Gender equality policies and intersectionality: strategies and keys to articulation

Políticas de igualdad de género e interseccionalidad: estrategias y claves de articulación

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is twofold. First, to critically review the main strategies for addressing multiple inequalities; and second, to identify the key points for mainstreaming the intersectional framework in gender equality policies. The methodology is based on a literature review of the state of the art and the examination of different equality and no-discrimination plans and programs in the European and Latin American contexts. The results show the characteristics of the main policy strategies to address multiple inequalities (unitary expanded, multiple and intersectional) as well as their possibilities and limitations. They also show the relevance to incorporate the intersectional approach in all the phases of the policy cycle (problematization, diagnosis, design, procedures, and evaluation). In conclusion, the intersectional approach allows accessing groups and issues located at the crossroads of inequalities, increasing the efficiency, equity and inclusiveness of equality policies by accessing issues that are usually ignored and underestimated behind unitary categories.

Key words: intersectionality, equality policies, multiple discrimination, public policies, gender inequality.

Resumen: El objetivo de este trabajo es doble. Primero, realizar una revisión crítica de las principales estrategias de abordaje político de las desigualdades múltiples; y, segundo, identificar los puntos clave para la transversalización del marco interseccional en las políticas de igualdad de género. La metodología se basa en una revisión bibliográfica del estado de la cuestión y en el examen de distintos planes y programas de igualdad y no discriminación desarrollados en los contextos europeo y latinoamericano. Los resultados muestran las características de las principales estrategias políticas para abordar las desigualdades múltiples (unitaria expandida, múltiple e interseccional), así como sus posibilidades y limitaciones. También se evidencia la pertinencia de incorporar el enfoque interseccional en todas las fases del ciclo de las políticas (problematización, diagnóstico, diseño, procedimientos y evaluación). En conclusión, el enfoque interseccional permite acceder a colectivos y problemáticas

situados en los cruces de las desigualdades, incrementando la eficiencia, equidad e inclusividad de las políticas de igualdad al acceder a cuestiones habitualmente ignoradas y subestimadas tras categorías unitarias.

Palabras clave: interseccionalidad, políticas de igualdad, discriminación múltiple, políticas públicas, desigualdad de género.

Introduction

Approaching the multiple inequalities in gender equality policies is producing an intense theoretical, methodological and political debate about the most suitable, efficacious and inclusive strategies. Acknowledging that gender inequalities can be neither understood nor addressed in their complexity from a unidimensional perspective, the need to advance toward more open and interactive visions that recognize the confluence of various inequality lines that intersect gender such as race, ethnicity, social class, age, socioeconomic position, migrant status, disability or gender and sexual diversity has been emphasized (Comisión Europea, 2020; Comité para la Eliminación de la Discriminación Racial, 2009; Comisión Europea contra el Racismo y la Intolerancia, 2012).

In this regard, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, in the 2017 report, points at the deficiencies in the political treatment of the "intersectional forms of discrimination and violence that affect women and girls", and in particular regarding "economic exclusion and poverty, education, health care, violence, participation, equality before the law, and access to justice administration" as a result of the intersection of sexism, xenophobia, and racism (Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Derechos Humanos, 2017: 15).

The report above underscores the vulnerability of women and girls in certain racial, ethnic and religious groups, specifically in "contexts of deprivation of liberty and armed conflict, forced sterilization of indigenous women, abuse of female migrant laborers"; violence against refugee, displaced and asylum-seeking women; and the situation of multiple discrimination faced by "women in rural zones, and particularly, indigenous and Afro-descendant women" (Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Derechos Humanos, 2017: 3).

The European Parliament, for its part, recognizes the various forms of discrimination on the basis of interactions between gender, ethnicity / race and nationality (Parlamento Europeo, 2008), and the greatest exposure of disabled women to violent situations and domestic and labor exploitation,

multiple discrimination in access to education and employment (Parlamento Europeo, 2013). Particularly, intersectional attention has been paid to the sphere of violence, as noticed in the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women (Organización de Estados Americanos, 1994), in the Istanbul Convention (Consejo de Europa, 2011) and in the resolutions of the European Parliament (2014a and 2014b) on violence against women, sexual exploitation and prostitution.

