminating both violence in the workplace and domestic violence. To enhance the outreach work of the DI DDRH across the country, visits to other regional customs Directorates are currently being planned. The objective will be the same: to disseminate the protocol against gender-based violence, to understand the issues in the different areas of the country.

In addition to the discussions held in the provinces, the DI DDRH has another ongoing initiative, that of monitoring alignment with Law 27,636; [‘Promotion of Access to Formal Employment for Transvestites, Transsexuals and Transgenic People’.](#) This establishes a minimum 1% quota of the jobs in the Argentine National State for the trans community. The objective of this is to allow transvestites and trans people to access formal work under equal conditions. These monitoring sessions are conducted on individuals, both in person and virtually, guided by a structured questionnaire. There are also interviews with the supervisors in charge of new entrants. To provide a comprehensive overview and to improve support, [it is important to listen to the experiences of the supervisors to learn about their expectations, progress and challenges faced during incorporation.](#) This

information, which is gathered on a confidential basis, helps AFIP understand and improve the training and institutional support for new entrants. This in turn has allowed it to develop an approach to basic working conditions for the employees concerned. It also helps to visualize the impact of the entry of personnel through this law, both for the Administration as a whole and for the individuals in terms of their professional career and living conditions. [This procedure allows the AFIP to make recommendations for the future to anticipate and prepare for potential conflict scenarios.](#) At the same time, it makes it easier to monitor progress and unresolved needs, helping to improve the work experience for staff, which in turn optimizes their performance. [In some cases, joining the Administration has meant a first opportunity for these individuals to enter public and formal employment,](#) serving users or taxpayers in different strategic points of the country or performing office tasks.





# BOTSWANA UNIFIED REVENUE SERVICE

Following its participation in various World Customs Organization workshops on GED at the beginning of 2023, the Botswana Unified Revenue Service (BURS) took the initiative of establishing a **Gender Equality and Diversity (GED) Working Group**. This is comprised of members from various BURS departments (Human Resources, Customs Services, Operations & Domestic Taxes) and **was tasked with undertaking a GED organizational self-assessment, based on the WCO Gender Equality Organizational Assessment Tool (GEOAT)**. It was also asked to identify methods of mainstreaming GED within BURS.

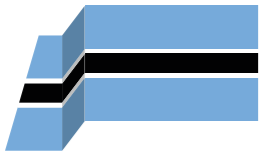
## **Initiative 1: Including GED in the Organisational Induction Programme**

BURS introduced gender equality, diversity and inclusion into its staff induction programme in

June 2023, led by its GED working group. **The purpose was to raise awareness and promote an inclusive workplace culture, improve customer service and reduce discrimination and harassment.** As of September 2024, the BURS GED team has presented at five such induction programmes.

Including this in the induction programmes has seen GED being embraced in BURS as important by both management and staff at lower levels. The high-level commitment to the GED agenda is demonstrated by the support given to the team to attend and take part in seminars, conferences, trainings and workshops relating to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI). An example of this is the recent BURS participation in the Botswana Summit on DEI, where it shared its experience in implementing the WCO GEOAT, generating considerable interest. In addition,





BURS staff now understand the concept and its importance to the workplace, making it safer and more equitable. It creates a more positive work environment where employees feel safe and supported, ultimately contributing to better mental health and job satisfaction.

The aim of integrating gender equality, diversity and inclusion into the induction programme is to create a long-term cultural transformation, one where GED is normalized and shapes how employees think, act and interact on a daily basis, not only with each other but also with other stakeholders. This is also in line with the 'Mindset Change Campaign', a strategic initiative aimed at reshaping attitudes, beliefs and behaviours in various sectors across the country. This seeks to encourage progressive thinking, innovation and adaptability among citizens to drive transformation in Botswana. BURS's efforts in integrating these principles may also serve as a model for other revenue authorities and public sector organizations in Africa, enhancing its influence beyond Botswana's borders.

### Initiative 2: BURS GED Study

BURS undertook a study through the Customs Services Division, in February 2023, on the Perception of Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in BURS, to help prepare internal implementation of the WCO ESA regional GED Framework. The objective was to explore the perception of BURS employees of gender equality and to find out their understanding of gender equality and its benefits.

Some of the highlights of the study were:

- 1. General perception of BURS employees on gender equality:** BURS staff believe that women and men should have equal rights, opportunities, treatment and pay. However, while most women embrace equality, some men remain sceptical and believe no change is required, as they feel that women want to be in control.
- 2. Exploring whether culture contributes to existing perceptions:** The study highlighted gender inequalities within BURS, with more females at the officer level and more males in executive management. Staff perceptions suggest that certain jobs and leadership roles are seen as male dominated, suggesting cultural influences on these perceptions.
- 3. Employees knowledge of gender equality and how it can benefit the organization:** While BURS employees recognize the importance of gender equality, diversity and inclusion, many are unaware of BURS's related initiatives, including for those with disabilities. In addition, some staff lack awareness of sexual harassment and reporting procedures, highlighting a need for improved communication within the organization.
- 4. Explore whether staff think more should be done by BURS in GED:** Although employees may not have an in-depth understanding of gender equality, diversity and inclusion, they acknowledge the benefits to any organization of taking this into consideration. Therefore, BURS needs to do more on the topic, and may have to establish a dedicated office for these efforts.

### Impact and Outlook

- The findings prompted BURS to enhance communication and awareness about its GED initiatives and related policies.
- The results are likely to influence BURS's to reassess its current policies and practices, to address the identified inequalities and cultural biases.
- There is a growing need for more training and educational programmes to clarify issues such as sexual harassment and ensuring that all employees are aware of the procedures for addressing such concerns.
- The insights will guide the future strategy for promoting a more inclusive and diverse work environment at BURS.

### Initiative 3: BURS GED Assessment

In July 2023, the BURS GED Working Group conducted an internal assessment, using the 2019 edition of the WCO Gender Equality Organizational Assessment Tool (GEOAT). This was to assess performance on gender equality and inclusiveness by considering existing policies, procedures and work environment. A comprehensive report was drafted, which was submitted to the WCO accompanied by a specific request for technical assistance in developing a BURS GED action plan.

BURS intends to leverage the GEOAT to continuously monitor and track its progress in promoting gender equality, diversity and inclusion within the organization. It seeks to systematically assess its policies, procedures and workplace culture to identify those areas requiring improvement. The tool will help ensure that gender balance is maintained throughout the organization, with both men and women having equal opportunities for professional growth and leadership. Periodic assessments will also promote a broader approach to inclusion, encompassing issues related to people

with disabilities (differently abled) including considering the needs of such employees.

Furthermore, regular use of the GEOAT will enable BURS to identify and address any gender biases, foster a more-inclusive work environment and track progress toward achieving gender equality goals over time. This will support BURS in building a diverse and equitable workforce, aligning with its commitment to excellence in public service and operational effectiveness.

### Result and Impact

The assessment reflected the fact that most of the indicators were not implemented at all. For example, BURS had no GED action plan and there was no sensitization on gender equality, diversity and inclusion within BURS. It also reflected that 25% of the indicators were fully implemented; examples of these include BURS offering all staff competitive and equitable wages and other benefits and provides comprehensive health coverage and insurance that are equitable for all employees. Last, 28% of the indicators were partially implemented; for example, a zero-tolerance policy for unacceptable behaviour was publicly displayed in some offices, but not in all.

### BURS Assessment GEOAT findings

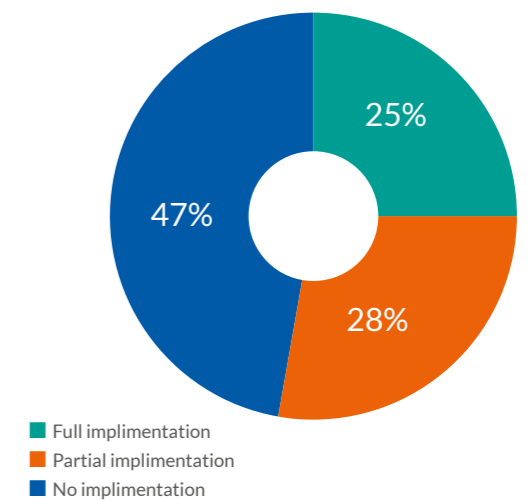


Fig. 1 Findings of the assessment as of July 2023

## Initiative 4: BURS GED Action Plan Development

Following the assessment, BURS received technical assistance from the WCO to develop its GED Action Plan. In December 2023, gender equality experts from the WCO assisted BURS in developing the action plan under the auspices of the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA)-WCO Trade Facilitation and Customs Modernization Program.

The main objectives outlined in the action plan are:

1. **Develop a framework** for the sustainable implementation of gender-responsive and inclusive policies and practices.
2. **Improve recruitment practices** to ensure greater gender balance and staff diversity at all levels of the revenue authority.
3. **Advance career development programmes** and monitor the numbers of men and women receiving training to promote equal opportunities for BURS employees.
4. **Enhance work-life balance** for BURS employees.
5. Improve **prevention of harassment and gender-based violence (GBV)** and support for victims.
6. Advance **collaboration with external stakeholders** (including OGAs, regional development partners and the private sector) on GED issues.
7. **Improve infrastructure** to enhance the inclusion, security and safety of both internal and external stakeholders.

To address these objectives, BURS plans to:

- Set up a GED office, including focal points responsible for GED planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation in all BURS regional offices.
- Analyze existing sex-disaggregated data to identify gender-specific trends.
- Develop a policy to prevent any type of harassment and to sensitize staff.

GED is anticipated to become part of the BURS 2024-2029 Corporate Strategy, with the possibility of a dedicated office and budget to roll out the GED Action Plan.

## Results and Impact

Development of the BURS GED Action Plan has yielded significant results and impacts.

- a) **Increased Awareness:** It has helped raise awareness over the importance of gender equality, diversity and inclusion within the organization, as different officials from BURS were involved in its development.
- b) **Policy Alignment:** It has aided integration of GED principles into BURS corporate strategy. This ensures that GED considerations are part of decision-making processes.
- c) **Curiosity:** Interest in inclusivity has increased among BURS staff, and employees are more GED-aware than before.

To ensure the effective implementation and continuous improvement of GED efforts within BURS following the development of the BURS GED Action Plan there will be:

### 1. Regular Monitoring and Evaluation:

Implement of the GED Action Plan will be continuously monitored through tools such as the WCO GEOAT. This will track progress and regular report on key GED performance indicators, ensuring accountability from top management down.

### 2. Capacity Building and Training:

Develop ongoing training programmes aimed at capacity building among staff on gender equality, unconscious bias and diversity-related topics. These will include sensitization workshops to encourage an inclusive organizational culture.

### 3. Inclusive Recruitment and Promotion Practices:

Implement recruitment strategies that actively pursue diversity, such as gender-balanced shortlists, equitable hiring practices and targeted outreach to marginalized groups.

### 4. Strengthening Policy Frameworks:

Continuously review and strengthen workplace policies relating to gender equality, disability inclusion, anti-discrimination and work-life balance. Align these policies with both national and international best practices to enhance BURS's inclusivity and diversity agenda.

### 5. Stakeholder Engagement:

Extend the GED efforts beyond BURS by partnering with external stakeholders, such as national departments/ministries and international organizations, to share knowledge, best practices and experiences. The goal is to reinforce BURS's leadership in gender equality and diversity on national and regional levels.

### 6. Leadership Accountability and Champions:

Ensure that the leadership at all levels is accountable for progressing the GED Action Plan, through establishing clear responsibilities and appointing gender equality and diversity champions within the organization. This will help drive the initiative and sustain focus on achieving the goals. Include GED in the BURS 2024-2029 Corporate Organizational Strategy.

### 7. Periodic Review and Adaptation of the Action Plan:

Establish a process for regularly reviewing and updating the GED Action Plan, to adapt to evolving organizational needs and changes in the external environment. This will ensure that BURS is responsive and proactive in addressing emerging gender and diversity challenges.

### 8. Benchmarking with local organizations:

Work with those that are ahead of BURS in achieving GED goals in order to exchange experiences, insights, understand the latest trends and innovations, enhance BURS reputation and strengthen relations with these groups.





# GENERAL DEPARTMENT OF CUSTOMS AND EXCISE OF CAMBODIA

In Cambodia, gender equality was rarely discussed, with men and women seen as playing different social and domestic roles. **Women oversaw the wellbeing of the family and household, while men worked outside the home to provide financial support.** This traditional arrangement often restricted women from pursuing education, further limiting opportunities for a professional career. A woman's ability to perform certain tasks was also doubted, meaning that working in professions traditionally perceived as 'male' - such as the police, army and customs - were rare.

However, according to the Cambodian Rehabilitation and Development Board<sup>1</sup>, there has been noticeable shift in attitudes since 2000. **Growing numbers of women are gaining access to education and employment opportunities, which in turn is increasing gender inequality**

**awareness and driving demand for equal rights and advancements.**

Since 2009 - as a result of the Royal government's plans and strategies - **gender equality has been increasingly recognized and promoted in Cambodia at all levels - national, ministerial, institutional - even in the home.** Its importance has gathered momentum in most government organizations, particularly in male-dominated fields. The General Department of Customs and Excise of Cambodia (GDCE) is among those Public Administrations making significant improvements in advancing gender equality.

One specific area of concern is **the perception that the nature of Customs makes it a job for men, not women.** Concerns over safety when performing enforcement activities, along with



<sup>1</sup> Council for the Development of Cambodia (cdc-crdp.gov.kh)



the need to work at the border, further limited the number of women interested in joining. Meanwhile, **training opportunities for women already working in this field was constrained by self-perception and cultural expectations, further restricting women from realising their full potential.** In addition, gender stereotyping and misconceptions of women as indecisive and emotionally driven, also constrains access to decision-making roles. These factors, coupled with societal norms, created unfavourable career paths for female customs officers in GDCE in the past and meant their voices were rarely heard.

However, **with strong recent commitment from GDCE leadership, there have been significant improvements on gender equality issues within the administration.** This, combined with the change of mindset in Cambodian society, has seen more women recruited to the Administration. Opportunities for promotion to decision-making positions have also been increased, along with enhanced capacity-building opportunities for female officers.

Overall, the number of female customs officers have increased in recent years from 79 (7.7% of the total) in 2012 to 200 (15.3% of the total) in 2024. Also, the number of women in Customs taking leadership positions has trebled, from 20

female officers in 2014 to 61 in 2024, with one being promoted to Deputy Director General. Meanwhile, the percentage of female officers given opportunities to participate in national and international events (such as meetings and workshops) rose from 27.6% to 36.6% during the 10-year period 2014-2024.

The GDCE has been implementing national policies in Cambodia that provide a **more-flexible working environment for female officers and officers who are caregivers for family members.** Women are given three months maternity leave and are allowed to reduced working hours during the first year after the child is born, working only seven hours daily. In addition, officers suffering from chronic diseases - or with family members with chronic diseases - are also allowed reduced working hours, only working seven hours daily.

As well as fostering gender diversity within the organization's operations, the GDCE supports and encourages female officers to take part in social activities contributing positively to society, including blood donation, visiting and donating to orphanages and nursing homes. This serves to empower female officers beyond their professional roles and instil a sense of social responsibility and community involvement.

## Stakeholders/Activities

The Ministry of Economy and Finance, which oversees the GDCE, established a dedicated working group on gender mainstreaming in 2007 and launched its **first five-year Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Plan.** This has been renewed for 2024-28 and is consistent with the objectives set by the Neary Rattanak VI Plan, developed by Ministry of Women Affairs of the Royal Government of Cambodia. It focuses on improving gender equality throughout the country involving various sectors.

**More female officers have been supported and provided opportunities for self-development, promotion and involvement in decision-making.** Moreover, activities to promote gender equality have recently been officially included in its five-year Customs Reform and Modernization Strategy for 2024-2028, such as: providing awareness programme on GED for customs officials, prioritizing female officers' opportunity for promotion and award programmes such as work medals and increasing the participation of female customs officials in both national and international training programmes.

The GDCE - with support from the Australian Regional Trade for Development - is currently implementing the 'Gender Equality and Diversity in Customs' project. This is aimed at enhancing gender equality and inclusion in its policies, practices and trade facilitation services. It covers - among others - **activities such as strengthening the institutional capacity on GED of the GDCE and supporting implementation of a sexual harassment prevention policy.** The GDCE is also collaborating with the Cambodian Women for Peace and Development, an NGO that provides a platform to empower women, reshaping their perceptions and raising awareness of women's rights and societal roles.

