

Guide

G-PESTLE

A GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE FORESIGHT
FRAMEWORK



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Strategic Planning Unit
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The G-PESTLE framework was developed by UN Women as a how-to guide to applying a gender-transformative approach to foresight. It responds to requests from UN Women country and regional offices for practical support on integrating gender into strategic foresight exercises with diverse stakeholders, towards realizing gender-transformative outcomes.

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The tool builds on the three areas to apply foresight in the UN Strategic Foresight Guide 2023, developed by the UN Futures Lab; the PESTLE factors; and UN guiding principles on the human rights-based approach, leaving no one behind, and gender equality and women's empowerment.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The objective of this document is to provide practical guidance on how to implement a gender-transformative approach to foresight at the country, regional and global levels. The G-PESTLE framework (gender, political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental) supports users to: reflect on how power, social norms and inequality influence the present; imagine new possibilities, especially for people who experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination; identify risks and opportunities to advance gender equality; and explore more inclusive paths forward.

As uncertainty becomes the norm, foresight complements traditional planning approaches by helping to anticipate change and sustain effectiveness. Applied uncritically, however, foresight may miss the perspectives of women, girls and overlooked groups. This, risks amplifying only the loudest voices and unintentionally reinforcing existing inequalities.

Building on the UN 2.0 vision of a forward-looking United Nations, UN Women developed the G-PESTLE framework. As a gender-transformative foresight approach, it aims to drive change, equitably and inclusively, towards better futures for all. It is shaped by a set of structured questions to expand perspectives and embed gender equality throughout any foresight process.

The G-PESTLE framework integrates the areas to apply foresight, based on the UN Strategic Foresight Guide developed by the UN Futures Lab; the PESTLE factors, and the UN guiding principles on the human rights-based approach, leave no one behind, and gender equality and women's empowerment.

The framework brings a gender and systemic perspective to long-term decision-making. It supports making sense of emerging change and anticipating possible opportunities and risks through a gender-transformative, human-centred lens.

People can use the guide to review whether signals represent a range of perspectives and topics, including those that challenge biases and assumptions. It can steer brainstorming on transformative possibilities for diverse population groups and frame actions to inform decision-making, based on risks and opportunities to advance gender equality and inclusion.

The first part of the guide provides an **overview** of G-PESTLE, explaining what it is, why it matters, and when and how to use it.

The guide then explores the **three core elements** that shape the framework: the areas to apply foresight, PESTLE analysis and UN principles. Next, it examines the relationships that emerge when these three elements are combined in pairs.

The G-PESTLE **framework** takes shape in the final sections. They combine the three core elements through guiding questions and practical examples:

- **Make sense of change** from a gender perspective
- **Imagine possible futures** with a gender lens
- **Take action** for gender transformation

OVERVIEW

What is G-PESTLE?

G-PESTLE is a framework of questions to expand perspectives and embed gender equality throughout the foresight process. It combines three core elements:

1

Areas of application¹



2

PESTLE analysis²



3

UN guiding principles³



Why use G-PESTLE?

By applying a gender-transformative foresight approach, G-PESTLE guides comprehensive and inclusive decision-making processes. Its systemic lens helps to amplify diverse perspectives, broaden the scope of analysis and integrate critical contextual factors.

When to use it?

G-PESTLE can be used at any stage of any foresight or futures process, alongside any tool or method. Some examples include:

- When starting a **futures-informed research process**, use the questions to review if signals gathered represent a wide range of perspectives and topics, and challenge biases and assumptions
- When **exploring the potential implications** of emerging signals, or shaping scenarios, use the questions to brainstorm transformative possibilities for diverse population groups
- When **framing actions to inform decision-making**, use the questions to ideate how to address risks and opportunities to advance gender equality and inclusion

How to use it?

- As triggering questions to **brainstorm** with participants during the foresight process
- As a checklist to **assess** if the current process covers critical aspects

No matter how G-PESTLE is used, it is recommended to **contextualize** the questions according to the specific topic being explored.

¹ UN Futures Lab 2023.

² Wikipedia. n.d.

³ United Nations Sustainable Development Group n.d.

THREE CORE ELEMENTS

1. AREAS TO APPLY FORESIGHT

Building on the UN Futures Lab definition, foresight is a participatory practice, a collective effort, an approach, and a set of tools for systematically thinking and acting in a long-term, anticipatory way under conditions of uncertainty. It goes beyond traditional planning by considering long-term scenarios and emerging changes that may not be immediately visible in traditional data.

