

PROVEN PRACTICES IN GENDER MAINSTREAMING

Foundations
in Conversation

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Philea

Philanthropy Europe Association

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Executive summary

Philanthropy has many options when it comes to mainstreaming gender in its operations, programmes, funding and overall strategy. Doing so, regardless of the path taken, can have a real impact on outcomes, not only in the area of gender but also when it comes to the many other challenges philanthropy seeks to address.

In 2025, Philea placed equality at the centre of its agenda. The Year of Equality offered the space to articulate a shared understanding of what equality means within philanthropy, and resulted in the [Philea Equality Framework](#), which emphasises the link between equality and power; highlights the need for different resources and opportunities to achieve fair outcomes; and encourages foundations to reflect on how inequality shapes both their practices and their impact.

It was in this context that the gender equality peer-learning journey, “Empower Foundations for Gender Equality”, began in 2025. The initiative helped foundations explore how gender relates to wider questions of equality, offering practical ways to apply these insights in their work.

Now, in 2026, this publication brings that journey together. It combines reflective pieces with concrete examples from foundations putting gender equality into practice. The result is a resource rooted in Philea’s Equality Framework, offering clear guidance and lived experience to support funders ready to make progress in 2026 and beyond.

Key takeaways

Gender matters in philanthropy

Gender equality is situated within a global framework, and as such is connected to the issues of democracy, sustainable development, and social justice. From an economic standpoint, systemic oppression comes at a staggering cost ([\\$12 trillion in lost global GDP](#)). Applying a gender lens allows philanthropy to understand how the experiences and needs of people of all genders intersect with other factors such as ability, migration status, and social marginalisation – all areas that philanthropy works in, and all areas that are essential for equitable, thriving societies. Foundations must confront inequality head-on.

Anti-gender movements are on the rise

Recent years have witnessed a global resurgence of anti-gender movements. With decades of progress in gender equality under threat, the need for philanthropy to adopt strategic, collaborative, and transformative approaches is more critical than ever. This political climate gives funders a unique opportunity to support initiatives that not only address immediate needs but also challenge regressive narratives and promote systemic change. A key part of this is including gender mainstreaming, both within their organisational practices and structures, and across programmatic strategies and grantmaking.

Pooled and collaborative funds offer powerful pathways to change

Siloed initiatives fall short in creating transformative change, so new ways of sharing power and resources are needed. Pooled and collaborative funds are tools for redistribution, enabling bolder grantmaking, participatory decision-making, and coordinated advocacy. Despite challenges such as trust, compromise, and long-term commitment, the payoff is significant: Power shifts to grass-roots actors, ecosystems are strengthened, and systemic impact is amplified.

Philanthropy can transform power dynamics by learning from feminist funding models

Philanthropy has much to learn from feminist movements and their innovative funding models rooted in trust, collaboration and long-term commitment. For instance, the [Women’s Funds Model](#) can act as a blueprint for justice-driven philanthropy, prioritising equity, flexibility and solidarity. Key strategies include funding self-led organisations, investing in excluded groups, providing long-term and emergency support, and connecting gender equality to issues like climate, democracy, and LGBTQ+ rights. Grass-roots collaboration, capacity-building, and care for activists themselves are central to this

approach. Because feminist and self-led organisations face structural neglect, receiving only 0.42% of philanthropic funding, this area represents a key opportunity for foundations to make the impact they wish for.

Philanthropy infrastructure organisations can incubate transformation

As networks that build an ecosystem by connecting and amplifying the work of thousands of foundations, philanthropy infrastructure organisations (PIOs) are able to translate shared concern into shared practice. Through learning spaces, advocacy, policy work and collaboration, they can make gender equality a sector-wide commitment rather than a scattered initiative. Across Europe, this growing awareness is translating into practice as PIOs put gender mainstreaming at the centre of their work.

Lessons from real-world cases

Six organisations share their insights and experience in mainstreaming gender in their operations, programmes and funding:

- P.23

AYDIN DOĞAN

How to use girls' education as a pathway to empowerment and gender equality
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KING BAUDOIN FOUNDATION

How to build a holistic and adaptive gender analysis strategy
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ASSIFERO

How to create a shared path against gender-based violence

Principles and practical steps to mainstream gender in your foundation

Principles to guide you

When distilling the information and case studies from this report, several elements critical to success emerge. Organisations should:

- **Build internal capacity**

- **Approach gender analysis as a holistic process, rather than as a fixed framework**

- **Link to systemic challenges**

- **Connect with others on the same path.**

4 steps to set you on your way

- 1

Develop a business case

Assess your foundation's priorities and consider how to effectively address the challenges you invest in. By focusing on your foundation's strengths and intentionally considering the needs of women and girls in your initiatives, you can unlock greater impact.
- 2

Find a champion

Identify an advocate within your organisation who can drive gender integration.
- 3

Start small and iterate

Begin with small initiatives, learn from them, and gradually build momentum.
- 4

Grow your base of champions

Expand the number of advocates within your organisation to enhance your impact.

Join Philea's Gender Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (GEDI) Network

You don't have to tackle this challenge alone: [Get in touch today](#) to start your gender mainstreaming journey.

Introduction

Gender equality is essential not only for achieving fair outcomes, but also for realising socially and economically stable societies. Using a gender lens means understanding how the experiences and needs of people of all genders (including women, men, non-binary, and gender-diverse individuals) intersect with other factors such as ability, migration status and social marginalisation, shaping opportunities and outcomes. Philanthropy that ignores these intersections risks perpetuating the very inequalities it seeks to address.

Moreover, gender inequality has an enormous economic impact across the globe, impeding sustainable development and progress toward equitable, thriving societies. Working towards gender equality not only rights these deficits; it opens pathways for new economic opportunities and societal change. As such, gender equality as an issue links to many areas of philanthropic focus and ambition.

Rise in anti-gender movements

In recent years, the global political landscape has seen a resurgence of anti-gender movements, challenging decades of progress in gender equality. These movements, often well-funded and strategically coordinated, aim to roll back rights related to reproductive health, LGBTQ+ inclusion, and gender education. For instance, [the UK government](#) has considered reversing its commitment to allocate 80% of foreign aid to gender equality-related projects by 2030, citing budgetary constraints.

This political climate underscores the critical need for philanthropy to adopt strategic, collaborative and transformative approaches. Funders have a unique opportunity to support initiatives that not only address immediate needs but also challenge regressive narratives and promote systemic change. This includes gender mainstreaming, both within their organisational practices and structures, and across programmatic strategies and grantmaking. By investing in grass-roots movements, amplifying marginalised voices, and fostering inclusive policies, philanthropy can play a key role in countering anti-gender ideologies and advancing gender equality. With intentional and informed action, every funder can contribute to sustaining progress and protecting hard-won gains in gender equality.



An opportunity to learn from feminist funding and women-led giving

Beyond countering anti-gender ideologies, funders have a powerful opportunity to learn from the practices and principles of feminist funding. Feminist movements, despite facing a quiet crisis marked by shrinking civic space, funding cuts, and coordinated backlash, have demonstrated remarkable resilience. Feminist-informed philanthropy is rising to meet these challenges with innovative funding models rooted in trust, collaboration and long-term commitment.



This resilience is mirrored in broader trends in women's philanthropy. As the [Women Give 2024 report](#) and other longitudinal studies show, women's giving has proven more adaptable and values-driven than men's, especially during times of crisis like the Covid-19 pandemic. Women donors tend to prioritise unrestricted, trust-based funding and collective models such as giving circles, which align closely with feminist principles. These approaches not only sustain movements but also reshape the philanthropic landscape by centring lived experience, shared leadership and systemic change.

Philanthropy should also respond to the evolving dynamics of wealth and giving. The Great Wealth Transfer is expected to shift trillions to women and younger generations, who bring distinct values and approaches to philanthropy. Women are increasingly leading with impact-driven, collaborative strategies, and are more likely to support causes that promote gender equality, racial justice, and social equity. This convergence of feminist funding models and women-led giving offers a transformative blueprint for funders seeking to deepen their impact and build more inclusive and resilient philanthropic ecosystems.

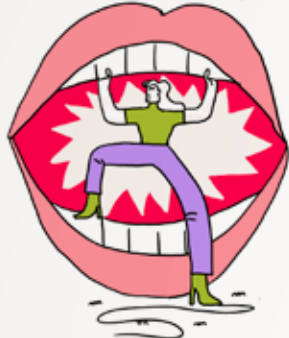
Mainstreaming gender in philanthropy

There are many ways for philanthropies to mainstream gender in their funding, operations and overall approach. Whatever path they take in mainstreaming gender, it's clear that doing so can have a real impact on outcomes, not only in the area of gender but also when it comes to the many other challenges philanthropy seeks to address.

I DON'T DO GENDER, WHY SHOULD I CARE?

gender is EVERYONE'S issue

language



matters

HOW TO START

- start small
- iterate and keep going
- develop a business case that resonates with your foundation
- find a champion
- grow your base of champions

- shared responsibility in organisation
- unlock the resources
- how to integrate gender into emergency?
- WHAT IS NEXT?
- follow global trends & practices for gender + human rights
- global joint monitoring programme for collecting data

RESOURCES:

- Why Gender Matters for Funders
- Organized Anti Gender Movement
- BMG Gender Equality Tool Box
- BMG Foundation Gender Marker
- BMG Gender Mainstreaming Primer

WE CAN DO IT ♀

if your work improves people and planet then you DO gender

engage the boys and men to prevent toxic masculinity

considering gender ensures you DO NO HARM

consider legal systems and patriarchal gender norms

if you care about IMPACT gender matters

the growing ANTI-RIGHTS MOVEMENT threatens progress

achieving gender equality is a fundamental HUMAN RIGHT

WHY GENDER MATTERS

GENDER

gender mainstreaming is an internationally acknowledged SMART STRATEGY to achieve sustainable development goals

GENDER IS NOT A SIDE JOB

MAIN JOB → GENDER



HOW TO APPROACH

- what are the best ways to tackle the problems you invest in?
- invest in areas that speak to comparative advantage
- what does your foundation care about?
- paying special attention to the needs of women and girls

HOW TO IMPLEMENT

ONE FOUNDATION'S GENDER FOCUS

dual-track approach

best practices

gender technical assistant

sharing knowledge and investing ideas

gender integration team:

- change agent
- service provider
- incubation & acceleration

direct gender programmes:

- women in leadership
- women's economic empowerment

impact

- water sanitation and hygiene
- immunisation team for zero-dose children
- clinical resources
- women's agency in vaccine decisions

Why gender matters in philanthropy

By **Hilal Baykara**, Consultant

In today's world, gender justice is not just a women's issue – it's a crucial part of building a more inclusive and equitable society. Amid multifaceted crises and global threats to democracy spanning Europe and beyond, prioritising marginalised groups, including women, girls and gender-diverse individuals, has never been more critical.

Gender, whether we notice it or not, permeates all aspects of philanthropy, impacting everything from resource distribution to programme effectiveness. UN agencies affirm that gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls are pivotal drivers of sustainable development, helping to end poverty and hunger, foster prosperity, build peaceful societies, and safeguard our planet.

Embracing gender equality isn't merely strategic; it's an essential catalyst for creating impact, fostering lasting systemic change, and building a more democratic and inclusive society.

Addressing gender inequality is both a matter of human rights and a strategic investment in societal progress. On one hand, it's about justice – combating discrimination against historically marginalised communities, including women, indigenous peoples, disabled individuals, and LGBTQ+ communities. On the other hand, gender equality is also an economic necessity. A [McKinsey Global Institute report](#) finds that gender inequality costs the world approximately \$12 trillion in global gross domestic product (GDP). Empowering individuals of all genders – women, men and LGBTQ+ alike – unleashes new potential for economic growth, social change and poverty reduction.

Gender isn't solely about women; it involves navigating power dynamics and recognising how intersecting factors like class and race influence experiences for all. Ultimately, it's about creating equitable systems and structures that support a democratic and inclusive society.

All issues are gender issues

Nearly 30 years ago, the Beijing Declaration established that all issues are gender issues. The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 underscored the necessity of reassessing societal structures and institutions through a gender lens to achieve full equality. As the [1995 UN Development Report](#) stated, "Development, if not engendered, is endangered." This marked a significant shift, positioning gender not just as a goal but as a crucial means for advancing equality. The same can be said for philanthropy... "Philanthropy, if not engendered, is endangered."

Gender mainstreaming – incorporating a gender perspective into actions, policies, or legislation – has since become a smart strategy for achieving sustainable development goals.