Despite these international mandates, the developments in legislations and public policies to approach multiple inequalities are still limited (Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Derechos Humanos, 2017; Chopin and Germaine, 2016; Comisión Europea, 2007; Fredman, 2016). In the case of gender equality policies, the incorporation of a vision to sensitively address the various inequalities is especially necessary to reach goals more efficiently, but mainly more equitably and inclusively to encompass the most vulnerable profiles, frequently excluded by unitary approaches (Hankivsky and Jordan-Zachery, 2019). Moreover, certain social problems such as violence, social inclusion, and social and political participation, employment inequalities, education or health care cannot be suitably addressed without this multiple and interconnected vision (Guzmán Ordaz and Jiménez Rodrigo, 2015; Hankivsky, 2012).

Intersectionality is a powerful analytical, social and political intervention tool to state the relevance of approaching the complexity of power, privilege and disadvantage relations as a product of the mutually constitutive interaction of various sorts of inequalities (Collins and Bilge, 2018). The intersectional context is conducive to articulating gender with other categories of social division such as race, ethnicity, social class, age, disability or sexuality to address heterogeneity and inequality in the collective of women (Anthias, 2020). This is a complex task that cannot be reduced to the mere incorporation of more "subgroups" into policies, as it implies the transversalization of a series of principles or intersectional keys in the various stages the policies undergo.

In this article, a critical review is made as regards the main contributions and discussions of the application of gender equality policies from a multiple and intersectional framework of inequality, as well as an exposition of the various keys and strategies to articulate political intersectionality. This work is supported on a bibliographic review of the topic and on the examination of various practical experiences of equality and no-discrimination policies, paying special attention to the European and Latin American contexts.

From unitary to intersectional approaches: possibilities and limitations

Intersectionality as an analytical and transformation paradigm of social inequalities comes from the contributions of the so-called multiracial, peripheral or colonial feminisms (Meloni, 2012) that pinpoint the limitations of unitary approaches supported on a single differentiation category or inequality. Various are the theoretical-political approaches (Crenshaw, 1989; Choo and Ferre, 2010; Davis, 2018; Ferre, 2018; Hancock, 2007; Hankivsky, 2012; hooks, 2020; McCall, 2005; Collins and Bilge, 2018) which have been developed to apply the intersectional framework to research and propose social interventions.

Among the proposals to assess public policies, distinguishable is the one by Ange-Marie Hancock, which is particularly useful to analyze political intersectionality. Hancock (2007: 67) distinguishes three models in the political approach of inequalities: unitary, multi-strand and intersectional. The unitary model emphasizes a single category of identity or differentiation that is defined as the most relevant or explicative. The multi-strand model *a priori* establishes the role of various categories —for example, race, class or gender— as important, though conceptually independent when the political phenomenon is examined. Finally, the intersectional model incorporates the interactive and mutually constituting relation of various categories, examining the way in which race / ethnicity and gender (or other relevant categories) interact in the configuration of political problems.

The usual approaches regarding inequality have been largely supported on the unitary model, mainly on gender and race / ethnicity (Kantola, 2014; Lombardo and Agustin, 2012). However, this unitary, homogeneous and isolated approach to the reasons for differentiation and inequality "exhibits limitations to apprehend the complexity of discrimination processes, frequently supported on the interaction of many factors" (Jiménez Rodrigo, 2018: 203). Considering social intervention groups homogeneous and static might become the policies' "failure to identify" the differential effect of stereotypes, discriminations and inequalities –for example, ethnic-racial reasons– in women's experiences (Jiménez Rodrigo, 2020: 321).

In like manner, policies against racial and ethnic discrimination can fail to address gender inequalities (Squires, 2008). Prioritizing gender may entail a simplification of the complex intersections between inequalities and the essentialization of the "gender" and "women" categories, which may turn into inadequately addressing the experiences of groups located at the

intersections of inequalities, and even in the reproduction or production of new inequalities regarding multi-marginalized groups of women (Ferree, 2018).