The UN Strategic Foresight Guide describes three applications for foresight:

1. **Make sense of change:** to understand what is happening
2. **Imagine possible futures:** to explore what might happen
3. **Take action:** to define how to make the desired change happen

2. PESTLE ANALYSIS

The PESTLE framework, attributed to Francis Aguilar (1967)⁴, supports analysis of macroenvironmental factors to understand external conditions that influence strategic planning and to inform it accordingly.

- **Political:** Governance structures, policies, institutions and legislative frameworks
- **Economic:** Distribution of resources, wealth, opportunities and labour
- **Social:** Cultural norms, demographic trends, education, health and public values
- **Technological:** Access to information, innovation, digital services and infrastructure
- **Legal:** Human rights protection and upholding justice
- **Environmental:** Natural resources, ecosystems, climate change and sustainability

3. UN GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development sets out a vision that is grounded in international human rights and centred on equality and non-discrimination. It encompasses economic and social rights; civil, political and cultural rights; and the right to development.

- **Human rights-based approach (HRBA)**

This dimension encompasses actively promoting and protecting human rights in the vision for and practice of human development. It entails analysing inequalities at the heart of development problems and redressing discriminatory practices and unjust distributions of power that impede development and leave people behind.

- **Gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE)**

This area encompasses discrimination and inequalities (often multiple and intersecting) that undermine the agency of people as holders of rights. Many barriers to services, resources and equal opportunities are not simply accidents of fate or a lack of availability. They result from discriminatory laws, policies and social practices that leave particular groups of people behind.

- **Leaving no one behind (LNOB)**

This element involves shaping attitudes and policy decisions to support the equitable distribution of resources. It is a way of considering how social norms and power structures impact the lives and opportunities of different groups. Understanding that men and women, and boys and girls, experience poverty differently and face diverse barriers in accessing services, economic resources and political opportunities helps to target interventions.

⁴ Aguilar 1967.

PESTLE ANALYSIS (2) AND THE UN GUIDING PRINCIPLES (3)

• **Political + HRBA, LNOB and GEWE**

A gender- and rights-based perspective examines whether political systems actively promote inclusive participation, representation and accountability. It analyses whether groups facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and inequality are equally able to influence decision-making, claim their rights and access justice. Inclusive politics steer power structures towards dismantling, rather than reinforcing, gender inequality.

• **Economic + HRBA, LNOB and GEWE**

A gender- and rights-based perspective examines who has access to decent work, income, social protection and financial services – and who does not. An approach based on human rights and leaving no one behind highlights the need for redistributive policies. These may redress disparities in unpaid care work, promote gender-responsive fiscal policies, address wage gaps and back economic autonomy for all, especially women and girls and groups facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and inequalities.

• **Social + HRBA, LNOB and GEWE**

A gender- and rights-based perspective examines how social structures influence people's roles, status and freedoms, across vulnerable groups. It analyses whether these structures promote dignity, agency and equality for all, especially for women and girls and groups facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and inequalities (e.g., based on race, disability or age). Leaving no one behind calls for transforming exclusionary norms and fostering inclusive social development.

• **Technological + HRBA, LNOB and GEWE**

A gender- and rights-based perspective examines how to identify and address digital divides, biases in artificial intelligence and appropriate access to STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) fields. A human rights-based approach emphasizes digital inclusion, safety and empowerment so that technology upholds rights and agency, especially for women and girls and groups facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and inequalities.