“Embracing gender equality isn't merely strategic; it's an essential catalyst for creating impact, fostering lasting systemic change, and building a more democratic and inclusive society.”

Gender integration: Leaving no impact on the table

Gender is not a side issue – it's central to creating lasting impact. A recent [Bridgespan Group report "Why Gender Matters in Any Issue Area" \(2024\)](#), reveals that many funders don't consider gender equity when thinking about impact. In 2021-2022, while US donors made around 200 grants of \$25 million or more to social change causes, only 16% explicitly focused on gender.

“ A “do-no-harm” approach to gender equality involves analysing potential risks of unintentionally reinforcing gender inequalities within projects and programmes, actively monitoring these risks, and implementing corrective measures as needed.”

So, how does gender come into play? A workforce funder might overlook bank policies that restrict women's access to loans, undermining entrepreneurship programmes. A livelihoods funder might fail to recognise that women are the primary food producers in low-income countries, directing marketing efforts toward men. In fact, women produce an estimated 60% to 80% of food in low-income countries. Investing in smallholder women farmers can improve agricultural yields by 30% and reduce carbon emissions by up to 2 billion tons by 2050. Conversely, environmental funders who support women in Indigenous communities may effectively combat deforestation by recognising these women as crucial environmental defenders.

Do no harm with gender in mind

Keeping gender in focus not only enhances impact but also safeguards those served through philanthropy. A “do-no-harm” approach to gender equality involves analysing potential risks of unintentionally reinforcing gender inequalities within projects and programmes, actively monitoring these risks, and implementing corrective measures as needed.

For example, if a health funder aiming to improve health-care outcomes for everyone fails to recognise that women are often excluded from clinical trials – especially those for cardiovascular disease, cancer and mental health disorders – this oversight can lead to misdiagnoses and inadequate treatment for women, worsening existing health disparities. Conversely, integrating gender considerations into health initiatives can also have economic benefits. According to the Bridgespan Group report mentioned previously, women spend about 25% more time in poor health compared to men. Addressing this disparity could significantly improve women's well-being and boost the global economy by an estimated \$1 trillion annually by 2040, as women more fully participate in the workforce.

A critical juncture for gender justice

In today's political climate, we're at a critical moment in the fight for gender justice. Well-resourced and strategically coordinated anti-rights and anti-gender movements are gaining ground against progressive communities globally. [A 2021 report](#) uncovers the staggering scale of anti-gender funding, revealing \$707.2 million in financial backing for these movements between 2009 and 2018, with the majority originating from the United States, the Russian Federation, and Europe. In Europe alone, annual anti-gender spending has skyrocketed, growing from \$22.2 million in 2009 to \$96 million in 2018 – a fourfold increase in just 10 years.



Additionally, several countries have tightened restrictions on foreign funding and NGO operations, with this trend continuing to spread. 99% of development aid and foundation grants still do not directly reach women's rights and feminist organisations. Meanwhile feminist movements and gender equality initiatives remain significantly underfunded, leaving a critical gap in support for those advancing human rights. In particular, those groups working at intersecting forms of marginalisation (LGBTQ+, indigenous, migrant and refugees, young feminists) are funded even less. We are facing an alarming reality that threatens to reverse hard-won gains in women's and LGBTQ+ rights, posing a serious threat to democracy itself.

“99% of development aid and foundation grants still do not directly reach women's rights and feminist organisations. Meanwhile feminist movements and gender equality initiatives remain significantly underfunded, leaving a critical gap in support for those advancing human rights.”

In a time of democratic backsliding and rising anti-gender movements, philanthropic organisations of all types have both the responsibility and the ability to act with courage to mainstream gender across internal practices and external strategies, to invest in those most affected by inequality, and to safeguard the progress already won.



WHAT ARE THE NEW FUNDING STRUCTURES NEEDED TO ADVANCE GENDER EQUALITY?



WHAT

collaborative funds
co-funding and co-creating with donors within a broad set of practices

pooled funds
donors aggregate funds for a large-scale impact

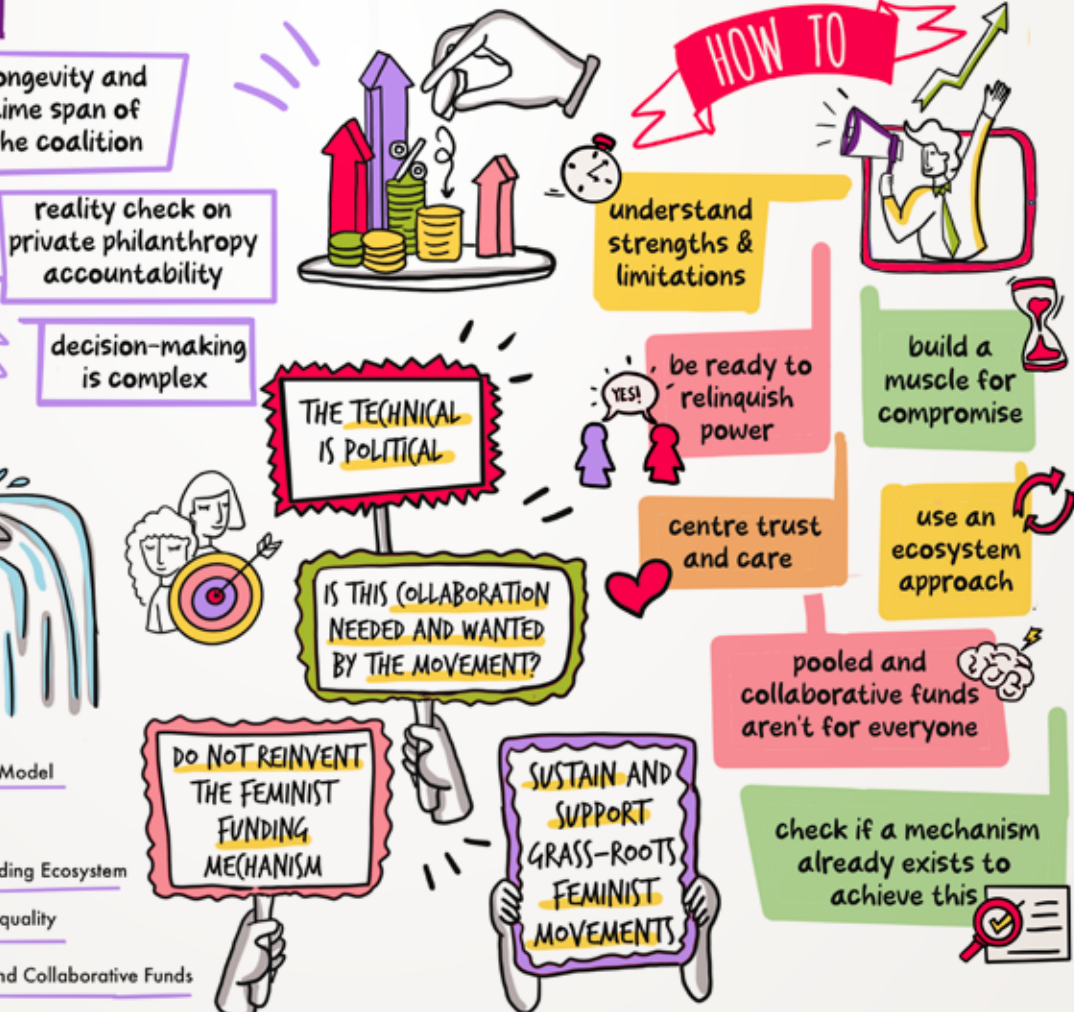


means more than **MONEY**



CHALLENGES

- everyone has their own agenda
- longevity and time span of the coalition
- reality check on private philanthropy accountability
- decision-making is complex



- RESOURCES:**
- ★ Gender Funders CoLab Model
 - ★ Fenomenal Funds Model
 - ★ Why We Need a Feminist Funding Ecosystem
 - ★ About Alliance for Gender Equality
 - ★ What We Mean by Pooled and Collaborative Funds

Pooled and collaborative funds: Innovative structures to advance gender equality

By **Hilal Baykara**, Consultant

“We cannot afford to operate like boutiques. We need a well-coordinated ecosystem approach, where funders understand their strengths and limitations as individual contributors to larger goals,” says Angelika Arutyunova, International Feminist Consultant and Co-Founder of the Dalan Fund. “And the good news is that it certainly is less depressing when we come together, and it can also be bolder.”

As the global struggle for gender equality faces mounting challenges – such as well-organised [anti-rights and anti-gender movements](#) and [increasing restrictions on foreign funding](#) and [NGO activities](#) – the necessity for innovative funding models becomes critical. These structures offer new ways to rethink how feminist movements are supported and how gender justice efforts can gain momentum. Funders are exploring models that demand flexibility, creativity and collaboration. While pooled and collaborative funds may not suit every organisation, those attuned to emerging trends should take notice of their potential. In a world where individual efforts can fall short, these models promise greater impact through shared strategies and coordinated action.

In this context, funders are increasingly asking questions such as:

- What are pooled funds, and what practical considerations come with using them?
- What opportunities can pooled funds create for advancing gender equality?
- What complexities should funders anticipate when engaging in pooled funding?
- How can collaborative funding approaches be designed to maximise impact?
- How is the gender equality funding landscape evolving, and how should funders adapt?
- Why are innovative, collective strategies essential to confronting today’s challenges?

The following offers brief reflections on each of these questions, aiming to highlight key considerations and practical insights for funders navigating this space.

“ (...pooled funds encourage funders to) step out of their comfort zone, mitigate risks, and take bolder actions together than they would individually.”

Marion Schaefer,
Managing Director of Fondation CHANEL
in Europe and Chair of the Alliance
for Gender Equality in Europe

What do we mean by pooled and collaborative funds?

[Pooled and collaborative funds](#) are mechanisms that bring donors together to enhance the impact and efficiency of grantmaking. While collaborative funds involve various forms of cooperation, such as sharing knowledge, co-funding, or co-creating initiatives, pooled funds focus on aggregating resources from multiple donors for larger, targeted investments.

What are some of the advantages?

According to Marion Schaefer, Managing Director of Fondation CHANEL in Europe and Chair of the Alliance for Gender Equality in Europe, pooled funds encourage funders to “step out of their comfort zone, mitigate risks, and take bolder actions together than they would individually.” By combining resources, expertise, and networks, funders complement one another’s roles and strategies. These funds also empower donors to experiment with new approaches and tackle complex challenges more effectively. Below are some key benefits:

BOLDER AND MORE INNOVATIVE GRANTMAKING

Collaborative funds inspire funders to move beyond conventional methods by experimenting with participatory grantmaking and engaging women’s funds in decision-making. This ensures that funding aligns with the real needs of communities and drives systemic change.

MITIGATING RESTRICTIONS

Collaborative efforts leverage complementary strengths, overcoming individual funder limitations – whether regional, thematic or institutional – and expanding the scope of impact.

COLLECTIVE ADVOCACY

Advocating for gender equality can be politically risky for individual institutions. As Mónica Enríquez-Enríquez, Senior Program Officer of Foundation for a Just Society, explains, “Sometimes it’s hard and intimidating, and can have repercussions for an individual institution to do philanthropic advocacy, especially public statements or calling out. So doing it in collaboration ensures collective responsibility.”

ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

Private philanthropy often lacks public accountability, operating on the principle of “our money, our decision”. Annie Hillar, Executive Director of Gender Funders Co-Lab, notes that “coming together is a bit of a communal accountability.” Collaborative funding promotes shared responsibility and transparency, while also reducing redundancy to ensure resources are allocated efficiently where they are needed most.

COORDINATION FOR IMPACT

Pooled funds foster partnerships across regions, facilitating the exchange of knowledge and resources to address shared challenges. Coordinating efforts among donors ensures complementarity of roles and tactics.

What are some of the challenges?

While pooled and collaborative funds offer numerous advantages, they also come with challenges that require intentional management. Bringing together multiple donors, each with their own priorities and practices, can create complexities in both process and relationships. Below are some key challenges:

COMPLEX DECISION-MAKING

Aligning diverse stakeholders requires consensus-building, which can slow down decision-making and place pressure on collaborations.

POWER DYNAMICS

Shifting power to pooled funds requires funders to relinquish some control, which can be difficult for institutions with long-established practices and priorities.

LONG-TERM COMMITMENT

Pooled funds need sustained financial support to remain effective. Short-term commitments can disrupt progress, undermining the momentum and long-term impact of the fund.