At international level, the GDCE adheres to the Declaration of the Customs Cooperation Council on Gender Equality and Diversity and takes part in the WCO Virtual Working Group for Gender Equality and Diversity. **This allows the GDCE to better understand gender-related issues and to learn from other customs administrations around the world.** This helps develop better approaches and solutions, promoting a more inclusive and supportive working environment for female customs officers. The GDCE also implements the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Declaration on Gender-Responsive Implementation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025, alongside the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.



## Impact

Implementing gender equality initiatives within the GDCE has brought about a remarkable transformation in what was previously a male-dominated organization. **There has been a substantial increase in the involvement of female officers in recent years** and a shift towards a more-progressive approach to education and career advancement.

Integrating a gender equality programme as a cluster activity of the customs reform and modernization strategy has delivered **a more-welcoming and supportive workplace culture**. The GDCE female workforce has emerged as a vital asset, contributing diverse viewpoints, skills and experiences, from operational positions to key policymaking roles.

In line with long-term objectives, the GDCE has consistently encouraged its female officers to advance professionally and personally. **GDCE women officers have expanded their presence both nationally and internationally, becoming WCO-accredited experts and focal points in customs-related working groups**, providing inspiration for other women in the Administration. As a result, the female workforce at GDCE is now more driven and ambitious in pursuing their career aspirations, significantly contributing to the ongoing success and advancement of the organization.

## What do we expect (Outlook)

The GDCE leaders have made a huge advance in improving gender equality in the workplace. The Administration has also seen many female officers promoted and given opportunities for personal improvement and acknowledged for their success based on their own merit. **These 'role models' have encouraged other women to follow suit**. The GDCE believes that the expectation of being fairly judged on performance and competence rather than on gender is attracting a more-competitive workforce and greater mutual recognition between both genders in the workplace. This in turn can improve teamwork and enhance organizational performance. It also sends an important signal to the public, showing how the GDCE has female representation at all level of its management, including leadership level.

Despite this, there are still improvements to be made. **Fighting against gender discrimination and stereotypes is not just women's obligation; it is everyone's**.





# CANADA BORDER SERVICES AGENCY

The Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) is committed to addressing gender imbalances and promoting diversity within its workforce. It recognizes the importance of closing representation gaps, particularly among women in key roles, and strive to create an environment where all talent is valued, regardless of gender. This commitment aligns with the country's broader governmental initiatives, including establishing Canada's first gender-balanced cabinet in 2015, something that continues today with many women holding top leadership positions.

In the Canadian context, **Employment Equity (EE)** encompasses a spectrum of identities, including women, Indigenous Peoples, racialized individuals and persons with disabilities. Each of these groups contributes uniquely to society, and

the CBSA is resolute in ensuring their equitable representation and participation.

## CBSA's Approach to Gender Equality and Inclusion

At the CBSA, 'women' includes anyone who identifies as a woman. Gender equality goes beyond the binary concept of men and women and is inclusive of all gender identities. The **CBSA's Women's Advisory Committee (WAC)** and Two Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and people who identify as part of sexual and gender diverse communities (**2SLGBTQI+**) committee work to educate and promote awareness on gender identity.

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FOR A CAREER AT THE CBSA?  
JOIN US.**





The Agency is putting in place the pieces required to ensure that it does its part to create the right culture. For example, since its creation in 2018, the Women's Advisory Committee has grown from a small group to over 200 members across Canada, led by a senior CBSA executive. The executive's presence ensures that the perspectives of women are represented in senior decision-making processes.

This process is assisted by the use of data to ensure equality when reviewing how policies impact different groups, using the Gender Based Analysis Plus (GBA Plus) methodology. This is a tool that seeks to assess how policies and programmes affect different groups of people by considering a range of factors, including gender, race and socioeconomic status. By using the intersectionality model, GBA Plus helps gather detailed information on the needs and experiences of diverse populations, ensuring that policies and programmes are more inclusive and equitable. This allows for better-informed decision-making that supports all individuals in fully participating in society.

The CBSA has instituted a Responsible Data and Artificial Intelligence Centre of Expertise Team. This is building responsible systems and AI applications that help minimize the risk of bias, discrimination and harm against women and other equity-seeking groups. A significant part of data work involves consulting communities that may be affected, and ensuring that the diversity of the people that the CBSA serves remains at the core of decision-making. In addition, the team verifies that data sets used in risk assessment and applications do not ultimately favour or hinder any specific demographic. The team consists of CBSA staff from varied career backgrounds, including data science, gender studies, peace and conflict as well as law – and all of them are women.

## Increasing Diversity in the Workforce and Supporting Employees

The CBSA's advisory committees representing marginalized groups continue to advance its commitment to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI).

- Women's Advisory Committee (WAC)
- Racialized Persons Advisory Committee (RPAC)
- Indigenous Advisory Circle (IAC)
- 2SLGBTQI+ Advisory Committee
- Persons with Disabilities Advisory Committee (PDAC)

These committees, alongside programme areas, strive to eliminate barriers and create an inclusive environment for all employees.

The CBSA has implemented targeted hiring processes to increase the representation of Indigenous Peoples and persons with disabilities in executive roles, ensuring diverse leadership perspectives. In addition, the Employment Equity Executive Developmental Leadership Programme prepares employees from underrepresented groups for leadership positions, reinforcing the commitment to diversity.

Supporting employee-led networks and advisory circles is a priority for the CBSA. These networks provide crucial support and advocacy for employees, encouraging an environment where everyone can thrive.

## Engagement on the Employment Equity Act Modernization

In spring last year, the CBSA took part in consultations led by the Employment Equity Act Review Task Force within the Government of Canada. The Act is a Canadian law that helps

make sure everyone is treated fairly at work. It focuses on removing obstacles to jobs for four groups: women, Indigenous Peoples, people with disabilities and employees who are members of visible minorities.

These consultations engaged with hundreds of partners and stakeholders, including community organizations, public, private and non-profit sectors as well as advocacy groups and networks. Its goal was a renewed Employment Equity Act that reflects today's realities and helps create a more vibrant and diverse workforce. More importantly, it will help build a country where everyone has a fair and equal chance to reach their full potential.

The renewed commitments to a government without barriers are focused on four key areas:

- Updating the objectives, designated groups and data collection from surveys.
- Supporting both employees and employers.
- Strengthening accountability, compliance and enforcement,
- Improving public information.

## Advancing Representation and Inclusion

The CBSA has made significant progress in increasing the representation of women, who now make up 47% of the Agency's workforce. Notably, women hold 51% of executive leadership positions. This is a result of the CBSA's efforts in eliminating barriers that can prevent women from entering executive leadership ranks in hiring processes.

There have been system-level changes to staffing processes, requiring managers to assess and mitigate bias during hiring. These changes reflect the commitment to creating a fair and equitable workplace for all employees.

<sup>1</sup> Character-Based Leadership: Why It's Crucial for Success (tec-canada.com)

The organization has worked to **increase representation rates in all employment equity groups, demonstrating a clear commitment to diversity**. This has been achieved through various targeted initiatives aimed at promoting the inclusion of racialized individuals, Indigenous Peoples, persons with disabilities and women.

### Demonstrating Leadership in EDI

The CBSA leadership has already demonstrated strong commitment to EDI, with **85% of executives completing a pledge on Anti-Racism and EDI**. Though this, anti-racist behaviours have been clarified and adopted by executives. These include fostering an environment where all employees feel supported, valued and motivated to contribute, as well as advancing reconciliation and actively combating racism and discrimination through implementing initiatives, educational programmes and partnerships while fostering accessibility. It has **established clear action plans throughout the organization designed to guide EDI efforts**, and has organized over 60 workshops on character-based leadership.<sup>1</sup> In addition, a virtual learning series on antiracism and inclusion themes provided ongoing education for employees.

**Executives have also taken on mentorship and sponsorship roles, supporting over 320 employees from underrepresented groups**. In 2022-23, an Employment Equity and Executive Leadership Development Pilot was created. This saw 11 individuals from various equity-deserving groups complete this programme. The initiative has provided them with coaching and mentorship and prepared them for executive roles. As this initiative has prepared these individuals for executive roles. As of 31 March 2024, four employees have been appointed permanently or are in acting roles.

<sup>1</sup> *Character-Based Leadership: Why It's Crucial for Success (tec-canada.com)*

This hands-on approach ensures that these employees receive the support they need to advance their careers and contribute to the CBSA's success. In addition, inclusion networks and champion roles have been established nationally and regionally to promote EDI initiatives.

### Changing Mindsets and Promoting Inclusion

The CBSA has made significant efforts to change mindsets and promote inclusion within the organization. **Training on unconscious bias has been offered to over 700 managers**, equipping them with the tools to recognize and mitigate biases in their decision-making processes.

The launch of the **'Anti-Racism Book Club'** has provided a safe space for employees to engage in difficult conversations about race and inclusion. This initiative has increased understanding of the challenges faced by members of visible minorities and promoted a culture of empathy and respect. The introduction of a cultural awareness calendar has also increased awareness of heritage and religious dates, promoting a more inclusive work environment.

### Reporting and Accountability

To maintain transparency and accountability, the **CBSA publishes quarterly reports tracking progress on EDI goals**. EDI principles are now embedded in the CBSA's business plans, ensuring that they are integral to operations. The CBSA has also updated its Anti-Racism, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan for 2024-27, which covers the following priorities:

### Closing representation gaps and supporting employee career development and retention

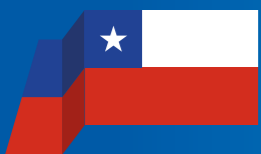
The CBSA is committed to creating an environment where all employees feel supported and valued. The CBSA address these gaps through staffing flexibilities, implementing best practices to remove barriers, and setting clear annual goals at the branch and regional levels.

### Improve communication and demonstrate leadership accountability

In an organization like the CBSA, it is vital that leaders understand their responsibilities and are held accountable for creating an inclusive and equitable workplace. The CBSA therefore measures progress through reports, making dashboards public and holding information sessions, ensuring any required regional adjustments can be made.

The CBSA is set for a transformative period, advancing its commitment to gender equity and inclusion. The coming years envisage an array of dynamic initiatives, demonstrating the Agency's dedication to fostering inclusion. From the recruitment in key occupational roles to the development of their career paths, the CBSA's efforts reflect a broader strategy to increase the representation of women within the Agency. The CBSA will continue to actively address diverse needs, commemorating pivotal dates for women, all while spreading awareness through impactful initiatives.





# NATIONAL CUSTOMS SERVICE OF CHILE

The National Customs Service of Chile considers it essential to commit - as a strategic axis of its management - to **establishing the gender perspective and promote good practices to achieve equality and equity between all genders and diversities**. With this objective at the centre of its management, it has developed policies and incorporated a workplan to promote the mainstreaming of the gender perspective.

The policies and workplan are part of the commitment that the Chilean Ministry of Finance has made to the Ministry of Women and Gender Equality for the period 2023-2025. They are part of a roadmap for advancing gender equality among citizens as well as within institutions of the finance sector.

The axes are:

- 1) To deepen the **diagnosis and analysis of female economic autonomy** through an intersectional approach, by improving data collection and developing studies.
- 2) To progress gradually to a **national public budget with a gender perspective**.
- 3) To define common standards for incorporating the **gender perspective in people management and development processes** in the public sector.
- 4) To implement measures for the **financial inclusion of women**, to strengthen their economic autonomy.





### Gender perspective in people management and development processes

To advance the implementation of these objectives within the National Customs Service, the administration used, as a basis, an institutional reference framework – [strategic guidelines provided by the Government](#) – in establishing the Gender Equality Policy and launching the [Participatory Working Group on Gender Equality](#). This group is made up of representatives from the institution and elected customs officials. The organization determined strategic pillars and priority action areas through a participatory process.

These were:

- Training and awareness-raising on gender issues.
- Ensuring gender equity and equality in access and opportunity in all areas of the institution.
- Promoting an institution free of gender-based violence and discrimination.

### Training and awareness-raising on gender issues

From 2022 onwards, the National Customs Service of Chile has developed a [gender training and awareness-raising plan to promote change in the organizational culture](#). The objective is - by 2026 – to have 90% of the institution’s officials trained in gender issues. The main training topics addressed include gender identity, sexual expression and orientation, gender roles and stereotypes, consequences of the sexual division of labour, gender inequality, gender violence and masculinity. A total of 1,337 places have been opened, and to date 35% of customs officials have been trained at least once.

### Gender equity and equality in access and opportunity in all areas of the institution

Another relevant aspect of the training plan is [encouraging and advising women within the institution on developing leadership skills](#). To this end, a programme of workshops is being developed in 2024 - within the framework of an agreement with UN WOMEN - to encourage female participation in the management and enforcement entities of Customs. It provides

tools to enhance career development and achieve positions of greater responsibility within the institution.

The National Customs Service has also supported and encouraged of female customs officials to take part in the +Women Programme (Programa +Mujeres), Leadership for the Public Sector’. Run by the National Directorate of the Civil Service of the Ministry of Finance, this is a [mentoring programme aimed at those female professionals women interested in pursuing a management career in the State](#). It seeks to strengthen, through mentoring, the professional and career development of public officials. It reinforces their leadership skills and improves their participation in positions of greater responsibility and management both in their institution and in the public service in general.

In May 2024, following an internal recruitment process carried out among female officials, four with leadership potential within the Service were selected to represent and participate in the programme.

### Promoting an institution free of gender-based violence and discrimination

The State of Chile’s commitment to preventing and eliminating of violence and harassment with a gender perspective at work, has manifested itself - among other measures - through the ratification of a number of international treaties. This includes [Convention 190 of the International Labor Organization \(ILO\) on the Elimination of Violence and Harassment](#). This saw the enactment of two regulations during 2024; the ‘Protocol for the Prevention of Workplace Harassment, Sexual Harassment and Violence at Work’ and the ‘Procedure for the Investigation of Workplace and Sexual Harassment and Violence at Work’. Prevention and sanctions are the axes that will allow all types of organizational violence to be eliminated.

In the prevention axis, the National Customs Service has developed a [protocol aimed at delivering safe and violence-free work environments that foster good treatment, promote equality with a gender perspective and prevent situations of sexual and workplace harassment and violence](#). Meanwhile, the sanction axis determines the steps to report, investigate and punish conduct constituting violence, harassment at work and sexual harassment. This helps create a work environment that protects the dignity of individuals.

The main value of public institutions must be the trust of people who come to them daily in search of solutions. Public trust in institutions assists the implementation of government programmes. For this reason, during the current year, Customs developed a user experience policy incorporating a gender perspective, providing an efficient, transparent and citizen-oriented service.

Following the same principles, the National Customs Service is a pioneer in its protocol for a comprehensive approach to preventing, guiding and eradicating violence against women. It has a [10-step programme for how to assist victims of gender-based violence, with trained officials throughout the country](#). In particular, officials with customer service functions are trained. The protocol focuses on providing initial care to victims, with tools to deal with the situation and refer them promptly to the appropriate bodies for legal or medical advice. With this, Customs becomes part of a network of public entities implementing a comprehensive approach to eradicating violence against women.

## Deepen the diagnosis and analysis of women's economic autonomy with an intersectional approach by improving data and developing studies

Exports can be a powerful tool for providing women with economic empowerment. By accessing international markets, women can generate income, create employment and contribute to the sustainable development of their communities. Here, [another relevant element of the strategic management of Customs from a gender perspective is the elaboration of foreign trade statistics](#). In particular, disaggregation by sex in the statistics for the export sector contributes to improving public policies and promotion in this area.

[Chile's extensive network of trade agreements provides fertile ground for female entrepreneurs to expand their businesses internationally](#). Of the value exported by the country in 2022, 37.5% was generated by women-led companies, of which 48.1% is attributed to MSMEs (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises). Women export in the same sectors as companies led by men; however, there is a significant gap in the level of participation, both in the total value exported and in the number of participating companies. This highlights that barriers remain to the equal representation of women in the leadership of national exporting companies.

## Implement measures for the financial inclusion for women to strengthen their economic autonomy

Here, Chile's National Customs Service is launching [the Aduana Conecta programme in 2024 to integrate women into global value chains](#). This provides direct and free training in export issues for female-led companies as well as technical assistance from customs experts and support to help them begin exporting. The programme saw its first iteration with 50 companies, a number expected to be increased over time.

At the same time, following the guidelines of the public procurement and contracting system of the State of Chile, Customs [encourages female-led companies to participate in public tendering processes](#), by establishing inclusive criteria in the public tender bases, promoting female economic autonomy and gender equality. While Chile's public sector has set a target of 5% for public tenders incorporating 'criteria with a gender perspective,' to date Customs has achieved 31% of tenders with these criteria implemented.