In the face of these limitations, intersectionality is an analytical and political frame with great potential to contest the binary and partial proposals regarding power relations supported only on gender stratification (Guzmán Ordaz, 2015). These critiques, initially focused on the "gender, class and race" intersection (Crenshaw, 1989; Davis, 2018; Hancock, 2007; hooks, 2020), have been extended toward other differentiation and inequality referents such as ethnicity, indigenism, miscegenation, disability, age or gender, and sexual-affective diversity.

The need to open the feminist emancipatory project to the heterogeneity of women is also proposed in the sphere of equality policies. And it is here where the concept of "political intersectionality" is found, originally coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) to express the insufficiencies of unitary policies in gender equality and against racial discrimination to satisfactorily deal with the particular forms of discrimination racialized black women experience.

These lacks in unitary policies have also been pointed out regarding other intersectional groups of women such as Roma (Kóczé, 2018; Seta, 2016), indigenous (Herrera and Duhaime, 2014), migrants (Guzmán Ordaz, 2015), with disabilities (Campos Pinto, 2016), or people with sexual genders different from the cisheteronormativity (Romero and Montenegro, 2018). In such manner that the incorporation of the intersectional perspective may contribute to better understand the social complexity of gender inequalities, and propose more inclusive social policies (Squires, 2008), more effective and equitable (Lombardo and Agustin, 2012) specifically dealing with the various and uneven experiences of women.

However, the intersectional approach has also limitations to be applied, since it has to take up the complex challenge of integrating widely diverse characteristics and dynamics of inequality in function of the inequality base upon which they support (Verloo, 2006). One of the main difficulties is the selection and determination of differentiation lines and social inequalities in the design of the equality policies. The way these lines are included in policies and how their relation —of subordination, independence or intersection (Hancock, 2007)— is defined has important effects on the determination of the groups or subgroups which the policies and their actions will be aimed at, and this may contribute to overlook or underrepresent certain intersectoral experiences in relation to others (Purdie-Vaughn and Eibach, 2008).

Another important limitation refers to the irreflective and decontextualized utilization of the intersectionality concept which, as it has been the case with gender or interculturality, has ended up becoming fashionable (Gandarías, 2017) and is frequently applied with no practical or theoretical support. In this way, for example, this abuse of the concept materializes in its use at a merely discursive level in the drafting of many plans and programs of equality, but without practical effects on the design and setting into motion of their measures (Jiménez Rodrigo, 2020).

This excessive and precipitous use of intersectionality may become the highly criticized practice of "adding and mixing inequalities" (Hankivsky and Grace, 2015), disregarding the contextual conditions that define the processes of social inequalities and the specificities of diverse groups. This entails an "oversimplification" of the policies that deal with the various stratification categories considering them similar or equivalent when addressing different and specific intersectional experiences (Squires, 2008). This has been called "inclusive policies for everyone" (Lombardo and Agustin, 2012) or "one-size-fits-all" policies (Verloo, 2006).

Furthermore, a fundamental challenge faced by the intersectional approach is a contradiction between various political demands and interests that various groups may have regarding their goals of equality and social justice (Fraser, 2006; Squires, 2008). For example, when the recognition of some cultural or religious rights may come into conflict with gender equality goals (Okin, 2017). Another especially polemic debate line in feminism refers to the risks of the *de-gendering* of equality policies as a consequence of the application of other diversity and inequality approaches, and which may entail detriment to the main goal of gender equality and the dissolution of the category "women" as political subjects. In such manner that it is referred that gender may tend to disappear as an explicit or main category by incorporating other inequality categories in gender equality policies. In this way, the "only intersectional" approach may obscure the distinctive ontology of each inequality line, an aspect considered crucial for the effectiveness and quality of equality policies (Lombardo and Agustin, 2012).

In addition to the theoretical difficulties, the incorporation of the intersectional perspective into equality policies also faces practical and political barriers. Firstly, due to the complexity of the intersectional analysis, which prevents the application or mere adaptation of gender mainstreaming tools, it needs new more comprehensive analytical tools and also to put forward political interventions more sensitive to multiple inequalities (Verloo, 2006).

