



GenderSAFE
ENDING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN ACADEMIA

Overcoming resistance in gender-based violence policy-making

In-person workshop

“When you expose a problem you pose a problem.”

Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life*

Title of the training

Overcoming resistance in gender-based violence policy-making

Learning objectives

The main objectives of this training are to:

- strengthen participants' understanding of how resistance to gender equality and gender-based violence policy work can manifest in institutional settings
- support participants in recognising active, passive, individual, group and institutional forms of resistance
- identify and discuss practical strategies to prepare for, respond to and follow up on resistance
- strengthen the understanding that resistance can be a sign that institutional change work is having an effect
- support participants' confidence, self-care and sense of agency when facing resistance in their everyday work

Description for the promotion of the training

This training supports participants in recognising and responding to resistance that may arise when developing, implementing or strengthening policies to address gender-based violence in higher education and research organisations.

Resistance may take many forms. It can appear as open opposition, dismissive comments, denial of the problem, delays, lack of prioritisation, refusal to take responsibility, procedural

blocking or backlash against those working for change. It may come from individuals, groups or institutional structures and can affect both the progress of policy work and the wellbeing of the people involved.

The training combines a short conceptual introduction, personal reflection, a World Café exercise based on real-life resistance scenarios and practical work on self-care and action planning. Participants explore how resistance unfolds, what effects it can have and which strategies can be used before, during and after difficult situations. The training also invites participants to reflect on how to sustain themselves and their teams when working on gender-based violence and institutional change.

Who is it for?

The training is designed for people involved in developing, implementing or supporting institutional policies and measures to address gender-based violence in higher education and research settings.

It may be relevant for:

- gender equality officers, equality and diversity officers and Gender Equality Plan teams
- human resources staff, ombudspersons, trusted persons and institutional support actors
- staff involved in policy development, ethics, legal affairs, student support or staff wellbeing
- managers, heads of units and institutional change agents
- trainers and facilitators working on gender equality, safe working environments or gender-based violence
- researchers, students or staff representatives involved in advocacy or institutional change

Preparation for facilitators

Before the training, facilitators are invited to:

- select or adapt a set of resistance scenarios that are relevant to the target audience
- prepare posters or Miro boards for each scenario
- brief facilitators and rapporteurs on the World Café format and their roles
- prepare a room layout with small table groups, ideally with space for five participants plus one facilitator and one rapporteur per table
- prepare a short introductory presentation on resistance, including forms, levels and common sources of resistance
- prepare a short self-care input and action-planning exercise

Participants do not need extensive preparation. They can be invited to reflect in advance on one stakeholder or situation where they have experienced resistance in relation to gender equality or gender-based violence policy work.

Format: In-person training, adaptable to online delivery

Duration: 3.5 hours, including a break

Suggested number of participants: 20–35

Language: English

Suggested methods: short presentation, personal reflection, World Café, group discussion, self-care reflection and individual action planning

Structure of the workshop:

Programme	Approach	Duration	Observations
Welcome and introduction	The facilitator welcomes participants, introduces the training objectives and presents the structure of the session. Ground rules are agreed, including the Chatham House Rule, confidentiality, respect, openness, safety and the possibility to take a break if needed.	10 min	The opening creates a respectful and safe learning environment. The facilitator can acknowledge that discussing resistance may bring up frustration, anger or fatigue, especially for participants who have experienced resistance directly.
Icebreaker	Participants are invited to reflect on the question: “What was the best piece of advice you ever received in relation to promoting gender equality?” Depending on time and group size, they can share with the person next to them or a few participants can share in plenary.	Included in introduction	This short exercise helps participants connect with their experience and with the collective knowledge in the room. It also shifts the tone from frustration to shared learning.
Understanding resistance	The facilitator gives a short presentation on resistance to gender equality and gender-based violence policy work. The presentation may cover: what resistance is, why it occurs, active and passive resistance, individual, group and institutional resistance and the idea that resistance is often part of change processes.	20 min	The presentation can explain that resistance may be rooted in traditional gender norms, stereotypes, institutional barriers, power relations or perceived threats to status, certainty, autonomy, relatedness and fairness. The aim is not to excuse resistance, but to help participants understand it strategically.
Personal reflection	Participants are invited to think of a key stakeholder or situation where they face resistance. They write or draw on a post-it the key challenge they experience when facing this resistance. They keep this post-it with them and return to it later during the action-planning exercise.	5 min	This reflection helps participants connect the training to their own context. It also supports the later shift from shared analysis to personal strategy and action.
Introduction to the World Café	The facilitator explains the World Café format. Participants work in small groups at tables, each focused on a resistance scenario. Facilitators and rapporteurs stay at the same table, while participant groups rotate between tables. Each round lasts 20	5 min	The facilitator can clarify that the goal is not to solve every scenario fully, but to develop a portfolio of strategies. Participants are encouraged not to repeat what is already on the