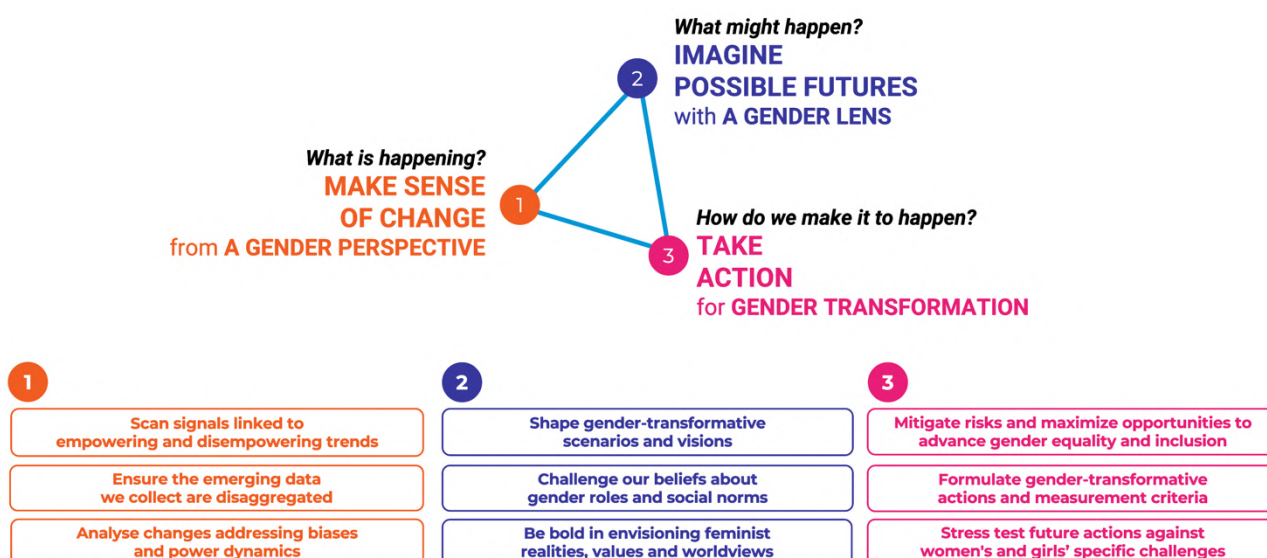
• **Legal + HRBA, LNOB and GEWE**

A gender- and rights-based perspective examines whether laws promote or hinder gender equality, protect bodily autonomy, prevent violence and enable full civic participation. It also examines access to justice – including whether people, especially women and girls and groups facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and inequalities – can seek redress, participate in legal reform and enjoy legal protection without biases.

• **Environmental + HRBA, LNOB and GEWE**

A gender-based perspective examines whether environmental risks and opportunities are experienced equally. Women and vulnerable groups often face disproportionate impacts while playing key roles in climate and environmental resilience. A rights-based approach demands climate and environmental justice, where all communities, especially the most vulnerable, can participate in related governance, access resources equitably, and live with dignity in a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

THREE AREAS TO APPLY FORESIGHT (1) AND THE UN GUIDING PRINCIPLES (3)



WHAT DO WE MEAN BY....?

• Gender-transformative

This refers to approaches that address the root causes of gender inequality by challenging discriminatory norms, roles and power structures. These approaches aim to trigger systemic change by engaging individuals, organizations and communities as agents of transformation, leading to equality and social justice.

• Groups facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination⁵

This refers to groups⁶ who experience overlapping forms of disadvantage based on factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, disability, age, sexual orientation, migratory status and other social characteristics. Intersecting identities may compound exclusion and vulnerability, requiring intersectional approaches to fully realize rights, dignity and access to resources.

• Social norms⁷

Social norms are embedded rules, standards or practices that prescribe relationships between people and key institutions such as the State, market, community and family. Discriminatory social norms are rooted in ideologies that justify inequality and discrimination, including based on gender, class, caste, race and other dimensions. They define where women and men are placed within institutions, and their relative power and privileges. Social norms come to life through narratives and material conditions that structure everyday life and shape what is done, how it is done, who does it and who benefits.

• Do no harm

This describes taking all necessary measures to avoid causing additional harm or exacerbating risks through humanitarian or development actions. It recognizes that interventions are never neutral and must be designed and implemented in ways that do not create new tensions, threats or discrimination, especially for women, girls and marginalized groups.

⁵ United Nations Sustainable Development Group 2022.

⁶ Note: The examples presented in the framework of groups facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination are illustrative only and not exhaustive. They are intended to highlight how topics may affect different people and to stimulate reflection and discussion.

⁷ UN Women 2026.

- **Intersectionality**⁸

This describes the theory that various forms of discrimination, centred on race, gender, class, disability, sexuality and other forms of identity, do not work independently but interact to produce forms of social oppression.

- **Address assumptions and biases**

This refers to actively identifying and challenging conscious and unconscious stereotypes, prejudices and structural barriers that influence decisions, policies and data. It involves deconstructing these biases and integrating inclusion, equity and rights-based approaches in all interventions, particularly for marginalized groups.