“Sometimes it’s hard and intimidating, and can have repercussions for an individual institution to do philanthropic advocacy, especially public statements or calling out. So doing it in collaboration ensures collective responsibility.”

Mónica Enríquez-Enríquez,
Foundation for a Just Society



HOW TO START OR APPLY POOLED AND COLLABORATIVE FUNDS

Understanding the broader ecosystem and determining where pooled and collaborative funds fit is essential before launching one. A useful starting point is to ask: “Is there a mechanism that already exists and is well-positioned and legitimate to do this work instead of us?” From there, it can be valuable to explore key considerations – such as the [Five Questions to Consider Before Plunging into a Pooled Fund](#) – to assess whether joining an existing structure is the right choice. Below are key steps for funders to consider:

→ USE AN ECOSYSTEM APPROACH

Funders should recognise their strengths and limitations while understanding the complementary roles within the existing funding landscape. Contributions must align with broader goals for maximum impact.

→ ASSESS THE MOVEMENT’S NEEDS

Before establishing a pooled fund, it’s important to ask whether the movement requires such a mechanism and if it aligns with the funder’s priorities.

→ BUILD A MUSCLE FOR COMPROMISE

Collaboration demands flexibility, a willingness to share power, and openness to collective decision-making processes. Funders must learn to navigate differences and embrace compromise to foster effective partnerships. Are you ready to relinquish your power?

→ ENSURE LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY

Sustained financial support is essential to maintain momentum and achieve meaningful impact. Short-term commitments or early withdrawals can disrupt efforts and limit success. Will you be able to commit in the long term?

→ FOCUS ON CARE AND TRUST

The way funders collaborate is as important as the outcomes they aim to achieve. Building trust, nurturing relationships, and prioritising care are essential to maintaining healthy and impactful partnerships over time.

Pooled and collaborative funds are not a one-size-fits-all solution. Understanding the broader ecosystem and determining where these funds fit is crucial before launching one. While these models may not solve every challenge, they open exciting opportunities for innovation and impact. When integrated with other strategies, pooled and collaborative funds can become powerful tools for reimagining grantmaking. They encourage funders to step out of their comfort zones, share responsibility, and shift power through collaboration. Although the process involves navigating complexities, it also creates new pathways to advance gender equality. By aligning efforts, embracing care, and building trust, funders can foster a vibrant ecosystem that drives lasting change – proving that, together, we can achieve far more than we ever could alone.

GENDER EQUALITY THROUGH GRANTMAKING



THERE IS NOT ENOUGH FUNDING FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS

only **0.42%** of grants

99% of funds do not directly reach women's rights and organisations

1% of global ODA goes to feminist movements

for systemic change we need

building trust
less bureaucracy
more flexible ways

FOR GREATER IMPACT WE NEED CORE SUPPORT IN THE LONG TERM

simpler processes for proposal & reporting

support self-led organisations

existence of feminist movements



decolonial

joyous rebelliousness

flexibility

care

community

courageous

support organisations that have limited or no access to funding

promote alliance building among organisations

flexible, long-term core funding to activists

support organisations and movements led by those most impacted

facilitate emergency funding in crisis situations

engage with activists to build their capacities

break down funding silos

THE WOMEN'S FUNDS MODEL

connect with small, frontline organisations

invest in self- and collective-care for activists

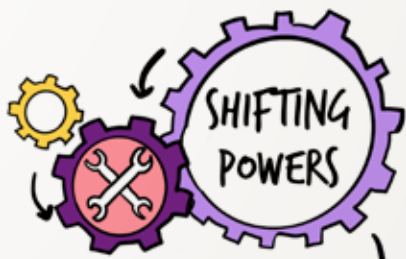
create a culture of feminist philanthropy



VALUE-BASED GRANTMAKING'

TESTED AND PROVEN PRACTICES FOR TRANSFORMATIVE GRANTMAKING

NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US



involve marginalised groups in the design phase

include the most impacted voices to meet the needs

participatory grantmaking can create competition, oh really?

it is a long process, why don't you be the trendsetter

RESOURCES:

- Funding for Women's Rights
- The Women's Fund Models
- Participatory Approaches in Grantmaking
- The International Network of Women's Funds



Achieving gender equality through grantmaking

By **Hilal Baykara**, Consultant

“Change within individuals, communities and society does not come from outsiders trying to empower others or isolated individuals working alone,” says Fiona Montagud, Programme Manager at Calala Women’s Fund. “Real, systemic change happens when people come together, reflect on their realities, and organise to demand changes that meet their needs. This is why supporting self-led organisations is so important.”

In a time of rising resistance and shrinking resources, funding for women’s rights and feminist movements remains alarmingly scarce. [AWID’s 2021 data](#) reveals a serious reality: Only 0.42% of foundation grants are allocated to women’s rights. Even more strikingly, 99% of development aid and foundation grants fail to reach feminist organisations, especially those led by marginalised groups, such as LGBTQ+, Indigenous, migrant, and youth-led feminist organisations. [Official Development Assistance \(ODA\)](#) dedicates less than 1% to feminist movements, while private philanthropy directs only 8% of development-focused funding toward gender equality.

Meanwhile, anti-gender organisations aligned with far-right political agendas are gaining substantial financial backing. In Europe alone, [annual anti-gender spending](#) by these organisations rose from \$22.2 million in 2009 to \$96 million in 2018. These challenges highlight the urgent need for funders to rethink how resources can drive systemic change.

The Women’s Funds Model: A transformative approach to funding

The Women’s Funds Model, developed by [Women’s Funds Europe](#), demonstrates the transformative potential of equity-driven grantmaking.

In 2020, a coalition of 13 funds mobilised €29 million to support women’s rights organisations across 76 countries. The model represents a paradigm shift in funding, offering a roadmap for more impactful and justice-oriented grantmaking.

At its core, the [Women’s Funds Model](#) is not just about providing resources – it is a revolutionary way of organising funding that embeds equality as a guiding principle at every stage of the grantmaking process. By fostering long-

term, sustainable change through solidarity and support, the model prioritises equity, inclusion and the leadership of those most affected by gender inequality.

“In a time of rising resistance and shrinking resources, funding for women’s rights and feminist movements remains alarmingly scarce... Meanwhile, anti-gender organisations aligned with far-right political agendas are gaining substantial financial backing.”

Key principles of the model encourage funders to:

1. SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS AND MOVEMENTS LED BY THOSE MOST IMPACTED

Focus on those directly affected by gender inequality to lead the change.

Provide resources to groups

excluded from mainstream funding:

Prioritise funding for organisations with limited or no access to traditional funding.

Offer flexible, long-term funding:

Provide funding that sustains organisations and allows them to adapt to changing needs.

Provide emergency funding during crises:

Ensure swift support during urgent situations to maintain critical work.

Break down funding silos:

Support groups working on interconnected issues like gender, climate change, democracy and LGBTQ+ rights.

2. ENCOURAGE COLLABORATION

Promote alliance-building among organisations and movements to strengthen collective action.

3. PARTNER WITH GRASS-ROOTS GROUPS

Work with small, frontline organisations that are closest to marginalised communities.

4. BUILD ACTIVISTS' CAPACITIES

Provide training and opportunities for activists to grow their skills.

5. INVEST IN SELF-CARE

Recognise the importance of well-being for activists and organisations to sustain long-term efforts.

6. FOSTER A FEMINIST PHILANTHROPY CULTURE

Create funding practices that value equity, collaboration, and justice.

Why supporting feminist movements and self-led organisations matters

The essence of the model can be distilled into a single strategy: support independent feminist movements and self-led organisations.

Self-led organisations, as integral parts of feminist movements, play a unique role in advancing gender equality. By centring lived experiences, these groups ensure solutions are contextually relevant, sustainable and deeply rooted in the realities of the communities they serve. Their regenerative power lies in their ability to design solutions that reflect the needs and aspirations of the people most impacted by systemic inequalities.

The impact of feminist movements is well-documented. A seminal [2013 study by S. Laurel Weldon and Mala Htun](#) analysed gender-based violence policies across 70 countries over 30 years. The presence of independent feminist movements emerged as the single most significant driver of policy change – outweighing economic indicators or parliamentary representation. Recent [successes in Spain](#) further illustrate this point. Feminist advocacy has achieved milestones such as recognising gender-based violence as a state issue, securing abortion rights, advancing trans rights, and granting domestic workers unemployment benefits. Beyond resisting rollbacks, these movements catalyse profound societal transformation, fostering more just and democratic societies.

Transforming power dynamics in grantmaking

The Women's Funds Model is more than a checklist; it's a dynamic, participatory framework that shifts power dynamics within grantmaking. One example comes from the Calala Women's Fund's work with the migrant women's movement in Spain. Initially, a migrant researcher was hired to assess the movement, but feedback from the movement revealed that participants wanted to co-create the research process from the start. Listening to this critique, Calala revised its approach by forming an advisory group of migrant representatives who were compensated for their time and expertise. The fund also introduced participatory grantmaking, allowing organisations to vote on funding proposals.

This shift led to powerful outcomes: stronger ownership within the migrant community, deeper collaboration among organisations, and greater recognition of activists' expertise. By redistributing power, the Women's Funds Model transforms grantmaking into a justice-centred process, where those traditionally seen as beneficiaries become decision-makers shaping their futures.

“By redistributing power, the Women's Funds Model transforms grantmaking into a justice-centred process, where those traditionally seen as beneficiaries become decision-makers shaping their futures.”

Creating momentum for gender equality

At a time when resources for feminist movements remain alarmingly scarce and resistance grows louder, we stand at a critical juncture. The challenges are undeniable, but waiting for the tide to turn is not an option – we must create our own momentum.

Funders can start by reassessing their grant application processes through the lens of the Women's Funds Model – a proven, effective approach to systemic change in grantmaking. Funders should ask themselves:

- Are our processes accessible to grass-roots organisations?

- Do we offer flexibility to address emerging challenges?

- What steps can we take to identify local activists to partner with – not just to define funding priorities but to empower them throughout the process?

- How about allocating a percentage of our portfolios to feminist movements?

- What does embedding equity into decision-making look like in practice?

Asking these questions and finding entry points can mark the beginning – or continuation – of supporting the gender equality movement more strategically.

By channelling resources to feminist movements and self-led organisations, we can reshape the trajectory of gender equality. These bold, intentional actions have the power to spark change where it is most urgently needed, laying the foundation for real, lasting transformation. The time to act is now – because equity in grantmaking is not just about the outcomes we achieve but about the justice we build into the process itself.

Using philanthropy infrastructure as an incubator for transformation

The role of PIOs in gender mainstreaming

By **Andrea Chiara Brancale**, Programme Officer, Assifero

Europe today faces what many call a “metacrisis”. The combined effect has deepened existing inequalities and created new ones, visible in access to opportunities, representation and well-being. Among the clearest signs of this imbalance are persistent inequalities related to gender. Across Europe, gender still shapes access to safety, opportunity and participation. Violence, discrimination and unequal representation remain widespread, reminding us that equality is far from achieved and that true social progress depends on addressing these gaps. Proof of this is the news that the [Gender Equality Index 2025](#), published by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), includes a revamped methodology. This edition indeed examines all areas of life through the lens of gender bias, highlighting how these biases, with their pervasiveness and persistence, influence people’s lives, choices and opportunities.

As Philea’s [Equality Framework](#) underlines, equality is not an optional ambition but fundamental to our field. Within this wider reflection, gender equality stands as a cornerstone. It is not simply one dimension among many, but a precon-

dition for fairness and social progress. This is where philanthropy infrastructure organisations (PIOs) have a distinctive role, as described in Carola Carazzone’s 2025 article [“Are you serious about system change?”](#).

As networks that build an ecosystem by connecting and amplifying the work of thousands of foundations, PIOs are able to translate shared concern into shared practice. Through learning spaces, advocacy, policy work and collaboration, they can make gender equality a sector-wide commitment rather than a scattered initiative.

“As networks that build an ecosystem by connecting and amplifying the work of thousands of foundations, PIOs are able to translate shared concern into shared practice. Through learning spaces, advocacy, policy work and collaboration, they can make gender equality a sector-wide commitment rather than a scattered initiative.”

Across Europe, this growing awareness is translating into practice as PIOs put gender mainstreaming at the centre of their work. Some are developing equality frameworks; others are creating peer-learning communities or collaborative funds dedicated to gender justice and the prevention of gender-based violence. Taken together, these initiatives show how philanthropy’s infrastructure can make gender equality a shared commitment across the ecosystem: strengthening

collaboration, coherence and trust, and enabling philanthropy to contribute more effectively to a fair and democratic society.