Despite these achievements, much still remains to be done to reduce gender inequalities, gaps and discriminatory practices. The National Customs Service of Chile remains committed to [promoting leadership and autonomy by increasing the female presence in positions of greater responsibility and decision making, through awareness raising, training and skills development strategies](#).





# DEPARTMENT OF CUSTOMS AND EXCISE OF CYPRUS

The Council of Ministers of the Republic of Cyprus have approved the **New National Strategy for Gender Equality 2024-26**, which came into effect on 1 January 2024. Its implementation is coordinated, monitored and evaluated by the Commissioner for Gender Equality in Action. The Commissioner is appointed by the President and, among their competencies, is the coordination, monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the Strategy. This is undertaken in collaboration with all national Ministries and deputy Ministries, including that of Finance, the competent authority for the Department of Customs and Excise.

The strategy document confirms the **Government's commitment to promoting gender equality and its zero tolerance for any sexist or harassing behaviour on the basis of gender in the**

**Public Service.** Among the horizontal policies and actions in the framework for implementing the Strategy was a request for technical support from the European Commission in preparing a gender state budget, which was approved with effect from June 2024. The background to this was the application by Ministry of Finance to the European Commission (through the Directorate General for Structural Reform Support) for **technical assistance on gender mainstreaming in public policy and budgeting**, which was approved in March 2024. The project has a duration of 30 months and is expected to be completed by the end of 2026. The overarching objective is to help integrate of gender mainstreaming, through the application of gender responsive budgeting, gender impact assessment, gender action plans or other relevant tools to help implement policies that consider equality between women and men.





The Department of Customs and Excise takes all measures falling within the Equal Treatment of Men and Women in Employment and Vocational Training Law - as well as the Public Service Law and Regulations - required to implement the gender equal treatment principle.

In particular, the Equal Treatment of Men and Women in Employment and Vocational Training Law aims at the implementing this principle in terms of provision. **The Customs Department, under the Guidance of the Public Administration and Personnel Department of the Ministry of Finance, has appointed an Equality Officer.** Their duties and responsibilities include dealing with issues of workplace gender discrimination, employment and/or vocational training. It is not, however, a full-time role.

Equality Officers of the Departments and Ministries, along with senior managers and competent officials of the Public Service, are from time to time to attend invited training workshops on **'Gender Equality in employment and vocational training in the Public Service'**. This helps them build knowledge on how to promote gender equality policy in their organizations.

Topics include:

- The basic concepts of gender asymmetry.
- The essential content of European gender equality policies and strategies.
- The content of the legislation of Cyprus on gender equality in employment.
- The recognition of issues related to discrimination on the basis of gender differences in employment.

In addition, the Academy has offered presentations by scientific associates on gender equality topics, addressed to all staff of Departments/Ministries.

**The Department of Customs and Excise also drafted its own Code of Ethics** in 2003, and was reviewed in 2017. The Code is based on those values that form the basis of undertaking the Customs Department's mission, such as legality, integrity, transparency, fairness, responsibility, professionalism efficiency, confidentiality and accountability. It is a clear and public statement of its commitment to cementing its departmental reputation. Promoting and maintaining equal treatment and diversity in the workplace are

seen as additional actions and efforts. These additional actions and efforts are recommended. However, they are neither mandatory nor bound by any legislation.

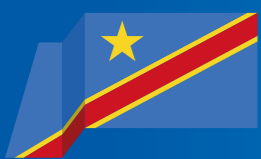
Customs Officers are obliged to comply with the Code when performing their duties and to act, among other things, without positive or negative discrimination to colleagues, civilians or stakeholders. **They must also abstain from discriminating against gender and other beliefs and sexual orientation by applying the principle of equal treatment.** The implementation of the relevant laws is absolute, and is applied impartially to all personnel and the public by relying on identical obligations.

This Code has established an Ethics Committee comprised of Chief and Senior Customs Officers. This examines pressing issues, updates the Code and assesses the degree of compliance with it. Citizens and colleagues have the right to address the Director of the Department with any complaints, including on gender equality issues; and these are examined by the Committee on behalf of the Director. During the examination, the complainant remains anonymized, and there should be a response within 60 days. This procedure is aimed at strengthening the democratic institutions, limiting complaints, taking corrective measures and satisfying the sense of justice.

**All personnel must familiarize themselves with the contents of the Code, and they are liable for upholding its regulations and principles of the Code.** In the event of any infringement of the Code, there is a disciplinary or administrative inspection for each case and decisions made on the consequences. The Code of Ethics is accessible to all via the Department's website.

It should be noted that the Department of Customs and Excise of Cyprus does not have its own strategy or action plan on Gender Equality and Diversity. Instead, the strategy is decided at national level, and the Department of Customs and Excise is expected to align with these goals and activities.





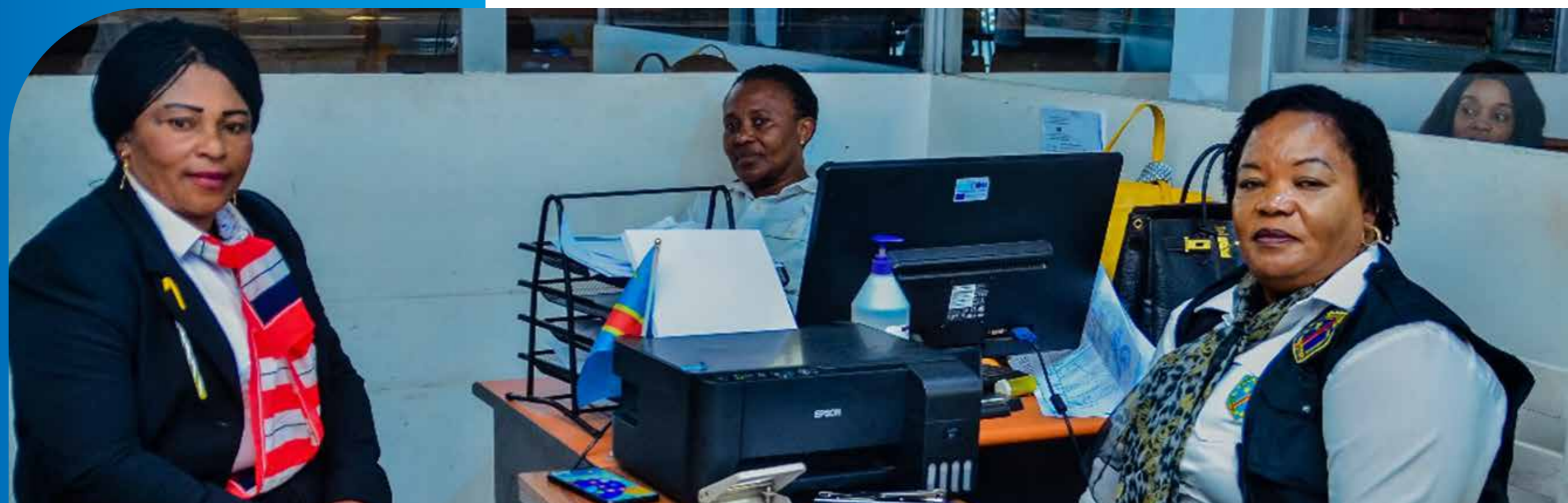
# DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF CUSTOMS AND EXCISE OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

In 2008, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) established a Ministry of Gender, Family and Children with responsibility for creating the legal and institutional framework necessary for ensuring not only that Congolese women are properly represented and play an active role in all national institutions but also that national policies and programmes make proper provision for them. Against that background, 42 focal points for achieving gender equality were set up in ministries and public services alike, such as the unit responsible for gender equality (Gender Unit) – within the Directorate General of Customs and Excise (DGDA) – which follows the strategic vision and plan espoused by its supervisory authority.

Given that gender stereotypes have become deeply ingrained in the DGDA's ecosystem due to the approach adopted by the administration's senior management, the organization decided to buck the trend by introducing a policy and strategy to promote gender equality and the inclusion of minorities.

*The Gender Unit is uncompromising in its stance on the issue of gender, rolling out the policies and strategy established by the DGDA's senior officials in its own activities.*

The unit, with its exclusively female hierarchy, comprises the Committee Chair who is supported by a college of advisers, a secretary and a treasurer. It is represented at both central administration level and across the DGDA Customs provinces by focal points promoting gender equality.





To combat gender stereotyping and the discrimination of minorities, the DGDA has invested in a series of flagship activities organized by its Gender Unit.

These activities are focused on six main themes as part of a groundbreaking strategy aimed at eliminating gender-restricted roles for women.

These themes cover:

### 1. Capacity Building

Along with its addresses at International Women's Day events, [the DGDA's Gender Unit regularly organizes capacity building seminars for women in Customs and various other areas](#). The purpose of this type of strategy is to promote career advancement among women. Moreover, the strategy goes beyond the general issue of gender to condemn specifically the prejudices endured by women and some minority groups in Congolese culture.

### 2. Health, Safety and Combating Violence

The DGDA rallies in support of women's health. It allocates substantial funds to the organization of sporting and recreational activities which are intended to enhance the well-being of its managers and other staff. More specifically, [the administration has set up a women's football team which enters both national and international competitions](#).

As regards health matters, the DGDA also targets its female staff in its support for the awareness-raising campaigns conducted by the DRC's Ministry of Health in partnership with renowned healthcare centres; such campaigns promote awareness of health screening checks for some women's diseases, such as cervical cancer and breast cancer.

### 3. Employment and Remuneration

With regard to employment and remuneration, the DRC's Customs administration introduced a wage policy focusing on the benefits and equal payment accruing to men and women on the basis of the merit principle.

In terms of combating discrimination, the Human Resources Directorate applied the procedures adopted in accordance with Decree No. 011/08 of 11 February 2011 introducing administrative regulations for DGDA staff. [The objective is to ensure fairness for all and safeguard against discrimination in the established ecosystem](#).

In addition to its administrative regulations governing its career staff, the DGDA relies on other legal instruments of the State, in particular Law No. 16/013 of 15 July 2016 on the status of the State's public service career agents, and more specifically Chapter 6 of that law on remuneration and social benefits.

### 4. Work/Life Balance and Career Development

With regard to the work/life balance and career development, [the Customs administration has introduced flexible working/service hours policies at operational and strategic level alike; these policies also cover women monitored on their return to work after a break for maternity](#). In those circumstances, the DGDA chose to adopt health policies that would provide medical care in partnership with high-quality healthcare facilities in the DRC and overseas. It has signed medical agreements for the transfer of patients with prestigious hospitals abroad and other agreements for the local care of sick managers and other staff as well as their family members with national healthcare centres.

Turning specifically to work, the strategy adopted in relation to women's career development highlights [a rise over time in the percentage of managerial positions held by women in the light of the quotas policy rolled out in the DGDA](#). Until 2021, women held only two of the DGDA's 40 managerial positions. Since 2022, seven out of the total 42 managerial roles have been held by women. In the case of Customs inspectors, the number of women has increased from 90 to 107 out of a total workforce of 511 inspectors in 2019 and 512 inspectors in 2024.

Finally, in accordance with the policy and strategy drawn up by the DGDA and implemented by the Gender Unit, gender equality promotion is contributing to the safeguarding of equal rights and the equitable sharing of resources and responsibilities between men and women within the DGDA. [Gender equality also lies at the heart of reforms to recruitment, posting and promotion policy that incorporate a gender perspective and take account of the specific roles and needs of each sex](#). By these measures, the DGDA has opted to establish inclusive recruitment and promotion policies and procedures.



## 5. Women's Participation in Customs Security and Tax Missions

To tackle the permeability of borders, experienced men and women are appointed to border control positions, mainly on the eastern borders of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Like their male counterparts, female Customs officers come under significant pressure at work, in border positions considered to be dangerous on account of the rebel groups and hostile forces operating in the region. In spite of that situation, female Customs officers play their part not only in monitoring and collecting revenue but also in performing Customs security operations as the first line of defence.

The operational services ultimately discharge the instructions issued by senior management, with particular regard to securing an inclusive environment with equal opportunities for all Customs employees and partners, irrespective of their gender, ethnic origin, religion or beliefs, with a view to improving the working conditions at border posts and thus making them more gender-sensitive.

### Introduction of Policy to Combat Gender-Based Violence

In addition to Decree No. 011/08 of 2 February 2011 introducing administrative regulations for DGDA career staff, in particular Article 68 which provides that "any agent shall be entitled, in accordance with the rules laid down by the Criminal Code and special laws, to protection against threats, insults and defamation", the DGDA has implemented Decree No. 24/09 of 17 February 2024 introducing administrative

regulations on discipline, which protects women and minorities from gender-based violence. In Chapter 3, on professional dignity, the decree provides that "any agent offending against decency, public ethics and morality in the workplace, in particular through sexual harassment, nudism, sexual intercourse, kidnapping of minors, rape and intoxication, shall be liable for dismissal".

Looking to the future, in January 2025, the DGDA will be introducing its policy on personal relations at work and gender-based violence. Workshops raising awareness among male and female Customs officers and the DGDA's partners will be aimed essentially at helping those stakeholders to identify the warning signs of gender-based violence and eliminate its consequences. The introduction of these policies is justified by the need for the DGDA to provide a working environment that is safe for staff and management alike. The Customs administration is committed to eradicating gender-based violence completely, as it infringes each individual's fundamental rights.





# ETHIOPIAN CUSTOMS COMMISSION

Gender parity is a recognized issue within the Ethiopian Customs Commission (ECC). There are almost equal numbers of men and women employed within the Commission (58% and 42%, respectively) and an equal level in senior management positions (two of each). However, men (78%) dominate in middle management positions. This disparity highlights the significant challenges that women face, particularly in attaining management roles. In addition, social responsibilities, particularly after marriage and childbirth, further impede their professional effectiveness and self-confidence, leading to a noticeable lack of women in middle management positions.

The ECC has embarked on a series of strategic measures to address this imbalance and promote gender equality. These include national policies and organizational gender mainstreaming guidelines, aimed at empowering women and fostering a more inclusive work environment. These initiatives are designed to tackle the barriers that women face and to create a supportive framework that encourages their advancement.





### Strategic Initiatives: Implementing Change

Recognizing the pressures on women, the ECC has proposed several targeted actions. **One key initiative is the establishment of an office nursery, which will alleviate the burden of childcare responsibilities** and enable women to better balance professional and family life.

In addition, specialized capacity-building programmes are being introduced. These include **leadership training, communication skills development and self-confidence workshops**, all tailored to support women in overcoming challenges and advancing in their careers. The ECC is also taking affirmative action to offer support during employment, training and development, thus ensuring that women receive the necessary resources and opportunities for career progression.

The ECC's commitment to gender equality extends beyond its internal operations. **There are also special awareness workshops for businesswomen, including importers, exporters and customs brokers.** This outreach aims to empower women in the business sector and

to enhance their understanding of customs regulations.

Diversity efforts are also being addressed through a recruitment quota system. In Ethiopia, there is a national law that requires government organizations to be inclusive. The ECC, as the first administration practically implementing the law, is a pioneer. **The quota is based on the population size of regional states, and aims to ensure representation from all regions and ethnicities within Ethiopia**, thus fostering a more inclusive and representative workforce.

To support women employees with lower levels of education and income in administrative positions, the ECC has introduced initiatives allowing them to undertake **income-generating activities within the office, including cultural coffee ceremonies and tea services** allowing them to improve their personal situation.

National laws and policies, including the Constitution, Public Employees Management Decree 1064/2010 and the National Women's Policy and Guidelines, underpin these initiatives. They provide a legal and policy framework that supports gender equality and women's empowerment.

### Transition: Embedding Gender Equality into the Strategic Framework

Establishing gender equality is more than simply a pilot project, it is a core component of the Commission's ten-year strategic plan. The agenda is reviewed annually, with each plan and initiative being endorsed by senior management. **Gender equality initiatives are integrated into the ECC's overall project framework, with performance being monitored and assessed throughout the year.** This strategic approach ensures that gender equality remains a priority and that progress is continually evaluated.

### Stakeholders: Collaborative Efforts for Success

#### Internal

Several departments within the ECC are pivotal in implementing gender equality-related initiatives, with the **Gender Department responsible for overall coordination.** The Planning and Project Directorate has a pivotal role in designing and evaluating the gender-focused project implementation, including establishing the nursery. The Human Resources Management Directorate manages the employees, including those in gender equality initiatives such as the nursery, while the Procurement and Finance Directorate manages financial aspects.

Through diligent oversight by top management and the swift allocation of resources, these departments have set high standards for collaborative efforts in implementing gender responsive and inclusive initiatives. Their coordinated approach exemplifies the ECC's commitment to fostering a diverse and equitable workplace.

