

Gender training in the European Union: Gender Academy and innovative methods to share experiences between gender mainstreaming professionals, ILO*



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Background and general information

Name of the Organisation	INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANISATION (ILO)
Contact person	Haley Horan , Program Officer, Distance Education and Learning Technology Applications (DELTA), International Training Center of the ILO
Period	21 November 2011 – 2 December 2011
Context analysis	<p>For 10 years the International Training Centre (ITC) of the ILO has been offering high-level training activities aimed at increasing the awareness of gender equality principles and at providing practical tools for their implementation. As such, the International Training Centre of the ILO has become a hub offering a unique opportunity to gain knowledge and share best practices in the field of gender mainstreaming.</p> <p>A newly designed Gender Academy was a consolidation of this experience. It aims to support the development of professionals from all over the world with a view to offering an exclusive forum for discussion and a platform for new experiences. The format of the Academy provided an opportunity for updating and upgrading professional knowledge through exposure to high-level international expertise.</p>

* 'Gender Academy and innovative methods to share experiences between gender mainstreaming professionals, ILO' was selected as a practice on gender training in the European Union with potential based on the research findings from the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) project on gender training in the European Union. The project aims to facilitate dialogue between policy makers, trainers and researchers on how gender training can be used to support informed policy making in the EU and Member States. The information collected for the study is based on desk research and stakeholder interviews conducted by ICF GHK in 2012. Other outputs from the study include online databases of gender trainers and training tools and resources available on EIGE's website at: <http://www.eige.europa.eu>



This was a residential opportunity that allowed in-depth discussions between the participants by offering sessions on cutting-edge topics which were presented and discussed in a series of master classes with simultaneous interpretation in English, French and Spanish. In addition, a range of elective workshops were offered that gave additional insight into specific subjects, developed skills and provided room for application and knowledge-sharing between gender mainstreaming professionals and experts.

An innovative element of the Gender Academy was a session run by the ILO that sought to promote the adoption of online communities of practice (CoPs)¹. The workshop showed the participants different ways in which they can use online technologies to develop and create their own CoP. For instance, the use of online CoPs was presented as a cost and time effective means of sharing and influencing gender practice globally. Firstly, they can bring together a diverse range of stakeholders (e.g. individuals, experts, policy makers, practitioners) in a virtual space, which would not be possible to achieve in a face-to-face seminar for cost-related and practical reasons. Secondly, they can make the policymaking cycle more effective, as they allow multi-dimensional interaction between policy makers and grassroots practitioners from a certain community. This way, a better insight into the real, on-the-ground application of gender policy can help to improve its implementation and thus contribute to achieving practical benefits. Finally, an online CoP can provide more democratic access to knowledge and resources as it fosters a culture of transparent sharing and learning. As effective means of sharing good practice and gaining knowledge and resources irrespective of job or location, online CoPs can therefore become a powerful tool to demonstrate where more practical actions are required. They are particularly relevant in the area of gender mainstreaming as they can help to overcome the barriers that women may face in accessing knowledge or attending other, more traditional forms of seminars and events.

Evaluation criteria

'WORKS WELL'

(Gender equality) objectives

The objectives of the Gender Academy for the participants were to:

- Be exposed to advanced international knowledge and best practices in areas related to the promotion of gender equality at work;
- Acquire tools and practical methods, successfully designed and tested in other national or regional contexts, and adaptable to your own environment;
- Share experiences and information with individuals and / or organisations with interests in mainstreaming gender equality and identify appropriate strategies for collaboration;
- Use research, networking, and knowledge sharing to assemble appropriate resources on mainstreaming gender equality.

As for the CoP workshop, its aim was to improve the knowledge of attendees on online tools to create online communities of practice in order to share and disseminate knowledge and resources on gender mainstreaming.

Target groups

The Academy was designed for development professionals including: government officials, representatives of employers and workers' organisations, international organisations, such as the agencies of the UN system and the international financial institutions, the private sector, academia and civil society organisations. There were 121 training participants and majority of them were women (approx. 87 %).