Second, the prevalence of unitary and separate normative and institutional models to protect equality and no-discrimination complicates the combination of various reasons for discrimination into the policies and also the identification of new "subgroups" that reflect intersectional experiences (Fredman, 2016). Third, the political priority traditionally given to certain reasons for inequality and discrimination —for example, gender or race / ethnicity— are subordinated or made invisible regarding other profiles situated in intersectional positions (Kantola, 2014). And four, the processes of "competition between inequalities" (Verloo, 2006) may intensify in a context of broadening of antidiscrimination policies and increasing competence for resources (Lombardo and Agustin, 2012). In this way, the best organized groups with the most capitals are able to obtain higher representativity and influence capacity on equality policies, which in practice entails reinforcing the invisibility and exclusion of the most vulnerable groups.

Rather than invalidating the intersectional approach all these limitations, challenges and dilemmas point at the need to produce accurate analyses on the structural processes and dynamics of inequality in particular spheres of action (Verloo, 2006), heeding the contradictions and antagonisms inside and between the groups targeted by the policies (Squires, 2008).

Strategies for the political approach of multiple inequalities

From Hancock's (2007) classification, three main strategies to approach multiple inequalities are identified in gender equality policies, in function of the sort of interaction between various differentiation and inequality lines: the expanded unitary strategy, the multi-strand and the intersectional.

Expanded unitary strategy

The expanded unitary strategy focuses on a single line of inequality or social differentiation that is considered privileged or a priority, and from this, other subordinate lines incorporate, in which crossings, it is understood, the experiences of discrimination of particular subgroups intensify. It is a hierarchical additive model of inequalities that corresponds to an *intra-categorial* problematization of gender inequality (McCall, 2005), and in which the internal differences and inequalities of a collective are examined. It bases upon a pragmatic approach which states that complex intersections between inequalities do not need new intervention instruments or specific

policies, making it possible to use and extend the existing resources of the unitary approach to deal with intersectional problems (Verloo, 2006).

In the case of gender equality policies, resorting to the expansive unitary policy is becoming usual to try to amplify the effects toward subgroups of women in situations of particular vulnerability (Jiménez Rodrigo, 2020; Lombardo and Agustin, 2012). In the European sphere, we have numerous examples, as noticed in the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 (Comisión Europea, 2020), which addresses particular situations of women regarding age, ethnicity / racial, religion, disability, or sexual identity. At national level, the 2018–2030 National Strategy for Equality and No-Discrimination of Portugal has been distinguished, as it recognizes that the experiences of women cannot be considered homogeneous, and calls for addressing the specific needs of Roma, Afro-descending, elderly, migrant or refugee women (Portugal, Presidência do Conselho de Ministros, 2018).

For its part, Ireland's National Strategy for Women and Girls (2017-2020) states the need to assist women in disadvantage, elderly women, disabled elderly women, Roma and Traveller women, as well as migrant women (Ireland, Department of Justice and Equality, 2017). In Spain, the incorporation of this expansive, hierarchical and additive perspective into the integral plans for gender equality is still limited and uneven between regions. Above all, age, rurality and social exclusion are the main lines that intersect gender to identify certain profiles pointed out as vulnerable such as girls, female youth, elderly, rural and prostituted women as well as victims of trafficking, drug-user or homeless women (Jiménez Rodrigo, 2020).

In the Latin American sphere, the incorporation of multiple inequalities is tangibly present in security plans, especially in relation to the intersection of gender, race, and ethnicity, focusing on the needs and problems of indigenous and Afro-descendant women (CEPAL, 2017).

Bolivia's *Plan Nacional para la Igualdad de Oportunidades* [National Plan for Equal Opportunities] follows, additionally, a "decolonization approach to the concept of gender by stressing the importance of considering the relationship between urban indigenous and rural indigenous nuclei, between mestizo and indigenous women, and between white and mestizo women" (Ministerio de Justicia de Bolivia, 2008: 30). For its part, Guatemala's *Plan de Equidad de Oportunidades* (2008-2023) [Plan for Equity in Opportunities] articulates gender and cultural-ethnic approaches to incorporate indigenous women into the core of its policies (Gobierno de la República de Guatemala, 2009). Adding to this, the importance given to

the promotion of the autonomy and participation of indigenous women in decision-making processes is noticeable (CEPAL, 2017).

