



Gender-inclusive social innovation ecosystems

The European Union's Innovation Union strategy on smart sustainable and inclusive growth aims to **“create an innovation-friendly environment that makes it easier for great ideas to be turned into products and services”**. An innovation-friendly environment is one where creativity thrives, everyone's ideas matter (regardless of their gender identity) and the implementation of ideas generated leads to products and services that contribute to GDP growth. Value is attributed to innovations and ideas as they feed into this GDP growth, determined by the range and number of patents, copyrights and intellectual property rights associated.

There is a need to redefine¹ what an innovation is, and its success measured by productivity. If innovations equal social economic growth, they would benefit from reflecting a pluralistic society. However, society's view and perception of who an innovator is and what an invention is, hampered by prejudice, traditions and preconceived notions that risk excluding segments in society. Redefining an innovation

entail reimagining who an innovator is. This process goes hand in hand with reforming societies that may veil opportunities for diverse ideas and creative methods because the ideas are unorthodox or originate outside of the group that has enjoyed hegemony over ideation and resource mobilisation for innovating. Ensuring the sustainability of innovations requires that the ecosystem in which ideas develop and are implemented, should bare gender inclusive markers that are enduring. This means that products or services that spawn out of innovation processes have integrated gender and diversity in so far as the use and access reflect the pluralism in society. **This policy brief outlines what characteristics are needed for gender-inclusive social innovation ecosystems.**

¹ Blake, M. K., & Hanson, S. (2005). *Rethinking innovation: context and gender. Environment and planning A, 37(4), 681-701. Argue for what is/should be counted as an innovation. The EQUALS-EU research data also reveals that funding for innovations tends to skew towards male dominated ideation proposals, small organisations/start-ups led by women struggle to compete for funding to grow their ideas.*

RECOMMENDATIONS ON GENDER-INCLUSIVE SOCIAL INNOVATION ECOSYSTEMS

Recruit – not just filling quotas in education or career opportunities. The education systems that exclude girls from choosing STEM subjects from primary level must be dismantled if girls are to have a chance at being part of the innovation ecosystem. This is an affirmative activity that needs to continue to ensure that innovations that contribute to social transformation are not just safety valves but ones that bring about the structural change required.

Retain – enable flexible career paths. There are several reasons women do not stay in STEM careers

even when they are trained in the field. Contending with social expectations both in private and public life, particularly in how society orders the work-life, means that finding balance can be a major factor in why retention levels are extremely low. Data from the study proposes flexible working conditions, structures and policies that enable continued productivity regardless of a woman's life stage. Supportive avenues such as “gender adjudicators” that allow a woman to express their frustrations and accomplishments freely.

Reward – representation and recognition matters. Younger generations relate to role models who espouse their aspirations, look like them or remind them of themselves. Representation makes visible alternate realities and rewards the innovation ecosystem that has made the representation possible. Therefore, profiling women and minority groups in STEM and innovation spaces and collecting data that makes visible the representation should be part of

the innovation standard. Rewarding also entails recognition through special themed events that centre around celebrating the achievements of underrepresented groups. The global initiatives such as Women in Tech, Girls in ICT, and Women in Science, continue to motivate interest and promote participation in areas that may otherwise remain unattainable to women.

INNOVATION ECOSYSTEMS

Data from the research and focus group discussions has revealed various factors required for an innovation-friendly environment. This policy brief takes this empirical contribution and outlines its input to what EQUALS-EU recommends as a **gender-inclusive innovation standard**. The same data will feed into a scientific definition of the innovation ecosystem; as components of the definition are unpacked and discussed through a gender-inclusive lens. In outlining gender-inclusive innovation standards that give body to socially transformative innovations it is about more than the products and services, it is about the ecosystems in which these products and services are allowed to develop that is critical for their sustainability.