PIOs ARE TAKING ACTION ON GENDER EQUALITY IN A NUMBER OF WAYS:

1 Strengthening governance and organisational frameworks

Across Europe, several national networks are starting from within, revising their internal structures and supporting their members to ensure that equality is reflected in governance and daily practice:

- In Spain, the Spanish Association of Foundations (Asociación Española de Fundaciones) has adopted a [comprehensive Equality Plan \(2024 - 2028\)](#) which guides its internal culture and supports foundations in advancing gender balance and fair representation.

- In Germany, the Association of German Foundations (Bundesverband Deutscher Stiftungen) has [conducted research on gender equality](#) within foundations in the country; established a dedicated group on the subject; and included the principle as a fundamental tenet in its document [“Guiding Principles of Good Practice for Foundations”](#).

- SwissFoundations has introduced a [Diversity Focus](#) to bring gender perspectives into dialogue, data collection and sector standards.

- In Italy, Assifero has developed the [Guidelines for the Elimination of Gender-Based Violence](#), a shared framework designed to support foundations and philanthropic organisations in elaborating policies and practices that can contribute to preventing and addressing gender-based violence while promoting equality, and fostering collaboration and systemic cultural change.

2 Nurturing learning communities and shared understanding

In many countries, PIOs are creating spaces where foundations can learn together, exchange experiences and strengthen their understanding of gender equality within their work. In France, the French Center for Funds and Foundations (Centre Français des Fonds et Fondations) offers knowledge-sharing and [peer-learning opportunities](#) that encourage members [to explore how gender perspectives can be integrated](#) into their programmes and organisational strategies. In some countries, national networks are working to embed gender perspectives across their broader learning and support programmes. In Kosovo, the Kosovar Civil Society Foundation runs initiatives such as [Gender Mainstreaming – A module of the School of Activism](#), which encourages inclusive and rights-based approaches among civil society and philanthropic actors. In Türkiye, TÜSEV embeds gender equality as a cross-cutting theme in its capacity-building, treating it as part of wider efforts on governance, participation and social justice.

“...philanthropy infrastructure is amplifying its role as a bridge between foundations, civil society and public institutions, helping to turn shared concern into coordinated action on gender equality...”



3 Enabling collaboration and collective action

In some contexts, philanthropy infrastructure is amplifying its role as a bridge between foundations, civil society and public institutions, helping to turn shared concern into coordinated action on gender equality:

- In Bulgaria, the Donors Forum works alongside initiatives such as the [Bulgarian Fund for Women](#), bringing together its members to address gender-based violence and promote equal participation across society.

- In Ukraine, the National Network of Local Philanthropy Development supports [community foundations that integrate gender perspectives into their local initiatives](#), from strengthening community resilience to ensuring that recovery efforts respond to different social and gendered needs heightened by the war.

- In Hungary, the community foundations support organisation Roots and Wings Foundation has developed local vehicles to support women directly through its [Solidarity Women's Programme](#), which channels community-raised resources to women experiencing hardship and enables community foundations to provide timely, locally grounded support.

4 Amplifying action for gender equality

Across Europe and beyond, philanthropy infrastructure also includes thematic networks that bring together foundations and philanthropic organisations already committed to advancing gender equality, creating shared spaces for learning, growth and coordinated action:

- [Prospera – International Network of Women's Funds](#) is the global hub of women's and feminist funds globally, fostering exchange, solidarity and joint action.

- The [Gender Funders Co-Lab](#) brings funders together to share knowledge and experiment with collaborative models that can respond to systemic gender inequalities.

- The [Alliance for Gender Equality in Europe](#) is a collaborative fund that brings together foundations with a shared commitment to gender equality, pooling resources and knowledge to support grass-roots organisations and movements.

Across Europe, philanthropy infrastructure organisations are showing that lasting change begins from within and is strengthened through collaboration. By embedding gender equality into their own practices and by guiding the sector toward more reflective, connected and accountable action, they help shape a philanthropic ecosystem able to stand with – and not apart from – the societies philanthropy serves. As system actors, PIOs can ask difficult questions, challenge established patterns and create the conditions for philanthropy to evolve.

LEARN MORE ABOUT PHILANTHROPY INFRASTRUCTURE ORGANISATIONS

Explore Philea's online guide, ["Philanthropy Infrastructure in Focus: Supporting, Empowering and Catalysing European Philanthropy"](#). The guide shines a spotlight on these often unseen engines of change in our sector, diving into the unique role and characteristics of PIOs and how they drive transformation despite operating with limited resources.

CASE STUDIES

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How to use girls' education as a pathway to empowerment and gender equality

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How to turn your gender commitments into practice

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How to build capacity on gender equality as a funder

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Fifty years of commitment to advancing gender equality

p.43 **ASSIFERO**
How to create a shared path against gender-based violence



GIRLS' EDUCATION AS A PATHWAY



WHO ARE WE?

Aydın Doğan Foundation

create opportunities that empower individuals

strengthen public awareness & advocacy

pioneering force since 1996

foster media literacy & promote democratic values

SKILLS

CONFIDENCE

AGENCY



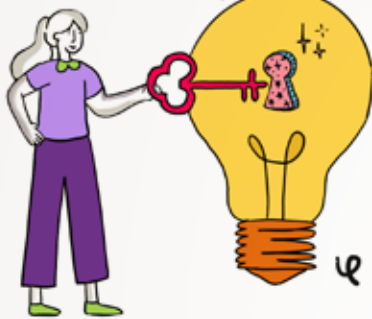
WHY EDUCATION MATTERS?

education opens every door in life

for girls: more than individual achievement

key for healthier families, stronger economies, more resilient communities

HOLISTIC APPROACH



gender equality = non-negotiable principle

zero-tolerance policy against all forms of gender-based violence

embed equality at every level (policy → practice)

create collaborative networks & promote inclusive practices



BARRIERS

#1 financial hardship

#2 cultural norms & gender stereotypes

#3 lack of role models/mentors

#4 external risks (violence, conflict, natural disasters)

scholarships ≠ stand-alone solution

part of broader ecosystem to dismantle barriers



EMPOWERED GIRLS, EMPOWERED FUTURES

current programme building on legacy with university scholarships, mentorship schemes, psychosocial support, leadership development

DADDY, SEND ME TO SCHOOL CAMPAIGN

2005-2015
built 33 dormitories + 10 schools
50,000+ scholarships provided
backed by 300,000+ donors

FUTURE WE'RE BUILDING

EVERY GIRL CAN LEARN, LEAD, THRIVE —REGARDLESS OF CIRCUMSTANCE

"I CAN DO THIS TOO"

adopt multidimensional approach: financial assistance + mentorship confidence-building experiences + strategic partnerships



WITH

HOW

- education
- empowerment
- collaboration

- strengthen partnerships
- expand capacity-building
- innovate to meet needs
- embed gender equality & risk-sensitive approaches

#1: scholarships alone are insufficient

must complement with: mentorship, leadership opportunities, psychosocial resilience

#2: collaboration is indispensable

partners amplify impact: international organisations, government institutions, local NGOs, private sector

#3: role models matter profoundly

when girls see successful women, believe more strongly in own potential

CRITICAL INSIGHTS



IMPACT

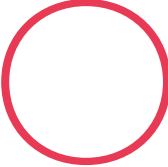
quantitative metrics & qualitative indicators
numbers + transformation stories = most meaningful impact measures

AYDIN DOĞAN FOUNDATION

How to use girls' education as a pathway to empowerment and gender equality

By **Candan Fetvacı**, Chief Executive Officer, Aydın Doğan Foundation

Since its establishment in 1996, the Aydın Doğan Foundation has stood as a pioneering force in advancing equal access to education – particularly for girls – under the guiding motto “Empowered Girls, Empowered Future”. This principle reflects a deep conviction: When girls are empowered through education, they become catalysts for societal transformation. From its earliest days, the foundation has embraced a holistic approach, working not only in education but also in culture, arts, sports, and social responsibility.

 Our mission is rooted in the belief that education is the cornerstone of progress. Over the years, we have launched numerous initiatives to improve educational quality, foster media literacy, and strengthen cultural engagement. These include prestigious awards such as the Aydın Doğan Awards, the International Cartoon Competition, and the Young Communicator Awards, which celebrate creativity and intellectual achievement.

Beyond education, the foundation contributes to public health, scientific research and democratic values. We organise conferences; fund modern schools and dormitories; and promote socially impactful scholarship. This broad scope reflects our founder's vision: to create opportunities that empower individuals and, in turn, strengthen communities. Today, as we look back on nearly three decades of impact, our commitment remains unwavering – to build a strong community and ensure that every girl has the chance to learn, lead and thrive.

What gender equality and mainstreaming mean to us

For the Aydın Doğan Foundation, gender equality is not an abstract ideal; it is a fundamental human right and a non-negotiable principle that shapes every aspect of our work. We adopt a zero-tolerance policy against all forms of gender-based violence – whether physical, psychological, economic, digital or sexual. This commitment extends beyond rhetoric into concrete action, ensuring safe and respectful environments for staff, partners and beneficiaries alike.

Gender mainstreaming is the mechanism through which we operationalise this principle. It means integrating a gender perspective into all decision-making, programming and partnerships. From policy frameworks to practical interventions, we embed equality at every level. Our EU-funded “Empowered Girls, Empowered Futures” project exemplifies this approach. By convening public institutions, private sector actors, and civil society organisations, we create collaborative networks that advance women's and girls' empowerment.

Mainstreaming also involves capacity-building in the form of stakeholder workshops, gender-equality training for NGOs, and public awareness campaigns that challenge stereotypes and promote inclusive practices. Through these efforts, we aim not only to protect women and girls but to enable their full participation and leadership in society. Gender equality, for us, is both a goal and a method – a lens through which we design programmes and measure success.

Why education matters

Education is the most powerful key that opens every door in life. For girls and young women, it is more than an individual achievement; it is the foundation upon which societies build justice, prosperity and hope. At the Aydın Doğan Foundation, we believe that if you want to change a nation – or even the world – you must educate girls.

Investing in girls' education creates a ripple effect: healthier families, stronger economies and more resilient communities. Especially in times of crisis – whether natural disasters, pandemics or social upheaval – the risk of girls dropping out of school increases dramatically. Ensuring their continued learning is not only vital for their futures but for ours collectively. Education equips girls with the skills, confidence and agency to navigate challenges and seize opportunities. It is, quite simply, the most transformative force we know.

Barriers to girls' education

Despite progress, numerous structural and social barriers continue to hinder girls' access to quality education. Financial hardship remains one of the most significant obstacles; even high-achieving students often struggle to continue their studies due to economic constraints.

Cultural norms and gender stereotypes create invisible barriers, limiting girls' choices and eroding their self-confidence. In many cases, young women lack role models or mentors to guide them through unfamiliar academic and professional landscapes – particularly those who are the first in their families to attend university.

“We adopt a zero-tolerance policy against all forms of gender-based violence – whether physical, psychological, economic, digital or sexual. This commitment extends beyond rhetoric into concrete action, ensuring safe and respectful environments for staff, partners and beneficiaries alike.”

External risks compound these challenges. Violence, conflict and natural disasters disproportionately affect girls, disrupting their education and exposing them to heightened vulnerability. Moreover, simply enrolling in school is not enough. Girls need safe, supportive environments where they can truly learn and develop their potential. High dropout rates during secondary education and unmet learning needs among out-of-school adolescents remain pressing concerns.

Finally, the transition from education to employment poses its own set of hurdles. Young women often face limited career guidance, unequal opportunities, and systemic biases that restrict their professional growth. Addressing these barriers requires a mul-

tidimensional approach – one that combines financial support with psychosocial resilience, mentorship and structural reform.

Our programmes and initiatives: Tackling structural barriers

Our response to these challenges is comprehensive. We do not view scholarships as a standalone solution; rather, they form part of a broader ecosystem of support designed to dismantle structural barriers.

The “Daddy, Send Me to School” campaign, launched in 2005, marked a turning point. For over a decade, it provided scholarships and dormitory opportunities to tens of thousands of girls; built 33 dormitories and 10 schools; and shifted societal attitudes towards girls' education. Today, our “Empowered Girls, Empowered Futures” programme builds on this legacy, offering university scholarships, mentorship schemes, psychosocial support and leadership development.

Mentorship is central to our approach. Through the voluntary involvement of Doğan Group executives, we connect young women with professionals who offer guidance, inspiration, and practical insights. Our Young Leaders Summer Camps further strengthen self-confidence and leadership

skills, enabling participants to design and implement social impact projects that benefit their communities.