As for the online CoP, the communities can be very broad or narrow depending on the topic area and the interests of the practitioners. A useful element of an online CoP is that participation and the target group can be very fluid and open – people can choose to become more or less involved depending on their interests and experience.

Aims, methods and tools used

The Gender Academy was a residential event which lasted two weeks. It included a series of master classes and 18 elective workshops, which aimed at improving the knowledge and skills of gender professionals². Participants selected 4 out of the 18 electives. More specifically, they could benefit from a combination of:

- Master classes and round tables (in a plenary session, with simultaneous interpretation) delivered by leading international experts in the field. Master classes covered topics such as: ILO gender equality mainstreaming: process and substance; Time Use Surveys; Engendering national planning and budgeting; ILO Convention on Domestic Workers; Maternity protection: formulas for advancing MDGs; Reconciling work and family; Gender and social dialogue; Gender equality information campaigns; and Global economic crisis, gender and employment.
- Elective workshops (in one or two languages) that provided a wide range of topics, according to participants' needs and preferences. Elective workshops in week one covered issues such as: Equality at work; Gender and organisational change; Elements of gender budgeting; Training of trainers module: facilitation techniques;

Understanding Time Use Surveys; CEDAW and Intl Conventions as policy tools; Break gender stereotypes; and Gender-sensitive project design. Elective workshops in week two touched upon: Gender in the project cycle; Gender equality and labour law making; Work and family: tools for promoting reconciliation; Training of trainers module: multimedia applications; ILO Maternity Protection Package: How to use it; Gender and decent work: A trade-union perspective; Equality at work: an employer's perspective; and Gender and HIV/AIDS: Code of Practice and ILO Rec.

- Structured knowledge-sharing opportunities, based on the open space methodology. Such methodology (technology) is founded on the following principles: 1) The people having the conversation are the right people, 2) It takes the time it needs, and 3) People are free to move in and out of different conversations as they wish. The open space was therefore to explore issues that are important for the participants. They got together according to their common interests, through dialogue and even striking new collaborations. Two expert facilitators facilitated one of the sessions by providing a structure in which participants were able to move freely, discuss important issues and work together on possible solutions. This way, the wealth of knowledge and experience that exists within the group is also recognised instead of a presenter-participant based dynamic.
- Study visits and events related to the topics of the Academy.

The CoP session method consisted of a presentation, which showed the existing good practice of an online CoP. This was then followed by a world café where participants discussed how the topic was relevant to them and a demonstration of how they can use online CoPs for their own objectives.

Gender equality results (long term and short term). Outcome/specific changes as an actual result of the process/activity

The Gender Academy aimed to:

- Give a unique opportunity to gender mainstream professionals to improve their skills and knowledge on gender equality;
- Enable professionals to apply new skills and knowledge to improve their professional practice;
- Disseminate the knowledge from the sessions among relevant partners at local and national levels and trigger longstanding partnerships between different stakeholders to work collaboratively to advance gender equality.

For the online CoP the main expected outcomes:

- Increased awareness and understanding of what an online CoP is and how they relate to gender mainstreaming;
- Increased access and use of existing gender equality online CoPs;
- Increased knowledge about gender issues gained through existing CoPs by accessing knowledge stores, sharing information and accessing resources;
- Knowledge of how to create an online CoP and willingness to create online CoPs of interest;
- Improved gender mainstreaming policy making through greater adoption of the use of online CoPs.

Evaluation of good practice

Three types of evaluation tools were used: questionnaires specific to the elective workshops, an interactive evaluation during the plenary by using an electronic audience response system, and a final questionnaire concerning the overall Academy's programme. In total, 522 questionnaires were processed - 415 questionnaires for the elective workshops and 107 final questionnaires. The response rate was around 85 % for both types of questionnaires³. The results were as follows:

- 75 % of participants considered the Gender Academy more useful for their personal / professional development than a traditional training course.
- 90 % of participants found the mix of topics provided through master classes and elective workshops to be 'good enough'.
- 75 % of participants found the share of time between master classes and elective workshops to be 'good enough'.
- 97 % of participants considered the challenging edition of three simultaneous languages to be worth the effort.