- **Duty-bearers**⁹

These comprise actors with a particular obligation or responsibility to respect, promote and realize human rights and to abstain from human rights violations.

- **Rights-holders**¹⁰

This describes individuals or social groups with particular entitlements in relation to specific duty-bearers. In general terms, all human beings are rights-holders under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Fostering gender-transformative foresight capacity means cultivating structured methods to:

- *navigate* uncertainty while challenging biases and power dynamics;
 - *imagine* better futures for all, envisioning transformative realities, especially for people facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination; and
 - *chart* inclusive new paths forward, addressing risks and opportunities in order to advance gender equality.
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⁸ UN Women 2021, 2025.

⁹ UN Women 2024. UNICEF UK 2023.

¹⁰ Ibid.

MAKING SENSE OF CHANGE FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

POLITICAL + HRBA, LNOB and GEWE

- Are there shifts in the **geopolitical landscape** that might affect gender-specific needs and the participation of particular groups of women, such as refugees and displaced women, those in conflict-affected areas, or Indigenous or other marginalized groups?
- What **policies** are starting to be discussed, supported or reconsidered? Who is behind? Who is reacting? Who is affected?
- Are there **(post-) conflict strategies** that might affect people differently in terms of safety, participation and access to resources?

ECONOMIC + HRBA, LNOB and GEWE

- Are there changes in the availability and access to decent **jobs, benefits** or **financial tools** for specific groups, such as poor, older or ethnic minority women in rural areas, those working in informal or precarious labour, or women heading households?
- How are economic changes affecting access to **livelihoods, resources** and **economic autonomy** across diverse groups, especially young women, those with disabilities or women without land rights?

SOCIAL + HRBA, LNOB and GEWE

- Are shifts in access **to education, health** or **basic social protection** affecting groups facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, such as girls and adolescent young women, those with disabilities, older women and/or LGBTIQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer plus) people?
- Are **social norms, values, practices** or **behaviours** changing and influencing how people approach inclusion, equality and dignity?

TECHNOLOGICAL + HRBA, LNOB and GEWE

- Are new **technologies** and **tools** emerging that might have a diverse impact (positive or negative) on women with limited digital access, such as those living in rural areas, with lower incomes or who are older?
- What new technologies are changing how people **relate, work, learn** or **access services** and **information** – and who is being left behind?
- Are technological shifts excluding or enabling women with low literacy from accessing new **digital services** and opportunities?

LEGAL + HRBA, LNOB and GEWE

- Are there any recent **legal reforms** that could affect some groups of women differently, such as women without formal identification, those in customary or religious legal systems, those seeking asylum or those facing intersecting forms of discrimination based on race, disability or sexuality?
- Are **informal legal systems** (e.g., customary or religious) shifting in ways that impact gender justice in the civic space?
- Are changes in policies upholding or weakening ethical values and respect for human dignity?
- Is the realization of **rights** being promoted or discouraged? Is anything changing in the relationship between rights-holders and duty-bearers?

ENVIRONMENTAL + HRBA, LNOB and GEWE

- Are existing risks escalating unexpectedly?
- Are new **environmental risks, crises** or **responses** affecting groups facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, such as women in rural and coastal areas, Indigenous land stewards or those living in informal settlements?
- How are current climate change **mitigation** and **regeneration plans** addressing gender roles?
- How is inequality fuelling **environmental degradation**?

A FICTIONAL EXAMPLE

Trend: Rise of climate tech start-ups focused on geoengineering

Neutral analysis	Analysis from a gender perspective
Climate tech start-ups are rapidly developing geoengineering solutions (such as carbon capture and solar radiation management) to address climate change, often moving faster than governments or academia.	The climate tech sector is mostly male led, raising concerns about whose values and priorities shape major geoengineering decisions. Geoengineering impacts (such as shifts in weather or land use) may disproportionately affect women, girls and groups facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and inequalities, particularly those who depend on natural resources and have less influence in tech governance.
Limitation	Opportunities
Overlooks who designs, funds and is affected by these technologies, assuming benefits are universal.	Elevating diverse voices and disaggregated data can support more ethical, equitable, context-aware and gender-transformative climate tech solutions.