### External stakeholders

1. Eka Kotebe General Hospital: Supported the ECC by providing free stress management training, enhancing the skills and expertise of employees.
2. World Bank Group: Sponsored workshops on Customs procedures, leadership and gender, providing valuable professional development opportunities to ECC colleagues.

### Impact Overview

#### Positive Outcomes:

1. **Enhanced Employee Ownership and Motivation:** Female ECC employees have developed a stronger sense of ownership for their roles and responsibilities. This increased motivation has led them to advocate actively for their rights and engage more in their professional development.
2. **Advancements in Gender Equity:** There have been clear improvements in the promotion of women within the organization. This includes progress through affirmative action and self-development opportunities, leading to greater gender equity in career advancement.
 

Some statistics of the current gender balance within ECC:

  - Of four Commissioners and deputy Commissioners, two are women (50%)
  - Of 89 Directors and deputy managers, 17 are women (19%).
  - Of 177 Process Owners, 24 are women (13.5%).
  - Of 685 Team Leaders, 166 are women (24%).
3. **Encouraging Broader Commitment:** The positive experiences and outcomes observed can act as a model for other administrations and governments, encouraging them to adopt similar initiatives and policies aimed at improving gender equity and employee empowerment.

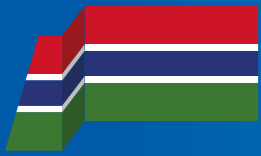
## Negative Outcomes:

- 1. Resistance to Gender Equality and Diversity:** Some parts of the organization have resisted moves towards gender equality, diversity and inclusion. This has posed challenges in fully implementing and supporting Gender Equality and Diversity (GED) initiatives. To overcome this opposition and change attitudes, the ECC is organizing trainings on gender mainstreaming.
- 2. Challenges in Integration:** Pre-existing negative attitudes within certain groups have made it difficult to seamlessly integrate GED efforts. This has uncovered a need for more-targeted strategies to address and overcome these cultural barriers and individual attitudes.

## Conclusion: A Path Forward

The ECC's strategic initiatives are laying down strong foundations for gender equality and diversity within the organization. **By addressing barriers to female advancement, implementing supportive measures and embedding these efforts into its strategic plan, the Commission is making significant strides towards a more inclusive and equitable work environment.** Commitment from all stakeholders ensures that these initiatives will continue to thrive, setting a precedent for GED and serving as a model for other institutions to follow.





# THE GAMBIA REVENUE AUTHORITY

## Developing a Gender and Diversity Policy and Plan

The Gambia Revenue Authority (GRA) became operational in 2006 with the appointment of its first Commissioner General. Since then, 962 staff have been recruited to work for the Authority.

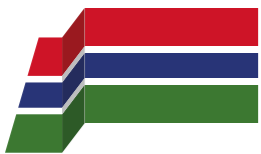
The GRA has always been aware of the importance of gender and diversity in attracting and retaining talent, hence the inclusion of an [Equal Opportunity Statement in the Staff Service Rules](#): "...supports the principle of equal opportunities in employment and opposes all forms of unlawful or unfair discrimination on grounds of color, race, ethnic origin, religion, gender, marital status, disability or political orientation...". This statement builds on the Gambia National Gender Policy 2010-2020.

The GRA's recruitment, training, rewards, and promotion practices have always recognized and applied the principles of equal opportunities and treatment of all employees. These are all anchored in written and approved policies and procedures that guide their implementation. References to these policies are made when required. It is worth highlighting that no policies or practices exist that favor or disadvantage any person or group of persons from being appointed, supported, and rewarded as an employee of the Authority.

Despite the significance of gender and diversity being recognized by the Authority in its policy and practices, this fact was not comprehensively reflected in a specific document. Given this, [the GRA developed a Gender and Diversity Policy and Plan](#) in 2021 and 2023, respectively, to act



*Training of the Gender Focal Persons 21 May 2024*



as a guide and to promote and strengthen equal opportunities in employment for all regardless of “color, race, ethnic origin, religion, gender, marital status, disability or political orientation”.

The policy promotes management practices based solely on objective, transparent and job-related criteria, and serves as a platform for bridging any gender imbalance in the Authority. It also serves as a guide in the application of management and administrative practices that promote gender equity equality and diversity. It provides an equal and fair employment and work environment that guarantees similar and transparent opportunities to all, as well as encouraging, realizing and nurturing individual potential without any form of prejudice, bias and/or favouritism. The policy also seeks to help develop and implement fair, transparent and realistic human resource management and administrative practices that support gender balance within the GRA.

The plan promotes equal opportunities and fair treatment of all staff and improves the GRA’s gender and diversity ratios. Activities in the plan include raising awareness of staff on the gender and diversity policy, appointing Gender and Diversity Focal Persons (GDFFP), and training Focal Persons to champion the Authority’s Gender and Diversity cause. It is also seeking to reconstitute committees to be more gender-balanced, to include “female applicants encouraged to apply” in job adverts, reduce the gender gap in offices. It also looks to reduce

the gender and diversity gaps by selecting the candidate of the less-represented sex when two candidates are equally qualified and by ‘directly appointing’ appropriately qualified candidates for junior positions. It is improving the gender balance of the senior management and within the Customs and Excise department, as well as monitoring the implementation. All activities are to be implemented by 2023 and 2024.

The policy and plan were developed by a working group consisting of 15 staff members from several departments, including that of the Commissioner General, who is responsible for developing all policies within the GRA. Drafts were first validated by the GRA’s Reform and Modernization Committee, reviewed by senior management and the Staff, and established by the Board before finally being considered and approved by the GRA Board of Directors.

The GRA decided to set up a team to work on GED implementation using the WCO GEOAT as a basis. It set up a dedicated GED working group composed of five people from departments relevant to the GED implementation. This group went through the GEOAT tool and chose several indicators to undertake an initial self-assessment. The GRA was assessed against each of these and ranked according to the GEOAT evaluation scale.

This process helped the GRA identify a need to enhance internal capacities to coordinate and transfer knowledge on GED throughout

the organization. It therefore decided to set up a Gender & Diversity Focal Persons (GDFFP) network of trained representatives from different GRA offices throughout the country. The GDFFP were selected from 15 border points and branch offices via their head of Department and head of the borders. They will serve as contact persons for all gender and diversity-related issues. This was part of the approved gender and diversity plan. All of the GDFFP focal persons were trained to champion the GRA’s Gender and Diversity Policy and Plan. Their role will be to disseminate information to all employees at the borders. A WhatsApp group was also created to ease communication among the members.



L-R: GRA Gender Focal Person, Commissioner General, Dir. HR & Admin and Deputy Dir. HR

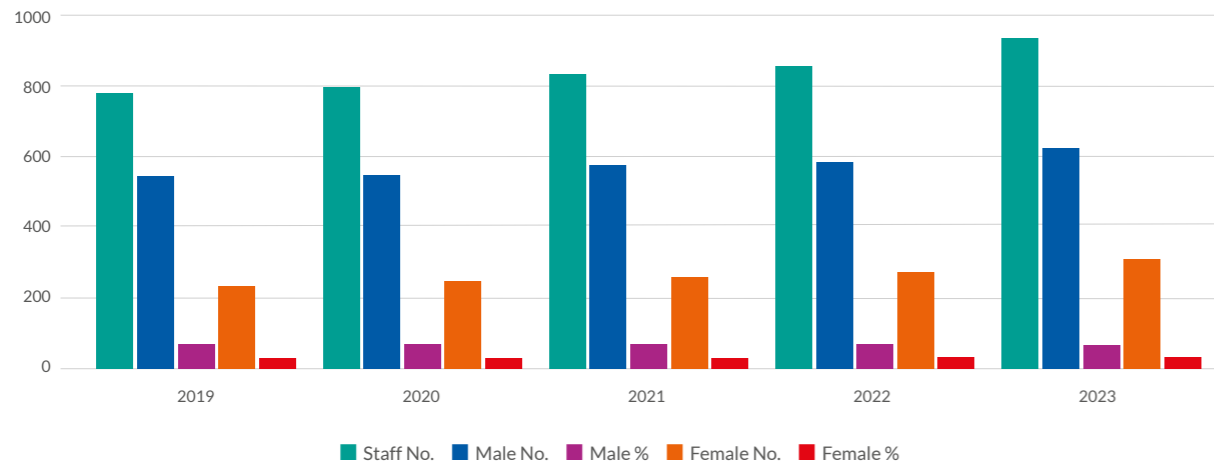


Gender Focal Person delivering her presentation

In recent years, the GRA has recruited increasing numbers of females, most notably in the Customs department, which was previously a male-dominated sector. The GRA proactively encouraged female candidates to apply in its job advertisement. [The gender balance at border offices has also improved recently as is the case in senior management positions.](#) The GRA is also encouraging female staff to embark on career development opportunities.

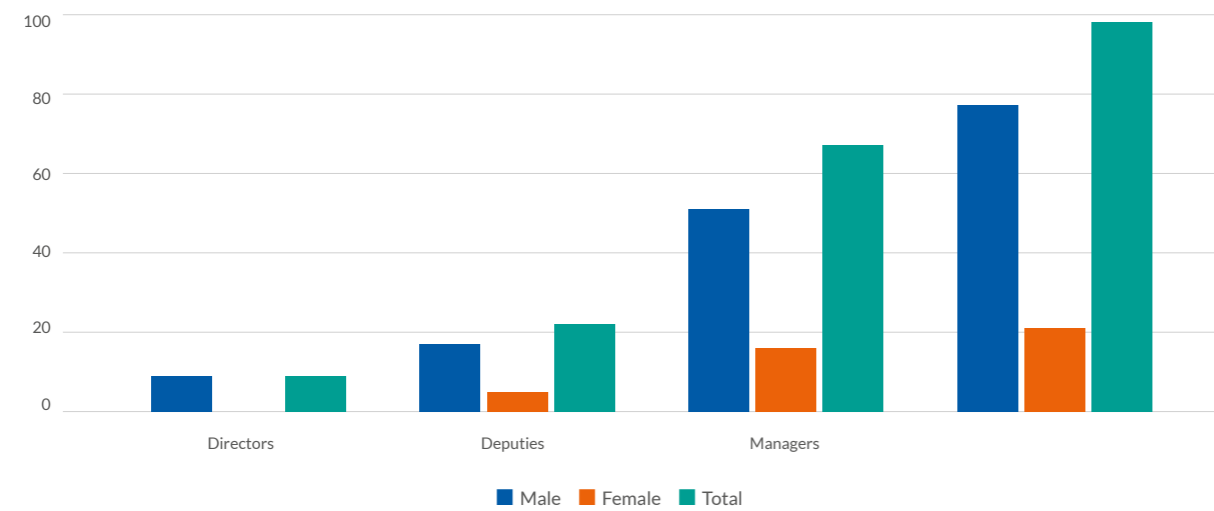
As the next steps to further advance its GED work, the GRA is planning to add suitably qualified female staff to the successor planning targets.

**Employee Numbers by Gender**



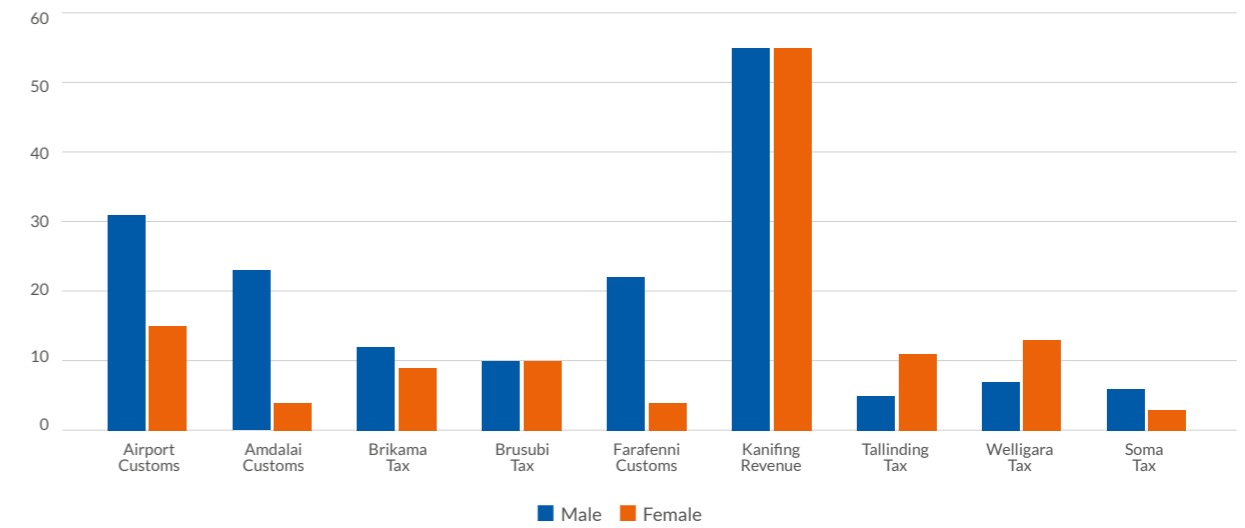
■ Staff No. ■ Male No. ■ Male % ■ Female No. ■ Female %

**Senior Management by Gender 2024**



■ Male ■ Female ■ Total

**Staff Numbers at some Offices**



■ Male ■ Female





# CENTRAL BOARD OF INDIRECT TAXES AND CUSTOMS OF INDIA

In recent years, the global trade landscape has seen a growing commitment to gender inclusiveness. **Female participation in international trade is not only a catalyst for economic growth but also a driving force for social development and empowerment.** Recognizing this, governments worldwide are implementing policies and initiatives designed to support female entrepreneurs in the international supply chain.

There are clear efforts to introduce diverse policies that promote gender inclusiveness in international trade. These address various facets, including customs regulations, logistics infrastructure, trade facilitation and security measures. For example, according to reports

by United Nation's Conference on Trade and Development and the Asian Development Bank many countries<sup>1</sup> have developed **gender-responsive trade policies to tackle the unique challenges women face in accessing trade finance, navigating regulatory frameworks and participating in global value chains.** Such efforts often feature capacity-building programmes, access to market information and financial support mechanisms tailored for female entrepreneurs.

Furthermore, governments are collaborating with international organizations and regional trade blocs to implement **gender-sensitive trade policies that empower women economically.** These policies aim to mainstream gender



<sup>1</sup> UNCTAD(2014), *Looking at Trade Policy through "gender lens"*, UNCTAD/DITC/2014/3, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development ([https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/ditc2014d3\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/ditc2014d3_en.pdf)), ADB (2023), *Policy Brief No.2023-16, Gender Mainstreaming and Trade Facilitation in G20 Countries*, Asian Development Bank, (<https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/928356/adbi-gender-mainstreaming-and-trade-facilitation-g20-countries.pdf>)



considerations across trade-related sectors, **fostering an inclusive trade ecosystem that benefits female-owned businesses and promotes sustainable development.**

Recognizing the benefits of gender-responsive and inclusive trade policies, Indian Customs has begun to proactively promote gender inclusiveness in the international supply chain through innovative digital initiatives.

**Digitization and electronic processing in cross-border trade have become significant facilitators for female traders and logistics service providers.**

These innovations increase efficiency, reduce costs and minimize personal interactions, thus decreasing the risk of sexual harassment and corruption, which disproportionately affects women. Recognizing this, the Indian Customs administration has streamlined cargo clearance by focusing on digitization and standardization of customs processes in all locations.

Another groundbreaking initiative was 'Turant' Customs, which has revolutionized the customs clearance process by making it anonymous, contactless and paperless. This new system

reduces bureaucratic hurdles and enhances trade facilitation efficiency, creating a more conducive environment for female-owned businesses. By minimizing physical interactions and paper, 'Turant' Customs not only increases transparency in business processes it also fosters a level playing field for all traders, including female entrepreneurs. This increased simplicity of doing business encourages greater participation of women in the international supply chain, promoting their economic empowerment.

