Ensuring gender equality in the work environment
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Objectives

This tool will enable participants to:

• explore the status of gender equality in their workplace;
• better understand how gender equality is reflected in key areas of their workplace practices;
• develop an analytical framework for reviewing institutional responses to gender equality;
• identify where action is needed in their workplace to promote gender equality.

Key information

Setting the scene

It is important that education offices and gender focal points provide an enabling environment for gender equality in practice. This tool explores issues that are relevant to achieving this.

Gender equality is at the heart of decent work (ILO, 2009). It is not only a moral and social imperative but an economic need. Sustainable Development Goal 5 underscores the role of gender equality as the foundation for a “peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world”. According to the World Bank¹, access to economic opportunities has increased over the last twenty years, particularly among younger, better-educated women in the Asia-Pacific region. However, while women account for 50 per cent of the world’s population, they still only make up 41 per cent of the world’s workforce.² Women are less likely than men to work in formal sector jobs and more likely to work in poorly remunerated occupations and enterprises. Despite the closing of education gaps, women still earn less than men for similar work across the Asia-Pacific region.

While overall East Asia and Pacific has made strong advances in gender equality (see Box 1), South Asia continues to perform poorly. Social norms are responsible for the region’s mixed record on gender equality. In South Asia in particular, women and girls face discriminatory family codes, son bias, domestic violence and restricted access to assets and resources.³ Women’s ability to take advantage of the region’s economic dynamism is also compromised by discriminatory laws, expectations and practices, with traditional gender roles limiting women’s participation in the workplace and decision-making fora.

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Box 1
East Asia and Pacific regional overview

The East Asia and Pacific region is the third best-performing region in the 2014 edition of the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI). The region has benefited from its cultural diversity and economic dynamism to advance gender equality. This is due to political commitments and growing recognition of the positive impact gender equality has on development.

However, progress remains mixed and slow across the region, with clear challenges in overcoming barriers to women’s public leadership and economic empowerment, and in tackling gender-based violence. Directly tackling the drivers of gender inequality could speed up development.

Economic growth has created unprecedented opportunities to achieve gender equality in all areas of social, political and economic life. Over half of the region’s economic growth for the past fifty years can be attributed to gains in education. Increased gender equality in years of schooling and more girls in higher education, in particular, have created a highly educated workforce (OECD, 2014).

While labour force participation rates of women have decreased (from 65 per cent in 2000 to 61 per cent in 2013), they remain above the global average (50 per cent) (OECD, 2016). The gender pay gap across the region has halved since 1998, albeit with significant differences depending on country, sector and level of education (World Bank, 2012).

Political commitments and legislative reforms offer a promising framework for sustaining and improving gender equality. All countries in the region have either introduced new measures or strengthened their legislative frameworks with the aim to promote gender equality in all areas of social, economic and political life.

Gender inequality has not been wiped out in the region. In the 20th anniversary review of the achievements since the Beijing Platform for Action (1995), regional governments identified economic empowerment, violence against women and girls, and public leadership as three ongoing challenges to gender equality (UNESCAP, 2014).

The high female labour force participation rates conceal major regional diversity. The gender gap in labour force participation in 2013 was close to 30 percentage points across the region (ADB, 2015). Women still face ‘sticky floors’ that exacerbate gender wage gaps and keep them stuck in low-income and/or vulnerable employment (World Bank, 2012). ‘Glass ceilings’ prevent women from reaching senior leadership positions in the public and private sectors. The region has one of the lowest percentages of women in parliament in the world (e.g. 6 per cent in Myanmar). Similar barriers are mirrored in the share of women in corporate boards (e.g. 2 per cent in the Republic of Korea (Korn Ferry, 2015).

Adapted from OECD (2016).4

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If ministries of education are to play a key role in promoting gender equality throughout national education systems, it is important that their own internal practices actively reflect the principle. It is common practice for a ministry of education to have a gender focal point (GFP) or even a network of such focal points across different departments. GFPs serve as the contact and resource persons within their organizations. They are usually tasked to help raise awareness and understanding of gender-related issues, and promote the application of gender equality policy or the concept in the daily work of their staff or colleagues.

**Institutional areas to consider for promoting gender equality**

There are various areas in which an institution can address gender equality. Think about what you know about the ministry of education in your own country and consider the areas highlighted below.

- **Values and principles:** Organizations usually promote certain values and principles. What are they in your country’s ministry of education? Is gender equality one of them? Are men more valued than women? How do gender-related values affect the ministry’s work?
- **Everyday practices:** Do everyday activities in the office, such as meetings and other professional interactions, enable men and women to participate equally?
- **Institutional structure:** Does the ministry of education have a structure that promotes gender equality in the workplace, e.g., is there a GFP or does any officer have clearly defined responsibilities for promoting gender equality?
- **Policy and strategy:** Does the ministry have a policy on gender equality and a strategy to implement it in practice?
- **Leadership and decision-making processes:** To what extent is female leadership encouraged? Is decision-making male biased?
- **Human resources management:** Does the human resources management of the ministry of education promote and monitor gender equality?
- **Training:** Does the ministry of education provide gender training in any professional training programme?
- **Facilities:** Does the ministry of education ensure that gender equality is enabled by the facilities that are available to all staff?
Looking at your organization’s approach to gender equality

Handout 1 contains a series of questions to help you reflect on and analyse the status of gender equality in your own organization. Read through the questions. Your responses should help you to identify where priority action should be taken to improve gender equality in your workplace.