Granstrand and Holgersson's (2020), conceptual review of 21 definitions of innovation ecosystems, draw them to a "new and synthesized definition" (Ibid., p. 90). Granstrand and Holgersson (2020), define an innovation ecosystem "as the evolving set

of actors, activities and products/services, the institutions and relations including complimentary and substitute relations that have an impact on the innovative performance of an individual or a community of individuals" (my emphasis). The innovative performance thrives in a set of institutions and relations that are substitute and complimentary in their creative collaboration. The architecture of productivity/performance benefits organisations with structured ideation processes, where judgements and biases are set aside. Idea-generating techniques such as brainstorming, are a great way for organisations to reinforce a culture of sharing, where people come out of their office cubicles to share and listen to each other. This is where substitute and complimentary relations brought together, can contribute to making idea(s) successful. This policy brief offers gender-sensitive scrutiny of **the evolving set of actors, activities, institutions and complementary and substitute relations** as critical components of the definition by Granstrand and Holgersson.

GENDER-INCLUSIVE INNOVATION STANDARD

- > Key groups define the problem
- > Ideation and solution design centres around the key group(s)
- > Gender-inclusive language use (nouns, pronouns) throughout innovation performance
- > Gender diverse metrics employed before and during innovation performance to assess gender inclusiveness
- > Documenting and archiving the innovation performance



GENDER-INCLUSIVE INNOVATION ECOSYSTEMS

Data from the focus group discussions as well as the survey informs the process of reading these aspects of the definition of innovation ecosystems through a gendered lens.

Evolving set of actors: This requires an intersectional look at the actors ideating, where gender, functional variabilities, class, ethnicity, social economic differences, and age accelerate ideas producing products and services that are reflective of and aligned with consumer needs. The evolving aspect of the actors who are innovating is helpful where the novelty is not in the idea but in the actors brought together to make the idea successful. Data from the focus group discussions reflected on the composition of the actors and the extent to which the space and the process that drives creativity allows for inclusivity across gender identities. This is the measure of a successful idea when underrepresented communities contribute to defining and owning the problem they want addressed, they set the agenda for solving the problem because innovations are not measured as inclusive if they emanate outside of the key group(s).

Innovations in and of themselves may not contribute to reducing social biases. The innovative performance highlighted earlier is where impact evaluation needs to be. Transformations are dependent on people and it is important that these processes are sustained.

Activities: The innovative performance requires activities that will ensure inclusive participation. Language is imperative in ensuring inclusion. Language that is absolutist, where a hegemonic group suppresses plurality, does not engender collective creativity. Collective creativity allows different world views and interests the space required, as ideating is dependent on people. Replacing these people, or when they move on, requires a plan that will sustain gender inclusive activities and the language in the innovation standard should be discussed in each setting. While there may be benefit to employing gender neutral terms, the approach can inadvertently obscure the visibility necessary for minorities or the underrepresented. Measuring engagement beyond the physical presence of gendered minorit-



