

# Gender in Kenya's social protection and child protection systems and programmes



MINISTRY OF LABOUR  
AND SOCIAL PROTECTION  
STATE DEPARTMENT FOR  
SOCIAL PROTECTION



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## Introduction

**Social protection programmes that address gender equality can significantly improve the lives of women and girls, with broader positive impacts on men, boys, and communities (Holmes, 2023).** Designing social protection through a gender-transformative lens tackles the root causes of gender inequality, a crucial step towards eradicating poverty (Camilletti, 2020). Well-designed social protection programmes enhance families' resilience to shocks, protect women and girls from violence, increase access to services, and improve women's economic empowerment, voice, and agency. (Holmes, 2023).

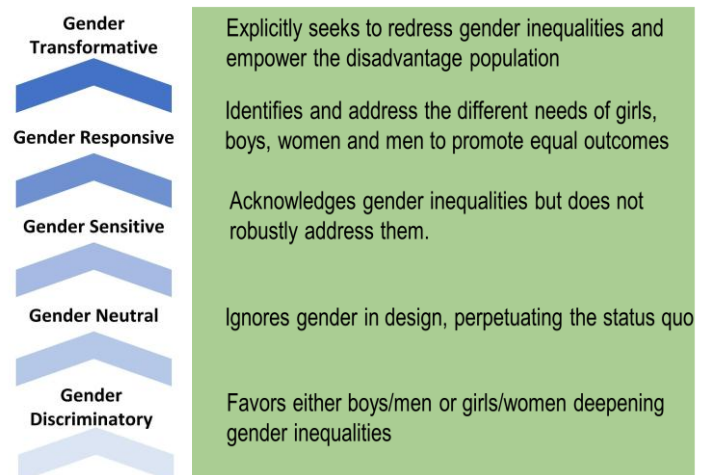
**Kenya has made significant progress in building a larger, more effective social protection and child protection system.** The 'Inua Jamii' cash transfer programmes and a viable child protection system have expanded considerably. In line with policy and strategic commitments, Kenya aims to ensure women and girls are equally protected.

This policy brief provides key insights from a gender assessment of selected social protection interventions and systems in Kenya, including the social protection and child protection workforce and case management systems. The assessment includes in-depth case studies in Garissa and Turkana, focusing on cash transfers under the National Safety Net Programme (NSNP).

## Methodology

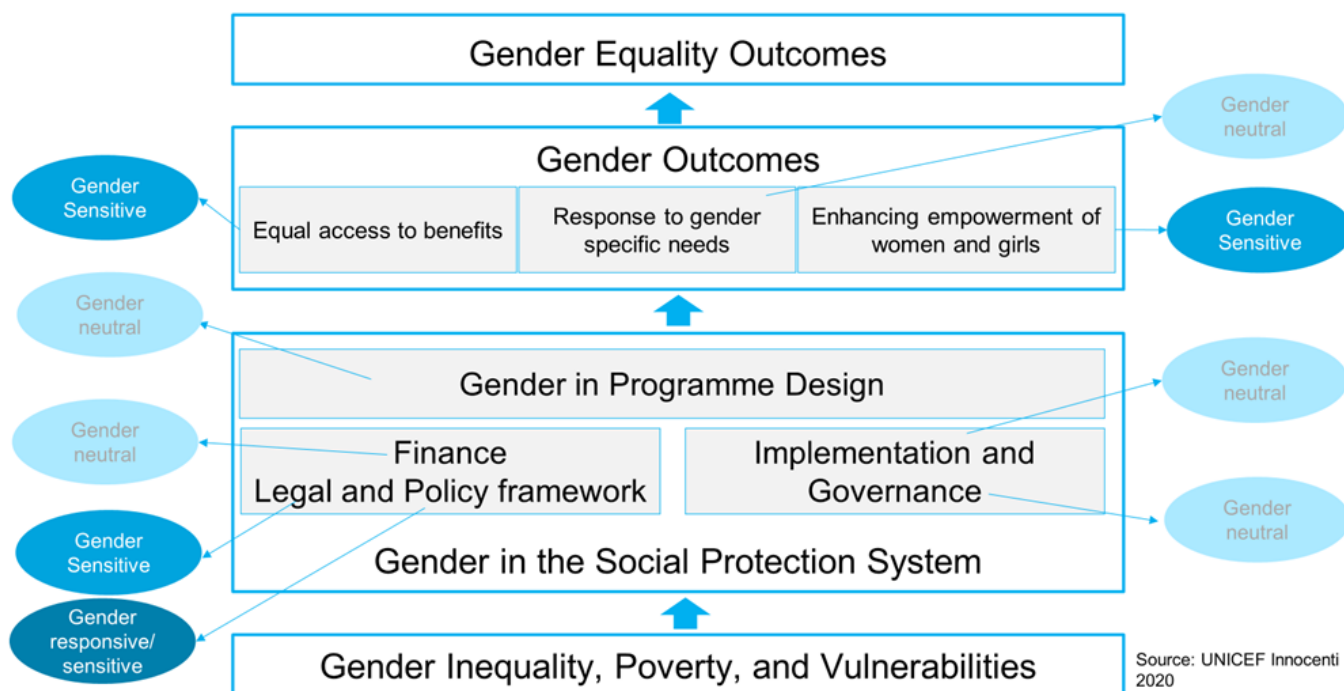
The assessment used the GRASSP conceptual framework developed by UNICEF Innocenti to evaluate gender-responsive social protection. This framework includes elements such as gender inequality, poverty, vulnerabilities, the social protection system (legal and policy frameworks, implementation, governance), and gender-responsive outcomes. Data were triangulated and analysed to assess these elements against the gender integration continuum (GIC).