Ways in which the good practice/activity could have been improved

In terms of improvements or a way forward, the ITC/ILO would look forward to partnering with other international or regional organisations.

Plans to gather financial resources and/or institutional arrangements

The conference cost was EUR 3 250, which covered the tuition and subsistence (which included full board and lodging on the Centre's campus; laundry; local study visits; emergency medical insurance; and some recreational activities). A limited number of fellowships covering the tuition fees only were available for nationals from developing countries who were required to pay EUR 1 680 for 2 weeks (in addition to their travel). In addition, two participants benefitted from the Elena Gastaldo fellowship that covered all expenses.



TRANSFERABILITY

Success factors

- **Good standing and long-time experience of the ITC** in providing gender training and gender capacity building on gender mainstreaming.
- Worldwide **openness to participants from various institutions** (e.g. the United Nations) / **countries**, which resulted in a **wide range of attendees and a combination of their gender expertise** at national and international levels.
- A number of **fellowships offered to participants** who were not able to cover the participation costs, which also **ensured a good mix of people**, including those who could be good change-makers in their societies / countries, but could not afford the training.
- A good **mix of methodology, including high level technical expertise as well as breakout sessions**, which were appreciated by the participants, allowing them to engage in a range of real learning conversations.
- A **possibility for the Academy participants to follow-up** in a form of other, more intense trainings offered by the ITC.
- Strong **support from the ILO's Gender Bureau, which offered its expertise**, helped to publicise the event, and gave additional credibility.
- Inclusion of contemporary, cutting-edge issues in the content of this initiative.

Main obstacles

- The **cost of training** could be relatively high for some potential participants and thus was mitigated to some extent by providing financial support in a form of fellowships.
- **Coordinating the arrival of participants from all over the world** (e.g. visas, travels, specific meals, etc.).

Actual replication or spin-off effects

The practice can be replicated into other contexts, e.g. in a regional setting. Similar but smaller scale training in different regions (e.g. Latin America, Africa, or Asia) would enable the countries from a certain area to share good practices and experiences, while taking into consideration their regional particularities. Also, the possibility of launching the second edition of Gender Academy is being considered.

LEARNING

Lessons learned from the process

- High level training contributes to spreading the gender mainstreaming message into different contexts and different countries.
- By increasing the knowledge of people who are interested in the subject, the training encourages and empowers them to engage in gender equality advocacy and policy development in their country or institution.
- Given the high level and the cost of the training, it were mainly the people who were in a position of power or influence who attended this event. Therefore they can use the knowledge gained to advance gender equality in their country or institutional context.

Sources

- Gender Academy, An international event on gender, work and employment, gathering experts and successful practitioners, 21 November - 2 December 2011, Turin, Italy, http://gender.itcilo.org/cms/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=238&Itemid=80
- ITC-ILO, Gender Academy, 2011, Turin, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b-6rM_tc--c
- ITC-ILO, Gender Academy, 2011, Turin, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hb3N5cIT9G8>

About EIGE:

The European Institute for Gender Equality is an EU agency that supports policy makers and all relevant institutions in their efforts to make equality between women and men a reality, by providing them with specific expertise and comparable and reliable information on gender equality in the European Union. More information: <http://www.eige.europa.eu>
Neither EIGE nor any person acting on its behalf may be held responsible for the content of the information contained in this publication.

Footnotes

- 1 CoPs were defined as 'groups of people who share a specific area of work, interest or passion in a knowledge domain. CoP members share knowledge, learn from each other and interact with peers in an enabling networked environment.'
- 2 A detailed description of master class and elective workshop sessions is available at: <http://gender.itcilo.org/academy/index.php?mod=program>
- 3 ITC-ILO Gender Academy: End-of-Activity Evaluation Results, Turin, 21 November – 2 December 2011.