Expanded unitary models have advantages and limitations to approach multiple inequalities. Among the main advantages one finds the harnessing of already existing regulations, structures, experiences, methods and tools for gender mainstreaming (Verloo, 2013) or to approach other inequality lines on the basis of ethnic-racial discriminations or migration status, for example. They allow focusing specific actions on multi-discriminated subgroups by means of 'intra-categorial diversification' (Krizsan, 2012) within a broader perspective. In such manner that the expansion of unitary policies for equality toward the complexity of intersectional inequality may be a way to increase their efficacy, equity and quality (Lombardo and Agustin, 2012), enriching gender *mainstreaming* (Walby, 2009). At once, the ontological and political identity of gender equality as a goal would be preserved by considering "the minorities in disadvantage within the minorities in disadvantage" (Squires, 2008: 56).

On the one side, the expanded hierarchical models have difficulties to work with intersectionality (Crowley, 2016), since the subordinate condition of various inequality lines may lead to an uneven coverage and intensity as regards the attention to determinate subgroups (Hankivsky and Grace, 2015). Oftentimes, this expansive strategy is limited to the particular addition of certain profiles that experience the issues dealt with in the policies in an intensified manner, but without addressing their problems and necessities from an integral approach.

It is the case of women with disabilities, who are included very marginally in some actions of Spanish equal-opportunity plans (Jiménez Rodrigo, 2020). Likewise, hierarchical models are highly vulnerable to the development of competitive relationships between categories of inequality (Hankivsky, 2012; Krizsan 2012), with the risk of potentiating subordination or dependency relationships subjecting determinate groups to determinate main categories (Squires, 2008).

Multi-strand strategy

The multi-strand strategy bases on the development of general frameworks of equality policies that may comprehend various lines of differentiation and inequality (Parken, 2010). This model is not very extended, though some referents can be found in the field of political inclusion and no discrimination, in which it is tried to apply gender mainstreaming to other

social hierarchization lines in a broader structure with a view to approaching inequalities (Hankivsky and Cormier, 2011). These lines of inequality are defined independently and separately, being gender understood as another line of inequality within the set of social inequalities.

An instance of this strategy is Guatemala's *Plan de Acción Nacional en Derechos Humanos 2007-2017* [National Human Rights Action Plan] (Gobierno de la República de Guatemala, 2007), which establishes, from a common actuation framework, various protection lines particularly aimed at women, indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, children and adolescents, the youth, the elderly, migrants or people with HIV-AIDS. This multi-strand approach is also observed in Mexico's *Programa Nacional para la Igualdad y No Discriminación* (2019-2024) [National Program for Equality and No Discrimination], which integrates several objectives and lines of action to address the problems and needs of various collectives that face discrimination on the basis of gender, age, ethnicity, territory, disability or sexual-gender diversity (Gobierno de México, 2021).

In this regard, such strategy would be at the risk of de-gendering equality policies (Lombardo and Agustin, 2012), by attenuating the importance of gender as a priority and transversal line to address determinate social problems in which it is fundamental, as it is the case of violence against women (Strid *et al.*, 2013). Likewise, in the multi-strand approach a thorough examination of the existing policies and dynamics of inequality that affect the target group of the policy in question is necessary (Parken, 2010) in order to avoid thoughtlessly developing decontextualized "one-size-fits-all solutions" (Verloo, 2006).

Intersectional strategy

This strategy characterizes by interactively dealing with various lines of inequality and focusing on the intersections of such inequalities. There are two sorts of applications. On one side, intersectional policies may focus on certain groups at intersectional positions (Choo and Ferree, 2010) to specifically and comprehensively address their problems and needs; a noticeable instance is *I Plan de Acción Integral para Mujeres con Discapacidad* [1st Comprehensive Action Plan for Disabled Women] (2008-2013), in Andalusia (Spain), which addresses a number of problems faced by disabled women in employment, health care, education, violence, social participation and decision making (Junta de Andalucía, 2008).

