



WP4: The Alliance as an Engine for Human Capital

D4.6 Gendered Innovation Training and Mentoring Programme

MODULE 1
GENDER EQUALITY

Script
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Gender

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The term "gender" entered the social sciences through the pioneering work of sociologist Ann Oakley. In her book *Sex, Gender and Society* (1972), Oakley suggested a distinction between sex and gender. She showed how different societies define masculinity and femininity in varied and even opposite ways. Oakley discussed the extent to which observable differences are based on biology and psychology versus cultural conditioning.

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"Gender" refers to characteristics that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviours, and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl, or boy, as well as relationships between them.

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As a social construct, gender varies from society to society and can change over time.

Gender equality

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In 1848, in the United States of America, 68 women and 32 men drew up the "Declaration of Sentiments" in Seneca Falls, New York. They asserted that "all men and all women are created equal" and demanded the same rights for women as outlined in the American Declaration of Independence of 1776.

Source: Signers of the Declaration of Sentiments (Library of Congress)

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This movement, followed by others in European countries, gave rise to feminism as a political movement and theory. The early western women's movements of the 19th and early 20th centuries demanded equal political rights, equal access to well-paid jobs, and recognition of the value of women's distinct contributions.

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Gradually, and as a counterpoint to the humanist approach of granting full citizenship to women and their unconditional entry into the public sphere, a more "woman-centric" or "romantic" perception emerged. It connected women's inclusion in the state

with the physical and social characteristics of women's gender, emphasising the value of certain "feminine" qualities and occupations and with motherhood playing a dominant role. New and often dichotomous formulations of the relationship between "equality" and "difference" emerged during the 19th and early 20th centuries. These were often linked to new feminist ideas and policies aimed at improving the position of mothers, especially those living in poverty, and advocated state support for motherhood and protective labour legislation.

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In the 1920s, particularly in the US and Britain, women's movements became differentiated between those emphasising "equality" and those emphasising "difference."

Equality or difference?

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The "equality or difference" dilemma is one of feminism's most enduring legacies. In the last decades of the 20th century, during the second wave of feminism, this key phrase was intended to encapsulate conflicting feminist positions and political strategies. Those who argued that gender difference should play no role in education, employment, justice, and legislation were placed in the equality camp. Those who insisted that appeals to women must be made in terms compatible with the needs, interests, and special characteristics that bind women as a group were placed in the camp of difference.

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Within the context of the second wave of feminism, the concept of "equality" was used far more often than "difference" initially, as it was often used to justify discrimination against women. However, other feminists challenged the then-dominant view that equal rights alone were sufficient for women's liberation. They argued that critical issues such as rape, abortion, or the abuse of women could not be effectively addressed in gender-neutral terms. They asserted that women's "difference" should be acknowledged in historical, philosophical, and legal terms.

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According to Gisela Bock and Susan James, women's emancipation has historically been seen in two ways: sometimes as the 'right to be equal' and sometimes as the 'right to be different'.

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Yet, this opposition conceals the mutual dependence of the two terms: equality is not the elimination of difference, nor does difference preclude equality. The way forward is to challenge the dichotomy itself.

The 'right to be equal' and the 'right to be different' are views that have often overlapped and interacted, playing an important role in the development of ideas about women and feminism, as well as in the works of political thinkers whose prime concern was not women's liberation.

Gender inequality

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Equality means that the rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of individuals do not depend on whether they are male or female, disabled or able-bodied, young or elderly, white or black, or from rural or urban settings. Different groups of people have the right to be treated fairly and have the same opportunities.

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Despite centuries of campaigning, gender equality remains an unmet goal. As Mary Evans argues in her book *The Persistence of Gender Inequality* (2017), optimistic narratives of progress and emancipation have obscured long-term structural inequalities between women and men, which are not only about gender but also about general social inequality.

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The Gender Inequality Index is a composite metric of gender inequality based on three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment, and the labour market. A low GII value indicates a high level of equality between women and men, and vice versa. The Index ranges from 0, where women and men fare equally, to 1, where one gender fares poorly compared to the other in all dimensions.

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As the graphics show, the world GII has decreased slightly from 0.579 in 1990 to 0.462 in 2022. However, there is still a long way to go. According to the World Economic Forum, it could take another 131 years to achieve global gender parity. Inequality affects the treatment, rights, and opportunities of women, girls, and transgender and gender-diverse people the most, but everyone is impacted in some way. Crises like war, climate change, and pandemics can exacerbate these issues.

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How does gender inequality manifest in everyday life?

Conclusion

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The September 2023, United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Summit made it clear that the world is failing girls and women, making gender equality an increasingly distant goal, and underscored the need for strategic and coordinated action to change the state of gender equality and women's rights. In response, UN Women worked with key partners to identify the root causes of persistent inequality and the most pressing issues for women and girls, resulting in formulation of the 10 "Gender Equality Accelerators". These frameworks provide flexible solutions in various areas to overcome existing challenges in achieving women's and girls' human rights and Sustainable Development Goal 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls).

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But is this enough? We will discuss these issues further in the three modules that follow, focusing on gender inequality in relation to:

- family and society,
- politics, and
- the workplace.

References

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