In addition to these digital initiatives, **Indian Customs has undertaken concrete steps to promote gender mainstreaming in the international supply chain ecosystem.** The National Trade Facilitation Action Plan (NTFAP) 2020-23, formulated by Indian Customs, includes specific measures to promote gender equality in trade. Notably, Action Point 27 emphasizes the importance of gender mainstreaming and outlines targeted interventions for enhancing female participation in the international supply chain. Under this, Indian Customs has supported numerous initiatives to support female entrepreneurs,

including providing targeted training programmes, capacity-building workshops and networking opportunities. **These initiatives aim to equip women with the skills, knowledge and resources to successfully navigate the complexities of international trade.**

On the topic of gender sensitization, Indian Customs has conducted nine sessions as a part of induction training for 373 departmental officers in 2023-24. Similarly, there were five and 12 sessions (exclusive POSH Act training) conducted in 2024-25 for 147 and 430 departmental officers, respectively. Indian Customs is fostering a supportive ecosystem for female-led businesses in collaboration with trade associations such as the Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO), the Federation of Freight Forwarders' Association in India (FFFAI), the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII). **The FICCI's Ladies Organisation (FLO) promotes economic entrepreneurship through mentorship, training and international collaborations, providing its membership of over 8,000 with networking and growth opportunities.** The CII's Indian Women Network (IWN) focuses on gender equality and workplace safety, while its National Committee on Women Empowerment undertakes leadership workshops and honours female achievers through initiatives such as the 'Woman Exemplar' and leadership awards. The FIEO also supports female entrepreneurs through outreach programmes, awareness sessions and representation on its managing committee. These sit alongside new initiatives such as **FFFAI's logistics apprenticeship programme for underprivileged women and monthly webinars by FFFAI's women's wing on logistics-related issues.**

To encourage a gender-inclusive trade environment, in March 2024, the Indian Customs administration directed its field formations to those various operational units and offices responsible for implementing and enforcing Customs and other indirect tax policies at ground level, to ensure representation of women in Permanent Trade Facilitation Committee and Customs Clearance Facilitation Committee meetings. This encourages trade bodies and custodians to establish dedicated helpdesks and processing mechanisms for female traders and logistics service providers, and to support upskilling efforts for women working in these sectors. Also in March 2024, Indian Customs mandated provisions for a safe and secure working environment for women in customs. This included **gender-inclusive infrastructure such as creches, sufficient lighting at borders to improve safety, panic buttons and regular upgrades of the facilities from a gender perspective.** It also calls for regular gender sensitization training sessions for all concerned staff and stakeholders.

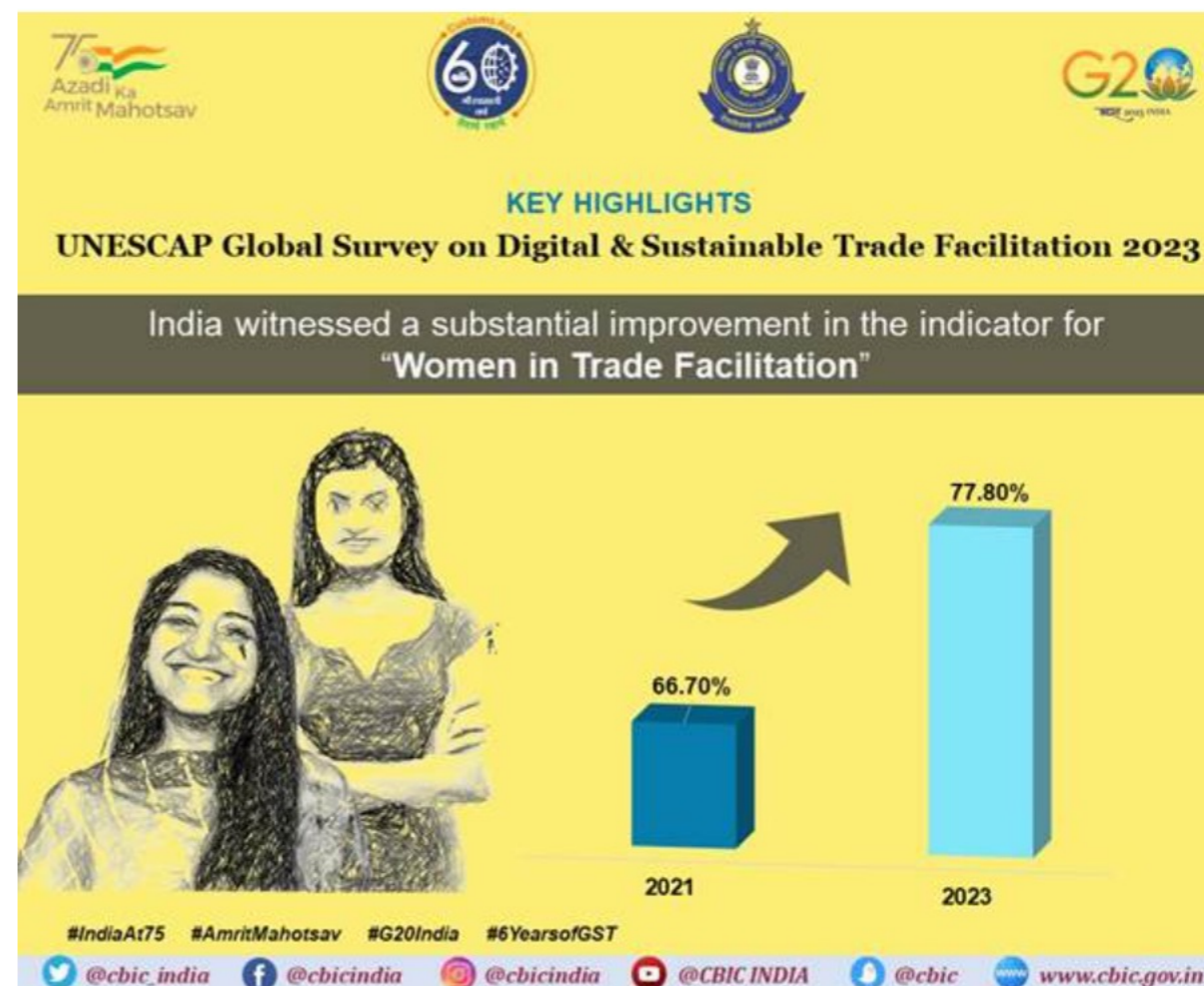
Given the substantial employment of women in the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector, **Indian Customs has introduced a 'Liberalized MSME AEO Package', which has relaxed entry barriers to encourage these companies to become Authorized Economic Operators (AEOs).** This initiative significantly empowers women economically, providing them with access to benefits such as Direct Port Delivery for imported containers, Direct Port Entry for export containers, reduced cargo release times, exemption from bank guarantees, priority for refunds/rebates/duty drawbacks and a client relationship manager at ports as a single point of contact.



As a result of the various measures spearheaded by the Indian Customs, India's score in the UN Trade Facilitation survey has substantially increased, from 66% in 2021 to 78% in 2023. This has resulted in an overall improvement in India ranking in the UN Trade Facilitation survey, with score of 93.55% in 2023 compared to 90.32% in 2021.

In conclusion, government policies and initiatives are pivotal in advancing gender inclusiveness in the international supply chain. **By addressing the specific challenges faced by female entrepreneurs and creating an enabling environment for them, these policies contribute to inclusive economic growth and sustainable development.** Indian Customs efforts, including innovative digital initiatives such as Turant Customs and targeted gender mainstreaming interventions, exemplify a strong commitment to promoting gender equality in the international supply chain. In future, it is imperative for all stakeholders to continue collaborating and implementing comprehensive policies that prioritize gender inclusiveness in trade. Through harnessing the full potential of female entrepreneurs, a more equitable and more prosperous global trading environment can be created.

Promoting diversity and inclusion encourages innovation and improves both individual and organizational performance. **While numerous measures towards achieving gender parity have been initiated in Indian Customs administration, it is imperative to advance our efforts further.** The positive gender decisions made today will undoubtedly strengthen Indian Customs ability to manage the customs landscape effectively. All Customs Administrations have a responsibility to champion gender inclusivity in customs. If not us, then whom? If not now, then when?





# AGENCY OF CUSTOMS AND MONOPOLIES OF ITALY



## Disability Manager

The Agency of Customs and Monopolies (ADM) recently published its 'Integrated Activity and Organisation Plan' (PIAO) for the three-year period 2024-2026. The "Objectives to promote equal opportunities and gender balance" – prepared with contributions from the Single Guarantee Committee – set out the relevant measures for promoting a gender equal and inclusive work culture, organisational wellbeing and combating any form of discrimination and moral or psychological violence.<sup>1</sup>

- **Action 1:** Continuing with widespread equal opportunity training initiatives.
- **Action 2:** Carry out awareness campaigns against violence and harassment.
- **Action 7:** Conducting surveys on employees' perceptions of organizational wellbeing.
- **Action 12:** Disseminating information on issues related to wellbeing or work-life balance.

Consistent with previous initiatives, the Agency has pursued actions aimed at **ensuring a working environment defined by organisational wellbeing**. The measures also seek to combat and eliminate all forms of moral or psychological violence within the Agency. Furthermore, the Agency - without further burdens on public

<sup>1</sup> Positive action planning year 2024-2026. The general objectives of promoting gender culture, organizational wellbeing and combating all forms of discrimination and moral or psychological violence are given as examples:  
**Action 1:** Continuing with widespread equal opportunity training initiatives. Training courses on equal opportunities and organizational wellbeing for all staff will also be organized in 2024. In particular, training/information, education and awareness-raising of all ADM staff - including newly hired staff - will be provided on issues of equality and respect for gender differences. Training will continue through the CUG Network and trusted advisors, while collaboration with SNA will be intensified.  
**Action 2:** Undertake awareness campaigns against violence and harassment. In cooperation with the Single Guarantee Committee, it will also continue - in the three-year period 2024-2026 - to spread the values inspired by respect and equality among people by carrying out awareness campaigns and maintaining on the Home of the Agency's intranet page the public utility number 1522.  
**Action 7:** Conducting surveys on employees' perceptions of organizational wellbeing. A questionnaire on the perception of organizational wellbeing will be circulated to staff aimed at surveying opinions on the organization and work environment. Such surveys allow identification of potential actions to improve the Agency's personnel policies and thus the general conditions for employees.  
**Action 12:** Disseminating information on issues related to wellbeing or work-life balance. Informative brochures on aimed at organizational wellbeing or work/life balance issues or to ensure gender equality will be developed.



finances - has appointed **Disability Managers** responsible for the processes of employing persons with disabilities for each central and regional office.

The tasks of the Disability Manager are:

- **Coordinate the relations** with the Employment Centre at the Head Quarters who are ultimately responsible for the employment of persons with disabilities and with the regional services for employment.
- To organize and propose where necessary - after consulting with their administration's competent doctor and where required the technical committee - the **technological solutions required to facilitate integration in employment**.
- **To monitor the implementation of the integration process**, recognizing and reporting any situations of discomfort and integration difficulties to the competent services.
- **identifying and assessing the needs of staff with disabilities**, promoting an inclusive culture through awareness-raising campaigns and by advising staff with disabilities and managers to address any problems.

The Agency is structured around a Central Directorate with a series of regional offices. The processes of integrating employees with disabilities is set centrally and implemented by **Diversity Managers appointed for each region, in order to provide support for employees with disabilities countrywide**.

The appointment of the Disability Managers, who are permanent staff of the Agency, was organized by the Central Directorate. The Agency has organized advanced training courses for executives to assist them in becoming disability managers. However, not all Disability Managers are executives.

The Disability Manager drafts a report on the previous year's activities, with the aim of **highlighting any technical and/or organisational corrective actions required**. The goal is to overcome any critical issues encountered in facilitating integration into employment. The report is then forwarded to the manager's senior Director. It is then sent to the Staff Directorate and the Administration and Finance Directorate

to ensure coordination and monitoring for the planned interventions as well as to develop methodologies and good practices for uniform implementation.

### Internal and/or External Stakeholders Involved in this Initiative

The goal of "establishing and appointing tutors with the task of supporting the person with disabilities in the process of labour inclusion" was foreseen in the 2024-2026 funding. To this end, the Agency planned to establish and appoint ADM tutors to assist Disability Managers in the labour inclusion process. Tasks include:

- **Welcoming and introducing** the employee with disabilities to the staff in the assigned office.
- **Introducing the structure** of the Agency of Customs and Monopolies, including the names and contacts of the regionally competent Disability Managers.
- **Informing on the legal arrangements** supporting and protecting persons with disabilities.
- **Communicating reports from staff with disabilities** to the regionally -competent Disability Managers to assess and implement actions to solve concerns emerging during the service activity

The number of tutors required was determined by the Agency's Personnel Directorate for the Central Offices and by the Regional Directorates for the area, according to the needs of those staff with disabilities in service.

### Further Initiative

#### Diversity Manager

In addition to their role of Disability Manager, the individual is given a second role as Diversity Manager. The reason is that a Disability Manager may already be involved in implementing strategies to address potential discrimination arising from the presence of disability.

Accordingly, they will have benefited from specific advanced training courses in which the role of the Diversity Manager was addressed.

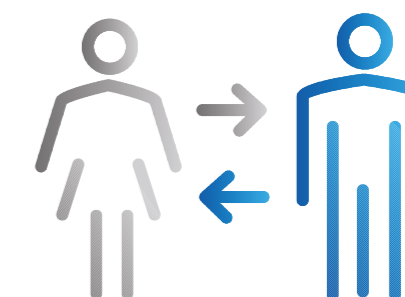
Disability Management is, in fact, part of the broader context of Diversity Management. It is that set of **'non-discriminatory' practices and policies aimed at managing and promoting differences**, viewing them as added value that positively impacts on the work environment and the wider organisation.

### ISO 30415:2021 - Human Resources Management - Diversity and Inclusion -

establishes the international standard that must be referenced to demonstrate valuing diversity within the workplace (gender, race, sexual orientation, culture, disability, etc.) and favouring inclusion. While the Italian Customs Agency officially has yet to obtain this recognition, it has chosen to comply with its requirements.

The most common situations giving rise to discrimination are:

- **age differences** (age diversity)
- **disability** (disability management)
- **gender disparities** (gender diversity)
- **cultural differences** (cultural diversity).



The Diversity Manager, therefore, as part of promoting a culture of difference through inclusion policies, is in charge of developing an action plan, aimed at:

- combating all forms of workplace discrimination through a fresh approach to diversity and compliance with standards;
- recognising, managing and valuing the differences of each worker, both in terms of access and advancement in the workplace.

The Diversity Manager is assisted by a Prevention and Protection Services Manager and is supported by a so-called 'Support Team'. This is made up of staff volunteers identified through a dedicated call for applications procedure. The activities of the Support Team are undertaken in parallel with other duties and do not involve any change in place of employment, salary and/or classification.

### Positive aspects

These initiatives are helping create a more-inclusive environment in the Agency and ensuring that employees with disabilities can fully participate in institutional activities without feeling excluded. To this end, a dedicated e-mail communication channel - between staff with disabilities and the Disability and Diversity Manager - was activated.

Several interventions have been resolved in the Agency by the Disability Managers.

In particular, the Disability Managers identified logistical solutions for improving the working conditions and/or environmental discomfort reported by staff with hearing disabilities, providing them with the appropriate technology. Some working environments – such as bathroom facilities and access ramps - have been redesigned to improve accessibility conditions. Training courses have also been offered to

hearing-impaired employees with support teachers who are experts in sign language (LIS).

To overcome logistical difficulties encountered in some offices, home working has been facilitated for visually impaired staff. In addition, the cancellation of a public transport line to one Agency's office - which caused considerable inconvenience for the staff, particularly those with disabilities - was resolved thanks to the contribution of the Disability Manager.

Hopefully, there will be no resistance by managers to changing established practices and procedures, as this could slow down the implementation of inclusive policies.

The Administration has yet to identify any direct results on diversity. However, it should be noted that the position of Diversity Manager is a recent addition, and will further be evaluated in future.

### Challenges

A lack of adequate resources could limit the effectiveness of the Disability and Diversity Managers' initiatives, just as the lack of adequate and continuous training could reduce their impact. Training is key to fully understanding the needs of persons with disabilities; therefore, any training must provide participants with the tools and skills to effectively respond to external contextual demands. These can include changes to government regulations, National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP/PNRR), European Directives and efforts to assess and measure the impact of diversity in their administration.

It is vital that the various sectors of the relevant administration coordinate effectively. Any failure to do so could lead to fragmented and less effective initiatives. In addition, an adequate monitoring and evaluation system is essential. Without this, it is difficult to measure the effectiveness of the policies and initiatives, making improvements difficult.

Last, communication to all personnel on the existence of these reference figures must be renewed periodically. This will maximize their impact and make the actions to value and respect the diversities present concrete and feasible.

A diverse workforce should be able to contribute to the decision-making processes, improve services and products and increase both user satisfaction and productivity.