Self-study activity

- Answer the questions in Handout 1.
- Make a note of questions you cannot answer and reflect on who you can ask for information.

Group activity

- Answer the questions in Handout 1 in your group.
- If you cannot answer any, see if the other groups can help (if you all work for the same organization).
- Make a note of questions you cannot answer and reflect on who you can ask for information.

Group activity

- Working individually to start with, reflect on the four questions below and make some notes.
- Then, compare the answers given by female and male employees from the same organization.

Questions:
- In your opinion, do all staff members consider gender equality important?
- What are the main strengths of your organization regarding the practice of gender equality?
- What are main limitations in the organization’s approach to gender equality?
- What improvements do you think are needed? What needs to be done to enhance gender equality in your workplace?

Optional extension activity for self-study and/or group work

- Reflect on what you could do – through direct action and/or advocacy – to bring about positive change in relation to one of the issues raised in the above questions.
- Pick an issue that seems most urgent or most achievable to change.
Further reading


European Training Foundation. *Gender Mainstreaming in Education and Employment.* Turin: ETF.


Gender analysis in your workplace

How is gender equality practiced and communicated across your organization?

- Is it included in recruitment announcements and related documents?
- Is it included in any job descriptions?
- Is it practised during staff meetings? (If so, how do you perceive it?)
- Is it clearly mentioned in the organization’s policies and reports?
- Are there visible messages on gender equality in the work environment?
- Is any form of gender inequality, bias or discrimination practised in the workplace?
- Is there any gender-related content on the organization’s website?
- Is there visible messages on gender equality in the work environment?
- Is there any gender-related content on the organization’s website?
- Is there a gender focal point or any staff member in charge of promoting gender equality in your organization?
- Is the gender focal point a team or a single person? (Are they female or male?) In case of a team, what is the distribution of the members? When were they appointed? At which level are they employed in the organization (a junior or senior position)?
- Is the gender focal point role an additional task for them, on top of other previously assigned tasks?
- Is the gender focal point provided with additional resources (time/budget/staff)?
- Does the gender focal point have an impact on the organization? For example, is the gender focal point participating in the decision-making processes of your organization? If so, at what level? Is the gender focal point in regular contact with all staff for either disseminating information or receiving comments and being asked for advice?

Looking at your organization’s policy on gender equality

- Does your organization have an explicit gender policy stating the objectives, visions, strategies and expected outcomes?
- Are there explicit rules and regulations to ensure gender equality in your organization? The scope of this question is quite broad. You may check if there are rules and regulations to ensure:
  - equal opportunities for placement, career development and promotion for both men and women at all levels;
  - availability of appropriate facilities and resources, depending on the needs of men and women;
  - protection against sexual harassment, gender-based violence, or gender discrimination.
- Are these rules and regulations fully respected in your organization?
- If not, then what (if any) are the mechanisms for change/improvement?

Looking at your organization’s human resources management

- Is there gender parity in staff distribution in your organization? How many females and males are there? How many females and males are there in each unit/section/department? How many females and males are there at each level of hierarchy?
- Is gender a criterion for selecting staff, consultants and partners? Is there an explicit mechanism to move towards gender parity?
- Is being a female (or male) perceived as an advantage or an inconvenience for certain jobs/tasks?
• Are there equal opportunities for training of both females and males?
• Are there equal opportunities for promotion of both females and males?
• Is working outside office hours/days a practice that is valued? i) Is this practice more prevalent among men or women? ii) What are the reasons for the difference (if any)?
• Can both women and men take paid leave for a child’s birth/ adoption? For how many children is the paid leave given? How many paid days can be given to fathers? And how many to mothers? Do you feel free to announce that you will be taking parental leave? If not, why?
• Do you think taking parental leave might affect your or others’ future career development and promotion?
• If there is a staff union, how is the staff union composed? How many men and women are there in the staff union? Is the head of the staff union a woman or a man?
• In your opinion, through the staff union, can concerns of female and male staff be considered and voiced equally?

Looking at your organization’s leadership and decision-making

• How many female and male staff members take part in policy formulation and decision-making?
• In your opinion, when decisions are made, are the views of female and male staff considered equally?

Looking at your organization’s gender training

• Is there information and technical knowledge on gender equality and gender mainstreaming available to all female and male staff members?
• How can staff members access this information? How many of them can access this information? If they don’t access this information, what are the possible reasons?
• Is sensitization and training in gender offered to all male and female staff members? Is it compulsory or on a voluntary basis?
• What incentives are there to motivate staff to join gender training sessions?
• How often is sensitization and training offered? How many female and male staff members have been sensitized and trained?
• Is the trainer appropriately trained, and familiar with gender issues of the organization? Is the trainer the gender focal point or someone outside the organization?
• Has the impact of gender sensitization and training been assessed?
• What are the organization’s future plans for further sensitization and training?

Looking at your organization’s gender-friendly facilities

• Are there adequate facilities for female and male staff members?
• Are the numbers of toilets proportional to the number of female and male staff members?
• Is there a medical unit? Is the medical unit staff male or female?
• Is there a child care facility available?

Looking at your organization’s gender equality monitoring and evaluation

• Is there a mechanism to recognize the personal efforts of staff members to promote gender equality?
• Has there been any gender-related evaluation in your organization?
• Are there gender benchmarks, indicators and monitoring tools?
• Has the gender responsiveness of your organization been evaluated?
• Is your organization planning to have an evaluation?
• Who could advocate for an evaluation, and how?


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