We also address cultural and psychosocial barriers by creating safe spaces for dialogue and growth. Workshops, training sessions, and capacity-building programmes equip girls with the tools to challenge stereotypes and advocate for themselves. Partnerships with organisations such as UNICEF, UN Women and UNFPA, particularly through our annual International Day of the Girl Child Conference, ensure that these issues remain on the global agenda.

Recognising gaps within local civil society organisations, we provide NGOs with standardised training materials, monitoring tools and micro-grants through our EU-funded projects. By strengthening these organisations, we amplify impact and create sustainable support networks. In short, our initiatives are designed not only to provide resources but to transform systems – addressing financial, social and structural barriers in an integrated manner.

Measuring impact

Impact, for us, is measured both in numbers and in narratives. We track scholarship completion rates, monitor progression into higher education, and evaluate leadership outcomes from our summer camps. Pre- and post-assessments help us gauge changes in awareness and knowledge, while participant feedback offers qualitative insights into personal growth.

Yet the most meaningful indicators are found in lived experiences: a student returning from camp saying, “I can do this too,” or a young woman resuming her education after a disaster and daring to dream again. These stories reflect the transformative power of our work in ways that data alone cannot capture.

The “Daddy, Send Me to School” campaign exemplifies this impact. Backed by Doğan Group’s wide reach of over 300,000 donors, it grew into a truly nationwide movement. Beyond its impressive statistics – over 50,000 scholarships and dozens of schools and dormitories – it sparked a national conversation about girls’ education and helped shift cultural norms across Türkiye. Today, when we meet former beneficiaries who are now doctors, engineers and teachers, we see the enduring legacy of this initiative.

“...our initiatives are designed not only to provide resources but to transform systems – addressing financial, social and structural barriers in an integrated manner.”

Lessons learned and recommendations

Our journey has taught us three critical lessons:

1. Scholarships alone are insufficient

Financial support must be complemented by mentorship, leadership opportunities and psychosocial resilience to ensure lasting empowerment.

2. Collaboration is indispensable

Partnerships with international organisations, government institutions, local NGOs, and the private sector amplify impact and enable systemic change. No single institution can solve these challenges alone; collective action is key.

3. Role models matter profoundly

When young girls see women who have succeeded, they believe more strongly in their own potential. For organisations seeking to empower girls through education, our recommendation is clear: Adopt a multidimensional approach that combines financial assistance with mentorship, confidence-building experiences, and strategic partnerships.

Outlook

As we look ahead, we recognise that the landscape of girls’ education is evolving, and sustaining progress requires us to stay responsive to new realities. Emerging risks – climate-related disasters, economic instability, and rising violence – pose new challenges that demand adaptive strategies. Our programmes increasingly integrate resilience-building measures, focusing on safety, psychosocial well-being and preparedness for environmental risks.

We will continue to strengthen partnerships, expand capacity-building efforts, and innovate to meet the complex needs of young women. By embedding gender equality and risk-sensitive approaches into every initiative, we aim to create not only opportunities but security and hope.

Our vision remains steadfast: a future where every girl can learn, lead, and thrive – regardless of circumstance. Through education, empowerment and collaboration, we will keep working towards that future. We believe in the strength of the girls who complete our programmes to become leaders in their communities and to cultivate the seeds for gender equality and a more peaceful world.

[Aydın Doğan Foundation](#)

BUILDING A GENDER ANALYSIS STRATEGY



WHO ARE WE?

King Baudouin Foundation

an umbrella foundation for grant-giving and capacity-building

fields of poverty and social justice, health, education, democracy & more

building better society in Belgium, Europe & worldwide

analysis of different impacts on women & men



KEY STRATEGIES



data collection considering gender differences

planning that accounts for different needs



consider spectrum of experiences, not just binary

HIGHLIGHT STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

CREATE A CONTINUOUS AWARENESS



EXPLAIN WHY

KEY IS KEEP CONTINUOUSLY DOING THIS

POWER OF THE GENDER SENSITIVITY



- + understands gendered barriers and experiences
- + collects and uses disaggregated data
- + designs inclusive, equitable responses

AMPLIFYING MARGINALIZED VOICES

BOOST success for youngsters in higher education

HOMELESSNESS challenging stereotypical narratives

young boys struggling to enter the labour market, migrant women, single-parent/mom families etc.



HOW TO?

use thematic entry points

understand gender dynamics and apply equitable approaches

focus on impact-oriented funding

start from the figures

create public and institutional awareness

explain the 'why' of gender sensitivity

foster a safe space



invest in data literacy and impact measurement skills

WHAT IS NEXT?

advocate for systemic change

foster gender-sensitive governance structures at all levels of management

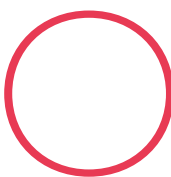
annual gender awareness trainings to staff and partners

KING BAUDOUIIN FOUNDATION

How to build a holistic and adaptive gender analysis strategy

By **Caroline George**, Head of Programme, Social Justice and Poverty, King Baudouin Foundation

King Baudouin Foundation has worked for nearly five decades to foster change, stimulate innovation and strengthen social cohesion. As an independent and pluralist foundation, active in Belgium, across Europe, and internationally, we connect philanthropists and donors with social causes. We are a so-called donor-driven umbrella foundation, hosting over 1,500 different funds all having specific objectives and being active in determined regions.

 Our collaboration with a wide range of philanthropists allows us to support around 4,000 organisations yearly and operate with an annual budget of more than €150 million. This allows us to act as a significant force for the public good, addressing issues as diverse as poverty, education, health, climate and democracy.

Within this broad mission, gender equality is, whether implicitly or explicitly, a key concern. For this reason, we have worked to integrate gender sensitivity across our programmes, using adaptive gender analysis and data-driven approaches to inform our strategies.

What gender sensitivity means for us

Gender sensitivity is about recognising that gender identity shapes life outcomes. Gender determines access to resources, educational pathways, employment prospects, housing stability, and even health outcomes. If we ignore these dynamics, we risk reinforcing existing inequalities.

Applying a gender lens allows us to ask questions that might otherwise go unexamined: Who benefits from this programme? Who is excluded? Whose needs are hidden because of stereotypes or assumptions? By using this perspective, we can uncover structural inequalities that affect people differently and design interventions that meet diverse realities.

Gender sensitivity, as we understand it, is not simply about balancing numbers between women and men. It is about understanding differentiated experiences and creating fairer opportunities in practice.

Our adaptive and data-driven approach to gender analysis

As an institution we have developed practical tools for designing and managing projects by applying a gender lens. Various workshops for staff have been organised to ensure that both practice and knowledge remain up to date.

As we are a donor-driven umbrella foundation, we apply a gender lens when possible. Our approach to gender is adaptive, shaped by context, specific needs and available evidence. It's through data-driven approaches that we can implement gender strategies within the programmes.

This combined approach reflects both who we are and how we work. Our programmes and actions are diverse, and gender issues manifest differently across them. Sometimes gender analysis is embedded from the outset; in other cases, it emerges during implementation as new insights come to light. We combine gender-disaggregated data, targeted research, expert consultation, and dialogue with our partner organisations. This flexibility enables us to adapt our strategies to realities on the ground while keeping our focus on meaningful social impact.

Examples from our programmes

Education and Talent Development: Increasing Boys' Participation

One clear example is our Boost programme, which supports talented young people from underprivileged backgrounds with long-term coaching, financial support and access to role models. As the programme developed, we noticed that around 80% of candidates nominated by schools were girls. This was surprising, given that boys are statistically more likely to drop out or achieve lower educational outcomes. We thus decided to increase awareness of this issue in partnering schools, and adapt our selection process and overall objectives of the Boost programme.

The imbalances within the field of education also prompted us to commission research into the structural factors shaping boys' and girls' different trajectories. The findings are informing the design of a new strategic vision for the Education and Talent programme, which will be launched in 2027. Through this process, we are learning how to address both the underrepresentation of boys and the specific challenges faced by both girls and boys. This illustrates how careful analysis of data can reveal hidden imbalances and lead us to adapt our programmes accordingly.

Homelessness Programme

In our work on homelessness, gender-disaggregated data transformed how we understood the issue. Public perception often associates homelessness with middle-aged men. However, through repeated homelessness counts that we helped support, we were able to unveil the fact that roughly one in three homeless people are women.

The data also showed important differences within this group: Women with children had very different needs than women without. Women with children were less likely to present the severe symptoms traditionally linked with homelessness, which meant they often remained invisible in services designed for men.

“Gender sensitivity is about recognising that gender identity shapes life outcomes. Gender determines access to resources, educational pathways, employment prospects, housing stability, and even health outcomes. If we ignore these dynamics, we risk reinforcing existing inequalities.”

We had the opportunity to collaborate with a philanthropic fund dedicated to women's homelessness, investing around €1.5 million in Brussels and supporting about 20 organisations. We asked grantees to show either a proven track record with women or a commitment to adapting their services to meet women's needs. Some created day centres exclusively for women and girls, others adapted their service offer so that homeless girls would have a safe space at least one afternoon in the week, responding to their very specific needs. All embraced the same principle: Equitable provision sometimes requires differentiated measures.

As the obtained data clearly lacked information on the LGBTQI+ community, we partnered with an organisation addressing their realities as well, to better understand the context and the realities homeless LGBTQI+ people are facing. By taking this approach, we could ensure that our interventions did not reinforce stereotypes but instead responded to the actual diversity of people affected.

Employment: Migrant Women in the Labour Market

Another area where gender analysis has shaped our work is employment. Research we commissioned showed that women with migrant backgrounds face systemic barriers to entering the labour market. Despite strong motivation, many encounter obstacles ranging from language to discrimination, lack of networks, or difficulties reconciling work and care responsibilities.

On the basis of this research, we launched initiatives that created low-threshold opportunities, such as volunteering placements, which could act as first steps into stable employment. By tailoring interventions to the women's realities, we supported pathways to both economic inclusion and broader social participation.

Key elements of our approach

Across these different domains, several key elements define how we integrate gender analysis into our work:

GENDER-DISAGGREGATED DATA

Collecting and presenting information for women, men, and other gender identities, so differences and inequalities between them can be identified and analysed.

COMMISSIONED RESEARCH

Studying structural barriers and contextual realities.

EXPERT CONSULTATION

Working with academics and practitioners to interpret data and design responses.

DIALOGUE WITH PARTNERS

Listening to organisations on the ground and building on their expertise.

FLEXIBILITY AND ADAPTATION

Allowing gender analysis to evolve throughout the life of a programme.

TARGETED FUNDING

Using donor commitments to address specific gendered gaps where they exist.

This combination allows us to remain both evidence-based and responsive to changing contexts.

“At the King Baudouin Foundation, gender equality is a continuous process of reflection, learning and adaptation in order to increase our impact on societal challenges. We are convinced that by applying gender sensitive approaches we can become more effective grantmakers driving social change.”

Learnings and future directions

At our foundation, gender equality is a continuous process of reflection, learning and adaptation in order to increase our impact on societal challenges. We are convinced that by applying gender sensitive approaches we can become more effective grantmakers driving social change. Here are some key takeaways from our journey:

1. A continuous process of internal growth

We recognise that embedding gender sensitivity into our work requires ongoing effort. Over the years, we have developed internal toolboxes and organised workshops to help staff apply gender-sensitive approaches in their programmes. However, we also understand that this is not a one-off exercise. There is a need for continuous awareness-raising, regular updates, and open dialogue to ensure that gender perspectives remain relevant and responsive to evolving societal contexts.

2. Learning through collaboration

We believe in the power of collective learning. By joining the Alliance for Gender Equality in Europe, we have deepened our understanding of the realities faced by grassroots organisations across different European countries. This collaboration not only brings us closer to the lived experiences of those working on the frontlines of gender justice, but also allows us to learn from other foundations – their strategies, challenges and innovations in applying gender-sensitive approaches. This exchange enriches our own practices and helps us refine our vision.

3. Increasing visibility to drive awareness

Visibility is a catalyst for change. By highlighting gender approaches within our programmes, we foster greater awareness across the entire organisation. Making gender-sensitive work more visible – whether through internal communications, reporting or showcasing successful initiatives – helps normalise these approaches and encourages others to integrate gender perspectives into their own work. For the future, our key challenge lies with reinforcing the message that gender equality is a shared responsibility, not confined to specific teams or projects.