### Gender Integration Continuum - GIC



## Findings

Kenya's social protection and child protection legal and policy frameworks are gender sensitive, but financing, implementation, governance, and programme design are gender neutral. Overall, more women are registered as NSNP direct and indirect beneficiaries than men, and social protection programmes contribute to women's empowerment, but the social protection and child protection systems do not respond to gender-specific needs and it is not always clear who controls the cash transferred by the NSNP.



## Gender Inequality, Poverty and Vulnerability

**Kenya has seen notable improvements in gender equality outcomes.** 42% of Kenyans are under 17. Individually, men and women are equally likely to be poor, although female-headed households are more likely to be poor than those headed by men.<sup>1</sup> Child health outcomes have improved, but maternal mortality remains high. Education has progressed with increased enrolment rates in early childhood, primary, and secondary education. However, child protection issues persist for girls, including child marriage and teenage pregnancy. Women spend more time on unpaid care work than men, and gender-based violence remains significant.

## Social Protection and Child Protection Systems

### Legal and Policy Frameworks

**Kenya's social protection legal framework and child protection legal and policy frameworks are gender sensitive** (i.e. they acknowledge gender inequalities but do not always prioritise gender needs), **and the social protection policy framework is gender-responsive** (i.e. it deliberately responds to the needs of men and women). These frameworks are grounded in the constitution and legislation such as the Children's Act 2022 and the draft 2024 Social Protection Bill. **However, financing for social and child protection is gender neutral.** Public spending is low at national and county

level. There is a lack of transparency and capacity for gender budgeting. Kenya scored a D on the gender aspects of the 2023 Public Expenditure Financial Accountability (PEFA) assessment.<sup>2</sup>



## Governance and Implementation

**Governance and implementation arrangements are generally gender-neutral.** Coordination between programmes is limited, and the division of responsibility between national and county governments unclear. The social services workforce, including Children's Officers, is under-resourced and inadequately trained on gender issues. Local leadership is largely male. Gender-disaggregated data and evaluation on social protection is limited. Grievance mechanisms rarely account for structural vulnerabilities faced by women.

***'I'm using my salary to do my work'*<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> KNBS 2023

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.pefa.org/node/5129>

<sup>3</sup> Sub-county officer.

## Gender in the NSNP and child protection system design

**The design of the NSNP is largely gender-neutral.** The design process lacks significant input from women. Nutritional Improvement through Cash and Health Education (NICHE) is the only programme that addresses women directly. Eligibility and payment mechanisms are gender-neutral. Women are less likely to have the identity documents and bank accounts that the NSNP requires. Apart from NICHE

which includes men and women in baby friendly nutrition counselling, messaging and complementary services are not sensitive to gender.