IMAGINING POSSIBLE FUTURES WITH A GENDER LENS

POLITICAL + HRBA, LNOB and GEWE

- How might an unexpected **social reaction** influence political leadership for young, Indigenous, migrant and refugee women, or people from other marginalized groups?
- How might new **political movements** or **policies** be driven by the needs and activism of women human rights defenders, those in peacebuilding roles or grass-roots women's organizations?
- How might regional **security dynamics** challenge or reinforce power relations influencing women in conflict-affected areas, those who are displaced and/or those excluded from security decision-making spaces?

ECONOMIC + HRBA, LNOB and GEWE

- How might a new **job opportunity**, **benefit** or **financial tool** be made accessible to poor, older or ethnic minority women in rural areas, single mothers, those working in informal or precarious labour or women heading households?
- How might an economic change affect access to **livelihoods**, **resources** and **economic autonomy** for groups facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, such as women without land rights, young people entering the labour market, people with disabilities or older adults?

SOCIAL + HRBA, LNOB and GEWE

- How might a social transformation influence access to **education**, **health** or **social protection** for girls, adolescents and young women, those with disabilities, older or LGBTIQ+ people or groups in remote areas?
- How might shifts in **social norms**, **values** or **behaviours** change approaches to inclusion, gender equality and dignity, especially for women belonging to minority ethnic or religious groups, widows or those facing stigma related to HIV, disability or migration status?

TECHNOLOGICAL + HRBA, LNOB and GEWE

- How might a new **technology** impact groups facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, such as women with limited digital **connectivity**, those in low-income households or informal economies, older women or Indigenous women?
- How might a new technology alter how people **relate**, **work**, **learn** or **access services** – and who might be left behind, such as refugee or non-literate women, people living in rural areas or women with caregiving responsibilities that limit digital access?

LEGAL + HRBA, LNOB and GEWE

- How might a new **legal reform** affect different groups of women, including those without formal identification, survivors of gender-based violence, women in customary or religious legal systems, or those seeking asylum or facing intersecting discrimination based on race, disability or sexuality?
- How might an **informal legal system** (e.g., customary or religious) shift or grow in ways that impact gender justice? Which **rights** might be promoted? Which ones might be discouraged?
- How might a new policy influence rights-holders, such as young women, those with disabilities or migrant domestic workers? What would be the responsibilities of State and non-state duty-bearers?

ENVIRONMENTAL + HRBA, LNOB and GEWE

- How might a new **environmental risk, crisis or response** affect women in rural and coastal areas, Indigenous land stewards, people living in informal settlements or those dependent on natural resources for livelihoods?
- How might current climate change **adaptation** and **mitigation plans** impact gender-determined roles, particularly for women responsible for water, fuel and food provision, adolescent girls pulled from school during crises, or older people with limited mobility?

A FICTIONAL EXAMPLE

Driver: Climate-induced migration due to drought

Neutral possible future	Possible future imagined with a gender lens
Increased migration from rural to urban areas due to prolonged drought conditions.	Heightened risks for communities during climate-induced migration include losses of livelihoods, exposure to gender-based violence, and reduced access to health services and decision-making spaces.
Limitation	Opportunities
Treats all migrants as a homogeneous group, ignoring differentiated experiences, roles, safety and access to resources.	Recognizing differentiated impacts and vulnerabilities can lead to more equitable resource allocation and resilience strategies for displaced individuals and communities, for instance, in relation to migration policies, safe transit and shelter infrastructure, access to essential and empowering services, and inclusive urban planning.

TAKING ACTION FOR GENDER TRANSFORMATION

POLITICAL + HRBA, LNOB and GEWE

- What opportunities do we have to challenge gender hierarchies in new **political structures** and realize the meaningful participation of young, Indigenous, migrant and refugee women, and people from marginalized groups?
- What **actors** could be involved in high-level decision-making to safeguard the well-being of women in conflict-affected areas, LGBTIQ+ people and those with disabilities?
- What **governance models** could promote intersectional representation and accountability and advance the inclusion of different groups, such as rural women, informal sector workers and human rights defenders?