On the other side, intersectional policies could focus on certain intersectional problems or needs which cannot be dealt with disregarding the concurrence of gender with other inequalities. This is noticed in the various violences against women (Guzmán Ordaz and Jiménez Rodrigo, 2015); hence, "honor killings", female genital mutilation, or forced marriage have given rise to numerous intersectional plans in Europe (Alonso and Arnaut, 2017; Asamblea General de Naciones Unidas, 2019). A significant referent is UK's Together We Can End Violence against Women and Girls (HM Government, 2009), which recognizes ethnicity, age, disability, family and residential status as other lines of inequality that affect the experiences of violence faced by women, identifying the most vulnerable groups such as girls and female youth, homeless women and from ethnic minorities as well as refugees (Strid *et al*., 2013).

In Spain and El Salvador highly significant pioneering policies have been developed regarding women, peace and security to address the context of migrant women, refugees and victims of armed conflicts and human trafficking and smuggling (Gobierno de El Salvador, 2017; Gobierno de España, 2015).

Keys for the intersectional transversalization of gender equality policies

Despite limitations, risks and debates which as previously described, are implied by the intersectional strategy, it offers important advantages to approach in full depth the complexity of the situations and problems faced by women in intersectional contexts (Crenshaw, 1989). Since incorporating gender perspective into policies cannot be reduced to merely "add women", neither can the application of an intersectional framework be reduced to include more groups or subgroups into the main policies. The transversalization of the intersectional perspective needs a series of principles which have to go through the entire production process of gender equality policies; which can be summarized as follows: problematization, diagnosis, design, production and implementation proceedings, and assessment of results (See Table 1).[1]

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1 This table is in Annex, at the end of the article (Editor's note).

Problematization

First. Intersectional approach, applied to social intervention, tries to rescue experiences of exclusion, inequality and discrimination in the periphery to place them at the core of its content (Collins and Bilge, 2018). In this way, the problematization of policies has to be carried out from simple static homogeneous categories to simultaneous interactions between categories, also going beyond the traditional "gender-race-social class" categories to consider other lines for differentiation and inequality such as ethnicity, indigenousness, territory, age, religion, disability or migration. The intersectional approach contributes to identify and reveal new problems and needs of profiles that have remained invisible or underrepresented in unitary policies and which might not be taken into account without crossing gender and other inequality lines (Hankivsky and Jordan-Zachery, 2019). It also contributes to refocus "old" problems from a new and complex standpoint as with the problematization of violence against women (Guzmán Ordaz and Jiménez Rodrigo, 2015).

Diagnosis

Second. The incorporation of an intersectional framework into equality policies needs to structurally understand power relationships, which leads to complex, contextual, comparative and relational diagnoses that allow apprehending and understanding the intersections between inequality lines regarding the problems and needs that are objects of intervention.

Intersectional diagnoses focus on the problems and needs of groups at the crossing of multiple lines of social hierarchization, intending to visualize, explain and comprehend their specific situations and experiences. The intersectional framework rejects, thereby, a binary excluding thinking, and invites to think social relationships in inclusive and interactive terms (Collins and Bilge, 2018). Moreover, an intersectional diagnosis has to explicitly identify the structural and systematic sources of discrimination and marginalization that affect the groups that face multiple discriminations (Crowley, 2016; Walsh and Xydias, 2014).

Third. Intersectional diagnoses need improved and innovated instruments and techniques to access, explain and understand the experiences of multi-discriminated groups, usually ignored or simplified in homogeneous unitary categories. The production of data and research works with gender perspective is an essential condition to be able to correctly

identify and characterize the needs, problems and interests of groups that face multiple discriminations and guide decision-making regarding equality policies (Comisión Europea, 2007; Crowley, 2016; Fredman, 2016).

From a qualitative standpoint, it is pressing to advance in the production of disaggregated data with two or more inequality lines and intersectional indicators (Esteves and Santos, 2013; Instituto Europeo para la Igualdad de Género, 2019). Adding to developing quantitative data, intersectional diagnoses require the incorporation of qualitative methods that allow grasping the experiences and relationships of interdependence, power and privilege between groups (Collins and Bilge, 2018; Hankivsky and Grace, 2015). Additionally, the complexity of intersectionality demands the combination of methods and the integration of qualitative and quantitative techniques (Choo and Ferree, 2010). The incorporation of participatory methods that foster the empowering of the groups affected by the policies is deemed fundamental (Kóczé, 2018) to facilitate the involvement of those groups in diagnoses, interventions and assessments (Seta, 2016).