By applying gender lenses across our work, whether in education, homelessness, employment, or youth services, we will continue addressing hidden disparities and develop tailored responses. In this way, we will remain true to our mission: to foster change, stimulate innovation, and strengthen social cohesion in ways that build a fairer and more inclusive society for all.

[King Baudouin Foundation](#)



FROM COMMITMENTS TO PRACTICE



"la Caixa" Foundation

WHAT WE DO



address science & education challenges

build sustainable solutions

one of Spain's leading philanthropic organisations

democratised knowledge & culture

SIX-STEP APPROACH

To BUILD A MORE INCLUSIVE AND FAIR SOCIETY



KEY STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

being more efficient



staying relevant

increasing the impact of your work

ENGAGING SENIOR LEADERSHIP

FINDING ALLIES



using internal expertise

being more credible

setting up structure for continuity

finding people in middle/top management to advocate

GIVING VISIBILITY TO THE PROCESS



ALIGNING WITH ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT

establishing gender integration

keeping motivation high



sharing good practices

PARTICIPATORY METHODOLOGY

- + bottom-up initiative
- + internal diagnosis
- + setting up a structure



identifying key moments

aligning gender efforts

starting with manageable initiatives

“LA CAIXA” FOUNDATION

How to turn your gender commitments into practice

By **Júlia Prats**, Gender Equality Lead, “la Caixa” Foundation
& **Roser de la Torre**, Project Manager, International Area, “la Caixa” Foundation

“Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world.” – UN Women

The “la Caixa” Foundation aspires to build a fairer and more equal society, giving more opportunities to those most in need and focusing on those programmes with the greatest impact and capacity to transform and improve people’s lives. It focuses on developing long-lasting sustainable solutions to challenges in the fields of science and education, as well as on projects that help to bring knowledge and culture closer to all segments of society.

The foundation is one of Spain’s foremost philanthropic organisations and a key player in the transformation of society. Its work is mostly carried out in Spain and Portugal, but it also supports international projects.

What gender integration means for us

The “la Caixa” Foundation acknowledges the importance of integrating a gender perspective into its work to identify and address systemic inequities; reinforcing strategic alignment with principles of equity, human rights, and social justice; maximising the effectiveness of its pro-

grammes; and upholding the highest standards of accountability and compliance.

Ensuring a gender perspective in design, implementation and evaluation processes increases the quality and impact of our programmes – whether they address social inclusion; child poverty; employment and entrepreneurship; research and health; or education and culture – because applying a gender lens better reflects the diversity of our society and responds more effectively to people’s needs.

“Ensuring a gender perspective in design, implementation and evaluation processes increases the quality and impact of our programmes – whether they address social inclusion; child poverty; employment and entrepreneurship; research and health; or education and culture...”

How our journey began

In alignment with our goal of promoting a just and equitable society, we took a decisive step forward to standardise and systematically incorporate a gender perspective across all our programmes through a participatory methodology.

A bottom-up initiative

Our journey began as a bottom-up movement, driven by colleagues who recognised the need to address gender disparities. This inclusive approach encouraged diverse perspectives and ensured that gender considerations became part of everyday decision-making.

“To turn diagnosis into action, we needed structure. We established clear roles, identified gender focal points in each programme, created a transversal Gender Team, and built communication channels to share knowledge and monitor progress. This structure ensures that gender integration is horizontal and therefore embedded in the organisation.”

Internal diagnosis

The first major step was conducting an internal diagnosis. This institutional gender assessment was analytical and strategic and allowed us to take a deeper look at our work.

We examined the actual state of our programmes, identified existing good practices, and found opportunities for improvement. This assessment was participatory; every programme area was involved, which not only produced better data but also built commitment to change.

Setting up a structure

To turn diagnosis into action, we needed structure. We established clear roles, identified gender focal points in each programme, created a transversal Gender Team, and built communication channels to share knowledge and monitor progress. This structure ensures that gender integration is horizontal and therefore embedded in the organisation.

Six-step approach

Our gender perspective strategy can be broken down into six steps:

1. IDENTIFICATION OF FOCAL POINTS

Each programme now has a gender focal point who serves as a bridge between the Gender Team and their area. These focal points create a participatory process, facilitate access to information and transparency; and help create a network to ensure continuity of gender integration.

2. INITIAL SESSIONS

The Gender Team holds meetings with focal points in each programme to explain the action plan, answer questions, and offer team-wide briefings to engage everyone from the start.

3. DIAGNOSTIC QUESTIONNAIRE

A simple, organisation-wide questionnaire gives us an initial overview of how each programme is currently designed, implemented and evaluated with or without a gender lens.

4. INTERVIEWS AND DATA COLLECTION

Based on the questionnaire, we conduct in-depth interviews with focal points, collect relevant documents, and identify both existing good practices and gaps.

5. ANALYSIS

We look at each programme through a gender lens to scope out how they can be more effective, relevant and efficient.

6. GOOD PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We document and share the good practices we find, and we issue targeted recommendations to improve impact. Over time, this process will make gender sensitivity a hallmark of our excellence.

For instance, the Work4Progress programme of the “la Caixa” Foundation aims to promote job creation and includes a gender perspective in all its phases: diagnosis, design, implementation and evaluation. An example of a specific activity within this programme is the implementation in India of a rickshaw network of secure transportation led by women. This initiative emerged from a listening and co-creation process with these women, who, besides having a sustainable business model, have become agents of change in their communities.

Lessons learned and key takeaways

Throughout this journey we've learned the critical importance of:

ENGAGING SENIOR LEADERSHIP

To bring about real change, we needed our leaders on board. We made the case that gender integration increases impact, efficiency and organisational relevance. We showed them specific examples (like the Work4Progress's rickshaw network led by women) to make the benefits tangible.

FINDING ALLIES

We built a network of allies in top and middle management, as well as a Gender Ambassador Network. These allies lend credibility, share expertise, and ensure that gender work is not siloed.

GIVING VISIBILITY TO THE PROCESS

We actively communicate milestones and successes internally, sharing compelling stories, and recognising the contributions of our allies. Visibility keeps momentum high and makes gender equality feel like a core organisational priority.

ALIGNING WITH ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT

We chose our moments strategically, aligning efforts with existing goals, initiatives and planning cycles. We moved on within a clear strategic framework and adapted as we went, understanding that patience is essential for lasting change.

Key takeaways

Based on our experience, we have seen that applying a gender perspective strengthens programmes, promotes equity, and leads to more sustainable outcomes. Doing so also strengthens our credibility, relevance and partnership opportunities. Many funders now expect gender integration as standard.

However, challenges may arise, such as, limited expertise on gender-related issues and ensuring consistent integration across diverse programmes. To address these, we recommend that funders:

Secure leadership commitment

and embed gender equality in core values and strategy

Invest in staff training

and awareness to build internal capacity

Develop clear frameworks

and practical tools to ensure systematic integration

Engage external experts and affected communities

to inform and validate approaches

The road ahead

By systematically considering gender in our programmes, we are not only making them more equitable and effective but also ensuring that they have the greatest possible impact on everyone in society.

We know this is just the beginning. Integrating gender into our agenda is not a one-off project: It's a continuous process of learning, adapting and embedding new ways of thinking into everything we do.

This journey has shown us that when we look through a gender lens, we pursue justice and equity more fully in our work. And that deepens our commitment to our mission: to build a more inclusive and fair society.

["la Caixa" Foundation](#)

LEARNING, LEADING, LASTING: GESI IMPACT

GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

Laudes Foundation

support brave action to transition to a green, fair, and inclusive economy

WHO ARE WE?

fields of labour rights, food systems, textile industry, finance & capital markets



WHY GESI MATTERS

gender, climate, rights are interconnected

support, resilience, inclusion

focus on marginalised groups and leave no one behind



CHALLENGES

ENGAGEMENT

getting everyone in the room consistently



APPROACH

- + building leadership
- + focusing on teamwork
- + having a theory of change
- + shift from general learning to practical experience
- + creating different learning tools



SUSTAINABILITY

making learning regular and sustained

VISIBILITY

GESI work often done without recognition



STRENGTHENED INDUSTRIAL SKILLS ALIGNED WITH SUSTAINABLE TRANSITION

shifting from geographic learning to industry-focused journey

community of practice

UNLOCKED HUMAN POTENTIAL THROUGH DIVERSE LEARNING METHODS

peer-to-peer learning

case studies & live learning sessions

webinars & podcasts

in-house & external trainers



CREATE A BALANCE FOR MEANINGFUL SHIFT

MAKING GESI VISIBLE WHILE EMBEDDING IT NATURALLY INTO OPERATIONS

PROVIDE TAILORED SUPPORT THAT PARTNERS ACTUALLY NEED

WHAT IS NEXT?

INVEST IN BOTH FINANCIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES



1 integrate grant cycle into actions

2 track knowledge & analyse what works best

3 measure & capture impact systematically

4 demonstrate what change looks like

LAUDES FOUNDATION

How to build capacity on gender equity as a funder

By **Andwele Bryan**, Head of Organisational Development and Inclusion, Laudes Foundation

Laudes Foundation is an independent philanthropic organisation committed to addressing two of the most pressing challenges of our time: climate breakdown and inequality. Our vision is of a global economy that values all people and respects the natural boundaries of the planet.

We work by partnering with others to support brave, collaborative and systemic solutions that can help shift industries and markets towards sustainability and fairness. Our programmes span multiple sectors, including the built environment, fashion, finance and capital markets, and, more recently, food. Alongside these industries, we also engage with cross-cutting themes to create the enabling conditions for green, fair and inclusive transitions.

At the heart of all of this lies a simple conviction; the transition to a green economy must be just and inclusive. It is not enough to decarbonise industries or reform markets if the benefits are not shared fairly and if those most affected by the transition (workers, women and marginalised groups) are left behind.

What gender equity means for us

For Laudes Foundation, gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) is more than a principle; it is a necessary condition for building an economy that works for both people and the planet. The climate emergency is not gender-neutral. Women, particularly those already marginalised by class, race, geography or other factors, are often the most affected by environmental and economic shocks, yet the least represented in decision-making.

Gender equity, therefore, is about recognition and redistribution, recognising who has been excluded and ensuring their meaningful participation in shaping solutions. It is about power, shifting who has a voice, who makes decisions, and who benefits from economic change. For us, embedding gender equality into our work strengthens our impact; it helps ensure that transitions to sustainable industries are not only green, but also fair and lasting.

“...gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) is more than a principle; it is a necessary condition for building an economy that works for both people and the planet. The climate emergency is not gender-neutral. Women... are often the most affected by environmental and economic shocks, yet the least represented in decision-making.”

Our journey of gender training and capacity building

Our journey towards mainstreaming gender equality began during our transition from C&A Foundation to Laudes Foundation. C&A Foundation had a dedicated gender justice programme, but as Laudes was established, we made a strategic decision: rather than having a stand-alone programme, we would integrate gender and social inclusion across all our areas of work.

To begin this integration, we first needed to understand our own capacities and gaps. Working with consultants, we carried out a baseline assessment of staff knowledge and comfort in applying a GESI lens. This assessment revealed a strong commitment across the organisation, but also a clear need for structured support and training.

We then developed a learning journey for staff. Initially, this was organised by geography; staff in Europe and staff in Asia participated in tailored sessions that responded to their contexts. The pandemic meant that much of this learning had to be conducted virtually. We used a mix of webinars, podcasts, self-paced courses and case studies to accommodate different learning styles. As restrictions lifted, we also introduced regional in-person sessions, which provided opportunities for deeper engagement.

From these early steps, we learned valuable lessons. One was that staff are highly motivated but also lacking in time. Competing priorities made it difficult for many to engage fully with voluntary training. We also realised that one-off learning events were insufficient; what was needed was sustained engagement and practical application.

How it looks now

Building on these lessons, our approach has since evolved. Instead of structuring learning journeys by geography, we now use an industry-specific model. This ensures that GESI is explored within the realities of each sector. For instance, in the built environment, discussions focus on tenants' rights, energy poverty and access to training and employment. In fashion, the emphasis is on supply chains, working conditions and the gendered vulnerabilities of garment workers.

We have also introduced the role of GESI Champions. These are staff from across programmes and operations who dedicate part of their formal work time to championing inclusion. They receive bespoke training in skills such as power analysis, stakeholder mapping and contextual analysis. As multipliers, they bring these insights back into

their teams and help embed GESI thinking into programme design and delivery.

To monitor progress, we now use a GESI integration analysis, which looks at three dimensions: how staff support their colleagues, how they support partners, and how they engage with the wider ecosystem. This goes beyond knowledge acquisition to examine whether practices are changing. We have also developed a new GESI marker, which will guide both staff and partners when designing and reviewing proposals.

