



Gender and Cultures of Equality

Policy Brief

Enhancing gender+ training as a tool for equality building in Europe

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Executive Summary

Gender+¹ training is about equipping people with the knowledge and skills to build equality. It refers to a process of knowledge development and awareness raising around gender issues with objectives ranging from knowledge transfer, to skills building, from community mobilization to social transformation (Thompson & Prügl 2015; Bustelo et al. 2016; Wong et al. 2016). However, despite the emancipatory intent and transformatory ethics of gender training the impact thereof is undermined by challenges and resistances. This is relevant in the current European political landscape where equality projects are under attack. This brief draws from recent research to present recommendations for addressing current challenges and policy actions to strengthen the impact of gender training as a tool for equality building in Europe.

Background and significance

Gender training is a key tool in gender mainstreaming (Council of Europe 1998; Booth & Bennett 2002; Parpart 2014; EIGE 2017), it equips participants of trainings with the knowledge and skills to promote gender equality in their work but the transformative aims of gender training are often not achieved. Despite the progress of six decades of equality work and policies in Europe and widespread recognition of the importance of gender equality goals, gender inequalities persist. Findings from a mixed-methods study with 240 trainers working across the European region isolate the factors which hinder the impact of gender training and provide strategies which can augment the transformative potential thereof, expanding existing research on this topic (see Prügl 2010; Ferguson & Forest 2011; EIGE 2014; Bustelo et al. 2016; Enderstein 2018; Ferguson 2018).

¹ Throughout this paper I use the term *gender training* to designate a gender+ understanding of training for gender equality. This is based on the requests of the trainers who participated in the research, they see their training work as inclusive of multiple intersecting inequalities. Additionally, the use of gender+ training is consistent with existing research on gender training practice (see TARGET: Transatlantic Applied Research in Gender Equity Training 2011).

On the **structural level** there is a progressive **deprioritization of equality issues** and **inadequate funding**; a dominance of **market utility** policy frameworks and overemphasis on the “**business case**” for gender equality; and highly visibly actions of **anti-gender political formations**². These factors halt, undermine, and regress the progress that has been made thus far (Caglar et al. 2013; Verloo 2018a; Verloo 2018b), they amplify resistances, limit the scope of trainings, and compromise the impact thereof.

On the **organisational level** there is an **absence of supportive leadership** and **active delegitimization by decision-makers**. **Lack of funding** and **inadequate compensation** is aggravated by **poor allocation of resources** within the organisation to support ongoing equality actions. The common format of gender trainings is a mandatory once-off brief workshop type event tailored to commissioner requirements which leads to the **simplification** of research and knowledge on multidimensional equality issues and results in **diluted, jargon-centric** trainings. The act of commissioning training is used as a stand-in for equality building, resulting in **tokenism** instead of practical change in power systems and professional activities.

On the **interpersonal level** participants in trainings **deflect responsibility** for gender equality. **Denial and delegitimization** of the factual information presented by trainers and their expertise is common, occasionally this takes the form of **violent opposition**. As gender mainstreaming has become more diffuse resistances have shifted from overt to more **implicit and passive** forms. Thus, claims that **gender inequality no longer exists** are common, as are statements from workshop participants that they are suffering from **fatigue regarding gender** issues. The consequence is that participants are likely to be disengaged and unwilling to implement knowledge and skills from trainings.

Position statement and recommended actions

In order to enhance the transformative impact of gender training it is necessary to directly address the current challenges that trainers are facing with appropriate policies and actions which build on existing progress and strengthen equality building.

- **Increase funding for gender training.** Funding is the principal challenge faced by trainers, and it is indispensable to increasing the impact of gender trainings. Increased funding means

² These political formations, commonly referred to as the anti-gender movement, consists of conservative and religious actors, heterogenous among themselves, which are collaborate nationally and transnationally against what they term ‘gender theory’, ‘gender ideology’ or ‘genderism’ (see Grzebalska 2016; Kuhar & Paternotte 2017; Graff & Korolczuk 2017; Paternotte & Kuhar 2018)

that more resources within organisations can be dedicated to providing in-depth and context specific trainings, and continuous support from trainers following trainings to effectively implement equality building. This will assist in combating tokenism and reliance on “business case” rationales for gender equality.

- ***Build systems of accountability and organisational support.*** Organisational leaders need to be actively supportive and visibly legitimizing of gender equality issues, or they become tacitly complicit in inactivity which sustains current inequalities. This can be achieved through the formalization of channels for the exchange of best practices and examples between organisations and institutions.
 - ***Establish formal networks, interactive platforms, and forums for gender trainers in Europe.*** These will support the growing community of practice of gender trainers in Europe, allow for dialogue and debate, facilitate the exchange of best practices, and provide trainers with the opportunity to establish common values, professional ethics, and standards. This will lead to higher quality training design and delivery generally and support the exchange of approaches and methodologies which respond specifically to current organisational and interpersonal level resistances. Furthermore, formal networks strengthen the legitimacy, and impact, of gender training as a practice for building equality in Europe.
 - ***Provide financial and institutional support for train the trainer programs.*** Train the trainer programs strengthen the aforementioned community of practice, allowing for the establishment of standards of practice and the development of appropriate methodologies. This will equip trainers with skills for the engagement of workshop participants on cognitive, affective, and physical levels to successfully address resistances and build equality. This includes specific contextually relevant and inclusive content, techniques for effective engagement, and transformative and experiential learning.
 - ***Organize specific events and conferences for gender trainers in Europe.*** These kinds of events provide a valuable physical extension of online networks during which gender trainers can meet and further develop the strategies and tools that they employ. Events which support conversations between trainers foster a culture of learning within the profession of gender training and allow trainers the possibility to share links between theory and practice, engage in reflexivity, and plan collective action in light of current issues. These events build connections between national and international contexts and strengthen supportive infrastructure for trainers which will enhance the local impact of gender trainings.
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