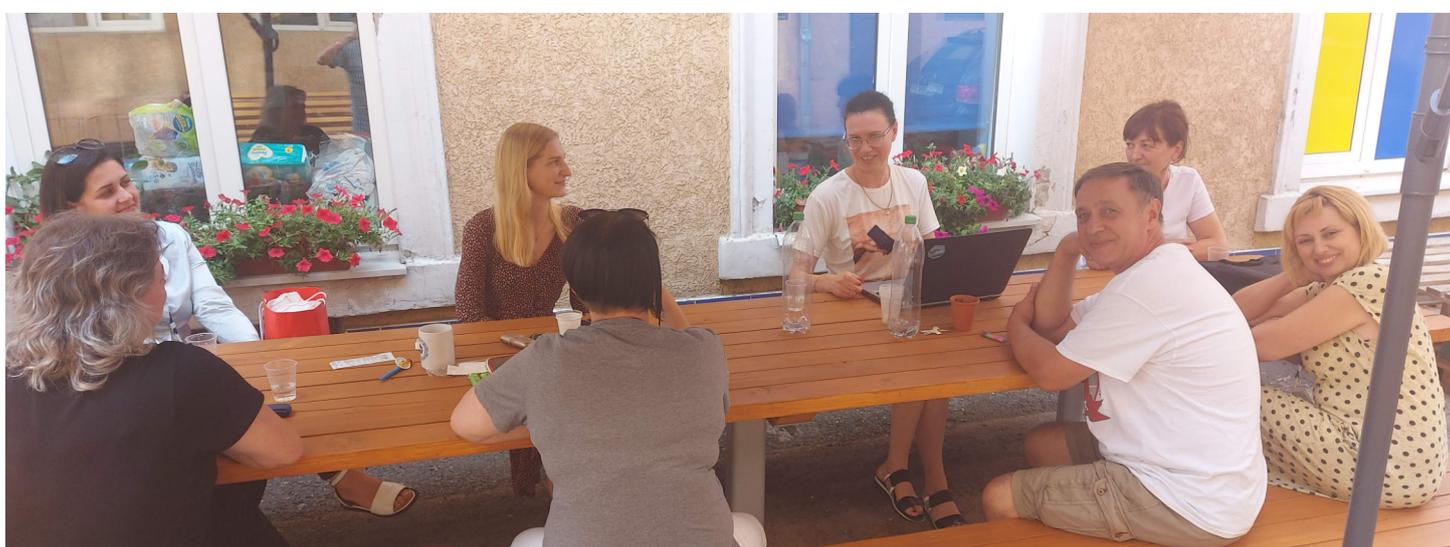
ies entails evaluating the level of engagement to understand the extent to which minority voices contribute or are allowed to contribute. This means that the space where ideation manifests is similarly vital for gender inclusive innovation performance.

Institutions: Spaces and the environment in which innovations flourish need to enable collective creativity. The political landscape is vital and contributes to frameworks that can shape innovation performance. Data shows that policies are not the issue, as there are many policies that articulate the benefits of gender inclusive social innovations. The challenge according to the focus group data, is in implementing the policies. That respondents to both the survey and the focus groups had difficulty in describing the extent to which existing policies are implemented, suggesting that while knowledge on the policies is available, accountable metrics that measure policy implementation need to be part of the innovation standard. Documentation and archiving innovation experiences should also be part of institutional processes because collective memories as mentioned in one focus group are helpful in sustaining not just the achievements, but the practices involved, and the impact on the institutional policies where these gains have been developed, revised and/or improved. Institutions require these collective memories to facilitate continuity when new cohorts of innovators come along. Metrics are useful in highlighting the extent to which knowledge translates into action.

Actions require resources for which funding mechanisms that support and accelerate social innovations from gender minorities are imperative. Data from the study suggests that the definition of innovation continues to be a hinderance to women acquiring funding. In addition, the limited resources available to women also suggest that initiatives for which funding is sought are small start-up interventions that are often judged alongside established grander ideas. Funding does not favour small organisations, and the feeling is that gender inclusive funding drives should shift from tokenistic approach to gender inclusion, towards radical chances in funding if they are to be inclusive of minority groups.

Complimentary and substitute relations: National and in-country interventions benefit from or are highly impacted by the global or international partnerships. The study found that there are contextual differences in the extent to which gender inclusive innovations are supported by the participating countries. However, the global influence contributes to the substitutionary relations needed to complement innovation performances that are gender inclusive. Global partnerships appear to drive the gender equality agenda more than in-country efforts among the countries surveyed. The funding from multilateral organisations often has among its criteria list for funding the requirement for recipients to outline their work with gender equality. Global partnerships are therefore imperative for gender inclusive social innovation ecosystems building as they ensure action.

Ukrainian focus group discussion



A BRIEF GLOSSARY OF GENDER-ASSOCIATED TERMINOLOGIES

Data collected highlighted the problematic use of some terminology that if used interchangeably or misused can veil attempts to socially transforming innovation ecosystems. Gender often precedes the following, but for the meaning to have impact, we must engage with the concepts as they impact work on gender:

THIS OR THAT

EQUITY: It is about positioning individuals according to their circumstances and investing in their opportunities from a perspective of social justice.

INCLUSION: A process that leads to a state of a fair and just community, where diversity is regarded as a resource.

EXCLUSION: Exclusion can carry both negative and positive connotations where a situation or state has been orchestrated to leave out particular groups and invite specific ones.