ECONOMIC + HRBA, LNOB and GEWE

- Which economic systems could shift to end **gender gaps** in access to decent work, income and social protection, and to recognize and redistribute unpaid care and domestic work?
- What would improved **informal employment** look like, particularly for single mothers, migrant domestic workers, rural populations and people in precarious employment?
- What would an **economic model** that redistributes wealth and labour more equitably look like, including for ethnic minority women, those without land rights, people living in rural areas or people with disabilities?
- What **fiscal** and **monetary policies**, **financial tools** or **incentives** might steer economies that expand opportunities for young women entrepreneurs, Indigenous cooperatives and informal traders?

SOCIAL + HRBA, LNOB and GEWE

- What **cultural values** might emerge or be reimagined through intergenerational dialogues between younger and older generations?
- What **partnerships**, rooted in ethical values and human dignity, might promote pluralism and prevent discrimination, especially against people experiencing stigma or social exclusion?
- What **channels** might make visible the intersectional inequalities experienced by displaced and ethnic minority groups?
- What enablers in the **education system** could advance opportunities and agency for marginalized groups?

TECHNOLOGICAL + HRBA, LNOB and GEWE

- What key **structures**, **capacities** and **resources** might we start developing to achieve technological sovereignty (meaning fair access to, control over and benefits from digital technologies) for rural communities, Indigenous women and those with limited digital access?
- What technological solutions could emerge to benefit caregivers, informal workers and young women entering **STEM fields**?
- What would inclusive **models to access technology** look like so that no one is left behind, especially women and girls in remote areas, displaced women, non-literate or older people, or those with disabilities?
- Which **data management** frameworks could respond to ethical concerns around privacy, consent, transparency, accountability and fairness, and how?

LEGAL + HRBA, LNOB and GEWE

- What would a new **legal system** that recognizes intersectionality look like?
- What is required to promote **human rights** and identify duty-bearers and the needs of the rights-holders, such as women human rights defenders, those who are displaced, survivors of gender-based violence or people with disabilities?
- What **rights-based regulatory reforms** could advance gender equality, especially for rural women without land rights, LGBTIQ+ people, migrant workers or ethnic minority groups?
- Which **monitoring** and **control systems** might uphold and translate new laws into real improvements in women's lives?

ENVIRONMENTAL + HRBA, LNOB and GEWE

- What new products, services and programmes would respect **planetary boundaries** while including groups facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, such as women in rural and coastal areas, living in informal settlements or depending on natural resources for livelihoods?
- What new roles could people play in **ecological resilience**, such as youth climate activists, Indigenous knowledge holders and women in community disaster response networks?
- What forms of **environmental stewardship** can arise from Indigenous knowledge and intergenerational networks?

A FICTIONAL EXAMPLE

Need: Climate resilience planning in a flood-prone region

Neutral action	Action for gender transformation
Develop a community-wide flood early warning system and evacuation plan.	Develop a community-wide flood early warning system and evacuation plan. Design a flood early warning and evacuation system that includes appropriate communication channels and safe shelters for women, girls and groups facing multiple and intersecting discriminations and inequalities, and support for caregivers.
Limitation	Opportunities
Assumes all individuals have equal access to information, mobility and decision-making power, overlooking gender-specific vulnerabilities.	Builds trust, increases resilience and provides equitable access to safety (e.g., protection from violence against women during displacement) and resources (especially for those with caregiving roles) by taking an intersectional approach to risk assessment.

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UN WOMEN EXISTS TO ADVANCE WOMEN'S RIGHTS, GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS.

As the lead United Nations entity on gender equality and secretariat of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, we shift laws, institutions, social norms and services to close the gender gap and build an equal world for all women and girls. Our partnerships with governments, women's movements and the private sector, coupled with our coordination of the broader United Nations, deliver lasting changes. We make strides in four areas: leadership, economic empowerment, freedom from violence, and peace, security and humanitarian action.

UN Women keeps the rights of women and girls at the centre of global progress – always, everywhere. Because gender equality is not just what we do. It is who we are.

The G-PESTLE framework is UN Women's how-to guide to applying a gender-transformative approach to foresight.

Developed through a collaborative design process with colleagues across UN Women country, regional and global offices, the framework provides a practical tool to integrate a gender perspective into strategic foresight exercises with diverse stakeholders, helping to shape gender-transformative outcomes.

G-PESTLE supports users to reflect on how power, social norms and inequality influence our present; imagine new possibilities, especially for people experiencing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination; identify risks and opportunities to advance gender equality; and explore more inclusive paths forward.



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