# MAURITIUS REVENUE AUTHORITY

Since the Mauritius Revenue Authority's (MRA) inception in July 2006, its management has continuously sought to infuse Gender Equality and Diversity (GED) throughout the organization. This includes the Customs Department, which employs more than 40% of the workforce. In December 2023, the MRA signed the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Charter with the National Committee on Corporate Governance (NCCG), which operates under the aegis of the Ministry of Financial Services and Good Governance. The Charter embodies a pledge between the MRA and the NCCG, and is also inextricably linked to GED initiatives.

Therefore, by signing the DEI Charter, the MRA has shown its commitment to:

1. Creating a workplace that embraces staff from various backgrounds and identities.
2. Fostering a sense of belonging among employees.
3. Reinforcing its reputation as an employer of choice.
4. Strengthening its reputation and brand image.

The core aim of the Charter is to build a more diverse, equitable, inclusive and sustainable business community and society. The Director of Human Resources & Training is responsible for monitoring these activities, and reports progress





to the NCCG on an annual basis. To achieve the above aim and being fully aware of the WCO Gender Equality Organisational Assessment Tool (GEOAT), the MRA has set its own targets for promoting DEI in various areas. To date, the following have been actioned:

### 1. Recruitment of Persons with Disabilities

In consonance with 'The Protection and Promotion of the Welfare of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act', the MRA has recruited two additional staff with disabilities as 'Telephonists'. To facilitate this recruitment process, the Training and Employment of Disabled Persons Board (TEDPB) was contacted.

In addition, in order to assist persons with disabilities, special arrangements such as ramps, a 'Work from Home' policy, special toilets and wheelchairs are being provided during emergencies. In addition, the Mauritius Revenue Authority has implemented a 'Buddy System' to support staff with disabilities. Thus, each employee with a disability is paired with a designated 'buddy', typically a colleague who works nearby. In the event of an emergency, the

buddy's role is to assist the staff with disability to evacuate the building safely.

### 2. Training on DEI

A Rce Person from the MRA, in collaboration with a trainer from the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare, conducted a two-half day trainings on 'Strategies to Promote Equal Opportunities at the Workplace'.

Participants were taught the various concepts around GED and how they can impact an organization. They were then asked to complete the online modules on gender equality on the WCO CLiKC! platform.

### 3. Development of dedicated policies:

The MRA is also finalizing its **Gender and its Harassment Policies**. The purpose of the Gender Policy is to promote gender equality and eliminate all forms of discrimination based on gender in MRA's operations. It aims to ensure that all staff members are treated fairly and equally, irrespective of their gender. The Policy will also outline how gender equality will be integrated into other policies and procedures so as to benefit all employees equally. It will also set

out a list of goals and actions to be implemented to promote diversity and gender equality at all levels.

The objective of the Harassment Policy is to ensure a safe and respectful workplace for all employees. It will **define what constitutes harassment, outline reporting procedures and establish a clear investigation process**, emphasising confidentiality and fairness. It will also specify the consequences for those engaging in harassment and provide support resources for affected employees. In implementing this policy, the MRA seeks to promote mutual respect and create a positive work environment.

### 4. Promoting Professional Growth and DEI

#### 4.1 Setting-up of the Employee Resource Groups (ERG)

To foster a supportive and inclusive workplace, **Employee Resource Group (ERG) for officers with disabilities** held its initial meeting. The ERG promotes the wellbeing of employees with disabilities, providing them with a safe and open environment to voice concerns and challenges. During the meeting, officers with disabilities were encouraged to share the difficulties they had been encountering in their roles. The Director of Human Resources & Training, who chaired the meeting, emphasised that this forum was created precisely for such exchanges, and that management would make every effort to address and accommodate their concerns.



Among the requests raised by the participants were:

- i) Providing parking facilities closer to their offices.
- ii) Allowing those with mobility challenges the possibility of leaving office a few minutes earlier.
- iii) Assigning more desk-based work, such as audits, instead of field duties.

These officers were assured that their requests would be taken seriously and acted upon, with management committing to implement solutions wherever possible. The Director also confirmed that there would be regular follow-up meetings to ensure ongoing dialogue and monitor progress.

This ERG meeting marks a significant step in creating a more-inclusive work environment, one where **the unique needs of employees with disabilities are not only recognised but also prioritised**. Management's commitment to maintaining an open communication with this group highlights the organization's dedication to equality and the wellbeing of its entire staff.

#### 4.2 Mentoring Programme

The MRA has introduced a new initiative aimed at fostering professional growth and development among its lower-level staff. This programme allows employees from any department to **select a mentor who can assist and guide them in performing their duties more effectively**. It is designed to empower staff through skill development and to promote diversity, equality and inclusiveness within the organization. By allowing staff from various departments and backgrounds to act as mentors, **the programme ensures that opportunities for growth are available to all, regardless of their position or background**. This inclusive approach creates an equitable work environment where every employee can thrive and where diverse

perspectives are valued. Currently, the wide-reaching programme boasts 124 mentees and 48 mentors. In providing this, the MRA aims to cultivate a culture of continuous learning and collaboration, ensuring that all staff members, regardless of their role, have access to the tools, guidance and support they need to succeed.

#### 4.3 Toastmasters Club to Promote Leadership, Communication and Inclusiveness

The MRA has launched its 'Toastmasters Club', which offers staff the opportunity to take part in activities designed to **improve public speaking and leadership abilities, fostering professional growth and confidence in communication**. The Toastmasters Club is an important initiative, one which aligns with the organization's commitment to promoting gender equality, diversity and inclusiveness. It provides a platform where employees from all backgrounds and genders can come together and ensures that all voices are heard, regardless of gender, position or experience. This environment of inclusivity encourages members to grow both personally and professionally.

Communication skills are seen as a key component for MRA staff, and the management team is encouraging staff to join the Club, as it will help them to engage better with staff and other stakeholders. It will also hone their leadership skills and make them more confident as an interviewee. It should however be noted that participation in the Club is voluntary and not used as an evaluation criteria during interviews or as a measurable qualitative indicator in the performance appraisal of staff. Currently, **the club has 28 members - including 16 female officers - at various stages of their development pathways**. Through participation in club's meetings and activities, members gain vital skills that will help them lead with confidence and communicate effectively in the workplace.

#### 5. Conduct an Employee Engagement Survey

To gauge **the level of staff satisfaction and to gather constructive feedback**, the MRA undertook an online 'Employee Engagement Survey' in July 2024. In order to make the survey an inclusive process, the views of the MRA Staff Association were sought prior to finalising.

The objective of the Survey was twofold:

1. Assess the present level of employees engagement/satisfaction in the MRA.
2. Identify stronger areas that need to be reinforced and weaker areas that need to be addressed and improved.

The survey encompassed several areas, including Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, Rewards and Benefits, Recruitment/Transfer of Staff, Training and Development, Safety and Health/Staff Well-Being, Discipline at Work and Communication with Employees. **The responses are presently being collated and recommendations - disaggregated by sex - will be proposed based on the findings.**

The MRA, as one of the WCO East and Southern Africa region Regional Training Centres (RTCs), will soon launch another online survey for the different generations of employees in the Customs Department. The aim of this survey is to take an inclusive approach to training by better understanding the preferred training styles of employees. This will ensure that future training sessions are more effective.

#### 6. Promoting Staff Well-Being

As a caring employer, the MRA is fully aware that promoting employee welfare and wellbeing can be a catalyst for increasing staff performance. A number of **'talks' and sensitization campaigns on topical issues have been organised at the MRA to promote staff wellbeing**. Topics included 'Managing Effects of Menopause', 'Non-communicable Diseases', 'Healthy and Nutritious Breakfast Ideas', 'Benefits of Yoga' and colorectal and prostate cancer as well as endometriosis and adenomyosis. In addition, MRA staff and their families were provided with a free dental caravan and health check-up in the various MRA premises. The aim of these initiatives is to support the diverse needs of the heterogeneous workforce of the MRA, thereby **fostering work-life balance and awareness of health risks that may affect both genders**. Another talk on 'Alcohol and Substance Abuse' will soon be organised in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life.

#### 7. Ensuring the Safety and Security of Employees

The MRA conducts regular health and safety checks, fire drill simulations, as well as awareness on fire safety to ensure the safety and security of staff and that they are aware of the procedures in case of any emergency. Staff are also provided with personal protection equipment such as hard hats, safety shoes, ear protectors and uniforms.

A subcommittee has been established under the Safety and Health Committee. This focuses on equitable opportunities for health and safety. It investigates and addresses complaints and other safety-related concerns, with a particular emphasis on those issues faced by female staff. It also **raises awareness of gender-specific concerns to foster a culture of respect and inclusivity, particularly for female customs officers** who often work in male-dominated

environments such as warehouses and seaport areas. The subcommittee also ensures that **female officers have access to equipment - such as like uniforms, gloves, safety shoes or vests - that are tailored to women's sizes and needs** and provide adequate protection, rather than just standard, unisex or male-designed options. One critical issue addressed was the lack of accessible women's toilets in these locations, which has since been resolved. Through proactively addressing these issues, the MRA aims to create a more-supportive and inclusive workplace for its staff.

### 8. Use of technology to support DEI

Technology has proved a boon for both MRA officers and for improving the quality of services being offered to stakeholders in both Tax and Customs Departments. In MRA Customs, **embracing technology - particularly for women posted in the enforcement and surveillance section - has helped both to facilitate trade and to integrate women** and improve their safety, thus enhancing inclusiveness.

- a. Female customs officers are trained in using technology in their routine duties: X-ray scanners, full body scanners and other scanners, drones, drug detection equipment, CCTV systems.
- b. Technology, through CCTV systems, is also supporting inclusiveness by assuring the safety and security of female staff based at remote stations, freight stations and port exits.

To encourage gender equality and inclusiveness at the MRA, and more specifically in the Customs Department, several steps have been taken to dispel some of the myths and taboos of female posting. Nowadays, **female MRA customs officers work on night duty and shifts and perform the following duties that were previously performed exclusively by male counterparts:**

- a. Physical examinations of goods/containers at examination centres and freight stations among forklift drivers, helpers and other male workers
- b. Act as dog handlers of the Customs K-9 Unit and drive dedicated vehicles for moving the sniffer dogs
- c. Work on nightshift duty for surveillance and enforcement activities, including postings at CCTV Control Rooms, scanning of containers and exit gates.
- d. Escort goods in transit/dutiable goods in the company of customs brokers.
- e. Undertake the rummage of vessels, wharf patrols along with officers of the Mauritius Port Authority and police, perform blitz operations/roadblocks and other excise enforcement duties.

The MRA is on the right trajectory to promote GED within the organization. **With its wide range of initiatives, it is making sure that its employees feel valued and that they can evolve in an inclusive environment, where they can freely voice their concerns with a view to finding remedies.** The MRA has already begun its GED journey, and it is determined to take it to greater heights.





# NEW ZEALAND CUSTOMS SERVICE

The Northern Customs Women's Network (NCWN) was established in 2018 as an employee-led network for women in the northern region of the New Zealand Customs Service. Its vision was and continues to be 'Women reaching their potential', and its flagship initiative has been its [Mentoring Programme \(MP\)](#).

The MP focuses on [encouraging the development of female officers striving to become future senior leaders](#). Acting as a platform for women to better prepare themselves for leadership, and to develop a pipeline of women leaders, it complements the existing Customs learning and development and leadership initiatives. It also helps fulfil the inclusion and diversity strategy goals of increasing female representation in leadership

roles and closing the gender pay gap, as women are promoted into leadership positions.

The NCWN conducted a few initial speed-mentoring events, which included [inviting a group of experienced leaders from within the organisation to act as mentors](#). They were seated individually, then a group of mentees (who had already been matched with three or four mentors from the topics of interest mentioned on their applications) moved through their mentor list one by one. They were given seven minutes for each discussion before they moved on, with the rapid pace forcing the mentees to focus on the main items they want to ask the mentor.





New Zealand Comptroller of Customs Christine Stevenson opening the Northern Customs Women's Network Mentoring Programme 2023/24

In addition, two of the NCWN committee members had also been mentors in a cross-agency National Security Workforce, Women in National Security Mentoring Programme in 2018. This was a large programme run by an external agency to provide a platform for women to network and focus on ways to make a greater impact. Its number one priority was “to attract and retain the right mix of knowledge, skills and capabilities for current and future priorities and demands”. The programme ran for 13 months, with over 50 mentors from 31 agencies.

These highly positive mentoring experiences led the two committee members to the daunting task of creating a MP for the NCWN. With the support of the People & Capability (P&C) workgroup and their own managers, the Pilot Programme was created and implemented in 2021. The two original MP coordinators were honoured in 2023 for their work with a WCO Certificate of Merit.

### Programme details

The NCWN MP has recently completed its third year and continues to be mentee driven, meaning the mentees are responsible for deciding the cadence and content of each meeting over the nine-month period.

Following the success of the initial pilot of nine pairings, the second cohort was more than double the size, with 22. This proved challenging, with double the administrative work required, so the third cohort was capped at a more manageable 15.

The MP mentee application is open to all NCWN members, although women have made up the majority of each cohort. The application asks several questions, on their previous experience with mentoring, the reason for applying, career plan and the qualities/skills they are seeking in a mentor. They also require the support of their current manager before submitting the application.

To date, the mentors have always been approached by the coordinators, knowing them as people and their leadership style. Most are humbled to be asked, and some require clarification over what they feel they can offer a mentee before committing. Once confirmed, the mentor will write short biography and setting out what they can offer. These are shared with the group of mentees that have applied for, and been accepted into, the MP.

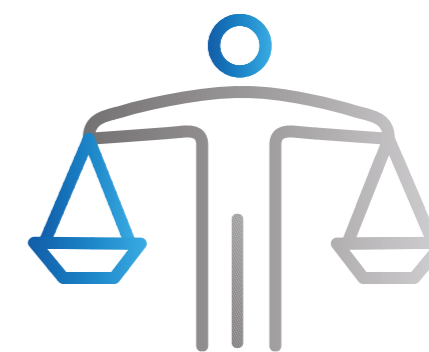
The mentees are asked to identify and rank their ‘top three’ preferred mentors; once all preferences have been received, the coordinators undertake a matching process as a group. They then pair each mentee with a mentor, taking into consideration their preferred list and their application alongside the mentor bio. The mentor is then advised who they have been matched with to check for any potential issues/history.

Mentors are asked to keep the pairing confidential until the introduction meeting for all mentees and mentors. Following a group introduction, the mentees are then separately sent to a virtual room with their mentor to meet each other for the first time. The level of excitement and nerves at this point is palpable, and it’s one of the most exciting elements of the process for the coordinators. They are left to meet for seven minutes, where they connect in private. They then return to the main group where the session continues covering the MP timings, mentor/mentee guidelines, e-learning and other support offered.

The e-learning ‘Mentoring 101’ programme was originally gifted by the New Zealand Ministry of Social Development, and has been updated to ensure it has a New Zealand Customs focus. It is a valuable resource to work through prior to and throughout the MP, particularly for anyone new to mentoring.

Support includes regular ‘check-ins’ by email undertaken by the coordinators, which include contacting each mentee and mentor directly to see how the relationships are working. In addition, there are Communities of Practice (COPs), which are facilitated virtually by the coordinators. These are held separately for both the mentee and mentor groups every 12 weeks, to discuss how the programme is progressing, enabling each group to learn about each other’s experiences. This allows both mentees and mentors to measure how the relationship is progressing alongside the group, and gives participants ideas of what they could try out within their pairing.

Between the many mentoring meetings, there are also MP workshops to further enrich the mentees’ learning. For 2023-24, these included the opportunity for the mentees to learn more about their strengths using the ‘Clifton Strengths’ assessment. This is a development tool, conducted by Gallup, through which New Zealand Customs increase awareness of the natural talents that people possess. Following the online assessment, the cohort were debriefed as a group by a coordinator who is also a certified ‘Strengths’ coach. In addition, there were also internal and external speakers who talked on relevant topics such as leadership, recruitment, resilience, governance and change.



The Comptroller of Customs, Christine Stevenson, opened the 2023-24 programme and spoke at a midpoint 'Strengths' centric workshop. The coordinators were delighted to receive this highest level of senior leadership support.

The co-ordination and support team has doubled to four members, a valuable boost as all their MP work is in addition to their formal roles within New Zealand Customs. Indeed, it is often described as a 'labour of love'.

The most recent cohort had mentees and mentors spread across many ranks, from the entry-level assistant customs officer to work area manager. However, the 2023-24 programme was different in that - for the first time - it was offered nationwide, enabling customs staff in regional ports to also take part. The feedback received about their experience was heartwarming. Although they had the challenge of only being able to connect virtually using MS Teams, they reported they were still able to develop strong partnerships.