DIVERSITY: A process that brings about a state or a situation that is multicultural or a variety of social groups.

MAINSTREAMING: Normalising the presence of gendered minorities in a society. It requires special attention to the minority groups, who receive assistance through programmes and activities aimed to ensure that they have access to the same opportunities in a mainstream society.

EQUALITY: Equality is the provision of equal opportunities in a society that is unequal. Equity is a process that leads to an equal society.

INCLUSIVITY: The state of being fair and equal where in the context of this policy brief, all ideas matter!

EXCLUSIVE: The consequence of exclusive processes where some actors are not invited to or allowed to participate in particular spaces. This is often in relation to a person's gender identity.

DIVERSIFICATION: The result of diversity where an innovation ecosystem is seen as embodying a diverse group of people.

INTEGRATION: Process of empowering, capacitating and advocating for women and under-represented communities in mainstream society. Integration requires women to situate themselves in mainstream society.

KEY ACTION POINTS FOR SUSTAINABLE GENDER-INCLUSIVE INNOVATIONS

To foster innovation friendly environments, there are three key areas that require urgent action: language, measuring metrics and funding.

Language requires close attention to mitigate social biases at bay. Language is a marker for the extent to which innovations and the innovation performances subvert gender structures. Products and services can be mere safety valves that may not bring about the structural change to accelerate women and other gender minorities to innovate. Therefore, innovation ecosystems require a holistic approach targeting law, policy, education, and digital literacy. It is also beneficial to have consensus on a vocabulary, so that communication is inclusive and gender sensitive. Determining the vocabulary is part of defining what terminologies to use and to ensure that there is collective meaning for the group that is engaging with said terms. Importantly, while localised to the context in which they are applied, definitions carry global aspects that flow downstream to national and even regional standards.

Measuring metrics to hold policies, standards and reforms accountable. Data collected on the participation of gender minorities should be used to evaluate the impact of these institutional reforms. However, policy is needed to unlock restrictions on how to use the data for progressing gender equality, especially policies that

ensure the collection of gender desegregated data to make the argument for more gender inclusive approaches. Innovation ecosystems require an intersectional approach to measuring inclusion, so that diverse gender representation, functional variation, class and location are included in the measuring metrics.

Funding and resources are important in implementing change. The current innovation culture is not conducive for women and other minorities to be included in the innovation ecosystem. Resources need to extend beyond financial investment, to include mentorship programmes that can build the capacity and empower the underrepresented communities. Ensuring spaces and structures that allow women the opportunity to discuss their challenges is worth the investment if it will ensure their retention in the innovation space. Investment in advocacy and sensitising drives to recruit more of the hegemonic groups as allies towards gender inclusive social innovation ecosystems are also complementary to affirmative gender inclusive activities. Mentorship, advocacy and sensitising activities will ensure that when women and girls are recruited, they are retained, and lastly rewarded through profiling their achievements as part of mentorship and representation. Further, funding investment needs to reevaluate what counts as an innovation, because women-led or minority groups do not always fit the criteria of established proof of concepts.



METHODS AND MATERIAL

This deliverable is one of 4 reports from Work Package 1 (WP1) led by Stockholm University through the SPIDER centre. It forms part of D1.4, the fourth and final report for WP1. This work package is appraising gender equity in digital and social innovation ecosystems from participating countries. This appraisal serves as baseline data for EQUALS-EU that will illustrate the ongoing efforts, the existing networks and where targeted efforts need to be directed to strengthen and build capacity in working with gender equity in innovations.

Data for this Policy brief is from 20 country-led Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The invitation to carry out FGDs included countries that were part of the Pilot phase of the data collection with the stipulation that reports D1.2 and D1.3 would be a preamble to the FGD session. Additional material from the survey data (incl. Pilot phase data) has been condensed into this Policy Brief.

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Countries that participated in the Focus Group Discussion

Austria, China-Macau, Croatia, Czech Republic (P), France, Germany, Greece, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Malta (P), Norway, Romania, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine and UK

**(P) – Pilot Phase country*