	minutes and later groups build on the previous discussion.		poster and to add new ideas, examples and responses.
World Café: strategising to address resistance	Participants discuss selected resistance scenarios in three rounds of 20 minutes. Each table works with one scenario. The discussion covers how the resistance unfolds, its immediate effects, what could be prepared before, what can be done on the spot, what follow-up is needed and what challenges may arise when applying the strategy.	60 min	The World Café enables peer learning and collective problem-solving. Scenarios can be selected from a prepared repository, for example denial of the problem, non-prioritisation, refusal to take responsibility, institutional inaction, resistance to anonymous reporting, challenges to data, fear of false accusations or legal arguments used to block action.
Break		20 min	During the break, facilitators and rapporteurs can briefly check the posters and prepare for the plenary summary.
Summary by rapporteurs	Each rapporteur presents the key points from their table. They name the form of resistance, summarise strategies identified before, during and after the situation and mention main challenges to applying these strategies.	30 min	Rapporteurs should focus on key patterns and new strategies. They do not need to report everything on the poster. They should build on what previous rapporteurs have said and avoid repetition.
Plenary reflection	Participants react to the World Café discussion. Suggested questions include: Do you feel more assured or less uncertain about facing resistance? What else would you need? How did this exercise make you feel?	Included in summary	This short reflection helps participants process the emotional and practical dimensions of the exercise. It can also help facilitators identify areas where further support or resources are needed.
Self-care in dealing with resistance	The facilitator introduces the importance of self-care and team care when working on gender equality and gender-based violence. Participants discuss in groups what they do personally to sustain themselves and prevent burnout and what they do as a team when	30 min	This section recognises that resistance can have emotional and professional costs. It can include the 4S approach: success, sanity, self-care and sustainability. The facilitator can remind participants that it is not their responsibility to manage the emotions of

	working on difficult issues. Each group shares one useful practice that has not already been mentioned.		resistant stakeholders, while empathy mapping and preparation can be useful strategic tools.
Action planning	Participants return to their personal reflection from the beginning. They exchange in pairs with someone from another organisation about key takeaways from the World Café and self-care discussion. They then write a short letter to themselves, identifying how they now see the resistance situation, which arguments they are taking away and which strategies they want to try.	15 min	The exercise helps participants move from analysis to action. It also supports individual ownership of next steps without creating pressure to solve complex institutional issues alone.
Closing reflection and feedback	Participants are invited to share one takeaway, one strategy or one support need. The facilitator closes the training, shares resources and invites participants to complete the evaluation.	15 min	The closing can include a reminder that resistance is part of institutional change work and that peer support, preparation and follow-up are essential.

Supporting materials for the World Café exercise

The World Café exercise is supported by a separate set of training materials, including anonymised resistance scenarios, facilitator and rapporteur guidance, strategic approaches to resistance, a World Café poster or Miro template and a participant reflection and action-planning worksheet.

Trainers may select the scenarios most relevant to their audience and adapt the materials to their institutional or national context. The supporting materials also provide guidance on how to facilitate the World Café rounds, how rapporteurs can summarise the discussion and how participants can move from reflection to action planning.

Materials needed

- PowerPoint presentation
- resistance scenarios printed or placed on posters
- large sheets of paper or World Café posters
- markers, pens and post-it notes
- stickers for voting on scenarios

- room with table groups for five participants plus one facilitator and one rapporteur
- projector and screen

Resources

- FESTA Handbook on Resistance to Gender Equality in Academia.
- SUPERA Consortium. (2022). *Participatory approaches towards GEP design and implementation: SUPERA guide*. SUPERA project.
- Ferguson, L., & Mergaert, L. (2022). *Toolkit: Resistances to structural change in gender equality*. SUPERA project.
- López Belloso, M., Mergaert, L., & Polykarpou, P. (2023). *The Humorarium - Toolkit for the use of feminist humour to combat sexism and resistances to gender equality in academia* (1.0). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7669683>
- Bohnet, I. (2016). *What works: Gender equality by design*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Chinsky Matuson, R. (2021). *Can We Talk: Seven Principles for Managing Difficult Conversations at Work*. Kogan Page.
- Kline, R., & Lewis, D. (2018). The price of fear: Estimating the financial cost of bullying and harassment to the NHS in England. *Public Money & Management*, 39(3), 166–174.
- Lombardo, E., & Mergaert, L. (2016). Resistance in gender training and mainstreaming processes.
- Rao, A., Sandler, J., Kelleher, D., & Miller, C. (2016). *Gender at Work: Theory and Practice for 21st Century Organizations*. Routledge.
- Rock, D. (2008). SCARF: A brain-based model for collaborating with and influencing others. *NeuroLeadership Journal*, 1.

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