For partners, support takes multiple forms. Sometimes it is direct funding for gender-related work; at other times it is non-financial assistance, such as access to consultants who can help them develop policies, conduct analyses or design more inclusive programmes.

“ We have also introduced the role of GESI Champions. These are staff from across programmes and operations who dedicate part of their formal work time to championing inclusion.”

Lessons learned and recommendations

Reflecting on our journey so far, several key lessons stand out:

DEDICATED RESOURCES MATTER

Without staff and consultants specifically tasked with GESI, integration risks becoming tokenistic.

DIFFERENT LEARNING FORMATS INCREASE ENGAGEMENT

A mix of self-paced, virtual, and in-person methods recognises diverse needs.

SUSTAINED ENGAGEMENT IS CRUCIAL

Real change does not come from a single workshop, but from ongoing reinforcement and practice.

SAFE SPACES FOR PARTNERS ARE ESSENTIAL

Power dynamics between funders and grantees can inhibit honest reflection. External consultants can help create confidential learning environments.

LEADERSHIP AT MULTIPLE LEVELS IS NEEDED

Senior management provides the mandate and resources, but change is also driven by programme managers and champions who integrate GESI into daily practice.

For other organisations beginning this journey, we would recommend the following:

- Start with an **honest self-assessment**

- Invest in both **financial and human resources**

- **Contextualise training** to your organisation's core mission

- **Create mechanisms for sustained engagement** (such as champions or peer groups)

- **Support partners respectfully**, providing resources without imposing your own approaches

Future directions

Looking ahead, our focus is on deepening integration. We are working to embed GESI systematically across our grant cycle, internal operations and monitoring frameworks. This includes developing indicators and rubrics that capture not just outputs, but outcomes (who participates, who benefits, and whose voices are heard).

We are also sharpening our focus on the intersection of climate and inclusion. The climate emergency cannot be addressed effectively without attention to inequality. We are engaging more with peer funders and networks to share and learn about how inclusion strengthens climate action.

Another important direction is place-based work. By engaging deeply in specific local contexts, we can better understand how systemic issues of inequality intersect with climate, and how a GESI lens can make transitions more just and sustainable.

Finally, we want to continue amplifying peer learning. Partners already carry out innovative, inclusive work, sometimes without labelling it as such. By creating opportunities for exchange, we can make these practices visible and encourage others to adopt them. Similarly, within philanthropy, collaboration and openness will be critical to advancing gender equality and social inclusion more broadly.

[Laudes Foundation](#)

50 YEARS OF GENDER EQUALITY IMPACT



WHO ARE WE?

Sabancı Foundation

founded in 1974 to promote equal rights and opportunities for everyone

works through education, culture & arts, and social inclusion

KEY MILESTONES

1970s-1990s

expanded access to girls' education and scholarships

2000s

shift to rights-based philanthropy
250+ projects, 4.6M reached

2006-2016

co-led Türkiye's first UN Joint Programme for women's rights

2009-TODAY

Türkiye's Changemakers Program highlights gender champions

2018-TODAY

Young Women Building Their Future project - 6,000+ NEET women reached, 4 TL social return per 1 TL invested

2024

new strategy - systemic change, global partnerships, innovative financing

GENDER MAINSTREAMING



APPROACH

INDIVIDUAL EMPOWERMENT

INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING

- + design initiatives responding to women's & girls' specific needs
- + ensure internal practices reflect equity & inclusion
- + build partnerships with civil society, government, and private sector
- + monitor using disaggregated data & SROI methodology
- + advocate with evidence & data

POLICY AND NORM CHANGE

SOCIETAL AWARENESS



IMPACT

83% of projects became models for others

91% of women reported positive life changes

62% accessed new funding

41% of partner organisations got first-ever funding from foundation

LEARNINGS



integrate gender into core strategies, not side programmes

use evidence & data to strengthen accountability

invest in internal capacity

ENABLERS OF PROGRESS

- strong partnerships
- trusted ally role
- public demand
- global frameworks
- persistence

CHALLENGES

STRUCTURAL barriers, patriarchal norms and gender pay gaps

CULTURAL resistance in rural areas

POLITICAL pressures affecting civil society

RESOURCES:

Social Impact Analysis

- Sabancı Foundation Grant Program
- Türkiye's Changemakers Program
- Young Women Building Their Future



SABANCI FOUNDATION

Fifty years of commitment to advancing gender equality

By **Sezin Dereci Kösem**, Programs Manager, Sabancı Foundation

Becoming a trusted and visible ally in empowering women, strengthening civil society, and driving lasting social change

Founded in 1974, the Sabancı Foundation is one of Türkiye's leading philanthropic institutions, established with the vision of building a society where everyone enjoys equal rights and opportunities. Over the past five decades, we have supported thousands of civil society initiatives, awarded scholarships to more than 55,000 scholarships, and invested in cultural and social development projects. With a strong focus on education; culture and arts; and social inclusion, the foundation has continuously evolved its strategies to respond to changing societal needs.

Among our core priorities, gender equality has remained a cornerstone of our work. Rather than being treated as a stand-alone issue, it is embraced as a guiding principle that informs every aspect of our work – from grantmaking and advocacy to organisational culture and partnerships. At the Sabancı Foundation, we believe that no progress in education, culture or social development can be truly sustainable without addressing gender inequality. Our approach combines direct support for women's empowerment with the integration of gender perspectives across all programmes.

“...gender equality has remained a cornerstone of our work. Rather than being treated as a stand-alone issue, it is embraced as a guiding principle that informs every aspect of our work – from grantmaking and advocacy to organisational culture and partnerships.”

What gender mainstreaming means to us

For the Sabancı Foundation, gender mainstreaming means placing gender equality at the heart of every programme and decision. It is not just a commitment – it is a strategic approach that shapes how we design, implement and evaluate our work. This includes:

- Designing initiatives that respond to the specific needs and realities of women and girls
- Ensuring that our internal practices reflect equity, inclusion and fairness
- Using tools such as disaggregated data and social return on investment (SROI) analysis to monitor and evaluate gendered impacts
- Building strong partnerships with civil society, government and the private sector to amplify impact and ensure sustainability

Gender equality is not an “add-on” to our work – it is a lens through which we view and shape all our efforts. Whether in education, culture or social development, this perspective helps us create more inclusive, equitable and lasting change.

TIMELINE OF PROGRESS AND SHIFTS IN FOCUS

The Sabancı Foundation's commitment to gender equality has evolved significantly over the decades, with the foundation continuously adapting its focus and methods to meet the changing needs and challenges of society:

1970s–1990s Expanding access to education	2000s A strategic shift to rights-based philanthropy, introduction of Grant Program	2006–2016 Global partnerships and advocacy	2009–Present Türkiye's Changemakers Program	2018–Present Preventing child, early, and forced marriages	2022–Present Empowering NEET women
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2024 and beyond: A renewed strategic direction

Marking its 50th anniversary in 2024, the foundation embraced a new higher purpose: “We support social development for a more equitable and sustainable future.” Gender equality remains a central theme, alongside quality and inclusive education, climate resilience, and social and cultural participation. The new strategy emphasises long-term, systemic change; deeper global partnerships; and innovative financing models. A redesigned grantmaking structure is currently underway to support this vision.

Challenges in advancing gender equality in Türkiye

Türkiye's gender equality landscape presents both opportunities and challenges:

STRUCTURAL BARRIERS

Persistent patriarchal norms, low female labour force participation, gender pay gaps, and lack of affordable child-care limit women's economic and social empowerment.

CULTURAL RESISTANCE

Social norms often reinforce traditional gender roles, particularly affecting rural women and girls.

POLITICAL SPHERE

Shifts in political priorities and restrictive environments can create pressure on civil society actors and funders working in this space.

Partnerships and enablers of progress

Despite these challenges, the foundation's persistence has been crucial. Several factors have enabled progress in advancing gender equality. Strong alliances with UN agencies, civil society organisations, ministries and the private sector have provided both legitimacy and scale, ensuring that initiatives are sustainable and far-reach-

ing. These conditions have allowed the Sabancı Foundation to design and scale projects such as [Young Women Building Their Future](#). In partnership with the Ministry of Family and Social Services and the Ministry of Labor and Social Security, a [Policy Recommendation Paper on NEET Women](#) in Türkiye was developed, strengthening the project's contribution to evidence-based policymaking.

These efforts are reinforced by public demand – especially among younger generations – for greater gender justice, which has created a more favourable environment for awareness campaigns and inclusive policies. Global frameworks, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 5), have also offered important policy windows to align local initiatives with broader international commitments.

Within this context, the Sabancı Foundation's role as a trusted and visible ally has been particularly influential. Its presence has helped open doors for local NGOs, provided legitimacy to local initiatives, and encouraged municipalities and public bodies to actively engage in gender equality projects.

Evaluating two decades of impact

To gain deeper insight into its gender equality work, the Sabancı Foundation commissioned an independent research organisation to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of its contributions over the past 20 years. The study reviewed more than 100 projects and programmes; conducted 113 in-depth interviews with opinion leaders, project teams, and beneficiaries; and analysed field data and case studies.

The findings revealed that the foundation's efforts have had significant, multi-layered impacts. Over the last two decades, more than 100 supported or implemented projects have directly engaged 150,000 women; reached over 850,000 women directly or indirectly; and involved 4,000 diverse stakeholders.

The evaluation also highlighted the foundation's unique role in legitimising the field of gender equality in Türkiye, empowering civil society actors, and creating sustainable models for change. As one opinion leader noted: "In a context where even the expression 'gender equality' is under risk, Sabancı Foundation did not step back." Impacts were seen in the following areas:

INDIVIDUAL EMPOWERMENT

Thousands of women and girls gained education, vocational skills, self-confidence and awareness of their rights. Among the women directly engaged, 91% reported positive changes in their lives.

INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING

Many civil society partners professionalised, gained visibility, and attracted new donors after initial Sabancı Foundation support. 41% of the organisations obtained their first funding from Sabancı Foundation, and 62% of the organisations accessed new funding following their first Sabancı grant.

POLICY AND NORM CHANGE

Projects inspired local and national policy debates, contributed to institutional equality plans, and helped shape new narratives on gender roles in society. 83% of the projects that are supported or conducted by the foundation inspire and act as models for other projects.

SOCIETAL AWARENESS

Through cultural programmes like the [Short Film Competition](#), gender equality has been mainstreamed into public discourse. Gender equality actors supported by [Türkiye's Changemakers](#) gain credibility and enhance their innovative works, bringing new themes to the agenda. The impacts were not only immediate but also structural, with supported organisations sustaining their work and expanding their influence long after their first engagement with the foundation.

In addition to assessing the overall impact of the foundation's work, an [in-depth analysis](#) was conducted on its flagship initiative, the Young Women Building Their Future project, using the social return on investment (SROI) methodology. SROI evaluates the social and economic value created by social projects, expressing changes in financial terms to calculate a social return ratio. According to the analysis, every 1 TL invested in the project generated 4 TL in social return, resulting in an annual social value of 45 million TL (~€885,000). The project has significantly strengthened NEET young

women's self-confidence, empowerment, awareness, emotional resilience, well-being and employability, providing valuable insights into how targeted interventions can promote their empowerment and employability.

Lessons learned and way forward

From decades of practice, the Sabancı Foundation highlights several important lessons for funders:

- **Integrate gender into the core strategy** of your organisation, rather than treating it as an isolated theme. This ensures that gender perspectives are systematically applied across all areas of work.

- **Build internal capacity** through ongoing training and organisational reflection to sustain commitment and foster innovation.

- **Engage in strong partnerships**, allowing your foundation to navigate sensitive cultural or political contexts while scaling successful models.

- **Ground advocacy in evidence**, using tools such as disaggregated data and social return on investment (SROI) analysis to strengthen accountability and demonstrate impact.

- **Proactively create an agenda to spark public debate** and drive action around issues that are often overlooked such as period poverty or older women's access to income.

Looking forward, the Sabancı Foundation sees significant opportunities in expanding women's economic participation, preventing early and forced marriages, addressing intersectional inequalities, and connecting gender equality to emerging challenges.

Over the past five decades, the Sabancı Foundation has become a leading force for gender equality in Türkiye. Its journey reflects a shift from infrastructural to systemic change, from local projects to global partnerships, and from one-off interventions to long-term empowerment models.