## Results and Impact

In each cohort, the evaluations have cited increases in mentee confidence and enhancements in their career development, with all mentees agreeing they had gained a role model through the programme. Many alluded to increased networking and secondment opportunities, improved connection with other leaders in customs; **almost all agreed that the programme has increased their overall satisfaction with work.**

The following quotes are taken from feedback from cohort 3 participants:

*"Initially, I felt confronted when my thinking was challenged, as I'd been around a while and had accepted some assumptions about my career path and development options. My mentor encouraged me to view opportunities and issues through a different lens; and, as the programme progressed, my mentor became a trusted confidant and my first port of call when I need support. I feel very lucky to have been part of this programme."*

*"Mentoring was initially something I saw as a way of 'giving back', but I have also been inspired by my mentee. It has spurred me to think about my own development, and overall has reinforced the power of connecting and supporting each other."*

*"I am so grateful to have my mentor, especially over a period where I am trying to progress, and being able to speak to her after knockbacks has been so great. We have talked about direction and aspirations, and I have been able to use her feedback positively."*

Many of the mentoring relationships will continue now that the formal programme has finished. One mentor used the following metaphors: "The first meeting was like walking into a blind date, then the second meeting was like a 12-year-old's school disco where no one is quite sure of what to do or how to act. But then, **as trust grows, the relationship blossoms into a very strong connection.** The key is to take the time to build the relationship."

## Challenges

There were a few challenges faced during all cohorts; for example, **there was a lack of technology - MS Teams-enabled laptops and work mobile phones - available to participants.** In addition, 24/7 shift patterns made it difficult for some participants to connect with their mentors or join the online workshops and COPs. Laptops were loaned to these mentees, but connection issues were prevalent and - alongside with the 24/7 work schedule - it was decided that recording the online sessions was a way of solving this. The COPs were not recorded, due to the privacy of the subject matter discussed.

In addition, **those mentors who could only meet with their mentees virtually commented that it was difficult to give the same level of support** if their mentee were feeling emotional or in need of extra support.

It was also highlighted that those participants who were newer to Customs may have benefited from more time in the Service before embarking on a mentoring journey. For this reason, for future cohorts a minimum of two years' service will be required.

## Outlook

New Zealand Customs P&C work group are pleased with the programme's success thus far. Customs will use the NCWN framework and lessons learned to help set up an overarching Customs Employee-Led Network Mentoring Programme, with a pilot planned for 2025.

*"Mentoring is the gift that keeps on giving. The trust that has been built between some of these pairings has enabled the beginning of what may be lifelong friendships. It's been a privilege to continue this wonderful work."* NCWN Co-Ordinator





# NATIONAL CUSTOMS AUTHORITY OF PANAMA

Discrimination is the unfavourable treatment or undeserved contempt of certain persons or groups. The National Customs Authority of Panama is convinced that **overcoming discrimination requires a deep individual exercise that promotes peaceful, respectful and equitable relations** in all spheres of human life.

Yet the Authority also understands that discrimination is, unfortunately, a daily occurrence. While not always perceived, at some point we have all discriminated or been discriminated against. **There are groups who are victims of prejudice for a wide range of reasons, including ethnicity or nationality, sex, disability and social or economic position.** Other perceived

differences can also be grounds for the exclusion or restriction of rights.

As part of an initiative launched by the Customs Logistics Integration Programme (PILA), a programme managing the modernization of Panama's land border posts with its neighbouring country Costa Rica funded via the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the National Customs Authority of Panama organized a **series of trainings on Gender and Diversity for 150 officials from the three regional offices** that border Costa Rica. In this region, there is a significant flow of people in the logistics and tourism sectors. The training programme targeted those supervisors, inspectors and





analysts that assist citizens and tourists at the border. The motivation was to **highlight the diverse identities and experiences of people entering and leaving the country**, with the aim of promoting equality and fostering respect and inclusion.

This training programme, through a range of activities and discussions, sought to enlighten customs officials, to **offer tools to combat discrimination and to create safe spaces where diversity is valued**. The ultimate aim was to build a more just and equitable customs institution that respects human rights.

Specifically, the main objectives of the trainings were:

- To **raise awareness** on gender inequalities and the importance of diversity.
- To **provide practical tools** for promoting inclusion.
- To create a **safe environment** for sharing experiences and knowledge.

The first trainings were held in two groups of fifty at the facilities of the Paso Canoas Bond (Chiriquí Province), located in the Regional

Administration of the Western Zone. There were another two for groups of twenty-five people, for the customs personnel of the Regional Administration of the Northern Zone. Occidental (Bocas del Toro Province). By piloting the staff trainings in these two provinces and seeing the change achieved, the National Customs Authority of Panama could replicate the results in the other regional offices.

The interactive trainings provided a **space for learning and reflection on gender equity, gender identity, sexual orientation and cultural diversity issues**. There were discussions and presentations by experts on research, experience and theoretical frameworks for gender and diversity. Individual and group reflection were also encouraged, allowing exploration of individual perceptions and experiences. There were also debates and round tables to discuss differing perspectives and create an open dialogue on the challenges and opportunities of diversity. In short, it sought to educate participants and empower them to contribute to creating a more-inclusive and respectful institution.

Sexist language has helped legitimize and reproduce unjust relationships that render **women invisible**. Therefore, inclusive language was used in the training design and implementation as a concrete and effective method of achieving gender mainstreaming and supporting equality and non-discriminatory approaches. This helps build a society capable of recognising and integrating diversity and gender equality.

To encourage collaboration with other government agencies, the Authority invited speakers from other agencies, including the Ministry of Women, the National Migration Service and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

Some of the positive outcomes from these trainings included:

#### 1. Increased Awareness:

- **Change of Perspective:** Improving understanding of gender issues and the importance of equality.
- **Sensitization:** Improving awareness of unconscious biases and how they can affect work decisions.

#### 2. Improved Communication:

- **Open Dialogue:** Creating an environment where gender issues can be openly discussed between all customs officials.
- **Active Listening:** Promoting empathy and understanding of the individual experiences of different genders.

#### 3. More-inclusive Policies:

- **Policy Development:** Reviewing internal policies to ensure gender equality, such as proper policies to prevent harassment and fair promotion opportunities.
- **Organizational Commitment:** Increasing the commitment of senior management to implementing inclusive practices.

#### 4. Reduced Discrimination:

- **Fewer Incidences:** Reducing the number of cases of harassment and discrimination in the workplace.

#### 5. Proactive Interventions:

- Ensuring that customs officials are **better equipped to intervene in situations of inequality**.



Bocas del Toro Province/ Regional Administration of the Northwestern Zone

Although there has been significant progress in promoting diversity, equity and inclusion within the Authority, much still remains to be done. **One way to measure progress is to compare the number of public officials trained in the area of gender equality and diversity to the decrease in complaints from internal and external clients.**

In addition, there have been other changes made within the Authority to achieve a more just and inclusive society where all people have equal opportunities and rights:

- 1. Equal pay:** The Authority has reduced the gender pay gap.
- 2. Political empowerment:** the Authority has increased the representation of women in decision-making roles, including having a female General Director of Customs
- 3. Creating a culture of respect:** The Office of Equal Opportunities has continued to provide training to eradicate gender violence and harassment within the Authority.

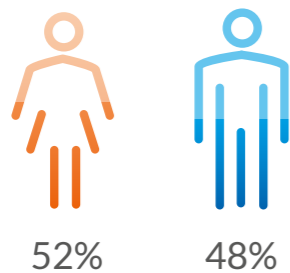
- The Authority has managed to train **52%** of staff in the Regional Administration of the Western Zone (Chiriquí Province) and **68%** in the Northwestern Zone (Bocas del Toro Province).
- Evaluations were undertaken to **assess performance before and after training.**

Discrimination and workplace harassment have been reduced within the Authority, where public officials had often experienced verbal harassment, subtle exclusions or more obvious discriminatory actions. These behaviours had negatively affected the emotional and mental well-being of public officials and undermined efforts to promote an inclusive work environment.

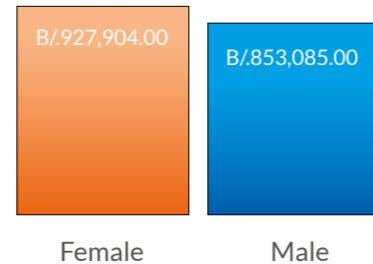
**For a culture of equity to be truly adopted at all levels requires a firm commitment from senior management** - including the support of the Director General of Customs - to act as the main driver of beliefs, values and initiatives in

Gender	Officials	Total Salary
Female	897	B/.927,904.00
Male	833	B/.853,085.00

Percentage of female and male officials working in Panama Customs



Total salary of women and men



diversity and inclusion. The Authority must also analyse those challenges that persist on the path to gender equality in order to propose and implement initiatives to eliminate barriers to the advancement of female leadership.

The Authority is working on:

### 1. Education and Awareness

- Implementing gender education.
- Promoting gender equality through informative campaigns that challenge stereotypes.

### 2. Inclusive Policies

- Evaluating and modifying labour policies to guarantee equality in hiring, promotion and remuneration.
- Implementing and enforcing laws and regulations that protect against gender discrimination.

### 3. Fostering an Inclusive Environment

- Providing regular gender and diversity training for all customs officials.
- Creating an environment where respect and inclusion are valued and where gender issues can be openly discussed.

### 4. Engaging male officials as allies in the fight for gender equality is for the Authority - fundamental for creating a meaningful change in society.

- Gaining an **understanding of power dynamics and how they affect everyone** is essential, as is encouraging men to participate in promoting gender equality. Male officials of the Authority will be trained in gender equality and the inequalities faced by women.

- Create men's groups that support gender equity and champion positive masculinity.** Engaging male participation in campaigns and movements - including donations and volunteering - that promote gender equality can have a positive impact.

### 5. Monitoring and Evaluation.

- Collect data** through studies and surveys in order to measure progress towards gender equality.
- Publish **regular progress reports** highlighting the impact of the policies and programmes being implemented.

The National Customs Authority of Panama firmly believes in creating an inclusive work environment. This will be achieved through **implementing policies and programmes that promote wage equity, professional development and leadership in all people.** In addition, the Authority recognizes the importance of collaborating with organizations and communities to address the challenges that women face.

The Authority plans to establish a '**Gender and Equality Office**', which will play a vital role in promoting gender equity and in empowering all gender identities. Some of its functions will be:

- Collecting and analyzing data** on gender representation and working conditions.
- Evaluating the impact** of gender equality initiatives and publishing regular reports.



# TOGOLESE REVENUE AUTHORITY

In order to achieve its objectives, the Togolese Revenue Authority (Office Togolais des Recettes – OTR) has turned its attention to a number of key areas, including modernization and capacity building. Focusing on the latter area, which places particular emphasis on enhancing the system of legal and institutional governance, the OTR has had the opportunity to [address gender and thus proscribe the associated stereotypes, guarantee women's integrity and ensure the security and safety of its staff members.](#)

Since November 2022, as part of the “Gender Equality and Diversity (GED)” component, the OTR has been involved in the West Africa Security Project (WASP), funded by the German Federal Foreign Office.

Under the framework of this project, an [organizational assessment of the OTR was carried out in March 2023, based on the WCO Gender Equality Organizational Assessment Tool \(GEOAT\).](#) The purpose of this assessment was to identify existing strengths and gaps, so as to promote gender-responsive and inclusive measures within the OTR.

According to the assessment report drawn up, it should be noted that the structure of the GED work undertaken in the OTR is, in part, consistent with the structure of the GEOAT, inasmuch as it primarily addresses the cross cutting policies before focusing on internal policies, in particular those relating to human resources management, training, work-life balance, the prevention of





discrimination, harassment and gender-based violence (GBV), and communication. Lastly, the assessment focused in greater detail on external policies, in particular border management and stakeholder relations, and included discussions with representatives of the Lomé Port and Sanvee-Condji joint checkpoint, located on the border between Togo and Benin.

The assessment resulted in a total of 23 recommendations, which were addressed to the Togolese Revenue Authority. **A draft Action Plan on Gender Equality and Diversity was later developed on the basis of 14 of the 23 recommendations made.** Several initiatives implemented within the OTR meet the GEOAT recommendations and may be regarded as specific and relevant examples of gender-responsive and inclusive measures implemented both in-house and externally, such as:

#### In-house policies:

- Visible increase over the years in the number of **women working in Customs, including in senior management positions;**

- Rise in the number of female staff, increasing from 363 female officers in 2020 to 596 in 2023, which, based on the statistics, represents a 64% increase;
- Introduction, in the context of human resources, of **fair and transparent measures underpinned by written policies (Staff Regulations)** incorporating clear definitions of, for example, promotion and transfer procedures;
- Implementation of a **fair and open promotion mechanism**, thereby encouraging staff members to apply for an in-house promotion in keeping with their skills;
- **Equal opportunity at different levels**, in particular in terms of accessing training, promotion, etc.;
- Fair and open system enabling staff members to **communicate their training preferences** through an online system;
- Creation of the **OTR Women's Association (AF-OTR)**, as acknowledged nationally by receipt of official declaration of association No. 0928/matddt sg dlpap-doca, issued on 16 August 2024 by the Ministry of Territorial Administration, Decentralization and Development of Territories.

#### External policies:

- Provision of **two freephone numbers for use by stakeholders:** (1) to obtain information in four subject areas (the options for selection are: Customs clearance, taxation, land register, support services); and (2) to report instances of corruption, harassment, discrimination and gender-based violence;
- Drafting of a **procedures manual for any stakeholders using OTR services**, thereby ensuring the transparency and dissemination of information in accordance with Article 1 of the World Trade Organization's (WTO) Trade Facilitation Agreement;
- Launch of initiatives to **raise awareness among taxpayers of Lomé Grand Market, targeting businesswomen and small businesses in particular**, and of campaigns conducted in various languages and using different means of communication as part of measures to improve external stakeholder relations and encourage those stakeholders to comply with the legislation voluntarily;
- **Simplified clearance of goods of a value below 1,500,000 West African CFA francs** (amount specifically in relation to Togo), which contributes to facilitating trade (saving time and reducing costs) for small businesses, which are often run by women. This measure has been in place since Togo's accession to the Revised Kyoto Convention (RKC) in 2014;
- **Annual award of 25% of procurement contracts by the OTR to young people and businesswomen**, in accordance with Decree No. 2018-028/PR of 1 February 2018 awarding a proportion of procurement contracts to young persons and businesswomen, in the context of implementing the policy of socio-economic inclusion initiated by the President of the Republic.

Recognizing the importance of creating **networking groups for women and promoting gender issues** within a modern organization for fostering awareness, improving the environment and building trust among its employees, the OTR has set up an association called the "OTR

Women's Association" (AF-OTR). Created on 8 March 2020 and with headquarters in Lomé, the association brings together all OTR female staff. In carrying out its activities, it is supported by a female patron as well as various male OTR officials, including the Commissioner General and the Commissioner for Customs and Indirect Taxation.

The objectives of the Association are:

- To **promote leadership by female OTR staff** by means of awareness raising campaigns, training, support and mentoring initiatives;
- To **foster friendship and solidarity** among women in the OTR;
- To **highlight the leadership roles acquired by OTR women nationally**, by means of discussion among their own ranks as well as with their female colleagues in other sectors;
- To strive to **meet the OTR objectives as a partner association;**
- To be at the forefront of efforts to discharge **OTR's social responsibility mandate** through humanitarian action;
- To **promote women's development** in different areas.



The AF-OTR has undertaken various activities, such as:

- Campaigns to raise awareness of **breast cancer, cervical cancer and hepatitis B**, followed by screening clinics;
- Campaigns raising awareness among female OTR staff of **all forms of harassment** in the work environment, conducted throughout the territory from 04 to 13 October 2023;
- Organization of recreational activities, such as Zumba, various games, walking, etc.

Externally, a number of events have been held, covering social action and awareness-raising initiatives in particular. These include:

- the “Give Blood, Save Lives” blood donation campaign, providing an official platform for the **National Blood Transfusion Centre** to collect **over 200 blood bags** obtained through donation;
- the “For every student, an official identity” mobile (touring) campaign.

In the light of the finding that some young people who have achieved success in their BEPC (Lower Secondary Completion Certificate) or BAC 2 (second part of the Baccalaureate) exams cannot access higher education because they have no certificate attesting to their Togolese nationality, the OTR Women’s Association launched a mobile (touring) campaign. It has involved **producing identity documents (substitute declaratory judgments and nationality certificates) for needy boys and girls preparing for exams in Togo’s five regions**. This initiative has also served as a framework for making parents and students alike aware of the **importance of such identity documents which transform these children into legitimate citizens, enabling them to continue their studies**. The campaign has been carried out in close collaboration with the local authorities, the Ministry of Justice – specifically the Seals, Nationality and Civil Identity Directorate – the police and the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education.