**The child protection system design is gender neutral.** Access to the information that would support referrals is limited, especially for women who may be less likely to attend community meetings. There are very limited attempts to address gendered vulnerabilities, and relatively limited take up of services by women.



***‘For one to be under the programme you must have a required documentation and getting some of those documents is hard’<sup>4</sup>***

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<sup>4</sup> Focus group with women, Turkana.

## Gender-Responsive Outcomes

The NSNP performs well in providing equal access to benefits, except for the People with Severe Disabilities Cash Transfer (PwSD-CT). However, it is not always clear who receives the actual benefits when the registered beneficiary is a woman, and even when a woman collects the money, it is not clear whether she always controls spending. There is some limited evidence that the NSNP can

address gender-specific needs, such as vulnerability of adolescent girls to early marriage. Some evidence suggests that the NSNP supports women's empowerment, economic status, respect, and decision-making, though this varies by context. Assessments indicate that social protection programmes positively impact household outcomes such as health, education, and positive parenting, especially from a gender perspective.



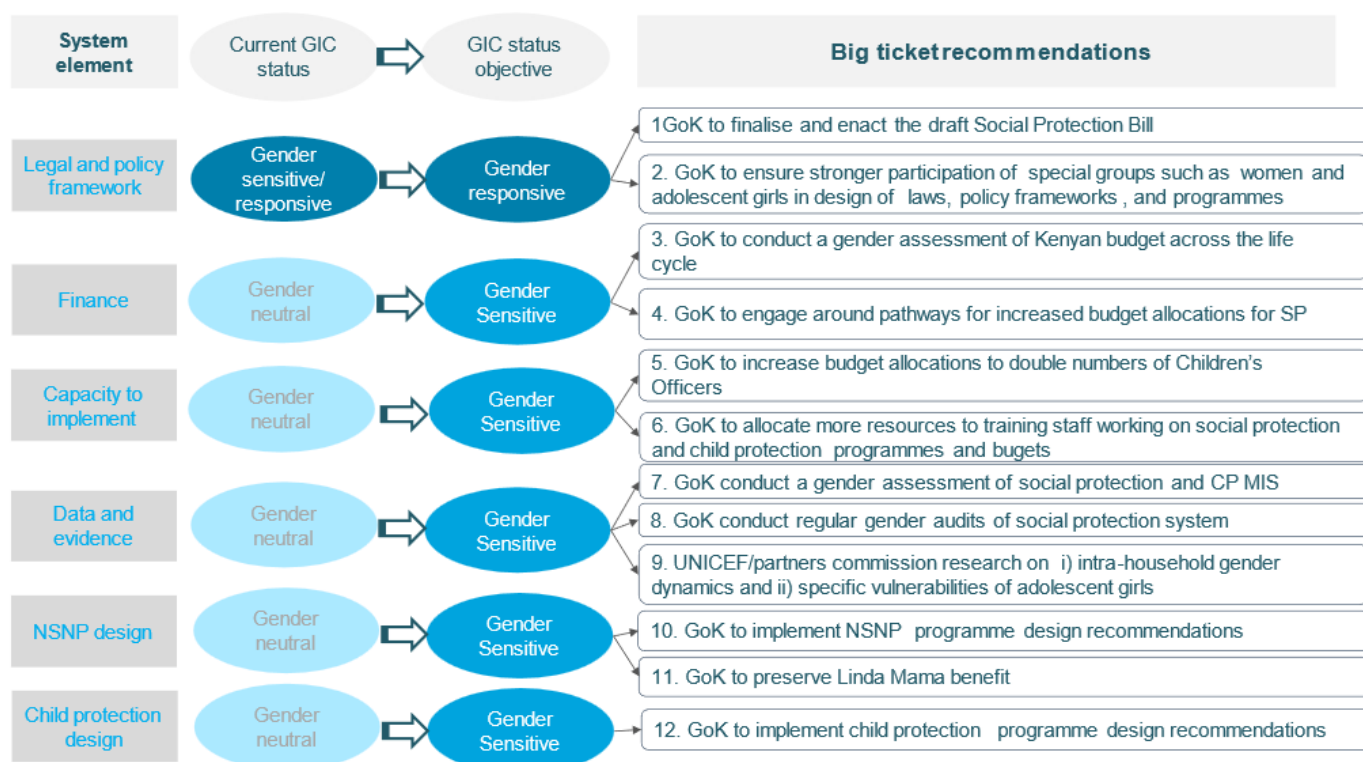
***‘The majority (of men) take the money home to benefit their families.’<sup>5</sup>***