By combining grantmaking, advocacy, partnerships and cultural engagement, the foundation has helped transform the lives of women and girls while strengthening the ecosystem of civil society organisations advancing gender justice. Its persistence in the face of social and political challenges underscores its credibility and influence.

[Sabancı Foundation](#)

HOW PIOS SUPPORT GENDER MAINSTREAMING



enable philanthropy to contribute effectively to fair, democratic societies

translate shared concern to shared practice

strengthen collaboration coherence, trust



make gender equality sector-wide commitment through

- learning spaces
- advocacy
- policy work
- collaboration

PHILEA'S FRAMEWORK

gender equality = cornerstone

equality is fundamental to philanthropy, not optional ambition

precondition for fairness & social progress

shapes philanthropy capable of long-term cultural change

gender mainstreaming is way of working

4 TYPES OF PIO ACTION

strengthening governance & organisational frameworks

nurturing learning communities & shared understanding

enabling collaboration & collective action

amplifying action for gender equality

CASE STUDY: assifero

A PIO BUILDING A SHARED PATH AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

2020 commitment

raise awareness within the Italian philanthropic sector and encourage reflection

2023 catalyst

the cultural and structural roots of gender-based violence in Italy

2025 adoption

the first collective effort of Italian philanthropy to address gender-based violence as a structural and systemic issue

2029 transformation

INFORM

- + build knowledge on gender issues, structural roots
- + promote learning
- + foster dialogue
- + collect data & experiences

FRAMEWORK

INTEGRATE

+ embed gender perspective in culture, governance, funding, operations, communication, partnerships

AMPLIFY

- + leverage networks to extend impact beyond own organisation
- + use relational capital
- + strengthen partnerships

OUTCOME

each organisation creates tailored internal policy = living instrument, not static document

THE GUIDELINES

FOR THE ELIMINATION OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

elaborated with Fondazione Una Nessuna Centomila

address GBV as structural & systemic issue

concerns ALL foundations (regardless of mission, field, size, scope, endowment)

open-source tool for any philanthropic organisation

involved whole Assifero membership

PIOS STAND WITH SOCIETIES, NOT APART

KEY LESSONS

- #1 catalyst moments matter
- #2 collective approach essential
- #3 threefold strategy provides clarity
- #4 open-source = wider impact
- #5 innovation enables scale

NEXT STEPS

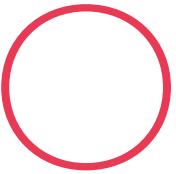
- + strengthen sector awareness & shared responsibility
- + promote Guidelines adoption as common framework
- + accompany internal transformation
- + use AI & digital tools for contextualised support

ASSIFERO

How to build a shared path against gender-based violence

By **Andrea Chiara Brancale**, Programme Officer, Assifero

Assifero is the Italian association of foundations and philanthropic organisations and the reference point for philanthropy in Italy. We strive to foster an Italian philanthropic system able to contribute to a just, equitable and pluralistic society centred on people and planet, in the interest of future generations. Every day we work to develop an increasingly aware, informed, connected and effective philanthropic system for our country, enabling philanthropy to fully express its transformative and generative role.

 Our membership includes family, corporate and community foundations; centuries-old philanthropic organisations; and new evolving kinds of philanthropic organisations. Members differ in mission, geographical focus, size and areas of intervention, and work for the common good by listening to territories and communities, identifying needs and potentials, and activating long-term processes of human and sustainable development.

We promote and facilitate collaboration and connections at Italian and European level; disseminate good practices and innovative approaches; increase the circulation of information; and foster opportunities for exchange and dialogue. We do this to build critical mass together, scale good practices, and strengthen our representation of Italian philanthropy, which includes proposing policies.

How we see gender equality

Assifero's work on gender equality and the elimination of gender-based violence is rooted in a long-standing commitment to social justice and systemic change. Since 2020, we have participated in the global [UNITE to End Violence against Women campaign](#) and the [16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence](#), catalysing these moments each year to raise awareness within the Italian philanthropic sector and to encourage reflection

on the role that foundations can play in preventing and addressing gender-based violence. This engagement helped lay the groundwork for a broader and more structured process within the network.

Guidelines for the Elimination of Gender-Based Violence

In late 2023, the femicide of Giulia Cecchettin deeply moved Italian society and brought to light once again the cultural and structural roots of gender-based violence in Italy. In that context, the Assifero National Council called on the association to take coordinated and concrete action on the issue.

This decision led to the development of the [Guidelines for the Elimination of Gender-Based Violence](#), elaborated together with [Fondazione Una Nessuna Centomila](#), which was established in November 2022 as the first Italian foundation entirely dedicated to preventing and combating violence against women. The entire Assifero membership was involved in creating the Guidelines, which were adopted by Assifero's General Assembly in June 2025. The Guidelines represent the first collective effort of Italian institutional philanthropy to address gender-based violence as a structural and systemic issue that concerns all foundations – regardless of their mission or field of work, size, geographic scope or endowment.

The Guidelines are designed as a practical, open-source tool, accessible to philanthropic organisations and their partners that wish to play an active role in preventing and addressing gender-based violence while promoting gender equality. At the core of the Guidelines lies a [threefold integrated strategy](#) – *Inform, Integrate, Amplify* – which provides a framework for acting on multiple levels within organisations by connecting knowledge, internal transformation and external engagement:

- **Inform** invites foundations to build knowledge and awareness of gender-based violence and gender inequality, starting from understanding their structural and cultural roots. It promotes learning, dialogue and the collection of data and experiences as a basis for more informed and responsible action.

- **Integrate** focuses on embedding the gender perspective within the organisation's structures, strategies and daily practices. It invites foundations to reflect on how their internal culture, governance, funding practice, operations, communication and partnerships can actively promote gender equality and prevent gender-based violence.

- **Amplify** highlights the distinctive role of foundations in generating broader cultural and systemic impact. By leveraging their relational capital, networks and partnerships, foundations can extend the reach of their internal change beyond their own organisations.

Together, these three dimensions provide a roadmap for organisations to move from understanding to transformation, aligning their strategies and resources with the goal of eliminating gender-based violence and advancing gender equality.

Shaping internal policies to promote gender equality

This process aims to lead each organisation toward the creation of its own internal policy for the elimination of gender-based violence and the promotion of gender equality, tailored to its identity, mission, size and field of work. These policies are not an additional outcome but the natural continuation of a process that aligns values, strategy and accountability. They serve as living instruments that make visible the organisation's stance and responsibility, fostering a culture of respect, equity and care within their organisation and communities.

Looking ahead, to carry this work forward, Assifero has entrusted Giulia Minoli – the President of *Fondazione Una Nessuna Centomila* and member of Assifero's National Board of Directors – with a 4-year strategic mandate (2025-2029) on equity and the elimination of gender-based violence. This mandate marks a new phase in which the association aims to transform the momentum generated by the Guidelines into long-term structural change across Italian institutional philanthropy.

In the coming years, we will focus on strengthening the philanthropic sector's awareness and shared responsibility in recognising gender inequality and violence as structural issues of social justice and as prerequisites for fair and cohesive communities. We will promote the adoption of the Guidelines as a common framework to orient foundations' policies, practices and organisational culture towards gender equity and respect. At the same time, the association will continue to accompany foundations in their internal transformation – integrating gender equality and prevention principles into decision-making, relationships, funding and practices, and translating them into organisational policies. Innovation will also play a role, through the responsible use of digital tools and artificial intelligence to contextualise and adapt learning, self-assessment and the elaboration of bespoke policies at individual organisational level.

Assifero, amplifying its role as a PIO, aims at embedding the principle of gender mainstreaming into collective impact, not as a separate agenda, but as a way of working that strengthens the whole ecosystem, shaping a philanthropy capable of driving long-term cultural and social change.

[Assifero](#)

How to mainstream gender in your foundation

Every organisation has its own way of mainstreaming gender, shaped by its mission, context and approach. There is no single standard or one-size-fits-all method. Here we share some common principles and practical steps to get your organisation started on this journey.

Cross-cutting principles of gender integration

The information and cases shared in this report illustrate different ways of embedding gender sensitivity into strategy and practice, but they also reveal some common elements that can inspire other funders seeking to strengthen their own approach:

Building internal capacity

A critical starting point is building internal capacity. This means beginning with an honest assessment of knowledge, skills and practices, then investing in structured learning journeys that reflect the diversity of staff needs and contexts. Dedicated roles or champions, backed by clear financial and human resources, help ensure gender perspectives are consistently integrated rather than left to individual goodwill. Sustained engagement is essential; change rarely comes from one-off workshops, but through ongoing reinforcement and opportunities to apply learning in practice.

Approaching gender analysis as a holistic process

Equally important is seeing gender analysis as an adaptive and holistic process rather than a fixed framework. Drawing on gender-disaggregated data, targeted research, expert consultation and dialogue with partners allows organisations to uncover hidden inequalities and adapt interventions as contexts evolve. By staying flexible, funders can design programmes that address not only visible imbalances but also the structural barriers shaping people's opportunities and outcomes.

Linking to systemic challenges

Embedding gender equality requires linking it to broader systemic challenges and fostering inclusive participation. Funders that succeed in this area create safe spaces for partners to reflect; balance financial support with non-financial resources; and build respectful relationships that overcome power dynamics. Leadership at multiple levels, both senior and operational, is necessary, as is encouraging peer learning within and across organisations. In this way, gender becomes not an add-on but a perspective that strengthens impact, allowing transitions in areas like climate, economy or social justice to be both effective and equitable.

Connecting with others on the same path

Ultimately, the path to gender equality in philanthropy is not one that funders walk alone. The strength of this work lies in community – communities of practice, alliances between funders, and, above all, partnerships with the grass-roots movements and organisations leading change on the ground. By listening, learning and standing together, philanthropy can not only protect hard-won gains but also help build inclusive societies where every person, regardless of gender, has the opportunity to thrive.

Practical steps to begin the journey

4 steps to set you on your way

If you're intrigued, interested, or even convinced that gender matters, you might be wondering where to start. Here are 4 practical steps to begin with:

- 1 Develop a business case**
Assess your foundation's priorities and consider how to effectively address the challenges you invest in. By focusing on your foundation's strengths and intentionally considering the needs of women and girls in your initiatives, you can unlock greater impact.
- 2 Find a champion**
Identify an advocate within your organisation who can drive gender integration.
- 3 Start small and iterate**
Begin with small initiatives, learn from them, and gradually build momentum.
- 4 Grow your base of champions**
Expand the number of advocates within your organisation to enhance your impact.

Join Philea's Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Network

You don't have to tackle this challenge alone. Through a dedicated peer-learning journey, this network provides an exciting opportunity to empower foundation representatives to take meaningful steps toward championing gender equality. Through collective learning and collaboration, you'll gain valuable insights, develop practical skills, and connect with like-minded peers, helping you make a lasting impact on gender equality.

[Learn more and get in touch](#)

About and contact

ABOUT PHILEA

Our vision is for philanthropy to use its full potential to co-shape and support a pluralistic, just and resilient society that centres people and planet. To achieve this, our mission is to enable, encourage and empower the philanthropic community to build a better today and tomorrow.

We nurture a diverse and inclusive ecosystem of foundations, philanthropic organisations and networks in over 30 countries that work for the common good. With individual philanthropies and national-level infrastructure organisations as members, we unite almost 9,000 public-benefit foundations that seek to improve life for people and communities in Europe and around the world.

We galvanise collective action and amplify the voice of European philanthropy. Together we:

→ **Co-create knowledge and learn**
from effective practices

→ **Collaborate** around current
and emerging issues

→ **Promote enabling environments**
for doing good

In all we do, we are committed to enhancing trust, collaboration, transparency, innovation, inclusion and diversity.

www.philea.eu

ABOUT PHILEA'S GENDER EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION NETWORK

This network is the place to be for Philea members seeking to advance gender equality in their programmes and operations or to learn more about aligning the values of diversity, equity and inclusion in philanthropic practices. It offers an opportunity to collaborate and partner with individuals and organisations sharing these values and vision, leveraging the collective resources, expertise and influence of the members to achieve greater impact.

[Learn more](#)

PHILEA'S EQUALITY FRAMEWORK

During our year of Equality in 2025, we developed "[Philanthropy and Equality: A Framework for Sharing Power and Addressing Inequalities](#)". This framework highlights how inequality is deeply connected to power structures, climate justice and democratic practice, and how it is deeply entangled with philanthropy's history, funding models, operating practices and legitimacy. Though the framework focuses on equality, some elements within it centre the concept of equity.

[Learn more](#)

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PROVEN PRACTICES IN GENDER MAINSTREAMING

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