

The Auditor Guide to Conducting a Gender-Sensitive Audit

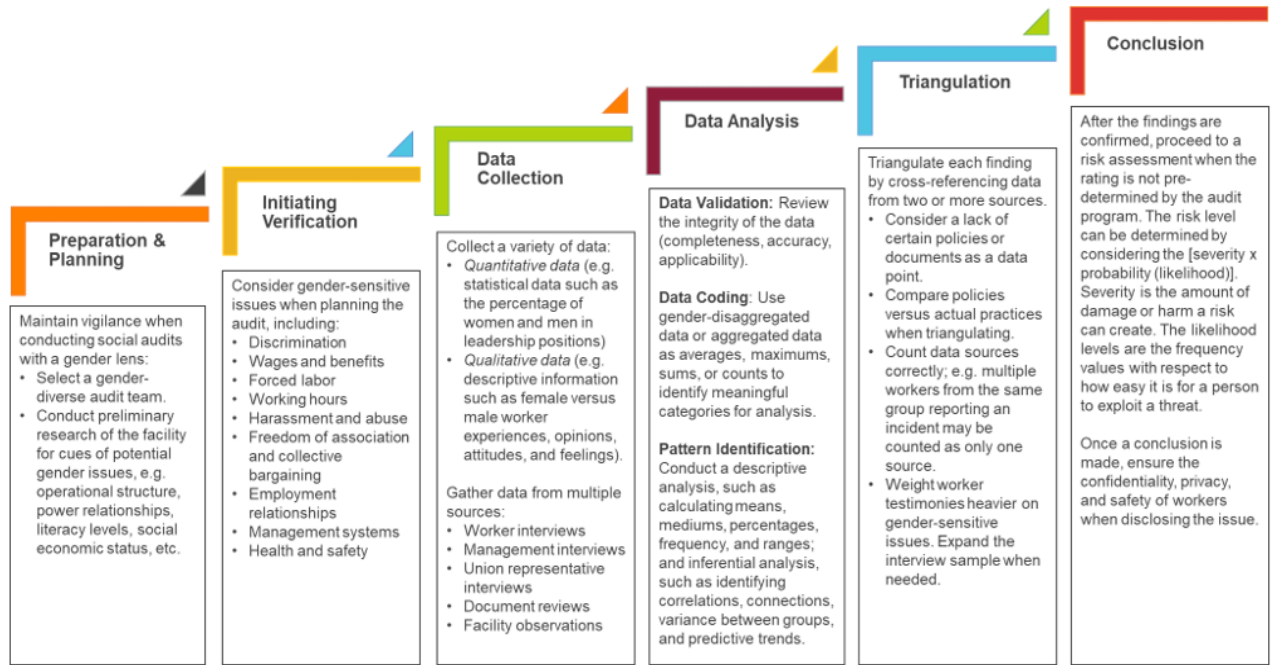
This guide provides practical guidance and tips for social auditors on how to identify gender-sensitive issues during a social audit. Audit company (second-party or third-party) professionals can also incorporate this information into their training plans, audit protocols, and methodologies.

The guide contains four sections:

- I) process for identifying and assessing gender-sensitive issues;
- II) gender-sensitive worker interview techniques;
- III) tips for reporting gender-sensitive issues; and
- IV) verification measures for different code-of-conduct categories.

Access the full guide here:

https://www.bsr.org/reports/BSR_Gender_Equality_in_Social_Auditing_Guidance.pdf



More guidance is available on [page 17](#)

II. Gender-Sensitive Worker Interview Techniques

1 Sample Selection

The interview methodology should consider:

- Proportional gender representation** for each selection criteria
- Vulnerability factors**, e.g. employment type (temporary, migrant, part-time), lower-level positions, low literacy levels, and underrepresented groups
- Appropriate aggregated profiling** for specific topics, e.g. young and mid-age groups on maternity issues

2 Interview Format

Select the appropriate interview format for gender-sensitive topics:

- Individual interviews:** One-on-one discussions when anonymity is crucial. *Tip: Consider the appropriateness of the interviewer's gender.*
- Focused group (single sex):** Informal group dialogues on commonly experienced topics. *Tip: Select an all-female group to minimize gender domination or potential "embarrassing" moments for women.*
- Focused group (mixed-sex):** Informal group dialogue. Be aware of potential power imbalances and gender dynamics. This group can also be used for validation.
- Spot interviews:** Discussions with potential bystanders on their indirect views of an incident, e.g. guards, onsite nurses, canteen workers, janitors, or non-production staff.