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<sup>5</sup> Focus group discussion with women in Garissa.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of the assessment, we propose twelve ‘big ticket’ recommendations and a series of ‘regular’ recommendations, to move social protection and child protection systems and programmes up the gender integration continuum. Here, we summarise the big ticket recommendations and then outline them by year. The full report has a more detailed set of recommendations and timelines.



### In 2025:

1. **GoK should finalise and enact the Social Protection Bill** as soon as possible, to finalise the current legal framework for gender-responsive social protection.
2. GoK, with support from development partners, should **conduct a gender assessment of the Management Information Systems (MIS) for all social protection and child protection programmes** to determine the current state of gender relevant data, including gender disaggregation, in terms of both data collection and analysis.
3. GoK, together with development partners should **design and commission a standard and routine rapid gender audit** that can be regularly implemented of child protection and social protection programming.
4. GoK should begin to **implement the programme design recommendations for NSNP** to enhance gender-responsiveness. The most pivotal programme design recommendations include programme objectives (e.g. adolescents, unpaid care/

care economy, disability), cash transfer value and payment modality (digital transfers), eligibility criteria and targeting of women, ID registration requirements, inter-linkages between child protection and social protection case management, and gender-responsive communications campaigns/ messaging.

5. **GoK should preserve the Linda Mama maternity benefit**, which plays an essential part in protecting women during a key life cycle period of gendered vulnerability. Withdrawing this benefit as a cost saving measure would significantly worsen outcomes and Kenya's gender responsiveness.
6. GoK should begin to **implement the programme design recommendations for Child Protection** to enhance gender-responsiveness through: Key priorities for design recommendations include increasing the social service workforce, providing gender-sensitive training for them, strengthening referrals and interlinkages for GBV services, psychosocial support, and social protection programmes especially for unpaid carers, national and county budgeting for allocation and spending, and increasing the voices and agency of women and adolescents.

## In 2026:

7. GoK, with support from development partners, should **organise stronger participation of special groups such as women, adolescents, persons with disabilities, etc. in programme and policy design** and in the specification of objectives as well as work to support the voices of girls and women to be expressed, including on emerging issues in child protection and social protection.
8. The MoLSP should engage around the next budget cycle on possible pathways to **increasing budget allocations and spending for social protection** by commissioning a combination of products designed to strengthen commitment from MoF, the President, and parliamentarians for increased financial allocations for social protection and child protection. Increased budget allocation could improve coverage of women and girls in general, support higher transfer values, support programmes addressing specific vulnerabilities, support more cash plus programming, support more and better trained social workers, and is a necessary condition for several other recommendations below.
9. The **GoK should allocate greater resources to training staff** working on social protection and child protection programmes and systems. This includes working with the Kenya School of Government to organise short-term training programmes for the social protection and child protection workforce, particularly Children's Officers but also including those involved in budgets to support gender mainstreaming in budgets.
10. GoK with development partners should **commission research on the specific vulnerabilities facing adolescent girls and boys in Kenya**, and an investment case for addressing them.

## In 2027:

11. GoK, with support from development partners, should **commission a periodic gender assessment of the GoK budget** across the life cycle, including age dimensions to encompass children, adolescents, and adults.
12. **GoK should increase allocations for social service workforce**, including Children's Officers, to enhance child protection capacity and gender-related social protection referrals and linkages for households.

**Together, these recommendations will put Kenya on the path to a gender transformative social protection and child protection system, delivering both more equity and more effective systems.**

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