Fourth. Incorporating the intersectional framework into equality policies entails a critical and reflective examination of the existing policies. The intention would be to apply a "reactive approach" (Verloo, 2013), which intends to assess the noxious or beneficial effects of equality policies regarding collectives at the intersections of inequalities. From an intersectional standpoint, it is necessary to examine the effects of the policies in maintaining, questioning or removing the multiple inequalities as a consequence of the reproduction of intersectional biases that might affect their creation and setting into motion.

The first of these biases refers to the omission of troubling experiences and needs of multi-discriminated groups. This has been called "intersectional invisibility" (Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach, 2008). A second bias refers to the thoughtless and decontextualized consideration of intersections between multiple inequalities as a consequence of the bad practices of "adding and removing" inequalities (Hankivsky, 2012). While a third bias is the reproduction of essentialist proposals, prejudices and stereotypes regarding certain multi-discriminated profiles (Hankivsky, 2012), contributing to their stigmatization (Lombardo and Agustin, 2012).

This critical and reflexive analysis would allow valuing the intersectional (in)sensibility of the policies developed for their improvement and future reorientations. In this sense, in a previous study on regional and national equality plans in Spain, the underrepresentation of certain social groups was disclosed, as for example, Roma, foreign migrant and disabled women

and also women with identities different from the cisheteronormativity, as they were insufficiently assisted or had been made invisible (Jiménez Rodrigo, 2020).

Design

Fifth. Policies with intersectional approach intend to identify and define their intervention objects as a result not of a single factor, but the intersection of various factors, making a broad range of social inequalities explicit and visible (Lombardo and Agustin, 2012). As previously exposed, intersectional policies may focus well on determinate multi-marginalized groups (Walsh and Xydias, 2014), or on specific problems and needs that could not be suitably approached without an intersectional perspective as it is the case of violence against women (Alonso and Arnaut, 2017; Strid *et al.*, 2013).

Sixth. Intersectional policies are characterized by the adoption of new goals and targets aimed at protecting, empowering and strengthening the rights of women who face multiple discriminations (Walsh and Xydias, 2014). Moreover, policies with an intersectional approach not only try to improve the situation of discriminated groups, also incorporate a transforming approach before power relations (Lombardo and Agustin, 2012; Verloo, 2006) for they question the fundamental structures that produce situations of exclusion, marginalization or discrimination women face (Walsh and Xydias, 2014) on the basis of the heterogeneity proper to them. Intersectional policies, thereby, are defined by a critical approach to the *status quo* and by a clear and defined orientation toward social justice (Collins and Bilge, 2018).

Proceedings

Seventh. Policies with an intersectional approach potentiate participatory processes in the target groups regarding their design, setting into motion and assessment (D'Agostino, 2015; Lombardo and Agustin, 2012). The incorporation of voices and standpoints of multi-marginalized groups in the devising of policies is a fundamental aspect in the advancement and deepening of democratic values (Martínez Palacios, 2017; Verloo, 2006), in the processes of political action inclusion (Collins and Bilge, 2018) and, all in all, in the empowerment of these groups (Walsh and Xydias, 2014). An instance of this is the strategy Together We Can End Violence against

Women and Girls developed by the British government (HM Government, 2009). From focal groups, various female profiles addressed in the policies were gathered in function of age, disability, sexual diversity, migrant-alien origin, and also heeding specific circumstances as being a refugee or asylum seeker, homeless, experiences of abuse and sexual violence, or being a victim of genital mutilation, exercising prostitution, or having mental health problems or drug addictions (Strid *et al.*, 2013).

Eighth. Collaboration and cooperation between various actors —institutions of equality, entities of civil society, unions, entrepreneurial organizations, education communities, communication means, research agents...— are key elements for a successful implementation of policies and practices of intervention against multiple inequalities (D'Agostino, 2015; Strid *et al.*, 2013). The institutions of equality perform an important role in the articulation of these networks of inclusive and participatory collaboration and dialogue between various governmental and non-governmental agents (Crowley, 2016; Krizsan, 2012). It is the case of projects promoted by *Instituto de la Mujer* [Institute for Women] in Spain, for the socio-labor insertion of women who experience multiple discrimination on the basis of their foreign migrant origin, rurality, disability, poverty, belonging to ethnic minorities, or age (Instituto de la Mujer, 2021).