3 Interview Location

Select an appropriate location for the interviews:

- High privacy and soundproof locations are ideal.
- Avoid areas where interviews can be monitored or observed.
- Maintain minimal people traffic or distractions.

4 Interview Approach

Use the following techniques during an interview:

- Build rapport:** Demonstrate empathy and ensure appropriate eye contact with interviewees. *Tip: Find relevant and interesting topics to discuss with workers. Give them time and space to speak.*
- Provide context:** Minimize interviewees' feelings of being threatened or targeted. For example, avoid asking: "Are you being discriminated against because of your gender?" Instead, ask: "In your community, would you say it's more common that..."
- Deliberate loading:** Make questions sound casual and acceptable; remove sense of threat; and show understanding and compassion. *"See sample interview questions on discrimination."*

5 Question Format

- Use **indirect and open-ended questions** to avoid coming across as being too direct or blunt. For example, replace "Have you been subject to harassment?" with "How are relationships among coworkers/supervisors here?" Or ask: "I saw a young female wearing a mini skirt outside the facility. What would be the reaction if she were to walk in here?"
- Formulate questions using familiar wording** and provide enough details in your questions to avoid ambiguity.

III. Tips for Reporting Gender-Sensitive Issues

- Report uncorroborated issues:** When strong suspicions are discovered based on probative facts but are unable to be triangulated, maintain records of the discovery in a supplementary document, which can be reported or used as a reference for future follow-up. This is especially relevant for sexual harassment cases.
- Keep in mind previous reported issues:** An audit is typically scoped to assess the previous 12-month period. Older issues may be considered historical. Weigh the potential risks or impact of the prior issue to determine how to handle and report the current case.
- Data protection is critical:** Always protect the privacy of workers involved!
- Think twice before disclosing to factory management:** Refrain from disclosing sensitive information that could harm women with facility management if you think that workers' safety and well-being are at risk!

More guidance is available on [page 28](#)

