

# Briefing on the EBRD Gender Strategy Revision

For more information

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The current EBRD Strategy for the Promotion of Gender Equality 2016-2020 has been focused on increasing women’s economic empowerment and equality of opportunity. The Strategy builds on the Bank’s 2009 Gender Action Plan and 2013 Strategic Gender Initiative. It also complements the EBRD’s Economic Inclusion Strategy (2017-2021).

During the last strategic period, the Bank successfully promoted the view that gender equality is a principal element of sound business management and critical to the advancement of transition. The EBRD has demonstrated that it can strategically streamline gender equality through investments, technical cooperation and policy dialogue.

The EBRD’s ‘strategic fit’ on gender has been very narrow, however. In particular, it lacks a focus on protecting women and promoting their participation in decision-making. It is time that this ‘strategic fit’ broadens to include a strong focus on preventing gender-based violence and harassment (GBVH) and to develop a practical toolbox to address gender impacts and risks in EBRD investments.

Increasingly in the last few years, the EBRD’s sister institutions have started to strategically address GBVH and other gender risks and impacts. The World Bank notes that [GBV affects more than one in three women](#), and that in some countries, ‘violence against women is estimated to cost ... up to 3.7% of their GDP’. Therefore, the World Bank has made addressing GBV in its operations a priority in the [World Bank Group Gender Strategy](#).

The European Investment Bank (EIB) includes ‘Protect’ as a pillar of its [Gender Strategy \(2017\)](#), with the strategic objective ‘to develop a fit-for-purpose EIB due diligence framework

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*enabling clients and EIB experts to assess, prevent and mitigate impacts and risks of EIB investments to girls and women’.*

The EBRD has claimed that its Environmental and Social Policy provides gender safeguards; however, practice has demonstrated that this is neither a strategic approach to the issue, nor is it implemented in practice.

### **Nenskra HPP Project Compliance Review**

In fact, gender impacts are not properly assessed and mitigated even in the highest risk projects, which are subject to the utmost scrutiny by the Bank and civil society. One example of such a project is the Nenskra hydropower plant in Georgia. The [Compliance Review for the Nenskra HPP project](#) was finalised by the Bank’s Accountability Mechanism in August 2020. It found the project non-compliant with the Bank’s gender safeguards and made important recommendations for improvements at both the systemic and project levels.

From the Nenskra HPP Management Action Plan, however, it is unclear if the Compliance Review’s important findings and recommendations will trigger a more strategic approach to the assessment and mitigation of gender risks and impacts in the EBRD’s operations.

### **Green Cities Gender Action Plan**

In addition, the EBRD’s gender Strategy claims that the promotion of gender equality is aligned with the EBRD’s key principle of additionality: *‘examples of ... additionality include the Bank’s engagements with the providers of public sector service which require systematic gender assessments’.*

Since January 2020, Bankwatch, together with its member groups in Georgia and Macedonia, has been requesting the disclosure of gender assessments at the country, sectoral and project levels. The EBRD has disclosed no such assessments as of August 2020.

A Non-Technical Summary for public transport projects in Tbilisi mentions that the client has developed an Equal Opportunity Strategy, but there is no sign of a comprehensive assessment of gender risks and impacts. This is in spite of the fact that the Asian Development Bank previously found that [45% of women and girls in the city have experienced some sort of GBVH](#) on public transport.

In addition, the Tbilisi Metro project is co-financed by the Green Climate Fund (GCF) as part of the Green Cities Facility. The GCF has a much stronger gender policy than the EBRD does, and as such it agreed on a Gender Action Plan (GAP) with the EBRD for the Facility. In the GAP, the EBRD committed to produce Gender Impact Assessments at both the sectoral and project levels, yet there is no sign that such assessments are done.

The EBRD has not disclosed a single gender assessment, however. It is of concern that the EBRD is implementing its flagship Green City initiative without ensuring sufficient safeguards for women as citizens and public service users.

**In conclusion**, Bankwatch recommends that the EBRD should widen its ‘strategic fit’ to protect women, prevent GBVH and promote women’s participation in decision-making. The Bank has demonstrated that it can do a good job when it sets a strategic direction to promote gender equality. Now it is time to demonstrate an equally ambitious approach to safeguarding women in its new Gender Strategy.