- Two thousand, six hundred and nineteen (2,619) identity documents, including one thousand and ninety-five (1,095) declaratory judgments (substitute birth certificates) and one thousand and forty-six (1,046) certificates of nationality, were issued in 2021. With support from senior officials at Mo Plain Prefecture (Central Region), two hundred and eighty-eight (288) forms of identification were issued in 2022. Today, the “For every student, an official identity” mobile campaign operates regularly across the national territory.

Under the WASP, the OTR organized a stakeholder engagement seminar. **The two-day seminar (19 and 20 September 2024), aimed at small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and small-scale traders, placed significant focus on women traders.**

The event was organized with the participation of the Ministry of Commerce, Crafts and Local Consumption, the Directorate of Foreign Trade and the West African Association for Cross-Border Trade in Food Products.

The seminar provided an **opportunity for participants to enhance their knowledge of the links between trade facilitation and gender**, the opportunities generated by the World Trade Organization’s (WTO) Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) and the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA), as well as their knowledge on Customs import and export procedures.

Another key component of the seminar was the issue of security and safety. This topic was addressed from different angles, including the **importance of having women officers at the borders, the prevention of harassment and gender-based violence, the risks of illicit and harmful goods and the need to meet certain standards, as well as the importance of having gender-responsive and inclusive infrastructure at the border**. Participants were also briefed on the role of Customs in collecting revenue, facilitating trade, ensuring safety and protecting society.

The seminar, which brought together more than 50 participants, was **a testament to the collective effort to strengthen collaboration between Customs and the stakeholders**. It provided a platform for the stakeholders to voice their specific needs and concerns, which were then used to identify recommendations for future cooperation between the OTR and these stakeholders.

Determined in its efforts to promote GED under the WASP, the **OTR intends to implement activities specified in its Action Plan with a view to achieving its individual and organizational objectives**, thereby contributing to sustainable development and national, regional and international growth. Some of the activities identified in the GED-related Action Plan are as follows:

- Establishment within the OTR of an offshoot of the “Gender” focal cell operating in the Ministry of Economy and Finance, which is responsible for coordinating the rollout, implementation and monitoring of the OTR’s Action Plan on Gender Equality and Diversity;
- Preparation and organization of **GED training sessions** for OTR staff in order to raise awareness of these issues;
- Preparation and organization of meetings aimed at raising awareness among all OTR staff of **harassment, discrimination and gender-based violence in the work environment**;
- **Creation of posters and visual aids** for raising awareness among staff and stakeholders of the different forms of harassment and gender-based violence;
- **Raising awareness among small-scale cross-border traders of tax and Customs procedures**, as part of the national seminar, held from 19 to 20 September 2024 in Lomé, on “The Opportunities and Challenges presented by Cross-Border Trade”.





# UNITED KINGDOM'S HIS MAJESTY'S REVENUE AND CUSTOMS

As part of His Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC)'s wider work to promote Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), HMRC is committed to raising awareness of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) - including domestic abuse - and the support available. This guidance provides information and support for those colleagues experiencing, or who have experienced, domestic abuse, managers, colleagues who may be perpetrators, or who are facing allegations of domestic abuse.

The HMRC has a Domestic Abuse Policy which states that:

*"HMRC believes that everyone has the right to a life free from abuse or assault in any form. Domestic abuse is wholly unacceptable and inexcusable behaviour, no matter what the circumstances are. HMRC is committed to raising awareness of domestic abuse and the support available."*





The Policy also recognizes that:

*“Domestic abuse can happen to anyone and can happen in many different relationships. Not all domestic abuse takes place between intimate partners. It can occur between other family members and includes honour-based violence and forced marriage”.*

As a large organisation of over 60,000 colleagues, the Policy also recognizes that as well as those who have experienced and/or are still experiencing domestic abuse, there will also be perpetrators of domestic abuse amongst our colleagues. It identifies the need to engage with them, “in a constructive way” in order to “help increase safety”. The policy defines different forms of domestic abuse, describes the legislative context of HMRC’s domestic abuse policy and provides guidance to managers.

The ‘16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence’ campaign is an internationally recognised annual event that advocates for the end of VAWG through raising awareness and promoting action. This initiative aligns

with the UK Government’s commitment to the Istanbul Convention, its VAWG Strategy and the Domestic Abuse Act 2021, which places additional duties on public sector organizations, including HMRC, to address domestic abuse and violence as workplace issues.

Recognizing VAWG as a significant workplace concern, HMRC sought to assess its impact on colleagues, particularly women who comprise 52% of the organization. It decided to drive awareness and change through a targeted campaign, supported by inclusion in HMRC’s EDI campaign.

The ‘16 Days’ campaign featured 14 sessions over 16 days, addressing various aspects of VAWG and its relevance to the workplace. Topics included domestic abuse, gaslighting, coercive control and cyberstalking. These sessions were complemented with a dedicated online hub, editorials and a ‘Yammer’ (a private social networking tool) page for broader engagement.

To understand the extent of VAWG’s potential impact, HMRC’s national Gender Network Chair collaborated with the Deputy Director of Knowledge Analysis and Information to design a colleague safety survey. This sought to gather both quantitative and qualitative data while ensuring compliance with the GDPR and other data protection laws. The decision to focus on female colleagues was informed by the government’s VAWG strategy, which highlights the disproportionate impact on women.

The results uncovered significant issues, such as a 400% increase in reports of poor mental health linked to domestic abuse during COVID-19. These results were echoed in long-term sickness absence rates among female employees, with poor mental health being among the most common reasons cited. Therefore, it was considered vital to make a compelling case for including the ‘16 Days’ campaign in HMRC’s ED&I calendar.

Using this data, the Gender Network Chair presented a compelling case for including the ‘16 Days’ campaign in HMRC’s ED&I calendar, which was then presented to senior leaders. Using a data-driven approach, it underscored the potential benefits of such a campaign to the organization and highlighted how it would align with a broad governmental commitment to ending VAWG. It gained support from senior leadership and sponsorship by HMRC’s Chief People Officer. Efforts were planned and led by the Gender Network Chair, with input from HR Business Partners, Employee Representation Groups (ERGs) and external specialists. This ensured alignment with organizational policies and broader objectives.

It should be noted that HMRC’s Public Sector Equality Duty resources those volunteer ERGs who promote ED&I, supported by a dedicated ED&I Team. The ERGs liaise with the ED&I and Communication Teams to shine a spotlight on issues of interest, such as the 16 Days and IWD through the organizations internal communication platforms.

### Creating an inclusive awareness raising campaign

To maximize engagement, the campaign offered interactive events via Teams, allowing colleagues access across departments and nationally. Given the gender profile of part-time workers and those at lower grades (who have less control over their calendar), campaign events were scheduled to take account of these needs and to be gender inclusive.

To broaden colleagues’ access to information and support, editorials were shared on a range of internal communication platforms, including creating a dedicated SharePoint Hub. This hosted the calendar of events and provided daily bitesize updates on the topics been addressed. It also contained links to relevant HR policy documents and guidance and signposting to internal and external sources of support.



All the campaign assets were quality assured against HMRC accessibility standards. The breadth of topics covered helped support and recognize the interests of a diverse range of colleagues. **The accessibility standards include, for example, ensuring that deaf colleagues can engage equally with all spoken content by providing text-based alternatives.** Campaign material is also accessible to blind colleagues by using existing assistive technology.

### **Working safely and with authenticity – a trauma-informed approach**

Creating safe spaces for discussion around such sensitive and complex issues meant drawing on key principles of trauma-informed practice. Thus, the **safeguarding of colleagues was a key consideration at every point in the design and delivery of the campaign.** Trigger warnings were read and displayed not just at the start of sessions, but at any point where necessary, addressing the potential for colleagues to join the sessions after initial trigger warnings had been shared. **Mental health first aiders - voluntary mental health advocates and first aiders supporting implementation of HMRC's Mental Health Strategy - were also introduced at the start of sessions and were available throughout events.** All sessions included signposting to a range of internal and external support sources, including for survivors and those colleagues concerned about their own potentially abusive behaviour.

The sessions were not recorded, and the expectation of confidentiality was expressly made. Attendees were not encouraged to disclose, but were empowered to do. Where disclosures were made, they were listened to without judgement and followed up privately with signposting to the appropriate support. This made it vitally important that session facilitators were suitably trained and confident in handling the subject matter. To safeguard the team and

facilitators, mental health supervision and support were provided following the campaign.

**The campaign combined the insights of a range of internal stakeholders, including representatives of the ERGs for black and ethnic minorities, disabled and Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer or Questioning (LGBTQ)+ colleagues.** They contributed to panel discussions that explored the additional challenges faced by these colleagues when experiencing domestic abuse.

External stakeholders also provided invaluable expertise, with the **National Centre for Domestic Violence providing free training to the campaign team.** Refuge (the UK's largest domestic abuse charity) and Women's Aid also provided support in the form of materials and advice for the sessions.

### **The Results**

The campaign saw substantial engagement, with **6,477 colleagues attending Teams sessions and the SharePoint Hub attracted 2,375 unique views.** The Gender Network Yammer page attracted 3,695 visits. A post on the campaign by the Director General for HR was viewed by over 40,000 colleagues, taking overall engagement to 56,000. Such high levels of engagement underline the success of the awareness-raising, as it allowed HMRC to promote its domestic abuse policy and guidance while ensuring colleagues know where to find support should they, or someone they know, need it.

**The campaign received overwhelmingly positive feedback, with participants describing the sessions as 'great', 'informative' and 'very useful'.** Many attendees found the sessions cathartic and reassuring, helping validate their own experiences. Importantly, 80% of managers who attended the session on 'Dealing with Sensitive Disclosures' afterwards reported feeling more confident in supporting colleagues.

Since the last '16 Days' campaign, **the UK Government has developed an Economic Abuse Toolkit**, in partnership with the Fairness Group and the charities 'Surviving Economic Abuse' and 'Money Advice Plus'. This initiative was piloted with the help of 30,000 HMRC call centre colleagues. It aims to **help those public sector bodies involved in recovering debt to identify stakeholders experiencing economic abuse, so they can offer clear processes for support.** It should be noted that financial and economic abuse is a form of controlling and coercive behaviour where, amongst other things, the perpetrator steals and/or builds up debts in the name of their victim. Call centre staff in HMRC responsible for recovering debts - such as unpaid taxes and duties - were given a toolkit to help identify where the stakeholders with whom they come into contact may be subject to economic abuse.

The next iteration of the '16 Days' campaign will repurpose the highly effective 'Dealing with Sensitive Disclosures' session to promote awareness of this important new toolkit. There is **a Cross Government Gender Network that meets monthly to allow Gender Network Chairs to share best practice as well as to advocate for and support GED initiatives.** It was this network that informed HMRC about the Treasury work to develop the Economic Abuse Toolkit.

**The '16 Days' campaign is now a permanent fixture in HMRC's 'Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (ED&I) calendar'.** Furthermore, the safeguarding standards devised for its delivery have been shared throughout the organisation as best practice for the delivery of other sensitive topics, such as bullying, harassment and discrimination. The ED&I calendar is agreed with the input of a number of ERGs that were set up to promote the inclusion of colleagues with 'protected characteristics' - sex, sexual orientation, race, religious belief, age and disability - as defined by the Equality Act 2010. Under this legislation, these characteristics afforded protection from discrimination. In addition, HMRC - as with other public sector employers - has a responsibility under the Public Sector Equality Duty to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between groups sharing these protected characteristics. This is reflected in a number of ERGs, all of which receive the support and resource of an ED&I HR and Communications team for the celebration days identified on a shared ED&I calendar. **Having the '16 Days' campaign added to this calendar meant that events were more widely promoted, that an article was issued on the all-company intranet and - importantly - signalled the recognition of domestic abuse as a workplace issue.**



# ZIMBABWE REVENUE AUTHORITY

As an administration, the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (ZIMRA) has worked to implement a range of gender initiatives. Among these is a goal of achieving a 50/50 ratio in recruitment, in line with that in the national political sphere since 2009 as well as with the National Constitution of Zimbabwe.

One such initiative was the successful launch of a 'Women In Taxation' (WIT) Forum in 2021. However, through these targeted initiatives focusing on women, ZIMRA also realized that men were lagging behind in terms of networking and accessing enabling environments where they could meet for candid discussions on issues of interest. Often, when people think of gender equality issues, the first thing that comes to mind may be affording a greater proportion of opportunities to women. At a macro level, many gender initiatives focus predominantly on the

female child and women. This same scenario was now also mirrored at an organisational level within ZIMRA. In order to redress a situation where men view gender issues as something that only impacts women, a programme that also targets men was needed.

## Awareness-Raising before launch

ZIMRA decided to launch a so-called 'Taxmen Cave' forum. Ahead of the inauguration, it held awareness-raising sessions and launched a newsletter.

In preparation, all ZIMRA stations were tasked with nominating representatives from all the stations dotted around the country, including those at the border. A total of 130 men were nominated from all the ZIMRA stations. In total,





Deep discussions during the 6 December 2023 event, Bushmen Rock

the event targeted 150 participants, made up of 130 male officers from ZIMRA and 20 externals. The programme was funded by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), a ZIMRA partner from Germany.

### The Launch

The Men's Forum would play an important role in both reversing gender-based inequality and violence and in [supporting men to become advocates for those issues affecting them in society](#). It would also offer them a chance to [engage and undertake self-examination of their role in the society](#). The Forum also provides a platform for making men realize the importance of opening up and sharing the challenges which they may be facing in life. This overcomes the rigid norms that encourages men to put on a brave face no matter what they might be going through in life. High-level speakers from both outside and inside ZIMRA were identified and engaged as facilitators for the topics chosen for the day.

### Topics Covered During the Launch

- **Leadership and Accountability:** Event facilitators stressed that every man is a leader in his own right, starting from the family set up, where the husband is expected to both support and be accountable to his family. A leader should be able to generate solutions for their followers, not problems. Leadership in the home should not be one-sided but rather be inclusive for both the wife and the husband. Men should be conversant with the digital age, where technology is the norm.
- **Man of integrity:** The facilitators initiated a debate to determine what the participants thought was a man's greatest attribute. Following discussions around empirical evidence and research outcomes, it was agreed that society most trusts a man of integrity.

- **Life pressures and how to navigate:** Arguing against the stereotypical patriarchal belief that requires all men to be strong and to never show grief, even in times of need, the facilitators explained how research has demonstrated that most men break down due to overwhelming internalized issues. Men were encouraged to share their life experiences with mentors and counsellors.
- **Preparation for retirement:** Participants were reminded that retirement is an inevitability, and that they should start preparing while still physically capable. There should be a balance between work and private life and it was important to take the leave available. Men were encouraged to have multiple revenue streams to complement their salaries and avoid financial stress, a leading cause of stroke and heart problems.
- **Men's health including mental health issues:** Studies have shown that many men often fail to visit a doctor until health problems reach advanced, incurable stages. Regular and frequent health checks are important and therefore encouraged.
- **Gender equality in ZIMRA:** The Director of Human Capital, Mr Philip Vanhuvaone, presented the ZIMRA Gender inclusivity policy, which clearly stresses that ZIMRA does not discriminate any employees based on gender. ZIMRA is an organisation that upholds equity, filling positions on merit irrespective of gender. He commended the establishment of the 'Taxmen Cave' Forum against the background of the similar programme 'Women in Taxation'.

### Elections

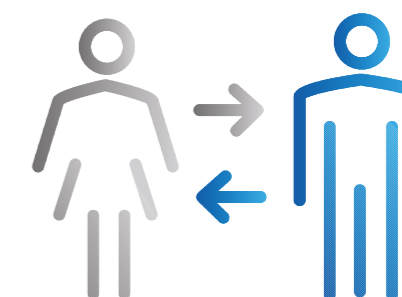
A national committee for the Taxmen Cave was elected, with six members from the various Regions. The committee was mandated to organize the regional committees selection and also to create a programme of events for the following year.

### The Future of the Forum

The forum hopes to hold its annual conference during the annual 'Men's Month' in November. It is the duty of the committee and the organizers to ensure that men from different stations have the opportunity to attend the conference and to take part in regional events organized by the committee.

### Expected Outcomes

The launch of this forum is expected to advocate for a shift in change of norms and - through mentoring and coaching - for a new type of masculinity. It is also expected to shape future leaders, promoting a work culture that embraces gender and diversity issues.







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