IV. Sample Verification Measures

	Sample Document Review	Sample Worker Questions	Observations
Discrimination/Equal Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies on non-discrimination • Policies, procedures, and records related to hiring and termination • Disciplinary procedures and records • General company policies and training records to identify gender bias or discrimination • HR records for overall workforce profile 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have heard there are several pregnant workers. How are their working hours, benefits, pay, promotion opportunities, etc.? • People say certain jobs are more difficult for women to apply. Does this sound familiar? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signs of discriminatory postings • Discriminatory acts among supervisors and workers • Disproportionate # of men v. women in management • % of female v. male dismissals/resignations • # of women returning from maternity leave • Workforce profile highlights potential structural and/or intersectional, multi-layered discrimination
Wages and Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wages and benefits policies and processes (including digitization of wages) • Employment contracts to ensure gender-relevant benefits like maternity leave, childcare, or other family leave 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It seems to me there is a good mix of female and male workers here. Could you describe the benefits female workers receive that male workers don't receive? • I heard some new workers joined recently. How are wages determined for new workers? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trends in unequal pay for the same position • Overtime or other benefits that are available predominantly for a certain gender • Comparison of base salaries, as well as the net income, for men and women • Deductions specific to a gender
Forced Labor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies on recruitment fees and deposit payments, including those for labor providers, temporary agencies, and recruiters • Recruitment and termination processes • Employment contracts for men and women • Payroll documents for deductions, deposits, loans, levies, and unpaid benefits. Review gender-disaggregated data. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I heard some people in the region have been recruited through labor brokers. Does that happen here? Do you need to pay money to work here? • If your friend wants to quit, what is the process? • It may be common to work overtime to meet production deadlines. What happens when a worker refuses to work overtime? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signs of segregation between groups, isolated individuals, or a hidden workforce • Restricted areas (not production or hazard related) • Fearful looking workers during facility tours • Security guards' behaviors when interacting with workers, especially during breaks or lunch time
Working Hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies and records related to regular and overtime working hours, overtime, breaks, rest days, sick leave, maternity leave, and breastfeeding breaks • Notification boards for overtime announcements • Quotas or production targets • Surveillance recording (CCTV cameras) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does your day look like? When do you normally finish work, and what do you normally do after work? • What happens if your children are sick and you need to take them to the doctor? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistently tired-looking individuals • Signs of hidden working-hour records • Excessive working hours for specific groups
Harassment and Abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti-harassment and abuse policies • Awareness/prevention training programs and records • Grievance mechanism policy with whistleblower protection and non-retaliation clauses • Complaint logs and investigation reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If I were to make a mistake on a product, how would the supervisor discipline me? • I recently read an article that 70% of women experience harassment in the workplace. Harassment can be as simple as sexual jokes, banter, or unwanted touching. Have you heard of this here? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signs of disciplinary action • Sexual posters at workers' workstations • Unusual or discomfoting interactions between supervisors and workers • Unusual interactions among workers (mixed- or single-gender groups) and/or body language
Health and Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health and safety (H&S) policies to ensure they accommodate and protect women's needs • Break policies: rights to rest, drink, and take toilet breaks • Healthcare policies and services, including insurance, referral services, and quality and conditions of daycare, healthcare, and medical facilities • H&S risk assessments to identify gender-related risks • Toilet facilities (gender-segregated) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you were to become pregnant, what would your hours, work load, and tasks look like? • I saw that you work with chemicals. How was the use of chemicals explained to you? • Are moms of newborns given time for nursing? • You all seem very busy here. How often can you use the toilet? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there risks to women's reproductive health or pregnant workers' exposure to hazardous substances or dangerous work positions? • Observe material data sheets and improper use of personal protective equipment (PPE). • Evaluate if restrooms provide adequate privacy, are clean, and have the # of toilets proportionate to the # of men and women on staff (gender-segregated).
Freedom of Association & Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worker representative lists • Collective bargaining agreements • Grievance incidences investigations and resolutions • Meeting minutes • Election records 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I heard that there is a union/worker committee here. How often do women run for office? Why? • How are women's issues discussed during committee meetings? • To what extent can women raise issues? Are they respected when they raise issues? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is worker representation proportional to the gender breakdown of employees? • Do collective bargaining agreements address gender issues? • Are grievances handled by the appropriate gender, and resolved fairly and effectively? • Are meetings held at a convenient location and time for women?
Employment Relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Types of employment contracts by gender 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I heard that it is difficult to become a permanent employee here. Are non-permanent workers being treated fairly and equally? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observe if workers with more vulnerable employment statuses (permanent, temporary, seasonal, migrants, homeworkers, subcontractors, piece-rate workers) are treated equally.
Management Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Company policies for clauses indicating gender mainstreaming and use of gender-inclusive language • Processes, communications, and training records on gender equality • M&E and gender-disaggregated data-collection processes • Any system that allows workers to provide feedback on the company's gender policies and processes (worker committee, gender committee, suggestion box, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you received any training on gender equality? • How do you feel about the company's commitment to empower women? Are there any programs specifically to help women advance in the company? • Is there a place to get more details on procedures related to discrimination, harassment, or H&S, etc.? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observe employee notice boards and bulletins for any gender-specific communications or issues. • Is gender-disaggregated data analyzed and findings used to update policies and systems? • Is a worker feedback loop adequately maintained and considered for workplace adjustments?

More guidance is available on [page 35](#)

Note: This one pager does not represent an exhaustive list of gender sensitive audit procedures, protocols, or practices. The Sample Verification Measures section only contains a short list of examples. To access the comprehensive guidance click [here](#).