Assessment

Ninth. The assessment of the impact of policies with intersectional approach demands to analyze the effects of experiences of groups located at the intersections of social inequalities. Following the objectives of intersectional policies, the assessment must reveal information whether these have contributed to protect, empower, and strengthen the rights of multi-marginalized groups (Walsh and Xydias, 2014); or, if on the contrary, they contribute —though unexpectedly and indirectly— to the reproduction of inequalities and their stigmatization (Lombardo and Agustin, 2012).

Tenth. The assessment of the impact of equality policies has to report about their consequences in the effective transformation of underlying structures and processes of inequality and the needs of groups at the intersections of inequalities (Jiménez Rodrigo, 2020). To do so, and as pointed out in the diagnosis section, it is necessary to develop assessment indicators sensitive to intersectional inequalities, as well as innovative and multimodal assessment methodologies (Hankivsky and Grace, 2015) that include qualitative and participatory instruments.

Conclusions

In this work, we deal with an issue that produces a heated debated as regards how to state equality policies so that they are more effective and inclusive in the face of multiple inequalities. The result of the revision of literature and various experiences in Europe and Latin America shows three main strategies that may be applied in function of the sort of relation between various lines of inequality and social differentiation —expanded unitary, multi-strand and intersectional— with different effects, possibilities and limitations regarding protection against problems, necessities and interests of women located at intersectional positions.

The expanded unitary strategy allows improving policies focused on a single inequality line, harnessing the existing resources and structures, and increasing the effectiveness and equity of gender mainstreaming by approaching subgroups of women with specific vulnerabilities. For its part, the multi-strand strategy entails the development of a common framework to address various inequality lines, which also supposes a better harnessing of the resources and structures, while at once, it allows addressing various profiles and needs from a comprehensive approach without developing multiple policies.

However, these two approaches may fail as regards the development of integral and in-depth measures to deal with certain problems and necessities of the most unprotected profiles, whose focalized attention is indeed target of intersectional policies, as it has been shown in the case of violence against women or certain collectives such as migrant women, of ethnic minorities or with disabilities.

The application of the intersectional approach in equality policies faces, however, dilemmas and theoretical, methodologic and political debates that create decisive challenges regarding the restatement of new more inclusive and equitable diagnoses, as well as analytical and social and political intervention strategies and tools. It is not enough to add more groups or subgroups of women, but that practical application implies the critical, reflexive, situated and transversal incorporation of a series of conditions that affect the problematization of inequalities, the design of policies and their processes of elaboration, implementation and assessment. The incorporation of intersectional frameworks into the policies demands, additionally, a clear conceptualization of the way structural intersectionality operates, as well as an accurate definition of the political goals regarding equality (Verloo, 2006).

Likewise, it is essential to substantiate the interventions on a relational and contextualized analysis of the multiple inequalities and pay attention to the available and necessary structures and resources with a view to unfolding the most relevant strategies. To sum up, intersectionality, in spite of the difficulties entailed by its political application, has meant a significant enrichment of debates around equality policies, expanding the horizons for reflection, participation, innovation and political praxis.

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Annex

Table 1

Keys for the transversalization of the intersectional approach in gender equality policies

Political elaboration phase	Keys
Problematization	1. Take the problems from the peripheries to the center of policies: identification of problems and needs located at the intersections of inequalities.
Diagnosis	2. Structural analysis of multiple inequalities and their interactions: relational, contextual and situated approaches. 3. Improvement and innovation of diagnosis instruments and articulation of quantitative, qualitative and participatory techniques. 4. Critical and reflexive examination of the existing policies: analysis of intersectional biases.
Design	5. Goals and measures focused on the problems and needs of groups at the intersections. 6. Goals oriented toward protection, empowerment, and strengthening of human rights of multi-discriminated groups.
Proceedings	7. Collaboration between social actors involved in politics. 8. Participation of the implicated groups.
Assessment	9. Analysis of the effects of the policies on the experiences, opportunities, and access to the resources of the multi-discriminated groups. 10. Exam of the impact on inequality structures: advance toward social justice.

Source: Own elaboration.

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